

## CLOCOLAN, THABO MOFUTSANYANA



By **Lynette Karp** (née Klein)

Clocolan is a small town established in 1906 in the Eastern Free State about 34 kilometres from Ficksburg and near the Lesotho border. It is 165 Km east of Bloemfontein on the railway line from there to Durban. The Basotho called the place Hlohlolwane (Hlohla-o-lwane, meaning "get up and fight"). New inhabitants mispronounced the name, and called it Clocolan.

It is perched on grassland at the foot of the Hlohlowane Mountain which dominates the town. With crisp mountain air and abundance of water (the Caledon River) conditions are ideal for farming. Clocolan is known for growing asparagus, cherry orchards, sunflowers, wheat, maize, potatoes, and farming with cattle. Visitors to Clocolan can visit the Deemsters Asparagus Factory and learn about the history of this important local crop.



At Nebo and Die Hoek visitors can view San rock art and paintings. Then just outside of Clocolan (about 25 kilometres) history-buffs will enjoy visiting the Stone Fort, an Anglo-Boer War fort and on the farm Evening Star you can view the old monastery and chapel which have been authentically restored.

A highlight of Clocolan is a visit to Lethoteng Weavers - a community project involving the weaving of articles by local craftswomen. All products produced are the result of years of experimentation using only the best fibres, while honing Southern Sotho skills. They produce soft jerseys, scarves and other items from Angora Rabbit, Mohair and wool as well as rugs and carpets from Mohair.



All the above introduces the reader to Clocolan, with thanks to Google.

### **Now for some personal additions -**

There was a small Jewish community in Clocolan when we lived there (1936-1947). My Dad, Percy Klein, recently qualified as a doctor at UCT and recently married to my Mom – Mary Goldberg of Worcester, joined his brother Leopold (Lockie) Klein (who had graduated at Wits in 1923) in a country medical practice in the town in 1936. I was born in 1940 in Bloemfontein as there was no suitable medical facility in Clocolan at that time. My sister Maureen however, was born there in 1946 a few months before the family left for Pretoria. Our family lived in Clocolan until 1947. The doctor of these country villages often doubled up as the dentist, also performing much in the line of minor operations and was available day and night for his patients. There were no cell phones, no computers, no time restrictions – often no payment – it was pure dedication.

First Lockie left Clocolan and a bit later his brother, my dad Percy, did too for Pretoria. They had both served in the Second World War, during which time a Dr Jammy took over the District Surgeons task and did a locum for the Klein brothers, ultimately buying the practice and coming to live in Clocolan with his family after we had left.

Leaving our country home, we made quite a picture. In an old Pontiac Sedan, we travelled well laden with everything we possessed. My granny had travelled up from Worcester to help us in the packing up process and she and I were seated on the back seat of the car with the baby in a carrycot between us and our wonderful Dalmatian dog of royal stock 'Bruce of Brisbane' comfortably sleeping on the floor at our feet.



Our 'luggage' consisting of four large suitcases was piled on the roof of the car, covered with a waterproof tarpaulin tied down with large straps. I remember nothing of the journey itself but imagine it must have taken many stops and much aggravation before we reached Pretoria.

At the time that we lived in Clocolan the local hotel was run by a bachelor, Adolph **Kornblum**. There was a large family of **Suttners** in the village. 'Town' was to be found around the centre square. The corner block was where the General Dealers' store was situated. This was run by the Suttner family. I remember stories of the Boer war being told to me - of the Boer army personnel putting all their purchases on 'tick' to pay for necessary goods seconded from the shelves!! (Reuben Hirsh Suttner had served in a Boer Commando during that war)

There was a family of **Kaplans**, but just the name remains a vague memory in my aging mind. I do remember well the Pick family (lifelong friends who were related to the Suttners). The **Pick** family eventually settled in Pretoria too as we did. I remember them well - 'Aunty Sadie' daughter of the household married Louis **Friedman**. She was an amazing baker – and taught me how to make taiglach in years gone by. Eventually I inherited her massive pot and large wooden board essential for successful results in the kitchen. My mouth still waters when I think of the fantastic homemade *chrein*, the *imberlach* and wonderful cheesecake we enjoyed every year at Pesach time in their home.

## The Synagogue

There was a small Shul run in my time, the early 1940s, by **Rabbi Bloch** who lived opposite the Shul with his family (daughter Sandra?) I recall a **Solomon** family with two daughters Cherry and Ida both a bit older than me, but they lived in a house back-to-back with our home separated by a service path.

I learned that by 1916 there was a minster in Clocolan, Rev **Vernon**. In 1923 they were holding High Holydays services in the Town Hall. In 1930 they bought some land to build a synagogue. The Foundation stone was laid by Mr RH **Suttner** and Mr S **Durbach** – who was the first known Vice President. The Clocolan Synagogue was officially opened by Rabbi **Romm** of Bloemfontein on 16 May 1936. The ceremony was attended by a representative from the Dutch Reformed Church and the Mayor of Clocolan, Mr Muller who spoke of his personal ties with the community.

For ten years the highly observant Yiddish speaking community operated what was called 'a pulsating Jewish centre'. They were able to field a minyan every day of the year. By 1947 this was no longer possible due to dwindling numbers. For a while they shared ministers and services teaching and shechita with neighbouring towns of Marquard and Ficksburg.

By 1962 the synagogue was no longer in regular use. The building was sold in 1965 and by 1967 the congregation was officially defunct. A Sifra Torah and a silver yad were returned to the Suttner family who also retrieved the foundation stone which went to their garden in Emmarentia.

### **Jewish business and professional life**

Clocolan was predominantly a farming community with a large mill in town, adjacent to the railway station and dominating the landscape. Jews were framers, livestock and cattle dealers, hoteliers, hide and skin merchants, chemists, doctors, attorneys, pharmacists and accountants. There was also a Jewish tailor and butcher.



Amongst the farmers, I remember well the family of three bachelor **Lewis** brothers. They eventually moved to Cape Town but were very close to the Klein family throughout their lives. The farm's name was *Blydskap* (happiness). I clearly remember spending many happy hours on the farm with my `uncles' Abe, Connel and Jack Lewis. They had a small cow shed and taught me how to milk the cows. I have a photo of myself there which is the only memory I have of that particular episode, except for the taste of fresh milk, still lukewarm which served the family's needs. I do

however remember my friends the small Basuto children living on the premises whose parents worked on the farm. Those friends introduced me to the Bushman (San) paintings on the hill behind the farm and the Basuto family gave me a Sotho name which I have never forgotten – *Mpho!*

## School

I attended school in Clocolan - tuition was bilingual – English and Afrikaans – and our class consisted of Grade1, Grade2 and Std 1. and with a limited number of children of that age we got a lot of individual attention, and I am sure a reasonable introduction to learning. I do know that I could speak a passable Sotho and a good Afrikaans in addition to English when we reached the Transvaal. Alas I lost a lot of it as time passed without using it.

Life was simple but rich. One communed with nature and friendships were sincere and honest. There was mutual respect amongst the different nations. I grew up hoping one day to bring up my own children in a country environment – barefoot and fancy free. I found adjusting to town life when it came all too soon very challenging!

## Arnold Suttner

I managed to make contact with **Arnold Suttner**, from a pioneer family in the town, who had celebrated his *barmitzvah* in Clocolan with Rev **Musikanth** in 1950, and who is still in Johannesburg. We are in Israel, so it hasn't been that easy, but with all the modern technology we have managed to share what we remember of our young years. I left Clocolan early 1947, and Arnold left the village in 1954. Both of us being in our eighties now, he added some facts to the story.

Arnold recalls a small diamond mine on the outskirts of the village, but I have found no record of it in Google. The local hotel was taken over by **Louis and Dora Sacks** of Kroonstad. They had a son Selwyn who became a pharmacist. A Kaplan (maybe Jonah Kaplan?) family owned an 'Algemene Handelaar' – a general dealership. Sam **Kaplan**, Jonah's brother was the local butcher who undoubtedly provided kosher meat to the small Jewish community.

He says there were very few Jewish boys in his time – his cousin Harold ( who I remember as 'Boetie') a friend Robert **Pick** ( I remember as 'Bobby' - quite a bit older than me) Cecil and Julius **Kaplan**, and Natie **Swartz** who may have relocated to Israel! He also had a cousin Rahle (was it **Suttner**?) and remembers happy days spent on *Blydskap* - the Lewis's farm - where he too acquired a Sotho name - 'Moketi'. Names mentioned by Arnold that ring a gentle bell in my head include a **Durbach** family and a family of **Arensens** – the children being Clarice, Reeva and Moishe. He remembers a **Gershon** family who had an African shop there. African 'eating houses' were found in every little village, catering for workers from far afield who lived in dormitory type accommodation. These establishments sold everything the workers might need, not only food. This was part of the cultural heritage of the old South Africa.

There was Henry **Adelstein** a pharmacist whom he recalls as possibly having gone to Australia. Although a small Jewish community there was always a Rabbi to service the shul. While the Suttners were still in Clocolan the services were provided by **Reverend Musikanth** followed by **Reverend Borowitz**.

In my day the sick were sent to hospital in Bloemfontein and those who died in Clocolan were buried in Bloemfontein too. A number of years later a nursing home was opened in Clocolan and the Klein brothers were invited back to be at the opening. There were at that event many that had been their patients over the years, and it was a very nostalgic but rewarding occasion for them.

The Clocolan of our day is long gone but affectionately remembered by those of us that spent formative years there. Several of the children and grandchildren of the original families have made names for themselves and provided valuable services in the cities of South Africa and throughout the world.

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**Clocolan** compiled by Lynette Karp, Israel November 2023

Lynette wrote on 10 October 2023

Dear Geraldine and Gail

I want you to know that I am knee deep in trying to gather information from the one contact I have found that was a child in Clocolan at the time that I lived there too. The contact was made with Arnold Suttner, (now of Johannesburg) the day before the war broke out here in Israel but we did manage to talk and I have got the ball rolling to collect our joint recall into some kind of form. We are both in our eighties, so this is proving quite a task – and with what is raging in our part of the world, it is to say the least not easy to concentrate on anything else. However we are advised that for our own sanity we should try to distract ourselves from the constant anxiety and heartache. Researching the masses of photos and memorabilia that one collects in a lifetime is actually a wonderful way to recall the halcyon days of childhood and allows me to escape temporarily into trying to recreate those times and to recall the life we enjoyed in the small Jewish country communities in the villages of South Africa in the years when family and friendship was paramount and communication was precious and no one was distracted with social media and the technology that tablets offer us today. I know that I will complete this task with at least two articles emerging from the effort - One that will be sent to you Gail for the memoirs section of your project and the other to you Geraldine with the information you require to initiate a website for Clocolan. I will be very eager to see if you receive additional information or indeed interest from anyone else out there.

I just feel bad that it has taken me so long to get started, but all that is happening around us has most decidedly taught me a lesson that procrastination is an enemy – time marches on at such a rate- it is important not to delay what is important to get done.

CHOL is a fantastic website and deserving of support and everyone connected with its establishment is to be congratulated- well done ladies!!!

with love

Lynette