

# S.A. SIG

Jewish Genealogy - South African Special Interest Group  
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## **AN APPEAL FOR SOLIDARITY WITH ISRAEL**

*Saul Issroff - President, S.A. SIG.*

I feel that in these tense times, where Israel is often isolated and berated unjustly in the world's media, that we should take every opportunity to express our support and solidarity for Israel.

There are ways in which we can do so. This came from a friend in Jerusalem:

"There are two very important things that World Jewry can do now to help Israel and Israelis:

1. Visit Israel
2. Purchase Israeli goods.

Since # 1 is very demanding, one can not expect many Diaspora Jews to be this committed. However, #2 is very easy and very accessible.

If every family would make it a point to buy an Israeli item every week, this could make a tremendous impact on the economy here in Israel.

Examples: Wine: I am sure you purchase a bottle of wine every so often. Make it a point to ask for Israeli wine. Gamla, Golan, Yarden or others. Even if they are a bit more expensive (which I am not sure they are). Buy Israeli.

Books: Look up on the internet and purchase your next book as a Bar/Bat Mitzvah gift from an Israeli publisher. There are many more products one could purchase and make a difference. Jewelry, Food products, Clothing, and more."

I would like to add, one does not have to believe in and support all the policies of the government to actually support the people of Israel. By the time this newsletter reaches you I will have made my third trip to Israel within six months.

Saul

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### GUEST EDITORIAL -

#### A PROSPECT OF SOUTH AFRICAN JEWRY

*Mike Getz*

Genealogy is a key to fulfilled identity. It is based on the history, traditions and culture, specific to families and communities within a larger society. Studying the origins, tenure and transitions of South Africa's Jews, invites attention to some distinctive characteristics.

At its peak, South African Jewry was smaller in size than many communities in both pre-Holocaust Europe and the U.S. Our Litvak and Latvian origins were defining features but in the universe of Jewish genealogy these attributes are not unique. What therefore distinguishes us as a community?

Some criteria include both a strong sense of family and community that survives transitions. Our founding generations conveyed positive memories of their roots and beginnings. The recall of life and living in shtetl and city featured both warm nostalgia and sober reality. Until the Holocaust, pogroms were relatively unknown in the Baltics during the last century.

Perhaps more important, was the environment our forefathers first found in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, and when they came in increasing numbers during the 1920's and 30's. South Africa even then was on a path of development that would distinguish it from Africa as a whole. Jewish immigrants brought needed skills and initiatives. The earlier arrivals would facilitate the process of integration - hosting, housing and launching the family members and landsleit who followed them.

There were, however, some important differences. Unlike Jews from the Baltics, Jewish immigrants to the United States from other parts of Eastern Europe, had lived through oppressive burdens and murderous assaults. This background added to early hardships in teeming American cities, seriously undermined Jewish identity. To a significant degree many second and third generation Jews in the US would be only marginally connected to their community.

Essentially Jewish identity in all its manifestations did not face serious constraints or challenges in South Africa. The community was homogeneous, possessed of a background that was rich in communal, traditional and family values. Jewish life and tradition did adapt to local conditions but without a punishing loss of identity. Anti-Semitism, before the Second World War, was linked to Afrikaner resentment of the British. It would fade with South Africa's commitment to fighting Hitler.

In the context of Jewish life there was harmony, rather than conflict, in the pursuit of personal and community goals. Typically, Jews were involved in intellectual life, the arts, as well as in business and the evolution of political democracy in South Africa. Distinctively, there was broad and consistent support for communal institutions and the Zionist movement. Eliot Osrin's account in this issue illustrates how durable and effective this heritage remains.

The key building blocks of Jewish life in South Africa were the family, its neighbourhood shul and the Zionist movement. This pattern of relationships mirrored those to be found in the Jewish communities of Lithuania and Latvia. South African synagogues largely followed the Mitnagid Orthodoxy of Vilna with both Rabbi and Cantor (Chazan) integral to a choral service, especially on Yomtovim. South Africa attracted some of the greatest Chazanim, among them Simcha Kusevitsky, brother to Moshe, Jaakov and David, who were without peer in the family vocation of Chazanut. Great choral works and Nusach, that mode which distinguishes Shabbat and festivals from the everyday, added to the musical and emotional reach of services.

The continuity of Zionism was vested in Zionist Youth movements. Aliyah to Israel before and after its independence was a seriously considered option for young people. South Africa, per capita, probably has the consistently highest rate of commitment to Israel, in the Jewish world. For many years members of Habonim, Bnei Zion, Bnei Akiva, Betar and Hashomer Hatzair chose Israel as a future home after their studies. Large numbers volunteered to defend Israel when its existence was threatened after independence. The community's ties to Israel are broad and deep.

The tentative equilibrium on political issues that existed until 1948, ended when the Nationalist Party promoting apartheid, came to power. In the 1950's Jewish emigration to the United Kingdom and the United States commenced out of concern for the government policy of racial discrimination. It was also a fear driven by Jewish experience, as well as conviction. Jewish involvement in actively opposing these policies added numbers to those leaving the country.

As world opinion condemned South African apartheid, Jewish parents understood that the future for their children would be in the US, Canada, UK and Australia as well as Israel. In the 1970's this became an identifiable trend as graduates and younger entrepreneurs left South Africa. These movements led to meaningful aggregations in major cities of the US, Canada and Australia where former South Africans could be found in the communal bodies and synagogues that underpin Jewish life. Their presence usually added commitment and substance.

The pioneers of Kovno, Vilna, Riga, Dvinsk, Liepaja and the shtetlach between them, brought a way of life to Johannesburg, Cape Town, Port Elizabeth, Pretoria and dorps

of the hinterland. A generation or so later, their descendants are spread between San Diego and New York, London and Manchester, Toronto, Sidney and Perth as well as locations that link them. The South African presence in Israel is now weighted with grandchildren and a commitment to withstand a grave threat to Jewish existence in its homeland and beyond.

Recording the beginnings, tenure and migration of South African Jews is an important task. We need to encourage family members to participate in the efforts to do so in South Africa, Israel and the many towns and cities where South Africans live. Including information about personal and family links to shuls and Zionist affiliations will be important. It is these features, which demonstrate special character of South African Jewry

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### MY ANGLO/GERMAN FAMILY

#### *Hazel Dakers*

The Cape Argus recorded the wedding on 19th February 1874 of my Great Grandparents, Julius Heimann and Sarah Norden. Samuel Rapaport was appointed marriage officer for the Eastern Cape, Griqualand West and the Orange Free State. The first Jewish marriage to be celebrated in the Orange Free State was that of "Mr Julius Heimann and Miss Sarah Norden both of Bethulie.

"The inhabitants of the little village, as though sensible of the importance of the occasion turned out en masse (including the Landrost, and other dignitaries) to drink the health of the newly-wedded pair, and that of the worthy host and hostess (Mr and Mrs Arnholz), the uncle and aunt of the bride, and that of Mrs Solomon, the bride's grandmamma.

"We will only add that Mr Heimann was a former resident of Bloemfontein; that, like a true burgher, he did good service in the late Basuto war; and that we hope he and his young wife will live to enjoy very many years of wedded bliss." A little stepping stone then, in South African Jewish history. What were their backgrounds? What did they make of their lives?

#### Sarah Norden's family

I have spoken and written elsewhere in some detail of Sarah's background . (<http://www.thecedars.demon.co.uk/>). Of 1820 settler stock from a large Jewish family in London, her Great Uncle, Benjamin Norden, was the first President of the Tikvath Israel, the first Hebrew Congregation in Cape Town. Another Great Uncle, Joshua Davis Norden, is celebrated as a military hero. Sarah's Grandfather, Marcus Norden was one of several children of Abraham and Abigail Norden in London to go to the Cape in search of a better life. One of Sarah's father's first cousins, Joshua Norton, spent the last years of his life in San Fransisco as Emperor Norton of the United States of America and the Protectorate of Mexico. Her own Father, Louis Norden in all probability ended his days in the Lunatic Asylum at Robben Island. Joel Rabinowitz was a key figure in his committal. I have as yet come across no further records of Louis after the proceedings in 1875. Sarah's mother, Miriam (nee

Heilbron) died in childbirth, aged 29 in 1863. Miriam died in Aliwal North and yet is buried in Grahamstown. In 1874 Sarah's uncle became legal guardian to all but the eldest of Louis's children as Louis was no longer of sound mind. Sarah was born on 14 July 1854. Her wedding was hosted by her grandmother, Fanny Solomon (nee Nusbaum), Aunt Sarah (nee Solomon) and Uncle Bernhard Arnholz.

#### Julius Heimann's family

Born Jacob Heimann in Luegde near Hannover in Germany on 16th April 1845, he is referred to in South African records only as Julius Heimann. We know that he went to South Africa in 1863 and, from the report of his marriage, that he fought in the Basuto War. Many members of Julius' extended family emigrated at around the same period from Luegde or the next town Pymont to South Africa where a veritable tribe of Heimanns settled. All were grandchildren of Meyer Heinemann Marcus Heimann (1777-1854) and Bela or Bette Meier or Meyer (1781-1854).

This is in fact where it becomes confusing. There seem to have been three contemporary Julius Heimanns listed in Kimberley directories between 1872 and 1884. I have assumed that one is my Great Grandfather because I seem to recollect Kimberley being mentioned by my Grandfather. There are also court cases mentioning Julius Heimann but I have so far been unable to ascertain whether "mine" or not! However, my Grandmother – when she wanted to annoy my Grandfather – would refer to his father having been involved in IDB (Illicit Diamond Buying) a serious offence in South Africa.

The Heimann family were settled in Luegde certainly in the mid 18th century and it has been suggested that they are descended from a 16th century Isaac the Jew. As far as I am concerned this last is as yet unproven. However I am hoping shortly to see houses occupied by Heimanns, and on which they paid taxes, in Luegde in 1809. Sometimes they used the name Heimann and sometimes Heinemann.

Julius was one of the four sons of Israel Heimann b. 1807 and Henriette Jette Michaelis-Jena b. 1820. Three survived to adulthood and all went to South Africa. After his first wife's death, Israel married Mathilde Stern by whom he had a further eight children. Between 1875 and 1888 Sarah and Julius had four sons and one daughter. My Grandfather, Herman Paul (known as Manny) was the youngest.

Henrietta, known as Hetty, born at Bethulie (1875-1966) was married to Jacob Meyer Huth. They had four children and later divorced. Some of Hetty Heimann's descendants live in Cape Town now. They are amongst a minority of still Jewish descendants of the Norden family I have so far discovered. The newest of her great grandsons, Geoffrey, was born in April 2002.

Bernhard Arnholz Heimann, born at Beaufort West, (1877-1943) married Isabel Lewis and they lived in Jacobsdal – not far from Kimberley – where they ran a store. They had no children but enthusiastically corresponded with their three London nieces (of whom the youngest was my Mother). I have visited Jacobsdal, seen the site of the store (in which my grandfather invested some money) and heard the recollections of one of the local residents reminiscing about my Great Uncle.

As a child Mr Heckroodt would be given a ticky (3d) by his father to buy a slim, long brown paper bag of juicy raisins the size of a thumb nail from Heimanns. Once in his first job in the Civil Service he purchased his first grey flannels from there for 7/6d and a sports jacket (reserved until the next pay day) for 10/-. Barkers golf shoes were de rigueur and were stocked at Heimanns. Bernhard's estate papers in the archive of the McGregor Museum at Kimberley, show that his business prospered and that Mosenthals were amongst his suppliers. My daughter and I were amused to find lottery tickets with the estate papers.

Joseph Heimann, born Middleburg (1879-1903) was buried in Jacobsdal having died from a disease caught swimming in the river. Max Heimann, born Smithfield (1882-1897) was buried Braamfontein apparently was drowned in the Modder River whilst collecting the little brother – Manny then aged 9 - from school. The ox cart overturned whilst crossing the river and his brother Joe managed to save Manny.

Herman Paul (Manny) Heimann, born Bloemfontein (1888-1983) was my Grandfather. He spoke glowingly to me and my younger cousin of his South African childhood, his school and university days at SACS overlooked by Table Mountain. He talked of his excitement stopped in the train during a journey at the beginning or end of term and watching from Majuba Hill a small pitched battle during the Boer War. He compared it with watching cowboy films on the television. The money left in trust for him by his father's successful cousin Max Heimann for upbringing and education enabled him to graduate first in Cape Town and then in Cambridge, finally becoming a barrister.

Manny was a wealthy, fun loving student and fell in love with a girl who was on the stage and a model. He married unsuitably in the eyes of his mother, Sarah, and so remained in England. He joined up as a soldier during World War I and spent much of it in the trenches. By the end of the War he had three daughters and it was too late to establish himself as a barrister. His inheritance was spent as was his fun. Manny's personality had been changed forever by whatever experience he had undergone in France. Sixty years later it was impossible to imagine the high living man of his youth.

Julius and Sarah:

Julius always seemed a bit of a mystery to me. In fact I grew up believing that my Grandfather had not known his Father either because he died before or during his babyhood. I then discovered a few years ago that in fact Julius died in the north of South Africa at Brak River District Zoutpansberg in 1897, leaving his estate to his widow, Sarah, with provision made for his daughter's marriage.

In fact what he had to leave was negligible. I set out to discover the jigsaw of the lives of Julius and Sarah Heimann whose start in married life seemed so auspicious and yet whose actual lives seemed to be concerned more with survival than anything else. In 1874 they married at Bethulie where Hettie was born in 1875.

By 1877, when Bernhard was born they were living at Beaufort West. Sarah's sister Rosie died at Beaufort West in 1878. In 1879 Max was born at Middleburg. Sarah's niece Miriam Norden died aged four of an eye accident at Carnarvon in the same year. In 1882 Joe was born in Smithfield. Bethulie, where they were married in the Orange Free State is not far from Smithfield where lived Berta Lieberg one of Julius' first

cousins. Smithfield is also a place in which Julius himself owned an erf which he was in the process of selling in April 1889.

Herman Paul (Manny) was born in 1888 in Maitland Street (now the main shopping street) in Bloemfontein. I grew up understanding that the reason he had no birth certificate – instead carrying papers confirming his birth until his death – was that the place in which he was born was too remote for any such document. In fact, during 1888, Julius was much taken up with verification of his signature in Fort Klipdam (near Pietersberg) Zoutpansberg and seemed also to have business links in Haenertsberg – far away from his wife and children in Bloemfontein.

In 1889 Julius Heimann withdrew security of £100 for Mr van Drongelen who applied for the job of (gold?) market master, Haenertsburg, 1889. Julius wrote a letter in this regard from Haenertsburg dated 8 August 1889 asking for the return of his money. Mr. van Drongelen argued in a long letter that his plot of land should be surety enough and that it was very difficult to find someone to provide surety as only three people in Haenertsburg owned property - Smith, Heimann and himself.

Dated 24 April 1889 in Haenertsburg a power of Attorney for Julius Heimann, living in Haenertsburg, Transvaal, and store keeper of Smithfield, OFS, was drawn up to enable WS Butler to act on his behalf in the sale of an erf in Smithfield.

In a letter addressed to President Kruger dated 25 August 1890 Julius Heimann requested permission with support from the mine commissioner's office to consolidate two farms for his (Julius Heimann's) use as he planned major building development. He explained that one farm was too small to make a living.

Both farms were in the Houtboschberg (Woodbush) District, Zoutpansberg - "Waterval", erf 624 - size 200 morgen and "Uitschart", erf 628 - size 300 morgen. I visited the family living on a part of this farm, still named Waterval in March 2002. Until the death of the previous owner, the farm had remained consolidated into the same area of land as combined by Julius Heimann in 1890. November 1890 Max Meier Heimann (cousin to Julius) died leaving a substantial inheritance for Manny's education.

In 1891 Julius was upset concerning some confusion in relation to another farm in the area named Waterval. 19th Day of October AD 1891 Julius made his will which was signed at Haenertsburg Houtboschberg Gold Fields South African Republic. By 1892 Julius Heimann of Haenertsburg was negotiating the lease erven 44 and 45 (on Mare Street) in Pietersburg for 10-20 years. Now the main post office stands on this site. During 1894 Julius Heimann, shopkeeper of Haenertsburg was trying to become naturalised. Although I am told that Jews were not allowed to naturalise, permission was eventually granted provided he paid £5. How frustrating not to know whether or not this was paid!

Letters written between Sarah Heimann's aunt, Sarah Arnholz, living in Carnarvon, and her sister-in-law Sarah Norden in 1894 and 1895 mention Sarah and Julius Heimann. Clearly the three Sarahs were in regular correspondence. In 1894 Mr Julius was unable to get a job having given up his business as it did not pay....." it is very

difficult for a man of his years to get a place". The two boys Bernhard and Joe were each earning a little. Bernhard earned £5 a month with the Arnholzs and Joe £1-10 shillings a month as an errand boy.

Bernhard Arnholz had to try and drum up business going round the countryside as the Boers were afraid of coming to the new shop. The tone of these letters clearly indicates that all three Sarahs were experiencing very hard times. Sarah and Bernhard Arnholz's business appeared to have failed in 1895 and they started another shop next door to Mr Baumann's house. Sarah Norden had just divorced her husband and had a small baby and in July 1895 Sarah Heimann was living at 7 Maynard Street Cape Town and was ailing.

In a letter dated 30 June 1896 Julius Heimann of P O Box 646 Johannesburg wrote to State Secretary Mr Leyds trying to obtain government post as rindpest inspector on the basis of seeing similar outbreaks in Germany. On 8th March 1897 Julius died in Brak River District Zoutpansberg, aged 57 years and Max had previously died on 16th January of the same year and was buried in Johannesburg.

Haenertsburg is a sleepy village perched on a hill often enveloped in cloud in green countryside of rolling hills not far from Tzaneen, Limpopo Province. It saw a mini goldrush in nearby Houtboschberg which is now no more than a single house and a store with rusting petrol pumps.

Paul Cheifitz, who identified and obtained the documents charting Julius' last ten years, believes that the reason my grandfather did not know his father was that Julius was obviously living away from the family much of the time prospecting. He would not have risked leaving his goods and chattels to visit his family for fear of theft. It seems that the family endured some very hard times and it is easy to imagine that the money left in trust for Manny's upbringing and education by Julius's cousin Max must indeed have been a life saver during his childhood.

The family story is that Julius came to a mission station stricken with veldt fever. He is said to have been staking a claim and to be so desperate to do so that he persuaded the missionary to do this for him. On the missionary's return, he found that Julius had died alone except for a servant who returned to Sarah Norden (his widow) saying "Massa dead, I bury". That, apparently, was all she knew.

There are two Brak Rivers in what would have been Zoutpansberg. The one nearest Pietersberg is marked on maps and recorded on the name of a farm but not even a dry ditch is any longer visible. There is a deserted mission station near there – a desolate place but probably of too recent foundation to have been there in 1897. So much of the mystery still remains.

Most of Sarah's very old age was spent in Jacobsdal with eldest son Bernhard and his wife Isabel. She had enjoyed the good life with her youngest son Manny, accompanying him on trips to Egypt and Europe and visiting him first in Cambridge, and later in London. It was always expected that after such a visit he would escort her back to South Africa. Long after Manny's inheritance had evaporated and he and his wife and children were living in very meagre circumstances she would expect Manny



as the “wealthy heir” to subsidise other members of the family. She corresponded weekly with her three granddaughters in London. Sarah lived on until the age of 82 years dying in 1937.

*With thanks to the many kind friends and relations who have helped with the research on which this article is based foremost amongst them Louis Changuion, Paul Cheifitz, Ray Dakers, Biebie and Chris van der Merwe, Paul Mitchell, Maxie Overgaard and Effie Schauder.*

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## **WEB CONNECTS ZELDIN COUSINS AFTER 75 YEARS**

*Eli Rabinowitz*

On 24 July 2001 former Capetonian Eli Rabinowitz, who now lives in Perth, noted an item on the SA Jewish Genealogy web page, which is edited by Dr Saul Issroff in London. It related to his paternal grandfather, Rev NM Rabinowitz, who was the chazzan at the Constitution St and Vredehoek shuls for about 30 years. He duly contacted Saul to tell him that this was his grandfather, and at the same time mentioned that his maternal grandfather was Issochar Zeldin.

“Twenty days later,” Eli says, “I received an email from a Ferenc Koszeg in Hungary. He wrote that he was going to the Durban conference on Racism and was looking for family in SA. His grandmother, Chassia Zeldin’s brother, had left Riga for South Africa after the First World War and contact with that branch of the family had subsequently been lost. The brother’s name was Sochar Zeldin.” He said that through a friend he had made contact with Dr Saul Issroff on 11 August (just 15 days after I had contacted Saul) and Saul had told him of an Issochar Zeldin and given him my details.”

Socher proved indeed to be Ferenc’s grand -uncle, Issochar Zeldin. Sochar and his wife, Chasal, had several children. Four of the daughters were the mothers of Eli and his Cape Town Zeldin cousins Solly Berger, Phyllis Jowell, Jerry Zinn and Jeanette Marcus (mother Ann Zinn), and Sonia Bloch. A fifth sister is Yetta Lindenbaum who lives in Sea Point.

A strong line of email communication was established between the (now) Australian and Hungarian relatives and with much excitement, linking on to the Cape Town branch. It turned out that Feri, as they came to call him, had in his possession a family photograph from the early fifties. Eli directed him to the old photographs on his extensive web homepage, where he found the very same photo – “ Jerry Zinn’s barmitzvah”.

Says Eli, “The rest is history. In a matter of days, some 73 years after Socher Zeldin left Riga, we linked up with two branches of my grandfather’s family.” Socher himself was a very prominent personage in Cape Town in earlier days. He was the first exclusive manufacturing jeweller for American Swiss in the 30s and 40s – and responsible for training a number of young Jewish fellows who went on to become well established in the jewellery trade. He was also well known as a driving force,

together with Mr Kellner and Mr Slivkin, in establishing the Chassidische Shul, first in Virginia Avenue Vredehoek, and later in Arthur's Road Sea Point.

His great-nephew, Ferenc's story is also pretty interesting, for the grandson of a Latvian Jew. He is a retired Hungarian MP and President of a human rights organisation, the Hungarian Helsinki Committee – hence his attendance at the Durban Conference. Plans were immediately put into place for Feri to come to Cape Town before Durban, to meet his cousins. After a brief stay-over in Jo'burg (where he met his Jo'burg cousins) , he duly arrived to be warmly welcomed in three family gatherings, including a special shabbat at Phyllis Jowell's home, meeting all his Cape Town kin. He had a wonderful time, reports Solly Berger, with whom he stayed. So much so that he actually postponed his flight to Durban.

As Solly explains, cut off from family and Yiddishkeit for some 70 years, Feri was overwhelmed by what he found in Cape Town. Apart from the family reconnection, he visited the Jewish Museum and the Holocaust Centre and enjoyed a shabbat service at the Gardens Shul. "He just couldn't believe what he saw," says Solly.

The Jewish community of Hungary is apparently very much fragmented, and has no organised communal structure. Feri happened to be in Cape Town during the 160th anniversary celebrations of the Jewish community and, in fact, on the evening that Solly himself presented a special lecture on the community's history together with Professor Howard Phillips of UCT History Department.

"Because of his lack of connection with Jewish life – he's also married to a non-Jew – it was a revelation for Feri – almost a revival. He admitted this himself," says Solly. After four wonderful days in Cape Town he went on to the Durban conference, which offered a very different set of scenarios! Had it not been for that conference, however, this reunion of family separated over some five decades and three distant continents, would never have come about. Such is fate.

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## **LIFE FOR A JEW IN CAPE TOWN IN THE NEW SOUTH AFRICA**

**Eliot Osrin**

Although, over the years, the Cape Town Jewish community has shrunk from about 25,000 souls to 17,000 souls and is still slowly declining, we nevertheless still have a wonderful, vibrant Jewish community in Cape Town.

It is true on the debit side that the value of our rand for political reasons has depreciated, we have a Government which is decidedly pro-Palestinian and we still have far too much crime; nevertheless there is no justification for the continual griping by some South Africans and, on the other hand, there is much about which to be thankful and proud. A few of the reasons for which we should be thankful and proud are as follows:

In 1986, when the State of Emergency was declared, white men did two years compulsory military service, 64,184 black people were removed from "white areas"

and 3,989 people were detained without trial. Today, we have the world's most progressive constitution and a free press.

After 20 years of double-digit inflation, since 1993, we have had single digit inflation. When Nelson Mandela was elected President in 1994, South Africa was virtually insolvent whereas today, our deficit is negligible because of the outstanding way in which our economy has been handled. The budget deficit is firmly entrenched below 3% of GDP, which is on par with the developed world.

Our economy is by the far the largest in Africa, the JSE is one of the 15 largest Stock Exchanges in the world, via SASOL and Mossgas, we produce 47% of our petrol requirements, we produce 53% of the continent's electricity and are the 9th largest internet users in the world.

Mercedes Benz C-class and BMW 3 series and Volkswagen motorcars for right hand markets throughout the world, are produced in South Africa with car exports exceeding local consumption. South Africa is one of only 12 countries in the world where you can drink water from a tap and, since the election of President Mandela, over 3-million additional people have been provided with running water and every year approximately 200,000 additional houses a year receive electricity.

I must add of course that the Cape is as beautiful as ever, tourism is up and, despite the devaluation of the rand, the economy is not bad at all. In many ways this country is still a very exciting one in which to live as one sees it evolve into a proper multi-racial democratic society. For example, the number of Africans obtaining university degrees increased by 173% between 1991 and 1998.

As far as the Jewish community itself is concerned, there is so much of which to be proud and optimistic – Our community is better organised than ever and, despite the decline in numbers, each and every year the amount collected by our annual IUA/UCF/Welfare campaign increases. Last year we collected over R17-million.

90-95% of all Jewish school-going children in Cape Town attend Herzlia, which is a better school than ever before. Not only are their matric results outstanding year after year, but the facilities of the school have been materially upgraded as a result of the outstanding young people who serve on the school's committee and have conducted excellent capital fundraising campaigns.

Highlands House Aged Home, which provides a safe and comfortable haven for some 250 elderly in our community, has improved beyond recognition even though almost 40% of the residents cannot pay fees and the cost of balancing its budget is an unending challenge. On visiting the Home one will be struck by how all the lounges and dining rooms have been renovated; the 15 smart en-suite rooms with attractive facilities; the new hospice and respite centre and the programme currently under way to upgrade all the rooms and bathrooms. The Home is undoubtedly in a better shape than ever before.

Jewish Sheltered Employment Centre for years had one Group Home accommodating adults who need to live with a supervisor. Because of their substantial waiting list they

have, through an excellent campaign managed to raise the money to establish a most beautiful second Group Home.

Cape Jewish Seniors has branched from Sea Point to other suburbs and is more effective than ever before. Hospital Kosher Kitchen now not only delivers hot meals to many of the indigent on a daily basis but also provides uncooked food baskets once a week to many of the needy.

Currently there are more lectures, activities and functions to attend than ever before. In addition, everybody receives a free copy of our outstanding local newspaper, the Cape Jewish Chronicle which, at worst, reminds everybody once a month that they are Jewish and, at best, keeps them abreast with all the amazing activities in the community.

Our Jewish campus in Hatfield Street is something of which any community in the world would be proud. It consists of really excellent community offices that were built on the old parking lot of the Gardens Shul. Immediately across the road, besides the Gardens Shul, we now have the wonderful Jewish Museum established by Mendel Kaplan and his family, the substantially and materially upgraded Albow Centre which houses the increased in size Israel Abrahams Hall, the absolutely brilliant Cape Town Holocaust Centre and the outstanding Gitlin Library plus a little theatre, a kosher restaurant and gift shop.

In passing I should mention that the Cape Town Holocaust Centre has proved to be unbelievably successful. It attracts at least one school a day, is currently providing weekly seminars which will cater for some 3,000 policemen in the Western Cape this year alone, is used by all the universities and thus attracts over 25,000 visitors a year. Their great attraction is that they teach the dangers of racism, discrimination and prejudice within the framework of the Holocaust.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect about the Jewish community in Cape Town today is the tremendous amount of young people involved. Obviously the school has a young vibrant committee, many being themselves former pupils of the school. The President of Highlands House is one Glen Heneck aged 40, the grandson of the late Joe Heneck who was a community stalwart. His treasurer is a young accountant aged 30 namely, my son, Bernard Osrin.

Glendale is chaired by a leading young accountant in his early 40's, Oranjia is chaired by a young advocate in his 30's and late Robert Berman's son who is also in his late 30's chairs the Board of Guardians.

It is surprising how many young adults serve on shul committees which today run many Jewish study programmes both for the adults and children of their communities. The community also today has a vibrant yeshiva, something that was only established about 7 or 8 years ago.

As always, the community is still very pro-Israel and certainly the great majority of the community members have visited Israel. The Bnoth Zion is still a particularly strong

organisation and happily throughout the community the women of the community play a greater role than ever before.

The community has not neglected its obligations to the wider community and via Tikkun, the schools and the Union of Jewish Women, there are a number of outreach programmes to the wider community.

Regard being had to the fact that the school has lost its entire Government subsidy of over R3-million a year (the Government no longer subsidises any private schools) and even though Highlands House has had its subsidy reduced from about R3-million per annum to R1-million per annum, there has been a lot of development in our community despite the fact that regrettably, because of security dangers, we have now established the Community Security Organisation which costs us almost R2-million a year.

One may rightly ask how does the diminished community finance all these activities. The answer is that, besides everybody being a little more generous than they used to be, fundraising is more intensive than ever before and, in addition, a substantial amount of our income (in fact almost R10-million a year) comes from over 20 Foundations which have been established in our community by emigres and by others in their Wills.

Whilst our school and our Aged Home do have difficulty in coping with their ever-increasing budgets, generally the community is benefiting from its excellent forward-planning and fundraising efforts.

A Los Angeles Jewish newspaper once referred to the activities in our community as misplaced optimism – they were dreadfully wrong because the activities result from the strong Zionist Jewish and forward-looking ethic of a community whose numbers will continue to diminish but who, despite this, probably has a future much longer than its excellent past.

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### **THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF PILGRIM'S REST, EASTERN TRANSVAAL**

**Batya Jaspan:** Pictures relating to this article can be seen on the web at <http://www.jewishgen.org/SAfrica/communities/11/index.htm>

When looking through the list of Synagogues in Southern Africa that are posted in the S.A.-SIG website, I recalled the Synagogue of the Pilgrim's Rest Jewish Community of the Eastern Transvaal. There is no synagogue there any more, but I, Batya Jaspan, nee Dredzen, and my cousin Ronnie Dredzen were born in Pilgrims Rest and know some of the story of this community. My Aliyah was in 1949 to Kibbutz Tzora together with my husband, Zvi. In 1998, Ronnie, son of Lazer and Lily Dredzen came with his wife June (Shefts) to Israel, to Bet Shemesh, which is adjacent to Tzora.

The first place where gold was discovered in South Africa was in the Eastern Transvaal in 1868 and in Pilgrim's Rest in 1873. A few years after the end of the Second Anglo-Boer war in 1910, my father Baruch Dredzen came from Latvia to

Johannesburg and after a few years started a store in Pilgrim's Rest, serving the local mine workers and the small village that was developing.

Traveling salesmen would become one of the main links with the outer world. The Jewish salesmen would be the connection with the other Jewish communities of Sabie, Lydenberg, Nelspruit, Graskop and other small isolated stores and families in the area. In the early thirties it was decided to build a synagogue in Pilgrim's Rest, to serve also nearby Graskop and the small outlying families of the area. There were 10 Jewish families living in the area at that time.

The shul was built on a slope so that it was raised off the ground at one end. The entrance with two adjacent small rooms was on ground level and paved. The exterior walls and roof were of corrugated iron and the interior was paneled with beaverboard. Each window had a Magen David etched in the centre pane. Bowl shaped porcelain light fittings hung by chains from the ceiling. The entrance was at one end and the Ark at the other. Seating was around the walls.

The community grew and at its 'greatest' was composed of 10 families. Their occupations were in General Stores serving the mining community of the village, a Pharmacy, a watchmaker, a News Agent and Tobacconist, and a Mineral Water works. As the gold reserves were gradually depleted, families started leaving. The last Jewish family left in 1960. The last mine was finally closed in 1971.

In 1960 the shul was dismantled and the materials sold. It was decided to send the Sefer Torah to Israel where two of the community's children had settled. That was in Kibbutz Tzora, to where I, Batya Dredzen (now Jaspán) and Tzippe Meyer (now Bannet) had settled after our aliya in 1949 and 1952 respectively. In 1961 at a ceremony to mark this event, the Sefer Torah was presented to this community.

When I visited Pilgrim's Rest in 1995 I found part of the foundation of the Synagogue on the edge of the new widened highway, built to replace the narrow windy road through the village. I met the curators of the Museum in Pilgrim's Rest. They were most interested to get details of the structure of the synagogue from me and from Ronnie Dredzen, who recalled much of its detail.

The old Dredzen store and home is now part of the Pilgrim's Rest Museum. When visiting the house I was most amazed to see one item in particular that was exhibited on a table in one of the rooms. It was a letter written in that period in pencil by my late brother, Chone Dredzen, from his boarding school in Johannesburg to his father, asking for money to pay for the Hebrew lessons he was taking.

Most of Pilgrim's Rest is a Museum Village today, commemorating this early pioneering mining community of the Gold Rush. On either side of the main street the old shops, hotel, post office, bank, and some houses are part of the museum. In the Bank, there was a ledger of specimen signatures for accounts held. When paging through it I came across the 1922 signature of my father, Barnet Dredzen, my uncle Lazer Dredzen and other residents of the village who I knew. There were also entries for: the "Zionist Society of Pilgrim's Rest" and the "Jewish War Victims Fund", both dated 5 May 1922!

The Jewish community kept together and kept their Jewish traditions as far as they could. They would go on outings and picnics together, visit each others homes, keep the chagim, and kasher their meat even though it could only be bought from a non-kosher butcher. I recall that era with much nostalgia, often wondering if our children will also view their early years in their new community, Kibbutz Tzora, in our new land, Israel, as I did in the old.

Names of people I remember who lived in Pilgrim's Rest and Graskop at that time:

**Pilgrim's Rest.**

<i>Barnet and Doba Dredzen.</i>	General Store
<i>Lazer and Lily Dredzen</i>	General Store
<i>Meyer and Ray Lewis</i>	General Store
<i>Itzik and Rachel Meyers</i>	Store
<i>Israel Meyers</i>	Store
<i>Jack and Lily Steckoll</i>	Pharmacy
<i>Leon and Tania Feldman</i>	Watchmaker
<i>Chaim and Bertha Chaitow</i>	News Agent and Tobacconist

**Graskop**

<i>Israel and Dasha Rabinowitz</i>	Store
<i>Leiba and Luba Berkowitz</i>	Mineral Works
<i>Julius Meyer</i>	Store

*Annie Shein*

*Nomi Metz*

*Halperin*

*Julius Miller*

**Bachelors**

*Mersh Miller, Isaac Aronowitz, Mr. Melamed, the Lewis brothers.*

Salesmen and the visitors who came to the village from Johannesburg on behalf of Jewish and Zionist organizations that I remember:

*Okkie Abrahamson* for Keren Kayemet.

*Dr. Zeitlin*, a religious man. Visited all in the area. Gave a talk in the shul.

*Mr. Sher* of Johannesburg, whose son *Itzik Sher* was years later my 'chanich' in Habonim.

*Abie Katzenellenbogen* from Pretoria

*Israel Katz (Ketzele)*. Particularly his Rosh Hashana songs at the table.

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**FROM NORTHCLIFF TO TZORA**

*Batya Jaspán: Pictures relating to this article can be found on the web at <http://www.jewishgen.org/SAfrica/gallery/index#HABOAFIK49> and <http://www.jewishgen.org/SAfrica/gallery/index#HABOAFIK50>*

In 1947 & 1948, the years immediately preceding the birth of the State of Israel, with the War of Independence determining the outcome of the Jewish National Home, Habonim leaders from all the provinces of South Africa region began their *hachsharah* at Northcliff near Johannesburg. The S.A. Zionist Federation had opened *hachshara* (preparation) farms for the Zionist Youth Movements in response to the call of the

Jewish Agency to create settlements, *Moshavim and Kibbutzim*, in the fast approaching post-war period.

The Habonim *hachshara* was at Northcliff and in 1948 had there were 12 – 15 *chaverim* there. Already in that period, *Aliya Bet* (Illegal Immigration into British Mandated Palestine) was in full swing. Every few days somebody else would be missing from the *hachsharah* work roster. Nobody asked questions; nobody knew for sure. No ceremonies, no goodbyes. They simply disappeared after a briefing from “our man” at the Zionist Federation offices. These *olim*, together with South African Second World War veterans, and a group from the Israeli Youth Movement, *Hatnua Hameuchedet*, set up a new kibbutz at the foot of Mount Hermon, namely Kibbutz Maayan Baruch.

At the beginning of 1949, with Israel an independent State, it was at last possible to talk of a proper organized *aliya* for the *chalutzim* of the youth movements. At a huge farewell gathering at the Coronation Hall in Johannesburg, 42 *chalutzim* representing all the South African youth movements emotionally bade farewell to 20 *chaverim* from Habonim left who left from Palmietfontein airport traveling on passports marked “Destination Europe”. I was on that flight. It took 3 days with us sleeping at Nairobi and Sudan and landing in between for re-fuelling at small anonymous airstrips in Africa finally arriving at Lydda Airport to be met by Leib (Goldberg) Golan from Kibbutz Maayan Baruch.

We were very aware of our commitment to find a *kibbutz* for *hachshara* that would fit our movement’s definition of “non-political”. Sa’adia Gelb from *Kfar Blum*, at that time secretary of “World Habonim”, and responsible for selecting our place of settlement, has since described our group as “suspicious and naive”. It must be admitted that we gave him a rough few days. After hours of endless discussion, crowded together in a little room at the Hotel Monopol in Tel Aviv, it was eventually agreed that we would receive a very good training at Kibbutz Afikim, in the Jordan Valley near Lake Kinneret, who would respect our movement’s non-political identity.

Our *chaverim* who had arrived during the previous “Illegal Immigration” period and had settled at *Maayan Baruch* were disappointed that their hopes for reinforcements were not to be realized. We could not decide our own future before the arrival of the second part of our group, *Garin ‘Bet’*, consisting of 20 *chaverim* who were completing their *hachshara* at Britz, and who joined us in March 1950.

Some of us had become attached to the Galilee, the Capetonians in the group wanted a kibbutz on the seacoast, while our group leaders, our *madrachim*, quietly whispered that we must find a kibbutz with a strong *chevrah*, if we wanted to fulfill our commitment to set up a centre for South African Habonim. After long, emotional and tense discussions, we opted for **TZORA**, a kibbutz founded after the War of Independence, in December 1948 by *Palmach* fighters, graduates of the Israeli Youth Movement, *Tnu’ah Me’uchedet* (United Youth Movement).

Before coming to Tzora, however, we first did our army service in the new Corp that was designed to allow most of the service period to be done on the border settlements, so as not to deplete the working force of the settlements during those critical first few



years of the State. This Corp was named NACHAL – *Noar Chalutz Lochem*, “The Fighting Pioneering Youth”. We were in the first batch of this new Brigade at the ex-British army base in Jerusalem, the Allenby Barracks. This close proximity to *Kibbutz Tzora* enabled us to make short visits there, where the main attractions at that time were hot water showers and the *bustanim* of figs and grapes.

The difficulties and hardships of the early years were not the simple and primitive conditions of our every day life, the lack of water, electricity and the toilet facilities. Nor did the tents and muddy floors, the leaking roofs of our baby house, the washing and cooking over primus stoves, dampen the spirits of our *chaverim*. We had expected these.

What bothered us was the gradual realization that the ideals and social values that we had so carefully evolved in the Movement were not so easily put into practice in day-to-day living on a young, struggling *kibbutz* with limited resources and experience. Some questioning set in. Some *chaverim* became concerned about the *kibbutz* style of baby care. Differences of opinion cropped up regarding *kibbutz* priorities. The Israeli *chaverim* were more pragmatic. We were more ‘addicted’ to Habonim principles and so, as was inevitable, members of our group left.

Still, during those unstable and soul-searching years Tzora retained its commitment to Habonim. The Movement continued to send its *Machon* (Zionist Youth Leaders Training Course), and *Hachshara* groups to Tzora, and since 1955, Tzora has sent a continuous stream of *shlichim* to South Africa. These ongoing links have enabled Tzora to absorb many South African *olim*, who consolidated the concept of a South African Habonim Kibbutz including the large groups of the South African *Garin* from *Kibbutz Naot Mordechai* in 1955 and *Garin Etgar* in 1965-1968, adding to the kibbutz a South African content. After a number of years of *olim* coming to Tzora from South African Habonim decided to create a second S. African *Kibbutz*. This was *Kibbutz Yizrael*, which received its first South African Habonim *Aliyah* in 1958. At a later stage *Kibbutz Nir Eliyahu* took the stage, followed by *Kibbutz Tuval* in 1980.

The Tzora of to-day is very different from that initial settlement of wooden pre-fabs huddled at the foot of the hill. While our growth as an agricultural and industrial economic entity has been one of many trials and errors, the feeling of community on Tzora has always remained strong, and has enabled us to come into our own as a vibrant and progressive society. Our children and grandchildren have been born here. They are the continuing generation. Wherever they are we hope that they have been instilled with some of those social and educational values that sprang from our grandparent’s upbringing in, shaped by the vastly different South African culture, and by the Zionist Youth Movement, and then practiced on Tzora.

### Glossary

*Aliyah* - (*Olim*) - Ascent to Israel. *Bustanim* - Fruit Groves

*Chalutz* – Pioneer *Chaverim* - Friends (Comrades)

*Habonim* - The Builders (Pioneering Youth Movement)

*Hachshara* - Agricultural training farm. *Kibbutz* - Collective settlement

*Schlichim* - Emissaries

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