

# S A SIG

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## PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

The SA SIG continues to grow with close to 200 people now subscribing to the online discussion group. The content of the website <http://www.jewishgen.org> continues to expand and new items of interest are added weekly. Recent examples include articles on Jews in Concession Stores and Oudtshoorn Jewry, synagogues in SA. Recent databases include Upington and de Aar burials

We urge anyone with something new to contribute to submit material. There is a huge amount of knowledge and the 'social fabric' of Jewish life in South Africa to which we can all contribute. Much of this may otherwise never be published.

As co-chairman of the London 2001 conference I am pleased to have Mendel Kaplan speaking on Rietevé, Parow and Ra'anana - the transfer of the soul of a shtetl to South Africa and Israel.. Eli Goldstein will speak on "Litvaks in the Rural South African economy (of Krautblintzes and Kings)"

There will be a workshop on SA Jewish Genealogy run by Roy Ogus and myself, combined with a meeting of the SA SIG.

There are many items of interest to Litvaks, Courlanders and other Latvian descendants. A number of archivists will be speaking and available for consultation. SA SIG members Constance Whippman and Arlene Beare have done outstanding work in getting the All Latvian Database up and running on the world wide web. It will be demonstrated at the conference.

We hope to meet many of you there.

Saul Issroff.

# EDITORIAL

JUNE 2001.

I am very happy to be sending you our third Newsletter, and also to welcome all of our S.A. SIG members to the London 2001 Conference.

As I have done previously, I am appealing to all of you to come forward with information that can be published in future newsletters. The continued success of our Newsletter depends on each and every one of us.

Please address all correspondence to me at [tuis@zahav.net.il](mailto:tuis@zahav.net.il), or by mail 19/17 Schwartz Street, Raanana, Israel. Opinions expressed in articles are those of the writer and not necessarily those of the SA SIG, its officers or editor.

Beryl Baleson  
Editor.

<b>SNIPPETS - THE SOUTH AFRICAN - ISRAEL CONNECTION</b>
<b>IN THE 1940's</b>

Source: 50th Jubilee Edition - South African Zionist Federation (Israel).
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<b>June 1946: Jews Take to the Streets in Jo'burg.</b>
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Throughout South Africa Jews gathered to demonstrate against the British Government's harassment and arrest of leaders of the Jewish Agency in Palestine. In Johannesburg, Jewish shops closed at 1p.m. as a mark of protest. Thousands of youngsters assembled outside Coronation Hall and at 1.40p.m. the procession began, led by Chief Rabbi Rabinowitz and senior members of the community and Zionist movement. "It was an inspiring sight. Orderly, dignified, marching silently and solemnly", was the way Morris Borsuk, a 21 year old Zionist activist, described it. At 3 p.m. the demonstrators gathered at Balfour Park and heard addresses through loudspeakers by the Chief Rabbi; Bernard Gering; S.M. Kuper; M. Kentridge; Louis Pincus and Lieut-Colonel Cecil Margo; Reg Donner, a 25 year old engineer, was at the scene. "I was standing near the front, not far from the Chief Rabbi, when I saw him tear off the British war medals he had received for distinguished service as a padre during the War. Throwing them to the ground, the Chief Rabbi shouted to the crowd "I am ashamed to wear these". The scene is set. "We are marching on the road to independence," remarked Morris
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# Personal Reminiscences of BETAR in South Africa

## HAYYIM EDINBURG - ISRAEL

1945 was a year of great changes in the whole world. These changes affected everyone in general and the Jews in particular. As the Western World celebrated victory over the evil of Nazi Germany, the British were bent upon trying to prevent remnants of the Holocaust from reaching the shores of Eretz Yisrael.

As usual, Jewish opinion was sharply divided both in the Yishuv and in the Diaspora. Should we fight against the might of the British Empire or should we allow them to perpetuate their mandate over Eretz Yisrael for eternity. As a youngster of 14 and belonging to Hashtilim and later Habonim, this dilemma was an eerie obstacle hanging over my head.

I remember those days as clearly as if they had happened yesterday. My problems were solved by the madri'him of Habonim themselves. They decided to become "Zionist Socialists" followers of the late Louis Pincus, who had a long political career in Israel, and took the Habonim movement with them. Those who differed joined the General Zionists or as they were known in South Africa "The United Zionist Party", and called themselves "Bnei Tzion"

I had a dilemma - Habonim meetings held every Sunday morning were about 15 miles away from my home, but Bnei Tzion met at the house in the grounds that were to become "The Oxford Synagogue". In addition, our madri'h who had split away from Habonim, was now operating at "Oxford". It was only natural that youngsters living in the area should leave with him. I was, however, suspicious of his motives and his enthusiasm, and I asked him for certain clarifications. He said that the senior chairman of the United Zionist Party was giving an address that evening, and he invited me to accompany him.

There was a full attendance at the meeting, and his address was critical of the excesses of Jewish youth in Israel who were confronting their English oppressors. I stood up at question time and asked, what to my mind, was a crucial question "Do you have the right to criticise the actions of residents of our country who are being repressed by the British, while sitting in Johannesburg?" His answer convinced me to leave "Bnei Tzion and the UZP immediately - "They are dissidents and misguided youth" he said. I turned to my revered Hebrew teacher of many years. Mr. Isaac Dumas of Yeoville/Bellvue for guidance.

The following Sunday I attended a garin of Betar in Doornfontein where the group had its Maon. Otto Seidman spoke at the meeting, and I met many Betarim who are almost without exception here in Israel to-day. Otto Sideman praised the actions of both The Irgun Tzvai Leumi (National Military Organization) (from now on IZL) and of "Lo'homei 'Herut Israel (The Fighters for Israel's Freedom) (from now on Lethe). I had found my home - and to this day I have never regretted leaving both Bnei Zion and Habonim, and their "one dunam and one cow policies", to quote both Chaim Weizman and David Ben Gurion.

Over the years, I remember many jobs that I did for the cause whilst in South African Betar. For a period I edited Betar's periodical - also entitled "Betar", sending it to influential politicians throughout the Western World, including The U.S. House of Representatives, the Congress and Senate as well as British and South African Parliamentarians of the time. It contained translations in English of speeches broadcast over the underground radio stations by Mena'hem Begin, Avraham (Mr. Haim Landau) and other IZL commanders - also by Freedman-Yellin and Yits'hak Shamir of Le'hi, and of course Geula Cohen who was the "golden voice of the underground". It is my fervent hope that in this small way I was able to contribute to Israel's freedom.

Not all of the activities of Betar were of a serious nature. There were annual camps, usually held at the more popular South African resorts. There were many activities, but my personal involvement was always serious and political. I met Betarim from all parts of the country and have enjoyed reunions with many of them here in our free and independent homeland.

Betar's offices were situated in Von Brandis Street, Johannesburg. Betar shared these offices with the New Zionist Organisation, which later became The Zionist Revisionist Organisation of S.A. ('Herut - Hatzohar in Hebrew). It was later affiliated with the 'Herut Party in Israel. A dedicated staff ran the offices and I revered and highly respected all the workers. Please forgive me if, because of a memory fade out, I do not mention all of the names but amongst prominent personalities were: Raphael Kotlowitz - at the time Natziv Betar. Harry Hurwitz - General Secretary of the party and later editor of "The Jewish Herald", Sidney Kuttner - Early Editor of "The Jewish Herald". Yedidyah Blumental - Chairman of the "New Zionist Organisation of S.A. Joe Daleski - Chairman of the "Jewish State Party of S.A." and later Chairman of The Zionist Revisionist Party of S.A. Shulamit Becker and Jessie Garlick operated the day to day affairs of S.A. Betar. Both were pillars of strength in the all out effort to establish and strengthen the State of Israel.

There are many stories of the days before the State of Israel was born, but I am limited for space. However I would like to recall one experience which showed that even those who relinquish observance are never far from Judaism and Israel. I was 17, when Raphael Kotlowitz announced a campaign for funds in support of IZL, through Keren Habarzel (The

Iron Fund). I was allocated with a few Betar colleagues the area of flatland in the suburb of Killarney Johannesburg. In full uniform, we went from flat to flat, determining Jewish residents and soliciting money for Irgun Tzva'i Leumi from them.

We came across the name of Mr. Harry Oppenheimer - outside the building, we discussed whether this was a Jewish name or not. We were all in our teens, and I'm afraid were not very well acquainted with business and financial sources. We decided to go to the apartment and make our bid - at worst we could be thrown out.

We were confronted with an extremely well dressed and well mannered young lady, who told us that she was Harry's wife but that she was not Jewish. She insisted that we join her for tea and cakes, and started to ask us questions about our mission. We were with her for at least an hour and she arranged for us to come to meet her husband the following afternoon at the same address. It did not occur to us youngsters that we were talking to the wife of one of South Africa's most prominent entrepreneurs. I casually reported to Raphael Kotlowitz that I was going back to see the Oppenheimers. He was astonished and admonished me for my "hutzpa". Later, he relented and accompanied me to the meeting. Needless to say, it was crowned with success.

In 1953, I had the unprecedented honour of accompanying Mena'hem Begin on his various assignments during short visits to Johannesburg and Pretoria. I also accompanied "Avraham" ( Haim Landau) who visited with him. In 1957, Mena'hem Begin accompanied by his wife Aliza and Haim Landau again visited South Africa. This time I felt honoured to receive them at my home in Emmarentia Johannesburg. Chaim Landau and I became firm friends, and on my Aliyah to Israel he personally welcomed me, whilst serving as Minister of Transport.

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<b>SNIPPETS - THE SOUTH AFRICAN - ISRAEL CONNECTION</b>
<b>IN THE 1940's</b>

Source: 50th Jubilee Edition - South African Zionist Federation (Israel).

**November 29, 1947: The best news in 2000 years.**

Jews all over South Africa sat glued to their radios for the live broadcast of the U.N. vote on Palestine. On Sunday at 2a.m. it was announced that the required two third majority for partition had been reached. South Africa had voted amongst the "ayes".

At the Board of Deputies meeting the following day, chairman S.M. Kuper, K.C. said 'For the first time in 2000 years we are recognized as a People by the peoples of the world. Now the Jews of Palestine will be eligible to join that assembly and play their part in the United Nations, through their properly constituted Government.

# THE SOUTH AFRICAN JEWISH COMMUNITY

## A Brief History - Source - The S.A. Jewish Board of Deputies

### Demography

The great majority of South African Jews trace their origins back to Lithuanian immigrants who arrived between the end of the 19th century and 1930. The two largest centers are Johannesburg (55,000) and Cape Town (15,000). There are many smaller communities, including Durban (5,000), Pretoria (3,000), and Port Elizabeth (1,200). Since 1970 some 50,000 Jews have left the country.

### History

Only at the beginning of the 19th century, when freedom of religion was introduced, were Jews able to come to South Africa legally. At that time, small numbers of Jews arrived from Britain and Germany, and the first Hebrew congregation was established in Cape Town in 1841. In the 1880s, large numbers of Jews began to arrive from Lithuania, and their contributions changed the character of the community.

### Community

The community is overwhelmingly Ashkenazi, with a small Sephardi population in Cape Town. It is affluent, well-educated, and has a strong traditional and Zionist bent. The central body of the Jewish community is the South African Jewish Board of Deputies. South African Jewry has a long record of Zionist activity, and the movement remains strong. There are local chapters of most of the major international Jewish and Zionist organizations. The four main youth movements are Habonim, Betar, B'nai Akiva, and Maginim (Progressive).

### Culture and Education

There are Jewish museums in Johannesburg and Cape Town (the latter housed in the beautiful Gardens Synagogue, built in 1849) and several Jewish libraries. A number of weekly, monthly, and quarterly publications appear, notably the quarterly Jewish Affairs published by the Board of Deputies. The Jewish day school system is comprehensive, embracing about 60% of all Jewish youngsters.

### Religious Life

Most of the community is religiously traditional, and some 80% are affiliated with Orthodox synagogues, of which there are 65 in the country. About 10% are affiliated with the Progressive movement and a smaller number with the Masorti (Conservative) movement. Kosher food is widely available, and there are several kosher restaurants and hotels.

### Israel

In the United Nations and in other forums Israel was often signaled out for special condemnation on account of Jerusalem's commercial and military ties with Pretoria, despite the fact that compared to the level of trade with other states, the scale of Israel's ties was negligible. Relations with the new majority government are good. Aliya: Since 1948, 16,300 South African Jews have emigrated to Israel.

### Sites

The Mooi Street Synagogue in Johannesburg, founded by Lithuanian immigrants from the shtetl of Poswohl, has been declared a national landmark. In Johannesburg there is an impressive Holocaust memorial at the West Park Cemetery. South Africa's wine country outside Cape Town is also home to the Zaandwijk Winery, the country's only kosher vintner.

## **LITHUANIAN JEWS MAKE BIG IMPACT IN SOUTH AFRICA**

Source: <http://jewishpeople.net>

Casino Magnet Sol Kerzner, the late Communist Joe Slovo and veteran anti-apartheid activist Helen Suzman make an unlikely trio, but they share one thing in common. Aside from making a big impact on South African public life, this colourful cast is all of Lithuanian-Jewish descent. "Within the realm of public personalities here, you have a lot of Baltic Jews and their descendants, especially Lithuanian Jews," Tony Leon, head of the small liberal Democratic Party and himself partly of Lithuanian Jewish heritage, told Reuters.

"We are quite a little mob here," said Suzman, who for 13 years was the only anti-apartheid voice in the whites-only parliament. Like their Old World ancestors, whose ranks included wealthy capitalists, zealous Zionists, prominent religious scholars and committed communists, South Africa's Litvaks, as Lithuanian Jews call themselves, have spanned the political spectrum. On the left stands Slovo, the former head of the South African Communist Party, who was born in Lithuania in 1926 and came to South Africa at the age of nine. On the right stands Kerzner, a flamboyant businessman who built the casino resort, Sun City, in a black homeland and founded the entertainment and leisure giant Sun International. The Baltic Jewish community in South Africa also includes Nobel prize-winnig novelist Nadine Gordimer, whose father came from Latvia.

### **SOUTH AFRICA NEW WORLD HOME FOR LITVAKS**

Lithuanians dominate the Jewish community in South Africa to an extent seen in no other country, even their former home. "We have around 80,000 to 90,000 Jews in South Africa, and about 80 percent of them are of Baltic descent, most of them from Lithuania", said David Saks, an historian and researcher at the Jewish Board of Deputies in Johannesburg. "We probably have the most

'Lithuanian' Jewish community in the world", said Saks, whose own grandparents came from Lithuania. This ratio even exceeds that of Lithuania itself as most of the Baltic state's small Jewish community, now numbering a mere 5,000 comprises immigrants who arrived from different parts of the Soviet Union after World War II.

The war devastated Lithuanian Jewry, once a leading centre of Jewish thought and culture. Historians estimate that 94 percent of the country's pre-war Jewish population of 220,000 perished in the Holocaust. The capital Vilnius, once known as the Jerusalem of Lithuania, was home to a thriving community of 60,000 Jews, with more than 90 synagogues and the biggest Yiddish library in the world. Aside from one functioning synagogue, few traces of its rich Jewish past remain. "South Africa is more Litvak than Lithuania itself...when Jews from Lithuania look to South Africa, we see our culture and society have been preserved there", said playwright and novelist Mark Zingeris, one of the few Litvaks remaining in Lithuania. "Here the Litvak culture was all but destroyed by the Holocaust and 50 years of Soviet rule. But it has lived on in South Africa," he told Reuters by telephone from Lithuani

## **ROOTS TAKE HOLD IN SOUTH AFRICAN SOIL**

The public activities and politics of South Africa's Litvak community were rooted in the Old World but flourished in the soil of oppression and opportunity found in the New. The reformist streak of Lithuanian Jewry, which faced anti-Semitism and repression at home, was carried on by a host of anti-apartheid activists. "Many of the Lithuanian Jews who arrived in South Africa in the late 19th century were fleeing repression in Tsarist Russia and so they were keenly aware of injustice", said Saks. "Those who came after also faced anti-Semitism and the Holocaust". "The striving for social justice for everyone is a very Litvak trait. It has carried on uninterrupted in South Africa", said Zingeris.

Other less altruistic immigrants, reared in a strong entrepreneurial tradition, were lured by gold, discovered in 1886 on the spot where Johannesburg now stands, and the opportunities offered by the booming economy built around it. "One of my great-grandfathers came from Lithuania in the late 19th century with nothing but the freedom to trade", said Leon, whose party is firmly in the pro-market camp. "He started a bag and bottle business and turned it into a huge company in one generation".

"I evolved my activist politics under my own steam...my father left Lithuania at the turn of the century to escape anti-Semitism, pogroms and service in the tsar's army. But he was not a radical chap", said Suzman, a part-time member of the South African Human Rights Commission. "He came to South Africa simply looking for a better life". Back home, Lithuania's small surviving Jewish community continues its diverse tradition of public and private service. Several of its members are prominent businessmen while the one Jewish member of Lithuania's parliament, Emmanuel Zingeris, heads its committee on human rights and minorities.

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## **PERSONALITIES - ISAAC OCHBERG**

Source - Jewish yearbook 1929  
"Telfed" - magazine of the S.A. Zionist Federation, Israel.

In his will Isaac Ochberg requested that a photograph of himself should hang on a wall in the offices of the S.A. Zionist Federation, Israel.

Does the name Isaac Ochberg ring a bell, or is he a 'forgotten benefactor'.

Born in Russia in 1879 Isaac Ochberg, a penniless immigrant settled in South Africa in 1894. He married and settled in the Cape where he became very involved in all activities. He was an Executive Member of the Kalk-Bay Muizenberg Ratepayers Association; Committee Member of the Helping Hand Association; President, Dorshei Zion Association of Cape Town; one of the three members of the Cape Executive of the S.A. Jewish Board of Deputies and since its inception, a member of the Cape Jewish Orphanage, where he was President for nine years and Trustee of the Cape Jewish Old Aged Home.

He succeeded in accumulating a sizeable fortune and was recognized as one of Cape Town's most prominent personalities.

In 1922 he went back to Russia under the auspices of the Conference Universeille Juive de Secours, Paris as Chairman of the delegation. He travelled throughout the starving areas of Russia, distributing great quantities of food, clothes and medicaments to the population.

Isaac Ochberg also contributed 10,000 pounds sterling to the Hebrew University in Jerusalem for the Chair of Agriculture.

When he died in 1937 he had bequeathed more than a quarter million pounds sterling - at that time, the largest ever contribution received from a single donor - to the Jewish National Fund and to the Hebrew University.

However, Isaac Ochberg's finest humanitarian achievement concerned the rescue of hundreds of Jewish children orphaned during World War I, bringing them to South Africa and housing them at the Cape Jewish Orphanage. "The Ochberg Orphans" as they were colloquially called, became worthy members of the community and many rose to prominent leadership.

At the Elyakim junction on the Nachal Yokneam road in Israel, stands a modest memorial commemorating the redemption by the Jewish National Fund of a vast tract of land - the Chevel Yitzchak - due to the generosity of Isaac Ochberg. Several agricultural settlements were established on the redeemed land. In accordance with his wishes, a photograph of Isaac Ochberg hangs in the boardroom of the offices of the South African Zionist Federation in Israel.

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## **PIETERSBURG: PROUD OF ITS PAST.**

**Source: Telfed Magazine, April 2001.**

The unfolding saga of the diminution of Jewish communities in the country districts of South Africa, has not ended with the closing of its Synagogues. New chapters are being written about many of their "Sifrei Torah" that are finding their way to Israel, enriching Jewish life and enshrining the memory of many of these communities.

At a special general meeting of the Pietersburg Jewish congregation recently, it was decided to donate two "Sifrei Torah" to "Shivtei Yisrael" Synagogue in Ra-anana, Israel. The congregation celebrated the "Hachnasat Sefer Torah" on May 20th, with a delegation from the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation. Dennis Wiener, one of the few remaining Jews of the dwindling community explained that most of the Jews who settled in the Pietersburg area in the early 1890s came from Lithuania and Latvia. The promise of diamonds and gold at Eersteling and Haenertsberg district lured a number of Jewish prospectors, including Salli Kahn at Hamertsberg and several others on the Murchison Range near Gravelotte. These were followed by many Jewish traders who braved the unknown, and established concession stores in isolated areas. Gradually these Jews migrated to Pietersburg where they established businesses and prospered. The earliest graves in the Pietersburg cemetery date

back to the 1890s, the oldest belonging to I. Wilensky. Senator Munnik records in his memoirs that when President Paul Kruger visited Pietersburg, a Jewish delegation led by Patsy Cohen and Barnard Herman approached him to ask for a burial ground. When asked why Jews could not be buried amongst the rest of the people, Cohen replied that special religious ceremonies had to be performed. "How big is the Christian cemetery", inquired President Kruger. The answer was 4 morgen, so the President promptly allocated 2 morgen to the Jews. "Why only half the size of the Christian cemetery?" indignantly asked the Jews. "Because Jews only believe in half the bible," Kruger countered confidently. After much protestation by Patsy Cohen, Kruger relented and allocated 4 morgen to the Jewish community for their cemetery.

Louis Herman in his book, *A History of Jews in South Africa*, relates that in 1893 the Jews in Pietersburg tried to make a "minyan" for the High Holydays, but could only assemble 9 men. About to abandon their attempt, the village blacksmith unexpectedly revealed himself as a modern-day Marrano and appeared with a "Machzor" to make up the tenth member. It was the first congregation in the Northern Transvaal. The service could not be repeated the next morning as the blacksmith's services were needed by a Boer who had broken the wheel of his wagon.

In addition to the established Israelsohn, Eichholz and Hirschmann clans, several other Jews established trading stores in remote areas. Amongst these early settlers were Isaac Brenner at Boyne; Meyer Tankel at Sandrivier; the Zaacks brothers and Jacob Urson at Smitsdorp and L. Schmahmann at Slypsteendrif in 1899. Many Jews also started farming, including Patsy Cohen at Kalkbank. As many Jews had been innkeepers in Lithuania and Latvia, it was not surprising to find Jews running hotels in almost every small village in the Pietersburg area in the early 1920s. These included Isaac Berman and S. Hirschfield in Tzaneen; Charles Schlesinger in Louis Trichardt; Philip Cohen at Naboomspruit; Charles White at Tuinplaas and Isaac Kahn at Soekmekaar.

The Zoutpansberg Zionist Society was established in Pietersburg in 1905 with 106 members. Even at this early date, the immigrants longed for a Jewish State. The synagogue building suited the needs of the fledgling community until 1952 when the foundation stone of the new synagogue was laid by Mr. Ben Levy and Mr. Sam Palte. Several Jews became mayors of Pietersburg, including Barnard Herman; Mossie Cohen; Max Marcus and depute-mayor Julian Meyer. Jews were active in the legal profession as well as in the mining and manufacturing industries.

In the late 1960s, the younger members of the congregation began to leave for the larger cities and the community became an aging one. Despite dwindling numbers, Friday night services and "Yom Tov" celebrations continued. Fonda Dubb, nee Halberstadt, today a resident of Ra-anana, Israel, was the daughter of a concession store proprietor in a nearby tribal area. Her family later moved to Pietersburg and she fondly recollects those days. "It was a vibrant Jewish community and very warm. It was the kind of place where if you caught a cold, you would get to taste everyone's chicken soup. We had wonderful rabbis and outstanding Hebrew teachers. Pietersburg was the hub of Jewish life in the Northern Transvaal

## **JEWES IN SOUTH AFRICAN TRADE AND COMMERCE**

By Eric Rosenthal

Source: South African Jewry 1965, Leon Feldberg.

From the early days of European colonisation in South Africa, Jews have been prominent in those bodies upon which the efficiency of trade, finance and industry so largely depend. Beginning with the Dutch East India Company, under whose auspices Jan van Riebeeck brought his famous expedition in 1652 to set up the first trading post on the shores of Table Bay, we already find Jews represented.

Upon flotation of the Company in 1602, Stephanus Cardozo put his name down for 1,800 guilders worth of stock, while another 3,000 guilders was furnished - surprisingly enough for those days - by a Jewish woman, Elizabeth Pinto. Other Jews became shareholders in 1604, including Diego Viz Querido and Emanuel Carvalho together for 1,900 guilders, and from outside Amsterdam, Belchio Mendoz of Haarlem, who accounted for 13,500 guilders.

In South Africa itself the Jewish role only began at a later date, since the early settlers were restricted to persons of the Christian faith. It was not until the beginning of the 19th century that Jews began to figure to any extent in the commercial life of the Colony. Cape Town in 1804 witnessed the establishment of the first Commercial Exchange, forerunner of the city's present Chamber of Commerce, which makes it one of the oldest in the world.

Already in business in the Mother City (as Cape Town is known) was I.C. Hertz who had established himself in 1809 at the corner of Long Street and Church Street as a wholesaler; likewise Isaac Manuel at 16 Wale Street, where, besides running a shop, started the export of hides. In 1823, Maxmillian Thalwitzer landed from Germany and set up a business in wool which he started to dispatch overseas. Thalwitzer stimulated the improvement of local flocks by importing merino sheep from Europe, along with skilled shearers from Germany.

Of the Jewish families represented among the 1820 Settlers, i.e. families Sloman, Norton, Simmons and Simons, nearly all made a contribution to the development of commerce and industry, though, like most colonists they began as farmers. Thus, Maurice Sloman, after disastrous experiences through raids by the Xhosas on the Frontier, finally became a merchant in Cape Town and a member of the Commercial Exchange. Similarly Benjamin Norden was a successful Cape Town merchant, while John Norton settled at Grahamstown in a similar capacity.

Gabriel Kilian who arrived from Germany about the same time as the 1820 settlers were responsible for the immigration of other commercial magnates of the future, including Nathan Birkenruth, Abraham Horn and above all, Joseph Mosenthal, all originally clerks in their counting-house. No less important was the advent in 1834 of Gabriel Kilian's cousin, Jonas Bergtheil, one of the leading figures in the early colonisation of Natal and the father of the country's cotton industry.

Pre-eminent in the Cape Commercial Exchange in the middle of the 19th century was the house of De Pass, who, amongst other things, led the way in the important guano industry. In 1859 they provided the first patent slip in South Africa for the repair of ships at Simonstown. They were rewarded with a

special vote of congratulation and thanks by the Exchange Committee. On the tragic day of May 17, 1865, when no fewer than 17 ships were wrecked in a storm on the shores of Table Bay, the "Committee of Merchants", formed to deal with the emergency and distribute relief, included Aaron dePass, Ernst Landsberg, and the Reverend Joel Rabinowitz.

Quite independently of the Cape Town Commercial Exchange there was established in 1850 the "South African Chamber of Commerce" which had among its committee members, Aaron de Pass and Joseph Mosenthal.

In 1860 a decision was made to convert the Commercial Exchange into the Cape Town Chamber of Commerce, the historic meeting at which the matter was discussed, being presided over by a Jew, Charles Manuel. It is also worth recording that at the final meeting of the old Exchange the chair was taken by another Jew, Saul Solomon. The first Jewish President of the Cape Town Chamber of Commerce was Meyer Cassel in 1853. Although the Mosenthals were still in Cape Town, they opened a branch in Main Street, Port Elizabeth in 1842 and soon were among the leading traders in the Eastern Province.

List of Jewish members of the Port Elizabeth Commerce in 1871 were N. Adler & Co.; H. Benhamin; J. Benjamin & "Co.;" L. Dreyfus; L. Lippert & Co.; A. Mosenthal & Co.; and H.H. Solomon. In 1874 J.W. Solomon became chairman, while the committee included Martin Lilienfeld whose firm had also joined the Chamber. In 1877 the famous August Hirsch, of the once outstanding firm of Hirsch, Laubser & Co., made his appearance and in 1880 P. Barnett & Co. Other new names were Joseph & Son and S. Weinthal. Max Gustav Solomon appears on the committee in 1893 and W. Mosenthal in 1894, by which time the membership also included Geroge J. Nathan; A.S. Tolson and Liebermann; Bellstedt & Co. Harry Mosenthal became President of the Chamber in 1893 and again in 1911, while his brother A. Mosenthal, attained the same office.

Significantly enough, a petition for the establishment of trade relations with Durban, submitted at the Cape in 1834, carried a number of Jewish signatures, including those of Joseph Solomon (brother of Saul), D.H. Canstatt and Isaac Manuel.

When in 1856 the Natal Chamber of Commerce came into existence, there were several Jewish merchants in the country. In 1882 W.H. Adler was a committee member of the Natal Chamber of Commerce, along with T.S. Flack, while in 1887 the Pietermaritzburg Chamber of Commerce had on its committee Mr. Pincus who continued to hold office for many years.

Always noted for its progressiveness, the city of Bloemfontein owed its Chamber of Commerce mainly to the efforts of two of its Jewish merchants, Wolf Ehrlich and Moritz Levisur. Mention must also be made of another notable Jewish Free Stater, Ivan H. Haarburger, who like Ehrlich and Levisur hailed from Germany. Ehrlich was the Orange Free State delegate to the Railway and Customs conferences during the 1890's. Moritz Levisur was sent overseas as Commissioner for the Philadelphia Exhibition of 1876. Haarburger was treasurer of the Boer Widows' and Orphans' Fund during the South African War. Similarly, in Kimberley, the Jews were among the original supporters of the Chamber Commerce, early stalwarts including S. Abrahams; Bernard Klisser; A.S. Levi; W. Sagar; F.E. Schuler; Senior & Co.; Sieff & Co.; and the celebrated firm of Holt & Holt.

For a considerable period in the early days, Johannesburg had both a Chamber of Commerce and a Mercantile Association. In 1893 David Holt, having seceded from the former became vice-chairman of the latter; while on the Mercantile Association Committee were also J.D. Elias; J. Hart; J. Jacobson; J.H. Israel and A.H. Jacobs - who in 1896 was the purchaser of the very first motor car every imported into South Africa! After the Anglo-Boer War the Mercantile Association became the Johannesburg Chamber of Trade, which lasted till 1910 when the two bodies merged.

For many years one of the mainstays of the Johannesburg Chamber was Alfred Rosenthal was on the executive, while J. Raphaely; B. Gundelfinger; J. Heilbronn; S.M. Ismay; Claude H. Leon were other well-known figures on that body. In 1922 Selig Hillman was elected vice-president.

Ever since the foundation of the Association of Chambers of Commerce of South Africa there have been Jewish presidents, starting with Ludwig Wiener who held office from 1894 to 1899. In 1909 and 1910 there was Wolf Ehrlich of Bloemfontein and in 1928 and 1929 Karl Gundelfinger of Durban. More recently there were Harry Goldberg, of Johannesburg in 1953-4 and E.P. Bradlow, also of Johannesburg in 1962-3.

Coming to our own times, (ie. time of writing this article, 1965) Jewish contribution is even larger. Taking ASSOCOM (the Associated Chambers of Commerce), we find E.P. Bradlow, one of the leaders of the country's furniture trade, as President, while another particularly notable personality is Miss G. Horwitz, who, apart from being prominent in the administration, was the chairman of ASSOCOM's Committee on Consumer Credit. Also L.M. Sher was vice-president for the Transvaal and I. Goldsmith vice-president for the Orange Free State. We find R. Goldman as the President of the Durban Chamber; L. Salber, of the Cape Town Chamber and G. Barris of the Port Elizabeth Chamber. At Bethal, Transvaal, the post is held by E. Feldman; at Randfontein by J. Chait; at Vereeniging by Max Shapiro; at Messina by G. Klaff; at Lichtenburg by A. Melman; at Somerset West by A. Friedman; at Kimberley by G.B. Haberkfeld; at Queenstown by B. Levin; at Vredenburg by S.J. Levin; at Leslie by L. Taitz; at Randburg by M. Sklaar; at Roodepoort by I. Simon; at Windhoek by Barney Gamsu; at Boksburg by H. Resnick; at Bellville by C.I. Jawitz; at Goodwood by W. Freedberg.

Similarly, in the Federated South African Chambers of Industries, former Presidents include Morris Kramer of Kingwilliamstown, pioneer of the tanning industry, who served from 1924-1925, and again from 1929-1930.

Presently (1965) office-bearers include S. Goodman, President of the Transvaal Chamber of Industries; S.R. Back of the Cape Chamber of Industries, well-known shirt manufacturer; L. Dubb, of footwear fame and on the National Clothing Federation; H. Abramowitz, Philip Frame and D.r J. Harte head of the National Textile Manufacturers' Association. J. Bloom is a leader of the South African Oil Expressers and the Soap Manufacturers' Association. J. Greenstein is director of the Transvaal Clothing Manufacturers' Association and W. Goldberg vice-president of the Cape Chamber of Industry. Apart from its chairman, J.H. Hyman, the Johannesburg Stock Exchange Committee of 1963-1964 included A. Mennell, R. Lurie and E. Heilbroner.

All these personalities have played their part in taking organised South African commerce and industry to the levels they hold to-day.

<b>SNIPPETS.....</b>

**May 1947: "Drom Afrika" sails into history.**

It was a joyous day for the crowd of well wishers at Cape Town docks who three streamers and sang "Hatikva" when they bade farewell to the "Drom Afrika" bound for Palestine. The ship had been procured by the Cape Town Branch of the Israel Maritime League and converted from a mine sweeper into a fishing trawler. Among the 17 crew were seven Jewish lads. From Muizenberg there was Jack Shirk; from Johannesburg Issy Greenberg; Tuvia Ozen; Yehuda Hershon; Sam Wulfson; Ernest (Piet) Groenewald and from Pretoria, Chaim "Solly" Chait, the only lad who had been at sea before. "As the Drom Afrika" sailed into Haifa we saw the "Exodus" being towed into port.

The 5,000 Holocaust survivors on board were transferred onto three British ships to be taken back to the Camps in Germany. That night, Haifa was alive with activity. Police launches patrolled the harbour, dropping depth charges against Jewish frogmen. Search lights constantly swept the area. "How excited we were to see at least one British ship used for transporting Jews from Palestine to Cyprus sunk at the wharf" - related Issy Greenberg.

**December 1947 - Youth at Mass Rally.**

Jewish youth filled the Coronation Hall in Johannesburg at a meeting convened by the South African Zionist Youth Council. Passion was riding high. It was suspected that as the Arabs had rejected the U.N. decision, fighting in Palestine was inevitable. Hundreds of young men signed up for service. The rally passed a resolution that "Jewish youth fully aware of the responsibilities which devolve on it, pledges its unqualified service to the Jewish State".

**February 1948 - High-Flying Shopping Spree**

Boris Senior, a WWII veteran pilot, returned to South Africa to recruit air force personnel and to buy aircraft. Armed with a letter from the Council of Jewish Aviation in Palestine, he presented himself to the South African Zionist Federation. Of the 14 civilian aircraft he purchased in South Africa, two crashed en route to Palestine and one was impounded in Egypt. In the ensuing weeks, the remaining rickety old planes were used for night bombing raids on Gaza, Migdal and Damascus. No sooner had they landed than they went into action - there was hardly enough time to remove their South African registration marks. Bombs were thrown out of the doors and windows, and machine guns were fired out of the luggage compartments.

### **May 10 1948: Jan Smuts speaks out**

Addressing the Johannesburg Rotary Club four days before the proclamation of the Jewish State, Prime Minister Jan Smuts, spoke out in favour of a National Homeland for the Jewish People. "It seems to me almost an historical necessity. I give it my blessing, and wish them every success. Palestine lies on one of the great highways of history and we just cannot leave the Jews and Arabs to fight it out amongst themselves. My nose tells me that this is one of the great problems of the world today and the whole world will in the future feel the effects of what is happening now. Palestine is as closely connected with the big issues of world history in the future as it has been in the past.

### **1948 - They weren't picking mielies!**

On the farm of K. Bacher, a popular picnic spot situated on the Main Reef Road near Krugersdorp, volunteers gather every Sunday for military training. "We have 5,000 men under training", said Leo Kowarsky. "The only weapons are small arms for instruction in assembling and disassembling. Training continues from early morning until late afternoon and accommodation is available for those who come from afar".

The police are obviously on the lookout. A South African security officer confronted Sime Weinstein, liaison to police headquarters. "Wat gaan daar aan?" (What's going on there?). The officer who turned out to be an old schoolmate of Simie's was reassured by his pal that "Agh, the boys are just having fun". Smiling with a twinkle in his eye, Sgt. Jobert responded "As julle kerels nie moelikheid opwek nie, sal ons julle nie hinder nie". (If you fellows do not stir up any trouble, we won't hinder you.)

### **May 16, 1948 - Solidarity Demonstration in Johannesburg.**

Following a packed to capacity service under the auspices of the League of the Haganah, at the Wolmarans Shul, the crowd converged on the City Hall in the largest demonstration in the history of South African Jewry. Basil Herman and Major Leo Kowarsky led the procession of Zionist Youth carrying banners and torches through the streets of Johannesburg to the City Hall, where people listened spellbound to fiery speeches by among others, Bernard Gering; Morris Kentridge M.P. Leo Tager and B.A. Ettlinger K.C. In shuls all around the country, from the Gardens in Cape Town to the smallest synagogues in remote country districts, Jews flocked to services in celebration of the dawn of a new era, the Birth of the Jewish State of Israel.

### **June 2, 1948 - S.A. Volunteers streaming in.**

A PAAC Dakota landed today in Haifa, with many South Africans on board, including Dr. Jack Medalie and his wife June, the two fighter pilots Les Bloch of Potchefstroom and Arnold Ruch of Cape Town, WITS University boxer Melville Malkin and rugby player Maurice Ostroff. The plane landed in the British-controlled enclave of Haifa. The British officer on duty was baffled by the arrival of these "tourists". "Whatever makes you want to come to Palestine at this time?" he asked Maurice Ostroff. "Its crazy!". "Just passing through" replied Ostroff. Sweeping his hand in the direction of the bay area the officer shouted, "We are pulling out of here, but it won't be more than two weeks before the bloody Jews will be yelling to us to come back".

### **1948 - Moeki Katz elected to Knesset**

Shmuel (Moeki) Katz, who arrived in Palestine in 1948 and served as a member of the Irgun Zvai Leumi, has been elected to Israel's first Knesset. Listening at the age of 15 in 1930 to Jabotinsky speaking in Johannesburg intensified Katz's Zionism. "He was my great teacher. it was one thing to be a Zionist - but he made us feel we had to do something about it. This was a leader telling us not to be spectators - that we had to be actively part of the solution.

### **1949 - 1950 Habonim Garin to join Kibbutz Tzora**

There is much interest in the site of Tzora, the new home to a "garin" of 50 South African Habonim olim. The "garin" came on aliya in 1949-1950 and have chosen to join a new Israeli kibbutz in the Jerusalem Corridor. The site was chosen for its strategic position in guarding the new Road of Courage, which replaces the old "Burma Road". Two kibbutzim, Mishmar David and Tsora were founded on the same day in December 1948, each positioned to protect this new lifeline to the City. Tsora's agricultural lands are in the adjoining Sorek Valley, Samson and Delilah's haunt. Agriculture and an industry are to be the main productive branches. Now there is an additional project for S.A. Zionist Youth and the Machon Le'madrachei Chutz La'aretz to focus their energy in developing pioneering settlements in our new State.

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### **Post Script**

The above is part of a series we intend as an ongoing feature. Members and readers are invited to share their experiences of Israel's memorable beginnings as part of this important record. Please mail or email your record and memories of these great events to Beryl.

I would like to remind you that membership fees of \$20 for the year July 2001 to June 2002, are now due. Cheques for renewal or new membership can be mailed to me at:

SA SIG  
5450 Whitley Park Terrace #901  
Bethesda MD 20814.

Please use a cheque drawn on a US Bank or a money order.

Many thanks,  
Mike Getz.