

S. A. SIG

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Southern African Jewish Genealogy Special Interest Group Newsletter

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Whilst preparing my talk on German Jewish migration to South Africa for the Jerusalem 2004 IAJGS Conference, I came across a few interesting items relating to Sephardic Jewry.

An early Cape settler before 1820 was Joseph Suasso de Lima. A talented, eccentric Dutch Jew, he was descended from families that fled from the Portugal Inquisition. He studied law, became a translator and a writer, establishing a satirical comic paper, *Die Versamelaar*.

Few people realise that Sir Alfred Beit was a son of a Sephardic family, originally Portuguese, that had settled in Hamburg. His parents had converted. Beit was a founder and funder of some of the major mining houses, such as the Corner House Group. In 1903 there was a small community, the *Sephardi Gamelouth Hassadim*, in Johannesburg, started by six Turkish Jews. They met for many years in the Wolmarans *Shul* Hall. One founder was Alexander Molko, whose son, Solomon, eventually became president of the United Hebrew Congregation. This indicated that whilst their traditions were important to the first immigrants, their children integrated into the larger Ashkenazi community.

In the last century many Sephardic families, especially from the island of Rhodes, settled in Southern and Northern Rhodesia and the Copperbelt. Jews of the former Belgian Congo created this tiny community in 1910 until its near end in 1990. Elisabethville (actually Lubumbashi) had a synagogue. With the breakup of the Congo, there was some migration to Zimbabwe. Following independence, many families moved especially to Cape Town, where there is a thriving congregation. A small number of Holocaust survivors also came to the Cape.

I have only found two works on Sephardic Jews in Southern Africa:

- Manfred Papo, *The Sephardic community in Rhodesia*, in *The Rhodesian Jewish Times*, Rosh Hashanah Annual, Salisbury, 1950, no.52. pp.24-25.
- Moise Rahmani, *Shalom Bwana, la saga des Juifs du Congo*. Romillat, Paris, 2002.

Many of the Israelis who settled in South Africa in the past 25 years are Sephardi, but of *Maghreb* origin.

This is an area of South African Jewish history that is wide open for further research. Perhaps one of the SIG members will take this project on?

Saul Issroff

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

The Southern Africa Jewish Genealogy Special Interest Group (SA-SIG) was created to provide a forum for a free exchange of ideas, research tips, and information of interest to those researching Jewish family history in the communities of South Africa, Lesotho (Basutoland), Botswana (Bechuanaland), Zimbabwe (Southern Rhodesia), Zambia (Northern Rhodesia), Swaziland, Mozambique and the former Belgian Congo.

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

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

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

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EDITORIAL

I have received a few e-mails from people wanting to contribute articles to this newsletter but are unsure about the types of articles we are interested in. Our Web site, which can be found at:

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

gives an excellent description of the types of articles we would be interested in.

The 24th International IAJGS Conference on Jewish Genealogy is almost upon us. This year it will be held in Jerusalem and has a fairly substantial South African content. The following talks will take place on Wednesday, 7 July:

- *Early Jewish Settlement in a Desert Land – German South West Africa 1850-1915*
by Richard Newman
- *Southern Africa Jewish Genealogy Resources and the Special Interest Group (SA-SIG)*
by Saul Issroff and Beryl Baleson
- *Creating Databases of Jewish Births, Marriages, and Deaths*
by Louis (Aryeh) Zetler
- *German Jewish Migration to South Africa*
by Saul Issroff
- *European Transmigration Through Britain*
by Nicholas Evans
- *The Jewish Victorian*
by Doreen Berger
- *The Jewish Chronicle Project 1900-1909*
by Miriam Pollack
- *British Passenger Lists*
by Nicholas J. Evans

A Southern African SIG Luncheon will be held at mid-day. Sidney Shapiro, Director of the Israeli offices of the S.A. Zionist Federation will be the guest speaker. If you want to find out more about the conference, go to the following Web site:

www.ortra.com/jgen2004

In the last issue of this Newsletter there were a few articles about Stellenbosch. I managed to find another one which was written in 1999 by a well-

known Stellenbosch resident, Myrel Ginsberg, and published in the local Stellenbosch newspaper, *The Eikestadnuus* to commemorate the millennium. Even though this article is a few years old, it is still interesting reading.

Myrel's article reminded me of a book I found at the library in Salt Lake City when I visited there in 2000. In the book, *A History of the Jews in South Africa, from the Earliest Times to 1895*, by Louis Herrman, published by Victor Gollancz in 1930, the author mentions a Susannah Levi who is listed as a member of the Church. She married a Gerrit Coetsee in 1726, who was a burgher of Stellenbosch, and the son of *Heemraad* Dirk Coetsee. The author goes on to say that Gerrit inherited the farm *Coetsenberg* near Stellenbosch, which had been granted to his father by Governor Simon van der Stel. For three years Susannah Levi is still known by the name of Susannah Levi, then her name becomes "Susannah Luffe," and in the *Geslacht Register* of C. C. de Villiers, she becomes known as Lubbe. Herrman surmises that single Jewish women were probably amongst those sent out to the Cape to become wives for the burghers.

As I re-read past copies of this Newsletter, I marvel at the memories of some of our contributors – their memories of growing up in South Africa, their drive in putting pen to paper to ensure that these memories are not lost and are there for future generations. Now that many of us have left South Africa, some of us getting on in years, it is more important than ever to document this information.

Two such contributors are Eric Rosendorff and Manfred Schwartz. Eric, who is a new contributor, has provided an article about his family from the Orange Free State who were distinguished in many facets of life, particularly sport, medicine, law, politics and business.

Manfred Schwartz, who lives in East London, has provided an article about his memories of Palestine when he was a young boy. In past issues he provided a detailed description of the early congregation of East London.

Many synagogues around South Africa are celebrating or will be celebrating their anniversaries this year. These historical events are significant as they double as reunions for old friends as well as an opportunity to commemorate and honour those who

were the founding members of these Jewish communities many years ago.

The Oudtshoorn Jewish Community will be celebrating its 120th anniversary later this year and the Muizenberg Synagogue will be celebrating its 80th anniversary this year too. We hope to bring you some information about these celebrations in future newsletters.

Three communities who recently commemorated their anniversaries were Piketberg, Brakpan, and Springs, and honoured those persons who contributed to their respective Jewish communities.

Mike Getz, who is a member of the South African Special Interest Group Board, has provided an article for this newsletter entitled *Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus: Affinities and Common Interests*. He delivered this paper at the Latvia Special Interest Group Luncheon which was held at the 22nd IAJGS International Conference in Toronto, Canada in 2002.

Please note that the contents of the articles in this Newsletter contain the opinions of the authors and do not reflect those of the Editor, nor the members of the SA-SIG Board

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THE ROSENDORFFS OF EDENBURG

Eric Rosendorff

One of the oldest and best known of the Free State families are the Rosendorffs, originally of Edenburg and subsequently of Bloemfontein. Prominent in the sporting, scouting, political, educational, religious, medical, legal and business world, they have left an indelible mark in the history of the Jews, both in Bloemfontein and the Free State, as well as in South Africa.

Martin Rosendorff was born in Berlin in 1855, and in 1877 at the age of twenty-one, sailed to South Africa, and landed at East London, whilst his only brother Herman emigrated to Australia.

Shortly after his arrival the Gaika-Galeka war broke out and he joined the Buffalo Volunteers serving in the field for ten months. On his return to East London he was appointed as the court interpreter for the German language. In 1880 when the Basuto war broke out, he again volunteered, joining the Burger forces. For his service in both these wars he received military decorations, and these medals are still in the possession of the family. With the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War he again volunteered for service with the Boer forces, but was not accepted because of ill health.

In 1884, he moved to Edenburg from Smithfield, setting up a business as a general merchant and in 1889 married Frieda Rothenburg, in Cape Town, where, together with her family, she had emigrated from Hamburg. In Edenburg, Martin served for six terms on the Town Council as well as on the School Board for many years. He and his family moved to Bloemfontein in the early nineteen hundreds, where the family finally settled.

From his marriage seven children were born, all in Edenburg. The eldest was Fanny who was married to Joseph Tobias and subsequently to Albert Norden, a descendant of the well known Norden family. She had two children from her first marriage, the eldest being Valerie, a most gifted singer and dancer, who sadly died at the age of twenty-one. Her son Phillip is the world renowned and much decorated and honoured palaeo-anthropologist, who served for over thirty-two years as the head of the Department of Anatomy at the University of the Witwatersrand, and as Dean of the Medical Faculty for three years.

The eldest son Max, a chartered accountant, married Doreen Farnham whose father had served with the Boer forces and was a prisoner of war in Bermuda for almost three years, and whose grandfather served as a member of the Volksraad in the old Free State Republic. Their eldest son Martin served in the South African and the Royal Air Force during the Second World War and was killed in action over Italy in 1944, and is buried in the military cemetery near Florence in Italy. A daughter Olga is living in Cape Town. She served in the W.A.A.F. during the war and was subsequently very active in the Jewish Ex-Service League. The youngest son Eric was for many years the Free State leader of the United Party Youth Movement, a Bloemfontein City Councillor for twenty-four years and a former Deputy Mayor as

well as being extremely active in various civic, Jewish and educational organisations. His late Father-in-Law, Alex Arvan, served for twenty-five years as the honorary secretary of the Bloemfontein Hebrew Congregation.

The next two children born to Martin and Frieda were twins. Siegfried, a prominent attorney who married Lenchen Cohen and they had one son Vincent. He joined his father's legal practice in Bloemfontein and also served on numerous Jewish organisations. Bertha, who married Lulu Raphael, had two children, Stanley a well known actor and broadcaster, and Joy who was active in the theatre world.

The next son Hermann married Clara Hodes and they had one son Gerald who was a medical doctor in Stellenbosch for 36 years. Herman served in the first world war and was active in the scouting movement, and for years ran the well respected Jewish Scout Troop.

Dora married Hyman Posner who became a leading businessman in the motor industry in Bloemfontein, they had three children, the eldest Harris, Walter an attorney now living in Canada, and a daughter June living in Australia.

The youngest son Karl married Rae Elkon who became the South African women's single bowls champion in 1957. He was active in the Rover movement for many years and attended various scouting jamborees. They had two sons, Clive a former professor of Physiology for twenty-one years at Wits University and also Dean of the Medical Faculty for two years. He now holds the position of vice-chairman of the Department of Medicine at the Mount Sinai School of Medicine in New York as well as being the Chief of Medicine at the V.A. Medical Center.

The youngest son Neil was a former captain of the Free State cricket team and is today prominent in the bowling world, he is also the last of the Rosendorffs still living in Bloemfontein.

Whilst the brothers were keen sportsmen in their younger days, they are possibly best known for their contribution over very many years to amateur boxing, where they, together with their brother-in-law Hymie Posner, played a leading role in keeping this sport alive in Bloemfontein for both white and

black amateur boxers. For his active role in this and other sports, Karlie was honoured with a special presidential award in 1977.

The death of Rae in September 2003 saw the passing of the last of that generation of this well known and popular family. The proud heritage they left is still being honoured, in both word and deed, by their families, who, although spread out today all over the world, still retain the close family links with which they grew up.

ARDENT ZIONISTS ON ALIYA EARLY IN THE LAST CENTURY

Manfred Schwartz

My Grandfather Abram Leib Schwartz (son of Moses Tcherny) emigrated from Belarus, where he was a citizen of the township Mir of the district Minsk, sub-district of Novogrudok during the early 1890's, and lived initially in Cape Town. When my Grandmother Devorah (daughter of Zalmon Podlashuc) and their two sons, Hyam six years old and Alex 4 years old followed him out to South Africa, they went to settle in Bloemfontein at the turn of the twentieth century and had a house at 133 Zastron Street.

Grandfather was an idealist and an ardent Zionist. So much so that he sold up everything in 1924 and went with Grandmother to Palestine. This nationalistic attitude resulted in my Mother and Father entertaining dignitaries such as Jabotinsky, Weitzman, Sokolov, Colonel Kisch, Schmaryiah Levine, Maz Nordau and many others, when they visited the Union of South Africa and Bloemfontein during the late 1920's and early thirties.

When Grandfather became widowed in 1945 he came back to South Africa to live with each of his four children and their families.

In this rare photo (Photo 1) taken about 1946, Grandfather is shown with his two brothers. Dr. Max Tcherny on his right and his younger brother Cecil Alexander Schwartz on his left. His only sister was married to a man named Issakow whose first name I do not know, died in Russia during the War.

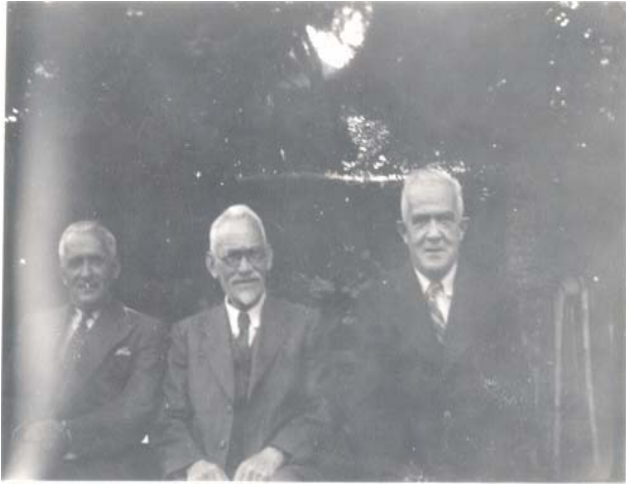


Photo 1

The following photo (Photo 2) shows my aunt Carmel (Dolly) with Grandpa Abraham Leib and Grandmother Deborah in the then Palestine of about 1925 or 1926.



Photo 2

In the next photo (Photo 3), taken in 1927, was when we visited the grandparents in Rehovot. Grandpa Abraham Leib aged about 60 and Dad Alex Cecil aged 31 and me, Manfred Joseph 5 years old, suitably clothed.



Photo 3

When in Rehovot with the grandparents, I remember them having a young Arab girl, a *Shabbat goy*, to switch the lights on and off. I still have snapshots to remind me of my helping Grandmother feeding the leghorn fowls (Photo 4).



Photo 4

Grandfather had shares with a Mr. Yudelman in a Pardess, an orange orchard which must have been about three or four few dunams, not very big at all.

One very hot Saturday afternoon, Mr. Yudelman sent his camel driver and camel for me to ride. Being only five years, old I was asleep, and the family did not want to wake me up. However when I awoke up, Dad told be of the opportunity I has missed. I was rather upset, why had I not been called and when would Mr. Yudelman bring his Camel round again? I was informed that the Arab driver would not be available for sometime to come. I proclaimed that it was of no importance now, as I would not have gone riding in any case. I was rather afraid of the Arabs, probable for the reason that these large or so is seemed enormous men, on tiny donkeys, symbolised cruelty. Even at that tender age I was overawed and distrustful of them.

Prior to this, the only experience I had with other than white people, were the picturesque Basuto tribesmen in their multicoloured blankets and conical straw hats riding on the small Basuto ponies which were not as small as the donkeys used in the Middle East. My heart still goes out to the poor beasts whenever I see scenes of these over-loaded long-suffering long-eared beasts of burden.

From Rechovot the grandparents moved to 54 Maze Street Tel Aviv. Apparently during 1939-1945 in some War-related sort of an accident, maybe during a blackout, Grandpa injured a leg with the result that he used crutches thereafter.

Incidentally, when Grandmother Deborah passed away, she was buried, among the most pious of pious, in Tel Aviv not far from many eminent Rabbis. Grandma was buried near to the site of the grave of Rabbi Moshe Avigdor Amiel (1883-1946) who was once Chief Rabbi of Antwerp and being a religious Zionist went to Palestine and was subsequently elected Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv in 1936 where he established a High School and Yeshiva.

A short while later a wealthy man passed away, and his family wanted to have him buried there too. "Money no object!" they said. They were advised that "'deeds not money" had earned a resting place for Grandma Devora who was buried in June 1945 in her prestigious resting place.

The following snapshot (Photo 5) is that of her headstone on her grave.



Photo 5

Grandfather was buried in the Jewish Cemetery in Bloemfontein. The inscription on his Tombstone (Photo 6) reads as follows: "This distinguished person and great visionary soul, our Father and beloved grandfather and guide Reb Avraham Aryeh Ben Moshe Schwartz died 29 Tishri 5721 (20th Oct 1960 at the age of 92. He devoted his life to the Land of Israel, to the people and to its language. His image will never depart from us."



Photo 6

When we went to Palestine we first travelled to London and from there on to our destination. The train journey to Marseilles and onto the French boat remains mostly a blank in my mind except a memory that I spent my fifth birthday in that train. What I do remember of the boat trip was of soldiers from the French Foreign Legion disembarking at Algiers. There were men in little rowing boats fishing and catching sardine-like fish.

We stopped off at Cairo, and the horse cabs or gharries intrigued me, I am sure we even drove in one to the world renowned Sheppards Hotel where we had tea on the enclosed veranda, which I imagine had cane chairs and tables, imported from the Island of Madeira.

From there we went to Port Said, while there we went swimming, the water must have been too deep for me as Dad put me on his shoulders, we had a snap shot showing us in the water near a wooden pier. Mom didn't go into the water.

From there we went on to Suez and then a frightening motor car journey, along the canal side road at breakneck speed, the Egyptian driver must have been the forerunner to the Japanese Kamikazi pilots. I remember getting to Kantara rather late at night and all I can recall was the open touring car with no windows or side curtains. In that one-car

Egyptian taxi fleet there were no sedan cars in those far off days, I don't think that they had yet reached that part of the world. I presume that we took a train from Kantara to Jerusalem or Tel Aviv, but I don't remember.

In so far as the return journey home to S.A., I have absolutely no recollection at all. I came home with a silk tussie suit which I got somewhere along the line, maybe in Egypt, Dad got me a pith helmet which I had for years, so the outfit was a complete match.

On our way to England by boat, Dad showed me a lone figure and I felt very sorry for this man in the deck chair. It appeared as if he had no communication with any of the other passengers. He was none other than Clemens Kedalie one of the first black trade unionists in S. A. (hailing from the Eastern Cape which was the birth place of the awakening by the masses for the struggle.) He was probably the first black political activist there was in the Union of S.A. It is very strange that I should still remember him sitting on the south side of the ship, the non sunny side of the boat.

In his latter years Grandfather was wont to say that he had "his train ticket" in his hand, but did not know which one he would go on and when. At this age I too feel the same, I know that I must be ready to get onto "THE TRAIN" but not aware which one

or when I have to climb on. Fortunately we do not know when or where, as we are unable to see the timetable contained in the "Book of Life", wherein we are inscribed

Like the religious who at least once in a lifetime have to undertake a Pilgrimage, I did my one and only journey to the Holy Land in 1927.

This record is written as a tribute to my Grandparents as well as to my own Parents. MTDSRIP.

LATVIA, LITHUANIA AND BELARUS: AFFINITIES AND COMMON INTERESTS

Mike Getz

Mike delivered this paper on 6 August 2002 at the Latvia Special Interest Group Luncheon as part of the 22nd IAJG International Conference in Toronto.

The roots and links of a family often reach beyond most borders as we know them. They are rather defined by access and common interests. In this context, Jewish identity determines a set of needs and common interests that can only be accommodated among Jews. It is however necessary to define issues of affinity, common interests and access.

The practice of Judaism was inseparable from the Jewish way of life for most families until well into the twentieth century. Communities therefore required the services of Rabbis, Cantors, *Shochtim* and teachers. They would have had pivotal roles in the Jewish life cycle as well as sustaining and maintaining institutions of learning and other communal activities. We will note examples of their mobility and influence.

Latvia today has three major provinces. It is divided by the river Dvina, which courses from Riga on the Baltic, deep into Belarus and White Russia. Kurland is west of the Dvina and Latgale is to its east. Riga and its region of Livonia constitute the third province of Latvia in its current borders.

Latvian Jewry is a part of Jewish migration in Eastern Europe over the centuries. But it also enjoyed a distinctive pattern of its own. German Jews first settled Kurland in the 16th century. Riga attracted Jews from White Russia as well as those of

Kurland in their Germanic mould. Dvinsk, with its background in the Vitebsk *gubernia*, would be home to a large Jewish community strongly linked to today's Belarus and Lithuania. Liepaja, Kurland's largest city was also a haven for many Litvaks. Under the Russian Empire, Kurland was excluded from the Pale of Settlement.

I recall as a child in South Africa hearing about friends and family in Subate with another tier in Rakishik (Rokiskis) and Abell (Obelai). Later I would learn that in terms of Jewish linkage these three locations – Rokiskis and Obelai in today's Lithuania, and Subate in Latvia, were almost neighbors. The Getz family reputedly is Rakishiker, although I have thus far found no records to substantiate the claim. But I do know that Subate drew its *shochet* from Obelai and its *chazzan* from Rokiskis. Together with the teachers who came, they were all part of the Lithuanian Jewish renaissance.

In a regional sense it was Latvia's three cities: Riga, Dvinsk and Libau that were prized destinations for different reasons and from various locations. Clearly Riga, both a cosmopolitan city and major port had universal appeal. Dvinsk, Daugavpils today, was perhaps the most Jewish of the cities, second only to Riga in size. Jews there were prominent in vibrant commercial and industrial sectors. Dvinsk was originally in the Vitebsk *gubernia* before the Russian Revolution of 1917. It was an important Jewish center of opportunity. Libau, Liepaja today, a major port on Latvia's western Baltic seaboard, would draw its Jewish population from Kurland, but as we shall see, not only from there.

Throughout the 19th century significant numbers of Lithuanian Jews entered Kurland. The general area of Bausk in Latvia was also an important Jewish location Lithuania, its Latvian status only finalised in 1919. There were no *Yeshivot* in Kurland. Rabbis and teachers were increasingly brought from Lithuania. Wealthy Kurlanders sent their sons to Slobodka and Mir and sought husbands for their daughters among students at those and other *Yeshivot*. Remarkably, the profoundly Germanic Jews of Kurland accepted the traditions of Vilna without conflict. It is important to note though that Bar-Aron Nurock, Chief Rabbi of Liepaja from 1907, came from a well-known rabbinic family in Mitau. His predecessor was Yehuda Leib Kantor,

from St. Petersburg originally, destined to be the chief Rabbi of Riga. Rabbi Kook, Israel's first Chief Rabbi, served in Bausk and born in Grivo outside Dvinsk where he was the pupil of Rabbi Reuvele Dinaburger, himself a major figure.

My wife Hilda's family, the Shaffs, have beginnings in Shkoud, at one time part of Kurland but now in Lithuania. The shtetl is 50 or 60 km from Liepaja. Her paternal grandfather Boruch ben Tsiyon, qualifies as a baker, marries at the age of 21 and moves to Liepaja. In the early 1900's he takes his eldest son Leo, aged 12, to South Africa to keep him from 25 years in the Russian Army. Hilda's father, Falk, a younger brother would follow some years later. The series of moves beginning in Shkoud were a key to this family's continuity.

Dvinsk, now Daugavpils, was the most Jewish of Latvia's cities. It had a developed infrastructure of commerce and industry where Jewish owners and workers were numerous and prominent. Moshe Amir describes it in the Jews of Latvia, "The Dvinsk to which memory returns is the famed City and Mother in Israel, teeming with Jews, hospitable beyond belief, bubbling with communal activities." Positioned on the Dvina between Riga and its course into Belarus, Dvinsk was an important rail, road and river junction. Sons and daughters of the region, where the city was pre-eminent, traveled from far and wide to work, study, and experience the urban life of a Jewish community. Travel to the city from adjacent Novo-Alexandrovsk passed through three *gubernia* – Kovno, Kurland into Vitebsk.

Dvinsk was famous for its Rabbis. Their distinction in Latvia and beyond was unrivalled in the last century or so. Meier Simcha Hacohen was the Rabbi of Misnagdim and Joseph Rosen, the Rogachover, was Rabbi of Dvinsk's *Chassidim*. There were no disputes between the *Rabbanim* or their followers, differences being minor in synagogue usage and the reciting of some prayers. Meier Simcha was tall, friendly and widely respected. I remember his picture in South African homes, always in a place of honour. The Rogachover was short, with a noble head and shoulder length hair. Chaim Bialik is reputed to have said of him, "From the brain of the Rogachover one could make two Einsteins." Meier Simcha was deeply loved for his courage in times of adversity. At the urgent behest of his community he turned down an invitation to Jerusalem.

Latgale, Latvia's eastern province, with its communities of Glazmanka, Gostini, Dagda, Lutzin and Varklan, was in the provenance of Dvinsk, which with Rezekne was in the Vitebsk gubernia. This is apparent in marriages, trade and Judaic traffic of the area – mostly but not entirely in the tradition of Vilna. Equally the influence of Dvinsk, its resources and rabbis, spread into Courland especially the area of Illukste, Subate and Akniste.

Riga is a centerpiece in the history and development of Latvia and is therefore pre-eminent in shaping the presence and history of Jews in Latvia. They had a presence in Riga throughout the nineteenth century and earlier but were always subject to many constraints. The first Jews in Riga, from whom the community developed, came from Kurland - their German culture and background fitted the prevailing and established Germanic environment. That influence would dominate the development of early Jewish schools – the inclusion of Russian only occurs late in the 19th century.

The Jews of Reissen came from the Pale, arriving from the *gubernia* of Minsk, Vitebsk and neighbouring White Russia in the northeast. Timber trading along the Dvina brought Chabad Chassidim, among them the Schneiersons of Lubavitch, to Riga. There they would add to Chassidic practice the dedicated intellectual rigor of Talmudic study that characterized *Litvak Misnagdim* and the tradition of Vilna. Schneierman would bring the special potential of Lubavitch to the United States from Riga.

It is in Riga that there is a full blossoming of affinity rooted in the diverse cultures and traditions of Germany, Lithuania and Imperial Russia. Mendel Bobe, in that fine study, *The Jews of Latvia*, gives a detailed account of Riga Jewry's achievement in the arts, sciences, commerce and industry. He recalls synagogues that were hosts to great cantors and a remarkable tradition of classic choral liturgy. Especially remembered is Isaiah Berlin, whose brilliant work as a historian and scholar are uniquely distinguished in our time. He would attribute his achievements and recognition to an upbringing rich in German and Russian culture built on a platform of Jewish tradition.

As with other communities, Latvian Jewry retained its diversity and community in transition and migration. Throughout our world we have echoes of identity and community in their *landsmanschaftn*,

synagogues, mutual-aid associations and the cemeteries they maintained. These testimonies of their beginnings are a valuable and valued component of the complex affinity, distinct identity and proud heritage that Jews of this region share with Jews everywhere.

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY LOOKS

BACK

Myrel Ginsberg

Myrel Ginsberg, a well-known Stellenbosch resident wrote this article for the local Stellenbosch newspaper, The Eikestadnuus.

This article was originally published in The Eikestadnuus on 10 December 1999 and is re-printed with permission.

This will not be an accurate history of the Stellenbosch Jewish Community. We hope that it will provide glimpses into the past of Jewish communal achievement. It is with grateful thanks and pride that we draw the curtain on the “stage of the past”.

Like Simon van der Stel 200 years before, the founders of the Stellenbosch Jewish Congregation, recognised the unique beauty of this valley and began to settle here in approximately 1900. It is recorded that in 1903 the first religious services were held in a building in Bird Street, between the present Rennies Travel and Foreign Exchange and the University Art Gallery.

The small nucleus of Jewish families, then mainly business men and farmers, were gradually joined by others. When the Bird Street prayer building became inadequate, the leaders purchased the ground and house then known as *Callabassenkraal*. In 1923 the cornerstone of the present synagogue was laid by the late Rev. A. P. Bender. Mr. Boet Zetler recalls that the then Mayor of Stellenbosch, Mr. Charlie Neethling, placed a few “tickey” coins under the cornerstone, presumably for “good luck”!

One of the early congregants was a Mr. Sam Meyer who was a craftsman of repute. It was he who made the synagogue pulpit and benches which gracefully adorn the synagogue and serve the congregation to this day.

The congregation was led by various religious leaders in the years that followed. However, it was the late Rev Isaac Pakter who held office from 1950 to 1972 who helped the community to grow, flourish and reach a membership of some 85 families. Under his leadership, inter-denominational services were held bringing Jews and Christians together in a spirit of understanding and mutual respect. The late Prof W. J. van der Merwe and his theological students frequently attended synagogue services.

The Dutch Reformed *Moederkerk* and the Jewish Community took turns annually to entertain each other. This “*toenadering*” of Jew and gentile did much to build bridges and generate inestimable goodwill.

This goodwill was never better demonstrated during the Yom Kippur War in Israel in 1973. The day after was broke out, Rabbi David Lapin held a service in the synagogue which was also attended by many prominent non-Jews who all expressed shock and support for Israel. The pianist Lionel Bowman offered his services and the University provided the Conservatory for a recital. All the proceeds were sent to the was effort.

There is scant information in our records as to the building of the communal hall adjacent to the *Skuinshuis* and synagogue. We know that it was built in 1932 and became the focal point of all Jewish communal life. Many a joyous wedding and Bar Mitzvah was held in the hall and all religious festivals were celebrated in the “Talmud Torah” hall.

The *Callabassenkraal* House, now known as the *Skuinshuis* (because of its angle to Ryneveld Street) for a short while was occupied by the Reverend of the congregation. It was then let to various tenants but soon became very run down. It was then refurbished and used as a meeting place by the Jewish students attending the Stellenbosch University. Many a lively and often controversial meeting took place there.

The teaching of Hebrew and the education of the children was always a top priority and from the very beginning Jewish children were taught Hebrew and instructed in Jewish customs, traditions and the ethics of their forefathers. These *Cheder* classes were the responsibility of the Reverend of the day.

The women of this community always stood by their men in all communal matters. In the early 1940's a branch of the Union of Jewish Women of SA was founded and today, some 60 years later, the Stellenbosch Branch of the UJW is still alive and active. The Union works for and is of service to all sections of the community, irrespective of race, colour or creed. There is excellent co-operation with other local welfare organisations and committees and the Union gives generously both financially and supportively.

Two celebrations of significance bear highlighting. In 1950 under the leadership of the late Rev. Pakter, the Golden Jubilee of the Congregation was commemorated in suitable style. Rabbi I. Abrahams, chief Rabbi of Cape Town addressed the congregation. The choir from the Gardens Synagogue added their magnificent voices to the service. At that time there were some 85 families in the congregation. In 1973, with Rabbi David Lapin as our spiritual leader, the 50th anniversary of the laying of the foundation stone of the synagogue was celebrated with a banquet held in the Communal Hall. At this celebration the late Frank Bradlow, a member of the Simon van der Stel Foundation was the guest-speaker. And it was at this function that the Stellenbosch Jewish community pledged itself to the restoration of the *Skuinshuis*. This community felt that it was their duty and privilege to restore this historic house to its former beauty and glory and in this manner express in some small measure their appreciation to fellow South Africans for their support of Israel during the Yom Kippur War.

It took from 1973 to 1980 to achieve this restoration and on 1 December 1980, the late Mr. L. Ginsburg, chairman of the congregation for 25 years, unveiled the National Monuments Commission's plaque declaring the restored *Skuinshuis* a Historical Monument! What an occasion! What an achievement! Especially as the congregation had dwindled from 85 families in 1950 to only 20 in 1980!

There is no doubt that the restoration of the *Skuinshuis* and all it means to Jewry, to Stellenbosch and to South Africa was the most significant achievement of this congregation during the past century!

These glimpses into the past have deliberately not highlighted any one particular person, but I now

bring onto the stage a most refined cultured and unusual person: the late Felix Gut. Felix was a man of great intellectual strength and sincere conviction. Having narrowly escaped the German concentration camps, Felix dedicated himself to collecting and assembling as complete a collection of books, articles and stories on the Holocaust as he could. These covered a period of 20 years and he presented them to the Stellenbosch University. The Gut Collection of over 300 books on the Holocaust are now housed in the J. S. Gericke Library. The University was so impressed with and grateful for this donation that they honoured Mr. Gut by the publication of a listing of these books. A bound volume of the many letters written by the University to Mr. Gut thanking him for this great generosity and commenting on each book as it was received, has also been published.

The most recent and final project of this undertaking by the Jewish congregation was the repairing and upgrading of the Jewish Cemetery and its surrounding grounds. As a community, we honour and revere the dead, and it is our privilege to maintain the cemetery which is situated in peaceful, beautiful surroundings.

The Jewish congregation, now only 17 families, has been able to maintain the synagogue, its cemetery, and make financial donations to numerous charities because of the income generated by the *Skuinshuis*.

"Their foresight is our inheritance". These words appear on a plaque in the synagogue and commemorate the role by Lossy Ginsburg, Louis Perel, and Chippy Armstrong in the restoration of the *Skuinshuis*.

(Present chairman is Mr. G. Zetler, ably assisted by Dr. Gerry Rosendorff as secretary)

ANNIVERSARIES

OUTDSHOORN JEWISH COMMUNITY CELEBRATES

This was originally published in the Honourable Menschen Column of the Cape Jewish Chronicle, April 2004 and is re-printed with permission.

The Oudtshoorn Jewish Community celebrates its 120th anniversary from 12 – 15 November of this year.

In 1879 there were already Jews settled in Oudtshoorn, which in the course of the next few years became known as the “Little Jerusalem” or the “Jerusalem of South Africa”. A Jewish community soon came into being to spread to every corner of South Africa. Some of the Republic’s finest sons are famous Jewish personalities born and bred in this town on the edge of the little Karoo.

Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris will be the honoured guest of the community, which is now down to 18 families. Following the *shul* service on Friday night there will be an *oneg shabbat*. Following the Saturday morning service there will be a *brocha*, thereafter a *braai* at the Safari Ostrich Farm on Saturday night. On Sunday morning there will be a memorial service at the Oudtshoorn cemetery.

PIKETBERG HONOURS JEWISH COMMUNITY’S HISTORIC CONTRIBUTION

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Former residents of Piketberg and their families came from as far afield as the UK and many centres in South Africa to attend a tree planting ceremony and plaque unveiling to honour the Jewish contribution to the town for over 100 years. The event took place in the restored Piketberg Museum, once the town’s synagogue and formerly a furniture store.

“They have come back to their heritage, to their grassroots,” said the mayor of the Bergriver Municipality, Alderman J. A. Raats, speaking of the influence of the Jewish community in Piketberg.

Referring to the “close relationship” between Afrikaners and Jews, he paid tribute to “the role of the Jewish community in uplifting the Afrikaner.”

Introducing himself as “the travelling rabbi”, Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, of the country communities department of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies, delivered the opening prayer and outlined his work in the country towns of South Africa.

Dr. Hannah Reeve Sanders, who was raised in the town and was well-known as superintendent of Groote Schuur Hospital, welcomed the ex-residents, recalling the contribution of many of the well-known families and individuals. She noted the representatives of the ‘Shaer clan’, who had been the largest Jewish family, thanking one of its members, Pnina Hoberman, for her efforts in helping to arrange the reunion.

In order to attend the ceremony, she said, she had to forgo the handing back on the same day of the first two houses in District Six to former residents. Coincidentally, the date, February 11, was shortly after *Tu B’Shvat*, the Jewish tree-planting festival, and also the anniversary of Nelson Mandela’s landmark speech on the Grand Parade, Cape Town, on his release from prison in 1990.

Adrienne Folb, of *Beth Hatefusoth*, presented a short history of the country communities, while Dr. Barry Cohen an ex-Piketberger, related humorous anecdotes about colourful characters who had lived in the town.

Suzanne Belling, executive director of the Cape Board of Deputies, presented a cheque from the Board’s Piketberg Trust Fund to Roche du Toit, curator of the Museum.

Sera Harris, from Cape Town, who, at 95, is the oldest surviving Piketberger, planted an olive tree in the ‘Commemorative Garden’ and a plaque was unveiled to mark the event.

BRAKPAN AND SPRINGS SHULS

On Sunday 30 May, the United Hebrew Institutions of Brakpan commemorated the 85th Anniversary of their community and the 100th Anniversary of the Springs Hebrew Congregation.

The Chief Rabbi Elect, Rabbi Dr. Warren Goldstein and his honour, the executive Mayor of Ekurhuleni,

Councillor Duma Nkosi were also present at this memorable function.

Plaques were unveiled to pay tribute to the late Joe Welcher and to the late Harry Sher in recognition of their outstanding services to their community.

The occasion was used to honour those persons who have their roots in these communities and who have distinguished them-selves by their services to the Republic of South Africa.

These include the following:

Dr. Jack Adno
Medicine

Mr. Justice Percy Blieden
Judge

Henry Blumenthal
Jewish Communal Affairs

Mrs. Ella Blumenthal
Holocaust Survivor and Business Woman

Adv. Binjamin Gudelsky
Senior Counsel of the Supreme Court

Ike Hyman
Sport Administrator

Professor Issy Kanfer
Academic Achievement

Elton Krawitz
Chazan

Thelma Klein
International Dance Teacher & Adjudicator

Lionel Levin
International Interior Designer

Wendy Machanik
Business Women

Matilda Rosowsky
Opera Singer & Humanitarian

Avroy Schlain
Businessman

Adv. Acting Judge Ronnie Selvan
S. C. Judge

Ida Smith
Headmistress and Teacher

Edith Waner

Ballroom Dancer, Businesswoman and
Humanitarian

Professor Harry Zarenda

Academic Achievement

The Service was conducted by Rabbi Gidon Wacks and Cantors Eric Wener and Elton Krawitz and Mr. Larry Welcher gave the address with Mr. Selwyn Leas acting as the Master of Ceremonies.

MUIZENBERG SYNAGOGUE
80th ANNIVERSARY

The Muizenberg Synagogue is looking for photographic material for their 80th anniversary. If you have any material, please contact Farrel Strul at: fast@global.co.za
