

## Roodepoort cemetery article – Desecration and Restoration



From Karen Michelle and Sharon (née Melandowitz). 2018

Having grown up in Roodepoort - whose Jewish community has now disappeared - they shared between themselves an article on the **desecration of their cemetery** that was in the SA Jewish Report the previous year.

[Desecration of Roodepoort Jewish Cemetery](#) SAJR 4 MAY 2017

Karen Melandowitz saw it and sent it to her sisters, Michele - who lives in the United States - and Sharon Brokensha, who lives in New Zealand and they decided to take it on themselves to help complete the restoration.

*“The vandalised and sorely neglected Roodepoort Jewish cemetery on the West Rand epitomises that of many former outlying Jewish communities who no longer have a Jewish presence,” says Michele. She described the Roodepoort cemetery as “wrecked”, with nearly a third of the tombstones having been broken or pushed over.*

*“There is also no wall to demarcate the area from the general cemetery. Unfortunately, the Jewish community no longer exists there to deal with the problem, nor are there funds available from the now defunct community, to carry out the necessary restoration.”*

This they discovered when contacting Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies, who fights a valiant battle to restore those now derelict cemeteries - and the dignity of the souls resting there.

It was only when Michele contacted Rabbi Silberhaft that she found out that her mother, Val Melandowitz, had been working on restoring the cemetery. Val, who passed away in July 2015, had been the Roodepoort-Florida Hebrew Congregation treasurer. ‘My mother with the help of other committee members started the restoration, but was unable to complete it.’ says Michele.

The sisters, Rabbi Silberhaft and an anonymous donor have taken this on to raise the money and then to restore the cemetery. They need R70 000 and the donor will match whatever they raise, so effectively they need to raise R35 000.

The Roodepoort community was established in 1904. The oldest grave is that of Abraham Simeloff who died in 1914 and the last person to be buried there was, as far as could be ascertained, Max Silber in 1988. The last rabbi to serve the community was Rabbi Kaye (Kwiatkovsky), who came to the congregation in the late 1960s and served there until the 1980s. The Josman, Traub, and Herson families were among the first founding families.

In the 1960s the community’s funds were dwindling, so they combined with the neighbouring Florida Jewish Congregation, and became known as the Roodepoort-Florida Hebrew Congregation.

The restoration will be done by laying all the headstones flat - a practical step Rabbi Silberhaft has initiated - secured in concrete to ensure no further vandalism can take place to the headstones. A fence demarcating the Jewish area will be put up as well.

The sisters and Rabbi Silberhaft are appealing to all descendants of the once vibrant and active congregation to make a contribution of R2 500 per family member's grave, to restore the dignity to those who have passed on. But any size contribution will be appreciated.

Rabbi Silberhaft has stated that it is not the Jewish way for Jews to abandon the graves of their loved ones, but to contribute to ensure that those graves are well-maintained and kept in the respectful condition they deserve.

The anonymous donor will match all contributions rand for rand toward this project. In this way it is hoped to raise the necessary funds for this important undertaking. If you know of anyone descended from this congregation, please let them know of this crucial project. And maybe Jewish Report readers would also like to contribute to this very worthy cause. Anyone willing to contribute, should contact Rabbi Silberhaft at [thetravellingrabbi@gmail.com](mailto:thetravellingrabbi@gmail.com), or at 082-440-2621.

**Go to the cemetery page to see the list of those buried there and to see their gravestones.**

Among those buried there, whose graves are vandalised, are people with the surname Adelman, Blumsohn, Boner, Miller, Morris, Losos, Tannenbaum, Schlapo, Shutz