

# SASIG

Volume 1, Issue 2

August 1999

## PRESIDENTS MESSAGE

FROM: SAUL ISSROFF

We need to begin this issue with a note of appreciation to a number of good friends for their guidance and very real help. Their interest, patience and diligence have brought our goals nearer to realisation.

I want to begin with Trevor who has given us a presence on the Web with our page. It is an indispensable means of signaling our presence and carrying the message of Southern African Jewry, its history and genealogy. It will also serve as a medium of communication and education, aligned to and developing our goals.

We have benefited from the kindness of Ann Rabinowitz, a knowledgeable and wonderful friend, who has donated valuable dbases.

The Jewishgen family have contributed formidably and readily, taking us through the steps of setting up our website and preparing the hosting of our email discussion group. We are indebted to Susan King, Carol Skydell and Warren Blatt for their kindness and patience.

An important project related to passengers lists will need our support. Prof. Aubrey Newman of Leicester University and Debbie Reavis will be working on a pilot survey to index passenger lists to South Africa. I look forward to keeping the membership advised.

The next stage of our development calls for the active involvement of volunteers in both the projects and routines that will determine our effectiveness and viability. I look forward to our New York meeting as a platform to plan achieve this together.

Anyone willing to assist please contact:

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**Saul Issroff** ([saul@swico.demon.co.uk](mailto:saul@swico.demon.co.uk))

It is important at this stage to note the goals that define our interests and the scope of our activities.

- ◆ To create a forum for those with Jewish links to Southern Africa, who are now members of a diverse international community.
- ◆ To reflect the homogeneous character and traditions of Southern African Jewry
- ◆ To address broader based issues related to the region's Jewry, its institutions and maintain contact with them.
- ◆ To assist members intending to travel to South and Southern Africa with information and contacts.
- ◆ To promote, support and assist projects.

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## EDITORIAL

Mike Getz

Our second issue brings the important news of a web page and beginnings of a discussion group under the umbrella of Jewishgen. There has been only a modest development of our readership although members and friends have provided interesting material, some of which is published in this issue.

We clearly need to set about providing regular features that should systematically record the history, makeup and character of our communities. We need commitments that will ensure coverage and continuity. There must be a regular feature on issues of genealogy. But these ideas must await a decision on whether we publish our newsletter as hard copy or electronically.

I am obliged to repeat the view expressed in our first issue. A few willing hands made it possible. It cannot be sustained in this way. It is demonstrably clear, several months later, that the broader involvement of members is necessary.

The contents of this issue are somewhat mixed. We have received material worthy of better and more comprehensive representation than on this issue. One or two notes of congratulation on the last issue and a host of corrections and additions to my "Woodstock" - which I will record briefly.

Both Ada Greenblatt and Selma Jackson mailed interesting material of broad interest that will be published in a following issue. Selma sent an account of the Johannesburg Keidan Socy, founded in 1909. Ada's material dealt with the history of Cape Town's well-known Polliack family.

As a diverse community of genealogists I thought an item from the the South African Jewish Report on Zambia's Jewish community would be interesting. Also from the same source is an 1989 account memorializing the Jewish Pedlar in Graaf Reinet. These were both provided by Michelle Zygilbaum,

Bethesda, courtesy of her father.

Mickey Glass of the Cape Council of Orthodox Synagogues visited DC briefly. He was here in the course of seeking support from ex Capetonians for the improvement and maintenance of Jewish cemeteries there. He also broached an initiative that should be helpful to all interested genealogists. Further details are provided elsewhere.

A further item is a brief synopsis of a talk by Ralph Yodaiken to an audience at the Rockville JCC. It symbolizes the intensity and degree of South African Jewry's commitment to Israel in its early and vulnerable days. The Yodaikens are prominent in the genealogy of Baltic Jewry, typifying the mix which characterizes the South African community.

Member involvement in projects should perhaps be motivated to provide more than the minimum data for contact and communication. Family histories covering four or five generations in the several locations to be expected, are interesting and valuable. This information become more representative of time and place, so crucial to what we do, as the excitement of Internet researching matures.

Basically contact with South Africa has been disappointing. We still do not have an understanding to work and cooperate with the Jewish genealogy community on matters of common interest. Hopefully recent discussions with interested friends passing through Washington DC will bear some fruit.

Again I must acknowledge the help of Bernard Lipsky who bears no responsibility for the less than perfect format.

To enroll, please complete the enclosed membership form and mail to Saul or me with your check for \$20

Include details of European locations to which your family is connected, using back of the page if needed.

Please mention any topics you could write on for the newsletter and/or suggestions for inclusion. Do let us know any area in which you could assist the SIG.

## The Early Fight for Israel

From an account by Ralph Yodaiken  
June 1999

Machal was the force of volunteers mainly from Anglo-Saxon countries that came to Israel immediately before and during the 1948 War Of Independence. It numbered some 3500, including 1500 from the and 800 from South Africa. At this time there were still survivors in European DP camps and the British had earlier refused entry to then Palestine of refugee boats, including the Struma which sank with all aboard in 1941.

Ralph joined the Betar in South Africa during his last year at school. The official policy of the Haganah under Ben-Gurion at the time, was Havlagah - self-restraint in the face of oppressive British measures. The Irgun Tzvai Leumi - and underground movement with links to the Betar and Revisionist Zionists chose to resist the British by military action against them.

Harry Hurwitz, Secretary of the UZRP, introduced Ralph to Raphael Kotlowitz, (member of a well-known Cape Town Betar family) who enrolled him in the Irgun. Ralph's duties included sending news items of Irgun activities to Government and Provincial leaders. Weekends were spent in training at a local farm.

At the time the British had imprisoned a large number of Irgun members in camps in Eritrea, Somalia and Kenya. Escape plans were made, one of which resulted in the escape of Ja'akov Meridor, one of the Irgun's top commanders.

A later plan involved Johannesburg's Chief Rabbi Louis Rabinowitz carrying Hebrew newspapers encoded with messages, during his visits to the camps. He would play an important role.

This was carried a stage further when Raphael asked Ralph, together with 5 others, to get passports. Louis Rabinowitz delivered these to the camp bakery where they were put into loaves of bread. A prisoner named Yodaiken, the camp baker, was disappointed to learn that Ralph's passport was not intended for his escape.

Back in Johannesburg Raphael Kotlowitz gave Ralph \$5000, which he deposited and drew as traveler's checks which were sent to Gilgil, the Kenyan camp. The passports had been prepared as a contingency.

Nico Germant escaped under Ralph's identity. He and 5 other escapees were taken by car to the Kenya Hotel, travelling on to Uganda. There they received visas and eventually traveled to Brussels by Sabena.

Raphael told Ralph to stay out of circulation, subsequently travelling by Dakota to Rome, then to Villa Villa Farragano where he received further training from the Irgun. At the time members of the South African Betar en route to Israel were passing through. Ralph served a many faceted role of counselor, guide and mentor.

Among his duties was to drive a truck with people and boxes to La Spezia, where they were put onto small boats destined for Palestine. He would eventually travel via Marseilles to Haifa on a ship named "Kadimah" captained by Enrico Levi.

At this time, the Irgun had collected funds to buy arms in France. These were to be shipped abroad the Altalena to Palestine together with men for Irgun's fighting units in the War of Independence. When the Altalena arrived Ben Gurion insisted that all arms go to the Haganah. He ordered the ship shelled - 18 were killed. However Machal units refused to take part in the attack as did a South African pilot directed to join a bombing mission

Ralph went on to provide a vivid account of experiences in battle against the Egyptians recounting incidents of bravery and critical incidents in the war of 1948.

...the article below, reprinted from the South African Jewish Report tells of A special tribute to the Jewish pedlar and his contribution to life in rural South Africa of yesteryear...

## MEMORIAL TO THE JEWISH PEDLAR UNVEILED IN GRAAF-REINET

EARLY on the crisp spring morning of Monday 18th September 1989, fifteen prominent members of the Port Elizabeth Jewish Community accompanied by Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris, and Mr Aleck Goldberg, executive director of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies, travelled to Graaf-Reinet for an historic occasion the unveiling of a monument in memory of the Jewish pedlars who had made such an important contribution to the economic life of the rural areas of South Africa in bygone days.

At the Drostdy Hotel, the party was warmly greeted by Rabbi S Zaiden, chief rabbi, country communities, with tea and cake, after which it proceeded to the site which is right on the main road into the town, in a prominent position.

Having been warmly welcomed and greeted by Mr T Whitlock chairman of the Graaf-Reinet Publicity Association,

the Town Council turned out in force lead by the Lady Mayor Mrs J Thornton, who have all taken a keen interest in the project. A warm welcome was also extended by the only Jewish couple still living in the town, Ald & Mrs F Horwitz.

In his address, Mr Aleck Goldberg spoke about trade and agriculture, related to the smous, the pedlar, and the social and cultural relationship between the smous and farmer. Thus, behind the bronze and stone which have been erected as a memorial, is a manifestation of human relationships. The excitement must have been great for the farmer and his wife and family, at the prospect of the arrival of the smous, bringing his varied wares. Many of the Jews had come from East Europe because of



Former Graaf-Reinet mayor, Alderman Frank Horwitz addressing the gathering.

persecution and here they had found freedom of thought and movement.

The monument out of bronze and stone symbolised an aspect of the human spirit, and was deeply appreciated by the Jewish community, and thus a special thanks was expressed to Mr T Whitlock of the Graaf-Reinet Publicity Association, and all who had helped to make this a reality.

In unveiling the monument, Mr C Kerbel chairman of the East Cape Council of the Board of Deputies read the inscription, after which Rabbi Zaiden spoke of Joshua having summoned twelve men

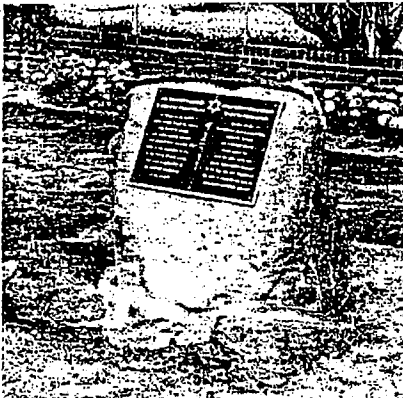
from the people of Israel to gather 12 stones into a heap, as a memorial to the future. He said that this memorial today serves as a reminder of our grandfathers who came here penniless, and laid new foundations for us and for the future. Mr Frank Horwitz expressed thanks to all who had assisted in this project over a long time. It had been the idea of the late Mr Pieter Pieterse, who had travelled widely, and especially loved the land of Israel, having visited it several times.

Mr Horwitz thanked Chief Rabbi Harris, all who had come from Port Elizabeth, as well as the

Graaf-Reinet Town Council, through whose assistance, this monument had been completed.

All present then proceeded to the Drostdy Hotel, where the Lady mayor welcomed everyone warmly, after which everyone partook of the sumptuous lunch, Rabbi Zaiden having brought adequate Kosher food from Johannesburg.

Mr Cecil Kerbel thanks those present, after which, Mr and Mrs Horwitz took the party on a tour of the town, starting from the old shul and cemetery, ending with the Drostdy Museum and Art Gallery



The new monument to Jewish pedlars.

THIS MONUMENT IS ERECTED  
IN HONOUR OF JEWISH PEDLARS

In honor of the pioneer  
Jewish pedlars known as smouse,  
who traded in outlying  
and remote country districts.  
They supplied their customers with  
many of the necessities of life.  
In the course of their trading  
they made a contribution to  
the economic development  
of the country.

HERDE GEDENKTEKEN IS OPPERIG

TER ERE VAN JOODSE SMOUSE

Ter ere van die  
baanbrekende Joodse bondeldraers,  
bekend as smouse,  
wat in afgeleë gebiede  
handel gedryf het.  
Hulle het hulle klante met  
menige lewensmiddele voorsien.  
In die loop van hulle handelsdrywe  
het hulle 'n bydrae tot ons land se  
ekonomiese ontwikkeling gemaak.

THE TEXT OF THE MEMORIAL PLAQUE

## Zambia's resilient Jews

**JOCYE LOEB**

The African Jewish Congress, which is affiliated to the World Jewish Congress, aims to improve liaison between the widely dispersed Jewish communities of Sub-Saharan Africa.

The emphasis of the congress was on cultural exchanges between the Jewish communities to co-ordinate the fight against anti-Semitism and to promote the interests of the State of Israel.

The member countries include Mozambique, Namibia, Swaziland, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Kenya, Lesotho, Zambia, Mauritius and the Democratic Republic of Congo. To this end, the youthful and dedicated Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft has visited or made contact with most of the Jews living in these widespread countries.

Rabbi Silberhaft has just returned from Zambia, where approximately 45 Jews live. There are eight Jewish cemeteries throughout the country, which are all in the process of being restored.

In January of last year he met Joyce Barnett, who expressed concern about her grandfather's grave in Lusaka "which had been ne-

glected to the point that it had been desecrated and finally lost."

"Seeing how adamant she was to find her grandfather's grave and to have it restored, I embarked on a mission to find the 'lost' cemetery in Lusaka, which contained her grandfather's grave, and supposedly four other unmarked Jewish graves dating back to the 1910's," Silberhaft said.

Once in Lusaka, he visited the area where the graves were supposed to be, only to find the entire area piled two meters high with garbage and filth. Long weeds and thick grass were growing on the dump, making it impossible to enter the area.

Some curious local onlookers assisted by cleaning away the weeds and grass so that access could be gained to find the graves. The headstone was finally found lying under some garbage and it was cleaned off.

With help from the Galaun Holdings office, more rubble was removed and the area cleared to ground level where, miraculously, the exact site of the Rabinowitz grave was found. The headstone was laid flat in wet concrete to prevent any further desecration or possible

removal, and a wall and lockable gate was erected.

A re-consecration service officiated by Rabbi Silberhaft at the restored "lost" cemetery was held on May 17, attended by the three grandchildren of the late Uri Rabinowitz, Joyce Barnett, Mervyn Segal, Martin Abrahamson and members of the Zambian Jewish community.

There are still 37 Jews living in Lusaka. Rabbi Silberhaft inspected the two main Jewish cemeteries that will soon be restored. He also visited other towns including Chingola where he met Fay Dobkins, aged 94, who is the last Jew living there.

In Kitwe, Gus Liebowitz is the only remaining affiliated Jew. The Kitwe shul was sold to the Salvation Army. The three desecrated Sifrei Torah were sent to Johannesburg for burial. The Kitwe Jewish cemetery is well maintained.

There are no Jews left in Mufulira. The shul building, which is now a Gospel church still has the Magen David over the main entrance.

In Luanshya, Dennis and Maureen Figov are the only practising Jews remaining. The only other Jewess is the Pastor's wife. On a previous

tour, the Rabbi was asked if he would officiate at the Pastor's wedding in the shul building on the concrete slab where the Aron Kodesh once stood.

Austrian-born Martha Paynter is the one remaining Jew in Ndola. In 1938, she moved to Palestine and seven years later, she moved to Ndola. She speaks fluent Hebrew and Yiddish and was thrilled to be able to speak to Rabbi Silberhaft in both languages. For nearly 44 years, Paynter has written a column in The Times of Zambia entitled: "From My Armchair".

The African Jewish Congress has been instrumental in assisting her to leave the copperbelt and fulfil her life's dream to return to Israel.

The two Jewish cemeteries in Ndola are in a respectable condition. The local Muslim community maintains the main one.

The last stop on Rabbi Silberhaft's tour was in Livingstone. In 1996, a former resident of Livingstone, Cecilia Krasner, who now lives in the United Kingdom, contacted the offices of the AJC to inspect the cemetery at which five members of her family are buried.

The area was inspected and found to be totally over-

grown with weeds and long grass. Michael Galaun, President of the Council for Zambian Jewry, initiated a restoration project. The area was cleared, headstones were restored and a wall and lockable gate were erected.

Sadly, the shul, the Rabbi's house and communal hall are now used as a church complex, but the Shul benches, pulpit and ornate wooden platform where the Aron Kodesh once stood, are still in place.



Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft with Martha Paynter, the one remaining Jew in Ndola.



Mervyn Segal, Martin Abrahamson, Joyce Barnett and Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft - at the re-consecration of the Late Uri Rabinowitz grave - Lusaka

## Union of Orthodox Synagogues Cape Town

The Cape Town Jewish Community has established a Cemetery Maintenance Board (CMB) embracing all facets of the community - Orthodox and Reform, lay and religious - in order to assume the responsibility for the upgrading and maintenance of the Jewish cemeteries in Cape Town. This became necessary because of the virtual collapse of services provided by our local authorities who are the actual owners of the cemeteries.

While much has already been achieved aesthetically by way of brick paved pathways, new roads etc., an important aspect of interest to all genealogists relates to the establishment of a data bank.

The decided to install a computerised index to assist visitors looking for the burial places of family or friends. Touch screens will provide names, age, date of death and grave site number. Data capture has commenced and it is expected that the system will be operational by June 1999.

The CMB will thus be in a position to respond expeditiously to enquiries. Steps are being taken to include burials in the Woodstock, Maitland and Woltemade cemeteries as well.

Enquiries are invited and there will be a nominal charge of \$25 per enquiry. Photographs and possibly copies of death certificates could be provided for a charge of \$50 to defray additional costs.

Please email me at [uoscape@iafrica.com](mailto:uoscape@iafrica.com) with details of your enquiry and I will be happy to respond.

**Mickey Glass**  
Executive Director

## AFTERTHOUGHTS AND CORRECTIONS.....

**Mike Getz**

It was never my intention to this turn our newsletter into a channel of personal nostalgia. However my memories of Woodstock are less than perfect and the following additions and corrections have been added to my Woodstock meanderings in the lasts issue.

### Omissions:

Burns Rd; Shotland, Monty and Bennie. Dermans.  
Mountain Rd: Siegel, Bokkie and brother  
Birkdale Ave; Munitz, Milton  
Booth Rd; Gevint, David . Shell, Etta  
Hares Ave; Schrock, Hilary'  
The Avenue; Sklar, David, Debbie, Diane.  
Fairview Ave; Langman, Max. Washkansy, Mary  
Salisbury St; Levine, Geoffrey  
Chamberlain St; Burnett, Ivan, Larry, sister  
Kent St; Politzky, Nathan  
Chamberlain St; Burnett, Larry Ivan & Sister.

Our first two issues have been adventure in the unknown with some enthusiasm, modest skills and equally modest accomplishment.

Wherever possible please submit contributions on a disk or by email - this does facilitate putting together this newsletter even if an electronic medium is chosen.

Saul and I appreciate the support we have enjoyed. It needs to be our goal at the New York Meeting to add to our strengths with interested and involved membership committed to our goals.

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Mike Getz [mgetz@erols.com](mailto:mgetz@erols.com)

## ENROLLED MEMBERS

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Chilton, Louis	chiltonl@dislink.jctejcs.mil	Bulawayo, Jo'burg
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Rhode, Harold	hrhode@erols.com	Cape Town, Oudtshoorn, Kimberly, Johannesburg, Salisbury.
Samuels, Jackie	Fax 0181-203-1990 (UK)	Kimberly.

This modest beginning indicates resources of some potential. Hopefully we can address the genealogy of Southern African Jewry methodically, community by community. This will need volunteers. Are you prepared to step up for your town? It is difficult, and perhaps unwise to set exacting criteria - but your views would certainly be welcome. A broad coverage of families in the community, their background, role and other key details would be useful. This is particularly important as we aim to tie in communities of our region with families and contemporaries appearing in the Family Tree of the Jewish People.

