

Expanded Issue

# SA-SIG

*The journal of the Southern African Jewish Genealogy Special  
Interest Group*

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

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## PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

In July, I attended the 34th annual IAJGS conference, held in Salt Lake City. This conference was much smaller than many of the others held in recent years, but that did not detract from the content. The theme was Jews in World War 1, and there were several interesting talks around the subject.

There were approximately five talks at any one time, as well as films, workshops, and tours. I represented the South African SIG at the annual general meeting of the IAJGS. These AGM's are lengthy, with a lot of procedural and bureaucratic matters being covered. However, the new Board, under a very business-minded new chairperson, Marlis Humphrey, was elected.

The new Board includes an ex-South African, Quentin Atkinson, from Muizenberg. He is a bright young guy, a content manager for Ancestry.com world-wide. He explained some of the problems relating to Ancestry.com's acquisition of the South African-based Ancestry24 relating to copyrights and permissions, etc., and hopes to get these issues sorted out and up and running in the next few months.

While in Salt Lake City, I visited the Family History Library, very impressive as is the whole of the Mormon enterprise in the city. I think there is little available there that you can't do in South Africa at a local family history centre, apart from having microfilms readily available. The key to this seems to be the use of *familysearch.org* to find the relevant film numbers and order them well in advance before you need to use them at the Library.

We visited the Ancestry headquarters in Provo, a coach ride of about an hour from the centre of the city. It was most impressive to see the various sections, the scanning machines, database checkers, operation's centre, etc. In the course of this visit, I discovered that Ancestry is owned by a venture capital company and its directors, several of whom are Jewish but almost unknown on the genealogy scene.

To quote from the Salt Lake City's Congregation Kol Ami web site ([www.conkolami.org](http://www.conkolami.org)):

Salt Lake City's Jewish community dates back to approximately 1854. The present congregation is the result of a successful

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

The purpose and goal of the Southern Africa Special Interest Group (SA-SIG) is to bring together Jewish genealogy researchers with a common interest in Southern Africa and to provide a forum for a free exchange of ideas, research tips and information of interest to those researching Jewish family history in the communities of South Africa, Lesotho (Basutoland), Botswana (Bechuanaland), Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia), Zambia (Northern Rhodesia), Swaziland, Mozambique, Kenya, and the former Belgian Congo.

The SIG has been producing a quarterly Newsletter since 2000 in which is included articles on personalities in the Southern African Jewish community, religious congregations, communities – past and present and general news about the lives our Southern African families led.

Further information on how to subscribe to the Newsletter, as well as an archive of previous Newsletter issues, can be found at:

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

If you would like to contribute articles to the Newsletter, accounts should include descriptions of families of the community, aspects of local Jewish life, its institutions and particular character. Jewish involvement in the community at large, its history, business life and development could be featured as well.

Articles for inclusion in the Newsletter, or any general enquiries, should be sent to Roy Ogus, Editor, at [r\\_ogus@hotmail.com](mailto:r_ogus@hotmail.com)

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

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1972 merger of Congregation B'nai Israel (Reform-founded in 1891) and Congregation Montefiore (Conservative founded in 1899). The Utah Jewish population numbers approximately 4,400, with membership at Kol Ami at approximately 350 family units, or roughly ¼ of the Jewish population of Utah. We do our best to serve every Jew in our midst. We belong to both the Union for Reform Judaism and the United Synagogue of Conservative Judaism and enjoy exploring new ways of expressing our common Jewish faith.

In 1916, Simon Bamberger became the Jewish governor of the state of Utah. Louis Marcus became the first Jewish Mayor of Utah in 1932. We have a solid, positive relationship with our Mormon neighbours and a high level of mutual respect and appreciation.

The mountains and gorges surrounding the city are spectacular for scenery and hiking. Ex-Witbanker Barry Mann lives in Salt Lake City and was extremely helpful, giving me rides to the conference every day, and volunteering at the resource room.

Next year the conference will be held in Jerusalem from July 6 – 10, 2015, under the auspices of the Israel Genealogy Society (IGS), the Israel Genealogy and Research Association (IGRA), and the IAJGS. Book now with your air miles! The conference web site can be found at [www.iajgs2015.org](http://www.iajgs2015.org)

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## EDITORIAL

This edition of the Newsletter covers the year 2014 through December, and the main news item in from this period as far as genealogists are concerned, is the sad passing away of Martha Lev-Zion. She was in so many ways a standard of information. “You want to know about this? ... or that? .. call on Martha” and without fail she was there to help. You can find a tribute to Martha on the JewishGen KehilaLinks site at:

[kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/rezekne/martha.php](http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/rezekne/martha.php)

I was delighted to read about the Levitts, Abel and Glenda, achieving advancement in their search for information on Lithuanian Jews. They recently (on April 1) held made an interesting presentation in London.

Benoni was always ahead of the other towns on the Witwatersrand in developing *Yiddishkeit* in so many ways, with their schools, their religious activities and the progress of the town. Now however, as with all the other towns, Judaism has retrogressed, but Benoni has popped up ahead of its erstwhile neighbours and is doing more for its cemetery than the others.

Beth Hatefutsot is making wonderful progress with the publishing of their books on Jews in South Africa. I almost wish that they could start again so that I could volunteer to work with them from the start. There is so much information.

Difficulties of research: Is this a general problem or is it limited to those faint of heart? We look forward to reading your comments about this article.

Can “Stellenbosch” be a verb? Yes, just as “Mafficking” became a verb after the town of Mafeking was relieved by the British in the 1899–1902 Boer War and the people in London went mad with excitement – they were ‘mafficking!’

There are many other articles and stories in this issue of the Newsletter. Please read and enjoy!

♦♦♦

I have been editing the SA SIG newsletter for 5 years now, and I feel that I am getting stale and that we should find a new editor to take my place. I therefore offered Saul Issroff, the SA-SIG President, my resignation.

I wish to thank all the people, especially Roy Ogus, who have assisted me through the 8 or 10 Newsletters that I've worked on, and to the many people who have supplied so much readable material for us to use. I have just re-read the farewell letter by my predecessor, Bubbles Segall, who said, "I have learned so much ...," and I must use her words and repeat that I too have learned a great deal from all the stories that have gone through our columns.

Roy Ogus will take over the role of Editor from me. Please let him have your feedback on this issue, as well as send him any materials for future issues!

*Au revoir!*

**Colin Plen**

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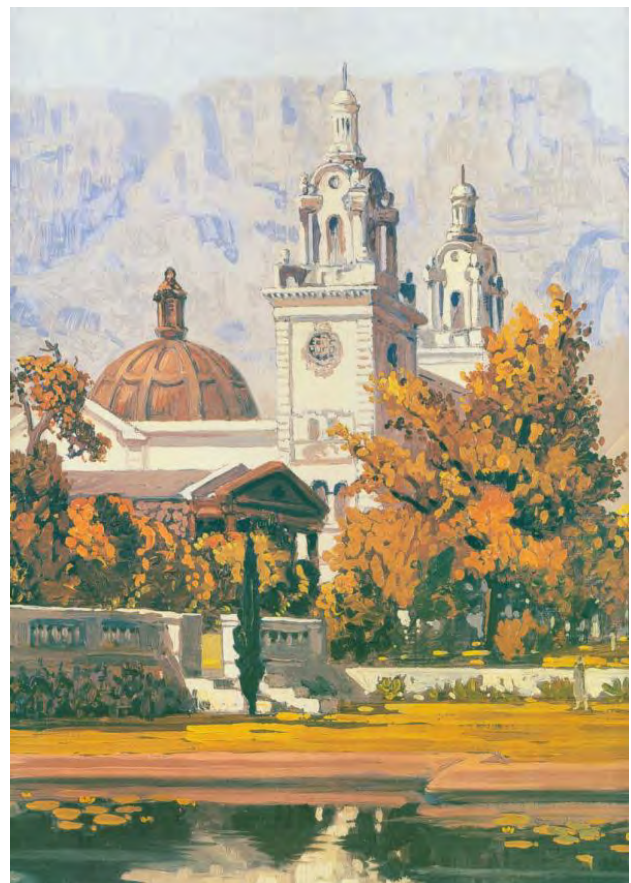
## **THE PRE-HISTORY OF THE GREAT SYNAGOGUE**

***The Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, 1841 – 1905***

*Solly Berger*

*This article is excerpted from the book, The Centenary of the Great Synagogue, Gardens, 1905-2005, by Solly Berger, Howard Phillips and Charles Melzer, et. al, published by the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation in 2005. The article is republished here with permission from the author. Thanks are also due to Eli Rabinowitz for his assistance with obtaining the permission. More information about the Great Synagogue and its history can be found in Eli's excellent blog entry at:*

*<http://elirab.me/2014/01/17/the-great-synagogue-gardens-cape-town>*



*The Great Synagogue, Gardens. Painting by Nils Anderson.*

The Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, which built the Great Synagogue, was founded in 1841. This makes it, after the Sydney Hebrew

Congregation, the oldest Jewish congregation in the southern hemisphere.

Until the 17<sup>th</sup> Century CE, the history of Jewry had been played out in the relatively confined geographical area of the Middle East, North Africa and Eurasia. Beyond these regions it did not spread until, on the back of the colonial expansion of Europe overseas, fledgling Jewish communities were created in the Americas, Australasia and sub-Saharan Africa. Thus, the establishment of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation (Tikvat Israel) in 1841 should be viewed as part of a relatively recent expansion of Jewry under the aegis of the Dutch, French and British Empires, which saw the first congregations established in North America in the 1650s and 1670s (the Shearith Israel congregation in New Amsterdam/New York and the Yeshivat Israel congregation in Newport), in Australia in 1828 (the Sydney Hebrew congregation), in New Zealand in 1843 (the Beth Israel congregation in Auckland) and in South America in 1862 (the Buenos Aires congregation).

In the case of the Cape, though a colonial settlement was founded by the Dutch East India Company in the mid-17<sup>th</sup> Century, the Company did not allow any form of public worship other than Protestant Christianity. Thus, although some apparently Jewish names do appear in the Company's Cape records, it is clear that Judaism was not openly practised, if at all. The strange irony of these religious laws was that Dutch Jews, who eventually became the majority shareholders of the Dutch East India Company, never attempted to liberalize the Company's laws of worship. In contrast, the Dutch West India Company, which controlled the areas of what became New York, New Jersey, Connecticut and Delaware, always allowed freedom of worship.

This religious intolerance remained official policy at the Cape until 1804 when the Company's short-lived successor Dutch regime, the Batavian Republic, inspired by the Enlightenment ideals of the French Revolution, removed the ban on religious freedom. Even then, the number of Jews at the Cape was so small and so assimilated, that it was not until the 1830s that economic opportunities were able to draw sufficient Jews from Europe to what by then had become a British colony, to achieve the critical *minyan* mass needed to try and set up a Jewish congregation. A first

attempt to do so in Grahamstown in 1838 did not get off the ground, while in Cape Town "several ineffectual attempts" were made "to collect a sufficient number of Israelites for the purpose of Divine worship according to the Mosaic Law, wherein it is commanded that no less than 10 Males of 13 years of age can constitute a congregation for general public prayers of Israelites."

In this disappointing situation, the arrival in Cape Town in 1839 of Benjamin Norden, an enterprising and dynamic 1820 Settler from Grahamstown, with a record of public service there, seems to have been decisive in turning these failures around. On the eve of the Day of Atonement, 26 September 1841, *Kol Nidrei* night 5602, 14 men, 3 boys and presumably, some women of the Jewish faith (though the male-blinkered records do not mention the women) met in his new house, Helmsley Place, in Hof Street, and held a service in accordance with the Orthodox tradition. This site today forms part of the Mount Nelson Hotel. Eight days later, on 3 October (*Chol Hamoed Sukkoth*), 10 of these men met at the Loop "Street house of another of the worshippers, Simeon Marcus, to take their hopeful initiative a step further by establishing the Society of the Jewish



Community of Cape Town, Cape of Good Hope (which became the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation), known in Hebrew as *Tikvat Yisrael* (Hope of Israel). Very soon it followed this up with regular *Shabbat* and Festival services in the homes of its leading members. The fledgling congregation's other initial step was that standard practice in new Jewish communities, the acquisition of land for a Jewish cemetery. Here it ran into Judaism's still twilight status in official circles, for the new Municipality of Cape Town turned down its request for the customary free grant of land for a cemetery and instead required it to pay £10 for a plot on Somerset Road. Miffed at this refusal and at the proximity of the offered site to a slave cemetery – which it supposedly took as a sly reference to Jews being descended from slaves in Egypt – the congregation withdrew its application and instead used funds generated by the sale of land donated to

it by an out-of-town supporter to purchase a plot in Woodstock for burial purposes. A stone wall was built around the new cemetery and a *Tahara* house erected, thanks to a donation by Benjamin Norden. The first person to be buried there was one of the congregation's founder members and trustees, the 41-year old Abraham Horn, a Rhinelander, who died in December 1844. His posthumously-born son, Charles, was the first child whose name was recorded in the new congregation's register of Jewish births in 1845.

Even before this, however, in June 1844, the first Jewish wedding in the Cape had taken place, between Amelia Marcus and Michael Benjamin. The matrimonial alliance encountered a problem, primarily because there existed no marriage officer in the Jewish community. It was resolved by requesting the Senior Colonial Chaplain of St George's Cathedral, the Rev George Hough, to solemnise the marriage in a manner that would give no offence to Jewish religious susceptibilities. This arrangement received the consent of the Attorney-General and all mention of the Holy Trinity and anything else objectionable to Jewish feeling was omitted. Thereafter, *Mincha* was read and a second marriage ceremony carried out, this time according to our ancient Law of Moses and of Israel".

By 1847 the congregation's membership had grown to 28 and encouraged by the Chief Rabbi of Great Britain, it decided that the time had arrived to take a step further by obtaining a rabbi and securing a permanent place of worship. However, Simeon Marcus, one of the pillars of the congregation, strongly disagreed, feeling that the community could not afford the likely expense and accordingly resigned, taking with him his two sons and his son-in-law. For a short period, therefore, he conducted his own separate services and Cape Town had two *minyanim*.

Meanwhile, led by Norden, the rest of the congregation set about raising the necessary funds to achieve their two goals. They did not limit their appeal just to Cape Town nor to Jews only as they did so.

Within a year they had raised enough to purchase a house in Plein Street to serve as a *shul*, but then changed their mind when they found more suitable premises on the corner of St John's and Bouquet Streets in Gardens, across the road from then-under-construction St Mary's Cathedral. The

two houses and adjoining store on the site were bought for £800 in 1849 – this time transfer fee was waived, suggesting that Judaism had at last been officially accepted as a legitimate religious denomination by the state – and the larger house was refurbished to form the first synagogue. Today the land is occupied by Belvedere House and forms part of the parliamentary complex, but a plaque on this building marks it as the site of the first *shul* in sub-Saharan Africa. The Congregation's first minister, the 46-year old Reverend Isaac Pulver, who arrived from Cheltenham in August 1849, formally consecrated the *shul* on Shabbat eve 15 September 1849.

This little synagogue served the congregation for the next 14 years, but this turned out to be a period when the "Hope of Israel" flickered uncertainly. Falling membership and ructions both internal and external during these years threatened to overwhelm the tiny congregation.

Strife arose almost as soon as the new *shul* had been opened, when Benjamin Norden became deeply involved in the Anti-Convict Crisis of 1849-50, taking up a stance which won him great popular hostility in the town to the point of being stoned by a mob in the street. By extension, this ill-feeling spilled over to his congregation too and a policeman had to be stationed in front of the new *shul* during services there so as to prevent any disturbances. The Congregation was anything but supportive of Norden's actions and under the name of its president, placed the following notice in the press to distance itself from him:



Reverend Isaac Pulver.

*"No member of the Jewish persuasion with the exception of those already known have acted against the wishes of the people of this colony, nor have been implicated in any way whatsoever to thwart any steps taken against the introduction of convicts. Though some malignant persona, out of mere malice, are exciting the public mind to condemn a whole community for the unworthy act of one or two, for conclusion I beg to say on behalf of the Jewish community, that they are*

*grateful to their Christian brethren for the benevolence shown towards them in contributing so liberally to their cause."*

Nor was financial situation comfortable and various methods were employed to raise income. The committee devised a Code of Laws, in fact 113 of them, whereby fines were issued for various transgressions. For instance: Taking off the *talith* or talking during the Services, 2/6d. Disturbing meetings 5/-. Ignoring a notice to attend a *Minyan* 5/-. This code of conduct irked many but was accepted until the congregation's finances improved in the 1870's, when members' objections were finally upheld and the code shelved.

The keeping of *Kashrut* was a problem too. Reverend Pulver who was also a *shochet* performed the *shechita* with a butcher's help. The problem of finding enough customers for purchasing the koshered meat made the exercise uneconomical, however. This produced friction between the minister and his congregation, leading to a split among the members. Added to a meagre salary and a barren Jewish environment in which to raise his children, this proved too much for Pulver and he resigned after only two years.

*"My principal reasons for wanting to leave this congregation," he wrote in despair, "are first, that I cannot get kosher meat; secondly, that I cannot as a Jewish parent bring up my children in a place where so little regard is paid to the principles of our Holy Religion; and thirdly, that notwithstanding nearly two years' trial to live as economically as possible, I could not make any income meet my expenses."*

Most debilitating of the problems facing the small congregation, however, was the loss of members through death, departure and disinterest and for several months at a time during the 1850s no services could be held for want of a *minyan*. More than once in these years there was serious discussion about dissolving the faltering congregation, but the strong personalities of those years prevent the closure. At one of the few well-attended services held in 1858, the son of Michael and Amelia Benjamin (the couple married in the two successive ceremonies back in 1844) celebrated the congregation's first *Barmitzvah*. From 1859 the efforts of the few stalwarts to keep the congregation going were powerfully supplemented by those of the vigorous and charismatic man

eventually appointed to succeed Pulver, the 31-year old Reverend Joel Rabinowitz, formerly of the Birmingham Hebrew Congregation. Rabinowitz did not spare himself to breathe new life into the ailing congregation and inspired by his enthusiasm, positive outlook and extraordinary fundraising ability – he was known both within the community and without as "The Great Beggar" – the congregation grew in numbers and financial strength. He raised funds for the underprivileged and the needy and formed the Jewish Philanthropic Society, which in later years became the present Board of Guardians and had the energy and the drive to visit Jewish brethren who lived in the outlying districts of the Colony.

On behalf of the struggling congregation itself, he issued a clarion call to his co-religionists throughout the Colony to rally to the support of the Mother Congregation to save it from having to close the doors of its synagogue.

So successful was this appeal that by 1861 he was able to declare that a proper, custom-built synagogue was necessary to replace the dilapidated and cramped Bouquet Street *Shul*. Swept up by his enthusiastic vision, the committee was quickly persuaded and later that year it bought a property high up St John's Street for a new synagogue. On this site it built the St. John's Street Synagogue for the sum of £2200.



It was formally consecrated on 13 September 1863, *Erev Rosh Hashanah* and served the congregation for the next 42 years, until it was superseded by the Great Synagogue in 1905. Today, it houses the entrance to the South African Jewish Museum complex. In designing it, the architect, James Hogg, 'supposedly' made a careful analysis of Solomon's Temple in the Books of Kings and Chronicles and incorporated features derived from this study in the final plan.

It remains a little known fact as to why the street that housed the two *shuls* has two names – St John's Street and Hatfield Street. Not far from the first *shul* in Bouquet Street and just below the present-day South African National Art Gallery,

were houses of ill repute. These brothels were situated in St John's Street, while the upper reaches of the street, housed some very wealthy residents and of course the new *shul*. Their objections were respected and instead of removing the brothels, it was easier to change name of the street. And so upper St John's Street



Samuel "Sammy" Marks.

became known as Hatfield Street. From this buoyant beginning the St John's Street *Shul* never looked back, as the congregation grew by leaps and bounds over the next 40 years, on the back of the swelling of the Jewish community of Cape Town as a result of the influx of tens of thousands of Jews. The

earliest of these immigrants were young men drawn to southern Africa by the diamond and gold rushes of the 1870s and 1880s, men like Samuel and Isaac Marks, Isaac Lewis and Barney Barnato, all of whom joined the congregation and attended services in its *shul* when in Cape Town.

Far more numerous and ultimately more significant in their impact on the Cape Town



Barney Barnato.

Hebrew Congregation was the second component of this influx of Jews, those „Great Migration“ Jews fleeing the renewed pogroms in the Lithuanian and Polish territories of the Russian Empire after 1881. Many of them settled in Cape Town where they had arrived by sea and joined the Cape Town Hebrew,

despite its very alien English atmosphere under Rabinowitz's unbending successor, the Reverend Abraham Ornstein.

Some trekked into the interior to sell their wares to the farmers as *smouse* and in many instances established a store in the middle of nowhere, which became a trading centre for the surrounding farming community. Villages and even towns developed from these humble beginnings, a good

example being De Aar, established by the Friedlander brothers, father and uncle of a later president and trustee of the Great Synagogue, C.K. Friedlander. There was also Garies in Namaqualand, founded by Maurice Eilenberg, who subsequently also moved to Cape Town where he became president of the Congregation and a major benefactor. As these two examples suggest, in the absence of congregations in these remote rural areas, many of these immigrants became “country members” of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation.



Reverend A.F. Ornstein.

With this surge in membership, the Congregation prospered. Gas lighting was installed in the St John's Street Synagogue which itself had to be enlarged. A *mikveh* was built. A second minister, the Reverend F. Lyons was appointed and he also became the *shochet*. By 1891 there were nearly 1000 Jews living in Cape Town and approximately 10,000 in Southern Africa.

The following is an illuminating word-picture of the local scene in 1891 from the pen of a contemporary Capetonian;

*“Touching our co-religionists in Cape Town, they are a fairly representative and industrious body. We worship in a bijou synagogue, which pretty as it is, is indescribable architecturally, although it has some pretension to the Byzantine. Our noble selves may be described as consisting of two classes, those who attend shul and those who don't. There are three sections – so to speak – among us, the highest are the big shopkeepers, the second are the small shopkeepers and the lowest – well, we have no lowest. The conditions of life are eminently comfortable and existence is not a very difficult problem with the majority.*

*Without egotism, we can claim the proud distinction of being a quiet, law abiding body, all more or less hardworking, following our respective pursuits with earnestness, if not with equal aptitude and results ... It is whispered that the royal road to 'society' is through the Cathedral. Hence a few, whom we can well spare, prefer*



*society to the synagogue. Our Minister, the Rev A F Ornstien (sic), is a popular man amongst all sorts and conditions. He is a distinct Chazan, an intelligent lecturer and is thoroughly broadminded, in fact he is the right man in the right place.... The class who go to shul are honestly Orthodox, the Reform Movement not having gained ascendancy here yet ... ”*

In this booming environment, the congregation was able to expand its activities into Jewish education too, and Rabinowitz's twice-a-week classes for children in a room attached to the *shul* were by 1879 able to expand into a full *cheder*. Reverend Ornstein, who had long experience as a schoolteacher and headmaster in England, took this project even further, by establishing his own full-time Jewish School in 1884, which drew pupils from near and far as it had a hostel for boarders too. By 1894 it had 80 pupils. After his death in



1895 it rapidly declined and in 1896 was entirely superseded by the foundation by the congregation of its own Cape Town Hebrew Congregational public School on the site of Hope Mill at the top of The Avenue. The driving force behind this initiative was the now-retired Reverend Joel Rabinowitz and

Ornstein's successor as minister, the Reverend Alfred Philipp Bender. Supported by luminaries such as Cecil Rhodes, Jan Hofmeyr and various churches, it flourished and by 1902 had 500 pupils in its high school and separate junior school. It was eventually taken over by the Cape School Board and it lost its character as a Jewish school. It eventually closed its doors in 1920.

The congregation's new minister from 1895, the 32-year old Reverend Alfred Bender, proved to be an outstanding orator and scholar and was soon also appointed as Professor of Hebrew at the South African College, the predecessor of UCT. However, though his Cambridge-polished erudition and very English demeanor might have been tailor-made for the Anglo-Jewish ethos of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, it gave him little appeal among the Lithuanian and Polish immigrants who had been streaming into the city

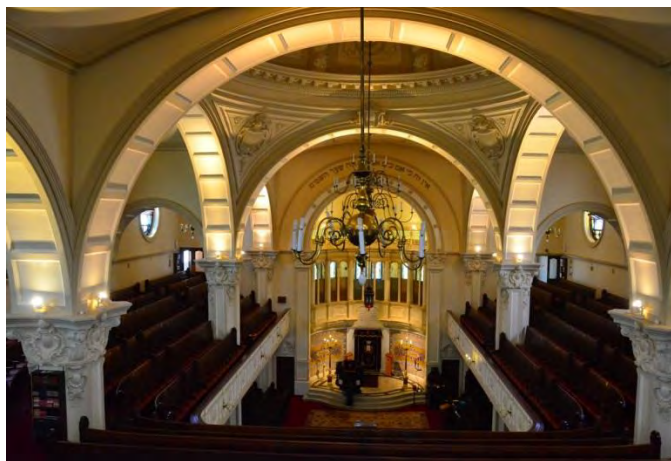
since the 1880's. To them, he and it were alien and the majority were disenchanted by the haughty treatment they received from the congregation, known to them, disparagingly, as the *Einglische Shul*. The culture that they brought from *der heim* was different and the feeling of *landsmanschaft* – the people from the same *shtetls* – encouraged them to set up their own congregations from 1895. To name a few – the ultra-orthodox *Beth Hamidrash* in Constitution Street (1901), to become in later years, the *Vredehoek Shul*, the New Hebrew Congregation (1895) in Roeland Street and later to move to Schoonder Street; the *Ponevez shul* (1904) in Vandeleur Street and later to move to Maynard Street, which is where it still is; the *Chabad* Congregation (1897) in Buitenkant Street, then in Virginia Avenue and today in Arthurs Road, Sea Point though no longer a *Chassidische Shul*; and many other *shtieblch* in rented rooms.

To this swelling community, the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 added thousands of Jews, *uitlander* refugees from the Transvaal republic, who temporarily doubled the local Jewish population to 10,000. Their sudden arrival in Cape Town in October 1899 raised many problems, for many of them had nothing but the clothes on their backs. Led by Bender, the congregation and the rest of the Cape Town Jewish community helped feed and house them. Their presence also put further pressure on an already overcrowded *shul* and during the High Festivals there was not enough seating to accommodate them. A Joint Festival Services Committee was formed comprising three representatives each from the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation, the Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation and the Johannesburg Hebrew Congregation. The Good hope Hall was utilised for the overflow services. Similar arrangements were also made at the Sea point Town Hall and Rabbi Dr Hertz, the minister of the Witwatersrand old Hebrew Congregation, preached at both centres, while Reverend Bender officiated at several overflow services too.

The St John's Street *Shul* was bursting at the seams and at the end of hostilities, plans were drawn up to build the Great Synagogue which opened its doors in 1905, its seating big enough to accommodate 1500 persons. The *shul* was designed by the architects Parker and Forsythe and build for the princely sum of 26 000 Pounds. It was formally opened by the President of the

congregation, Hyman Liberman, who at the same time held the position of Mayor of Cape Town, the first Jew to occupy this office. The little community's standing in the city had come far indeed since the Municipality of Cape Town had refused its application for a free grant of land for a cemetery back in 1842.

The year 1905 thus forms an end and a beginning of an epoch in the history of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation and of Cape Town Jewry.



*Interior of the Gardens Synagogue*

In conclusion, an interesting assessment: Had the immigration of Jews ceased in 1860, little might have remained of the few early and lively communities in South Africa. Indeed today, there are no Jewish descendants left of the men who founded *Tikvat Israel* in 1841. Those that arrived in the mass migration in the years that followed, brought with them an organized entity with warm-heartedness, generosity, practical-mindedness combining into a special culture that has endured and made the SA community such a special segment and influence in the world of Jewry.

The Cape Town Hebrew Congregation's century-old Great Synagogue is an edifice which is one of the great beauties in the Jewish world and which brings great acclaim and admiration by all who pass through its portals, both Jewish and non-Jewish.

The Mother Synagogue belongs to all South Africans and has a history which we ALL should be proud of, no matter what synagogue, congregation or community we belong to.

## Sources

This article is based on material from the following sources:

- I. Abrahams, *The Birth of a Community* (Cape Town, 1955)
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*Editors' Note: See also Eli Rabinowitz's blog entry of January 2, 2015, which describes Roy Scher's project to record a wedding ceremony in the Gardens Synagogue. (Roy is Telfed's Jerusalem Regional Head.). The blog entry can be found at:*

<http://elirab.me/2015/01/02/a-tale-of-two-shuls>

# OF KIDDUSH CUPS, NAMES, AND FAMILY TRADITIONS

Gilbert Herbert



*Migrations of my family*

Origins:	Lithuania, Latvia, Belarus	
=====	To United Kingdom	1880s
=====	To South Africa	1890s
=====	To Usa	1890s
Back home:	To Israel	1960s

It is *Erev Shabbat*, seven o'clock on a late summer evening in Haifa. Through the large plate glass windows we can see down across the forest in the *wadi* below – the filigree branches of the nearby trees now in silhouette – to the coastline and out across the sea, as far as the horizon. Down the coast the lights are coming on at the promontory of Atlit, once a Crusader Castle, today a base for the Naval Commando, where our late son once served. The sunset had, as usual, been spectacular, with a spread of colours that in a painting might have been considered garish, and avoided by an artist as 'chocolate-box.' However, as I once wrote:

*While the heart of man grows ever fainter  
Lord of the Universe, the master painter,  
makes the rainbow and the sunset glow,  
knowing that in heaven all colours go.*

Friday night is family night, and that has been our tradition over the generations. While our daughter Margie and son-in-law Itzik and some of their children continue to spend Friday nights with us, it is becoming a rare occurrence for all three of our grandchildren, now adults, to be in Haifa at the same time.

Avri, the older of our two grandsons, still lives in Haifa, but our granddaughter Shani, working in Tel-Aviv, now rents an apartment in Ramat Gan, and Maor, the youngest, is still in the army and goes where he is told.

Tonight, however, my wife Val and I are blessed to have the full family, all seven of us, sitting around the Sabbath table. At the far end of the table the candles flicker in their silver candlesticks, a gift from my mother when we came on *aliyah* in 1968. The bread-board stands ready, with two plaited *challot* under a cloth covering rich with Yemenite embroidery. At each place-setting there is a silver goblet, filled according to taste with sweet kosher wine or grape juice, ready for Kiddush, the ceremonial sanctification of the Sabbath. If only we knew the full provenance of these Kiddush cups, what a story they would tell. Even so, they are eloquent of our family structure, history and geography, all reflective of the wider Jewish experience.

As I have said, tonight there are seven cups. Actually we shall be discussing ten cups, but two are never, and one only occasionally, to be found on our table. The first of these, kept in the display cabinet, is an elegant stemmed silver goblet of simple modern lines, which I designed for our son at his birth in 1955, and was hand-made for us by Kurt Jobst, a renowned Austrian-born silversmith and non-Jewish opponent of the Nazis, then living and working in Johannesburg. The base of this cup bears Jobst's distinctive insigniare, similar to the one illustrated here, above the silver purity standard, .925.



*Illustration of the mark of Kurt Jobst*

This precious goblet, a gift to our son from his aunt and uncle, Val's sister Lorna and her husband Monty Nudelman, has not been used since Barry's death in a tragic motor accident – on a post-army

tour of South Africa, a country which was his birthplace, but one he hardly knew – in 1977. Inscribed in simplified Roman lettering on the delicately-hammered but otherwise undecorated surface, are the initials **B.C.X** – Barry Charles Herbert: Barry [in Hebrew, Binyamin] named after my late father Benjamin, and Charles after Val's grandfather. We are a family that honours its ancestors.

The second, a tall well-proportioned cup with an elliptical handle, set on a small base, belonged to my older brother, Cecil, and it came into my possession after his death, which took place during the second Lebanese War.

I shall never forget sitting *shiva* in the Herbert's flat in Safed, as Scud missiles fell all around us. The cup, bearing the letters EPNS, is evidently not sterling silver, but electro-plated nickel silver. Cecil's date of birth, 7.7.1919, is inscribed on the cup. Nearly a hundred years old, it is still in excellent condition, showing that it is an object of good quality, probably the best that my parents, not well off, could then afford. Above the date there is an intricate decorative monogram of entwined initials, S.H.

For a moment I wonder why it is not C.S.H., for my brother was given two first names at birth, being registered as Cecil Solomon Herbert. On reflection, the reason is clear: Cecil was his everyday 'English name', but Solomon honoured the memory of our maternal grandfather Solomon [Sholem] Miller. The name Solomon is yet another example of naming traditions being maintained over the generations. The grandfather Sholem (born in 1861) that Cecil was named for was himself named after his own great-grandfather, yet another Sholem (born about 1795); and the first great-grandchild born (in 2008) after my brother died was named Aharon Shalom, preserving the name for the fourth time. There has thus been a Sholem in our direct family line in every century since the 18<sup>th</sup>. Cecil chose to call himself Shlomo (actually a more accurate translation of the name Solomon than Sholem), in all the years that he lived in Israel. This cup is now to be handed over to Bernard Herbert, Cecil's first-born son, who in turn will transfer it to his son, Gary.

The first known case of the name Sholem was in my maternal Miller family, my great-great-great-grandfather. I did not say Sholem *Miller*, for the simple reason that in the 18<sup>th</sup> century Jews in the Old Country did not usually have a family name, only a patronymic.

I am not quite sure when the surname was acquired by the family, and what it was. It is just possible that the next son in line in the family sequence, born David ben Sholem in 1803, might in later years have been known as David MILLER, but it is equally likely that he was David PITEL, because it is believed – and there is some evidence to prove it – that Pitel was the original family name, which somewhere along the line was changed to Miller. Such name changes are well-known in the Russian Empire's environment of invasive, often anti-Semitic, bureaucracy, and the ever-present threat of conscription into the Tsar's army. In our case there is some logical connection between the earlier and later names. Miller (and its variants, Mahler, Meller, etc.) is a common family name, and obviously derives from an occupation, one dealing in flour or working in a mill; Pitel, curiously enough, also relates to the milling trade, deriving from 'Pytel', a machine for sifting grain.

Coming back to our main theme, we continue our discourse on our kiddush cups. The third cup, the one only occasionally found on our Shabbat table, is a beaker of sterling silver, marked .925 purity, gilded internally. It has ornate *repousse* decoration with six identical pendant bunches of grapes (a familiar Israeli tourist emblem), possibly machine formed. In Hebrew letters, the name טלאור is inscribed.

Therein lies a story, both personal and universal, at least in the Jewish world. Our son-in-law Itzik, an orphan, has no surviving immediate family other than his sister, for many years a divorced single mother living in Beer Sheva, with only one child, her son Talor. As our daughter Margie has no surviving sibling, this young man is their only nephew, and our grandchildren's only first cousin. Because of this unique relationship, and with no regular family base of his own, Talor as a young boy came to 'adopt' ours. Affectionately, he called us Granma and Grampa, just as our grandchildren do.

Now, as we shall see, we have given our grandchildren their own designated kiddush cups for use in our home. We decided that when Talor visits us he should be treated similarly, and presented this cup to him on his barmitzvah. After all, although not a blood relative, he is *mishpocha*, part of our all-embracing extended family, the clan. This concept of 'clanship' is part of a long family tradition. In my youth we cast our net wide, not only calling our


parents' cousins Aunt and Uncle, but using those familial terms more liberally, to cover relationships with no blood ties whatsoever. I recall to this day that the sister of the wife of my mother's cousin Avremel was called by us 'Aunt' Polly. In view of the inclusive nature of the clan, no wonder that Talor when young regarded us as his grandparents. Family cohesiveness had always been a feature of Jewish life in Eastern Europe, and mutual responsibility was a critical element for survival when families moved to the unknown new worlds of England, America and South Africa. See how frequently, in English or American census documents of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, cousins and nephews (however loosely connected) are included as members of the core household, see how young women accompany related families when travelling to remote lands, see how sisters-in-law share a home as their husbands try to establish themselves far across the seas. See how various branches of Jewish families chose to live in close proximity, whether in Dvinsk in Latvia, Whitechapel in London, the lower East Side of New York, or the southern suburbs of Johannesburg.

Let us return to our Shabbat meal. As I have done ever since my father died in 1945, I rise to chant the Kiddush, reading from my *siddur* in my left hand (I don't trust my memory), while holding my own kiddush cup in my right. It is filled with sweet red sacramental wine, usually *Nitzachon* [victory], I believe so-called after the Six-Day War, but tonight the slightly fruitier *King David*, named after the Biblical monarch who ruled over Israel in Jerusalem 3,000 years ago. We are an ancient people, and just as the cups from which we drink celebrate our family history, so our wines commemorate our long connection with the Land of Israel, from the days of the Covenant to the wars we have fought to preserve our heritage. These sacramental wines are made by the pioneer Carmel Winery, founded in 1882 by Baron Edmond de Rothschild, with two major establishments, one in Rishon le Zion, the other in Zichron Yaacov, just south of my home in Haifa – two of the earliest Zionist settlements.

I try, as my hand trembles slightly, not to spill any. According to custom a kiddush cup should hold a minimum of 4.5 ounces of kosher wine or grape juice, which mine does, but only if filled to the very brim. Let us take a close look at this cup, for it is now nearly 90 years old. It is relatively plain, and I guess that it was chosen by my mother, who had a

refined aesthetic sense, preferring elegance and simplicity in all things from clothes to furnishings.

Let me give you an example I recall from my childhood days. The mahogany sideboard in our house, which had an ornate back-board about a metre high, with a curvilinear profile of marked baroque character and a large ornate infill of bevelled mirrors, was typical of the prevailing taste of the day. Mom, who was no slave to fashion, had this much-admired back-board removed and replaced with a low straight board, with a simple strip mirror running its length – something the Bauhaus itself would not have been ashamed of.

I call the vessel from which I drink a cup rather than a goblet or beaker, for it is truly cup-shaped, almost as wide as it is high, with a concave profile (the technical term is a 'baluster'), and is fitted with a handle. It is an unusual shape for a kiddush cup, but I have seen several in the catalogues of similar (but not identical) form, usually dubbed 'christening cups.' My parents, whose Jewish lifestyle would today be called 'modern orthodox', would surely not have been aware of this questionable association. The surface of the cup is entirely free of decoration, except for a monogram of two letters, my initials GH. [Gilbert Herbert], in a flowery script something like this: , but more convoluted, and overlapping. The very English name I was given at birth, Gilbert, certainly eased my way in the Anglo-Saxon world in which I lived. I was named for Eliakim Getzel Yerusalmiski, the father of my maternal grandmother Hannah. Among the many of Eliakim Getzel's descendants who are named after him are two Getzels, at least five Gilberts, and one George; also a Gershon, by which name great-grandfather Getzel was familiarly known in Latvia.

The date [22-6-1925] inscribed under my monogram presents a slight problem, for it signifies my first birthday, instead of the more customary marking the date of birth, commemorating the naming of the child, which for a boy is at his circumcision, the *brit mila*. I should note that, for unconnected reasons, 1925 was a landmark year for the Herbert family, for this was when we moved from the home my parents rented in the predominantly Jewish neighbourhood of Troyeville (the modest house in Fuller Street where my brothers and I were born) to an architect-designed and recently-built red-brick house of our own at 81 Mitchell Street, in Johannesburg's more up-market northern suburb of Berea. As befits a family who

are home-owners, and who have now entered at least the lower echelons of the middle class, the cup dedicated to me is not stamped EPNS, as was my brother Cecil's, but is made of high-grade .925 English sterling silver, with a Birmingham hallmark dated 1924. The cup was made by F.H.Adams & Co., a Birmingham firm of silversmiths, first registered in 1920.



*The maker's stamp*

I suggest it was imported from England by a reputable firm like Mappin & Webb (which had established a branch in Johannesburg before the Great War), and engraved locally.

Before we discuss the antique kiddush cups – the most intriguing of the Herbert collection – let me deal with those more recent ones, with which we commemorated the birth of each of our three grandchildren. The first is an Israeli stemmed goblet standing on a pedestal. On the whole it is plain, except for a decorative filigree chain around the base of the pedestal, and another under the rim of the cup. There is, however, an embossed decoration on one face, in heavy Hebrew letters, reading – one word above the other – **בורא פרי הגפן** (a blessing of the Almighty who “createth the fruit of the vine”).

On the opposite face is the inscription: **שני אסנת**, which is the name of our first grandchild, Shani Asnat: Shani after Sheina [Jeana] Boeangu, Itzik's mother – who died suddenly shortly before Itzik married our daughter – and Asnat, after Valerie's mother Agnes [Asnat] Ryan. Shani was born on 2 September 1984, but there is no date of birth on this goblet because it was actually the second one we bought her.

The first was not sterling silver, and after we gave real silver cups to our grandsons, we decided we should level the playing field, as it were, and replaced Shani's kiddush cup with a sterling silver one, of .925 purity. As a family we have our principles: treating our grandchildren equally is one of them, honouring our parents, is another. Honouring them in life, as we are commanded to do, but also honouring their memories: for, just like the tombstones we consecrate to mark their graves, the names inscribed on our kiddush cups – on a smaller, more intimate scale – help to keep the memory of those who have departed ever fresh.

Next let us have a close look at the cup we purchased to celebrate the birth of our first grandson. It is a beaker (in Yiddish, a *becher*) about 8 cm high, with straight sides splaying from a base whose diameter is 4cm to a rim of 6cm. It is plain, except for a 1cm wide *repousse* band below the rim of the cup. It is gilded internally. As with the other cups for the grandchildren, it is an example of Israeli craftsmanship, in sterling silver (there is a hallmark on the base, difficult to decipher, which seems to indicate it is of .925 purity).

We bought all our cups from a store specializing in Judaica, run by a couple originally from England, upon whose integrity we relied. The shop was located in Hadar, once a flourishing business and residential district of Haifa, a treasure house of early modern architecture, which my associate Sylvina Sosnovsky and I enshrined in our book, *Bauhaus-on-the-Carmel and the Crossroads of Empire*.

Today Hadar is run-down and badly in need of renovation. The beaker, on the other hand, after more than a quarter century, is still in first-class condition. It is inscribed **אברי בנימין** [Avri Binyamin], and dated **כ בחשוון תשמ"ז**, that is, 22 November 1986, Avri's birth date.

The origin of the name Avri, an uncommon name at that time, is explained by his mother in this way: “The way I got to Avri's name is by taking Barry's name in Hebrew **ברי** and adding a distinctive aleph at the beginning.”

In this oblique way Margie commemorated the memory of her beloved brother, without burdening her son with the sorrow evoked by that name. There is however a more direct connection between the names, for Barry and Avri share the same Hebrew name, Binyamin, which of course was that of my London-born father (Binyamin ben Haim). Mentioning the name Haim, we note that so far we have no mention of a kiddush cup dedicated to his memory. This is because we have not succeeded in tracing his cup or the cup belonging to my oldest brother, Harold Hyman Herbert, known in Hebrew as Haim ben Binyamin, who died in Johannesburg in 1992.

Our next grandson was Maor, born in 1992. His beaker is similar in shape, size and style to that of his brother, but the decorative band is less ornate and the silver in our subjective judgment seems lighter: there is a tiny hallmark on the base, but we have been unable to decipher it.



*Israeli kiddush cup, sterling silver, similar to those of Avri and Maor*

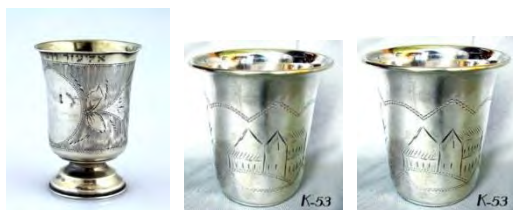
Despite our desire not to discriminate between our grandsons, we could not find an identical one. The inscription in Hebrew reads מאור אלימלך [Maor Elimelech], and dated תשנ"ב כ"ה בטבת with its equivalent in the Gregorian calendar: 3.1.92 also being denoted. While Shani's name derives from both her parents' families and Avri from his mother's, Maor gets his name from his paternal grandfather: Mircea Elimelech Boeangiu.

We have so far identified, in addition to those cups of the three absentees (my late brother, our late son, and the one not directly related but included in the wide net of the *mishpocha*), also those of our grandchildren. But what, you may ask, of the matriarch of our little family, my wife Valerie, and our daughter Margie and her husband Itzik? What cups do they drink from, in order to say *l'chaim*, and greet the Sabbath? There are three cups still to be accounted for, and they will take us back to another time and another place. We now come to the more enigmatic examples, in our search for meaning - in a family history sense - to be derived from our study of the kiddush cups in use at our Shabbat table.

In order to explain how I came by them I must recount something of my immediate family history. When my father suddenly died, felled by a cerebral hemorrhage, in 1945, I - of the three Herbert boys the only unmarried one - was still living at home, in the family apartment in Connaught Mansions, in downtown Johannesburg.

I continued to live there with my mother, taking responsibility for the household, until my marriage in 1953 to Valerie Ryan. My mother then insisted on going to live with one of my married brothers, in order to leave the flat (which of course had also been my home) free for the newly-weds. In this way we acquired several of Mom's belongings, mainly utilitarian, but also some heirlooms, including the three antique kiddush cups we are about to discuss.

There are three vessels, all similar in shape, size and decoration, (but one is a goblet on a hollow pedestal), looking very much like the illustrations below, taken from catalogues of Russian silver goblets, dated c1900:



*Three antique Russian silver kiddush cups, c.1890*

My cups are obviously of Russian manufacture, as evidenced by the frequency in which similar examples appear in the catalogues, and by the Russian hallmarks, stamped below the rim on the goblet, and the base of the beakers. Unfortunately, these are not easily legible. I cannot read the assayer's and maker's marks, but the date of assay, 1890, is clear on all three of them, as is the silver standard, 84 *zolotnik*, the equivalent of .875 sterling, on the beakers.

The drinking vessels are 5cm high, with an average diameter of about 3.5cm; in other words, they are not large enough to hold the mandatory 4.5 ounces of liquid. My suspicion is that they are secondary cups of a set, with the central large goblet (that used by the master of the house, the one making kiddush) missing.

I cannot recall if that is what my father used, nor do I know where that one is. The engraved decoration, comprising various combinations of geometric patterns, houses in crude perspective (what in one article is called "a naïve architectural vignette") and trefoil foliage, are characteristic of Russian cups and goblets of that period. Mine are generic rather than personal cups, for there is no inscription of name or date. Whether these were made specifically as kiddush cups I cannot say, for there are no obvious Jewish symbols. According to one account such cups "were made originally as vodka cups, but were quickly adopted by the Jewish population." According to one authoritative web-site, the ubiquitous engraved houses are *shtetl* scenes. On Shabbat evenings I, of course, have my own cup, as do the youngsters, but it is customary for my wife to have the stemmed goblet, and my daughter and son-law the two beakers.

I don't know how these antique Russian cups originally came into my parents' possession. The fact that there is no personal inscription does not help us answer this question. If these are family heirlooms then the fact that the cups are Russian makes sense, for my four founding families, before they moved to England and then to South Africa, originally were Litvaks, coming from Lithuania, Latvia, and Belarus, all parts of that area of the Russian Empire known to Jews as 'Lita.'

But while the Russian origin of our cups is undisputed, and its relevance to our family is clear, there is nevertheless a problem with the date stamp. According to the hallmarks our cups were assayed in Russia in 1890, but by then my grandparents had already been in England for some years. My paternal grandparents Haim Yablochnik, of Vilkomir (and at one time from Karvaskas), and his wife Minna (born Paikin), whom he married in Dvinsk in 1875, emigrated as a childless couple, and had their first child, Lazarus, in London in 1885, by which time Haim had changed his name, first to Hyman Herbert, and then to Simon Herbert. On the other hand, my maternal grandfather Solomon Miller emigrated from Dvinsk to London, where, in the Princes Street Synagogue, Whitechapel, in 1887, he married Hannah Yerusalimski, also from Dvinsk.

Despite having emigrated from Russia, therefore my grandparents could not have brought the cups assayed in 1890 with them. Regretfully, I cannot establish the original source, whether the cups came to me through my father's or my mother's family or if they came into our family's possession in my grandparents' generation or that of my parents.

The obscure provenance of these antique kiddush cups remains frustrating. However, there is a larger question, which is even more intriguing, and that is, why these cups were purchased just at the time that the various branches of my family were leaving Lita, and setting out for the unknown new worlds of the United Kingdom, South Africa and the United States. Back home in Lithuania and Latvia, whether in large towns like Vilkomir, Dvinsk, or Polotsk, or the smaller communities of Kavarskas or Kraslava, we were a clan of well-established families, and as such surely each had its own kiddush cup, handed down through the generations.

As Rabbi Wein wrote: "Kiddush cups are treasures, always viewed as heirlooms to be passed on to later generations. They would continue to be used to sanctify the Sabbath, the wine, the table and the

family itself. There is nothing as precious in a Jewish home as a kiddush cup of a grandfather or great-grandfather. It is as though the family elder is still present at the Shabat [sic] table, reveling in the joy of the successful transmission of Jewish tradition in his family." The handing down of family heirlooms from generation to generation presupposed a cohesive, unified and stable family group. Did the great dispersion and relocation resulting from this new exodus of the Jews of Eastern Europe demand the replication and redistribution of cherished ritual items?

No matter how unclear their history, I too regard my three antique Russian cups as precious heirlooms to be cherished, in honour of the Shabbat, in honour of our Jewish heritage, and in honour of my family. With the newer cups, those my parents bought for me and my siblings, and those we in turn provided for our son and later for our daughter's children, we continue to honour the past, but are also dedicated to the future, the continuation for generations to come of our life-enhancing Jewish traditions.

## ARCHIVE COLLECTS STORIES OF SOUTHERN AFRICAN JEWS

*Jodie Shupac*

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Hardly the wallflowers of Jewish immigrant groups, many Southern African Jews living in Ontario are well-established in fields such as medicine, law, business and academia and are notable contributors to the Jewish community.

Realizing it had a sizeable gap in its holdings when it came to archives from this community, the Ontario Jewish Archives (OJA) Blankenstein Family Heritage Centre, a department of UJA Federation of Greater Toronto, launched the "Southern African Legacy Project" this past spring.

The goal is to document and preserve the personal histories and archival materials of Ontario Jews hailing from South Africa and Zimbabwe, for the purposes of both historical research and posterity.



Staff archivist Melissa Caza, who is heading the initiative along with the organization's chair, Eric Slavens, stressed the OJA is not only interested in stories from the community's most prominent members, but in every unique immigrant account. "This is the OJA's first effort to specifically target a particular immigrant group," she said. "So this is truly a pilot project."

Still in its early stages, the initiative is slated to involve three distinct phases: the collection of local Southern African Jews' archival records, ranging from photos and films to business records, personal diaries and correspondences; the production of a number of filmed oral histories, facilitated by professional oral historians, featuring individuals within the community and an exhibition to showcase OJA's findings.

To provide direction, fundraising assistance and help get the word out, the OJA has formed a committee of five community members of Southern African Jewish descent, chaired by Stephen Pincus, a Toronto lawyer who came with his wife to Canada from South Africa, via Israel, in 1982. The committee has been reaching out to the South African community for support and has already received private donations.



*Stephen Pincus*

"I think Southern Africans in Canada have made quite an extraordinary impact on the Jewish community and the broader Canadian community in a variety of areas," Pincus said. "The impact made especially by those who came in the 1970s and '80s has been

quite profound... in law, architecture, business, academia, the arts and sciences and community work."

He believes showcasing this community's stories is worthwhile "for the children and grandchildren of those who came [from Southern Africa] and for the wider Canadian Jewish community to understand what it means to be an immigrant and... learn from the successful integration and absorption of immigrants."

Pincus said the first wave of Southern African Jews came to Canada after South Africa became a republic in the 1960s, and was followed by another

wave in the late 1970s, which was precipitated by anti-apartheid rioting and civil unrest.

"Certainly, the majority who came in the '70s and '80s came because of frustration with the politics of apartheid," he noted, "but they also came for professional or family reasons... parents often followed their children to Canada."

While some Southern African Jews live in smaller Ontario cities such as Hamilton, London and Kingston, they're overwhelmingly concentrated in Toronto. Caza cited the 2001 federal census, the most recent tally available, in which 4,370 Toronto Jews said they were born in South Africa.

Southern African Jews in Canada are unique from other local Jewish immigrant groups, she said, because they weren't refugees fleeing anti-Semitism, nor were they the direct targets of violence. "[When they left Southern Africa], [t]he majority of them were financially well-off, well-educated and able to leave their country without extra social assistance," she said.

The OJA wishes to capture the experiences of Jewish Southern Africans of varying ages and backgrounds, as well as those who came here during different time periods.

So far, it has publicized the initiative in *The CJN* and *SAJAC NEWS*, a magazine published by the South African Jewish Association of Canada, and is considering putting out calls for archival materials or donations in specific synagogue bulletins.

The goal is to complete the collection of materials and oral histories in the next few years, then create an exhibit to share with the greater community. Ideally, the OJA hopes to conduct similar projects with other Jewish immigrant groups.

The OJA web site can be found at: [ontariojewisharchives.org/](http://ontariojewisharchives.org/)

# THE STORY OF YIDDISH

Harvey Gotliffe

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<https://www.createspace.com/3782405>

Once upon a time, nearly a thousand years ago, there were people with no country of their own. From the eleventh through the fifteenth centuries, they were expelled from whatever European land they had settled. At times, they were unable to take all of their physical possessions with them. However, they always took what was most important—their religious beliefs and their language. The people were the Jews, their religion was Judaism, and their language was Yiddish.

## When Yiddish began

In the tenth century, Jews from France and Italy migrated to the German Rhine Valley, and Yiddish began in an Ashkenazi culture. The name came from the medieval Hebrew designation for the territory and Ashkenazi Jews were literally “German Jews.” The term, “Yiddish,” comes from the German word for Jewish, Judisch, and to Germans, a Jew was “ein Yid.” Yiddish developed as a blend of German dialects with Hebrew, Aramaic, Slavic languages and traces of Romance languages. It was the *lingua franca* of Ashkenazi Jews.

By the late 1200s, Jews had created a language rooted in Jewish history that they used in their daily lives and when they conducted business among themselves. When they did business with Gentiles, Jews spoke the language of their countrymen. Today In the United States, you could be greeted in New Orleans with “How you all?” or in Brooklyn with a thickly accented “New Yawk” hello.

In earlier times, Yiddish evolved into four accents or dialects, also depending on the locale. There was Eastern and Western Yiddish, and Eastern Yiddish encompassed three distinct dialects. A Litvak spoke “Lithuanian Yiddish” and lived in either in Lithuania, Belarus or northeastern Poland. A “Polish” dialect speaker was known as a Galitzyaner

and this dialect was spoken in Poland and the Austro-Hungarian province of Galicia. Those who spoke “Ukrainian” Yiddish were from the Ukraine, Romania, southeastern Poland and eastern Galicia. Western European Yiddish was closer to German and its use began to decline in the eighteenth century.

Hebrew was the language of *davening* (praying) used in ritual and religion. It became known as the *loshn koydesh*, the sacred language used exclusively by men. In the Ashkenazi community women weren't considered holy enough for Hebrew, but they learned to read and write in Yiddish the “*mame loshn*”—the mother tongue. Men were able to read both.

## The Move Eastward

Jews have been a convenient target for persecution, expulsion and annihilation. In 1095, Pope Urban II called for the first crusade to take the Holy Land away from Muslim infidels. As some crusaders marched through Germany, they sought out “infidel” Jews and offered them the choice of death or conversion to Christianity. Thousands of Jews were slaughtered when they refused to abandon their faith.

After the Crusades, many Ashkenazi Jews migrated eastward, forming communities in non-German-speaking areas, including Hungary, Poland, Belarus, Lithuania, Russia, Ukraine, Eastern Europe, and elsewhere. Jews were forced out of France in 1182 and twice in the fourteenth century, and out of England in 1290.

The oldest surviving literary document in Yiddish is a blessing in a Hebrew prayer book from 1272, and the 1526 Prague Passover *Haggadah* contained the first page printed in Yiddish. The advent of the printing press in the sixteenth century resulted in an increase in the amount of Yiddish material produced that has survived.

In the thirteenth century, Yiddish replaced both Hebrew and local languages in conversation. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, songs and poems were written in Yiddish, using Hebrew alphabet letters. During that time, Jews were expelled from Hungary, Lithuania and Germany twice, and once each from Austria, Spain and Portugal. The Jewish population moved further eastward into Poland and Russia and in the late Middle Ages, Slavic elements were incorporated into Yiddish. Jews further

developed the language and included elements of Hebrew, Jewish-French, Jewish-Italian, and various German dialects.

In the fifteenth century, Poland's Jewish communities were the largest and remained the heart of Ashkenazi Jewry until their demise in the Holocaust. From the fifteenth through the nineteenth centuries, Eastern European Jews lived in *shtetls*—"small towns"—and in large cities.

In 1792, the Russian Empress Catherine the Great created a "Pale of Settlement" where Jews were forced to live in their *shtetls* within its boundaries—boundaries they dared not cross. The "Pale" covered western Russia, Belarus, Lithuania, Poland, Ukraine, Romania and eastern Hungary. By the eighteenth century, the Yiddish language was between 10 and 20 percent Hebrew and Aramaic, and nearly 75 percent Germanic. A small percent was based upon Romance words with Slavic words framing the rest.

### **The People's Language**

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, secular Yiddish literature flourished and much of its original growth was attributed to the writing of three major authors. The "grandfather of Yiddish literature" was Sholem Abramovich (1835-1917), who wrote under the name Mendele Mocher Sforim. Isaac Leib Peretz (1852-1915), better known as I. L. Peretz, was a writer of social criticism, plays and short stories. Solomon Rabinovich (1859-1916) was a Yiddish author and playwright who wrote under the name, Sholem Aleichem. His stories about Tevye, the dairyman, were the basis for the twentieth century play and movie, "Fiddler on the Roof."

In the 1897 and 1917 census, more than 95 percent of Russia's Jews who were mainly poor, listed Yiddish as their native tongue, and for many it was their only language. Jews were subjected to more frequent pogroms—terrifying acts of destruction. The increase in their usage and severity ordered by tsarist edicts between 1877 and 1917 caused further fear.

Between 1870 and 1914, some two million Eastern European Jews came to America. They had the foresight and the *mazl* to escape the upcoming rampant waves of anti-Semitism in Europe. Many brought little more than their Yiddish language with

them, and the majority who settled in New York considered Yiddish their native language.

Jews who had been known as "the people of the book," became the people of the press. The first Yiddish-language newspaper was published in New York in 1870, and in 1875 the *Judisches Tageblatt* ("Jewish Daily News") was the first Yiddish daily to survive. Its circulation reached 100,000 by 1900 but it was being challenged by the *Forverts* ("The Jewish Daily Forward"), whose circulation peaked at 250,00 in 1929. The *Forverts* helped to Americanize immigrants by offering a popular *Bintel Brief* advice column, a variety of human-interest stories, and highbrow and lowbrow literature.

By 1914 there were ten Yiddish daily newspapers with a combined circulation of more than 750,000. Parties and interest groups across the spectrum started their own papers, including the socialists, communists, centrists, labor workers and Orthodox Jews.

Polish-born Isaac Bashevis Singer (1901-1991) was on staff as a journalist and a columnist for the *Forverts* from the 1930s into the 1960s. He was also a leading figure in the Yiddish literary genre, writing short stories and novels, first in Yiddish, and then translating them into English. In 1978, Singer was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature.

During the 1920s, Yiddish was emerging as a major Eastern European language. Its rich literature was widely published, Yiddish theater and Yiddish film prospered, and it even achieved status as one of the official languages of both the Belarusian and the short-lived Galician Soviet Socialist Republics. In 1925, YIVO was founded in Wilno, Poland, now Vilnius, Lithuania, as the *Yidisher Visnshaftlekher Institute*, the Yiddish Scientific Institute. It was the pre-eminent repository and publisher of Yiddish-language materials.

When Poland's 1931 population was just under 32 million, nearly one in ten of its citizens were Jewish, and more than 87 percent of them spoke Yiddish. In 1937, there were 150 Yiddish newspapers and journals with a combined circulation of more than 500,000.

### **Almost Its Demise**

The U.S. Immigration Act of 1924 curtailed large numbers of Eastern European Jews and others from

coming to America. In May 1939, Great Britain produced a White Paper that restricted Jewish migrations to Palestine to 75,000 in the coming four-year period. The actions of both governments helped to bring about the decimation of Europe's Yiddish-speaking Jewish population by the Nazis. The Act also eliminated a vital source of new readers and the Yiddish press circulation in America began its decline. Children of immigrants actively strove for cultural assimilation and they were more likely to read an English-language newspaper than the Yiddish *Forverts*.

Before the Nazis invaded Poland in September 1939 and World War II began, there were more than nine million Jews in Europe. In the eastern European countries of Poland, Russia, Romania, Lithuania and Latvia, there were a combined total of 7.3 million Jews, and almost 75 percent of them spoke Yiddish.

Nearly six million Jews were slaughtered during the horrific Nazi era, and two-thirds of them were Yiddish speakers. A Lithuanian rabbi in Kovno, Lithuania, wrote that “the bandit Hitler” not only killed a people, but also tried to kill a culture and a language. The Nazis destroyed schools, *shuls*, books, Yiddish theaters, movies, and radio programs, and the Holocaust led to a dramatic decline in the use of Yiddish.

Millions of Yiddish speakers survived the war, including those living in America, yet further assimilation in the United States and the Soviet Union diminished the daily use of Yiddish. In Russia, Stalin was suspicious of Jews and their “secret language,” and Yiddish culture became a prime target. Jewish institutions were suppressed and its leaders, actors, writers and poets were arrested, and in August 1952, thirteen prominent Yiddish writers were executed.

### **Yiddish Barely Survives**

Yiddish-speaking Holocaust survivors sought refuge where anti-Semitism wasn't overt, including the United States and Israel. The latter seemed to be a promised, egalitarian land for Yiddish speakers. Unfortunately, its leaders feared that if the seeds of Yiddish was allowed to be planted, then both the country's new identity as a special haven for Jews and its *lingua franca*, Hebrew, might not flourish.

To counteract an unwritten law of what was acceptable, those in power curtailed a nascent

Yiddish theater. It had been created by survivors as a dedication to and a remembrance of the way things were. It was a *shanda*—shame—but an understandable one for a new nation. Then and now, Yiddish was spoken on a daily basis primarily in Jerusalem's religious neighborhoods. A tale is told about an American grandmother who was visiting Israel and was overheard on a bus teaching her ten year-old grandson a few words in Yiddish. A man sitting across the aisle said, “Tell me why you are teaching your grandson Yiddish. You know that Israel's national language is Hebrew.” She looked at the man and said, “Because I want him to remember he's a Jew.”

Until Israel was established in 1948, Jews were a people without a country, a government, or a military, and their Yiddish language was one fragile connection between them. After World War II, Jews in the United States sought to live in an assimilated society. They encouraged their children to become even more American and in doing so, discouraged them from learning Yiddish.

Yiddish-speaking Holocaust survivors also wanted their children to have a better opportunity to become successful, and they also equated success to becoming more Americanized. One requisite was to speak “perfect” English and Jewish children learned to read Hebrew, the language that represented Israel. With Yiddish slowly being silenced, the old country and its rich culture was becoming a fading memory. Parents of baby boomers viewed Yiddish as the language of their parents and grandparents. By 1960, only three percent of American children enrolled in Jewish education learned Yiddish. At the same time, Yiddish newspaper circulation continued to decrease.

In 1999, the Minority Language Committee of Sweden formally declared Yiddish as one of its country's five minority languages. In its latest *Atlas of the World's Languages*, UNESCO, the United Nations World Heritage organization, referred to Yiddish, as a “definitely endangered” language. That foreboding term means, “Children no longer learn the language as mother tongue in the home.” What would become of the *mame loshn*, if it were no longer the mother tongue?

The U.S. Census Bureau's 2007 survey of language use revealed that only 158,991 people spoke Yiddish at home, and that figure had declined in every census since 1980. The major exception is found in the more closely-knit, ultra-Orthodox

(Hasidic) communities, yet there are many modern Orthodox Jews who do not know Yiddish. However, there has been resurgence in Yiddish learning and the language, with many Jews embracing “*Yiddishkeyt*.”

### **Yiddish in America**

*Yiddishkeyt* reflects a person's “Jewishness.” It is an eclectic “mish mash” of mannerisms, speech and a cultural and emotional connectivity to things Jewish. It could involve attending Jewish movies and plays, enjoying Jewish humor, books, periodicals, music, and associating with and supporting Jewish organizations. You don't have to speak Yiddish to be part of *Yiddishkeyt*, but if you are of Ashkenazi descent, it helps.

When Yiddish theater was banned in Russia in 1883, some of its troupes first went to London and then came to New York City. Today, Yiddish theater is doing well in New York and The National Yiddish Theater *Folksbiene* produces both Yiddish plays and plays translated into Yiddish. *Folksbiene* began in 1915 when there were fifteen Yiddish theater companies in New York alone, and others throughout the world.

Between 1936 and 1939, “The Golden Age of Yiddish Film,” there were seventeen Yiddish sound films produced in the United States, and many reflected the immigrant experience in America. The National Center for Jewish Film at Brandeis University has restored thirty-eight Yiddish feature films, and some are shown at international film festivals.

If you want to “*lernen a bis!*” Yiddish today, you can do so in a university classroom, a *shul*, Jewish community centers, in small study groups, on your own, or on line. The academic study of Yiddish received a boost in 1949 with the publishing of Uriel Weinreich's *College Yiddish: An Introduction to the Yiddish Language and to Jewish Life and Culture*. Yiddish is taught in universities across the United States, and a graduate program in Yiddish Studies at Columbia University began in 1952 under Weinreich's leadership. The prestigious Oxford University in England offers an MSt in Yiddish Studies and there are intensive summer study programs offered in the United States, Canada, Israel, Poland, Lithuania and Germany.

There are also classes available on line from the Yiddish Book Center that was founded in 1980 by

Aaron Lansky. The Center has helped rescue more than one million Yiddish volumes and has diligently worked to preserve the Yiddish language. Since 1998, it has digitalized the full texts of more than eleven thousand Yiddish books that can be downloaded at no charge. The Center has helped establish Yiddish collections at the Library of Congress, the British Library, and more than 600 libraries around the world, including national libraries in Australia, China and Japan. In 2010, a Yiddish-Japanese dictionary was published.

In 1981, The Yiddish Book Center began publishing Pakn Treger—the Book Peddler. It is written in English with some Yiddish, and looks at contemporary Jewish life and its Yiddish roots. In 1983, the Yiddish-language *Forverts* became a weekly newspaper, and now has a circulation of 5,000. In 1990, the *Forward* began as the English-language weekly version and its circulation has now grown to 26,000. The *Forward* went online in 1998, followed by the *Forverts*, which tries to reach a younger, worldwide audience of Yiddish speakers.

Today, there are Yiddish-language newspapers, magazines, as well as Yiddish radio programming with one station each in Boston and New York, and others around the world. Highly spirited klezmer music emanated in the Hasidic culture of Eastern Europe in the 1700s. The name comes from the Hebrew words, *klei* and *zemer*, and literally means “vessels of song.” It was played at joyful celebrations such as weddings, and that tradition continues in America where it's melodic and somewhat soulful sounds have helped spur interest in all things Yiddish. There are more than two hundred klezmer groups found in thirty-six states.

Yiddish melodies were sung and played by an array of artists, including the Andrew Sisters recording, *Bei Mir Bistu Shein* in 1937, Cab Calloway's *Utt Da Zoy* in 1939, and Billie Holiday's rendition of *My Yiddishe Momme* in 1956. Many organizations in the United States and around the world work to preserve and promulgate Yiddish. In its world headquarters in New York City, YIVO's library has more than 385,000 volumes and its archives contain more than 24 million pieces, including manuscripts, documents, and photographs. YIVO offers cultural events and films, adult education and Yiddish language classes, as well as a six-week intensive summer program.

The Workmen's Circle/Arbeter Ring is a Yiddish language-oriented, American Jewish fraternal

organization committed to social justice, the Jewish community, and Ashkenazic culture. To perpetuate the Yiddish language and culture, its extensive online Jewish Book Center offers songbooks, CDs, klezmer CDs, textbooks, instruction books, and dictionaries, as well as books of Yiddish literature.

The International Association of Yiddish Clubs (IAYC) helps unify Yiddish activities and events, holds international conferences, and strives to keep the Yiddish language, literature and culture alive. Information on these and other Yiddish-focused organizations can be found on *DerBay.org*.

### **Yiddish Lives On**

The Yiddish language has survived centuries of fervent anti-Semitism, planned and executed pogroms in Eastern Europe, and man's ultimate evil personified by the calculated, calamitous atrocities committed by the Nazis. Yet the Third Reich was destroyed while the remnants of European Jews and their coveted Yiddish language still survive. Today, many Holocaust survivors relish conversing in Yiddish whenever and wherever they get together.

On December 8, 1978, Isaac Bashevis Singer received the Nobel Prize in Literature and delivered his acceptance lecture in both Yiddish and English. He concluded by saying, "Yiddish has not yet said its last word. It contains treasures that have not been revealed to the eyes of the world. It was the tongue of martyrs and saints, of dreamers and cabalists--rich in humor and in memories that mankind may never forget. In a figurative way, Yiddish is the wise and humble language of us all, the idiom of the frightened and hopeful humanity.

The vulnerable Yiddish language could have languished and died but instead it has become a venerable part of our society. The one-thousand-year-old story of Yiddish is not over. It may not be as richly told as before, but it would be a mistake to write it off. Now is the time to continue writing the current chapter that begins with, "Once upon another time in the twenty-first century."

## **BENONI CEMETERY HAS A SPANKING NEW CONCRETE FENCE**

*Ronnie Suttner*

*This article was originally published in the South African Jewish Report on May 26, 2014, and is republished here with permission. The Jewish Report website can be found at:*

*<http://www.sajr.co.za/>*



*The new concrete palisade fence erected around the Benoni Jewish Cemetery, thanks to the generosity of donors.*

The Benoni Chevrah Kadisha some time ago, through the letters page of the *Jewish Report*, appealed "to all families with loved ones buried in Benoni, to assist us in raising funds to erect a concrete palisade perimeter wall and hire a security company to assist us in protecting our cemetery. Even the tombstones in the cemetery are at risk, because the theft of tombstones is now becoming a reality."

On behalf of the president of the United Hebrew Institutions of Benoni, Bernie Goldman and the Benoni Chevrah Kadisha, we would like to thank

each one of our kind donors for making phase one of our project possible.

A concrete palisade fence has been erected around the cemetery and a garden service has been hired to take care of the grounds.

Our next project is to increase the security of the *Ohel* and Tahara House by fitting burglar bars to all windows and find a suitable gate which cannot be stolen.

The cemetery was consecrated and used as a Jewish burial ground in 1912 although we have one grave which dates back to 1901. Before this time Jewish interments took place at the Boksburg cemetery.

The great flu epidemic of the early 1900s tragically took the lives of many young Jewish children. Thanks to our late chairman, Danny Dancig, a tombstone showing the name and date of death was erected on every one of these graves after much research and investigation.

Benoni has a fully functional and dedicated Chevrah Kadisha which takes care of the needs of the deceased in our community.

The Benoni Jewish Cemetery had become the victim of ongoing theft and damage and the perimeter fence had been stolen three times; the electrical connection had been stolen and we had to endure numerous break-ins and damage to property.

*Ronnie Suttner is the chairman of the Benoni Chevrah Kadisha. For further information, please contact Ronnie at [ronnie.suttner@gmail.com](mailto:ronnie.suttner@gmail.com), or the Benoni Shul at [benonishul@telkomsa.net](mailto:benonishul@telkomsa.net)*

## **NEW ITEMS OF INTEREST ON THE INTERNET**

*Roy Ogus*

*The section describes new information, resources, and updates that are available on the Internet and which may be of interest to Southern African genealogical researchers.*

### **Southern African KehilaLinks sites**

A number of the South African *KehilaLinks* pages have recently been updated. JewishGen's *KehilaLinks* project (formerly called *ShtetLinks*)

provides a set of web pages which commemorate the places where Jews have lived. *KehilaLinks* provides the opportunity for anyone with an interest in a particular place to create web pages about that community which may contain information, pictures, databases, and links to other sources providing data about that place.

The *KehilaLinks* main page can be found at:

<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/>

Eli Rabinowitz recently announced the availability of a new *KehilaLinks* sites for the towns of Pretoria, Germiston, Cape Town, and Stellenbosch, at the following locations:

<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/pretoria>  
<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/germiston>  
<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/capetown>  
<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/stellenbosch>

Other existing *KehilaLinks* sites for Southern African cities include Germiston, Kwekwe (Que Que) in Zimbabwe, Kimberley, Muizenberg, Oudtshoorn, Pietersburg, Port Elizabeth, Uppington, and Witbank. Eli is also working on the creation of new *KehilaLinks* sites for the cities of Johannesburg, Bloemfontein, and De Aar.

Links to all the Southern African *KehilaLinks* sites can be found at:

<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/Asia.html>

Eli is always on the lookout for new materials for these towns (such as photos, stories, memoirs, and other items). If you have or have had connections to any of these communities, please contact Eli at [eli@elirab.com](mailto:eli@elirab.com).

Eli also encourages you to fill out the questionnaire that can be found on the "Families" link on the existing *KehilaLinks* pages.

Details of the progress on the other sites will be posted in Eli's blog which can be found at <http://elirab.me/>. A full list of Eli's *KehilaLinks* pages can be found at:

<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/muizenberg/Kehilalinks.html>

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**South African Jewish Affairs journal special issue, Pesach 2014**

The Pesach 2014 Special Issue of the South African *Jewish Affairs* periodical is titled *Jewish Lithuania: Memories and Legacy*. Many of the articles relate to the South African Jewish community.

The issue is divided into two broad themes. The first looks at the legacy of Jewish Lithuania, providing perspectives by those who were born and grew up there, those descendants of Jewish Lithuanians who have returned to visit and from a renowned rabbi and historian on Lithuanian Jewry’s enduring spiritual-intellectual heritage. Part two of this issue deals more broadly with the themes of identity and culture in the Jewish community.

The issue contains a fascinating collection of articles, and can be found in full on the SAJBD web site at:

<http://www.jewishsa.co.za/media/jewish-affairs/jewish-affairs-pesach-2014-edition-2>



**FamilySearch database record collections for Southern Africa updated**

FamilySearch has added new searchable and browsable collections for South Africa and Zimbabwe to its online database. FamilySearch is a nonprofit, volunteer-driven organization sponsored by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. All records in their database are available free of charge from the search page at:

[www.familysearch.org/search](http://www.familysearch.org/search)

To navigate directly to the South African collections, go to the above search page, click on Africa in the *Research by Location* map at the right, and then select “South Africa” (or “Zimbabwe”) in the menu. Then click on “Start Researching in South Africa” (or “Zimbabwe”) to enable a global search of the searchable databases.

To access all the Southern African databases (including the browsable databases), go to the complete FamilySearch list of historic databases at:

<https://familysearch.org/search/collection/list>

The following collections of records are currently available:

<i>Title</i>	<i>No. of Records</i>	<i>Searchable or browsable</i>
<i>South Africa</i>		
Cape Province, Civil Deaths, 1895-1972	103,574	Searchable
Church of the Province of South Africa, Parish Registers, 1801-2004	389,387	Searchable
Dutch Reformed Church Registers, 1660-1970	220,122	Searchable
Free State Dutch Reformed Church Records, 1848-1956	46,522	Searchable
Methodist Parish Registers, 1822-1996	63,475	Searchable
Orange Free State, Estate Files, 1951-2006	19,126	Searchable
South Africa, Natal Province, Civil Marriages, 1845-1955	210,566	Searchable
Dutch Reformed Church Records, Stellenbosch Archive, 1660-2011	496,315	Browsable
Eastern Cape, Estate Files, 1962-2004	425,696	Browsable
Reformed Church Records, 1856-1988	40,337	Browsable
Western Cape Archives Records, 1792-1992	1,016,009	Browsable
Western Cape, Estate Files, 1966-2004	73,456	Browsable
<i>Zimbabwe</i>		
Death Registers, 1890-1977 Index to Death Registers, 1892-1977	74,045	Browsable
Death notices, 1904-1976	328,546	Browsable

As the browsable collections become indexed, the web page will be updated to provide the appropriate search form for the records.



**South Africa Voter Lists on Ancestry.com**

Ancestry.com now has added a set of voter indexes from South Africa for the period 1719 –1996. There are about 220,000 names included.

This index contains a wide variety of details on voters in South Africa. Depending on the year and the source material, along with name and residence,



the index may provide spouse, maiden name, occupation, employer, gender, qualifications to vote, race, maiden name, date of birth, age, etc. A list of the sources for this database can be found in the Record Source drop-down menu in the search box.

The voter records can be found at:

<http://search.ancestry.com/search/db.aspx?dbid=60671>

Note that the access to this data requires a subscription to Ancestry.com.

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### **FindMyPast acquires Mocavo**

In June 2014, *FindMyPast.com*, the leading British family history company, announced that it has acquired *Mocavo.com*, the fastest growing genealogy company in the US.

Findmypast has been at the forefront of the British family history market for over a decade. It has an established collection of 1.8 billion historical records and an extensive network of partners including the British Library, the Imperial War Museum, the Allen County Public Library, and Family Search.

Founded in 2011, Mocavo.com is a technological innovator in the genealogy industry. Its highly sophisticated search engine brings together, in one place, a diverse range of sources, such as family history record indexes, school and college yearbooks, church records and biographies, which help millions of family history enthusiasts to fill in blanks in their family trees and add color to their family stories.

The full announcement of the purchase can be found at:

<http://www.dcthomsonfamilyhistory.com/2014/finmypast-buys-mocavo/>

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### **MyHeritage and BillionGraves team up to digitally preserve the world's cemeteries**

MyHeritage, the popular online family history network, has partnered with BillionGraves to launch a global crowdsourcing initiative to preserve the world's cemeteries.

BillionGraves is a free iOS and Android application that lets users easily photograph and document gravestones, providing an important source of information for people who are researching their ancestors and family history. Using patent-pending technology, BillionGraves is the only mobile application of its kind. With the help of MyHeritage, the app will be available in 25 languages, and will support Gregorian, Hebrew, and Julian dates. It records the GPS locations of gravestones to make them easy to find and volunteers can easily see which areas of any cemetery remain undocumented, to maximize efficiency and avoid duplication. The gravestone photographs are then transcribed by volunteers on the BillionGraves website, resulting in searchable digital data.

All records collected are made available for free on the BillionGraves and MyHeritage websites. The partnership with BillionGraves brings major benefits for families using MyHeritage to explore their past, as all users will receive free Record Matches – alerts about gravestone records that have been automatically matched to their ancestors, making it easy to make new discoveries. In addition to the photographs and GPS coordinates of the gravestones, an index of corresponding information, such as dates of birth and death, close family relatives and epitaphs, is made available to search for free on MyHeritage's search engine for historical records, *SuperSearch*.

The full announcement of the new collaboration can be found at:

<http://blog.billiongraves.com/2014/02/myheritage-partnership/>

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### **FamilySearch plans to make billions of obituaries available online**

During the past few months, *FamilySearch.org* has announced two projects that will significantly increase the number of obituaries that are available online.

- *FamilySearch / GenealogyBank partnership*

In celebration of Family History Month (October 2014), *FamilySearch* and *GenealogyBank* announced an agreement to make over a billion records from historical obituaries searchable online. It will be the largest — and perhaps most significant

— online US historic records access initiative yet. It will take tens of thousands of online volunteers to make GenealogyBank's vast U.S. obituary collection more discoverable online.

The tremendous undertaking will make a billion records from over 100 million US newspaper obituaries readily searchable online. The newspapers are from all 50 states and cover the period 1730 to present. The completed online index will be fairly comprehensive, including 85% of U.S. deaths from the last decade alone. The death collection will easily become one of the most popular online genealogy databases ever, detailing names, dates, relationships, locations of the deceased, and multi-generational family members.

Full details of the announcement can be found at:

<https://familysearch.org/node/2577>

The FamilySearch project page can be seen at:

<http://www.familysearch.org/campaign/obituaries>

- *FamilySearch's Obituary Digitization Project*

2014 has been designated by FamilySearch as "The Year of the Obituary". Many Family History Centers have clipped obituaries from newspapers, and FamilySearch wishes to place these collections online on their website. FamilySearch will scan and digitize the collections, which will then be indexed and placed online. Digitizing obituaries will make these valuable collections easier to access and simpler to attach to one's family tree. Information gathered from obituaries will provide valuable information that will enable users to add additional people and data to their family tree.

For further details about the project, and for directions on the process to submit obituaries, consult the following page:

<https://familysearch.org/blog/en/familysearchs-obituary-digitization-project/>

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### **GenealogyInTime Magazine publishes its top 100 genealogy websites for 2014**

The *GenealogyInTime Magazine* web site has published its top 100 genealogy sites for 2014. The web site, one of the world's most popular online genealogy magazines, publishes this list on an annual basis.

The description of the project can be found at:

<http://tinyurl.com/Genealogy100-2014>

The top 10 sites on the list are as follows:

Rank	Website name	Address
1	Ancestry.com	<a href="http://www.ancestry.com/">http://www.ancestry.com/</a>
2	Find A Grave	<a href="http://www.findagrave.com/">http://www.findagrave.com/</a>
3	FamilySearch	<a href="https://www.familysearch.org/">https://www.familysearch.org/</a>
4	MyHeritage.com	<a href="http://www.myheritage.com/">http://www.myheritage.com/</a>
5	Geni.com	<a href="http://www.geni.com/">http://www.geni.com/</a>
6	Ancestry.co.uk	<a href="http://www.ancestry.co.uk/">http://www.ancestry.co.uk/</a>
7	GeneaNet	<a href="http://www.geneanet.org/">http://www.geneanet.org/</a>
8	Archives.com	<a href="http://www.archives.com/">http://www.archives.com/</a>
9	Genealogy.com	<a href="http://genealogy.com/">http://genealogy.com/</a>
10	Genealogy Bank	<a href="http://www.genealogybank.com/gbnk/">http://www.genealogybank.com/gbnk/</a>

The JewishGen web site is ranked #33 on the list, and the Steve Morse site is found at #35. The Eastman site is at #11, and the Ellis Island web site is at #38.

The GenealogyInTime Magazine ranked itself at #16.

The complete list can be found at:

<http://tinyurl.com/top100-2014>

Since Internet traffic is now the primary measure of a website's popularity, the survey used this measure to determine the ranking. The following factors were considered: number of visitors to a website, number of page views per visitor to the website, and the amount of time spent at a website.

More details on the methodology can be found at:

<http://tinyurl.com/Genealogy100-2014>

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### **A DNA Time Capsule**

Imagine being born again in a future where interstellar travel is a reality, this time free of all inherited genetic defects and illnesses, when 200 year life spans are normal.

What if there was a way now to be together forever with your wife, husband, lover, partner, all your family members, grandchildren, ... even your pets.

If there was such a possibility, even a remote one, would you take it?

The best part is that you don't have to die first. All that is needed is a tiny sample of your unique DNA ... the building blocks of life that made you. Enough to grow another you and those with you!

The company *Itgoeson Genebank Timecapsules* appears to be making these promises, and they even offer a 1,000 year guarantee!

You can read about this intriguing idea at <http://timecapsulesdna.com>.

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### Archive of pre-Holocaust Jewish Images in Eastern Europe Digitized

A vast archive of photographs of pre-Holocaust Eastern European Jewish life is being made available to the public and researchers. The International Center of Photography in New York and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, D.C., announced the joint creation of a digital database to facilitate access to photographer Roman Vishniac's archive.

Roman Vishniac was a Russian-born Jew who moved to Berlin in 1920. He created some of the most iconic images of Jewish life in Europe before the Holocaust, documenting a world that would soon vanish. He also chronicled the rise of Nazism and the aftermath of World War II. However, the public has never had the opportunity to appreciate the breadth and depth of his work—of Vishniac's 10,000 negatives, only about 350 have previously been published. The Museum has worked with the International Center of Photography (ICP) to put those images online and invites the public to help us learn more about Vishniac's photographs.

You can read more about this collection in an Associated Press article published in the *National Post* at: <http://goo.gl/A5vSRr>.

The USHMM web page for this project can be found at:

<http://tinyurl.com/USHMM-Vishniac>

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### Cape Town: A Jewish Journey to South Africa

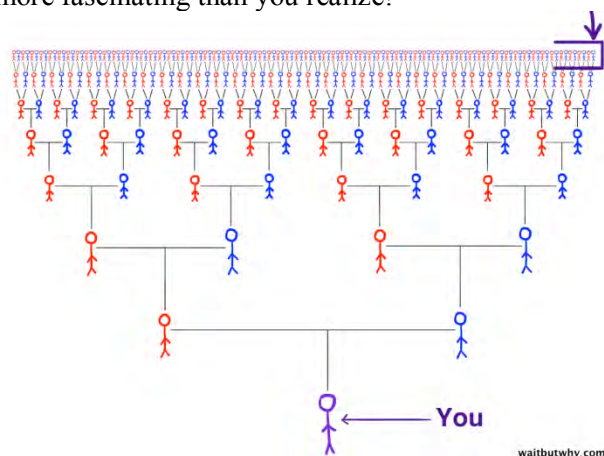
A short video about the Jewish community of Cape Town created by the Jewish Discoveries web site, can be found at:

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c\\_LKriBR6aA](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=c_LKriBR6aA)

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### Fun article titled *Your Family: Past, Present, and Future*

An entertaining and thoughtful article can be found in the *Wait But Who* blog by Tim Urban, titled *Your Family: Past, Present, and Future*. The past, present, and future of your family tree are all far more fascinating than you realize!



The article can be found at:

<http://waitbutwhy.com/2014/01/your-family-past-present-and-future.html>

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### Ancestry.com expands collaboration with FamilySearch

FamilySearch will provide more than one billion digitized records from 67 countries to Ancestry.com. These additional records became available on Ancestry.com in early 2014. The collections include digitized and indexed records and more than 200 million images containing birth, marriage, death, census and church records from Europe, Latin America, South Africa, South America, Asia and more.

The records are an addition to the agreement that the two largest providers of family history resources announced a few months ago to help digitize, index and publish an expected one billion global historical

records never before published online from the FamilySearch vault over the next five years.

Ancestry.com stated it has committed to investing \$100 million to digitize and index new content over the next five years. The company claims to have 2.7 million paying subscribers and more than 12 billion records.

The complete announcement can be found at:

<http://ir.ancestry.com/releasedetail.cfm?ReleaseID=820259>

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### **The Lions Shul, Doornfontein**

There are a number of videos about *Shuls* which are meant to entice congregants to attend services, and to attract new members. One such video is the following link which describes the historic 108-year-old Lions *Shul* in Doornfontein, Johannesburg, which was built in 1906, and is the longest-standing congregation in Johannesburg. The synagogue is in pristine condition and the *chavershaft* is warm and family-oriented.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6pN6A4nqTs>

Some other links to the beautiful *Shul*, known for the two bronze lions at its entrance, are the following which also include information on the area:

<http://tinyurl.com/LionsShul-1>

<http://tinyurl.com/LionsShul-2>

<http://tinyurl.com/LionsShul-3>

Thanks to Ann Rabinowitz for providing the links to the Lions *Shul*.

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### **Beit Hatfutsot changes its translated name**

The Tel Aviv institution, Beit Hatfutsot (התפוצות בית), has changed its English-language name from “Museum of the Diaspora” to “Museum of the Jewish People,” and is also broadening its focus. The Hebrew name literally means “Museum of the Diaspora.” The Museum was founded in 1978.

An article describing this change can be read at:

<http://tinyurl.com/BeitHatfutsot>

The Museum’s web site can be found at:

<http://www.bh.org.il>

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### **Using a Crowd-Sourcing Approach in Genealogy**

The February 2, 2014 issue of the New York Times has an article by A. J. Jacobs entitled, *Are You My Cousin?* (A. J. Jacobs is an author, and an editor-at-large at Esquire magazine.)

The article discusses the various crowd-sourcing genealogy programs, and debates whether we really want tens of thousands of cousins, while also being supportive of the unprecedented record of humanity available, and the availability of important data on history and disease. The article mentions, among others, Geni.com, Randy Schoenberg, WikiTree, and Ancestry.com.

To read the article, go to:

<http://tinyurl.com/kudtdx3>

Thanks to Jan Meisels Allen for the reference to the article.

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### **SABC Issues of Faith documentary on the journey of the Litvak Jews to South Africa**

A few years ago, SABC-TV presented the documentary, *From the Ashes – A New Beginning*, as part of its religion series titled *Issues of Faith*. The promo for this series from *Spirit Sister Productions Network* describes the documentary as follows:

Before World War II, Lithuania was one of the most celebrated centres of Jewish culture in Europe. It was home to famed Jewish scholars, artists and writers, as well as more than 250,000 Jews, who spoke Yiddish – the language common to Jews across Eastern Europe. But that community was almost totally destroyed by the Nazi Holocaust and decades of Soviet repression. For the South African Jewish community, there is a strong and poignant connection to these events, for the overwhelming number of South African Jews look to Lithuania as “de heim”, the home in the “old country” from which their parents, grandparents and great grandparents immigrated to South Africa. This connection has traditionally been a source of great pride for South African Jews.

*From the Ashes – A New Beginning* is an emotional and celebratory documentary, depicting the journey of the Litvak Jews to South Africa.

The documentary can be found at the following links:

Part 1:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aFJH7DVxxLk>

Part 2:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PaTRiUC-v9w>

Part 3:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Xf-if44YZcM>

Part 4:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3n8H2cr4D3c>

Part 5:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KgGfnAYlIV0>

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### **Habonim Dror South Africa – History Project**

Habonim-Dror South Africa (HDSA) is collecting, archiving, and curating the history of the Habonim movement in Southern Africa. As part of the *History Project*, the aim is to collect and archive photographs, clothing, songs, videos, oral interviews, writings, and other HDSA memorabilia.

This collection will also showcase the story of Habonim *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* over the years, and will honor those HDSA members who fell defending the State of Israel. During HDSA's *Machanot* and various programs throughout the year, its members will be able to access and use the museum as a facility for learning and engagement with the movement's rich history.

The end goal is to set up a multimedia exhibition documenting Habonim's history at the Onrus campsite, to educate young members of the movement about its long history. The plan is to digitize everything related to Habonim, which will also make it easy for past and present members further afield to share in this rich resource.

The project will be curated by Leila Emdon who can be reached at [leila@ctjc.co.za](mailto:leila@ctjc.co.za) or at [archive@habo.org.za](mailto:archive@habo.org.za)

*Thanks to Beryl Baleson for drawing our attention to this project.*

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### **The *HaChayim HaYehudim* Jewish Photo Library**

This rich collection of images contains more than 85,000 photographs spanning 102 countries and territories on 6 continents, and covering a wide range of topics, such as synagogues, cemeteries, Holocaust memorials, Jewish museums, and Judaica. The photographer is Jono David. The photograph collection is unfortunately not indexed, but images can be browsed by category.

Key links are as follows:

Home page

<http://www.jewishphotolibrary.com/>

Africa collection

<http://jewishphotolibrary.smugmug.com/AFRICA>

South African collection

<http://jewishphotolibrary.smugmug.com/AFRICA/AFRICASouth>

Cemeteries

[http://www.jewishphotolibrary.com/?page\\_id=97](http://www.jewishphotolibrary.com/?page_id=97)

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### **Eli Rabinowitz blog entry on Arthur's Road Shul in Cape Town**

As mentioned in previous Newsletters, former South African, Eli Rabinowitz, maintains a very interesting blog at: <http://elirab.me>.

His December 31, 2013 blog entry describes his visit to the Arthur's Road *Shul* in Sea Point, Cape Town, and provides a rich multimedia documentation of the synagogue.

Eli has a personal interest in the *shul* as both his grandfathers, Rev. N. M. Rabinowitz, and Socher Zeldin, were present on 28 March 1953 at the signing of the documents establishing the *shul's* existence in Sea Point.

You can read the blog entry at:

<http://elirab.me/2013/12/31/arthurs-road-shul-digging-up-the-history/>

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### **Your Family Tree Explained**

A cute YouTube video explains the mysteries of great-great-aunt, great-great-uncles, and of

second cousins once removed. You can view the video at [http://youtu.be/PM79Epw\\_cp8](http://youtu.be/PM79Epw_cp8).

## EDITOR'S MUSINGS

Colin Plen

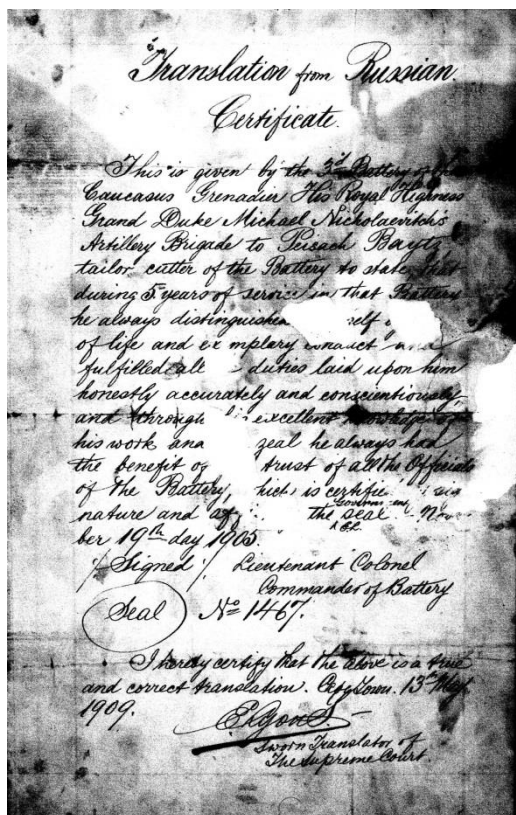
### Difficulties of research

I must admit it. I am scared of attempting genealogical research. When we reached a blocked wall in my upward research of my maternal grandfather's line, because in 1900 when he reached London and wanted to apply for citizenship, they asked him for his surname and when he replied that he did not know what a surname was as they did not have surnames in Siedlce, Poland, in 1900, he had to make one up. That effectively meant the end of research into his upline because if he had no surname, neither did his father or his grandfather, did they?

So what I did at that stage was that I made a full list of all the family that I did know about, and I made a family tree from that. This was also a major task because as proud as grandparents are of their offspring, to get them to list the offspring and their birthdates is more difficult than looking for hen's teeth. But we did it.

What made me think along these lines is the difficulty of translating a piece of paper or any other relic with a foreign language on it. A friend proudly showed me some prints she had of her ancestor's documents. She did not know what they were but surely with all that fancy writing it had to be important.

I sent photo-copies of the documents to my Russian cousin now in California, and to my *Rebbitzen* in Milnerton, Cape Town, who was born in Russia, and to my family members. My brother in Israel took the copies to *shul* with him and one man looked them over and in 7 minutes had translated them. The two Russians I asked have still not understood my question!



Page 1

Page 1 reads:

Certificate #1. This is given by ... Caucasus Grenadier ... Royal Grand Duke Michael Nikolaevich, Artillery Brigade. Pesach Baytz tailor / cutter of the battery [unclear bit] during 5 years of service fulfilled honestly and accurately.

November 19th day 1905  
Lieutenant Colonel  
Commander of Battery

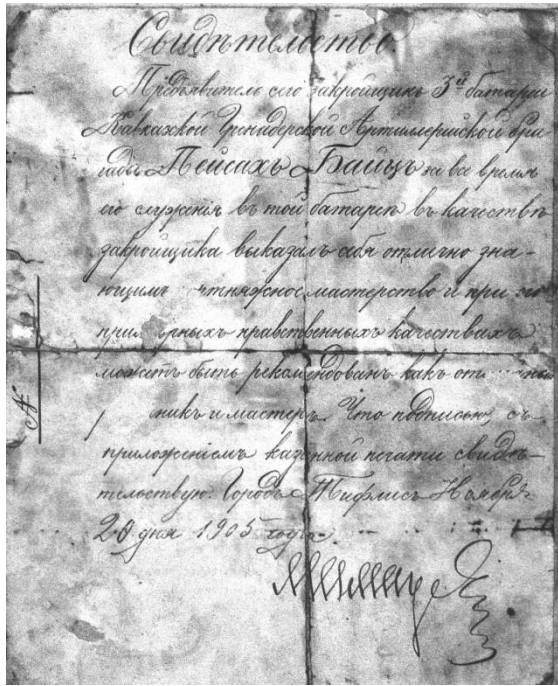
Page 2 reads:

Certificate

Representative of this is a tailor of 3rd Battery of Caucasian Special (?) Artillery Brigade (Mr) Pesach Baytz during his service at this battery as a tailor, he showed excellent knowledge and master like and high moral qualities and he can be recommended as an excellent master

[Signatures] ... [Stamps]

City of Triflis, 20 November 1905



Page 2



Page 3

Page 3 reads:

Certificate

Given this from 3rd Battery Caucasus Elit Unit of his Imperial Highest Prince Michael Nickolavich Artillery Brigade to Battery Tailor Mr Pesach Baytz in that he during 5 years' service in the Battery showed always excellent qualities of life and outstanding sober behaviour and exemplary service showed accurate service and performed his assigned with excellence earned everyone's trust including his superiors at the Battery Unit. That this certificate was signed and stamped on November 19 1905.

Please will the readers give me some encouragement and tell me how they prevailed against great odds to get more information about their families? When I have spoken to people and asked them, "How far have you *actually* got?," they usually admit that they have got back to the mid-1800's, to their grandparents or great grandparents. Which is where I have got, and then to a dead stop. Am I being negative? Or realistic?

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Stellenbosch – a verb?

Wordsmith.org's *A.Word.A.Day* column tells us that the English language has many expressions where the name of a place has become associated with a particular human quality, as well as many words that are called "toponyms", words derived from the names of places.

One such toponym is the verb "to stellenbosch," which means "to relegate someone incompetent to a position of minimal responsibility". Wordsmith provides the following description of the origin of this word:

Stellenbosch, near Cape Town, was a British military base during the Second Boer War. Officers who had not proven themselves were sent to Stellenbosch, to take care of something relatively insignificant, such as to look after horses. Even if they kept their rank, this assignment was considered a demotion. Eventually the term came to be applied when someone was reassigned to a position where he could do little harm."

Wordsmith.org also tells us that another word derived from the name of a South African town is "to maffick", which means "to celebrate boisterously." This is derived from the town of Mafeking, where a British garrison was besieged for over 200 days during the Boer War. After the siege was lifted on May 17, 1900, a number of wild celebrations occurred in London.

The Wordsmith *A.Word.A.Day* column can be found at: <http://wordsmith.org/awad/>

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The Pale of Settlement

Recently a columnist in the *Sunday Times* wrote an article and discussed the word "Pale," but she wrote about a Pale of Settlement not in Russia and not about Jews, and naturally I went further into this.

The Russian name for the Russian Pale is: *Cherta Postoyannoy yevrey skoy Osealosti*.

In Western Europe there were two forerunners of the Pale, the Irish Pale and the Calais Pale. The Norman invasion of Ireland, beginning in 1169, brought much of Ireland briefly under the theoretical control of the Plantagenet Kings of England. From the 13th century onwards, the Hiberno-Norman occupation in the rest of Ireland at first faltered, and then waned. Across most of Ireland, the Normans increasingly assimilated into Irish culture after 1300. They made alliances with neighbouring autonomous Gaelic lords. In the long periods when there was no large royal army in Ireland, the Norman lords, like their Gaelic neighbours in the provinces, acted as effectively independent rulers in their own areas.

The Lordship actually controlled by the English king shrank accordingly, and as parts of its perimeter in counties Meath and Kildare were fenced or ditched, it became known as the Pale, deriving from the Latin word “palus”, a stake, or a fence.

The Pale of Calais (French: Pale de Calaisis), is a historical region in modern-day France that was controlled by the monarchs of England following the Battle of Crécy in 1346.

Seeing as the various uses of the word such as in ‘beyond the Pale’ cannot come from the Russian/Jewish Pale (because the phrase was already in use by the mid-17th Century), I suppose we have to accept that they come from the French or the Irish Pale.

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### **Financing emigration**

You may be interested in a discussion I recently had with Les Melamed about the topic of philanthropists funding Jewish emigration in the past. Les had sent me the following message:

Dear Colin,

You and I have communicated periodically over the past few years on matters of Jewish Genealogy. I have a new request / question.

This past Friday I gave a talk about the Jews of Oudtshoorn and the ostrich feather business. During question time, one of the people there made a comment about how Baron De Hirsch had funded Jewish

settlements in western Canada. This helped to bring Jews out of the Pale of Settlements into Canada, though eventually the Jews brought into Canadian agricultural settlements drifted out of agriculture in the traditional Jewish professions, as well as, to my surprise, becoming civil servants.

This got me thinking about the degree to which rich Jewish philanthropists might have sponsored Jewish immigration to South Africa. I would be grateful if you would point me to any books or reports, etc., which deal with the following:

Did Baron de Hirsch sponsor any movement of Jews to SA? (He did to Canada & Argentina.)

Did Moses Montefiore sponsor any movement of Jews to SA? (I presume he did contribute to the Poor Jews Temporary Shelter in London?)

Were there other Jewish people in SA responsible for sponsoring relatively large scale Jewish immigration to SA? I'm thinking of Barney Barnato, Alfred Beit, and Sammy Marks as possibilities.

Any suggestions would be appreciated.

Les

I responded to Les follows:

Dear Les,

I have not found any information relating to the assisting of people travelling to South Africa, However, there was help from South Africa occasionally. The most prominent item is that of the Ochbergs who were in business in Cape Town during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Evidently Isaac Ochberg had made a pile of money and took it on himself to go to Europe to look for orphans. He brought out a large number of orphans from Poland and Lithuania to South Africa where he installed them in homes in Cape Town and Johannesburg. I am not sure if he used communal funds or if he only used his own and family funds.

However, everyone who has heard of this guy is most impressed in that he went to Europe and got permissions, and brought them out.

If I hear of any more I will let you know.

Colin



If you have any further information to provide to Les, he can be reached at [lmelamed@sympatico.ca](mailto:lmelamed@sympatico.ca).

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### ***Progress of the Levitts***

Abel and Glenda Levitt (formerly from Cape Town, now living in Israel) presented a talk at the London Jewish Cultural Center last April titled Challenge Prejudice: A Lithuanian Search and Discovery

The talk was a family tale of research, memory, and Holocaust education, which has previously been presented in Jerusalem, Tel Aviv, Cape Town, and Johannesburg, and now in London.



After years of leadership in Cape Town, Glenda and Abel left South Africa and made Aliyah with four young children. They have helped create a Tolerance Centre at the Gymnasia in the Lithuanian town of Plunge, and together with Yacovas Bunka, the last Jew in Plunge,

have enhanced the mass graves with giant carvings such as the one shown in the image at left.

An article on the Levitts' work in Plunge can be found in the March 2012 issue of the *SA-SIG Newsletter*.

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### ***Yid'n Bridge***

I enjoyed this snippet of history in the Wikipedia article about the history of the Jews in Canada:

In the late 1800s and early 1900s, through such utopian movements as the Jewish Colonization Association, fifteen Jewish farm colonies were established on the Canadian prairies. However, few of the colonies did very well. This was partly because, the Jews of East European origin were not allowed to own farms in the old country, and thus had little experience in farming. One settlement that did do well was *Yid'n Bridge* [Jews' Bridge], Saskatchewan, started by South African farmers. Eventually the community grew larger as the South African Jews, who had gone to South Africa from Lithuania

invited Jewish families directly from Europe to join them, and the settlement eventually became a town, whose name was later changed to the Anglicized name of Edenbridge. The Jewish farming settlement did not last to a second generation, however.

At its peak the Edenbridge Hebrew Colony had about 170 inhabitants, a post office, a school, and a synagogue – Beth Israel Synagogue. The settlement is now abandoned. Beth Israel Synagogue is now a designated heritage site.

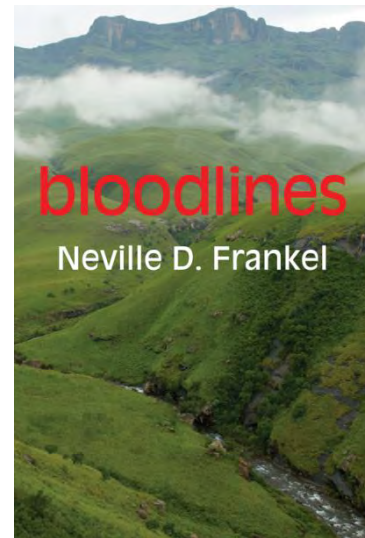
The full article can be found at:

<http://tinyurl.com/jews-canada>

### ***New Book***

## **BLOODLINES**

***by Neville Frankel***



*Published 2012. Available from Amazon.com as well as many bookstores throughout the USA. The link to the author's web site is:*

<http://www.nevillefrankel.com/bloodlines/>

The latest book by author Neville Frankel, a former South African who now lives in Boston, is titled *Bloodlines*, and draws from his personal experiences growing up in South Africa and his subsequent emigration to the USA. The description of the book, taken from the author's web site, is as follows:

From the age of seven, when he began his new life in Boston, Steven Green believed he was the son of a dead mother—a woman who had sacrificed her life in the fight to end apartheid. His father refused to talk about their past in South Africa. Eventually, Steven stopped yearning for answers. He made peace with his father's silence and moved on to building a career and a family of his own. At age 48, after losing his father to cancer, Steven gained knowledge of a staggering fact. The mother he had spent his childhood mourning was very much alive and very different from the brave, selfless woman he had imagined.

In *Bloodlines*, author Neville D. Frankel unfolds the complicated story of Michaela Davidson Green (a.k.a. Grace Michaels) – a courageous, defiant, confounding woman. As Steven learns, his mother risked her life for not only the cause of justice and equality for all South Africans, but also for the love of one black man. For following her principles and her passion, Michaela suffered terrible consequences and faced agonizing choices, especially the decision to stay in South Africa as a fugitive, and forfeit her relationship with her son.

Grounded in extensive research and the author's childhood and travels in South Africa, *Bloodlines* interweaves gripping drama with harrowing history and fictional characters with political figures) – Nelson Mandela, among others. Covering a span from 1953 to 2003, Michaela's story is told from the perspectives of the son she abandoned, the husband she betrayed, and the lover who inspired her to sacrifice her reputation, her career aspirations, and her family) – and who brought her tremendous joy and incredible pain.

We learn one side of Michaela's story from Lenny Green. As a quiet engineering student, Lenny fell in love with the strong, stubborn, strikingly beautiful Michaela as he watched four policemen escort her out of the university newspaper's office and into custody for writing an editorial critical of government policy. Soon after, Lenny became Michaela's constructive critic, collaborator, and devoted husband. He never stopped loving her – and never forgave her for committing an unspeakable act of infidelity.

We learn another side of Michaela's story from Mandla Mkhize, known to friends by his Zulu clan name, Khabazela. Mandla was a school teacher in Sophiatown when he met a pretty, young white radical named Michaela, who touched his heart. A few years later, after violent attacks against his people drove Mandla into combat training, he met Michaela again and again at underground meetings and protests. Swept up in their shared fervor for political activism, Mandla and Michaela fell into a dangerous liaison, culminating in charges of sabotage and miscegenation. Being sentenced to prison only marked the start of the hardships and heartache ahead for the lovers who dared to defy their nation's greatest taboo.

The final authority on her story is Michaela. As this passionate, headstrong, complex woman recounts the daring twists and tragic turns in her life, readers will find themselves asking the questions that gnaw at her son, Steven – a middle-aged man who never stopped mourning and yearning to know his mother. Why did Michaela remain a stranger to Steven, even after 1992, when apartheid came to an end? Were her actions heroic or reckless? What is the truth? Did she make the ultimate sacrifice for her country, or did she force her family to forego their happiness for her own?

With historical accuracy and vivid immediacy, *Bloodlines* captures the day-to-day brutality of apartheid, the rich customs and spirituality of Zulu culture, and the breathtaking beauty and daunting wilds of South Africa. While firmly set in the context of apartheid South Africa, *Bloodlines* raises universal questions about the limits of tolerance and forgiveness, the hold of the past, and the enduring bond between mother and child, regardless of distance or age.

The author's bio can be found at:

<http://www.nevillefrankel.com/the-author>

The book can be purchased from Amazon at:

<http://tinyurl.com/Bloodlines-book>

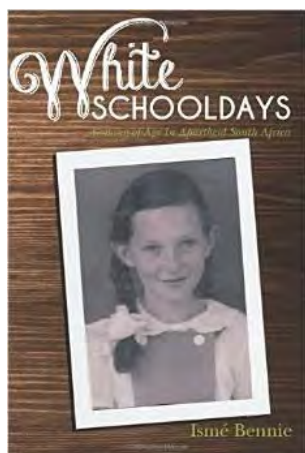
*Note that the SA-SIG Board has no connection to Neville Frankel or to this book.*

**New Book**

**WHITE Schooldays**

**Coming-of-Age in Apartheid South Africa**

**by Ismé Bennie**



*Published: December 10, 2014*

*Publisher: CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform*

*Available from Amazon.com*

The description of the book, taken from the Amazon.com web site, is as follows:

From the age of seven, when he began his new life in Boston, Steven Green believed he was the son of a dead mother—a woman who had sacrificed her life in the fight to end apartheid. His father refused to talk about their past in South Africa. Eventually, Steven stopped yearning for answers. He made peace with his father’s silence and moved on to building a career and a family of his own. At age 48, after losing his father to cancer, Steven gained knowledge of a staggering fact. The mother he had spent his childhood mourning was very much alive and very different from the brave, selfless woman he had imagined.

Ismé Bennie reflects on her life of privilege as a young white Jewish South African growing up during the tumultuous and unjust Apartheid era.

As a young girl she was not aware of how advantaged she was, she was a child at play under the South African sun.

White Schooldays is a reflection on the relative normalcy of Bennie’s life in the 1940s and 1950s – a life filled with her pets, family, school and friends. As a Jew, Bennie was a minority within a minority, but she still enjoyed the benefits of life as a white South African. Her everyday experiences stand in stark contrast to the suffering of the black community, the violence and discrimination that went on around her.

White Schooldays is Bennie’s homage to a way of life that was special and beautiful for those who were privileged to lead it. In this collection of pieces, with a strong Jewish thread running through it, she paints a picture of daily life as she remembers it.

But these memories are underscored with the political reality of the times!

*About the Author*

Ismé Bennie is a graduate of the University of the Witwatersrand, South Africa. She started her career as a librarian, but a move to Canada led her to become one of the most respected women in Canadian broadcasting. She has received numerous honors including the Canadian Film and Television Production Association Personal Achievement Award; the Jack Chisholm Lifetime Achievement Award; and the Toronto Women in Film and Television Outstanding Achievement Award.

Now writing full time, Bennie has published articles on a variety of topics, from food to crime fiction, and contributes to New York-based VideoAge International on Canadian media issues.

A preview one of Isme’s stories, *George or Holidays by the Sea*, which appears in this book, can be found on the Muizenberg KehilaLinks page at:

[http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/muizenberg/Ismé\\_Bennie.html](http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/muizenberg/Ismé_Bennie.html)

*Thanks to Eli Rabinowitz for providing the information about this new book.*

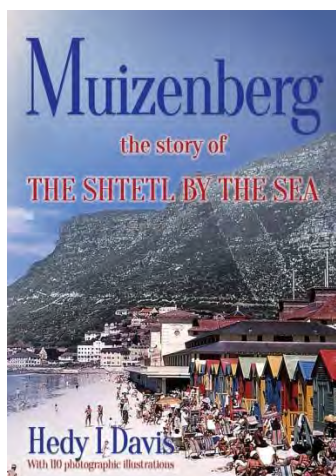
*Note that the SA-SIG Board has no connection to Isme Bennie or to this book.*

## **New Book**

### **MUIZENBERG:**

#### **THE STORY OF THE SHTETL BY THE SEA**

**By Hedy I. Davis**



Published 2014. ISBN 978-0-620-5729.

Web site: <http://www.muizenbergshtetl.com/>

Using personal photos and reminiscences focussed on Muizenberg's Jewish community and the visitors who descended during the summer, carefully selected and researched, the *Memories of Muizenberg Exhibition* covers the period 1900-65 as "the brief summer of South African Jewry."

The exhibition first opened in Cape Town, and set attendance records in Cape Town, Johannesburg, and then Israel. Following the runs in South Africa and Israel, the exhibition was next hosted at the London Jewish Cultural Centre in May 2013. After London, the Exhibition was deployed in Melbourne, Australia (December 2013), then Perth (April 2014), and Sydney (August 2014).

The *Memories of Muizenberg Exhibition* is now on its way to North America after its highly successful tour of Australia. The first stop will be in Toronto, Canada, home to many ex South Africans. For details on the opening in Toronto, please follow the Muizenberg *KehilaLinks* page at:

<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/muizenberg>

Building on the work that she had done on the Exhibit, author Hedy I. Davis has now written a

comprehensive book about the town that was published earlier in 2014. Titled *Muizenberg – The Shtetl by the Sea*, the book tells the story of the Jewish community who lived in the town between 1880 and 1980, and became so much part of the fabric of the town. Through her thorough research, Davis has collected hundreds of memoirs from ex-Muizenbergers of all generations, and has also included a collection of 110 beautifully-restored photographs that provide a comprehensive visual record of the changing town.

Full details of the book, as well as the book's availability, can be found on the web site:

<http://www.muizenbergshtetl.com/>

An interview with Hedy Davis, published in the *Cape Jewish Chronicle* on April 1st, 2014, can be found at:

<http://www.cjc.org.za/?p=3158>

Note that the SA-SIG Board has no connection to Hedy Davis or to this book.

## **LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

### **Martha Lev-Zion**

I have just heard the very sad news that Martha [Lev-Zion] has passed away. I am deeply saddened and I know she will be missed by many. Martha put a great deal of time and effort into the Jewish Genealogy of Latvia particularly Courland. She was a Speaker at the Conference in Boston, delivering a paper on Genealogy in Latvia and as an Historian eager to document all aspects of the history of Latvia. Her helpful nature was appreciated by all as she was ever ready to give advice and help. She did a great deal for the Genealogical Society in Israel. It is indeed a sad day and we have lost a good friend and Researcher.

*Arlene Beare*  
United Kingdom

Editor's Note: See the tribute to Martha on the JewishGen KehilaLinks site at:

[kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/rezekne/martha.php](http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/rezekne/martha.php)

◆◆◆

## The surname Gordon

Well done, Colin, as Editor of the SA-SIG Newsletter. I was in Oudtshoorn last year to trace some of my family roots and visit my cousins.

I was very interested in your information on the Gordon surname [*Editor's Note: Refer to the December 2013 edition of the Newsletter*]. I have an extensive "Gordon/Gordom" family tree.

My family was from the village of Gordomski. Gardamas is the current name of this town which is located not far from Zemaiciu/Naumiestic, now known as Naumiestic-Taurage. In Yiddish: Naishtut Tavrig. (This is also the birth place of Sammy Marks).

Some family members used the surname:

Garden/Godel was used from about 1816  
Gordom/Gordon/Gordem/Gardem was used from  
about 1858  
Girdom from about 1877

*Ada Gamsu*  
*South Africa*

◆◆◆

## SA-SIG Newsletter

Having just finished reading the latest Newsletter, my husband Abel and I want to congratulate you on the excellent publication. The articles were of great interest and we read it from cover to cover.

Keep up the fine work you are doing!

*Glenda Levitt*  
*Israel*  
*glenda@flexmor.biz*

*Editor's Note: Refer to the item Progress of the Levitts in this Newsletter on page 31.*



## SURNAMES APPEARING IN THIS NEWSLETTER

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The numbers in parentheses refer to the page numbers where the surname appears.

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

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

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

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