

# SA-SIG

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## *Southern African Jewish Genealogy Special Interest Group Newsletter*

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

As family historians we spend a lot of our time collecting information about ancestors. With a lot of effort and over long periods of time most of us can manage to put together lists of names of much of our families. We can get to know when and where they lived; who married, divorced, and died; how they migrated, and so on. In some cases (not that often with Litvaks) one can inherit a family tree or even manage to get an oral history out of an older relation.

Some have *yichus* (lineage, distinguished birth, pedigree) with rabbinical or other relevant ancestry. Most of us have to be content with a little bit of *nachas* (noun: pleasurable pride, especially in another's achievements) from the children or grandchildren.

With newer techniques, such as DNA studies, a family tree can grow unexpected branches and new relations are found in unexpected areas.

But what we seldom get to know is how our ancestors lived. Yes, we get recipes and cookbooks; we know what they ate and how they starved at times. We know how they prayed (or did not!). We know about the *shadchan* (marriage broker) and weddings.

We pride ourselves on traditions and thrive on anecdotes especially about *ferribles* (arguments) and *broges* (being annoyed), real or imagined.

But we don't have much knowledge of day to day life, how they washed, ablutions, kept warm, got clothing and food, kept healthy, and how they dealt with teeth and toothache, hearts and heartburn, and the general *meshugas* (neurosis or in worse cases mental illness).

It is the detail that we miss and the more recent generation, who were barely exposed to those who came from *der heym* (the ancestral homeland), have even less of an idea.

Few of us have the novelist's talent to imagine and write the scenes from the past. I sense that is what we seek about the past generations, and it is what most of us are not able to find.

**Saul Issroff**

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

### 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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## EDITORIAL

Welcome to my third Newsletter. Please send in your thoughts and comments, and don't hold back. We can only improve if you tell me what you want and what you don't want.

South African place names which have a Jewish connection are always of interest to most of us. Dennis Kahn has sent us a list of place names that he has diligently researched and this is in this month's Newsletter. I was reminded that years ago when I was a keen philatelist, a Postmaster had a collection of Postmarks of South Africa place names which have a mention in the Bible. I must try to get a list to Dennis.

Maurice Skikne has also delved into history and written an interesting piece on the Jews who first came out to this country and became the Jewish population. Maurice does not talk about the always-ongoing argument about the origin of the term *Peruvians* to denote people who ate without manners. The best explanation we have seen is that these *Grieners* set up a society of Jews from Poland and Russia and somehow in Yiddish this was called the Peruvians. Later as the more cultured Jews disdained them they called them the Peruvians, this time as an insult. Maurice (Mo) has written a very absorbing article for us.

*Growing up in Cape Town* is by Beryl Baleson, a previous editor, and she has reminded us of all the fun we used to have.

The next IAJGS conference will be in Los Angeles and we have reprinted their first newflash in the hopes that some people from South Africa will be able to attend.

A very special rabbi, Rabbi Mirvish made a history for himself in Cape Town. We have a history of his life.

Wishing you a happy New Year for 2010!

**Colin Plen**

*Editor*

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## *Biography*

### **RABBI MOSES CHAIM MIRVISH (1872 – 1947)**

*Cecil Helman*

*This article has previously been published and is reprinted here with the permission of Rabbi Mirvish's family.*

**Moses Chaim Mirvish** was born in the small Lithuanian village of Baisagola, in December 1872.<sup>1,2</sup> He was the son of Joseph Ze'ev Mirvish (born c. 1845) – a miller and grain-merchant – and Tzivia (or Pese) (c. 1850 – 1917), and the grandson of Hirshel Mirvish (born c. 1815). He was one of seven children: four sisters and a brother emigrated to the United States in the 1890's, while another sister died in the Holocaust.

He studied for the Rabbinate, first at Slobodka Yeshiva, and later at the Yeshiva of Telz (Telsiai)<sup>3</sup> – in those days, the most famous *yeshiva* in Lithuania. His teachers there were the Head of the *Yeshiva*, Rabbi Eliezer Gordon, Rabbi Yosef Leib Bloch, and Rabbi Eliezer Shkop. At the end of his studies, he received his Rabbinical Diploma or *Smicha* from Rabbi Gordon, and from Rabbi Shmuel Avigdor Feivelson of Plunge (Plungian).<sup>1</sup> In Plunge, he married Seine Margolis (1871-1941), and founded a Hebrew School there, run on modern lines.

In 1908 he emigrated with his family to Cape Town, Cape Colony, South Africa. En route from Lithuania via Bremerhaven (Hamburg), they stayed for four days at the Jews' Temporary Shelter in Lemn Street, London, from 5 Sept 1908 (the Shelter records indicate that their entire assets were just 20 Pounds), before leaving from Southampton for Cape Town on 11 September 1908, aboard the S.S. Dover Castle.<sup>4</sup>

Rabbi Mirvish was brought to South Africa to be the minister of the Cape Town Orthodox Hebrew Congregation (the *Beth Hamedrash HaChodesh*), then sited in the Constitution Street Synagogue in District Six, in the old centre of town. Like him, most of its members had originated in Lithuania, and many lived close to the synagogue itself. It was significant that, arriving in Cape Town on the eve of Yom Kippur in 1908, he based his first sermon or *drushe* on the text 'I was a stranger in a strange land' (Exodus II:22).

He was the first fully qualified rabbi (with *Smicha*) in the entire Cape Colony.<sup>5</sup> His arrival there coincided with a period of turmoil, with the community and the country still recovering from the disastrous effects of the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. As the *South African Jewish Times* (29 August 1947) wrote:

*'One of the greatest difficulties confronting him was that the bad times which succeeded the Boer War prevailed throughout the country. He soon, however, managed to bring new life into the Congregation in the old Synagogue in Constitution Street, forerunner of that in Vredehoek'*<sup>6</sup>

The Cape Town Jewish community had been officially established in 1841, by English and German immigrants, but from the 1880's onwards there was a large-scale settlement of Lithuanian Jews (or *Litvaks*). The Constitution Street Synagogue was the most Old-Worldly and Lithuanian of the three main Cape Town communities (in Roeland Street, Gardens, and Constitution Street), but also the most orthodox, and the least affluent. In its annual synagogue accounts for the period 1 Nov. 1909 – 1 Nov. 1910, for example, Rabbi Mirvish's annual salary was given as 93 Pounds (though this had risen to 116 Pounds a year later).<sup>7</sup> In 1939 the community moved from Constitution Street to a new, purpose-built synagogue – the Vredehoek Synagogue – built in the art decor style on the lower slopes of Table Mountain.

In their book *The Jews of South Africa*, Gustav Saron and Louis Hotz describe the particular atmosphere in the Constitution Street synagogue – a small piece of Lithuania recreated in Africa – and how it differed from other Cape Town congregations of the time:

*'On entering the Beth Hamedrash, one became conscious of a pervading atmosphere totally alien to that of the other two synagogues. Heavy much-thumbed tomes of the Talmud lay strewn along the long tables. To be shaven was almost as serious a breach of decorum as to enter a synagogue with the head uncovered.'*<sup>8</sup>

Despite this East European atmosphere, until 1910 the Cape was still a Colony, administered by a Governor on behalf of the British Crown. On 11 December 1909, Rabbi Mirvish was given a

Commission by Sir Walter Hely-Hutchinson, Governor of the Cape of Good Hope Colony, as a Marriage Officer, empowering him:

*'to solemnise Marriages between persons professing the Jewish faith, in the Division of the Cape'*

but requiring him also to ensure that:

*'in the solemnization of all marriages you do confirm to the provisions of the Seventh Section of the Order of Her Majesty the Queen in Council of the 7<sup>th</sup> September, 1838, relative to a declaration made and words to be spoken during the ceremony, and that you do also conform to so much of the Twenty-first Section of the said Ordinance as is not repugnant to the laws and customs observed among Jews.'*<sup>9</sup>

Within the context of the growing *Litvak* community in Cape Town, Rabbi Mirvish was a crucial figure not only in his own congregation, but also in the development of the Cape Town community as a whole. During his years as Rabbi of the *Beth Hamedrash HaChodesh*, he was active in wider community affairs, helping to create the basic social and religious structure of the Cape Town Jewish community, and in turn this influenced developments in other parts of the country.<sup>10, 11</sup> His Obituary in the *Cape Argus* (18 August 1947) noted that:

*'There was scarcely any activity in the synagogic, charitable or educational spheres of the Jewish communal life in which he did not play an important part.'*<sup>12</sup>

while an article in the *South African Jewish Times* (22 August 1947), describing him as 'the Grand Old Man of the Cape Town Rabbinate', reported that:

*"So numerous were Rabbi Mirvish's activities," said a well-known Cape Town communal worker, "that it is easier to mention those with which he was not associated than those with which he was."'*<sup>13</sup>

For example, he founded the *Beth Din* (Ecclesiastical Court) in the Cape, and for many years was the *Av Beth Din*, and he also founded the Cape Board of *Shechitah*.<sup>10, 11</sup> He was one of the founders of the Cape Executive of the Jewish Board of Deputies, and a member of its executive board

for many years.<sup>5</sup> He was a founder of the *Bikkur Cholim* (Sick Relief Society), and a Foundation member of the Jewish Aged Home.<sup>14</sup> He was always an active Zionist – even before leaving Lithuania was active in the pre-Herzl *Chovevei Zion* movement – and while in Cape Town became a leader of the *Mizrachi* movement. The *South African Jewish Times* (29 August 1947) noted that:

*'History was made by Rabbi Mirvish in 1917, when at a Conference he helped to define South African Jewry's attitude towards the Balfour Declaration.'*<sup>6</sup>

While, putting his approach in a wider historical context, his Obituary in the *South African Jewish Chronicle* (22 August 1947) noted that:

*'Local Jewry has been deprived of the foremost link joining up three distinct periods in Jewish history. Rabbi Mirvish grew up in the atmosphere of the Talmud, steeped in the life of a self-contained Jewish community long before emancipation came to the countries of Eastern Europe. That was the first phase. He lived through the period of Haskalah, which witnessed a fundamental change in Jewish outlook. When he arrived here some 39 years ago, the Zionist movement (the third phase) was in its beginnings, and he not only displayed the greatest interest in its progress but unhesitatingly offered it his whole-hearted and substantial support. Rabbi Mirvish's life was, therefore, part of the very essence of more than one historic episode in our modern history and this, coupled with his virile leadership, explains why he was so universally popular.'*<sup>15</sup>

Always active in education,<sup>5,15</sup> he was Chairman of the United Hebrew Schools in the Cape, founded a Talmudical study group for the young, and was an examiner of *Talmud Torah*'s in both Cape Town and its hinterland. After the First World War, he was active on the committee for the assistance of Jewish War & Pogrom victims from Eastern Europe.

In his overall impact on the South African community, Rabbi Mirvish was a human bridge between the two cultures: the old world of European, particularly Lithuanian Judaism – and the new realities of South Africa, especially within the Cape. He was someone who mediated between these two realities, a living catalyst in the birth and

development of the South African Jewish community. His son Dr Louis Mirvish, in an article in *Jewish Affairs* (Vol. 15, No. 5, May 1960), has described how his father had to solve a whole set of problems in this new, South African setting:

*'It is not easy for a later generation to realise the legal and practical difficulties which arose in this new land, and which my father was called upon to solve. As a pioneer in his field he was conscious that every step was a precedent. Problems connected with divorce, marriage, proselytism, chalitzah and burial, arose daily and had to be tackled in a practical manner. Jewish religious life had to be adjusted to the conditions of the new country – and there were no precedents.'*<sup>16</sup>

After his death, a special Editorial in the *South African Jewish Chronicle* (22 August 1947) noted that:

*'Although Rabbi Mirvish devoted himself primarily to his congregation and particularly to the learned orthodoxy in our midst, nevertheless his beneficent influence stretched out to all sections of the community. For he was not only a great scholar but also a leader and a man of action. His scholarly ability was true to the old rabbinic style – he was exceptionally well acquainted with 'Shas' and its commentaries – and in addition he was possessed of an extensive knowledge of Haskalah and modern literature. To this wealth of knowledge was added a progressive approach to communal life and he imbued the activities of his community with something of his own spirit.'*<sup>15</sup>

At various times, this progressive, more open approach to the realities of communal life, were at variance with those of his own congregation.

During his lifetime, Rabbi Mirvish was one of the few South African rabbis known of abroad, and was listed in an international directory of rabbis, published in 1912.<sup>17</sup> But as well as his many, local communal activities, he was also widely known – both in South Africa, and abroad – through his writings. In addition to contributing to many journals, he wrote two important books: both compilations of his sermons, essays, homiletics, Biblical commentaries, and Halachic *Responsa*.<sup>5</sup> Both of them were written in Hebrew and published in Jerusalem, and each had a Foreword by Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, Chief Rabbi of Palestine

under the British Mandate. The first was *Zichron Yakov* ('In Memory of Jacob'), published in 1924, and named after his son Jacob – a poet and pharmacist – who had died tragically in the Influenza epidemic of 1918. The second was *Drushei HaRamach* – ('Sermons of *HaRamach*' – an acronym of 'HaRav Moshe Chaim'), published in 1935. Both books – but especially the second – dealt with the particular problems of South African Jewry, and of how to adapt the beliefs and practices of traditional East European Judaism to this totally new environment. An Editorial in the *South African Jewish Chronicle* (22 August 1947), noted that:

*'His droshim (sermons) are of a special type, combining the outlook of the Haskalah period with the old type of droshes – a task to which very few indeed were equal. It is this remarkable bridge between the old and the new which gave his published works such value and which led to their becoming books of reference for many orthodox Rabbis of today.'*<sup>15</sup>

During his lifetime, his two books were widely circulated among Rabbis in many other countries. Today, copies are owned by the British Library, the Library of Congress, and the Harvard Judaica Collection.

In the 1920's and 1930's he carried on an extensive correspondence with rabbis and communal leaders in many parts of the world, including Russia, Eastern Europe, Palestine, Great Britain, and the USA. The collection of over 200 letters – now housed in the Manuscript Collection of the University of Cape Town Library<sup>18</sup> – dealt with communal, Rabbinical and Halachic issues, but also with the condition of Jewish communities of Eastern Europe after the privations of the First World War. The collection includes letters to him from Chief Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook of Palestine, Chief Rabbi J. H. Hertz of Great Britain, Chief Rabbi Isaac Herzog of Ireland (and later of Palestine), Rabbi Salis Daiches of Edinburgh, Rabbi I. L. Bloch, Head of the Telz *Yeshiva*, the Rabbinical Council of Warsaw, and Rabbi Israel Meir Kagan of Radun (the '*Chafetz Chayim*'). As well as providing an insight into Jewish religious thinking at that time, many of these letters also offer a unique glimpse of the social and economic conditions of Jewish communities of the time – especially those in Russia, Eastern Europe, and Palestine.

In 1930 – together with Rev. Bender of Cape Town, Rabbi Dr J. L. Landau of Johannesburg, and Advocate M. Alexander MP – he represented the South African Jewish community in a delegation to Parliament, which was considering a Bill which might have outlawed *Shechitah*. As a result of their representations, the Bill was withdrawn.<sup>19</sup>

Rabbi Mirvish worked as a congregational Rabbi, right to the very end. On the 17 August 1947, he collapsed and died on the steps of the Vredehoek Synagogue, after officiating at a wedding.<sup>20</sup> That evening he had been scheduled to preach at the *Beth Hamedrash* memorial service in honour of the 15,000 Jews killed by the Nazis in Ponvez (Panevzys) on 24 August 1941.<sup>13</sup> Some months after his death, the street alongside the Synagogue was renamed 'Rabbi Mirvish Avenue' by the City Council.<sup>10, 11</sup> According to an article in the *South African Jewish Chronicle* later that year, this street was then the only one in South Africa named after a rabbi.

Saron and Hotz, in their book, *The Jews of South Africa*, describe him as 'a learned and pious rabbi from Lithuania'<sup>8</sup> He was, as the *South African Jewish Chronicle* (22 August 1947) put it:

*'an eloquent and inspiring speaker who, in private life was loved and admired for his piety and personal integrity. He was an orthodox Rabbi of the old school, but understood the needs and thoughts of the young.'*<sup>5</sup>

But from all contemporary accounts, it is clear that he was not only a gifted Rabbi, teacher, scholar and communal leader – he was also, by all accounts a *zadik*, a holy man, someone of great compassion and human tolerance. As Dr C. Resnekov wrote, in appreciation of him in the *South African Jewish Chronicle* of 29 August 1947:

*'We cannot evaluate yet the great influence Rabbi Mirvish wielded in the community. As time goes on, we will realise the truth of the Rabbinic saying: "The righteous attain a higher stature in death than when alive," and the Scriptural verse: "The wise shine like the brightness of the firmament and those that lead many to righteousness like the stars forever and aye."*

*'We may say over Rabbi Mirvish as was said over Rabbi Abina: "Bend your heads, ye palm trees, for a palm tree among men has fallen. Turn the*

day into night while mourning for him who in search for the light of truth, turned the nights into days." <sup>21</sup>



The author of this article, Cecil Helman, an anthropologist and medical general practitioner born in Cape Town, who achieved international renown as the foremost expert on the clinical applications of medical anthropology, died on 15 June 2009. His obituary can be found at:

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/2009/jul/06/obituary-cecil-helman>

## NOTES

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2. *Lithuanian Jewry* (Hebrew) (Tel-Aviv: Lithuanian Immigrants' Association in Israel, 1967). Page 292: **Baisagola**.
3. *Telsiai Book (The Book of Telz)* (Hebrew), edited by Yitzchak Alprowitz (Tel-Aviv: Organisation of Immigrants from Telz in Israel, 1984), Page 44: **Famous graduates of the Telz Yeshiva**.
4. *Jews Temporary Shelter Records*, Leman Street, London, England.
5. *South African Jewish Chronicle* (22 August 1947) **Death of Rabbi Moses Chaim Mirvish: Great Loss to Cape Jewry**.
6. *South African Jewish Chronicle* (29 August 1947) **Rabbi Mirvish's Work and Personality**.
7. *Statement of Income and Expenditure, Beth Hamedrash Hachodosh*, 1 November 1909 – 1 November 1910. (1910) University of Cape Town Library.
8. *The Jews in South Africa: A History*, edited by Gustav Saron & Louis Hotz (Oxford University Press, 1955). Chapter 3: **Cape Town Jewry, 1902-1910**, by Max Geffen, pages 45-58.
9. *Commission by His Excellency the Honourable Sir Walter Francis Hely-Hutchinson*, 11 December 1909.
10. *Beth Hamedrash Hachodosh Annual Report: 1947-1948* (16 June 1948) **The Late Rabbi Moses Chaim Mirvish**.
11. *Cape Town Orthodox Hebrew Congregation* (8 March 1955) **Golden Jubilee Souvenir Brochure**.
12. *Cape Argus* (18 August 1947) **Obituary: Rabbi M.C. Mirvish**.
13. *South African Jewish Times* (22 August 1947) **Death of Rabbi M. Ch. Mirvish: Moving Grave-side Tributes**.
14. *South African Jewish Times* (5 July, 1946) **Palatial Old Age Home in Cape Town: Opening Ceremony Arouses Great Enthusiasm**.
15. *South African Jewish Chronicle* (22 August 1947) **Editorial: Cape Jewry Bereaved**.
16. *Jewish Affairs* (May 1960) **Cape Town Jewry in 1910**, by Louis Mirvish, pp. 4-8.
17. *Ohele-Schem: Biografien und Adressen d. Rabbiners: Europa, Asien, Africa, America und Ustralien*, (International Directory of Rabbis) (Hebrew), by Sch. N. Gottlieb (Pinsk, Russia, 1912), Page 511: **Biography of 'Rabbi Mozes Ch. Mirwisch'**.
18. *University of Cape Town Library, Manuscript Collection* (Ref. No. BC 1063), **Rabbi M. Ch. Mirvish**.
19. *Cape Town Hebrew Congregation: A Centenary History: 1841-1941*, by Louis Herrman (1941). Page 129.
20. *Cape Times* (18 August 1947) **Sudden Death of Veteran Cape Town Rabbi**.
21. *South African Jewish Chronicle* (29 August 1947) **The Late Rabbi Moses Chaim Mirvish: An Appreciation**, by Dr C. Resnekov.

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## HUMOR AND LEGENDS OF COUNTER JOCKEYS IN THE "NATIVE TRADING STORE" GAME

*Maurice Skikne*

What a motley bunch they were, these "Shopnikes", "Kaffritnikes", "Conchesnikes"! Coming as they did from "Litte", "Pailand" and more rarely, other "Medines" in "Der Heim" (Europe), they more than made up for their lack of local education, with that zany sense of humor they brought with them. They had no hesitation in laughing at themselves or others, nor did they worry about the niceties of borrowing words or expressions from other languages. In particular from the new languages they now encountered, namely English, Afrikaans and "Fanakalo". This latter dialect was really a highly modified offshoot of SiZulu, which was being spoken by the majority of mine workers and township dwellers, with the inevitable infiltration of English, Afrikaans, Malayan and technical terminology. It was developed by the mining

industry training schools for both white and non-white miners as a *lingua franca*, so that the workers could better understand one another and carry out instructions. Many words and expressions of this Dialect have been listed by Dr Israel Abramowitz and this writer.<sup>1</sup>

To me, the most humorous were some of the nicknames *they* (the *griener*) gave one another. Some have already been related in *Jewish Affairs* (Volume 58, No.1, page 33). But there were numerous others. Some other titles were:

*Cohen die Pipke*: He stood outside his shop, with a pipe perpetually jammed in his mouth.

*Der Gutte Kind* (“The Good Child”): His mother always related how good a child he was when in fact he was not. He was a womanizer.

*Die Heiche* (“The Tall One”): He was nearly 2m tall. (Alternate: *Der Lange* – The Long One.)

*Weinberg der Shuster*: He obviously repaired shoes

*Leizer Haizen* (a “Loose Trousers”): Referring to one who was a Womanizer

*Levin der Hinkedike*: Suffered from a hip problem.

*Mapumpani* (“The Pumpkin”): He was short and rounded like a pumpkin (siZulu)

*Der Reite* (“The Red One”): Two such characters, one who was always very ruddy, probably because he tended to indulge in alcohol; the other who continuously criticized capitalism, embraced communism, but owned his own shop.

*Meyer die Latutnick* (“Meyer the Patch Artist”): He was a poor tailor, and basically was only good for light alterations and clothing repairs. An unskilled tailor.

*Goldene Tzainer* (“Golden Teeth”): Was one who had many gold capped teeth.

*Der Pollak* – “The Pole”): He was obviously a Polish Jew. Not many of them went into the African Trading Store, type of business.

*Machonisa* (“he makes us poor”) (siZulu) i.e. he takes our money. [The writer’s father]

*Manyo’Nosa* (“The Chameleon”) (siZulu). He had the habit of ambling like a chameleon.

*MaKeppies* (“The Cap”) (siZulu). He always wore a Cap no matter what the weather was.

*BugaPezul* (“He looks to Heaven”): He had the habit of standing with hands behind his back, nose in the air (siZulu)

This list is but an abbreviation of different groups in some of the towns. Others shopkeepers in other towns, handed out their title tokens quite liberally as well.

In reaction to anti-Semitism, many of the “*bocherim*” chose to ignore the snide remarks made about these *Griene* Jews. However there were also those who organized themselves into groups and fought back at cinema venues or other public places. There were those young men who punished their aggressors another way. This particular two would walk into the bar of a hotel in Brakpan called the “Masonic” on a Friday evening (what an ironic name to give a hotel! – it exists to this day); a particular watering hole, where the *goyisher* miners would gather in order to “*suip*”(imbibe in Afrikaans), their miserable pay before going on to “*donder*” (beat in Afrikaans) their wives and children at home. Now Sifris the smaller, would antagonize a particular miner, and when this lout reacted, in would step his mate Chaim. With one very hard punch he always felled his opponent, which put every other lout in fear and trepidation. These two characters called it “*Kirbe* Baiting”. Chaim and his friend became legends (to be avoided) in the early thirties.

There were also those “shopnikes” who were pretty unscrupulous as well. In the days of price control many were the dark customers who purchased, say, a particular pair of trousers, only to discover a cheaper pair in the wrapping paper, when they got home after finishing their mining contract. This type of unscrupulous behavior also extended to measuring short, weighed substances like sugar, flour etc and rolled cloth when being measured out. When a customer fancied a particular jacket the Shopkeeper would, if short of his size, grasp the back of the oversize jacket, reducing the girth to make it fit – this was called “Size Fit”. To make shoes fit they would even stuff paper into the toe boxes to reduce the size. With the times of the Great Depression causing so much financial pressure, these shop owners hoped thereby to make good. It is amusing to this writer just how they hoped to score



financially, as the gain each time was so small as to be laughable.

The dual political affiliation, of Communism versus Capitalism, by a number of Shopkeepers is also the subject of amusement to me. It was always a source of great humour to witness a so-called “Pink” Capitalist expounding the perceived great virtues of Socialism, without themselves ever really living under the sickle and hammer flag. They had no real experience of ever living long term as Jews in the USSR. This was the result of having left “*Der Heim*” either before the *Revolutzieh* had got going properly, or else they left in the earlier 1920’s, at a period where the heavy fist of Communism had not come crashing down so heavily. They actually believed the propaganda poured out by the Soviet Union on the air waves. It was amusing that when one asked of that “philosopher” to embrace socialism, his reaction would typically be in the negative. They wanted their cake and the right to eat it too! What also made it more difficult to accept was that such people had next to no experience in this field of politics.

Then there were those who had to come to work wearing their best. One such character who ran a grocery store, always wore a tie and silver armbands. He reveled in being meticulous and drove a light yellow coupe car to boot! Another attended to record, gramophone, primus stove, and bicycle sales dressed in a dark suit, tie and white shirt.

When it came to clothing, the spouses became the champions at fashion. No sooner would hubby make a couple of pounds than the wife would acquire quite a wardrobe of dresses, hats, coats, and shoes. As well as that, genuine pearl necklaces, diamond engagement rings (and wedding bands graced the body of this comely wife). This was known as “*Putzing ois*” (dressing up). Dresses were not bought off the peg, they were generally made by “bespoke” dressmakers, who plied their trade among the wealthier folk of a town. “*Putzen*” and “*Oistzufleitzenzeg*” (to dress very smartly and show off) became the order of the day at functions, barmitzvahs and weddings. However the “Grand Parade” at *Shul* on *Rosh Hashanah* and *Yom Kippur*, also figured high on the list. Arriving late in the Ladies Gallery of the *Shul* was the done and deliberate thing, so that the latest fashion could be admired by the men and the lesser females

(including the dressmaker herself). One well remembers sitting in soul and the service momentarily being halted whilst these young flashy “mommies” sashayed into the Lady’s gallery wearing picture hats gloves and the latest “in” colours. Perchance this ostentatious behavior was a reaction to an earlier life of deprivation? We will never really know, but it served as an item of “one-upmanship” as well!

The “National Jewish Sport” in those days was undoubtedly card playing. Games like Poker, Klaberjas, Vantoon, figured very highly in popularity. Such games were organized in the evenings, most times on Saturday evenings. The most amusing times during these games occurred when a *Kailiker* (“cripple player”) made a blue of a mistake during okay. He then beset by a tirade of ribaldry accusing him of being an “Ignoramus”, a “*bobbejan spieler*” (a baboon player in Afrikaans) etc. In such plays, naïve skills were not tolerated!

Some shopkeepers by dint of hard slogging, scrimping and saving were eventually able to put money by, and invest into other enterprises. Property investment seemed a sensible way of expanding ones horizons. However petty jealousy arose in the communities. For example when this writer’s late father demolished an old house to build a block of apartments, many comments were passed about how he acquired his money to do so. Being a witness to such remarks did not lessen the speaker’s embarrassment however! Thereby it became amusing to antagonize the *P’nai* (“Elite”) of the community, many of whom lived very well, but were never solid financially. When further property was developed, the African Trading Store keeper suddenly acquired an air of respectability!

It was as if such men suddenly became more accepted and respected than ever before!

What about the offspring of these Shopkeepers? Did any of them gather experience and knowledge by aiding their parents in the businesses? Well it certainly rubbed off on many of them. The acquisition of experience working as counter-jockeys in the shops certainly taught them about handling customers. They also learnt how to organize their finances and purchase of stock in other enterprises. Some learnt how to manufacture clothing by watching their parents toil at making them up. Many of these children were to later on put

such knowledge to very good use in their own enterprises, most of which had no connection to their parent's business types and enterprises. They say one also learns from the negative, so they also learnt how to reorganize themselves for success.

Just why did such businesses eventually die out? Probably for a number of reasons:

- The offspring of these shop owners received a very good school, and in many cases a tertiary education. They could thus earn livings as professionals.
- The customer body of the African Trading stores became sophisticated and learnt how to shop inside the so-called white townships.
- The shopkeepers as a group invested in other means of living and thus left /sold their businesses to other people (non-Jewish).
- They also became aged and died off.

Thus an era where Jewish immigrants were involved, and contributed immeasurably to the social strata of the smaller (and larger) mining towns, gradually came to an end in the 1970's.

#### NOTES

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2. *Reeftown African Trading Storekeepers: Some Anecdotes and Reflections*, Skikne, M. I., *Jewish Affairs*, Vol 58, 1, p.33, 2003. Readers are directed to read this article as it contains many other items not expressly mentioned here.
3. *The Kaffireatik*, R. Feldman, translated by Sherman, J, *Jewish Affairs*, Winter 1997, p. 28.
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## THE JEWISH PIRATE

*Prof. Edward Bernard Glick*

*This recent article about the most famous Jewish Pirate, Jean Lafitte, was written by a former professor from Temple University, Professor Edward Bernard Glick. It is re-published in this issue of the SA-SIG Newsletter with permission.*

*Many of the pirates of the Caribbean were Sephardic Jews who turned to piracy to get revenge on the Spanish Catholics who expelled them from Spain in 1492, murdered their families and stole their property.*

*Six of Barbarossa's chief officers were Jewish! This article sheds light on one of the most famous Jewish Pirates, Jean Lafitte.*

One of the things I do since I retired from Philadelphia's Temple University in 1991 is lecture on cruise ships. My signature talk is the 50-century-old history of piracy, whose practitioners I call the Seafaring Gangsters of the World. A few weeks before my first gig, I sent a draft of the talk to my history-buff sister, Phyllis. She liked it, but she was very unhappy that I had not mentioned Jean Lafitte. I told her I didn't include him because, except for two famous bisexual female pirates, Mary Read and Anne Bonny, I intended to deal with the economics, the sociology and the politics of piracy.

She said I simply had to talk about Lafitte because he was unique. He was a Sephardic Jew, as was his first wife, who was born in the Danish Virgin Islands.

In his prime, Lafitte ran not just one pirate sloop but a whole fleet of them simultaneously. He even bought a blacksmith shop in New Orleans, which he used as a front for fencing pirate loot. And he was one of the few buccaneers who didn't die in battle, in prison or on the gallows.

Though I didn't lecture about Lafitte at first, a circumstance of serendipity has made me do so ever since.

I was flying to Norfolk, Virginia. The man in the seat next to me wore a skullcap, and he began chatting with me in Gallic-accented English. Though born in France, the friendly passenger now lives in Switzerland. We quickly established that we

were both Jewish and that both of us had taught in Israel.

Then we had the following conversation: "What are you doing on this plane?" I asked.

"I'm a mathematician. I work for an American company and I'm flying to Norfolk today because it has the US Navy's largest naval base and my company is trying to get a Navy contract. Now, what are you doing on this plane?"

"My wife and I are picking up a cruise ship in Norfolk."

"Taking a vacation?"

"Not entirely. I'll be giving lectures on the ship, as many in fact as there are full days at sea."

"What do you lecture about?"

"Cruise lines frown on controversial topics. I have talked about Israel once or twice. But I usually talk about Latin America, which is my second specialty, or the Panama Canal, or Mexico's Isthmus of Tehuantepec, or Prince Henry the Navigator, or Portuguese explorations after Prince Henry, or Alfred Thayer Mahan's belief in the supremacy of sea power, or the political economy of the 21st century, or the voyages of Captain Cook to the South Pacific.

But I always begin a cruise with a lecture on pirates. The kids love it, and the old folks like it, too."

"Are you are going talk about Jean Lafitte?"

"No," and I repeated what my sister had told me. He pulled out his wallet and handed me a business card. It had "Melvyn J. Lafitte" written on it.

"The truth is that I am a direct descendant of Jean Lafitte."

"Your sister, Phyllis, is absolutely right. Our family, originally named Lefitto, lived in the Iberian Peninsula for centuries. When Ferdinand and Isabella reconquered Spain and expelled the Muslims and the Jews in 1492, most of the Jews fled to North Africa. Others went to the Balkans or to Greece and Turkey. But some Sephardic Jews, my ancestors among them, crossed the Pyrenees and settled in France, where Jean was born in about 1780. He moved to French Santo Domingo during

the Napoleonic period. However, a slave rebellion forced him to flee to New Orleans." "Eventually, he became a pirate, but he always called himself a privateer because that label has a more legal ring to it.

In 1814, the British sought his aid in their pending attack on New Orleans," he continued. However, he passed their plans to the Americans and helped General Andrew Jackson beat them in 1815. A grateful Jackson, not yet president, saw to it that Lafitte and his family became American citizens. And by the way, did you know that there is a town of Jean Lafitte, as well as a Jean Lafitte National Historical Park in Southwestern Louisiana?"

I was flabbergasted, not so much by the saga of Jean Lafitte as retold by a proud descendant, but by the fact that the two of us had met so coincidentally in the skies over Georgia.

Melvyn Lafitte lives in Geneva and I live in Portland, Oregon. These cities are 5,377 miles apart. Unlike him, I am mathematically challenged, so I don't know what the statistical probability is that a descendant of the Franco-Jewish-American pirate Jean Lafitte would board an airplane and sit next to me, as I was agonizing over whether to mention his famous ancestor in a forthcoming talk.

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## HEBREW AND JEWISH NAMES IN SOUTH AFRICAN PLACES

*Dennis Kahn*

### INTRODUCTION

Before the editor's call for the meaning of surnames came, I had acquired *A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Russian Empire*, by Alexander Beider. This treasure has given me insight into some 200 surnames of my extended family, of which one in four is from a toponym (place name). This large proportion has prompted me to search for places in southern Africa that are distinctly as well as obscurely connected to the Hebrew language and Jewish persons.

The place names of South Africa constitute a commonly-shared vocabulary of all the people of the country and are a national asset. The oldest names are those of the *San* and *Khoikhoi*, and those

of the African peoples. From the second half of the fifteenth century, Portuguese, Dutch, English, French, German, and other names were given. The evolution of Afrikaans further enriched the geographical nomenclature. Settlement, colonization, and immigration resulted in the addition of names from Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Italian, Indian, and other languages.

The Jewish contribution to South African society in the past two centuries is known to be much greater than its small population. To existing place names, I have added the street names of one metropolitan area. The result of this finger exercise is still incomplete and in need of verification and further study. Perhaps this article will stimulate readers of this newsletter to add their small piece to the large puzzle. I look forward to responses.

### PLACES WITH A HEBREW NAME

**Benoni:** Town developed from a gold-mining camp east of Johannesburg. Named by surveyor Johann Rissik, who found it difficult to assign title deeds to all unclaimed property between occupied farms in 1881, after the biblical Benoni, son of Rachel. The name means 'son of my sorrows'.

**Benrose:** Industrial suburb of Johannesburg. Laid out on farm Doornfontein and proclaimed 1952, the suburb was named by R. Horowitz after his mother Rose, who died in a German concentration camp during World War II. The name means 'son of Rose'.

**Reuven:** Suburb of Johannesburg. Proclaimed a township on 22 May 1963, it was named after Robert Horowitz; *Reuven* is the Hebrew form of *Robert*.

The reader is excused for thinking that the following places were founded by zealous *chalutzim* (pioneers). Zealous they certainly were for religious observance. In fact, these are (with a few exceptions) small rural enclaves on land, which were developed by a Mission Society as centres for an existing or potential Christian community. They cater for or are inhabited by rural poor. Included in the 4600 stations and smaller outstations between 1737 – 1904 are:

**Mizpah:** Railway siding near Greytown. Named from the *Mizpah* where Samuel prayed for and judged Israel; the ancient *Nebi Samwil* north-west

of Jerusalem, stones heaped by Jacob and named by Laban. An Israeli *Mitspe* is better known for strategic observance, as in *Mitspe Golani*, *Mitspe Ha-Yamim*, *Mitspe Mikhvar*, *Mitspe Netofa*, *Mitspe Yerikho*, etc.

**Moria:** Urban area east of Pietersburg (Polokwane). Headquarters of the Zionist Church of South Africa. The name is taken from the land *Moriah*, on which was the mountain where Abraham was instructed to sacrifice his son Isaac.

**Morija:** Headquarters of the Lesotho Evangelical Church established in 1833. Now a well-known educational centre. The name is derived from *Moriah*, meaning 'provided by the Lord'.

**Pnie:** Settlement and mission station between Stellenbosch and Groot Drakenstein founded in 1843. The name refers to the place where Jacob wrestled with God; it means 'face of God'. The name was also given to a station on the Vaal River near Barkly West in 1849.

**Rehoboth:** Town south of Windhoek. The name was changed from Anis by a missionary who came work with the Khoikhoi in 1844. The name means 'space' or 'room'. *Rehovot* is a town in Israel.

**Salem:** Settlement near Grahamstown founded by 1820 Settlers. The name means 'peace', which was achieved with marauding Xhosas with a sermon, and gifts of tobacco and pocket-knives. *Shalom* Observation Point overlooks the Sea of Galilee in Israel.

### PLACES WITH A JEWISH NAME

**Ermelo:** Town east of Johannesburg founded in 1871 by Frans Lion Cachet, a convert to Christianity in Ermelo, Netherlands. The hidden links are:

- Frans Lion Cachet (1835-99), the son of Rachel Hamburger by her marriage to Salomon Lion Cachet of Amsterdam, went to South Africa as a missionary in 1858. His family converted from Judaism in Amsterdam in 1849. Frans's brother Jan went to the Cape in 1860, to become a leader of the Gereformeerde Kerk and a founder of literary Afrikaans.
- The Jewish branch of the Cachet family was transported from Amsterdam to Auschwitz

where Eva, Rosa, Anna, Phine, Mathilde, Willem, and Margaretha perished between 1942-1944.

**Max Goodman Park:** Suburb of Johannesburg laid out on the farm Doornfontein in 1966. Named in honour of Max Goodman, mayor of Johannesburg between 1956-1957.

**Morristown:** Early name of Malvern, commemorates Hyman Morris, representative of the Duvenhage Syndicate, who was empowered to issue claims or stands on the farm Doornfontein in 1890. The spelling *Morriston* is also encountered.

**Raedene:** Suburb of Johannesburg. Laid out on the farm Klipfontein and proclaimed in 1935. Named after Rae Sandler, one of the township owners. The word *dene* is derived from the Old English and means 'valley'.

**Robertsham:** Suburb of Johannesburg laid out on the farm *Ormonde* and proclaimed in 1948. Named after Robert Shapiro, Chairman of the Kalven Estates which purchased the farm in 1948. The element *ham* is derived from Old English and means 'home', later 'village'.

**Rosettenville:** Suburb of Johannesburg. Established on the farm Turffontein in 1889, one of Johannesburg's oldest suburbs. Name derived from the surname of the founders, Levin or Leo Rosettenstein and his son Albert.

**Schauder:** Suburb of Port Elizabeth. Laid out in 1938 and named after Adolph Schauder, a city councillor who did much to promote economic housing in Port Elizabeth.

**Sophiatown:** Former suburb of Johannesburg, where Triomf was. Laid out in 1903 on the farm Waterval by Herman Tobiansky, and named after his wife Sophia. Occupied by Africans until 1955, when it was rezoned for whites, resurveyed and rebuilt. The inhabitants were moved to new townships.

**Sydney on Vaal:** Village near Barkly West. Founded in 1902 and is variously said to be named after Sidney Mendelsohn, Director of the Vaal River Diamond and Exploration Co., which owned the land, as well as after its situation on the Vaal River; and after Sydney Shippard, Acting Attorney of the Executive Council of Griqualand West in 1872.

## STREETS WITH A JEWISH NAME

The tribute to a Jewish presence is more visible at street level than in other places. Being unable to enter their municipal offices for official records, I have used a street guide of Cape Town and its nearby towns. The resulting search speaks for itself: errors and omissions are in need of correction, and additional information is more than welcome.

### *Derivation assumed known*

#### Cape Town

**Abraham** Julius (1907- ), pioneer of seaweed industry and leading entrepreneur in the field?

**Abrahams** Israel (1903-73), Chief Rabbi of Cape Town and Hebrew scholar born in Vilna. Came to S.A. in 1937 and held the position of chief rabbi for more than thirty years. Part-time professor of Hebrew at the U.C.T. Wrote extensively. Retired 1968, settled in Jerusalem.

**A.Z. Berman** (Aaron Zalman, 1894-1975) was a soldier, politician and civic leader. Entered the City Council in 1932, and served for 42 years. Elected a United Party Senator in 1960.

**Brodie** Bernard (1919- ), industrialist?

**Gelb** Julius (1921- ), attorney, Mayor of Milnerton 1964-66 and in 1980s.

**Isadore Cohen** (1903-87) owned virtually all of Camps Bay when it was a sandy waste in the 1920s. When his property was developed into a suburb and resort area he became a multi-millionaire. Endowed the Chair of Hebrew Language at the U.C.T, and a Charitable Trust, with members of his family.

**Louis Gradner** (1883-1955), Mayor of Cape Town 1933-35.

**Millin** Sarah Gertrude (1889-1968)?

**Morris** (6x) Dr Solly Morris (1913-84) City Engineer for 25 years. Associated with *The Foreshore Plan of Cape Town*, and freeways in the urban transport system.

**Moses Kottler** (1896-1977), a Lithuanian immigrant in 1915, was a self-taught sculptor with numerous important sculptural commissions.

**Rabbi Mirvish**, Moses Chaim (1872-1947), from Lithuania in 1908, first fully qualified rabbi in the Cape Colony, and later of Vredehoek Synagogue. Helped create the basic social and religious structure of Cape Town.

**Raymond Ackerman** (1931), Executive Chairman of Pick 'n Pay Stores Ltd., South Africa's major retailer. Pioneer of the hypermarket.

**Sam Gordon**, general dealer, owned all of Gordon's Avenue, now Jackson Road, in Seaforth?

**Sarah Goldblatt** (1890-1975), writer of Afrikaans children's books and short stories, was literary executrix of C. J. Langenhoven, a foremost Afrikaans poet.

**Sol Cohen** (Solly Morris) was an eminent surgeon during the 1930s. Knighted by King Gustav of Sweden for services to the then Crown Prince.

**Solomon** Isidore (1902-?) from Lithuania in 1907, General Manager O.K. Bazaars, member of City Council, East London, 1944-46?

**Wolf Kibel** (1903-1938), Polish immigrant, is partly responsible for introducing expressionist painting to South African artist.

**Yudelman** (1881-1943), owner of Yudelman's Store in Plumstead, one of the two oldest businesses in the area in 1905.

#### Paarl

**Kaplan** Yasha, from Dvinsk, opened the first button and buckle factory in S.A.? OR Mendel, owner of Zandwyck wine farm in Southern Paarl?

**Solomon** Benjamin from England, the first Jewish settler in Paarl (and probably in the Cape). He lived there in 1806-1809? OR

Bertha (nee Schwartz 1892-1969), one of the first women barristers in S.A. Member of Parliament for over 20 years?

**Volks** Abel, the first Jewish mayor of Paarl in 1959-1960.

#### Somerset West

**Soloman** A.J. was mayor in 1921-1925.

#### Wellington

**Sarembock** Philip (1908-?) from Liverpool in 1908, Mayor of Wellington 1957-60 and Chairman of Hebrew Congregation.

*Derivation still unknown*

#### Cape Town

**Abrahams** (2x), **Brodie**, **Gelb**, **Gershon**, **Goldstein**, **Kruskal**, **Louis Glassman**, **Maisel**, **Mendelsohn**, **Mendelson**, **Nathan Mallach**, **Sher** (3x), **Sive**, **Solly Freedburg**, **Solomons** (3x).

#### Paarl

**Kaplan**, **Mendelsohn**, **Rabinowitz**, **Solomon**, **Tabakh**.

Atlantis: **Katzenberg** (suburb).

Somerset West: **Goldman**, **Levy**.

Strand: **Abrahams**.

Wellington: **Abrahams**, **Solomon**.

The survey of major cities and over 1300 country communities identified as having had a Jewish presence is a daunting task and unlikely prospect. I hope that this example at least stimulates interest in the subject.

*Dennis Kahn*

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## OH, DO SURNAMEN HAVE MEANINGS?

*Colin Plen*

Some surnames are abbreviations: Katz is an abbreviation for *Kohen Tzeddek*. A person with the name of Cohen was a righteous person and was known as the Righteous Cohen. His children took on the name of *Kohen Tzeddek*, which became Katz. In a similar way, names like Bank, Back, Sack, Zack, are derived from *Zerah Kodesh* (seed of the holy) or *Bnei Kodesh* (sons of the holy) which imply that the person whose name originated the line were probably people who were martyrs.

Mr Abie Berman wrote to me about his surname. A Berman could be a bear trainer, a beer seller, a neighbour (think of the Afrikaans *buurman*) and the spellings vary between places of origin. He says that their Berman name has survived for many generations. The story is told that his great great-grandfather was still known as *Ish be'er*, the "Man of the Well". They were descendants of those who guarded the wells on the main routes in the past.

I have written about the sources of names, trade names, town or country names, descriptive names and patrilineal names, names which are inherited from one's father. Typical of these, besides Cohen and Levy, are names like Levinson, Rabinowitz, and names starting with Ben or Bar. –Owitz, Ben, and Bar, all mean "son of." But there is another: What about Gittelson? Gittel is a woman's name! Possibly a woman had a child through a means other than being married, and she could not name her child after the father. In war time or in one of many *pogroms* many women were raped. So her child received the surname of Child of Gittel. These names are matrilineal.

In English names there is still another group of names, known as Habitat names. Names like Lawn,

Hill, Mountain, and Forest describe the area where a person actually resided.

A name that was considered to be a "good" name would have been a colour. Weiss (white), Shwartz (black), Braun (Brown), Grun (Green), Rod or Rot (Red), are examples of colour names. There is a man in Cape Town with the surname Wise. He has confirmed that originally his family name was Weiss, and it was altered along the way.

Some of the Twelve Tribes had mascot animals. They were not real animals but impressions of animals. Names like Wolf, Fuchs (Fox), Lew (a lion) and Behr or Bear are amongst these. Some people took on the names of stones, possibly because the Twelve Tribes all had stones to represent them. Amongst these stone names are: Bernstein (amber). There are many "stone" names but I am unable as yet to provide the correct translations for some of them; Feinstein and Epstein are two.

There are many interesting stories as to how surnames evolved. A man called Mayer had an inn, or rather a place where people stayed, and he put up a red sign to show where he was. His business became known for its Red Shield, or Rothschild, and Mayer Rothschild produced a family of sons who made Rothschild a household word in finance.

Rappaport derives from two Rafa brothers (Rafa meaning a raven) who moved to Italy, to live on a river there. One brother lived near the port and he and his descendants have become known as the Rappaports.

Furmans in Eastern Europe were the men who led the horses pulling a cart. Do you know anyone called Wasserman? A waterman was the person who went to the well or the river and fetched water and brought it to the houses. A Puterman was the man who made or sold butter. A Chait or a Chayat is a tailor, and is another example of names I have previously mentioned where you could find alternative languages being used for the same job. A Schneider is also a tailor.

A Caspar or Casper, is derived from a Persian word meaning a treasurer or an accountant. Lapidus was the person who lit the lights in the Temple (I do not know how this name has come through all these many years), and Fanaroff was a lamplighter in Eastern Europe.

I am sure that your name has not been used yet. Please email me at [colplen@iafrica.com](mailto:colplen@iafrica.com) and tell me your surname's meaning.

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## **GROWING UP IN CAPE TOWN IN THE 1950'S**

*Beryl Baleson*

My memories go back to the early 1950's when I was old enough to go out on my own with my friends, away from the restrictions of my parents and family.

I was a member of the *Habonim* Youth Movement, and although I never went to the annual camps because of being asthmatic which was a concern to them, I was involved in the other activities that took place nearer to home.

I, in particular, remember my summer days at the beach. Growing up in Cape Town meant going to the beach every weekend, and of course during the end of year 6 week school holidays. How on earth did the Johannesburg and other inland town folks cope without the Atlantic Ocean on the one side and the Indian Ocean on the other? It was at that time i.e. during the 6 week end of year school holidays that the Johannesburg and other inland-town people "invaded" Cape Town and our beaches.

Saturday afternoons my friends and I used to go to Clifton and on Sundays to Muizenberg where further friendships were formed and "dates" were made! Thank goodness for an excellent bus service in those days, which I believe is not available to-day in Cape Town.

How could I not remember those "heady days of summer" and "itsy-bitsy yellow bottomed polka-dot bikinis" (a song of which was a "hit of the 1950s"). Unfortunately I was not in the category of being able to wear a bikini – but most of my girl friends did.

Coincidentally, and something which influenced me to write this article, was a programme on Television on Sunday October 4, about an Island called "Bikini." I learned that the Bikini bathing costume name was inherited from that island which is a part of the Marshall Islands, south of Hawaii.

The most important part of our Beach days was not the swimming, nor the "talent" which abounded both on Clifton and Muizenberg beaches, but getting a "brown tan" darker than a large portion of our community who we only met or knew as housemaids and street cleaners. I remember using Brylcream on my skin in order to get a better suntan! (I am grateful that in my older days I never developed skin cancer.) First thing I did when I arrived home was to have a hot bath (on my mother's instructions) with bicarbonate of soda in to remove the sting which "HIT" at the end of the day!

The only problem that sometimes arose was Cape Town's famous "South Easter" wind which always blew at the wrong time – imagine sitting on the beach and having the lovely, soft white sand blowing all around us!

On Sunday mornings my friends and I took turns in phoning the Police Station in Muizenberg to enquire about the weather, as although it used to be really hot in Cape Town, the wind usually strongly in Muizenberg! If the weather was fine, then we "phone-chained" everyone and met at the Cape Town Station, under the famous clock at 10 a.m. as pre-arranged. If we were told that there was a strong South Easter blowing in Muizenberg, we usually went to Clifton where the wind seldom blew as it was protected by the 12 Apostle's Mountain above.

Muizenberg, for us teenagers meant the Snake Park where we all gathered. We resembled an unfinished scrabble board, as we lay on the beach in groups, one head on top of another's stomach, the fatter the stomach, the more comfortable for our head!

We also loved sitting on the Promenade wall, swinging our legs, talking to those below or just looking to see who was there and who we should join for the day when we arrived!

We Cape Town girls were quite lucky in the summer school holidays, i.e. from the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> week in December to about the 15<sup>th</sup> January, the Johannesburg boys enjoyed "dating" the Cape Town girls and the Cape Town boys, "dated" the Johannesburg girls – so for 6 weeks a year we had a change of talent! And what a "shame" if one wasn't asked out for New Years Eve parties! (Dating was always arranged at the Snake Park or at Clifton).



Winter was another story – Saturday afternoons meant going to see the latest film, then going to Waldorf Café, which was the most well-known and famous meeting place in Cape Town where we made arrangements for Saturday night dates, usually what we called “get-togethers” in each other’s homes where the music from our 78 speed records, got us “bopping” after of course rolling up the carpets. (Luckily in those days none of my friends had edge-to-edge carpeting).

Sundays in winter were involved in *Habonim* arrangements, and we usually met at the *Cheder* Hall in Hope Street, Cape Town where we either played Table Tennis or Volley Ball. Meetings changed for different ages to different times. At age 14 we had our meetings on Sunday nights, and by the time I was 16 our meetings were on Friday nights at the Zionist Hall, opposite the Cheder in Hope Street, Cape Town.

I have not forgotten our Friday night and Saturday morning *Shul*. We were members of the Vredehoek *Shul* which sadly is no more, and in general Cape Town is not what it used to be, but then neither is Israel to-day where we came in 1977.

However, changes or not, Cape Town and its beaches, its famous Waldorf Café, our Vredehoek *Shul*, my school days and generally my teenage years will live with me forever.

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## **ARCHIVAL PLATFORM LAUNCHES IN CAPE TOWN**

Archives in South Africa are currently underfunded and understaffed, putting valuable documents at risk. Museums and heritage sites are often still perceived by the public as being part of the old apartheid order, and transforming the sector has not been as easy as we thought in 1994. The Archival Platform is a national networking, advocacy and research initiative to address these problems. It brings together people who are interested in South Africa’s heritage and identity, and it was launched formally at the Castle in Cape Town from Thursday 12 November 2009.

Sello Hatang, Information Communications Manager at the Nelson Mandela Foundation, commented on the crisis in archives today.

Archival Platform director Harriet Deacon explained what the newly launched initiative aims to achieve. The archive – records, memory, cultural practice and places that tell the stories of the past – is critical to our sense of identity and citizenship. Yet the archive in South Africa is facing serious challenges which include the lack of sufficient public and government investment in the sector, and the fragmentation of the professional sector.

In helping to address these challenges, the Archival Platform provides resources and opportunities for information-sharing and debate. It already speaks to a large network of professionals working in archives, museums and heritage disciplines, government employees and interested members of the general public.

The Platform has a monthly e-mail newsletter, a website ([www.archivalplatform.org](http://www.archivalplatform.org)), a Twitter feed and a Facebook fan page.

The Archival Platform will ensure that key issues are taken up by professionals, the public and government. For example, in Heritage Month the Platform launched a “Letters for Lulu” campaign, in the spirit of “Tips for Trevor”, in which professionals in the sector alerted the new Minister of Arts and Culture, Lulu Xingwana, to issues of concern within the sector. These letters were to be presented to the Minister at the end of November.

The Archival Platform is funded by The Atlantic Philanthropies and supported by the University of Cape Town and the Nelson Mandela Foundation. For more information, contact:

Dr Harriet Deacon  
Director, Archival Platform

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## *Book Review*

### **JEW OF KWAZULU-NATAL – A HISTORY** *by Julia Prosser*

*Colin Plen*

I think the book is published by the Council of KwaZulu Natal Jewry as I cannot see anyone else claiming to be the publisher.

The book is an attractive 417 page volume in a large size, 310 x 220. Very well printed on good quality paper.

The author obviously did a great deal of research and has presented a readable book. I found it sad that so much went into it, and it is spoiled by some inaccuracies and errors which would have been prevented by proofreading.

Two brothers owned a sort of chain of hotels in Durban, the K hotels. Mrs Prosser names them as one name: Sasha (George) Kahn as if it was one man, whereas Sasha and George were two men.

People who should have been mentioned for their historical influences on business development were omitted but their grandchildren have been included for such activities as winning a tennis tournament in 1970 and being members of a sports team. The book is useful for students of Jewish Natal but it is not a Bible.

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### *IAJGS International Conference*

#### **GO WEST, GENEALOGISTS!**

The website for the 30th IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy is now live! Come visit us at: <http://www.jgsa2010.com>

The Jewish Genealogical Society of Los Angeles is your enthusiastic host for this event, taking place from July 11-16, 2010 at the JW Marriott Hotel at L.A. Live, downtown Los Angeles' new entertainment and cultural complex.

Are you passionate about genealogy, but haven't attended a conference before? Have you been going for years and wonder what's special about this one?

The 2010 conference will offer rich content, unparalleled learning and networking opportunities, and the intangible experience of connecting with others as obsessed as you are about tracing their family trees.

Whether you are a seasoned pro or absolute beginner, there will be a slate of workshops, lectures, films and panels on global Jewish history, resources and methodology that will educate and engage you for five and a half days.

Our website provides program, travel, and venue information, plus an FAQ section which should answer most of your early queries. The Call for Papers began on November 15th and registration opened on January 15<sup>th</sup>, and hotel reservations can be made now. Take a stroll through our site to learn more.

If you really want to be in the loop with breaking news, sign up for our conference newsletter at:

<http://www.jgsa2010.com/about/sign-up-for-the-announcements-newsletter/>

You can also sign up for the JewishGen conference discussion group, as well as keep up with our website blog and Facebook accounts.

We value your opinions and encourage you to contribute and/or volunteer to make this the best conference ever. Go to the "Contact" or "Volunteer" or "Sponsor" links on the site to reach us. Consider making this true vacation by arriving early or staying late and traveling the length of our beautiful state and throughout the west.

And remember: the number one reason to attend an IAJGS conference is the people – friends and colleagues, learning and collaborating in a unique, collective experience. For Jewish genealogists, there's nothing like it.

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### *JewishGen*

#### **RE-LAUNCH OF JEWISHGEN SUCCESS! STORIES PAGE**

We're excited to re-launch *Success! Stories* as a more-or-less monthly webzine, featuring edited

stories of ancestor and family connections made through JewishGen.

This time around we're highlighting the kinds of success stories that we read about almost every day on the JewishGen mailing lists and discussion groups. These stories emphasize the "who-knows-who" approach that list members make possible, including nearly 5,000 readers of the JewishGen Discussion Group, thousands more who read the SIG mailing lists, and around 86,000 users of the JewishGen Family Finder (JGFF).

Allan Karan reconnected with cousins and connected with an entire new family line from a single posting of names and a photo to the JewishGen Discussion Group.

Michelle Essers was just starting her research when she sent a query to the LitvakSIG mailing list in hopes of solving a family mystery.

A reader working with another researcher "thinks outside the box" and recognizes a possible connection, and the sleuthing pays off.

Rita Redlich listed her great-grandfather's *shtetl* in the JGFF and not only discovered cousins all over the world but also met a

Holocaust survivor of the same *shtetl* who showed her where her family's business had been on a map of the town.

Meredith Hoffman and Nancy Siegel have worked with the authors to edit these pieces for publication. In addition, the *Heard on the Lists* column features emails that capture an entire story, or an exciting research moment, in one page. Be sure to read this month's terrific story-in-an-email by Israel Pickholtz.

We're sure you'll be inspired by these stories and we encourage you to send Meredith and Nancy your own success stories for possible future publication (their email is [success@lyris.jewishgen.org](mailto:success@lyris.jewishgen.org)),

The *Success! Stories* web page can be found at:

<http://www.jewishgen.org/JewishGen/testimonials>

*Phyllis Kramer, VP, Education, JewishGen, Inc*  
[phylliskramer1@att.net](mailto:phylliskramer1@att.net)

## EDITOR'S MUSINGS

*Colin Plen*

### Pinelands Cemetery

Some interesting names I came across in the Pinelands Cemeteries:

*Benjamin Disraeli Goldberg*

*Benjamin Franklin*

*Walter Bendix.* (A bendix is a part of a car – maybe the original inventor had the same name as the deceased Mr Bendix?)

I told a friend that I had seen a gravestone for Paul Kruger. "That was my grandfather" she said. "He died in 1966"

"No," I said, "he died in 1945".

So I went back and sure enough there was another Paul Kruger, twenty year later.

I have seen several gravestones for women with the name of Queenie. In most cases, the Hebrew name was Malcah which means Queen.

### Muizenberg Cemetery

In the last issue of the Newsletter I told you about the Muizenberg Cemetery *Ohel* which had been damaged by vandals. I took this photograph to show you how bad it is.



## Letters to the Editor

### The Jews of Mocambique

A few IAJGS conferences ago at an SA SIG meeting I mentioned to someone that I had a book about the Jews of Mozambique. I promised to do lookups for her when I found it as I had just moved, and much of my belongings was in a storage locker. I am finally cleaning up the storage locker and came across the book today. It is actually a report on the 7th annual congress of the African Jewish Congress in Maputo, Mocambique in 2000. It contains the history of the Lourenco Marques (Maputo) Jewish Community as well as archival material and press cuttings about the Jews of Mocambique, and minutes and reports from small Jewish communities in Southern Africa. I'm hoping that the lady I spoke to those years ago is on this mailing list and I can finally help her.

I also found my book on the Jews of Mauritius, a booklet on the Jewish Community of Graff-Reinet and a pamphlet on the Gatooma (Kadoma) Hebrew Congregation and its Jewish cemetery.

*Ed Goldberg*  
*rhodesia@gmail.com*  
*Vancouver, Canada*

◆◆◆

### **Kol Hakavod, Ann!**

Dear Friends,

Our latest volunteer spotlight has been published on the [JewishGen] blog. This month we honor Ann Rabinowitz, JewishGen's Assistant Blog Coordinator.

Please visit [www.JewishGen.blogspot.com](http://www.JewishGen.blogspot.com) to read the complete profile and be sure to leave a note in the comments field thanking Ann for all of her hard work.

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## MEMORIES OF MUIZENBERG



### ***Memories of Muizenberg Exhibition opens in Cape Town at the SA Jewish Museum*** ***9 March – 11 June, 2010***

The long awaited exhibition is guaranteed to evoke a flood of memories and nostalgia.

Featuring photographs, memorabilia, and anecdotes, recalling those glorious summer days in Muizenberg – the ‘Snake Pit’, the Balmoral Beach, white-coated beach photographers, peanut sellers, beauty and “bopping” contests, and, of course, the iconic bathing boxes and bluebottles!

The exhibition provides a fascinating insight into the origins of this unique seaside place, and those colourful characters, many of them international celebrities, who established holiday homes there.

The SA Jewish Museum is located at 88 Hatfield Street, Gardens, Cape Town.

With best wishes,

The Muizenberg Team

Email: [memoriesofmuiz@gmail.com](mailto:memoriesofmuiz@gmail.com)  
Phone: (011) 728-8378 Fax: (018) 468-5895  
Postal address: P. O. Box 117, Klerksdorp 2570  
South Africa

## SURNAMES APPEARING IN THIS NEWSLETTER

*Vol. 10, Issue 2 – January 2010*

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

Abina (6), Abrahams (13, 14), Abramowitz (8), Ackerman (14), Alexander (6), Back (15), Baleson (1, 2, 3, 16), Bank (15), Barbarossa (10), Bear (15), Behr (15), Beinkeinstadt (7), Bender (6), Bendix (19), Berman (13, 15), Bernard (13), Bernstein (15), Bloch (3, 6), Bonny (10), Braun (15), Brodie (13, 14), Casper (15), Chait (15), Chayat (15), Cohen (2, 13, 14, 15), Daiches (6), Deacon (19), Epstein (2, 15), Essers (19), Fanaroff (16), Feinstein (15), Feivelson (3), Feldman (10), Fox (15), Franklin (19), Freedburg (14), Fuchs (15), Furman (15), Geffen (7), Gelb (13), Gershon (14), Getz (2), Gittelson (15), Glassman (14), Glick (1, 5, 10), Goldberg (2, 19, 20), Goldblatt (14), Goldman (14), Goldstein (14), Goodman (13), Gordon (3, 14), Gottlieb (7), Gradner (13), Groll (20), Grun (15), Hamburger (12), Harris (2), Hart (2), Hatang (19), Helman (1), Hely-Hutchinson (5), Hertz (6), Herzog (6), Hoffman (7, 19), Horowitz (12), Hotz (4, 6), Issroff (2), Japha (14), Kagan (6), Kahn (1, 3, 11, 18), Kaplan (14), Karan (19), Katz (15), Katzenberg (14), Kibel (14), Kook (5), Kottler (14), Kramer (19), Kruger (19), Kruskal (14), Lafitte (10, 11), Landau (6), Langenhoven (14), Lapidus (15), Le Grange (14), Lefitto (11), Levin (13), Levinsohn (15), Levy (14, 15), Lew (15), Lion Cachet (12), Mahan (10), Maisel (14), Mallach (14), Mandela (17), Margolis (3), Mayer (15), Mendelsohn (13, 14), Millin (13), Mirvish (3, 7, 14), Morris (13), Muller (10), Pickholtz (19), Plen (2, 3, 15, 18, 19), Prosser (18), Puterman (15), Rabinowitz (2, 14, 15, 20), Raffa (15), Raper (14), Rappaport (15), Read (10), Redlich (19), Resnekov (6), Rod (15), Rood (15), Rosettenstein (13), Rot (Roth) (15), Rothschild (15), Sack (15), Sandler (13), Sarembock (14), Saron (4, 6), Schauder (13), Schneider (15), Schwartz (15), Shapiro (13), Sher (14), Sherman (10), Shippard (13), Shkop (3), Siegel (19), Sifris (8), Sive (14), Skikne (1, 4, 7, 10), Solomans (14), Tabakh (14), Tobiansky (13), Todeschini (14), Volks (14), Waldorf (16), Wasserman (15), Weinberg (8), Weiss (15), Wise (15), Wolf (15), Yudelman (14), Zack (15).

### MEMBERSHIP DUES for 2009 / 2010

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

The Newsletter is published four times a year. An annual subscription (4 issues) costs US\$20, two years (8 issues) costs US\$35. The subscription year runs from **1 July of the current year to 30 June of the succeeding year**. Members joining during a year receive back issues.

The SA-SIG Newsletter is available in two formats:

- **A printed magazine-style format** which we will mail to you by post. There is a subscription fee to cover materials and mailing costs
- **An on-line PDF format** which you can download into your computer, read whenever desired and print on your printer. If you wish to be advised by e-mail when a new issue is available for downloading, then please send an e-mail request to Mike Getz at *MikeGetz005@comcast.net*

If you require a printed magazine-style format which is dispatched by airmail, please go to the SA-SIG Website for a postal subscription form which you can print.

You can also pay online. Just follow the instructions on the Website:

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

If you wish to subscribe and pay off-line by postal mail, a subscription form is available on the last page of this Newsletter.

# SA-SIG Newsletter

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Subscription Manager: Mike Getz – *MikeGetz005@comcast.net*

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Please fill in your name, delivery address and other details and send it together with a US Dollar check/cheque payable to “SA SIG” and drawn on a USA bank account to:

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