



Community History On-Line Newsletter #9 September 2024

In this issue: compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE geraldine@chol.website

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A New Year Wish for All

As Gail said in the last CHOL Newsletter: *‘I believe that it will take us years to understand, work through, come to terms with what has happened in this small country over the last year. Each and every one of us in Israel and you out there, with mindsets swayed and coloured by our South African roots, has been touched in some way or another. It’s been a time to reflect on so many aspects of who we are, what we believe in and how to face the change in the world of today...’*

The yearning for peace and tranquillity for the Jewish people has been there for millennia. Are we coming nearer to a time of peace and security – or is it getting further out of reach for Jews in Israel and for all those around the world. As I write Iran is raining rockets down on Israel, and Israel is battling Hezbollah inside Lebanon and Hamas in Gaza. America is consolidating and consulting with the IDF on what the response will be.

We are entering a new phase of the Jewish journey that will mainly be experienced by our children and grandchildren and those that come after. Let us keep hoping for more miracles – many of which have come to pass already in the Jewish journey.

I hope CHOL has been an oasis of calm and sanity for you amidst the turmoil and anxiety. A place of quiet of reflection, of writing and of piecing together the great tapestry of Jewish life in South Africa. A community that served and still serves, the country proudly. In our presentations and memoirs we have seen how the Jews of South Africa excelled in business, the professions, science, the arts and in social justice. Those that braved the insecurities and discomforts of travelling out of Lithuania and Latvia at the turn

of the 20th century to the tip of Africa, were saved from the horrific fate of those who stayed behind in Europe and were annihilated. They found a fertile land for their children to grow and prosper, giving back a hundredfold in benefits to all sections of the peoples of South Africa.

As I have said before, South Africa could not have contained the explosion of expertise and talent that grew out of this mainly Litvak community with its great work ethic, thirst for learning and for leaving the world in a better place than they found it. The community in South Africa is still vibrant and the South African Jewish diaspora has contributed so greatly also to the places where they now reside. We think specially tonight of those who made their home in Israel.

In the coming months on CHOL we look forward to a new series of presentations telling us about the research that is being carried out now by professional researchers on Jewish life in South Africa. (see page 5)

Let us wish and hope that when this fighting ends, the world will be in a better place than it was before.

What's new on www.chol.website

'Communities' pages



It's great when people stumble upon the wealth of information already on the CHOL website. This month I have been contacted by the chairman of Muizenberg Heritage Formerly the Muizenberg historical Conservation Society NPC. He had found my article on the Jewish owned **hotels**. He wanted to know what else we had so I referred him to the articles on **pavilions** and on the

iconic **bathing boxes** here [Muizenberg Places](#). He sent me a map of where the hotels are or had been, which we will add to the Muizenberg community site in due course.

Brandfort, Clocolan

It is very pleasing to see more and more people coming forward wanting to preserve the footprint of Jewish life in their towns online. Fasia Cherin, now living in Cape Town, found out when she visited her hometown of Brandfort in the Orange Free State that there is

absolutely no trace that Jewish life ever existed in the town – yet it was central to its development and prosperity.

This encouraged Fasia to write and publish a booklet about Jewish life in Brandfort and have a launch of her book in the town. We are thrilled to have had her talk about it in presentation no 12 here [Community](#) and on the communities pages we have the booklet on [Brandfort](#). This in turn prompted Lynette Karp, now living at Beth Protea, in Israel to write about growing up in [Clocolan](#). Where is that you may ask? Well, have a look on the 'Communities' page of the website and you will find out.

New and Developing sites:

We are now listing the Jewish Communities we are working on under their own names – even if they were suburbs of larger places. Bellville now has its own entry as does [Muizenberg](#) with Cape Town in brackets afterwards. These have been joined by the new website of [Parow \(Cape Town\)](#) Jewish Community created by a research team under Professor Richard Mendelsohn. Richard will write about the launches of his book and website and the celebrations of Cape Gate metal works in South African and Israel for our next Newsletter. Richard's presentation about the Jews of Parow is available to view on the [Presentations](#) page at no 34.

Bellville

Stanley Loon, in Israel, whose family were first generation Bellvillites, has taken on 'driving' the Bellville community site. Stan asks were you in 'our gang'? see the list compiled by David Smith: [OUR GANG](#). Several family stories have been uploaded including that of Sam Perch who was an orphan brought South Africa by Ochberg, and you can read the stories of many of the GPs researched by Gail Loon Lustig (of which Gail and Stan's dad Donny Loon was one) and you can also read the stories of the pharmacists who practiced there.

Maitland – the map



Driver, [Philip Stodel](#) and our wonderful webmaster [Bramie Lenhoff](#) are working on an annotated map of Maitland, where if you hover your mouse over (or click on) a number the name of that landmark comes up. The synagogue page quotes a scroll written by Rev Kaufman about the history of the community that was hidden behind the foundation stone

of the new synagogue in 1951 outlining the previous half century of history. This site is developing well and Philip hopes this will engage the interest of its ex-pats when he shows it to them.

Beaufort West – the flood

Our man in Cape Town, Natie Finkelstein, continues to fill the pages of the community site which Bramie Lenhoff has expertly created for [Beaufort West](#). Latest on the pages are the Soskin family story and an article entitled **The Karoo: Drought or Deluge** about the great flood in the town in 1941 compiled by Natie Finkelstein



Roodepoort – concession stores

Geoff Boner compiled the story of the **Josman** family who had run the concession store on the Roodepoort Durban Deep mine, selling all the commodities they needed to the black workers on the mines. Looking at the patterned blankets hanging up in picture of brothers at a concession store on the rand that I had found, I recalled stories of Kimberley concession store trader, Frank Gross who had befriended the Basuto King and who designed colourful blankets and had them made by another Kimberley associated family the Harris's at the Waverley Woollen Mills in Cape Town – and distributed to all the concession stores (mainly Jewish owned).





Read the story I put together of the

[Concession stores, Basotho Blankets and the Jewish Connection](#)

However big or small your town or city, if it had a Jewish Community of any size then www.chol.website can help to provide a platform for where it can be documented

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**Next CHOL Events: November /December 2024**

## **New Research on South African Jews**

**Three sessions: Wednesdays 6 and 27 November and 4 December 2024 7.00pm South African time**

(10.00am California; 1.00pm New York; 6.00pm UK; 7.00pm South Africa, Europe; 8.00pm Israel)

*South African Jewish community history offers so many topics for in-depth study. The CHOL community fulfils a great role in eliciting and organising personal family stories and primary research documents for our communities. But we are eager to hear what subjects have been chosen for current dissertations for higher degrees and by leading research scholars. In this series curated by professors Shirli Gilbert (UCL) and Adam Mendelsohn (UCT) we are offered a window into the academic world of South African Jewish research.*

- 6 November: **Reviva Hasson**  
**Topic: *The Paradox of South African Jewish Emigration***
- 27 November: **Gavin Beinart-Smollan**  
**Topic: *Finding Displaced Relatives: how South Africans found their missing loved ones during and after the Second World War.***
- 4 December: Professor **Shirli Gilbert**  
**Topic: *Who is researching What, about South African Jews these days?***

**Read the details for each presentation below:**

**To join** please email [info@chol.website](mailto:info@chol.website) for the link (and to be put on the CHOL mailing list)

**Checkout [www.chol.website](http://www.chol.website) for 34 presentations, 57 memoirs, 53 communities, and 142 stories of South African Jewish people and communities**

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## **More details of CHOL November/December Seminars**

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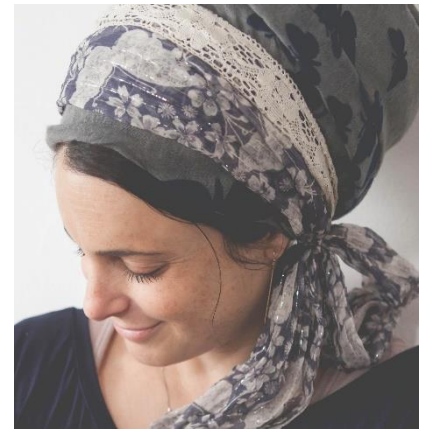
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*Topic with details*

- 6 November: Reviva Hasson  
**Topic:**  
**The Paradox of South African Jewish Emigration**
- The South African Jewish community ranks as the strongest Jewish community in the English-speaking world and yet Jews have been leaving such that the population today is half what it was at its peak. This paradox underlies our question: why have Jews been leaving South Africa? Using data from three community surveys in the post-apartheid era we explore the ‘what, where and why’ of South African Jewish emigration trends as well as differences based on age, place of residence, financial wellbeing and Jewish identity strand.

- **Bio**

Reviva Hasson is a social scientist at the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies. Her research focuses on the study of contemporary South African Jewry, with an emphasis on survey data analysis. She holds a BSc in Environmental Science and a Master's in Economics, both from UCT. Reviva coordinated the 2019 nationwide survey of the South African Jewish community, is a participant of the prestigious international Nahum Goldman Fellowship program and is a recipient of the UCT Research Associateship Award. She lives in Cape Town with her husband and three children.



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- 27 November: Gavin Beinart-Smollan

Topic: *Finding Displaced Relatives: how South Africans found their missing loved ones during and after the Second World War*

- *In 1944, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies established the 'Relatives Information Service' (RIS), to help South African Jews trace relatives in Europe with whom they had lost touch. In this session, we will explore how this remarkable organisation worked and try to understand its place in the massive global effort to help people in the Allied countries, Jewish and not, find their missing European relatives. We will also explore how you might go about searching for the names of your own relatives in the files of the RIS. Please come prepared with any South African family stories of WW2-era relative tracing that you have!*

- **Bio:**



Gavin Beinart-Smollan is a public historian and PhD candidate in History and Judaic Studies at New York University. His dissertation is titled 'Fragile Ties: The Translational Family Relationships of Lithuanian Jews, 1899-1949'. Gavin is the creator of the [South African Jewish Cookbook Project](#), and is the public historian in residence at The Jewish Board, a large mental health agency in New York City. He lives in Stamford, Connecticut with his wife and daughter.

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- 4 December: Professor Shirli Gilbert

**Topic:**

***Who is researching What, about South African Jews these days?***

- *Where are the current scholars based, and what topics have piqued their interest? Shirli Gilbert, Professor of Modern Jewish history at University College London, tells us what is currently in the pipeline, who is investigating and on what topic from German-Jewish refugees to Yiddish newspapers.*

- **Bio**

Shirli Gilbert is Professor of Modern Jewish History at University College London. She obtained her D.Phil. at the University of Oxford and was a postdoctoral fellow in the Society of Fellows at the University of Michigan. She has published widely on the Holocaust and its legacies, and Jews in South Africa. She is Editor-in-Chief of *Jewish Historical Studies: A Journal of English-Speaking Jewry*. 6 November:



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To join the zooms, ask for the link by emailing info@chol.website.

(Those already on this mailing list will receive the link in due course) We hope you will join us on zoom to add to the discussion, as we get to know each other, from around the world.

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## **Jewish Gen South African - SIG Newsletters**

In the third of the South African Special Interest Group Newsletters, of July 2001, edited by Beryl Baleson, there were articles on Litvaks, on Isaac Ochberg and on South African Jewish youth movements and on Jewish business personalities by Eric Rosenthal. There was a focus on the community of 'Pietersburg' as the shul closed, and the contents were shipped to communities in Israel. Beryl also started a section where members and readers were invited to share their experiences of Israel's memorable beginnings. We include some of the 'snippets' here from the years 1947-8.

### **November 29, 1947 – the UN partition vote**

Jews all over South Africa sat glued to their radios for the live broadcast of the UN vote on Palestine. On Sunday at 2am it was announced that the required two-thirds majority for partition had been reached. South Africa had voted amongst the 'ayes'. At the Board of Deputies of meeting the following day, chairman, SM Kuper said, 'For the first time in 2000 years we are recognised as a people, by the peoples of the world. Now the Jews of Palestine will be eligible to join that assembly and play their part in the United Nations, thought their properly constituted Government.

### **December 1947 – Youth at Mass Rally**

Jewish youth filled the Coronation Hall in Johannesburg at a meeting convened by the South African Zionist Youth Council. Passion was riding high. It was suspected that as the Arabs had rejected the UN decision, fighting in Palestine was inevitable. Hundreds of young men signed up for service. The rally passed a resolution that 'Jewish youth, fully aware of the responsibilities which devolve on it, pledges its unqualified service to the Jewish State.



## May 10, 1948 – Jan Smuts Speaks out



Addressing the Johannesburg Rotary Club four days before the proclamation of the Jewish State, Prime Minister, Jan Smuts, spoke out in favour of a national homeland for the Jewish people. 'It seems to me almost a historical necessity. I give it my blessing and wish them every success. Palestine lies on one of the great highways of history and we just cannot leave the Jews and Arabs to fight it out amongst themselves. My nose tells me that this is one of the great problems of the world today and the whole

world will in the future feel the effects of what is happening now. Palestine is as closely connected with the big issues of world history in the future as it has been in the past. To read the whole of this SA-SIG Newsletter click here [SA-SIG Newsletter Vol 1/3 July 2001](#)

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Your feedback to the CHOL Newsletter would be welcome. Please send to info@chol.website Please keep us informed of your own 'Community History On-Line' activities and interests. If you know people who might be interested in CHOL activities, please forward this Newsletter to them or pass on their details to CHOL. You can also say if you would prefer not to receive post from CHOL

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**CHOL Newsletter no 9** compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London, September 2024, comes to you with warm wishes as we round up our year and go forward, hopefully, to happier times.

Checkout the CHOL website: [www.chol.website](http://www.chol.website) which now has on it:

- 53 communities <https://chol.website/communities.htm>
  - 53 Memoirs <https://chol.website/memoirs.htm>
  - 142 original stories <https://chol.website/stories.htm>
  - 34 Videos of presentations <https://chol.website/presentations.htm>
- also on the site are resources and journal articles and all our CHOL newsletters

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CHOL – Community History On-Line is a forum set up in 2020, under the auspices of the Kaplan Centre at UCT and the South African Jewish Museum – bringing together all those working on / or interested in creating an online presence relating to the **History of Jewish Communities in Southern Africa**. see www.chol.website contact info@chol.website.



SAJM
South African Jewish Museum