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Southern African Jewish Genealogy Special Interest Group Newsletter

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The Southern Africa Jewish Genealogy Special Interest Group (SA-SIG)

The Southern Africa Jewish Genealogy Special Interest Group (SA-SIG) was created 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 and the former Belgian Congo.

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

The SA-SIG Newsletter is published quarterly. Further information on how to subscribe to the Newsletter can be found at:

<http://www.jewishgen.org/SAfrica/newsletter/index.htm>

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

MUSEUM EXHIBITIONS OF INTEREST

On a recent visit to Cape Town I was again impressed by the ability of the small SA Jewish Museum to mount significant shows.

Currently the museum has an exhibition of Netsuke which is outstanding. (Netsuke are miniature ceremonial Japanese carvings which were worn on the belts of the Samurai.) One may wonder at the connection between a Jewish Museum and Netsuke. The late Isaac Kaplan, father of Mendel and Robert, who endowed the museum through the Kaplan-Kushlick Foundation, began collecting Netsuke in 1946. Together with Dr Toddy Schrire, he acquired a collection and built on it over the years. He taught himself Japanese and learnt all he could about Japanese Art. He bought from London dealers and auction houses, and became friends with some of the Netsuke experts and connoisseurs around the world. The exhibition has some family history and films of the Kaplan and Kushlick families. In addition, it also encompasses other forms of Japanese art: Ojime, Inro, Tonkotsu and metalwork.

As a result of this show many people who would not ordinarily visit a Jewish Museum are passing through to see it, and are returning to see the story of the Jews of South Africa. The last two entries in the visitors' book when I was there were a family from China and another from Kazakstan!

There is an excellent, illustrated catalogue, *Hidden Treasures of Japanese Art. The Isaac Kaplan Collection of Japanese Miniatures*, Cape Town: Kaplan Kushlick Foundation, 2004. ISBN 06203326X.

Another exhibition, just opened last week, is the story of the politician Helen Suzman, her role as a spokesperson for the oppressed and a fighter against apartheid. The story begins with extracts from her parents' family records in Latvia and Lithuania, then pages from the *Poor Jews' Temporary Shelter* records recording her father passing through en route to South Africa. It goes on to tell of her education, her stance as a politician, many of the letters to her thanking her for assistance, and also some abusive ones. One of the early letters of thanks is from Chief Albert Lutuli. The exhibition is replete with appropriate quotes from various

politicians, and with her many honorary degrees. This remarkable lady derived from simple *Litvak* stock. The jump from 'poor immigrant' status to her high profile and very effective position in one generation is amazing.

One must congratulate Prof. Milton Shain, Millie Pimstone, and their team on a superb presentation of this story.

I also attended the opening of an exhibition at the Jewish Museum, Albert Street, London NW1 on *Closing the Door? Immigrants to Britain 1905-2005*. This exhibit runs until 21/8/2005.

It is a topical exhibition on immigration to Britain to mark the centenary of the Aliens Act. It is very interesting to see how little, in reality, has changed in regard to attitudes to immigrants in the United Kingdom. A small part is devoted to attempts to keep out Jews 100 years ago, and the whole history of 'general' immigration to Britain is shown; much is devoted to immigrants from the Caribbean, Africa and the Middle East. It illustrates how migrant and refugee communities have struggled and survived, despite the restrictions on their right of entry, and how they have enriched and enhanced British Society.

There is a very good programme of lectures on these topics. For more information, see:

<http://www.jewishmuseum.org.uk/whatson/events/camden.asp>

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EDITORIAL

I would like to wish all our readers *Hag Sameach*.

In this issue of our Newsletter, we have a new contributor and two who have contributed articles in the past.

Adam Yamey, who lives in London, has provided another article with family ties to the Barkly East, a town in the northeast Cape Province. In the September issue last year, he provided an article about his maternal grandfather Iwan Bloch. In this issue he has provided information about a member of his Seligmann family from Ichenhuasen in Germany.

Herzl Marks, a new contributor to this Newsletter, grew up in Cape Town and now lives in England, has written an interesting article about his family's move from the *shtetl*, to Israel and finally to South Africa. His grandfather was involved in setting up the Woodstock and Salt River Hebrew Congregation. Today's generation would be amazed to think that Woodstock and Salt River had enough Jews to sustain a *shul* and *cheder*. In their eyes these places would just be a place the train passes through on the way to Cape Town!

An earlier version of Herzl's article was published in *Shemot*, the Newsletter produced by the Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain. Part 1 appears in this Newsletter while part 2 will appear in the next issue.

The Woodstock *Shul* had a reunion in December last year which was attended by 170 people. Mike Getz, who is a member of the South African Special Interest Group Board, attended this event. Shulamith Levin has provided an article for this Newsletter about this event.

With *Pesach* around the corner, our veteran contributor, Manfred Schwartz, has provided an article about the meaning of Pesach including the traditions and customs practiced by both Ashkenazi and Sephardic Jews worldwide.

In the last issue, I mentioned a book by Mr N.D. Hoffmann – *Book of Memoirs* – which contains some interesting insight into the lives of Jews in the early 20th Century. In this issue I have provided information about a man who many of you may have heard of – Mr Beinkenstadt, who owned a

Jewish bookshop in Cape Town. Moses Beinkenstadt's shop is still open and is run by his grandson. It is the last remaining Jewish store in District Six. The shop sells a good selection of Judaica including 'craft' Judaica, and also a selection of Talmuds and prayer books.

A few years ago, someone posted a query on the South African SIG online digest, wanting to know the origin of the word *smouse*. *Smouse* were the backbone of rural life in early 20th century South Africa.

It is the traditional South African name for a hawker, particularly one who goes from farm to farm selling goods of all kinds. The business of the *smouse* is a very old established one and is referred to as early as the 18th century when François Le Vaillant visited the Cape (French naturalist and explorer of the Cape (1753 -1824) born Dutch Guiana). There were two kinds of *smouses*, those who travelled with a wagon, and those who were content with the so-called '*pens winkel*' (stomach shop), or tray. Many famous South Africans began their careers as *smouses*, one of those proud to refer to the fact being Samuel Marks (later becoming a Senator of the Union of South Africa). The origin of the word is uncertain.

Reference

Encyclopedia of Southern Africa. Compiled by Eric Rosenthal. Fifth Edition, 1970. William Clowes and Sons, Ltd., London and Beccles.

In June 2003, the town of Graaff-Reinet, paid tribute to the contribution Jewish *smouse* made to rural life and a plaque has been erected in their memory. David Saks wrote an article for the S.A. Jewish Report about the occasion.

Bubbles Segall

Editor

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JEW OF SOUTH AFRICA HISTORY & CULTURE

This course explores how Jews have been part of South African history since the earliest colonial times. We look at the establishment of early Zionism in South Africa, and the various waves of Jewish migration. We consider Jewish communities' role in times of crisis, during the Second World War and later in the Apartheid era, and examine questions of individual and communal conscience. We also look at the extraordinary influence of South Africans in the Diaspora in the worlds of the arts, politics, science, medicine and technology.

Instructor: Saul Issroff

Tuesday mornings: 10.00 – 12.00
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Summer £80
Code: JH215

To register:

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Course outlines are on:

http://www.ljcc.org.uk/courses/culture/features/?disp_feature=y6GpGF

UNCLE KARL AND THE OSTRICH EGG

Adam Yamey

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Recently I received a letter from my (fourth) cousin Liselotte Bachmann¹. She wrote,

“I remember, when I was in Munich, with my grandmother Sophie² (I was about 5-6 years old) there was an Uncle Karl, who was on a visit from South Africa.”

She remembered him mainly because of the gift he gave to her,

“...he gave me an ostrich egg (empty of course).”

“Uncle Karl”³, was Karl Seligmann, a first cousin of my mother’s father, was born in Ichenhausen in Bavaria on 2nd February 1878. He died in the Cape Province, South Africa, on the 20th April 1934⁴. He was one of many members of the Seligmann family of Ichenhausen to emigrate from Germany to South Africa. His parents were Nathan Seligmann (1849-1909) and his wife Frieda, née Rosenfels (1853-1935). Nathan and Frieda were first cousins, once removed. Karl’s father was a son of Isak Rafael Seligmann and his wife Hale, née Springer. Isak Rafael (1814-1870) was one of the five children of Jakob Seligmann (1775-1842) of Ichenhausen. Karl is a descendant of two of these five. Karl’s mother Frieda Rosenfels was a daughter of Sigmund Rosenfels (1819-1893) and his wife Regine (1829-1910), née Bergmann. Regine was a daughter of Lazarus Bergmann (about 1800 - 1880) who married Isak Rafael Seligmann’s sister Klara (Gluck) Seligmann (1807-1884). Please see Fig. 1 (page 8) for a graphic representation of the above.

Of his early life in Germany I have no information. Karl’s uncle Sigmund Seligmann, his father’s brother, went to South Africa in 1876, and by 1884 he had opened a general store, S. Seligmann & Co., in Barkly East⁵. The store was very successful and Sigmund invited a number of his nephews including Karl Seligmann to come out to South Africa to help him run, and eventually to take over his business. Karl arrived in South Africa in 1896, aged 18-19 years. By 1899, when he was applying for Naturalization as a British Subject⁶ he was living at Moshesh’s Ford a few miles east of Barkly East, where his occupation was given as “clerk”.

Seligmann & Co. had a branch store and possibly also some kind of hotel⁷ at this tiny place. His naturalization was to attain some importance later on in his life.

Sigmund Seligmann retired to Munich in 1897 and although still active as a buyer in Europe he sold the firm in South Africa to his nephews, Jacob Krämer, Moritz Rosenberger and Julius Cornelius. By about 1903 Karl Seligmann along with his cousin Moritz Cornelius had become one of the partners of S. Seligmann & Co⁸. My mother’s cousin, the graphic artist, Dolf Rieser⁹ (1893-1983), who was a nephew of Karl’s writes about visiting his uncle in the early years of the 20th century. From his unpublished and uncompleted autobiography¹⁰ we find the following, written about his life near the end of the 19th century:

“My uncle, my mother’s brother (i.e. Karl Seligmann), was at that time living on the border of Basutoland¹¹. He was running a small trading post and also kept some horses and sheep. This place was right up on the high plateau and was called Moshes-Ford after the famous Basuto chief, Moshes. My uncle invited us up to him for a holiday and I think we first took a train and then had to continue by horse and carriage, which presumably was also the postal service at the time. I remember well an ‘ooutspan’ for lunch near an immense field full of dried bones and skeletons. These were the remains of the ‘Rinderpest’ which shortly before had nearly wiped out the cattle of South Africa

“.... Moshes-Ford was absolutely ideal for children. There was practically nothing there but a now empty river and the farm buildings, a Police Station and a Post Office, my uncle’s house and stores and a few corrals. The rest: the very wide-open spaces continued literally for hundreds of miles. There was also a strange contraption spanning the riverbed. It consisted of a very large box-like structure hanging from two cables. Later during our stay I saw it in use. One day the rain started and poured down for days on end and soon the empty river bed filled up and overflowed, reaching the buildings. Everything was flooded and sand sacks were put in front of the doors to keep the water out, but water still penetrated the buildings. The ferry on cables was used to haul

people and goods across the surging waters, which very nearly reached over it¹². I remember, because I sat in it for the journey across and back. Floods however did not last very long and soon we were back to the old routine. The trading post and frontier station attracted a deal of traffic and it was at that time that I first made acquaintance with the famous heavy Boer oxen wagon. There were about 16 or 18 oxen pulling the very heavy wagon, laden with goods and driven by a black driver, who had an enormously long stick and whip that could reach all the animals. A small boy led the foremost pair. One boy's leg was badly hurt by the ox hooves. The driver knew all the animals by name and when they started to move he called their names, which usually were Biblical. Thus 'Jochanan, Abraham etc. Trek! Trek!' and then the whole column started off at a slow walking pace....

"....One day my uncle said, 'It's time you had a horse and learn how to ride.' They caught a young horse (who had not yet been broken in), put on a saddle and lifted me on to it. Of course, as soon as it was free, the horse bolted and threw me off. Unfortunately, one of my feet remained in the stirrup and kept me hanging freely in the air. I remember seeing the ground a few inches away from my face. They quickly managed to catch the horse before I hit a rock. After this my uncle said 'You are obviously too young to have a horse. Come along into my shop and I will swap it for something else'. So he led me to the store which sold practically everything, apart from the sheep's wool in which he also dealt. I then chose a mouth organ that I fancied.....

"....The hills behind Moshes-Ford were of particular interest. One day my father took me there and we climbed to an overhanging rock shelter. There I saw for the first time Bushmen wall paintings. I am certain that it was then that the foundations of my later graphic ambitions were laid. At least I still remember the breathless feeling of wonder and awe I experienced then."

The Rinderpest to which Dolf referred must have occurred before 1897. I know this from a book, written to celebrate the centenary of the town of Rhodes. I bought this when visiting Barkly East and

Rhodes in August 2003¹³. On the 26th Nov. 1897 the Barkly East Rinderpest Committee became a thing of the past¹⁴. Moshesh's Ford is located between Barkly East and Rhodes, where there was yet another branch of Seligmann & Co. The Rhodes branch of the firm was opened in January 1903¹⁵. The following year Karl's name appears on a list¹⁶ of "War Losses Compensation Claims". Listed as being of Moshesh's Ford Karl was making a claim of £26 in compensation for damages suffered during the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902). A diarist noted that in February 1904

"...Building is going on here. Mr Hackings's Hotel is getting on fast, and so is Messrs Seligmann & Co's store."¹⁷

Four years later there is a record¹⁸ of a banquet held on the 3rd of November at the residence of Karl Seligmann to mark the departure to Barkly East of Karl's cousin Emil Seligmann¹⁹ (1877-1927). By 1910 the telegraph had reached Rhodes and the same diarist notes on 16th September 1910,

"....The village is growing. I notice the telegraph wire has been extended to messrs S. Seligmann & Co's store, and there is talk of some other extensions."²⁰

Of Karl's life until the First World War I have no information. It would appear that Karl returned to Germany, and was interned there as an Enemy Alien after the outbreak of WW1. In 1918 he applied for a British Passport. A letter from the Governor General's office in Pretoria addressed to Walter Long at the Colonial Office in London refers to

"... the application of Mr. Karl Seligmann, at present interned at Ruhleben²¹, for a British passport."

Ruhleben was a camp near to Berlin in which the Germans during WW1 interned male holders of British nationality. When he was interned is not known. But according to a letter from London, dated 8th May 1918 his name,

"...appears on a printed list of prisoners at Ruhleben received early in 1915, and he was therefore probably interned in February 1915, when most Colonial British subjects in Germany were interned at Ruhleben."²²

The internment camp was set up in the grounds of the racecourse at Ruhleben, located in a suburb of Berlin. It housed many men who were regarded by the Germans as enemy aliens. The men were well treated by the Germans and had to devise many activities to keep themselves occupied and maintained. The camp newspaper *Ruhleben Camp News* was produced on a regular basis. It contained, in addition to items of literary interest, notices of matters of practical importance and also details of the camp's very extensive recreational activities (notably sport and music)²³. Ruhleben even had its own horticultural society²⁴. The passport was issued in 1918. What this passport was worth to its holder is illustrated by a problem that Karl encountered 8 years later in 1923, by which time he had returned to South Africa. It would seem that Karl had bought a certificate of deposit from the *Deutsche Treuhand Gesellschaft* for a 5% Gold Bond issued by the St Louis and San Francisco Railroad Company, presumably before the outbreak of WW1. In 1923 Karl was trying to retrieve this from the American (US) Alien Property Custodian²⁵, which had sequestered it. In order to do this he had to show that he was a British Subject, and not a citizen of an enemy country, at the outbreak of the War. This required the issuing of a special certificate, which, according to a letter, dated 24th August 1923, from an office in Downing Street²⁶,

"...which will make it clear to the United States Government that the person in question was locally naturalized in a certain Dominion or Colony and is regarded as having lost his enemy nationality;....."

The letter is addressed to no lesser personality than "Governor General, Major General His Royal Highness Prince Arthur of Connaught, K.G., K.T., G.C.M.G., G.C.V.O., C.B., &c., &c., &c." is signed by, or on behalf of (Lord ?) "Devonshire." It continues with a sting in its tail, namely that his "localised naturalization",

"...does not confer upon him British nationality outside the Dominion or Colony."

This was precisely the same problem faced by Ugandan Asians (who had been naturalized by the British) when they wished to flee from Uganda when Idi Amin expelled them in the 1970s²⁷.

Karl Seligmann left the area around Moshesh's Ford sometime just before or just after the First World War. It was around this time that his younger cousin Iwan Bloch²⁸, my mother's father, became one of the two managing directors of S. Seligmann & Co²⁹. My guess is that Karl retired as a managing director of S. Seligmann & Co, passing on this position to his cousin Iwan, and then planned to retire to Germany, as had many of his other cousins. After WW1 conditions in Germany were very bad, not to mention anarchic, economically and otherwise. This was probably the reason that Karl returned to South Africa. At some time in the late 1920s or the very early 1930s Karl paid a visit to Munich, bearing an ostrich egg as a gift for his niece Liselotte, as described above. This would have been a few years before his death. In the last years of his life he was living as a "merchant, but lately retired"³⁰ in Nieuweplaats, which is located in the Uniondale Division of the Cape Province, about 70 Km north of Knysna³¹.

A year or two ago my late uncle Felix Bloch³² told me how his younger brother Bobby, who died in 1992, had been accosted by a "coloured"³³ man in a street in a town on the Garden Route. Bobby was very surprised when the man revealed to him that they were cousins. Bobby asked how this could be the case, and the other person replied that he was the son of Karl Seligmann. This child does not appear on the family tree³⁴. In fact Karl is shown as having been a bachelor and childless. The story can now be confirmed. In his last will and testament³⁵ he leaves money to the two children of Miss Lena Vermaak³⁶, "...the eldest being my son Karl³⁷." From this we cannot be sure who was the father of the younger of Miss Vermaak's children. This is made clear later in the paperwork associated with the estate, much of which is concerned for the welfare of his two children. The younger child, a daughter, Helen Elsie Seligmann³⁸, is noted as having passed away on the 11th April 1936. What has become of his son Karl, I do not know. A letter dated 1940 indicates that he was alive then and the chance encounter with my uncle Bobby occurred after WW2. According to the liquidation account of Karl Seligmann's estate, his funeral expenses were paid to the "Hebrew Congregation", suggesting that his last rites were carried according to the faith into which he was born.

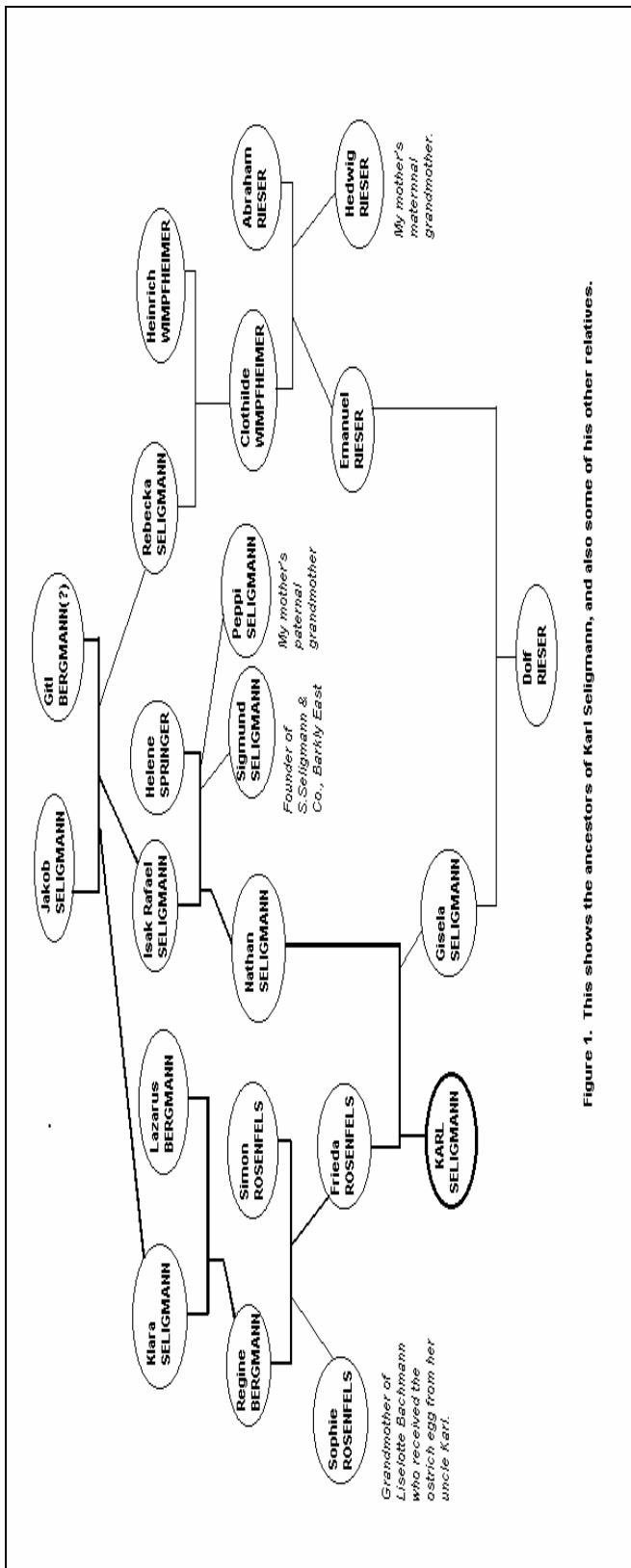


Figure 1. This shows the ancestors of Karl Seligmann, and also some of his other relatives.

Notes:

1. She was born 1925, and lives in Israel, having emigrated there from Germany before 1939.
2. Her grandmother Sophie (née Rosenfels) Bachmann (1858-1942), a victim of the Holocaust, was the mother of Karl's mother Frieda Rosenfels.
3. My first cousin twice removed.
4. Information from death certificate. See National Archives South Africa (NASA): KAB MOOC 6/9/4425/41366 1934.
5. Information about Sigmund Seligmann is from his granddaughter Fea Bradley.
6. Application for Letters of Naturalization submitted by Karl Seligmann on 14th April 1899. See: NASA: KAB CO 8581/22/1899.
7. See page 139 of the book, "Rhodes 100", privately published by its author Hanna Reeders (ISBN 0-620-17419-6).
8. See NASA KAB DOC 4/1/978/7320/1 1903.
9. Interestingly, Dolf was a descendant not only of Isaak Rafael Seligmann and his sister Klara, but also of their sister Rebecka who married Heinrich Wimpfheimer. Dolf was descended from three of Jakob Seligmann's five children.
10. Kindly lent to me by Dolf's son's Richard and Martin Rieser.
11. Basutoland is currently known as Lesotho.
12. This was the Kraai River: it was not until late 1913 that an ironwork bridge was built across it at nearby Belmore.
13. The book is written, and privately published by Hanna Reeders and is called "Rhodes 100 : 1891-1991" (ISBN 0-620-17419-6).
14. Reeders, page 35.
15. Reeders, page 44.
16. Anglo-Boer War. List dated 23rd Feb, 1904. See Reeders, page 77.
17. See Reeders, page 50.
18. See Reeders, page 64.
19. Emil Seligmann was the fourth born child of Heinrich Seligmann and his wife Fanny, née Bissinger. He died in South Africa and is buried in Barkly East. His younger brother Benno also spent time in Barkly East before returning to Zurich where his son still lives.
20. See Reeders, page 67.
21. It was at Ruhleben that my mother's grand uncle, the dentist Gustav Ginsberg (1873-1919/20), father of the South African jazz pianist Felix De Cola, was interned. Emanuel Rieser, the father-in-law of Karl's sister Gisela, was also interned in Germany, and sadly passed away in another internment camp in 1917.
22. For this and the previous quote, see NASA SAB GG/708/9/133/155 1918.

23. Amanda Jermyn has very kindly sent me photocopies of this publication.
 24. See: <http://www.rhs.org.uk/publications/pubs/garden1104/societywar.asp>
See also *The Ruhleben prison camp.....*, by Israel Cohen, published by Methuen & Co.: London, 1917.
 25. The correspondence regarding this can be found in NASA SAB GG/1488/48/1398 1923.
 26. Downing Street was, and still is the residence of the British Prime Minister. It also contains various other important governmental offices.
 27. Information about Uganda from Chandresh Vithani.
 28. Iwan Bloch (1886-1931) was son of Karl's aunt Peppi (Seligmann) Bloch who married Salomon Daniel Bloch of Gailingen am Hochrhein.
 29. The other director was Carl Blume, also of German origin.
 30. See NASA: KAB MOOC 6/9/4425/41366 1934.
 31. Knysna is located on the coastal Garden Route, beloved by many tourists to South Africa.
 32. Lately deceased, Felix Bloch (1918-2004) was my mother's elder brother and an encyclopedic source of family history.
 33. In South Africa a person of mixed blood (for example, European and Cape Malay) is referred to as being "coloured".
 34. The Seligmann family tree was drawn up first in 1935, then revised in 1966 shortly before the death of its compiler, Reinhold Seligmann (son of the entrepreneur Sigmund Seligmann).
 35. See NASA: KAB MOOC 6/9/4425/41366 1934.
 36. Full name: Susanna Magdalena Vermaak.
 37. Karl junior was born 23rd April 1929.
 38. Helen Elsie was born 5th May 1932.
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OUT OF THE SHTETL INTO
AFRICAAND BEYOND
Part 1: Marks/Mordukhovitz –
Janowski/Odelski Early Days

Herzl Marks

This article was originally published in Shemot in September and December 2004 Volumes 12 Nos. 3 & 4. This updated version is reprinted here with permission from Shemot and the author.

Born and brought up in Cape Town where we knew almost everybody Jewish and where most Jewish people knew us, I lived surrounded and supported by a large clan of Marks uncles, aunts, cousins and siblings. Comforting and comfortable. As a youngster I took all this for granted.

Where did we come from? How and why did *Zeide* (my grandfather Yitzchak Mordukhovitz) choose to live in Cape Town when others went to America? How did he get there? I hardly gave a thought to any of this or what their life had been in the old country. I tended to tune out when they spoke of '*der heim*' (back in the *shtetl*) and the 'good old days'.

Our Family's wanderings still have not stopped but now the move is away from Cape Town. Will our grandchildren, who now live as pocket-sized family islands in the USA ever connect as we did in Cape Town. Will they wonder about that life and the one that preceded it in '*der heim*'? Will anyone be able to supply answers?

My father, Moshe Nachman Marks, *Aba* to his children and *Saba* to his grandchildren, had a lot more to him than the bald statement on his tombstone in Pinelands, Cape Town:

<p>Moshe Nachman Marks Passed away 9 October 1979 He will always be remembered for his integrity, decency and social conscience</p>
--

And, similarly, *Ima*, my mother and *Sabta* to her grandchildren, had so much more to her life than these few words on her tombstone next to *Aba*:

**Chana Marks
(née Jonowski)**

Passed away 23 April 1981

A loving and loyal wife

Devoted mother and grandmother

Eishet chayil

To describe her merely as an *eishet chayil* (a woman of valour) is not enough. My parents deserve a lot more than the few words on their tombstones that stand as sentinels over seldom-visited graves in far away Cape Town's Pinelands No. 2 cemetery. Not to mention *Ima's* forebears who ended up in Treblinka's crematoriums, who have no memorial at all.

Unless something is done about it the saga of the Marks/Mordukhovitz – Janowski/Odelski families will fade away. Deciding to do something about it before all links disappear, I put together different pieces of the jigsaw that finally emerged as a coherent picture of our Family's life: in Russia and Poland, in the Cape Colony, in the Yishuv (the Jewish settlement in Palestine) and in South Africa before we left. Sources include photographs, letters, official documents and tape recordings.

On my stereo system in London, my parents' stories come alive with uncles Peisel, Shimon, Mottel and various cousins chipping in to evoke a tremendous emotional pull for the times when our family was a warm unit, who believed in working together for the family's common good.

Little is left of *our* roots in Cape Town, except for lonely tombstones in Pinelands and Woltemade cemeteries, which are now sometimes too dangerous to visit because of the fear of mugging.

1903 – Marks/Mordukhovitz Family: Beginnings in Cape Town

My grandfather, Yitzchak Mordukhovitz and his second son Peisel were two poor-as-church mice 'greenehrs' (greenhorns) who arrived in Cape Town on the steamer 'Koenig' on 29 March 1903: the first of the Mordukhovitz family to strike out for a life in a new country where the discovery of diamonds and gold meant wealth for all. It wasn't a good time to arrive. Cecil Rhodes had just died and recession had set in following the end of the Boer War in 1902. But whatever the hardships of the Cape Colony, life was infinitely better than in Russia

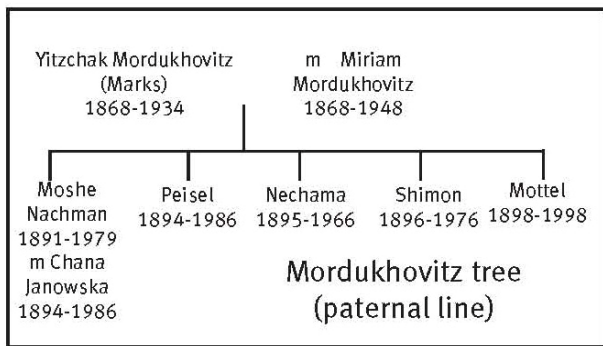
under the Tsars. At least there was hope at the Cape where streets were paved with gold. Or so the story went in Gorodyszhe, near Minsk, Byelorussia where they came from.



My uncle Peisel, my grandfather Yitzchak and my father Moshe Nachman in South Africa, 1908

There had been no money to pay for *Zeide* and Peisel's ticket, but a cousin who'd gone out to Cape Town some years earlier came to the rescue, enabling *Zeide* to get out before the infamous Pogrom of Kishenev in 1903. But his wife Miriam and four remaining children were forced to continue their meagre existence in their *shetl*. He determined to get them all out, one by one if necessary.

My father Moshe Nachman, born in 1891 between the pogroms of 1881 and 1903, was the eldest of 5 children. Normally, the eldest should have been the one to accompany *Zeide*. But it was decided to take Peisel and let *Aba* complete his studies at nearby Mir *Yeshiva*. This was not a bad move because Peisel, all of 8 years old, was a born trader from the time he could count, whereas *Aba* was always immersed in books. His handwriting was a beautiful copperplate and by producing handwritten traditional religious texts like *mezuzot*¹ he was able to accumulate some money. Through his efforts as a sofer (scribe) and the *essen teg* roster, *Aba* was able to keep body and soul together. *Essen teg* was a custom whereby families took it in turns to provide a daily meal to out-of-town students like *Aba*. No one family had enough resources to feed an extra mouth on a regular daily basis so the student ate with a different family on different days.



In 1904 *Zeide* sent for him. Aged 13 and travelling on his own, *Aba* was totally unprepared for the alien new life. He could not speak the language, nobody wanted hand-written *mezuzot* and he certainly did not have the physique for manual labour. His father decided to remedy this by sending him to work for David Cohen, a tough, no-nonsense man, owner of the inn at Hottentots Kloof, high in the Koue Bokkeveld, near Ceres, a *dorp* (village) 80 miles north of Cape Town.

Known locally as *Oom Dawie*, he too had emigrated to SA some years earlier and became an entrepreneur trusted by all the local in this back-of-beyond outpost. *Zeide* felt this was the kind of man he could entrust his son to, one who still retained his religious values of *der Heim*. This was the person who would give his son a good training for the rough and tumble of life in a new country. And so it proved to be.

In later years over lunch in our factory dining room, I tape recorded *Aba* and his brothers' stories of their earlier days. His reminiscences remain as fresh as ever.

“Those early days in the Koue Bokkeveld were some of the happiest and most carefree days in my life ... my bed was a shelf under the counter of the general store a sack of dry hay was my mattress but I saw the world passing by right there in front of our store ... in ‘*alle drehrden*’, what you would call the back of beyond ... our inn was the first stop for travellers to Kimberly diamond mines and Jo’burg’s goldfields ... we had all kinds of men and women passing through royalty, *ganovim* (thieves), gamblers, soldiers, miners ... all sorts. They were nice people ... I had no cares ... good days much better than Russia!”

Aba's toughening up period lasted for 2 to 3 years. When he was 16 or 17, he returned to Cape Town to join *Zeide* and Peisel, who eked out a living repairing shoes and selling old clothes. *Aba* took on a baker's round delivering bread to Tamboers Kloof, a suburb on the foothills of Table Mountain.

“I walked the 3 miles to Tamboers Kloof from Woodstock, with a full basket of bread on my back. I didn't want to spend the one penny fare for the tram. Uphill was bad, but walking back the basket was empty, not so bad! This way I could save 2 pennies.”

After a few years, the combined efforts of *Zeida*, Peisel and *Aba*, enabled them to save enough money to send for *Bobbe* (Grandma) Miriam and the remaining 3 children, Nechama, Shimon and Mottel.

On 8 August 1910, 7 years after his own arrival, *Zeide* Yitzchak, now known as Isaac Mordukhovitz, paid £9/8s/10d (£9.44) for a permit to allow his wife Miriam, age 46, and his 3 remaining children to join him in the Cape Colony. Before the permit was issued, he had to assure the authorities that his family could write in Yiddish which was regarded as a European language for immigration purposes. Isaac further declared that he wanted his ‘family to come to South Africa as I now have sufficient means to support them.’

When the family arrived the route out of the harbour was decorated with flags, bunting and flowers. Crowds lined the streets, cheering and waving flags. A *goldeneh medinah* (golden land) indeed! *Bobbe* Miriam imagined this red carpet reception was arranged specially for newcomers! It so happened that the country was celebrating independence from Britain and they had disembarked just hours before the Earl of Athlone, the King's representative, was to be driven to Parliament. She could never quite work out why she and her family got such a rousing welcome.

After all these years they looked worlds apart. Tiny *Bobbe* in *heimische* (homely) ‘best’ contrasted noticeably with her moustached husband in modern dress, sporting a gold watch chain across his waistcoat. Listening to her husband giving directions in English to their cab driver, he looked and sounded no different from the *goyim* (non-Jews) lining the route. However, it would not be long before she too and her 3 younger children (now

anglicised respectively as Mary Nechama 13, Simon 11 and Max 9), also adopted *goyische* garb.

Until her death in 1948, Yiddish remained *Bobbe's mama-loshen* (mother tongue) and English a tongue-twisting foreign language. She dressed in western style and did not wear a *sheitel* (wig) but did keep a strictly kosher home with religion as the epicentre of family life. *Zeida* and his sons continued to '*daven Shaharit*' (say morning prayers) with *tefillim* (phylacteries) every day, but made a small exception when it came to *parnassah* (making a living). *Zeide* had entered the country as a cobbler and opened a small shop selling shoes and second-hand clothing. *Parnassah* took precedence over all else and God would forgive them for keeping open on *Shabbat* (the Sabbath) because this was the principal shopping day for their mainly railway artisan clientele. *Shabbat* rest would come after the shop closed. God must have been in agreement and the business prospered.

Not many years after their arrival, *Zeide*, as chairman of the Woodstock and Salt River Hebrew Congregation, laid the foundation stone for a new *shul, cheder* and community hall in Argyle Street. On the tape, *Aba* continues his story:

"We *sukkeld* (struggled), living above the shop and when Mama *avasholem*² arrived with the rest of the family in 1910, we moved into a bigger shop with a bigger house upstairs. We lived there. One night my brother Peisel was lying in a pool of water in his bed because the roof was leaking. The landlord said you can mend it yourself. We had no running water ... the landlord said put it in yourself

" There was no money in second-hand clothes, so we tried to get new goods, coats, dresses, hats, shoes and suchlike from traders who trusted us. *Zeide* already had a good reputation for being honest.

"Our landlord, who was in competition with us, put up the rent once, twice, thrice So my father (*Zeide*) unburdened himself to an understanding supplier who also happened to be the Mayor of Cape Town ... He was impressed with our industriousness, the way *Zeide* and his 5 children worked together as a family unit, and the way we always paid on time. He said, 'Mr Marks, I have a small shop further

along, across the road at No. 471 ... you can rent it. It's in a much better position than this one. Workers have to pass it on their way to Salt River station. You should do well there'".

Zeide took the shop. And so it was.

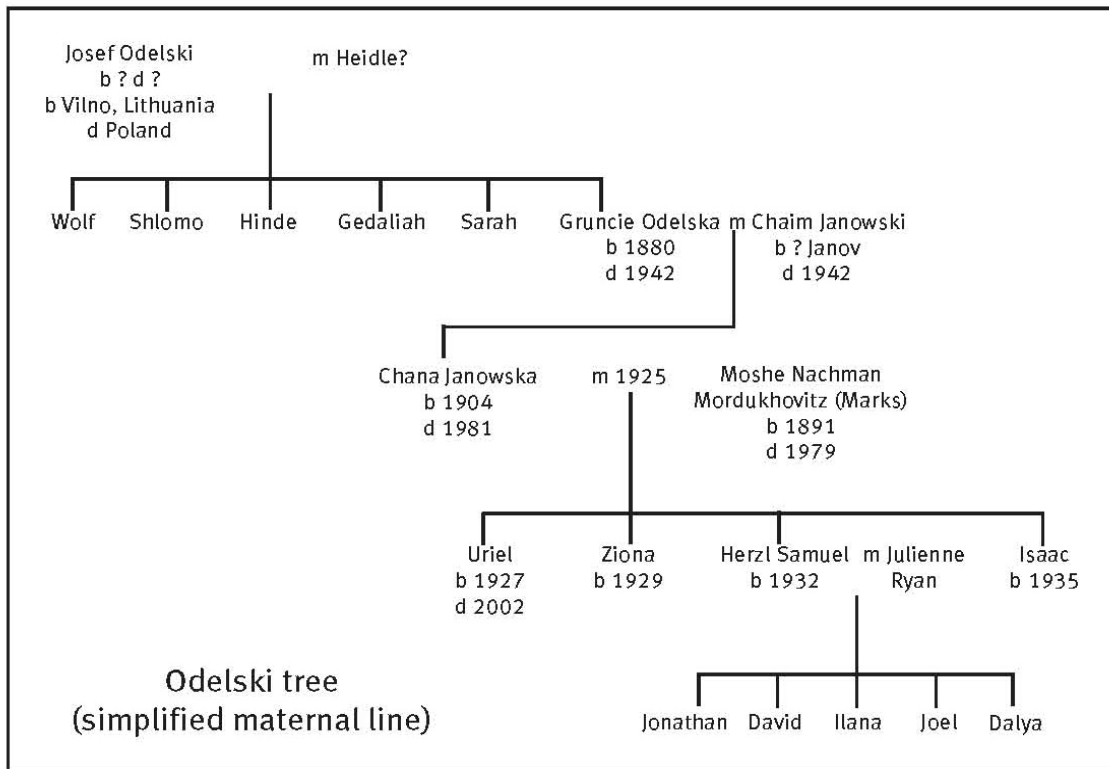
"... Within weeks, we were doing five times as much as in the old place ... By the time the 1914 War broke out just a few months later, we were already doing well, very well. We took another shop next door at No. 473 on the corner of Junction Road. We all worked hard, we didn't spend This was the main thing ... we all worked together and soon were able to buy both shops. Then across the road, *Zeide* bought a row of shops with a little house.

"Shortly after, he bought 2 big Victorian double-storey houses and we moved into one of them. It had a small front garden and I got the 'boy' to dig it over, put in manure, and I planted roses. Passers-by laughed at me. 'Roses! The wind will kill everything. The only thing that'll grow here are stones!' They were wrong. I had a George Dixon that was the best in Cape Town"

I hear the pride in his voice.

Changing Values

He is interrupted by my sister Ziona, "Boy? You had 'boys' even in those days? Like now?" She lives in Israel, believes in self-help, and sounds faintly derisive. *Aba* is having none of this political correctness. "Tell me in Communist Russia they don't have boys? In America they don't have boys? Wouldn't you have boys in Israel if you could find them?" He was prophetic. Even *kibbutzim* now employ paid labour from outside the *kibbutz*.



Aba is in full flow and this interruption is only a diversion:

“Next to our house was open land and we built a parade of shops (where Truworths is now) We were doing well. At that time most of our customers were white railway workers from the Salt River Railway workshops down the road, but they all went to live in Parow and Goodwood after the Government offered them cheap housing there. I remember we had small houses at the back of our shop, where a railwayman who earned 7/6d (35p) a day, had to keep his wife, five children and a blind father. He bought a house in Goodwood for several hundred pounds from the railways. Today you couldn’t buy it for £50,000.”

By the end of World War 1, the Family was financially secure and relatively well established. *Zeide* had become a confident entrepreneur. With his reputation for honesty he could always get a line of credit from the bank. He had a feel for property and if he was offered one which seemed right he had no hesitation in clinching the deal then and there.

He did not forget the people they’d left behind in Gorodyshze and after he died in 1934, *Aba* continued looking after them. Our family was convinced that Yaacov (*Zeide*’s last surviving brother in Gorodyshze) had been killed either by the Nazis or by Stalin. Yaacov and his family survived but were afraid to make contact with us in the West. Gorbachov’s *Perestroika* in 1991 enabled Michael (Yaacov’s son) to emigrate to Israel with his family. Miraculously, they made contact with our Israeli Family and filled in the gaps between 1939 and 1991.

Yaacov gave us some indication of *Zeide*’s generosity. He recounted in Yiddish (translated into English):

“Yitchchak (your *Zeide*) after his visit in 1921, immediately started assisting all the Jews financially to restore the *Shtetl!* He was a great philanthropist and a charitable man. He paid to have the little *Shul* restored. He also had the cemetery walled in so that the goats and horses could not enter and foul the graves. He helped many poor and destitute people of which there

were so many. He organised regular financial help for us which came twice a year, at *Pesach* and *Rosh Hashana*. He sent us a cheque with details of who was to receive how much. They included the Rabbi, the *Shul* and many needy people. Thanks to him and support from Moshe Nachman and the family, we grew up well.”

On the same 1921 trip *Zeide* sent out word that he was “in the market” for an unmarried young man with impeccable scholarly credentials, who would be willing to take his daughter Nechama as his wife. He was directed to Rabbi Soleveitzik, the sole representative for Jews in the Lithuanian Parliament. Rabbi Soleveitzik recommended Baruch Leib Rubik, his parliamentary secretary, a brilliant student who’d obtained “*smichess*” (ordination) when only 17. A good-looking man in his early 20’s and dressed fashionably, Baruch Leib was presented to *Zeide*. “You’ll do very nicely,” *Zeide* resolved. It was not everyday that such a prized “*gelehrenteh*” (a learned man) could grace the family fold. Baruch Leib came out to Cape Town to marry Auntie Nechama.

Not long after, *Aba* who’d become an ardent Zionist, decided to realise his dream of being part of the rebuilding of the *Yishu*³ (Jewish homeland) and made *aliyah* (emigrated to Eretz Yisrael) in 1923.

At that very time, a determined young lady in Poland was also trying to set in motion plans that would take her to Eretz Yisrael. The path she chose was not as straightforward as *Aba*’s. Were it not for her spirit and self-confidence, I doubt that she would have achieved her goal. This young person was *Ima*, my mother Chana Janowska.

No red dot against my name

Ima was part of a large family I knew little about. She seldom referred to them when I was a youngster. It was only long after the end of World War 11 that *Ima* started to reminisce about her life in Poland. Until then, most of her stories were about her life in Eretz Yisrael. Probably it was the shock of finding out that most of her family had perished in the Treblinka death camp before she had a chance to see them one more time, which made it so difficult for her to speak of her early days in Poland.



Nechama Mordukhovitz marries Baruch Leib Rubik in Cape Town, 1923

Shortly after *Ima* died in 1981, I was lucky enough to meet one of her younger cousins, Eli Rubinstein, who survived Hitler’s invasion by serving in the Russian army.

He sent me a little book written by his older brother Sol, now in California, who had escaped from Poland in December 1938, before Hitler’s invasion on September 1, 1939.

The book is dedicated “In loving memory of our families perished in the Holocaust 1939 to 1945”. He also compiled a family tree and it’s spooky for me to see my name together with Julienne, as well as our kids, written on this chart, as part of a large family whose names I’d never heard of. Many of those are marked with a red dot to indicate that they died at the hands of the Nazis. If it had not been for my mother’s determination to leave Poland she could so easily have been one of those red dots. Would I have ever been? At the end of 1938 Sol, due to marry shortly, was called up for army duty. Devastated, he turned to the one person who could possibly help, his uncle Josef Odelski.

“My nephew isn’t well enough to serve in the Army,” Uncle Josef told the medic. “Vodka will

cure him ... a case will do it," responded the officer with a wink.

After delivery of the vodka, Sol now officially unfit for duty, smuggled himself out of Poland to his fiancé Toby in America. He served in the US army through the war in the Pacific, master-sergeant in charge of parachutes, including those for the crew of the *Enola Gay*, the aircraft that dropped the first atomic bomb on Japan.



Odelski Compound with well in Łapy

Seeing the extent of this family, most of whom had been wiped out, it is particularly poignant for me. Until reading this little book, family meant the Marks clan, who all lived in Cape Town. As a child, my world meant *Bobbe* Miriam Marks, my Marks uncles and aunts, and my 23 Marks cousins. In comparison, my mother's side was a tiny speck. So when I suddenly became aware of people still living, who were part of *Ima's* family, a whole new dimension opened up for me.

The author, Herzl Marks, retired after many years as joint-managing director of the Family business in Cape Town. Now living in England, he is a photo-journalist and is writing his family history titled In the Cheeks. Visit his website at:

www.photoimagesgallery.com

References

1. A small case containing a sacred scroll of parchment inscribed with two passages from the Torah; "*Shema Yisrael*" and "*Vehaya*" (Deuteronomy 6: 4-9 and 11: 13-21) This case (the *mezuzah*) is affixed to the doorpost.
 2. May her soul rest in peace
 3. This became possible after Turkey's defeat in 1920, the final act of WW1 and the subsequent carve up of the Ottoman Empire by Britain and France.
-

PESACH – PASSOVER

Manfred Schwartz

Pesach is a holiday that commemorates the liberation of the ancient Israelites from 400 years of slavery in Egypt (approximately 3000 years ago). Since that time, the holiday has come to represent the universal value of freedom. Exodus recounts the story of our people's liberation from bondage and redemption through divine intervention. And so we relive our Jewish experience of redemption year after year to remind us not so much of our connection to the past, but our goal for the future.

Passover reminds us that redemption is real, the liberation is on-going, and that the possibility of salvation is always here. Thus although *Pesach* is celebrated by Jews throughout the world, the cultural background and their 'roots' determines the traditions they adhere to.

The Sephardic Community has naturally the same basic rules, but their interpretation in certain ways differs from those of the Ashkenazi Jews. In addition to wheat, barley, oats, spelt and rye, all leavened foods, Ashkenazi rabbis classified *kitniyot* (rice, millet, corn and legumes) as inedible by *minhag* (custom). *Chometz* is any leavened food from which we abstain during the days of Passover (the 14th through to the 20th or 21st Hebrew month of Nissan).

Most Jews keep Passover for 7 days, as the Torah prescribes and many in the Diaspora an extra day. The Sephardic keep it for the extra one, while the Moroccan Jews only, celebrate '*a mimouna*' with song and dance and have all the sweet dishes that are not eaten during the week of *Pesach*. *Chometz* may not be consumed under the principle of *ma'arit ayin* (one should avoid the appearance of violating a commandment). Some Jews do not eat *kitniyot* during *Pesach* and some do.

There is a feeling that there is value in observing the customs of those who came before, while others feel that the restriction of *kitniyot* is overly burdensome, especially given that it is not instructed in the Torah, and does not enhance their observance of *Pesach*.

Until some 40 or 50 years ago, one just did not eat what was considered as *Chometz*. Certain nuts, chocolates, sweets and ice cream to fizzy cola

drinks, beer and certain spirits too were taboo, but which are not displayed and offered for sale.

The younger generation, with looser ties to the Old Country, has managed to label such commodities as '*Kosher le Pesach*'. How customs could be altered to such an extent in half a lifetime of the older generation makes one wonder how tradition can so easily be swept away to enable a financial benefit to rear its head and take over.

Matzah is prepared in a special way. It has to be watched from the time the wheat is harvested and threshed, through to the baking process. It is necessary to insure that the wheat never comes in contact with water or moisture. Everything is guarded (*shemura*) against any contamination. From the time the water is introduced into the flour, it has to be placed within the oven not more than 18 minutes (and because of climatic conditions in South Africa, only 15 minutes) to prevent fermentation.

Prior to the Industrial Revolution, *matzah* was made by hand and with the Jews dispersed world wide, they took the familiar nomenclature and language and expressions with them, thus those workers who made matzot would have designated titles, so in Yiddish they were known as:

Bakermehl Mester who measures the flour;
Wasser Giesser who measures out the water;
Roedel Wielle who rolls, flattens and perforates the dough;
Durlanger who carries to the *Schieber* who places it in the oven.

In about 1890, Dov Ber Manaschewitz established the first machine-made *matzot* in Cincinnati. Here in South Africa, in the mid 1920's there was Mosmarks owned by Premier Biscuit Co. in Siebert Road, Doornfontein, named after one of their directors – Moses Marks. The general manager was Morrie Posner.

The other factory was Bear's in Bertrams. Both factories produced various other *Pesach-dika* bi-lines such as *matzah* meal, tea rounds, potato flour and other special items. The price of the local *matzah* at the then-sterling rate, was 18 pence per one pound carton, as against 30 pence for the American one.

Egg *matzah* is not '*lechem ani*' – bread of affliction – the poor man's bread. *Pesach* recalls the episode of the Exodus, in which the Israelites, lacking time to raise their dough properly on the night of their escape from bondage, baked the unraised dough into flat, hard cakes called *matzot*.

During the Seder, the doors are opened to admit Elihah, the prophet who will herald the messianic age, the age of ultimate peace, freedom, tolerance, a time when everything we cherish most and everything to which we, as a society, aspire, will come to fruition. If we have heard well the message of the Seder, then we understand that the redemption of the past – our ancestors' Exodus from slavery and degradation, to freedom and dignity – is a paradigm, a model, a guarantee that future redemption is possible.

Many Israelis use a chicken wing to signify God's "outstretched arm" because the *Torah* tells us that God brought the Israelites out of Egypt with a "strong hand and an outstretched arm."

The *Hagaddah* instructs us to drink 4 cups of wine, corresponding to the 4 promises of redemption in Exodus 6: 6-7. For those who do not consume alcohol, sparkling grape juice is an excellent substitute and the blessing applies to it. Passover is also known as the Feast of Unleavened Bread.

Many years ago when I was farming, some very Orthodox Jews approached me to supply them with milk during *Pesach*. The reason was that large dairy farmers could not alter their feed programme. As concentrates fed to the cows contain maize and other grains (for a few days prior to and during *Pesach*), no lucerne (which is a legume) or other *chometz* may be fed to the lactating cows. With all the goodwill in the world, one could not alter the entire setup by making such changes to the rations fed to the herd by affecting their intake and hence productivity levels. By the same token, egg-producing females could easily go off the lay if their feed was altered in any way. The same goes for battery housed hens – their egg production could decrease if they were fed anything but a grain based feed.

The solution regarding *Pesach-dika* eggs could be in obtaining supplies from those farmers who do not use battery cages, which are cruel, but practice extensive free range conditions.

All Jews throughout the world adhere to the same foods that are eaten on the various holidays. There arises a differential with regard to the eating habits when the geographical spread out is considered. Depending on the origin whence we come, the different climes and availability of food determines the menu. Each country has its own type and assortment of fruits and vegetables and nuts etc.

The environment plays an enormous part in their everyday type of food people eat. What their forefathers and what they were used to is carried to the new land to which they emigrate. They enjoy and adhere to the inbred known foods, thus are only able to appreciate, enjoy and like '*heimishe*' dishes. Their introduction to new flavours, smells, tastes and textures takes some getting used to. The Jews more than other people are more involved in their own genealogy. Their widespread dispersal to every corner of the world and from every corner of the world continues to encourage their changing habits and altering customs.

The Sephardi cuisine keeps in with the Mediterranean foods and the necessary fatty and olive oil dishes, which the Ashkenazi retain the Euro-Germanic style and type of menu.

GRAAFF-REINET'S TRIBUTE TO JEWISH SMOUSE

David Saks

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An impressive delegation of local dignitaries were in attendance at the unveiling last week of Graaff-Reinet's unique monument to the Jewish "smouse", those itinerant peddlers who were a familiar feature of the rural economy a century or more ago. Also present were Country Communities Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft and Brenda Horwitz, the last remaining Jewish resident of Graaff-Reinet. Brenda Horwitz's late husband, Frank, was a prominent citizen in the town and also served a number of terms as its mayor.

The monument to the *smouse*, originally a bronze plaque affixed to a boulder near the entrance to the town, was first erected in 1989 on the initiative of the Jewish Board of Deputies, under whom the Country Communities Department operates. Late last year, it was reported that the plaque had been stolen, presumably for its scrap metal value. On the insistence of the Graaff-Reinet Heritage Association, it was replaced with a granite plaque to avoid future vandalism.

Rabbi Silberhaft, who presided over the proceedings, spoke about the history of the Jewish community of Graaff-Reinet. From an historical point of view, he said, it had been one of the most important of the hundreds of South African Jewish country communities that had come and gone over the previous 150 years. Graaff-Reinet, the fourth oldest town in South Africa, also boasted the country's third-oldest Jewish community. The first Jewish resident settled in the town as early as 1836 and the Graaff-Reinet Hebrew Congregation was established in 1850, only nine years after the founding of the mother congregation of the South African Jewish community in Cape Town and shortly after the establishment of Grahamstown Jewish community. Jewish residents of Graaff-Reinet had included such well-known pioneers as Isaac Baumann, the Mosenthal brothers, Adolph and Joseph, and Mr Justice Joseph Herbstein.

"We sincerely hope that this plaque will still be here many generations into the future as a perpetual

testimony to a community who for so long were a valued part of the fabric of Graaff-Reinet society," Rabbi Silberhaft said.

Rabbi Silberhaft also paid tribute to former Graaff-Reinet resident, Dr Anton Rupert, through whose generosity the booklet, *The Jewish Community of Graaff-Reinet – A brief History*, was published in 1998. The booklet, which records the growth and eventual demise of the Jewish community and the important role it had played in the growth and development of the town was researched and written by the South African Friends of *Beth Hatefusoth*.

The dignified ceremony concluded with Rabbi Silberhaft intoning a short prayer in memory of the *smouse* and for the residents of Graaff-Reinet.

WOODSTOCK REUNION: A GENERATION REMEMBERS

Shulamith Levin

There was a great sense of anticipation and excitement as 170 people crowded into the Ruth Prowse Art Centre in Woodstock Cape Town for the Woodstock *Shul* reunion. It took place on December 20th, 2004.

Those present had spent their formative years in Woodstock during different periods of time. The reunion was originally conceived as a small “get together” of a group of friends from USA, Canada, Israel and England who planned to be in Cape Town at that time. As word spread about the forthcoming event there was a growing interest resulting in the need to develop an agenda and get a venue for the evening. A committee of Herschel Gelbart, Ada Sher (Boyd), Harold Idesis, Naomi Schroder (Boyd) and Joe Gatz was struck to organise a larger scale reunion. The original fifty people turned into 150 who signed up, and the 170 who came to the standing room only affair.

The Ruth Prowse art centre is a beautiful old restored mansion in the heart of the area where the Jewish Community once lived. In earlier years it was considered by the children to be a scary “ghost house”.

It was a joyful gathering as many people who had not seen each other for many years got reacquainted.

Woodstock, Cape Town, South Africa was a unique community. In the 1920's and 1930's many Jews who had immigrated from Latvia and Lithuania settled there. At the height of the community the membership comprised over 200 families. Meticulous records of the membership and the committee meetings are preserved for posterity by the diligent recordings by Mr Alexander Rubin. He was the *shul* secretary in a volunteer capacity for over a quarter century.

The Woodstockers were primarily business people – shopkeepers. They formed a very close-knit community. Their homes and places of work were often in the same area and the *shul* and the *cheder* were the focal points of the community. This was the central theme that was alluded to in the reminiscences of the participants.

In the 1960's and 1970's the numbers dwindled as people moved out of the area and in the 1980's the *shul* was sold, as a regular *minyán* could not be sustained. Today there are no longer any of the original Jews living in Woodstock.

The evening started with a humorous speech by Harold Idesis – the master of ceremonies. Michael Bagraim whose family came from Woodstock now the Head of the SA Board of Deputies followed, with Joe Gatz thereafter.

Naomi Schroder who is a professional caterer in Cape Town, catered the dinner in the true Woodstock tradition.

After dinner Herschel Gelbart passed around a roving microphone and various people recalled aspects of their lives. Invariably their memories involved the *cheder* teacher Rev Gulis who had a very great impact on their lives. Others recalled the dense population of Jewish businesses along the main road and recalled that when the businesses were closed for high holidays the streets would be deserted. Among those who spoke were Prof Solly Marks, Prof Isaac Marks, Mike Getz – Washington, Hannah Helman (Rosenthal) – Alabama, Wilf Levin – Toronto, Simon Gavish (Golshevsky) – Israel, Solly Sklar – Cape Town, and Ettie Binder – Johannesburg, who came down especially for the evening.

All expressed their pride at having grown up in the community and appreciation for the intense Jewish education they had received. They had a sense of belonging and they reminisced about community leaders and what the *shul* had meant to them.

As Joe Gatz mentioned in his speech we will never see the likes of a community such as this again. It was self-sufficient.

Today, as their fathers came to Woodstock to seek a better life, so too have their children moved on. It was evident that night that the bonds between the Woodstockers remain strong.

BOOK OF MEMOIRS
Reminiscences of South Africa Jewry
N. D. Hoffmann

Contemporary observations on the social environment of South Africa in the early Twentieth Century

Being the collected Articles on all matters Jewish and Judaism in South Africa by N. Hoffmann

Collected in the book "The Jews of South Africa" published in 1916

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BOOK OF MEMOIRS
Reminiscences of South Africa Jewry
An excerpt
N. D. Hoffman

The following excerpt is from a book, titled Book of Memoirs: Reminiscences of South African Jewry, by N. D. Hoffmann, published by the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research. This extract has been reprinted with the permission of the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Hebrew and Jewish Studies, University of Cape Town.

Mr M. Beinkenstadt

He was born in Ozshmina, near Vilna. His parents were respectable townsfolk who saw to it that he had a good Jewish upbringing. When he was older he went to live in Vilna, where he worked in a wholesale and retail stationery business. Thinking that in South Africa there would be a wide market for a similar business, which would include Yiddish books, literature and so on, he made an agreement with the well-known Vilna publisher, M. Katzenellenbogen to supply him with books. He arrived in South Africa with a large stock of Jewish books, in Yiddish and Hebrew, including religious books and he established a business in Cape Town. He soon realised that he had made a big mistake. Cape Town was not yet ready for this type of merchandise. However, within a period of ten years, his acute business ability had made him the largest bookshop in the land. Today his shop is filled with all sorts of books. The religious section contains old Shas volumes as well as prayer books. He keeps a large range of Enlightenment literature, in Yiddish and Hebrew, old as well as new publications. Owing to his practical and common-sense approach to finding stock, he soon attracted a large number of steady, satisfied customers, and, most of all, for bringing into this market the annual supply of *matzos* for Passover, from the famous Manishevits of Cincinnati, he deserves the grateful thanks of all the Jewish citizens in South Africa.