

## Roodepoort Zimbler family: Joseph and Sarah

Children: Leonard, Sonia and Gerald (who writes:)

~~~~~  
My father, **Joseph Zimbler** (1888-1971) was born in Plunge, Lithuania, as was my mother, **Sarah Siegler**. Her parents emigrated to England when she was a child. She was schooled and grew up there. Sarah was also one of the first victims of a bombing raid in London during World War I. Joseph and Sarah were cousins and there seems to be connection with Siegler and Zimbler.

Joseph was a cousin and he met Sarah Siegler in London on the way from Lithuania to South Africa. They corresponded with each other and Sarah, 28, subsequently came to South Africa and she and Joseph, 32 were married in October 1920 and celebrated their Golden Wedding anniversary in 1970.

The couple opened a general dealer business in Paul Roux, not far from Bethlehem, in the then Orange Free State.\* Later they moved to Harrismith and then to the Transvaal (Gauteng).

They were originally involved in the Imperial Hotel, Benoni and later the Station Hotel in Roodepoort. After a short involvement in a business in Johannesburg, Joseph and Sarah returned to Roodepoort, where they initially leased and later bought the Savoy Hotel including the property.

My parents Joseph and Sarah, first had two children: my brother Leonard, 15 years my senior and my sister Sonia, 13 years older than me. Then I came along probably as a surprise. We all lived in Roodepoort for about 30 years. The community was probably at its peak, and I think there were between 30 and 40 Jewish families.

The shul itself was small but served the needs of the community. The leader was **Reverend Orenstein**, he was not a Rabbi but apparently he later obtained his smicha in Israel. My dad, other than being a member of the Roodepoort Hebrew Congregation, was not involved in the shul.

Gerald Zimbler wrote 'I doubt if there was a regular morning minyan. I had my Barmitzvah at the shul in 1949.' There was a notice in The Star (newspaper 1949) which proclaimed. 'Zimbler – Gerald Julian, youngest son of Mr and Mrs J Zimbler will read a portion of the Law and Maftir on Sunday October 9 (second day Succoth) at the Roodepoort Synagogue'.

After leaving Roodepoort having leased the hotel to tenants, Joseph and Sarah settled in Berea, Johannesburg, a block away from the Berea Shul.

'They became members there and it was where I got married. Coincidentally when I went to give them the details one of the Gaboyim was Ernest Seliger, previously one of the Roodepoort Gaboyim.' Gerald remembered.

\*Paul Roux was a small town in the then Orange Free State, not far from Bethlehem. It was laid out as a town in 1909 by the Reverend Paul Roux. It is still a general farming area but is an important producer of poplar wood used for the production of safety matches. Former president of South Africa PW Botha was born there. Today it is situated in the Thabo Mofutsanyana region of the Free State Province. (<http://www.free.state.info.co.za>).

## A walk down memory lane

'Responding to an advert in the Jewish press from people who were looking for friends, I met my wife, **Shulamith**. Subsequently we got married and had a family: two daughters and a son who are all married and live with their families in Johannesburg. A letter from Shulamith in Woman Wise, a supplement in the SA Jewish Times (Friday November 30), complained about kosher chickens. "They are filthy, repulsive and require much time for cleaning. In instances even feathers have to be plucked. Its (sic) about time that housewives united in their complaints and showed the supplier the power of the purchaser. Just because we want to keep kosher does (it) give license to monopolistic suppliers dishing up whatever they please".

This after numerous attempts to gain the support of the Beth Din and complaints to the supplier failed to elicit any response. Since Shulamith died in 2017, after 48 years of marriage, Gerald's interests have become limited.

'I was born in a Johannesburg nursing home while my parents were running the Imperial Hotel in Benoni. For my schooling I attended the Roodepoort Primary School when the headmaster was Dr **A Beron**, who later became the first principal of the newly founded King David Primary, Linksfield. I wrote matric at Krugersdorp High School and then did my BA at the University of the Witwatersrand (Wits), majoring in History, Political Theory and Government.

'Although I served my Articles with a firm of attorneys in Johannesburg, I gave up my studies, with the intention of running the **Savoy Hotel in Burger Street** on a full-time basis as well as being a partner with my brother in the Delarey Bottle Store which my parents had now bought, and was on the border of Roodepoort and Johannesburg' Gerald said. Gerald was very involved in business and as a result didn't take part in any of the communal activities the shul arranged

By this time, the hotel trade nationally underwent an entire make-over with the grading and classification scheme. Accordingly, the **Savoy Hotel**, which complied with all the legal provisions of the Act, was awarded a one-star tourist and residential grading.

'After acknowledging that the hotel was at its prime and doing well, my parents decided to sell the hotel and the property and to move to Sea Point. I joined my brother in the bottle store but it did not work out as expected and I bought him out' Gerald recalled.

'I was bought out by the Rebel Liquor Group and after a few years was appointed the Operations Manager in Gauteng. A few years later, Gilbey's, a large manufacturing company took over Rebel. I then left and my next port of call, before I was appointed as the national director of the Legacy for Life division of the Israel United Appeal, was as a full-time canvasser. Once I reached retirement age I was required to step down.'

"Reverend **Orenstein** had two sons **Meyer and Avriel** and a daughter, **Nechama**," he noted. Gerald remembered that Avriel Orenstein had written a letter headed, 'Stuffy ties and cooking blazers', to the Star, asking how, 'We as schoolboys are expected to wear these stuffy ties and cooking blazers on a hot summer's day, through a gruelling day at school, and still be able to walk on to a sports field and excel ourselves.

'Are we able to do our best, in our schoolwork, hot as we are and sweating all over? Does coming home hot and 'out of sorts' in any way improve our homework? I suggest that the wearing of

blazers and ties be made optional and that we be allowed to wear open-necked sport shirts and shorts in the summer months'.

Back came the riposte from Proud Schoolboys, Roodepoort, under the headline, "Clothes and the schoolboys". "In our opinion A Orenstein has no pride for his school because at school he would be given permission to take off his tie or blazer if it was necessary. The reason for wearing ties and blazers in the summer months is not to make us 'little gentlemen' but to show our respect to our school. "We are pupils in the same school as A Orenstein and think that he has not taken into consideration that the school to which he goes is noted for the dress in which the pupils attend".

Said Gerald, "Kosher meat was obtained from a butchery owned by a Mr Stoppelman and Rev Orenstein would 'schlacht' chickens when required by members of the community. If we wanted other kosher goods we would have to go to Doornfontein. Later my parents used to get kosher meat from a butchery on the way to Krugersdorp High. When they didn't need meat, I used to catch the train to school."



The Morris Hockman Talmud Torah Hall, Roodepoort

Although Gerald wasn't at the consecration or deconsecration of the shul he was there when the foundation stone was laid on 3 April 1949, for the Hockman Communal Hall. A photograph taken at the time shows Jack Traub, treasurer; S Tannenbaum, who laid the foundation stone; and wearing their Habonim uniform, Lionel Josman and Gerald Zimble. (We sadly don't have that picture with the boys but a picture of the hall)

'**Jack Schlapo**', said Gerald, 'was at one stage the mayor of Roodepoort, and owned the Station Garage. I don't recall him playing a part in the shul, but his daughter **Miriam married Dave Myerson** from Johannesburg who took over the business and they became involved in the Roodepoort Hebrew Congregation. '**Morris Klein** had a shop in Roodepoort, and he had a son,

**Herman**, who became an internationally respected orthopaedic surgeon. Stella, the eldest, was a good friend of my sister, Sonia.

‘While I remember **Morris Sewitz and Barney Greenberg** who owned Morrie’s and Greenberg’s Oufitters respectively, I don’t recall buying anything from them.

**Morris Hockman and his wife Dolly** owned a jewellery store. Morris was chairman of the Roodepoort Hebrew Congregation and the Morris Hockman Talmud Torah Hall was named after him.’ Mr Michael was the man at the *shtender*. ‘Apparently he was a widower and living with an Afrikaans woman, which is why most of the shul members ignored him and he was never given an Aliya even though he was a regular at services’ Gerald said.

Gerald said that although the **Herson family owned the Grey’s Hotel**, another landmark in Roodepoort, they didn’t run it themselves.

~~~~~

**Zimblar Family Story** provided by Gerald Zimblar to Brian Josselowitz 2018

Sadly’, Brian Josselowitz said, ‘Gerald Zimblar who provided a lot of information, including news clippings, died while I was putting this together.’

~~~~~