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Southern African Jewish Genealogy Special Interest Group Newsletter

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

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

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

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

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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

I sit on New Year's Eve in freezing London, yearning for the wide open spaces of the Cape and the heat and the dust and times past. A grey, cold, and wet day. We South Africans are spread around the world.

One of the suggested projects is to try and map SA Jewish migration over the past 40-50 years. No one has come up with a credible methodology as to how this could be done. It is relatively easy in some key areas where the community is known and coherent but try thinking seriously about how this gets done in a New York, London, or Los Angeles? Ideas are welcome.

I would like to pay a personal tribute to Ivan Elion, the founder of the JGS in Johannesburg who died recently. Ivan was a pharmacist by training and even in his retirement continued to work for the Transvaal provincial health service. He was a man of many interests and skills. Genealogy was but one of these. He made jewellery and was a passionate gardener, knowing and identifying many plants by their Latin names. He devoted a lot of time and energy to genealogy and succeeded with some help in building up an active society with regular programmes of meetings and also editing the newsletter, *Yichus*. He will be deeply missed. We wish his children and his partner, Evelyn, long life and deepest sympathy.

Saul Issroff

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EDITORIAL

The September issue of the Newsletter contained an article by Manfred Schwartz about his ancestor, **Mendele Mocher Sforim**. One of our readers has taken exception to the fact that I did not check the correct spelling of some Yiddish words before publishing this article. According to this reader, the *YIVO* system of Romanization for Yiddish words should have been used and the correct spelling should be **Mendele Moykher Sforim**, the nom de plume of **Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh**.

He goes on to say that the *YIVO* system for Yiddish words follows established rules and if not adhered to actually denigrates the Yiddish language. The standards *YIVO* developed for Yiddish orthography or spelling, and for the transliteration of Yiddish into English are the most commonly used – see the following website: *What is Yiddish?*

<http://www.yivoinstitute.org/yiddish/yiddish.htm>

Adam Yamey, a name familiar to regular readers of this Newsletter, has provided another story about his family – this time about a Jacob Seligmann. The places he mentions in his article – Barkly East, Rouxville, Lady Grey and Aliwal North – probably had substantial Jewish families around the second half of the 19th century and probably employed rabbis, *dayanim*, reverends, cantors, *shochtim*, and *mohelim*, but it is unlikely any remain today. Adam’s account of the lives of his family during this time, give us an insight into the early history of these communities.

On Sunday, 11 September, about 100 people attended the opening of a new *shul* in Somerset West. The Ark, *bimah*, and some of the windows from the old *shul* were moved to this new *shul*. The choir from the Marais Road *shul* gave a superb performance and the dedication to the *shul* was given by the Chief Rabbi, Dr Warren Goldstein. Information about this joyful event is included in this Newsletter

In previous issues of the Newsletter, people have provided articles and information about Woodstock and Salt River, neighbouring suburbs of Cape Town, which once had thriving Jewish communities. In the very first issue (January 1999), Mike Getz, who is on the SA-SIG Board and an ex-resident of Woodstock, provided an article about his memories of growing up in Woodstock.

In this issue we have provided another article by Mike Getz about growing up in Woodstock. This article appeared in a local Woodstock publication – *The Woodstock Whisperer* – as well as in a publication of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies.

Woodstock and Salt River, like so many other communities, were home to many Jewish families in the past, but not today. By the late 1950’s families from the Woodstock and Salt River communities were moving to the suburbs of Vredehoek, Oranjezicht, Sea Point, Claremont, Kenilworth, Bantry Bay, etc.

A new contributor to the Newsletter, Zvi Pantanowitz, has provided an article which reflects on 75 years of *Habonim*. Zvi, originally from Klerksdorp, married Dorothy Segal and went on *aliya* in 1960. He and Dorothy have 3 children and 8 grandchildren and now live in Zichron Yaacov after living in both Jerusalem and Kibbutz Yizreel.

Another new contributor to the Newsletter, Alec Charlson, has done some research into the premature death of his Uncle Alex Charlson, who died tragically in an accident in Boksburg in 1914.

The South African Jewish Museum which is located in Cape Town, has launched a new website which enables people to submit their family trees as well as photographs and family history. For more information about this site, see page 21.

I would like to wish all our readers a Happy Chanukah.

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OUR FRIEND AND FOUNDER

IVAN

Mo Skikne, a member of the Jewish Genealogical Society Johannesburg (JGSJ) and editor of the Society’s newsletter Yichus, pays tribute to Ivan Elion, the founder and Chairman of the Johannesburg Jewish Genealogical Society, who died in Johannesburg recently.

It is with very great regret and sadness that I have to announce the passing of the Jewish Genealogical Society Johannesburg founder and Chairman, Ivan Elion.

Ivan died on Wednesday, 26 October 2005. His funeral was held on Friday, 28 October, at Westpark Cemetery.

I for one deeply regret his passing as I absolutely loved his zany sense of humour, the way he fussed about the JGSJ, and being a stickler for correct procedures. May he be a “*Gutte Better*” for his family and us who counted him as a friend.

Mo Skikne

JACOB SELIGMANN **IN THE ORANGE FREE STATE**

Adam Yamey

This article was originally published in FAMILIA – the Quarterly Journal of the Genealogical Society of South Africa, Year 42, 2005, No. 1, pages 40-53, and is reprinted here with permission.

In the early part of the second half of the 19th Century, a number of people left Ichenhausen in Bavaria to seek their fortune in and around the small town of Rouxville in the Orange Free State, the Southern African Boer Republic. Many of them were related to each other by matrimony or by blood (by sharing a common ancestor, Jakob Seligmann of Ichenhausen¹: see Figure 1). Most of these migrants either stayed in Africa or retired to Germany after making their fortunes. My mother's paternal grand-uncle Sigmund Seligmann (1856-1939) was one of these pioneers. He came out to Rouxville in 1874, and after working there for two years, he moved to Lady Grey, then, later, to Barkly East where he opened his own business in 1885. This was very successful: he retired to Germany in the late 1890s after having transferred the running of his business to some of his nephews, including my mother's father, Iwan Bloch (1886-1931)². Sigmund's brother Jacob³ Seligmann (1846-1900), also from Ichenhausen, differed from his relatives in that after spending some time in Africa he moved to the USA⁴. This essay tries to determine his story.

Jacob went to South Africa following in the footsteps of his cousin Henry Bergmann⁵ (1831-1866) who was probably the earliest of Jakob Seligmann's descendants to migrate to South Africa. In 1849 Henry arrived in Cape Town where he joined the recently established firm of Mosenthal Brothers. Besides developing commerce within South Africa the Mosenthal brothers⁶ were responsible for bringing many German Jews into the country⁷. Henry Bergmann⁸ and Julius Mosenthal jointly directed a branch of the Mosenthal business located in Aliwal North, including the local branch of the company's bank. Aliwal is a small border town on the southern (Cape Colony side) bank of the Orange River. This river formed the frontier between the British Cape Colony and the independent Orange Free State. In common with a number of Henry's younger relatives⁹, Jacob

Seligmann went to the neighbouring town of Rouxville.

Rouxville¹⁰ lies in the southeastern corner of the Orange Free State (see Figure 2). It is the first town reached in the Orange Free State after leaving Aliwal North in the Cape Province (formerly the Cape Colony). It is 34 kilometers north of Aliwal. In 1863 mail from the Cape Colony to the Orange Free State was directed via Zuurbult Farm due to irregularities at Aliwal North. In that year Petrus Wepenaar founded a town on this farm's land, and named it Rouxville in honour of Rev. Pieter Roux, a peripatetic Christian clergyman. Then Rouxville was a centre servicing the local cattle and sheep farmers, as it is today. It became, in the late 19th century, the most important settlement in this corner of the Orange Free State and a seat of government for the district¹¹. The town still exists. It had a deserted feel about it when I visited the place briefly in 2003.¹²

In a history of Rouxville¹³, probably the only detailed history that has ever been written of the town, the following are named amongst its prominent early citizens: "Leopold Reichenberg" and "J. Seligmann". As I cannot be completely certain that the latter was my relative Jacob Seligmann, I will refer to him as "J. Seligmann" when describing what is written about him in the aforementioned history¹⁴. Leopold Reichenberger¹⁵ (born 1846, in Ichenhausen) was known also as Leopold Reichenberg¹⁶. Leopold arrived in South Africa and in 1873¹⁷ married Henry Bergmann's niece Mathilde Rosenfels¹⁸ who was a first cousin once removed of Jacob Seligmann. Jacob married the year before. In November 1872 he married Hendrina Carolina Hendrikse in Rouxville¹⁹. His bride was the daughter of a clergyman in Graaf Reinet. The town of Rouxville was established officially in 1863, but it took a number of years to become the seat of a Magistrate (*Landdrost*). The reason for this delay was opposition by the neighbouring town of Smithfield, some miles north of Rouxville across the Caledon River. One of the reasons given by Rouxville for wanting its own Magistracy was the difficulty of getting criminals to trial when the River Caledon was in spate. In 1869 the town of Rouxville sent its first petition to obtain its own Magistracy to the *Volksraad*²⁰. Leopold Reichenberg was among its 108 signatories²¹. A second petition, containing 60 signatures, followed the first, and was written by Leopold Reichenberg

in 1870²². Reichenberg's petition included the information that already in 1870 Rouxville could boast of having three shops, a bakery, a slaughterhouse and two hotels with bars, and there were plans for much more growth²³. After Rouxville had been granted a Magistrate, a committee of burghers was set up to advise this dignitary. The committee whose role was to ensure the execution of the town's regulations included: "*Heemraad*²⁴ Leopold Reichenberg" and "J. Seligmann". From its founding on the land of Zuurbult farm, which was originally established as a Church farm, until 1876 the town of Rouxville was run by a Committee of Management, which was independent of the Church. Between 1873 and 1876 the Church purchased all rights of management of the town from this Committee. "J. Seligmann", vested with Power of Attorney, acted as a seller to the Church of the rights and claims of the Committee on the town, built on this farm²⁵.

Both Jacob Seligmann and Leopold Reichenberger eventually left Rouxville. Leopold Reichenberg (before 1881) retired to Germany²⁶. He had been a popular figure amongst the Afrikaner people in Rouxville.²⁷ Jacob Seligmann did not return to Europe but to Illinois in the USA²⁸. He with his Afrikaner wife, and their four children crossed the Atlantic soon (less than two years) after the time that their youngest child was born. Jacob's family appears in the 1880 US Federal Census²⁹. It will probably never be known for certain why Jacob Seligmann and his family left South Africa for the USA instead of going back to Europe. During the Second Anglo-Boer War (1899-1902) most of the official records kept in Rouxville were destroyed³⁰, but some documents were preserved elsewhere, in the National Archives of South Africa (NASA), and these offer a possible explanation for Jacob's departure to the USA.

On the 9th of October 1878, the *Gouvernements Courant*, a newspaper published in Bloemfontein, the capital of the Orange Free State, reported a jailbreak in Rouxville³¹. Sometime during the night of the 5th of October and the early morning of the next day someone called Jacob Seligmann escaped from the jail at Rouxville. A "wanted" notice was published in the same issue of this newspaper, both in Dutch and in English. It read,

"WHEREAS PRISONER JACOB SELIGMANN, charged with the crime of

FORGERY and FRAUD, did, in the night of the 5th and 6th of October, 1878, escape out of the Prison at Rouxville, with the assistance of one or more persons, Notice is hereby given, that a REWARD OF TWENTY-FIVE POUNDS STERLING will be given"

Two rewards of £25 each were offered: one for the capture of Seligmann, and the other for the capture of those who aided him in his escape. The Free State authorities were concerned that Jacob Seligmann would try to escape from the Republic. On the 10th of October an unsigned letter was sent from Bloemfontein to Natal, the neighbouring British colony. It was addressed to no less a person than the Lieutenant Governor of Natal, His Excellency Sir Henry Bulwer, KCMG³². The letter begins by telling that a copy of the warrant of Seligmann's arrest was attached, and it continues,

".... Jacob Seligmann who was sentenced by His Honour, the Chief Justice, at the Circuit Court at Rouxville, on the 27th May 1878, to three months imprisonment, which time has since expired.

"After that conviction other charges have been brought against him, for which he was to have been tried at the Circuit Court to be holden on the 21st of November next, and for which he was to be detained in prison."

The letter ends by informing the reader that Seligmann had defrauded³³ several persons of a large amount of money. By the 15th or 16th of October, ten days after Jacob had escaped from prison, the police authorities in Natal were alerted to look out for the escapee. Photographs of Seligmann, sent from Bloemfontein, were distributed. These pictures have been lost from the files kept in the South African Archives. In November 1879, authorities in Natal drafted a letter³⁴ to the Home secretary of the Orange Free State, reporting on the efforts made to apprehend Seligmann, all of which were in vain. A letter, dated 20th November 1879, was sent from the Government Office in Bloemfontein to the Colonial Secretary in Pretoria in Natal. It includes the following,

"I am directed by the President to thank your Government for all the trouble taken in the case of Seligmann"

From the tone of this and related correspondence, it seems likely that the escaped prisoner Jacob Seligmann was never recaptured.

None of the documentation that I have seen can be used to determine conclusively whether or not the escaped prisoner Jacob Seligmann was also my mother's paternal grand-uncle bearing the same name. One clue as to the identity of the escapee can be found his description that was issued, in Dutch, in the *Gouvernements Courant*, dated 9th October 1878. A translation of this, written by the *Landdrost* of Rouxville, exists amongst the correspondence sent from Bloemfontein to Natal. One part of this read,

"Nationality, a German Jew About 32 to 35 years of age...."

The description ends rather unflatteringly by stating that Seligmann has,

"... long thin fingers with very long nails of which he seems to be very proud and is frequently or rather invariably cleaning and dressing them with a knife or suchlike when speaking to one."

My relative was born in Germany in 1846, and was born Jewish. This means that in 1878 he would have had his 32nd birthday. This is compatible with, but is not conclusive proof that, the escapee was my relative. It is possible that there was more than one Jacob Seligmann in Rouxville in 1878³⁵.

The National Archives of South Africa contains a ledger³⁶ listing all the payments, made in Rouxville during the period late 1871 until December 1875 inclusive, for revenue stamps of various kinds, and by whom they were paid. The name "Seligmann" appears frequently from February 1874 onwards, and, with two exceptions³⁷, in one of two forms: "J. Seligmann" and, less often, "Jacob Seligmann". Sometimes both forms appear on the same page. It may have been that amongst the stamp buyers in Rouxville there were two J. Seligmann, one called Jacob, the other with a now unknown forename. However as J. Seligmann and Jacob Seligmann together seem to have bought more stamps than anyone else in the ledger, it is likely that the clerks who made the entries in the ledger frequently shortened "Jacob" to "J." when making an entry for Seligmann. What is much less likely is that there

were two men in Rouxville named Jacob Seligmann both German Jews, and both aged 32 to 35 years.

When the escapee Jacob Seligmann was on the run, the authorities in Bloemfontein were concerned that he may have been trying to leave the country. Bearing in mind that Rouxville was a frontier town, very close both to Basutoland (now called Lesotho) and to the Cape Colony, the letter from them contains the following,

"It is supposed that Jacob Seligmann has gone though Basutoland to Durban with the intention of embarking from there to Australia or America."

There is a file³⁸ that may throw light on the reason for the imprisonment of the person in Rouxville who bore the name, Jacob Seligmann. I found this in the Orange Free State archives (now kept as part of the National Archives of South Africa). It contains documents, which are dated June 1877 to May 1881 and has the title *Insolvente Boedel van Jacob Seligmann (gedwongen Sequestratio): District Rouxville*. In English this reads, "Insolvent Estate of Jacob Seligmann (compulsory Sequestration): Rouxville District". On 28th June 1877 the High Court of Justice of the Orange Free State ordered the sequestration of Seligmann's assets following the issue of a bankruptcy against him by F. A. Hamelberg acting on behalf of N. Adler and Company of Port Elizabeth. Mr. Charles Orpen³⁹ of Smithfield was appointed as trustee of Seligmann's assets. Seligmann was issued a "Notice of Attachment" at Rouxville on 6th July 1877. This was written both in Dutch and English. As its content is pertinent to this story, here it is in full (with punctuation as I found it),

"Jacob Seligmann take notice that I have taken the goods in the attached inventory by notice of an order signed by Albertus P de Villiers, as acting Master of the Insolvent Chamber in the Orange Free State, dated Bloemfontein 28 June 1877 for the compulsory sequestration thereof: and that any person who knowingly the same to have been so attached shall dispose of remove conceal, or remove the said or any part thereof with intent to defeat the said attachment is liable on conviction of such offence to be transported for any period not exceeding seven years or to be imprisoned with or without hard

labour for any period not exceeding five years ...”

An inventory followed, and includes what seem to be mostly household effects. Amongst these are listed 2 children’s bedsteads. Also present was one baby’s cradle. A second inventory was drawn up in September 1880. It consists of a long prose preamble followed by an inventory containing of a list of correspondence books and ledgers (including a books with entries dating back to 1866) relating to Jacob Seligmann’s business activities. The preamble contains a brief reference to Jacob Seligmann’s escape from prison. This refers to these books as having been left behind,

“... door Jacob Seligmann toen by uit de tronk al daar vlugte ...”

Which, translated, means, “... by Jacob Seligmann when he fled from the prison ...”. By December 1880 the decision to distribute Seligmann’s assets, in more than one instalment, to his creditors had been taken by the High Court of Justice. By April 1881, it appears that Seligmann’s estate had been ‘wound up’. This is recorded in a note written in Smithfield, dated 14th April of that year, to which is appended the following handwritten comment, which, in translation, reads,

“It was the least of my thoughts that I had to work on the Estate of Jacob Seligmann again. Earlier in Rouxville I had enough to do with him, but this ‘Jacob’ who comes to the fore is unforgettable in the history here in Rouxville.”

I have found three instances in which the name Jacob Seligmann is associated with Rouxville: (1) as a member of my extended family, (2) as a jail-breaker in 1878, and (3) as a bankrupt in 1877. Is there any connection between any of these? The escapee, Jacob Seligmann, was of an age and origin not incompatible with having been my relative. The US Census of 1880 contains information that Jacob Seligmann, with his South African wife and four children were living in Illinois. The Census entry for the family notes that all four of his children were born in Africa. As the youngest of these children was two years old in 1880, it would seem that Jacob’s wife and children must have left South Africa between 1878 and 1880. A warrant⁴⁰ for the arrest of a Jacob Seligmann, issued on the 12th

November 1878 in Pietermaritzburg, Natal contains the following,

“... Jacob Seligmann, charged with the crime or offence of Forging or uttering⁴¹ a Forged Security.”

This is suggestive that the escapee had been accused of, but not yet found to be guilty of, some crime of a financial nature. In the documentation dealing with the assets of Jacob Seligmann there is the warning, quoted above, that attempting to interfere with the contents of the assets, sequestered as a consequence of this bankruptcy, led to a selection of harsh penalties. So if the escapee was indeed the bankrupt, it is easy to understand why escape was an attractive option for him. From what I know of my mother’s grand-uncle’s family, Jacob had two children born before 1877 and one whose date of birth was 1877. The inventory drawn up in 1877 includes two children’s bedsteads and one baby’s cradle. One interpretation of this is that the inventory listed the bedding for my relative’s children. Based on this bit of evidence there is reason to begin to suspect that the bankrupt was my relative. The mention, in the note attached to the second of the inventories of the assets of the bankrupt Seligmann, of flight from prison, as well as the comment, made later, that Jacob was unforgettable in the history of Rouxville suggests that the escapee and the bankrupt were the same person. Putting this together it may be reasonable to hypothesize that my relative Jacob Seligmann, having been accused of trying to defraud the bankruptcy court, escaped from prison, and fled to the USA.

It has been suggested to me that my mother’s grand-uncle may have left Rouxville for war related reasons. In the late 1870s there was warfare in South Africa, mostly minor border skirmishes, but there is evidence that Rouxville was not badly affected by this⁴², so I doubt that this was the cause of his exodus. If we assume, and I must emphasize that this is an assumption, that my hypothesis is correct and that Jacob Seligmann left South Africa because of serious complications of a personal financial nature, then he was not alone in his family to have been in this kind of situation. Jacob’s cousin Henry Bergmann, who was a pillar of the community in Aliwal North, had made some poorly judged speculation, which left him £5000 in debt. His particular solution to this dilemma was to take his own life⁴³. There is evidence, which I have

described earlier, that Jacob Seligmann, like Henry, may have held positions of trust, but in Rouxville. We will probably never know what miscalculation damaged Jacob's business strategies and led him to bankruptcy. Was it his ineptitude, or was he the victim of others who were more ruthless than he was? Rural South Africa, in the 1870s, was, like the Wild West, a savage place with a frontier mentality where people felt that anything was possible, if they could get away with it. As a fellow migrant from Ichenhausen, Isaac Gundelfinger, put it,

*"Be quite careful in this country and do not rush, do not spill water you do not yet possess."*⁴⁴

And possibly anticipating the liberation of the mind that new arrivals might have felt when arriving in a new continent, he picturesquely cautioned that common sense should not be abandoned,

*"... do not dream that roasted doves fly into one's mouth here. The world is round and it is the same everywhere, here as well as elsewhere."*⁴⁵

Along with his wife and three young children Jacob Seligmann was, as a result of the sequestration order, deprived of everything that his family would have required to live. Did he attempt to rescue some of his effects, not, as was alleged, in an attempt to defraud his creditors, but merely in order to survive? Did he feel that he had been unfairly accused and/or that, for some reason he was unlikely to receive a fair trial⁴⁶? Or did pioneers like him and his cousin take risks in South Africa, which they would have been loath to take in the more constrained environment of their homeland, Germany? We will probably never know. Despite the relatively recent emancipation⁴⁷ of Jews in Bavaria, the migrants to South Africa, in which new traditions and social constraints had yet to be developed amongst the European settlers, must have felt a greater sense of freedom there. In Germany even after the enfranchisement of the Jews, they lived in an atmosphere of prejudice and circumscription by tradition. South Africa was a new country in which there was little or no hostility toward the Jews and they encountered an atmosphere of much greater freedom of action. Freedom can 'go to the head', and lead to unusual behaviour. As the singer Janis Joplin, put it,

*"Freedom is another word for nothing left to lose."*⁴⁸

NOTES

1. 1775-1842.
2. Iwan Bloch arrived in South Africa in 1903. He succeeded some of his older nephews as director of his uncle's firm a few years later.
3. Jacob was most likely known as "Jakob", but to avoid confusion with his grandfather Jakob, I have chosen to anglicize his name.
4. Jacob Seligmann was one of the 18 children of Isak Rafael Seligmann (1813-1870), the only son of Jakob Seligmann. On the Seligmann family tree, "*Die Nachkommen des Jakob Seligmann*", drawn in 1933, and revised in 1966, by Reinhold Seligmann, the son of Jacob's brother Sigmund, there is the following note, in German, next to Jacob's name, "*1846-1900. Rouxville (Süd Afrika) dann Chicago*".
5. Henry was a son of Jakob's daughter Klara (1807-1884) who was a sister of Jacob's father Isak Rafael Seligmann. Klara married Lazarus Bergmann from Dittenheim.
6. Gabriel Kilian came from Germany to Cape Town in the early 1830s and opened a branch there of the Frankfurt based commercial firm, Kilian and Stein, of which he was a partner. In 1839 Joseph Mosenthal, from Kassel, arrived in Cape Town and joined Kilian and Stein as a clerk. In 1848 with several of his brothers who had come out to the Cape from Germany, they together established the firm of Mosenthal Brothers. For more detail, see, "*A History of the Jews in South Africa*", by Louis Herrman, publ. by The South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Johannesburg: 1935. The innovation of Mosenthals' was the provision of transport and storage, which facilitated the hitherto impossible trade between the remote interior of the country and large commercial centres such as Cape Town. In so doing they increased the geographical extent of the markets for the produce of the rural farmers. The Mosenthal firm,

"... set up a nexus of trading-houses that extended over all the eastern and midland farming districts and well into the Orange Free State." (See Herrman, page 209.)
7. See page 303 of *The Jews in South Africa* (by G. Saron and L. Hotz, publ. by Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1955),

"...the Mosenthals brought from Germany a considerable number of their co-religionists who settled in various parts of the Colony, and like them showed a keen aptitude for business"

Furthermore,

“The Mosenthals and their industrial and commercial activities were the means of introducing into South Africa nearly half the Jewish families who came to this land between 1845 and 1870.” (See Herrman , page 216.)

8. Henry Bergmann was an important businessman. (In the 1857 volume of *Cape of Good Hope Almanac*, published by J. Noble and Vand de Sandt: Cape Town, the following is written in the entry for Aliwal North, “*Messrs. Mosenthal, Bergmann and Co. have also a very extensive business establishment*”). He was also a member of the Divisional Council and on the town’s Immigration Board. (See 1857-1862 volumes *Cape of Good Hope Almanac*.) His brother Ludwig (1835-1893: Ludwig’s dates are from his Death Certificate: see National Archives of South Africa (NASA): VAB /MHG/ 01 /B1/486, 1893.) settled in Rouxville. By 1860 Ludwig was living in neighbouring Smithfield (see NASA: KAB/MOOC/7/1/286/01/97/1, 1860).
9. A brief note about other related migrants to Rouxville.
Leopold Reichenberg had a nephew, Jacob (1869-1940) later known as ‘Jack’, son of his brother Gerson. According to Ernest Kallmann, a descendant of the Reichenberger family, Jack came to South Africa in 1885. He lived, amongst other places, at Bekker’s Kraal, near Rouxville, until about 1894. His first job was in the business owned in Rouxville by Julius Rosenfels (1859-1906), the brother-in-law of Leopold Reichenberger. Two brothers of Julius Rosenfels also came to South Africa: Jakob (1855-1906) and Max (1862-1944).
Jacob was a speculator and played for high stakes: his fortunes waxed and waned. Julius and Jakob both retired to Germany (Julius Rosenfels closed his business in Rouxville in 1891, and Jacob returned to Augsburg in about 1893/4). On his return to Germany Jacob became a *Privatier* and was also the Honorary Consul for the Transvaal and the Orange Free State.
Max left Rouxville on a trading trip with Thomas Meikle, an early European pioneer in S. Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) and was persuaded by Meikle to settle with his family in Bulawayo. In 1894 Max brought his wife and three month old baby into Rhodesia by ox wagon. Many of his descendants still live in Zimbabwe, despite having been dispossessed of their farms by the regime of Robert Mugabe. In 1994 when the family wanted to celebrate the centenary of their arrival in the country by staging a 20 mile trek in ox wagons along the route taken by their forefather, Max, they faced major opposition from the local authorities, who said, “*If they went ahead it would be a declaration of war and they will profusely regret their racist attitude and misguided*

action”. Not wishing to offend, the family abandoned this plan (see <http://www.anc.org.za/anc/newsbrief/1994/news0612>).

10. Current African name: Role-Lea Thunya (see <http://www.letsatsigamelodge.co.za/places.htm>).
11. Information about Rouxville’s history from <http://www.xhariep.co.za/towns.htm#rou>
12. Other people, with whom I have spoken, including Harold Hodes, agree with my assessment of the place.
13. *Eeufees Gedenkboek van die Suidoostelike Vrystaat*, by Prof. Dr. C. J. Uys. Publishing details not known. Madeleine Joubert, the curator of the Aliwal Museums in Aliwal North, has kindly translated relevant excerpts of this book, written in Afrikaans. Simon du Plooy, of Potchefstroom, whose great grand uncle was also a prominent early citizen in Rouxville in the 1870s, sent me digital scans of some of the pages of this book.
14. According to information from Thys du Preez, there were only two J.Seligmann in South Africa, the other being Julius Seligmann who lived in the Cape Colony. This Julius may well have lived for some time at Lady Grey where he was made bankrupt in 1861 (See NASA: KAB/MOIB/2/1173/f.367 1861-1867).
15. Leopold Reichenberger was a younger brother of Lazarus (Ludwig) Reichenberger (1835-1909) who came to South Africa in 1855 and was a business partner of Henry Bergmann in Aliwal North. For evidence that Ludwig Reichenberger was in partnership with Henry Bergmann see, for example, NASA: KAB/CSC/2/2/1/140/01/24/1, 1861. This document relates to an action in 1861 to recover a debt. The following was written, “*Henry Bergmann and Ludwig Reichenberger trading at Aliwal North under the style of H. Bergmann & Co*”
16. Many members of the Ichenhausen family called Reichenberger shortened their name to Reichenberg (information from Ernest Kallmann).
17. The marriage was celebrated in Port Elizabeth, South Africa. Information from copy of Marriage Certificate, kindly provided by Harold Hodes, a Reichenberg descendant.
18. In this way the Ichenhausen families of Reichenberger and of Seligmann were united in Rouxville not merely by business but also by matrimony.
19. The marriage process began with the issuing of a Special Licence in Bloemfontein in October 1872. It was concluded in Rouxville on 14 November 1872. The wedding was officiated by BO Leitson in Rouxville, with H.Hendrikse and F. Hellman as witnesses. (Information from Johan Pottas who

extracted it from a database of all the Mariages in the Free State, compiled by Niel Botha of Bloemfontein.)

20. Volksraad: House of Assembly of the Orange Free State.
21. See: Uys, p.43. Leopold Reichenberg was appointed Postmaster of Rouxville in 1870 (see Saron & Hotz, page 325). Harold Hodes told me that there is a street in the town, which was named after Reichenberg.
22. See Uys, page 48.
23. See Uys, page 54.
24. *Heemraad*; the County Court, and also the title for a member of it.
25. See Uys, page 117.
26. Information from Ernest Kallmann.
27. In a letter, dated April 1881, sent to Leopold, after he had retired to Germany, Hendrik P. Cronje, an Afrikaner who lived in Rouxville, wrote,
“*We cannot and shall not forget you. All the friends and acquaintances that you mention are well and all say send our best regards to Reichenberg.*”
Further on the writer makes an interesting generalization about the Boer’s attitude towards the Jews, whom they respected, on the whole, as they were regarded as being people of the Bible:
“*But we Afrikaners regret one thing. Especially in the Free State, here people often say that when a Jew is rich enough he leaves. We regret this as we like the Jewish people.*”
(Harold Hodes gave me a photocopy of this letter, which is written in Dutch, not Afrikaans. Translations by Masya Spek and Johan Pottas.)
28. At that time the home of his older brother Julius (1843-1910). Julius Seligmann married Julius married in the USA 1869, and applied for Naturalization in 1870: Julius must have arrived in the USA by 1869 at the very latest. (data from www.ancestry.com)
29. US Census, as accessed by www.ancestry.com.
30. Personal communication from Simon du Plooy of Potchefstroom, South Africa
31. See NASA: NAB/CSO/663/01/1878/3834/1, 1878-1879, which contains the correspondence about Jacob Seligmann’s escape from Rouxville. Rosemary Dixon-Smith very kindly scanned this series of papers for me.
32. For more about Bulwer (1836-1914) who became Governor in 1875, see *The washing of the Spears*, by D. R. Morris, publ. by Pimlico: London, 1994, and <http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Rotunda/2209/Natal.html>. His secretary was the author of *King Solomon’s Mines*, by William Rider Haggard.

33. I am not at all sure that this was proven; rather it was alleged at this stage.
34. I have not seen the actual letter, but I have a copy of a minute dated 7th November 1879, which alludes to it.
35. In 1871, the town and district of Rouxville had a population of 2310 (See Uys, page 54).
36. See NASA: VAB/LRO/ANDER ARGIEWE/6/1/00/1, 1871-1877. Sophie le Roux very kindly photocopied this for me.
37. The exceptions are “Ja. Seligmann” and “Jac. Seligmann”, each of which occurs once only.
38. See NASA: VAB/MHG/1/3/1/56/01/BS31/1, 1877, which contains the documentation relating to the Insolvent Estate of Jacob Seligmann. Sophie le Roux very kindly photocopied this for me.
39. The name Edward William Pitt keeps appearing in the various papers connected with Seligmann’s insolvency. It seems to me that at some stage the handling of this affair was transferred from Rouxville to Smithfield.
40. See NASA: NAB/CSO/665/01/1878/4039/1, 1878.
41. In archaic legal language “uttering” means “passing or circulating” something forged such as coins or notes..
42. A letter to Leopold Reichenberg in Germany, written from Rouxville in May 1881 by Andries S. Cronje states that Rouxville had not suffered from the war that was in progress. Note that the first Anglo-Boer War only started in 1880, and that Rouxville was quite far from the sites at which the earlier Zulu War had taken place.
43. For a fuller account of this, see my article in *Stammbaum*, Issue 25, Summer 2004.
44. Letter from Isaac Gundelfinger to Jack Reichenberg, dated 19 March 1887 (from “Reichenberg Correspondence”, edited by Ernest Kallmann).
45. Ibid. Letter dated 7th April 1887.
46. Some of the people who are named as trustees of Jacob Seligmann’s Insolvent Estate had formerly served with “J. Seligmann” in the administration of Rouxville. Jacob might have feared that they were insufficiently remote from him to deal with him fairly.
47. 1871, in Bavaria.
48. From a song with lyrics by Bobby Mc Gee.

FIGURES (See next 2 pages)

Figure 1

SOME OF THE DESCENDANTS OF JAKOB SELIGMANN (1775-1842) OF ICHENHAUSEN WHO WENT TO SOUTH AFRICA.

The following all lived for some time in Rouxville:- Sigmund and Jacob Seligmann, Leopold Reichenberg(er), Ludwig Bergmann, and the Rosenfels siblings: Rosa, Julius, Mathilde, Jakob and Max.

[A **rectangle** denotes a blood relationship with Jakob Seligmann]

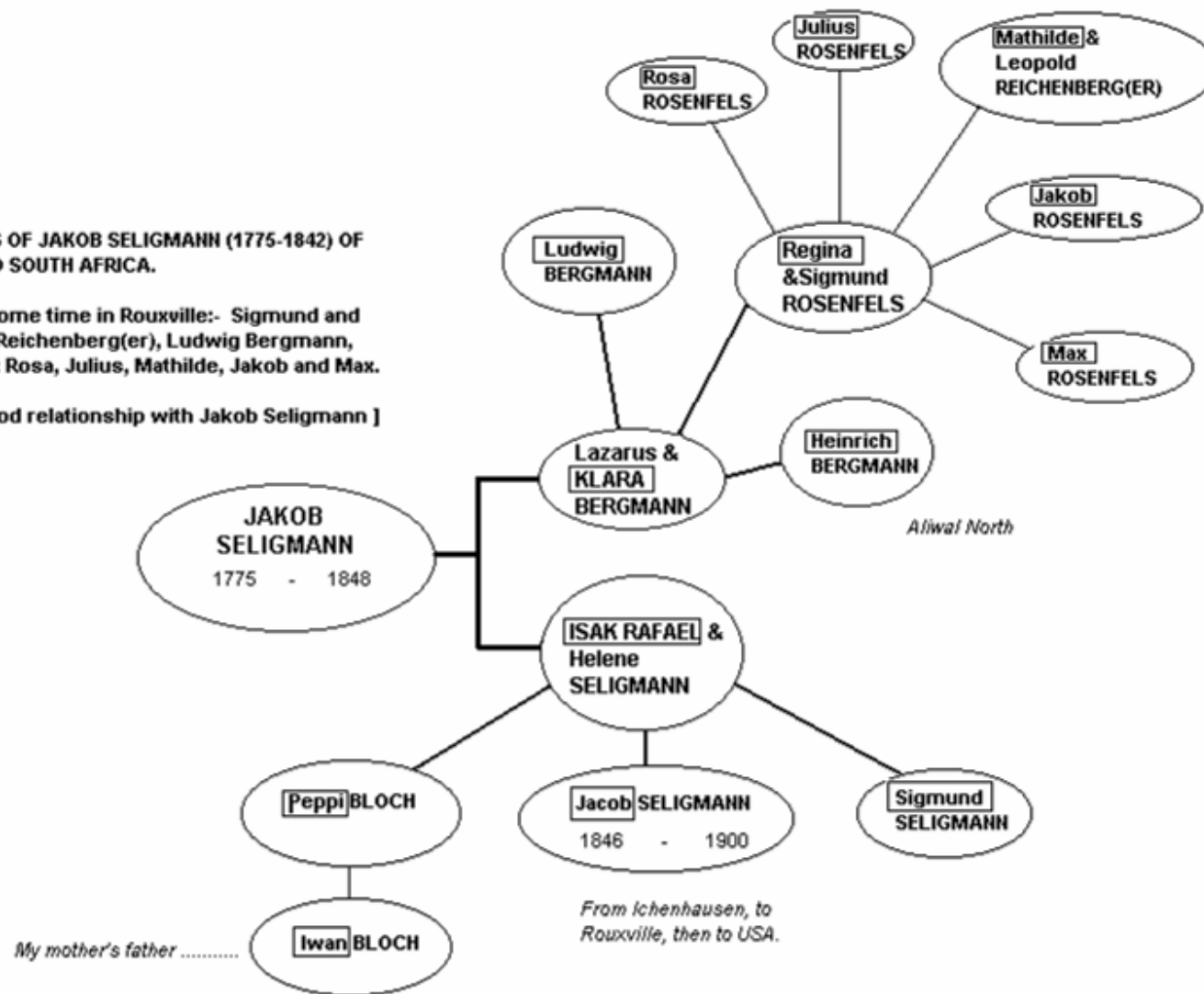
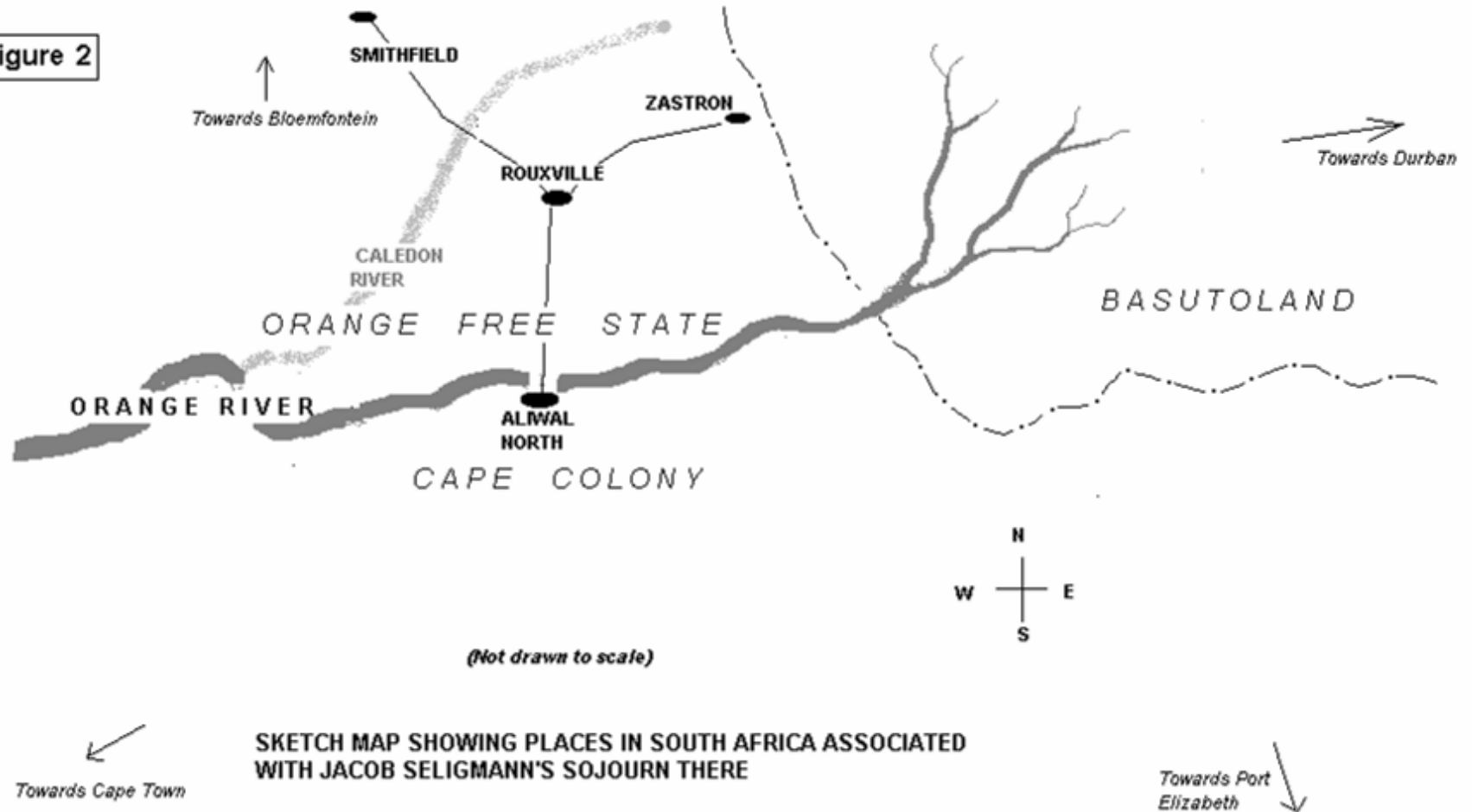


Figure 2



REFLECTIONS ON HABONIM'S 75TH REUNION

Zvi Pantanowitz

We commenced the year with a bank balance of \$540. The funds on hand as of 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.

Seventy-five years on – roughly a person's average life span – explains, perhaps, the obsession I have now, at this stage of my life, with *Habonim* –the need to look at what it meant to me when I started, and still means today. And aptly, here at Yizre'el, the place of planting and sowing; on this green grass... beyond us, rising in darkness, Gilboa, with its biblical overtones of curses, and personal sacrifice and brotherly love; beneath us, the valley, spreading its patchwork, and echoes of באה מנוחה ליגע – “rest for the weary”, of tranquility.

Tranquility is not what we thought about some fifty, sixty years ago when we were planning our lives. We were looking – many of us, I think, to find a place for ourselves in this patchwork country, to grow things green and trees tall, and to push away darkness. And to do it all together, with people you cared for, and with whom you shared a dream.

It would be easy to trap yourself in this dream, as if it told the whole story. But it can't, of course. There are other stories. And in my memory of the almost mythical figures who loomed so large in our lives as we grew up, there are many, I'm sure, I know, who would cross swords with me, and confront me with their roads, even if they changed direction in mid-path. And they, of course, would also be right although, at the time, they seemed like gods that failed me.

My first memory of *Habonim* lies in the, then, small town of Klerksdorp. I was about ten and there were about ten of us in an old brown American car driven by Gerald Goldstein, our first *madrich*. The time was 1945, the end of the war. In Palestine, the post-war turmoil had begun, but I think we were pretty oblivious of that. Just out enjoying ourselves, ten boys and girls, having to duck all the time to avoid a policeman's eyes – a pretty inauspicious start, I

suppose, to “*Bonim*” who were shortly going to swear to be truthful at all times. But the journey had, also, the delicious taste of touching beyond what was conventionally allowed, of defying adult authority, of doing what you wanted to do.

Only two more memories I have of Gerald, before he faded from our soon-to-become intense *Habonim* lives. In his sweet, strong voice, he taught us two songs: “*Habonim Strong Builders*” – a song I can't stand till this day, and a song in Yiddish, “*Arum Dem Feier*”, whose last lines go as follows:

*“Batzir di kep, batzir di kep, mit blumen kranzen
Arum dem feier is gut tzum tanzen
Uhn tanzen zingen is unzer leben
Uhn in shlof haleimes weben.”*

*“Garland your heads with flowers
It is good to dance and sing around the fire
And dancing and singing – are our lives
And in sleep, let us weave our dreams.”*

Over many years of campfires, the singing and the dancing, the flames painting reflections, light and dark, on the faces around.--heads on our laps; ours on others, surrounded by friends, people we cared for, whom we wanted to touch, and who touched us deeply ...

And then, if not quite sated, but drunk with all this overwhelming mix of the open air, the reveling in our youthful independence, the rising sap in our young bodies, standing to go to bed, and singing softly “Day is done” And more painfully, after, “*Habonim* are going homeward.”

It was magical. A magical, sweet ache, even today...

My first camp was the last one at Nahoon at the end of 1948. It was the first night of camp. Into the mess of the tent, the inevitable bell-tent, with six young unorganized boys, myself, my brother Philly, Jackie Gluch, also from Klerksdorp, Cyril Touyz, and one of the Bortz boys, and another boy, I can't remember now, trying to do blanket rolls in the dark, to find things in god-knows-why huge unwieldy suitcases, came our *madricha*, Sonya Kaganton, “*Zichrona Livracha*”-- to take roll call.

When she came to the names of my brother and I ...
Pantanowitz?

“You don’t expect me to read names like that, every time, and twice?”

“You (that’s to me) will be ‘Big Pantz’ and to my brother, Philly, ‘You’ll be little Pantz’ ”. And the names stuck.

But it was, in retrospect, more than just a name. It gave me an identity, something, through *Habonim* that I could identify with, with all my heart and soul. Until *Habonim*, I thought that the world revolved round Arithmetic, English, *Kennekie*, and Cricket.

Now, came something, which turned my life upside down:

There were new terms, new to me at least, a new language and a new dress. But beyond *woggles* and scarves and bricks and badges, there were new ideas and concepts. There was Pinsker and there was Hess. There were new sounds in music to listen to, often intently in the dark. There were new songs to sing about Israel, of course, but also about Negroes in bondage, and workers fighting for their rights.

And above all, there was a code of values – of what was right and wrong, and what was important, and what unimportant – TAFEL. There was a huge political world around us, and a social complexity to challenge.

Post World War Two was seething: the U.N. was being set up. Two huge ideological blocs glared at each other across a dangerous divide; the Jewish people were staggering about, deeply wounded, Palestine was on fire, and South Africa was coiled in a political and moral mess, crying out for help.

How did we find our way through this cascade of ideas and events? So many roads leading in so many directions...

We sought to find our own solutions, and answers. And we had the answers, or so we thought.

Were we shackled – or freed – by this often *collective* view on how to resolve these overwhelming issues?

To this day, I’m uncomfortable wearing a suit or a tie: am self-conscious in a ballroom, and have an inexplicable longing for the smell and feel of old brown lumber jackets. But somehow, our

madrichim – and we in time – knew also how to temper this.

There was 1984, and Arthur Koestler, and Brave New World – and Animal Farm. And we survived.

We were, I think, also like little lights, dancing and bobbing on a great churning river. Not always did we know where we were, or where it was taking us, but it carried us – a humbling, exhilarating feeling, rising up as we slowly became aware that it bore us on, perhaps, during the most tormented time of a long-tormented-history.

Children, we were, taking great *Nachshon*-like leaps. How did we dare to do this? I think. Children, drawing other, younger, children after us, dazzled by that lamp just ahead of us, seeking national and personal redemption.

How did we do it?

We did, that’s all.

In the great saga of national redemption, we found our small, dramatic place.

Not without loss, sometimes painful and tragic. There were *chaverim* who laid down their lives. And, we had taken a road that, at times, brought our *children* into great danger.

But there are other things to contemplate as well, here, now:

There are *kibbutzim* and *moshavim* and town settlers, and kibbutzim in towns – as I heard inspiringly from two young *madrichim* recently – Emma and James – and professionals galore, giving of themselves in a special way, and who have not abandoned an almost indefinable standard of giving and caring, the world over.

And I know and see this when I meet people, ex-*Habonim*. It is instantly recognizable, instantly available. You see it in the faces and memories of the people, and it stretches beyond borders and time – a great, intricate lace network. Fingertip to fingertip, sustained by the memories we had, and tightened by the dreams we dreamt.

And, in a melancholy moment, it can make you want to go out, like now, into the night sky, seek out laps to rest your head on, and heads to rest on *your*

lap... to light a fire again, and to sing, ever so softly. "Day is done"

Zvi Pantanowitz
June 30, 2005
pantan@netvision.net.il



Photo: Habonim, Nahoon, 1948

Top row, left to right: Jackie Gluch; Cyril Touyz;
Unknown; Unknown, a
Madrich; Leib Krut.

Bottom row, left to right: Philly Pantanowitz; Unknown
Bortz; Zvi Pantanowitz.

BOKSBURG TRAGEDY
THE DEATH OF ALEXANDER
CHARLSON
JULY 1914

Bubbles Segall

With the assistance of Carol Leigh of the Johannesburg Library and Jack Harrington of the Department of Biology of the University of Witwatersrand, Alec Charlson was able to find information about his uncle, Alexander Charlson who died at the age of 36.

Alec Charlson grew up in the Transvaal, went to High School in Cape Town and studied science at Cape Town University. He now lives in Sydney, Australia where he has been since 1971.

Alec's grandfather Maurice (Moses) Charlson was the father of Alexander, Herman (his father), Aaron, Joseph and Mina. It appears that Maurice may have had two wives – Rachel and Leah. He died in 1930 and Rachel was killed during the Holocaust. The family originally came from Siauliai in Lithuania – the name originally being Zalesohn.

Herman, Alexander and Aaron migrated to South Africa, Joseph to the States and their only sister Mina, an eye surgeon who practiced in Riga, was also killed during the Holocaust.

This story is about Alec's uncle Alexander who met an untimely death in Boksburg at the hands of the notorious Foster Gang. William Foster, his brother Jimmy and a friend Jack Johnson became known as the Foster Gang – William being the leader, was born in 1886 in East Griqualand. He was responsible for the murder of ten people including three policemen and seriously injuring an innocent bystander.

William Foster's first brush with the law occurred in Durban in 1908 when he spent a night in gaol for getting drunk, ending up in a brawl and resisting arrest. His life of crime then continued for the next six years.

On 17 July 1914 the Foster Gang attempted to rob the Boksburg North Branch of the National Bank. While breaking into the bank they disturbed a clerk who slept on the premises who attacked the men and a struggle ensued. The clerk ran towards a nearby hotel - the Boksburg North Hotel where Alex

Charlson was employed as a barman. He tried to intercede but was shot in the chest and died soon afterwards. He was 36 years old and single. Alex Charlson is buried in the Boksburg Cemetery.

(See the following website:

http://grub.its.uct.ac.za/cgi/cgi_RootWeb.exe)

For a full account of the events surrounding Alex Charlson's death, see:

<http://www.africacrime-mystery.co.za/books/fsac/chp2.htm>

RAND DAILY MAIL 20 JULY 1914

BOKSBURG Sunday. The funeral took place this afternoon from the mortuary at Boksburg Hospital to the Jewish section of the Boksburg Cemetery of the late Mr. Alexander Charlson, formerly barman at the Boksburg North Hotel, who lost his life under such tragic circumstances on Friday night.

The cortege, which numbered some three or four hundred people, gathered at the mortuary, and the respectful and saddened groups which lined the route as the funeral moved along bore testimony to the fact that the heart of the people had been touched by this tragic event, and when the Cemetery was reached this fact was accentuated, for here many had gathered to await the final scene.

At the mortuary and by the grave the Rev. B. Lipkin, Jewish minister of Benoni officiated the last solemn rites of the Jewish faith being carried out with impressive ceremony.

Attending the funeral were the following: Messrs. Aaron Charlson and Harry Charlson (who had come from Middelburg to be at the funeral of their brother), E.C. Reynolds (general manager of the National Bank), Thomas Watson (manager Boksburg North branch), S. Lang (manager Boksburg branch), W. Hossack (manager Comet branch), S.H.S. Ogilvie (manager Springs branch), and several office staffs, H. Goldberg, B. Gayliss, M. Lavenstein, J. Sugarman, H. Levin, J. Harbour, L. Abrahams, L. Woolf (these representing the Boksburg Chevra

Kaddisha), J. Bourgenstein, P. Mousel, B. Delany, J. Lancaster, V. Fineberg, R.P. Botes, C.H. Beddard, C. Drawford, J. Clark (representing the Boksburg R.A.O.B.), Andrew MacDonald, Mr and Mrs S. Kotzen (Boksburg North Hotel), Mr and Mrs S. Waiggowsky, Messrs E. Alexander, B. and H. Spitz, L.Y. Waiggowsky, I. Boder, W. Whitfield, H. Smulian, T. Julyan, S. Mendelsohn, E. Williams, J. Bourgenstein, J. Saretzky, S. Silverstein, J. Clark, G. Alexander, L. Kirbel, R. Head, L. Jacob, J. Hyman, A.P. Miller, H. Solomon, H. Hotz, Stenis, J. Joel, H. Silke, C. Rudolph, M. Lessos, L. Mantle, S. Bann, J. Rathouse, C. Bernard, M. Herschowitz, M. Blankfield, S. Milner, R. Rubenstein, D. Milner, M. Finestone, Forman (2), D. Epstein, F. Coleman, H. Wanner, A. Rubinstein, J. Dusheck, N. Ash, M. Lenberg, Abe Feldman, J. Bloom, A. Creinhold, S. Levin, H. Smaller, etc.

Among a number of beautiful wreaths were noticed the following: "With deepest sympathy from the directors, general manager and staff of the National Bank of South Africa, Ltd.,"; "From Mr and Mrs S. Kotzen, Boksburg North Hotel"; "From Boksburg North Friends," and many others.

NEW SHUL DEDICATED IN SOMERSET WEST

This article was originally published in the Cape Jewish Chronicle in October 2005, and is reprinted here with permission.

Chief Rabbi Dr Warren Goldstein acknowledged a feeling of excitement as he was dedicating a new *shul* for the first time. It was even more significant because it was a country community which was demonstrating continued strength and vigour, having increased its membership by over 20% during the past twelve months.

Mervyn Davidson, president of the congregation, gave the history of the community which was established in 1904 and eventually absorbed by the adjacent Strand congregation.

Mr W. Miller, son of the founder, reminisced about the early years. A large crowd of present and past members were present at the dedication of the new

building in Laurensford Road, which replaced the original synagogue which was recently sold. The old building was situated in the heart of the commercial district and the area was no longer easily accessible.

Chief Rabbi Goldstein referred to the beautiful *Aaron Hakodesh* which provided a link between the new building and the original *shul*. The growth of the community represented a reversal of the trend in which the country communities were denuded of Jews as young families gravitated to the cities.

Thanks were expressed to the Stellenbosch Hebrew Congregation for its donation, which covered the cost of repairing the *Sifrei Torah*. Rabbi Desmond Maizels represented the Cape Beth Din; the UOS was represented by its Executive Director, Mickey Glass, whilst the SA Jewish Board of Deputies was represented by its national chairman, Michael Bagraim.

THE WOODSTOCK – SALT RIVER JEWISH COMMUNITY

Mike Getz

This article originally appeared in a publication of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies dated October 1987, and is reprinted here with permission. It then appeared in the February/March 2005 issue of The Woodstock Whisperer to coincide with a Woodstock reunion which occurred in December 2004 and is reprinted here with permission. The two versions differ slightly.

Woodstock – “a place of echoes that return” Shul

Woodstock: it is the world where many of us began and it remains a place of echoes that return and return over the years, rich and remarkable. Who were the people of Woodstock and Salt River? They came mainly from Latvia and Lithuania – Jews in the beginning without their families – in search of a better life. They were shoemakers and tailors, the smallest of small businessmen. Among the founding fathers were Isaac Mordukhowitz, Harris, Politsky, Chaim Derman, Raphael Oblowitz and Avrom Leib Gelbart; names that would recur in the story of Woodstock – some of them into our time.



The Hebrew Community Hall at the corner of Albert Road and Argyle Street, Woodstock

The memory of that life is there for us still in a familiar geography of the heart and mind. The streets we knew, where life flowed between Albert and Victoria Road, carrying the traffic of the community. Our boundaries stretched from Durham Avenue to Sussex Street and from Walmer Road to Queens Park Avenue. Who can forget the rich Jewish life among the streets where Goldsmith, Burns, Pope and Coleridge are remembered. And those other arteries – Salt River Road – bustling route to the market – Roodebloem Road – the corridor to a better life above Victoria Road and Argyle Street, where the *Shul*¹ and *Cheder*² stood.

The community was well integrated. Most of the shops were within walking distance of the homes. Woodstock was a community of shopkeepers. One square mile covered it all; home, schools, work and the *Shul*. Here was born and sustained a set of standards and qualities which set the community apart. It was an unusual mixture of modesty and achievement founded on determination and commitment.

Cheder was an arena where a range of accomplishments were necessary – not all in the Board of Education’s syllabus. The playing fields of Eton had nothing on the fleet-footed artistry acquired between *Cheder* classes. It is not always easy to remember that our *Shammes*³ Mr Mushnick, had other duties that ferociously defending the Hall windows.

¹ *Shul* - Synagogue

² *Cheder* – Hebrew School

³ *Shammes* – Beadle/Verger



The Cheder - a place of learning for the youth of Woodstock

One remembers his wonderful *nusach*⁴ and diction on the *Bimah*⁵, so appropriate and meaningful, and so rich by comparison to some of the tuneless mumbling that is about. His protégés included Bruce Lipow, who years later could do a matchless *Shabbes Minchah*⁶ under any conditions.

Woodstock *Cheder*: there was that unequal struggle between Kassel, Kaplan, Smolenski and Lederman, their pupils, and the ever-vigilant *Talmud Torah*⁷ Committee. Debates and experiments prevailed to improve content and method. The preparation for Barmitzvah and always the financial problems of the *Talmud Torah* had to be considered.

We are in the thirties, a time of hardship for many in Woodstock. Records tell of families having difficulty to meet monthly *Cheder* fees of 15/-, reduced to 11/6d. The *Talmud Torah* committee was divided on how to deal with those in arrears. There were fierce debates about a Jewish child being denied access to Jewish learning and the struggle to provide deposits for Barmitzvah lessons. Always the mothers persisted where fathers were embarrassed, or had been denied.

⁴ *Nusach - Prayer*

⁵ *Bimah - Pulpit*

⁶ *Shabbes Mincha - Afternoon Service*

⁷ *Talmud Torah - Hebrew School*



The Shul of the Woodstock Community in Argyle Street

It is hard to speak with confidence of *Cheder* methods in these days of advanced education, but the Woodstock and Salt River product stands up pretty well in terms of Jewish knowledge and accomplishment. We can hold our own on a *Bimah* and have a ear for trop and *nusach*, those key essentials at the heart of any *Shul* service.

Most of us would like to be remembered and known for our feeling on things Jewish, for keeping them alive, and for approaching life with a Jewish heart. In these things, the graduates of Woodstock and Salt River stand proud.

How could it be otherwise when in our memory are the tears men wept at *N'Sane Tokef*⁸ and how some stood throughout Yom Kippur to atone. Our fathers and mothers brought sanctity and solemnity to those days. These were matchless examples of sincerity and commitment.

Rabbi Grawitzky, Zichrono Livracha, father and grandfather of Rabbonim, lived a holy life among us; gentle, concerned for the poor, learned and of great faith, modest in his ways and exemplary in his life. He gave comfort and wisdom freely. His rewards were insubstantial. Yet which Barmitzvah can forget his soft-spoken injunction, in the midst of an excited thirteen year-old's joy and relief – "*Mein kind, hiel die tefieln.*"

Rev. Kassel was the *Chazan*, the *Talmud Torah* Principal, the *Schochet*⁹ and *Mohel*¹⁰ - a formidable

⁸ *N'Sane Tokef - Prayer for Yom Kippur*

⁹ *Shochet - Slaughterer - Kosher*

man. He had the heavy responsibility of carrying out these duties to a standard and in a way that would satisfy the *Balebatim*¹¹ and the Community. He was a disciplinarian who communicated vigorously, and possessed of a temper expected of a *Kohein*¹². The individuals and their escapades, who tried his patience and that of his colleagues and successors, are legion. He held office with dignity and style.



*Melvin Dawidewitz, Abe Gulis, Rev. Gulis, Bokkie Zegal
outside the General Post Office in Darling Street*

The communal complex in Argyle Street housed the *Shul*, the Talmud Torah, a Communal Hall and *Succah*. Any open ground there improvised as a soccer pitch, a venue for bok-bok or leggings. At the appropriate *Yom Tovim*¹³ the ladies descended, and the required *kichel*, *taigel* and herring were provided. Life was complete with a few bottles of brandy, and Glantz Raizes's memorable mineral water for the minors. Those were the days when a *droshe*¹⁴ was a *droshe* – none of these 15 or 20 minute brevities – but a solid 30 or 40 minutes ramble, three or four times over. After the third

snaps, the odd *drem!*¹⁵ among the listeners went unremarked and unresented.

Who were our leaders? I would like to focus on the reign of three or four of our *gabbaim* as I remember them. Peisel Marks came to office in 1938 after many years of communal involvement. He was the son of Isaac and Mary Mordukhowitz, a manufacturer and businessman of some substance, part of a family committed to, and involved in things Jewish. He brought to the office formality and structure, leading and implementing from personal commitment and stature. He enhanced the standing of Woodstock in the larger community and established himself among its leaders.

By 1940 he would be commenting on the decline in numbers of the congregation and continue to stress the importance of Jewish education and its role. His wife Leah, was prominent too, and active across a whole range of communal activities. Although both were recently lost to us, their daughters and sons are very much part of Jewish life here.

Isaac Merkel took office as President in 1943. He represented a new and emerging force in the community. A self-made man, in South Africa since the early 1920's, he possessed a vitality and spirit that was able to carry the Woodstock and Salt River community into the fifties. By 1947 there were 200 families. In his time the State of Israel was born, the school still had some 50 pupils and Rev Baran succeeded Rev Kassel, while Rev Gulis took over the Talmud Torah. Isaac Merkel was openhearted, generous and a man of warmth. In 1952 he led the rebuilding and preservation of the Shul, an act that probably ensured the preservation of those buildings, as recently ordered by local authorities. He died tragically in 1957 and an era closed with him. His wife Hessie Merkel, who contributed so much to Woodstock in her own time, keeps his memory alive.

By that time the numbers of Jewish families in Woodstock had fallen to 50 or fewer. But Archie Levine, Max Fligel and Mike Gelbart were the core of an active daily *Minyan*. Mike had already been serving as a Vice-Chairman and the responsibilities of office fell on his shoulders. In a number of ways he was perhaps more accomplished than his predecessors. As Isaac Merkel did, he came from

¹⁰ *Mohel – Circumciser - Brith Milah*

¹¹ *Balebatim - Elders*

¹² *Kohein - Cohen*

¹³ *Yom Tovim – High Holidays*

¹⁴ *Droshe - Sermon*

¹⁵ *Drem! – Sleep (forty winks)*

Shubitz in Latvia as a teenager and was possessed of understated qualities and strengths, typical of a Kourlander.

Although educated here, he was trained from childhood in *Kriat ha Torah*¹⁶, as well as the related accomplishments necessary to holding the *Bimah* – almost to the point of cantorial competence. He taught both his predecessors his remarkable *Maftir Trop*¹⁷ – unmatched for its sonorous beauty – and he was a wonderful *Baal Tefilah*¹⁸, another man of warmth and great heart, with deep faith.

His faith was to be tested. In 1958 his wife, Sybil, was seriously hurt in an accident and did not recover. Mike came back to lead the community as only he could. His commitment survived the early and tragic death of his son, Sidney. He returned to the *Shul* he loved and with his friends, took up the work he knew so well. Mike, too, left us before his time and his clear and particular memory remains with us.

He wrote it all down

Throughout this time one man dedicated himself to recording the life of the community, as reflected in the role and work of its *Talmud Torah*. Alec Rubin, as Hon. Secretary, wrote it all down – the hopes and conflicts, the fears and anger, the ambition and petulance of life in committee. He also recorded the problems with parents and members, with staff and with the Board of Education. Everything concerned with Woodstock and its Jewish community interested him and he recorded it. It began in 1929 and ends with his death. It is an invaluable record and a remarkable achievement that has meaning and is precious to all of us.

Jewish life has left Hares Avenue and Avenue Road. Greatmore Street and its tributaries Kent, Oxford and York Streets only have faint echoes of our days there. Devon Street is quiet too, as are Milner Road, Mountain Road and Fairview Avenue. No Jews go down Argyle Street as they once did for *Minchah* or *Maariv*, and we do not take out dead past the *Shul*, as our fathers did.



*From the Playing Fields of Woodstock
The Israel Football Team of October 1961*

Back Row (L to R): C. Jaffe (Manager), L. Alperstein, E. Herr, L. Miller, N. Stein (Chairman), N. Gordon, M. Marcus, M. Isaacs, A. Simanowitz, H. Gelbart, M. Jones (Ass't Manager)
Front Row: M. Bravo, B. Zegal, M. Danelewitz (Captain), L. Zeidel, G. Sher, H. Zeidel, J. Berelowitz

The Spirit lives on

The great spirit of that generation which kept faith in adversity and hardship, that taught its children and loved its people, is with us today.

The devotion and modestly, the determination and achievement, lives on and enriches the Jewish community and the community at large. The husbanding and care that nourished a generation, was not exhausted and did not run down. As you see, the life and work of Woodstock and Salt River Jewry continues for the benefit of all, flowing from the hands and hearts of that remarkable place.

It is important not to forget the past and I hope some of us will do enough to preserve what there is of a past we share. With this in mind the trustees of Woodstock agreed with Herzlia School that an initial portion of income from its endowment will be devoted to setting up a centre here for Holocaust studies, specialising on the links of this community with that traumatic event.

However one tries, it is impossible to honour those who truly gave Woodstock and Salt River its unique and memorable place in our lives. Most precious surely, are the men and women, fathers and mothers, who added their commitment and often slender means, to build a community, a society the like of which we will never see again.

¹⁶ *Kriat ha Torah* – Reading from the scrolls

¹⁷ *Maftir Trop* – Prayer

¹⁸ *Baal Tefilah* – Conductor of the Service



The Holocaust Memorial at the Pinelands Cemetery was restored by the Woodstock Congregation

SOUTH AFRICAN JEWISH MUSEUM LAUNCHES NEW WEBSITE

This article was originally published in the Cape Jewish Chronicle in December/January 2005, and is reprinted here with permission.

The South African Jewish Museum has recently launched its new website. Designed to be more user-friendly with faster access to the most popular elements, the new SAJM website has already attracted attention.

Says Shea Albert, director of the South African Jewish Museum, "Visitors to our site need immediate access to their specific areas of interest. So we have designed a site which reflects the most frequently referenced elements.

"We now have a direct link to the *Family Tree* section, which will enable people to submit their family trees without initially searching the site for this facility. We also invite viewers to write a family history, and submit this with photographs, if they like."

A more extensive section on Immigrant Jewish Life has been added, with enhanced information on

Eastern European origins, as well as dorps and towns in South Africa. In addition to a guide to events and exhibitions, the website offers information on the history and architecture of the new museum and the old synagogue.

According to Shea Albert, inspiration for the site came from the museum theme of "*Memory, Reality and Dreams*," which is also the theme for the museum's fifth anniversary celebrations.

"As part of these celebrations, we wanted to enhance the site, to make it more relevant to the visitors' experience, and to provide fast, easy and friendly access to our information," she says.

The website was developed by *Flatspin*, who were also responsible for the revamped Discovery Centre and the touch screen presentation for the exhibition "*Hidden Treasures of Japanese Art: The Isaac Kaplan Collection*".

Web site: www.sajewishmuseum.co.za

For further information:

Tel: 465-1546

e-mail: info@sajewishmuseum.co.za

Correction

JEWISH LIFE IN THE SOUTH AFRICAN COUNTRY COMMUNITIES, VOLUME 2

In the September 2005 issue of the SA-SIG Newsletter, we provided information about a new publication, *Jewish Life in the S. A. Country Communities: Vol. 2*. Rose Norwich, the Project Convener of this outstanding book, contacted us recently to let us know that we omitted two regions, viz. *West Coast* and *Swartland*, together with their towns. The book covers ten regions and we only listed eight. On the next page is a revised list of all the regions, including the two that were previously omitted.

<p>BOLAND Ceres Clanwilliam Franschoek Gouda Paarl Prince Alfred Hamlet Touwsriver Tulbach Wellington Wolseley Worcester</p> <p>BUSHMANLAND Brandvlei Calvinia Kenhardt Loeriesfontein Niewoudtville</p> <p>CENTRAL KAROO Britstown Carnavon Colesberg De Aar Fraserburg Hanover Hopetown Middelburg Noupoort Petrusville Philipstown Prieska Richmond Strydenberg Sutherland Van Wyksvlei Victoria West Vosberg Williston</p> <p>FAIREST CAPE Somerset West Stellenbosch Strand</p>	<p>GRIQUALAND WEST Barkly West Douglas Griquatown Jan Kempdorp Modderrivier Warrenton</p> <p>KALAHARI Kuruman Mafikeng Rietfontein Taung Upington Vryburg</p> <p>KOUP Beaufort West Lainsburg Prince Albert</p> <p>NAMAQUALAND Garies Klawer Port Nolloth Springbok Vanrynsdorp Vredendal</p> <p>SWARTLAND Malmesbury Mooreesburg Piketberg Porterville Riebeek-Kasteel</p> <p>WEST COAST Darling Hopefield Lambert's Bay Vredenberg – Saldahna</p>
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**The 26th IAJGS International Conference on
Jewish Genealogy
will be held 13 – 18 August 2006
at the New York Marriott Marquis Hotel**

Recently confirmed speakers so far include:

- The keynote speaker will be Dr. **Allen Weinstein**, the Ninth Archivist of the United States
- **Peter Lande**, a longtime volunteer at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, will present a paper on the newest holdings of the Museum Archives
- Dr **Stephen Morse** will speak and also teach in the Computer Lab
- **Stanley Bergman**, the Director of the Centre for Jewish History's Cahnman Preservation Laboratory, will offer programs on conservation and other multi-media presentation of family histories
- Genetic DNA pioneer **Bennett Greenspan** of Family Tree DNA, will address exciting new developments in the field
- Fordham University Professor **Daniel Soyer**, will present *Landsmanshaftn: East European Jewish Hometown Societies in the New World*, which will explore resources for and origins, functions, and culture of the landsmanshaftn
- Dr **Simone Eick**, the Scientific Director of Deutsches Auswandererhaus (the German Emigration Centre in Bremerhaven), will speak about the Museum's recently-opened research facilities
- Dr **Eleanora Bergman**, Deputy Director of Warsaw's Jewish Historical Institute – a specialist in old synagogues
- Professor **Phil Brown**, founder of the Catskills Institute, will be presenting a paper – the *Jewish Legacy of the Catskills*

Other speakers previously confirmed include Stanley Diamond, Olga Muzychuk, Daniel Schlyter, Marian Smith, and Miriam Weiner, while JewishGen, as always, will be represented in numerous ways.

As well as the above interesting sessions, the *Southern Africa Special Interest Group* (SA-SIG) will be running its annual group meeting, and will be holding a Computer Lab class on South African genealogy research. The Computer Lab at the Conference, with twenty-five PCs, will provide instructor-guided hands-on experience in a series of classes on a wide range of topics.

For more information about the conference, see:
<http://www.jgsny2006.org/>

SURNAMES APPEARING IN THIS NEWSLETTER

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

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JEWISH MEMORIAL (YIZKOR) BOOKS IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Destroyed European Jewish Communities

by CYRIL FOX and SAUL ISSROFF

This book is a unique listing of approximately 1000 Yizkor books and *memorbücher* in 32 academic libraries in the United Kingdom.

- ◆ Localities such as country or place names are listed alphabetically. The original language(s) of each book are noted.
- ◆ Bibliographic details about each entry, including the geographical co-ordinates of specific towns or villages are given (because many places have similar or even identical names).
- ◆ A list of books translated or partly translated into English is given.
- ◆ Smaller places, mentioned in Yizkor books but not in the title of the book are listed. There are also notes on how to use a Yizkor book.
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