

# S. A. SIG

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

Editor: Bubbles Segall

*bubbles.segall@wagait.net*

## Southern African Jewish Genealogy Special Interest Group Newsletter

**Vol. 6, Issue 1**

**September 2005**

### In this Issue

<i>President's Message – Saul Issroff</i>	2
<i>Editorial – Bubbles Segall</i>	3
<i>Meeting of the SA-SIG at the Las Vegas 2005 Symposium – Roy Ogus</i>	4
<i>SA-SIG Treasurer's Report – Mike Getz</i>	6
<i>The Lost and Found Family – Sue and Elliot Axel</i>	7
<i>Plungyan of yesterday and Plunge today – Abel Levitt</i>	10
<i>19,234,000,000,000,000 bytes – Gary Mokotoff</i>	13
<i>Memories of Habonim in Port Elizabeth during the Thirties</i> <i>– Phyllis Sachar</i>	14
<i>Mendele Mocher Sforim – Manfred Schwartz</i>	14
<i>Zadok and Sara Bluma Zilber – Dov Sidelsky</i>	17

© 2005 SA-SIG. All articles are copyright and are not to be copied or reprinted without the permission of the author. The contents of the articles contain the opinions of the authors and do not reflect those of the Editor, or of the members of the SA-SIG Board. The Editor has the right to accept or reject any material submitted, or edit as might be appropriate.

## **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>

### **SA-SIG Board**

<b>President</b>	Saul Issroff
<b>Vice-President and Treasurer</b>	Mike Getz
<b>Newsletter</b>	
<b>Editor</b>	Bubbles Segall
<b>Layout</b>	Roy Ogus
<b>Australian Coordinators</b>	Herbert Epstein, Selma Jackson
<b>Canadian Coordinator</b>	Ed Goldberg
<b>Israel Coordinators</b>	Rose Lerer Cohen, Beryl Baleson
<b>South African Coordinators</b>	Stan Hart (Durban), Colin Plen (Johannesburg)
<b>USA Coordinators</b>	Roy Ogus, Ann Rabinowitz
<b>Membership</b>	Mike Getz
<b>Webmaster</b>	Roger Harris

## **PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE**

My grandson's imminent *bar mitzvah* in New York has focussed me on the sorts of life milestone events where we have little or no records from past generations.

Although we genealogists are adept at getting birth, marriage, and death records, we seldom see records of a *bris milah*, a *pidyon haben*, a *bat* or *bar mitzvah*. *Bris* records are sometimes found in *mohel* registers, but there seem to be very few of these around that pertain to South Africa. What happens to them? Does the next generation of *mohelim* just throw these out?

I have a certificate of my own *bris*, the entry into the Covenant of Abraham, provided by the Port Elizabeth Hebrew Congregation. I have no record of my own *barmitzvah*.

What happens to records of Jewish divorces – “*gets*”? The certificate is kept by the relevant authority, and sometimes one can obtain a copy from a Beth Din. Obviously there is usually a civil record.

Other life or death events such as a cremation can be difficult to find. There are records for Durban Jewish cremations. West Park in Johannesburg has a wall of plaques at the back of the cemetery giving names and some family details of many cremations, but there is no list that I have come across.

There must be other esoteric types of records that we should be trying to find.

### **Saul Issroff**

London  
[saul@shaul.homechoice.co.uk](mailto:saul@shaul.homechoice.co.uk)

---

## EDITORIAL

Welcome to another issue of the SA-SIG Newsletter. *Chag Sameach* to all our readers. May this New Year bring health and happiness to you and yours.

The 25th *International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies* Conference on Jewish Genealogy was held in Las Vegas recently. Roy Ogus and Mike Getz, two of our Board Members, attended and have provided information on proceedings at the conference.

Subscriptions for this Newsletter are now due. See the end of this Newsletter for details.

It is that time of the year again – after each conference, our Treasurer, Mike Getz, provides a Financial Report. His report covering July 2004 to June 2005 is included in this Newsletter for your information.

We have some new contributors this quarter:

- On their retirement, Sue and Elliot Axel attended an introductory course in genealogy at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, and like so many of us, became hooked! They have prepared an article for the Newsletter about discovering family in Philipopolis in the Orange Free State.
- Abel and Glenda Levitt have a strong affinity with Plunge in Lithuania and have written a moving account of their connection with this *shtetl* which includes the names of Lithuanian gentiles who saved Jews from death at the hands of the Nazis and Lithuanians.
- Phyllis Sachar, an ex-resident of Port Elizabeth, has fond memories of the establishment of *Habonim* in the 30's and her subsequent involvement with that movement. Now living in Israel, she has provided a description of those early days.

One of our regular contributors, Manfred Schwartz from East London, is back with another story. This time it is about the well-known Yiddish writer, Mendele Mocher Sforim who is related to his family.

Mendele Mocher Sforim, (Hebrew: *Mendele, the Itinerant Bookseller*), was the pen name of Shalom

Jacob Abramovich, commonly regarded as the father of modern Yiddish literature. As a young man he became an adherent to the *Haskalah* – an 18<sup>th</sup> century movement initiated by the German philosopher Moses Mendelssohn which familiarised Jews with Western culture and marked the beginning of the move away from the traditional Jewish lifestyle and traditions of the day. It endeavoured to assimilate Jews into the modern world by changing the curriculum and methods of teaching of the day. They introduced subjects such as languages other than Hebrew, mathematics etc and tried to limit the number of hours of Hebrew study.

The central figures of this movement disapproved of Yiddish and regarded it merely as a jargon and preferred Hebrew; however, Yiddish was the only language understood by the masses and people like Mendele Mocher Sforim and others, used it to write about *shtetl* life. He was one of the first authors to describe the *Haskalah* movement.

Dov Sidelsky, another past contributor to this Newsletter, has been researching the maternal side of his family and has provided an article about his research. He is interested in hearing from anyone who has links to the communities of Musninkai, Sirvintos, and Gelvonai in Lithuania for his book about the history of these communities. Any photos or family records would be appreciated. His contact details have been provided at the end of his article.

What do Kirkwood in the Eastern Cape and the British Royal Family have in common? Theo Aronson. Theo was born in Kirkwood and became the author of many books on the Royal Family. Theo died recently in Somerset in England at the age of 73. We have provided a piece about his life including a web address which outlines his interesting life in the United Kingdom.

A new 500 page book has been published – *Jewish Life in the South African Country Communities, Volume 2*. It covers many communities which probably had substantial Jewish families around the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century but few or none today. Information about this new publication is available on page 19.

Good news from the Mormon Family and Church History Department. They are planning to digitize 2.5 million rolls of microfilm to digital images

which will then be placed on the Internet for public use. It is envisaged that this will take about 6 years to complete. Gary Mokotoff, the editor of *Nu? What's New?*, the e-zine of *Avotaynu*, has provided information about this amazing project in this Newsletter for you.

As you will see at the end of this Newsletter we have a new feature – an alphabetical listing of all the surnames mentioned in this Newsletter. This will be an ongoing feature in future Newsletters. We are in the process of setting up an online searchable database which identifies the particular Newsletter(s) where surnames can be found. Over 80 surnames are mentioned in this Newsletter alone which is quite sizable!

### **Bubbles Segall**

*Editor*

Darwin, Northern Territory, Australia  
*bubbles.segall@wagait.net*

### **CHIEF RABBI OF SOUTH AFRICA DIES**

The former Chief Rabbi of South Africa, Rabbi Cyril Harris died on September 13, 2005, days before his 69th birthday. Rabbi Harris was born in Glasgow and moved to South Africa in 1987. He resigned as Chief Rabbi due to ill health and died of cancer at Hermanus, a coastal town near Cape Town. His body was flown to Jerusalem where he was buried on Thursday 15 September.

Rabbi Harris was well known for his human rights activities with the poor black community and was recognised for the part he played in South Africa's Reconciliation Process during the transition from apartheid to the new South Africa of today.

Rabbi Harris is survived by his wife, two sons, and five grandchildren.

## **MEETING OF THE SOUTHERN AFRICAN SPECIAL INTEREST GROUP (SA-SIG) AT THE LAS VEGAS 2005 IAJGS INTERNATION SYMPOSIUM ON JEWISH GENEALOGY**

*Roy Ogus*

The focus of the South African discussions at the recent IAJGS Symposium on Jewish Genealogy, held in Las Vegas, in July 2005, was the SA-SIG Group meeting. There were relatively few attendees at the Symposium with strong South African interests, but in spite of this, the SA-SIG Group meeting was very well attended.

The meeting was run by Roy Ogus and Mike Getz, and the attendees all showed great interest in the discussions, which lead to a very productive and stimulating session. In addition, several of the attendees signed up as new members of the SA-SIG after the session.

During the first part of the SA-SIG session, a number of topics describing the SA-SIG activities were presented, after which followed a general discussion and question-and-answer session. The topics presented during the first part of the session commenced with an overview of the SA-SIG Mission, followed by an review of the comprehensive SA-SIG Web pages which contain a large amount of information and resources, as well as the SA-SIG Internet discussion group, run under the auspices of JewishGen. Following these topics was a detailed review of several key ongoing SA-SIG projects such as the quarterly Newsletter and the Clearinghouse. Finally, the highlights of a relatively new on-line database, called the South African Jewish *Rootsbank*, were presented. There was a strong interest in all these topics by the attendees.

The hardcopy *SA-SIG Newsletter* has been published quarterly for a number of years, and the publication covers a wide range of topics relating to the South African Jewish communities, both in South Africa, as well as in other parts of the world. Further information about the Newsletter, as well as directions of how to subscribe to the publication, can be found at:

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

The *Clearinghouse* project was established a few years ago to create a mechanism to exchange information about the various documents, information, and other artifacts relating to one's own research that may be useful to others who are also researching their family connections in this area. Further information on the Clearinghouse project, and instructions on how to submit information to this project, can be found at:

<http://www.jewishgen.org/safrica/clearing-house/index.htm>

The *South African Jewish Rootsbank* database was created by the Centre for Jewish Migration and Genealogy Studies in Cape Town. The Centre is managed under the umbrella of the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Institute for Jewish Studies at the University of Cape Town, and will also provide a public access section located at the South African Jewish Museum.

As stated on the *Rootsbank* Web pages, the key mission of the project is to create a comprehensive database of records and information relating to Jewish immigration to South Africa. The project plans to document the estimated 15,000 core families who migrated to Southern Africa between 1850-1950 from England, Germany, Lithuania, Latvia and Belarus.

The research on the project will focus on the locations where the families originated, their patterns of migration to South Africa, where the families first settled, what communities they established after arrival, the growth of families, their subsequent movements within the country, and the later emigration of many of the families abroad. A wide array of source documentation has been consulted including passenger arrival lists, naturalization lists, community records, vital records of marriages, births and deaths, family trees, as well as many others.

A comprehensive collection of records has already been integrated into the database, which can be searched on-line at:

[http://grub.its.uct.ac.za/cgi/cgi\\_RootWeb.exe](http://grub.its.uct.ac.za/cgi/cgi_RootWeb.exe)

The project can be reached on e-mail at: [kapgen@humanities.uct.ac.za](mailto:kapgen@humanities.uct.ac.za)

Two other SA-SIG projects that were mentioned during the SA-SIG session were the *South African Communities* and the *South African Youth Movements* projects.

Up until now, the Country Communities project has received the focus of attention, and the communities in the larger urban areas in the country have been left behind. These are the communities which are not considered "country communities", but have substantial populations and Jewish institutions. Examples of these communities include Cape Town, Durban, Pretoria, Johannesburg, Port Elizabeth, etc. Included in this project focus are the suburbs of these communities, which are also considered quite important to differentiate.

With the departure of so many Jewish South Africans to other places in the world, it is important that the history and cultural heritage of these towns be documented while it still can be done. Many people feel that they want to integrate themselves totally into their new environments in Israel, Australia, Canada, Great Britain, America and the like, and forget their life in South Africa. For others, their connections to their birthplace in South Africa has either been severed by the passing of their elderly relatives or their memories have grown dim of the life they had there and the contributions that they made.

The *South African Communities* project plans to collect information about the various families and communities of South African origin that are located around the world. The objective of this project is to document these far-flung families and communities in order to preserve the information about these groups, many of which have long lost contact with South Africa.

The project is inviting current members of the SA-SIG to update family information that includes places of origin, lifestyles, and relocation within SA and to various parts of our world. The description of the information that has already been collected on a number of South African communities can be found at:

<http://www.jewishgen.org/safrica/communities/>

The *South African Youth Movements* project aims to collect information and artifacts (such as photographs) about the numerous Jewish Youth Movements that were an integral part of the South

African Jewish Communities during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. It is of great significance that the Jewish youth societies that arose in South Africa were all identified with the Zionist movement. Indeed, youth involvement as such was taken for granted as a Zionist affiliation. Consequently it must be noted that successive generations of Jewish youth were exposed almost exclusively, to a mode of Jewish identification determined by Zionism.

A start has been made to catalogue and describe the history of each of the major Youth Movements, and a number of photographs have been collected. The initial collection of these photographs, as well as further information on the project, can be found at:

<http://www.jewishgen.org/safrica/youth-movements/>

After the presentations at the meeting, there were numerous questions from the floor, and these produced a stimulating set of discussions and brainstorming of new ideas.

The attendees were encouraged to join the SA-SIG and to volunteer to help on the various projects, and, in particular, to contribute items to the Clearinghouse and the Newsletter. After the meeting, a number of new members signed up for the SIG.

In summary, the SA-SIG group session was very successful and productive. While the number of attendees with a strong South African interest at the Las Vegas Symposium was relatively small, the SA-SIG meeting had a good turnout, and the meeting renewed the strong interest in the activities of the SA-SIG. Contributions are solicited from all members of the group for Newsletter articles, Clearinghouse items, and for volunteers to help with the various SA-SIG projects. Please contact any members of the SA-SIG Board if you would like to contribute your services. (The Board Member names can be found on the SA-SIG Web pages at <http://www.jewishgen.org/Safrica>).

---

## **SA-SIG TREASURER'S REPORT**

*July 2004 - June 2005*

*Mike Getz*

We commenced the year with a bank balance of \$540. The funds on hand as at June 30 2005 will approximate \$625. Income, principally from membership totaled \$540. Expenditure amounted to some \$455. Expenditures were mainly for printing and mailing newsletters to paid-up members. There were some modest costs associated with our annual Conference.

The SIG newsletter, now also available in PDF format, has increased its broad readership. There has not been a major change in the number of members who receive a hard copy version. We currently mail some 30 copies to these paid-up members. Their subscriptions also support the mailing of hard copies to a number of institutions in Israel and the US.

Currently renewals of paid up members remain at historic levels with new enrolments replacing those who discontinue their affiliation.

Roy Ogus has been wonderfully helpful in keeping our SIG effective and responsive, particularly in matters of administration and communication. Together with our Editor, Bubbles Segall, Roy makes the Newsletter happen. Saul Issroff, our President, continues to oversee our broad interests that are almost global in scope. He is patient and detailed in responding to queries as well as continuing to build resources. These encompass many web sites, not excluding our own, and a range of databases across a broad range of contacts.

I am confident that our members and others, who are interested, will be supportive as the development of Jewish Genealogy in South Africa continues. This evolution is necessary to both illustrate and understand the important links between that community, its origins in Europe and onward migration to several continents.

---

## THE LOST AND FOUND FAMILY

*Sue and Elliot Axel*

When I was a child, I heard stories of our family in South Africa. Unfortunately, that was during the '40's and no one visited, but I knew they were there. A cousin did come to New York in the '50's and met with an aunt and uncle. There was some correspondence, but for whatever the reason that too stopped, and all contact was lost. I did write to the last known address of one of the cousins and the letter was returned stamped "moved".

My grandfather never spoke of the old country or of his siblings, and I, being quite young and interested in other things, never thought to ask. So while I knew that family was there, I had no idea of who his siblings, if any, were.

This sorry state of affairs lasted until my husband and I retired. Now we had the time to investigate and had no idea of how to proceed. We attended some meetings of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Oregon and left even more confused. JGSO has since developed excellent materials and courses on how to proceed that have proven to be a great help for newcomers to genealogy. Elderhostel offered an introductory course in genealogy at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah and we took advantage of it and were hooked!

Armed with some knowledge, we began to search and immediately ran into problems. I knew the family name was Jacobson, and we began with that. However, we did not know the country my grandfather came from, but from discussion with my remaining aunt and uncle they felt it may have been Latvia. We then attended our first International Conference of Jewish Genealogy held in Salt Lake City. It was a wonderful experience, but we did not come up with answers even with the best efforts of people at the Family History Library. Census data and naturalization papers were no help when folks arrived in 1888, nor were the landing cards for Philadelphia or Baltimore. Everyone was positive that Grandpa Louis did not come through Ellis Island. He didn't, as it wasn't open, but probably did enter the United States through Castle Garden. There are no landing cards for that year due to a fire.

By then I began taping interviews, and while transcribing an interview with my uncle Lester, it

came to my attention that he mentioned that his father had returned to the old country to bring his now widowed mother-in-law to the United States in 1922 or 1924. She would not come the first time. Apparently she was one stubborn lady, but that is another story. Armed with that information, we again returned to Salt Lake and began looking for Grandpa Louis' passport application. It was a treasure, as it said he had been born in Klykoliai, Lithuania and his father, my great-grandfather, lived in Philippolis, Orange Free State, South Africa.

Then we really got lucky. We attended the International Jewish Genealogy Conference in London in 2001. I attended the Southern African SIG meeting. It was a small group and we introduced ourselves and stated the family we were researching. I got up and with little expectation of success, said my name and that I was looking for the family of Jacob Jacobson who lived in Philippolis, Orange Free State in 1922. From across the room came a voice that said, "I believe I know your family". My feelings at that point were truly disbelief. Mr. Hodes, the voice, and I talked for a while, and from our conversation it probably was my family from what very little I knew. He then said I had relatives in London and gave me their phone number. Not wanting to be disappointed in case it was not so, I waited a day and then phoned. I said I was from the United States and thought we may be related. My cousin Abe Jacobson cried, "You must be related to Uncle Louis", and yes, I surely was. That was the beginning of an incredible odyssey and the finding of my family.

We met and I couldn't write fast enough with all the stories of my great-grandfather, his children and their children. Some of the family now lived in the United States in the Boston area and others in Australia, Canada and more in London and Scotland as well as South Africa. Then came a shock, the family name was not Jacobson, but Nowesenitz. My grandfather's name was Goldberg, due to the fact that he left the country shortly after his Bar Mitzvah with the papers of a teenager who had recently passed away. My grandfather traveled to Ireland with either a friend or an uncle and later to the United States. He was Goldberg when he arrived here and so the American family has the name of Goldberg. The South African family took the name Jacobson when my great-grandfather either went into business or when he was naturalized. Needless to say, it did create confusion

when looking into records with an incorrect name and country of origin.

When we returned home I contacted the family in the Boston area, and my aunt Bea, husband Elliot and I went to visit. The person with the address I had written to had indeed moved, and she was here! This was Bertha Sandler, formerly of Durban. The visit of the first cousins was touching, seeing the ladies recall their family and childhood, looking at pictures and each other was a joy to behold. It was one of many joys to come.

During the discussion of cousins, mention was made of a cousin living in Vancouver, British Columbia. No one was sure of the spelling of her married name, but never mind. I e-mailed a lady we had met at several of the conferences to see if she knew her. She did not, but sent me the phone number of a person she thought may fit the information. My husband and I were taking his sister and her husband to Canada, as they were going on a cruise, so we phoned. The four of us ended having Shabbat dinner with my cousin and her family. The minute I saw my cousin, I saw my aunt as she had been at that age. The resemblance was uncanny. Not only was the dinner wonderful, but much more information was shared. We are six hours away by car and now see each other frequently. It is super.

By now, I had a good idea of the scope of the family, and we began contacting people and getting dates and data. Everyone has been supportive and helpful. We attended the IAJGS conference in Toronto and met with another cousin and her mother, who shared wonderful stories and transcribed tapes.

My great-grandfather Jacob Nowesenitz married Riva Gavronsky in Lithuania. My grandfather was their first-born child. They had 14 children, seven of whom survived to adulthood. There were five years between my grandfather and the next child and many more before the next son. This lessened the immediate reason to move to escape forced service in the Tsar's army.

Jacob Nowesenitz came to the United States in the early 1890s. He apparently was in New York. He had been a merchant and grain dealer, albeit a humble one, in Lithuania. He did not find New York to his liking and returned to Lithuania. The family moved to Popelan where Riva was a baker.

Jacob struggled to make a living, and at the behest of his cousin, Joseph Orkin, he immigrated to South Africa in 1895. He went to Philippolis in the Orange River Republic where his cousin Joseph provided him with a cart, horse and goods with which to *smous*. Philippolis was a farming community. Unfortunately Jacob's family was not with him. It had to be a difficult time.

During the Anglo-Boer War, the English confiscated Joseph's possessions, and Jacob, not a citizen, went to East London. After the war he returned to Philippolis, where the farmers too returned ruined with homes and stock destroyed. In short, they all struggled. Joseph Orkin left the area, leaving his shop to Jacob.

Jacob apparently was an austere man who worked diligently. Unfortunately he was not able to save enough to bring his family from Lithuania. The farming community had difficulty-pronouncing Nowesenitz and so the name was changed to Jacobson. Jacob learned the language and became a citizen of the Orange River Colony January 7, 1904. He was well respected in the community.

The farmer Andries Lubbe, who farmed Boesmanfontein a few miles from Philippolis, would often stop by and chat with Jacob. He always inquired when Jacob's family was arriving. Mr. Lubbe felt it was no way for a man to live. Money was tight with barter being a way of doing business. Jacob felt his family could come in a few years. The situation bothered Mr. Lubbe, who inquired about the cost of bringing the family.

One day in 1903 Mr. Lubbe came into the shop and waited until all the customers had gone. He again inquired about the cost of bringing the family to Philippolis. Jacob told him it was a sum he could only dream of. Andries Lubbe asked if one hundred fifty pounds would be enough. Jacob said it was, and Lubbe poured the golden coins over the counter. The money was repaid with interest. Later Jacob learned that Andries Lubbe had borrowed the money to give to Jacob.

Jacob's family arrived in August 1903. The family consisted of Riva and six children. They were Gertie, 22, Sarah, 19, Moritz 13, Cecilia, 11, and John 9 years old. Joseph, 16 years old had arrived a few months before. The family was together except for Louis.



The children grew, prospered and married, had children, and in the United States Louis' family also grew to eight children. One daughter Sophie died of TB in her late teens. The other children married and had children and so on. So there we were a family separated by an ocean and separate histories. I felt I had to find my family, and, now I have.

In March 2004 my husband and I traveled to Australia to meet my cousins, Naomi and Jack Fletcher and their children. They were marvelous and very helpful describing the family history. Much revolved around Philippolis. There was nothing else to do then but go and see for myself, and we did in August, 2004.

The town is small, and now a tourist location rather than a farm town, but even in winter charming with tree lined streets. It is a neat, well kept up place. Everyone we met was delightful and welcoming. But I felt I had to walk where my great-grandfather walked and see the countryside he saw. Fortunately I was able to do that and gain an appreciation of his life.

Philippolis is in the Free State, and in what we would describe as high desert, which is hot in summer and very cold in winter though it does warm up during the day. It is also rather dry. The area is predominantly farmland and golden in color. It is similar to parts of the American West, especially the area of northern New Mexico.

My great-uncle Moritz's store was built on the location of his father's store. Jacob's house was across the road from the store. When Moritz married he lived in a house not far from the church. The family gave the house to the town, and it is now the library.

The Jewish Cemetery is maintained by my cousin Leslie and is close by the town. My great-grandparents are buried there. Being there was a feeling of completion, of reuniting the circle of family. It was a cold and cloudy day when I was there, but it felt so right and at the same time so sad that the family had been separated for so long. The feeling of being with my cousins was not that of a stranger, but of belonging and as the song says, "we are family". I only wish the distance was not so great so we could continue visiting back and forth, but who knows what the future will bring.

We stayed with my cousins Alice and Leslie Jacobson. We originally met them in North Vancouver, B.C., when we visited with their daughter Sandra Cassel and her family. Sandy is a six-hour drive from Portland so we are able to visit easily. Benjamin, Alice and Leslie's son lives next to his parents with his family. The Jewish Community of Philippolis, i.e. the Jacobson family, bought the building where Laurens van der Post, the historian, writer and philosopher, was born and used it as a *schul*. A melamed was hired to teach the children, but after they had grown, the building was sold. Leslie and Benjamin are part of a small group of Jewish farmers in the area.

While we were in South Africa we attended my cousin Gavin's Bar Mitzvah in Bloemfontein. It was held in a small orthodox *schul*. The larger *schul* in Bloemfontein had been sold as the Jewish population of the town dwindled. Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft and Cantor Eric Wener officiated. They both travel around the Free State.

We then toured South Africa going to Cradock, then to a game reserve, Shamwari. One simply cannot go to Africa and not see animals, and it is a fabulous experience. We proceeded to Plettenberg Bay and from there to Cape Agulhas. We stayed in Swellendam and then in Stellenbosch. One of my cousins, Wilfred Jacobson, came over from Paarl and took us around the countryside. It was a fantastic day seeing wineries and vineyards. We had lunch in Hermanus and watched the whales. The viewing was somewhat better than our experience of whale watching in Oregon. We then went to Camps Bay and used it as our base to tour Cape Town and Sea Point.

Another cousin, Dr. Julius Jacobson, picked us up so we could visit the family in that area. When he drove up it was as if my Grandfather Louis had returned to life. They are of one face. One of the most amazing things of the entire trip is seeing the family resemblances. One person laughs like my brother, another looks like my aunt when she was that age, etc. It was an odd feeling yet comforting to say the least. We are part of a large chain of family.

South Africa was also amazing to us apart from the family. We did not know what to expect and the beauty of the country is breathtaking. We drove around and did a lot of tourist things, trying to

understand the country and our family's role in it and it was a remarkable experience. The Jewish Museum in Cape Town is a wonder with the life-sized recreation of a Lithuanian *shtetl*. Unfortunately the weather did not cooperate and we did not get to the top of Table Mountain, but one cannot do it all.

In summary, it was an honor and a privilege to walk where my ancestors walked and be reunited with my extended family. I only wish I had been able to do it sooner.

---

## **PLUNGYAN OF YESTERDAY AND PLUNGE TODAY**

*Abel Levitt*

*Abel and Glenda first visited **Plunge** in Lithuania in 1999 and have now visited Lithuania 8 times altogether. They originally come from South Africa and currently reside in Kfar Saba in Israel where they have lived for the past 27 years. They have a special bond with the shtetl of **Plunge** where they are involved in projects to preserve the memories of Jews who were murdered there many years ago. Amongst other things, they have established a **Tolerance Centre** in memory of Levitt family members who were wiped out in 1941.*

*Before their first trip, the Levitts had heard that Mendel Kaplan (the founder of the Kaplan Centre at the University of Cape Town), had visited Lithuania with a large group of people. They approached Mendel's cousin David who also lives in Kfar Saba and had participated in the trip. He gave them the name of a contact in Lithuania – a Joseph (Yossel) Bunka, the last remaining Jew in Plunge. Abel and Glenda have met Yossel, his wife Dina, their son Eugenijus, his wife Dana, and their families and have become close friends.*

*This is a letter they wrote to family and friends about their connections and involvement with **Plunge** today.*

Dear Family and Friends,

It has been a long time since I have written to you about our activities. This does not mean that we have been idle, nor that Glenda and I have lost our interest in, and work for the projects in **Plunge**. On

the contrary, our dedication to preserving the memory of the murdered Jews of Lithuania, and our determination to educate the young, and not so young Lithuanian people, has strengthened over the years. I am not sure where I left off last time I wrote, or what Glenda and I have told verbally to those whom we have met, whether in South Africa, in North America, in Australia, in Israel or anywhere else. I will therefore write about some of the highlights that we have enjoyed in the past year or two.

Things move rather slowly in Lithuania. A visit to a restaurant is a lengthy experience, and not infrequently, one has to go to the desk to ask for the bill. And so it is with many other aspects of life in the country. Eventually things get done, and well done, but it takes time to see the final result.

We were a little concerned with progress at the **Tolerance Centre**, established, as you well know, by the Levitt family, in memory of our kin who were wiped out in July 1941.

In July 2004 we visited **Plunge**. We were keen to participate in the Annual Memorial Service, held each year on the 3rd Sunday of July. I asked in advance if I could be amongst the speakers, and in order to prepare myself, we visited Yad Vashem, the Holocaust Memorial and Education Centre in Jerusalem.

We bought newly available material for the **Tolerance Centre**, and I became inspired with a quotation from the Book of Joel, which I used as the theme for my address. The message is one of teaching our children and their children of the catastrophe that befell our people. I stressed the brutality of the killers, Germans and Lithuanians, and the bravery of the Lithuanian Christians who, at great risk to themselves and their families, saved the lives of Jews. In the crowd who attended the gathering was Kazys Vitkevicius, who, as a boy of 14, saved Jewish children. He and his mother were honoured as Righteous amongst the Nations by the State of Israel. What an honour to be in the presence of this white-haired gentleman. My words were translated into Lithuanian by Mr. Bunka's grandson Mike.

After the service, the crowd gathered in the **Tolerance Centre**, which together with the **Kausenai Forest Mass Graves** is the centre for a

Jewish gathering in *Plunge* today. During this visit, we met with our now good friend Danute Serapiniene, one of the most highly motivated teachers in Lithuania who started teaching about the Holocaust nearly 10 years ago. We discussed her programme, her needs and her future plans. She had been given a computer by a local supporter, but as so often happens with used electronic equipment, the computer needed to be replaced which we did.

We paid a visit to the Kausenai Forest, a different picture from the green of the summer. The graves were covered in snow; there were a few stones on the Memorial and the remains of *Yahrzeit* candles that had been placed there by visitors saying their Kaddish. Previously it had been decided to plant 23 trees to honour the Lithuanian families of Plunge and the surrounding villages who helped save Jews during those savage days but Eugenijus has decided that rather than plant trees which would probably not survive, they will put plaques naming the families on 23 existing trees with a pathway for visitors which will lead from one tree to the next.

In October, finding a gap in our business lives, we again visited *Plunge*, and included a visit to London at the same time. We met with Neil and Susan Levitt, gracious in their hospitality, and spoke to several Levitts and told them of our activities. All expressed interest in a visit to Lithuania in 2006, 65 years since the events of July 1941. Upon arrival in *Plunge*, we learned that we had arrived on *United Nations Tolerance Day*. A pure coincidence, unplanned. We were asked to speak to the senior English class, and did so. I spoke about our family in Lithuania and their deaths, and Glenda spoke about living under the apartheid regime in South Africa.

We then attended the concert for the High School students, commemorating International Tolerance day. It was very moving. The finale, 4 teachers, accompanied by piano and guitar, sang a peace song in Hebrew. Just imagine the emotion, and the tears.

We also met some remarkable women in the village of *Alsedziai* which is not far from *Plunge*. Vanda, her daughter Rigonda and granddaughter Kristina have a family history of helping Jews. They are trying to restore the places of interest of former *Alsedziai* Jews, as well as maintaining the nearby mass grave where the women of the village, together with the children were shot in 1941.

*Alsedziai* is a small village, looking today very much the same as it probably looked in 1939. Vanda wants to buy the old Jewish school building in order to house the artifacts of Jewish life which she has collected.

Through our friend Eugenijus Bunka, son of Yossel, we have made contact with Mischa Belkindas, a Lithuanian Jew originally from *Alsedziai*, who lives in Washington with his father Velve. Mischa's mother was saved by Vanda's parents and thus survived the war. Mischa has kindly undertaken to assist in the purchase of the old Jewish school building in which Vanda, Rigonda and Kristina hope to accommodate the historical objects of Jewish interest.

### **Cape Town and other connections, Feb. 2005**

In February, as part of my 70th birthday celebrations, we visited South Africa. We enjoyed some notable "*Plungyan*" experiences which included a meeting with Selma Friedland and her son Peter, descendants of Notta Levitt's brother, a meeting with Alfred Zanger's sons Mark and Stephen Solarsh, meeting with Peter Machlup, our late cousin Ruth's son, a meeting in Cape Town with 2 generous members of the community, one with a *Plungyan* background, the other with roots in the neighbouring village of *Rietava*. Both were extremely interested to learn of our activities and promised financial support when a new project is launched, meeting with our friend Riva Tworetsky, although born in Cape Town, as knowledgeable as anybody in the world regarding *Plunge* demography and geography. What a gem! – and meeting in Cape Town with Myra Fortes, Jean Kiel and Marion, like Selma Friedland, descended from the Irish Levitt connection.

June 2005. Days before our visit of last week, I learned from Bunka that he was expecting a very important guest from Israel. The Judge President of Israel, Aharon Barak was due to visit Lithuania on an official visit, and that he was going to visit the *Kausenai Mass Graves* where his grandfather Feive Brik is buried. Now, those of you who have a connection with my great-grandmother, Riva Mira Lipschitz (Brik) will know that the Judge Barak's great-grandfather and Riva Mira Brik were brother and sister. With the help of my sister Meera, I contacted the secretary of the Judge, and sent him a note explaining who we were, and our *Plunge*

connection. A short while later she phoned and asked when it would be convenient for Glenda and I to visit him in Jerusalem.

We arranged a meeting and duly met the distinguished Judge Barak. We spoke freely for about 40 minutes, told him, as he had asked us to do, about the town of *Plunge*, and the work that we had done there. The following day I took him a collection of papers that we had about *Plunge* and a copy of Bunka's book. He had a very short visit in *Plunge*, met the mayor, went to the graves and visited Bunka and saw his work.

### Our latest visit

We arrived back in Israel last night after a remarkable journey. I had been through school with Ronald Horwitz. We were good friends, played sport together (we were knocked out of the Junior Doubles Tennis competition at Sea Point Boys' High in the semi-finals!), competed against each other in the Eisteddfod competition for Speech (he always won Gold, I sometimes won Silver), went to the 10th Green and Sea Point Cubs, he was Sixer of the Reds, I was Sixer of the Blues. We grew up together, never knowing that our fathers emigrated from the same *shtetl*. Yes. *Plunge*. Ronald went to study acting in London at the Royal Academy, took the stage name Harwood, and has become a world renowned writer, playwright and screen play writer. His most recent success was winning the Oscar for the best screen play of 2003 for the adaptation of the book *The Pianist*. His list of published work is very impressive, as are his accomplishments.

Ronnie has taken a keen interest in our work in *Plunge* and at the *Tolerance Centre*. We have an annual award in his name for a work with a theme of the Holocaust or Tolerance. Finding a gap of a few days in his busy schedule, he and his charming and beautiful wife of 46 years, Natasha, joined Glenda and me for a visit to *Vilnius*, *Kaunas* and *Plunge*. We were accompanied by the guide Regina Kopilevich, and her excellent driver Victor.

### Highlights of the Harwood Visit

- Visiting Yossel Bunka and his wife and seeing his collection of carvings
- Visiting the Mass Graves at *Kausenai* and lighting candles there

- Visiting the *Saules Gimnazija* in *Plunge* and addressing the senior school body on the making of the film *The Pianist* followed by a lively Q and A session
- Visiting the *Tolerance Centre* of the school and speaking to 4 of the senior students, hearing of their backgrounds, their wanting to learn more about the Holocaust, their wanting to spread a message of tolerance between peoples of different societies. On this visit, Glenda presented several gifts to the *Tolerance Centre*, gifts that were given on my 70<sup>th</sup> birthday included a Tallit from Glenda's sister Rolene Segal and her family, an inscribed wine goblet from our friends the Musikanth family here in Israel and a Hannukia from our children Ari, Mia, Sonya, Adam and their families.
- A meeting at the *Oginski Palace/Museum* for the *intelligentsia* of *Plunge*. The event, sponsored by the *Tolerance Centre* and in partnership with the *Oginski Palace* and the *Plunge* Museum was address by Ronald Harwood in English, superbly translated by Regina Kopilevich into Lithuanian. The meeting started with a pianist playing Chopin from the film *The Pianist* and concluded with Ronald answering several questions and stressing the bravery of those people who made the tough moral choice and saved Jews.
- A dinner given by Ronald and Natasha and ourselves for the Bunka family, the teacher Danute and her husband, the Director of the school, Juozas Milasius and his wife, Mr Alvidas Vitkevicius – son of the Righteous Vitkevicius and his wife Solveiga, Mrs Vanda Balandieva and her daughter Rigonda of *Alsedziai*. This was a tribute to the tireless work of the Bunka family and to those Lithuanians involved in honouring the memory of the lost communities of Jews. The role of the next generation of the Bunka family, in the person of Mike, the Bunka grandson who helped enormously in arranging the visit.
- A visit to the village of *Alsedziai*, close to *Plunge* to meet Vanda, Rigonda and her 17 year old daughter Kristina, all involved in trying to restore the places of interest of former Jews who lived there, and in maintaining the nearby mass

grave where the women of the village, together with the children were shot in 1941.

- Visiting the mass grave and lighting candles.
- Addressing about 100 pupils of the Sholem Aleichem School in *Vilnius*, followed by a Q & A session and answering countless requests for photographs with the celebratory visitor and his wife.

Missing from this grand visit was Eugenijus Bunka, who is in hospital recovering from heart surgery. The Harwoods and the Levitts visited Eugenijus, together with Regina at the Kaunas Hospital. He will be home soon.

To find out more about Yossel Bunka, see:

<http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/plunge/Plunge.html>

*Abel and Glenda Levitt can be contacted at alevitt@netvision.net.il*

---

## **19,234,000,000,000 BYTES**

*This article originally appeared in Nu? What's New?, the E-zine of Jewish Genealogy, Volume 6 Number 13, September 11, 2005. The Editor is Gary Mokotoff, and this is reprinted with permission.*

The focus of the South African discussions at the recent IAJGS Symposium on Jewish Genealogy, held in Las Vegas, in July 2005, was the SA-SIG Group meeting. There were relatively few attendees at the Symposium with strong South African interests, but in spite of this, the SA-SIG Group meeting was very well attended.

That is the amount of computer storage the Mormon Family and Church History Department (FCHD) says will be required for their planned digitized version of the 2.5 million rolls of microfilm in their possession. The rolls contain three billion frames of information about an estimated 12 billion people. If you are having trouble counting the zeros, the number is 19 quadrillion bytes.

This was just one of the many interesting comments made by David E. Rencher, Director of the Records and Information Division, and Jay L. Verkler, associate managing director of the Family and Church History Department, to the attendees of the

just-concluded annual conference of the Federation of Genealogical Societies held in Salt Lake City.

Converting the microfilm to digital images will take six years to complete and there are plans to place all these records on the Internet for public use. Rencher also stated that the Church is requesting the worldwide genealogical community to help index the records which also will be placed on the Internet as a new product called the FamilySearch Index. The indexing software that was demonstrated at the conference is based on the software the Church currently uses in its Extraction Program in which individual Mormons, under the direction of the Church, gather names for Temple ordinances such as posthumous baptism. The worldwide indexing effort will be completely independent of the Extraction Program.

I saw the indexing software demonstrated last April at the meeting of Mormon officials and representatives of Jewish organizations who met in Salt Lake City to discuss a resolution to the continual problem of posthumous baptism of Jews. The software is excellent. It is designed so that "little old ladies from Provo, Utah" can enter data in a manner that minimizes the risk of error. All data will be entered twice by two separate persons and the results matched to confirm its accuracy.

The implication to genealogy is staggering. It means genealogists from their home PCs will have access to the entire Mormon microfilm collection. When fully indexed, it might even trivialize the record searching aspect of genealogy, because it will now be possible to search for information about people independent of location. Rencher noted in one of his talks that genealogy today is primarily oriented by location/person. That is, you cannot find a record unless you know where the event took place. Today, if you want to locate the birth record on an ancestor on a Mormon microfilm, the first question is "where was s/he born?" With FamilySearch Index, the question need not be answered. It will be possible to search by name independent of location.

*Nu? What's New? is a bi-weekly Internet magazine published by Avotaynu providing information of interest to persons tracing their Jewish family history. For more information see: <http://www.avotaynu.com/nu.htm>*

## MEMORIES OF HABONIM IN PORT ELIZABETH DURING THE THIRTIES

*Phyllis Sachar (nee Bergman)*

Kibbutz Yisreel recently celebrated the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Habonim in South Africa which was outstanding. As there was nothing much about Habonim in Port Elizabeth, I decided to document my memories which unfortunately were too late for inclusion in the celebrations.

In 1933 Norman Lourie and his wife visited Port Elizabeth and established Habonim. There were 2 girls ***Gedudim*** – one was called ***Gdud Hanna*** and the other was ***Gedud Ruth***. I do not remember how many boys Gedudim there were. I was appointed ***Rosh Kvooz***.

We held our meetings at the Bennun's Den which they had built in their back yard and where all kinds of Jewish and Zionist activities were held. Three summer camps were held in Summerstrand – 1934, 1935 and 1936. Some of our ***madrichim*** were Louis Pincus, Colin Gluckman, Maili Donen, Ari Silberman and Sadie Kaplan ("Kappie") from Rhodesia. When I was older I became ***Sagan Rosh Gdud*** to Bessie Sacks (Wolozinsky) and later was appointed ***Rosh Gdud***.

Once a month we held a combined meeting with the boys ***Gdudim*** which was always very exciting. We held Chanukah concerts and celebrated the Chagim. Habonim played a great role in our lives.

On one of my many visits to Israel, I met Norman Lourie and we recalled those early days. I lived in Cape Town from 1946 and my 3 children – Jackie, Kenneth and Rachel were all members of Habonim. They attended various camps in the Western Cape (Simondium), until Onrust became the permanent camp site which we visited on "Open Day".

Today I live in Tel Aviv where I have been for 18 years.

---

## MENDELE MOCHER SFORIM – OUR ILLUSTRIOUS GRAND UNCLE

*Manfred Schwartz*



The father of Yiddish literature, **Mendele Mocher Sforim**, or **Mendele the Bookpeddler**, is the name of a character created by **Sholem Yacov Abramovich** (1836 – 1917) which then became the author's pen name. It is ostensibly **Mendele Mocher Sforim** who narrates **Abramovich's** stories.

I have been able to trace back five generations to **Sholem Yacov Abramovich**. My grandson **Torben**, is the youngest, and for the present, the last **Schwartz** descendant in this family (see Descendant Tree).

**Mendele Mocher Sforim** was born **Shalom Yacov Abramovich** in Kapulye (Kopyl near Minsk) in Lithuania. He became the principal of a Jewish School in Odessa. His first Yiddish story was published in 1864. As a boy he had the traditional exclusive religious Jewish education of the time as well as a difficult but interesting youth which provided him with much material for his later masterpieces.

He is credited not only for founding Yiddish Literature, but modern Hebrew Literature as well. A *Yeshiva* scholar, **Abramovich** immersed himself heavily into *Haskalah* following the death of his father. The young **Abramovich** began begging as a peddler on the streets of the Czar-imposed Jewish **Pale of Settlement**<sup>1</sup> where he met *maskil* **Abraham Baer Gottlober** – a leading Hebrew/Yiddish writer

of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century *Haskalah* or Jewish Enlightenment movement. He was tutored in the worldly subjects (Mathematics, Literature, Languages) by one of the learned daughters of **Gottlober**. He lived with them and eventually married one of his daughters. His early works were about social reform which he first published in Hebrew. His strong desire to be 'of use to his people' made him turn to Yiddish, the language of the Jewish masses of Eastern Europe.

After heavily influenced by the *Haskalah*, he transcended its didacticism to create a style and a modern literary language from both Yiddish and Hebrew – sufficient to earn him the title as founder of the modern literatures in both languages.

Eventually though, to appeal to the Yiddish-speaking masses, he created a persona for himself of **Mendele Mocher Sforim**, or "**Mendele, the Book Peddler**." The publication in 1864 of his first Yiddish novel *Dos Kleyne Mentshle* (The Little One), marks the beginning of the modern period in Yiddish Literature. Some other famous works include the following: *Fiske the Lamé, The Mare, The Travels of Benjamin, Shem and Japhet on the Train of Bygone Days*, et al.

His *Haskalah*-inspired stories like *The Magic Ring* and *The Meat Tax* were designed to be both educational and provocative, demanding the uplifting of his audience's minds towards better education, betterment, and eventually social action. **Mendele** faced a disillusionment when he finally realised the 'glass ceiling' that prevented Jews from rising too far in Russian society, and saw the limits that faced even an 'enlightened Jew'. After 1881, he ceased producing new Yiddish writing, and returned to Hebrew.

Although his dreams of social change seemed shattered, **Mendele** opened the door for the hundreds of writers to follow him. If **Shalom Aleichem** is the father of Yiddish Literature, **Mendele** is the grandfather. His satiric, driven style foreshadows the power and determination of future writers who grappled with similar issues.

## References

### 1. Pale of Settlement

**Catherine the Great** seized what was left of Polish Lithuania, so that Valinsk and many other villages

came under Russian rule. Czarist Russia's history of anti-Jewish policy gave the people of the *shtetlach* good reason to fear what the future might hold for them.

Indeed, **Catherine** faced a dilemma – what was to be done with the Jewish population, the largest in the world, now living within Russia's borders? Like other absolutist monarchs who annexed parts of Poland, Catherine soon realised the Jewish population, with its unique socioeconomic and religious traditions, would not be easily integrated.

To solve the problem, **Catherine** decreed the *Pale of Settlement*, a territory within the borders of Czarist Russia where the Jews were given authorization to live. The Pale remained in effect from 1791 until the Russian Revolution in 1917.

While this solution may have appeared satisfactory to **Catherine** and the Czars that ruled after her, it didn't do much to calm the fears of the Jewish population. Since the Pale's borders were always uncertain, expanding and contracting at the whim of its rulers, Jews lived at the edge of disaster. They never knew when a decree would come down ordering them to leave their homes.

Despite these uncertainties and shifting fortunes, many of the Lithuanian *shtetlach* within the Russian Empire managed to thrive. Indeed **Catherine the Great** and the warring aristocracy of Europe, lived in a world beyond their imagining, spiritually and materially remote from their daily lives and deep-rooted beliefs. Even pivotal historical events, like the American and French Revolutions, reached them only as distant echoes.

### 2. For more information about Mendele Mocher Sforim, see the following:

- <http://www.bartleby.com/65/me/Mendelem.html>
- <http://www.infoplease.com/ce6/people/A0832653.html>
- <http://www.encyclopedia.com/html/M/Mendelem.asp>
- <http://reference.allrefer.com/encyclopedia/M/Mendelem.html>
- <http://www.strugglingwriter.com/mendele.htm>
- *Encyclopedia Judaica* (See *Haskalah*, Yiddish Literature, Mendele Mocher Sforim)
- Microsoft® Encarta® Encyclopedia 2003. © 1993-2002 Microsoft Corporation. All rights reserved.



***Descendants of Moshe Tcherny***  
***(brother-in-law of Shalom Yacov Abramovich)***

*Note: The surnames of Tcherny, Cherney & Schwartz were the same but in different languages)*

<b>Moshe Tcherny</b>	1845
married <b>Pessa Merra Abramovitz</b>	
<i>(sister of Shalom Yacov Abramovich)</i>	
<b>son Abraham Leiba Movshavitch Schwartz</b>	1869 - 1960
<i>(nephew of Shalom Yacov Abramovich or Mendele)</i>	
married Deborah Podlashuc	1865 - 1945
<b>1<sup>st</sup> son Hyman Schwartz</b>	1895 - ?1970
<b>2<sup>nd</sup> son Alexander Cecil Schwartz</b>	1897 - 1977
married Gertrude Dorothy Ginsberg	1901 - 1980
<b>son Manfred Joseph Schwartz</b>	
married Nora Middelbeek-Warnecke	1922 -
<b>son Anthony Leo Schwartz</b>	1961 -
married Helga Wagner	1961 -
<b>son Torben Carl Anton Schwartz</b>	1993 -
<b>3<sup>rd</sup> son Harry Schwartz</b>	1910 - ?1990
married Frieda Goldberg	
<b>son Lester Schwartz</b>	1945 -
(He has 2 daughters & no sons)	



**ZADOK AND SARA BLUMA ZILBER**  
**Looking for Stories and Information of the**  
**Zilber/Silver Family, their Branches and**  
**Descendants**

*Dov Sidelsky*

It is likely that few people in the world would have heard of Zadok and Sara Bluma **Zilber** of **Musninkai**. Undoubtedly they were esteemed and respected by those who knew them in **Musninkai** and in the neighbouring towns of **Sirvintos** and **Gelvonai**, and even by a number of people in **Vilnius**. But what about their forefathers and descendants and their spouses? Some certainly rose to fame. Sara Bluma was the granddaughter of Rabbi Eliyahu Eliezer **Grodzensky** of **Sirvintos**, who was married to the daughter of Rabbi Yisrael **Salanter**. Rabbi Chaim Oizer **Grodzensky** was a regular visitor in their home.

Grunia, one of the daughters of Zadok and Sara married Eliyahu **Lewit**. Their elder son, Baruch **Lewit**, became a prominent physician in Haifa. Arie Leib **Lewit**, their second son, became a vet and one of the founders of the Tel Aviv zoo. Their daughter Tonia, married the famous Yosef Dov Halevi **Soloveitchic** of Boston (1903-1993) who was an orthodox rabbi, talmudist and modern Jewish philosopher who wrote *Halakhic Man* and *Halakhic Mind*. Their children are Prof. Haym **Soloveitchic**; Tovah who is married to Rav Aharon **Lichtenstein**, Rosh Yeshivah of Har Etzion; and Atarah who married Rabbi Prof Yitzhak **Twersky**. Rachel, Tonia's sister, married Prof Henry **Lisman**.

Other descendants and/or their spouses who achieved fame in different spheres of life include: Leah, another daughter of Zadok and Sara Bluma. She married Dov (Berel) Avraham **Berman**. Their two sons elder sons, Jack and Mannie **Berman**, joined the Allied forces up North (in Africa) during World War 11, and Charles **Berman**, the youngest son, fought in Israel's War of Independence. Their elder daughter, Goldie, became the commandant of the only Jewish Detachment of the South African Red Cross. Her husband, Lazer **Sidelsky**, became the mentor of the young Nelson Mandela, when he accepted him to serve articles in the law firm **Witkin, Sidelsky & Eidelman**. Mandela was to give recognition to **Sidelsky** after he became the State President of South Africa. Mannie's son,

Neville **Berman** became the captain of the Springbok hockey team.

One of the sons of Zadok and Sara Bluma was Yitzhak who married Masha **Slochinsky**. They had three sons: Louis, Alec and Solly **Silver**, who founded *Silver Motors* which became a successful public company listed on the Johannesburg Stock Exchange. Louis married Rivke (Becky) **Pokomunsky**, his first cousin, and their home in Saxonwold, Johannesburg, became the centre of the **Musninkai** clan.

### **Research**

Just after Rosh Hashanah 5762 – 2002, I received the original draft writings about the **Zilber** family from Giora **Lewit** of Ra'anana. His late sister, Ira, began the book together with Neville **Berman**. I soon decided that this would be a project to write not only about the family, but also about the history of the Jewish community of **Musninkai** up to its tragic destruction during the Holocaust.

Where was I to begin? Of course, first and foremost with members of family.

I began to interview family members and sent letters and e-mails to South Africa, England, USA, Australia and Israel.

I also began corresponding with individuals and institutions in Lithuania.

In December 2002 I sent two letters to Lithuania asking for further details about members of the family of Zadok and Sara Bluma **Zilber**.

My first letter was to the *Lithuanian State Historical Archives*. I received a reply that I would have to pay \$100 for an archives search. The money was sent and after a long wait, I received the information I had requested.

My second letter, to the *Town Council of Musninkai*, elicited a reply from an amazing woman in the town – an ethnographer who wrote to me about my grandmother's younger sister, Hana, who never left **Musninkai**. She married Leib **Lunin** and they had 3 children. Their elder son, Zadok, who joined the 16<sup>th</sup> Lithuanian Rifle Division, died fighting against Germans in the battle of *Siauliai*. The others were murdered by the Nazis and their collaborators together with the other Jews

of **Musninkai**. From the elders of the town, my correspondent found details of Hana and her family and even sent me a photograph of the Zilber **Lunin** house.

I also started corresponding with Maryte **Galvosiene**, the head of the **Muskinkai Secondary School History and Local Lore Museum**. Maryte does not know any English, and I had to correspond with her using the assistance of a translator.

Another place I looked for information was the **Vilna Gaon Museum** in **Vilnius** but I didn't find anything other than what is available on their website.

### Other Sources of Information and Pictures

The book, **Lithuanian Jewry it's History in Pictures**, published by Mossad Harav **Kook**, has some very good pictures of old **Sirvintos**.

After sending membership fee of \$75 to the **Balzekas Museum of Lithuanian Culture**, I received some old pictures of **Sirvintos**, **Gelvonai** and **Musninkai**. One of the photographs shows German troops in the main street of **Musninkai**. What a stark reminder of what happened to the Jews of the town and all the towns and cities of Lithuania during the Holocaust!

**Beit Hatefutzot** in Tel Aviv couldn't provide me with any pictures or information.

**The National Library of the Hebrew University and the Library of Yad Vashem**

In the book, **Yahadut Lita – Lithuanian Jewry**, I found some information about the one outstanding daughter of Zadok and Sara Bluma. *“The home of Henia Freida Pokomunsky served as a meeting place for the enlightened young people of the town (of Musninkai). This young woman, who had a scholarly knowledge of both Tanach and Talmud, served as a model mother in Israel, educating her five daughters in the spirit of Zionism and Hebrew. Her home had an influence on the surrounding areas. There the first Chalutz Garin was established and when its members went on aliyah, they joined the Gedud Ha'avodah.”*

The **JewishGen** website did not provide any pictures and only scant information on **Musninkai**. However, following a lead in the **JewishGen**

**Family Finder**, I came across the name of Milton **Gladstone**. At last I had “struck gold”, but not immediately; I had to “dig for it”. Milton told me that he had a cousin Tsilla in Jerusalem. I called her and when I mentioned that my grandmother's one sister, Hana, was married to Leib **Lunin**, she got very excited and said her mother often spoke of the **Lunins**. Later she called back to tell me that she had spoken to an uncle of hers who told her that her mother's sister, Rachel, was married to Shlomo **Lunin**, the younger son of Leib and Hana.

### People Researching the Towns of **Muskinkai**, **Sirvintos** and **Gelvonai**

There are at least 20 people listed as searching for information on the town of **Musninkai** on the **JewishGen Family Finder**. My research will help me to create a book not only about family, but also about the history of the Jewish communities of **Musninkai**, **Sirvintos** and **Gelvonai**. It will be a history with unique pictures, not to be found in any of the books of the *shtetls* of Lithuania.

*I call on all fellow Jews world-wide who have pictures or family records that will enhance this book to get in touch with me. In this way together we can add another invaluable chapter to the history of Am Yisrael.*

Dov Sidelsky  
2/10B Hai Taieb Street  
Har Nof  
Jerusalem 95405  
Israel  
[dovs1@netvision.net.il](mailto:dovs1@netvision.net.il)

### NAMES OF LITHUANIAN PLACES

OFFICIAL LITHUANIAN NAME	YIDDISH NAME
Gelvonai	Gelvan
Musninkai	Musnik
Siauliai	Shavel
Sirvintos	Shirvint
Vilnius	Vilna



***The Family Tree of Zadok Zilber & Sara Bluma***  
*(Four Generations)*

- 1 Zadok Zilber
- .. +Sara Bluma
- .... 2 Grunia Zilber
  - ..... +Eliyahu Lewit
  - ..... 3 Baruch Lewit
  - ..... 3 Rachel Lewit
  - ..... +Professor Henry Lisman
  - ..... 3 Arie Leib Lewit
  - ..... 3 Tonia Lewit
  - ..... +Yosef Dov Halevi Soloveitchic
  - ..... 4 Professor Haym Soloveitchic
  - ..... 4 Tovah Soloveitchic
  - ..... +Rav Aharon Lichtenstein
  - ..... 4 Atarah Soloveitchic
  - ..... +Rabbi Professor Yitzchak Twersky
- .... 2 Leah Zilber
  - ..... +Dov (Berel) Avraham Berman
  - ..... 3 Jack Berman
  - ..... 3 Mannie Berman
  - ..... 4 Neville Berman
  - ..... 3 Charles Berman
  - ..... 4 Goldie Berman
  - ..... +Lazer Sidelsky
- .... 2 Yitzhak Zilber
  - ..... +Masha Slochinsky
  - ..... 3 Louis Silver
  - ..... +Rivke (Becky) Pokomunsky
  - ..... 3 Alec Silver
  - ..... 3 Solly Silver

**JEWISH LIFE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN  
 COUNTRY COMMUNITIES, VOLUME 2**

A new 500 page book has been published – *Jewish Life in the South African Country Communities, Volume 2*. The book was co-authored by Adrienne Kollenberg, Rose Norwich, Joan Gentin, Phyllis Jowell, and David Saks. The photographs were collected by Joy Kropman, Yvonne Jawitz, Phyllis Jowell, Larna Bronstein, and a Cape Town sub-committee.

This significant and vital book which will be invaluable to both historian and genealogist alike, was researched by *The South African Friends of Beth Hatefusoth* – affiliated to *Beth Hatefusoth, The Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora* in Tel Aviv.

The areas covered in the book include the following communities:

<p><b>BOLAND</b>            Ceres            Clanwilliam            Franschoek            Gouda            Paarl            Prince Alfred Hamlet            Touwsriver            Tulbach            Wellington            Wolseley            Worcester</p> <p><b>BUSHMANLAND</b>            Brandvlei            Calvinia            Kenhardt            Loeriesfontein            Niewoudtville</p> <p><b>CENTRAL KAROO</b>            Britstown            Carnavon            Colesberg            De Aar            Fraserburg            Hanover            Hopetown            Middelburg            Noupoort            Petrusville            Philipstown            Prieska            Richmond            Strydenberg            Sutherland            Van Wyksvlei            Victoria West            Vosberg            Williston</p>	<p><b>FAIREST CAPE</b>            Somerset West            Stellenbosch            Strand</p> <p><b>GRIQUALAND WEST</b>            Barkly West            Douglas            Griquatown            Jan Kempdorp            Modderivier            Warrenton</p> <p><b>KALAHARI</b>            Kuruman            Mafikeng            Rietfontein            Taung            Upington            Vryburg</p> <p><b>KOUP</b>            Beaufort West            Lainsburg            Prince Albert</p> <p><b>NAMAQUALAND</b>            Garies            Klauer            Port Nolloth            Springbok            Vanrynsdorp            Vredendal</p>
--	---

If anyone is interested in purchasing a copy of this book, please e-mail the *SA Friends of Beth Hatefutsoth* at [museum@beyachad.co.za](mailto:museum@beyachad.co.za) or contact them in Johannesburg on 011-645-2598.

- If the book is purchased directly from their office the cost is R365
- Postage and packaging in South Africa – R30.50
- Postage and packaging to the USA add R146 for surface mail or R390,45 airmail
- Postage and packaging to the UK add R146,30 for surface mail or R297,90 airmail
- Postage and packaging to Canada add R115,10 for surface mail or R356,05 airmail
- Postage and packaging to Netherland add R144,30 for surface mail or R295,90 for airmail
- Postage and packaging to Australia add R115,10 for surface mail or R356,05 for airmail
- Postage and packaging to Israel add R152,20 for surface mail or R316,10 for airmail

### **THEO ARONSON AND THE ROYAL FAMILY**

Theo Aronson, from Kirkwood, Eastern Cape, died recently at his home in Somerset, England after a long battle with cancer. He was 73. He first met the Queen Mother as a boy in South Africa when she and King George VI were on their Empire tour. Thirty years later he was appointed official biographer to the ageing Princess Alice.

He was the author of numerous books on the Royal family. He was friendly with Princess Margaret, later the subject of a biography by him which she was unlikely to have found easy reading. Other royals who entertained him included the Queen's aunt, Princess Alice, Duchess of Gloucester.

See:

[http://www.theherald.co.za/herald/2003/05/14/news/n16\\_14052003.htm](http://www.theherald.co.za/herald/2003/05/14/news/n16_14052003.htm)

for more information about Theo, his life, his books and his involvement with the Royal Family.

**MEMBERSHIP IS NOW DUE TO JUNE**  
**2006**

**Subscription fees for the SA-SIG Newsletter are due.**

The Newsletter is published four times a year. An annual subscription (4 issues) costs US\$20, two years (8 issues) costs US\$35. The subscription year runs from **1 July of the current year to 30 June of the succeeding year**. Members joining during a year receive back issues.

The SA-SIG Newsletter is available in two formats:

- **A printed magazine-style format** which we will mail to you by post. There is a subscription fee to cover materials and mailing costs
- **An on-line PDF format** which you can download into your computer, read whenever desired and print on your printer. If you wish to be advised by e-mail when a new issue is available for downloading, then please send an e-mail request to Mike Getz at *MikeGetz005@comcast.net*

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

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

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

If you wish to subscribe and pay off-line by postal mail, a subscription form is available on the last page of this newsletter.

**SURNAMES APPEARING IN THIS**  
**NEWSLETTER**

*Vol. 6, Issue 1 – September 2005*

The numbers in brackets refer to the page numbers where the surname appears:

**Abramovich (3, 14, 16), Aronson (3, 20), Axel (3, 7), Balandieve (12), Baleson (2), Barak (11, 12), Belkindas (11), Bergman (14), Berman (17, 19, 20, 22), Brik (11), Bronstein (19), Bunka (10, 11, 12, 13), Cassel (9), Cherney (16), Cohen (2), Donen (14), Eidelman (17), Epstein (2), Fletcher (9), Fortes (11), Friedland (11), Galvosiene (18), Gavronsky (8), Gentin (19), Getz (2, 3, 4, 6, 21), Ginsberg (16), Gladstone (18), Gluckman (14), Goldberg (2, 7, 16), Gottlober (14, 15), Grodzensky (17), Harris (2, 4), Hart (2), Harwood (12, 13), Hodes (7), Horwitz (12), Issroff (2, 6), Jackson (2), Jacobson (7, 8, 9), Jawitz (19), Jowell (19), Kaplan (10, 14), Kiel (11), Kook (18), Kollenberg (19), Kopilevich (12), Kropman (19), Lerer Cohen (2), Levitt (3, 10, 11, 13), Lewit (17, 19), Lipschitz (11), Lisman (17, 19), Lourie (14), Lunin (17, 18), Machlup (11), Mendelssohn (3), Middelbeek-Warnecke (16), Milasius (12), Mokotoff (4, 13), Musikanth (12), Norwich (19), Nowesenitz (7, 8), Ogus (2, 3, 4, 6), Orkin (8), Pincus (14), Plen (2), Podlashuc (16), Pokomunsky (17, 18, 19), Rabinowitz (2), Sachar (3, 14), Sacks (14), Saks (19), Salanter (17), Sandler (8), Schwartz (3, 14, 16), Segal (12), Segall (2, 4, 6), Serapiniene (11), Sforim (3, 14, 15), Sidelsky (3, 17, 18, 19), Silberhaft (9), Silberman (14), Silver (12, 17, 19), Slochinsky (17, 19), Solarsh (11), Soloveitchic (17, 19), Tcherny (16), Twersky (17, 19), Tworetsky (11), Vitkevicius (10, 12), Wagner (16), Witkin (17), Wener (9), Wolozinsky (14), Zanger (11), Zilber (17, 18, 19)**

# SA-SIG Newsletter

## *Postal Subscription Form*

Subscription Manager: Mike Getz – *MikeGetz005@comcast.net*

The SA-SIG Newsletter is published four times a year and is despatched to subscribers by air mail. An annual subscription (4 issues) costs US\$20, two years (8 issues) costs US\$35. The subscription year runs from **1 July of the current year to 30 June of the succeeding year**. Members joining during a year receive back issues.

Please fill in your name, delivery address and other details and send it together with a US Dollar check/cheque payable to “SA SIG” and drawn on a USA bank account to SA-SIG Newsletter, 5450 Whitley Park Terrace #901, Bethesda, MD 20814, United States of America.

<b>Please enroll me for a subscription to the SA-SIG Newsletter</b> <b>one year, 4 issues, US\$20 <input type="checkbox"/> two years, 8 issues, US\$35 <input type="checkbox"/></b>	
Name and delivery address:	
Telephone, facsimile, e-mail (as applicable):	
Your informative replies, on a separate sheet, to as many of these topics as you are able would be appreciated:	
areas of interest	shuls
your ability to offer skills or time	movements
details of family names	cemeteries
towns being researched	archival and other resources
bibliography, especially about South African	suggested Newsletter topics
Jewry which you may have:	volunteers - to
1. towns	1. write, research
2. communities	2. assist with projects
3. organisations	3. assist with recruitment, etc.
<b>Printed name:</b>	
<b>Signature:</b> _____ <b>Date:</b> _____.	