

Maraisburg Recollections – the Schneiders

by Robert Schneider, Sydney, Australia, July 2024



~~~~~

My grandfather, **Lewis Schneider** was born in Pasvetin, Lithuania on 15 September 1876 (according to what we were told). He must have arrived in South Africa in the late 1800s and was known as a Rand Pioneer. He later **made his way to Maraisburg**, being attracted by the burgeoning gold mining industry in the area (Durban Roodepoort Deep and Rand Leases) and there he established a general dealership under the name of Schneider's Groceries and Provisions on Main Reef Road.

Around 1904, he met the beautiful Gertie Katz who was also born in Pasvetin apparently, on 15 February 1889. The couple were engaged on 23 December 1906 and their engagement notice appeared in the first Christmas edition of the newly established Sunday Times on this very same date. (A copy of this page with engagement announcement is featured at the end of the article.)



The engagement notice under the heading “Fiancailles” (an old fashioned way of announcing a betrothal based on a French word) stated “KATZ-SCHNEIDER .... The engagement is announced of Miss Gertie Katz, younger daughter of Mr. and Mrs. M. Katz of 3 Ferreira Street Johannesburg to Mr Lewis Schneider of Maraisburg.”

I recall my grandmother Gertie telling me that Lewis Schneider was a ‘very frisky man’ and wealthy to boot as he bought her a piano which was then an expensive and uncommon household item. The couple married in Johannesburg on 23 June 1907 at the Johannesburg



Hebrew Congregation. Apparently, my grandfather’s wealth was diminished considerably after the 1929 stock market crash.

The newly-weds set up residence in a semi-detached house at **10a Sixth avenue Maraisburg** – the home where all five of their children were born – see this photograph taken in 1998 prior to my migration to Australia.

By 1913, **Lewis Schneider** had built his own premises for his store in a building with a headstone stating ‘L Schneider’s BDG’ with the date ‘1913’ above the name. **Below: Lewis Schneider’s store**





The building was situated on the main thoroughfare running through Johannesburg to the mining areas appropriately named Main Reef Road.

I last visited the building in 1998 when the building housed a paint and hardware store. The name of the building was still clearly visible. In the changing South Africa, Main Reef Road became Albertina Sisulu Road and looking at a google earth photo in March 2021, the building is now painted a bright red and houses Darryl's Motor Engineering and a fast-food chicken outlet. The headstone with the building name and date is still in place and the address is shown as 2285 Albertina Sisulu Road. At the same time, I also checked the two homes that my grandparents had owned on google earth and found that the home on **Arthur Matthews Avenue** was clearly identifiable but the home on **Sixth Avenue** looked very different although some features of the original semi were still in place.

## Maraisburg Shul and Jewish Community

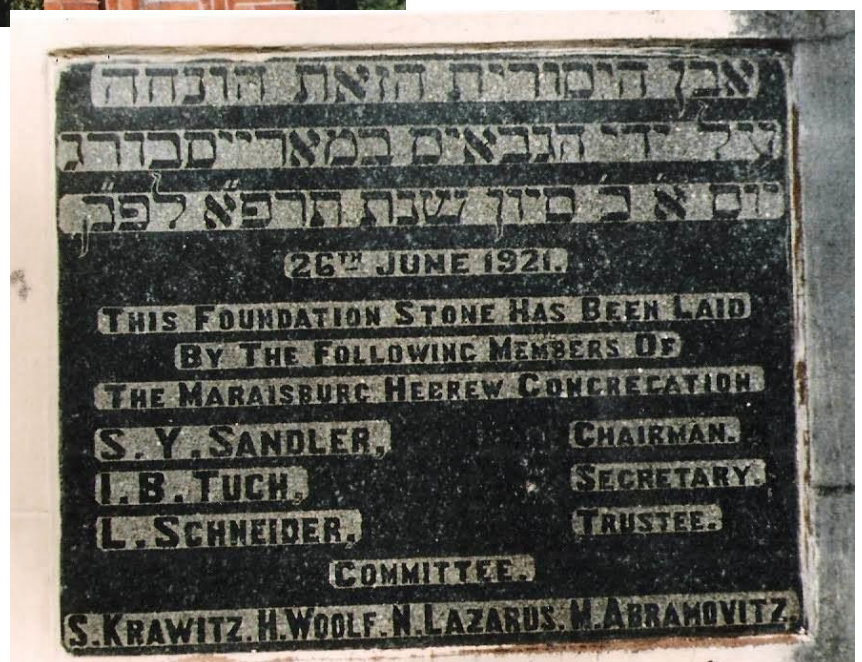


My grandfather, Lewis Schneider was active with the Hebrew Order of David, Dr Herzl Lodge No 1.

He was a stalwart of the Maraisburg Jewish community being instrumental in the establishment of the Maraisburg Shul. He was the Trustee who secured the land and his name and title appear on the

foundation stone laid on 26 June 1921. The small congregation of nearby Florida also worshipped at the synagogue in Maraisburg. The Maraisburg Synagogue was described as being an intimate site of prayer with a closely knit congregation. In the 1960s the congregation amalgamated with its larger close neighbour in Roodepoort, bringing new life for the dwindling congregations.

I am familiar also with some of the other names on the foundation stone



namely **H. Woolf**, **S. Krawitz** and **S Y Sandler**. My family have had a special and longstanding relationship with the Krawitz family going back to my grandparent's time. Their eldest son Abe, who became a prominent solicitor in Johannesburg, proposed the toast to my grandparents Lewis and Gertie Schneider at my parents, Max Schneider and Vida (née Milunsky)'s wedding in Johannesburg on 27 December 1950.

### **My grandparents Lewis and Gertie**

**Schneider** had five children:

**Rose, Bessie, Sarah (Sokkie) Jack** and lastly my father **Max**.



The eldest child Rose married **Hymie Massey** from Pretoria where they lived with their two children, **Rhona and Brian Massey**. Rhona, being one of my older cousins, has many memories of our grandparents and there is a photograph here of her and Neville Klein, the son of neighbours of my grandparents with

the delivery bicycle belonging to Schneider's Groceries and Provisions. Rhona recalls that our grandparents assisted many newcomers from Lithuania with board and lodging. She also recalls them hosting many a Shabbat Kiddush for the community at the larger home to which they had moved – 8 Arthur Matthews Avenue, Maraisburg. Rhona also remembers that our grandparents were the first to replace the old outside bucket toilet with a proper flushing toilet inside the house and that the Mayor of Maraisburg came to consecrate this new addition to the Schneider home.

However, back to the semi on 6<sup>th</sup> Avenue where after Rose came **Bessie**. Aunty Bessie married a wonderful, community-oriented businessman, **Morris Hertz** who was the founder of the Valley Observatory Hebrew Congregation in Johannesburg. Bessie and Morris had three children, **Marlene Krowitz**, (who sadly passed way in November 2023. Marlene was always very kind to me and in my youth, lent me her car on weekends, before I was able to get my own car.) **Max**



**Hertz** and **Ilona Wides**. In my childhood, virtually all of our family attended the Valley Observatory Shul where uncle Morris served as the chairman and later president for virtually all of the Shul's existence. I had my Barmitzvah there on 9 July 1966

Aunty **Sokkie** married **Solly Krawitz** (of the Maraisburg Krawitz family). Solly was a GP in Johannesburg. Solly's brothers were Abe, Barney (who was an accountant) and Les (who owned a children's clothing factory). Solly and Sokkie Krawitz were well-known lawn bowls champions in Johannesburg and

beyond. Sokkie and Solly Krawitz with their bowls trophies.



**Sokkie and Solly Krawitz** had two children, **Marion and Steven**. Marion sadly passed away in February 2021 – the first of my first cousins to die, and it was a very sore loss for me as Marion and I had been very close growing up in adjoining streets in Highlands North and I used to visit her and the rest of the family in South Africa every year until Covid put paid to that. Steven –



Hebrew name Shmuel after his paternal grandfather, Samuel - and I spent many happy hours in our childhood playing soccer and cricket in the Krawitz's back yard as well as amazing games such as Balyna cricket and Escalado horse-racing game.

My uncle **Jack Schneider** was an accountant. He married **Rhoda Jankelowitz** who came from Benoni. They had two children, **Mark and Loren** both of whom live in Sydney and I am very grateful to have first cousins here. Sadly, Uncle Jack died at an early age. Aunty Rhoda later came to live in Sydney as well and it was very special for me to have a surrogate mother here. Her passing in January 2017, left a huge void in my life.

Jack, Robert and Max Schneider



My parents Max and Vida (née Milunsky)'s wedding: Jack Schneider, Lewis Schnieder (seated) Gertie Schneider, Max Schneider, Vida (Milunsky) Schneider, Ethel Milunsky, Louis Milunsky.

I mentioned earlier that my late father, Max – the younger son of **Lewis and Gertie Schneider** married my mother **Vida Milunsky** in December 1950.

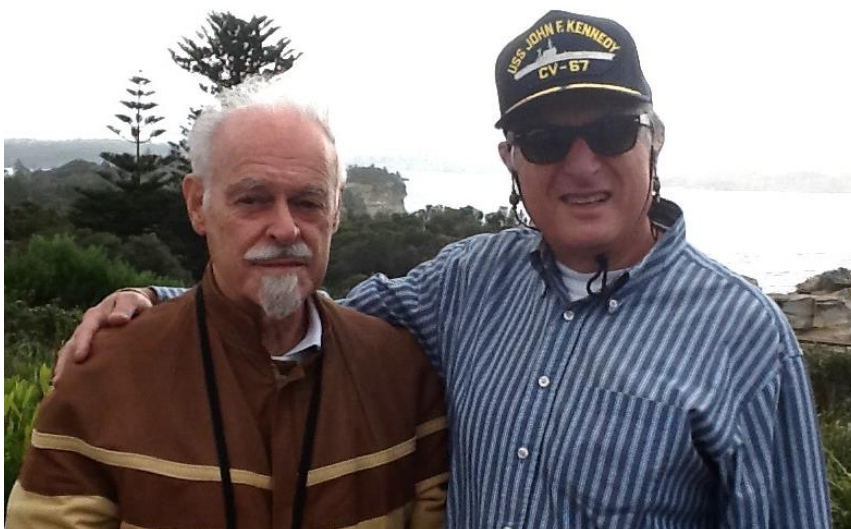
Max being the youngest in his family was able to relate very well to his older sisters' children and they all have fond memories of him in Maraisburg playing with him in the garden of the house in Arthur Matthews Avenue. I have copies of some lovely letters they wrote to him and also their voice tributes to Max and Vida when they got married – most of the nieces were either bridesmaids or flower girls at the wedding.

## **Milunsky Family**

My bonds with Maraisburg/Florida/Roodepoort continue as my maternal grandfather, Louis Milunsky had an uncle living in Florida, Harry Milunsky married to Janie. Reference is made in the list of family names of Jewish residents of Roodepoort, to Harry and Janie and their children, **Aubrey, Joyce and Cyril**. I had the pleasure of hosting in Sydney, both Joyce with her husband David in 2012, and also Aubrey and his wife Laura in 2014.



David and Joyce Lamensdorf with Rob Schneider in Sydney in 2012



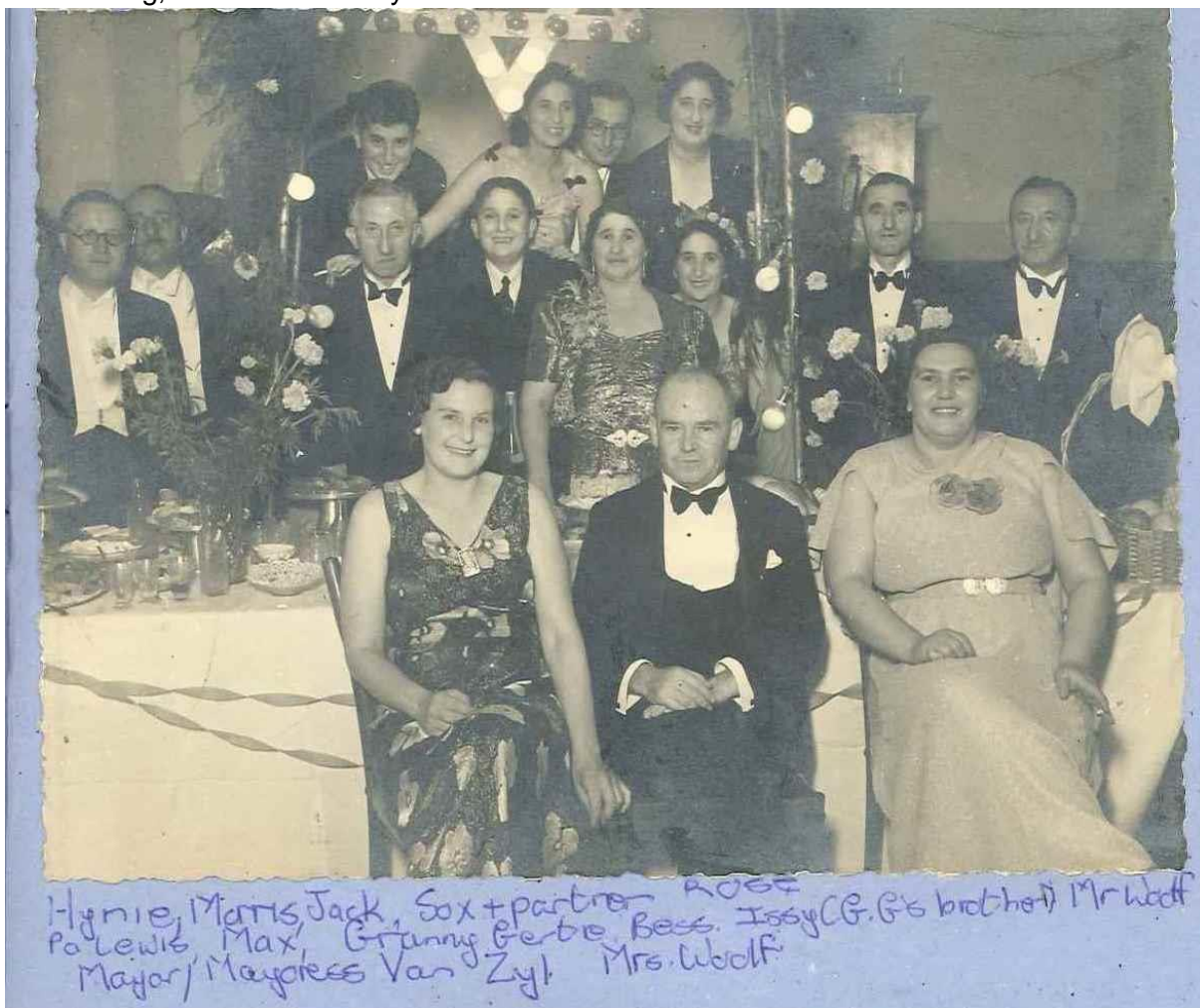
Aubrey Milunsky and Rob Schneider in Sydney in 2014.



We had other family connections in Florida on my grandfather Milunsky's side – Lena (Sacks) who was married to Abe (Boma) Shubitz. They had a lovely daughter, Valerie who sadly passed away in her prime. I remember many wonderful family picnics at Florida lake with my parents, sister Mandy and maternal grandparents, Louis and Ethel Milunsky and cousins Lena, Boma and Valerie. We used to row on the lake and enjoyed swimming in the public pool there.

I have a recording of the speeches from my parents' Max and Vida Schneider's wedding, where Abe Krawitz spoke glowingly about my grandparents Lewis and Gertie Schnieder, and their contribution to Jewish life in Maraisburg, including the fact that every Rosh Hashana, they opened their home for a brocha to the whole Jewish community of Maraisburg.

My father Max had had his barmitzvah on 28 January 1939 in the **Maraisburg Shul**. The next day, his parents Lewis and Gertie Schneider hosted a reception which was attended by the Mayor of Maraisburg, Councillor Van Zyl and his wife.



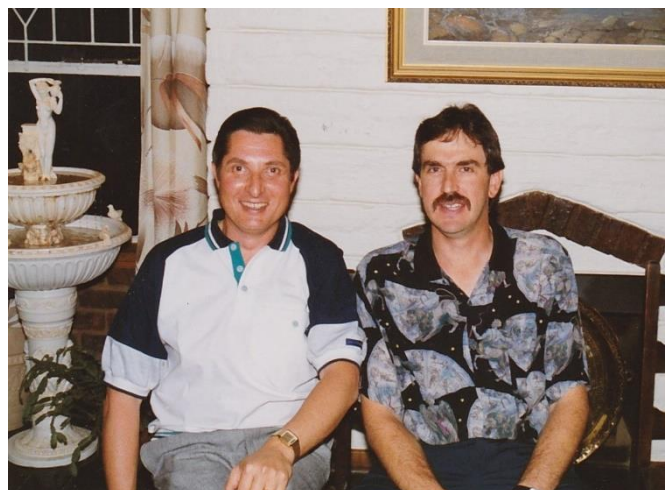
The photo above includes all the Schneider children, their spouses (of those who were married) and Mrs **Sarah Woolf**, the wife of **Harry Woolf** who was also on the Shul committee. (not all the names are known)

L/R top Hymie Massey, Morris Hertz, Jack Schneider, Sockie Schneider & partner (name unknown), Rose Massey, Lewis Schneider, Max Schneider, Gertie Schneider, Bessie Hertz, Issy Katz (Gertie's brother) Harry Woolf, Mayoress Van Zyl, Mayor Van Zyl, Mrs. Woolf.

The relationship between the Schneider's and the Woolf's must have been quite close because I recall as a child, shlepping with my parents to Maraisburg for the Barmitzvah of **Barney and Ada Woolf's son. Barney** who was the eldest son of Harry and Sarah was also involved in the winding up of the Maraisburg Shul. In a strange quirk of fate, I am very friendly here in Sydney with Harry and Sarah's grandson **Hilton Woolf**, the son of their youngest son, Stanley. The Woolf's had two other sons, **Isaac and Ernest Woolf**.

Another name on the Shul foundation stone that I am familiar with is that of Sandler. I recall in later years that **Elias Sandler** used to visit my Granny Gertie once she and my grandfather Lewis had moved to Johannesburg. Elias Sandler (after whom Sandler Road in Fairmount/Glenhazel is named) was also involved in the establishment of the Johannesburg township known as Percelia. I also recall the Zidel family – **Sam Zidel** had a real estate agency opposite Schneider's Groceries & Provisions. Sam Zidel's grandsons **Jeff** and **Ian Zidel** still live in Johannesburg and Jeff is still involved in real estate including developments in Maraisburg.

Another prominent son of Maraisburg was **Dr A (Jock) Beron** who, although born in Roodepoort, moved to Maraisburg before becoming the principal of King David Primary School in Linksfield. My late father Max was very friendly with Dr Beron – I myself was a student at King David School – and I daresay that this friendship may have had something to do with Max becoming deeply involved as the chairman of the King David Schools Management Committee and an executive member of the S A Board of Jewish Education.



Photographs of Robert Schneider and Stephen Stone in 1968 on Ulpan in Israel and another one of us in 1992

This reminds me of another connection to Florida – around 1966, Jack and Rhoda Schneider told me that the son of some family of Rhoda, young **Stephen Stone** from Florida would be coming to King David School after an unhappy time at St. Stithian's School. Stephen duly joined my class, and we became firm friends until his untimely passing at a young age in 2002. Stephen was the son of Robbie & Yetta Stone. Robbie had joined the South African Board of Jewish Education as Business Manager after he retired from managing concession stores on the mines that belonged to the Jankelowitz family – my aunt Rhoda was a Jankelowitz. Stephen had two sisters, Jennifer (deceased) and Carolyn. Aside from our school years together, Stephen and I were also on the 1968 Jewish Day Schools Ulpan in Israel and were in business together for many years.



## My father Max Schneider's Memories of Maraisburg

My father Max was very community minded – something he possibly inherited from his father Lewis – and aside from Jewish education, Max was the president of the local chapter of Lions International, and both he and his older brother Jack were actively involved with what was referred to as the 'Young People's Committee' of the then Witwatersrand Jewish Aged Home (WJAH).



My father told me how he and his siblings used to help my grandfather Lewis in the shop. One of the highlights of his childhood was the arrival each year of Pagel's Circus to the town and that Mrs Pagel was notorious for not giving the correct change when you bought a ticket to the show.

Max loved his nieces and nephews, and they loved him. They all have fond memories of playing with him in the garden at **8 Arthur Matthews Avenue**. (left). Rhona told me that my father Max used to love to take them to the circus and also to the cinema in Roodepoort.



My father adored his dog, a collie named Peter, and often told me how smart this dog was as it always sensed which train Max was coming home on from Johannesburg where he was studying pharmacy. This alerted his mother, Gertie so that she would know that he would soon be entering their home. Rhona told me that it was quite amazing how they would all be sitting in the garden and suddenly Peter would disappear crossing many roads and passing through the subway beneath the railway line to get to the station where he would be waiting for Max when he got off the train.

Max Schneider with his dogs.

Sadly, the dog Peter was run over when a drunkard kicked him, and he ran into the street. Rhona tells me that Max was absolutely heartbroken.

In the early 1950's my **grandparents moved from Maraisburg to Johannesburg** living at 176 Tenth Avenue Highlands North. I was born in 1953 and my grandfather Lewis passed away in

1959 so I have only scant memories of him as a white-haired old man who used to love to sit on the veranda of their home and that he always had a khaki handkerchief. I am told that as the first Schneider grandson, my grandfather was quite besotted with me. I remember his study and that on his desk, he had a rubber stamp stand that contained a number of different stamps. He used to stamp all his books "L Schneider" and I must have inherited this trait because as a child, I had my own rubber stamp with my name 'R P Schneider'. I inherited the iron stamp stand and when I migrated to Australia, I gave it to my cousin Brian Massey.

One event of my childhood involving Lewis and Gertie Schneider stands out for me and that was celebrating their Golden Wedding in June 1957 in the garden of my beloved aunty Bessie and uncle Morris's garden, at 5 Doorn Street Observatory.



In the picture of this event we see all my grandparent's five children, their spouses and children and there in the centre standing between my beloved grandparents stand I, Robert Schneider, the first of the next generation to carry the name Schneider **Standing:** Jack Schneider, Rhoda Schneider, Solly Krawitz, Sökkie Krawitz, Max Schneider, Vida Schneider, Harold Krawitz, Rose Massey, Marlene Krawitz, Hymie Massey, Bessie Hertz, Rhona Massey, Morris Hertz **Seated:** Brian Massey, Steven Krawitz, Marion Krawitz, Lewis Schneider, Robert Schneider (in front), Gertie Schneider, Ilona Hertz, Max Hertz.

My grandfather Lewis Schneider passed away in June 1959. I recall going with my parents to visit him at the Lady Dudley in his last days. I was extremely attached to my granny Gertie and when we moved to 148 Tenth avenue Highlands North, it was very easy for me to go and visit her daily. She was a beautiful woman in her younger days and in her mature years, she maintained this beauty and a dignity and grace that made her the queen of our family until she passed away in January 1973.



## Robert Schneider – my life in South Africa and Australia

My own desire to serve the community continued this tradition as later I joined the Executive Committee of the Witwatersrand Jewish Aged Home – the youngest member I might add – and also served on the chaplaincy, publications and country communities committees of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies.



On the **educational** front, I served on the board of Northview High School as well as being vice chairman of its foundation. I was also a member of the **Herman Charles Bosman Literary Society** and was involved with the actor and raconteur, **Patrick Mynhardt** in staging some Herman Charles Bosman events in the Groot Marico. Picture of Rob and Patrick Mynhardt, Groot Marico 1996. I have had many wonderful

experiences exploring areas featured in the stories and even met family members of some of the characters mentioned in the stories.

## Nature and Wildlife



I have always loved nature and wildlife and in the 1970's became actively involved with the **Endangered Wildlife Trust** later becoming the only Jewish Trustee. I was also a Trustee of the **Rhino & Elephant Foundation**, **Lapalala Wilderness School**, the **Wilderness Trust**, the **African Raptor Information Centre**.

I was the founder of the **South African Friends of the Israel Nature Reserves Authority** and **chairman of Project Noah's Ark** – a project to conserve Israel's endangered biblical species. I am also a Life Member of the Wildlife and Environment Society of Southern Africa and the Endangered Wildlife Trust. Interestingly, the official launch of the African Raptor Information Centre took place in the **Roodepoort Botanical Gardens (now known as The Walter Sisulu National Botanic Garden)** (picture above) in the presence of the then MP for the area and then

Minister of Finance, Barend Du Plessis whose nickname was Barend die Arend ('arend' being the Afrikaans for "eagle.")



In this picture I am with the founder of the Endangered Wildlife Trust Clive Walker, Chief Buthelezi Hon. President of the Rhino & Elephant Foundation, Ian Player – prominent conservationist and patron of the Rhino and Elephant Foundation.

On migrating to Australia in 1999, I became the CEO of the Jewish National Fund of Australia for 14 years (photo below) followed by a 5-year stint as the Development Director of the Sydney Jewish Museum.

At the time of writing, I currently serve as the CEO of the Australian Friends of the Hebrew University and the honorary representative in Australia of the Israel Nature & Parks Authority.





---

Memories of the Schneider family in Maraisburg: story and pictures from Robert Schneider, Sydney

formatted and edited by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London, July 2024. Posted on the CHOL website July 2024

---



Stuttard & Co., Ltd. Department Stores. NEW DEPARTMENT. NEW ENTERPRISE. NEW APPOINTMENTS. Hairdressing Department. Dressmaking and Tailoring. Ladies' Upholstery. Best Values in the City.

Sunday Times

Important to Golfers. Stuttard & Co. New Golf Clubs. Have Arrived. 7s. 6d. & 8s. 3d. each. Price Three Shillings.

Vol. L—No. 47.]

[SIXTEEN PAGES.]

JOHANNESBURG, TRANSVAAL, DECEMBER 23, 1906.

[SIXTEEN PAGES.]

[Price Three Shillings.]

Sunday Times.

BUSINESS NOTICES.

ADVERTISING TARIFFS. Single insertion in 100 words, with minimum of 10 lines, 1/6. Subsequent insertions 1/3. Special rates for long columns and for advertising in the "Sunday Times" Supplement.

Advertisements in the "Sunday Times" Supplement. Single insertion in 100 words, with minimum of 10 lines, 1/6. Subsequent insertions 1/3.

Advertisements in the "Sunday Times" Supplement. Single insertion in 100 words, with minimum of 10 lines, 1/6. Subsequent insertions 1/3.

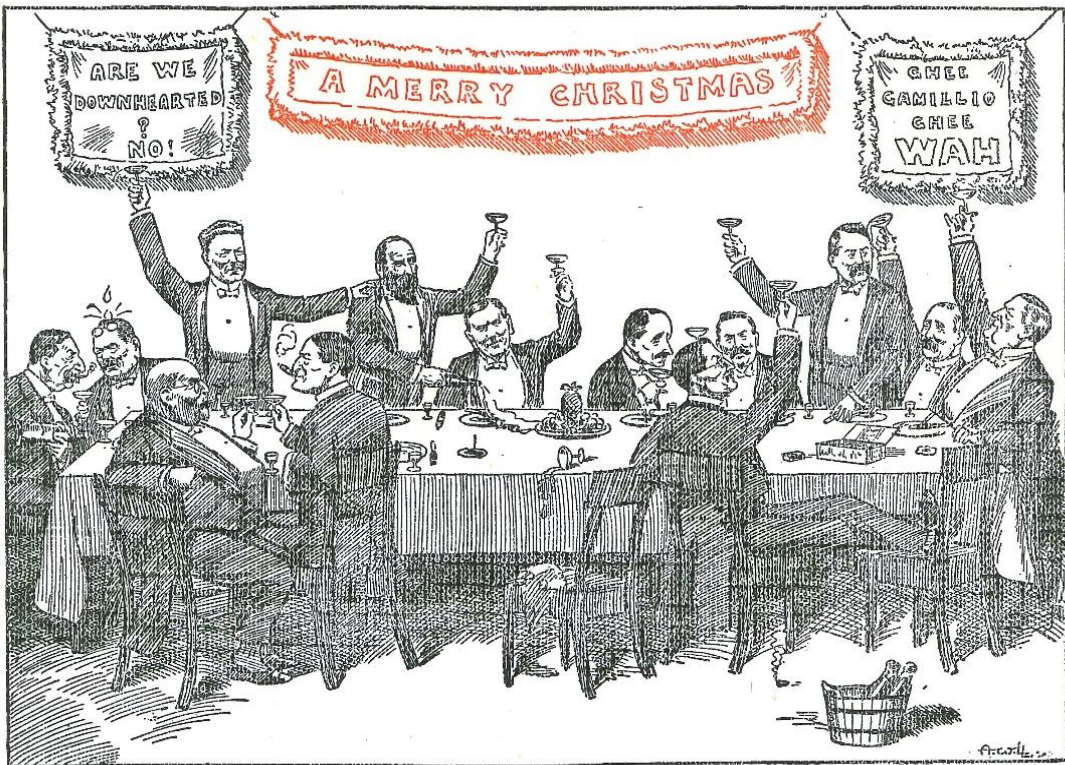
Advertisements in the "Sunday Times" Supplement. Single insertion in 100 words, with minimum of 10 lines, 1/6. Subsequent insertions 1/3.

Advertisements in the "Sunday Times" Supplement. Single insertion in 100 words, with minimum of 10 lines, 1/6. Subsequent insertions 1/3.

Advertisements in the "Sunday Times" Supplement. Single insertion in 100 words, with minimum of 10 lines, 1/6. Subsequent insertions 1/3.

Advertisements in the "Sunday Times" Supplement. Single insertion in 100 words, with minimum of 10 lines, 1/6. Subsequent insertions 1/3.

PEACE AND GOODWILL.



It is suggested that during the festive season men of all shades of opinion should be brought together to drink and make merry, for on the morrow who knoweth which of these will be politically extinct?

Sunday Salutes.

A German report has been in the hall of assembly... Mr. J. W. B. ... The Church of England ... The House of Commons ...

The Passing Show.

Recent statistics show that during the past year every resident of Orange... Mr. Outhwaite has resigned... The Church of England ...

Important to Golfers.

The London "Daily Mail" after of 1906 in the men who attend in... The London "Daily Mail" after of 1906 in the men who attend in...

Advertisements in the "Sunday Times" Supplement.

Advertisements in the "Sunday Times" Supplement. Single insertion in 100 words, with minimum of 10 lines, 1/6. Subsequent insertions 1/3.