

# SA SIG

Vol 2 Issue 1

March 2001

## Presidents Message

**From: Saul Issroff**

There is a growing international interest in Southern African Genealogy. The African Jewish Diaspora is very widespread and we all have contacts and family everywhere.

We welcome Beryl Baleson who takes over as the new editor of the newsletter/ journal and thank Mike Getz for his work in setting this up and keeping it going. Editors naturally welcome new and interesting material.

Beryl's skills are aptly demonstrated in her contributions to this newsletter, in particular the piece on the Strand. While it is easy to find material in published books on the major cities, and of course, Oudtshoorn, finding material on smaller centers is more difficult. Recently our SA SIG worked with the Simons Town Museum in tracing prominent Jews who loved there. There are few mentions of Simons Town in Jewish History books and we will be placing this material on our website in the near future.

Beryl has also launched an appeal for names of South Africans who went on Aliyah and intends to compile a database of these names. The SA contribution to the founding and development of Israel needs to be perpetuated. Please support her by publicising this project and provide any names of people you know who went on Aliyah.

The number of participants in the SA SIG online discussion group has grown considerably.

There have been a number of changes with our website. Roger Harris has taken over as webmaster, redesigned the layout and made the flow more user- friendly. Roger has also contributed an outstanding piece on synagogues of South Africa. Several people, including Ann Rabinowitz of Miami Beach, have contributed databases. Ann's main contribution was the indexing of entries in the 1929 SA Jewish Yearbook.

The Southern African SIG is largely undemocratic – Mike and I started it. We have not had an election and would be happy to have new people involved and take over. So please volunteer.

I am thoroughly immersed in the organisation of London 2001, the 21<sup>st</sup> International Annual Conference on Jewish Genealogy to be held at the Intercontinental Hotel, Hyde Park Corner from the 8<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> of July 2001.

A number of focused topics of interest to South Africans are featured. There will be an all-day Migration Symposium led by Prof. Aubrey Newman, with emphasis on the Temporary Shelters and discussion on a

large amount of newly available material. A day of Genetics and Genealogy, with summing up by former South African Prof. Lewis Wolpert, is also be featured.

Viv Anstey, Director of the new South African Jewish Museum in Cape Town, will be discussing its relationship to family history and genealogy. Mendel Kaplan is to speak on the making of Yizkor Book, Rietevé.

So please try to come and join us. The hotel is filling up, register early.

**Saul**

London 2001 – 21<sup>st</sup> International Conference on Jewish Genealogy  
8-13 July 2001. [www.jewishgen.org/london2001](http://www.jewishgen.org/london2001)  
[info.london2001@talk21.com](mailto:info.london2001@talk21.com)

## **EDITORIAL      BERYL BALESON   Editor**

The S.A. SIG of The International Association of Jewish Genealogy Societies was initiated at its Hollywood Chai Seminar in Los Angeles in 1998 by Saul it was decided to Issroff and Mike Getz. Although provide a newsletter regularly, there were only two issues in 1999. We plan to publish quarterly.

Please address correspondence and contributions to Beryl Baleson, E:mail: [tuis@zahav.net.il](mailto:tuis@zahav.net.il). Alternatively send your contributions or enquiries by mail to 19/17 Schwartz Street, Ra-anana 43212, Israel.

We would like to hear about "Family traditions - Old and New". For those who have emigrated, tell us how you have settled into your new homes, how your lives remain influenced by your South African background. It is also important to recall and recount the traditions our parents and grandparents brought from Latvia, Lithuania, Europe, Mediterranean countries and from wherever they came to settle in South Africa.

Many South African communities no longer have a Jewish population. For those of you who have information of these communities, please share it with us. Details of families, their businesses, community life, activities, leaders, shuls and talmud torahs, cemeteries, etc. Please also forward your ideas as to future contents. "Letters to the Editor" will be welcome and topics such as "Country Communities"; "Prominent Persons in the SA Jewish Community" and "Memories of Life in the Shtetl" which could have been passed on from generation to generation. This newsletter features:

**Jewish Community of the Strand.....** The Strand is a seaside town nestling at the bottom of the Hottentots Holland Mountain in the Boland, Western Cape, South Africa, about 30 miles northeast of Cape Town. This community that thrived until 1986, now has only 5 Jewish families, most of whom have joined with Somerset West.

**District Six - A Jewish Shtetl in Cape Town.....,**

**The South African-Israel connection.....** The first article in this series deals with the establishment and formation of the Zionist Association in Cape Town in 1897.

**The Kupishok (Kupiskis) - Cape Town Connection.....**

The South African-Israel connection, being close to my heart, will be an ongoing feature of this Newsletter, with articles on the various aspects and roles that South Africans have played in Israel. But we would also like to have, as another permanent feature, information about the role that South Africans are playing in other countries in the four corners of the world.

I look forward to hearing from each of our members, and receiving contributions that can help our newsletter grow from strength to strength.

## **THE SOUTH AFRICAN-ISRAEL CONNECTION.**

(Information obtained from Philip Gillon's book "Seventy years of Southern African Aliyah)

Zionism came officially to Southern Africa when the "Chovevei Zion Society" (Lovers of Zion) was founded in Johannesburg in 1896, the year that Herzl published his "Judenstaat". The Society received some Passover wine from Rishon Le Zion, and recorded with delight that "our fellow Jews tasted it and were made to see that Palestine, too, is a land like other lands, where it is possible to live".

A Zionist Association was formed in Cape Town in 1897 and a year later, the "Chovevei Zion" merged into the Transvaal Zionist Association. By the end of 1898 - despite the ferment in Southern Africa that resulted in the Boer War breaking out in 1899 - there were a dozen Zionist societies with 5,000 members in South Africa, and the S.A. Zionist Federation had been established.

Two South Africans, Lennox Loewe and Leopold Kessler, represented South Africa at the Third Zionist Congress in Basle in 1899, one of them visited Palestine and reported on his return to South Africa that settlement there was a practical proposition.

A trickle of immigration from Southern Africa into Palestine started at a Zionist conference in 1906, where it was reported that 35 former Transvalers were living in Jerusalem.

In the 1920's and early 1930's, after the Balfour Declaration was issued and WW I ended, several prominent Southern Africans emigrated to what was then Palestine.

Among the early Southern African arrivals was Abraham Levy, who became chief accountant of the Palestine Railways in 1922. A year later he was joined by his wife Milly, who remained a venerated figure in Haifa until her death in 1987. Abraham Levy was later appointed head of the S.A. Binyan Mortgage Bank Company, established by Southern Africans.

Tziporah Genussow, the wife of Menachem Genussow of Barkley West immigrated with their four young children in 1925. Menachem stayed behind in South Africa to liquidate his affairs and only managed to join them in 1933.

Jacob Gesundheit, a prominent industrialist in Cape Town and a leader of the Mizrahi movement, immigrated with his wife Bella and four children in 1926. Jacob became active in many fields, restoring the Tiberias Hot Springs and joined another Southern African, Chaim Joffe, who had been a leading figure in the meat industry in Cape Town, to establish the Palestine Cold Storage Plant. Together with Yehuda Magnes, the Chancellor of the Hebrew University and Henrietta Szold, the founder of Hadassah, Gesundheit worked in the "Brit Shalom" movement, that believed in peaceful co-existence between Jews and Arabs.

Louis Policansky, who had manufactured cigarettes in South Africa brought capital and know-how to the tobacco industry in Israel, where he took over Dubek Ltd.

The 1929 South African Jewish Year Book notes that eleven prominent Southern Africans had immigrated by then to Palestine.

Eliahyu Gurland from Cape Town, who had represented South Africa at the Basle Zionist Conference, made "aliyah" in 1923. In 1933 his son Max Gurland, wife Sonya and three daughters joined him in Palestine.

Immigration from Southern Africa to Palestine sustained a severe blow when the Passfield White Paper was issued. The British limited Jewish immigration certificates and Southern African immigration was therefore curtailed during the rest of the Mandate, in order to give priority to refugees from Europe, which had fallen under the Nazi regime.

Nevertheless all the Zionist youth movements included "aliyah" as a major objective in their programmes.

In 1933 a "chalutz" farm near Krugersdorp was established where people interested in going to settle the land in Israel learned agriculture. Although this "chalutz" farm was eventually closed down, 40 percent of its graduates settled permanently in Israel.

In the mid-1930's prominent Zionist Youth leaders came to Palestine, which was known as "the Yishuv". These included Herzl Zuckerman who became the Secretary and thereafter Managing Director of the Tel Aviv Port Authority, Polly Salber (Reznek), Sima Herman and Solly Friedman who had been a leading lawyer in Haifa since 1936 - all of them leaders of the Cape Zionist Youth Executive as well as Abraham Katz, Chairman of the S.A. Young Mizrahi.

During WWII many former Southern Africans enlisted in the British army in Palestine and in the Jewish Brigade when it was formed.

Twenty-five ex-soldiers, who had visited Palestine during WW II formed a group called "Chalutzim Chayalim" (pioneering soldiers) and returned to Israel.

One organized group of 20 "chalutzim" left Southern Africa by ship in July, 1947. It was a momentous occasion and before their departure, 800 Zionist leaders and members of youth movements crowded Coronation Hall in Johannesburg to bid them farewell and good luck. Some of this group formed the nucleus of Moshav "Timorim".

Graduates of the Bnei Akivah youth movement helped to establish kibbutz Kfar Etzion in the Gush Etzion area, near Hebron. Two of them were killed, and others captured, when the Arabs attacked the it in 1947.

In 1948 the South African Zionist Federation (Israel), was set up. Now known as "Telfed", it was as an office designated to provide practical help to "Mahalniks" i.e. volunteers from Southern Africa who

volunteered to help Israel during the War of Independence.

By 1959 at the end of the State's first decade there were 2,000 Southern Africans registered in Israel. By the end of the 20th century, 17,000 South Africans are said to be living in Israel.

(To be continued)

## Projects to Consider

Mike Getz

Beryls' initiative and work has given us another opportunity to create a representative record of our communities in Southern and South Africa.

We are encountering a similar problem to that of a number of SIGS. There is often more comprehensive material on little shtetlach than the urban locations. In the limited history of this newsletter we have had no accounts of a number of important centres of Jewish life in our region. The following is a list of a few key examples.

Port Elizabeth  
East London  
Durban  
Bloemfontein  
Pretoria  
Salisbury  
Bulawayo

Of no lesser important for their significance are:

Oudsthoorn  
Grahamstown  
Uitenhage  
Kimberly  
Vereeniging  
Springs  
Brakpan  
Benoni  
Krugersdorp

As well as many others with as much merit. It should be a goal among us to include a history of at least one new community in every newsletter and to actively recruit for such a project among those who know. Beryl has set an example with the Strand. It is a model that can be adapted to suit almost any perspective.

Please advise Beryl if you know of South Africans who can add to a record their communities each of which was vital to the spirit and character of Southern African Jewry

## **District Six - A Jewish Shtetl in Cape Town.**

**By Marian Robertson**, co-ordinator for Research - SA Jewish Museum.

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No area of Jewish life covered for the South African Jewish Museum by different researchers has been more tantalising or fascinating than District Six in Cape Town.

Tantalising because hardly any photos can be found of it before the 1920s. After all, who wanted to photograph one of the poorest areas? Fascinating because old street directories prove it was, for at least fifty years, the main centre of Jewish life in Cape Town. This was where the East European immigrants found a home, recreating all the elements of the "shtetlakh" they had left behind.

The Directory for 1906, which would have been compiled towards the end of the previous year, reveals that not a single street in District Six was without at least one Jewish business or home. Most of them had far more. Hanover Street, the main shopping street, which ran like a spine through the area, had 383 buildings and was 20.3% Jewish; Caledon Street, with 253 buildings, 36.6% Jewish; Constitution Street, with 146 buildings, 31.1% Jewish - and this was where the synagogue was built, although, besides this, vague recollections suggest there were several "shtetls" - and we so much wish we knew more about them!

Take a couple of medium-sized streets: Van der Leur Street with 83 buildings, 31.3% Jewish and Tennant Street, with 87 buildings, 17.3% Jewish. As an example of two small streets, Wicht Street with 42 buildings was 16.6% Jewish and Selkirk Street, with 35 buildings, 20% Jewish.

The Jews lived side by side with others who took refuge in this poor area of Cape Town; "Coloured"; "Malays"; Indians; Afrikaners; typically British names and the occasional unmistakable German or other European name. All seemed to live in harmony for no indication of any friction has been traced through the Jewish descendants or in the research done by the District Six Museum.

The Jews, however, had to satisfy their dietary requirements. So we find the Canterbury Kosher Meat Store in Canterbury Street. The Cape Kosher Meat Supply Co. in Caledon Street and the Cold Storage Kosher Meat Supply in Wandel Street, besides J. Schochet in Caledon Street. There were also three Jewish bakers and more than three dozen small grocers. The Jewish Sick Benefit Society had its own office, as did a Jewish newspaper. There were shoemakers, furniture stores, drapers and more than one bookshop.

## **THE KUPISHOK (KUPISKIS) - CAPE TOWN CONNECTION..**

(from Article in the **Cape Jewish Chronicle**, December 1997)

Kupishok, or in the Lithuanian, Kupiskis, was one of the many thousands of small shtetlach in "der Heim" which was set in a cluster of small villages, in the near vicinity of Ponevez. The first erosion of this community, which in 1923 numbered 1444 people (over 50% of the population), began in the early decades of the 20th century with a steady stream of departures of families to "goldene medina" in search of better lives. Most of those left behind, who were still living in May 1941 when the Germans began their savage path of slaughter through Lithuania, were murdered by local Lithuanians.

In Cape Town in the early 1930's, the Kupishok Beneveloent Society was established under its first chairman, Velva Sachar. An ebullient Percy Berger clearly recalled those days - how they collected 2/6d a year from each of the 45 - 50 members which they used to make up parcels of clothing and material to send home via an agent in London. Lily Marcus, who was secretary from the late 1930's also has vivid memories. Born in Kupishok, she came to South Africa when she was 3 years old, living in Hopefield for 12 years and then in Cape Town. While Lily was a little young, Percy has clear memories of his shtetl as he was near Barmitzvah age when he came to South Africa with his mother and sisters to join his father and brothers at the end of 1929.

Ann Rabinowitz of Miami, U.S.A. arrived in Cape Town in November 1997, and brought about a gathering of some 30 enthusiastic Kupishokers, "native" born or descendant, at the home of Charles and Debby Myers in Sea Point.

In 1980, Ann explained, at the behest of her father, she began to seek out family in South Africa. In the course of this, she realised she could help others who were trying to find their roots. The demise of the former Soviet Union meant that previously unavailable records were now accessible.

Now, 20 years on, Ann has accumulated and computerised an enormous amount of material pertaining to Kupishok, as well as other Shtetlach, and she formed the Kupishok Special Interest Group.

A lively crowd of former Kupishok people namely families Jacobs, Kaplan, Sachar, Barron, Sadowitz, Berger, Kagan, Kling, Reznik, Choritz, Jaffe, Mofsowitz, Levin were present and gave family information, which many recognized with approval. Percy Berger, seemed to know most of the families, as in fact, did Ann herself. Betty Abramowitz surprisingly asked Ann if "you are telling me that we are related". Everyone was amazed at the lists of names, birth and death registers, video material and computerised information. Collaborating with the Kaplan Centre, she was using sources to augment her Kupishok and Lithuanian database during her CapeTown stay.

Ann mentioned they were also working on naturalization lists and records from the Jewish Shelter in London giving names and details of ships and sailings of all those who used the Shelter when they stopped over in London on their way to South Africa.

It was also advised at this meeting, that findings at the University of Cape Town Medical School noted that in descendants of Kupishok there was a noticeably greater than normal incidence of the specifically Jewish genetic Tay-Sachs disease (brought on, it was thought, because of the high incidence of inter-marriage within the shtetl community)

The interest level in families and their Lithuanian backgrounds soared that evening as Ann explained that the need to know everything about one's origins is becoming increasingly important. There is no doubt that Ann Rabinowitz, from Miami, whose father originally settled in the Cape, before moving out of South Africa, did a great deal that night in November when she introduced her Kupishok (Kupiskis) information to the Cape Town Jewish Community.

# THE STRAND JEWISH COMMUNITY

## by Beryl Baleson.

(With thanks to Mrs. Mickey Friedman and Mrs. Ethel Walt of S.A. Friends of Bet Hatefutsoth who supplied the information).

The earliest Jewish settlers who arrived from Lithuania and Latvia were

1. Harris Brodovsky (or Brodovsky), arrived 1899 from Kovno.
2. Morris Cheller arrived 1902 from Kamay, Lithuania.
3. Joel Dorfan arrived 1897 from Kovno.
4. Benjamin Friedman arrived from Lithuania in 1903.
5. Max Meller arrived 1902 from Kovno.
6. Meyer Millchian arrived 1902 from Vilna.
7. Myer Miller arrived 1899 from Malatt, Lithuania.
8. N. Nochemowitz date and place of arrival unknown.
9. Abe Schulman arrived 1902 from Dvinsk.

By comparison with other European groups of the Strand community, the Jewish community have been more attached to The Strand than any others, and names like Friedman, Rossenstein, Cohen, Ginsberg, Portnoi and Jacobson are landmarks in The Strand's development for more than half a century. Jewish enterprise has done much to make The Strand one of the best shopping centres in the Boland.

At the beginning of the century i.e. 1903 their "Shul" was in Michau Street, just behind the Marine Hotel. Rent of 7s.6d. was paid monthly.

A permanent Shul opened in 1930 in Wesley Street and the foundation stone laid by Mr. Ben Friedman. The Shul in Wesley Street, was sold in 1986 to the Ebed Gemeente as a Church and later re-sold. Although the inside has changed, the facade has remained.

One Sefer Torah was sent to the Beit Shemesh Shul, Beit Shemesh, Israel.

The 5 Jewish families who reside to-day in the Strand attend services at the Somerset West Shul.

The first Rabbi was Rev. I. Green, succeeded by Rev. Hirshowitz.



There were 40 families and subscription was 1 Shilling per month.

Rev. Bordien followed as leader of the community between 1932-42 and he was succeeded by Rev. Gad and Rabbi Karwan in 1953. There was a cheder, run in the Shul premises.

The Strand Zionist Society combined with Somerset West, was established in 1906.

The first Young Israel summer camp was held at the Strand in 1925/6 but the actual Young Israel Society in the town is not mentioned until 1934.

There were also the following Jewish societies:

1. Revisionist Society.
2. Wizo.
3. Ladies Benevolent Society.
4. Union of Jewish Woman.

The beaches in the Strand attracted a great deal of Jewish people from all over the Western Cape area in the summer, including the annual Young Israel Camp. However with the rise of the "Greyshirt" movement and anti-semitism becoming rife, the Jewish people of the Western Cape, started using Muizenberg as the summer holiday resort. The Young Israel Camp also moved its headquarters to Lakeside in the Muizenberg area.

The Jewish families settled there since 1899 were as follows

Barenblatt, Berdien, Bernberg, .Bernstein, .Brodovsky, .Bucheltz, .Cohen,  
Cohen, Cotton, Dirmeik; Dorfan; Friedman; Fuchs; Gad; Ginsberg; Goldberg; Green;  
Hirshowitz; Isaacson; Ison; Jacobson; Juter; Kantor; Karwan; Katz; Katzenellenbogen; Lang; Lipschitz; Luntz;  
Meyerowitz; Neppe; Nachomowitz; Nocky; Nurok; Perel; Portnoi; Shapiro; Silke; Sweiden; Toyk; Werb;  
Wisenberg.

During 1995 the following Jewish families were still in the Strand:

Mr. & Mrs. B. Bucheltz; Mr. & Mrs. S.B. Cohen; Mr. & Mrs. C. Cotton; Mr. & Mrs. A. Friedman; Mr. &  
Mrs. D. Neppe; Mr. & Mrs. I. Nocky; Miss E. Portnoi; Mrs. S. Sweiden; Mrs. Werb; Mr & Mrs. Wisenberg.

By 1999 the Jewish Community dwindled to 5 families. The original amount of 40 families had either passed away or moved to Cape Town, as well as following their children who moved to Israel, Australia and the United States.

The remaining members of the Jewish community have now combined with the Somerset West Jewish Community and are known as The Strand-Somerset Jewish Community.

