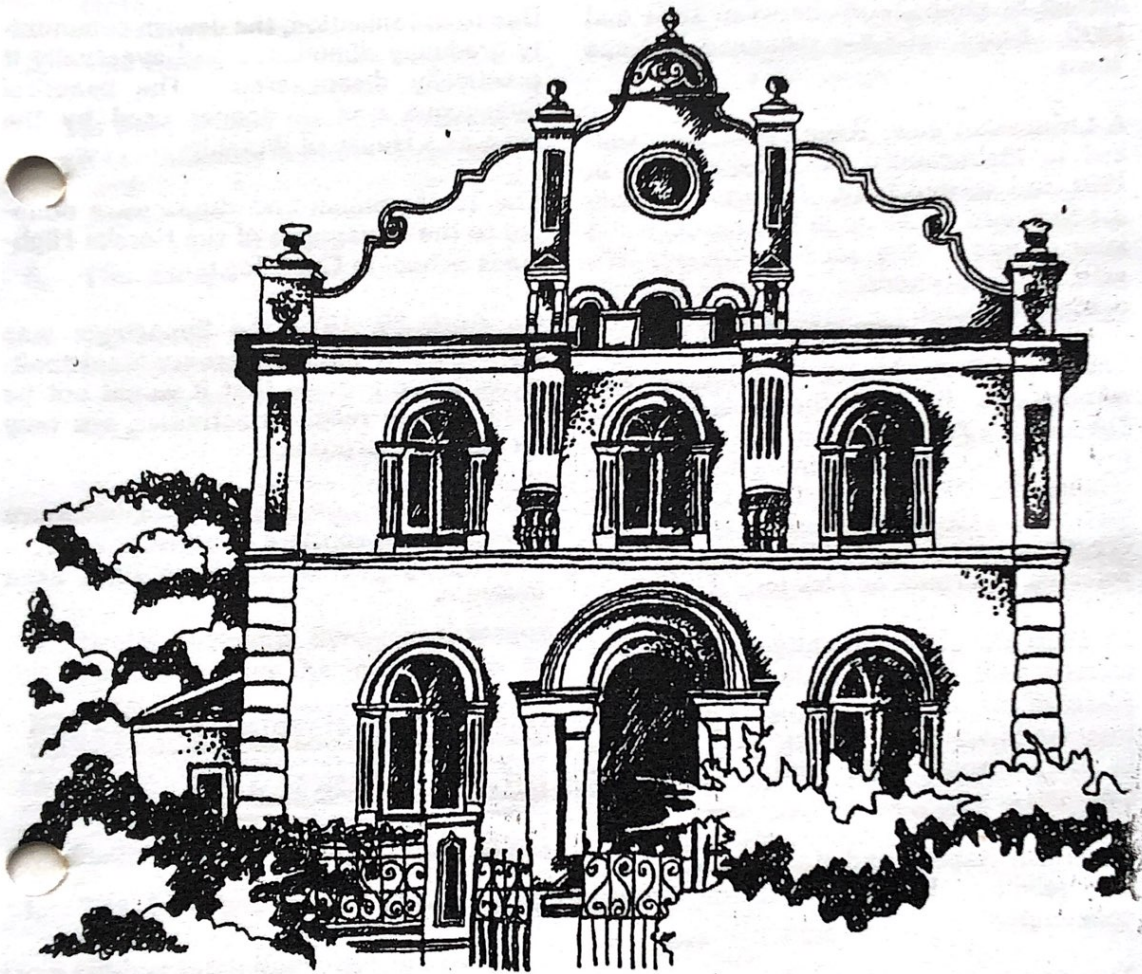


The Malmesbury Synagogue



Ohel Jacob Congregation

DONATION R1,00

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Yom Kippur.

2. Yom Kippur

This is the holiest day of the Jewish faith. It is the day of humility, of reconciliation amongst one another. A twenty-four hour fast is adhered to, from sunset to sunset. Businesses are closed during the fast.

Jews as far afield as Darling, Kalbaskraal, Hopefield and Piketberg attended this important event in the Synagogue in their finest apparel.

Yom Kippur is ended with the blowing of the Shofar.

3. Other festivals

3.1 Pesach

This festival commemorates the Jews' flight from Egypt and their sojourn in the desert. Pesach has been celebrated for 3 500 years.

3.2 Purim festival

This commemorates the Jewish

victory over the Persians as described in the book of Esther. Childrens re-enact the story of Esther at this joyous celebration.

3.3 Savout festival

This festival commemorates God's gift of the Ten Commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai.

3.4 Hannukkah

This festival occurs in mid-December near Christmas. Candles are lit and children receive gifts.

3.5 Succoth

The Succoth festival takes place five days after Yom Kippur and has an agricultural flavour. Temporary huts are erected and decorated with fruit and other products. The huts symbolise the shelters in which the Jews had to live during their sojourn in the desert. The fruit is the symbol of the harvest.

The Board of Curators of the Malmesbury Museum decided to research and document the history of the Synagogue, as a tribute to the former Jewish community.

The doors of the Museum opened on October 10, 1991; 80 years after the erection of the Synagogue. We trust that the Malmesbury Museum will prove worthy of this building.

HISTORY

The South African Jewish community originated when Russian refugees from Lithuania, Letland and Estland arrived after the Russo-Turkish war of 1877. These refugees landed possessionless on African soil.

Approximately a hundred Jewish families settled at Oudtshoorn between 1881 and 1890. Some refugees remained in Cape Town.

A Lithuanian Jew, Tobias Kretzmar, walked to Malmesbury from Cape Town in 1901 and settled here. He was probably the first Jew to settle in Malmesbury and later owned a shop on Main Street. His wife and four children, whom he had left behind in Lithuania, joined him later.

Thus the first Jewish community was established. By 1904 there were already 114 Jews. According to the minutes of the Founding Jewish Committee of September 26, 1904 the first Jewish congregation, the Ohel Jacob Malmesbury congregation was founded. Woolf Belnart was selected chairman and leader.

By 1906 a lively community of 40 families existed and it was decided to build a place of worship - a Synagogue. Here they could worship, educate their children in the Jewish faith and teach them Hebrew.

A certain Kaplan and Kahanowitz provided religious leadership to the Jewish community.

The corner-stone of the Synagogue was laid on 11 November 1911 by A. Katz and B. Olswang, two community leaders. The architect was a certain Goldman. This Synagogue, as all other synagogues, became the focal point of the Jewish community.

By 1920 the community was well established. The majority of Jews were general dealers, others dealt in fodder or travelled

the district as merchants.

The children fared well at school and had better command of the languages than their parents. At school parents could proudly observe their children receiving prizes.

Due to urbanisation, the Jewish community gradually diminished and eventually it practically disappeared. The beautiful Synagogue was no longer used by the Jews as a House of Worship.

The Torah, Bimah and chairs were donated to the Synagogue of the Herzlia Highlands School in Cape Town.

On April 29, 1974 the Synagogue was transferred to the Malmesbury Municipality, with the proviso that it would not be used for any religious activities, but only for cultural purposes.

The Cultural Committee of Malmesbury thought it appropriate to utilise this beautiful Synagogue, dating from 1911, as a museum.

CLASSIFICATION OF THE MALMESBURY SYNAGOGUE

1. The Ark

The Ark is the focal point and the most important item in all synagogues. It is symbolic of the two stone tablets on which the Ten Commandments were written, which were brought down from Mount Sinai by Moses. The Ark is in fact a cupboard which contained the hand-written parchment scrolls. These scrolls included the Torah which was written in Hebrew. The Torah is the law as is found in the first five books of the Old Testament.

2. The Draping

In front of the Ark hangs the Draping called the Paroketh. It is an elaborately embroidered curtain. Directly above the curtain are two tablets, each with five Hebrew words representing the Ten Commandments. During the Yom Kippur celebrations this curtain is replaced by a white curtain.

3. The Lamp

In front of, and above the Ark hangs a continuously burning lamp. It is to remind the congregation that God is ever present.

4. The Bimah

The Bimah is a raised platform in the centre of the Synagogue. The Cantor, preacher and Rabbi, if present, stands here.

The spot where the Bimah originally stood, is still discernable.

5. Women

In this Orthodox Synagogue, women sat apart from the men, i.e. on the gallery.

CUSTOMS IN THE SYNAGOGUE

1. The Shabbat

The Jewish Sunday starts on Friday evening at sunset and lasts until Saturday evening when the three stars appear. At the Shabbat service, men wear a decorated headpiece, the Yamukah, and a prayer shawl, the Tallit.

The service begins with a welcome and the Shema prayer which is often repeated during the service (Deut. 6 verse 4: "Hear, O'Israel; the Lord our

God, the Lord is one.)

2. The Torah

The Jewish children studied the Torah, i.e. the law of the five books of the Old Testament, and learned to read it in Hebrew. This took place in the antechamber.

The Torah is the essence of the Jewish faith. A Rabbi studies the Talmud which is in turn a more intensive study of the Torah.

3. Bar Mitzvah

This was an important event in the Synagogue. It is the confirmation of a thirteen-year-old boy as a full member of the congregation. He must read from the Torah on this occasion.

4. Weddings

Weddings were joyous events. They were conducted under a canopy in the Synagogue. After the ceremony, a glass would be crushed underfoot to symbolise the destruction of Jerusalem.

5. Minyanim

This is a service in the Synagogue which must be attended by at least 10 people after a funeral. Some of the departed are at rest in the Rozenburg cemetery.

FESTIVALS

The two holiest festivals of the Jewish year last for ten days.

1. Rosh Hashanah

This is the New Year celebration lasts for two days and occurs in September or in October. The festivities begin with the blowing of the Shofar or Ram's horn. It calls the congregation to penitence and is followed by