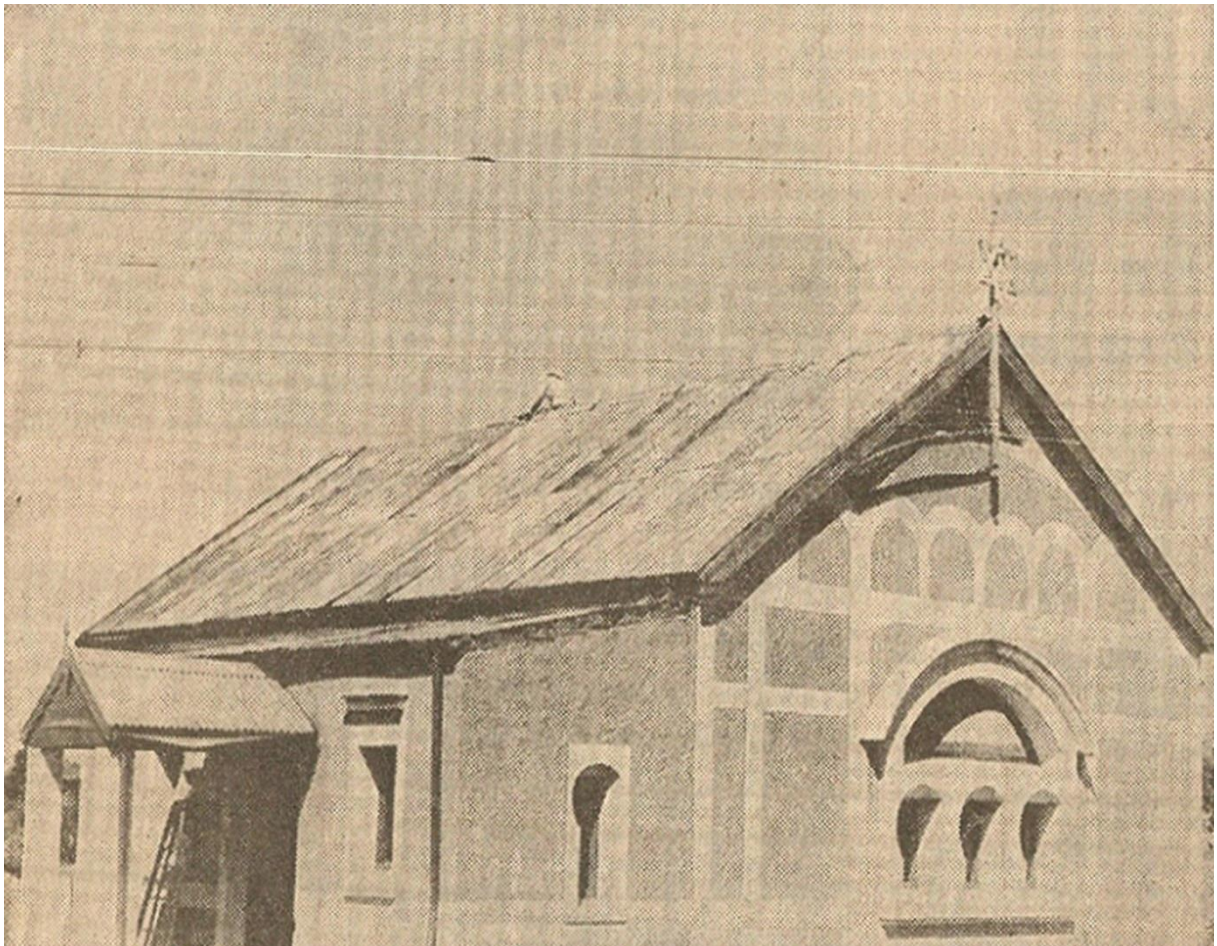


THE JEWISH COMMUNITY OF BRANDFORD, FREE STATE



Our Community
Our village
Our memories

Compiled by: Faisia Cheerin Shaskolsky

*The Mayor of Brandfort, Mr Steve Kolani
Mrs Faisia Cheerin Shaskolsky, Author
The Travelling Rabbi. Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft
The Brandfort Librarian, Mr Reuben Mayo*

It is with great pleasure that I send warm greetings on the occasion of the launch of the new memoir that records both Brandfort's Jewish past and some broader aspects of Brandfort's history.

I, of course, have many memories of Brandfort, some of them harsh, others sad, all too often of times of hardship, suffering and loneliness. Exile is never easy - something the Jewish people know only too well from their own 2 000 years of diaspora existence - and I believe it is important to keep a proper record of it.

For this reason, I welcome the memoir, paying particular attention to Jewish life in this small town, written by someone who grew up in it.

I believe I am mentioned several times in the memoir. My time there is part of Brandfort's past, as well as my own. I recall fondly the support and help given to me by some members of the small Brandfort Jewish community, such as Mr and Mrs Levine who are also mentioned in the book.

I was extremely grateful for the kindness shown to me by the Jewish community. Had it not been them I would not have survived the brutality of apartheid. They understood what it was to be persecuted and have played a great role in helping me and Zindzi, my daughter, cross the racial barriers under very difficult circumstances.

I wish the publication every success and know that now being part of the Brandfort Library in what used to be called a township, it can help bring this little bit of history to life for the local people, particularly the young.

With best wishes

Winnie Madikizela Mandela

Brandfort Community:

I visited my hometown of Brandfort after an absence of many years. It was my personal desire to return to my old hometown where happy memories of childhood were and still are very much part of me. Part of the very fibre of who I am today. While going back down the halls of memory I was upset to notice that the Jewish cemetery was unkempt and neglected and that, on visiting the local library, there was neither a hint nor glimmer, that I could find that Jews had resided in this 'my village.' At the local H. F. Verwoerd library I asked to see anything pertaining to the history of Brandfort and was shown a book about the village. I found no information mentioning the fact that Jews had resided in and contributed to life in the village, this village of my youth. I then decided to collate as much information as I could about the Jewish presence of our town. I have done my level best to achieve this goal and was assisted most willingly by ex-residents and people who have had affiliations with the town. During this journey of discovery I met some helpful and interesting people who have opened their homes and given me as much knowledge as they could recollect to make this task possible. I am not an historian and certainly did not endeavour to delve into the archives of history. **I merely wanted it to be clear that Jews had resided in Brandfort and that they had made a healthy and significant contribution to life in the tiny village.** I initially started to re tell memories as I recalled them. I slowly discovered that this task was certainly larger than I had originally anticipated. At various points I was convinced that the task was done. Then another door or window of information would swing wide open.

I interviewed as many of the former residents of Brandfort whom I was able to locate. Some of these interviews were conducted personally and others telephonically, including international calls. Each person expressed a feeling of warmth, happiness and nostalgia as their fond memories were rekindled.

My intention was to give every former Jewish resident an opportunity to share in this venture. If I have been unable to contact anyone, I apologise. There are factual references which can be obtained by interested parties simply by contacting a central Jewish establishment. **Mine is a personal journey which attempts to illustrate the vibrancy of our little village at the time my family lived there.**

I was disappointed to find hardly a noticeable trace that a Jewish community had lived, flourished and fully participated in life in our village. I came away with a definite drive to put Jewish life as it was then, on the map, as those were important formative years that were placed firmly in the roots of our lives.

This then is my attempt to change that.

The village of Brandfort constituted a vibrant Jewish community in its heyday. This information endeavours to reinstate Brandfort on the Jewish Dorp map.

Brandfort is situated between Bloemfontein and Welkom. It was known as a cattle, wheat, dairy and maize farming area.

According to figures in the Jewish year book in its heyday the Jewish community comprised 117 souls. To date there are none.

The Jewish women belonged to the V.L.V. (Vroue Landbou Vereniging - The Women's Agricultural Society). They looked forward to participating in the annual Brandfort show.

April 2016

My husband Ivor and I visited the Free State three years ago (2013) for my Eunice School reunion in Bloemfontein. The plan was to put this book on the shelf of the Brandfort library in the location, which I as a child was not permitted to go to. It was out of bounds to me, as a young white child. I recall being welcomed warmly and with much appreciation by the librarian, Mr Reuben Mayo, as well as counsellor Mafu and the school children who were included in the presentation at the library. My welcoming speech follows:

Today there are no longer any Jewish families living in Brandfort. There had been a significant Jewish presence in this town for many years.

I wanted to ensure that there would be a record of their presence, their lives and the contribution to life in the village.

And so, after much thought, I decided to write a book and present it to the libraries of Brandfort today. In order to do that I needed to spend time and research that history. I spent many hours with friends and family collating stories, memories of our lives in Brandfort. At times it was emotional, at other times hilarious. We all shared fond memories of our lives in this little Free State town. Some of whom are here today, and I would like to acknowledge their presences. Our beloved and beautiful Betty Levin who today forms the link between our generation and the generation of our late parents. Her daughter, Jennifer Levin Cohen, who grew up in Brandfort is here. Of my generation, who grew up here in the 50's and 60's, my brother, **Norman Cheerin, Mike Levin, Hyman Levy and Mark Schlome**. We are all the children of the general dealers and shopkeepers, whose businesses lined

Voortrekker Street and provided the goods and provisions to the entire Brandfort community.

I thank you all for your support, your presence and your contributions.

I tried to contact **Papadi**, the granddaughter of our beloved **Mary Molelokao** who dedicated her working years to our family when I was a child. Unfortunately, this was not possible.

To bring this event together I want to thank **Counsellor Mafu, Mr Reuben Mayo**, the librarian, whose enthusiasm and assistance is much appreciated. It was his idea to bring you, the school children here, so that you can appreciate some of the history of Brandfort, your town. Counsellor Mafu in her address, felt that this book was of such significance that she would like to see it on every school library bookshelf so that the children would study the history of the Jews of Brandfort.

I wish to thank our travelling **Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft** and **Mrs Suzanne Belling** for not only printing this book, but also for assisting to make this event possible. As part of the event today we will visit the Jewish cemetery, to pay our respects to those who once lived here. **Mr Martin Jordaan** worked hard to restore the cemetery. Mr Jordaan has put in great commitment, effort and work into the upkeep of the Jewish graves. He has assisted my project by all means. Great thanks to you. I wish to thank those well - wishers who are part of Brandfort's history, but were unable to be here, as they live too far away. To Ivor, my precious husband and supporter in every way – Toda raba (Thank you very much).

Thank you all for coming here today.

I dedicate this book in memory of my parents Solly & Bessie Cheerin who lived their lives here in Brandfort.

Lily Levin was the treasurer of the Brandfort branch of SANTA until she left to live in Cape Town. She collected money for charity.

Masonic dances were held regularly in the Masonic Dance Hall.

Maurice Levin was reputed to be an excellent dancer.

Abe and Zorach Koseff lived in Brandfort. Above the Grand Hotel was a turret room where **Mr Koseff** lived.

Brocha Kosseff, (nee Gerson), married **Hymie Becker**. They had four children, three sons and a daughter.

The **Kaiser** family owned a store across the road from the hotel. There were three daughters and a son in the family. **Ethel Kaiser** married a **Mr Greenblatt**. Judy married **Mr Goering** (possibly Georing). There was a sister. It was said that Julius Kaiser was as good looking as a film star.

Mr Hellman was the tailor. He had many sons and one daughter.



This is a formal photograph of Reverend and Mrs Batlan dressed formally and elegantly for the Hellman wedding, where the Reverend officiated.

Estella Abro remembers her grandmother, bobba **Hinda**, as a highly organised, fastidious lady who ran a dignified home. She owned an exquisite, large dinner service which was used for numerous Pesach, Sukkot and Shabbat functions. She would entertain about 30 people at one time. Estella stayed in Brandfort and all three children went to school there. Estella was awarded a gold medal in 1936 for achieving an excellent matric. She married **Edward (Teddy Abro)**. They had two children, a son **John Michael** and a daughter **Lyn** who married **Peter Raphaelly**. They have two children, **Brian** and **Carin Abrahamson**.

The Kotzens had three children. **Isadore** married Beattie Goodman from Potchefstroom. **Marcel** married Eddy Becker. Issy joined the Air Force. He became a pharmacist.

After Reverend Batlan passed away, the Kotzen family moved into the family house in Keightley Street. All Reverend Batlan's immediate family went to live in America.

Next to the chemist a Greek man called **Mr Kotchebos** owned a café. He dressed smartly for work, wore a tie and carried a newspaper under his arm. He was possibly half-Jewish. Estella Abro and a few of the local children used by "marshmallow fish" from his shop.

Two German refugees came off the boat bringing with them a lovely Jewish girl. Estella, aged about 11 at the time was sent to Cape Town by **Ephraim Derman** to fetch these people. They took the train back to Brandfort and lived there for a while. The young lady committed suicide. On Faisia's return to Brandfort she noticed an unmarked grave, it might have been this lady.

When **Ephraim Derman** came out of Lithuania he went to school in Brandfort. Their grandmother was **Hinda Derachinsky**. The family became **Derman**.

A family who owned a large furniture factory in Berlin, comprising a mother, two elderly brothers and a beautiful wife. The couple were childless. They swapped businesses with a German who made cold drinks. They started making furniture in Brandfort. They subsequently opened a furniture factory in Johannesburg.

The Hofmann family:

Jack was involved with the catering business and worked for African Caterers in Johannesburg. Jack Hofmann was a member of the Brandfort Lodge. Jack married **Fay**, they had a daughter and a son namely **Esme** (Abrahamson) & **Stanley**.

Leopold Hofmann married **Rebecca Green**.

Mr **Heyman Hofmann** was a lawyer. He married **Dollie Segal** and they had three children namely **Jack, Alan & Joan**, all reside overseas.

Gerty Hofmann worked for her father. She married late in life. She might have had a brother.

They lived on the farm called Rooikoppies which was 7 miles from Brandfort.

Sam Schatz married **Regina Hofmann**, sister to **Heyman Hofmann**. They had two children a son and a daughter namely **Jeanette and Ivan**. **Jeanette** married **Mark Markowitz**.

The Young Ikes was a youth group that came to Brandfort from Bloemfontein, Winburg and Theunissen for picnics, dances and sleepovers. Children enjoyed swimming in the weir.

All the cheder (Hebrew school) boys sang in the choir in the Shul. (Synagogue)

There were four sons, **Siggie, Willie, Joe and Jack**. Much later a daughter was born. **Bernice Zwi**, being the youngest was born in 1933 during the Depression. Conditions were hard during that time. The land bank called up the loan on the farm. Bernice's parents could not hold onto the farm, despite help from the brothers, who assisted in paying the arrears. Things became too difficult financially. The family then moved to Johannesburg, where the brothers were working.

Bernice recently passed away and lived in Toronto Canada with her husband **Charles**.

Money was collected for the Chevra Kadisha, (The Jewish Burial Society) for the upkeep of the graves. Information was gleaned from the cemetery which is looked after by *Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft*. Prior to his passing, **Mr Piet de Waal** took care of it. Money was forthcoming from **Collie Sternberg** from Durban.

Jewish children who were born in Brandfort and Bloemfontein during my sojourn there:

Selwyn & Michael Levin

Norman Cheerin

Faisia Cheerin

Jennifer Levin

Neville Levin

Selwyn Levin

Michael Levin

Eric Immerman

Laura Schlome

Mark Schlome

Mathew Sheftz

Ray Sheftz

Fay Sheftz

Sheila Sheftz

Spiritual Leaders:

The Brandfort Hebrew Congregation was founded in 1903 and a synagogue was built in 1907. A school committee regulated the activities of the cheder and in 1924 a cheder room/communal hall was built. In 1908 the Jewish Cemetery was laid out and in 1909 the Tahara House was completed. The first burial took place in 1908. The first reverend who served the Brandfort community was **Reverend Rubin**. He was followed by **Reverend J Batlan**, who was with the community for 27 years until his death in 1933.

Rev Golding (1933-34) was the last resident minister. Thereafter itinerant reverends attended to the needs of the community and various arrangements were made for shechita (slaughtering) and cheder classes over the years.

The Reverend Batlan

Reverend Batlan served the community. He came to South Africa as a jeweller. He opened a jewellery store in Cape Town. He had a beautiful voice. A rabbi heard his voice and approached him with the idea that South Africa was opening up and that there was a definite need for rabbis.

He was sent to London to become a rabbi, a mohel, (to enable him to perform circumcisions), and a shochet (kosher ritual killing of animals in a humane way). His wife and daughter Sophie joined him in London, thereafter they returned to settle in Brandfort where he became the spiritual leader of the community. He was the father **Sophie Kotzen**.

The Kotzen family lived in the village – they moved to Brandfort when a pharmacy became available. Sophie went to Eunice school in Bloemfontein. It was unusual for a Jewish girl to go to boarding school at that stage. She enjoyed tennis and playing the piano. She was brought up in a modern age. After she had completed her studies, she taught music for a while. She married **Myer Sydney Kotzen**.

Myer Sydney Kotzen was a pharmacist and practised in Doornfontein.

The Kotzens had three children, **Estelle**, **Isidore** and **Marcelle**. Estelle married Edward (Teddy) Abro. Isidore married **Beatrice** (Beatty) **Goodman** from Potchefstroom. Marcelle married **Eddy Becker**. Issy joined the Air Force during the war. After the war he became a pharmacist

Accordingly to Lily Levin, the Reverend taught Alec Levin to blow the Shofar (ram's horn) for which he became renowned.

Mr Max Klevansky lived at the Commercial Hotel. He was the spiritual leader of our community. He was a gentleman farmer by profession. Here say suggests that the Brandfort shul is reputed to have been the oldest shul in the Free State. This still has not been verified. The community was close knit. **Mr Kalish** and **Mr Talpis** were farmers in the district and they were responsible for the upkeep of the synagogue.

The shul was active every Friday night. If there were not enough men for a Minyan (quorum consisting of 10 men) travellers who were in the village on business or staying at the local hotel were requested to join in to form a Minyan. Shabbat dinners were provided on many occasions by the local families.

The following families were included in the Jewish community:

Messrs Hellman, Hofman, Lovius, Fainsinger, Immerman, Levin, Schlome, Scheftz, Brauer, Cheerin, Levy, Klevansky, Kessel and Immerman.

I was contacted recently by **Merle Katz (Hellman)** who wrote the following information:

My father **Leo Hellmann** and his family were prominent members of the Brandfort community in the 1920's and 30's.

I live in Port Elizabeth.



Gershon Hellman family taken in Brandfort in 1921

From left to right:

Leopold, Gershon, his wife Sarah (nee Lowenberg), Joseph, Esther, Michael, Jacob.

Seated on the table Abrajham and Raymond.

Esther later married **Ossher Ruttenberg**.

None of the persons in the photo are alive today but their descendants are scattered all over the world.

Families and friends came for Yomtaivim (Jewish Holidays) from Bultfontein, Johannesburg, Kestell Kimberley, Kroonstad and Winburg. Students from Glen Agricultural College and the young Jewish men doing National Service were included for a Minyan. Among the names remembered were Treger from Bethlehem, Joffe from Johannesburg and Leslie Freedman from Kroonstad.

Leon Shub to mention a few.

Norman Cheerin celebrated his barmitzvah in 1956.

Neville Levin was brisced (circumcised) by **Rabbi Werner**. The Rabbi came from Kimberley originally, and then went to Bloemfontein. He travelled to Brandfort for the bris.

Neville's was the first bris in Brandfort.

Neville Levin was the last barmitzvah to be celebrated in 1964.

The little shul was crowded on these occasions. A lunch brocha followed the barmitzvah in the adjoining shul hall. Family functions took place in the evening. There was a special children's seat and Faisia remembers sitting in it. The children received Shabbat wine in this area.

The Mark Schlome family left Brandfort in 1970.

Thereafter the Cheerin family left Brandfort. The Levin families found it hard to maintain the upkeep of the shul.

According to "**Die Brandforter**", a local newspaper which was distributed twice weekly, Alec and Lily Levin were the last two members of the community to leave Brandfort.

Email from **Paul Alberts**:

I have heard vague stories about Jews who lived in Brandfort at the turn of the previous century and a bit later. I live in a hotel which I converted into a manor house that was known as the Basson's Hotel. The **Basson** family were Jews. The earliest photo I have of the building with the name Basson Hotel on it dates from 1913. I also have a postcard with the Basson Hotel on it dating from the late 1920s.

This coming week my family and I will be living in Brandfort for 15 years, and we are as much strangers in this strange little town as the day when we arrived. The one person I know who might have been of help, sadly passed away less than a month ago. She was the mayor of the town for many years. The other person was Piet de Waal, an attorney who looked after Winnie Mandela's affairs when she was incarcerated in Brandfort.

Not much help, but I will enquire and let you know.

Regards
Paul Alberts

The **Gershner** family bought the Commercial and Grand National Hotels. **Dave and Fanny Gershner** had two children, **Selma and Hymie**. Hymie was known as Chaimpie.

Hymie Shariff was brought out to South Africa by his uncle after the war. Initially he lived on a farm with his uncle. He played tennis at the local courts. He left Brandfort to live in Johannesburg where he was married. He was a survivor of the Holocaust.

The **Levy** family moved to Bloemfontein. Once the synagogue closed down, **Sally Immerman** took charge of all the books. These, including the Torah were sent to Durban as well. The interior of the synagogue was reputed to be in the aged home in Durban, however this information has not been substantiated.

The remaining congregants were each given chairs from the shul.

The High Holidays were celebrated in the Brandfort shul for the last time in 1968, Faisia and her husband Ivor Shaskolsky from Cape Town attended those services.

My father, Solomon, spent many hours with **Dr Verwoerd**, the father of the late Prime Minister who owned the local bookstore. He was a well-liked, charming and kind man. He came from Holland and enjoyed pickled herring prepared from him by Betty Levin. He drove an old Chrysler with wooden spoke wheels. He was so different from his son and it was hard to believe that the future Prime Minister was indeed his offspring.

Max Immerman and **Maurice Levin** were members of the Brandfort Chamber of Commerce together with Mr Verwoerd senior.

Sally (nee Flax) **Immerman** arrived in 1941 as a young bride. She married **Max Immerman**. They had a son **Eric**. Max's father Mr **Leopold Immerman**, who lived with them had a general dealer store. He attended Grey College in Bloemfontein and was a very good athlete. Sally was a housekeeper and kept a kosher home. She helped her husband in the store. Households utilized coal and electric stoves. Kosher ingredients were brought from Johannesburg. This enabled the family to entertain the Rabbonim (rabbis) who passed through the village or stayed over. The Immerman family left Brandfort in 1961.

Eric Immerman played with Jennifer Levin who was the daughter of Betty and Maurice Levin. It was said that she bossed him around as a small child, as they used to play together every day. Maurice had a soccer game on the veranda and many children in the neighbourhood gathered there to play.

Nellie and Abraham (Ginger) Schlome had two children, **Laura and Mark**. Ginger came from Tels in Lithuania. He was a religious man.

The children attended boarding school in Bloemfontein. They have happy memories of their time in Brandfort. Mark's recollections were after most of the Jews had left the village.

He recalls Solly Cheerin keeping a bottle of whisky for a special family celebration or graduation. Bessie Cheerin gave him the family budgy before the family left Brandfort. When Mark visited the Levins next door, he played with their cat. It was very old and contracted cat flue. Naas de Bruyn, a farmer and friend gave the cat an injection which improved its health. It lived a while longer, much to Mark's joy and then it succumbed. Mark visited after the cat's demise and enquired: "Auntie Betty, where's your kat (cat)?" When it was explained to him what had transpired, he asked: "Where did you begrawe (bury) her?" The children often spoke a mixture of English and Afrikaans.

Laura Schlome felt that her fondest memories were of her life with the Jewish community in Brandfort. She played with **Jennifer Levin**. Both Jennifer and Laura were born in Bloemfontein. They attended Hebrew classes with Lily Levin. By the time they got to boarding school, they could read Hebrew. They attended dancing

classes weekly in Bloemfontein as well. Her recollections were of a close knit community and the small shul which she highlighted.

Mark is married to **Andrea Bartkunsky**. They have two children, **Danica** and **Aiden**.

The Schlome family enjoyed visits to Bloemfontein accompanied by the Cheerins.

At that time there were four families left, the two Levin families, Schlome and Cheerins.

Max and Anne (Chana) Levin were the parents of **Alec, Maurice and Rachel Levin**. Max Levin senior was the first commercial client of the Standard Bank. He originally came from Coerney, a farming district near Port Elizabeth.

Maurice and **Betty Levin** had two children **Neville** who lives in Toronto and **Jennifer** who is married to **Joel Cohen** and lives in Johannesburg with their son **Matthew**.

Betty Levin taught dancing to the people in the village. Norman (Cheerin) loved to dance with her as a small boy. She eventually taught him the waltz. Maurice Levin played the piano by ear and is reputed to have sung the loudest and with much gusto in the shul. He had a good voice.

Tennis and flower arranging played a big part in Betty's life and she travelled with teams to play matches in the surrounding towns.

Lily and **Alec Levin** had two sons, **Selwyn** and **Michael**.

Selwyn married **Marilyn Horwitz**.

They have two children, **Brian** and **Jody**.

Brian married **Sharon Lawrence**. They have three children **Alex, Kayla** and **Bella**.

Jody married **Elliot Gothold**. They have a son **Julian**.

Michael married **Sharon Goldberg**. They have two children, **Brett** and **Terry**.

Brett is married to **Geraldine**. **Michael** is currently married to **Beth Samuels**.

The Cheerins would visit and enjoy a Sunday evening 'gesels' (chat) together.

Alec Levin excelled at blowing the Shofar. **Lily Levin** made french toast on a Sunday morning and toasted cheese on a Sunday evening. There would be visits and chats on the stoep. (patio)

The Levin families enjoyed many social golf days at the Brandfort Golf Club.

Solly and Bessie Cheerin had two children, **Norman and Faisia**. **Norman** married **Denise Cohen**. They have three children, **Amanda** married **Gavin Aarons**. They have two children, **Joshua** and **Danielle**.

Edana married **Russel Blieden**, they have a son **Keagan**.

Steven married **Iris Herz**, they have a daughter **Liora**.

Faisia married **Ivor Shaskolsky**. They have three sons, **David**, **Gavin** and **Daniel**.

Gavin married to **Justine Scher**. They have a daughter **Ruby**.

The **Cheerin** family owned a general dealer store. As was the custom during those days, due to Apartheid, there were two entrances. One for whites and the other for non - whites. The children assisted in the shop during school holidays. Both attended boarding school in Bloemfontein. Norman attended St Andrews from 1954, while Faisia attended Eunice School.

Ivor Shaskolsky recalled that on visits to the Cheerin family that after supper, Solly Cheerin would put on his warm winter coat and go for an hour's walk along the national road, either in the direction of Bloemfontein, Winberg or Welkom. It was a time of bonding between father and son-in-law and many topics were covered as they walked under a clear sky of myriads of stars. It was quite safe in those days to walk along the national roads in the pitch dark with their breath warming the icy Free State air.

Norman and Hans Engelbrecht and their black friend 'Suikerbossie' rode donkeys on the *common* with the neighbours. 'Suikerbossie' would tickle the donkey from behind. It would take off and run, throwing the boys off eventually. This proved to be great fun.

Of course, riding bicycles was a pastime of all the children.

The farm De Aap was owned by President CR Swart, (nicknamed Blackie) ex - President of South Africa during the Apartheid era. The Engelbrechts revamped the farm. The boys would ride their bikes and free-wheel downhill.

Norman recalls a favourite birthday gift consisting of a packet containing "goens" and "ironies" (marbles), a spinning top and a variety of screws. This was a highlight as a gift given to him by Lily Levin. He loved the variety.

The children played down the at the 'spruit' for hours. The built **klei ossies** (mud oxen). The boys enjoyed playing **kleilat**. (green stick with mud attached to it)

Norman recalls the railway crossing directly outside the village where the Kok family were killed.

The 'koppie' (hill) was the perfect place to play. The children would climb up to it and spend time there. Faisia recalls at about age seven being angry and packing up

her goods to run way to the koppie. This opposition was met with the back of her mother's hand (a frask) or the plastic strap which lay in waiting for offenders. She maintains that she is no worse for wear today.

Bessie is reputed to have been an excellent cook. She was house-proud and her garden was filled with roses.

On meeting some of the remaining members of the community in Johannesburg, Norman Cheerin felt that it brought back many fond memories of his life in the village. He was born and raised in Brandfort. At the age of ten he was sent to Saint Andrews boarding school. Our parents lived in Keerom Street. They moved to Duke and then finally built their own home at 15 Keightley Street. **Henk de Bie** was the architect. Norman was delivered by sister Pretorius at 6.00 am on April 02 1943.

Our father **Solomon Cheerin** came from Dvinsk in Latvia via Southhampton to Cape Town harbour on a one-way ticket. On arriving in South Africa he went to his uncle **Mr Babrow** in Smithfield who employed him. He was the father of the late **Louis Babrow**, a Springbok Rugby player and selector. He played for the Springboks the day before the battle of El Alamein. He became a referee. Doug Zeeman recalls that Louis used to park his car in the Zeeman's parking lot.

Solly met **Bessie Cheerin** (nee Zangwill) in Kroonstad. Bessie was one of seven children, born to Chaim Michael and Nechama Ita **Zangwill**.

The Germans flew over the British positions and reported that 'nothing was happening'. The following day the Battle of El Alamein ensued. That heralded the end for the Germans in Africa.

Norman has fond memories of the **Immerman** house. Susan the domestic worker, was very kind to him. Sally (Immerman) had beautiful roses in the garden.

In 1956 Norman's barmitzvah was held at the shul. Family came from far and wide. All the ladies in the community helped and lent an able hand as caterers were unheard of in those days.

Messrs Kalish and Talpis were gentlemen farmers in the district. They were responsible for the upkeep of the synagogue in the village.

Louis Klein played the piano accordion at the party. He was retired and lived at the Grand National Hotel. He drove a car with a dickie seat and gave 1 guinea

(1 English pound and 1 shilling) which Norman considered a memorable gift for his barmitzvah.

Selwyn Levin recalls going to shul on Friday nights until 1958 when services became infrequent.

Gershon and Bessie owned a General Dealer store. They had three children, **Mathew, Ray and Fay**. Mathew married **Rebecca**. They had a son **Louis**.

Ray married **Maxleigh Derman**. They have a son **Searle** and a daughter **Cheri**. Searle is married to **Simone**, they have a son **Joshua and Mason**.

Cheri married **Royston Posting**. They have two daughters, **Caitlin** and **Courtney**. Gershon's forefathers were all rabbis who studied the Torah be alpei (by heart). Gershon also helped out with the Shabbat services when no one else was able to do it. He taught his son Mathew his barmitzvah portion. The family were bakers and baked for the army. They were forced to leave Lithuania for Poland. Ray recalls stories of money sewn into jackets. They arrived in Poland where money was changed, but in essence they arrived penniless.

Ray's memories of Brandfort are quite vivid and this is her personal view on how she recalls her childhood.

Ray mentions that a **Mr Cohen** had a shop on the corner and was friends with Ray's later father. Ray's parents looked after Mr Cohen when he fell ill. However, as soon as Mr Cohen died his family came in the middle of the night and rumour has it that the will was destroyed. There was reputedly a court case, but nothing was ever proved.

Ray recalls Ben Gurion visiting Brandfort – she doesn't mention the year.

The children used to swim outside of the town by the river dam. Ray also wanted to go, despite the fact that she couldn't swim and almost drowned. She remembered from a show that when someone was drowning they put their hand up, and someone saw her and rescued her. That was the day she got the biggest hiding from her father who was angry because he could have lost her.

She also mentions that her mother was an excellent cook.

She remembers toilets on the outside of the houses, affectionately known as 'uithuisies'.

A swimming pool was built, but the rules were that only half hour was allowed for boys and half hour for girls, as well as for the men and women. They all had to swim separately.

Ray passed away and this is part of the Hesbet (eulogy) that her son Searle presented at the Pinelands cemetery in Cape Town.

My mother Ashira Bat Gershen

Worked hard and prayed hard to support and bless her children, myself, my sister Cherie, Tamrad and every single other person she met who was less fortunate than herself.

She had a hard life. She was often let down by her family. It never broke her spirit. She worked hard to support our family.

My mother's morals were impeccable! She spoke the truth. She definitely spoke her mind. She was brave enough to tell you 'difficult to bear' news irrespective of the consequences to herself. She was decisive.

Ashira lived an honest, honourable and pure life. She prayed constantly, with and for everyone. From a young age I remember every single person who had any problems such as; a death in the family, a divorce, or any crisis, would come to our house, to be comforted by Aunty Ray. Recently she painted her house yellow and called it 'the light house' so that people who needed help could find her more easily.

We were poor most of our early life and she used to teach piano at rough government schools, then privately at home late into every single night.

She was a generous hostess who loved food and catering. She collected recipe books. She would literally cook for and entertain every single person who walked into our house whether a new or old friend and whether we had the money to do so or not.

Over the past 10 years she fed thousands of disadvantaged peoples from local and Karoo poverty stricken areas. Up to 12000 meals a month. She literally gave thousands of packets of sweets to poor children on a regular basis. Township children would always run next to her car, praising her... Aunty Ray.

Ray Ashira won South Africa's most prestigious responsible tourism social upliftment and charity awards, presented to us by the Minister and Deputy Minister of Tourism, for her massive efforts.

She was a regular patient at the hospital. A nurse came into our room recently. She told me she couldn't believe it when one day she recognized my mother, the first white woman she had seen in De Noon township, in a wheelchair accompanied by a truck feeding the poor. She even rallied trucks of dog food for Touws River's hungry pets.

She organised truck, after truck, after truck, of food and blankets for the poor, disadvantaged people of Touws River who had to suffer -7° winters with snow on the surrounding koppies (hills) I would estimate she donated 12000 blankets, one to probably every person. She would get out of ICU intensive care and confined to a wheelchair in a township handing out food within 3 days. Such was her commitment and determination.

I was at my farmhouse 4 weeks ago when I heard my mom was hospitalised. I left immediately to be back with her and asked a member of staff who was helping me pack if she had ever met my mother. She said 'Yes, Aunty Ray came into my shack with a blanket and a prayer many years ago'. My mother went to great effort to give each blanket out with a prayer (herself) so she could make sure they went to people who really needed them.

My mom made friends wherever she went. Every single cleaner, nurse and doctor (in the hospital) called my mother Aunty Ray! They would pop in every day, before and after their shifts for weeks on end.

Several years ago my mother was pronounced clinically dead after having had an embolism and after being resuscitated by a nurse for 45 minutes she was on a ventilator life support system for several days. Every doctor and nurse advised turning the plug off. Several days later she 'walked' out that hospital. She taught us determination.

She suffered but never complained. She was very ill with stage four cancer, kidney failure, Parkinson's, lung disease, pneumonia, diabetes, infections and a badly broken foot and a crushed vertebra. She lived in massive pain but never complained. In fact, she never even considered herself sick and didn't even know about the stage four until the end. At her last charity function I saw her in more pain than I had ever seen anybody in. She couldn't speak yet she sat there proudly,

for as long as she could, making sure it all went well. She would suffer to get in and out of the car to visit her grandchildren at every single opportunity she had.

My mother was the best businesswoman that I have ever met.

I can honestly say that Aquila Game Farm would not have made it this far without her! She worked at a sales desk at the Waterfront in Cape Town for many years. She made more turnover than any of the other staff ever did.

In those days we needed every single cent to keep the doors open. She kept our doors open. She worked 9am-9pm almost every day. I only found out recently that after work every single night she would visit many of Cape Town's hotels and guests houses and build business relationships and pray for their staff. She did this for years. At tourism shows in Durban and London, she managed to befriend everyone from the management, cleaners to the security guards who used to run around for her to organise us everything we needed.

My mother did business with love, tourists from everywhere in the world used to come to me at Aquila while I was covered in cement onsite building. They would tell me that they don't really know how they got here. They met my mom, who showed them a photo of me and gave them a hug, a muffin and raved about the good food and Aquila experience. So they booked and came.

At tourism shows, she always won the love, respect and business's support from the biggest National and International tour operators in the world. She would summon them with a wave and a smile to leave their scheduled meetings at their stands and come to her wheelchair in the aisle to chat and take a brochure. These suppliers still support us today, and when I meet with them, it's not 'how are you?' Or 'how's the business?' It is 'how is your mother?'

She never missed an opportunity to pray with many people from many religions but always declared that there is only one G-d and that all roads lead to Hashem.

My mother's charity efforts will continue

I trust that Hashem has seen all his work that she has done for him and that he blesses her accordingly.

I beg that Hashem grants my mother Ashira bat Gershon mercy and compassion.

My mother will never be forgotten!

Anti-Semitism was part of living in Brandfort. It was felt that at times you could 'cut it with a knife'. Norman got beaten up for being 'a Jood'.

Max Immerman chased a farmer out of his general dealer store for making an anti-Semitic remark. According to Nellie Schlome, a person has a right to be called by their name and should not be referred to as 'Jood'.

On a lighter note. It is told that a customer walked into the Cheerin's general dealer store and purchased an item. When Bessie was asked to 'put in on account', she enquired as to the purchaser's initial and was told 'Jew' i.e. J, for **Junior**.

Norman's nose was broken by Pieter Immelman, the local doctor's son. 'Jood', (Jew) 'Joodjie' (little Jew) were commonly used and Norman didn't know he had a real name for quite a while.

Mike Levin's dog Taffy barked at some children on their bikes and they remarked: 'Voetsek jou Joodse hond!' (you Jewish dog) to the dog. More anti-semitism was personally experienced at St Andrews in Bloemfontein by Norman.

I would like to make it quite clear that there were many families and respectful citizens in the village who accepted, befriended and lived amicably with and alongside the Jews in the village. *It should be noted that there was positive interaction between communities as well.*

There is a wonderful story of a Jewish farmer who came from Vrede and during the Depression bailed out about 6 or 7 Afrikaans farmers who couldn't maintain their farms any longer. After the Depression he offered them back their farms at the same price that he had paid for them interest free.

Mr Yudel Cohen, owned a general dealer store in Brandfort. He had relatives in Bloemfontein and was quite well off.

Mr Goldberg was a jeweller who came to live in Brandfort. He worked in the Levin family's jewellery shop where he did repairs.

The township was referred to as 'the location'. It was situated across the hill from the village. A siren would sound at 9.00 pm to ensure that the people returned to their township. It was a punishable offence for black residents to be in the village beyond that time without a pass.

On a visit to the village about 40 years later, Faisia visited 11 Keightley Street to see the house she had grown up in. She bumped into a man walking past called Daniel. He asked after her brother Norman and said they had played together as children. There were both grandparents by now.

Mark Schlome remembers going down memory lane on a visit to the village to revisit familiar sites.

Betty and Lily Levin befriended Ms Winnie Madikizela Mandela when she was banished to Brandfort during the Apartheid era. It is said that only a handful or so of white people spoke to her. Piet de Waal was her attorney and she referred to his wife Adele as "my white sister". They all became firm friends.

The **Sternberg** family had a house on Voortrekker Road. They lived next to the Immerman's shop. **Collie** was an only child. He sent money to Piet de Waal, a then lawyer in the village, to look after his parents graves.

Mr McEwan owned a jewellery store.

The Fainsingers: The two brothers owned a hotel in Brandfort. Zundel lived near the hill and Chippy lived nearer the town. **Kate and Zundel** decided that their children should learn 'speech'. Selma was learning the piano. To this end a teacher was brought from Bloemfontein. They left for Bloemfontein about 1934.

There were two children, a son and daughter namely **Tillian** and **Selma**.

Joe Fainsinger lived in Brandfort and only moved to Bloemfontein later (about 1930) to further the childrens' education.

There were three daughters from this marriage and they were all very musical. **Cecilia** (Chippy) married **Percy Yutar**. They had a son called **David Yutar**. Chippy was an excellent flautist who was originally taught by her father. After she matriculated, she acquired a bursary, a big honour to study piano and the flute at Cape Town University School of Music.

Grace married **Judge Solly Miller**.

They had two children, a son Dennis and a daughter Barbara.

Freda was the eldest daughter. She married **Gus Porter** and then married **Dave Greenblatt**. They had 2 children, Allan and Margaret. They were born in Port Elizabeth.

Other members of the Fainsinger family were **Sarah and Rudolph Flink**. They had three children, a son **Gerald** and two daughters, **Maisie** and **Betty**. After spending a few years in the village the family moved to Bethulie where Mr Flink was the proprietor of the Royal Hotel in Bethulie.

The **Brauer** family owned the Grand National Hotel in Brandfort. They sold it to the **Nathan** family. **Louis and Dora Brauer** had four children, **Kenneth, Monty, Archie and Sheila**. The children were sent to boarding school Grey and Eunice in Bloemfontein. Their grandmother, was a religious lady, who lived with the family in a cottage adjacent to the hotel.

Peter Nathan's bris was arranged and performed by the Reverend Batlan. **Bobby Nathan** married **Dr Jammy**.

Peter married **Therle Peterson**.

Bernard and Sophia Lovius were a well-known family in Brandfort. **Sophia** was a sister to **Leopold Hofmann**.

Mr Lovius had two sons.

Lily and **Alec Levin** were the last Jews to leave Brandfort approximately at the end of March 1981.

Lily Levin mentioned that a member of the Brandfort community remarked that they felt sorry that the last vestige of the Jewish community had left as a special ambience was lost by their leaving.

Paul Alberts owned the former Grand National Hotel and a farm outside Brandfort. It had one of the biggest existing Boer cemeteries from a concentration camp. Paul was hugely encouraging about this project.

It has been a privilege and a definite dream to gather together the information about our village of Brandfort. Some of us were born there, some 'arrived' there and the sojourn lengthened into years. For others it was a passing moment in time.

For me it was home. It was the Free State in its enriched warmth. It gave me the strength and background to go forth with my life and to tackle each living moment to the best of my ability.

I salute the village of Brandfort!

I wish to thank everyone who gladly gave of their time and energy to enable me to put this project together. If I have inadvertently left out any names or information the intention here was completely honourable.

*I dedicate this to the memory of my beloved parents
Solomon & Bessie Cheerin.*

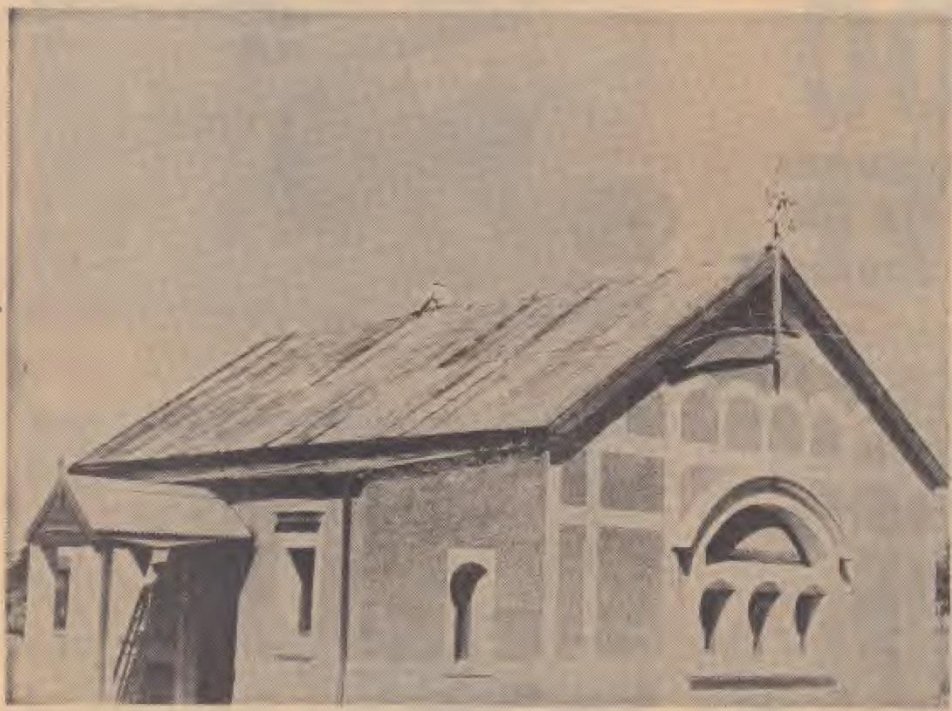


*Left top: Betty Levin, Bessie Cheerin
2nd Back Row: Lily Levin, Mrs Gerson, Ray Sheftz, Mrs Kessel
3rd Row: Selwyn Levin, Selma Levy, Faisia Cheerin
Front Row: Michael Levin, Chaim Levy, Neville Levin.*



Silver goblet lodged with museum

FRIENY
WED.
SEPT
26/9/73.



The Brandfort Synagogue is being demolished — 70 years after Mr J. Lovius (Snr), now living in Bloemfontein, founded it. The last resident rabbi was Rabbi J. Batlan who died in 1935 and served Brandfort for 27 years. Since then the Jewish community has had lay preachers, but now there are only three Jewish families living in Brandfort and it has become difficult to obtain a quorum of 10 adult males for a service. Until five years ago the synagogue was regularly used for High Festivals.



Back Row: Harry (Kudu) Zangwill, Dave Levy, Alec Levin, Maurice Levin, Mr Kalish, Max Klevansky, Joe Weitzer
2nd Row: Rose Weitzer, Ray Scheftz, Emily Zangwill, Max Immerman
3rd Row: Mrs Kessel, Sally Immerman, Betty Levin, Lily Levin, Bessie Cheerin, Faisia Cheerin, Solly Cheerin, Nellie Schlome, Norman Cheerin, Mr Donner
Front Row: Mrs Gershon, Hazel Weitzer, Michelle Zangwill, Selwyn Levin, Jennifer Levin, Neville Levin, Michael Levin (Chaimpie) Levy, Laura Schlome, Mr Kessel



Lily Levin's 70th Birthday: January 1995
Left: Betty Levin, right Faisia Cheerin Shaskolsky



Mrs Batlan



Rev Batlan

under Acts No. 2 of 1883 and No. 35 of 1889. For Council.

To the Colonial Secretary of the Cape of Good Hope. No. 2 of 1889.
17th March 1902

I do hereby apply for Letters of Naturalization in the Colony of the Cape of Good Hope, and I declare that the answers to the questions hereunder given are true and correct.

1. Name of Applicant (in full). Lazar Weinbren
2. Birth-place (state fully the name of the place and the country in which the place is situated). Onakete Volkmar Co. Russia.
3. Age next Birthday. 40
4. Occupation. Matchmaker
5. Place of Residence in the Colony. 277 Albert Rd. Salt River.
6. Length of time during which the applicant has resided in Colony. 2 1/2 years.
7. Does the applicant intend, when Naturalized, to reside in the Colony? Yes.
8. Have you ever been convicted and sentenced for any of the following crimes? Treason, Murder, Culpable Homicide, Rape, Theft, Fraud, Perjury or Forgery. If so, have you received a free pardon? No.

Dated at Salt River
the 17th day of March, 1902

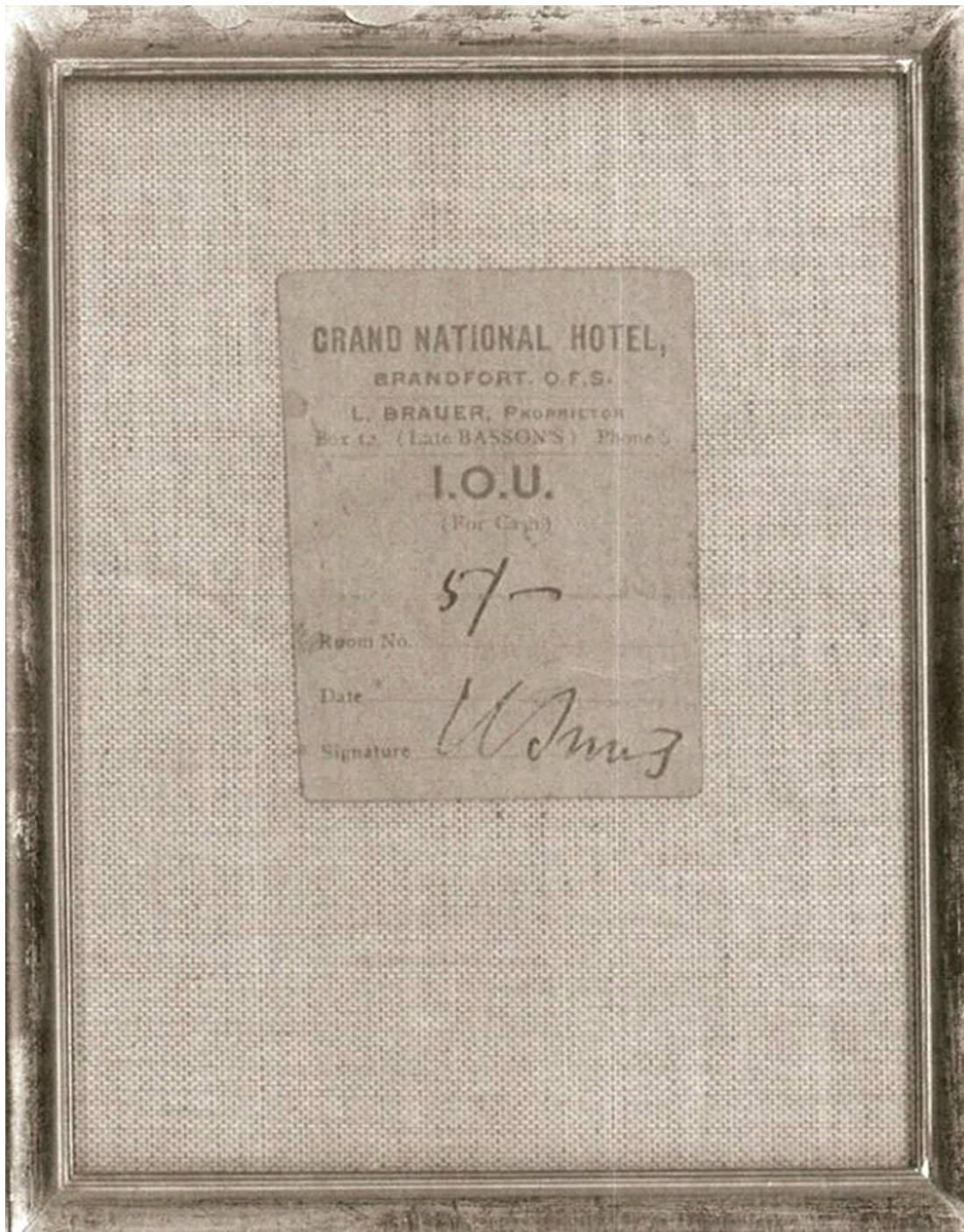
Signature of
Witness. L. Weinbren

Matchmaker (Shatgun)

When a bachelor came to the village a matchmaker was summoned to find a match / partner in life.

I find it interesting that even Brandfort had a matchmaker.

The Grand National Hotel



This is an I. O. U. It means that someone owed L. Brauer 5 shilling.

Information received from the late Mr Paul Alberts

I have heard vague stories about Jews who lived in Brandfort at the turn of the previous century and a bit later. I live in an hotel which I converted into a manor house that was known as the Basson's Hotel. The Basson family were Jews. The earliest photo I have of the building with the name Basson Hotel on it, dates from 1913. I also have a postcard with the Basson Hotel on it dating from the late 1920s.

(I did not manage to make contact with the Basson family)



My (Douglas Ziman) late mother, Sheila's parents who took Minnie Spiro in.



The girl is Sheila my (Douglas Ziman) mother, then her brothers Archie, Monty and the eldest Ken

TO WHOM IT MAY CONCERN :

Mr. Louis Brauer, who has been the Proprietor of the Grand National Hotel, Brandfort, Orange Free State, is after nearly twenty years disposing of his hotel business.

It gives me pleasure as Chairman of the Liquor Licensing Board for the Brandfort District, to testify to the fact that during the whole course of his career in the hotel trade, Mr. Brauer has kept an unblemished record, and has had no offences recorded against him.

He has, as far as the public of Brandfort is concerned, as well as in respect of the travelling public, at all times given of his best in the way of civility and attention, and is leaving behind him a very high reputation as an hotel Proprietor.

During almost twenty years of business in Brandfort he has been most ably assisted on the hotel side by his good wife, Mrs. Dora Brauer, and my good wishes go with them both in any business venture they may undertake on leaving this town.



W. Mitchell
 CHAIRMAN : LIQUOR LICENSING
 BOARD, BRANDFORT, O.F.S.

J. C. M. M. M.

Russia in Reality

A Terrible Tale of Actual Experience

THE FRIEND NEWSPAPER JUNT 7TH 1929

Orphaned Children Now Safe

Mrs Ray Solomon from Brandfort has in her short life traversed many hardships. She has climbed many steep hills and endured much. The adopted daughter of Mr and Mrs Isaac Solomon of Brandfort, she was, writes out Brandfort correspondent, one a family of eleven born in *Pavlogrod*, Russia. Her father, a man in good circumstances, carried on the manufacture of buttons, and held the order from the Russian Government for the supply of lead seals for the Russian postal administration.

During the revolution of 1919, all her father's worldly possessions, the result of 41 years of strenuous effort, were confiscated by the Bolsheviks. Her mother and father were tied hand and foot, the latter placed face to the wall and with a pistol held to his neck, his money demanded.

After being subjected to considerable abuse and ill treatment, they were thrown from their home onto the snow-clad earth. Within six days of this treatment, her mother, father and two of the children died of hunger, shock and exposure.

The surviving members of the family, left destitute and penniless, passed through sordid privations which beggars description, until eventually, at the instance of their uncle, residing in America, they went to that country, there only to find, on their arrival, that the refugee quarter was so crowded, that the accommodation was unprocurable.

They were sent to Southampton to await the next batch of refugees, and were delayed seven months.

Arriving in America eventually, they were brought before the American Supreme Court at the instance of President Coolidge, on the appeal of Senator Perlman, and were again rejected and returned to Southampton.

In desperation, they then appealed to their uncle, Mr I Solomon, in South Africa who provided their passage to this country and guaranteed the costs of their Southampton sojourn.

They came to South Africa and were adopted by him.

Eight months later the widowed sister of Mrs Solomon died in Alexandrovsk, leaving further five orphans penniless. These Mr and Mrs Solomon also adopted and brought them to South Africa. Five of these children are now earning their own livelihood in South Africa. Four Mr Solomon is still educating, and Mrs Ray's engagement has just been announced.

Mr and Mrs Solomon's devotion to human interests in the absence of any children of their own, is one of the many admirable, practical, humanitarian demonstrations by the Jewish community in South Africa, to emancipate their relatives from terrible social conditions.

JAX

ADD 4 X PIKS OF THE SOLOMONS

Information was supplied by Mr Barry Slavin.

Unfortunately the photograph quality is poor)



These two pictures were taken in Brandfort. We have tried to find out names and particulars, but have not been successful.

| Town | Surname | English Name | Maiden Name | Hebrew Name | Parents | Date of Birth |
|-----------|------------|----------------|-------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------|
| Brandfort | | Semi | | Semi b Moshe Eliyahu | | |
| Brandfort | Batlan | Hinda | | Hinda b Eliyahu Moshe | | |
| Brandfort | Batlan | Rev Joshua | | Yehoshua b Moshe Shraga | | |
| Brandfort | Cohen | Joseph | | Yosef b Ariye HaCohen | | |
| Brandfort | Fainsinger | Michael | | | Sundel & Kate Fainsinger | |
| Brandfort | Gersohn | Solomon B | | Shlomo Bendet b Chaim | | |
| Brandfort | Goodman | Joseph | | Yosef b Gershon | | |
| Brandfort | Graff | Anna | | | | |
| Brandfort | Hellmann | Olga Lena | | Golda Leah b Yisrael Pinchas | | |
| Brandfort | Hoffmann | Louis | | Eliezer b Shlomo Zalman | | 09/01/1857 |
| Brandfort | Immerman | Esther | | Esther b Mendel | | |
| Brandfort | Immerman | Leopold | | Yehuda Leib b Zeev | | |
| Brandfort | Lovius | Bernhard Selig | | Baruch Yehoshua b Chaim HaLevi | | |
| Brandfort | Lovius | Sophia Chaia | | Chaya Shifra b Shlomo Zalman | | |
| Brandfort | Melman | Samuel Meyer | | Shmuel Myer b Leib | | |
| Brandfort | Merskey | Hilda | | Hinda b Shlomo | | |
| Brandfort | Prenzlau | Adele | Sussmann | Shaina b Eliyahu | | 13/01/1862 |
| Brandfort | Rosenthal | Louis | | Yehuda Leib b Yehchezkel | | 14/05/1856 |
| Brandfort | Schatz | Jacob | | Yacov b Yehoshua Zelig | | |
| Brandfort | Schatz | Rosa | Sternberg | Rachel Leah b Kalman | | |
| Brandfort | Smith | Louis | | Yehuda Leib b Ephraim | | |
| Brandfort | Spiro | Max | | Mordechai b Shabtai HaCohen | | |
| Brandfort | Sternberg | Marcus Louis | | Mordechai Eliezer b Kalman | | 16/03/1888 |
| Brandfort | Wainer | Max | | Mordechai b Chaim Yosef | | |
| Brandfort | Weinbren | Lazar | | Eliezer b Yacov | | |
| Brandfort | Weinbren | Yetta | | Yenta b Benzion | | |



| Age | Date of Death | Hebrew date of Dea | Birthplace | Spouse |
|-----|---------------|--------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| | | 14 Cheshvan 5679 | | |
| 61y | 11/05/1935 | 5 Iyar | | Joshua Batlan |
| 61y | 04/12/1933 | 16 Kislev | | Hinda Batlan |
| 59y | 10/01/1910 | 13 Tevet | Talsen, Kurland | |
| 9m | 20/11/1934 | | | |
| | 29/08/1925 | 9 Elul | | |
| 31y | 18/12/1910 | 17 Kislev | | |
| | 18/02/1948 | | | |
| | 24/01/1921 | 15 Shvat | | |
| | 23/12/1925 | 6 Tevet | | |
| 60y | 27/01/1941 | 28 Tevet | | |
| 81y | 22/06/1958 | 4 Tammuz | | |
| 75y | 31/03/1935 | 26 Adar | | Sophia Chaia Lovius |
| 75y | 25/07/1935 | 24 Tammuz | | Bernhard Selig Lovius |
| 47y | 10/08/1908 | | | |
| 34y | 17/11/1915 | 4 Kislev | | Bernard Merskey |
| | 11/07/1913 | | Luchow, Hanover, Germany | |
| | 21/06/1932 | 17 Sivan | Liebemuhl, Prussia | |
| | 05/04/1923 | | Frauenburg, Kurland | |
| | 22/08/1932 | 20 Av | Talsen, Kurland | |
| 47y | 01/12/1927 | 7 Kislev | Akmejani, Lithuania | |
| 46y | 26/07/1930 | 1 Av | | |
| | 18/09/1917 | | Talsen, Kourland | |
| 49y | 25/06/1936 | 6 Tammuz | | |
| 64y | 19/07/1927 | Tammuz | | Yette Weinbren |
| 69y | 22/11/1933 | 2 Cheshvan | | Lazar Weinbren |

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| | 11/07/1913 | | Luchow, Hanover, Germany | |
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| | 05/04/1923 | | Frauenburg, Kurland | |
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| 49y | 25/06/1936 | 6 Tammuz | | |
| 64y | 19/07/1927 | Tammuz | | Yette Weinbren |
| 69y | 22/11/1933 | 2 Cheshvan | | Lazar Weinbren |

This info was sent to us by Rabbi Silberhaft. There is a ledger which contains minutes and relevant information pertaining to Jewish Brandfort. If anyone is interested, please contact Beyachad

011-645-2500/011-645-2567

museum@beyachad.co.za

Municipaliteit
van
Brandsfort



Municipality
of
Brandsfort
BRANDSBURG
MUNICIPALITY
BRANDSBURG

POOR KUNDE DIESE KUNDEKAAR MOET AAN
MR. H. KLEWANSKY, BRANDSBURG
DIE VERVOLGINGS- en de VERVOLGINGS-
VAN DESE KUNDEKAAR, EN AAN DE

By printed order to order to Mr.
H. KLEWANSKY, BRANDSBURG

2/4/79

1718 2010/1979

220/10

Mr. H. Klewansky,
Klewo Hotel,
BRANDSBURG.

Dear sir,

Re: ERVEN 165 AND 166 - HEBREW CONGREGATION

With further reference to my letter of the 16th August, 1978,
and your enquiry about the future use of the erven after
demolishing of the buildings, I have to inform you that the
property must be transferred back to the Council for use as
a park in accordance with the town planning scheme.

Although the Hebrew Congregation is not entitled to stipulate
any condition for the transfer of the property to the Your
Council of Brandsfort, I can assure you that the property will
be used as a park in accordance with the town planning scheme.

Yours faithfully,

Letter to Mr Klewansky - Re Erven 165 - 166 - Hebrew
Congregation

On the day of our visit to the village

There was a feeling of excitement and anticipation when we entered the village. We came from Cape Town, Mark Schlome brought a Land Rover group from Johannesburg, Rabbi Silberhaft travelled with Michael and Suzanne Belling, accompanied by prayer books, kosher refreshments and much positive input. We anticipated a small crowd of Brandfort 'oldies, who had resided in the village and came to relive an amazing milestone of our return.

'We are here, we are proud to be here!!'

I had made it quite clear to my young friend, the librarian in the township, Reuben Mayo, that **this** was where I wanted this book to be presented. In a library that I, as a white child, was not allowed to visit, as the location was out of bounds for us.

What did we find upon arrival?

A beautifully equipped space, welcoming us with abundant joy.

My book had come home.

The school children with faces shining in clear anticipation of the occasion, waited, well-mannered and respectfully for the presentation.

Councillor Mafu welcomed us and spoke to the children about the fact that Jewish people had lived in and contributed selflessly to the community. They, these children, would learn the history that was within the pages of this book and know the contribution that was made.

Then an Afrikaans resident from the old age home blew the Shofar (ram's horn) in joyous celebration of this auspicious event.

We broke bread, enjoyed cake and cookies together in true party spirit.

It was indeed a happy day!

I was delighted with this, as I had begun this journey and I had no idea that it would follow this fulfilling route.

Thereafter, we bade our hosts farewell and continued down towards the Jewish cemetery to greet our ancestors and pay our respect to those who had lived their lives in our village.

Rabbi Silberhaft and our quorum of men and women prayed at the gravesides in the cemetery.

We met a warm and caring gentleman, called Martin Jordaan.

He was in charge of cleaning the cemetery before the 'tekes' – ceremony.

He took pride in this work and has since been in watts app communication with me, whereby he has sent photographs to me to show me the good, well- kept state of the Jewish cemetery.

He learnt that men are required to cover their heads with a hat, cap or 'yarmulka'- skull cap. In our Jewish tradition this shows respect to the Almighty, who is always above us.

Lo and behold, our newly- found friend arrived at the cemetery, in his best attire, to pay his personal respects.

We were delighted by his presence and welcomed him warmly.

I know and believe that he will continue looking after the cemetery as long as he is able to.

I thank him for this. Our Brandfort connection.

Hindsight teaches me that nothing is by accident. Everything happens for a reason, albeit it seemingly concealed in various guises.

Mam Winnie Madikizela Mandela has passed away.

The news is just out, hot off the press.

May her dear soul rest in peace.

Her connection with Brandfort encouraged me to place my book on the library shelves in the village, for the children to study and know and understand that we were there.

We contributed to our village in the best way that we knew how.

Today I feel that I am a strong woman because of the village I left behind.

The village that taught me to be who I am and to stand firmly in the strength of my Brandfort legacy.



Ivor & Faisia Cheerin Shaskolsky

And last but not least our esteemed “authoress”

If anyone wishes to contact me:
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Faisia Cheerin Shaskolsky

I grew up in Brandfort. I was a boarder at Eunice school in Bloemfontein.

After matriculating I moved to Cape Town to study Speech and Drama at the University of Cape Town.

My family moved to Israel where we lived for 6 years.

I currently live in Cape Town with my husband Ivor and son.

I am the proud owner of my business, SpeakWell, where I train clients in the art of Effective Communication.

*My thanks go to my dear friend **Ashne Beinart Segal** and **Jaclyn Goodman** for their excellent contribution in collating this information so professionally.*

Nothing was ever too much.

10 - 17 May 2013

'Jewish' Brandfort celebrated in an enlightening booklet

SUZANNE BELLING

Brandfort, a tiny dorp in the Free State, in the middle of nowhere, would probably have gone unnoticed on the map of South Africa, had Winnie Madikizela-Mandela not been banished there during the apartheid era.

The town's now-depleted Jewish community was once a vibrant one but, up till now, there was hardly any record of its existence. Former resident, Faisia Shaskolsky (née Cheerin), of Milnerton, changed all that with the compilation of a booklet recording the history of the Jews in the town and bringing to life the memories of the personalities who lived there.

On April 30, Faisia, her husband Dr Ivor Shaskolsky, "Travelling Rabbi" Moshe Silberhaft, who co-ordinated the publication of the booklet, former residents and those with ties to the town, braved the numerous potholes for a reunion in Brandfort and the launch of the booklet in the library of the former township, metres from the exile home of Winnie Madikizela-Mandela.

Councillor Gladys Mafa, representing Mayor Steve Koalane, was guest of honour. Librarian Reuben Mayo, who worked alongside Shaskolsky in organising the event, was also present, as were schoolchildren from Matshediso High School and current residents of all denominations.

Jews (the Boerejode), Afrikaners and the Sotho people, over the generations had uniquely close relationships.

Winnie Madikizela-Mandela said in a message read out by Rabbi Silberhaft: "I was extremely grateful for the kindness shown to me by the Jewish community. Had it not been for them, I would not have survived the brutality of apartheid.

"They understood what it was to be persecuted and have played a great role in helping

me and Zindzi, my daughter, cross the racial barriers under very difficult circumstances."

She added that she welcomed the memoir. "I have many memories of Brandfort, some of them harsh, others sad, all too often times of hardship, suffering and loneliness. Exile is never easy - something the Jewish people know only too well from their own 2 000 years of Diaspora existence - and I believe it is important to keep a proper record of it."

Shaskolsky was prompted to undertake the project after a return visit to Brandfort, following an absence of many years.

"I was disappointed to find hardly a noticeable trace that a Jewish community had lived, flourished and fully participated in life in our village.

"I came away with a definite drive to put Jewish life, as it was then, on the map, as those were important and formative years that needed to be placed firmly in the roots of our lives."

Mafa told the schoolchildren: "Books are knowledge," encouraging them to make use of the library.

The programme included reminiscences by former Brandfort residents and the blowing of a shofar by Afrikaans resident Dalena Visser, who bought copies of the Tanach for her Jewish friends. She told the gathering how much she loved Israel and had visited the country 13 times.

Rabbi Silberhaft said the Country Communities Department of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies commended Shaskolsky on "her foresight and dedicated efforts in conceiving this project and bringing it to fruition".

The Jewish members of the gathering then proceeded to Brandfort's Jewish cemetery, where Rabbi Silberhaft led them in Kaddish as there were enough men present to make up a minyan.

Welcome comments

It is so wonderful to read this-so proud and privileged to have you in our lives-for also being a pioneer and beacon of light in the community and the world-well done mama!!!
We are really proud of you!
Gavin Solomon Shaskolsky my son

FORMAL INVITATION

Hello Everyone,

After a lot of time,my (our) memories of Brandfort are in black & white and ready for the big event.

Hope to see all of you there.

Kind regards

Faisia

This will happen before my school reunion. Iv and I plan to visit Kroonstad on our way back from Jozy and visit the memories of days gone by, the cemetery will also be on the agenda.

When in Johannesburg I will plan for a tea for Annette in the garden of the Sandringham Home for the Aged and some delish goodies to chow.

Just to make our cousin smile.

How beautiful was that very special invitation you sent.

I think it is fantastic to be doing this and I can only tell you that the Zangwills with all the others from Brandfort are smiling down on you and are going to be watching every move that day.

You are truly special – yes – we are family – and so proud to be part of you.

Annette Zangwill cousin is going to be delighted

Please let us know all about the day on the 30th – will be thinking of you and so wish we could be part of it.

Lots of love and big hugs.

Tony and Sugar Cohen (Zangwill cousins from Sydney Australia)

After visiting my hometown where I grew up. I went back for my school reunion, Eunice in Bloemfontein. Took a trip to my village, wandered down memory lane, went to the (wait for it) H.F. VERWOERD library and asked for a book which had any history of Brandfort, only to find that we, as Jews, were not mentioned in a single sentence. So, I came away, not realising that this would be my mission. I have since met with many ex Brandforters and

our community, as they are today. And thus compiled the history of the Jews of Brandfort.

Iv, myself and my brother Norman will be there to put this book in the Brandfort library.

We will meet the elders of the village and have a celebration, together with folk and the local school children who will be joining us, to honour and celebrate the memory of **my beloved parents**.

Bessie and Solomon Zangwill Cheerin

