

THE HISTORY OF THE PIETERSBURG [POLOKWANE] JEWISH  
COMMUNITY

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# THE HISTORY OF THE PIETERSBURG [POLOKWANE] JEWISH COMMUNITY

## SUMMARY

The town of Pietersburg [Polokwane] was established in 1868. Jews were present in the area from the establishment of the town. Most Jews came from Lithuania, although some came from England and Germany. They were attracted first by the discovery of gold at Eersteling, then by the availability of land and job opportunities. The Zoutpansberg Hebrew Congregation was established around 1897 and included the villages of Pietersburg and Louis Trichardt. In 1912, because of the increase in members, Pietersburg formed its own congregation, the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation. Its first minister Rev Hurwitz was employed in 1914. A communal hall was built in 1921 at 23 Jorissen Street for religious and social purposes. With the increase in numbers of Jews, a synagogue was built in 1953. The first Jewish cemetery was established on land granted by President Paul Kruger in 1895. A Jewish burial society and a benevolent society were founded about the same time. The Pietersburg-Zoutpansberg Zionist Society was formed in 1905.

Jews contributed to the growth and development of Pietersburg. Several Jews were mayors, deputy mayors, town councillors, members of school and hospital boards and held executive positions on service clubs. They were accepted by the general community and there was little anti-Semitism. From the 1960s, members of the community began moving to the cities. The communal hall and minister's house were

sold in 1994. Eventually, because of dwindling numbers the synagogue was sold in 2003. Only a cemetery remains in Pietersburg as a symbol of the Jewish community.

10 key words:

1] Pietersburg [Polokwane]

2] Zoutpansberg

3] Anglo-Boer War

4] Jew

5] Synagogue

6] Cemetery

7] Rabbi

8] Hebrew

9] Zionist

10] Anti-Semitism

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## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this study is to record the history of the Jewish community of Pietersburg [Polokwane], from its earliest beginnings in the 1890s until the time it ceased functioning as a Jewish community in 2003. It records information about where the Jews came from, why they came to the Pietersburg area, how they adapted to their new surroundings and the larger community and why they eventually left the area. The life of the Pietersburg Jewish community mirrors in many ways the development of Jewish communities in other country towns in South Africa in the origins of its settlers, its Jewish commitment, its institutions and its decline. As a large number of the Jewish country communities in South Africa are disappearing there is a need to document their history for posterity before all the pertinent information is lost.

According to Elazar and Medding's 'Centre and Periphery' model<sup>1</sup>, the South African Jewish community is an example of structured power, whereby the countrywide institutions formulate policy. This model of authoritative control works well in the relatively homogenous Jewish community of South Africa. Other models are the American Jewish model of 'pluralistic' diffusion of power, where it is difficult to locate the source of decisions affecting the overall community, and the separatist fragmentation of Argentinian Jewry. In the South African context, Pietersburg was a satellite town which looked to Johannesburg and its Jewish institutions as the centre for guidance in its Jewish needs. In the same way, Pietersburg [Polokwane] became the centre in the Northern Transvaal [Limpopo Province] for the Jewish requirements of the surrounding satellite towns of Louis Trichardt [Makhado], Messina [Musina], Potgietersrus [Mokopane] and Tzaneen, as well as the smaller hamlets of

Soekmekaar, Haenertsberg, Duiwelskloof, Eersteling, Smitsdorp and Marabastad. Whenever possible, the Jews of the nearby towns and smaller settlements relied on the Pietersburg minister to provide their children with a Hebrew education and to supply kosher meat. The Pietersburg *Chevrah Kadisha* performed their burial ceremonies. The Pietersburg community organized family days and regional committees in the Northern Transvaal which strengthened the ties between the Jewish communities of the north.

The Zoutpansberg Hebrew Congregation, which included Pietersburg and Louis Trichardt was established in 1897. However, Pietersburg broke away in 1912 as the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation [PHC]. The Potgietersrus Congregation was established later in 1927 and the Messina Congregation only in 1937. The exact numbers of Jews in the early years of Pietersburg is not known, although a list of donors to the building fund of the Pietersburg communal hall placed under the hall's foundation stone in 1921 contained the names of 70 men from Pietersburg<sup>2</sup>. Community records show that Pietersburg's Jewish population was at its peak in 1943 when there were 369 Jews. The decline in Jewish members of South African rural communities began in the 1950s, at a time when the overall South African Jewish community was still rapidly growing<sup>3</sup>. Therefore the decline of country communities was not part of the overall decline in the number of Jews in South Africa, which only began later. The Pietersburg community followed this trend of disappearing country communities from the late 1950s so that when the synagogue was closed in 2003, only a dozen Jews were left in the town.



The development of the Northern Transvaal and the major towns of Pietersburg, Louis Trichardt and Potgietersrus at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century are described in Chapter One. This information serves as the background to the description of the growth of the Pietersburg Jewish community. The area changed its name several times in the course of the history of South Africa. The British recognized the Boer Republic, the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek* [ZAR] [Transvaal Republic] <sup>4</sup>, in 1853. The ZAR's existence was ended when the Boers lost the Second Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902 and this area, including the Northern Transvaal, was incorporated into the British Empire. In 1910 the Transvaal was incorporated into the Union of South Africa with the Cape Province, Orange Free State and Natal. Later, in 1994, when democratic elections were held for the first time in South Africa, the Transvaal was restructured and the Northern Transvaal became known as the Northern Province. Its name was again changed on 12 February 2002 to Limpopo Province.

Pietersburg is situated in the northern region of South Africa, 50 kilometers south of the Tropic of Capricorn and 275 kilometers north of Pretoria on the Great North Road to Zimbabwe. The town of Pietersburg was officially proclaimed on 31 July 1886 and was named after the Vice-President of the Transvaal Republic, Pieter Jacobus Joubert. Pietersburg was renamed Polokwane in 2002 and is the capital of Limpopo Province. It is the largest city in Limpopo and is the commercial centre for the surrounding agricultural area. Iron, silicon and other minerals are mined nearby. The old name of Pietersburg will be used in this study, as well as the old names of the surrounding towns.

The main towns surrounding Pietersburg [Polokwane] are:

- a] Louis Trichardt [renamed Makhado in 2003], 100 kilometers north of Pietersburg,
- b] Messina [renamed Musina in 2000], 160 kilometers north of Pietersburg
- c] Tzaneen, 90 kilometers east of Pietersburg
- d] Potgietersrus [renamed Mokopane in 2003], 58 kilometers south of Pietersburg
- e] Naboomspruit [renamed Mookgopong in 2000], 100 kilometers south of Pietersburg
- f] Nylstroom [renamed Modimolle], 140 kilometers south of Pietersburg and 125km north of Pretoria.
- g] Warmbaths [renamed Bela-Bela] 167 kilometers south of Pietersburg

Chapter Two describes the early Jewish settlers from the time they arrived in the Pietersburg area in the 1880s until the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902. The first Jews to settle in South Africa came from Great Britain, Germany and Holland. These were followed by a large immigration of Jews from Eastern Europe from the 1880s until 1930. However, Jews only came to the unknown hinterland in the northern part of the country in the last two decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Thus Jews from both central and Eastern Europe were among the original settlers in Northern Transvaal towns.

Most of the Jews in the Northern Transvaal, like those in the rest of South Africa, came from Lithuania. Large numbers of Jews left Eastern Europe after 1881 as part of the great migration to the West. They left because of the political and religious oppression, economic hardship, overpopulation and military conscription. They were

attracted to South Africa because they believed that in South Africa there would be plenty of room, freedom from oppression and economic opportunities. The Jews heard from returning immigrants that the Afrikaners were friendly to the Jews and their Afrikaans language was similar to German and Yiddish which they spoke. They were attracted by stories of fortunes that had been made in the mineral-rich country, like that of Sammy Marks, a Lithuanian Jew who came to South Africa in 1868. He made his fortune in South Africa and sent money back to rebuild the synagogue in his hometown of Neustad-Sugind. This resulted in a large number of Jews from that area immigrating to South Africa<sup>5</sup>. The shipping lines, Union Line and Castle Line, wanted to fill empty steerage decks of ships, so in a form of ‘directed travel’, they subsidized the passage of steerage passengers to South Africa<sup>6</sup>, making it easier for Jews to travel to South Africa.

In contrast to the East European Jews who went to America and first settled in the larger cities and towns before moving to the smaller towns<sup>7</sup>, a large number of Jewish immigrants to South Africa first settled in remote country areas and only later moved to the towns and cities. At first, the gold mines in the Pietersburg area attracted prospectors. However, when the mines proved of little worth, these men moved on to more lucrative fields elsewhere or they remained and turned to trading. A large number of black tribes had already settled in the rural areas of the Northern Transvaal, as well as white farmers, who served as a ready market for their goods. As in other country areas, these young mostly single Jewish men started trading stores and hotels in isolated places around Pietersburg. Because of close family ties, many new immigrants joined family members who were already established in the area and who could facilitate their integration. Usually an established trader sent money for the

journey to his wife, relatives and friends in Lithuania to come and help him run his business in South Africa. Eventually small Jewish communities sprang up around these trading stores.

Jews were present in Pietersburg even before the town was officially declared in 1886. Therefore, they were involved in the planning and growth of the town from its beginning, and helped in its commercial, agricultural and political development. Just as in Johannesburg<sup>8</sup>, Jews were amongst the founders of the city and were accepted as part of the town from its establishment. This gave the Jews a sense of identity and pride in their town. Because of their involvement in civic affairs they were more readily accepted by the larger community. Several Jews became mayors or served on the Pietersburg Town Council and the Chamber of Commerce and they were on the executive committees of service clubs. Barnard Herman was one of the earliest settlers and was an influential member of the community. He was President of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation [PHC] for 34 years and was one of the founders and leaders of the Zoutpansberg Zionist Society. He also became mayor of Pietersburg.

Most Jews in Pietersburg became traders because they were already familiar with business practices and economic activities from their previous occupations in Eastern Europe. They traded in clothing, dry goods, groceries, hardware and furniture. They owned several fruit markets and mills. There were only a few professional men in Pietersburg in the early decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, mainly lawyers, doctors, a dentist, a land surveyor and a couple of teachers. The Jews who settled in the northern towns mostly spoke Yiddish, but they learned to speak English because of the Anglo-Jewish

origin of the organized community and the upward economic mobility of the English-speaking class<sup>9</sup>. However, those who lived in the rural areas invariably also learned to speak a fluent Afrikaans. In addition, the traders in the tribal areas also spoke a black language, usually Northern Sotho in the Northern Transvaal.

Those Jews who lived in the remote country districts eventually moved to the commercial capital, Pietersburg. This was because they wanted to provide their children with a Jewish education and because of their desire to become part of a larger Jewish community. With the improvement of transport conditions after World War II, people reached their destinations faster and no longer needed a place to stay overnight. Hotels and shops were no longer a necessity in these isolated areas. The establishment of co-operatives put an end to the small country store as they gave their clients longer terms to pay<sup>10</sup> and the trading store could no longer compete with them.

The history of the Second Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902, and how the Jews of the Northern Transvaal were affected by the War, is described in Chapter Three. Some Jews, fearing the imminent War with the British, left for the Cape or returned to the country of their birth. Several Jews from the Northern Transvaal fought on the side of the Boers and acquitted themselves very well. However, many Jews remained in the Northern Transvaal and maintained their neutrality. Most of them continued to trade during the War until the British occupied Pietersburg in April 1901, when they had to close their businesses. The British carried out their 'scorched earth' policy, whereby they destroyed all food and shelter for the Boers in the country districts. The British brought some Jewish families from the countryside to live in Pietersburg or they sent them to the concentration camp in Irene, Pretoria. After the Anglo-Boer War, many

Jews tried to obtain compensation for goods looted by the British troops or for property lost as a result of the War. However, very few were paid out by the British, who had found a loophole in the law. As most Jews were not British citizens and as they had no proof of Russian citizenship, the British would not pay them compensation. The British also claimed that the businessmen had traded with the Boers and had therefore placed themselves in a position to suffer loss. After the War, the Jews had to begin again to rebuild their businesses.

The Jews in the northern areas of South Africa were far removed from the religious centres of Johannesburg and Pretoria and their facilities, but they nevertheless tried to observe a traditional Jewish life. According to Jocelyn Hellig the level of religious affiliation of the Jews of South Africa could be considered mostly ‘non-observant Orthodox’. Jews were affiliated to Orthodox synagogues but “without necessarily being bound by all the requirements of orthodox Judaism”<sup>11</sup>. The South African Jewish community differed in this respect from those in countries like Israel, the United States and England where members of the Orthodox community tended to be religiously observant<sup>12</sup>. It was only with the establishment of the Reform movement in South Africa in the 1930s, that there was a realization that their non-observance really meant another kind of religious practice. The Pietersburg community never considered joining the Reform [Progressive] movement because of the ‘non-observant Orthodox’ syndrome as well as the community’s resistance to change. Almost all the Jews in Pietersburg became members of the PHC despite their irregular attendance at services as the synagogue became the centre of their communal identification. Very few Jews in Pietersburg kept *Shabbat* as they traded on Saturdays in order to make a

living, but they lit candles and recited the *Kiddush* on a Friday night. Although many kept kosher at home, they often ate *treif* food outside the home.

Because the new immigrants had been exposed to the rudiments of daily prayer in Eastern Europe, they would have understood from the morning service prayers that the basic community requirements included attendance at the house of study morning and evening, attending to the dead, visiting the sick, providing for a bride, acts of kindness and hospitality to guests, etc<sup>13</sup>. These basic community obligations seemed to have informed the way the South African Jewish community conducted itself. Therefore, Jews established synagogues, burial and benevolent societies, societies to visit the sick and to assist poor brides in both the main centres and the country communities. Pietersburg formed a burial and benevolent society and established a synagogue and cemetery.

Louis Trichardt was the only other town in the Northern Transvaal to build a synagogue. It was built in 1938 on land donated by Aron Berman, a resident of Louis Trichardt. The synagogue was sold about 40 years later by the Brenner family as the building was no longer being used. The communities of Messina, Potgietersrus, Tzaneen, Soekmekaar and Duiwelskloof held services for *Shabbat* and festivals in private homes, led by members of their own communities. No *mikveh* was ever built in the Northern Transvaal, although the idea was considered at one stage, but proved to be too expensive. The ministers' wives had to travel to Johannesburg or Pretoria to use the *mikveh* there. In the event of a *bris*, a *mohel* had to be brought from Johannesburg.

Jewish ministers were employed in Pietersburg from about 1914 until 1992. Chapters Four and Five detail the role of the Jewish religious leaders of Pietersburg. The congregation often had great difficulty in employing a suitable minister as the community frequently had monetary problems. Most ministers only stayed for two or three years before moving on to better paid opportunities. They often did not want to work in remote areas with few Jewish facilities or observant Jews. The community eventually imported several ministers from Israel in the 1960s and 1970s when no appropriate minister could be found in South Africa. The minister in Pietersburg had to fulfill several functions – he had to conduct services, funerals and weddings, deliver sermons, teach Hebrew classes to the children, lecture adults on Jewish topics, be a *shochet*, act as chaplain to the Jewish soldiers in the army camp and liaise with the non-Jews. As the PHC was the only community in the area to have the full-time services of a minister, *cheder* teacher and *shochet*, the surrounding areas looked to Pietersburg and its minister for ministerial and educational services<sup>14</sup>.

The longest serving minister in Pietersburg was Rev J I Levine, who served from 1931 to 1963. He was a humble caring man who became deeply involved with his congregants. He formed a regional ministry in the Northern Transvaal whereby he established contact with the surrounding towns of Potgietersrus, Tzaneen, Louis Trichardt and Messina. Naboomspruit and Nelspruit regarded Warmbaths and Pretoria as their religious centres. This initiative so impressed Chief Rabbi Rabinowitz that he used it as an example for Potchefstroom and South West Africa<sup>15</sup>. After Rev Levine died, various attempts were made to employ a minister who would serve the needs of several towns on a rotational basis<sup>16</sup>, but due to poor traveling conditions and demands of time, this scheme never worked successfully. A regional conference was



held in Pietersburg in 1947, but was not considered a success as attendance was poor<sup>17</sup>. Family days, an idea promoted by Rabbi E J Duschinsky, the country communities Rabbi 1964-1968, replaced the regional conferences. The first family day in the Northern Transvaal was held under the auspices of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies [SAJBD] and the PHC on 12 June 1966<sup>18</sup>. These occasions strengthened ties between the Jews of Pietersburg and those of the surrounding areas, as well as with the SAJBD. Family days continued to be held until the 1980s. Zionist functions also attracted country members and strengthened ties. The country communities Rabbi representing the SAJBD regularly visited the country communities in South Africa beginning in 1951. He assisted the Pietersburg community in the placement of ministers and *cheder* teachers and the supply of kosher meat.

The synagogue is the most important physical expression of a Jewish presence in a small town. It serves as a place of their own where Jews can gather to fulfill both religious and social needs. Chapter Six explains the problems the Pietersburg Jewish community encountered whilst erecting its religious buildings. The first religious building was constructed at 23 Jorissen Street, Pietersburg in 1921 and served as a synagogue, communal hall and *cheder* for the PHC. However, already by 1931, there was a call for a bigger synagogue as the community was growing rapidly in size. The new synagogue, which included a *cheder* and meeting rooms, was eventually built in 1953 next to the original building which was enlarged and used for communal functions. A minister's house existed on the same property, and this was rebuilt in 1964. Because of the community's ongoing financial problems and its decrease in size, it was decided to sell the communal hall in 1994. As a result, both the communal

hall and the minister's house were sold to the Moolman Group, who then built a new, smaller communal hall, attached to the synagogue, for the dwindling community. Finally, in 2001 with very few members left, it was decided to sell the synagogue building to the Moolman Group. The furnishings, including the *bimah*, *aron kodesh*, seats etc were sent to the town of Tel Mond in Israel for their new synagogue. The de-consecration service of the Pietersburg Synagogue was held in January 2003. The service was conducted by Rabbi Silberhaft, the country communities Rabbi.

In the early days of the community, the leaders of the Pietersburg Jewish community understood that one of the first things a new community needed was a Jewish cemetery. Therefore, when President Paul Kruger visited Pietersburg in 1896, they approached him for ground for this purpose, which was granted. Jewish cemeteries are also to be found in the Northern Transvaal in Louis Trichardt, Potgietersrus and Messina. The Pietersburg *Chevrah Kadisha* assisted in conducting Jewish burials in these towns. This society existed independently until 1931 when it was incorporated into the PHC committee. Chapter Seven describes the ongoing dispute between the Pietersburg Burial Society committee and the PHC committee. The *Chevrah Kadisha* wanted to function independently of the PHC committee because they resented the congregation committee's interference in their decisions, but they never succeeded in regaining their independence and remained an adjunct to the PHC committee. The *Chevrah Kadisha* sometimes strayed from accepted *halakhic* laws and traditions in how they conducted funerals and whom they buried. This was probably due to the long-standing executive's desire to act independently as well as its remoteness from Jewish centres that could guide it.

The religious and social life of the Jewish community was organized by various Jewish societies. These societies included the Pietersburg Jewish Women's Guild, the Benevolent and Burial Societies, various Zionist groups, the Union of Jewish Women, the Hebrew Order of David, the Orphan and Relief Fund and the War Appeal. Practically all members of the Jewish community were involved in one or more of these societies. Speakers, fund-raisers and religious and Zionist leaders included Pietersburg in their itineraries, but not as often as the community would have liked. The lack of involvement of the Johannesburg leadership in the country communities and the infrequent visits by speakers and then mainly to raise funds, was a common complaint of all the country communities in South Africa.

The prolonged battle waged by the women to receive the vote on the PHC committee and the role of the woman in synagogue affairs is documented in Chapter Eight. Although women were present on the *Chevrah Kadisha* and the Zionist committees from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, they only joined the PHC committee in 1948. The formation of the Pietersburg Women's Guild and the problems it had in controlling its financial affairs is documented. The women eventually solved their financial problems by becoming competent caterers. The Union of Jewish Women only came into being in Pietersburg in 1966. It undertook charity work in the general community. However, this society did not last long in Pietersburg as the number of women was too few to sustain three women's societies and it disbanded in 1973. Relations with their non-Jewish neighbours were strengthened because of the social ties developed by the Jewish women's organizations in the town with other organizations.

Most Jews in the Northern Transvaal originated from Eastern Europe, where Zionist awareness was especially high. Jews in the Northern Transvaal, just as in other country communities in South Africa, were strong supporters of Zionism. As a result a large number of 'country Jews' made *aliyah* to Israel. Almost every Jew in the Northern Transvaal was a member of a Zionist organisation and they donated money, time and effort for the Zionist cause. The Zionist societies in Pietersburg are described in Chapter Nine. Beginning in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, both men and women were involved in Zionist societies in Pietersburg. Later in 1932, the women formed the Pietersburg and District Women's Zionist League. They were enthusiastic supporters of Israel and organized functions to collect money towards the quota they had to submit to the Women's Zionist Organisation of South Africa. The Northern Transvaal Jews were amongst the most generous donors of money to Israel. As most of the minutes, correspondence and treasurer's reports of the Pietersburg and District Women's Zionist League have been misplaced information concerning this society has been gathered from the minutes of other organizations and newspaper reports.

As a community does not exist in isolation, the contribution of the Pietersburg Jewish community to the town and its relationship with the Gentile community is outlined in Chapter 10. The Jews of Pietersburg always had good relations with their non-Jewish neighbours. Despite Pietersburg having many right-wing political supporters, there were few incidents of anti-Semitism in the town, except during the 1930s and 1940s. Anti-Jewish feelings were greater in the Tzaneen area due to a strong German presence in the area. The SAJBD sent speakers and distributed pamphlets during this time to the outlying communities to combat anti-Semitism. Jews in many country communities in South Africa achieved much in all fields of endeavour in their towns.

The Jews of Pietersburg contributed extensively to the economic, civic and cultural growth of Pietersburg and participated in many of the social societies in the town.

The numbers of Jews in all the country communities of South Africa have been steadily declining over the years as Jews moved to the cities for economic, educational and religious reasons. The Pietersburg Jewish community's youth began to move to the larger cities to complete their education. They hoped to find better economic opportunities and to meet other Jewish young people. Their parents soon followed them to the cities. This migration occurred in many of the small towns in South Africa, leading to a decrease in the numbers of Jews in the towns<sup>19</sup>. Some moved overseas to Israel, England, United States of America, Canada and Australia. New members did not replace them as Jews were loath to move to country towns, where there were few religious facilities. The communities in this way decreased until there were not enough members to sustain them and like Pietersburg and Louis Trichardt, the synagogues had to be closed.

The Pietersburg community encountered many problems as the number of members dwindled. The manner in which the PHC dealt with these problems is described in Chapter 11. The Pietersburg Jewish community had always been a closely knit community. This was because it was small enough for everyone to know each other and because many families were interconnected through marriage. Unfortunately, the decrease of Jews in the town meant that the number of members available for positions of leadership was reduced. This led to the same members remaining in office for a long time resulting in complacency and stagnation. In a small community, congregants are more aware of each person's shortcomings and this can lead to

friction amongst members. The lack of a minister means that there is no intermediary to defuse the situation. In Pietersburg, the enmity between members eventually led to the division of the community.

To prevent the synagogue from being abandoned after the last members died or left the town and to safeguard the congregation's assets, the PHC adopted a new constitution in 1997. The new constitution made allowance for the implementation of a trust to be administered by the SAJBD at a later date according to the wishes of the congregation. The trust was formed in 2003, earlier than it should have been. This was due to the dissension in the community that led several members to leave the synagogue and form their own community.

The authoress of this study was a resident of Pietersburg from 1972 until 2003, and was a witness to events that unfolded during this time. She is married to the past treasurer of the PHC who was also involved with many of the events that occurred at the time of the closure of the synagogue. His family had been living in Pietersburg since 1936. Although she was actively involved with the Pietersburg Jewish community, she has attempted to present an unbiased version of events that occurred there.

The present study has focused on the Jews of Pietersburg, as the inclusion of information pertaining to the Jews of all the small towns in the Northern Transvaal would have made this study too lengthy. However, where the surrounding towns were dependent on Pietersburg for their Jewish religious and social needs, this information has been included. The South African Friends of *Beth Hatefutsoth* is recording the

history of the Jews in all the country communities of South Africa<sup>20</sup> and has proved an invaluable source of material. However, as its information has been presented in broad outline only, the present study has focused on the Jews of Pietersburg in much greater detail.

Due to the isolation of the Jews in the Northern Transvaal, there are few records of their earliest settlement. An important source of material used in this thesis is that of the South African National Archives. Claims by Jews for compensation after the Second Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, names of Jews who were naturalized and records of court cases are documented. These records were written in High Dutch before the Anglo-Boer War of 1899-1902, but in English thereafter. The records provide proof of who was living in the northern area of South Africa in the late 19th century. They also provide details of where these Jews came from, when they arrived in South Africa and how they conducted their lives. The Archives of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies [SAJBD] also provide a significant source of information about the various Jewish communities in the Northern Transvaal. These Archives also house the country communities Rabbi's Reports describing their visits to the Northern Transvaal over many years.

The Pietersburg newspaper, *the Zoutpansberg Review* and its successor the *Northern Review*, recorded details of the everyday life of the Jewish community. Information was also obtained from the social, business and obituary columns of the newspapers. News about Jewish matters featured prominently in the *Zoutpansberg Review* as it was Jewish owned for a number of years. Personal interviews with residents, ex-residents and their descendants were also conducted by the authoress. The late Mr

Wally Levy was an important source of information as he had lived in Pietersburg all his life. Several books and articles have been written about the history of Pietersburg and the Northern Transvaal, but as they focus on the Afrikaner population, they do not include much information about the Jews of Pietersburg.

Most of the information concerning the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation was obtained from the minute books and correspondence of the congregation from 1921 until 2003.

The information about the Pietersburg Jewish Women's Guild was acquired from their minute books and correspondence from 1948 until 2003. The Pietersburg Women's Zionist League's minutes are incomplete, as most of the early minute books have been mislaid. Information was instead obtained from the Zionist League's treasurer's reports for the missing years as well as the minutes of other societies and the SAJBD archives. The information about the history of the *Chevrah Kadisha* was obtained from the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minutes from 1921 until the present day. These were supplemented by the *Chevrah Kadisha* minutes from 1959 until the present day kindly supplied by the chairman for all these years, the late Mr Wally Levy. All minute books and correspondence are now to be found in the archives of the SAJBD in Johannesburg.

The meaning of Afrikaans, Hebrew or Yiddish words which appear in italics is provided in the Glossary at the end of the study.



A questionnaire was sent to many Jewish residents and ex-residents of Pietersburg for the purpose of this study. It included questions asking for information about their or their parent's arrival in Pietersburg, where they came from, their reasons for coming to the area and whether they encountered any anti-Semitism. Also what their religious and Zionist affiliations and home language were. The responses only provided general information about the immigrants that was not of any significant value. Most immigrants came from Lithuania and Latvia to join family members or to trade in the area. Most had religious and Zionist inclinations and spoke Yiddish or Russian. Very few encountered any anti-Semitic incidents. A copy of this questionnaire is included in Appendix I and answers as to where the immigrants came from in Appendix II.

Appendix III features several family trees of large Jewish families who were present in the Northern Transvaal from the beginning of the establishment of the towns. These families grew in number, either because one member of the family brought his extended family out from Eastern Europe, or because members of families in the same area intermarried. These large families and the intermarriage between them, account for the close ties between the Jews of Limpopo Province. These family trees have been completed only until the time that the families left Pietersburg for the larger centres in South Africa or to Australia, Canada, Israel and the United States.

As most of the Jews in Pietersburg and its surrounding areas were traders, a list is included in Appendix IV of the names of the various traders. Appendix V lists the chairmen of the PHC.

This study traces the history of the Jews of Pietersburg from the 1880s until the closure of the synagogue in 2003. It follows the growth of the community and its contribution to the town. However, with the trend towards urbanization, the Jews from the small country towns like Pietersburg moved to the cities for educational, economic and social reasons until only a small core of members was left to finally close the synagogue. Today, as in many small country towns, all that remains of the once vibrant Jewish presence in Pietersburg is the Jewish cemetery.

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NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Elazar, D J and Medding, P. *Jewish communities in frontier societies: Argentina, Australia, and South Africa*. Holmes & Meier: New York, 1983, p. 191.

<sup>2</sup> A list of donors to the building fund of the Pietersburg communal hall in 1921 was found under the foundation stone of the communal hall, together with several newspapers from 1921, when the building was razed. The list included the names of 70 male members of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation, as well as several Johannesburg Wholesalers, Messina Stores and the Himmelhochs from Louis Trichardt. Also included as a donor was Mr J K Kleinenberg [not a Jew]. The list is now in the South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives.

<sup>3</sup> Saks, David Y. "Jewish Roots in the South African Hinterland". In: *Jewish Affairs* Winter 2002. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 2002, p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> South African Republic [SAR]. Brits, Jacob P. *The Penguin Concise Dictionary of Historical and Political Terms*. Penguin Group: London, 1995, p. 234. The area was also called the Transvaal which means beyond the *Vaal* [grey] river.

<sup>5</sup> Saron, Gustav and Hotz, Louis. *The Jews in South Africa: A History*. Oxford University Press: London, 1955, p. 73.

<sup>6</sup> *Jewish Chronicle*. "Castle Lines for the Goldfields of South Africa", 8 March 1889 and "Union Lines for South African Goldfields", 22 March 1889. Newman, Aubrey. "Why did our Lithuanian Grandparents come to South Africa?" In: *Jewish Affairs* Winter 1994. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 1994.

<sup>7</sup> Weissbach, Lee Shai. *Jewish Life in Small-town America: A History*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 2005, p. 96.

<sup>8</sup> *Founders and Followers: Johannesburg Jewry 1887-1915*. Edited by Mendel Kaplan and Marian Robertson. Vlaeberg Publishers: Cape Town, 1991, p. 18.

<sup>9</sup> Cohen, Stephen. "Historical Background". In: *South African Jewry: A contemporary survey*. Edited by Marcus Arkin: Oxford University Press: Cape Town, 1984, p. 5.

<sup>10</sup> Norwich, Rose. "Recording Our Past – the Beth Hatefutsoth Country Communities Project". In: *Jewish Affairs*, Winter 1997. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 1997, p. 23.

<sup>11</sup> Hellig, J. "Religious Expression". In: *South African Jewry: A contemporary survey*. Edited by M Arkin: Oxford University Press: Cape Town, 1984, pp. 95-116.

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<sup>12</sup> The Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town conducted a new attitudinal study of the South African Jewish community in 2005. The study found that nowadays South African Orthodoxy is moving towards greater strictness of observance, especially in Johannesburg and Pretoria. Although most are 'traditional Jews', almost three in every ten Jews in the 25-34 year age group claim to be strictly Orthodox. Shirley Bruk. "The Jews of South Africa: Highlights of the 2005 attitudinal survey". In: *Jewish Affairs, Rosh Hashanah 2006*. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 2006.

<sup>13</sup> Talmud Shabbos 127a in *The Complete Artscroll Siddur*. Edited by Rabbi Nosson Scherman and Rabbi Meir Zlotowitz: Mesorah Publications Ltd: New York, 2000, p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives: country communities Rabbi's Report: Rabbi Dushinsky, 1964.

<sup>15</sup> Rabinowitz, Chief Rabbi Professor L I. "The Problem of the Country Communities". In: *The South African Jewish Times* Rosh Hashanah, September 1947, p. 6.

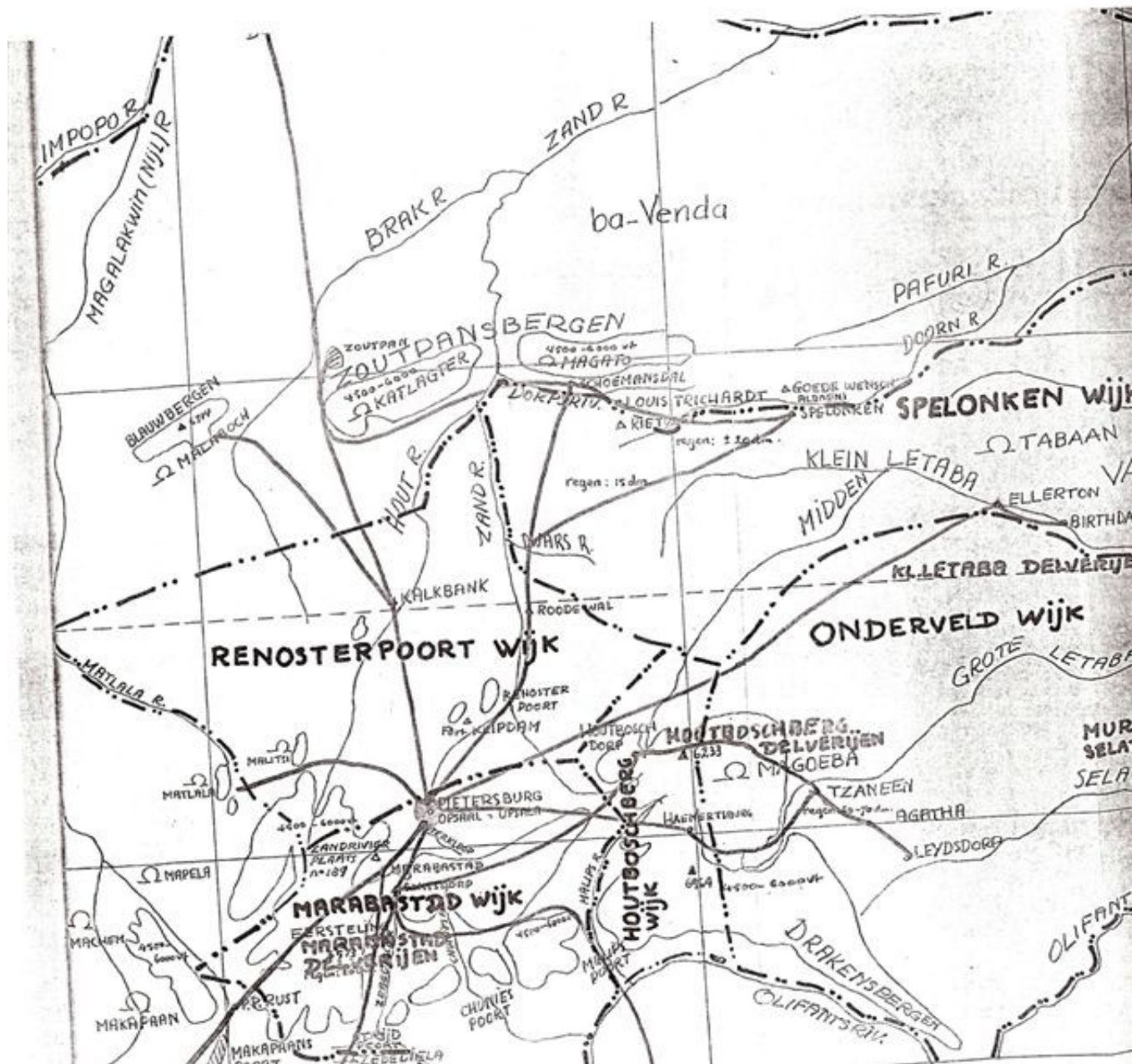
<sup>16</sup> The Communal Relations committee of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies [founded in 1943] sponsored the formation of community councils and regional committees as a means of strengthening local communal bonds as well as tightening the bonds between the South African Jewish Board of Deputies and the community. Community councils consisted of representatives from the Jewish organizations of the town in order to co-ordinate local activities and maintain a link with the South African Jewish Board of Deputies. Regional committees had the same goals but were made up of representatives from rural areas grouped around a larger centre. A regional committee was formed in Pietersburg in 1947. South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file L 1945/47 p. 29. Mr Moss Cohen was chairman in 1947. *Jewish Affairs* 1947. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 1947, p. 69.

<sup>17</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file K 27 May 1947, p. 2180.

<sup>18</sup> *South African Jewish Times* 1 July 1966; South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives 46 correspondence 1965 to 1975.

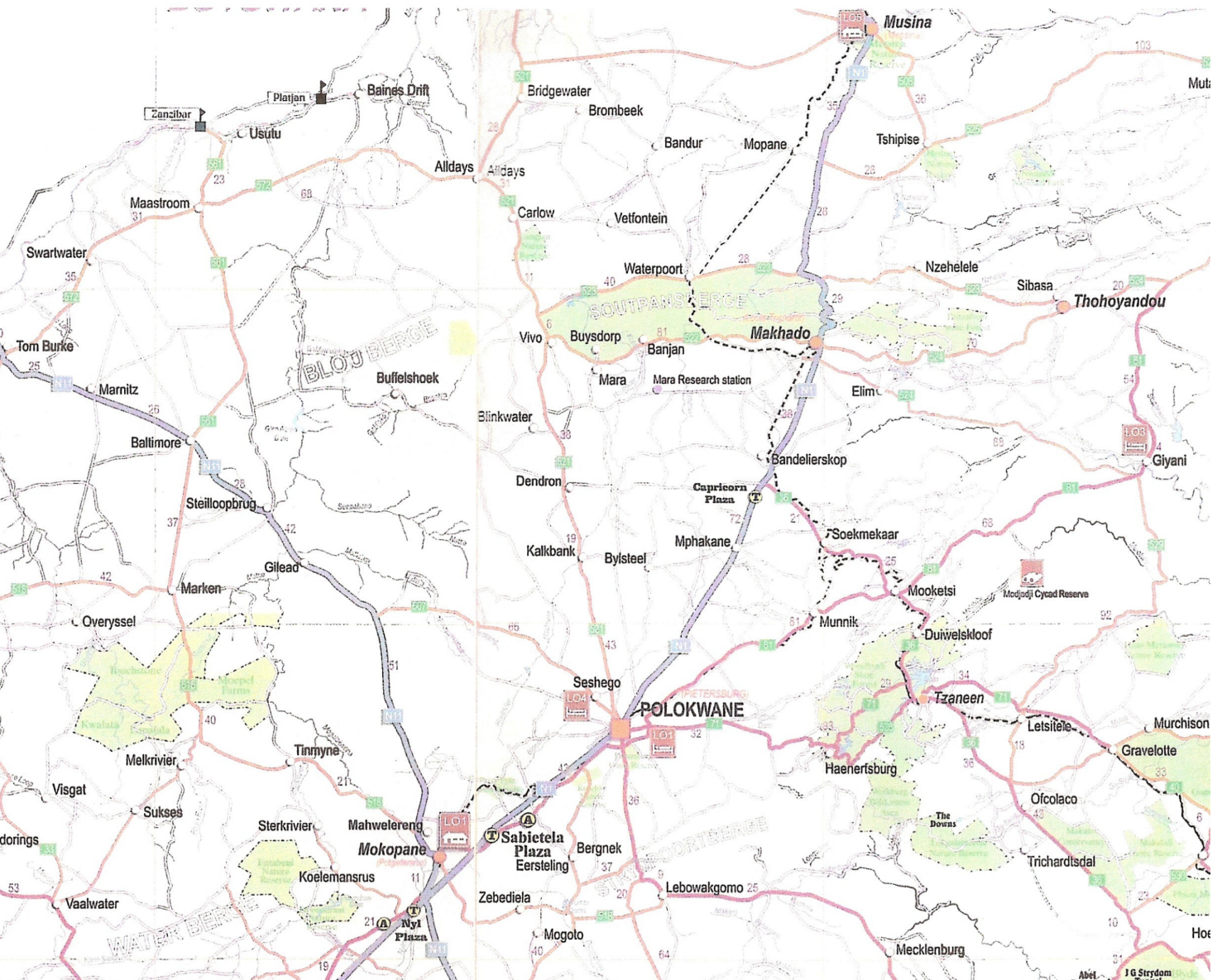
<sup>19</sup> Jews also left for other reasons, such as the decline in the ostrich-feather trade in Oudtshoorn and Humansdorp. "The Story of South African Jewry: Oudtshoorn Jewry Today". In: *The South African Jewish Times* 27 February 1948, p. 6.

<sup>20</sup> The idea to establish Beth Hatefutsoth [the Nahum Goldmann Jewish Museum of the Diaspora] in Israel was proposed in the late 1950s by Dr Nahum Goldmann, the founder and president of the World Jewish Congress. The idea was to create a centre for information about Jews in the Jewish Diaspora, past and present. The South African Friends of Beth Hatefutsoth was established in 1983 in South Africa. In 1992 this committee undertook a research project to document the history of the Jewish communities that lived in the small towns of South Africa in order to complete the information in the museum. Over 1400 places have been identified in South Africa as having had a Jewish presence. The first book on the Jews of the northern and eastern Transvaal called "*Jewish Life in the South African Country Communities* Volume I" researched by South African Friends of Beth Hatefutsoth was published in Johannesburg in 2002. Volume II was published in 2004 and deals with parts of the Western Cape, Boland, Northern Cape and Karoo.



Pietersburg area map 19<sup>th</sup> century, showing many of the places referred to in the text. The map shows many of the original names of places. It is for information only as no distance scale was available for this map.

[Van Asten, F G. *Die Geskiedenis van Pietersburg en omgewing 1833-1899*. MA UNISA, South African National Archives]



*Map of Pietersburg 21<sup>st</sup> century, featuring the new names of places.*

*[Limpopo Province: Tourist and Street Atlas. Map Graphix cc: Johannesburg, 2006, pp.4-5]*

# CHAPTER 1

## THE EARLY SETTLEMENT OF THE ZOUTPANSBERG AND PIETERSBURG

The Zoutpansberg was a large area in the north of South Africa, which was bounded by the Limpopo River, the Waterberg mountain range and the Olifants River<sup>1</sup>. The history of the colonization of the Zoutpansberg area by whites goes back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. This is the period when the first hunters and explorers ventured north from the Cape Colony into the northern areas of Southern Africa. At that time, several black tribes occupied the area. These included the Bavenda, Shangaan and Tsonga in the Far North, the Bagananwa of Chief Malabog towards the east in the Blouberg and the Balobedu [Modjadje's tribe] who lived next to the Kalaga tribe. In the Pietersburg area, the smaller tribes of Maletzie, Maraba, Zebedelia, Ramagoepoe and Chunie settled. Splinter Zulu groups fleeing from the Zulu king Chaka were also found in the Northern Transvaal. These were the Kekaan tribe of Chief Makapaan and the Batlou tribe of Chief Mapela<sup>2</sup>.

In 1836 several groups of white *trekkers*<sup>3</sup>, who were part of the Great Trek, decided to leave the Cape Colony to escape the influence of the British. Hans van Rensburg and Louis Trichardt were the leaders of the first two *trekker* groups to travel northwards and pass through Strydpoort in the Molepo Mountains towards the Zoutpansberg Mountains. The two groups had a disagreement and went in different directions. Louis Trichardt and his followers went further north and settled near the saltpans of the Zoutpansberg for almost a year, before moving on to Delagoa Bay on the east coast of Southern Africa. They were followed in 1848 by another *trekker* group, which was led by Andries Hendrik Potgieter. This group settled in the same

area that Trichardt had occupied. They established a town, which was first known as “de Oude Dorp” and later as Zoutpansbergdorp [on the outskirts of present-day Louis Trichardt]. Some trekkers settled further south in the area where Pietersburg would later be established. Andries Potgieter was appointed Commandant-General of the Zoutpansberg area<sup>4</sup>.

Britain recognised the independence of the area north of the Vaal River, when the British and the *Voortrekker* leader, General AWJ Pretorius, negotiated the Sand River Convention at Sand River on 17 January 1852. This was the first official British recognition of a *Trekker* Republic, the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek* [ZAR], also called the Transvaal Republic. However, the Transvaal settlements were torn apart by the dissension between the Boer leaders AWJ Pretorius, based in Potchefstroom, and Andries H Potgieter, based in the Zoutpansberg area. Potgieter supported local, instead of centralized, authority and he refused to ratify the treaty. However, on the 6 March 1852 peace was declared in Rustenburg between these two Boer leaders. Subsequently, on the 19 March 1852, as a result of a request by Commandant-General Andries H Potgieter, the *Volksraad* decided to found a town called Vredenburg in Makapanspoort in honour of this peace. Vredenburg was to be the future site of the town of Potgietersrus, where several Jewish families were to make their homes<sup>5</sup>.

Andries Potgieter died in December 1852 and was succeeded by his son Piet Potgieter. In 1854 Piet Potgieter’s brother Hermanus Potgieter was killed near the Nyl River in the Waterberg district during an outbreak of violence with the black chief Makapaan. Commandant-General Piet Potgieter gathered commandos to attack Makapaan, who took refuge in the Makapan caves. In the subsequent siege of the caves, Piet Potgieter was killed by a sniper and *Veldkornet* Paul Kruger, [who was

later to become the President of the Transvaal Republic in 1883], heroically retrieved his body. Makapaan, as well as many of his followers, were killed. The town of Vredenburg was renamed Pietpotgietersrus after Piet Potgieter in 1854<sup>6</sup>. Piet Potgieter's widow married Stephanus Schoeman, who became Acting Commandant-General of the Zoutpansberg in 1855. He re-named Zoutpansbergdorp as Schoemansdal<sup>7</sup>.

The people in the Zoutpansberg in the 1860s numbered about 700 whites and most of them earned a living through hunting and the ivory trade. As the Government had no money and was too far away for proper policing, the whites in the Zoutpansberg had no regard for Government rule. The settlers supplied black trackers with guns and ammunition for hunting. These guns were used by the black tribes in their skirmishes with the Whites in 1866. Relations between the whites and the Bavenda tribe under Magato deteriorated drastically because of disagreements over grazing and hunting grounds. The *Zuid-Afrikaner* Administration did not have sufficient funds to protect the whites. As a result, on 15 July 1867, the defenders of Schoemansdal under Commandant-General Paul Kruger, were forced to abandon the village, which was then burned by the Bavenda. Some retreated south to Sterkloop, the farm of Hannes Venter and the future site of Pietersburg,<sup>8</sup> and a few families also went to Marabastad, near the deserted village of Chief Maraba. In 1868 Paul Kruger finally managed to overcome the hostile black tribes to ensure the safety of the whites. What remained of 'de Oude Dorp' can nowadays be seen on the outskirts of Louis Trichardt<sup>9</sup>. The Transvaal Republican Government promised to compensate these whites with land, but it was to be 19 years before they were to be granted land in the new town of Pietersburg<sup>10</sup>. These plots were given to the people as their 'Burgher-Right'<sup>11</sup>.



According to the list of the first farms registered in the district between 1863 and 1870, in Changuion's *Pietersburg Die Eerste Eeu 1889-1989*, Appendix A p. 238, there appear to be no names of Jewish origin.

Some Whites remained in the Schoemansdal area, but lived in *laagers*<sup>12</sup> for protection. Gradually, during more peaceful times, they began farming further away and spread west to Kalkbank, east to Rietpol and Kalkfontein, Turfloop, Houtboschberg and Mathibaskraal and south to Eersteling and Deelkraal<sup>13</sup>. In later years Jews established trading posts in many of these areas [see Chapter 2]. A small garrison protected Pietpotgietersrus<sup>14</sup>, but by April 1870 so many Europeans had died from malaria that the town had to be abandoned<sup>15</sup>. Only in 1890 did the Whites return to the town. Marabastad then became the northernmost settlement of the Transvaal Republic and the official seat of the ‘*landdrost*’<sup>16</sup>.

Gold was found in the Transvaal in 1871 on Frans du Preez’s farm ‘Eersteling’ near Marabastad<sup>17</sup>. This led to the first gold rush in the Transvaal<sup>18</sup>. Lured by the promise of gold, many prospectors braved the harsh conditions in the northern areas of the country. It was uncharted territory beset by malaria, heat, wild animals and problems with the black tribes. Living conditions were rudimentary and the Government buildings, including the jail, consisted of tents. Travel by horse or ox-wagon over rough terrain was very difficult<sup>19</sup>.

The First Anglo-Boer War 1880-1881<sup>20</sup> broke out between the Transvaal and Britain following the annexation of the Transvaal by the British in 1877. After a series of decisive victories by the Boers, the British gave back a large measure of self-rule to the Transvaal. The Boers’ victory over the British was celebrated on 16 December

1881 in the Zoutpansberg district<sup>21</sup>. The declaration of peace saw a fresh rush of diggers and prospectors to the fledgling village of Marabastad.

As Potgietersrus and Schoemansdal no longer existed, on 8 October 1883, *Kommandant-Generaal* Pieter Jacobus Joubert, the head of the South African Republic's defence force and Vice-President of the Transvaal Republic under President Paul Kruger<sup>22</sup>, visited the Zoutpansberg district to decide where its capital should be established. Several meetings were held to discuss the various options for the new town. At the first meeting at Fort Klipdam [Rhenosterpoort], 72 men proposed that Sterkloop should be the site chosen. Amongst the names on this document signed at Renosterpoort on 20 October 1883 were L C Kaufmann and A J Marcus<sup>23</sup>. These family names are similar to those later found in the Jewish community of Pietersburg<sup>24</sup>. This is probably the first record of a Jewish presence in Pietersburg. Joubert decided to establish the new town on Opzadel [Sterkloop], then owned by B J [Rooi Barend] Vorster and Gert Emmenis<sup>25</sup>. The town was called Pietersburg, after *Kommandant-Generaal* Pieter Jacobus Joubert.

On 29 January 1884, the Government bought these farms and the land-surveyor G R von Wielligh laid out 150 plots. Of these, 94 plots were given free of charge to people who had owned property in Schoemansdal and the rest were sold to the public for £6 each. A list compiled by *Landdrost* D S Mare of the owners of the first plots, do not show any names that could be Jewish<sup>26</sup>. On 26 July 1886 the magistrate's office was moved from Marabastad to Pietersburg and on 31 July 1886 Pietersburg was officially established<sup>27</sup>.

Marabastad ceased to exist by 1887 as it proved to be too far from the claims sites. Instead on 21 November 1887, the diggers moved to Smitsdorp, southeast of Marabastad, and named after General N J Smit. However, because this shantytown had little water, it was moved two kilometers away to a place called *Nuwe Smitsdorp* [New Smitsdorp]<sup>28</sup>. The Caledonian Hotel and a sporting club were built and the Zeederberg mail coach connected the town to Pretoria. A document sent by the Mine Commissioner to the Government<sup>29</sup> refers to a request he had received for a liquor licence to be granted to Cohen and Grauman. Because their hotel had been moved from Marabastad to Smitsdorp in January 1888, they needed to renew their liquor licence. It can be presumed that the Cohen referred to was Patsy Cohen and is one of the earliest references to a Jew in New Smitsdorp [see Chapter 2]. The gold rush soon petered out because the deposits of gold in this area proved to be very small, especially after large deposits of gold found on the Witwatersrand in 1885 drew prospectors to the new fields.

Gold was also found in other areas of the Northern Transvaal, leading to the establishment of the new townships of Leydsdorp, New-Agatha and Joubertsdorp<sup>30</sup>. Gold was discovered near the Klein-Letaba River, in the Murchison mountain range around 1886 and in Houtboschberg, 45 kilometers east of Pietersburg, at the foot of the Wolkberg, where in 1887 the village of Haenertsberg, was established<sup>31</sup>. None of these goldfields yielded much gold nor did they give rise to any large towns.

As the Republic needed settlers in the Zoutpansberg area to strengthen their forces there, the *Volksraad* in 1886 passed Law Number 8 [Occupation Law for Government land situated in the district of Zoutpansberg and a small area in the north-eastern

corner of the Waterberg district]. This law enabled burghers of the Republic and, after them, people who were already in the country who might become burghers at a later date, to buy farms at a nominal price<sup>32</sup>. This law, with its opportunity to acquire land, brought more settlers to the northern areas of the Transvaal Republic than the discovery of gold had done. Farms were allotted to any man who wanted to settle on the land, provided he possessed a rifle and ammunition and a horse and saddle, and was willing to do military service when called upon to do so<sup>33</sup>. Although these farms were smaller than the huge farms allotted to the original Trekkers, they were eagerly taken up. This was despite the obligation of Commando duty and the prevalence of malaria and the rinderpest cattle disease, especially in the Tzaneen and Duiwelskloof areas. These pioneers also managed to survive by trading, transporting goods and hunting.

In 1888, G G Munnik became the Mining Commissioner in New Smitsdorp. He decided to move the town in its entirety to Pietersburg<sup>34</sup>. By 1894 there were only three whites left in New Smitsdorp and the town effectively ceased to exist. Soon after the establishment of the town of Pietersburg, there was a demand for plots by people who were entitled to farms according to the Burgher-Right's farm scheme, but who preferred plots in the town. The Government declared that they were each entitled to three plots in town<sup>35</sup>.

In 1888 the railway was completed from Pretoria to Pietersburg, opening up the North even further. The population of Pietersburg grew quickly from 200 whites in 1889 to 800 in 1893. The town of Pietersburg achieved municipal status in 1903. Pietersburg became the hub of the North as it was the industrial, commercial and financial centre of the Northern Transvaal.

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NOTES:

- <sup>1</sup> Cartwright, A P and Cowan, N. *The Old Transvaal 1834-1899*. Purnell and Sons SA Pty Ltd: Cape Town, 1978.
- <sup>2</sup> Changuion, Louis. *Pietersburg Die Eerste eeu 1886-1986*. V&R Printers Pty Ltd: Pretoria, 1986, p. 7.
- <sup>3</sup> This was the name given to the Dutch-speaking sheep and cattle farmers, who moved into the interior of the Cape from the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century. The Great Trek was a migration by *Afrikaners* from the Cape Colony in 1836 and 1837, mainly out of protest against the British Government's interference in their lives, which they were not prepared to tolerate. By the end of the 1850s they had established a Boer Republic between the Orange and the Vaal Rivers and one north of the Vaal River, both of which were recognized by the British. Brits, Jacob P. *The Penguin Concise Dictionary of Historical and Political Terms*. Penguin Group: London, 1995, pp. 101 and 255.
- <sup>4</sup> Changuion, *op. cit.* p. 7.
- <sup>5</sup> *Centenary Album Potgietersrus 1854-1954*. Compiled by A J Combrink: Die Morester Drukkery: 1954, p. 17.
- <sup>6</sup> The name was abbreviated in 1902 to Potgietersrus. Centenary Album Potgietersrus, *op.cit.* p. 18.
- <sup>7</sup> Cartwright and Cowan, *op. cit.* p. 33.
- <sup>8</sup> Changuion, *op. cit.* p. 17.
- <sup>9</sup> Cartwright and Cowan, *op. cit.* p. 20.
- <sup>10</sup> *Northern Review* September 1973, p. 6.
- <sup>11</sup> According to the constitution of the new Transvaal Republic, the 'Burgher Rights' [citizen rights] of the burghers or farmers were set out. Every burgher who had trekked into the area before 1852 was entitled to two farms of approximately 3000 morgen [2.2 acres]. Those who came later were entitled to one farm for which they had to pay ten shillings per annum. This incentive encouraged occupation of the land.
- <sup>12</sup> An Afrikaans word used for an encampment defended by a circle of wagons, with branches of trees closing gaps between the wagons. Brits, *op. cit.* p. 135.
- <sup>13</sup> Changuion, *op. cit.* p. 15.
- <sup>14</sup> Bulpin, T.V. *The Golden Republic. The Story of the SA Republic from its Foundation until 1883*. Citadel Press: Cape Town, *n.d.* p. 114.
- <sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* p. 131.
- <sup>16</sup> A local magistrate during the rule of the Dutch East India Company at the Cape. Although the office was abolished in British areas of South Africa in 1832, it survived in the Independent Boer Republics. Brits, *op. cit.* p. 136.
- <sup>17</sup> Gold was discovered later at Pilgrim's Rest in the Transvaal Drakensberg mountains [present-day Mpumalanga] in September 1873. London-based financier David Benjamin founded the Transvaal Gold Mining Exploration and Land Company in 1883 which did not allow private individuals to own land in the area, and hence no permanent buildings were erected. The gold rush did not last long and the town was mostly abandoned.
- <sup>18</sup> Bulpin, *op. cit.* p. 132.

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- <sup>19</sup> *Zoutpansberg Review* 24 September 1953, p. 2.
- <sup>20</sup> Also called the Transvaal War of Independence 1880-1881. Brits, *op. cit.* p. 254.
- <sup>21</sup> Changuion, *op.cit.* p. 21.
- <sup>22</sup> *Ibid.* p. 30.
- <sup>23</sup> Van Asten, F G. *Die Geskiedenis van Pietersburg 1867-1899*. MA University of Pretoria, 1954.
- <sup>24</sup> South African National Archives TAB Ref SPR 946/87 Vol II mentions the ‘onvluchting’ [flight] and bail of an L C Kaufman in 1887, but the circumstances of this event are not known. His name appears on another document SP653/87 sent from the charge office in Pietersburg on 3 October 1887 to the State Prosecutor. On January 1931, a Pietersburger, B H Dicke, wrote in his memoirs in the *Zoutpansberg Review* of a time in 1893 when Chief Matjatje’s “natives” attacked his farm Middelspruit. A member of the Shangaan tribe who was with him managed to escape to find help, but no one arrived. Only at 10 pm that night a certain Louis Kaufman arrived with 20 Shangaans following a forced march of 23 miles, after he had heard that they were in danger. This could be the same L C Kaufmann mentioned in the above document, although the spelling is not the same. According to South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file SA, p. 142, a Jewish family by the name of Kaufman was living at Sandfontein before 1914, Jacob Kaufman traded at Palmietfontein mine in 1916, I Kaufman lived at Bandelierkop, and a Kaufman had an inn in Naboomspruit in 1910, but it is not known if they were related to L C Kaufmann as here too the spelling is different. Also South African National Archives Ref SPR 6431/99 refers to S Marcus concerning the sale of a farm. South African Jewish Board of Deputies file SA, p. 313 refers to the Jews I Marcus and L Marcus living in Pietersburg in 1918. It is not known if they were related to A J Marcus. Max Marcus, the future mayor of Pietersburg came to Pietersburg in 1904. Because these names are found amongst Jews in the area, it is therefore possible that the Kaufman and Marcus mentioned in this document were Jewish.
- <sup>25</sup> Upsala was another name for Opsaal or Opzadel and it was used by the trekkers before the 1860s where they saddled up and remounted at this crossing of the Sterkloop and Sandrivier streams and it appeared as such on European maps in the 1880s. It was later renamed Sterkloop for the strong-running stream that crossed the area. It was also called Polokwane [safe resting place] by the Blacks long before the whites arrived in the area. Changuion, *op. cit.* p. 31.
- <sup>26</sup> Changuion, *op. cit.* p. 239.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* p. 35.
- <sup>28</sup> *Ibid.* p. 35.
- <sup>29</sup> South African National Archives Depot TAB Source SS Ref R290/89.
- <sup>30</sup> *Zoutpansberg Review* 24 September 1952, p. 12.
- <sup>31</sup> Changuion, *op. cit.* p. 35.
- <sup>32</sup> Cartwright and Cowan, *op. cit.* p. 44.
- <sup>33</sup> *Zoutpansberg Review* 24 September 1924, p. 12.
- <sup>34</sup> Munnik, The Hon G G. *Memoirs of Senator The Hon G G Munnik*. Maskew Miller: Cape Town, 1916.
- <sup>35</sup> Changuion, *op. cit.* p. 37.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE EARLIEST JEWISH SETTLERS IN PIETERSBURG AND ITS SURROUNDING AREAS UNTIL 1899

The first Jews to enter the Transvaal Republic before the 1880s, were the hunters and prospectors. They were part of the general migration of adventurers to South Africa<sup>1</sup> and many of them did not remain in the area for long. The earliest Jewish settlers who settled in the northern parts of the Transvaal Republic were from England, Germany and Holland, as well as from Eastern Europe. Jews left Germany because of civic and political discrimination against them, as well as the economic insecurity in Germany after 1860<sup>2</sup>. Major Joseph Huneberg was a German Jewish veteran of the Franco-Prussian War of 1871. He became *Landdrost* at Waterberg in the Nylstroom area in 1880<sup>3</sup>. It was not common for a Jew to hold such a position at that time<sup>4</sup>.

After 1881, whilst some of the Jewish settlers who arrived in South Africa from Eastern Europe came from Russia, Poland and even Rumania<sup>5</sup>, the majority came from Lithuania. Poland had been in decline since the Khmielnitzki Revolt in 1648. Its economic and political situation weakened as a result of the Swedish war and because of internal insurrection. Russia, Austria and Prussia took advantage of Poland's weakness and divided the country amongst them. As a result of the partitions of Poland in 1771, 1792 and 1795, Russia acquired the largest Jewish community in Europe. Lithuania and northern Poland, the area from which most Jewish South Africans hailed, as well as parts of Ukraine, Belorussia and Latvia, fell under Russian rule. Jews had been officially expelled from Russia in 1727 and from the Ukraine and

Belorussia in 1739<sup>6</sup>, so when Russia occupied Lithuania, she had no specific policy regarding the Jews. Successive Russian Tzars, not knowing how to manage this large Jewish group that refused to be assimilated, instituted anti-Jewish policies. Jews were confined to the Pale of Settlement, which took its final form in 1812, and consisted of 25 western provinces from the Baltic to the Black Sea<sup>7</sup>. By 1880, 94% of Jews lived in this overpopulated area, the other 6% being the privileged few that were allowed to live outside the Pale.

After the assassination of Tzar Alexander II in Russia in 1881, terrible pogroms devastated 160 towns in southern Russia and Poland. On 3 May 1882 Tzar Alexander III enacted the 'Temporary Rules' whereby no Jews would be allowed to settle 'anew' in any rural areas of Russia, not even in the Pale of Settlement<sup>8</sup>. This resulted in overpopulation and poverty in the towns and cities as they could not move out of these areas. Jews were no longer allowed to trade on Sundays, traditionally their most profitable trading times with the peasants. Jewish ownership of agricultural land was forbidden and without warning the borders of the Pale were redrawn so that Jews were evicted from their homes. The great migration of Jews westward was part of the general movement of people from Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and was spurred on by the terrible conditions under which Jews had to live. They were fleeing from persecution, poverty, drought, famine, fire and conscription into the army. As a result of these terrible conditions, Jews fled Eastern Europe, mainly for the United States and South Africa, although some went to England, Germany and the Netherlands<sup>9</sup>. Jews were never regarded as full citizens by the Tsar, so they were never given passports when they travelled, only travel documents. This lack of official



documentation was to affect the Jews' claims for compensation after the Anglo-Boer War of 1899.

Many Jews were drawn to South Africa because of the development of gold and diamond mining. Reports received in Lithuania of immigrants who had made their fortunes spurred immigration to South Africa<sup>10</sup>. After they had made their way to England from Eastern Europe, many Jews stayed at the Poor Jews Temporary Shelter in London before sailing for the Cape. Over 90% of Jews at the Shelter were from Lithuania and 40% of the Jews recorded in the Shelter's registers travelled on to South Africa<sup>11</sup>. Most Jews wanted to go to America, but not all were able to gain entry, so South Africa became their destination instead. Some of those who did go to America but failed to make a living there, came instead to South Africa. The Union Shipping Company and the Castle Line offered cheap, regular fares to South Africa. Agents of these lines in Kovno, through advertisements in the local press, encouraged Jews to go to South Africa<sup>12</sup>. The majority of those passing through the Temporary Shelter in London were found to be from Kovno<sup>13</sup>, Ponevez, Shadowa, Wilkomer, Krok, Keidan and Anikst<sup>14</sup>. Therefore many of the Jews who came to South Africa were from these districts in Lithuania. The first few pioneers made some money and then brought out family and friends from their home towns. In so doing, they established a connection between these towns and South Africa, and Jews continued to be drawn from these districts<sup>15</sup>. About 40,000 Jews arrived in the Cape between 1880 and 1914<sup>16</sup>. Of these immigrants, 71% were young men under the age of thirty<sup>17</sup>.

On their arrival in South Africa, these immigrants looked for work. Contrary to popular belief most of the Jewish immigrants to South Africa were not "*smouses*",

peddling their goods about the country<sup>18</sup>. Most of them had come from urban centres and because of residential and land ownership restrictions, they had become traders and artisans in Lithuania. Many had been shopkeepers, hotelkeepers and barkeepers. Therefore the immigrants found work in their trades and through hard work and entrepreneurial skills developed the furniture, clothing and shoe industries in South Africa<sup>19</sup>. Those who had only studied in *yeshivas* and who had had no secular education, found it much harder to find work.

Some of these immigrants travelled as far north as Johannesburg, but when they found that there was a shortage of jobs there, they travelled even further northwards towards the Zoutpansberg area, which was largely uncharted territory. Those attracted to the northern regions of the country were first drawn by the discovery of gold at Eersteling, Haenertsburg and the Murchison mountain range. When the gold deposits proved to be uneconomical in this area, they turned instead to trading. Several also bought farms.

Jews who settled in the Pietersburg area were mostly general dealers and hotelkeepers<sup>20</sup>. Many single young men started trading posts in remote areas where they were often the only whites. They sold staples such as maize meal and sugar to the black population and household goods and agricultural implements to the farmers, who travelled long distances to these stores. Once they became established and their economic situations improved, they sent money back to their home countries, so that they could bring their families out to South Africa. Most Jews therefore came to the Pietersburg area because they already had family members living there, who gave them assistance, or because of business opportunities<sup>21</sup>. Several villages grew around

these stores such as Soekmekaar, which was started by the Kahan family. Mary Kropman in her thesis on the traders of the Ciskei, describes a similar situation developing in the Eastern Cape, where the newly arrived immigrant from Eastern Europe ventured into the interior of the platteland as a *smous* and settled as a trader wherever he saw a prospect of making a better livelihood<sup>22</sup>.

Some Jews established hotels as way stations for the *smous* and commercial traveller. These travellers stayed at the back of isolated general dealer's stores or hotels in small country towns or villages. In 19<sup>th</sup> century Russia, Jews in the country areas had run the taverns or canteens owned by noblemen and in the towns they sold alcohol to the factory workers, so that when they came to South Africa, many of them continued to work in this trade. In South Africa, liquor trading and hotels are strongly connected. The hotel owner's wife used to oversee the cooking and many hotels became renowned for their excellent table. Unfortunately as the *smous* and commercial traveller began to disappear and travel became faster with better cars and roads after World War II, the need for hotels in out of the way places declined. Eventually this led to the closure of these hotels and the disappearance of the Jewish hotel owners from the rural areas<sup>23</sup>. Almost every hotel in Pietersburg itself was owned by Jews.

The Jewish immigrants from Lithuania all spoke Yiddish when they first came to the Pietersburg area, and some also spoke Russian<sup>24</sup>. They eventually all learned to speak English. Many Jews also learned to speak Afrikaans<sup>25</sup>. The medium of English was used in the Government school in Pietersburg after the Union was formed in 1910, and Dutch, not Afrikaans, was taught as a subject. However, in 1914 Afrikaans was also accepted as a school language<sup>26</sup>.

Jews were involved with the town of Pietersburg from its inception. Changuion quotes a list of names in his book “PIETERSBURG Die eerste eeu [the first century] 1886-1986” page 240<sup>27</sup> that originally appeared in Fred Jeppe’s Almanac. Some of the names in the list are known to be Jewish or could be Jewish. Of these are the following:

LIST OF EUROPEAN MALE INHABITANTS OF PIETERSBURG,  
HAENERTSBERG AND SMITSDORP IN 1889:

HAENERTSBERG [WOODBUSH]:

Hayman, storekeeper

PIETERSBURG:

Green, storekeeper, Lichtenstein A, storekeeper

SMITSDORP:

Benjamin A, Bloom J, Cohen W, Herman B, Rubenstein H.

Hayman is probably Julius [born Jacob] Heimann who was a Jewish storekeeper and prospector in Haenertsburg. No other reference to Green has been found, as well as to A Benjamin or J Bloom. However, a Jew by the name of H E Benjamin farmed in the Nylstroom district in 1904<sup>28</sup> and a Jewish family with the name Bloom lived in Potgietersrus in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, but do not seem to be related. The only other reference to A Lichtenstein is in the South African National Archives<sup>29</sup>, but gives no proof as to Lichtenstein’s Jewishness, other than that he was a storekeeper, as so

many Jews in Pietersburg were. W Cohen is William E “Patsy” Cohen, together with his business partner H Rubenstein, and B Herman is Barney Herman.

William E [Patsy] Cohen was one of the earliest Jewish pioneers to the Zoutpansberg area. He was born on 15 April 1853 and was the eldest of six children. He left Russia in 1875 for Ireland before coming to South Africa, hence the nickname ‘Patsy’<sup>30</sup>. He arrived in the Zoutpansberg around 1885. Patsy first lived in Smitsdorp and then moved to his farm Koedoesvlei near Mara, 27 kilometers west of Louis Trichardt, where he had a general dealer’s store. His family maintains that he bartered the farm from an African chief<sup>31</sup>. He also had businesses at Lasfontein and Louis Trichardt<sup>32</sup>, in partnership with Mr H Rubinstein of Bulawayo, as well as a portion of a farm Kalkfontein<sup>33</sup>.

Patsy Cohen married Mrs J van Gelder [nee Myers] of Johannesburg on 8 December 1907<sup>34</sup>. His children were David van Gelder [adopted], who became a customs-officer in Durban and married a Gentile woman, Samuel, an apprentice pharmacist who was killed during World War II and Hilda, a solicitor, who never married and died in 1961. Because he was very well known in the area, Patsy was asked to lay the foundation stone of the Jewish communal hall in Pietersburg in 1921. Patsy Cohen died on the 2 November 1925 at the age of 74 and was buried in Pietersburg.

Mr Barnard [Barney] Herman was brought out to Pietersburg by Patsy Cohen. Barnard Herman was born on 18 May 1867 in Weksne, Russia. He arrived in Pietersburg in 1887<sup>35</sup>, shortly after the town was proclaimed in 1886<sup>36</sup> and he tried his luck as a prospector. He was living at New Smitsdorp in 1889<sup>37</sup>. Herman came from

Marabastad to Pietersburg in 1891, the same year that the first *Landdrost* arrived. He found four Jewish families already living in Pietersburg. The first Jewish home in the Northern Transvaal area was supposedly established by Mrs Kallmeyer<sup>38</sup>. President Paul Kruger came to Pietersburg in 1896 to visit the Marabastad goldfields. Messrs Barney Herman, Patsy Cohen and S Frenkel, were the deputation that met with the President in order to obtain a cemetery site and ground for a synagogue [see Chapter 7]. By 1898 a Hebrew congregation had been formed in Pietersburg and Barney Herman was elected president<sup>39</sup>. Barney was president of the congregation for 34 years from 1916 to 1950 and played a vital role in the establishment of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation.

Barney Herman owned the Café Royal Hotel and a general dealer's store in Pietersburg in 1910, and later became a farmer. His marriage to Lena Ginsberg [born in Russia] at the Goede Trouw hall in Cape Town on the 21 August 1903, was officiated by Rev Bender. They had two children, Joseph Nathan [born 12 October 1904 in Pietersburg] and Evelyn [birth date unknown].

Barney Herman was elected a member of the Pietersburg Town Council in 1904 and served on that body for 18 years. He was elected mayor of Pietersburg twice in succession, 1915-16 and 1916-1917 and many times deputy mayor. He was a member of the hospital committee for twenty years, one of the founders of the Pietersburg blood transfusion service, chairman of the sports club and the school board and foundation member as well as president for many years of the Chamber of Commerce. He became chairman of the Farmers' Union and the Agricultural Society and he won several prizes at agricultural shows<sup>40</sup>. In 1905 the Pietersburg Zionist Society was

formed and Mr Herman was elected president, a position he held until 1923. He was also a foundation member of the Pietersburg Masonic Lodge and became master of the Pietersburg United Lodge. Barney was president of the Public Library since its formation in 1904 and a foundation member of the Pietersburg Club. He died on 14 July 1950 and was buried in Pietersburg.

Julius Heimann was an early inhabitant of the Haenertsberg area. Julius Heimann [sic Heinmann]'s last will and testament, signed at 'Haenertsburg Houtboschberg Gold Fields South Africa Republic' dated 19 October 1891, states that Heinmann, 'a General Merchant residing at Haenertsburg in the South African Republic' was born in Luegde in the Hannover area of Germany on 16 April 1845. He came to South Africa in 1863 and married Sarah Norden<sup>41</sup>, from a well-known Eastern Cape family. They had three sons Bernhard born 1877, Joe born 1879 and Hermann born 1889 and a daughter Henrietta Violet [birth date unknown]. Heimann was naturalised in 1894<sup>42</sup>. He died in Brakrivier, Zoutpansberg in 1897. According to family legend, he died in the *veld* of a fever, alone except for a servant who returned to Sarah Norden, his widow, saying "Massa dead, I bury". His body was probably not re-interred in a cemetery as there is no record of any burial in the area. Due to the itinerant nature of some travellers as well as the vast empty spaces in the Transvaal, it is quite probable that several Jews died in remote areas far from any Jewish cemetery and were buried where they died. No record of their deaths or their burial places would have been made<sup>43</sup>.

There are several references in the South African National Archives to correspondence with Heimann, proving his presence in the Haenertsburg area in the

1880s. In response to a request for verification of Julius's signature, Heimann replied on 21 June 1888 from Fort Klipdam, Zoutpansberg<sup>44</sup>. Therefore, he may have been living there first. However, in 1889, he wrote letters from Haenertsburg, where he must have been one of its earliest residents. In the letters, he requested the return of money given as security to the market master in July 1889<sup>45</sup> and another requesting the return of legal documentation on 8 August 1889 and the Mine Commissioner's answer. Julius Heimann also owned a store in Smithfield, Orange Free State as a Power of Attorney dated 24 April 1889 was given to him so that he could obtain transfer of an erf [property] in Smithfield<sup>46</sup>. He also owned farms in Haenertsburg as on 25 August 1890 he requested information about the transfer into his name of two farms in the Houtboschberg [Woodbush] area, Zoutpansberg: 'Waterval', erf 624 – size 200 morgen and 'Uitschart', erf 628 – size 300 morgen<sup>47</sup>. By 1892 Heimann must have been prospering as he also requested to hire erven 44 and 45 on Mare Street, Pietersburg for 10 to 20 years<sup>48</sup>.

Other possible Jewish names are mentioned in the South African National Archives as living in the Pietersburg area. Mr Jacobsohn's name is mentioned in a case brought by the public prosecutor in 1889 against several men for the amount of ten shillings in 1898<sup>49</sup>. An affidavit by *Veldkornet* J L H du Preez on 18 September 1895 testifies to Leon Miller's name on the *Veldkornet's* list on 11 December 1890 in Renosterpoort, Zoutpansberg<sup>50</sup>. H Horwitz asked the Government for ground in Pietersburg in 1899<sup>51</sup>. There are also several references in the National Archives to the common Jewish name of Cohen in the Zoutpansberg area: a prisoner Cohen needed to be transferred to Pretoria in 1896 and the neglected children of a Cohen is referred to in 1899<sup>52</sup>.



Several Jewish financiers invested in land in the Northern Transvaal, although they did not live there. The well-known Jewish financier, Alois Hugo Nellmapius, the trusted friend of President Kruger, never lived in the Zoutpansberg, but acquired land in the area. He was born in Budapest in 1847 and arrived at Delagoa Bay in 1873. A qualified civil engineer, he was drawn by the discovery of gold at Pilgrim's Rest in the Eastern Transvaal in 1873. He soon made his fortune not only panning for gold, but in 1876 he established the first chain of rest stations on the 'Nellmapius Road', in order to transport goods from Pilgrim's Rest to Delagoa Bay<sup>53</sup>. He acquired large land-holdings in the Zoutpansberg in 1888<sup>54</sup>. Around 1890, he was granted a concession for the 50-year lease of saltpans in the Zoutpansberg area, with the right to refine the salt mined there.

Carl Hanau, born in Germany in 1855, invested in the Northern Transvaal, although he did not live there. He was a representative of Barnato Brothers and a founder of East Rand Propriety Mines, and was also one of the first directors of the Iron Crown Reef Gold Mining Company established in Haenertsburg in the 1890s<sup>55</sup>.

Sir Lionel Phillips was one of the main shareholders in the firm Hermann Eckstein & Co as well as the president of the Johannesburg Chamber of Mines. He was a leader of the movement for reform and was arrested for being involved in the Jameson Raid [see Chapter 3]. Sir Lionel purchased five farms in the Tzaneen area and they were renamed 'Broederstroom Stud Farm'. He intended breeding polo ponies and municipal mules, but as the soil lacked the calcium necessary for the formation of strong bones in growing animals, the foals died. The idea of a stud farm was

abandoned and instead Aberdeen Angus and Shorthorn cattle were raised. Sir Lionel's son Harold became the manager. Later his father sent him to study agriculture in Canada. There he met and married Hilda Hills, a non-Jewess. Sir Lionel presented them with Westphalia farms in the Tzaneen area as a wedding present in 1914<sup>56</sup>, but the young couple did not enjoy living there. The farms declined and were eventually sold in 1929.

Sir Lionel bought 14 farms in the area in the depressed economic times after the Second Anglo-Boer War 1899. He commuted between his homes in Haenertsberg, Johannesburg, Cape Town and England. Sir Lionel's wife Florence contributed much to the area. On the 25 June 1910 she started a branch of SANU [South African National Union], which promoted the export of South African products and industry as part of a rebuilding process after the Anglo-Boer War. She also tried to promote the furniture trade. Sir Lionel contributed extensively to forestry and the wood industry in the Haenertsberg area, as the Government began promoting the planting of exotic fast-growing varieties of pine and eucalyptus. Lionel Phillips was knighted by the British King as 'Sir Lionel Phillips Bart of Broederstroom, Northern Transvaal'.

The first settlers included several who came from Western Europe - Germany, Austria and Holland. Amongst them was Salli Kahn, a Jewish prospector who was born in Wiesbaden, Germany in 1867. He lived in Pietersburg for a short time in 1890, before moving on to Marabastad and Haenertsburg to prospect for gold<sup>57</sup>. Julius Koenig also came from Germany. He was born on 9 July 1879 in Felsberg, Germany. In 1897 he moved to Pietersburg where he owned Koenig's General Dealer's Store and was an agent for agricultural implements. In May 1913 he married Miss Hattenbach. Julius

Koenig was elected a member of the Town Council in 1925 and became the mayor of Pietersburg in 1927/1928. During his mayoral year he went to Germany for a holiday where he died on 16 December 1928. Max [Marcus] Rosenberg, an Austrian-born Jew, opened a general dealer's store, Zoutpansberg Stores, Pietersburg in 1893 and then later the business Rosenberg Ltd. He married Miss Frenkel, whose brother Simon Frenkel, a German Jew, owned a produce and tobacconist business in Main Street Pietersburg, called Frenkel and Co. Frenkel also had a business in Ventersdorp, as well as a farm Sterkfontein No 44, Zoutpansberg and a farm Tweefontein No 385<sup>58</sup>. Isidor Rosenthal<sup>59</sup>, a Jew from Germany who had previously prospected for gold along the Murchison Range near Gravelotte, ran a hotel and a store in the Marabastad area from 1898. Joel Charles Duveen was a Dutch Jew born in 1876 who had come to Louis Trichardt in the Transvaal in the mid-1890s. He was to become a hero in the Anglo-Boer War fighting for the Boer forces [see Chapter 3].

Many of the early settlers also came from Lithuania. Amongst the first Jewish immigrants from Lithuania that lived in the Pietersburg area were the three brothers Louis, Heimann and David Taback, Isaac Mates and Rebecca Levin [see chapter 3].

Several large Jewish families lived in the northern areas of the Transvaal Republic before the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The Pietersburg Jewish community was dominated by two large families. These were the Israelsohn/Eichholz/Brenner families and the Kallmeyer/Hirschmann families. The only connection between the two groups was when Rev J I Levine's two daughters married. Sarah Levine married George Eichholz from the Israelsohn/Eichholz clan and Lily Levine married Kuba Rakusin from the Kallmeyer/Hirschmann clan, thus connecting the two groups. The four Himmelhoch

brothers Sachne Simeon, Yosef, Wolf Ze'ev and Tsemach, who lived in Louis Trichardt and the Schmahmann family in Slypsteendrif were two more large families whose members intermarried with other families in the district. All these families were pioneers in the region and their family trees are to be found in Appendix II.

Herman Hirschmann [born 2 February 1879] came out from Latvia to Woodbush [Houtboschdorp] near Haenertsburg in the Northern Transvaal where he owned a farm and a general dealer store. Later he ran the Tzaneen Hotel. Herman Hirschmann married Doris Thal from Mitau, Latvia in 1898. Their wedding was the first Jewish wedding in the Woodbush district. Herman Hirschmann was instrumental in bringing several other Jewish settlers to the district of Woodbush. These included the Kallmeyer, Perlman, Palte and Thal families. Herman Hirschmann's sister, Johanna Hirschmann was born in Talsen in the Baltic States in 1870. She married Joseph Kallmeyer in Amsterdam in 1891 and they immigrated to Johannesburg in 1892, moving soon after to Middelburg. Joseph Kallmeyer came to Houtboschdorp and in 1896 Johanna Kallmeyer came by ox-wagon with their two daughters to join her husband. They shared a house with the Hirschmanns. Herman brought out his brothers Jacob, who married Erna Ethel Raick, and Joseph [Brahle], who married Rachel [Rahele]. He also brought out his sister Bryna Rakusin's children, Jacob [Kuba], who, as mentioned earlier, married Lily Levine and Samuel Rakusin, who married Francis Tager, daughter of Ellis Tager of Pietersburg.

The Israelsohn/Eichholz families, through marriage joined with other families in the Haenertsberg and Pietersburg area. These include the Levy, Brenner, Zaacks, Meyer, Tankel, Sacks, Solomon, Miller and Ellison families. The Israelsohn/Eichholz group

was pioneered by Max Israelsohn, who came to South Africa in 1888<sup>60</sup>. Max was in the employ of Mr Himmelhoch and later of Mr Kallmeyer at Woodbush Village. His brother Wolf first went to America, but did not stay there long before coming to South Africa and joining Max<sup>61</sup>. Max and Wolf Israelsohn, acting on Mr Hirschmann's advice, obtained a government loan to purchase the farm Turfloop [number 391], where the University of the North now stands. On the farm Syferkuil [number 342], on the main road linking Houtboschdorp and Pietersburg, they built a small house. The Israelsohn brothers also owned Haenertsburg Mill and Stores, as well as a butchery in the early 1920s. In 1898 Max and Wolf brought out their sister Clara's husband Herman Eichholz [born 1869, died Pietersburg 31 January 1942] and set him up in a trading store in Haenertsburg. In 1903 Herman brought his wife Clara and eight year old daughter Helena from Riga, Latvia, as well as his nephew Benjamin Meyer<sup>62</sup>. Ben Meyer later brought his own sister Hannah out from Lithuania and she married Meyer Tankel, who had a trading store at Sandfontein near Matlala. A cousin of Max and Wolf, Adolph Israelsohn [nicknamed big Adolph] also came to South Africa in the 1890s and farmed and traded at Groot-Spelonken. Adolph brought three of his sisters out to South Africa to join him. The one sister Male married Sidney Sacks, Ida married Solomon Solomon and Fanny married her cousin Benjamin Meyer, Clara and Herman Eichholz's nephew. Ben and Fanny Meyer joined Fanny's brother Adolph on his farm Boskoppies and managed the four trading stores while Adolph attended to the farming. Smulka and Harry Solomon were brought to the area by their uncles Solomon and Sam Solomon. Ben Meyer brought out Fanny's sister Chaiah's son Aaron Ellison from London to join him at Groot-Spelonken.

The majority of Jews who came to South Africa at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> and the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century came from Lithuania. Most of the Jews of Pietersburg also came from Lithuania, although there were also several families from Latvia, Germany and England. Most became traders and hotel keepers, often in remote areas before moving to Pietersburg. They were foundation members of the town and contributed to the economic, civic and cultural growth of the town.

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NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Gershater, C. "From Lithuania to South Africa". In: *The Jews in South Africa: A History*. Edited by Gustav Saron and Louis Hotz. Oxford University Press: London, 1955, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> Overpopulation, land hunger and unemployment led to unrest and economic insecurity and fuelled emigration from Germany. Sachar, Howard M. *The Course of Modern Jewish History*. Revised edition. Vintage Books: New York, 1990, p. 182.

<sup>3</sup> *The Zionist Record* October 17 1952 and South African National Archives Source CJC 1145.

<sup>4</sup> Although freedom of worship had already been granted to all residents in 1870, the revised *Grondwet* of 1896 still debarred Jews and Catholics from military posts, from the position of president, state secretary or magistrate, from membership in the first and second *Volksraad* and from the superintendencies of natives and mines. Hertz, Rabbi Dr J H. "The Jew in South Africa". Paper presented at the First Congress of the South African Zionist Federation Johannesburg 9-11 July 1905. Pamphlet: Central News Agency: Johannesburg, 1905. Also reprinted in: *Jewish Affairs* Autumn 1999. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 1999, p. 42.

<sup>5</sup> Gershater, *op. cit.* p. 61.

<sup>6</sup> Greenbaum, Masha. *The Jews of Lithuania: A History of a Remarkable Community 1316-1945*. Gefen Publishing House Ltd: Israel, 1995, p. 161.

<sup>7</sup> Johnson, Paul. *A History of the Jews*. Harper Collins Publishers: Great Britain, 1987, p. 358.

<sup>8</sup> Sachar, *op. cit.* p. 282.

<sup>9</sup> Greenbaum, *op. cit.* pp. 189.

<sup>10</sup> Gershater, *op. cit.* p. 73.

<sup>11</sup> Newman, Aubrey. "Why did our Lithuanian grandparents come to South Africa?" In: *Jewish Affairs* Winter 1994. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 1994, p. 11.

<sup>12</sup> \_\_\_\_\_ . "The poor Jews' temporary shelter and Lithuanian Jewish immigration to South Africa, 1885-1914." In: *Jewish Affairs Rosh Hashanah* 2006. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 2006, p. 8.

<sup>13</sup> Towns could also have different names in Russian, Lithuanian or Yiddish such as Vilna in Yiddish, Vilnius in Lithuanian and Wilno in Russian. The following names are in Lithuanian and in Yiddish eg Kaunas and Kovna, Panevėžys and Ponevezh, Šeduva and Shadova or Shadeve, Krakės and Krok, Kėdainiai and Keidan, Anykščiai and Anikst, Ukmergė and Vilkomir. Berel Kagan [Cohen]. *Yidische Shtet, Shtetlech un Dorfische Yishuvim in Lite biz 1918: Historish-biografische skitzes*. New York, 1991.

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- <sup>14</sup> Gershater, *op. cit.* p. 63.
- <sup>15</sup> Herrman, Louis. *A History of the Jews in South Africa from the earliest times to 1895*. South African Edition. South African Jewish Board of Deputies: Johannesburg and Cape Town, 1935, p. 255.
- <sup>16</sup> Saron, G. "Jewish Immigration 1880-1913". In: *The Jews in South Africa: A History*. Edited by Gustav Saron and Louis Hotz. Oxford University Press: London, 1955, p. 100.
- <sup>17</sup> Shain, M. *Jewry and Cape Society*. Historical Publications Society: Cape Town, 1983, p. 84.
- <sup>18</sup> Schrire, Gwynn. "Mostly Smouse? South African Jews and their Occupations a Century ago". In: *Jewish Affairs* Autumn 2000. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 2000, pp. 9-14. This article also appeared in *Jewish Affairs* Spring 2002. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 2002, pp. 33-38.
- <sup>19</sup> \_\_\_\_\_. "Is it true what we're told about zeyde? Some realities behind our eastern European immigrants". In: *Jewish Affairs* Winter 1997. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 1997, p. 19.
- <sup>20</sup> Similarly, in Potchefstroom, in 1902, there was a 50/50 split between those living in the town and the greater district. The majority in the district ran roadside hotels and general dealer stores. A very few were farmers. Interview with Paul Cheifitz, who is currently researching his Masters degree on the history of the Jews of Potchefstroom.
- <sup>21</sup> C Wiener questionnaire. See Appendix I.
- <sup>22</sup> Kropman, Mary. *The Contribution of the Pioneer Traders to the Ciskei*. Unpublished MA Thesis: University of Cape Town, 1977, p. 60.
- <sup>23</sup> Interview with Marcia Levisohn 2002.
- <sup>24</sup> C Wiener questionnaire. See Appendix I.
- <sup>25</sup> According to the South African 1936 census, 76% of the Jewish population had English as their home language and 2% had Afrikaans as their home language. Dubb, A A. Demographic picture. In: *South African Jewry: a contemporary survey*. Edited by M Arkin. Oxford University Press: Cape Town, 1984, p. 37.
- <sup>26</sup> Changuion, *op. cit.* p. 105.
- <sup>27</sup> Jeppe, Fred. *Transvaal book almanac and directory 1877-1889*. Self-published. No place of publication, 1889.
- <sup>28</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives Nylstroom residents file.
- <sup>29</sup> South African National Archives R3908/91. The Government secretary wrote to the *landdrost* in 1891 referring to a letter written by A Lichtenstein complaining about the poor condition of the road [Buffelsberg] between Pietersburg and Klein Letaba in the Lowveld. Lichtenstein requested that the road be fixed as he transported goods from his store in Pietersburg to the Lowveld.
- <sup>30</sup> Interview with his niece Hannah Levy 23 January 2003.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>32</sup> Messrs Cohen and Rubenstein built a building for business purposes on erf no 1403 in the Louis Trichardt district in 1899. South African National Archives Source SS Ref R3158/99.
- <sup>33</sup> South African National Archives Ref. 162/1887.
- <sup>34</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file SA pp. 313-1918.

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- <sup>35</sup> South African National Archives Source SR/SN Ref PR/A2382/0. According to the *Northern Review* 1973, p. 53, Barney Herman arrived in Pietersburg in 1885.
- <sup>36</sup> Tribute to Herman by the mayor, Mr Mossie Cohen in the *Zoutpansberg Review* July 1950.
- <sup>37</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives Archive 46.
- <sup>38</sup> Mossie Cohen's speech to Rev Dr Brodie in the *Zoutpansberg Review* 1949.
- <sup>39</sup> *Zionist Record* 3 June 1927.
- <sup>40</sup> *Zoutpansberg Review* 23 May 1947.
- <sup>41</sup> Benjamin Norden came to the Eastern Cape with the 1820 British Settlers and farmed and traded in the Albany district. He became well-known in business and public affairs. He explored the interior of Natal and negotiated with Dingaan, the chief of the Zulus. The first Jewish services were held in his house in Cape Town.
- <sup>42</sup> South African National Archives Source SS Ref R1807/94.
- <sup>43</sup> Interview with Julius Heimann's great-granddaughter Hazel Dakers 2002 in Pietersburg.
- <sup>44</sup> South African National Archives Source SS Ref R6002/88.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* Source SS Ref R8348/89 and Source SS Ref R9792/89.
- <sup>46</sup> *Ibid.* Source SS Ref R15076/89. An erf is about half an acre.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* Source SS Ref R13481/90.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* Source SS Ref R10268/92.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* Source SPR Ref 2181/89. According to South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives File SA, p. 313, a Mr G Jacobson was a Jewish general dealer in Munnik in 1918. Jacobsohn could therefore be a Jewish name. The spelling of Jacobsohn is German, whereas in the case of Jacobson, the spelling is probably English.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* Source SS Ref R9423/95.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid.* Ref R4759/99. Issie Berman and Barney Horwitz were two Jewish general dealers who owned one of the first shops in Tzaneen, as well as the Tzaneen Hotel. This Horwitz could be the same man or related.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.* Source SPR Ref SPR3747/96 and SPR998/99.
- <sup>53</sup> Kaye, Helga. *The Tycoon and the President: The Life and Times of Alois Hugo Nellmapius 1847-1893*. Macmillan South Africa Publishers Pty Ltd: Johannesburg, 1978, p. 29.
- <sup>54</sup> *Ibid.* p. 76.
- <sup>55</sup> *Zionist Record* 17 October 1952: '1880s'.
- <sup>56</sup> *Tzaneen-75 1919-1994*. Edited by Changuion, Louis. Letaba Printers, Tzaneen: 1994, p. 12.
- <sup>57</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives Newscuttings 103A Kahn.
- <sup>58</sup> South African National Archives Depot TAB Source CJC Ref CJC 378.



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<sup>59</sup> *Zionist Record* 17 October 1952. South African National Archives Ref 1156.

<sup>60</sup> *Northern Review* 11 November 1930, p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> Interview with Wally Levy in Pietersburg.

<sup>62</sup> Permit granted by the French consul in Johannesburg on 27 April 1903 for Keile Malke Eichholz and two children.

## CHAPTER 3

### THE EFFECT OF THE ANGLO-BOER WAR 1899-1902 ON THE JEWS OF PIETERSBURG

The Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902<sup>1</sup> was fought between the British Government and the two Boer Republics of the Transvaal and Free State from October 1899 to May 1902. There were several reasons for the outbreak of war. President Kruger's decision to pass legislation to deal with the immigration and expulsion of aliens caused much dissension between the *Zuid-Afrikaansche Republiek* Government and the *Uitlanders*<sup>2</sup>. In 1890 the *Volksraad* raised the qualification for the franchise to 14 years as it feared that the *Uitlanders* would soon outnumber the original burghers. This was because of the arrival of large numbers of *Uitlanders* on the Rand following the discovery of gold there. A petition by the *Uitlanders* requesting an easier franchise was contemptuously rejected by the *Volksraad*. The *Uitlanders* then appealed to the British Government for assistance. Three years after the discovery of gold in 1885, six mining houses dominated the industry. The mining houses had several grievances against Kruger's Government. These included the dynamite monopoly, the railways, food supply and the pass laws that hampered the hiring of blacks on the mines<sup>3</sup>. President Kruger feared that if he acceded to the demands of the British or the mine-owners, he would lose his independence. Some people believed that the British really became involved in the Boer War because the British wanted control of the gold mines on the Witwatersrand<sup>4</sup>.

The Jameson Raid, which was an attempt by Cecil John Rhodes's right-hand man, Sir Leander Starr Jameson, to overthrow the Kruger regime, took place in the Transvaal in 1895. Britain's Radical Left attributed the Raid to the connection between the Jewish financiers in the mining houses and British Imperialism<sup>5</sup>. They saw the approaching war as the Randlords'<sup>6</sup> war for gold. A new kind of political anti-Semitism was emerging in England. The Jewish so-called complicity in the Raid was exaggerated. J A Hobson a radical English Left-wing journalist, who already disliked the rich Jews in England, considered the mining magnates to be Jewish swindlers. He believed that the Jewish Randlords with their financial power and political intrigue in the Jameson Raid, were to blame for the Boer War and for dragging England into the War. He claimed that the many Jewish mining capitalists sought to overthrow Kruger's Republic, because they wanted to replace the Government with one more supportive of their need for a cheap and docile black labour force<sup>7</sup>. However, although there were powerful Jewish leaders in the gold mining industry, they did not act together in a Jewish conspiracy. After the Raid, sixty-four members of the Reform committee were arrested. Of the four leaders, only Lionel Phillips was Jewish and of the 'rank and file,' only five were Jews<sup>8</sup>, including the Randlords Beit and Lippert, who were Jewish in name only but who were still perceived as Jewish by the anti-Semites. Hobson's thesis that "this little ring of international financiers controls the most valuable economic resources of the Transvaal<sup>9</sup> " was also refuted by his newspaper *Ethical World* that claimed that it was "not as Jews but as capitalists that they are to be condemned". This 'Rich Jew' anti-Semitism accused a "secret Jewish cabal of aiming to seize the gold-rich lands to further the interests of world Jewry"<sup>10</sup>.

The Jews of Britain were appalled at this anti-Jewish stance. However, the situation in Britain had been changed by the large influx of uncultured Russian Jews who had arrived after 1881, and who had once again stirred up anti-Jewish feelings in the general population. In Britain's defence, however, Max Nordau<sup>11</sup> stated that Britain had also won support in the Jewish world through her reputation as a defender of freedom and democratic institutions, because she had denounced the persecution suffered by Jews in various countries in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Anglo-Jewry therefore took the opportunity of declaring their support for the British in the South African War and several British Jews fought for the British. On the other hand, the Jews of Holland and a number of other countries supported the Boers. Many Jews living in Russia sided with the Boers because they sympathized with a small nation fighting for its independence, as it struck a cord with their own strong Zionist sentiment.

The outbreak of War caused consternation amongst the Jewish community of South Africa. Those who had lived in England felt an allegiance to the Crown and sided with the British. Most of the British subjects were ordered to leave, with the exception of those who had been given special permits to remain. Many Jews left for Natal or the Cape or even further afield to Britain or back to Russia. Some of the Jews in the Pietersburg area, especially those of British descent, left for the Cape, where they saw out the War. However, the majority remained but maintained their neutrality. Jews from the Zoutpansberg region, who were naturalized before 1899, included Messrs Solomon Wolf Himmelhoch, Herman Hirschmann, Joseph Kallmeyer, Max Israelsohn, Barnard Herman, Leon Miller and Marcus Rosenberg<sup>12</sup> and they remained neutral during the War. The Boers nevertheless commissioned horses and goods from these Jewish farmers and shopkeepers. Throughout the War, Jewish congregations

continued to function in Johannesburg, Pretoria and other centres. According to Rev Wasserzug, in an address entitled 'The Present and the Future of the Transvaal', on 16 August 1901 "even in far away Pietersburg several Jewish families were residing at the time of its capture by General Plumer's force<sup>13</sup>.

The Free State Jews enjoyed full civil rights and as such were obliged to do military service when required. The Jews of the Transvaal, unlike those in the Free State, were not obliged to fight for the Boers but there were those who believed in helping their adopted country fight for its independence and many fought to the bitter end [the *Bittereinders*<sup>14</sup>]. Those Jews of Eastern European origin who did business with the Boers in the *Platteland*, were well integrated amongst them. Many of these Jews also spoke Afrikaans and therefore aligned themselves with the Boers rather than with the British.

The English-speaking population who remained in the towns of the Transvaal during the War were either pro-Boer or neutral but nevertheless was regarded with suspicion by the Afrikaans speakers<sup>15</sup>. General Viljoen in his book 'My reminiscences of the Anglo-Boer War'<sup>16</sup> tells of how the Boers plundered the stores belonging to the English-speaking owners. Most Jews in the Northern Transvaal preferred to remain neutral during the War as they had not been living in the country for long and they did not feel the need to involve themselves in the War. However, they carried on trading with the Boers during the War and some of their stores were looted by the Boers.

Britain had become a formidable imperialist power. From the time of the Crimean War, there was strong anti-British sentiment in Russia. As a result, a large number of

Russian volunteers fought on the side of the Boers. There is no complete list containing the names of the Russian volunteers but it is estimated that 225 Russian volunteers fought with the Boer forces<sup>17</sup>. However, only about four dozen are mentioned in Russian sources, almost all non-Jews, whilst there is no information about the remainder. Davidson and Filatova in their book 'The Russians and the Anglo-Boer War' mention only a few Jewish volunteers. It is possible that a large percentage of those counted amongst the Russian volunteers were Jews. Russian Jews who fought in the Boer commandos were not included in any Russian reports or lists of volunteers, as they were believed to be "useless to the Russian state and were thus ignored"<sup>18</sup>. As the Russian authorities did not recognize these Jewish immigrants as compatriots, they refused to protect them. Many of the Russian *émigrés* were not only from Russia but also from the Russian Empire, and include those Jews who had settled in South Africa before the War to get away from the hardships of life in Russia. The non-Jewish Russians had no connection with these Jews from Russia who had immigrated to South Africa and did not regard them as Russian. The Jews were barred from joining the detachment formed by Russian volunteers. However, foreign correspondents and the Boers themselves regarded the Russian Jews as Russian and did not seem to be aware of the ethnic distinction drawn by the Russians. The Boers did not embrace the Russian volunteers who came from Russia to fight with them against the British, as they could not understand why people who were so different from them would want to fight and die in battle<sup>19</sup>. The Jews however did accept the Russian volunteers more readily, especially as they themselves were mostly recent arrivals from Russia and some could speak their language.

Amongst the Jewish volunteers from the Zoutpansberg region who fought for the Boers in the War was Commandant Kaplan. Mention is made of a soldier Nicholas Kaplan who served as an adjutant to General Pienaar who could be the same man. He was reported to be efficient in the use of the pom-pom gun, which he had learned to use in Russia<sup>20</sup>. Another volunteer for the Boers was Sasha Snyman or Jan Snyman die Jood [the Jew], whose real name was Sascha Schmahman. He was nicknamed 'Jan Snyman die Jood', not in a derogatory manner, but to distinguish him from another Boer with the same name and also because his real name Schmahmann was considered unpronounceable. A number of Jews took part in the great Boer victory at Colenso on 15 December 1899. Young Sascha Schmahmann of Slypsteendrift was one of the sharpshooters on the Tugela who forced the British to abandon ten of their guns<sup>21</sup>.

Sascha Schmahmann told his story to Roza van Gelderen in April 1943<sup>22</sup>. He arrived in South Africa in 1895. As soon as the Anglo-Boer War broke out he joined up at the age of 17. As he was considered too young to fight, he became a Red Cross orderly.

The Boers regarded him as a mascot, as the unit had not lost a man since he joined them. Later Schmahmann returned to Slypsteendrift in the Northern Transvaal. It was very difficult for the settlers during this trying time to protect their homes as the country was in turmoil. Schmahmann tells how on 1 April 1900, two Boers camped outside his house to sew their blanket into a pair of trousers with a portable sewing machine and to demand some food. The soldiers' clothes were in tatters and they had to make do with whatever they could find. Ten minutes after they had left, an Englishman arrived looking for food and lodging. As it was Passover Schmahmann

and his sister had no bread, nor did they have any *matzos*, so they fed him potatoes and let him sleep on the counter in the shop. A little later, the Boer Commandant Moller arrived and he also demanded food and a bed. They gave him biltong, warned him of English soldiers in the vicinity and saw him on his way. Then they woke the Englishman, warned him of the presence of Boers and saw him off the premises. Three days later Sascha and his family were captured by Colonel Plumer and sent to Pietersburg and then to Pretoria. There they were persuaded to escape as the prisoners in the Irene concentration camp were dying like flies. Sascha and his brother made their way to the provost marshal, who put them on parole due to their youth. Schmahman also fought in World War I and was awarded three medals. In the Second World War he volunteered again, but was considered too old to fight, so he joined the Civic Guard.

Chief Rabbi L I Rabinowitz researched the names of Jews who fought in the Anglo-Boer War. His list of Jews in the Boer Forces 1899-1902 includes the names of a few soldiers from the Northern Transvaal<sup>23</sup>. One of these was Moses Miller from Pietersburg who was related to the Israelsohn family. Also included as possibly being a Jew from Pietersburg is Julius Baumann. K Jacobson 25442-26689, a Captain in the Waterberg district was on the list of Prisoners Of War sent to Bermuda on 1 December 1900.

Chief Rabbi Rabinowitz interviewed Harm Oost, a Dutch immigrant, about his fellow soldier Joel Charles Duveen. Oost had met Duveen in Louis Trichardt and fought side by side with him for the Boers<sup>24</sup>. Duveen was a Dutch Jew born in 1876 who had come to Louis Trichardt in the Northern Transvaal in the mid-1890s. Several Dutch



Jews had been encouraged by President Paul Kruger to reside in the Zoutpansberg during the 1890s, partly in order to staff his civil service. Duveen became a hero in the Anglo-Boer War fighting for the Boer forces. He was described as a "well-built blond daredevil". In 1898 when one of the stores of the State Artillery in Louis Trichardt caught fire and several artillerymen were unable to escape, Duveen dashed in, ignoring the exploding bullets and shells, and rescued the trapped men. When the Anglo-Boer War broke out, he joined the Zoutpansberg commando and fought in Natal. He was selected by General Beyers for dangerous intelligence work behind enemy lines. Not satisfied with this, Duveen persuaded Colonel Mentz and Major Dommissie to form a small scouting party to harass the British. On one occasion they tried to derail a train a few miles from Naboomspruit in the Northern Transvaal. Although his party was surrounded, he managed to get them to freedom without a casualty. His own horse was killed and he had to take cover in a thick bush to escape his pursuers. On another occasion he displayed great courage when he rescued his fellow officers from hundreds of mounted men with just seven Boers. At Spioenkop, a British soldier threatened to shoot Duveen's *Veldkornet*. Despite having an empty rifle, Duveen threw it to his shoulder and shouted: "If you shoot him, I will shoot you". The officer dropped his gun.

Duveen, at the age of 25, was wounded in the stomach and sent to the hospital in Pietpotgietersrust where he was captured in October 1901. He was sent to India on 2 November 1901 to sit out the last eight months of the War. After his release, he settled in Pietersburg with his Afrikaans wife and son and opened a store. In 1904, on a trip to his store in Thabina in the Lowveld, he contracted blackwater fever, which proved fatal. Already dying, he was taken to the store of a nearby shopkeeper, but

such was his dislike of the English, that he insisted he be put on the floor to die. He is reputed to have said: "I am going to die, but I refuse to die on an Englishman's bed. Put me on the floor".

Johannesburg and Pretoria were occupied by the British by the end of May 1900.

Gradually the Boers lost the offensive and instead turned to guerilla warfare. Only the Far Northern Transvaal was not under British rule. The Boers decided to make Pietersburg their temporary headquarters and for a while it became the administrative center for the two Boer Republics. Finally, on 8 April 1901, British General Plumer, entered Pietersburg without a shot being fired. The Boers retreated to Haenertsberg with the Long Tom cannon. The soldiers had brought with them the last of the four 'Long Toms' 155mm creosote cannons, the other three having been blown up to prevent them falling into English hands. As the cannon had been damaged and its end had been cut off, it was nicknamed 'The Jew'. The cannon was also blown up by the retreating Boers, but its remains have been retrieved and made into a memorial in Haenertsberg. It has an accompanying plaque explaining the origin of its name.

Plumer left to attack General Viljoen in the Eastern Transvaal. Lieutenant-Colonels Grenfell and Colenbrander arrived to take over command. These gentlemen were responsible for the administration of the town and several of the Jewish shopkeepers complained to them about the looting of their stores by the British soldiers. After the shopkeepers were removed to Pretoria by the British in 1901, there was widespread looting by British soldiers from these businesses and large losses were reported by the shopkeepers.

The British started their 'scorched earth' policy in the Northern Transvaal in order to bring the Boers to heel<sup>25</sup>. Hundreds of farms were destroyed and women and children were taken to concentration camps to remove the Boers' source of supplies. Some Jews living in outlying areas moved into Pietersburg and thus escaped being put into a concentration camp. Several hundred prisoners, including a number of Jews, were sent to the concentration camp in Irene near Pretoria before the concentration camp in Pietersburg was completed. Most of the Jewish *bittereindes* were spared the ordeal of having wives and children interred in the British concentration camps as only a few of them had been living on farms before the War and only a handful of them were married<sup>26</sup>. The Hirschmann family was arrested, their farm was confiscated and they were put in an internment camp at Houtbosdorp<sup>27</sup>. The Kallmeyer and Palte family, together with several other families from the district, moved into Pietersburg during the War.

The Zoutpansberg commando hid in the Strydpoort and Houtbosch mountains and tried to disrupt communications between Pretoria and Pietersburg by blowing up the railway line. Gen Beyers held out until February 1902. On one occasion he was attacked by a British convoy on the farm Syferkuil [owned by the Israelsohn brothers] and nine Boers were captured. 1350 Northern Transvalers died in the War and a great deal of farming land was destroyed<sup>28</sup>.

The Anglo-Boer War ended in May 1902 with the signing of the Treaty of Vereeniging. The refugees were eager to return home but Lord Roberts, the Commander-in-Chief was reluctant to allow more than a limited number to return. As this upset the refugees, a Central Registration Committee was set up to issue return

permits to desirable refugees<sup>29</sup>. The South African Zionist Federation urged the naturalization of the alien Jew in order to vindicate him from false charges. Samuel Goldreich<sup>30</sup>, chairman of the Zionist Federation, who was entrusted with the examination of permit applications from Jews, said that: “Every Jew who is not naturalized and registered is a source of weakness to South Africa, to Jewry and to himself....it is imperative for every Zionist at the earliest moment to cease to be an alien”.

Several Jewish names from the Pietersburg area are to be found in the South African National Archives files claiming compensation from the British Government after the War, but very few received any compensation. These documents serve to confirm the names and businesses of Jews who remained neutral and carried on business in the area during the War. Most of these traders were of Lithuanian origin who had emigrated in large numbers to South Africa due to the restrictions imposed on them by the Tzar’s ‘temporary regulations’. These regulations included the stipulations that they were forbidden to trade on Sundays, to own land outside the towns and to settle in the villages. The Jews were forced to move into overcrowded rooms in the towns. Also higher educational institutes had a quota limit for Jews and they had lost the right to participate in municipal elections<sup>31</sup>. As a result of these difficulties and to avoid conscription, many of the young Jewish men left Russia illegally and therefore did not have Russian passports. As Jews they had been denied the franchise and full citizen rights in Russia, and they therefore did not have the protection of the Russian Government. Russia did not have an Embassy in South Africa, only a Consul who refused to grant Jews the aid to which Russian subjects were entitled. As Jews had no Russian passports they had no proof of Russian citizenship. Therefore, the British

used this loophole in the law to prevent them from having to pay compensation to the Jews. Many of the Russian Jews in South Africa had become British subjects during the War, but their credentials were not recognized by the British authorities<sup>32</sup>.

The British also denied compensation to anyone who had served in the Town Guard for the Boers. The British did not compensate shopkeepers who had imported goods during the War and therefore had knowingly put themselves in a position to lose money. They also claimed that these shopkeepers had traded with and received cash from the Boer forces before the arrival of the British forces therefore the British were not liable to pay for their loss of goods. However, the Boer forces had also requisitioned goods from the English-speaking shopkeepers without any notice of future compensation. It was also possible that the Boers had looted the shops before the arrival of the British, but there was no way to 'prove' which side did the looting. Some Jews of German descent also did not receive compensation from the British, because they had been in the country too long and had lost their right to German citizenship. Those shopkeepers who had closed their businesses during the War were also not compensated for goods looted, as the British claimed that the goods remaining in the stores had to have been un-saleable items anyway<sup>33</sup>. Therefore, whether Jews had traded with the Boers or not, they still did not receive compensation from the British.

According to the South African National Archives, most of the claimants for compensation after the War in the Zoutpansberg district were labelled 'Foreign Subjects', 'Protected Burghers' or 'Burghers'. Most of the 'Foreign Subjects' were Jewish in origin. Non-Jewish foreigners in Pietersburg also had problems in claiming

compensation from the British, for example, Carl Natorp's claim was found to be invalid as, although he was sworn as a German citizen, he had not been neutral during the War<sup>34</sup>. There were no Jewish 'Protected Burghers' but there were several Jewish 'Burghers' as mentioned before.

William [Patsy] Cohen was a partner in the firm Cohen and Rubenstein, Rubenstein being a Russian subject residing in Bulawayo. Cohen also claimed to be a Russian subject born 15 April 1853, who had left Russia in 1875 and who was "strictly neutral during this war". In 1903 he claimed losses of £272 to their business in Louis Trichardt<sup>35</sup>. They were awarded compensation of £150 for a wagon and team, but nothing for the rest.

Barney Herman submitted his claim from Cape Town in June 1901. He arrived in Pietersburg in 1887, shortly after the town was proclaimed in 1886<sup>36</sup>. He claimed to be a burgher of the former South African Republic, having received his Burgher Rights ten years earlier when he was commandeered to fight in one of the 'Kaffir Wars'. He declared that he had not been on commando and had not taken up arms against the British forces. He had been commandeered several times but had "got out of it". He carried on the business of a hotelkeeper in Pietersburg until he surrendered on 8 April 1901 at Pietersburg under Lord Robert's Proclamation. He then left for Pretoria in April 1901 where he was placed under parole for a short time before leaving for Cape Town. Herman wanted to take the oath of allegiance and become a British subject so that he could return to Pietersburg to carry on his business<sup>37</sup>. Herman claimed an amount of £3000 for board supplied to commandos and for horses, feed and goods sold in connection with his business. He claimed that he had

stored the forage and mealies, expecting the British to arrive sooner than they had, but the Boers had found his store and commandeered the goods. He also claimed that as owner of the Café Royal he had offered his horses for the commandos instead of doing personal duty. He had not used the horses himself on commando and did not know what had become of them. His claim was disallowed by Major Bolton, as all burgher claims were disallowed under Government Notice 570. However, the ex-Burgher Fund awarded him £846 on 15 January 1905.

The three Jewish brothers Louis, Heimann and David Taback came from Shadova [Seduva] in Lithuania and lived in the Pietersburg area<sup>38</sup>. David Taback had a general dealer's business at Makapansgat on the road between Pietersburg and Pietpotgietersrus on the premises of Messrs T W Becket & Co. Whilst Taback was away in Pietersburg, the British troops under General Plumer entered Makapansgat on 6 April 1901 and took away Mr Abel Klein, a Russian Jew, whom he had left in charge of his store. Klein claimed he was forced to leave the business "just as it was" and that the troops that escorted him to Pietersburg had taken goods from the shop with them. Both Taback and Klein, although they considered themselves neutral, were sent to Pretoria by the British on 13 April 1901. Despite the fact that the British would not let him return to Makapansgat to assess the damage to his shop, Taback made a claim of nearly £300 for all of its goods. His Consular Certificate of Russian Nationality dated 15 May 1902 was considered insufficient proof of Russian nationality by the British authorities. It only served as proof that he had not registered himself as neutral at the start of the War. To prove his Russian nationality, the British agent for foreign claims told him to produce his "Russian Passport, a small green

book 6x3x1/4 inch, without which you could not have left Russia”<sup>39</sup>. As he could not do this, his claim was disallowed by the British.

Louis Taback was a Russian citizen who left Russia in 1885, but had no Russian passport. He had three oxen on the farm Syferkuil, owned by the Israelsohns, about 18 miles from Pietersburg and tended by a ‘native’ Philip. All cattle “owned by white people, but running with ‘native’ cattle,” were taken away by the Boers. As Taback was removed from Pietersburg by the British, he claimed for the loss of his wood and iron building, which he had taken down and stored, and also for his furniture and goods. On 15 April he obtained a consular passport on the evidence of his brother and three witnesses. He admitted to serving in the Pietersburg Town Guard, but only for one night as: “The Town Guard did duty by night, the Boers did duty by day”. He had not returned to Pietersburg but was informed by his friends that all his things had disappeared. He became a cabdriver but unfortunately one of his horses, after nearly killing him, had to be destroyed and he was considered to be “in a bad way”. He claimed £150 from the British Government for damages sustained through the action of British troops. He was only paid £21 on receipts on 19 August 1904<sup>40</sup>.

Heimann Taback also had no Russian passport, but obtained a consular passport in September 1899. He too served in the Pietersburg Town Guard at night and had Boer receipts to show that he had paid the special war tax of £10. He claimed £150 for an iron building that had been removed by the military and for the furniture that had been taken to the military hospital and a store destroyed in Pietpotgietersrus. The Commandant decided that as the furniture was stored in Pietpotgietersrus, the claimant could have recovered it. The earliest receipt was dated May 1900 so he



believed that the Boers must have paid him in cash for goods taken before this date. He further said that the claimant incurred the loss by remaining and carrying on business. He might possibly be paid for the buildings that had been destroyed but it was noted that he had no proof of nationality and that he had served in the Boer Town Guard. In the end, as his nationality was not proved and his Russian passport was not produced, he received no award.

Isaac Mates, a Russian Jew also ran a general dealer's business in Pietersburg before the Anglo-Boer War<sup>41</sup>. Isaac Mates claimed that the day after the British arrived in Pietersburg, a notice was sent out that all cattle had to be brought to the market square. He took his cattle, but on his return he found his store had been forced open and several items were missing. He was then sent to Pretoria and whilst he was away his place was totally destroyed and all his goods were removed. David Taback lived near Isaac Mates and saw "a British trooper and a coolie" in the store helping themselves to one thing and another whilst Mates was away at the market. Mates claimed £372 in compensation. He was given no award as he had no Russian passport and because he had remained in Pietersburg until April 1901 assisting the Boer Government.

Rebecca Levin was the wife of Abraham Levin, a Jewish Russian subject and was a traveling "*smouse*" residing in Pietersburg<sup>42</sup>. Rebecca claimed Abraham was a Russian subject who had been neutral during the War. She also said she was obliged to leave Pietersburg on 8 April 1901 when the British forces arrived and she had had to leave her property and belongings behind. She also claimed that the British troops destroyed or looted property to the value of £20. A Mr Warwick from whom she

rented her business premises however negated her claims and declared that three months before the arrival of the British, she had given up the premises because her stock of merchandise was exhausted. As there was no proof of her being a Russian subject and because her claim appeared to be a bogus one, there was no award.

Mr S S Himmelhoch claimed to have come from Pilaten, Courland to South Africa in 1890 and was resident in the Transvaal. He was a general dealer up to 13 May 1901 at Louis Trichardt, Boschkopjes and Schoemansdal, at which time he left for Rhodesia [Zimbabwe]. When the British entered Louis Trichardt on 9 May 1901, his two businesses in the district were closed as the Boers were frequently commandeering his goods. He declared he had at no time been on commando nor aided His Majesty's enemies, but the Boer Government commandeered large quantities of goods and gave him numerous receipts for these. He appeared before Major Knox and the British put him, his son and his bookkeeper, Mr Thal, under guard despite his protests of being a Russian subject. When Mr Thal went to fetch writing paper from the business for Major Knox, he found the doors had been forced open and several men were removing foodstuff from the bakery. Himmelhoch also reported to the Major that he had a safe with money and valuables, but his protests were ignored. However, when Colonel Collenbrander heard that the safe was being removed, he ordered that it be kept in his own tent for safekeeping and it was later returned to Himmelhoch. His claim for compensation for damages was disallowed as he was considered a "general purveyor to the *Staats* Artillery of the late Government". He had also not produced a Russian passport<sup>43</sup>.

Herman Hirschmann was a burgher of the South African Republic. He was born in Russia on 2 February 1879. He received his South African naturalization papers on 12 August 1895<sup>44</sup>. During the War he was a resident in Woodbush Village, then in Pietersburg. He was the manager of a store for Mr Kallmeyer at Rietfontein. He was in possession of commandeering notes to the value of £191 from the Transvaal Government. He claimed to have been neutral during the War but supplied the Boers with horses<sup>45</sup>. His claim was disallowed as he had no Russian passport.

Jews of German and Austrian origin also did not receive some or all of their compensation claims. Isidor Rosenthal was a German by birth. He had left Germany in February 1881 and came to the Cape Colony, where he made application for British citizenship. However, before his application was considered, he left in April 1887 for the Transvaal goldfields, which had just been opened. He ran a store and a hotel in Marabastad from 1896<sup>46</sup>. During the Anglo-Boer War he took no part in the War. When the British arrived he was sent to the Irene Refugee camp near Pretoria. He was told by the authorities in Pretoria to apply to the German Consul for a certificate stating that he had been neutral, but unfortunately he had already lost his German nationality as he had been in South Africa too long<sup>47</sup>.

Simon Frenkel was a partner in a firm Frenkel & Co. who carried on businesses in Pietersburg and in Ventersdorp. Simon Frenkel was a Jew, who was a German subject, and who owned a produce and tobacconist business in Main Street Pietersburg, as well as a farm Sterkfontein Number 44, Zoutpansberg and a farm Tweefontein Number 385<sup>48</sup>. He was taken to Johannesburg with the British residents and from there he left for Germany. He left Mr Koenig in charge of his business and

returned in July 1902. As he had never obtained Burgher Rights in the late South African Republic and his goods had been commandeered from him, he claimed £3326 in compensation from the British Government. He claimed that he had been in business with several partners and had dissolved the business in 1903. As he was the only partner to declare his neutrality as a German subject, he claimed for all the losses sustained whilst the partnership existed. However, the books of the company showed that they had imported goods during the War into Pietersburg. The claims court therefore declared that he had voluntarily increased his stock during the War and must have knowingly placed himself into a position to suffer loss. No award for compensation was therefore made to him. However, as his building had been removed by the British authorities he was awarded £30 for it <sup>49</sup>.

Mr Max [Marcus] Rosenberg was an Austrian-born Jew who had a general dealer's store in Pietersburg since 1893. He left for Johannesburg in March 1899 where he opened a produce store in partnership with Mr Frenkel, his brother-in-law. Meanwhile he left Mr Lyndburg in charge of his business in Pietersburg. Rosenberg returned to Pietersburg in November 1899 having given up his business in Johannesburg. However in February 1900 he once again returned to Johannesburg and this time left Mr Koenig, a German Jew, in charge of his business. Rosenberg surrendered to the British on their occupation of Johannesburg on 4 June 1900. Some of his goods were commandeered by the Transvaal Government. Several months before the British occupation, the business was closed as it did not pay to keep it open. Mr Koenig was sent to Pretoria where he told Rosenberg that all the stores had been broken into by the British troops. He himself saw soldiers breaking the door of Rosenberg's store and taking things out. Rosenberg first sent his claim to Major Josef Huneberg in Pretoria

on 30 July 1901 but it was returned as the claim should have been dealt with in Pietersburg<sup>50</sup>. Rosenberg received no award as it was felt that the store had been closed and the goods left in it were un-saleable lines that would not have found a buyer. Also he had not proved that he was a neutral foreigner<sup>51</sup>.

The attempts of Jews to claim compensation from the British after the War were mostly unsuccessful. The British used a loophole in the law in order to evade paying the Jews compensation. They were using the fact that the Jews from Russia could not produce proof of Russian citizenship to deny them any payment. Nevertheless, the Jews managed to rebuild their businesses after the War even without the compensation monies that their Boer neighbours received from the British.

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NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> The Second Anglo-Boer War or the South African War.

<sup>2</sup> Name used by Transvaal *Afrikaners* to describe 'foreigners' to the Transvaal in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, usually British subjects who poured in after the discovery of gold. Brits, Jacob P. *The Penguin Concise Dictionary of Historical and Political Terms*. Penguin Group: London, 1995.

<sup>3</sup> Wheatcroft, Geoffrey. *The Randlords: The Men who made South Africa*. Weidenfeld: London, 1993, p. 129.

<sup>4</sup> Saron, Gustav and Hotz, Louis. *The Jews in South Africa: A History*. Oxford University Press: London, 1955, p. 208.

<sup>5</sup> Shain, Milton. "Imperialist Judaism in Africa: The Anglo-Boer War and the Image of the Jew in South Africa". In: *Jewish Affairs* Spring 1999. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 1999, p. 43.

<sup>6</sup> Entrepreneurs who controlled the diamond and gold mining industries in South Africa in its pioneer phase from the 1870s until World War I.

<sup>7</sup> Mendelsohn, Richard. "The Jewish Soldier: Anglo-Jewry at War 1899-1902". In: *Jewish Affairs* Spring 1999. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 1999, p. 11.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 193.

<sup>9</sup> Saron and Hotz, *op. cit.* p. 209.

<sup>10</sup> The claim was similar to other displays of anti-Semitic conspiracy theories, such as the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion' libel, which was compiled by the Tzarist secret police in the 1890s. In this libel Jews were accused of having a secret international organization which was 'plotting' to control the world. It was eventually exposed as a forgery by *The Times* in 1921 as being similar to a French pamphlet written by Maurice Joly in 1864 and thereafter it was not taken seriously in responsible circles, although the notion of a 'Jewish secret body' controlling world events, persists until today. In

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1934 a court in Berne Switzerland also held the Protocols to be a forgery and there have been other instances where they have been proven to be false. Wistrich, Robert S. *Anti-Semitism: The Longest Hatred*. Cox and Wyman Ltd: Great Britain, 1992, p. 106. At the Greyshirt Libel Trial held in Port Elizabeth in 1934, the leader of the South African Gentile National Socialist Movement, Johannes von Strauss von Moltke and his associate Harry Victor Inch, maintained that there was a secret Jewish plot to destroy the Christian religion and overthrow the existing system of civilization. He based this assumption on a 'secret' document allegedly stolen from the Western Road Synagogue, Port Elizabeth based on the 'Protocols of the Elders of Zion' and allegedly bearing the Rabbi's signature. Rev A Levy was the minister at the synagogue, and since he was personally implicated at the centre of the libel, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies decided to pursue the matter in court. Rev Levy won the case and the Court pronounced the 'Protocols' as an "impudent forgery obviously published for the purpose of anti-Jewish propaganda". Saron, Gustav. *The Jews of South Africa: An Illustrated History to 1953*. Edited by Naomi Musiker. Scarecrow Books in association with the South African Jewish Board of Deputies" Johannesburg, 2001, pp. 139-141. Shimoni, Gideon. *Jews and Zionism: The South African Experience*. Oxford University Press: Oxford, 1980, pp. 139-141.

<sup>11</sup> Saron, Gustav. *The Jews of South Africa: An illustrated History to 1953*. Edited by Naomi Musiker. Scarecrow Books in association with the South African Jewish Board of Deputies: Johannesburg, 2001, p. 31.

<sup>12</sup> South African National Archives Depot TAB Volume 1264 Ref 591, Volume 1265 Ref 634, Ref R3116/95, R6457/95, R6715/95, R7917/95, R9423/95 and SPR634/97. SS Ref R9423/95 is an affidavit by *Veld-Kornet* JLH du Preez testifying to Leon Miller's presence in Renosterpoort, Zoutpansberg for at least five years in 1895.

<sup>13</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives Anglo-Boer War File, p. 114.

<sup>14</sup> Smith, Iain R. *The Origins of the South African War 1899-1902*. Longman: London, 1996, p. 7. Those Boers who surrendered their arms were called *hendsoppers*.

<sup>15</sup> Changuion, Louis. *Petersburg: Die eerste eeu 1886-1986*. V & R Printers Pty Ltd: Pretoria, 1986, p. 65.

<sup>16</sup> Changuion, *op. cit.* p. 67.

<sup>17</sup> Davidson, Apollon and Filatova, Irina. *The Russians and the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902*. Human and Rousseau: Cape Town, 1998, p. 45.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* p. 57.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.* p. 61.

<sup>20</sup> Report by J J Wolf, a non-Jewish fighter, to Moss Cohen of Pietersburg. South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives Eric Rosenthal's Prisoner of War List.

<sup>21</sup> Saks, David Y. "Jews on Commando". In: *Jewish Affairs* Spring 1999. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 1999, p. 25.

<sup>22</sup> Van Gelderen, R. "Memories of a Boer War Veteran". In: *Jewish Affairs* May 1943. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 1943, p. 11.

<sup>23</sup> Saks, David Y. "Three Boere-Jode on Commando". In: *Jewish Affairs* Summer 1996. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 1996, p. 40.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.* p. 39.

<sup>25</sup> Mendelsohn, Richard. "The Boer War, the Great War and the Shaping of South African Loyalties". In: *Memories, Realities and Dreams: Aspects of the South African Jewish Experience*. Edited by Milton Shein and Richard Mendelsohn. Jonathan Ball Publishers: Johannesburg, 2000, p. 52.

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- <sup>26</sup> Saks, *op. cit.* 1999, p. 25.
- <sup>27</sup> Interview with Melvin Salamon, a descendant of the Hirschmann family in Israel 2001.
- <sup>28</sup> Changuion, *op. cit.* p. 83.
- <sup>29</sup> Saron, *op. cit.* p. 41
- <sup>30</sup> Gitlin, Marcia. *The Vision Amazing: The Story of South African Zionism.* The Menorah Book Club: Johannesburg, 1950, p. 87.
- <sup>31</sup> Levin, Dov. *The Litvaks A short history of the Jews in Lithuania.* Keterpress Enterprises: Jerusalem, 2000, p. 74.
- <sup>32</sup> Saron, *op. cit.* p. 41.
- <sup>33</sup> South African National Archives Source CJC 1145.
- <sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* Ref CS 6843/02.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* Ref CJC1488.
- <sup>36</sup> Tribute to Herman by Mayor Moss Cohen.
- <sup>37</sup> South African National Archives Source SR/SN Ref PR/A2382/01.
- <sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* Source CJC Ref CJC 1912 and 1913 Volume 337.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* Ref CJC1752 Volume 327.
- <sup>42</sup> *Ibid.* Ref CJC1697 Volume 324. It was unusual for a woman to be a *smous*.
- <sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* Ref CJC 1603 Volume 318 and Source KG Ref CR9635/99.
- <sup>44</sup> *Ibid.* Ref R6457/95.
- <sup>45</sup> Interview with Richelle Hirschmann, a descendent of the Hirschmann family in Israel 2001.
- <sup>46</sup> South African National Archives Ref 1156.
- <sup>47</sup> *Ibid.* Source KG Ref CR271/98.
- <sup>48</sup> *Ibid.* Source CJC Ref CJC 378.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>50</sup> The reason for sending the claim to Major Huneberg could have been because he was a fellow Jew in a position of influence.
- <sup>51</sup> South African National Archives Source CJC Ref CJC1145.

## CHAPTER 4

### THE INFLUENCE OF THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS, ESPECIALLY REV J I LEVINE, ON THE PIETERSBURG HEBREW CONGREGATION UNTIL 1963

The Jewish immigrants who came to South Africa from Eastern Europe from 1880-1930 were committed to *Talmud* learning, Jewish laws and traditions and a deep attachment to Zionism. Most of the Jews in South Africa came from Lithuania, where they followed the traditional practice of Orthodox Judaism<sup>1</sup>. When the Lithuanian immigrants arrived in South Africa, their Orthodoxy fused with the already established Anglo pattern. Saron<sup>2</sup> put it so succinctly: “It was a case of pouring *Litvak* spirit into the Anglo-Jewish bottles”. The South African community was considered to be the most Jewish-conscious and well-organised community in the world. This was due to the special blend of the organized Anglo-leaders and the religious open-heartedness and generosity of the *Litvaks*. The prayers and order of the service were modelled on those of the United Synagogue of London. The Singer Prayer Book [Hebrew text with Rev Singer’s English translation] and Dr Hertz’s commentary of the Pentateuch were used in most synagogues. Sermons were delivered in English. The Chief Rabbi of England was the spiritual head of the South African community for many years until links with England became weaker and the South African community became more firmly rooted. The Pietersburg community conducted its services in the same way as the other Orthodox communities in South Africa.

The Jewish community in South Africa developed its own particular expression of Judaism. Jews who lived in South Africa could be considered to be ‘non-observant



Orthodox'<sup>3</sup> as they remained attached to traditional Orthodox Judaism without being closely influenced by *Halakhic* requirements. To be 'religious' in South Africa did not mean complete compliance with the laws of Moses, but rather entailed membership of a synagogue. According to Arkin<sup>4</sup> the community was a "visible manifestation of a commitment to a way of life". The majority of Jews in South Africa considered themselves to be more 'traditional' than religious. However, they resisted the introduction of the Reform movement because of their deeply ingrained Jewish ethnicity and resistance to change. They were also against the Reform movement because in its early years the movement did not support Zionism and South African Jews were strong supporters of Zionism. For these reasons, the Jewish community of Pietersburg also never considered changing to Reform Judaism. Only from 1933 with the arrival of German Jews to South Africa did the Reform movement emerge. In contrast, in the United States of America, Conservative Judaism and Reform took root much earlier as Jews tried to conform to new conditions in the melting-pot of their new country.

Because of this lack of religious observance amongst the new immigrants to South Africa, N D Hoffmann<sup>5</sup> wrote in 1891: "Our brethren have forgotten their people, their religion and language. Their children grow wild in the absence of any schools to give them Jewish education." Gwynne Schrire's explanation for the new immigrants' lack of religious observance around the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, was that "those who left for South Africa were the daredevils, the adventurers, the non-conformists, the types that would break ties, and challenge authority, the types who were not so observant"<sup>6</sup>. Those young men who were "observant, conformist, conservative personalities stayed at home safe and secure within the fold of their communities and

their *minyanim*". This must surely have applied to the many single young men who came to the Northern Transvaal to make their fortunes and to brave the harsh conditions in areas far from any organized religion. In the rural areas, due to economic needs and social influences, traditional religious observances became too difficult to follow and the new immigrants were willing to drop their traditional practices with ease. They conformed to the fashionable way of dressing and head coverings were abandoned. First *Shabbat* observances were neglected and then *kashrut* laws were not properly observed.

Jews were reported as living in the Pietersburg area from about 1885. The small numbers of Jews in the Zoutpansberg district in the 1880s did their best to keep some of their Jewish customs and practices alive. As they were so far away from any organized centres of religion, they had difficulty in knowing the exact dates of the festivals. A case to illustrate this was the occasion when *Yom Kippur* was celebrated by four young Jews for the first time in the Northern Transvaal, shortly after the opening of the Low Country gold fields in the mid-1880s. A letter was published in the *London Chronicle* on 15 November 1889 under the title 'How we observed *Yom Kippur* in the Low Country by 'One of the Four'<sup>7</sup>. These four young men, three of them from England and one from Germany, came together at *Yom Kippur* on 3 October 1889 at a general dealer's store in Fountain Gorge, a very remote area in the Murchison Range of mountains. Their names were Joseph Jacobs [Plymouth], Maurice Freeman [Newport], Louis Goltman [Hull] and Isidor Rosenthal [Thorn]. The young men attempted to recite the *Yom Kippur* service to the best of their abilities despite their lack of a *machzor*. After the service, they went out for a walk, but after a few minutes, Isidor remembered that *Yom Kippur* could not fall on a Friday, the day

before the *Shabbat*, as preparation for the *Shabbat* would not be able to be carried out. After much argument, they concluded that they had started the fast a day too soon! The next day the four young men repeated the prayers of the night before and they fasted the whole day of *Shabbat*. The day after that, Goltman saddled up his horse to do business in Haenertsberg and the prospector Rosenthal rode off on a two-day journey home on his donkey.

The editorial comment in the *London Chronicle* on 22 November 1889 commended the fact that these four young men had overcome immense difficulties to be able to celebrate their Judaism and its teachings. They could just as easily have abandoned their observances but their religious upbringing overcame all odds and served as a lesson to those living in civilized surroundings and who did not have to make any sacrifices to observe their religion.

Whenever Jews established themselves as a community they first tried to get a *minyan* for the High Festivals. They gradually increased their membership until they could build a synagogue. Chief Rabbi Rabinowitz<sup>8</sup> explained that the initiative of starting a Congregation was taken not by ministers, but by laymen. Only after the foundations of the community were laid, was a minister appointed. The true strength of a community lies not in its spiritual leader, but in the devotion and loyalty of its members. Those who came after them built on this solid foundation. Because of the small number of Jews in the Pietersburg area, the first reported *minyan* held in Pietersburg only occurred in 1893<sup>9</sup>, when the Jews of Pietersburg tried to make up a *minyan* for the High Holy Days services. They could only assemble nine males from the town and surrounding districts. About to abandon their celebration of the New

Year, the village blacksmith unexpectedly revealed himself as a modern-day *Marrano* and appeared with a *machzor* to make up the tenth member of the *minyán*. The service was conducted by Mr M Rosenberg at his residence and this was the first congregation in the Northern Transvaal. The service could not be repeated the next day as the blacksmith's services were needed by a Boer, who had broken the wheel of his wagon.

Although the Zoutpansberg Hebrew Congregation, which included both Louis Trichardt and Pietersburg had already been established by 1897, there are no records of any permanent ministers before 1914. Even during the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902, Rev Wasserzug reported that: "with the exception of Pietersburg all the towns ... had their own *shochetim*"<sup>10</sup>, so Pietersburg did not even have a *shochet*. This meant that there was no kosher meat available in the area, which testifies to the small community's lack of religious observance at that time.

Chief Rabbi Rabinowitz<sup>11</sup> described the rural community Rabbi's lot as a difficult one as he was usually denied security of tenure and provision for retirement. He also had to be adept at the various specialities of *shechita*, *chazanut*, teaching and preaching. The Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation [PHC] therefore typically relied on their religious leader to be a *cheder* teacher and youth leader, a *shochet*, a *chazan* and preacher, and a representative of the Hebrew community in the Gentile world. Very few ministers were able to fulfill all these criteria effectively. In Pietersburg because only a few Jews observed the *Shabbat* or studied the *Torah*, the minister suffered spiritual isolation. *Minyans* were usually obtained at Friday evening and Festival services as many members had a strong sense of Jewish identity and considered the synagogue to be a meeting place where they could meet other Jews. The religious

leaders and congregation chairmen were always exhorting the men to attend synagogue services, especially on *Shabbat* mornings, as many businessmen started to keep their businesses open on Saturdays. Despite the kosher meat problems and the distances from centres where kosher products could be bought, a large percentage of Jews bought kosher meat. Despite their laxity in observance, most Jews therefore centred their Jewish identity in the synagogue and only a small number considered their participation in Zionist organizations as their only Jewish identity<sup>12</sup>.

Ministers and assistant ministers who served the PHC<sup>13</sup> over a period of almost 80 years were:

Rev J Hurwitz	1914-1918
Rev L Kellen	1919-1920
Rev M L Cohen	1921-1922
Rev Monte M Levy	1923-1928
Rev P Rosenberg	1929
Rev G Gadd	1930
Rev J I Levine	1931-1963
Assistant minister Rev Schatz	1940
Assistant minister Mr H Lempert	1944-1945
Assistant minister Rev Z Rachman	1946
Assistant minister Rev A Kaminer	1947-1952
Assistant minister Rev I L Mannschein	1953-1964
Rev J Scherer	1964-1967
Rev W Wolfson	1967-1971
Relieving minister Rev Freedman	1971
Rev A Belitsky	1971-1975
Rev S Pasternak	1975-1978
Rev Y Ariely	1978-1979
Rev B Lerer	1979-1992

Not much is known of Rev J Hurwitz, who served from 1914 to 1918. A *Talmud Torah* was already established by 1917 taught by Rev J Hurwitz. The children were examined by Mrs A Jacobson of Duiwelskloof, and Messrs A Israelsohn [junior] and S Abelkop under the auspices of the Hebrew School Board<sup>14</sup>. In 1922, according to the PHC minutes, a Mr Hurwitz from Haenertsberg was engaged for £25 to conduct the High Holy Days services as he had done in previous years. It is possible that this was the same Rev Hurwitz that had earlier served as a minister in Pietersburg before retiring to Haenertsberg.

Rev L Kellen only served for one year as minister in 1919/20. The PHC consisted of about 70 male members at this time<sup>15</sup>. Rev M L Cohen was appointed as the minister of the PHC in 1921. However, according to the PHC minutes of 23 April 1922 the committee decided to give Rev Cohen three months notice from 1 May 1922, as they could not afford to maintain him at such a high salary. This proposal was passed unanimously. The matter was again discussed on 21 May 1922 at a special congregational meeting. It was first suggested that another minister be obtained who spoke better English, so that he could communicate more effectively with the children and the community. This problem was often encountered in the early years of the Jewish communities as many ministers came from Eastern Europe and spoke broken accented English, which the children could not understand. It was then suggested to offer Rev Cohen a reduced salary of £25 per month. Several committee members resigned at this lack of support of their decision to give Rev Cohen notice. Rev Cohen was clearly not satisfied with this state of affairs and resigned as minister in August 1922.

On 13 June 1922, Chief Rabbi Dr J H Hertz undertook his first pastoral tour of the Jewish communities of the British Overseas Dominions from Johannesburg and Pretoria to Bulawayo in the former 'Rhodesia' [Zimbabwe]. He reported that he "found Jewish hearts throbbing with enthusiasm for all forms of Jewish endeavor, and nowhere more so than in many a wayside station with its two or three inhabitants"<sup>16</sup>. Presumably he passed through the Northern Transvaal on his way to 'Rhodesia' and encountered some of the smaller trading stores or farming communities in the area, where the inhabitants had not forgotten their Judaism.

Rev M M Levy became the minister in Pietersburg in 1923. He and his wife had two children Gladys and Magnus. Rev Levy was a *shochet* and a Hebrew teacher. Because his classes were not well attended, the committee decided that two committee members would attend the classes on alternate Sundays so as to inspire the youngsters to attend. The passing of the Smuts Education Act [25 of 1907] excluded denominational instruction of all kinds during school hours, therefore religious and Hebrew instruction took place in the afternoons and Sunday mornings<sup>17</sup>. Pupils attending Hebrew classes paid a minimum fee of ten shillings for one child, twelve shillings and sixpence for two children, fifteen shillings for three children and maximum £1 for four or more. By 1927, 20 children were attending Hebrew classes. Rev Levy also gave lectures to adults on Saturdays. These were so well supported that the classes were divided and a Miss Herman was asked to assist him.

Unfortunately Rev M M Levy caused problems for the community. A serious complaint was brought against him by Mr Solomon<sup>18</sup>, in which he was accused of being "dishonourable"<sup>19</sup>. A special meeting of the PHC committee was held on 11

July 1928 to discuss the complaint. The minutes report that on Friday night 30 June 1928, Rev Levy overheard a conversation during *Shabbat* services between Mr Solomon and Mr A Israelsohn with regard to certain mining ventures. On Saturday morning Rev Levy approached Mr Israelsohn asking him to let him in as a partner but the latter said that he first had to refer to Mr Solomon. Rev Levy asked him for the name of the man from whom the mineral option was to be obtained. It was alleged that Rev Levy then went directly to the man himself on a *Shabbat* afternoon and obtained the option for himself, intending to leave Messrs Solomon and Israelsohn out of the transaction. In defense of himself Rev Levy claimed that the deal had been done on Sunday and that he had intended the others to have their share. After discussion, Mr M Israelsohn proposed and Mr E Levin seconded, that Rev Levy should be asked to resign as minister of the Congregation. It was decided that Mr Herman would speak to Rev Levy and inform him of the committee's decision. Rev Levy left for Pretoria, where he became a tailor, working with his father-in-law. Rev G Gadd was employed as the minister in Pietersburg in 1930 but tendered his resignation in the same year.

Rev J I Levine was appointed as minister for twelve months from February 1931 but he was to remain as the spiritual leader of the PHC for over thirty years until 1963. In 1931 he was paid £40 per month plus a free house, lights, water and phone. He was also given £25 to help in his move to Pietersburg. A life policy for Rev Levine for £1000 was taken out by the PHC committee with National Mutual Life Association of Australasia in favour of the Congregation<sup>20</sup>. As the community grew in numbers and reached its peak, he served as a role model and guide to his congregants.



Rev Levine came from a long line of Rabbis with the family name of Kargon. His family came from Russia to England, where they changed their name to Levine. Rev Levine was a minister in Dundee, Scotland. He married Lena Mathews in Great Yarmouth and they had a daughter Lily in 1909. Lena also came from a Rabbinical family which had emigrated from Russia to England with ten children. In 1904 Lena's father came to South Africa as a minister to the Paarl community. Rev Levine and his family immigrated to South Africa where he became the minister of the Robertson Hebrew Congregation from 1911 to 1922. A second daughter Sarah was born. Unfortunately Lena died in Robertson at the young age of 35 on 4 September 1940 from a miscarriage. Rev Levine later remarried a Miss Levitan but they did not stay together for long. Rev Levine was a keen Zionist and helped form the first Zionist Youth Society in Robertson and published the first Zionist Youth periodical in the Cape Province. From 1922 to 1931 he served as the spiritual leader to the Pietermaritzburg Hebrew Congregation in Natal. He pioneered the Zionist movement in Pietermaritzburg and organized the first Young Israel conference in Durban in the early 1920s<sup>21</sup>.

Chief Rabbi C K Harris<sup>22</sup> describes an ideal Rabbi as a “dynamic preacher... conscientious teacher... congregational manager... energetic youth leader... regular visitor of the aged and infirm at home and at hospital... tactful communal diplomat... skilled marriage and bereavement counselor... persuasive fundraiser... capable membership canvasser. He must show approachability, educate his congregation, care and inspire. His work must have job satisfaction and he becomes involved with his congregation and their problems and joys. Should he stay with one congregation for a long time? His vigour and effectiveness wanes with time but his pastoral work

improves as he gets to know his congregants and can help in times of trouble or add to occasions of joy ”. Rev Levine had many of the attributes that Chief Rabbi Harris considered essential for the ideal Rabbi and because of his long tenure in Pietersburg, he was able to become involved in the lives of all his congregants, giving them advice and counsel. He was intimately involved with his pupils and encouraged their studies and involvement in youth movements. He encouraged the community to follow the *Halakhah* despite their resistance to many religious practices. He was a caring, humble man who ministered not only to his own community, but also to those in the neighbouring towns and was respected by people of all faiths. Chief Rabbi L I Rabinowitz<sup>23</sup> reported that ministers like Rev Levine, who treated each member of his community like one of his own family, were an inspiration to their congregations. Chief Rabbi Rabinowitz also stated that the standard of Hebrew teaching in Pietersburg was very high.

One of the first duties of Rev Levine was to conduct a service in the Pietersburg Synagogue on Sunday 7 December 1930 honouring Mr Max Marcus when he was elected mayor of Pietersburg. Rev Levine was also a *shochet* and congregants used to bother him at various hours to slaughter their poultry until the committee agreed to set fixed times for him to perform this function. When Rev Levine was unable to perform *shechita*, Mr Harry Lidven, a trader in the Pietersburg area, used to assist him in the 1940s or the Rabbi from Warmbaths would travel to Pietersburg for this purpose. Mr Harry Lidven was born in Pinsk on May 23 1908. He was an ‘Ochberg Orphan’ who was brought out to South Africa in 1921 by Isaac Ochberg, a leader of the Cape Town community and the President of the Cape Jewish Orphanage. Mr Ochberg had gone to Russia and had brought back 167 orphans to South Africa. These children had

witnessed the terrible atrocities that had occurred in the pogroms in Eastern Europe. Mr Lidven lived in the Arcadia Orphanage in Johannesburg, where he studied to be a Reverend. He was the minister in Bethlehem and Bothaville before coming to Pietersburg around 1938. He settled at Leshoane, 45 kilometers outside Pietersburg as his wife Dora's sister, Sarah Jedwood, already ran a general dealer's store there on a trust farm with her husband Joseph. He also assisted in conducting the services in the synagogue, singing in a beautiful voice. He died in 1957 in Pietersburg.

Rev Levine always took an interest in his pupils and this showed in their participation at *cheder*, synagogue and youth groups. Rev Levine introduced the Sephardic pronunciation of Hebrew into his classes from as early as 1933<sup>24</sup>. This was 15 years before the United Hebrew Schools of Johannesburg introduced this form of pronunciation. He gave weekly lectures to the children on historical subjects and also gave Hebrew classes twice a week to the Pietersburg Young Israel Society. In addition he gave *shiurim* to parents once a week. On April 24 1933, Mr D Mierowsky, the Director of Jewish Education, praised Rev Levine's teaching methods and recommendations were made to introduce a curriculum prepared by the Jewish Board of Education. Rev Levine, like Hebrew teachers in other centres, had the problem of children wanting to participate in sports in the afternoons instead of attending Hebrew classes. Eventually a compromise was reached with two longer Hebrew classes a week instead of four shorter classes to give pupils more free time for sport.

Rev Levine encouraged his students to study Hebrew for the Junior and Senior Certificate examinations at school. In order to further their participation, various congregants donated bursaries, whilst the congregation contributed £25. As a result, in

1943, 10 out of 32 children were taking Hebrew as a subject at school<sup>25</sup>. Rabbi J L Zlotnik, the director of the Board of Jewish Education, expressed his pleasure at the excellent results achieved by Rev Levine. A *Shabbat* children's service was started in 1943 that was conducted by the children themselves in Hebrew and English. In 1945, Rev Levine was so pleased with the matriculation results that he put an insertion congratulating his students in the *Zionist Record* and the *Jewish Times*. A decision was made by the PHC committee to have girls celebrate *Batmitzvahs* according to a syllabus obtained from England by Rev Levine in the hope of attracting them to religion<sup>26</sup>. On 19 May, 1953, six girls celebrated their *Batmitzvahs*.

Rev Levine encouraged his students to continue their Jewish education even after they had left school. One of his pupils Minna Solomon, daughter of S H Solomon, was the first South African to pass the Hebrew Teachers' Examination of Jews' College, London in 1933. She became the first Hebrew teacher to qualify in South Africa<sup>27</sup>. Rev Levine arranged bursaries for two of his students, his own son Sonny Levine and Abe Shrock, his nephew, to go to Jews College in London and London University College to study and he was very proud when they became Rabbis in 1926 and 1928 respectively. Rae Notelowitz went on to train as a Hebrew teacher at Normal College, the second Hebrew teacher produced by Pietersburg.

As the Hebrew classes were increasing in size, attempts were made to find an assistant to help Rev Levine without much success. This would continue to be a problem for the congregation throughout Rev Levine's life. In December 1940, Rev Schatz was appointed as an assistant minister on three months trial, but he was considered unsuitable as he had different teaching methods to Rev Levine and he was

unpopular with the children. In order to help the PHC finance a minister's salary, in 1940 the PHC committee approached the Louis Trichardt community with the idea of sharing the assistant Hebrew teacher. He was to spend Friday to Monday with them and they would then pay half his salary. However this arrangement was found to be unsuitable.

In April 1944 Mr H Lempert was employed as an assistant Hebrew teacher and *shochet* at a monthly salary of £22.12.4 plus £2.7.8 cost of living allowance. Hebrew school fees were increased to meet his salary. He left in May 1944 as he was dissatisfied with his salary, but returned in June when the committee offered him £30. Mr Fisher [first name unknown] was engaged as a *chazan* for the High Holy Days in 1944 for the fee of £75, of which £25 came from the committee and the rest was collected from the congregation. In November, Mr Lempert again asked for a raise of £5 but when it was refused he left in December, citing difficulty in obtaining kosher food. He remarried his former wife and once again returned to Pietersburg on 17 January 1945. A bicycle was bought for Mr Lempert to ride to the abattoir. In April 1945, Lempert again asked for an increase of £5 but this was not given to him, so he resigned. Once again Rev Levine was doing all the slaughtering himself.

Another ongoing problem was the supply of kosher meat. It was difficult to obtain kosher meat from Johannesburg. This was due to the necessity of obtaining a permit to transport the meat and because there was a shortage of meat in Johannesburg. Instead a separate kosher department and block was provided at a local non-kosher butchery. In May 1948 a congregant complained that she had received a piece of pork with her kosher meat from the butchery. The chairman and the minister went to

interview the butcher to express their disapproval and to endeavour to make new arrangements so that there would be no recurrence of the incident.

Mr Z Rachman of Upington was appointed as assistant to Rev Levine from July 1946 at £45 per month and membership fees were increased to pay him. Rachman only stayed until 31 October 1946 when he resigned. Rev A Kaminer assisted Rev Levine from 1947 but he was dismissed in 1951. His dismissal was withdrawn in November 1951 as he undertook to carry out his duties in a proper manner in the future. However Kaminer himself resigned in July 1952. Mr Lidven once again helped as *shochet*. Later, because of his poor health, Rev Levine was assisted by Rabbi L Hazdan of the Warmbaths Hebrew Congregation<sup>28</sup>. Rabbi Hazdan was paid £42 for doing the *shechita* in Pietersburg during July 1954<sup>29</sup>. At that time there were 27 pupils in the Hebrew classes, 12 of whom were girls, divided into six classes.

Rev Levine carried out his duties diligently and believed in ensuring that the congregation kept strictly to the Jewish laws. Even though the community regarded itself as Orthodox, in many aspects they deviated from religious practice. Inevitably this led to clashes with some members of the congregation. Rev Levine was against the children of Jewish fathers and non-Jewish mothers attending *Habonim* or Mrs Palte's reading circle as *halakhically* they were not regarded as Jewish. As a result, after much protestation from the father of one of the boys, the boy concerned stopped attending<sup>30</sup>. In 1951, Rev Levine, according to normal Orthodox practice, said that members who married out of the faith should not be given any honours, such as being called up to read from the *Sefer Torah* in the synagogue. This affected a number of members who had married out of the faith. Rev Levine attempted several times to

ensure that the communal hall was kosher. However, due to the lack of complicity by the ladies, as well as the difficulty in obtaining kosher products, *kashrut* was not strictly kept in the hall at this time. Cakes from non-kosher homes were allowed to be brought into the hall, but were not eaten by those who observed *kashrut* [see also Chapter 8].

It was during Rev Levine's tenure, that Pietersburg reached its peak as the regional centre for the Northern Transvaal. In Chief Rabbi L I Rabinowitz's report entitled 'The Problem of the Country Communities' 1948<sup>31</sup>, Rabbi Rabinowitz explained the difficulties that the smaller communities had in obtaining good spiritual leaders. He had discovered that each community selfishly limited its sphere of influence to the immediate confines of the community itself. He singled out Rev J I Levine as a notable exception, as he had taken upon himself the task of establishing contact with the Jews in the neighbouring towns of Potgietersrus, Tzaneen, Louis Trichardt and Messina. As a result he had established a regional ministry for the whole of the Northern Transvaal, with Pietersburg as the centre. Rabbi Rabinowitz was so impressed by Rev Levine's example that he also implemented it in Potchefstroom and Windhoek when these two towns requested the services of a minister. Rabbi Rabinowitz made it a condition that the minister's duties would include Fochville and Ventersdorp in the former case and the whole region in the latter case. Successive Pietersburg ministers continued to carry out Rev Levine's example of ministering to the neighbouring Jewish communities. During the 1940s, the South African Jewish Board of Deputies [SAJBD] encouraged the formation of regional committees. The purpose was to strengthen ties between the various Jewish communities as well as with the SAJBD. As a result, a regional conference was held in Pietersburg on 8 June

1947 under the auspices of the SAJBD. Mr Moss Cohen was the chairman. Although Messina sent representatives, overall attendance was poor and the conference was not considered a success<sup>32</sup>. In the 1960s, Rabbi E J Dushinsky again advocated a regional ministry with Pietersburg as its centre [see Chapter 5].

The religious needs of the small country towns were looked after by the country communities Rabbi. He was the representative of the country communities Department of the SAJBD. These Rabbis would visit the small centres in order to make them feel part of the larger Jewish community. They gave advice, ensured that the Jewish institutions, such as the synagogues and cemeteries were well kept and helped communities find religious leaders. The country communities Rabbis were as follows:

Rabbi Dr Jacob Newman	September 1951 - March 1957
Rabbi A H Rabinowitz	September 1957 – October 1958
Rabbi B E Naifeld	November 1959 – July 1962
Rabbi Eugene Jacob Duschinsky	1964 – 1968 and after
Rabbi Gershon Meir Engel	August 1970 – 1982
Rabbi Stanley A Zaiden	September 1983 – 1993
Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft	November 1993 –

Rabbi Newman tried to solve the problem of obtaining a minister for Pietersburg. He suggested that a young Rabbi be imported from England at a salary of £75 per month for the whole area of the Northern Transvaal. A meeting was arranged on 19 October 1952, between the committee of the PHC, representatives of the Messina and Potgietersrus communities and Mr I Greenstein [Treasurer], Mr A B Klipin [Vice-President] and Mrs H Kerr [Secretary] of the country communities committee of the SAJBD. Three congregants attended from Messina but unfortunately none from



Potgietersrus. After much discussion, it was decided to keep Rev Levine as the senior minister, despite the deterioration in his health. A junior minister would be employed, who would also act as a regional minister for Messina, Louis Trichardt and Potgietersrus<sup>33</sup>. A suggestion was made that £45 would be provided by Pietersburg, £20 by Messina and £15 by Potgietersrus. As Louis Trichardt had no children to attend Hebrew classes, they would not contribute. The SAJBD would advance £1000 to buy a car plus £40 monthly for a driver and maintenance. The PHC would repay £15 per month until the car was paid off and the car would then belong to the PHC<sup>34</sup>. Eventually at a special general meeting held on 6 December 1952, it was decided instead to employ Rev I L Mannschein for the PHC only and not for the outlying towns. This was due to transport difficulties over bad roads in poor weather conditions to Messina. Rev Mannschein arrived in March 1953. Rabbi Newman suggested that Rev Mannschein should visit Messina once a week to teach the children and for *shechita*. The SAJBD would subsidize £25 per month and Messina would pay £10 for the taxi. This scheme also did not work as the Jews of Messina claimed that once a week was not enough time to teach the children and the taxi fare was too expensive<sup>35</sup>. Eventually, on 19 September 1955, Messina cancelled the call for a minister as there were only nine families left and they had no money for a minister.

Rev Levine first lived in Beth-El, the house next door to the synagogue. Later he moved in with his daughter and son-in-law Lily and Kuba Rakusin in Burger Street. One of the reasons he remained in Pietersburg was because his two daughters lived in the town. He was a very humble man and always put the interests of the community above his own. Already in 1932 Rev Levine suggested in a letter to the committee that

in view of the bad times in the economy, his salary should be reduced, but the committee refused to do it<sup>36</sup>. Again during World War II when the Pietersburg community was finding itself in financial difficulties, Rev Levine insisted that he receive a reduction in salary. Later, in August 1945, Rev Levine's salary was increased to £70. Rev Levine's health began to deteriorate so that he was no longer able to fulfill all his duties. At a special general meeting on 6 January 1953 it was decided that Rev Levine not be approached about retirement but that he would receive a salary of £70, of which £20 would be supplied by his sons-in-law Kuba Rakusin and George Eichholz. In 1953, Rabbi Dr S Levine, Rev Levine's son, made a few indiscrete comments at a reception at the Pietersburg Town Hall claiming that the congregation had treated his father badly. Rev Levine also remarked that the congregation had not treated him well and "had sucked him dry and then discarded him"<sup>37</sup>. The committee discussed the issue fully and decided to send Rev J I Levine a letter demanding an explanation and an apology. Rev Levine sent a letter to the committee and the matter was closed.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Rev Levine's service to the PHC in 1955, a special dinner attended by almost 300 members of the local and neighbouring communities was held by the Pietersburg community in the communal hall to honour him. Tributes to his loyal and devoted service to the community were paid by representatives of many societies. Reports of the event were sent to the *South African Jewish Times*, *Federation Chronicle* and *Zionist Record* on 5 July 1955. For the first time, Mr D J Naude, the mayor of Pietersburg, the town councillors and leading citizens such as Senator Tom Naude, the South African Minister of Finance, were invited to attend the Friday evening service in the Pietersburg Synagogue on 10 August 1956. The mayor

wrote a letter of thanks to the congregation for inviting him. In the letter, he praised Rev Levine's sermon<sup>38</sup>. Rev Levine was held in high regard by both the Jewish and the Gentile community. In fact, he was so well regarded by the general community that, out of concern for his welfare, the local council erected a public seat half way between his home and the synagogue for him to rest on, and established a lighting system along the route he walked. As Rev Levine was an erudite speaker, in 1937 he gave a lecture series entitled 'The golden period in Jewish history' to the Pietersburg Cultural Society. He was asked to deliver the sermon in the Wolmarans Street Synagogue in Johannesburg in 1960<sup>39</sup>. He used to represent the Jewish community at the annual Armistice Day ceremony by laying a wreath at the Pietersburg cenotaph<sup>40</sup>. Rev Levine held high Masonic honours as he was a past District Grand Chaplain. During World War II he was a part-time chaplain to the Jewish forces in Louis Trichardt with the rank of captain. He was also a president of the Hebrew Order of David lodge.

Eventually, Rev Levine found it difficult to carry out his duties because of his illness. As a result, by 1963 the community was beginning to have many problems due to the lack of religious leadership. There was a decline in attendances at the evening synagogue services as well as deterioration in the teaching. Rev Mannschein also became very ill and was unable to fulfill his duties. An attempt to obtain the services of Rev A Kaminer proved fruitless as he too was too ill to travel by train from Warmbaths. The SAJBD was approached and they sent Mr Schatz to slaughter meat for the congregation. When this proved to be too expensive, the congregation decided to obtain their meat from Pretoria instead.

Rev Levine eventually died of cancer of the stomach in August 11 1963. He had led the community for 33 years and under his influence the Pietersburg community had thrived. He was buried apart from the other graves in the Pietersburg cemetery as he was a *Cohen* and also as a mark of respect for the service he had rendered to the community. Rabbis A T Schrock, I Aloy, S Katz and Rev B Glass came to Rev Levine's funeral. In 1964 a plaque honouring his memory was placed in the foyer of the Pietersburg Synagogue reading:

“Erected in memory of the late Rev Jacob Isaac Levine who served this congregation faithfully and devotedly from 1930 to 1963”

At the 1971 AGM, Mr Samuel Rakusin proposed that the communal hall be named after Rev Levine and this motion was passed. The Jacob I Levine Memorial Hall was named on 4 December 1972 at the *Channukah* function.

At the 1963 AGM, the chairman remarked that it would be difficult to replace Rev Levine as there were few men as dedicated as Rev Levine and who considered the financial aspect as a secondary matter. The lack of a religious leader was having a deleterious effect on the congregation. The number of children in the Hebrew classes was dwindling. The chairman castigated the community for its apathy since Rev Levine had died. He lamented over the weakening of the unity of the community, as well as the presence of a destructive element within the membership. He appealed for members to place the unity of the community above personal views for the common good. The membership of the congregation had changed and there were an increasing number of younger men. These men were unable to finance the needs of the community in the way that the older and wealthier men had been able to do in the

past. The poor financial position of the PHC was to continuously have a deleterious effect on the employment of ministers.

The stability provided by Rev Levine in the community, as well as his empathy and good reputation served to attract Jews to Pietersburg. The community reached its peak during his tenure and there was a strong feeling of unity. After his death, the community lapsed into apathy and dissension and the numbers began to decline.

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NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Shimoni, Gideon. *Community and Conscience: The Jews in Apartheid South Africa*. David Phillip Publishers: Republic of South Africa, 2003, p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Saron, Gustav. "The Making of South African Jewry". In: Leon Feldberg, ed, *South African Jewry 1965*. Johannesburg: Fielding Publishing Company, 1965, p. 17.

<sup>3</sup> Isaacs, Dennis. "The Non-observant Orthodox". In: *Jewish Affairs* Spring 1995. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 1995, p. 63. Orthodox Judaism includes the non-observant in its ranks because there is always hope that he will become observant.

<sup>4</sup> Arkin, M. *South African Jewry: a contemporary survey*. Cape Town: Oxford University Press, 1984, p. 96.

<sup>5</sup> \_\_\_\_\_. *One people, one destiny: some explorations in Jewish affairs*. Owen Burgess: Hillcrest, 1989, p. 203.

<sup>6</sup> Gwynn Schrire. "Is it true what we're told about Zeyde? Some realities behind our Eastern European Immigrants". In: *Jewish Affairs* Winter 1997. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 1997, p. 19.

<sup>7</sup> This article also appeared under the heading "Jews of the Northern Transvaal, The First Pioneers" by S A Rochlin in the *Zionist Record* October 17 1952.

<sup>8</sup> Rabinowitz, Chief Rabbi Dr L I. *To Reach for the Moon*. Rabbi Dr Gerald Mazabow: Johannesburg, 1999, p. 209.

<sup>9</sup> Herrman, Louis. *A History of the Jews in South Africa from the earliest times to 1895*. Victor Gollancz Ltd: London, 1930, p. 272.

<sup>10</sup> Rev D Wasserzug, *London Jewish Chronicle*, 28 October 1900 as quoted in Saron, Gustav and Hotz, Louis. *The Jews in South Africa: A History*. Oxford University Press: London, 1955, p. 175.

<sup>11</sup> Rabinowitz, Chief Rabbi Prof LI. "The Problem of the Country Communities". In: *The South African Jewish Times*, Rosh Hashanah, September 1947, p. 6-7.

<sup>12</sup> Wiener, C. See Appendix I and South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives Anglo-Boer War File, p. 114.

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<sup>13</sup> *Jewish Life in the South African Country Communities: Volume 1. The South African Friends of Beth Hatefusoth: Johannesburg* [Affiliated to Beth Hatefusoth: The Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, Tel Aviv], 2002, p. 152. South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives, file SA 1914, p. 7 and 1919, p. 562. Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minute books 1921-2003. The initials of Revs Schatz and Freedman are unknown.

<sup>14</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file SA, p. 236.

<sup>15</sup> This figure comes from the list of donors to the building fund placed under the foundation stone of the communal hall in 1921, together with several newspapers from that time. These were found when the communal hall was building was razed. The list is now in the South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives.

<sup>16</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies paper read before the Jewish Historical Society of England 13 June 1922 and appeared in Volume X of the Society's transactions.

<sup>17</sup> Saron and Hotz, *op. cit.* p. 65.

<sup>18</sup> His first name is not mentioned in the minutes.

<sup>19</sup> Minutes of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation committee meeting 11 July 1928.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 30 January 1931.

<sup>21</sup> *Zionist Record* 24 July 1953.

<sup>22</sup> Harris, *Chief Rabbi Cyril. Leaves from a Rabbi's Diary: The Ideal Rabbi" in Jewish Tradition* Volume 40 No 1 April 1995, p. 27.

<sup>23</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies country communities Rabbi's reports.

<sup>24</sup> Rev J I Levine's annual report 1948.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.* 1943.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.* 25 September 1944.

<sup>27</sup> *Jewish Life in the South African Country Communities*, vol. 1. *op. cit.* p. 150.

<sup>28</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file G 2 February 1950 and 15 February 1950.

<sup>29</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation correspondence 14 October 1954.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* from Rev J I Levine February 1934

<sup>31</sup> Rabinowitz, *op. cit.* p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file K 27 May 1947, p. 2180.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* file F 8 October 1952, 23 January 1953 and file A 23 May 1957.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* file 46.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* country communities Rabbi's report: Rabbi J Newman's Report 20-29 June 1955.

<sup>36</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minutes 20 July 1932.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* July 1953.

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<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 15 August 1956.

<sup>39</sup> *The Zionist Record* Friday 24 July 1953, p. 13.

<sup>40</sup> This practice was continued by the chairlady of the Pietersburg Jewish Women's Guild until 2003 when the community ceased to exist.

## CHAPTER 5

### THE PROBLEMS CONCERNING THE RELIGIOUS LEADERS AFTER 1963

After Rev Levine died, the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation [PHC] struggled to find a minister that was suitable to its needs. Either the community was not happy with the minister or he was not satisfied with his low salary. After eight months without a spiritual leader, a special general meeting of the PHC on 1 March 1964 unanimously decided to employ Rev J Scherer of Uppington as their minister. Rev Scherer was born in Austria and educated in England. He was a *ba'al tefillah* and a *ba'al kriah*, a *shochet* and a *mohel*. His wife came from Germany and was a qualified Hebrew teacher. At the same meeting, the congregation was told that Rev I L Mannschein had accepted a call to Heilbron. His resignation was approved by the congregation and the granting of a gratuity of R750 from the pension fund was accepted unanimously. Farewell functions were usually held by the congregation for the ministers employed by the PHC. A farewell function was held on the 19 March 1964 for Rev Mannschein as he was leaving on 31 March for Heilbron.

Rev Scherer's contract was signed on 18 August 1964 for three years, effective from 1 May 1964. He received R450 per month and the congregation enrolled him in the South African Hebrew and Yiddish Teachers and Ministers Pension Fund. All ministers employed by the PHC were supplied with a furnished house and free water and lights. The Scherer family first rented a flat until a new house was built for them in 1964 to replace the minister's old house which had been demolished.



Rev Scherer held *Shabbat* morning services for children, followed by a *Shabbat* breakfast which was funded by adding an extra 25 cents per month onto the *cheder* fees. Mrs Scherer proposed starting a Jewish nursery school, but as only three children enrolled, there were not enough children to warrant a school. Rev Scherer continued Rev J I Levine's work as a regional minister in the Northern Transvaal. The Potgietersrus Jewish children travelled to Pietersburg twice a week for *cheder* classes in 1965.

On 19 August 1964 the country communities Rabbi, Rabbi E J Dushinsky, visited Pietersburg and suggested a gathering of the isolated country communities in the Northern Transvaal. His idea was that Pietersburg should 'absorb' the surrounding districts, starting with Potgietersrus, in both a religious, communal and cultural manner. It was decided at the 1965 Annual General Meeting [AGM] to co-opt two members, Messrs B Krikst and A Donde, from Potgietersrus onto the PHC committee in order to cement relations with the nearby town. A family day for the whole district was held on 12 June 1966. Rabbi E J Duschinsky attended with Mr Harry Rajak of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies [SAJBD], Mr L Lipshitz and Mr J Amiel of the youth department. That night, Cantor S Mandel of Johannesburg conducted the Republic Day evening service, which was attended by the mayor of Pietersburg.

As a result of the success of the family day, the SAJBD wrote to the PHC asking them to set up a regional organization under their leadership. A loose regional organisation was formed to keep in contact with the Jews in the outlying areas. The country Jews showed their enthusiasm for communal connections by travelling long distances to attend the monthly *Shabbat* services in Potgietersrus. Those living in Phalaborwa

attended the High Holy Days in Pietersburg. In 1966, the SAJBD requested that Rev J Scherer undertake a pastoral tour to Dendron, Bandolierkop, Louis Trichardt, Messina, Duiwelskloof, Tzaneen, Gravelotte and Phalaborwa under the aegis of the country communities committee of the SAJBD. This was appreciated by all he visited.

Following the success of the first family day, a second one was held in 1967. It was attended by Rabbi E J Duchinsky, Advocate David Mann, Cantor Asher Hainovitz, Joseph Amiel of the Youth Department of the SAJBD and the president of the Federation of Hebrew Congregations Women's Guild. Unfortunately this family day was poorly attended, especially by the country members for whom the function was intended. A family day was again organized by the SAJBD on 16 March 1969.

On the 28 July 1965 Chief Rabbi B M Casper visited Pietersburg and the women's guild catered a dinner for the congregation. His sermon inspired all those who heard it and as a result of his visit, the congregation began holding early *Shabbat* morning services at seven o'clock for adults. However, there was a decline in attendances at evening and Friday night services. Once again the chairman of the congregation berated the community for its apathy.

Rabbi J Klevansky reported that Rev J Scherer's tuition had improved but attendance in *cheder* classes was poor. He suggested that Rev Scherer attend a special teacher's seminar at his own expense, which he and his wife did on 8 to 18 August 1966. A special general meeting was held on 11 October 1966 attended by 48 members to decide whether to renew Rev Scherer's contract when it expired in April 1967. They were also to decide whether or not the congregation should help him to buy a car.

Many of the members believed that Rev Scherer had not been fulfilling his duties and he should be kept without a contract and without a grant for a car. This arrangement was not satisfactory to Rev Scherer and he handed in his resignation in February 1967. He left to serve the Bethal congregation.

For several months the community was once again without a minister. Advertisements were placed in the Jewish press for a new spiritual leader and several applications were received. Rev W Wolfson was accepted at a general meeting of the congregation in March 1967. He was an erudite, scholarly man. He had been a senior minister to the Plymouth Hebrew Congregation for 16 years, minister of Beth Shalom Congregation in Canada for four years, regional minister to communities in the Copperbelt of Zambia for three years and minister in Carletonville for three and a half years. He was a teacher, had lectured at the University of Alberta, and was a *ba'al kriah* and *shochet*. Rev Wolfson was inducted by Chief Rabbi B M Casper on 6 September 1967.

Each new minister tried in his own way to re-instill religious practices for the adults and the children. Some succeeded for a while and then the community relapsed into apathy. Rev Wolfson tried very hard to encourage the Jews of Pietersburg to follow the tenets of Judaism. He held two services on *Shabbat* mornings for children of different age groups. However, his attempt at a Sunday post-*Barmitzvah* discussion group was not popular. He also encouraged *Habonim* meetings for the youth on Sundays. Saturday morning services for the men were poorly attended and a roster system was initiated. Rev Wolfson was an excellent orator and he provided lectures before the *Shabbat* afternoon services. He also published a journal every two months

for the community. He travelled to Potgietersrus by taxi to teach *cheder* to 12 children and once in three months he spent a *Shabbat* there. He ensured that there was a greater variety of kosher meat which was also available to Potgietersrus and Louis Trichardt Jews. Rev Wolfson wrote regular lengthy letters to the committee on various matters. He explained the disadvantages of hiring out the hall to non-Jewish organizations such as the Christian Church of the Gospel's Christmas party<sup>1</sup>. He requested that members should not park in front of the synagogue on *Shabbat* but the committee did not support him and they declared it was up to the individual to decide where to park. He asked the headmasters of the schools not to hold examinations on Jewish holidays. His wife also involved herself with the community and presented a paper to a monthly ladies study group.

Despite Rev Wolfson's efforts, the members' involvement in the community was decreasing. The overdraft in March 1967 was R1100 as members did not pay their subscriptions. The apathy of the community continued and they did not even attend lectures by visiting dignitaries. In May 1968 Rev Wolfson became ill and could not *shecht* so kosher meat had to be obtained from Pretoria. Due to Rev Wolfson's illness, there were no more synagogue services during the week<sup>2</sup>, nor were there *cheder* lessons for the older children. The Saturday afternoon talks were abandoned and the adult study group was not well attended. Rev Wolfson informed the PHC committee on 10 October 1968, that as both he and his wife had been ill, they were moving into a flat, which would be easier to manage than a house and garden<sup>3</sup>. The committee dissuaded him from this move, as it would have proved difficult to rent out the minister's house.

A discussion took place in February 1969 whether or not to renew Rev Wolfson's contract. It was felt by the committee that he was not taking any notice of the committee's requests. A report from the conference of the South African Board of Jewish Education stated that all the small centres were in the same position, as most of the Hebrew teachers were being employed by King David and other Jewish Schools. Because the committee thought that they would not get a better minister, the matter was shelved.

In March 1971, it came to the attention of the PHC committee that Rev Wolfson had 'applied for another calling' with the Vryheid Congregation as they had offered him a higher salary. Rev Wolfson left for Vryheid on 25 June 1971 after four years service with the Pietersburg congregation. For several months the community was again without a spiritual leader. The congregation was very grateful to the South African Jewish Board of Education who sent Mr Friedman to help with the *cheder* lessons for the children in the interim. He was paid R300 per month plus free board in the synagogue house.

As no local ministers were available, the PHC took the unprecedented step to import a minister from Israel. Although this would necessitate extra costs to bring him and his family out to South Africa, the community had no alternative. The Pietersburg congregation had to supply the South African Department of the Interior with proof that they had advertised the post in South Africa and that no suitable local applicants had been found. They had to undertake to maintain the minister and his family during their stay and guarantee to repatriate them at the conclusion of the contract. On 31 July 1971, at a special general meeting it was decided the congregation would enter

into an agreement for three years with Mr Avram Belitsky from Israel. He was to be a minister, cantor and teacher, but not a *shochet*. This was to be the first time that the community would have to manage without a local *shochet*. Mrs Shoshanah Belitzky was to help with the *cheder*. His salary would be R500 per month. Belitsky and his family's airfares to and from Israel were paid for by the congregation. Members donated R2000 towards the cost of bringing the minister to Pietersburg. The PHC only managed to continue paying for a minister's service because of the generosity of several members who were always willing to contribute extra funds. The house was refurnished at a cost of R1800 and members of the community donated furnishings.

Rev Belitsky and his family arrived in October 1971 and they were met at Johannesburg airport by a delegation from Pietersburg. He was to be the first of three Israeli ministers brought out at the PHC's expense. Rev Belitsky was instructed in his duties by the country communities Rabbi, Rabbi G M Engel, who visited Pietersburg soon after Rev Belitsky's arrival. Rev Belitsky said that he had only associated with religious families before coming to South Africa and on his arrival was amazed at the Pietersburg congregation's lack of religious practice. However, he said that he found the community very warm<sup>4</sup>.

Rev Belitsky, as the new minister, tried to motivate the congregation. He instituted longer hours for *cheder* classes. The Jewish Women's Guild donated audio-visual equipment for the adult Hebrew classes. He also tried to start *Shabbat* morning services for adults but this was not successful as most Jewish businesses were open on Saturday. An attempt to read a section of the service in English was not approved of by the committee.

As Rev Belitsky was not a *shochet*, kosher meat was obtained from a kosher butchery in Pretoria. A section of a butchery in Pietersburg was used by Rev Belitsky to *kasher* the meat and to stamp it with a kosher stamp before it was sold. However consternation was caused in the community when Rev Belitsky discovered that the local butcher had somehow obtained his own stamp and for eight months had been stamping non-kosher meat as kosher. A letter was written to the butcher explaining the “seriousness of the malpractice of which he was guilty and the deepness of the hurt that he had inflicted on the congregation”<sup>5</sup>. He was asked for a letter of apology as well as compensation for defrauding the community and repayment for the butcher’s block that was now no longer kosher. He also had to surrender the kosher stamp. The butcher apologized and said he had not realized the seriousness of his actions and accepted full responsibility for them.

The community had to find an alternate source of kosher meat. At first meat was railed from Woods Butchery in Pretoria, but this proved unsatisfactory. Instead the *shochet*, Rev M Mandelberg, travelled every three weeks from Pretoria to slaughter in Pietersburg. A special section of Moregloed Butchery in Pietersburg was set aside for the kosher meat and the butchers were informed of the seriousness of keeping kosher. This system worked very well for a while until Rev M Mandelberg left the Pretoria community. Moregloed Butchery claimed that they were dissatisfied with the lack of support given to them by the Jewish community. Instead, Rev Schatz<sup>6</sup> traveled from Johannesburg to Pietersburg by train to *shecht* animals and the butchery facilities were changed to Dalmada Butchery. Eventually in May 1974 when the price of kosher meat was increased, it was decided that it would be cheaper to obtain the meat

directly from Johannesburg. This practice continued until the demise of the community in 2003.

The congregation desperately needed funds. The committee wrote to the Louis Trichardt members asking them to join the Pietersburg community and to pay subscriptions, but they declined. At the 1972 AGM Rev Belitsky asked for an increase in salary. This was given to him in the form of an entertainment and travel allowance. Rev Belitsky travelled to Potgietersrus where he taught Hebrew lessons. Due to a lack of communication between the minister and the PHC committee, several misunderstandings occurred. Unaware of the protocol in Pietersburg, Rev Belitsky decided unilaterally to ask Cantor M Konviser in 1973 to conduct the Pesach services whilst he was away on leave. As no request had been made to Konviser by the PHC committee to perform in Pietersburg as a cantor, they refused to pay him for conducting the services. It was also discovered that Rev Belitsky had been teaching *cheder* in Louis Trichardt to Jewish children from Louis Trichardt and Messina, without the committee's knowledge. The president of the PHC contacted the Louis Trichardt families involved and they subsequently became country members of the Pietersburg congregation. Their *cheder* fees covered Rev Belitsky's travelling expenses.

As the congregation was satisfied with Rev Belitsky, at the 1973 AGM the community decided to extend his contract for another year until October 1974 and to pay him an extra R100 per month. The following year, the congregation once again wanted to extend his contract. His employer in Israel, from whom he had taken leave of absence, confirmed that it might still be possible to extend Rev Belitzky's contract.



Unfortunately they later rescinded Rev Belitzky's leave of absence from Israel when they discovered that there was another suitable candidate viz. Rev S Pasternak to fill the position of minister in Pietersburg. Mr Julian Meyer, a PHC committee member, whilst on a visit to Israel in June, had interviewed Rabbi Pasternak and recommended him as minister to the PHC.

Rev S Pasternak was born in Rumania in 1948 and was married with two children. He was a *ba'al tefillah* and a *ba'al kriah* and had had seven years experience teaching in Hebrew schools. He also was not a *shochet*. His English was fair and his Yiddish was fluent. His wife Esther was a laboratory technician. Pasternak was to receive a salary of R600 per month for three years from 31 August 1975. He would also be a chaplain to the Jewish national servicemen at the military camps in Pietersburg and Messina. According to his contract, the shipping of his belongings and the airfare for his family to and from South Africa was to be paid by the PHC. Rev Pasternak and his family arrived on 24 August 1975 and they were met at the Johannesburg airport by a delegation of the committee together with Rev Belitsky.

In October 1975, Rev Pasternak enquired whether a *mikveh* [ritual bath] could be built in Pietersburg, as it was a financial burden for Mrs Pasternak to have to travel to Johannesburg every month<sup>7</sup>. The matter had not been a priority before as most of the ministers were older men whose wives did not need to make use of a *mikveh* and the women of Pietersburg were not interested in using a *mikveh*. Those minister's wives who did need the *mikveh* used to travel to Johannesburg or Pretoria to use one there. A special committee meeting on 24 November 1975 voted unanimously against the proposal as it would cost R2500 to build a *mikveh*. It was decided to give Rev

Pasternak an extra R50 for traveling expenses instead. However, Rev Pasternak persevered and in 1976 Vorster Bros quoted R734.50 to build a smaller *mikveh*, excluding the geyser. The country communities committee decided they would give Pietersburg a loan of R1000<sup>8</sup>. The PHC committee asked the minister to use his R50 traveling expenses towards the new *mikveh*, but the minister was against this. By September it was resolved that there would definitely be no *mikveh* and there the matter was left to rest.

The inspector, Mr M Zimmerman, inspected the *cheder* classes on 4 March 1976, and again on 15 November 1976<sup>9</sup> and was upset that his recommendations had not been implemented by Rev Pasternak. Zimmerman complained that there was a complete lack of community discipline and parental co-operation. At a special meeting on 9 November 1976, the chairman reported that Rev Pasternak wanted to leave Pietersburg due to his financial problems in Israel. It was agreed that he could return to Israel if he wanted to go. Rev Pasternak had the following suggestion as to how he could solve his financial problems, viz the *Chevrah Kadisha* in Johannesburg should grant him a loan, the Pietersburg committee should give him an increase of R100 and each member of the congregation should donate R2 per month to help him. This suggestion was not well received by the committee. At the 1977 AGM the chairman acknowledged that the congregation was not satisfied with the minister's demands, but they could not afford to repatriate him either. Rev Pasternak applied for various ministerial positions but the executive of the PHC informed him that he had to stay in Pietersburg and fulfill his duties until his contract expired in October 1978, especially as there were several *Barmitzvahs* pending. The PHC committee was continuously

meeting in an attempt to deal with the minister's problems and several congregants were displeased with his demands.

By January 1978 an attempt to find a South African minister or teacher to replace Rev Pasternak proved unsuccessful, as they preferred to go to the larger centres. Rev Belitsky was approached for assistance and he recommended Rev Y Ariely as a minister. Ariely lived in Israel, had had 20 years primary school teaching experience and was a certified poultry *shochet*. He was born in Libya and was married with four children. He spoke English and Italian, and had been an emissary to Iran [1969-70] and Cape Town [1973-75].

The PHC committee gave the Pasternaks R450 towards confinement fees as Mrs Pasternak was expecting a baby. As she no longer had the need to pay a monthly visit to a *mikveh* during her pregnancy, this solved the *mikveh* problem. In July she gave birth to a baby boy and the *bris* was held in the Pietersburg synagogue. Rev Pasternak took up a position with the Bellville congregation, and that community offered to pay for his repatriation expenses to Israel. The PHC was very grateful to be released from this obligation. Rev Pasternak left on 24 August 1978.

From the beginning Rev Ariely caused problems for the community. He objected to several clauses in the contract drawn up by the PHC after taking the contract to a South African lawyer in Ra'anana, Israel<sup>10</sup>. The SAJBD suggested that careful consideration should be given to the amendments "in the light of the hesitancy still shown by interested candidates in taking up the position in South Africa, because of the political climate, and the impossibility of obtaining ministerial personnel from any

source other than Israel". As a result, the PHC agreed to these amendments. The final contract specified that Ariely would serve as minister, cantor, teacher, youth leader, *shochet* and Jewish chaplain to the military camps. The committee decided unanimously to offer Ariely a position with a salary of R825 per month. The congregation would pay to repatriate his family to Israel if he availed himself thereof within 30 days of the termination of his service.

The Ariely family arrived on 30 August 1978. A welcome tea was held for them by the Jewish Women's Guild so that they could meet the community. Soon after his arrival, Rev Ariely asked the congregation for a R1000 loan to buy a freezer and a TV, which was agreed to by the committee after a schedule of repayments was negotiated. Ariely was disappointed with the standard of progress of the 23 *cheder* children. *Shabbat* morning services for the children continued. For the first time there was no *minyan* for a Friday night service in October 1978. The congregation celebrated the 25th anniversary of the opening of the synagogue and the induction of Rev Ariely on 26 November 1978. Rabbi G M Engel, the country communities Rabbi, conducted the service for the congregation.

In January 1979 Rev Ariely asked for a raise in salary and his February salary in advance. The PHC committee was dismayed that he was not able to control his finances, especially as he had already received R750 in lieu of luggage expenses and R350 for conducting the High Holy Day services. As the congregation's expenditure far exceeded its income, it was felt that a raise was not justified at that time. Rev Ariely said that this was unacceptable. However, a special general meeting was called on 18 February 1979 to discuss an increase in subscriptions and a large number of

members attended. They voted to increase Rev Ariely's salary as well as the members' subscriptions. His raise was only due to start with the new financial year in August. However, already in March Rev Ariely asked if the raise could be made retrospective to January 1979.

Numerous complaints were made about Rev Ariely's teaching methods. Eventually in April, Rev Ariely told the chairman that he would like to leave as his children wanted to go to a Jewish school. Because of the complaints, the committee decided unanimously to let him go, provided he pay back his loan. In July 1979 Rev Ariely went to Durban for an interview with the Carmel Hebrew School which accepted him. They agreed to pay  $\frac{2}{3}$  of the cost of bringing him from Israel, the R750 luggage fee and they guaranteed to repatriate him at their expense. Rev Ariely wanted to leave within two weeks and asked for a double salary for conducting the High Holy Day Services. The committee was against these demands as there was no replacement for him and there were *Barmitzvahs* coming up soon. For the first time, the committee was also against giving the Arielys a farewell party<sup>11</sup>.

The committee had difficulty in finding a replacement minister. Two couples living in Israel, suggested by Rabbi G M Engel, were considered unsuitable because the one was thought to be too religious for Pietersburg and the other spoke no English. The congregation was in dire financial straits and could not afford to bring another family out from Israel. They were also wary of hiring another Israeli minister after the problems they had experienced in the past. A suggestion to only employ a teacher a few times a week was disputed by some members as it was felt that this could be the end of the congregation.

The community was therefore pleased in 1979 to employ as minister, Rev Basil Lerer, a teacher from the Yeshiva College in Johannesburg. He was employed at a salary of R750-36 per month. For the first time in years, the congregation showed an excess of revenue over expenditure as they no longer had to pay repatriation fees for the minister to Israel. A letter was sent to the Secretary of the Interior asking for permission for Rev Lerer to perform marriages and this was granted<sup>12</sup>. In 1980, there were 18 children attending *cheder* and four children attending a pre-school class. Rev Lerer in an attempt to improve the teaching standards complained that *cheder* classes twice a week was not enough to teach the children and the *Shabbat* afternoon classes for adults were poorly attended. Rev Lerer decided to inaugurate a Bible study and discussion group on Wednesday evenings for adults. A religious group for school children in standards 8-10 was started. He also introduced a nursery school class once a week. The children's services on *Shabbat* mornings were well attended. In June 1981, the *cheder* inspector, Mr M Zimmerman reported that he had visited the *cheder* on 19 May 1980 and he was very impressed by the warm relationship between the teacher and his pupils. Rev Lerer was following the syllabus and the classes were more homogenous. Mr Zimmerman was replaced by Rabbi Dr G Mazabow as *cheder* inspector in February 1983.

On Rosh Hashanah 1986, Rev Lerer personally *kashered* the bakery at Checkers supermarket and supervised the baking of the *challahs* for the community. He instituted a *succah* competition, encouraged Friday night communal dinners and accompanied the children on a *Shabbaton* to Magoebaskloof. Many of the children became enthusiastic supporters of Judaism as a result of Rev Lerer's influence. One

pupil, Hillel Klingman, became a Rabbi in Israel. Most of the children also attended *Bnei Akiva* camps. Rev Lerer was also influential in helping a family to make their home kosher and by 1989 nine families kept kosher homes in Pietersburg. Rev Lerer was one of the most significant ministers since Rev Levine, mainly through the influence he exerted on the children and because of his longer tenure in Pietersburg.

By 1985, the shortfall in the congregation's finances had risen to R18 000 and the congregation only survived through donations from members. Some Friday nights there were not enough men for a minyan. There were 30 couples, 11 widows, five bachelors and 17 children in the community in 1985. The Messina Jews were approached to join the Pietersburg congregation but they were against the idea. By the 1987 AGM, the congregation was once again in debt to the sum of R15 000. The *Lubavitch* Foundation was the only organization that sent speakers to Pietersburg and the congregation complained that the SAJBD and the Federation of Synagogues were ignoring Pietersburg despite the fact that they paid affiliation fees to them.

In 1987, Rev Lerer told the chairman that he wanted to leave Pietersburg. At a general meeting, the congregation gave the committee a mandate to ask Rev Lerer to stay on a six-month basis. Chief Rabbi Cyril K Harris, Mrs A Harris and Mrs Harris's mother visited the community on 11 May 1988. The Chief Rabbi called Pietersburg a "special Jewish congregation and the only viable congregation in the North due to Rev Lerer". By 1989, the PHC had dropped to 25 family members and 21 widows, single men and country members. The overdraft before donations was estimated to be R40 000.

During 1991 Rev Lerer married Miss Lisa Dembo, a nursery school teacher in Cape Town. Rev Lerer's salary was increased by R250 in February 1992. On 15 April 1992, Rev Lerer sent a letter of resignation to the committee. He wrote that thanks to teamwork, a community had been created in Pietersburg that continually grew in terms of *yiddishkeit* and hopefully this standard would be maintained. A farewell party for the Lerers was held on 28 June 1992 before they left for Paarl. The PHC found Rev B Lerer's tenure to have been refreshingly different from his immediate predecessors.

Rev Lerer was to be the last permanent religious leader in Pietersburg. As the number of members was diminishing due to families leaving Pietersburg or dying and because the congregation continued to have economic problems, they decided that they would no longer employ a permanent minister. Chapter 11 will elucidate how the community attempted to function without a minister.

As the Pietersburg community centred its religious observance in the synagogue, the performance of the minister affected the community's participation in all aspects of religion. Rev Levine was a modest, moral minister deeply involved in his congregation. His ministry became the example to which all other subsequent ministers was compared. Each new minister initiated his tenure by reminding the community of their religious obligations and brought a temporary renewal of interest in religious observances. However, the congregation lost respect for the minister when he behaved in a manner they considered problematic, made excessive demands or was unable to fulfill his duties. As a result, they again lost interest in religious affairs. This led to a general disenchantment with the ministers by the community.



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NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Letter sent by Rev W Wolfson to Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation committee 1 December 1968.

<sup>2</sup> Rev W Woolfson's 1968 annual report.

<sup>3</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation correspondence 10 October 1968.

<sup>4</sup> Interview with Rev A Belitsky in Israel 2002.

<sup>5</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation correspondence 20 February 1973.

<sup>6</sup> Rev Schatz's first name is not mentioned.

<sup>7</sup> Married women use the *mikveh* after menstruation before resuming marital relations with their husbands.

<sup>8</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives: country communities Rabbi's report 1976.

<sup>9</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation correspondence 26 November 1976.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.* 23 May 1978.

<sup>11</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minutes July 1979.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 20 November 1980.

## CHAPTER 6

### SYNAGOGUES AND BUILDINGS IN AND AROUND PIETERSBURG

#### SERVING A RELIGIOUS OR COMMUNAL FUNCTION

The Zoutpansberg Hebrew Congregation, which included both the villages of Louis Trichardt and Pietersburg and the surrounding areas, was established around 1897<sup>1</sup>. The first president of the Zoutpansberg Hebrew Congregation was Bernard Herman<sup>2</sup>. In 1904 the president was William [Patsy] Cohen, the vice-president was Joseph Kallmeyer, the treasurer was Barney Herman and the secretary was Julius Koenig<sup>3</sup>. In 1912 the Pietersburg community formed their own congregation known as the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation [PHC], but Louis Trichardt retained the original name. However, the Pietersburg congregation only notified the South African Jewish Board of Deputies [SAJBD] in November 1914 that they had changed their name from the Zoutpansberg Hebrew Congregation to the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation [PHC]<sup>4</sup>. As the Pietersburg community had no synagogue of their own, they held their services in the Masonic hall<sup>5</sup>. Mr Kallmeyer was the chairman of the Zoutpansberg then the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation from 1904 until 1916. Mr S Kaufman took over as chairman of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation from 1917 to 1918<sup>6</sup>. After this, Mr Barney Herman was chairman for 34 years. Mr A Zaidel, with the assistance of Mr S Marcus and Mr H Manaschewitz, drew up the constitution of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation. It was adopted by members on 22 November 1925.

In the towns surrounding Pietersburg, only Louis Trichardt built a synagogue. Jewish cemeteries were established in Louis Trichardt, Messina and Potgietersrus<sup>7</sup>. The town of Louis Trichardt was proclaimed on 15 February 1899, two years after the formation of the Zoutpansberg Hebrew Congregation. The 1904 census recorded 75 Jews in the Zoutpansberg district. There were 31 Jews in Louis Trichardt in 1943, but the number had dropped to 16 Jews in 1959 and by 1969, only five families remained<sup>8</sup>. At first, services were held in the Masonic hall in Louis Trichardt and a *Sefer Torah* was bought by Sachne Himmelhoch<sup>9</sup>. Aron Berman, who lived in Louis Trichardt before 1920, ceded land to the Zoutpansberg Hebrew Congregation in his will in 1933 according to deed of transfer number 1433<sup>10</sup>. Jacob Hirschmann and Adolf Abramowitz were the executors of his estate. The synagogue was built on this land in 1938 on the corner of Krogh and Devenish streets, Louis Trichardt. A bachelor flat was built for the minister at the back of the building, but was never used for this purpose. Rev Joseph Gabriel Katz, a furniture dealer, was the first minister, Hebrew teacher and *shochet* in Louis Trichardt from around 1930 until 1938. He was followed by Rev Kuppelsohn [first name unknown] for a short while<sup>11</sup>, but thereafter there were no more ministers. Mr Chaim Brenner, the chairman of the Zoutpansberg Hebrew Congregation, arrived in Louis Trichardt in 1930. After the last minister left, he led the synagogue services until his death in 1972<sup>12</sup>.

The regional minister scheme was first initiated under the Pietersburg minister, Rev J I Levine, whereby he visited the surrounding Jewish communities [see Chapter 5]. Thereafter, Revs I L Mannschein, J Scherer and W Wolfson visited Louis Trichardt from Pietersburg in the 1950s and 1960s, to perform *schechita* and to teach the children's Hebrew classes. In 1972, Mrs Sarah Klaff, the Israeli wife of Leon Klaff<sup>13</sup>,

taught the children Hebrew using the South African Jewish Board of Deputies [SAJBD] Mother-Teacher Scheme<sup>14</sup>. In 1974, the SAJBD arranged to bring children from Messina to Louis Trichardt on Sundays to be taught by Rev Belitzky of Pietersburg.

The SAJBD was concerned that any synagogue property in a small town could accrue to the State if there were no Jewish members left in the town. Therefore, they wanted the few members left in a country town to sign consent in advance for a Trusteeship Constitution, whereby the SAJBD would administer a trust for that community. Mr M Udwin of the SAJBD approached Mr Chaim Brenner in 1968 to sign on behalf of the Louis Trichardt community, but he refused to sign<sup>15</sup>. After Mr Chaim Brenner died in 1972, the Louis Trichardt community no longer had a leader and ceased to function. The SAJBD, through Rabbi G M Engel, the country communities Rabbi, began negotiations with the few remaining residents in Louis Trichardt, including the late Chaim Brenner's sons, Stanley and Maish, to sign the SAJBD's Trusteeship Constitution, but he was unsuccessful<sup>16</sup>. In 1976, Rabbi Engel suggested to the SAJBD that the Brennens should be invited to their offices for a talk about the signing of the Trusteeship Constitution.

In 1977, Rabbi Engel reported that there were only three Jewish families, one single adult and four children left in the town. The two *Sifrei Torah*, one of which belonged to the Brenner family, were donated by them to the Pretoria Hebrew Congregation in 1980<sup>17</sup>. The Brenner family eventually decided to sell the synagogue in 1998 to the Old Mutual Insurance Company for R480 000. An agreement was reached between the SAJBD and the Brenner family that the capital would be invested in the name of

the Zoutpansberg Hebrew Congregation and the interest would be donated to charities of their choice<sup>18</sup>. The Brenner family will continue to control the trust until the last male Brenner either leaves South Africa or dies. Thereafter, the SAJBD will control the trust.

The Messina Hebrew Congregation was founded in 1937<sup>19</sup>. There are two Jewish cemeteries, an old and a new cemetery. In 1939, Mr S Steingold was the congregation's chairman and Mr A Bloom was the secretary<sup>20</sup>. In the early years, High Holy Day services were conducted with the help of a *Ba'al Tefillah* from Johannesburg, who brought a *Sefer Torah* with him. The Messina community never employed a minister. Services were held in the Masonic hall or later in the home of Mr Abe Flax on the High Holy Days. They used a *Sefer Torah* which was lent by the SAJBD from 1973 and kept in Abe Flax's home<sup>21</sup>. The Messina Congregation hosted Jewish servicemen from the nearby army camp on *Shabbat* and Festivals. The last *minyan* was held in 1987.

Although ground was given by the municipality to build a synagogue in the 1950s, the small number of Jewish families did not warrant its actual construction. The Messina municipality alleges that as the property for the synagogue was donated to the Messina Hebrew Congregation, and because no synagogue was ever built on this property, they reserve the right to reclaim the property without payment. Mr Jack Klaff, the last remaining member, is still negotiating with the Messina municipality in the name of the Messina Hebrew Congregation<sup>22</sup>.

A Young Israel Society was already present in Messina in 1927<sup>23</sup>. A Messina Jewish Ladies Sewing Circle was in existence in 1939<sup>24</sup>, and a Messina Women's Zionist Society in 1946 with Mrs B Flax as chairman and Mrs P Klaff as secretary<sup>25</sup>. The regional ministry system, as referred to above in connection with the Louis Trichardt community, was used to assist the Messina Jewish community. Pupils travelled to Louis Trichardt, where they were taught by the Pietersburg minister. However, this was not very successful due to the long distances and bad roads they had to travel. At other times, local mothers taught the children using the SAJBD's Mother-Teacher Scheme. Mrs Elsa Roth from Beit Bridge taught the children twice a week from 1974 to 1984.

The largest number of Jews in the Messina area appears to have been in the 1940s at which time 65 Jewish souls were recorded. This number dropped to 36 in 1943<sup>26</sup>, then to 30 Jews [nine families] in 1953, then decreasing to 20 Jews [seven families] in 1964 and by 1980 there were 17 souls left<sup>27</sup>. Sadly only Jack and Dina Klaff remained in Messina by 2003. Jack Klaff was mayor of Messina several times. He was involved with the establishment of De Beers Mining Company in Messina and in 1991 was selected as property baron of the year for the Far Northern branch of the Institute of Estate Agents.

The Potgietersrus Hebrew Congregation was founded in 1927. It was later known as the Potgietersrus and Districts Hebrew Congregation. The earliest Jewish settlers included the Schmahmann family. They owned a shop in Slypsteendrift from before 1899, when their son Sascha fought for the Boers in the Anglo-Boer War [see Chapter 3]. Mr F D Cohen, a farmer in the Potgietersrus district from 1904, was one of the

first people to open an account when Barclays Bank opened a branch in the town<sup>28</sup>. Rev M I Reichenberg, who came from Warsaw, was the only recorded minister in 1928. In the 1930s services were held on the High Holy Days in Holly Hall, a local hall attached to Mrs Holly's tearoom. Mr A Donde owned a *Sefer Torah* which he kept in a special cupboard in his home. Later as the number of members decreased, the services were held in private homes. In the 1960s Friday evening services were conducted once a month by Mr Donde, alternating between Potgietersrus, Marble Hall and other towns in the region, followed by a communal dinner<sup>29</sup>.

According to the regional ministries system, Rev J I Levine of Pietersburg was to have visited Potgietersrus from 1950. Unfortunately, due to his failing health he was assisted by Rabbi I Hazdan of Warmbaths from 1953 to 1959<sup>30</sup>. Over the years, various ministers [Revs I L Mannschein, J Scherer and W Wolfson] came from Pietersburg to perform *schechita* and to teach the children Hebrew classes. From 1964, kosher meat was obtained from Pietersburg<sup>31</sup>. From 1966 to 1967 Mrs Ruth Gordon, a qualified Hebrew teacher who moved to Potgietersrus, established a *Talmud Torah* for the children. She taught Sonia Bloom for her *Batmitzvah* in 1967, the first such ceremony held in Potgietersrus<sup>32</sup>. Thereafter, mothers used the SAJBD Mother-Teacher programme. Around 1958 there was a Potgietersrus and District Women's Zionist Society with Mrs R Donde as chairlady<sup>33</sup>.

In the 1950s, the Potgietersrus Jewish community was associated with the Warmbaths Hebrew Congregation, but from the 1960s, there was a closer association with the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation. In the 1970s the few remaining congregants became members of the PHC. Family days in Pietersburg under the auspices of the

SAJBD encouraged the Jews of the Northern Transvaal to meet and forge closer ties with each other.

The Jewish population of the Potgietersrus area is reported to have consisted of 56 Jews in 1943, with nine living in Sterkwater and 16 in Zebedelia<sup>34</sup>. By 1953, the number had dropped to 25 in Potgietersrus and 14 in Zebedelia<sup>35</sup>. However, in 1959 the number of Jews was recorded as 63, because the South African Jewish Yearbooks included the Jews in the surrounding district. By 1964 the number had decreased to 18 families with 56 souls. There were 15 Jews living in Steilloopbrug in 1973. Unfortunately, by the mid-1980s there were only 16 Jews left in Potgietersrus, 10 in Steilloopbrug and one soul left in Zebediela<sup>36</sup>. By 2003 only the Albers family was left in Potgietersrus. The official South African census records show that there were 110 Jews in 1936 and 105 in 1951 in Potgietersrus, which does not tally with the Jewish records. However, by 1980 the census records 15 Jews and by 1991, five Jews, which is more in line with the Jewish records.

In order to build a synagogue, the Potgietersrus Congregation became the registered owners of Erf 194, Potgietersrus on 30 April 1928<sup>37</sup>. As the erf was to be used solely for religious purposes, it had no resale value and only minimum rates were charged. The congregation was always too small to build and maintain a synagogue. Although the idea of erecting a communal hall was first put forward in 1957, nothing came of these plans<sup>38</sup>. In 1976 the erf was rezoned for flat rights and the congregation was no longer able to pay the higher rates. An offer from the local Dutch Reformed Church to buy the erf was rejected. Chief Rabbi B M Casper ruled that a property that was designated for Jewish religious use could not be sold to members of another religion



for their religious use. Also the congregation was obliged to return the property to the municipality. After a meeting of the Town Council on 28 June 1976 it was agreed to refund the rates to the congregation. This was on condition that the erf would be transferred to the Town Council and that all rates were paid up to date. The transfer of erf 194, 89 Pretorius Street, from the Potgietersrus Hebrew Congregation to the Potgietersrus Town Council was registered at the Deeds Office on 7 December 1976. The municipality paid the congregation R2665.04 on 20 May 1977. This money was invested and the interest used to maintain the cemetery under the country communities department of the SAJBD. The *Sefer Torah* was loaned to the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation<sup>39</sup>.

A Potgietersrus Helping Hand and Burial Society was originally founded with the name Pietpotgietersrust Helping Hand and Burial Society but the date of its origin is not known. Mr M A Weizmann was the secretary in 1929. Mr Louis Hersh was instrumental in acquiring land for the cemetery in Potgietersrus around 1925 and a *Tahara* House was built. However, Mr I W Schlesinger, owner of the Zebedelia Citrus Estates, one of the largest citrus estates in the world at that time, chose to be buried on his Zebedelia farm on 13 March 1949. He was buried by the Pietersburg *Chevrah Kadisha* and the burial plot was consecrated by Rev J I Levine. Schlesinger's wife Mabel was also buried on the farm. A memorial gate was consecrated at the Potgietersrus Cemetery in 1959, in the name of the late Mr John Fisher, by the Pietersburg *Chevrah Kadisha*<sup>40</sup>. The Potgietersrus cemetery has been looked after by the Potgietersrus municipality from 1977 under the country communities department of the SAJBD.

Duiwelskloof had the small number of 10 Jews [three families] in 1955, going right down to only one couple in 1964<sup>41</sup>. The Jews of Tzaneen, Soekmekaar, Duiwelskloof, Haenertsberg, Phalaborwa and Gravelotte never had any Jewish facilities, so they used those of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation when needed. They usually came to Pietersburg for services on *Shabbat* and festivals, if they could not raise their own *minyans*. They sourced their kosher meat and *Pesach* products from Pietersburg. When they died, they were buried in the Pietersburg cemetery.

In the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, because the rural Jews felt that their children required a Jewish education, they began to migrate to Pietersburg. As a result, the size of the Jewish congregation in Pietersburg increased. Community records show that Pietersburg's Jewish population was at its highest in 1943 when there were 369 Jews. The white population of Pietersburg was 6500 in 1946. In 1951, the official National Census indicated that the number of Jews in Pietersburg was 323. However, by 1959, the number showed a decrease to 246 as members left the area for the larger cities<sup>42</sup>. By 1964, after the time of Rev J I Levine's death, Rabbi E J Duschinsky recorded in his report to the SAJBD that the number had decreased further to 216 members [72 families]<sup>43</sup>. The PHC minutes record 150 souls in 1967 but by 1985, there were only 64 members left in Pietersburg. By 1992, the community no longer had the members or resources to retain a fulltime minister.

At the beginning of the 1920s, the Pietersburg community decided that the time had come to build their own synagogue as the congregation consisted of about 70 members<sup>44</sup>. The deed of transfer number 14180 for erf number 485 situated in Boven

and Jorissen Streets in Pietersburg was signed on 30 September 1919. The amount of purchase was £675<sup>45</sup>. The deed was between:

Ockert Jacobus Oosthuizen who had power of attorney for Lodewicus Lourens Johannes Visser and The Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation Its Successors-in-Title to transfer Certain Erf No. 485, situate in Boven and Jorissen Streets in the Town of Pietersburg Measuring 200 square roods; Extending as Deed of Grant No. 4489/1896, with Diagram annexed, made in favour of Andries Petrus Johannes Digne on 27 August, 1896, and subsequent Deeds of Transfer the last of which No. 641/1914, made in favour of Appearer's Constituent on 7 February, 1914....

Finally the congregation very proudly laid the foundation stone of their synagogue/communal hall in Jorissen Street in 1921. The minutes of the congregation from that day report that:

on the 19<sup>th</sup> day of June 1921 at 3 p.m. a huge gathering, including gentiles gathered to lay the foundation stone of the new synagogue. Mr Herman, the chairman of the congregation, Mr B Levy, the secretary and Mr W Cohen<sup>46</sup>, as well as the committee, appeared on the platform. The Reverend Mr Cohen intoned the prayers usual to such a ceremony. The stone was laid by Mr W Cohen of Mara, a popular choice chosen by the committee as he was well known by all those present. A silver trowel was presented to Mr Cohen by Mr Herman in appreciation of services rendered. Mr Herman appealed for more donations and the public obliged with the sum of £221.18.0. The inscription on the stone reads: 'Foundation stone laid by W. Cohen the 13<sup>th</sup> day of Sivan 5681, the 19<sup>th</sup> day of June 1921.' In the evening a social was held at the Royal Hotel

kindly lent for the occasion by Mr Solsky and was attended by the whole community.

The architect of the building was a Mr Higgins. The making of the seats was allocated to a certain Mr Engelbrecht<sup>47</sup> of Pietersburg. Funds were raised from donations and from functions such as a dance held by the ladies. An overdraft of £1100 was taken out at the Nederlands Bank. By 12 October 1921, the communal hall had been completed and the Annual General Meeting [AGM] was held there on that date. At that meeting, the chairman Mr Herman said:<sup>48</sup>

I have to congratulate you gentlemen for having your own place of worship this year. I am sure we can all be proud of seeing that long wish has at last been fulfilled, and that we have our own place of worship. We had a lot of struggle to get it. Perhaps the building does not fall in with the wishes of all of us, but we have had it built to the best of our ability and means. Let us hope the time is not far when we will have the Hall enlarged, and made a more elaborate building.

The founders of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation were Messrs W [Patsy] Cohen, Simon Frenkel, Marcus Rosenberg, Barnard Herman, Joseph Kallmeyer, Herman Hirschmann, Max Israelsohn, Wolf Israelsohn, Jacob Hirschmann, Adolph Israelsohn and Herman Eichholz<sup>49</sup>. The committee of the PHC in 1921 consisted of Mr Barney Herman as chairman, Mr Ben Levy as secretary and the members Max Israelsohn, Herman Eichholz, Solly Marcus, Sam Palte, S. Kramer and Julius Kruger. Meetings of the committee first took place in Mr Herman's office but were transferred to the communal hall after it was completed<sup>50</sup>.

The services were conducted from a high table placed near the back of the hall in front of where the ladies sat. In 1931 a Dr Obersen<sup>51</sup> presented the congregation with a *bimah*. A *chupah* was donated by Mr and Mrs Sam Palte in 1937. Seats were allocated to members for the High Holy Day services. The six seats next to the Ark were allotted at £75 each to Messrs Sam Palte, Max Israelsohn and Wolf Israelsohn on the one side and Messrs Barney Herman, Jack Kallmeyer and Julius Kruger on the other side. The allotment of the remaining seats for the High Holy Days resulted in considerable debate every year. This contentious matter was finally resolved by drawing for seats by ballot.

The PHC was growing so rapidly that in 1931 it was decided to investigate the feasibility of building a new synagogue. It was to take over 20 years from the first time the idea was mooted, before a new synagogue was built in Pietersburg. This long journey is chronicled in detail in the minute books of the PHC committee. Indecision and a lack of drive seem to have been the main causes of the delay. The first step was taken when a building fund sub-committee was appointed at the AGM of the congregation. In August 1933, Mrs L Herman and the ladies committee of the congregation organized a 'hidden talent' evening [talent contest] to collect money for synagogue funds. At the 1934 AGM, the congregation approved, in principle, to build a new synagogue. The community continued to increase in size and by 1939, there were insufficient seats for everyone on the High Holy Days. Because of World War II, the matter was left in abeyance until the 1942 AGM, when the synagogue committee was instructed to devise ways and means to build a new synagogue. Mr Palte ensured that a building fund was again established. In 1944, he once more raised the matter of building the new synagogue. At the May 1945 synagogue committee

meeting, it was decided that as the estimations for extensions to the communal hall were too high [£820 and £850], funds would be raised to build a new synagogue instead.

A sub-committee was appointed to formulate a policy for the allocation of seats in the new synagogue, as this had always been a problem in the past. At the 1945 AGM, it was decided that every member would be allocated a seat even if they had not contributed to the building fund. By this time they had collected £1500. It was decided that if the building had not been started within five years, the money collected would be refunded. In November 1946, the architect Mr Monte Bryer was asked to submit plans for the synagogue. On 21 July 1947 the committee decided to ask the architects to proceed with the preparation of the estimates of the costs for 300 worshippers on the ground floor and 200 in the gallery. A special committee was appointed consisting of the congregation committee as well as Messrs Max Miller, B Meyer, M L Marcus, A J Lewis, L Danzig, S Rakusin, L Brenner, H Cohen and Solly Israelsohn. Mr H Manaschewitz, a local land surveyor, prepared a site plan in October 1947 for the architects. In 1947, women were allowed onto the synagogue committee for the first time and the Pietersburg Jewish Women's Guild was formed. They helped to raise money for the new synagogue. Chief Rabbi L I Rabinowitz visited Pietersburg and addressed a meeting in aid of the new synagogue funds.

The various builders who were asked for quotes were Messrs Houston Bros, John Watt, Jacobs and Stewart, J T Laubscher, Volhand and Molenaar and W Campbell. In April 1948, the architects decided the tender of Messrs Volhand and Molenaar would be accepted in principle. The congregation paid £217 10 in May 1948 to Messrs

Monte Bryer, which was to be credited against their account if the project was to be continued. On 8 May 1950, at a special committee meeting, the committee decided the scheme could only be proceeded with, if they could collect £10,000 and the cost of the building could be reduced to £18,000.

The congregation wrote to the building controller asking that the building of the synagogue should receive priority. It was also decided to ask Senator Tom Naude to support their application, which he did. Despite all these preparations, in June 1950, there was a difference in opinion amongst the members of the committee as to whether the time was appropriate to proceed with the actual building. It was felt that all efforts in collecting money should rather be directed towards the Emergency Campaign for Israel instead<sup>52</sup>. Despite the fact that Messrs Monte Bryer sent a cheque for 110 guineas on 8 September 1950 as a donation to the building fund, a letter was received from Monte Bryer in October stating that the project had been deferred. The reason given was that they could not reduce the cost of the synagogue without radical alterations to the plan, which would involve payment of more fees. The full balance of the account of Monte Breyer of £209-09-0 was paid.

At a special committee meeting in March 1951, Mr S Rakusin reported a meeting with Mr Cooper of Messrs Cooper & Hellman, architects in Johannesburg, who could design a building for £14-15,000 for 300 men and 200 women. The Permanent Building Society was willing to assist with a loan. By April the sketch had been reduced to a building seating 200 men and 150 women as the earlier size would have cost £17,000. Builders were told they would not be allowed to work on Saturdays or Jewish Festivals. Tenders were received from W Campbell at £14,953, J T Laubscher

at £18-500-0, Vorster Bros at £14-228-02, John Watt cost price plus 10% and Volhand & Mollenaar £18,000. The tender went to Vorster Bros and was accepted at a special general meeting of the congregation on 8 July 1951 for the sum of £14-228-02. Norman & Company, a hardware company, signed surety for Vorster Bros for 10% of the contract price.

South African Mutual Life Assurance Society was asked for a loan on erven 527 and 458. They only agreed to grant a loan at 5½ % for 20 years provided five prominent members of the congregation bound themselves as sureties and revealed their balance sheets. After protracted negotiations, the committee failed to obtain a loan with acceptable terms. Instead an approach was made to the Standard Bank of South Africa Ltd, which agreed in November to give an overdraft of £7,000 on security of the first mortgage bond over the two erven. Repayment was to be £100 per month. A special general meeting in December 1951 gave approval for this agreement. The eventual cost of the building of the synagogue was £18,000<sup>53</sup>. The tender for the electrical work by Messrs Roomes Radio and Electrical Service Depot was accepted. Rev J I Levine's suggestion that the new synagogue be given a name was rejected. Building began in January 1952.

Mr A J Lewis and other members proposed the enlargement of the communal hall, which could then be used for various functions<sup>54</sup>. A permanent *sukkah*, kitchen and verandah were to be built on the south side. Mr Lewis undertook with Mr L Danzig to supervise the building project. This proposal was unanimously approved at a special general meeting of the congregation in January 1952. A separate committee and bank account was approved for this purpose. 38 people had been approached and the sum



of £1100 had already been collected. Mr Ralstein<sup>55</sup> from Zimbabwe, Max Brenner's brother-in-law, donated £300 towards the building of the *sukkah*. The Women's Guild advised on the layout of the kitchen. In December 1952 Mr E Levin was advised to obtain tenders to renovate the minister's house. This house was situated adjacent to the communal hall. Mr J van Waardhuizen was awarded the tender for £587.

The ceremony of the laying of the foundation stones was held on Sunday 14 September 1952 at 2:30 p m. The chairman Mr Ben Levy laid the foundation stone of the new synagogue and Mr Palte laid a second stone to the memory of the late Mr Barney Herman. The inscriptions on the stones read:

This foundation stone was laid by Ben Levy, president of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation

This stone was laid by S. Palte on behalf of the Pietersburg Congregation in memory of Barnard Herman in grateful appreciation of his services as President of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation for 34 years. 14<sup>th</sup> September 1952.'

Both these men were presented with trowels for laying the stones. Mr S Rakusin as the chairman of the building sub-committee and Mr S Marcus as the oldest member of the community presented the trowels. A cylinder was placed under the foundation stone containing the latest copies of the *Zoutpansberg Review*, *Zionist Record*, *South African Jewish Times*, Afrikaans newspapers, as well as a list of the names of the past presidents of the congregation and of the present committee. About 300 people attended the ceremony, including the mayor of Pietersburg, Mr D J Naude. He delivered a message from his brother Mr J F [Tom] Naude, then Minister of Posts and

Telegraphs, in which he praised the Jewish pioneers of Pietersburg. Also present were representatives of several churches and Mr P P Hugo, Member of the Provincial Council. A tea was held in the town hall after the ceremony<sup>56</sup>. A roof wetting ceremony was held by October 1952.

A delegation of the PHC committee was sent to Johannesburg to investigate the purchase of light fittings, seats, the *bimah* and the *Aron Kodesh* in February 1953. An order was placed in April with Messrs Central Cabinet Works, Pretoria totalling £2697-16-0 for seats, the pulpits and *bimah* in kiasat wood. A special book was kept in the foyer of the synagogue to record all donations, but its present whereabouts are unknown. Mr Ellis Levine donated £200 towards the *Aron Kodesh*. Light fittings were bought in Johannesburg from Messrs New Era Electric Company [Pty] Ltd. Mr A Skok donated the chandeliers. Mr and Mrs Chummie Hirschmann donated £50 for the marble tablets, on which were engraved the first letters of each commandment in Hebrew, above the *Aron Kodesh*. Although six seats were donated by Jack Hirschmann, and 12 seats by H Danzig, the bulk of the seats were purchased as a result of a donation of £2130 by Mr Louis Brenner. Mrs Colman donated the pulpit in the name of her late father, Mr Pogrund. Mrs A Sacks and Mrs Max Brenner each donated a new *Torah* mantle. The Eternal Light [*ner tamid*] was donated by Mr and Mrs Harry Danzig. Mr S Worms donated two seats, one for the incumbent Rabbi and a seat for a visiting Rabbi, in the names of his daughters Beryl and Marion. Mr Wiener donated and manufactured the balustrade for the back verandah. Thirteen dozen new Singer Daily Prayer Books were donated by various members. Mr Alex Rubin of Salt River donated a large prayer book for use on the *bimah*. Mr H Beron donated a white cloth for the *bimah* in the name of his parents.

Because Messrs L Brenner, S Colman and E Levine had donated the major articles to the synagogue, they were entitled to install plaques in the synagogue commemorating these donations. Mr Louis Brenner and his wife had first choice of seats. The commemoration plaque for the seats reads:

The seats in this Synagogue were presented by Mr and Mrs Louis Brenner in memory of their parents July 12<sup>th</sup> 1953-5713.

For the Aron Kodesh:

This Aron Kodesh was presented by Ellis Levin in memory of his wife Frieda Ella 12<sup>th</sup> July 1953.

For the Pulpit:

This pulpit was presented by Miriam Colman in memory of her Father Morris Pogrund 12<sup>th</sup> July 1953.

The opening ceremony and service of consecration of the new synagogue was held on Sunday, 12 July 1953 at 2 30 p m. It was followed by a reception in the Pietersburg Town Hall. The opening address was given by Mr Samuel Rakusin, chairman of the building committee. The key was presented to Mr Moss Cohen, president of the congregation by Mr A Sacks, vice-president of the congregation. Cantor Israel Alter and choir under the direction of Mr A M Himelsztejn of the Wolmarans Street Synagogue sang '*Mah Tov*' before a procession, headed by the bearers of the *Sifrei Torah*, entered the synagogue. The chandeliers were lit by Mr A Skok and the *ner tamid* by Mr H Danzig. The *minchah* service was led by Rev I L Mannschein and the sermon, prayer of dedication and prayer for the congregation were given by Rev J I Levine. Advocate I A Maisels, the president of the SAJBD and Mr S M Kuper

represented the SAJBD. The mayor and mayoress, as well as ministers of various churches also attended. An article in the *Zionist Record* on 17 July 1953 captures the ethos of the opening ceremony in its description:

Everybody it seems is here, and everybody smiles with a warmth and satisfaction...with a sense of “ours” in a personal way which we who live in cities never feel. Outside in a respectful semi-circle, we sit on our chairs in the hot winter sunshine waiting, almost in a hush of anticipation, as we see the officials collect on the steps of the building...and even the formal speeches take on that sense of “ours”. The doors are open and quietly we go to our assigned places...the women upstairs, from where they watch with pride their sons and husbands proudly bearing the Scrolls of the Law, to halt before the Ark. Then a hitch occurs as no lights come on at the appointed moment. Everyone is trying to attract somebody’s attention. The only one who knows where the vital switch is, is a young boy hidden behind the weight of one of the Holy Scrolls. An elder hastens to his aid and soon the lights twinkle through their star-studded shades. The Scrolls are committed to the Ark, the moment of holy dedication.<sup>57</sup>

Rev Levine was a driving force behind the building of the new synagogue in 1953. In his annual report the following year he enthused how the new synagogue had brought a renewed spirit to the members. The first committee meeting was held in the new synagogue committee room on 29 July 1953. The chairman congratulated all who had worked towards the great achievement of a new synagogue. He declared that everyone, Jew and Gentile, had been deeply impressed with the opening ceremony.

Monty, Leon and Adele Lewis donated the fence surrounding the synagogue. It was decorated with *menorahs* and was made by Wiener's Engineering. A ceremony was held for the erection of the commemoration stone inlaid into the fence. Entertainment followed after the ceremony.

The plaque read:

This fence was erected by Monty, Leon and Adele Lewis in memory of their grandparents Israel David and Doba Itel Lewis May 1954 - Iyar 5714.

The new *sukkah* was formally opened by John and Sylvia Brenner on *Succoth* 1954. In 1957 a standing electric *menorah* made by Mr Morris Wiener was donated by Mrs D Manaschewitz. As Mrs Manaschewitz had been a member of the Guild, the Guild paid to have a plaque placed on the *menorah* inscribed with the words:

Presented by Mrs Dora Manaschewitz August 1957 in memory of the 6 million Jews who perished under the Nazi Regime.

It was found that the electrical wiring to the light fittings in the old section of the hall was dangerous and had to be replaced in May 1961. It was also decided that the outside toilets of the communal hall were to be used by the men and the inside toilets were for the use of the women. A framework was made to hide the two outside toilets. Later, the old toilets outside the communal hall were broken down and both men and women used the inside toilets. A handrail on the steps of the synagogue for the use of the elderly was designed by Mr Geoff Goddard and manufactured in Pretoria. A light was donated by Mr Wally Levy outside the synagogue as it was difficult to negotiate the steps. Mr J M Walgenbach was paid £250 for the erection of two servant's rooms on the synagogue property. In 1955, the wall to the anteroom was

broken out so that the benches could be stored there in bad weather. The garden was looked after by the Jewish Women's Guild but the costs were borne by the PHC.

An ongoing problem for the congregation was that they had no other income except from subscriptions and donations. Various suggestions were made in an attempt to solve the monetary problem. In July 1962, Mr M Chaitow, the vice-chairman of the synagogue committee, as well as Mr J Meyer, recommended that as the minister's house had become old and had to be demolished, a double-story block of flats could be erected in its place, costing approximately R40,000. They believed there would be no problem in obtaining a loan and it would be a steady source of income for the community. One of the flats would be available for an assistant minister. In time this could also have resulted in a reduction of subscriptions. At the 1962 AGM, the congregation voted 24 against and 11 for the proposal. The congregation was to regret this decision as the income from renting out the flats would have solved the congregation's economic problems.

Another suggestion was made that a new house could be built for the minister for the amount of R8-10,000 but this would not bring in any income. A proposal in 1964 to buy the corner house opposite the synagogue was adopted by 24 votes to 16 with the amendment that occupation would be given within three months. However, as they could not get occupation within the three months, the PHC committee decided instead to build on the site of the minister's old house. A special general meeting was called to approve the plans and tenders for building the new house. The building committee organized that the minister's old house would be demolished without cost to the congregation, the materials to accrue to the demolisher and this was accepted by the

committee. J Watt's tender of R11,100 was recommended to the congregation and was unanimously accepted at a special general meeting on 20 May 1964. The congregation had R4,750 available for the house. The committee was given the right to raise the necessary finance and the plan of the house was approved. Later beams for a *succah* were added to the plan. The synagogue was repainted at the same time. The non-Jewish architects Day and Goddard generously only charged the congregation a nominal fee.

In June 1965, the committee discussed whether they should repair or rebuild the *Tahara* House at the cemetery although there was no money available. However it was announced in November 1965 that an anonymous donor had made the funds available to build a new *Tahara* House. On 15 March 1966 new sketch plans to the value of R2,800 were approved by the committee subject to the approval of the donor and the *Chevrah Kadisha*. In September 1966, the chairman announced with gratitude that the anonymous donor was Mr Solly Colman. He had donated the new *Tahara* House at the cemetery in the name of his late wife Miriam, who had died in childbirth [see chapter 7].

Rev Joseph Lekganyane of the Zion Christian Church approached the chairman. He requested that he be authorized to obtain a copy of the plan of the synagogue with a view to erecting a similar building for the purposes of his church. The chairman authorized Lekganyane to obtain a copy from the municipality or the architect if the architect's copyright would not be infringed. The church building was built at Zion City Moriah, near Pietersburg.

In 1992, after Rev B Lerer left Pietersburg, it was decided to rent out the minister's house to an elderly couple. The bedroom furniture from the house was installed in the back rooms of the synagogue to be used by visiting Rabbis. A geyser and a shower were also installed in the synagogue for their use.

In January 1994, the treasurer, Mr D Wiener, suggested that a sub-committee should be formed to decide on the future of the congregation because of its poor financial situation.

On 20 February 1994, the sub-committee recommended that negotiations should be carried out with the Moolman Group to sell the communal hall and house. An offer was received from the Moolman Group consisting of<sup>58</sup>:

- 1] an offer of R780,000 for erf 485 [the house and hall]
- 2] an offer of R100,000 for the portion of erf 527 up to the flagpole.
- 3] The Moolman Group undertook to erect at cost price a building on the southern side of the synagogue, which would incorporate a hall, toilets, a kitchen and servant's room within 120 days. There would be a ceiling price of R160,000 plus a contingency allowance of R10,000.
- 4] The total cash surplus after the sale should be about R700,000 and this amount would be invested with the Moolman Group against the security of the congregation having a first bond over erf 485. Interest would be at prime commercial rate equal to R105 000 p a with four months notice period by either party.
- 5] There would be a servitude on erf 485 in which the Moolman Group would pay a percentage of the income from the property towards a fund set up for the upkeep of the Jewish cemetery.



6] The Moolman Group reserved first right of refusal for the balance of erf 527 when it became available.

A valuation by a sworn valuator had been received at R800,000 for erf 485 and R350,000 for erf 527. The proposal was accepted unanimously by all present at the committee meeting. As a result, the treasurer Mr D Wiener undertook to negotiate with Mr J Moolman. A letter was sent to the congregation by the synagogue committee calling for a special general meeting on 13 March 1994 in terms of Section 4 of the constitution under the heading 'Alienation of the Immovable Property'. 33 members of the congregation attended the meeting. They were informed that the congregation could no longer survive financially. The proposal that the property would be sold and the Moolman Group offer would be accepted was unanimously adopted.

The building committee proposed that the Moolman Group be asked to draw up provisional plans for a new hall. Special attention was to be given to the planning of a kosher kitchen and a *succah*. The deed of sale was signed by Messrs L Levy and D Wiener. On 17 April 1994 the plan for the new hall was tabled. Ladies who kept kosher homes assisted in the plans for the new kitchen, together with Mr Mike Fisher, who installed the fittings at a reduced price. Because there was no minister the ladies had to take on the onus of ensuring that the kitchen was kept kosher. The foundation stone from the Jacob Levine Communal Hall was mounted in one wall of the Wally Levy Communal Hall. The budget for the hall overran by R33 000 because the size of the hall was increased. The Moolman Group generously wrote off the cost overrun as a gesture of goodwill.

The new hall was officially opened on 5 March 1995 by Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris. A *mezuzah* was affixed on the entrance of the hall by Rabbi Silberhaft, the country communities Rabbi. The ceremony was preceded by a service at the Pietersburg Jewish cemetery to bury old religious books and a *possel Sefer Torah*. Mr Solly Starkowitz led the service which was attended by many ex-Pietersburgers. A luncheon considered by the visitors to be of a very high standard was catered for by the Pietersburg Jewish Women's Guild. A video was made of the event and copies were sold to cover the costs.

On 3 June 1995, the Moolman Group asked for a second bond on the property in order to restructure their finances. As the congregation held the first bond and the prime rate at that time was 17½ %, the committee decided rather to increase the original bond.

In November 2001, when it was decided to sell the synagogue, the original developer, the Moolman Group, offered to buy the remaining extension of stand 527 for R900,000. The PHC would have unfettered use of the property for 15 months. The contents of the Pietersburg synagogue would be installed in the new synagogue that was to be built in Tel Mond, Israel. The plaques and memorabilia from the Pietersburg synagogue would be displayed on a wall especially made for this purpose. This would ensure that the memory of the Pietersburg synagogue would be perpetuated for posterity. This proposal was agreed to on 4 March 2002 by the Pietersburg congregation after a stormy meeting that resulted in one member physically assaulting another [see Chapter 11].

An article appeared in the *Zoutpansberg Review* 11 July 2002 'Last Synagogue in Limpopo protected' written by reporter Liza Jay. The article stated that the Pietersburg synagogue had been declared a national monument by the Heritage Foundation. This came as a surprise to the PHC and there was much speculation as to who could have been behind this move<sup>59</sup>. Notices were put up around the synagogue by the National Heritage Foundation, which stated that nothing could be removed from the premises. The PHC was afraid that the Heritage Foundation would not permit the sale of the synagogue building, and would prevent the shipping of the synagogue's contents to Israel. The Executive of the committee wrote a letter to Mr Ron Viney of the South African Heritage Resource Agency. In it they explained that once the synagogue had been deconsecrated, it no longer held any traditional, sentimental, architectural, religious or financial significance to the Jews and there was no merit from their point of view in preserving the building. Subsequently, a meeting was held with Mr R Viney on 17 September 2002. It was attended by Mr D and Mrs C Wiener, Mr Wally Levy and Mr S Starkowitz of the PHC committee. Mr R Viney explained he had put the building under provisional protection for a maximum of two years to prevent the building being damaged or destroyed. During that time he could investigate if there was a threat to the building. He considered the building to be a good example of 1950's modernism with a classical modern entrance. As the Heritage Foundation had been criticized in the past about the lack of a memorial to the Jews in Louis Trichardt, he also wanted to preserve the building as a memorial to the Jewish community. Mrs C Wiener informed him that the synagogue building was not unique in the district, as the Zion Christian Church had used the same plans for their church building. As she was writing a history of the Jews of Pietersburg, that would be a

memorial in itself. On 25 September 2002 the South African Heritage Resources Agency withdrew the notice of protection from erf 527. Ironically after the synagogue was sold, the premises were hired by the South African Heritage Resources Agency itself. A memorial stone detailing the history of the Pietersburg Jewish community was erected at the entrance to the Pietersburg cemetery.

A de-consecration service for the Pietersburg synagogue was held by Rabbi Silberhaft on Friday evening 31 January 2003. The contents of the synagogue's kitchen were handed over to the Selwyn Segal Hostel in Johannesburg. The synagogue was closed and its contents were shipped to Israel. The library was transferred to the SAJBD Library.

At first, the Zoutpansberg Hebrew Congregation served the needs of the few scattered Jews throughout the Northern Transvaal. Later, with the growth of the various communities, separate congregations were formed. All these satellite communities looked towards Pietersburg with its synagogue and ministers as the centre of their Jewish needs. Eventually with the demise of the satellite communities, Jews moved to Pietersburg or to other large centres in South Africa. A new synagogue was built to accommodate the expanding community. The trend of the declining small communities in the rest of South Africa was mirrored in the demise of the Jewish community of Pietersburg and the departure of its members to the larger centres.

The synagogue was the most important building for the small Jewish country communities as their Jewish identity was centred within it. Because of the importance of the synagogue, the closure of this building was symbolic of the demise of the

community. The closure can become a point of contention by some of the remaining members of the congregation as it is often the only manifestation of their Jewish identity.

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NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Jewish Year Book: London 1951 edition. Edited by Hugh Harris. Jewish Chronicle publications: London, 1896/97-1965. Incomplete.

<sup>2</sup> *Zionist Record*.

<sup>3</sup> Jewish Year Book: London, *op. cit.*

<sup>4</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file K 24 November 1914.

<sup>5</sup> *South African Jewish Year Book* 1955. Edited by Leon Feldberg. Fielding Publishing House Ltd: Johannesburg, 1955, p. 247. South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file K 6 August 1912.

<sup>6</sup> The Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation correspondence of 23 June 1962 contains a list compiled by the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation committee of the chairmen of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation up to 1962. The information also comes from the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minute books. The South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file SA 1914, p. 7 and 1918, p. 327 refers to S Kaufmann being the president between 1917 and 1918. However, this contradicts with the minute books that Barnard Herman was president for 34 years from 1916 until 1950 when he died.

<sup>7</sup> The first grave in the Louis Trichardt Jewish cemetery was that of Mrs Miriam Lewis in 1907, in the Potgietersrus Jewish cemetery, that of Ida Susser in 1930 and in the Messina Jewish cemetery that of Wilfred Levine in 1945.

<sup>8</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Matzah Board Survey 1943. *South African Jewish Year Book* 1959/60. Edited by Leon Feldberg. Fielding Publishing House: Johannesburg, 1959. South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file W, p. 544.

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Nat Himmelhoch, a descendent of Sachne Himmelhoch in Israel, 2002.

<sup>10</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives country communities Rabbis reports: Rabbi G M Engel's report 18 June 1975.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* file SA p. 313 and p. 721

<sup>12</sup> Brenner Mills became a public company in 1987. Chaim Brenner was joined in the business by his sons Arnold, Stanley and Maish.

<sup>13</sup> Leon Klaff is a brother of Jack Klaff, the mayor of Messina and they both grew up in Messina. Leon and Sarah Klaff moved to Israel in 1985 but returned to Louis Trichardt in 1993.

<sup>14</sup> A home study course in 'Judaism for country children'. This material was compiled for Jewish mothers to use to teach their children in rural communities. The material consisted of gramophone records, books and work books for the children. South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives: country communities Rabbi's reports: Letter from Rabbi E J Dushinsky, country communities Rabbi to rural communities 17 January 1966.

<sup>15</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives country communities Rabbi's reports.

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- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* Rabbi G M Engel's Report 1972.
- <sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* 1980.
- <sup>18</sup> *Ibid.* Rabbi M Silberhaft: Louis Trichardt.
- <sup>19</sup> The Messina Hebrew Congregation celebrated its Golden Anniversary on 26 September 1987. An invitation was sent to the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation but none of their members attended.
- <sup>20</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives correspondence.
- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.* country communities Rabbi's reports: letter written to Rabbi G M Engel 8 July 1974.
- <sup>22</sup> Interview with Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, country communities Rabbi.
- <sup>23</sup> *Zionist Record* 1927.
- <sup>24</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives country communities Rabbi's reports: Dwolatsky file 33.3, 1939.
- <sup>25</sup> Jewish Year Book London, *op. cit.* 1947.
- <sup>26</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives Matzah Board Survey 1943.
- <sup>27</sup> *Ibid.* Surveys.
- <sup>28</sup> Eeufees-Album/Centenary Album 1854 - 1954. Compiled by A J Combrink. Edited by A C J Mellett and J H Barnardo. Die Morester-Drukkery: Potgietersrus, 1954.
- <sup>29</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file A 25 January 1966.
- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* file G 2 February 1950 and 15 February 1950.
- <sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* file A 13 - 24 August 1964.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* file 100A 343. *Jewish Herald* 3 January 1967.
- <sup>33</sup> *Zionist Record* 13 June 1958.
- <sup>34</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives Matzah Board Survey 1943.
- <sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 1953 Survey.
- <sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* country communities Rabbi's reports: Rabbi S A Zaiden's report .
- <sup>37</sup> Memorandum sent to the Potgietersrus Town Council June 1976 that was part of the negotiation process with the Potgietersrus Town Council for the refund of the rates paid over the years.
- <sup>38</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file A 10 November 1957.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* country communities Rabbi's reports: Rabbi G M Engel's Report 1970.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* Rabbi G M Engel's tour 58, 1977.
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* Rabbi E J Dushinsky's Report 1964.
- <sup>42</sup> *South African Jewish Year Book* 1959/60, *op. cit.*

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<sup>43</sup> *South African Jewish Year Book* 1965. Fieldhill Publishing House Ltd: Johannesburg 1965.

<sup>44</sup> This figure comes from the list of donors to the building fund placed under the foundation stone of the communal hall in 1921, together with several newspapers from that time. These were found when the communal hall building was razed. The list is now in the South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives.

<sup>45</sup> Deed of transfer kept in the South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives.

<sup>46</sup> W Cohen refers to ‘Patsy’ Cohen, believed to have been the first Jew to live in the area.

<sup>47</sup> The first names of Messrs Higgins and Engelbrecht are not known.

<sup>48</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation Annual General Meeting minutes 12 October 1921.

<sup>49</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation correspondence sent by the Hon secretary G M Susser to the members concerning the erection of plaques 23 June 1962.

<sup>50</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minutes 22 June 1921

<sup>51</sup> The first name of Dr Obersen is not known.

<sup>52</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation committee correspondence 11 June 1950

<sup>53</sup> Jeppestown Hebrew Congregation built a new synagogue in 1927 for £10 000. A bond of £4500 was needed but times were bad and no institution wanted to take the risk of having to foreclose on a bond over a synagogue. Eventually the money was advanced by the Standard Bank against 30 guarantors, of £150 each. Reznik, Isaac. “The Jeppestown Hebrew Congregation”: In: *Jewish Affairs* Pesach 2003, South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 2003, p. 16. The Wynberg Congregation had a mortgage of £2400 attached to the property when they built their synagogue in 1903. Scher, David and Scher, Lionel. *A Monument to the Generations: Centenary of the Wynberg Synagogue 1905-2005*. Wynberg Hebrew Congregation: Wynberg, 2005, p. 6. Klerksdorp had become an affluent community. When they built a synagogue for 500 people in 1966 the cost of a synagogue had increased to R166000. De Jong, Peter F v B. “The Klerksdorp Hebrew Congregation 1888-2003”. In: *Jewish Affairs* Pesach 2003, South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 2003, p. 19.

<sup>54</sup> Mr and Mrs A J Lewis donated the *parochet* for the Ark in 1948 in celebration of their Golden Wedding anniversary.

<sup>55</sup> The first name of Mr Ralstein is not known.

<sup>56</sup> *Zionist Record* 26 September 1952.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* 17 July 1953.

<sup>58</sup> Correspondence from Moolman Group: East and West Investments to the secretary of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation 16 February 1994.

<sup>59</sup> Mr R Viney informed the Jewish delegation that a Pietersburg Jewish woman mentioned the sale of the synagogue to the reporter at an informal gathering.

## CHAPTER 7

### THE ROLE OF THE *CHEVRAH KADISHA* [BURIAL SOCIETY] IN PIETERSBURG AND ITS SURROUNDING AREAS

The *Chevrah Kadisha* [The Holy Association] is the organization which concerns itself with the burial of the Jewish dead. It was already known in *Talmudic* times. Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi in 1564 at Prague laid the foundations of an efficient burial society which became the model of all similar bodies<sup>1</sup>. There are many customs related to how the dead and mourners are treated. The *Chevrah Kadisha* together with the local Jewish Rabbi has the role of discharging these obligations. The *Chevrah Kadisha* also acquires and maintains the cemeteries. The *Chevrah Kadisha* undertakes the purification process of a corpse before burial<sup>2</sup>. There is a *halachic* Jewish requirement of burial as soon as possible after death<sup>3</sup>. This is regarded as a mark of respect to the deceased. The members of the *Chevrah Kadisha* are usually volunteers, who wash and dress the body and keep watch over the corpse before burial. It is considered the greatest act of kindness as there is no reward for this service. In most towns in South Africa, the work is done voluntarily. In Johannesburg, however, there are a number of paid officials due to the large number of burials. The Witwatersrand Helping Hand and Burial Society was formed in Johannesburg in 1888, and was thus in existence from the very beginning of Jewish communal life in Johannesburg<sup>4</sup>. The *Chevrah Kadisha* society is usually associated with a *Gemilut Chesed* [Helping Hand or Benevolent Society]<sup>5</sup>, whereby Jews in need are helped with loans at no interest or with food.



In the last decade of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the need arose for a Jewish cemetery in Pietersburg as by that time there was a sizeable community. When President Paul Kruger visited Pietersburg in 1896, the Jews of Pietersburg, led by Patsy Cohen and Barnard Herman, came as a deputation to ask Kruger for a plot of land for a Jewish cemetery. The *Landdrost* Senator Munnik<sup>6</sup> reported that Kruger asked: “Why can’t you lie among the rest of my people when you are dead?” Patsy replied that certain ceremonies had to be performed in a building at the gate<sup>7</sup>. The President then asked Senator Munnik how big the Christian cemetery was and he answered four morgen. The President told him to “Instruct Surveyor Devenish to measure off two morgen for them, and send up the diagram and I will issue a title”. When Patsy Cohen asked why they were getting a graveyard only half the size of the Christian cemetery, Kruger instantly replied: “Because you believe in half the Bible”. After much protestation by Cohen, Kruger gave in and allocated four morgen to the Jews because “I acknowledge that you Jews are good and law-abiding citizens wherever you fix your abode, so I will give you four morgen also”.

The first Jew to be buried in the Pietersburg cemetery in 1896 was Mr I Wilensky. Nothing is known about him or where he lived in the area. The next person to be buried was S W Himmelhoch from Louis Trichardt who was buried in 1896 aged 23 [see Appendix III]. Joseph Spiro and Solomon Philip Klisser were buried in 1897. A Burial Society was probably in existence from the time of the establishment of the Pietersburg Jewish Cemetery. No further information is available on the society’s origins<sup>8</sup>. However, in 1913 there was a reference in the *South African Jewish Chronicle* concerning the existence of a Pietersburg Jewish Benevolent and Burial Society<sup>9</sup>. It was duly noted as a constituent body of the South African Jewish Board of

Deputies [SAJBD] at its 1923/5 conference and the society agreed to an annual subscription fee to the SAJBD in 1924. The society was one of the founder organizations of South African Jewry's Endowment Fund created by the SAJBD and its name appears on the Founder's Roll<sup>10</sup>.

A combined special general meeting of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation [PHC], Benevolent and Burial Societies was held on Sunday 24 May 1931, when it was decided to incorporate the Burial Society into the PHC committee. The Burial Society was to be controlled by a sub-committee with Mr Sam Palte as the first president. The Benevolent Society however, was to remain as an independent institution. Bye-laws for the Burial Society were passed at the Annual General Meeting [AGM] of the PHC on 21 September 1931.

In August 1937, Mr A G Jacobson erected a tombstone over his wife's grave without Hebrew characters as was required by the bye-laws of the congregation. This oversight had occurred because all the arrangements had been negotiated through the Pietersburg municipality. The congregation committee decided that future arrangements for Jewish graves were to be handled by the PHC only and not the municipality. Mr Jacobsohn was asked to include the Hebrew lettering on the tombstone and these were duly added.

At the AGM of the PHC in October 1940, it was decided that the Burial Society would have its own banking account for sundry expenses only, but this account was only opened in 1943. At the 1944 AGM, the Burial and Benevolent Societies were amalgamated to assist people in need of monetary support.

In May 1941, Mr Joe Frenkel, in appreciation for the *Chevrah Kadisha's* services at the burial of his father, financed the cost of building a small room at the Pietersburg cemetery. This was to be used as a place where the *Chevrah Kadisha* could watch over corpses prior to their burial<sup>11</sup>, especially in the case of a deceased who had had no home in Pietersburg. Before this, the body was usually kept at the deceased's home where it was watched over by members of the *Chevrah Kadisha*. Funeral processions proceeded to the cemetery from the home of the deceased, often passing the synagogue on the way. The cemetery room was finished in July 1941, and was furnished from members' donations. The Pietersburg municipality would not charge less than eight shillings and six pence for an electrical connection. The committee considered this amount to be too high and for some time utilized a lamp instead of using electricity.

The first record of women serving on the committee was in 1942, when 17 men and 10 women were elected to the *Chevrah Kadisha* committee. Women were also recorded as serving on a women's committee for the *Chevrah Kadisha* in 1948. The chairlady in 1948 was Mrs M Miller and committee members were Mesdames S Gifter, M Sacks, A J Lewis, S Jedwood, B Segal, L Brenner, L Danzig, M Dinkelspiel, H Beron, G Eichholz, H Levin<sup>12</sup>.

In February 1943, due to shortages created by World War II, the *Chevrah Kadisha* in Pietersburg had difficulty in obtaining *tachrichim*, the funeral shrouds in which the dead are clothed, from Johannesburg as there was a shortage of white linen. The

*Chevrah Kadisha* instead devised their own plan and made them up themselves from calico obtained from a retail store in Pietersburg.

Hubert Essakow of Potgietersrus was the son of a Jew, Rubin Essakow and a Gentile woman. He overcame polio as a child to achieve renowned acclaim as a boxer in South Africa. However in 1956, at the age of 21, Hubert was knocked unconscious in a boxing match with Willie Toweel. He lay in a coma for 52 hours before he died. An impromptu service led by Chief Rabbi Rabinowitz was held in the Wolmarans Street Synagogue, Johannesburg to pray for Hubert Essakow and was attended by several well-known sportsmen. The inhabitants of Potgietersrus had always regarded Hubert as a Jew and took it for granted that he would be buried in the Jewish cemetery. They came to ask the local Jews the time of the burial and whether they had to wear hats to a Jewish funeral<sup>13</sup>. The Jewish community was in a predicament as *Halakhically* Hubert was not a Jew, as his mother was a non-Jewess. Because Potgietersrus had no minister, Mr John Fisher phoned Chief Rabbi A H Rabinowitz on behalf of the community to ask his advice. The Chief Rabbi gave his permission for Hubert's burial in the Jewish cemetery. Rev J I Levine and the Pietersburg *Chevrah Kadisha* performed the last rites. The funeral was attended by 2000 mourners. Mr Wally Levy clearly recalls that Rev Levine performed a token *bris* on the body before Hubert was buried<sup>14</sup>. This was unusual as a *bris* is not normally performed on a dead body as it is a desecration of the body.

Mr Wally Levy became chairman of the *Chevrah Kadisha* in 1958 and continued in this capacity for over 40 years. The first funeral that Mr Levy had to supervise was that of his own mother Lena Levy on 28 December 1958. The second one was his

uncle George Eichholz on 5 April 1959. Wally was ably assisted for 20 years by his secretary/treasurer, Morris Wiener, and his vice-chairman Solly Israelsohn. Messrs Levy and Wiener were devoted to the upkeep of the cemetery and inspected it every Sunday morning, so that they could attend to any problems immediately. Numerous reports by the country communities Rabbis over the years have attested to the excellent state of the Jewish cemetery in Pietersburg. Mr Wiener built and donated a trolley to the Burial Society to convey the bodies from the *Tahara* House to the grave side. From 1964 the municipality began charging the *Chevrah Kadisha* for water used at the cemetery. As there were complaints by some members that the money spent on water for the lawn should rather be spent on the living, Messrs Levy and Wiener paid the whole water bill themselves. The fact that they also tipped the workers who cleaned the cemetery attested to their devotion to their work.

When Mr Julius Kruger died in 1961, his life-long friend Senator Tom Naude, a non-Jew, gave £32-18-0 to the *Chevrah Kadisha* for a stone to be erected on his grave<sup>15</sup>. It was very unusual for a non-Jew to erect a stone for a Jew. This is the only stone in the Pietersburg Jewish cemetery with an Afrikaans inscription.

In 1961, the *Chevrah Kadisha* handed over excess funds of £250 to the PHC, according to a ruling in the constitution, and continued to do so. The congregation began to rely heavily on these donations. As a result of the lack of control of their own finances, relations between the *Chevrah Kadisha* and the PHC committee began to deteriorate. The *Chevrah Kadisha* also regretted the interference of the PHC Committee, especially when they changed decisions that had already been made by the *Chevrah Kadisha*<sup>16</sup> [see later]. As a result, the *Chevrah Kadisha* wanted to be

independent of the PHC committee. Several other towns in South Africa established independent volunteer *Chevrah Kadishas*, which combined with Helping Hand societies to help the poor. These include Oudtshoorn established in 1880, Kimberley in 1886, Pretoria in 1897, East London and Bloemfontein in 1902, Kroonstad in 1906, Germiston in 1910, Port Elizabeth in 1914, and Pietermaritzburg in 1919<sup>17</sup>. On the other hand, Paarl transferred the affairs of the *Chevrah Kadisha* to the congregation in 1947, Oudtshoorn's *Chevrah Kadisha* later became a section of the United Hebrew Institutions and both Queenstown and King William's Town's *Chevrah Kadisha* was a sub-committee of the congregation<sup>18</sup>. Some towns had separate Helping Hand societies, such as Potchefstroom. Kimberley established a Benevolent society in 1887, Cape Town a Helping Hand society in 1903, Winburg a Ladies Benevolent society in 1916 and Klerksdorp a Benevolent society in 1920. Both systems, either the independence of the *Chevrah Kadisha* or its incorporation into their congregation committee, appear to have functioned successfully. The problems experienced by the Pietersburg *Chevrah Kadisha* appear to have been unique to the congregation.

An incident occurred that severely disrupted the relationship between the PHC committee and the *Chevrah Kadisha*. In June 1961, the oldest member of the congregation died. Her husband had been an early president of the congregation. A few months prior to her death, she had made representation to the PHC committee requesting to be absolved from paying membership fees, due to her poor state of health and financial affairs. The committee resolved to absolve her from payment. She was however to remain a full member of the congregation. After she died, the burial committee decided to charge her estate £105 for her burial, far in excess of the usual member's fee. The *Chevrah Kadisha* believed that the deceased's estate could afford

to pay this amount as she had left several valuable properties in her estate and they believed she should not have been absolved from membership fees in the first place. The executor of her estate protested at this charge as the deceased had been a full member of the congregation and she had already paid £28 towards the reservation of her grave. The subsequent argument at a synagogue meeting on 21 June 1961 concerning the amount charged, led to the resignation of the executive of the *Chevrah Kadisha*<sup>19</sup>. Despite several pleas for them to withdraw their resignation, the executive remained firm and a new executive was elected. On 16 January 1962, the synagogue committee, after a bitter internal dispute, passed a resolution to only charge the woman's estate the normal member's burial fee.

At the 1963 AGM of the PHC, Mr Wally Levy proposed that the *Chevrah Kadisha* become an independent entity from the congregation<sup>20</sup>. Mr Levy maintained that the *Chevrah Kadisha*'s decisions had often been ignored by the synagogue committee. Fees charged by the *Chevrah Kadisha* had been changed by the PHC committee without consulting them. He felt that the advantage of a separate burial society would be that legacies and donations could be saved up in order to help those who could not afford to pay burial fees. Instead the PHC was using these monies purely to keep the congregation functioning. After a long discussion, the proposal was defeated by 24 votes against and 11 for the proposal. At the same AGM, despite their previous disputes, Mr Levy was again elected chairman and Mr Wiener secretary/treasurer of the *Chevrah Kadisha*. They continued as such until their deaths in 2003 and 1978 respectively<sup>21</sup>. The *Chevrah Kadisha* never managed to function independently of the PHC committee.

As a result of the previous events, on 6 October 1963, the PHC committee and the *Chevrah Kadisha* agreed on a set fee structure. Members of the Pietersburg congregation were to be charged R21 plus disbursements of R10 per set of *tachrichim* and a travelling fee of 10 cents per mile. Non-members were to be charged R300 plus disbursements. A reduction for needy persons could be made at the discretion of the *Chevrah Kadisha* committee and the executive of the congregation. Tombstone charges were to be 15% of total erected cost, with a minimum of R20. The minister was to be paid R4 by the *Chevrah Kadisha* to officiate at the funeral service. Any funds required by the *Chevrah Kadisha* were to be supplied by the congregation. The executive of the Pietersburg *Chevrah Kadisha* decided donations would not be solicited at the grave side from the mourners, as happened in other towns. They believed it was not fitting to take advantage of mourners at their lowest emotional point<sup>22</sup>.

In 1972 the financial reports indicate that the *Chevrah Kadisha* could barely manage financially. Fees were raised from R21 to R42 for members and from R300 to R600 for non-members. The fees for burials and consecrations were increased by the *Chevrah Kadisha* in 1982 in keeping with the rising cost of living. In 1994 burial fees were again adjusted to R500 for members and R1000 for non-members.

In 1962, when a Jewish man was found to have committed suicide in Pietersburg by gassing himself in his car, the executive of the Pietersburg *Chevrah Kadisha* decided not to bury him in the outer section of the cemetery as was the custom in many centres. They believed that the person had not been responsible for his action and they did not want the remaining family to be stigmatized by the burial separation<sup>23</sup>. Today,



more communities are doing away with a burial separation in the case of a suspected suicide, as the belief grows that the deceased is not fully responsible for his actions due to his intense despair. Unless a person announces he is going to commit suicide and then does it in front of witnesses, the issue is always debatable. There is also an unfortunate increase in the number of suicides.

In 1964 a Jewish couple died from gunshot wounds in what was believed to be a suicide pact. They were cremated in Pretoria according to their last will and testament. It is against the Jewish *Halakhah* to be cremated as it is seen as a denial of the belief in resurrection<sup>24</sup>. The *Chevrah Kadisha* could not officially assist in any arrangements, however members of the *Chevrah Kadisha* did assist in their private capacities.

In 1966, an anonymous donor offered to erect a new *Tahara* House at the cemetery. This donor was later found to be Mr Solly Colman. The *Tahara* House was completed in 1966.

The inscription on the foundation stone reads:

“This Tarra House [sic] was erected by Solly Colman in memory of his late wife Miriam who passed away on the 9 January 1963”.

Because of the great distances of these country communities from any central Judaic authorities, unique problems occurred that had to be dealt with by the *Chevrah Kadisha* themselves. The Pietersburg *Chevrah Kadisha* was sometimes called upon to conduct burials in the Louis Trichardt, Messina and Potgietersrus Jewish cemeteries.

They could not levy any charges for burials in other towns, since they had no jurisdiction outside of Pietersburg. In 1964, a Jewish woman living in Haenertsburg died and was buried in the Haenertsburg cemetery according to her wishes. The ritual preparation of the body for burial was carried out by the women members of the Pietersburg *Chevrah Kadisha*. As there was no Jewish cemetery in Haenertsburg, only the one grave was consecrated in the Haenertsburg cemetery by Rev J Scherer. Unfortunately this area was not partitioned off and this grave now lies amongst the Christian graves with nothing to denote that it is a Jewish grave. The only information on the small tombstone is her name. Mr Isaac Brenner was buried on his farm outside Pietersburg according to his wishes. Today squatter settlements are encroaching onto his grave and there is a danger of desecration and the grave may be lost. Many Jews were buried in isolated areas in the early days of settlement and without proper records their whereabouts are unknown today [see Heimann in chapter 2].

On 18 January 1968, When Mr Wally Levy and Mr Harold Levin of the Pietersburg *Chevrah Kadisha* travelled to Messina to bury a member of the Messina community they found that rock had caused the old cemetery to be unusable. As there was no consecrated ground in the new cemetery, they decided to consecrate the ground themselves. Being far from any *Halakhic* authority, these two men had to make an *ad hoc* decision as to how to do this. Mr Levin recited a short prayer he composed himself, namely: ‘In the name of G-d I hereby consecrate this piece of ground as a final resting place for departed souls Amen’. Then Mr Levy walked around the grave seven times<sup>25</sup>. After that the deceased was buried. At a later date, the minister from Pietersburg consecrated the ground in a proper manner.

When a member of a community dies in another town, the body should be accompanied by a member of that town's *Chevrah Kadisha* to his home cemetery. This did not occur when a member of the Pietersburg congregation died in Johannesburg early on a Friday morning in 1994. The funeral was arranged for 2 o'clock that Friday afternoon. Her body was to be transferred by Dove's Funeral Parlour to Pietersburg. Due to a mistake by a new member of the Johannesburg *Chevrah Kadisha*, one of their members was not sent to accompany the body to Pietersburg. Unfortunately, the body did not arrive in Pietersburg in time for the funeral and the large gathering of mourners had to be sent home. The body only arrived late that night, the driver having made a detour on the way to visit his family. The funeral was eventually held on the Sunday. Usually no burials could take place on a Sunday [see later], but this time it was possible as the grave had already been allocated and had been dug for the funeral on the Friday.

The remains of Mr and Mrs Sam Palte were removed from the Pietersburg Cemetery to be re-interred in Jerusalem in Israel on 9 November 1999. Their daughter, Mrs R Rabinowitz requested this as she was relocating to Israel. She cited the continued vandalism at the cemetery as one of the reasons for removing her parents' remains. The removal of the remains was done with the assistance of the Johannesburg and the Pietersburg *Chevrah Kadishas*, as well as the Pietersburg municipality. This was the only time that remains have been removed from the Pietersburg cemetery. The gravestones remain in place and a plaque has been placed on them stating that the remains have been re-interred in Jerusalem.

The Pietersburg municipality passed a new regulation that from 1970 no funerals were to be held on Sundays. This caused a problem for the Jewish community, because according to Jewish custom Jewish burials must take place as soon as possible after death. Usually, the *Chevrah Kadisha* had to inform the municipality of a death. A grave would be allocated by the municipality and municipal workers would then dig the grave. However, on the weekends, the municipal offices were closed and there were no workers to dig the grave. Therefore, in the unfortunate instance that a Jew died on the weekend, he could only be buried on the Monday. Christians did not bury their dead on a Sunday so this ruling did not affect them. The Jews, Moslems and non-denominational citizens had no choice except to abide by this decision.

In 1972 it was decided to install headstones on those graves without any stones. Messrs Wally Levy and Morris Wiener tabulated and named all the neglected graves and 44 new headstones were placed on graves at a total cost of R396. A special consecration service was arranged in April 1973 at which Rabbi G M Engel, the country communities Rabbi, and *Chazan Lerer* from the *Beth Hamedrash Hagadol* in Johannesburg officiated.

In 1975<sup>26</sup>, the municipality announced it was going to eliminate the separate sections in the cemetery for different church denominations, in order to simplify the upkeep of the cemetery. The *Chevrah Kadisha* managed to retain their separate section, pleading that their religious way of life demanded this separation. As a result, the fees were increased by R12 per burial by the municipality. Later, because of the shrinking community, the semi-circular section on the north side of the *Tahara* House was handed back to the municipality with the approval of the executive of the PHC. A

non-denominational cemetery adjacent to the Jewish cemetery was used by Jews who had married out of the faith or who had converted to other religions.

In 1976, the *Chevrah Kadisha* began to show an increase of income over expenditure and several improvements were made to the cemetery. A black perspex name and grave number plan in a glass case was installed at the cemetery at the cost of R138. The *Chevrah Kadisha* fixed all the graves that needed renovations. Letters were written to family members of the deceased and most donated generously towards this task.

It proved to be very difficult to keep the perimeter of the Jewish cemetery fenced off from the rest of the cemetery. A diamond-mesh fence erected around the cemetery in September 1992 was stolen and had to be replaced. Shrubs were planted as a fence in October 1998 but unfortunately 33 of the new shrubs were stolen and had to be replaced. In 2001 the large shrubs had to be removed as they were being used by thieves to hide stolen goods. The municipality replaced the bushes with a low ranch-style fence. Unfortunately vandalism became a common occurrence at the cemetery. In 1970 the chains around the graves were stolen. The doors of the *Tahara* House were broken off several times and the windows and washbasins broken. Only in 2004 when the *Chevrah Kadisha* disbanded, were burglar bars placed on the windows of the *Tahara* House and steel roller doors installed at the entrances.

The *Chevrah Kadisha* arranged for a dinner to be catered annually in the communal hall by the Women's Guild for the Pietersburg congregation. It was held on 7 *Adar*, in honour of the traditional date of the anniversary of the death of Moses. By carrying

Joseph's bones from Egypt into the desert, Moses fulfilled Joseph's wish to be buried in the Promised Land. For this reason he is honoured by the *Chevrah Kadisha*<sup>27</sup>. This practice was also observed by the *Chevrah Kadisha* in Johannesburg<sup>28</sup>.

In 1995 when the Wally Levy Hall was opened by Chief Rabbi Cyril Harris, a ceremony took place at the Pietersburg cemetery when all old religious books and a *Sefer Torah* were buried in the same grave that had been used for this purpose in November 1970. The service was conducted by Mr Solly Starkowitz. After Rev B Lerer left Pietersburg in 1992, Mr Starkowitz very ably conducted all funeral services and tombstone unveilings.

Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, the country communities Rabbi is compiling a computerized list of Jewish graves in the country towns of South Africa<sup>29</sup>. Messrs W Levy and D Wiener have ensured that each grave in the Pietersburg cemetery has been added onto the central database on the internet together with a photograph of each gravestone.

The Pietersburg community was declining in numbers and it was decided to amalgamate the finances of the various organizations. In 1997 the finances of the *Chevrah Kadisha* were incorporated into those of the PHC.

During 2002, the Pietersburg *Chevrah Kadisha* decided that the headstones of all the Jewish graves should be laid flat onto the graves to prevent any possible future desecration. This was in response to reports that headstones had been pushed over and broken in other Jewish cemeteries. Family members were canvassed and they contributed generously towards this project.

The *Chevrah Kadisha* was disbanded at the same time as the Pietersburg congregation in 2003. Rabbi Silberhaft, the country communities Rabbi, together with a Jewish resident of Pietersburg, maintains the upkeep of the cemetery.

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NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Rabinowicz, Rabbi Dr H. *A Guide to Life: Jewish Laws and Customs of Mourning*. Ktav Publishing House Inc: New York, 1964, p. 38.

<sup>2</sup> *JewishEncyclopedia.com*. The rite of ritual washing of a corpse before burial is derived from: “As he came so shall he go” *Ecclesiastes* verse: 5. When man is born he is washed and when he dies he is washed. This rite can be done in the home or in the *Tahara* House. Rabinowicz, Rabbi Dr H, *op. cit.* p. 40. Traditionally, the corpse is washed thoroughly before being doused with a ritually prescribed amount of water. It is then anointed with spices and wrapped in a linen shroud [*tachrichim*]. Unterman, Alan. *Jews: Their Religious Beliefs and Practices*. Rutledge & Kegan Paul: Boston, United States of America, 1981, p. 165.

<sup>3</sup> Deuteronomy XXI: 23 “His body shall not remain all night upon the tree but thou shalt surely bury him the same day”. It was considered a humiliation to the dead to leave them unburied. A delay in burial is permitted if it is “for the sake of his honour” eg to enable relatives to pay their last respects *Sanhedrin* 47a. Rabinowicz, Rabbi Dr H. *op. cit.* p. 23.

<sup>4</sup> A *Bikkur Cholim* organization was first started in Johannesburg for charity purposes and for visiting the sick in 1887. This was the first organized social welfare work of any kind in Johannesburg. It was decided to merge this body with the *Chevrah Kadisha* in 1888, when the latter body was founded. It served all the congregations in Johannesburg. *Founders and Followers: Johannesburg Jewry 1887-1915*. Edited by Mendel Kaplan and Marian Robertson. Vlaeberg Publishers: Cape Town, 1991, p. 92.

<sup>5</sup> Derived from the last words of Jacob to Joseph: “I pray thee...deal kindly and truly [chesed v’emet] ...and bury me [Gen xlvii. 29, 30]”. *JewishEncyclopedia.com*.

<sup>6</sup> Munnik, the Hon G G: *Munnik: Memoirs of Senator The Hon G G Munnik*. Maskew Miller: Cape Town, 1916.

<sup>7</sup> He must be buried in consecrated ground according to the *Halakhah* and cannot be interred in a non-Jewish cemetery. The burial ground is regarded as a religious enclave and it must be consecrated for this purpose by a special religious ceremony, which marks the parameters and borders of the area. Hence a Jewish cemetery must have a clearly defined boundary. The burial service is a religious service which can only be conducted within the specified area of the Jewish cemetery.

<sup>8</sup> Because of the absence of minutes of the early years of the *Chevrah Kadisha*, a photograph taken at the Pietersburg cemetery in 1920 provides the only record of the people who apparently were active in the town with the organization at the time. On 31 October 1918, Mr Saul Blondes, who came from Kovno, Lithuania to Woodbush Village, died in the flu epidemic aged 27 and was buried in Pietersburg. Mrs Wiener has in her possession a photograph taken by his brother Samuel Blondes at the unveiling of Saul’s tombstone in 1920. Samuel came from Cleveland, America for the unveiling. In 1999 Samuel’s daughter, Ruth Baker, brought the photograph to Pietersburg from Cleveland whilst on a visit to Saul’s grave. Present on the photograph are Messrs Symons, Herman Skok, Max Korber, Isaac Brenner, Jack Hirschmann, Jack Kallmeyer, Ben Levy, Solomon Solomon, Max Marcus, Julius Kruger, Barney Herman, Joseph Kallmeyer, Herman Eichholz, Wolf Israelsohn, Sam Palte and Max Israelsohn.

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<sup>9</sup> *South African Jewish Chronicle* 9 May 1913, p. 307.

<sup>10</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file L 1929/31, pp. 31-33.

<sup>11</sup> According to Jewish custom, a dead body should not be left alone. The reasons are varied. Some suggest that it was to keep away evil spirits, others to protect the body from rodents and body snatchers, but most probably it is a mark of respect as it is considered disrespectful to leave a human body in a defenseless state unattended. Rabinowicz, Rabbi Dr H, *op. cit.* p. 21.

<sup>12</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives 46 file 1 letter 23 June 1948.

<sup>13</sup> Interview with Estelle Joffe [nee Fisher] of Potgietersrus.

<sup>14</sup> This incident had repercussions when in 2005, Hubert's brother, also a non-Jew, died in Potgietersrus. He had prior to his death made arrangements to be buried in the Jewish cemetery and was interred there by a Christian priest. Rabbi Silberhaft, the country communities Rabbi, is attempting to negotiate with the Mokopane/Potgietersrus municipality to demarcate the Jewish cemetery so that this grave will be outside the Jewish cemetery. He wrote to the Potgietersrus municipality asking them to contact him before burying anyone in the Jewish cemetery. The need to keep a Jewish cemetery for Jews only has become a problem in South Africa. As Jews leave the country towns, there are no Jews living there permanently to oversee the cemeteries and to ensure that the municipalities realize the need for a separate Jewish cemetery. South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives, Hubert Essakow file.

<sup>15</sup> *Chevrah Kadisha* correspondence 7 January 1966.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Mr Wally Levy.

<sup>17</sup> *South African Jewish Year Book* 1929, 5689-90. Edited by Morris De Saxe. South African Jewish Historical Society: Johannesburg, 1929, pp. 277-289.

<sup>18</sup> Markowitz, Arthur. "The Story of South African Jewry: They helped to build South Africa". A series of articles in: *South African Jewish Times* 1947-1948.

<sup>19</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minutes June 1961.

<sup>20</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation Annual General Meeting minutes September 1963

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>22</sup> Interview with Mr Wally Levy.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>24</sup> Unterman, Alan. *Dictionary of Jewish Lore and Legend*. Thames and Hudson: London, 1991, p. 58. Jews have invariably buried their dead in the earth. For it is written "dust thou art and to dust thou shalt return" Genesis III: 19. The Rabbis regarded cremation as an indignity to the body and an idolatrous practice carried out by the Romans and therefore to be avoided by the Jews. Orthodox Jews do not practice cremation as it is a denial of the belief in bodily resurrection in the messianic age which the Sages tell us will begin for each individual from a bone in the spinal column [*Os coccyx*]. Rabinowicz, Rabbi Dr H, *op. cit.* pp. 26-28. Reform Jews do accept cremation.

<sup>25</sup> Some communities have the custom of circumambulating the corpse seven times and of throwing money in the four directions as a bribe to evil spirits to keep away. The remembrance of this custom might have led Mr H Levin to think that this was the method of consecrating a grave. Unterman, *op. cit.* p. 43.

<sup>26</sup> Pietersburg *Chevrah Kadisha* correspondence 12 November 1975.



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<sup>27</sup> *JewishEncyclopedia.com*. Burial Society.

<sup>28</sup> Saron, Gustav. *The Jews of South Africa: An Illustrated History to 1953*. Edited by Naomi Musiker. Scarecrow Books: Johannesburg, 2001, p. 61.

<sup>29</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation correspondence 24 September 1998.

## CHAPTER 8

### THE WOMEN'S STORY

Women have always played an integral role in the South African Jewish community. Already in 1895, Rev A P Bender formed a Ladies Association in the Cape Colony, and he became the association's patron<sup>1</sup>. Most Jewish communities formed a ladies guild soon after they were established. In Pietersburg, the work of welcoming newcomers to the town and looking after the needy was carried out by Lena Herman, the wife of the president of the congregation, Barney Herman, and her ladies committee. They welcomed and visited all new Jewish families to the town and gave them any assistance they needed. They also provided teas for visiting dignitaries. Lena Herman carried out charitable work by personally collecting money from each Jewish household for the Orphan's Fund<sup>2</sup>. From as early as 1921, Jews in the Zoutpansberg contributed towards the South African Jewish Orphanage [Arcadia] in Johannesburg. Around 1928 the Pietersburg community applied to the South African Jewish Board of Deputies [SAJBD] to form a separate fund, the Pietersburg Jewish Orphans and Relief Fund<sup>3</sup>. Mesdames A Salomon and J Kallmeyer were founder members<sup>4</sup>.

A proposal to elect ladies to the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation [PHC] was proposed by Mr J Kruger at 12 October 1921 Annual General Meeting [AGM] so that they could assist in collecting fees<sup>5</sup>. After considerable discussion the proposal was not approved. At the 1931 AGM of the PHC<sup>6</sup>, Mr Jacob [Jack] Hirschmann gave notice that he intended to propose at the next AGM, that women be given the vote in

congregational matters<sup>7</sup>. Accordingly, in 1932, he submitted his proposal to the AGM, seconded by Mr H Manaschewitz. He proposed that this right to vote would be extended to the wives of members, members in their own right and women over 21 who were paying more than five shillings subscription fees a year. Women however would not be eligible for any executive position unless this motion was passed by a two thirds majority of male members<sup>8</sup>. After much discussion, the proposal was postponed to the following year. The minutes do not record the details of the discussion, nor the reasons for the reluctance of the men to give the women the right to vote<sup>9</sup>. This was to be the beginning of a long struggle for the women of the Pietersburg Jewish community before they would be allowed to vote.

The following year, after further discussion, the matter was again left in abeyance until the year thereafter. In 1934, Jacob Hirschmann withdrew the motion, presumably because the apparent deadlock was causing dissension in the community. Unfortunately Mr Hirschmann died in 1935. That same year a new sponsor arrived in the person of Dr Philip Hack. He indicated his intention of introducing a resolution at the next AGM, concerning the vote for women in congregational matters. Both Mr Hirschmann and Dr Hack were members of the Zoutpansberg Zionist Society, which had women on their committee. This might have influenced their support for women to be elected onto the congregation committee. Unfortunately, Dr Hack was absent from the 1936 AGM, and his proposal was not discussed. But the issue was given new life by Mr Chaitow, who gave notice that he would raise a similar motion at the 1937 AGM. Regrettably, the following year, it was Mr Chaitow's<sup>10</sup> turn to be absent from the meeting, so once again no progress was made and there the matter was left to lie for many years to come.

The Jewish women were finally granted the franchise by the PHC in 1947. A requisition was presented to the PHC committee on 24 July 1947 signed by 20 men. They requested that a special general meeting be called to discuss the following resolutions: wives of members, widows and unmarried adult women members would be entitled to vote at General meetings of the congregation, no more than two women were entitled to serve at any one time on the committee, nor would they be entitled to hold any executive office in the congregation. According to the constitution of the congregation:

Any fifteen duly qualified Members may requisition the Council to call a Special General meeting of the Members for a specified object, and it shall be the duty of the Council to convene such meeting within fourteen days after receipt of such requisition.

A special general meeting was held at the communal hall on 20 August 1947, attended by only 15 interested members. Due to the small number of members, it was suggested that the meeting be postponed, but after a vote, it was decided by eight votes to seven to carry on with the meeting. The resolutions were passed at the meeting. Mr M H Cohen then moved that the subscription payable by widows remain five guineas, that unmarried adult women be admitted to membership on payment of two guineas per annum and that no subscription be payable by wives of members. These motions were carried.

At the 1947 AGM of the congregation, the chairman, Mr B Herman welcomed the women “who were now entitled to take part and vote”. Before proceeding with the election of the committee it was resolved that the committee would in future consist

of eight men and two women. As 14 men and four women were proposed, a ballot was taken with Dr R Rabinowitz and Mr I Hirshmann as appointed scrutineers. The two women who were elected to serve on the committee were Mesdames B Palte and D Sacks.

As a result of women having representation in the running of the synagogue, it was decided to form a lady's Guild. A meeting of the Pietersburg Jewish ladies was called on 2 October 1947 by Mrs B Palte. It was to have taken place in the communal hall but instead was transferred to Mrs Palte's house next door. The meeting was attended by a "full and representative gathering"<sup>11</sup> who decided to form a ladies committee. Mrs Palte was unanimously appointed as chairlady and Mrs D Sacks as vice-chairlady. As no one wanted to be the secretary, Mrs L Herman offered to take the minutes. A committee of 12 was decided upon, but other members could be added if they wanted to serve on the committee. The first elected committee was:

Mesdames Bertha Palte [chairman]<sup>12</sup>, Dora Sacks [vice-chairman], Lily Rakusin [secretary], Ida Lewis, Dora Manaschewitz, Lydia Brenner, Jenny Worms, Laura Cohen, Ann Beron, Lena Herman, Frances Rakusin, Ruby Gifter, Frieda Levin. Mesdames Sarah Eichholtz and S. Solomon were added in December. Mesdames E. Tager and Mary Brenner were unable to accept nomination onto the committee.

It was decided at the first meeting on 29 October 1947 to call the new society the Pietersburg Jewish Women's Guild. Bye-laws were framed by a sub-committee consisting of Mesdames Palte, Lewis and Worms and were ratified at a General Meeting. The aims of the Pietersburg Jewish Women's Guild were to foster the interests of Judaism by:

a] instilling the spirit of Judaism in our homes

- b] observing the Jewish festivals
- c] attending to the religious needs of our children
- d] interesting ourselves in the study of Hebrew
- e] taking an active part in the general communal life of this town as representatives of the Jewish women
- f] raising money for the furnishing of the new *shul* [synagogue].

A new committee was to be elected annually and all Jewish women over the age of 18 were eligible for membership. Members of the committee had to have resided in Pietersburg for a minimum of six months. All matters discussed at committee meetings were to be kept strictly in committee only and were not to be discussed outside the committee. A quorum consisted of one third of the committee members. 24 hours notice of a committee meeting and one week notice for the AGM was to be given. Annual subscriptions of two shillings and sixpence were to be collected from the ladies of Pietersburg and it was decided to open a bank account at the Standard Bank. The books were to be audited by Messrs Levitt, Horvitch and Co in an honorary capacity.

To raise funds for the synagogue, a banquet and dance was to be held in the town hall on 17 February 1948. However, in February a meeting was called to ask the members whether the banquet should be postponed in view of the recent developments in the Partition of Palestine. It was decided to continue with arrangements for the function as the prestige of the Guild was at stake, this being their first function. The problem was solved by selling tickets only within the local community. The function proved to be a great social and financial success as the sum of £170 was collected. The *Purim* and *Pesach* functions were cancelled in 1948 due to the Poliomyelitis epidemic.

In November 1948 the society's name was changed to Pietersburg and District Jewish Women's Guild [the Guild]. By 1949 all the women of Pietersburg, 83 in total, were members of the Guild. Ladies in the district were invited to join the Guild and attend their functions. Ten women from Potgietersrus became members and district representatives were appointed from Potgietersrus, Grootspelonken and Soekmekaar. The Zionist League was also asked to send a representative to the Guild committee meetings.

One of the functions of the Guild was to visit the sick, lonely and bereaved and 50-60 people were visited in 1949 alone<sup>13</sup>. At times of bereavement, the Guild would prepare food and take it to the house of mourning. They hosted district members for meals during *Yom tov*. The Pietersburg newspaper, *The Northern Review*, reported on functions held by the Guild. Fund-raising events for synagogue funds included card evenings, Bring and Buys, where members brought home-made goods for sale, games evenings, a baby show and raffles. When books of tickets for a piano raffle were sent in 1949 to other Jewish communities to sell throughout South Africa, the Guild was informed that this practice was illegal. The problem was solved by only selling tickets within the local community. Unfortunately, despite house-to-house sales, not enough tickets were sold to cover the cost of the piano, which had already been purchased from Messrs Polliacks. In the end, another function, a card evening, had to be held by the Guild to raise the sum of £35 15 9 so that they could buy up the extra tickets themselves. The mayor drew the winning raffle ticket in his office.

A 'Bring and Buy', was held to raise money to buy ten dozen of each crockery, cutlery and glass cups for kosher functions in the hall. They hired these items out to

other societies. The Guild catered for all the Jewish holidays. *Purim*, *Shavuoth* and *Succoth* were celebrated with dinners or teas. A *Purim* Ball was held in the town hall in 1950 to raise money for synagogue funds. 300 people attended and the dignitaries of the town were invited. Non-kosher cold meat was served <sup>14</sup> because it was considered to be too difficult to transport kosher meat from Johannesburg and to keep fresh the large quantities of meat needed for the function. The function was also non-kosher as many Gentiles attended and it took place outside the communal hall. The Guild also catered a non-kosher reception on 11 December 1949 when Mr Moss Cohen was elected as the mayor.

The Guild catered a civic cocktail party for Rabbi I Brodie, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the British Commonwealth, and his wife, when they visited Pietersburg on 19 April 1950. Mrs Palte requested that only kosher meat be used for the function in the town hall, but again the committee decided it was impractical<sup>15</sup>. Eventually out of respect for Chief Rabbi Brodie, the Guild decided to have no meat at the cocktail party held in his honour. However, they resolved that they would make Chief Rabbi Brodie's table only "as kosher as it is possible to be"<sup>16</sup>. According to Orthodox Jewish practice, it is a flagrant act of disrespect not to cater a completely kosher function for an Orthodox world leader. According to their kosher standards at that time, the Guild believed that they had provided sufficient kosher facilities for the Chief Rabbi, but these were extremely inadequate in terms of the laws of kashrut. It is highly probable that Chief Rabbi Brodie knew nothing about this arrangement as he would not have eaten at the function if he had known. Rev J I Levine must surely have been aware of the Guild's practice and could not have condoned the practice. However Rev Levine's deteriorating health might have prevented him from having



the strength to oversee the functions properly. His disapproval obviously did not deter the ladies from carrying out what suited them best.

The minister was supposed to act as the *mashgiach* at functions in the communal hall to ensure the function was kosher. However, the functions in the hall were not kosher as cakes were accepted from homes that did not adhere to the laws of *kashrut*. At a meeting in December 1956, there was a complaint that congregation members' plates were mixed up with the hall plates. The Guild also hired out the crockery from the hall and these acts must have compromised the *kashrut* of the hall. Realising this, it was later resolved by the Guild that no crockery should be removed from the hall. In 1958, the hall provided facilities for milk, meat and *parev* functions. However, the *parev* section ceased to exist when it was discovered that one of the societies had inadvertently used the *parev* dishes for serving meat, despite the dishes having different patterns to aid in distinguishing their different uses. In 1959, Rev Levine complained that the hall should not be hired to non-Jewish societies, as they had non-kosher meat at their meetings. Instead of complying with his request, the Guild merely informed these societies that they could no longer have meat at their functions in the hall.

The Guild also catered functions for other visiting Jewish dignitaries in the communal hall, such as Israeli Brigadier Alon when he visited Pietersburg on 7 June 1956, the Israeli Consul General on 3 June 1957 and General Dayan and his wife on 15 September 1957.

The ladies of the Guild wanted to maintain their independence from the PHC, but as they were unable to manage their finances, they often had to ask the PHC for assistance. In 1953, the congregation gave the Guild a loan of £627-12-0. In August 1955, the Guild was asked by the PHC committee to take over the management of the communal hall with the assistance, if necessary, of three members of the congregation committee. Two Guild ladies were appointed to take charge of the hall. The PHC paid the monthly light and water bill and the Guild refunded the congregation at the end of the year. Two non-Jewish ladies were hired, one to supervise the garden and one to organize the hall's crockery and to make sandwiches for functions. A loan was taken from the PHC to buy extra cutlery so that there would be enough for 200 people.

By 1957, the Guild was badly in debt due to the costs of running the hall. To bring in funds, the Guild subscriptions were raised from five to ten shillings per year and the hall was hired out to the badminton club. In 1959 the floor of the hall had to be replaced as the badminton players had damaged the old one. The ladies of the Guild were distressed when the newly replaced floor had to be repaired within the year due to the players ruining it again. The Guild's finances suffered because of the loss of income incurred when the badminton players were no longer allowed to use the hall. Because of the Guild's debts, the PHC expressed its willingness to take over the running of the hall. Mrs B Palte suggested that the Guild be given another year's trial period. The Guild believed that the PHC was under the misconception that the Guild was started for and was an adjunct to the congregation. To enlighten the PHC, a letter was written to tell them that the Guild was an independent society with the object of fostering Judaism by:<sup>17</sup>

1] taking an active part in general communal life of the town as representatives of the Jewish women

2] raising money for communal requirements and charities at the Guild's discretion, therefore they were entitled to send donations to charities as they had done for years.

The Guild's original constitution did not mention that they were an appendage to the synagogue committee, only that they would raise funds for furniture for the synagogue. Therefore, they had always considered themselves as an independent entity. Nevertheless, the PHC once again had to come to the Guild's rescue by paying off the Guild's debts. It was decided to run a separate bank account for the hall. The PHC committee suggested to the Guild that they reduce the non-Jewish lady's salary. As a result, much to the consternation of the Guild, their employee resigned. In a show of independence and despite their poor financial position, the Guild continued to give their annual *Pesach* and *Rosh Hashanah* donations to the Jewish Deaf, Old Aged Home and Jewish Orphanage,

In 1962 the Guild asked the PHC if they would subsidize the running of the hall that year. It was found that the municipal accounts were very high. The Guild decided to charge for the use of the stove and lights at the rate of R10,50 per function. Ladies from kosher homes lent their utensils to non-kosher homes, so that food could be prepared in all the homes to alleviate the cost of the use of the stove in the hall. However, in October 1964, the Guild again had to ask the PHC to pay the Municipal account. To make money, each member was charged with raising an amount of R2 towards funds for the Guild. A sweet making and a facial make-up demonstration, as well as a morning garden party, succeeded in raising money.

Besides the work they did for the Jewish community, the Guild also took an active part in the general communal life of Pietersburg. They contributed towards a combined societies' tea for the old people of the town. In May 1956, the first Goodwill Tea was held by the Guild. The idea of a Goodwill Tea was an innovation of the Guild. It was subsequently emulated by many non-Jewish societies and churches in the town. It is possible that the idea originated from a Goodwill Day which was held on 30 March 1940 by the Society of Jews and Christians who wanted to promote 'goodwill between all races and all faiths'<sup>18</sup>. Members of the town's women's societies, the mayoress and wives of the town councillors and ministers of various denominations and their wives were invited. Entertainment was provided in the form of singing, dancing and piano-playing. The following year the Tea was again hosted by the Guild, but thereafter it was decided to give other societies a chance to host the Tea, so that it would truly be a goodwill gesture. The Guild also sent representatives to the *Vroue Federasie's* Goodwill Tea, the Methodist Birthday Party, the Transvaal Agricultural Union's International Day and the Armistice Parade. The Guild sold Christmas Stamps, helped the Red Cross Feeding Fund, and undertook hospital visiting. Mrs Palte represented the Jewish ladies at the annual Women's World Day of Prayer. The Jewish women later held their own Women's World Day of Prayer in the synagogue and they invited non-Jewish dignitaries. Every year the chairlady of the Guild laid a wreath in the shape of a *Magen David* on behalf of the PHC at the annual Armistice Day service. This custom was started by Rev J I Levine and continued by the Guild until the demise of the congregation in 2003 [see Chapter 4]. The Guild assisted in street collections for the general community, except on Saturdays because they could not work on *Shabbat*. Instead, they collected money from local businesses on Fridays.

The Guild arranged that both Jewish soldiers and school hostel children, who attended Friday night services in the synagogue, would be hosted by local families for dinner afterwards. At the 1963 Guild AGM, a letter was read from the SAJBD congratulating the Pietersburg Women's Guild for entertaining the soldiers. The South African Defense Force maintained an army camp on the outskirts of Pietersburg and Jewish soldiers were often sent there for military training. As the camp had no kosher facilities, religious soldiers were transferred to other camps that did provide these facilities.

At the 1959, 1961 and 1962 AGMs respectively<sup>19</sup>, Mrs B Palte lamented that the Guild had moved away from its original objectives of visiting the sick and running study groups and Hebrew classes. She urged them to return to the spiritual side of their work and not to focus only on raising money and running the hall. At the 1956 AGM, Mrs B Palte, who was truly the driving force behind the Guild, was made an Honorary Life president and Mesdames D Sacks and D Manaschewitz Honorary vice-presidents of the Guild. Mrs Manaschewitz had already been made an Honorary Life member in 1950. In later years, Mesdames I Lewis and S Goldreich were also made Honorary Life members. The Federation of Women's Synagogue Guilds committee awarded certificates in 1980 to ladies with long service records with the Pietersburg Women's Guild. These included Mesdames Bessie Meyer, Dora Lidven, Ann Beron, Sheila Levy and Lily Rakusin. In August 1989, when the Federation of Women's Synagogues Guild again wanted to honour Pietersburg women, no names were forwarded. The Pietersburg Guild felt that as they were a small community and everybody assisted at the functions, no one should be singled out for honours. They

did however decide to make Mesdames Lily Rakusin and Dora Lidven Honorary Life Members of the Pietersburg Guild.

In December 1970, as Mrs Palte was relocating to Johannesburg, she was presented with an Illuminated Address at a special dinner for committee members of the Guild and congregation committees. It read:

Presented to Mrs Bertha Palte on the occasion of her departure from Pietersburg. In appreciation of her lifelong selfless and unstinted devotion and service to the Jewish community of Pietersburg in all its spheres of endeavour, encompassing Zionism, youth activities, education, welfare, religion and charity. She was successful in achieving for the Jewish women of Pietersburg, recognition as full members of the Congregation: was the founder of the Jewish Women's Guild and a foundation member of the Pietersburg and District Women's Zionist League.

Mrs Palte became the Pietersburg representative on the committee of the South African Women's Guild in Johannesburg and informed the Pietersburg Women's Guild of what transpired at the meetings. She also received a copy of the minutes of the monthly meetings of the Pietersburg Guild. True to form she suggested that a sub-committee be formed in Johannesburg to visit the sick and the elderly. The Pietersburg Guild requested that Mrs Palte recommend to the *Federation Chronicle* Jewish newspaper that they publish a list of kosher goods available in South Africa and this was duly done. In February 1976 an article appeared in the *Federation Chronicle* about the work of the Pietersburg Guild. Mrs Palte's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday was honoured by the Guild by hanging a clock and plaque in the hall dedicated to her name.

An attempt had been made in 1950 and again in 1951 to start a branch of the Union of Jewish Women [UJW] in Pietersburg, but the members of the Guild were not interested. However, in 1962, the Guild responded to an invitation to send a representative from Pietersburg to attend the Union of Jewish Women's Congress. In 1964, the Guild was again approached and once more they rejected the UJW. Finally, in 1966, the UJW sent a representative to address the Guild. It was decided to ask the congregation committee to convene a meeting with the UJW representatives. The Union of Jewish Women [Union] came into being on 27 November 1966 with Mrs Ellen Skok as its first chairlady<sup>20</sup>. Other members of the founding committee included Ann Beron, convenor of adult education, Mickey Vides, secretary, and Ada Danzig, Ida Lewis, Bessie Meyer, Maureen Notelowitz and Benita Stein<sup>21</sup>. The Union involved itself with work in the general Pietersburg community, such as visits to the hospital, tea parties for the aged and support for the servicemen stationed around Pietersburg.

The Union did not last long as there were not enough women in Pietersburg to work for three Jewish organizations. Already in December 1970, the Union had difficulty in finding a chairlady and committee. In January 1973, the Union asked their head office if they could hold monthly meetings in conjunction with the Guild. Head office rejected the suggestion of a shadow committee and blamed the Guild for the breakdown of the Union. However, the Union's chairlady, Mrs Lily Rakusin denied that the Guild was to blame and thanked them for their co-operation. The Union started decreasing their work, and by April 1973, the Union decided to close. In May 1973, the congregation presented two of the Union of Jewish Women's members, Mesdames L Rakusin and M Pogrund, with Goodwill Certificates for their work for

the Union. In 2001, a letter was received from Mrs Lorna Levitt of the Union of Jewish Women. She wanted a list of names of ladies in the community so that they could be asked to join the Union again, but no one was interested.

In 1962 the ladies also resolved that the chairlady of the Guild would automatically be the representative of the Guild at the PHC meetings. The Potgietersrus ladies, who were no longer members, were invited to rejoin the Pietersburg Guild, but they declined. The Pietersburg Guild joined the Federation of Synagogues Women's Guild at R6 per annum. They also paid affiliation fees of R2,10 to the National Council of Women<sup>22</sup> and had a representative on its local committee.

The Guild, together with the Pietersburg Jewish Women's Zionist League [Zionist League], held 'welcome teas' for Jewish newcomers to the town. Although relations between the Guild and the Zionist League were usually good, every now and then there was a clash of interests. In December 1965, the Zionist League catered for a function in the communal hall, but ran short of crockery. The chairlady of the Zionist League decided to buy extra crockery without the permission of the Guild chairlady. Unfortunately as the new milk crockery was the same colour as the meat crockery, it was feared that this would lead to confusion and would compromise the *kashrut* of the hall. At a special meeting of both societies, it was decided that the Zionist League would have to dispose of the crockery that they had bought. A combined Zionist League and Guild jumble sale was held for the specific purpose to raise money to buy new milk crockery for the hall. Soon after, in February 1966, the Zionist League decided to stop catering in the hall. They would however, continue catering for functions outside the hall. On another occasion, a clash of functions occurred on



*Purim* on the 28 February 1972. The Zionist IUA campaign was due to be launched on the same day as *Purim*. A compromise was reached whereby the *Purim* dinner normally catered for by the Guild, was taken over by the Zionist League. It was then followed by the IUA campaign. A suggestion by some ladies to combine the Guild and the Zionist League societies was rejected by both organizations.

The competition between the Guild and the Zionist League flared up again in 1979 when a member of the congregation asked the Guild to cater for her son's *bris* at a venue outside the communal hall. At a special general meeting of the women of the congregation called on 17 January 1979 it was decided that it was the prerogative of the client to decide which society should cater. However on 7 February 1979, at another open meeting held in the hall, the Zionist League informed the Guild that the Zionist League intended once again to cater functions in the hall in order to raise funds for Israel. Finally, the matter was settled by deciding that the Guild would cater in the hall, including private functions, and the Zionist League would cater all functions to raise money outside the hall. Both societies decided together on the tariffs so as to eliminate any competition between them.

Each new minister on their arrival attempted to improve the standards of *kashrut* in the community. Chief Rabbi B M Casper visited Pietersburg for Rev W Wolfson's induction on 6 September 1967. Rev Wolfson asked the Guild to make the food in the hall or in kosher homes only, so that the Chief Rabbi could eat everything. However, a few months later, when Rev Wolfson became ill, the Guild once again allowed the non-kosher homes to make food for the hall. Because the facilities at the hall were considered inadequate by the women and there were not enough kosher homes, cakes

were often prepared in non-kosher homes and then brought to the hall. Rev Wolfson asked the Guild to make sure that all preparations for functions be made and food brought to the hall before *Shabbat*. The onus would be on the Women's Guild to ensure that this was carried out<sup>23</sup>. He also objected to the hall being let out to a local church for a Christmas party, complete with a large Christmas tree. The PHC committee decided in May 1971 that the hall could only be let out to non-Jews on the condition that only the Jewish societies would undertake the kosher catering. Rev Wolfson organized a communal *seder* for *Pesach* 1970 at the Great North Road Hotel roof garden. The Guild and Rev Wolfson *kashered* the hall's cutlery, which for this occasion was allowed out of the hall. 130 people attended the *seder* and each table had someone to lead the *seder* service. In 1973, Rev Avram Belitsky organized a *Pesach seder* in the hall on the second night of *Pesach*. New cutlery and crockery was borrowed from the OK Bazaars supermarket chain with the help of the Jewish manager who had also assisted the community by obtaining *Pesach* goods from Johannesburg through the OK Bazaars. Rabbi Pasternak also insisted that everything should be prepared in the hall, but the ladies complained that the facilities were inadequate. Rabbi Pasternak only accepted food that was prepared in kosher homes. However, as it was considered too expensive to buy ready prepared kosher products from Johannesburg, the onus on the kosher homes to prepare food became very heavy. Therefore, it was decided to improve the kitchen at the hall with new equipment so that all the women could work in the hall. When renovations for the hall were carried out, alterations were made to the kitchen and new cupboards were installed. These were completed in July 1970 and an opening function was held in September with an entertainer from Johannesburg.

The *Chevrah Kadisha* helped the Guild over the next few years by donating a new stove for the minister's house in 1988, a new fridge for the hall in 1989 and a second fridge for the hall in 1994. Rev B Lerer did his best to ensure that the hall was kosher and that only kosher homes brought food to the hall. Frozen kosher meat was obtained from Johannesburg by rail. Rev Lerer fetched the meat from the station and distributed it to the ladies. Kosher cold meats and some *Pesach* products were kept by the Checkers supermarket chain intermittently. Rev Lerer also visited the local bakery to inspect their products. He found that they were not kosher, so these products were no longer allowed into the hall.

The community was decreasing in size and its effects were felt on the work of the Guild. Any bereavement in the congregation affected the whole community, so that when two families lost family members at the same time in 1976, the Guild decided to cancel the *Purim* party in sympathy with the families. For the first time, in 1976, the Guild did not provide a *brocha* in the synagogue on *Rosh Hashanah* morning. The Guild no longer undertook any work in the general community, but the Guild still catered large functions for the Jewish community. In May 1975 a cookery book was published for Guild funds with the help of Mrs Ann Brenner.

On 16 October 1977, the Guild celebrated 30 years in existence with a dinner in the hall. Mesdames Rae Fine and Sapire<sup>24</sup> from the Federation of Synagogues Guild were the guests of Honour. Past chairladies Mesdames Lily Rakusin, Ida Lewis and Bessie Meyer also attended. 18 trees were planted in the South African Forest in Israel as a tribute to Mrs Bertha Palte.

In October 1979, a suggestion by the PHC committee that the Guild hand over its money to them was strongly opposed by the Guild. The Guild's funds had greatly improved due to the numerous kosher *Bar-* and *Batmitzvah* celebrations that were admirably catered for by the Guild due to the catering expertise of Mrs Fonda Dubb. Enough money was made so that R2000 could be placed on fixed deposit. In her annual report at the 1983 AGM, the chairlady praised the fact that the Guild was a unifying force in the community of 54 families. Through their participation in communal functions, the women were kept from drifting away from Judaism. By 1984, several families had left Pietersburg and the Guild found it more difficult to find enough workers. Ladies were loath to take on the heavy duties of chairlady as the *Barmitzvahs* involved difficulties in *kashrut* organization. An injection of new enthusiasm for the community came from the unexpected influx of several Israeli families, who arrived on contract to work at the air-force base in Louis Trichardt, but who lived in Pietersburg. They enthusiastically attended all the Jewish functions, as this was the principal way of mixing with the Jews of the community. Several Israeli women joined the Guild, swelling the number of workers. However, by 1990, there were only 37 Jewish families left in Pietersburg. In 1991, Rev B Lerer got married and six months later he and his wife decided to relocate to Paarl. This was a blow to the community as Rev Lerer became the last minister to serve the community. At Rev and Mrs Lerer's farewell tea in May 1992, Rev Lerer encouraged the community to continue their high standards of *kashrut*. He told them that those women that did not keep kosher knew just as much about *kashrut* as those who did. The chairlady took over the *hashgachah* at all functions in the hall so that the high standard of *kashrut* was maintained.

In 1994, the old hall was sold by the congregation and a new smaller hall was built onto the synagogue. The new Wally Levy Hall was officially opened by Chief Rabbi C Harris on 5 March 1995. 120 people attended the dinner in the hall that was catered for by the Guild. The new kitchen was planned by the ladies of the Guild, with the help of Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, the country communities Rabbi. The hall was divided into separate areas for meat or milk functions. Several Friday night and festival meals were held in the communal hall. It was decided not to rent out the hall to any outside organizations as it could compromise the *kashrut* facilities.

In 1995, most of the Israeli families had returned to Israel and there were only 23 families left in Pietersburg. By 1997, the Guild was organizing the ordering of kosher meat from Johannesburg for only three Jewish homes. Kosher meat was brought from Johannesburg by road transport. It became difficult to obtain *Pesach* products and each Jewish home had to source these in Johannesburg. Because of the smaller number of members, a communal *Rosh Hashanah* dinner was catered for by the Guild.

The Guild still considered itself independent of the congregation committee. In 1996, the Rotarians asked the Guild for a quote to cater a function for them. Unfortunately, the PHC committee decided that the hall could only be used for the congregation's functions. After a heated discussion and a last show of independence, the ladies sent a letter to the congregation stating that they would do their own catering and the proceeds would go to the Zionist League. Unfortunately, the catering was not awarded to the Guild by the Rotarians.

The Guild's fixed deposit account had grown to R10 000. However, as the number of *Barmitzvahs* began to decrease, the Guild's current account grew smaller and they started using their savings. Some extra money was generated by a second recipe book produced by the Guild. In 1996, the Guild passed a resolution at their AGM that their books no longer needed to be audited. In 1998, the synagogue committee donated R6 000 to the Guild to pay for their festival functions. By June 2000, the synagogue committee took over the Guild's finances. The fixed deposit of R20 000 was loaned to the congregation. Subscriptions were abolished. In 2001, both nights of *Rosh Hashanah* were celebrated with dinners held in the hall. This attracted the large number of 70 guests, as the last remaining congregants invited their extended families to spend the festival in Pietersburg.

Due to the smaller number of women, the Zionist League decided to combine many functions with the Guild. They held their monthly committee meetings after the Guild committee meetings as the same ladies served on both committees. They kept their own books and collected their subscriptions. However, the Guild catered for the traditional Zionist functions of *Yom Ha'atzma'ut*, *Yom Yerushalayim* and *Tu B'Shvat*. The year 2000 saw the demise of the Pietersburg Women's Zionist League.

As a result of the disharmony in the community caused by the altercation at the special general meeting in March 2002, the vice-chairlady and a member of the committee, resigned from the Guild. A special general meeting of the Guild was held on 11 September 2002 to discuss the disbanding of the Guild. The majority voted that the Guild should continue. However, on 31 January 2003, the Guild executive passed a resolution to disband the society and to donate the remaining R20 000 permanently

to the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation. This was due to the fact that the synagogue and hall had been sold. A circular was sent to the members of the Guild informing them that the Guild had formally ceased to exist.

After the women of Pietersburg had been granted the vote on the previously male dominated congregation committee in 1947, they became confident enough to form their own ladies committee. Although they claimed to be an independent entity, they were continually manoeuvred into acting as an adjunct to the PHC committee, especially in the running of the communal hall and in catering congregational functions. The Guild struggled to maintain its finances and had to call on the PHC to assist them on several occasions. The Guild helped to uphold the ideals of Judaism in the community and was responsible for organizing the celebration of all Jewish festivals. In its earlier years the Guild was negligent in its attitude towards *kashrut*. However, because of improved communications with the main Jewish centres and due to the general trend of South African Jewry to become more religiously observant, the Guild gradually improved their standards of *kashrut*. This trend was aided by the insistence of the ministers, as well as the improved facilities in the communal hall.

#### GUILD CHAIRLADIES

Mrs Bertha Palte	1947-1955, 1958, 1963
Mrs Lily Rakusin	1956-1957, 1974
Mrs Ann Beron	1959-1962, 1964, 1967-1968
Mrs Bessie Meyer	1965-1966, 1969-1970, 1972
Mrs Mary Schechter	1971
Mrs Phyllis Price and Mrs Laurane Klingman	1973

Mrs Lily Rakusin	1974-1975
Mrs Chippie Kier	1976
Mrs Chippie Kier and Mrs Benita Stein	1977
Mrs Charlotte Wiener and Mrs Phyllis Price	1978
Mrs Charlotte Wiener	1979, 1987-1988, 1991-2002
Mrs Marie Pogrund	1980-1981
Mrs Fonda Dubb and Mrs Lily Rakusin	1982
Mrs Hilary Starkowitz	1983-1984, 1989-1990
Mrs Benita Stein	1985-1986

The treasurers of the Guild usually held the post for several years at a time: Eva Stein for eight years, Adene Notelovitz for 10 years, Laurane Klingman for 16 years and Rene Levy for 10 years. Likewise the secretaries: Minnie Susser for three years, M Kohn for six years, Mary Schechter for five years, Rene Levy for four years, Adene Notelowitz for eight years and Sheila Levy for 17 years.

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NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Saron, Gustav and Hotz, Louis. *The Jews in South Africa: A History*". Oxford University Press: London, 1955, p. 36.

<sup>2</sup> Tribute speech to the late Lena Herman by Dora Manaschewitz in the possession of her granddaughter, Justine Rapeport in Durban. During World War I, Lena worked continuously for the war effort and was awarded the MBE [Member of the British Empire].

<sup>3</sup> *South African Jewish Observer* annual report 1921. South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file K, 29 January 1928 and file K 29 April 1948. In 1929, Johanna Kallmeyer also started the Star Seaside Fund in Pietersburg.

<sup>4</sup> The society was unable to pay affiliation fees by 1943, and as no functions were being held by 1948, the fund was discontinued as a constituent body of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies. South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file 46. *South African Jewish Times* 23 June 1961.

<sup>5</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minutes 12 October 1921.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 21 September 1931.

<sup>7</sup> White women were granted the franchise in the national electoral system in 1930. This may have been why Mr Hirschmann introduced the motion at this time. Davenport, T R H. *South Africa: A Modern History*. Johannesburg: Southern, p. 304.



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<sup>8</sup> According to the Constitution, no resolutions could be rescinded, except by a special general meeting convened for that purpose, and then only by a decision of a majority of two-thirds of the qualified voters present. *The Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation Constitution and Bye-Laws*. Adopted by members 22 November 1925, 5<sup>th</sup> Day of Kislev 5686.

<sup>9</sup> In Potchefstroom, the women already had a vote on the synagogue committee from about 1918, but they were mainly involved in fund raising. Interview with Paul Cheifitz, currently finishing his Masters degree on the history of the Jews of Potchefstroom.

<sup>10</sup> His first name is not included in the minutes.

<sup>11</sup> Pietersburg and District Jewish Women's Guild minutes 2 October 1947

<sup>12</sup> The terms 'chairman' and 'vice-chairman' were used earlier instead of the term 'chairperson' as used today.

<sup>13</sup> Pietersburg and District Jewish Women's Guild minutes November 1949.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 18 February 1950.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* March 28 1950.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* 19 April 1950.

<sup>17</sup> Pietersburg and District Jewish Women's Guild correspondence: to Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation committee 30 April 1957.

<sup>18</sup> Saron, Gustav. *The Jews of South Africa: An Illustrated History to 1953*. Edited by Naomi Musiker. Scarecrow Books: Johannesburg, 2001, p. 170.

<sup>19</sup> Pietersburg and District Jewish Women's Guild minutes 9 November 1959, 18 May 1961 and 17 May 1962.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.* 6 September 1966.

<sup>21</sup> *South African Jewish Times* 23 September 1966.

<sup>22</sup> South African umbrella organization for women promoting equal rights.

<sup>23</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minutes May 1971.

<sup>24</sup> Her first name is not included in the minutes.

## CHAPTER 9

### THE ROLE OF ZIONISM IN THE COMMUNITY

Zionism was a Jewish national movement that emerged in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Its aim was to establish an independent homeland for Jews in Palestine [*Eretz Israel*]. Nationalist stirrings in Europe during the 19<sup>th</sup> century as well as the manifestation of a new anti-Semitism that was no longer based in the Church inspired the growth of Zionism. National movements emerged in Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the unification of Germany and Italy and the disintegration and decay of the Austro-Hungarian and Ottoman Empires. Jews, using the model of other national groups, developed a Jewish version of nationalism and longed for their own country, *Eretz Israel*. Jewish nationalism was based on a common religion and Biblical heritage, as well as the shared experience of suffering and persecution over the centuries. Jewish nationalism was unique in that their longing was for a national land that was not the land in which they lived.

Until this time, the Jewish link with the Land of Israel had always been a religious one with the belief that only G-d would determine when the Jews would return to Zion. A national secular self-awareness began to replace this traditional Jewish religious identity. Rabbi Yehudah Alkalai [1798-1878] and Rabbi Zvi Hirsch Kalischer [1795-1874]<sup>1</sup> were proto-Zionists whose Zionism emerged from a religious base, whereas with many of the later Zionist thinkers, the basis for their Zionist ideas was secular. These two Rabbis were radical thinkers for their time who through biblical quotations argued that the coming of the Messiah was imminent because all the other nations were gaining their independence. The Messiah's arrival would be

hastened if Jews returned to the Land of Israel and carried out all the commandments. They advocated that Jews should take their redemption into their own hands and establish a settlement for Jews in *Eretz Israel*. Other Rabbis [later consolidated into *Agudat Israel*] opposed them as they believed that only the advent of the Messiah would bring about the return to the Land of Israel. They were therefore against the establishment of *Eretz Israel* before the coming of the Messiah.

Despite the growth of liberalism in Europe and the emancipation of the Jewish minority there, the Jew was still regarded as an alien and felt excluded from such emerging nations as the French, German and Italians. This was evidenced during the Dreyfus trial in France when a Jewish captain in the French army was the target of trumped up charges in a treason trial. Anti-Semitism still continued despite Jewish secularism. Moses Hess [1812-1875]<sup>2</sup>, a secular Zionist Socialist, believed Jews would always be regarded as aliens in the countries they were living in, unless they had their own national state.

Jews in Russia formed the *Chovevei Zion* [Lovers of Zion] society after 1881<sup>3</sup>. The members of this society were practical Zionists who were amongst the first pioneers to establish agricultural colonies in Palestine. Theodore Herzl [1860-1904] turned Zionism into a political movement – he advocated the establishment of an independent Jewish state with the consent of the Great Powers. He convened the first Zionist Congress in Basle in 1897. South African Jews were strong supporters of Theodore Herzl.

Descended mostly from Lithuanian Jews, the South African community was devoted to Zionism. The Zionist movement served to strengthen their Jewish consciousness and unify the community<sup>4</sup>. Many had been members of *Chovevei Zion* societies in Lithuania and they brought these Zionist ideals with them to South Africa. In 1896, the first *Chovevei Zion* Society was established in Johannesburg and by 1898 Zionism was established from the Cape to the Zambesi<sup>5</sup>. In 1898 the Transvaal Zionist Association was formed in South Africa with 500 members. At the first South African Zionist Conference in 1905 there were 60 Zionist societies in South Africa.

Many of the Jews of Pietersburg, most of who had come from Eastern Europe, also brought their love of Zion with them to South Africa. The Pietersburg-Zoutpansberg Zionist Society was established in 1905<sup>6</sup>. It drew its members from the whole of the Northern Transvaal, including Louis Trichardt, Mara, Koedoesvlei, Potgietersrus, Tzaneen, Houtbosdorp and Haenertsburg<sup>7</sup>. Mr Barney Herman was elected the first president and he held the position until 1923, except when Mr A Zaidel was president in 1911<sup>8</sup>. The Pietersburg-Zoutpansberg Zionist Society was represented for the first time at the third South African Zionist Conference in Johannesburg in 1909<sup>9</sup>. At this conference, the claim was made that South African Zionists were the largest contributors *per capita* to world Zionist funds<sup>10</sup>.

The committee of the Pietersburg-Zoutpansberg Society in 1912 consisted of Mr B Herman [president], Mr A Zaidel [secretary/treasurer], Messrs J Kallmeyer, S Marcus, B Lenz, S Saks and M Marcus. By 1913 the Pietersburg-Zoutpansberg Zionist Society consisted of 39 members. Women were elected onto the committee on 22 September 1914<sup>11</sup>, long before they were elected to the synagogue and

Women's Guild committees<sup>12</sup>. These included Mrs H Manaschewitz, vice-chairman, Miss B Kallmeyer, secretary, and Mesdames J Kallmeyer, S Marcus, B Herman, and H Hirschmann as committee members. The 1916 committee<sup>13</sup> consisted of Mr B Herman, president, Mrs J Kallmeyer, vice-president and Miss B Kallmeyer, secretary/treasurer. Committee members included Mesdames S Marcus, S Saks, B Herman, M Israelsohn and Messrs M Marcus, J Kruger and S Saks. Ex-officio members were Mr J Kallmeyer, president of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation [PHC] and Rev J Hurwitz. Workers canvassed the whole of the Northern Transvaal. In 1918 a committee of ladies collected from members in Louis Trichardt and Potgietersrus<sup>14</sup>. The Annual General Meetings [AGM] were held in the Masonic Hall in Pietersburg for many years.

The Pietersburg-Zoutpansberg Zionist Society Bye-Laws<sup>15</sup> declared that the objects of the Society were the 'upbuilding' of the Jewish National Home in Palestine by

- a] supporting all funds which aim at the purchase of land in, and the colonization by Jews, of Palestine,
- b] cultivating a Jewish National spirit by fostering and supporting all cultural movements which have that object in view,
- c] providing suitable literature on Jewish History and current events.

A library was started by members of the Zionist Society in the Pietersburg communal hall and a bookcase was built in the front room of the hall for this purpose<sup>16</sup>.

Membership of the Society was open to all Jews and the annual subscription was ten shillings and sixpence for men and five shillings for women. The Executive consisted of a chairman, two vice-chairmen, one a woman, the Honorary secretary and the Honorary treasurer. There were 10 committee members, of which five were women.

The standing committees were:

- a] Membership and library, three members with Honorary secretary as convener
- b] National fund and entertainment, lady members with lady vice-chairman as convener
- c] Propaganda and cultural, five members with vice-chairman as convener.
- d] Chairman ex-officio a member of all sub-committees

The Pietersburg-Zoutpansberg Zionist Society members organized a special fund called the Pietersburg and District Jewish War Relief Fund around 1918<sup>17</sup>. Mr B Herman was chairman and Miss A Kallmeyer was the secretary<sup>18</sup>. Although this fund was run by Zionists, money was not collected for Israel but for needy Jews suffering from the effects of World War I. This fund seems to have had little connection with 'Zionist work'.

By 1919 the Pietersburg-Zoutpansberg Zionist society included 75 members. The first visit of an Executive member of the South African Zionist Federation [SAZF] occurred in 1919 when Mr B S Hersch toured the district<sup>19</sup>. The society's growth is indicated by its re-classification by the SAZF with respect to affiliation fees: in 1919 it was a Class 4 society paying £4 per annum, in 1922 it was a Class 3 paying £7 per annum and in 1926 it became a Class 2 category paying £10 per annum. In

1927, a function was held to celebrate Mr Barney Herman's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday. He was inscribed in the Golden Book<sup>20</sup> by the Pietersburg Zionist Society. This was an honour only granted in cases of exceptional meritorious service in the cause of Zionism. The inscription reads:

Barnard Herman, inscribed on his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday by the Pietersburg-Zoutpansberg Zionist Society in recognition of his many and valued services over a period of many years to the Zionist cause and the community in general<sup>21</sup>

The president in 1929 was H Manaschewitz, the vice-president Mrs D Hirschmann and the treasurer/secretary Miss H Israelsohn. The committee consisted of Messrs B Herman, S Palte, M Marcus, M H Cohen, H Kallmeyer, M Friedel and Mesdames S Palte, E Levin, H Manaschewitz, H Gifter, B Levy, S Solomon, M M Levy, J Kallmeyer, M Israelsohn, Miss M Apple<sup>22</sup>. In 1929, the number of Jews belonging to the Pietersburg-Zoutpansberg Zionist Society was 106<sup>23</sup> which must have included most of the Jews in the area. The numbers exemplify the strong support Zionism had in the Northern Transvaal. In 1929, the Jews of Louis Trichardt, also strong Zionist followers, held a protest meeting about the Arab uprising in Palestine and the subsequent atrocities<sup>24</sup>.

The chairman of the Pietersburg-Zoutpansberg Zionist Society in 1931 was H Manaschewitz, the vice-chairmen were Mrs L Miller and Mr M Friedel, the Hon secretary was Mr B Chaitow. The committee consisted of Mesdames D Hirschmann, J Young, S Skok, S H Solomon, Miss Novis, Rev Levine, Dr Hack, Messrs M H Cohen, Traub and J Hirschmann.

Both the owner, Solomon Marcus, and the editor, Joseph Edelman, of the weekly Pietersburg newspaper, the *Zoutpansberg Review*, were Jews. Therefore all Zionist functions were reported in detail. For example, on 23 October 1931, the *Zoutpansberg Review* reported that the Pietersburg Zionist Society had held a ‘Mock Marriage’ in the communal hall. Between 200 and 300 people enjoyed the function. Other social events included an annual Zionist social and a community bazaar. The *Zoutpansberg Review* newspaper reported that when Mr I M Kahan left on a visit to Israel, huge crowds of co-religionists and fellow Zionists were at the station to wish him *bon voyage*<sup>25</sup>.

The *Zoutpansberg Review* fully supported the Zionist lobby for the State of Israel and often featured pro-Israel articles. It chronicled Chaim Weizmann’s tour of South Africa in 1931 when he came for the *Keren Hayesod* campaign to raise money for Israel. He was well received during his visit to South Africa. On his visit to Pietersburg, Chaim Weizmann was welcomed by Mr Lombard, the magistrate, in the absence of the mayor. Weizmann addressed a meeting in the town hall in front of an audience of 400 people. He also spoke in the Pietersburg communal hall on 20 March 1931 to a large and receptive gathering of people.

His hosts for his sojourn in Pietersburg were Mr and Mrs H Manaschewitz. Mr Manaschewitz was nicknamed the ‘Father of Zionism’ in Pietersburg, as he was an avid worker for Zionism and had helped found the Zionist Society in Pietersburg. His papers were presented to the SAZF library. Dr Chaim Weizmann travelled north to Rhodesia [Zimbabwe] and on his return to South Africa was entertained at a tea party



by the Messina Zionist Association. The Manaschewitz family drove him from Messina to Louis Trichardt and then to Warmbaths where he was again entertained at a tea party. He also visited a member of his family Max Weizmann, who was living in the Potgietersrus area. Chaim Weizmann and his wife requested that the Manaschewitz family accompany them on their visit to the Kruger National Park<sup>26</sup>. After their visit Weizmann sent a letter to Manaschewitz thanking him for his hospitality. This letter is now in the Weizmann Institute in Israel Manaschewitz was mentioned in Weizmann's book 'Trial and Error' as their "expert Lithuanian guide". After Weizmann's departure, various newly-formed organizations in South Africa were imbued with a new spirit, such as the Women's Zionist Council, the Zionist Youth Council and the Department of Organisation and Propaganda<sup>27</sup>.

Another Zionist leader to visit Pietersburg was Ze'ev Jabotinsky [1880-1940]. He was the leader of the Zionist Revisionists<sup>28</sup>. His movement, the 'New Zionist Organisation', was established in 1935. It was independent of the World Zionist Organisation headed by Chaim Weizmann. Jabotinsky was sharply critical of the World Zionist Organisation. He too believed in a Jewish State according to the League of Nations Mandate but he believed Transjordan should be included in the state and he promoted mass Jewish colonization. The Union of Zionist Revisionists of South Africa had their first conference in May 1930 but did not have much support in South Africa at that time. Only 2761 votes were cast for the party in a population which counted over 80 000 Jewish souls<sup>29</sup>. The Revisionist movement published the *Jewish Herald* weekly newspaper from 1938 for over 50 years. In 1937 Ze'ev Jabotinsky toured South Africa. By this time the Revisionist movement had gained wide support in the main centres but not in the Northern Transvaal. When he visited

Pietersburg, he was met at the station by his supporters, Messrs Isaac Brenner and Leon Danzig. Jabotinsky stayed overnight with Isaac Brenner, but as he had few followers in Pietersburg, a communal meeting never materialised<sup>30</sup>. Although the Pietersburg community did not support the Revisionist Party, the congregation committee, which normally had to approve of the various campaigns, agreed to the holding of the Jabotinsky Memorial Campaign in 1964 in memory of Jabotinsky who was one of the great leaders of the Zionist movement.

Various Zionist youth societies were founded over the years. Miss Bertha Kallmeyer, [later Mrs Bertha Palte], suggested at the 1914 AGM of the Pietersburg-Zoutpansberg Zionist Society, that a junior society should be formed. Only in 1919 was the Young Israel Society established by Mrs Palte. Its slogan was: 'We work in hope'<sup>31</sup>. Many children were imbued with Zionist ideals by Mrs Bertha Palte, who ran classes of Jewish interest for the younger children on *Shabbat* and Festivals. As a result, a number of those children eventually went to live in Israel. Over the years the Young Israel Society ceased to function, but it was revived in 1931 by Rev J I Levine<sup>32</sup>. An inaugural meeting was held in mid-1931 and was addressed by Mr I Dunsky, chairman of the Transvaal Young Israel Society Executive Committee. The constitution was revised in 1932. Mr Adolph Hattenbach represented the society at the Transvaal Council meeting in Johannesburg in 1935<sup>33</sup>.

In Pietersburg, *Habonim's Gedud* Weitzmann, was founded in 1933 by Daphne Manaschewitz, who was an ex-Pietersburger and the head of *Gedud* Sharon of Johannesburg. She imbued the young Pietersburgers with the spirit of *Habonim*<sup>34</sup> whilst spending her vacation in Pietersburg. The youth had also been influenced by

Dr Chaim Weizmann's 1932 visit when he had addressed the youth and inspired them with his zeal for a national state. His words to the *Rosh Gedud*, Mr S Hirschmann had been: "Carry on, it's worth it" and this became their rallying cry<sup>35</sup>.

The Pietersburg and District Zionist Youth Society was established in 1935 by Samuel [Chummy] Hirschmann<sup>36</sup>. It included all existing Jewish Youth bodies – the Young Israel Society, *Habonim* and Mrs Palte's group. A new constitution was introduced and the following were elected: chairman, Mr S Hirschmann [who was also a member of the Transvaal Zionist Youth Executive]<sup>37</sup>, vice-chairman, Mr S Israelsohn, secretary, Mr E Hirschmann, assistant-secretary, Mr A Hattenbach, treasurer, Mr D Solomon, committee, Misses F Tager, B Hirschmann, M Eichholz, Mrs B Palte; Messrs L Israelsohn, Charlie Hirschmann, J Levin and G Susser. Another member from the *Habonim* movement was also appointed. Hebrew and cultural activities were the focus of the society. These were convened by Rev J I Levine, who was an avid supporter of Zionism. The forerunners of the Zionist movement were studied, news of the week was given at each meeting and extracts from the Bible were read. The society functioned until the early 1960s<sup>38</sup>. In the 1940s the Bnei Zion Youth Group was formed and held meetings for the Jewish youth every Sunday morning. The society changed its name in 1943 to the Pietersburg Zionist Society. The committee in 1946 consisted of chairman, Mr David Tankel, secretary, Ziphre Palte, treasurer, Doreen Goldreich and Olga Skok, Ruby Levy and Jack Notelovitz<sup>39</sup>. Jack Notelovitz became chairman in 1948<sup>40</sup>.

By the late 1960s there was no longer a Jewish youth society in Pietersburg. Rabbi E J Dushinsky, the country communities Rabbi, requested help from the Youth Council

of the Federation of Synagogues in 1966 to help organize a youth group. As a result it was decided in 1972 to start a Young Adult Zionist group. Joseph Amiel, the Youth Director of the Federation of Synagogues conducted youth programmes on family days organized by the SAJBD and the Pietersburg congregation. In 1979 Ze'ev Bielski, the *Aliyah shaliach*<sup>41</sup> was the charismatic guest speaker at a function to honour Golda Meir on 21 March 1979. He stimulated the youth into again starting the Zionist movement of *Habonim* in Pietersburg. Several of these members went to *Habonim* camp each year. Rev B Lerer stimulated an interest in *Bnei Akiva* in the 1980s and many children went to *Bnei Akiva* camps each December.

The Pietersburg and District Women's Zionist League [Zionist League] was formed after a visit by Mr Lewin<sup>42</sup> of the SAZF in 1932. It broke away from the Pietersburg-Zoutpansberg Zionist Society following many arguments<sup>43</sup>. Whether the arguments were about political issues or personal disagreements is unknown. At the first meeting, Mrs Heyman<sup>44</sup> from Johannesburg, spoke about the Women's Zionist Organisation<sup>45</sup>. This was followed by a lecture on Hitler and Mussolini by Mr M Sonnenberg. In 1937 the Tzaneen, Duiwelskloof and District Zionist Society was recorded as an affiliate member of the SAZF, but no other references can be found to this society<sup>46</sup>.

Not much is known concerning the early days of the Pietersburg and District Women's Zionist League [Zionist League], but information can be gleaned from different sources such as certificates presented to members. When the Zionist League celebrated its 21<sup>st</sup> birthday on 3 May 1953 a certificate for 100 trees was presented by the Morning Sewing Group<sup>47</sup>. It stated that a *dunam* of land had been

reclaimed in the name of the founders of the Zionist League in the Huleh Reclamation Project in Palestine. It reads:

Planted by the Pietersburg and District Women's Zionist League on the occasion of its 21<sup>st</sup> anniversary, in memory of its founders who had done so much for the cause:

Doris Hirschmann –founder and chairman for first five years, Jean Young – founder and chairman, Lena Herman, Betty Israelsohn, Sophie Skok, Frieda Levine, Anne Himmelhoch, Dora Lewis, Rae Bloch –foundation and committee members

This certificate provides the names of the founders. Another certificate also presented to Doris Hirschmann states:

In Appreciation for the Help and Generosity that has contributed to the Development of Mothercraft Training and Child Care Centre.

Cot in the name of Doris Hirschmann

Founder and first chairman Pietersburg Women's Zionist League 1932

The main function of the Pietersburg Women's Zionist League was to raise money for Palestine and the members initiated their campaign with great vigour. On 21 October 1932 a Zionist ball was held in the Pietersburg Town Hall. 230 townspeople attended, including the mayor of Pietersburg and Senator Tom Naude, the Member of Parliament for Pietersburg.

According to notices appearing in the *Zoutpansberg Review*, 1933 proved to be a very busy year for the Zionist Society. January saw a debate between the Zionist

Society and the Young Israel Society. Lectures on Palestine and its Zionist founders were given by visiting Palestinian *Halutzim*. *Shekel* Day was celebrated with Zionist members canvassing the Jews of the town to pay the equivalent of a *shekel* for Israel. A mass meeting in the communal hall drew 100 enthusiastic Zionists. Other social events included treasure hunts, dances, musical evenings and debates. Mr I Kahan was the local delegate to the South African Zionist Conference in 1933.

The Pietersburg and District Women's Zionist League was responsible for organizing functions associated with the modern land of Israel. These included *Tu B'Shvat*, *Yom Ha'atzma'ut* and later *Yom Yerushalayim*. *Tu B'Shvat* was celebrated with the planting of trees by the children at the communal hall, donated by the Pietersburg Jewish Women's Guild. The Women's Zionist Council of South Africa were so impressed with this initiative of the Pietersburg Zionist League branch, that they sent directives to their other societies to emulate this example<sup>48</sup>. A certificate was issued for a grove of 100 trees planted in the Jewish National Fund [JNF]<sup>49</sup> forest in Israel by 81 of the children of Pietersburg on *Tu B'Shvat* February 1955. Two trees were also planted in the names of the late Mr Barney Herman and Mr Ben Levy, past presidents of the PHC.

*Yom Ha'atzma'ut* was celebrated every year with a dinner in the communal hall. Candles were lit by prominent members of the community, equivalent to the number of years the State of Israel had been in existence. As the membership numbers dropped eventually every member of the congregation had a turn to light a candle. In May 1977, ten years after Jerusalem was recaptured, *Yom Yerushalayim* was celebrated in Pietersburg for the first time by the Zionist League.

The Zionist League, in the same way as the Pietersburg Women's Guild, co-operated with the non-Jewish societies in their fund-raising efforts. They ran a stall at the National Council of Women's Harvest Festival on 28 March 1958, where Mesdames Sadie Hirschmann and Jane Danzig built a model of an agricultural settlement in Israel. It showed various types of farming and land reclamation schemes carried out in Israel<sup>50</sup>. Jews of Pietersburg were often called upon to present talks on Israel to the non-Jewish community. On 18 November 1965, the Marble Hall branch of the Women's Agricultural Union held its annual International Evening with Israel as its chosen country for that year. A five-course dinner was prepared under the instructions of Mrs Percy Wingrin. Mr Jack Hirschmann of Pietersburg was the guest speaker and he illustrated his talk with slides and a film on Israel<sup>51</sup>.

In 1970, the women's branch of the Transvaal Agricultural Union [TAU] in Dendron, about 50 kilometers from Pietersburg, held an Israeli evening. The Zionists were asked to assist in preparing the dinner of typically Jewish and Israeli dishes. Mr I D Unna, the Consul for Israel, was the guest of honour, speaking first in Afrikaans and then in English. The local Afrikaans papers gave the function a full-page write-up with photographs. Mr Unna also visited Pietersburg and was entertained in the town hall at a function held for both Jews and Gentiles. The TAU in Levubu, about 70 kilometers north of Louis Trichardt, also held an Israeli evening and all the people of the surrounding district attended, as well as the Jewish community of Louis Trichardt. In Levubu, as in Dendron, the Afrikaans women had taken the trouble to learn the words and meaning of *Hatikvah*<sup>52</sup>. An Israeli evening was given by the TAU in Naboomspruit in 1974 where Mr Jack Hirschmann gave a talk and

Jewish dishes were served. The *Vroue Landbou Unie*, Hangklip held an Israeli tea in October 1976, assisted by the Jewish ladies.

The Jews of Pietersburg was always willing to donate money to Israeli causes, especially during times of trouble. An article in the *South African Jewish Times* in 1948 reflects the work done by the Jews in the Northern Transvaal for the *Magen David Adom* [the Jewish equivalent of the Red Cross] in Israel:

Due mainly to the untiring efforts of Mr Louis Brenner, the Pietersburg and District Jewish Community has presented to the *Magen David Adom* [MDA], for the use of the *Haganah*, one fully equipped ambulance, two field ambulances and a blood transfusion appliance in the names of the Pietersburg, Louis Trichardt, Potgietersrust and Zoekmekaar communities respectively, at a total cost of £3 500<sup>53</sup>.

The Israel United Appeal [IUA] fund<sup>54</sup> collected £14,748 from the Pietersburg area in 1949 for the newly proclaimed State of Israel. A mass meeting was held at the communal hall on 1 May 1949, addressed by Mr Bernard Gering, the chairman of the SAZF, Mr Harry Cohen, chairman of the Johannesburg IUA and Mr Solly Shewitz, acting chairman of the Transvaal committee of the IUA. Mr Jack Hirschmann was the chairman of the Pietersburg branch of the IUA and Dr R Rabinowitz was the secretary in 1949<sup>55</sup>.

On 20 December 1962, as the feelings of the community were running high because of the Israeli sanctions vote against South Africa, Mr A S Super of Johannesburg was invited to address the community to clarify Israel's position and to collect



money for Israel. 70 people attended and the meeting was most successful and enlightening. The Campaign raised £762-10 from 42 donors. An emergency meeting was held on 12 June 1967 as a result of the Six Day War in Israel. An 'Actions Committee' consisting of the Jewish Women's Societies was formed to raise money with Mrs S Hirschmann as chairlady. The Jewish women organized an emergency funds week for Israel. The premiere of the movie 'Exodus' was screened and a 'Sacrifice Sale' was held by the Pietersburg Women's Zionist League on 30 June 1967. Sacrifice gifts donated by the Jewish ladies of Pietersburg and the surrounding areas, were sold out of a shop in the main street. A large jumble sale in the form of a 'Cheap Bazaar' was held in the poorer area of the town on 2 August 1967. R4100 was raised in total. As a result of the war in Israel in 1973, an emergency appeal was launched for the 1973 Israeli Jewish War Appeal. A shop was opened on 31 October 1973 to sell articles of value collected from members. Large items were raffled, such as a car donated by Mr H Sacks, a swimming pool by Mr S Tager, two suede coats by Mr H Notelovitz, a lawn mower by the Levy brothers and a dinner cloth by Mrs R Jedwood. The winning tickets were drawn at a dinner. The total profit was R8761,50. The 'Entebbe Cake Sale' to raise funds after the Entebbe Raid into Uganda by Israel in 1979 to rescue hijacked Israeli citizens, brought in R400 as once again feelings for Israel ran high.

Pietersburg was not only generous with money donations to Israel but also with manpower. Several Pietersburg boys left for Israel to join the Israeli army and farewell functions were held for them. Herman Hirschmann, son of Jack and Sadie Hirschmann went to join the Israeli army in 1957. Unfortunately he was badly

injured in a shooting accident whilst in the army. Leslie Susser and Sydney Dinkelspiel left for Israel in December 1961 and Morris Jedwood in 1962.

In March 1968, a branch of the South African Zionist Federation was formed in Pietersburg. This was a separate body to the Women's Zionist League, which at that time was the only Zionist society in the town. Messrs M Schechter and J Meyer represented the congregation and Messrs G Mendelsohn and J Hirschmann the study group, Mrs S Hirschmann the Women's Zionist League and Mrs A Beron the Women's Guild. Mr J Hirschmann was the liaison officer<sup>56</sup>. For unknown reasons, this branch did not last long in Pietersburg.

Over the years, Mesdames G Feinberg, Rahel Hirschmann and Jenny Worms were responsible for overseeing the finances. The Zionist League was allotted a quota that they had to raise every year and submit to the Women's Zionist Council of South Africa in Johannesburg. The treasurer's reports show that the Zionist League was very active in the 1950s. In 1952, the Zionist League found it very difficult to raise their quota, even though they catered large functions such as weddings<sup>57</sup>. In 1954 the Zionist League raised money by holding several dances in the communal hall, catered three Barmitzvahs, held several card afternoons, a cake sale, a film show, a picture competition and a record evening and raffled a dinner set. The large sum of £1024-4-0 was raised in 1956 due to the many and varied functions held. They catered a wedding reception in the town hall for 250 people, a Masonic banquet for 150 people, a 'Leap Year' dance, a cocktail party for 120 people, a *Yom Ha'atzma'ut* banquet, a fete and a mannequin parade. This amount also included Blue Box collections [£109], trees sold [£113], Golden Book inscriptions [£75], New Year

Cards sold [£8], catering [£198], JNF, Wizo and *Youth Aliyah* functions [£514] and donations.

When Rev J I Levine complained that the Zionist League ladies worked on *Shabbat*, the chairlady of the Zionist League assured him that they worked as individuals and not as a society. The Zionist League ladies believed that Israel's need was so great, that to work for its cause was actually a *mitzvah*, even though it was on *Shabbat*. This is contrary to *Halakhah* and this idea was certainly not supported by Rev Levine.

The Women's Zionist League still continued to hold fund-raising events for their quota. In 1969 a 'Sparkling Champagne' supper for 375 people was held. In 1970 Max Collie, the hypnotist appeared in the Pietersburg Town Hall. The Jewish Guild Orchestra under Dr Solly Aronowsky played in Pietersburg. He returned on 14 October 1972 and the League raised over R1000. Because of the huge success of the Aronowsky concert, the Zionist League attempted to repeat this with a Gert Potgieter Concert on 25 August 1973. Unfortunately it had to be cancelled as the singer had a throat infection. The last minute replacement by Vincent Frittelli, the violinist, led to a profit of only R231,20 being made.

By 1970 the Pietersburg Women's Zionist League had 72 members and the committee had 17 members. The JNF convener congratulated the Messina and Louis Trichardt ladies for selling a considerable number of trees. Mrs Davidoff, the president of the Women's Zionist Organisation of South Africa, asked the Pietersburg branch to try to enroll new members, but Pietersburg replied that

everyone was already a member<sup>58</sup>. As part of a membership drive, a letter was written to the ladies in Potgietersrus, offering them membership of the Zionist League but there was no response from them.

In 1971, the annual remittance to the Women's Zionist Council of R1263,86 exceeded the Pietersburg branch's quota, despite a reduction in membership of 12 members to 60 members. The quota raised for 1972 was R1554,50 of which the greatest contribution was the R500 of the '101 Club'. The '101 Club' was started in 1965 with 101 members. Members donated money and every month there was a draw for prizes. Pietersburg was praised by the Women's Zionist Council for invariably making their quota. Despite their smaller number of members, the 1974 quota of R2000 for Pietersburg was raised to R2250 by the Zionist Council head office. Nevertheless, the Zionist League managed to raise the amount of R2504. In 1975 despite numbers falling to 56, the branch's quota was raised to R2500. In 1976, R2022 was submitted towards the quota, despite there only being 49 actual town members. The 1977 quota remittance was increased yet again to R4000. Fortunately R3419 had been raised from four large *Barmitzvah* caterings.

The chairlady lamented at the lack of interest shown by members as the committee meetings were poorly attended, some members having attended no meetings at all during the year. Non-cake sales or 'phantom cake sales' were held, where only money and not cakes were donated. This was because of the lack of workers, but proved to be only moderately successful. Letters were written to members living in the rural areas outside Pietersburg to ask them to pay their subscriptions, JNF blue box donations, phantom cake sale contributions and their 101 Club contribution. Mrs

B Flax from Messina and Mrs Cecily Hirschmann from Pietersburg won trips to Israel in the Blue Box draw.

Sadly in 1980, the Zionist League only raised R2246 and did not make their quota, nor were there any cultural functions during the year. At the 1982 AGM, it was recorded that the revised quota of R3600 had been exceeded, as R3891 was raised. This was due to money raised from a recipe book called 'Tea and Taste' that was compiled and printed by the Zionist League. In August 1982 a tea was held in the communal hall to launch the book. Contributors to the book baked their own recipes and brought them to the hall. Tickets to the function sold out rapidly as the Jewish ladies had earned a formidable reputation for their baking in the town. In 1983 R3578 was sent towards their quota, but after this the amount collected declined over the years. Few large functions were catered for and most of the money was collected from Blue Box collections, selling of tree certificates and phantom cake sales. In 1990 the quota was not achieved and only R1300 was sent as the membership declined to only 32 members. By 1993 there were only 12 members left but R3,383 made from catering was sent towards the quota. The chairlady lamented the lack of Zionist activity and inspiration.

The Pietersburg Zionists followed events in Johannesburg. Even though they were far removed from the main centres, they were not afraid to intervene and make their opinions known. At a special meeting of the PHC on 17 February 1967, the members objected that large amounts of money collected for Israel through the IUA were instead being used by the South Africa Jewish Board of Education for the Jewish Day Schools in the large cities. They believed that collection of money for the

Jewish Day Schools should instead be the responsibility of the parents and the congregations concerned. The PHC unanimously adopted the decision to cable the Jewish Agency on 15 September 1967. This cable read:

unanimous decision condemning action using Zionist funds Jewish Day Schools.

Signed "Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation and Zionists".

Another occasion where the Pietersburg branch expressed its opinion was at the 32<sup>nd</sup> Zionist Conference. There was a strong movement within the SAZF in 1972 to change the basic structure of the organization from party-list representation to election on an individual-personal basis. Delegates to the World Zionist Conference were elected on an [Israeli] Party political basis of Labour, Revisionists, etc. This also fixed the division of mandates of the SAZF. Mrs Frances Rakusin was elected the Pietersburg representative to the 32<sup>nd</sup> Zionist Conference on 30 August 1972. She proposed a resolution, seconded by Mrs Sadie Hirschmann and accepted by the meeting, being:

That Conference urges the Executive of the SA Zionist Federation to take immediate action for a more realistic basis for the organization and representation of the actual members of Southern Africa upon whose support the strength of the Zionist Federation depends. That this conference urges that representation on the SA Zionist Federation should be on the basis of a best-man policy and not on the basis of party representation<sup>59</sup>.

In time, a non-party body called the United Zionist Association, not affiliated to any Israeli political parties was formed.

The 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Pietersburg Womens' Zionist League was celebrated with a tea in the communal hall on 18 June 1972. Mrs Fay Kofsky from the Women's Zionist Council attended. This function was combined with the 'Rebecca Sieff Memorial Lecture' delivered by Mrs Jeanette Davidoff of the Women's Zionist Council. Over the years, members were honoured for their years of devotion to the Zionist cause. Rebecca Sieff awards were given to Mesdames Gertie Feinberg, Rahel Hirschmann, Sadie Hirschmann and the late Lena Miller. All mothers in the congregation were inscribed in the 'Honour Thy Mother Forest'. The certificate read "in honour of all the Jewish Women Members of the Pietersburg and District Women's Zionist League". The Rebecca Sieff Award was presented to Mrs Frances Rakusin for 40 years service to the Women's Zionist League. When Mrs Sadie Hirschmann went on *aliyah* to Israel, she was presented with a certificate for 40 trees in the Jewish National Fund [JNF] Forest by the Pietersburg Zionist League for 40 years of devoted service, including many years as chairlady. In 1981 Mrs Miriam Israelsohn was made an Honorary member of the League because of her years of service as secretary. Mesdames Eva Stein, long-time treasurer, Mabel Israelsohn and Lily Rakusin were also made Honorary Life Members of the League. Mrs Palte was made an Honorary Life vice-president and an Honorary Life Member of the Zionist League. At the 1989 AGM, Mesdames B Meyer, C Hirschmann and R Garb were congratulated for 40 years service to the Pietersburg Zionist League and Mesdames J Danzig, L Klingman, R Jedwood and C Tankel for 25 years service<sup>60</sup>.

Difficulties in communication with the Women's Zionist Council head office in Johannesburg led to problems in arranging functions. The long distances and the

need to find accommodation for visitors also contributed to their troubles. Programmes and speakers promised by the Women's Zionist Council often failed to arrive. In 1989, *Yom Ha'atzma'ut* was a disappointment as the *Bnei Akiva* members from Johannesburg did not arrive, due to difficulties in arranging adequate transport. The Zionist League presented tree certificates to all Jewish babies born in the community as well as for all marriages, important anniversaries and *Barmitzvahs* but these certificates usually arrived too late to be presented on time. The Northern Transvaal was considered to be too far from the head office in Johannesburg to be included in Transvaal regional meetings. A memo from one of these meetings expresses its regret that a few societies remain outside the orbit of the three regional committees of Southern Transvaal, East Rand and West Rand. These included Lichtenburg, Mafeking, Pietersburg, Rustenburg and Witbank. However, Pietersburg was invited to join the Transvaal regional committee meeting on 24 February 1981.

Mrs Mickey Goldblatt came to Pietersburg to inaugurate the women's Biennial Zionist Campaign on 28 March 1976. This campaign was separate from the annual quota. Each individual member was approached to donate to Israel. R5306 was collected from forty three contributors, compared to R5393 from forty eight contributors in 1974. However not all Jewish ladies gave freely to Zionist causes. One lady in Louis Trichardt declined to give towards cake sales and stated that she was "actively connected with Lions, Wildlife Society, Music Society, SA Legion and Bowls...I find that I am constantly having to make contributions monetary and otherwise for many morning markets and suchlike. Sorry I can't help"<sup>61</sup>. In 1981, the campaign raised R4226 from thirty members, but there were still members who did not give to Israel. The campaign raised R6918 from the contributions of only



nineteen members in 1989. After the League ceased to exist in 2000, campaign monies were collected by post from individual members.

In 1982 Jenny Worms and Cecily Hirschmann became the *Hasbarah* convenors and they instituted the practice of delivering five-minute lectures on Jewish and Zionist topics at committee meetings. The *Hasbarah* convenor at head office liked the idea so much that she ensured that this practice was adopted in other towns<sup>62</sup>. In one of her talks, Mrs Worms reported that over the years the Women's Zionist League became so active that renowned Zionist speakers never omitted to visit Pietersburg and address the community. Amongst these were Chaim Weizmann and his wife Vera, Chief Rabbi I Brodie of the United Kingdom, Prof S Brodetsky, Dr N Sokolov and his daughter, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, Dr Cherick, Mrs Ruth Kisch<sup>63</sup> and General M Dayan. Amongst the local speakers were several National leaders of the Women's Zionist Organization of South Africa such as Mesdames Katie Gluckman, Anna Franks, Nettie Davidoff, Muriel Maisels, Jane Levitas, Esther Cohen, Joan Lipworth, Ethel Balkind and Rachiel Rappaport. Most Zionist AGMs in Pietersburg were attended by representatives of the SAZF from Johannesburg.

Other speakers included Colonel Maxie Kahan, who visited Pietersburg in 1971 and addressed the Jewish community. He had grown up in Soekmekaar in the Northern Transvaal and had gone on *aliyah* to Israel where he became the Chief of Police for Northern Israel<sup>64</sup>. The Pietersburg Women's Zionist League donated R50 to the sports complex that he was building in his late son Danny-Hai's name. Rabbi W Blumenthal of the Temple Shalom of Johannesburg acted as chairman of a seminar entitled 'Jerusalem through the ages' held on 26 January 1972. Israel's 25<sup>th</sup>

Anniversary was celebrated in 1973 with entertainer Mel Miller at a dinner for 100 people. Aubrey Hurwitz, the Director of Israel Affairs Department, visited Pietersburg on 11 June 1974. In 1989 Mrs Ann Harris, the wife of Chief Rabbi Harris and her mother, Mrs Boyce, visited Pietersburg. Mrs Harris gave a talk on the history and aims of Zionism and then the audience was entertained to a three-course dinner<sup>65</sup>. Rabbi M Silberhaft visited Pietersburg in 1998 on *Yom Hasho'ah* and on *Yom Ha'atzma'ut* with a speaker to celebrate Israel's 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary. Mr Micha Danielli, the IUA/UCF campaign director and Rabbi Adi Sultanik visited on 15 August 1999 and a *braaivleis* was catered for by the Women's Guild.

In 1998 the Mangondi Water Wise Organic Food Production project was started by the Jewish National Fund and the South African Department of Water Affairs and Forestry, for the residents of Mangondi village in Venda. On 14 September 1999, the Minister of Water Affairs, Ronnie Kasrils, opened the project<sup>66</sup>. Mrs Ann Harris, Chief Rabbi C Harris's wife, Mr Uri Oren, the Israeli Ambassador and Miss Isla Brito [Feldman], the JNF national director, attended the ceremony, together with representatives of the PHC. Unfortunately, this project did not last long, as floods destroyed the project a few years later.

Due to the reduction in numbers of members, the Women's Zionist League combined their meetings with the Pietersburg Jewish Women's Guild in the 1990s. The Guild took over the catering of all Zionist functions in the communal hall. The Zionist League ceased to exist in 2000.

The following names are a list of the chairladies of the Pietersburg Women's Zionist League from 1932 until 2000. The number of years they held office is uncertain as the minute books have been mislaid:

Mesdames Bertha Palte, Lena Miller, Miss Feinberg, Mesdames Rahel Hirschmann, Sadie Hirschmann, Minnie Susser, Ellen Skok, Frances Rakusin, Rachel Mendelsohn, Rita Mendelson, Maureen Notelovitz, Norah Tager, Shoshanah Belitzky, Bessie Meyer, Charlotte Wiener, Phyllis Price and Jackie Fisher.

The Jews of the Northern Transvaal were strong supporters of Zionism from its earliest pioneers until the present time. The area was one of the biggest per capita monetary contributors to Israel and the Women's Zionist League almost always made their allotted quota despite their dwindling numbers. The community's attachment to Israel is demonstrated by the fact that two *Sifrei Torah* as well as the contents of the synagogue were donated to synagogues in Ra'anana and Tel Mond in Israel, where a number of South African Jews had settled. A large number of Jews from the Northern Transvaal eventually made *aliya* to Israel<sup>67</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Laqueur, Walter. *A History of Zionism*. Schocken Books: New York, 1976, p. 55.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.* p.48.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* p. 75.

<sup>4</sup> Saron, Gustav. *The Jews of South Africa: An Illustrated History to 1953*. Edited by Naomi Musiker. Scarecrow Books: Johannesburg, 2001, p. 244.

<sup>5</sup> Gitlin, Marcia. *The Vision Amazing: The Story of South African Zionism*. The Menorah Book Club: Johannesburg, 1950, p. 16.

<sup>6</sup> *The South African Jewish Year Book 1929, 5689-90*. Edited by Morris De Saxe. South African Jewish Historical Society: Johannesburg, 1929, p. 281 and South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file S, p. 352.

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<sup>7</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file SA v 2 pp. 313, 393.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* file S, p. 265.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.* file S, p. 26.

<sup>10</sup> Simon, John. "The Roots of South African Zionism". In: *Jewish Affairs* Winter 1998. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 1998, p. 10.

<sup>11</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file SA, p. 7.

<sup>12</sup> The Pietersburg Jewish Women's Guild was only formed in 1947. Up until then the women had struggled to obtain the vote on the synagogue committee. However, there seemed to have been no problem for the women on the Petersburg-Zoutpansberg Zionist Society committee, as five members were women. In the 1930s Mr Jack Hirschmann and Dr P Hack championed the cause of the women's right to vote on the Pietersburg congregation committee. Both men were also members of the Pietersburg-Zoutpansberg Zionist Society committee and were already accustomed to serving on a committee with women, which probably encouraged them to support the women's cause. See Chapter 8.

<sup>13</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file S, p. 135.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* p. 375.

<sup>15</sup> Pamphlet called *Pietersburg-Zoutpansberg Zionist Society Bye-Laws* in possession of Richelle Hirschmann in Israel.

<sup>16</sup> This bookcase was moved to the entrance of the synagogue when the communal hall was sold. When the synagogue itself was closed, Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, the country communities Rabbi, removed the books to the South African Jewish Board of Deputies library.

<sup>17</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file SA, 1919, p. 553.

<sup>18</sup> In 1948, reference is made to the South African Jewish war appeal, but it is not known if this is the same fund. The chairperson was Mrs R Gifter and the secretary Mrs I Lewis. *Ibid.* 46 file 1 letter 23 June 1948.

<sup>19</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file SA, p. 135.

<sup>20</sup> Under the auspices of the Jewish National Fund, a Golden Book Certificate can be bought in a person's name to honour him/her. His name will then be inscribed in the same hand-lettered Golden Books in which Theodore Herzl's name appears. In addition a tree will be planted in Israel.

<sup>21</sup> Justine Herman's notes. She is Barnard Herman's daughter.

<sup>22</sup> *South African Jewish Year Book*, 1929, *op. cit.* p. 281. The women's initials are those of their husbands.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.* p. 281.

<sup>24</sup> *Zionist Record* 1929.

<sup>25</sup> *Zoutpansberg Review* 23 January 1931, p. 1.

<sup>26</sup> On the way home they stayed at the Tzaneen Hotel. Weizmann was very upset when that night he put his grey shoes outside his door to be cleaned and the next day he found his shoes had been polished with black shoe polish. Interview with Laura Cohen [nee Manaschewitz] in Johannesburg.

<sup>27</sup> Gitlin, *op. cit.* p. 313.

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- <sup>28</sup> Laqueur, *op. cit.* pp. 369-373.
- <sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* p. 292.
- <sup>30</sup> Interview with Ernie Brenner in Pietersburg 10 May 2000.
- <sup>31</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file W, 1946, p. 55A.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* p. 152 and file Q1B p. 533.
- <sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* file Q1A p. 65.
- <sup>34</sup> *Habonim*'s main aim was to attract youngsters to Judaism and Zionism, not by lectures, but by games. *Habonim* means 'to build' a national home for all Jews in Palestine.
- <sup>35</sup> *South African Menorah*, November 1933. Interview with Richelle Hirschmann in Israel 2001.
- <sup>36</sup> Samuel 'Chummie' Hirschmann became an executive member of the South African Zionist Federation. He was one of the three originators of El Al Airlines, which started off as a private company called Universal Airways. He was also appointed the honorary representative of El Al for Africa in 1951. He was a cub reporter on the *Zionist Record* newspaper and later became an honorary chairman of its board of directors. He entered the insurance world and wrote a book called '*Sales by the Million*'. He died at the age of 44 in 1961. Bernstein, Edgar. "Chummie Hirschmann: South African and Jew". In: *Jewish Affairs* August 1961. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 1961, p. 49.
- <sup>37</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file Q1B, p. 86.
- <sup>38</sup> *South African Menorah*, March 1935, p. 22.
- <sup>39</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file Q v 2, p. 200.
- <sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 46 file 1 letter 23 June 1948.
- <sup>41</sup> Ze'ev Bielski worked as Israel's emissary to South Africa in order to help South Africans make *aliyah* to Israel. He later became the mayor of Ra'anana in Israel and was elected chairman of the Jewish Agency in 2005.
- <sup>42</sup> His first name is not mentioned.
- <sup>43</sup> Cultural report by Mrs J Worms, Pietersburg Women's Zionist League 1983.
- <sup>44</sup> Her first name is not mentioned.
- <sup>45</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives, file N, p. 125. *Zionist Record*, 1932. Women formed their own Zionist societies in various centres of South Africa from 1899. Each worked as an independent unit. For many years well-known Zionists urged the formation of a united South African Zionist body as part of WIZO [Women's International Zionist Organisation]. However, the women were against being part of WIZO as they wanted to be part of a wider scope of Zionist activities. Only in 1933, the Women's Zionist Organisation of South Africa became affiliated to WIZO. *The Women's Zionist Organisation of South Africa Manual 1980-5740*. Women's Zionist Council: Johannesburg, 1980, pp. 5-6.
- <sup>46</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file N p. 138.
- <sup>47</sup> The Pietersburg Women's Zionist League, together with the Red Cross Society, held sewing classes under Mesdames D Sacks and Lily Cowan during World War II to help refugees from Europe. Clothes were sent to children in Europe.

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- <sup>48</sup> Pietersburg Zionist League Correspondence 22 December 1972.
- <sup>49</sup> The Jewish National Fund [JNF] is the central Zionist instrument for the purchase of land in Palestine as the inalienable property of the Jewish people. Gitlin, *op. cit.* p. 57.
- <sup>50</sup> *Zoutpansberg Review* 3 April 1958, p.3.
- <sup>51</sup> Correspondence in possession of Richelle Hirschmann in Israel 2001.
- <sup>52</sup> Pietersburg Zionist League chairlady's report 1970.
- <sup>53</sup> *South African Jewish Times* 25 June 1948.
- <sup>54</sup> The Israel United Appeal [IUA] combines collections for different Israel funds into a single drive, although Women's International Zionist Organization [WIZO] conducts its own campaign. The United Communal Fund [UCF] for South African Jewry was created in 1949 as a single fund-raising instrument for South African needs. The UCF became a department of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies in 1972. At one stage the IUA and UCF campaigns were separate. Recently the campaigns were merged and now money is collected together for both the IUA and UCF.
- <sup>55</sup> Correspondence in possession of Richelle Hirschmann in Israel.
- <sup>56</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minutes March 1968.
- <sup>57</sup> According to Jenny Worms, the catering, as a fundraising project, began when she, Bertha Palte and Janey Danzig catered a wedding for a couple who lived outside Pietersburg in the country district.
- <sup>58</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minutes 7 June 1971.
- <sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 31 July 1972.
- <sup>60</sup> Pietersburg Women's Zionist League correspondence 17 June 1991.
- <sup>61</sup> *Ibid.* 1977.
- <sup>62</sup> *Ibid.* 20 January 1984.
- <sup>63</sup> Colonel F H Kisch was the chairman of the Zionist Executive in Palestine. His wife accompanied him on his visit to South Africa and in the interests of the *Keren Hayesod*, she discussed the question of a South African Women's Zionist Federation becoming a branch of WIZO, but this was rejected. Gitlin, *op. cit.* p. 261.
- <sup>64</sup> Interview with Maxie Kahan in Haifa, Israel, 2002.
- <sup>65</sup> *Zionist Record* 12 January 1990, p.10.
- <sup>66</sup> "JNF is in the forefront of Mangondi upliftment project". In: *Jewish Report* 15 October 1999, p. 3.
- <sup>67</sup> Over 50 ex-residents of the Northern Transvaal who were living in Israel were invited to the *Hachnasat Torah* held in Ra'anana, Israel on 21 May 2001.

## CHAPTER 10

### THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE JEWS AND THE NON-JEWS IN PIETERSBURG AND SURROUNDING AREAS

Before the Second Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902, Jews were subject to additional disabilities over and above those to which the *Uitlander* was subjected to in the old South African Republic. These were the restrictions imposed by the revised *Grondwet* of 1896<sup>1</sup> of the South African Republic which debarred non-Protestants from military posts, as well as from the position of President, State Secretary, magistrate and member of the *Volksraad* and superintendencies of natives and mines. Jewish and Catholic children were not allowed to attend government schools<sup>2</sup>. This policy was motivated by the Boer's need to maintain his independence and his distrust of the *Uitlanders*, not because of anti-Semitism<sup>3</sup>. Nevertheless, the Jews enjoyed good relations with the Transvaal government and President Paul Kruger. Jews in the Pietersburg area experienced few incidences of anti-Semitism and were accepted by the local population<sup>4</sup>, especially as they had been part of the town from its earliest days and had contributed to its growth.

During the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902, British radicals stimulated anti-Semitism by blaming the outbreak of war on Jewish financiers who wanted to seize the goldfields for world Jewry<sup>5</sup>. Britain's scorched earth policy during the Anglo-Boer War destroyed the Boers' farms. The drought and depression in the 1920s and 1930s slowed down the rural economic recovery and exacerbated the 'poor white'<sup>6</sup> problem. The Jewish community's extensive involvement in commerce became a natural

scapegoat<sup>7</sup> for the ills of the large 'poor white' population. The Jew, with his different language, dress and customs, was a visible target for the poor whites' frustrations. The threat of competition fuelled anti-Jewish sentiment. Some Afrikaners believed that the Jewish pedlar or the Jew who owned a small farm shop exploited the white farmers<sup>8</sup>. Despite rumblings against the many Russian Jews pouring into the country, Jews in South Africa were accepted as part of the dominant white population because of their white skins<sup>9</sup>. Most of the Jews who came to the Northern Transvaal became traders or hoteliers and dominated these fields. There appears to have been little commercial competition for the Jews from the poor whites in the Zoutpansberg area as they were mostly uneducated and were more involved in hunting, farming and transporting than trading<sup>10</sup>.

During the Anglo-Boer War, most Jews in the Northern Transvaal had remained neutral. However, during World War I [1914-1918] Jews felt more settled in their new homeland and there were several Jewish soldiers from the Pietersburg district fighting for the South African Forces. These included Messrs H Hotz, M L Hurwitz, H Levitan, Charles Solomonsohn, I Stodel and M Daywis. Ben Levy looked after the army's horses in Cape Town and also served under Jan Smuts in South West Africa and East Africa. During World War I, Lena Herman, as mayoress of Pietersburg, was awarded the Member of the British Empire [MBE] medal in recognition of the work she did in the interests of servicemen. Her portrait is preserved in the Imperial War Museum in London.

East European immigration to South Africa, as well as to Pietersburg, increased in the 1920s. This was due to deteriorating conditions in Lithuania and changes in the



United States of America and Australian immigration policies that restricted immigration to these countries. The increase in immigrants to South Africa led to objections being expressed in the *Cape Times* and *Die Burger* newspapers. The concern was that the existing dominant 'Nordic stock of Europeans' would be replaced by people with different characteristics - resulting in a surplus of traders<sup>11</sup>. The objection appears to be a veiled anti-Semitic statement. Dr D F Malan, as Interior Minister of South Africa, introduced the Immigration Quota Act on 1 May 1930, which limited the quota of immigrants born in countries other than those specified in the Act. These restricted countries included those of Eastern and Southern Europe from which most of the Jewish immigrants came, such as Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Russia and Greece. Various Jewish communities in South Africa protested the Immigration Bill of 1930. At a Jewish mass meeting held in Pietersburg in February 1930, the community wanted Senator Tom Naude, their member of parliament, to oppose the Bill. Members of the congregation who spoke out against the Bill at the mass meeting included Messrs M Marcus, I M Kahan and H Manaschewitz. The president of the congregation urged the congregants to exercise restraint.

On 28 January 1930, a few days before the mass meeting, an article had appeared in the *Zoutpansberg Review* under the heading 'Why Immigrants from Lithuania'. It reported that a gentleman from Lithuania was touring South Africa and he was interviewing Government representatives with a view to purchasing farms and placing "Littish agriculturists"<sup>12</sup>. In the Pietersburg area, he was told that: "we have all the Lithuanian traders we require but we can offer a warm welcome to agriculturists from that country on condition that they ARE agriculturists and will be repatriated in the event of them abandoning the land for the mart, store or even the pedlar's pack"<sup>13</sup>.

The problem seemed to be not so much against the Jews, but the fear of competition from Jewish traders. In response to this newspaper article, it was stated at the mass meeting that the Jews may have started off as traders but many then became agriculturists<sup>14</sup>. Max and Wolf Israelsohn, Joseph Kallmeyer, Patsy Cohen, Barney Herman, Abraham Perlmann, Isaac Kahan and Abraham Donde were some of the general dealers who branched out into farming.

Senator Munnik of Pietersburg's comments on the Immigration Bill in the *Zoutpansberg Review* on 14 March 1930 reflected adversely on the Jewish community. He accused the Jews of not assimilating or learning Afrikaans. He asked: "Do we want people here who will make our political problems difficult for us? I don't speak now only of the people who come from Eastern Europe, I speak also of other countries [I here mean Asiatics]. The people who come from Eastern Europe into our country don't know our language...they come here to make money and will never be absorbed in the people of the country. They will live in a colony by themselves, and we do not want such people." When tackled later about this statement, Munnik back-peddled and explained that he "had in mind the Boers who trekked into Angola. They never assimilated with the Portuguese"<sup>15</sup>.

In contrast to these sentiments, letters in support of the Jews in the Northern Transvaal and how they were accepted by the general community appeared in the local newspaper. 'Old Timer' wrote in the *Northern Review* on 31 January 1931 that he could remember the happier days of 40 years earlier when evenings were spent under the trees in Mare Street playing cards and drinking tankards of beer. There were "Boers, British, Germans, Jews, all nations and no one cared one dam [sic] what they

were”. In praise of Jewish pioneers, Mr Dick wrote on 10 February 1931 that only 40 years later are “the names Altenroxel, Plange, Dicke Brothers, Max Israelsohn beginning to historically stand out in object lessons what Germans and Jews can accomplish in taming the wilderness despite the terrible nature forces they encountered, through sheer pluck, high intelligence and dogged determination”.

After the Immigration Quota Act of 1930 became law, there was a drastic reduction in Jewish immigration to South Africa from Eastern Europe and therefore also to Pietersburg. However, German Jews were still immigrating to South Africa. As Pietersburg only received a small number of Jewish immigrants from Germany in the 1930s, their numbers were not noticeable in the town. Those German Jews who had been living in Pietersburg for many years still felt strong ties with Germany during the time of the Weimar Republic and before the rise of Hitler. Hans Loeffler came out to Pietersburg from Germany at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was a non-practising Jew married to a non-Jewish woman<sup>16</sup>. He founded Pietersburg Cold Storage in 1910. He owned the business together with Max Levor, his brother-in-law, whom he had brought out from Germany, and A Josephy. Mr Loeffler was the president of the German Club in 1931 and 1932 and Mr G Feldman<sup>17</sup>, another Jew, was the treasurer. They used to sing the German anthem and gave three cheers for von Hindenburg, the Reichspresident. Loeffler lent the club a picture of Bismarck and he entertained the German Consul von Kessler when he visited Pietersburg in 1932. One wonders if Mr Loeffler would have entertained the German Consul if he had visited Pietersburg after Hitler’s rise to power in 1933. Hans Loeffler died on 31 October 1941 and was buried in the Jewish cemetery in Pietersburg.

Anti-Semitism began to increase in the 1930s throughout the world because of the rise of German National Socialism in Germany. The Nazi movement found support in South Africa in the emergent Afrikaner nationalism which was strongly anti-British. Press reports appeared of persecutions of Jews in Germany. The Law and Press Committee of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies [SAJBD] reported of the increase of anti-Jewish Nazi propaganda material in towns and country districts in South Africa. The SAJBD decided in 1933 to disseminate literature<sup>18</sup> giving reliable facts and figures to counteract this propaganda. Most of the conflict between the Jews and non-Jews in the Northern Transvaal occurred during the period of the 1930s and up to the end of World War II. In June 1935, a committee was formed for Pietersburg and the outlying districts, to report any incidents of anti-Semitism. Mr C Lyons, the chairman of the Executive Council of the SAJBD, Mr H Carter MPC, the Honorary treasurer and Mr M Franks, the chairman of the Press and Propaganda Committee, visited Pietersburg on 17 November 1935 to inform the community of the dangers of anti-Semitism.

Anti-Semitic incidents in business in Pietersburg were rare. One such incident occurred in 1930. Alex Hyams was a Jew who had a general dealer store in Mare Street. A non-Jew Mr P A C Weideman, who had just been released from jail for stealing poultry, stood outside Mr Hyams store and without provocation shouted: "I'll show the ....Jew what I'll do". He then proceeded to kick the shop's window in. He was arrested and found guilty of malicious damage to property<sup>19</sup>.

On 26 February 1936, Mr Moss Cohen, the secretary of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation [PHC], reported to the SAJBD that Pietersburg was singularly free of

any anti-Jewish agitation. There had been no meetings of any anti-Semitic party. There had also been no anti-Semitic pamphlets for at least a year and before that, only a few had arrived, having been posted outside Pietersburg. The SAJBD continued to monitor the various districts for any signs of anti-Semitism. They wrote to Mr M Cohen on 30 June 1936 asking for a list of non-Jews, who were influential public leaders and heads of boards in the magisterial district of Pietersburg, who were suitable candidates to receive publications countering anti-Jewish propaganda<sup>20</sup>.

In 1936, Dr D F Malan's Purified National Party openly called for unequal treatment of the Jews because of Jewish 'unassimilability'. They also feared Jewish domination in the business world and the professions, thus taking over Afrikaner work opportunities. The Aliens Act 1937 [Act Number 1 of 1937] was passed by the United Party in January 1937 and introduced the principle of individual selection of immigrants according to specific qualifications. This served to limit the number of German Jews entering the country. The SAJBD wrote to the Pietersburg congregation on 7 July 1936, requesting if Morris Alexander KC MP could visit Pietersburg to deliver a lecture. Alexander opposed Dr Malan, the leader of the Purified National Party's, use of the 'Jewish Question' as an integral element of his party's policy as well as his antagonism to German Jewish immigration to South Africa. Alexander addressed the leading non-Jews of the town at a tea held on 26 August 1936, and spoke at another function in the evening for the Jewish community. Afterwards the PHC secretary, Mr Moss Cohen, wrote that it had been a "good reception with gentiles and all those invited would be on the propaganda mailing list"<sup>21</sup> [of the SAJBD to counteract anti-Jewish propaganda]. The following night Mr Alexander visited Tzaneen. In contrast to Pietersburg, the members of the Tzaneen community

felt that it was inadvisable that Mr Alexander should speak to the Gentile community as there had been a considerable amount of propaganda spread in Tzaneen and they did not want to provoke any trouble.

The English speaking section of the South African population supported Britain and opposed Germany in World War II. In contrast, many Afrikaners were sympathetic towards Germany as Kaiser Wilhelm had supported the Boers in the Anglo-Boer War. They saw an analogy between their struggle with Britain and Germany's struggle against the humiliations of the Treaty of Versailles after World War I. The emerging Afrikaner nationalists were attracted to Nazism and Afrikaner National Socialist groups increased in South Africa. The Greyshirt organization or South African Christian National Socialist movement, founded in 1933, was one of several Fascist groups in South Africa, based on the Nazi model. They were part of what was known as the 'Shirtist Movement'- their political affiliation was indicated by the colour of their shirts, which they wore as part of their uniform [grey, black or brown]. Among their aims was the active promotion of anti-Jewish sentiment. By denigrating Jews, the Afrikaner felt superior. Mr Louis T Weichardt, a leader of the South African Nationalist Movement, visited the Northern Transvaal and spoke at the Nylstroom Town Hall in 1935. Another of its prominent members, General Salomon Gerhardus 'Manie' Maritz also visited the area. He had been found guilty in the late 1930's in South West Africa of promoting "a strong feeling of hostility against the Jewish race" in his book *'My Lewe en Strewe'*<sup>22</sup>. Maritz, in public speeches in Makwassie in the Northern Cape in 1924, Lichtenburg in 1926 and Namaqualand in 1939 amongst others, had blamed the poverty of the Afrikaner people on the Jews and tried to incite the farmers to boycott Jewish stores<sup>23</sup>.

Mr Jack Hirshmann of Pietersburg wrote a letter on 16 November 1938 to the SAJBD in connection with General Manie Maritz's anti-Jewish meeting in Pietersburg. As this meeting had taken place on an empty property belonging to Mr Hirschmann, resulting in much criticism from the local Jewish community, he felt that he had to justify his actions to the SAJBD. Mr Hirschmann stated that he had been informed on the previous Friday night, that the meeting was to take place the next afternoon on a vacant plot of ground belonging to him. He had approached the District Commandant of Police, who had agreed to prevent the meeting from taking place. The next day, after 200 people had gathered, the police intervened to thwart the meeting. A local prominent supporter of the movement then approached Mr Hirschmann to ask if they could proceed with the meeting. Mr Hirschmann was unhappy at the prospect and told the man he would not permit anyone who insulted him and his people onto his property. The supporter advised him to allow the meeting to proceed quietly. Mr Hirschmann then agreed to allow the meeting to continue. His reasoning was that they would probably move on to another vacant property if he refused, and as most of the vacant properties in the area belonged to Jews, the situation could be aggravated when the supporters realized how much property was in Jewish hands. He also suspected that the meeting had been held on Jewish property on purpose so that the meeting would be stopped, thereby provoking the supporters. In the end, the meeting proceeded quietly, with not much enthusiasm from the supporters. Mr Hirschmann stated that the decision had been most distasteful to him<sup>24</sup>. No response from the SAJBD can be found.

A report in 1939 concerning anti-Semitism in Pietersburg<sup>25</sup> presented to the SAJBD, again stated that there were no active manifestations of anti-Semitism in the Pietersburg area. Many Germans in the district had been interned and it was believed that all these individuals had been actively concerned with anti-Semitic propaganda before the war. There was an undercurrent of anti-Semitism in the district but business people did not experience any discrimination.

In contrast to Pietersburg, which had a large Jewish population that was on fairly good terms with its neighbours, the surrounding smaller Jewish communities reported several anti-Semitic incidents. The Tzaneen Jews in particular lived in fear of their German neighbours. During World War II there was an *Ossewa Brandwag*<sup>26</sup> [O B] Internment Camp at Tzaneen. The O B movement was a fascist, anti-Semitic movement. The Tzaneen branch of the German Labour Front [*Arbeitsdienst*] built a communal hall and named it after Wilhelm Gustloff, the leader of the Swiss Nazi party who had allegedly been murdered by a Jew. At the opening ceremony, the German Consul, Herr Stiller, spoke on behalf of both the German Reich and the Nazi Party. The movement however did not include the German settlers who had been in the area for a number of years and who “may be said to be the leaders of the German community in Tzaneen”<sup>27</sup>.

In 1936, Mr Moss Cohen sent a report to the SAJBD reporting that anti-Jewish meetings had taken place at the German colony outside Tzaneen and “a considerable amount of agitation appears to have been carried on”. One of the main agitators in the area was Hans Merensky, owner of the estate, Westfalia, near Duiwelskloof. He received several warnings from the local magistrate. When some of his employees



were incarcerated in 1939, the situation became much quieter. Two employees at Mr I W Schlesinger's Letaba Estate were also engaged in anti-Semitic propaganda.

Messrs S Fine, S Rakusin and I Berman served on the local Jewish Vigilance Committee formed in Tzaneen in 1939<sup>28</sup>. The schools were institutions of propaganda and Jewish children were made to feel unhappy. Mr and Mrs S Fine's children went to the Tzaneen Primary School and were subjected to taunts, had their hair pulled and were called "bloody Jew" every day by the German children. Because of this harassment the Fines decided to send the two girls to boarding school at the Convent in Pietersburg<sup>29</sup>. In contrast to the Germans' anti-Semitism, a non-Jewess, Mrs Doris Eland, of the farm Ravenshill near Duiwelskloof, wrote to the Society for Jews and Christians in 1938, offering assistance and training for Jewish refugees from Europe on her farm.

Rabbi A H Lapin visited Tzaneen on his pastoral tour on 19 May 1941. He reported that there was no setback in the commercial lives of the Jews as a result of the O B's presence in the town. They did not boycott the Jewish businesses as Jews owned most of the stores in the town. However, the potential danger was there. This movement was strong in membership but greatly in need of funds. Before the war, there had been cordial relations between the Jews and the Afrikaners, but during the War they only greeted each other formally. Rabbi Lapin arranged that the book 'Israel die *Sondebok*' should be presented to all the Municipal libraries in order to present the Jewish viewpoint.

Jews were not afraid to defend themselves against acts of anti-Semitism. Mr I Kahan owned a general dealer's store in Soekmekaar and when an Afrikaner entered the shop wearing a swastika around his neck, Mr Kahan refused to serve him<sup>30</sup>. In 1939 the teachers at Messina school were reported to be actively anti-Semitic. A vigilance committee of local Jews was formed and the SAJBD organized several meetings to advise them on how to counter this threat.

In Potgietersrus, Jews were not aware of any anti-Jewish agitations. Estelle Fisher, who lived in Potgietersrus during the war, explained that she went to school with German nuns as teachers and they treated the Jews well<sup>31</sup>. However, during the 1930s there was considerable anti-Semitism in the Nylstroom, Waterberg area on a daily basis, as well as in Zebediela. At Moorddrift, near Nylstroom, on 16 December 1936, speeches were made at Dingaans' Day celebrations attacking the English, Jews and "coolies". References were made to the 'Jewish Problem'<sup>32</sup>. Maurice Levi had a store at Harkdoring, between Potgietersrus and Naboomspruit, which burned down. He speculated that the Leibbrant gang, a virulent anti-Semitic group operating in the area during World War II, had set fire to his agricultural store as petrol had been poured under the door to set the shop alight<sup>33</sup>. He could not prove this allegation and received no compensation. Robey Leibbrant, a member of the O B, returned to South Africa from Germany in 1941. He held a meeting in Pietersburg, which was well attended by Pietersburgers. Leibbrant expounded on his ideal to free the country of 'British-Jewish domination'. Shortly thereafter, the Pietersburg police received orders to arrest him for subversive actions against the government. He managed to evade capture whilst hiding on a farm in the Zoutpansberg area, but was later arrested near Pretoria<sup>34</sup>.

Individual anti-Semitic acts did occur in Pietersburg. It was reported in the PHC minutes on 6 October 1942 that a dispute arose between a Jewish teacher at Pietersburg Hoërskool and the educational authorities. When a boy in the matriculation class made anti-Semitic remarks to him during class, the teacher hit him. This resulted in the teacher's dismissal from the school. Also on 18 August 1942, an army Information Officer from Pretoria, a Captain MacMillan, spoke to soldiers at the Pietersburg military camp<sup>35</sup>. He was reported as saying that many poor whites were not allowed to rise above their economic situation because they were in the grip of Jewish moneylenders. His statement was believed by the camp to be true. This allegation was similar to that used in Greyshirt propaganda, charging Jews with domination and secret organizations. Jews stationed at the camp informed Mrs B Palte in Pietersburg, and the incident was reported to the SAJBD. The incident cast a serious reflection on the army educators. How Gus Saron, secretary of the SAJBD dealt with the matter, is unknown.

A large contingent of Jews from the Northern Transvaal fought for the Allied troops during World War II<sup>36</sup>. The following were killed on active service:

Samuel Cohen [killed in action 1942], Alec H Egnal [killed in the air crash at Khartoum in July, 1945, while on his way back to the Union], Samuel M Tager [died of wounds received in action in December 1941], Ephraim Kalman Musiker [Messina].

Others serving during World War II were:

77046 Pte J Brenner, Ruby Brenner, 96245 Air/Mechanic [A/M] Jack Carson, Corporal [Cpl] Aaron Barney Chazen [Messina] [wounded], Valery Conley, 77055 Pte Maurice Ellison [discharged 1940 as medically unfit], 77062 Pte W Frankel, 312943v H [Bert] Garb, I Gibbert, 175048 Sgt Cecil Gifter [exempted in December 1940], M G Greenberg, 143396 Gunner Joseph Nathan Herman, 589166 Pte Mark Simpson Hermann, Grootspelonken, 176085 Sgt Maurice David Hirschmann, Abe Hofstein, M Israel, 77075 Cpl Solomon Hirsch Israelsohn, 77074 Pte Eleazar Israelsohn [Prisoner Of War escaped from Italy to Switzerland], 236473 Pte Joseph Jedwood [discharged December 1940], 212116 A/M M Kaplan, Louis Katz, 77780 Cpl Harry Leon Levin, Harold Levin, Sgt Jack Levin [wounded], Rev J I Levine, 173368 Pte Solly Levy, 95670 A/M Walter Morris Levy, 127353 Lieut Harold Marcus [awarded Member of British Empire medal], Rudolph Plaut, Gerald Reubensohn Air/Mechanic Air photographer 24 squadron SAAF N Africa 1941, R A H [Dick] Rubin, Ted Rudnick, 77092 Cpl Bernard Sacks, 77093 Sgt Leo Salamon, 94740 A/M B Skok, Lance/Bombardier, Dave Solomon [wounded], 76899 S/Maj Gerald Manfred Susser, 77100 L/Cpl Issy Tager, Joseph Tager, 581096 A/M Michael Tager, 117025 Pte Kurt Moritz Wiener [discharged because he was an alien] and Miss Rhoda Palte. Barney Krikst, Samuel Reubensohn and Julian Meyer came to Pietersburg after the War.

After the War, anti-Semitism declined as the economy improved and the Afrikaners found material success, power and social mobility. Dr D F Malan and the Nationalist Government supported the establishment of Israel in 1948. There were several reports

in Pietersburg of Gentiles supporting the Jews after World War II. Mr Loxton<sup>37</sup>, the non-Jewish editor of the *Zoutpansberg Review*, wrote an article published on 30 April 1948 on the evils of anti-Semitism. He supported the Jews by encouraging contributions to the Palestine Emergency Fund. Another illustration of support occurred at the opening ceremony of the new synagogue in Pietersburg on 12 July 1953, when both Senator Tom Naude and the Mayor, Dap Naude, commented on the excellent relations between Jews and Gentiles in Pietersburg.

Anti-Semitism reappeared in the Northern Transvaal in the mid 1980s, when a series of anti-Semitic letters were published in a local newspaper. During the 1930s the *Zoutpansberg Review* was owned by Jews which influenced the pro-Jewish content appearing in the newspaper. In later years, the Pietersburg newspapers [the *Northern Review* {the old *De Zoutpansberg Review*} and the *Noord-Transvaler*] were not Jewish owned and the nature of material appearing in the newspapers changed. Mr M C J van Schalkwyk wrote a letter in the *Noord-Transvaler* newspaper, asking why so many Jews become members of the African National Congress [ANC] and the South African Communist Party. He wondered why so many Jews left the country when the situation became difficult. He enquired if many of the Jews were riding “the golden wave of each nation for their own comfort”? The PHC committee was upset at these anti-Jewish criticisms and felt that these charges could not go unanswered. A reply to the article by Mr Aleck Goldberg, secretary of the SAJBD, was published. The PHC asked the *Noord-Transvaler* newspaper to discontinue publishing such material. Some of Van Schalkwyk’s allegations were founded in truth as Jews were prominent in the leadership of the communist party in South Africa<sup>38</sup> and peaks of emigration correlated with major surges of political unrest, namely after 1976 and 1985<sup>39</sup>.

During the 1980s the Arab-Israeli conflict encouraged the spread of ‘anti-Zionist’ rhetoric, which was a thinly-disguised form of anti-Semitism. The notion of ‘anti-Zionism’ was introduced by people who rejected the existence of the State of Israel as the Zionist State. They made the distinction between ‘anti-Semitism’ and ‘anti-Zionism’, claiming they had nothing against Jews, but that they opposed the Zionists. This view was adopted by those in the Muslim world who identified with the Palestinian cause. Anti-Zionist leaflets distributed in South Africa referred to the need to boycott Jewish businesses, as they sent their profits to Israel to buy arms to fight the Palestinians. On 15 January 1984 the *Northern Review* published a letter written by a Mr Oosthuizen blaming the woes of the world on a ‘Zionist Conspiracy’. Oosthuizen threatened to write again the following week to explain to the readers ‘The Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion’, an anti-Semitic pamphlet<sup>40</sup>. This pamphlet had been exposed several times as a libelous publication with no basis in truth. Oosthuizen was equating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism and the unfounded oft-repeated belief that the Jews were conspiring to take over control of the world. On the advice of the SAJBD, the president of the congregation and two committee members went to see the proprietor of the *Northern Review*, Mr de Jager, who apologized for the appearance of the letter<sup>41</sup>. No more such letters were published.

Interviews with Jews who had attended school in Pietersburg reveal minor incidents of anti-Semitism. Most of the incidents against Jews were more because they were English speakers in an Afrikaans environment, than because they were Jews, especially on the sports fields. However, Raymond Katzman found that when he played rugby, the opposing team often used to call out “vang die Jood” [catch the

Jew]<sup>42</sup>. Unfortunately, comments like these led to feelings of alienation for the Jews from the general community. Cecil Jowell of Namaqualand believes that “random negative remarks about Jews were not true anti-Semitism...but merely gratuitous comments...not really with any malicious or meaningfully critical intent”<sup>43</sup>. The Jewish youth of Pietersburg often socialized with the non-Jews after school hours. On Sunday evenings Jews and Christians used to go to a dam three kilometers outside Pietersburg for picnics.

The Jews of Pietersburg usually had a good relationship with the indigenous people, especially the traders who had stores in the rural areas. Their stores became a place where the “people gathered to gossip and see their friends as well as transact business<sup>44</sup>”. The traders learned to speak a black language in order to carry on business with the local people. The trader was often given a North Sotho name by his customers and the name reflected the feeling that the trader belonged in some way to the community in which he traded. It also carried the connotation of affection of the people amongst whom he lived<sup>45</sup>. Harry Crown of Tzaneen was called ‘Masokis’ as he wore a crewneck jersey whilst cycling and the blacks thought he wore a sock around his neck; Solomon Steingold of Messina was called ‘Baas Maglas’ as he wore glasses and Abe Flax of Messina's nickname was ‘very cheap’ as this was his favourite expression. Because of the lack of Jewish female company, many Jewish traders in the rural areas had non-Jewish girlfriends, and in a few cases black girlfriends<sup>46</sup>. There are several coloured families in Pietersburg who claim they are descended from white Jewish traders and black mothers.

The Lemba are a black tribe living in the Zoutpansberg district who are self-proclaimed Jews. They are also to be found in Zimbabwe, Malawi and Zambia. They believe that they are Jews of the lost tribes of Israel and had migrated southwards through Africa from Sana in Yemen, the historical home of the Yemenite Jews in pre-*Talmudic* times. They observe many rituals similar to the Jews such as *kashrut*, avoidance of eating pig, ritual slaughter of cattle and circumcision. However, it is virtually impossible to demonstrate a link between Lemba and Jewish traditions. Although they did not attend the Pietersburg synagogue, they made several approaches through the Pietersburg ministers to convey to the SAJBD that they wanted to be recognized as Jews. No recognition has been forthcoming as it is uncertain whether they are descended from Jews or Muslims. Parfitt, who studied the Lemba<sup>47</sup>, postulates the tribe could be observing Islamic customs, altered by recent contact with Jews. British researchers have found that the genetic make-up of the Lemba to be highly similar to the *Kohanim* or Priestly caste of the Jews. Chief Rabbi A H Rabinowitz in 1960 suggested that a certain Jewish Mr Himmelhoch “was the innocent cause of the now well established belief among the Lemba tribe, who are numerous in the area, that they are of Jewish descent<sup>48</sup>.” Himmelhoch, who traded in the Louis Trichardt area, apparently observed their rituals and persuaded them that they could be of Jewish origin. It is uncertain which Mr Himmelhoch is being referred to, as there were several members of the Himmelhoch family trading in the area.

The Pietersburg Jews had a good association with the Indian community over the years. During the apartheid years Indians were not allowed to lease property in the business district of town. Several Jews were alleged to have acted as ‘fronts’ for Indian businessmen by allowing them to use their names, whilst the Indians supplied



the funds for the properties. After Apartheid ended, some Jews entered into business partnerships with Indians. With the rise of the *Intifada* movement and the perceived intensification of the Arab-Israeli conflict, the potential for discord could have occurred as the Muslim sections of the Indian community were Palestinian supporters and the Jews supported Zionism and the State of Israel. However, Jews in Pietersburg experienced very few anti-Jewish incidents from the Muslim community, mainly because the Jewish community had by this time shrunk to such small proportions that it no longer made an impact on the general community. Guards were deployed to protect the synagogue during services in case of conflict, but no such cases were reported.

On their arrival in South Africa, most Jews were too preoccupied with earning a living, social adjustments and learning a new language to be concerned with politics and the system of racial relations<sup>49</sup>. In later years, most Jews in Pietersburg, like those in the rest of South Africa gravitated around the United and Progressive political parties<sup>50</sup>. However, several Jewish families showed conservative leanings and supported the Apartheid system<sup>51</sup>. The only Jew from Pietersburg who was actively involved in any political resistance against the Nationalist Government was Arthur Goldreich<sup>52</sup>. Goldreich moved with his family to Pietersburg in the 1930s and was educated in Afrikaans at the Pietersburg *Höerskool*. He explains that he was affected by what happened to the Jews in Europe during World War II and equated racism in Europe with South African apartheid policies. His family supported Zionism and Arthur was a volunteer during Israel's War of Independence in 1948, where he learned how people were prepared to fight for their freedom and independence. This influenced him to support armed resistance in South Africa. When he returned to

South Africa in 1954, he became active in the Congress of Democrats and became a front man for the communist underground movement. He was captured together with Nelson Mandela and other leaders of the *Umkhonto we sizwe* underground movement in 1963 at the group's secret headquarters in Rivonia, Johannesburg. Goldreich, together with Harold Wolpe and two other prisoners, escaped from Marshall Square Police Station in Johannesburg and fled South Africa through Swaziland. Goldreich finally settled in Israel and Wolpe in England. Wolpe had relatives in Pietersburg and their house was watched for some time by the police in case he sought refuge with them. When recently interviewed, Goldreich declared that he was disappointed that the Jews of Pietersburg supported the National Party's policy of white supremacy<sup>53</sup>.

Over the years, Jews had a very good rapport with the Gentile community of Pietersburg. Jews had no problem in attaining high office in the town and they became prominent in civic and cultural affairs. Records of their involvement in the town are to be found in the Pietersburg Museum. Barnard Herman [see Chapter 2] became mayor of Pietersburg in the years 1915, 1916, 1917, Julius Koenig was mayor in 1927/28 [see Chapter 2], Max Louis Marcus in 1930/31 and Moss Cohen in 1949/50. Max Louis Marcus became mayor of Pietersburg in 1930/1931. Max Marcus was born in Knupe, Lithuania on 17 March 1888. In 1903 he moved to Pietersburg and owned a bottle-store. He married Netta Cohen [born 15 February 1903] from Louis Trichardt in May 1925. Mr Marcus was a member of the town council from 1928 to 1939 and chairman of the finance committee. He was also a member of the working committee of the Transvaal Municipal Association and a founder member of the joint Municipal Pension Fund [Transvaal]. He was treasurer of the Governor General's War Fund and chairman of the Financial Assistance Committee for returned

soldiers. He was also the chairman of the Pietersburg Chamber of Commerce and at one time was the vice-president of the Association of Chambers of Commerce of South Africa, from whom he received an award for 47 years meritorious service. Max Marcus was a charter member of Rotary Pietersburg and one of its first presidents. He served the Rotary club for 22 years. He took a keen interest in sport and was president of the Noordland Tennis Association. Pietersburg had its own rugby team and Max Marcus was chairman of the Pietersburg Rugby Football Association for many years. He was the manager and J Kallmeyer was a player when Pietersburg was the winner of the Wolf-Krause Cup in 1914. Max Marcus died on 9 May 1973 and Netta on 13 January 1982 and both were buried in Pietersburg.

Another prominent mayor was Mr Moss Cohen who was elected mayor of Pietersburg in 1949. Cohen had already spent six years on the town council, most of them on the Finance Committee. Moss Cohen was born on 1 September 1902 and educated in Oudtshoorn. He obtained his BA LLB degree from the University of Cape Town. He arrived in Pietersburg in 1922 and stayed with his relatives Herman and Dora Manaschewitz. Moss Cohen married their daughter Laura Manaschewitz on 14 August 1932 in the Pietersburg synagogue and they had two sons Dale and Clive. Mr Cohen was on the School Board and on the Hospital Board for 10 years. He was a Past Master of the Pietersburg Masonic Lodge, president of Rotary and chairman of the Pietersburg Law Circle Society. He was secretary of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation for 27 years and was also the chairman of the local Zionist Society<sup>54</sup>.

In nearby towns, Jews also became mayors, such as Jack Klaff of Messina and Jacob Hirschon of Louis Trichardt in 1939. Dr Bernard Morris was deputy mayor of

Nylstroom. Several mayors were honoured by having streets named after them, namely Herman, Marcus and Koenig Streets in Pietersburg, and Klaff Street in Messina.

Hans Loeffler [1949] [see Chapter 2] and Julian Meyer were deputy mayors of Pietersburg. Julian Meyer was deputy mayor of Pietersburg in 1960-1962. He was chairman of the Ratepayers and of the Water Board on the town council. He fought in World War II and was a prisoner of war in Germany for three years. He was the treasurer of the Rotarians for many years and the chairman of Capricorn School Board. He was also the Pietersburg representative on the Council of the Law Society of Transvaal.

Mark Israel was the Chief Native Commissioner for Duiwelskloof [born Jewish, but as he was not a practising Jew, he was not buried in the Jewish cemetery]. Herman Manaschewitz, Max Chaitow, Hugo Kahn and Isaac Brenner were on the town council of Pietersburg and Dr Kirk-Cohen and S Zway on the town council of Louis Trichardt<sup>55</sup>.

Herman Manaschewitz was a land surveyor and in January 1919 he surveyed 58 plots on portion 26 of Pusela No 55 at the Tzaneen Station, which was named the Township of Tzaneen<sup>56</sup>. He also laid out the town of Soekmekaar by dividing up the farm owned by his friend Mr I M Kahan. The streets Kahan, Maxim, Feigele and Adelaide are named after Mr Kahan's family. He surveyed Louis Trichardt and also the Kruger National Park after the Orpen family gave eight farms to the Park. In 1937 he laid out Extension No 1, the first industrial area in Pietersburg. Herman Manaschewitz was

born on 15 September 1881 in Shavli, Lithuania. He came to South Africa in 1890 at the age of nine. He was educated in Oudtshoorn and graduated from the South African College [now the University of Cape Town]. In 1906 Herman Manaschewitz married Dora Gordon of Ladysmith [Cape]. Their children are Daphne, Laura and Sybil. Daphne married Abe Lipschitz, the first principal of King David School, Johannesburg. The Manaschewitz family lived in Louis Trichardt in 1916 and moved to Pietersburg in 1920.

Jews were founder members of most of the societies in Pietersburg. The Pietersburg Club was founded in July 1902 after the Anglo-Boer War<sup>57</sup>. It was a social club started for some of the officers of the British occupation forces who administered the Northern Transvaal from Pietersburg. At first it was a club for men only but much later women were also allowed to use the facilities. Barney Herman was one of the original members of the club. Amongst the Jewish chairmen of the club were Solomon Marcus [1929-30, 1934-35, 1941-42, 1943-44], Julian Meyer [1969-70] Wally Levy [1980-81 and 1981-82]. Honorary Life Members include B Herman [since 1939], Sam Bolon, Leon Levy and Wally Levy [since 1995].

The Pietersburg Chamber of Commerce was heavily represented by Jews as most Jews in Pietersburg were involved in trading. In 1929 Jack Hirschmann was the vice-president and Messrs B Herman and M Friedel were members<sup>58</sup>. Jack Hirschmann became president in 1930 with Joe Edelman as the vice-president. A year later, Joe Edelman became the president. By 1932, nine of the 16 members were Jewish. These included Messrs M Chaitow, H Eichholz, M Friedel, A Israelsohn, B Herman, M Hirschmann, A Lewis, M Marcus, S Palte<sup>59</sup>. In 1955, out of 17 members, the

following 10 were Jewish: Messrs H Stein, H Beron, S Rakusin, S Colman, S Israelsohn, H Edelman, S Worms, A B Lewis, Max Marcus and Jack Hirschmann<sup>60</sup>. S Rakusin was president in 1964 and J Jedwood was vice-president.

Jews were members of the various Masonic Lodges from their inception in the Northern Transvaal. The Zoutpansberg Liberty Lodge was one of four lodges consecrated in the Transvaal. Barnard Herman was a charter member of this lodge when it was consecrated on 29 November 1893 and was their first initiate<sup>61</sup>. The foundation stone of the Masonic Temple in Schoeman Street was laid on 16 May 1894. This Temple building was used by the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation for religious services on High Holy Days for many years until they built their own synagogue.

Several Jews were members of the various lodges in their early days, including Sir Lionel Phillips, the mining magnate, who was initiated into the Pietersburg United Lodge. Yank Gordon was a charter member of the Star of the North Lodge. W I Eitzman became Master of the Pietersburg United Lodge no 2485 in 1931. When the new Masonic Temple was built in 1966, the foundation stone of the old Temple was halved and one half was displayed in a glass case in the entrance lobby and was unveiled by Max L Marcus. The other half was placed in the north eastern part of the Temple and unveiled by his brother Solly Marcus. Rev J I Levine was elected Master of the Lodge in 1945 and later occupied the Chair of Chaplain for 25 years. In 1951 he became a District Governing Chaplain and officiated at the laying of the foundation stone of the Headquarters and Temple of the District Grand Lodge in Johannesburg<sup>62</sup>.

Mr C E Schlesinger, who ran the Zoutpansberg hotel near Louis Trichardt, used to ride to Pietersburg on a bicycle, but sometimes with a horse and trap for lodge meetings<sup>63</sup>. He became Charter Master of the Lion of the North Lodge Number 3640 in Louis Trichardt in 1913, as well as Master in 1917 and 1927. Other Jewish Masters of the Lion of the North Lodge were W Cohen [1915], J Hirschon [1925], Dr S Kirk-Cohen [1931], S Zway [1938], C Brenner [1949] M Gelfand [1951] S Brenner [1959] M Brenner [1961].

The Jews of Pietersburg decided to form a Lodge for Jewish members only. The Hebrew Order of David Lodge [H O D]<sup>64</sup> No 17, Pietersburg was founded in 1952. It was consecrated through the efforts of Messrs M Kaplan, J Gordon and S Solomon of Pietersburg and largely as a result of a visit to Pietersburg of Messrs R S Meyers, H S Blank, J C Lazarow and P Rappoport of Johannesburg. Early in August 1953 the 27 foundation members of the Lodge were initiated by R S Meyers and officers of Grand Lodge. At the same time, the first officers were raised to the Second Degree. The Lodge was consecrated on Sunday 6 September 1953 by the Grand President, D J Etkind and officers of Grand Lodge. The following were installed as the first officers of the Lodge: president, A Sacks; immediate past president, Rev J I Levine; vice-president, M Schechter; secretary, M Kaplan; treasurer, S Colman; master of ceremonies, J Gordon; trustees, A Lewis, Rev I L Mannschein and I Gibbert; inner guard, S Solomon; Marshals, M Lewis and J Notelowitz; management committee, S Worms, H Beron, L Menachemson and M Cohen. The ceremony was attended by about 70 visitors representing various lodges throughout the country.

Presidents of the H O D Lodge were Rev J I Levine, A Sacks, Monty Schechter [1954], Harry Beron, Jack Hirschmann, Simon Worms and Julian Meyer. Members included Rev I L Mannschein and Rev J I Levine. Members were drawn from surrounding towns and included Abraham Donde and Barney Krikst from Potgietersrus. The Lodge continued to flourish but members who had moved away from Pietersburg had difficulty travelling the long distances and the Lodge could not continue to meet regularly. In the early 1970s, with great reluctance, the Grand Lodge decided to recall the Charter and the Lodge was formally closed. The accoutrements were returned to Johannesburg<sup>65</sup>.

Jews were volunteers on all the service club committees which collected money for various charities. These included Rotary, Lions, the Old Age Home, the Hospital and various medical services. At the first meeting of the Rotary Club in Pietersburg at the Grand Hotel on 25 August 1951, Max Marcus was elected the vice-president and Moss Cohen the director. Max Marcus [1951/2], Moss Cohen [1955/6], Max Conley [1959/60], Jack Hirschmann [1972], Julian Meyer and Arnie Stein [1994/5] were Jewish presidents of the Pietersburg Rotary Club. Rotarians were involved with the founding of the Pietersburg Old Age Home in 1954. Amongst those who were on the committee was Solly Coleman, who donated a block of flats to the Old Age Home. The Pietersburg Lions Club was a service club that was founded in 1962. The first president, Max Chaitow and the vice-president, Simon Worms, were Jewish. Subsequent Jewish presidents were Solly Coleman [1971], Harry Beron, Simon Worms and Raymond Katzman. Louis Klingman was the motivating force behind the Lion's Ambulance service in 1975, which ran between Pietersburg, Pretoria and Johannesburg<sup>66</sup>. In 1929 Dr P A Hack, Messrs A M Cohen and C Himmelhoch were



on the Pietersburg Hospital board of management. Later, Louis Brenner was also a member of the Pietersburg Hospital Board. He donated the Louis Brenner fountain in front of the Pietersburg Civic Centre. Morris Wiener started Suicides Anonymous in Pietersburg. Messrs Wally Levy, Leon Levy and Louis Klingman were amongst those who volunteered to fight fires before a permanent fire brigade was formed in Pietersburg.

Jewish women were also active members of several Pietersburg women's organizations. Jewish founder members of the Pietersburg Women's Club in 1949 included Mesdames L Cowan, Honorary secretary, L Cohen, Cultural Convenor and M Levin, tea hostess, in charge of arranging the teas, as well as Cicely Hirschmann and Jenny Worms. Of those named as being on the committee of the National Council of Women in Pietersburg, Mesdames W Eitzman, P Cohen, G and R Hirschmann, S Palte, H Manaschewitz, B Herman, L Levy, Hirsch were Jewish<sup>67</sup>. A branch of the South African Red Cross Society was formed on Pietersburg in 1928. In that year the Voluntary Aid Detachment was formed and Mrs Rahel Hirschmann was a member. Jeanne Young was the organizer and Hon secretary of the Pietersburg Ambulance Fund committee. The first ambulance in use in Pietersburg was named after her in 1929. Jenny Worms was the Superintendent of the railway branch of St Johns First Aid and together with Mr Louis Brenner was a founder member of the Pietersburg Blood Transfusion Service.

Jews were also prominent on the sports field. Several Jewish men and women were presidents of the bowls and golf clubs and became Pietersburg's champion players. Max Marcus was the Administrator of the Pietersburg Rugby Club and manager of

the Pietersburg Football Team when it won the Wolf Krause Cup in 1914 and J Kallmeyer was a player for the team. Joe Kaminer, the son of Rev A Kaminer, played first team rugby for Pietersburg High School before playing for the Springboks in the second rugby test against France in 1958. Wilfred Rosenberg, another Springbok rugby player, was the son of Rev P Rosenberg, also a minister of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation. Laurie Mitchell was a Springbok soccer player. Many Jewish players obtained places in the Northern Transvaal hockey, rugby, cricket and swimming teams. The Pietersburg Maccabi Society was started in 1959 by Harold Stein<sup>68</sup>.

Pietersburg Jews also exerted an influence in other parts of South Africa or overseas after they moved away from Pietersburg. They became renowned mayors, professors and authors. Amongst these are:

- Adolph Sacks, who was mayor of Bothaville for seven terms from 1916-1930
- Dr Solly Feinberg, who was mayor of Margate in 1952
- Prof Geoffrey Dusheiko is a leading cancer specialist in London
- Dr Morris [Maish] Notelovitz is a professor at the University of Florida
- Josef Tager became professor of Biochemistry at the University of Amsterdam and was made a *Staatsridder* Netherlands by Queen Beatrice for science
- Prof Asher Susser, a professor at the University of Tel Aviv, is the author of several books on Jordan
- Leslie Susser PhD is a senior writer for *Jerusalem Report* and Israel correspondent for Deutsch Welle Radio
- Sylvia Poss is the authoress of the book '*Death with Dignity*'

- Ruth Miller [nee Fridjon] from Haenertsburg, wrote short stories and radio plays and published poetry in British and American magazines during WWII
- Harry Klein, journalist writer of '*Valley of the Mists*' lived on a farm in the Haenertsburg district in the 1940s
- Leon Chaitow wrote '*Candida Albicans*' [Thorsons an imprint of Harper Collins Publishers 1996]
- Woolf Solomon 'Dr Paul' is a well-known sex therapist in Johannesburg, appearing on television shows
- Julius Louis Saks<sup>69</sup> served on the South African Optical Association from 1928 until his death in 1975. He was president of the society and was editor of its journal. He was made an honorary life fellow of the South African Optometric association in 1946 and honorary life president in 1951. He was the first non-American to be made an honorary life fellow of the American Academy of Optometry in 1974
- Julius Israelsohn served six terms as chairman of the South African Retail Chemists and Druggists Association, chairman of the Editorial Board of the South African Pharmaceutical Journal and was on the executive of the Pharmaceutical Society of South Africa and is Honorary Curator of the Pharmacy Museum in Johannesburg
- Boris Chaitow founded Stellenbosch Health Farm
- Chris Levine, whose father owned the mine at Bewaarkloof, became a well-known couturier
- Scully Levine is a stunt pilot and a South African Airways pilot. He captained the SAA Boeing which flew over the opening match of the World Cup cricket in Cape Town in 2003

- Jack Notelovitz became chairman of the Board of Deputies in Natal
- Lionel Stein became chairman of the Johannesburg Community Policing Area and chairman of the Glenhazel Congregation 2002
- Maxie Kahan was Deputy Commander of Police in Northern Israel
- Wilfred Eitzmann, a Jewish schoolteacher in Pietersburg collected samples of bone in 1924/5 from Makapaansgat Caves, 16 kilometers north-east of Potgietersrus, and sent them to Professor Raymond Dart<sup>70</sup> at the University of Witwatersrand. Professor Dart's discoveries and interpretations were rewarded with many honours. In 1945 students working under P V Tobias found more bones in the cave. In 1947, J Kitching found the first specimen of the ape-man Australopithecus in these caves

Jews integrated well into the general society of Pietersburg, even though it was a predominantly Afrikaans-speaking right-wing community. They experienced very little anti-Semitism except for the period before and during World War II. Jews achieved positions of prominence in all spheres of society, especially in municipal, economic, cultural and sports fields. Despite having grown up in a remote unsophisticated society, Jews left the town and rose to prominence in their various fields throughout the world.

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NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Hertz, Rabbi Dr JH. "The Jew in South Africa: Paper read before the first congress of the South African Zionist Federation Johannesburg, 9-11 July 1905". Central News Agency: Johannesburg, 1905. Also reprinted in: *Jewish Affairs* Autumn 1999. South African Board of Deputies, 1999, p. 42.

<sup>2</sup> Some Jewish families provided their children with private tuition. Hermann and Doris Hirschmann brought out an English governess from England to Woodbush to teach their children English.

<sup>3</sup> Shain, Milton. *The Roots of Antisemitism in South Africa*. The University Press of Virginia, USA: 1994, p. 20. These policies fell away in 1902 under British rule.

<sup>4</sup> Wiener Questionnaire Appendix I.

<sup>5</sup> Wistrich, Robert. *Anti-Semitism: The Longest Hatred*. Cox and Wyman Ltd: Great Britain, 1992, p. 106.

<sup>6</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, whites of British origin virtually monopolized high positions in every sector of the economy except agriculture, whereas many Afrikaners were impoverished. Known as 'poor whites', they were being driven off the land as agriculture became capitalized and they were finding it difficult to adapt to the urban economy, except as unskilled workers as they were uneducated. Thompson, Leonard. *A History of South Africa*. Yale University Press: New Haven CT, United States of America, 2002, p. 155.

<sup>7</sup> Cohen, Stephen. "Historical Background". In: *South African Jewry: A contemporary survey*. Edited by Marcus Arkin. Oxford University Press: Cape Town, 1984, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.* p. 57.

<sup>9</sup> Shimoni, Gideon. *Community and Conscience: The Jews in Apartheid South Africa*. David Philips Publishers: Republic of South Africa, 2003, p. 7.

<sup>10</sup> Changuion, Louis. *Pietersburg die eerste eeu 1886-1986*. V & R Printers Pty Ltd: Pretoria, 1986, p. 139.

<sup>11</sup> Saron, Gustav. *The Jews of South Africa An Illustrated History to 1953*. Edited by Naomi Musiker. Scarecrow Books: Johannesburg, 2001, p. 117.

<sup>12</sup> Presumably he means Lithuanian farmers, assumed to be Jewish by the non-Jewish community although it is not clear if they were Jews.

<sup>13</sup> The word 'ARE' was stressed in the original text. *Zoutpansberg Review* 28 January 1930, p. 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.* 7 February 1930, p. 3.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.* 14 March 1930, p. 2.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Gerald Susser in Israel 2001.

<sup>17</sup> Mr Gershon Feldman had a trading store at Nobody.

<sup>18</sup> Saron, *op. cit.* p. 138.

<sup>19</sup> *Zoutpansberg Review* 20 June 1930.

<sup>20</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives 46: Pietersburg file1: correspondence 'Anti-Semitism'.

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- <sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>22</sup> Saron, *op. cit.* p. 142.
- <sup>23</sup> Jowell, Phyllis and Folb, Adrienne. *Into Kokerboom Country: Namaqualand's Jewish Pioneers*. Fernwood Press: Republic of South Africa, 2004, pp. 114 -5.
- <sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>25</sup> Number 4 on 13 October 1939.
- <sup>26</sup> Afrikaner National-Socialist organisation established in 1938 inspired by the revival of Afrikaner Nationalism in commemoration of the Great Trek.
- <sup>27</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation correspondence Moss Cohen 26 February 1936.
- <sup>28</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives Mr Dwolatsky Report 1939.
- <sup>29</sup> Interview with Rae Fine in Johannesburg 2001.
- <sup>30</sup> Interview with Maxie Kahan in Israel 2001.
- <sup>31</sup> Interview with Estelle Joffe [nee Fisher] in Israel 2001.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>33</sup> Interview with Alf Levi in Israel 2001.
- <sup>34</sup> Changuion, *op. cit.* p. 147.
- <sup>35</sup> Captain MacMillan's first name is unknown. Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minutes 18 August 1942.
- <sup>36</sup> *South African Jews in World War II*. South African Jewish Board of Deputies. Eagle Press Ltd: Johannesburg. South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives 46.
- <sup>37</sup> Mr Loxton's first name is not mentioned.
- <sup>38</sup> Shimoni, *op. cit.* p. 9.
- <sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* p. 208.
- <sup>40</sup> See Chapter 3, note 9, concerning a European case and a South African case refuting the 'Protocols of Zion'.
- <sup>41</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minutes January 1984.
- <sup>42</sup> Interview with Raymond Katzman in Pietersburg and Gerald Susser in Israel 2001.
- <sup>43</sup> Jowell and Folb, *op. cit.* p. 116.
- <sup>44</sup> Kropman, Mary. *The Contribution of the Pioneer Traders to the Ciskei*. Unpublished MA Thesis: University of Cape Town, 1977, p. 62.
- <sup>45</sup> *Ibid.* p. 77.
- <sup>46</sup> Private correspondence with the daughter of a black mother and white father, who is looking for her allegedly Jewish father. Her mother told her that her father was the Jewish shopkeeper for whom she worked.

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<sup>47</sup> Parfitt, Tudor. *Journey to the Vanished City: The Search for a Lost Tribe of Israel*. Hodder and Stoughton: Great Britain, 1992. Whether or not the Lemba are genuine Jews must still be determined. Parfitt teamed up with a group from The Centre for Genetic Anthropology at University College London to test the genes of the Lemba. A particular chromosome, the Cohen modal haplotype, that is characteristic of the *kohanim* [priests] of Israel, was found in a similar frequency to major Jewish populations. Most of this Cohen genetic signature was found in individuals of the Buba clan which in Lemba oral tradition had a leadership role in bringing the Lemba out of Israel. Jacobson, Lana. "The Lembas – a Lost Tribe of Israel?" In: *Jewish Affairs: Rosh Hashanah 2004*. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, Johannesburg, p. 33. Abe Flax, a Jew living in Messina, was phoned by the local magistrate to come to the police station to collect a man as the magistrate stated: "He's one of yours." On arrival at the police station, Flax found a Lemba man wearing a *kippa*. The magistrate clearly believed they belonged to the same religious group. Interview with Merle Proos [nee Flax] and Bucky Flax in Israel 2001.

<sup>48</sup> *Zionist Record* 29 January 1960.

<sup>49</sup> Shimoni, *op.cit.* p. 6.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* p. 57.

<sup>51</sup> Interviews with Pietersburg residents.

<sup>52</sup> Shimoni, *op. cit.* p. 91.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Arthur Goldreich in Israel 26 July 2001.

<sup>54</sup> *Northern Review* 17 August 1956.

<sup>55</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives questionnaire Rochlin box 6 arch 114 file T.

<sup>56</sup> *Tzaneen-75 1919-1994*. Edited by Changuion, Louis. Letaba Printers: Tzaneen, 1994, p. 20.

<sup>57</sup> Changuion, Louis. *The club with a capacity for survival: Pietersburg Club 1902-2002*. Review Printers: Pietersburg, 2002.

<sup>58</sup> *Zoutpansberg Review* 14 November 1929.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* 30 September 1932, p. 1.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.* 30 September 1955, p. 1.

<sup>61</sup> *Northern Review* 26 May 1931, p. 1.

<sup>62</sup> Cooper, A A Dr and Vieler, D E G. *A Century of Brotherhood: A History of English Freemasonry in the Transvaal 1895-1995*. 1995.

<sup>63</sup> Levy, Wally. *Centenary Meeting 27 November 1993: Summarized History of Pietersburg United Lodge No 2485*. Unpublished, Pietersburg 1993.

<sup>64</sup> The Hebrew Order of David's mission statement states that it is a forum for adult Jewish males that serves the community whilst applying Jewish ideals and values and upholding the principles of unity, fraternity, love and peace.

<sup>65</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Order of David correspondence: from the Grand Secretary Bennie Asch, an ex-Pietersburger 17 January 1973 quoting from *Hebrew Order of David: The First 80 Years*, Hebrew Order of David: Johannesburg, 1985, p. 288. *Hebrew Order of David: The First 100 Years*. Hebrew Order of David: Johannesburg, 2005, pp. 288-9.

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<sup>66</sup> Interview with Pietersburg Red Cross President, Mrs Doreen Roome in Pietersburg 2002.

<sup>67</sup> *Zoutpansberg Review* 29 August 1930, p. 1.

<sup>68</sup> *Zionist Record* volume XLV no 1804 13 March 1959, p. 22.

<sup>69</sup> <http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/saks,j.htm>

<sup>70</sup> [http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/dart\\_ra.htm](http://www.sahistory.org.za/pages/people/dart_ra.htm)



## CHAPTER 11

### THE DECLINE OF THE COMMUNITY FROM 1992 UNTIL 2003

Jews started leaving the isolated trading stores in the country areas of the Northern Transvaal because they wanted to be part of a larger Jewish community. They believed their children should have a Jewish education and this was only available in the larger towns. The improvements in road and rail transportation meant that it became easier for people living in remote country areas to reach the larger towns. This led to a decreased demand for trading stores and country hotels in remote areas. The growth of co-operative societies contributed to the demise of the country trading stores as they gave the farmer longer terms to pay and the small traders could not compete with these large groups. As the Jewish children in the small towns grew to maturity, they preferred to move to the cities for better educational, business and social opportunities. Eventually their families followed them to the cities. The Jewish community in the cities of South Africa is gradually becoming more religious. Jews are reluctant to move to the small towns as they often do not have the required religious facilities or sufficient numbers for regular *minyans*. As a result there are no Jews to replenish the dwindling country communities.

The numbers of Jews in country communities throughout South Africa have been steadily declining. In the Transvaal, by 1994 Klerksdorp's numbers had fallen from 169 families at its peak to 55 families, Lichtenburg from 50-60 families to only three families and three widows, Vereeniging from 200 to 34 families, Krugersdorp from 360 to 85 and Benoni from 400 to 163 families<sup>1</sup>. In the Cape Province, Stellenbosch has fallen from 90 to 13 families, Oudtshoorn from more than 400 at its peak to 17

families<sup>2</sup>, Paarl from 210 to 39 and Kimberley from 260 to 28 families. This decline in numbers in small Jewish communities is also to be found in other countries. In Canada in Saint John, New Brunswick, the community dwindled from its peak of 1400 Jews in the 1920s to just 125 in 2004. Monckton declined by 9% and Fredericton dropped by 33% in the last decade<sup>3</sup>. The Jewish communities in the small towns of America also began declining in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century as the youth moved to the bigger centres for better education and job opportunities, except in towns which showed economic growth such as the carpet manufacturing centre of Dalton, Georgia<sup>4</sup>.

In Pietersburg, the Jewish community had shrunk to only 24 families by 1992 when the last minister, Rev B Lerer, left Pietersburg. The Pietersburg congregation decided against employing another minister. Some members felt that it was not essential to have a permanent minister, especially if there were insufficient funds. To employ a minister for weekends only was also deemed unfeasible due to the long distances he would have to travel from other centres. A suggestion by an ex-member to start a *yeshiva* in Pietersburg, so that students could assist with services, was found to be unviable as the town did not have all the required religious facilities.

Because they no longer had to pay a minister's salary, the finances of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation [PHC] improved slightly as R57 000 was saved per annum. They were also assisted by donations from the Jewish Women's Guild, the *Chevrah Kadisha* as well as R1700 from the Israel United Appeal/United Communal Fund [IUA/UCF]. Unfortunately from 1993, the IUA/UCF donation was stopped.

The PHC had to solve the problem of functioning without a permanent minister. Mr Solly Starkowitz very ably took over the conducting of the *Shabbat* and festival services. At the Friday evening services, the chairman read mini-sermons, which were received from the office of the Chief Rabbi. The community attempted to celebrate all the festivals in the same manner as when a permanent minister had been present in Pietersburg, however this proved difficult - no services were held in the synagogue for the 18 children on *Shavuoth* morning, as had been the custom in the past and *Yom Yerushalayim* celebrations were combined with *Shavuoth*. When Rabbi S A Zaiden, the country communities Rabbi, contacted the chairman on 25 July 1993 concerning assistance for the High Holy Days<sup>5</sup>, the committee agreed that Mr G Fachler should conduct the services. Rabbi S A Zaiden also helped conduct a *Barmitzvah*. Rabbi M Silberhaft was appointed as the new country communities Rabbi by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies [SAJBD] in November 1993 and he was to provide considerable assistance to the community. Mr Leon Levy was elected an Honorary Life president of the PHC in 1993.

Mrs Charlotte Wiener took over the teaching of the children in the *cheder* as well as the Bar- and Batmitzvah classes with the assistance of tapes obtained from Rabbi Silberhaft. She also taught Jewish Studies during school hours at Mitchell House School, a private primary school in Pietersburg, which most of the Jewish children attended. Rabbi Dr G Mazabow, the inspector of Hebrew Schools, and Mr M Zimmerman, from the South African Board of Jewish Education, assisted with telephonic advice. The Women's Guild organized the ordering of kosher meat from Nussbaums and Bolnicks Butcheries in Johannesburg as well as the ordering of Passover products from Pick n Pay supermarket chain in Johannesburg. Festival and

Friday night meals were held in the communal hall for the community and *kashrut* was supervised by the chairlady of the Women's Guild.

In many small country communities, as the number of members decrease, there arises a need to downsize the number and size of communal buildings. In January 1994, the treasurer of the PHC, Mr D Wiener, suggested that a sub-committee be appointed to investigate the future of the PHC as the community was decreasing in numbers, there was no minister and finances were low. On 20 February 1994<sup>6</sup> the sub-committee recommended that the PHC committee should negotiate with the Moolman Group to sell the communal hall as it had become too large for the community's needs. It was decided not to sell the synagogue building as there was too much sentiment attached to it. The sum of R630 000 was received from the Moolman Group for the communal hall. A smaller hall was built by the Moolman Group at the back of the existing synagogue building at cost price. However, the cost overruns came to R40 000, which the Moolman Group very generously wrote off. The extras were incurred by the decision to build a larger hall, the addition of a *Succah* and a storeroom and the painting of the synagogue. The PHC committee decided on 28 August 1994 to name the new hall the Wally Levy Hall after the long-serving chairman of the *Chevrah Kadisha*<sup>7</sup> and this was announced at the 1994 AGM. The Wally Levy Hall was opened by Chief Rabbi C Harris on 5 March 1995. On the same day a ceremony was held at the Pietersburg Jewish cemetery to bury old prayer books and a *possel Sefer Torah*.

At the 1994 AGM the chairman, Mr Leon Levy, announced that the decision to sell the old hall had been a good one. For the first time the congregation had enough

money to keep it viable for many years to come. Unfortunately, various societies in Johannesburg had heard of the Pietersburg congregation's newly acquired wealth and had immediately written to them asking for donations. The PHC committee was upset that Johannesburg societies now knew where to contact them for money but had not been there to assist them when the congregation had been in financial trouble<sup>8</sup>.

The chairman thanked the treasurer for turning the finances around and for all the work he had put into supervising the building of the hall. The excess of income over expenditure that year was R5500 and for the first time in many years no donations were needed from members to assist the congregation's finances. Instead donations of R27000 were given by the PHC to various charities in Johannesburg and Pietersburg. Financial assistance was also given to various members and ex-members of the congregation. Assistance was usually in the form of interest-free loans that were to be recovered from the estates of the recipients at the time of their deaths<sup>9</sup>. The committee decided to temporarily reduce the synagogue fees to R600 per annum and then in 1995 the fees were again reduced to R400 per annum. An unexpected result of the new communal hall was the improved attendance by members at synagogue services and at functions. The size of the congregation was increased by the arrival of several Israeli families, who also attended functions.

The SAJBD was becoming concerned that country communities were not making provision for the eventual demise of their congregations. A letter was received by the PHC from the SAJBD on 24 August 1994 stressing the importance of drawing up a legal constitution for each country community. As many of these communities were dwindling in size, their assets needed to be secured. To assist the communities, the

SAJBD forwarded a draft constitution that they had already drawn up, appointing the SAJBD as legal trustees of the remaining assets. All proceeds from a defunct community would be held in trust in the name of the community for the upkeep of the local cemetery and any other purposes that may be required. The PHC committee decided to attend to this as a matter of urgency and the letter from the SAJBD would be taken into consideration. The committee was concerned that when the community eventually closed down, its funds should not be left in the control of the few remaining members. Instead they wanted the assets to be secured whilst there was still a viable community who could decide how they wanted these assets to be distributed in the future.

At the 1994 AGM the community approved in principle the drawing up of a new constitution<sup>10</sup>. However, by May 1996 the new constitution had still not been drawn up. The secretary of the PHC urged the committee to proceed without delay. As a result on 2 June 1996, the chairman informed the committee that the SAJBD was drawing up a proposed constitution for the congregation's consideration. It was received on 28 July 1996 and a copy was sent to all members for their consideration<sup>11</sup>. Finally, only a year later, after many discussions by the committee, the treasurer attended to the drawing up of the new constitution, using the SAJBD's constitution as a base. At the 1997 AGM, the community went through this proposed constitution point by point. After lengthy discussion, amendments were made. The final draft of the constitution was presented at a special general meeting of the congregation held on 6 November 1997. The 28 members present, who constituted almost all of the members, voted in favour of the new constitution<sup>12</sup>. This constitution made allowances for the demise of the congregation and the formation and conditions of

operation of a trust to administer the remaining assets<sup>13</sup>. As we shall see, the new constitution was to play an important role in the final negotiations pertaining to the closure of the congregation.

For the first time the PHC had extra finances. Members wanted to find a use for these funds to the benefit of the congregation. At the 1996 AGM<sup>14</sup>, a suggestion was made by Mr M Fisher, the local IUA co-ordinator, that the congregation should sponsor members of the PHC to visit Israel in order to raise their Zionist commitment. After a discussion, the majority of those present agreed to use congregational funds to assist those members who wanted to visit Israel. At the November 1996 committee meeting it was decided to combine the visit to Israel with a re-union dinner in Raanana with ex-Pietersburgers living in Israel, to be sponsored by the PHC. However, in January 1997, the PHC committee was informed of a letter that had been received from the Cape Jewish Board of Deputies [Cape JBOD]. An ex-PHC member living in Cape Town had objections to the trip to Israel and had informed the Cape JBOD of the proposed trip. The Cape JBOD wrote objecting to the PHC squandering their community funds. The chairman expressed his outrage that ex-Pietersburgers had interfered in the community's affairs, but they had not come forward to assist them when the congregation had been in a critical financial situation. As the Pietersburg community had worked to collect these funds over many years he believed it was entitled to say how the money should be used. It was decided that the trip would go ahead on 15 June 1997. The secretary of the PHC then left the meeting in anger as he was also against the use of community funds for a trip to Israel. He suggested the money should rather go to a charity.

A reply was sent by the PHC committee to the Cape JBOD with copies to the SAJBD and Rabbi M Silberhaft. The latter two replied, giving their support for the trip. At a special committee meeting on 29 January 1997 it was decided to go ahead with the trip and to sponsor tickets to the maximum amount of R45 000 plus R5 000 for the dinner. However, at the meeting on 26 February 1997,<sup>15</sup> the arrangements for the trip were stopped. This was due to the negative criticism that had been received and because the original proposer, Mr Fisher, withdrew his support for the trip. We shall see later that in May 2000 the idea of sponsoring members' trips to Israel was again proposed for the *Hachnasat Torah* ceremony [for a new *Sefer Torah*] in Raanana.

Although the Pietersburg community no longer had to worry about financial problems, they were instead faced with the problem of declining numbers. Most of the community consisted of aged members and there were very few children. At the AGM on 23 September 1998, the chairman complained that it was getting more and more difficult to make up *minyans*. On 16 April 1998 there were only five men at the Friday night service, the lowest in the history of the congregation. Members had resorted to saying *kaddish* on the Friday night nearest to their *yahrzeits* instead of on the day itself, as they could not gather 10 men during the week. Even then, members had to be phoned on Fridays to attend services. Although audiences were small, a few speakers still visited Pietersburg, mainly due to Rabbi Silberhaft's support of the community. In 1997 Miss Romi Kaplan, accompanied by Rabbi Silberhaft and cameramen, arrived to interview and videotape a gathering of the older Jewish members as they spoke about early Jewish life in Pietersburg. She was part of the *Beth Hatefutsoth* project that was recording the history of the country communities before they disappeared. On 19 October 1997, Marlene Bethlehem, chairperson of the



SAJBD and Rabbi M Silberhaft paid a courtesy visit to Pietersburg. A supper was held in the Wally Levy Hall where she was the guest speaker.

As the number of members decreased, the PHC committee became remiss in carrying out their duties. In the past, PHC committee meetings had always been held at monthly intervals. The main topic of discussion was usually the difficulties presented by the various ministers. However, without a minister, problems were significantly reduced. The chairman therefore felt that there was no need to hold monthly meetings, there being little to discuss. As a result, there were no committee meetings between September 1997 and August 1998 except on 24 March 1998, when some committee members requested that a meeting should be held. Unfortunately, therefore, several matters were not brought to the attention of the committee timeously, such as the organization of different events and arrangements for a minister for the High Holy Days. At this committee meeting on 24 March 1998<sup>16</sup> it was decided to ask Rabbi M Silberhaft, the country communities Rabbi, to find someone to officiate during the High Holy Days. However, at the committee meeting on 13 August 1998<sup>17</sup> it was brought to the attention of the committee that there had been a misunderstanding between the chairman Mr Leon Levy and Rabbi M Silberhaft. Rabbi Silberhaft had written a letter to the congregation on 12 August 1998. In it he stated that on Friday 31 July 1998, he had contacted the chairman, as he had done the previous five years, to enquire if the PHC required someone to officiate on the High Holy Days. As the chairman had requested him to appoint a suitable person, he, Silberhaft, had done so. However, a week later the chairman informed him that his own two sons, Drs Brian and Cecil Levy, would be officiating and Rabbi Silberhaft's appointee would no longer be needed. As the appointee had turned down other lucrative offers, Rabbi

Silberhaft felt that the congregation should make good any loss of earnings resulting from this matter. The chairman alleged that he had only *enquired* about a *Ba'al Tefillah* from Rabbi Silberhaft, whereas the Rabbi had considered it as a request and had found someone for the congregation. The committee decided that a compromise needed to be made. The treasurer was authorized to pay Rabbi Silberhaft the sum of R2500 for the *Ba'al Tefillah*, whose services were no longer required. As a result of this matter, the chairman believed that his integrity had been questioned. This was the beginning of a rift between him and Rabbi Silberhaft as the chairman refused to communicate with Rabbi Silberhaft. Instead Rabbi Silberhaft and the treasurer, Mr Wiener, decided to communicate with each other concerning any items of importance to the community. The treasurer therefore acted as a 'go-between' between Rabbi Silberhaft and the chairman<sup>18</sup>.

At a meeting held in September 1998, the chairman proposed that the congregation pay his two sons R2000 each for their services. This motion was carried by four votes for the motion, three against and one abstention. The Levy brothers subsequently donated this money to charity. In order to avoid future misunderstandings, Rabbi Silberhaft advised the congregation that all requests for the services of a *Ba'al Tefillah* etc for the PHC were to be made in writing. To prevent any further problems, the committee agreed to have regular monthly committee meetings. The chairman of the *Chevrah Kadisha*, Mr Wally Levy, [who was the brother of Mr Leon Levy] was also invited to attend the synagogue meetings. High Holy Day services were again conducted by Drs Brian and Cecil Levy in 1999, 2000 and 2001 and R4000 was donated each time in their names to five charities.

The rift between the chairman and Rabbi Silberhaft meant that Rabbi Silberhaft did not visit the Pietersburg congregation again until June 1999. During that Friday night service, Rabbi Silberhaft did not deliver a sermon. He said that he had been waiting to be asked to do so, but this had not happened. This was recorded in the minutes by the secretary as “an obvious misunderstanding”<sup>19</sup>. Rabbi Silberhaft again visited Pietersburg on 10 September 1999 to conduct a *Barmitzvah*. Upset by the chairman’s continuing hostility, the Rabbi, in a sermon in the synagogue, admonished a “member of the congregation” without naming him, for having antagonistic feelings towards him. Thereafter, formal communication resumed between the Rabbi and the chairman although a feeling of tension still remained.

Because the community was decreasing in size, other synagogues realized the PHC would no longer be requiring all its assets. In February 1999, it was reported to the PHC committee that a request had been received from the new *Shiftei Yisrael* Synagogue in Ra’anana in Israel, which consisted mainly of ex-South Africans, for the donation of a *Sefer Torah* from the Pietersburg congregation. At a special general meeting the congregants agreed to the proposal as the community no longer needed all its *Sifrei Torah*. The PHC at that time had five *Sifrei Torah*, of which two were known to be owned by the congregation. Three *Sifrei Torah* were *possel*. At the 1999 AGM, it was proposed that the congregation should send two of these *Sifrei Torah* to Israel and this was agreed to by all present<sup>20</sup>. Both *Sifrei Torah* were restored by Rabbi Klein in Johannesburg at the cost of the Israeli congregation. They were transported to Israel by members of the Ra’anana synagogue.

Despite the negative reaction to the earlier proposal to sponsor a trip to Israel, in May 2000 Mr D Wiener proposed that the PHC sponsor a part or whole of the air ticket for members to attend the official handing over ceremony in Israel of the *Sifrei Torah*. All ex-members of the congregation living in Israel were to be invited to the ceremony. The committee agreed to a ceiling cost of R60 000. After some discussion, during which several candidates were suggested, the committee agreed that Rabbi Silberhaft would be their representative minister in Israel. The committee was told that the Ra'anana congregation had asked the PHC to contribute towards the buffet meal. A heated discussion followed as some members were of the opinion that the *Sifrei Torah* were in themselves a sizeable gift and it was presumptuous of the Israeli congregation to expect a further gift. In the end R3000 was made available towards the buffet meal. A memento of laminated photographs of the Pietersburg synagogue, with a brief history of the congregation, was produced at the congregation's cost for those attending the function. Only seven members eventually traveled to Israel. The final cost to the PHC congregation was R53000. As the chairman was unable to attend the ceremony, Messrs D Wiener and S Starkowitz represented the PHC committee. An article about the Pietersburg congregation was featured in the Israeli *Telfed* magazine in April 2001<sup>21</sup>. The *Hachnasat Torah* ceremony was held on 21 May 2001. The two *Sifrei Torah* with their new mantles inscribed with the words 'Presented by the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation' were carried into the *Shivtei Yisrael* Synagogue by Messrs Solly Starkowitz and Dennis Wiener. Speeches were made by Mr Maish Isaacson, chairman of the *Shivtei Yisrael* Congregation, Rabbi Y Peretz, Chief Rabbi of Ra'anana, Mr Ze'ev Bielski, mayor of Ra'anana, Rabbi Daniel Beller of the *Shivtei Yisrael* Congregation, Mr Dennis Wiener, of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation, and Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft, the country communities Rabbi. The ceremony was

followed by a reception attended by 30 ex-Pietersburgers living in Israel, who enjoyed participating in an evening related to their roots in the northern Transvaal<sup>22</sup>.

The community decided in August 2001 to celebrate *Rosh Hashanah* with a communal function in the hall as this could possibly be the last one celebrated in Pietersburg as a community. Despite the small number of members, dinners were catered by the Jewish Women's Guild on both nights for seventy people. In a final attempt to recapture the spirit of the large celebrations held in the past, members invited family and friends from afar to attend. Two *Yeshiva* boys were also paid to come to make sure that there would be a *minyan* for all services, as not everyone attended the morning services.

Two incidents occurred during the declining years of the community involving non-Jews attending services in the synagogue. These incidents were not handled decisively by the chairman and committee of the PHC, leading to discord in the community. As the number of members attending Friday evening services in the Pietersburg synagogue declined, any non-member was especially noticeable. Several non-Jews had attended services sporadically in the past, however, a couple of families began to attend these services on a regular basis. This led to objections by some members of the congregation as they were seen as intruders. At the meeting on 21 February 2000, the chairman and a few of the other members strongly objected to a non-Jewish black family's continued presence at Friday night services<sup>23</sup>. The basis for their objection appears to be that the family was black rather than that they were non-Jewish. The PHC minutes record that it was the feeling of the majority of the committee members that in terms of the new post-Apartheid laws of the country nothing drastic could be

done about this matter<sup>24</sup>. Pietersburg was a traditionally right-wing region of the country and several members of the congregation had conservative leanings which might have influenced their objections. The majority of the committee decided that this matter would be referred to Rabbi M Silberhaft or Chief Rabbi C Harris. The black woman, whilst speaking to a committee member in the synagogue, explained that she had expressed an interest in converting to Judaism in the past and had taken lessons with Rev B Lerer. However, she had found that it was too difficult for her to travel to Johannesburg for long periods of time in order to convert to Judaism. After the following Friday evening service, the chairman remarked aloud that it would be preferable for visitors who came regularly to services to convert to Judaism in order to become members of the synagogue<sup>25</sup>. She did not attend services again.

Another non-Jewish couple, Mr and Mrs V, had also been attending Friday night services and their continued presence resulted in objections from some members. Mr V admitted to wanting closer ties between the PHC and their Christian Church, so that “the Christians could ask forgiveness for the wrongs they had committed over the centuries towards the Jews”<sup>26</sup>. This desire had also been expressed by other Christians in South Africa. Chief Rabbi C Harris had drafted an answer in November 1999 against this proposal and this was read to the PHC committee. It was decided by the committee not to comment publicly on this issue but it would advise the couple that they were not interested in forming an active association with their Christian Church. However, on 13 November 2001, Mr J a member of the PHC, sent a letter to the PHC Committee worded:

I strongly object to members of other religious faiths attending prayer services of our Shul. I now state I will not attend Shul if this continues. Also I object to certain members encouraging these people to attend. Members should be trying

to get other members to attend Shul and make 10 [a reference to needing 10 men to make up a *minyan*].

Mr J's objection was on the basis that he believed that as the non-Jews did not want to convert to Judaism, they had an ulterior motive of wanting to convert Jews to Christianity. At the PHC committee meeting on 20 November 2001, it was reported that Mrs V had asked a committee member if she could bring other members of their church to synagogue services. The committee conducted a heated discussion. They feared that soon the Christians would outnumber the Jews at services, there being already less than ten Jewish men. On 27 January 2002 it was reported that when the couple had arrived at the Friday night service, member J had walked out of the synagogue. The chairman offered to visit the couple and to suggest to them that if they wanted to attend services regularly they would be required to convert to Judaism. However this meeting did not take place as there was a reluctance to confront the couple. On 3 March 2002, a committee member threatened to resign from the PHC if Mr V was stopped from attending services<sup>27</sup>. The committee was beginning to show signs of division.

On 18 March 2002 Mr J again wrote enquiring what action had been taken against the couple. He was angry that certain members were still encouraging the couple to attend services and they had also been invited to attend festival celebrations in the hall. As several of the members of the committee did not want to antagonize the couple, it was decided to ignore the matter. The chairman and committee were reluctant to commit themselves to any positive action resulting in the situation escalating beyond their control. Mr J also sent a letter of complaint to Rabbi M Silberhaft. After a discussion between Rabbi Silberhaft, the chairman and Mr J<sup>28</sup>, it was agreed that the chairman

would request the couple not to attend services regularly, but the chairman again did not do so. The chairman did not carry out his duty.

Mr J, feeling that he was not getting any satisfaction from the PHC committee, also sent a letter of complaint to the *Beth Din*. Rabbi D Isaacs, *Dayyan* of the *Beth Din*, asked the chairman for an explanation. The chairman replied on 26 June 2002 that the couple's attendance at synagogue was not regular. He believed they might belong to a sect called The Friends of Jews and of Israel and he did not want to provoke them, nor did he want to start an anti-Semitic incident should the newspapers get hold of the story. The couple had no intention of giving up their Christian faith although they wanted to pray in a synagogue. In mitigation of his lack of action, the chairman said he had spoken to most of the regular attendees and they felt the couple was welcome to attend synagogue. On 29 July 2002 the *Beth Din* wrote to Mr J to tell him that one cannot stop non-members from coming into a synagogue provided they are not in any way causing any disturbance and also provided they are not being counted in the *minyan*.

However the treasurer, Mr D Wiener, was not satisfied that the issue had been fairly dealt with by the *Beth Din*. He informed the *Beth Din* that the life-long member J was a *Kohen* who had been attending services fairly regularly. He felt that it was not right that the members had chosen a non-Jew over a long standing Jewish member, who could help to make up a *minyan*. The *Beth Din* reopened the issue. Rabbi Dr D Isaacs of the *Beth Din* replied to the treasurer on 8 October 2002 stating that they had met with Rabbi M Silberhaft who had "put them more fully into the picture of what actually happened". They understood from him that meanwhile the chairman had



resigned from the PHC committee [see later]. The *Beth Din* understood that the whole situation had been fostered by the chairman and that the matter was now resolved<sup>29</sup>. Mr Wiener informed Mr V of the *Beth Din's* letter, but he still insisted on attending services. Rabbi Silberhaft then phoned Mr V and he agreed to stop attending services<sup>30</sup>. As a result of this issue, the congregation began to show increased signs of division<sup>31</sup>.

The new constitution that had been adopted on 6 November 1997 stated that when the number of males residing in Pietersburg became less than nine, the congregation would be managed by a Board of Trustees. This Board was to be comprised of a committee with 75% of the vote and the National Director of the SAJBD with 25% of the vote. In 2001, in anticipation of this eventuality, Yehuda Kay, the National Director and Rabbi Silberhaft of the SAJBD were asked to attend the PHC AGM in September. The committee also decided to send the minutes of all committee meetings to the SAJBD so that they could familiarize themselves with the working of the committee.

At the PHC committee meeting on 20 November 2001, the treasurer, Mr D Wiener, reported that the number of members was falling faster than originally thought. Although the constitution called for the sale of the synagogue building only after there were three members left, he did not want the building to be abandoned as had happened in other communities such as Mafeking. He had therefore, after consultation with the chairman, Mr L Levy, taken it upon himself to enquire of members of the community how they felt about the possible sale of the synagogue. He had found that although not everyone was in agreement with the sale, the majority of members did

agree. He reminded the committee that the developer who had bought the communal hall, the Moolman Group, had first right of refusal<sup>32</sup>.

At the committee meeting on 27 January 2002, the treasurer said that he had been told of an allegation by a member that he, the treasurer, and the developer were “doing an underhanded deal” regarding the sale of the synagogue<sup>33</sup>. The treasurer was deeply upset by this allegation. The committee agreed that this sort of talk was uncalled for. It was decided to hold a special general meeting on 17 February 2002 to resolve the issue of the sale of the synagogue and to put to rest all unwarranted allegations. At this special general meeting the chairman agreed that the sale of the synagogue was a very traumatic and emotional issue. He believed that the time had come to sell the synagogue as they no longer made a *minyan* on Friday nights and the big building was both impractical and costly. The treasurer presented his financial report which set out the facts and figures of the sale of the synagogue. Mr F said that he would first like to go through the figures. The chairman pointed out that the treasurer had at all times acted in good faith – his integrity and loyalty had been excellent and the conscientious manner in which he had always carried out his duties was completely above reproach<sup>34</sup>. A motion was passed that before the members should decide to sell, the committee should make enquiries as to various other options. Members could come forward with alternative proposals. The meeting would be reconvened two weeks later.

On 3 March 2002, the PHC committee met to consider three proposals. The first was deemed unfeasible, the second was a motion not to sell the synagogue and the third was the proposal as presented by the treasurer. The treasurer’s proposal included the

fact that the original developer, the Moolman Group, had offered to buy the remaining extension of stand 527 for R900 000. The PHC would still have unfettered use of the property for another 15 months. The furniture of the Pietersburg synagogue would be installed in the new synagogue that was to be built in Tel Mond, Israel. The foundation stones, plaques and memorabilia from the Pietersburg synagogue would be displayed on a wall especially made for this purpose in the Tel Mond synagogue and this would ensure that the memory of the Pietersburg synagogue would be perpetuated for posterity. Allowance would be made for the remaining Pietersburg members to acquire an alternative place of worship. A certain amount would be donated to charities and to assist members and ex-members. The committee decided to support the treasurer's proposal<sup>35</sup>.

The special general meeting was reconvened on 5 March 2002. The treasurer presented the committee's proposal. Thereafter Mr P put forward his and Mr F's proposal not to sell the synagogue. Their main basis for retaining the synagogue was for sentimental reasons and to continue Friday night and festival services as before. Mr F then arose to endorse Mr P's comments and was interrupted by Mr Wiener. A heated exchange took place between the treasurer and Mr F. Subsequently, Mr F approached the main table and assaulted the treasurer in front of the congregation<sup>36</sup>. After a period of pandemonium, Messrs P and F withdrew their proposal. The chairman asked them if they were withdrawing their proposal in response to the events of the evening or because they were now supporting the committee's proposal and they answered in favour of the latter. Because the committee's proposal was the only one standing, it was adopted by the meeting. Mr F apologized to the treasurer, but his apology was not accepted by him. The following day the treasurer opened a

criminal case docket against Mr F for assault. The events of that evening were to have far reaching effects for the congregation, as it finally divided the community into two factions, one supporting the treasurer and the other Mr F. The chairman subsequently asked the treasurer to withdraw his court action as he feared a split in the community, but he refused. Several attempts were made by various Jewish leaders from other centres to get the two parties to reach an out of court settlement but they were unsuccessful.

At the committee meeting held on 21 April 2002<sup>37</sup>, the minutes of this meeting only glossed over the occurrences of that evening:

A discussion took place, after which Mr P and Mr F withdrew their proposal. The committee's proposal was duly accepted.

The treasurer rejected the minutes as he did not deem them to give a true reflection of what had happened at the meeting. The secretary, Mrs Levy, asserted that she had been too upset by the events of the evening to record what had happened. She agreed to rewrite the minutes to reflect more accurately the events of the evening. The next day, the treasurer and two committee members sent a letter to the secretary giving their version of the events of the evening. In reply, the secretary disagreed with the way in which the incident was portrayed and she replied saying:

Item 2 and item 3 will be re-drafted exactly the way I saw it happen, and as I am the secretary, that is the way it shall be recorded<sup>38</sup>

An ongoing correspondence occurred between the treasurer and the secretary about the minutes, as these minutes were important evidence in the pending court case. The secretary believed that the treasurer had "provoked" Mr F by interrupting him<sup>39</sup> and as a result, she supported Mr F. After the secretary rewrote the minutes, the treasurer

wrote to the secretary on 6 June 2002<sup>40</sup> stating that he did not agree with her version of the minutes. At the AGM on September 2002 the original minutes and the secretary's redrafted minutes were read. Objections to the redrafted minutes were lodged. However, the redrafted minutes were adopted and ratified by a majority count<sup>41</sup>.

On the morning of 27 September 2002, the due date of the court case, the case was settled out of court and Mr F agreed to pay a settlement of R60 000 to Mr D Wiener. The settlement stated that this amount was to be paid to the Pietersburg congregation, which would then forward the amount to the SAJBD. The SAJBD would give the money to charity after reimbursing Mr Wiener's legal costs. At the October 2002 committee meeting<sup>42</sup>, the secretary read a letter she had written to Mr F in which she and the chairman thanked Mr F for his "very generous donation". The committee members disagreed with the chairman and the secretary<sup>43</sup> as to the wording of the letter accompanying the money sent to the SAJBD. As the money was referred to as a "donation" and not a "settlement", the amount could be misconstrued to be a generous act performed by Mr F and not Mr Wiener. The secretary resigned in protest at "being criticized yet again". The chairman then also resigned. The vice-chairman, Mr Wally Levy, took over as chairman. There were only three other members on the committee Messrs S Starkowitz, Sam Bolon and Mrs C Wiener. Mr Wiener had resigned as treasurer at the end of the financial year in July 2002 as he intended leaving Pietersburg to make *aliyah* to Israel during the year. Two members of the committee visited the ex-chairman the following day, but he did not withdraw his resignation.

A week later the ex-chairman and four of the members [as well as Mr and Mrs V] decided to hold their own Friday night services in a private home. The remaining six members were left to hold services in the synagogue. In a community that could not even make up a *minyán*, two services were held every week, one at the synagogue and one in a private house.

On 21 April 2002, it was decided by the PHC committee that the SAJBD would assume financial management of the Pietersburg congregation from the beginning of the new financial year in July 2002 and members of the SAJBD would attend future PHC committee meetings.

On hearing that the synagogue was closing down, ex-members began to lay claim to the assets of the congregation. An ex-member of the Pietersburg congregation who is a descendant of the Palte family claimed that a *Sefer Torah* in the Pietersburg synagogue belonged to the Palte family as it had the family name inscribed on the handle. However, Mr W Levy negated this claim as he believed that the *Sefer Torah* with the label 'Palte' on the handle belonged to the congregation and not to the Palte family. When Mr Sam Palte died in 1958, an amount of money had been donated to the congregation from his estate. The committee of that time had decided to use this money towards buying a *Sefer Torah* for the congregation. Therefore, the PHC committee decided that if the Palte family wanted the *Sefer Torah*, they would have to pay the congregation 50% of its worth. The ex-member was not happy with this decision and threatened to take the matter to the *Beth Din*<sup>44</sup>. Eventually at the end of 2003, Rabbi M Kurstag of the *Beth Din*, at a meeting with Mr Yehuda Kay at the SAJBD, agreed in principle that the Palte family had no claim over the *Sefer Torah*<sup>45</sup>.

The family was given 30 days to decide if they wanted to buy the *Sefer Torah* and when there was no response it was assumed that there was no longer a dispute.

A de-consecration service for the Pietersburg Synagogue was held by Rabbi M Silberhaft on Friday evening 31 January 2003. Members of the break-away faction did not attend the service, but several ex-members of the congregation travelled to Pietersburg from Johannesburg. The service was followed by a dinner in the Wally Levy Hall. Certificates representing inscriptions in the Golden Book were presented to Messrs Wally Levy and Solly Starkowitz and Mrs Charlotte Wiener for services rendered to the congregation. At the dinner, the contents of the synagogue's kitchen were formally handed over to Mr Mike Baum of the Selwyn Segal Hostel by Mrs Wiener the chairlady of the Pietersburg Women's Guild. A bronze plaque commemorating this donation has since been erected at the entrance of the Hostel's dining room. All those attending the dinner recalled their happy memories of living in the Jewish community of Pietersburg.

Because the congregation no longer had an effective leadership, the remaining members of the PHC committee met with Rabbi Silberhaft on the evening of 2 February 2003, in order to discuss how the community would continue in the future<sup>46</sup>. Mr Wiener was invited to attend the meeting in order to discuss the closing of the synagogue and the shipping of its contents to Israel. It was decided to close the synagogue earlier than originally intended as it was only being utilized by four men on Friday nights. In order to secure the assets of the congregation, Rabbi Silberhaft and Mr Wiener had met with a lawyer in Pietersburg that morning to discuss and draw up a memorandum. The memorandum allowed for the PHC to cede all its funds to a

trust to be administered by the SAJBD according to the constitution of the community. Two trustees from the SAJBD and two from the PHC were to govern the funds of the congregation. This memorandum was passed at the committee meeting. The PHC constitution called for the Board of Trustees to be formed when there were less than nine males left. However, as five of the members were no longer involved with the running of the affairs of the congregation, the committee decided to form the trust earlier. The annual interest on the capital was to be allocated as follows: 20% for inflation, 10% for the upkeep of the cemetery, 30% to designated charities, 20% to help ex-members<sup>47</sup>, 10% at discretion of the SAJBD, 10% at the discretion of the country communities Rabbi. The two trustees of the community were to be Messrs Wally Levy and Dennis Wiener, failing which Mr Charles Starkowitz would replace either one, together with two members from the SAJBD, one of them to be the National Director of the SAJBD. Sadly Mr Wally Levy passed away on 16 February 2003 and Mr Charles Starkowitz became the second trustee for the community.

It was decided to pay Ephraim Setwaba, who had been the caretaker of the synagogue buildings for 35 years, R30000 on the termination of his service. The committee agreed that the trust would be responsible to pay for seats for members of the congregation on the High Holy Days in synagogues in other towns, if no services were arranged in Pietersburg itself. However, no-one took advantage of this offer. The committee decided that the bond held by the Moolman Group should be ceded to the Pietersburg Trust account held by the SAJBD whenever it was recalled by the congregation.



On 2 February 2003, Rabbi Silberhaft transferred to the SAJBD the marriage registers and boxes of correspondence from the Pietersburg synagogue, as well as all the religious books. Some prayer books were kept for the congregation for their services in various homes. The minute books were also stored in the SAJBD Archives. Three *Sifrei Torah* were taken to Johannesburg to be held in safekeeping by Rabbi Silberhaft at the SAJBD. All the old and torn religious books were later buried in the Pietersburg cemetery.

In March 2003, Mr Wiener oversaw the packing of the synagogue contents for transport to Israel. The benches were cut into the required lengths by the carpenter, who was paid R10 000, and packed together with the furniture, foundation stones and plaques. An amount of R125 000 was needed for the large container, but only R105 000 had been allocated by the Pietersburg congregation towards sending the furniture to Israel. Tel Mond congregation agreed to send the congregation \$2000 in February 2003 towards the transportation costs. Ex-members were allowed to buy some of the furniture in the synagogue building not needed in Tel Mond. Unfortunately by 2007, the synagogue building had still not been erected in Tel Mond due to financial difficulties. However, the community still plans to continue with the project.

On 30 May 2003, a notice was sent to all the remaining members in Pietersburg informing them that the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation Trust had been established and registered with the Master of the Supreme Court. In August 2003, the members remaining in Pietersburg declared their intention to challenge the trust. Those members who had earlier disassociated themselves from the running of the community now wanted to regain control of the trust. On 16 January 2004, Mr

Yehuda Kay, the National Director of the SAJBD, received a letter from “the majority” of the Pietersburg congregation opposing the formation of the trust<sup>48</sup>. Those endorsing the letter included seven men “plus the six ladies left with us”. One member was away and one abstained. After protracted negotiations between the representatives of the PHC and the SAJBD, a memorandum was submitted on 20 April 2004 to Mr Ivan Levy of the SAJBD<sup>49</sup> stating that the concerned residents of the PHC were challenging the validity of the trust. A meeting took place on 2 August 2004 in Johannesburg between the SAJBD and representatives of the remaining members of the PHC where they declared their demands. They wanted both the presiding SAJBD trustees and Mr D Wiener to be removed as trustees, 50% voting power for each party, a Jewish lawyer, suspension of subscriptions, the allocation of donations should be 10% less to the stated beneficiaries and 10% more to members and ex-members. An allocation of R20 000 was to be made to the remaining members for local Jewish needs.

The first priority of the SAJBD was to ensure that the trust would not be challenged by the members of the PHC. Only then could they negotiate the terms of an agreement. Mr D Wiener resigned as a trustee in October 2004. An amendment to the trust deed was drawn up agreeing to three members each from the PHC and the SAJBD as trustees, the PHC members to be re-elected every two years by those members still residing in Pietersburg. The distribution of income was changed to 10% more for ex-members with a smaller percentage for the SAJBD and the country communities Rabbi. R20 000 was to be allocated for the use of the PHC. After much procrastination by both sides, the amendment to the trust was eventually signed in August 2006.

The Pietersburg congregation was beset by several problems during its declining years. Without a minister, the community had to rely on its own members to carry out the minister's functions, just as it had done when the congregation was first formed. The declining numbers meant that there were not enough members to ensure that new incumbents would take over official positions. The chairman had been in his position of leadership too long and had become complacent. Because it had become a small congregation, personal antagonisms affected all the members leading to a split in the community. There was no minister to arbitrate between feuding parties and to ensure that harmony should exist in the community. On hearing that the synagogue was about to close, various claims were made on the congregation's assets, not all based in fact.

In all small communities, there is a definite need for appropriate controls to be put into place for the eventual demise of the community, whilst there is still a responsible committee in charge. Sometimes, if there are only one or two families left in a town, they believe that they are the guardians of the assets of the Jewish community. Unfortunately, when these, usually old, members eventually die, no provision has been made to dispose of the remaining assets of the congregation. As a result, the synagogues become empty and neglected and are plundered by vagrants<sup>50</sup>. Pietersburg was different in that the leadership had the foresight to make provision for the administration of the defunct community's assets and funds through the alteration of the constitution and the creation of the trust. The opposition by some members to the formation of the trust was ironic as these were the same members who had signed the new constitution outlining the way the trust should be set up. The trust was set up

prematurely - before the minimum number of members was reached according to the new constitution. However, the remaining members felt that they had no alternative because the other members had abandoned the committee and the synagogue.

The Jewish community of Pietersburg lasted over a hundred years, reaching its peak in the 1960s. It was never a very religiously observant community but most Jews expressed their Jewish identity through the synagogue. After the closure of the synagogue in 2003, Mr Starkowitz tried to maintain religious services in private homes, but after a few months, these were poorly supported by the remaining Jews. The Jewish congregation of Pietersburg had effectively ceased to function as a religious community.

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<sup>1</sup> Union of Orthodox Synagogues Conference. 'Workshop – dwindling communities'. 1994.

<sup>2</sup> Jews also left some small towns for other reasons, such as the decline in the ostrich-feather trade in Oudtshoorn and Humansdorp. "The Story of South African Jewry: Oudtshoorn Jewry Today". In: *The South African Jewish Times* 27 February 1948, p. 6.

<sup>3</sup> "Canada's small communities struggling". In: *The Jerusalem Post* March 16, 2004, p. 5.

<sup>4</sup> Weissbach, Lee Shai. *Jewish Life in Small-town America: A History*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 2005, p. 309.

<sup>5</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation committee minutes 25 July 1993.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.* 20 February 1994.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.* 28 August 1994.

<sup>8</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation Annual General Meeting minutes September 1994. The Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation committee had made unofficial overtures to the Sandton and Oxford congregations for monetary assistance. The idea was that if they 'twinned' with the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation and provided funds, they could possibly get a portion of the assets when the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation closed. However, the Johannesburg congregations were not interested.

<sup>9</sup> Donations were given to approximately five families at any one time. These families were either members or ex-members of the Pietersburg congregation. The loans were given on the understanding that the amounts could be recovered from their estates on their deaths, if there was any money available. A problem arose when one woman member asked for a loan despite having considerable assets in the form of her apartment, a fixed deposit and shares. Despite these assets, she was given a

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monthly stipend by the congregation, but as this amount quickly mounted up to R80000, the *Chevrah Kadisha* committee decided to limit the amount that had to be paid back from her estate to R20000. According to the Constitution, the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation committee did not have the authority to reduce the amount. The rest of the money that was to be given to her was to be considered a donation. After the implementation of the Pietersburg Trust, the amount of money available for donations to members and ex-members was stipulated by the Constitution to be 20% of the total. As this amount had to be divided amongst five families, each family actually received less than they before the formation of the trust. This became one of the points of contention brought up later by the 'break-away' faction of the Pietersburg congregation.

<sup>10</sup> The first constitution and bye-laws of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation were drawn up on 22 November 1925. A new constitution was drawn up in 1957.

<sup>11</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minutes 28 July 1996.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.* 6 November 1997.

<sup>13</sup> According to the Constitution, if there were less than nine male members, the congregation would be managed by a Board of Trustees comprising of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation committee with 75% of the vote and the National Director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies with 25% of the vote. If less than six males, the committee would have 51% and the National Director 49% of the vote. If three or less members remained, the remaining members would have 40% and the National Director 60% of the vote. If there were no male members left in Pietersburg, a Board of Trustees would be formed and the fixed property would be disposed of. The annual interest from the capital would be distributed as follows: 20% added to capital against inflation, 10% for upkeep of cemetery, 30% to designated Jewish charities, 20% to members and ex-members in need, 10% at the discretion of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies and 10% at discretion of the country communities Rabbi's Fund.

<sup>14</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation Annual General Meeting minutes October 1996.

<sup>15</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minutes 26 February 1997.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.* March 1998.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.* August 1998.

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Mr D Wiener 2004.

<sup>19</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minutes August 1999.

<sup>20</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation Annual General Meeting September 1999.

<sup>21</sup> *Pietersburg: Proud of its past in Telfed Magazine*: South African Zionist Federation [Israel], Raanana, Israel, April 2001, p. 6. This magazine is printed in Israel by the Israeli branch of the South African Zionist Federation and has articles about South Africans and ex-South Africans.

<sup>22</sup> Report to Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation committee by Mrs C Wiener July 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minutes 21 February 2000. The authoress herself was present at these meetings and was witness to what occurred there.

<sup>24</sup> As far back as 1897 there was some antagonism to blacks attending synagogue. The Witwatersrand Old Hebrew Congregation on 17 November 1897 unanimously resolved:

'That no black proselytes be admitted to the synagogue and no man who had married one can be admitted as a member; also no black person be allowed to enter the synagogue during any services'.

Chief Rabbi N M Adler on 15 March 1897, in contrast wrote to the Kimberley congregation:

'The fact that the lady's father is of coloured origins, I would not regard as an impediment, Jewish law not acknowledging definitions of race and colour'. Simon, John. "Proselytism in the South African

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Jewish community: The problem, the responses, the reception". In: *Jewish Affairs* Autumn 2002. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 2002, p. 13.

<sup>25</sup> Interview with Mr D Wiener and several other members.

<sup>26</sup> Interview with Mr V at Wieners' residence, Pietersburg, March 2000.

<sup>27</sup> Interview with Mr D Wiener.

<sup>28</sup> Interview with Mr J.

<sup>29</sup> Correspondence with Rabbi Dr D Isaacs, *Beth Din* Johannesburg 8 October 2002.

<sup>30</sup> This incident had a sequel. When certain members of the congregation broke away to hold their own services, the Gentile couple joined them in attending services regularly.

<sup>31</sup> In other cases where non-Jews became interested in the Jewish religion, they either intended to convert to Judaism or they formed their own group with its own services and followed the Jewish religion. Schneir Levin called the latter 'Jewoids', quasi-Jews who follow the Jewish religion but have not abandoned Jesus. They keep kosher, the Sabbath and Jewish festivals but do not attend services at the synagogue. Levin, Schneir. "Jewoids". In: *Jewish Affairs* Chanukah 2003. South African Jewish Board of Deputies, 2003, pp. 3-4.

<sup>32</sup> A tribute dinner was held on 19 March 2002 at the Beyachad centre in Johannesburg, jointly hosted by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies and the Pietersburg congregation, to honour Mr Jannie Moolman and to present him with a Golden Book award. Over the years, he had greatly assisted the Pietersburg community through a series of business arrangements. Mr Moolman's company had bought both the properties of the communal hall and the synagogue. He had served as mayor of Pietersburg. Mr Moolman spoke about the long history of friendship and co-operation that had existed between Jews and Afrikaners over the years, especially in a small community such as Pietersburg. South African Jewish Board of Deputies country communities Department newsletter 2002.

<sup>33</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minutes 27 January 2002.

<sup>34</sup> Special general meeting minutes 17 January 2002.

<sup>35</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minutes 3 March 2002.

<sup>36</sup> The authoress was a witness to these events.

<sup>37</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minutes 21 April 2002.

<sup>38</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation correspondence 25 April 2002.

<sup>39</sup> Correspondence between Mrs R Levy and Mr D Wiener April 2002.

<sup>40</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation correspondence 6 June 2002.

<sup>41</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation Annual General Meeting minutes September 2002.

<sup>42</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minutes October 2002.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* October 2002.

<sup>44</sup> When a dispute is taken to the *Beth Din* by two Jewish parties, both parties agree to abide by the decision of the *Beth Din*. This understanding is the basis of the legal jurisdiction of the *Beth Din* Court. Without such an agreement between the parties, the *Beth Din* would not be able to resolve disputes in a legally binding way.

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<sup>45</sup> Minutes of a meeting of the trustees of the Pietersburg Congregation Trust held at the South African Jewish Board of Deputies on 5 November 2003.

<sup>46</sup> Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation executive meeting February 2003. One of the 'break away faction' was a member of the committee. As he was unable to attend the meeting due to ill health, Mr W Levy visited him and explained what had occurred at the meeting.

<sup>47</sup> Unfortunately, members receiving a monthly contribution had their allocation reduced, as only a stipulated amount was available for all donations to ex-members and interest rates had decreased. This amount had to be divided amongst all those in need.

<sup>48</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies correspondence with the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation, Pietersburg file, 16 January 2004.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.* 20 April 2004.

<sup>50</sup> Mafeking synagogue was unused for three years. It was broken into, vandalized and the assets stolen. Eventually the South African Jewish Board of Deputies sold the building. Aliwal North synagogue was used by only six Jews. Eventually it was also sold by the South African Jewish Board of Deputies and according to their Constitution, the proceeds were sent to Israel. Interview with Rabbi M Silberhaft, country communities Rabbi.

## CONCLUSION

The early Jewish settlers in the Northern Transvaal were a part of a resilient community who braved the hardships of long distances, poor roads, malaria, heat and wild animals in a largely undeveloped area. As Jews were present in the Northern Transvaal even before the establishment of the towns in the area, they played an integral part in the formation of the town of Pietersburg. They therefore differed from Jews in towns further south who only arrived after the towns had already been established.

At first the lure of gold, then the promise of job opportunities, cheap land and the desire to join family members and friends who were already living in the area drew the Jews to the Northern Transvaal. The close ties between families and friends resulted in a communal cohesiveness with deep concern for each other's welfare. The number of marriages between the large families in the Pietersburg area only served to cement these strong connections. The almost homogenous nature of the community's origins also meant that they had common religious and Zionist ideals.

Jews contributed to Pietersburg's economic, civic and cultural development. They were a dominant presence in the business sector as Jews owned most of the stores and mills in the town, as well as the trading stores in the district<sup>1</sup>. Almost all the hotels in the Northern Transvaal were owned by Jews. Because they were dependent on the larger community for their businesses, Jews became more involved in civic activities. They held mayoral and council positions, served on hospital and school boards and held office in all the service clubs. Jews also achieved on the sports field, playing for



their schools, clubs and province and even for their country. They supported cultural events and brought well-known theatrical shows and musicians to the town. Their exploits and successes were reported in the local newspapers.

Because of their involvement in all fields of endeavour, Jews were respected and readily accepted by the non-Jewish community. Many Jews forged close social ties with non-Jews and as a result there were few incidents of anti-Semitism. During the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902 a large number of Jews remained in Pietersburg because they were already well-integrated into the local community and several had already been naturalized. Most maintained their neutrality during the war but carried on trading with the Boers. A number of young Jewish men from the district fought valiantly on the side of the Boers.

Because the colonization of the Northern Transvaal occurred much later than the rest of South Africa, the Anglo-German Jews arrived in the area at the same time as the East Europeans and not before them as in the rest of South Africa. This meant that the Anglo-Germans Jews did not have the opportunity to first establish their Jewish traditions. Consequently there was no dissension between the two groups. As soon as there was a sufficient number of Jews for a *minyan*, a High Holy Day service was held in 1893. In the same way as other growing communities, they secured ground for a cemetery and formed benevolent and burial societies. As there were still only a small number of Jews in the Northern Transvaal, the Jews of Pietersburg and Louis Trichardt together formed the Zoutpansberg Hebrew Congregation around 1897. Because of their strong support for Zionism, the Pietersburg-Zoutpansberg Zionist Society was established as early as 1905. In 1912, with the increase in numbers of

Jews, the Pietersburg congregation separated from the Zoutpansberg congregation and formed the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation [PHC]. High Holy Day services were held in the Masonic hall as they did not have their own communal centre<sup>2</sup>.

After many years of conducting their own religious services, the Pietersburg community was finally able to afford the services of a minister in 1914. A communal hall was built in 1921 and it served both as a religious and social centre. Bye-laws for the congregation were formulated in 1925. The congregation began to grow as Jews began to move to the town from outlying areas or were attracted by job opportunities. By the 1930s, the community began plans to build a large new synagogue, but these were continually shelved because of indecision and lack of funds. The new building was finally built in 1953 and it served as a symbol of the Jewish community in the predominantly Christian town<sup>3</sup>.

Pietersburg became the Jewish centre for the Jews of the area as it had the largest number of Jews, a synagogue, a full-time minister, a *cheder*, a cemetery and a *Chevrah Kadisha*. Almost all the Jews in Pietersburg associated themselves with the synagogue or with Zionist societies as a means of expressing their Jewish identity. Attendance at synagogue services became the main religious affiliation of the members. Like most Jews in the country communities, as well as the rest of South Africa, the level of Jewish observance of the Jews in Pietersburg was that of non-observant Orthodoxy as they regarded themselves as being more traditional than observant Jews. However, there was no question but that they regarded themselves as an Orthodox community. The PHC committee ensured that the rituals of the festivals and religious events were carried out. Ministers officiated at *Bar/Batmitzvahs*,

weddings and funerals, but a *mohel* had to be brought from Johannesburg when needed. No *mikveh* was ever built in the area. Hebrew classes were always provided for the children of Pietersburg and the surrounding areas by the ministers in Pietersburg. The standard of Hebrew teaching was usually high, as reported by the Jewish Board of Education's inspectors of schools, who inspected the *cheder* regularly. The country communities Rabbis also paid regular visits to the community and provided assistance when needed.

There was no *shochet* in the Northern Transvaal before the first minister arrived in 1914 so kosher meat was not available for these early settlers. Thereafter the PHC employed ministers who were also *shochetim* until the 1970s. After that time subsequent ministers no longer performed *shechita*. Instead the transport of kosher meat was arranged from Johannesburg or Pretoria and this was achieved despite the difficulties of long distances and the need for refrigerated transport. The early settlers were obviously prepared to live without kosher resources, but when kosher meat was made obtainable, a large percentage of the community kept kosher homes.

For 80 years, the Pietersburg community had always had a religious leader to guide them. Rev J I Levine, who served the community for 33 years, was the longest serving minister. He gave stability to the community and was highly respected by both the Jewish and non-Jewish communities. During his long tenure, Rev Levine became actively involved in the personal lives of his community. He 'spoilt' the community so that subsequent ministers found it difficult to live up to his example and the community was never satisfied with his successors. However, the congregation took advantage of his kind nature and he did not receive the pecuniary remuneration he

deserved. The PHC found it difficult to provide him with the assistance in his ministerial duties that his failing health demanded.

The PHC had ongoing monetary problems. Treasurers were often lax in collecting membership fees, so that large amounts of money had to be written off each year. The subscription fees were only sporadically increased and the amount did not keep up with inflation. The community was only able to continue functioning because of generous donations by wealthy members of the community. As the congregation could not afford to pay ministers adequate salaries, the community experienced difficulties in finding qualified ministers. Often ministers who applied for positions were advanced in age and unfortunately became sick during their tenure. Several ministers left to find more lucrative positions elsewhere after their contracts ended.

Some ministers created problems due to their difficult personalities and unreasonable demands on the PHC for extra money. The problematical conduct of these ministers tended to instill a distrust of all ministers amongst the congregation. Attendance at synagogue and Hebrew classes declined during the tenure of an unpopular minister, but improved with the arrival of each new minister. The extra expense involved in bringing ministers from Israel only added to the community's financial burden. Ironically, only after the last minister had left and the communal hall and minister's house had been sold, did the congregation finally have enough money to employ a minister. However, by then the community had become too few in number to warrant the services of a minister. The problems with the ministers however were not the main reason for the waning number of members. The decline, as in other country communities, was mainly due to the movement of the young people to the cities,

followed by their parents. From the mid 1970s, the emigration of Jews from South Africa began. However, only a small number of Jews from the Northern Transvaal moved overseas during this period, most preferring to move to Johannesburg or to retire to a coastal city.

For the most part, the ministers were unable to sway the congregation to become more religiously observant. Possibly this was because their tenure was too short for them to have much of an influence on the members. The ministers attempted to persuade members to keep kosher homes and to have kosher functions, but they often met with opposition from reluctant members. For many years, the Pietersburg Jewish Women's Guild did not uphold high standards of *kashrut* in the communal hall as they complained that the facilities at the hall were inadequate. Therefore, food was prepared in private kosher homes but as these were few in number, the same women were doing all the work every time. Later, the facilities in the hall were improved. All the Jewish women in the town were then content to be involved with the catering in the hall and all the functions were catered kosher. The women's reputation for excellent catering spread far and wide.

Traditionally, Jewish men were involved with the running of the synagogue and women ran the affairs of the home. As a result, for many years the men were reluctant to give the women voting rights on the PHC committee as they considered it to be a male domain. Only after many years of persistence, women were eventually granted the vote in 1948. In the same year, the women formed the Pietersburg Jewish Women's Guild. The women of the Guild always considered themselves to be independent of the PHC committee. However, when the Guild took over the running

of the communal hall, they often had to turn to the PHC committee for monetary assistance. It was to take many years before they could overcome their financial problems and this was achieved by catering large functions.

The Zionist Society had men and women serving on its committee from its inception but later the women formed their own committee, the Pietersburg Women's Zionist League. The women collected money for Israel and usually managed to meet their quota allotments to the Women's Zionist Council, even in later years when their numbers decreased. The men were mainly involved in the organization of the very successful Israel United Appeal campaigns. The Jews of the Northern Transvaal were amongst the most generous contributors to Zionist funds in the country. They were keen Zionists as they had brought their love of Zion with them from Eastern Europe. A large number of Jews from country communities in South Africa eventually made *aliyah* to Israel and the Jews of the Northern Transvaal were no exception. Social and cultural functions were also organized by the Zionist League for the whole Northern Transvaal, but due to the large distances from the main centres it was often difficult to bring speakers to address the community. Over the years various youth movements instilled a Zionist fervour in the youth and many of them attended the annual youth movement camps.

Pietersburg became the centre for the Jewish needs of the satellite communities. To improve ties between the various communities in the area, social functions, Zionist activities and fundraising functions were held in Pietersburg and Jews from the surrounding towns were invited to participate. Rev J I Levine started a regional ministry whereby he visited the surrounding Jewish communities. Subsequent

Pietersburg ministers also sometimes visited these towns. However, schemes to share the services of the minister from Pietersburg with the satellite towns on a regular basis were abandoned due to economic and travel problems. Instead, Jews in the surrounding isolated areas sent their children to boarding school in Pietersburg, or even to Johannesburg, to receive a Jewish education. The PHC and the South African Jewish Board of Deputies [SAJBD] promoted better communication between the Jewish communities of the area through regional conferences and family days in Pietersburg.

Louis Trichardt was the only other town in the Northern Transvaal to have a synagogue. Although Louis Trichardt, Messina and Potgietersrus had Jewish cemeteries, their communities looked to the Pietersburg *Chevrah Kadisha* for assistance in burials. The *Chevrah Kadisha* was respected for their caring attention to mourners and their maintenance of the cemetery. However, the *Chevrah Kadisha* committee resented the authority of the PHC committee who often overrode their decisions and commandeered their funds. Therefore, they continuously tried to become independent of them. However, as the PHC committee relied on the income from the *Chevrah Kadisha* to bolster their dwindling funds, they were not prepared to allow them their independence.

The number of Jews in Pietersburg began declining in the 1960s. With the growth of chain stores, the personalized small general dealer was no longer a viable entity. Children no longer wanted to take over their father's business, preferring to move to the larger cities to further their education and for social opportunities and their parents followed them. As the number of members in the community decreased, there was no

longer a pool of responsible members from which leaders could be drawn. Therefore, there was a tendency for one or two people to remain in office for many years<sup>4</sup>. As a result, other members were reluctant to usurp their positions. After Barney Herman's long service as chairman of the PHC, the constitution was changed so that chairmen could only serve for two years. However, in later years Mr Leon Levy once again served for many years as chairman. Mr Wally Levy was chairman of the *Chevrah Kadisha* for 40 years. Several of the chairladies of the Jewish Women's Guild and the Zionist League, as well as their secretaries and treasurers, also had long years of service. Such long tenure could not have served the best interests of the community as leaders became complacent in their positions of power and new ideas were stifled. This stagnation led to friction in the congregation as was shown during the last years of the community. A power play sometimes erupted between chairpersons of committees, who wanted to do things their way. This happened between the PHC and the *Chevrah Kadisha* and between the Women's Guild and the Zionist League and this was detrimental to the harmony of the community.

The Pietersburg congregation had looked to the Johannesburg institutions for guidance in Jewish matters. However, like other country communities, they felt that they had been neglected by the larger centres. The PHC believed that they did not receive enough assistance from the SAJBD or the Federation of Synagogues when new ministers or Hebrew teachers had to be found. Nor did other congregations come to their assistance when the community was in dire pecuniary straits. However, as soon as the PHC's financial situation improved after the sale of their property, the Johannesburg institutions approached them for money, which offended the Pietersburg community. Most country communities believed the Johannesburg



institutions only remembered them when campaign contributions were needed for both South African and Israeli charities<sup>5</sup>. Distinguished visitors did not visit the country communities but confined themselves to audiences in the larger centres where donations were larger. When speakers did visit the small communities it was so that they could collect money from these generous hearted Jews "where everyone knows everyone else, and where a social consciousness is developed to a degree unknown in the larger centres"<sup>6</sup>.

The SAJBD realized that the assets of a shrinking community had to be protected to prevent unlawful claims or abandonment by members. Monetary assets especially had to be protected against abuse by those members left in a community. The SAJBD therefore recommended the drawing up of trusts by diminishing communities to protect their assets. Unfortunately, there was a history of distrust of the SAJBD in many of the country communities, as they believed that they had not received assistance from them in earlier years. As a result, many would not draw up trusts that would be administered by the SAJBD. The PHC committee, unlike many other committees of diminishing communities, did make provision for the closure of their synagogue with the formation of a trust, administered by the SAJBD to look after their assets.

After the last minister left Pietersburg, the community valiantly tried to keep up their Jewish traditions. Gradually the decrease in numbers and the lack of guidance led to disruption in the unity of the community. The complacency of the chairman as religious affairs wound down led to disharmony and the eventual split in the small

community. The process of closing the synagogue was a very painful one for both members and ex-members and this led to dissension in the community.

After the closure of the Pietersburg synagogue, the remaining members of the PHC opposed the terms of the Pietersburg Trust. Due to personal animosities, several members had distanced themselves from the synagogue and only renewed their interest in the affairs of the community after the synagogue was closed. This opposition to the formation of the Pietersburg Trust was ironic as these same members had signed the new constitution outlining the way the trust was to be set up. The SAJBD's main concern was that the trust should be preserved in order to safeguard the assets of the PHC. After much negotiation between the members and the SAJBD, the members accepted the trust with a few alterations.

Most Jews who grew up in small communities consider themselves privileged to have been part of a unique experience. The closeness and caring interaction of their small communities is viewed with nostalgia by ex-members as the communities begin to disappear. Weissbach describes the unique experience of small-town Jewish communities thus:

The relative isolation of the individuals and families who lived in these centres and their encounters with small-town society were crucial factors conditioning both their everyday existence, at home, at work, and in the civic arena, and the character of their religious and cultural experience as Jews<sup>7</sup>.

The Jews of Pietersburg courageously ventured into the remote far northern areas of the Transvaal primarily in order to earn a living. Their encounter with small-town

society resulted in a warm, caring community for whom the synagogue became the focal point of their Jewish identity. For more than a hundred years, they were proud to participate in the building up of the infrastructure of the town. Sadly the Jews of Pietersburg, like those in other country towns, left for the cities where better economic and social opportunities awaited them. They all took away with them memories of having been part of something special.

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NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> Most businesses used to close on the Jewish High Holy Days, bringing the town to a virtual standstill. Before the Dutch Reform Church planned its *nagmaal* gatherings, they first checked whether it was a Jewish holiday as farmers from outlying areas needed to do their shopping at this time and could not do so if the Jewish businesses were closed.

<sup>2</sup> It became the custom to hold the Annual General Meeting of the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation on the evening after the *Yom Kippur* fast as most of the country members were already in town for the services.

<sup>3</sup> During the 1950s, after the austerity measures experienced during World War II, there was an unprecedented increase of synagogue building activities throughout South Africa. New synagogues were also built in Durban, Goodwood, Springs, Parow, Cradock, Kensington, Pretoria, Somerset West, Eitz-Chaim, Valley-Observatory and Parkview-Greenside.

<sup>4</sup> For many years at the Annual General Meetings, the community re-elected the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation committee and the *Chevrah Kadisha* committee ‘en-bloc’.

<sup>5</sup> A Markowitz remarked in a lecture on 27 April 1948 that all over the *Platteland* he had come across the same grievances where people said: “You only come to us when you want money – You give us nothing in return”. South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives, file 400.1 10A24.

<sup>6</sup> Rabinowitz, Chief Rabbi Prof I. “The Problem of the Country Communities”. In: *The South African Jewish Times*, Rosh Hashanah, September 1947, p. 6.

<sup>7</sup> Weissbach, Lee Shai. *Jewish Life in Small-town America: A History*. Yale University Press: New Haven, 2005, p. 312.

## GLOSSARY

<i>Agudat Israel</i>	Religious Orthodox, non-Zionist political movement founded in 1912
<i>Aliyah</i>	Hebrew for 'going up'. Someone who is called to recite the blessings over the reading of the <i>Torah</i> in the synagogue. Also refers to emigrating to Israel
<i>Arbeitsdienst</i>	German for 'labour front'
<i>Aron Kodesh</i>	Hebrew for 'Holy Ark'. Cupboard containing the <i>Torah</i> in the synagogue
<i>Ba'al Tefillah</i>	Person who leads service in synagogue
<i>Ba'al Kriah</i>	Person who reads from the <i>Torah</i>
<i>Barmitzvah</i>	Hebrew for 'son of commandment'. Ceremony when a boy turns 13 and assumes the religious responsibilities of an adult.
<i>Batmitzvah</i>	'Daughter of commandment'. A girl is considered an adult woman at 12 and has to keep the commandments. In modern times a ceremony is arranged for girls to celebrate her religious 'coming of age'.
<i>Beth Din</i>	Jewish ecclesiastical court
<i>Beth Hamedrash</i>	Hebrew for 'house of study'. Combined synagogue and study hall
<i>Bikkur Cholim</i>	Hebrew for 'visiting the sick'. Organisation for visiting the sick and assisting the poor
<i>Bimah</i>	Hebrew for 'platform'. Raised structure in the synagogue from which the <i>Torah</i> is read
<i>Bittereinders</i>	Die-hards – the Boers who fought the British to the 'bitter end' during the Second Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902.
<i>Bnei Akiva</i>	Hebrew for 'sons of Akiva'. Jewish youth movement stressing religious observance and Zionism
<i>Bnei Zion</i>	Hebrew for 'sons of Zion'. Jewish youth movement stressing Zionism and socialist ideals. Later merged with the <i>Habonim</i> youth movement.
<i>Boer</i>	Farmer – historically refers to descendants of Dutch and Huguenot colonists who inhabited the interior of South Africa from the 18 <sup>th</sup> century
<i>Bonim</i>	Hebrew for 'builders'. Jewish youth movement stressing Zionism and socialist ideals, later merged with <i>Bnei Zion</i> .
<i>Braaivleis</i>	Cooking meat on an open fire. Barbeque.
<i>Brith Milah</i>	'Bris'. Hebrew for 'covenant of circumcision'. Removal of foreskin of an eight day old boy or of a male proselyte, goes back to G-d's covenant with Abraham [Genesis 17:11-12]
<i>Brocha</i>	Blessing
<i>Chabad</i>	Mnemonic for ' <i>Chochma, Binah and Da'at</i> ' – <i>Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge</i> . Another name for the <i>Hasidic</i> movement <i>Lubavitch</i> .
<i>Challah</i>	Plaited loaves of bread eaten on <i>Shabbat</i> and festivals. Also called ' <i>kitke</i> ' in Yiddish. Tithe taken from bread dough before

	baking and given to the priesthood in Temple times.
<i>Chanukah</i>	Hebrew for 'dedication'. Festival of lights celebrated for eight days by lighting candles [one candle on the first night, two on the second and so on]. Celebrates the victory of the Maccabees in 165 BCE over the Seleucid rulers of Palestine. The Seleucids attempted to turn the Jewish Temple into a pagan place of worship
<i>Chazan</i>	The cantor who leads the prayers in the synagogue
<i>Chazanut</i>	Prayers sung by the cantor. Cantorial music
<i>Cheder</i>	Hebrew for 'room'. Elementary Hebrew school originating in Eastern Europe. Hebrew classes, usually in the afternoon, for Jewish children.
<i>Chevrah Kadisha</i>	Aramaic for 'holy fellowship'. Jewish burial society which undertakes the purification and dressing of a corpse before burial. The society arranges all the other matters related to burial, such as the digging of the grave, conducting the funeral, maintenance of the cemetery
<i>Chovevei Zion</i>	Hebrew for 'Lovers of Zion'. Name of many of the Zionist organisations in the pre-Herzl period
<i>Chuppah</i>	Hebrew for 'canopy'. Wedding canopy under which the marriage service is solemnized
<i>Dayyan</i>	A judge who serves on a religious court
<i>Dunam</i>	Land measure used in Israel– 1000 square meters
<i>Eretz Israel</i>	The land of Israel. This is also the Hebrew equivalent for Palestine, particularly during the period of the British Mandate
<i>Gedud</i>	Regiment. Also used to designate a group within a Zionist movement like Habonim
<i>Gemilut Chesed</i>	Giving of charity
<i>Generaal</i>	General
<i>Grondwet</i>	Constitution
<i>Habonim</i>	Hebrew for 'builders'. Jewish Zionist youth movement
<i>Hachnasat Torah</i>	Ceremony to welcome a new <i>Torah</i> into the synagogue
<i>Haganah</i>	Underground military organization in Palestine from 1920 to 1948
<i>Halakhah</i>	Jewish law. The legal tradition of Judaism
<i>Halutz</i>	Jewish pioneer in Palestine [later Land of Israel]
<i>Hasbarah</i>	Hebrew for 'information'. Propaganda
<i>Hashgachah</i>	Supervision [in this context in relation to supervision of kashrut]
<i>Hasidism</i>	Revivalist movement for the uneducated masses to experience G-d through song and dance. Founded by the Baal Shem Tov in southern Poland in the second half of the 18 <sup>th</sup> century
<i>Hatikvah</i>	Hebrew for 'The Hope'. National anthem of the State of Israel
<i>Hendsoppers</i>	'Handsoppers' – the Boers who surrendered to the British during the Second Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902
<i>Hoërskool</i>	High school
<i>Intifada</i>	Arabic word for 'uprising'. The second <i>intifada</i> is the wave of violence and political conflict that began in September 2000 between Palestinian Arabs and Israelis.
<i>Israel United</i>	Campaign conducted every two years by Jews throughout South

<i>Appeal [IUA]</i>	Africa. It channels its funds to <i>Keren Hayesod</i> , the central fundraising body for the Jewish Agency for Israel. In recent years this campaign has joined with the UCF campaign
<i>Kaddish</i>	Aramaic for 'holy'. Aramaic prayer recited by mourners following the death of a relative or on a <i>yahrzeit</i> . A <i>minyan</i> is necessary
<i>Kashrut</i>	Jewish dietary laws
<i>Keren Hayesod</i>	Foundation Fund of World Zionist Organisation
<i>Kiddush</i>	Hebrew for 'sanctification'. Prayer said over wine drunk on <i>Shabbat</i> and festivals
<i>Kippa</i>	Skull-cap
<i>Kohen</i>	Hebrew for 'priest'
<i>Kommandant</i>	Colonel
<i>Kosher</i>	Hebrew for 'fit'. Permitted to be eaten according to Jewish dietary laws. If it is not kosher, it is <i>treif</i>
<i>Laager</i>	An encampment defended by a circle of wagons, with branches of trees closing the gaps between wagons
<i>Landdrost</i>	Magistrate
<i>Lewe</i>	Life
<i>Litvak</i>	Jews from pre-Tzarist Russian provinces of Kovno, Vilna, Grodno and North-Suwalki, Vitebsk, Minsk and Mogilev. Person coming from the general geographic area of Lithuania
<i>Lubavitch</i>	Subgroup of the Hassidic movement founded by Shneur Zalman of Lyady in 18 <sup>th</sup> century Russia. Today one of the best known of the Hassidic groups. At the behest of the last <i>Rebbe</i> , Rabbi M M Schneerson, it has established outreach communities throughout the world to encourage greater religious observance within the Jewish community
<i>Machzor</i>	Prayer book used on festivals
<i>Magen David</i>	Hebrew for 'shield of David'. A six-pointed star commonly called a 'Star of David'
<i>Magen David Adom</i>	Jewish Red Cross. Uses a red <i>Magen David</i> as its symbol
<i>Marrano</i>	Spanish name for Jewish convert to Christianity who retained a secret adherence to Judaism
<i>Mashgiach</i>	Supervisor, the person in charge of ensuring that the laws of <i>kashrut</i> are adhered to
<i>Matzos</i>	Unleavened bread
<i>Menorah</i>	Candelabrum
<i>Mezuzah</i>	Hebrew for 'doorpost'. Parchment scroll containing the first two paragraphs of the <i>Shema</i> prayer fixed to the doorpost of a home
<i>Mikveh</i>	A pool of water used for ritual purification. There are certain conditions necessary for the pool to constitute a <i>mikveh</i> , such as a minimum amount of natural water [spring or rain water]
<i>Minyan</i>	Quorum of ten adult males required for conducting religious services
<i>Mitnagdim</i>	Opponents to the <i>Hassidic</i> movement
<i>Mitzvah</i>	Hebrew for 'commandment'. A good deed
<i>Mohel</i>	Person who performs circumcision in which he removes the

	foreskin of Jewish baby boys
<i>Nagmaal</i>	Holy communion
<i>Ner Tamid</i>	Eternal light continually burning above the ark in the synagogue
<i>Parev</i>	Yiddish for 'neutral'. Foods classified as neither meat nor dairy
<i>Parochet</i>	Curtain hanging in front of the ark
<i>Pesach</i>	Festival of Passover
<i>Platteland</i>	Countryside
<i>Possel</i>	Hebrew for something unfit, wrong. Used in relation to a holy item [like a <i>Torah</i> or a <i>mezuzah</i> ] rendered unusable because it is in need of repair, or has become damaged
<i>Purim</i>	Persian for 'casting of lots'. Festival celebrating the story of the redemption of the Jewish people as related in the Book of Esther
<i>Randlord</i>	Mining magnate
<i>Rebbe</i>	Teacher
<i>Rosh Gedud</i>	[lit] head of the regiment. Used in relation to leader of a Jewish youth movement
<i>Rosh Hashanah</i>	Hebrew for 'head of the year'. Festival of the Jewish New Year
<i>Seder</i>	Ritual meal eaten at home on the first night [or first 2 nights in the Diaspora] of <i>Pesach</i>
<i>Sefer Torah</i>	pl= <i>Sifrei Torah</i> . The scroll of the law written on parchment, containing the five books of the Pentateuch
<i>Shabbat</i>	Sabbath. From sunset Friday night until sunset Saturday night
<i>Shabbaton</i>	A gathering to celebrate the <i>Shabbat</i>
<i>Shadkhan</i>	Aramaic for 'matchmaker'
<i>Shaliach</i>	Emissary
<i>Shavuoth</i>	Hebrew for 'Pentacost'. Festival celebrated seven weeks after the second day of <i>Pesach</i>
<i>Shechita</i>	Hebrew for 'slaughter'. Method of killing of animals and birds for meat to be kosher
<i>Shecht</i>	Yiddish for 'slaughter'
<i>Shekel</i>	Ancient coin. Name of the annual membership fee providing the right to vote for the Zionist Congress
<i>Shiur</i>	Lecture, study group on Bible and <i>Talmud</i>
<i>Shochet</i>	Person qualified to perform <i>shechita</i> or ritual slaughter
<i>Shomer Shabbat</i>	pl = <i>Shomrei Shabbat</i> . One who observes the commandments of the Sabbath
<i>Shul</i>	Yiddish for 'school'. Synagogue. Originally applied to place used for both prayer and study
<i>Siddur</i>	Prayer book
<i>Smous</i>	Pedlar, hawker, trader
<i>Sondebok</i>	Scapegoat
<i>Staats Artillery</i>	State Artillery
<i>Strewe</i>	Struggle
<i>Succah</i>	Temporary hut used during the festival of <i>Succoth</i> [Tabernacles] to remind Jews of the booths their ancestors dwelt in during their wanderings in the wilderness during the exodus from Egypt
<i>Succoth</i>	Hebrew for 'Tabernacles'. Festival of Tabernacles

<i>Tachrichim</i>	Hebrew for 'to bind, enwrap'. White funeral shrouds
<i>Tahara House</i>	House where bodies are prepared for burial
<i>Talmud</i>	Hebrew for 'study'. Oral Law. Ancient laws and traditions. Extensive encyclopaedic work recording Rabbinic discussions of sections of the <i>Mishnah</i> , the major Jewish collection of the Oral Law, includes extensive commentary by successive generations of Rabbinic scholars
<i>Talmud Torah</i>	School to study <i>Torah</i> . A more formal name for <i>cheder</i>
<i>Tefillin</i>	Hebrew for 'prayer objects'. Phylacteries
<i>Torah</i>	Pentateuch [in the narrowest sense]
<i>Treif</i>	Hebrew for 'torn'. Non kosher food
<i>Trekker</i>	Dutch-speaking sheep and cattle farmers who moved into the interior of the Cape from the end of the 17 <sup>th</sup> century
<i>Tu B'shvat</i>	Fifteenth of Hebrew month of <i>Shvat</i> . New Year of Trees
<i>Uitlander</i>	Name used by Transvaal Afrikaners to describe 'foreigners' to the Transvaal in the late 19 <sup>th</sup> century, usually British subjects who arrived after the discovery of gold
<i>Umkhonto we Sizwe [MK]</i>	'Spear of the nation'. Military wing of the African National Congress established in 1961 following the banning of the African National Congress and the Pan Africanist Congress by the South African government
<i>United Communal Fund [UCF]</i>	Founded in 1949 to establish a combined appeal for a number of Jewish organizations in South Africa. Recently it has combined with the IUA campaign
<i>Veld-kornet</i>	Lieutenant acting as magistrate and tax collector
<i>Volksraad</i>	House of Assembly of the Boer Republics
<i>Voortrekker</i>	Boers who took part in the <i>Great Trek</i>
<i>Vroue-Federasie</i>	Women's Federation
<i>Vroue Landbou Unie</i>	Women's Agricultural Union
<i>Yahrtzeit</i>	Yiddish for 'anniversary'. Anniversary of the death of a close relative, usually a parent, commemorated each year
<i>Yeshiva</i>	Talmudic college
<i>Yiddishkeit</i>	Yiddish for 'Judaism'
<i>Yom Ha'atzma'ut</i>	Israel's Independence Day
<i>Yom Hasho'ah</i>	Day of Remembrance of six million Jews killed by the Nazis
<i>Yom Kippur</i>	Day of Atonement. Holiest day in the Jewish calendar
<i>Yom Tov</i>	Hebrew for 'good day'. Commonly used for festivals
<i>Yom Yerushalayim</i>	Jerusalem Day



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## APPENDIX I

The questionnaire was sent at the beginning of this study to many Jewish residents and ex-residents of Pietersburg in order to gather general information about the immigrants. It did not supply any information of significant value [see Introduction, chapters 2, 4, 10].

### QUESTIONNAIRE FOR PIETERSBURG RESIDENTS BY C WIENER

NAME:

1 Which town and county did you come from?

2 Why did you come to South Africa?

3 What was the date of your arrival?

4 What was your occupation on arrival?

5 What was your age on arrival?

6 Were you or your family religious?

7 Were you or your family Zionists?

8 Did you receive help on arrival?

9 Did you bring any family out to South Africa?

10 What language did you speak on arrival?

11 Did you encounter any anti-Semitism?

12 Did your economic situation improve?

## APPENDIX II

Many of the Jews in the Pietersburg area came from<sup>1</sup>:

In Lithuania:

Kaunas [Kovno {Jewish name}] [Ellis Levin, Aaron Behr, Ann Brenner, Leslie Vides, Luba Polessky, Abraham Wolpe etc],

Kedainai [Keidan] [Gertie Fainberg]

Panevezys [Ponevez] [Abraham Notelovitz, Sadie Brenner],

Raguva [Rogove] [Fanny Notelovitz],

Vilnius [Vilna] [Yetta Lifschitz, Max Korber, Leon Polessky],

Seduva [Sadove] Louis, David and Taback, Max Miller]

Seta [Shat]

Vieksniai [Vekshne][Paul Feinberg], Ligumai [Ligum] [Max Brenner],

Dusetos [Dusiat][Jacob Urson]

Darbenai Darbian [Mary Schechter]

In Latvia:

Riga [Meyer Tankel, Helena Eichholz,

Krupp near Riga [Max Marcus],

Latvia: [Herman Hirschmann]

Ludzin [Max Chaitow]

Dvinsk [Leon Katz]

Karsava [Abe Donde]

In Courland:

Goldinger [Himmelhoch],

Talsen [Adolph Israelsohn, Millie Zaacks]

In Estonia:

Dorpet [Eva Stein]

In Russia:

Soekjan [Ben Levy]

Pinsk [Harry Lidven]

Tavrik [Rev J I Levine]

Wexner [Barney Herman]

In Poland:

Lachua [Sam Katzman],

In Germany:

Felsberg [Julius Koenig], Aschaffenberg [Simon Worms], Lubeck [Elias and Morris Wiener,  
Willy Frankel], Willingshausen [Max Plaut] Simon Frenkel.

## APPENDIX III

### *Descendants of Mr Israelsohn*

1 Mr Israelsohn  
..... 2 Yehuda Benyamin Israelsohn  
..... 3 Clara Israelsohn  
..... +Herman Eichholz 1869-1942  
..... 4 George Eichholz  
..... +Sarah Levine  
..... 5 Leonard Eichholz  
..... +Sarah  
..... 5 Rhona Eichholz  
..... 5 Herman Eichholz  
..... 4 Bessie Eichholz  
..... +Louis Brenner  
..... 5 Angie Brenner  
..... +Sam Bolon  
..... 6 Alan Bolon  
..... 6 Kevin Bolon  
..... 4 Minna Eichholz  
..... +Morris Ellison  
..... 4 Helena Eichholz  
..... +Benjamin Levy  
..... 5 Ruby Levy  
..... +Aaron Golach  
..... 5 Leon Levy  
..... +Rene Sussman  
..... 6 Cecil Levy  
..... 6 Brian Levy  
..... 5 Walter Levy 1922-2003  
..... +Sheila Blecher  
..... 6 Hilary Levy  
..... +Harold Starkowitz  
..... 7 Caron Starkowitz  
..... 7 Neil Starkowitz  
..... 7 Arnold Starkowitz  
..... 6 Benjamin Levy  
..... 6 Lynn Levy  
..... 3 Max Israelsohn  
..... +Betty Israelowitz  
..... 4 Solomon Hirsch Israelsohn  
..... +Miriam Feinberg  
..... 5 Beverly Israelsohn  
..... 5 Cedric Israelsohn  
..... 4 Eleazar Israelsohn  
..... +Josine Du Toit  
..... 4 Helena Israelsohn  
..... +Max Miller  
..... 5 Mendel Miller  
..... +Sonia Neppe  
..... 5 Victor Miller  
..... +Marion Worms  
..... 6 Deborah Miller  
..... 6 Joanne Miller  
..... 6 David Miller  
..... 5 Beulah Miller  
..... +Zvi Lipman  
..... 3 Wolf Israelsohn  
..... +Bertha  
..... 3 Morris Israelsohn  
..... +Bertha  
..... 4 Julius Israelsohn  
..... 3 Rudolph Israelsohn  
..... +Ethel Berman  
..... \*2nd Wife of Rudolph Israelsohn:  
..... +Mabel Cohen  
..... 3 Adolph Israelsohn  
..... +Golda  
..... 2 Miss Israelsohn  
..... +Mr Blumenau

..... 3 Eva Blumenau  
 ..... 4 Millie Blumenau  
 ..... +Abraham Zaacks  
 ..... 2 Brother Israelsohn  
 ..... 3 Fanny Israelsohn  
 ..... +Ben Meyer  
 ..... 3 Ida Israelsohn  
 ..... +S. H. Solomon  
 ..... 4 Minna Solomon  
 ..... +Mr Kramer  
 ..... 4 David Solomon  
 ..... +Ros Judaiken  
 ..... 4 Rene Solomon  
 ..... 3 Adolph Israelsohn  
 ..... 3 Mala Israelsohn  
 ..... +Sydney Sacks  
 ..... 4 Louis Sacks  
 ..... 4 Mannie Sacks  
 ..... 4 Ray Sacks  
 ..... 4 Minna Sacks  
 ..... +Lionel Spanner  
 ..... 3 Chaiah Israelsohn  
 ..... +M Ellison  
 ..... 4 Aaron Ellison  
 ..... 4 Morris Ellison  
 ..... +Minna Eichholz

### *Descendants of Mr Eichholz*

#### 1 Mr Eichholz

..... 2 Herman Eichholz  
 ..... +Clara Israelsohn  
 ..... 3 George Eichholz  
 ..... +Sarah Levine  
 ..... 4 Leonard Eichholz  
 ..... +Sarah  
 ..... 4 Rhona Eichholz  
 ..... 4 Herman Eichholz  
 ..... 3 Bessie Eichholz  
 ..... +Louis Brenner  
 ..... 4 Angie Brenner  
 ..... +Sam Bolon  
 ..... 5 Alan Bolon  
 ..... 5 Kevin Bolon  
 ..... 3 Minna Eichholz  
 ..... +Morris Ellison  
 ..... 3 Helena Eichholz  
 ..... +Benjamin Levy  
 ..... 4 Ruby Levy  
 ..... +Aaron Golach  
 ..... 4 Leon Levy  
 ..... +Rene Sussman  
 ..... 5 Cecil Levy  
 ..... 5 Brian Levy  
 ..... 4 Walter Levy  
 ..... +Sheila Blecher  
 ..... 5 Hilary Levy  
 ..... +Harold Starkowitz  
 ..... 6 Caron Starkowitz  
 ..... 6 Neil Starkowitz  
 ..... 6 Arnold Starkowitz  
 ..... 5 Benjamin Levy  
 ..... 5 Lynn Levy  
 ..... 2 Unknown Eichholz  
 ..... +Unknown Meyer  
 ..... 3 Hannah Meyer  
 ..... +Meyer Tankel  
 ..... 4 Jack Tankel  
 ..... 4 David Tankel  
 ..... +Celia Katzman  
 ..... 5 Jonathan Tankel  
 ..... 5 Keith Tankel  
 ..... 3 Ben Meyer  
 ..... +Fanny Israelsohn

## *Descendants of Mr Brenner*

1	Mr Brenner				
..... 2	M Brenner	b 1905			
.....		+Feige Wittert			
.....	3	Louis Brenner			
.....			+Bessie Eichholz		
.....	4	Angie Brenner			
.....		+Sam Bolon			
.....	5	Alan Bolon			
.....	5	Kevin Bolon			
.....	3	Chaim Brenner			
.....		+Zena Gevisser			
.....	4	Maish Brenner			
.....		+Isobel Gutkin			
.....	4	Arnold Brenner			
.....		+Ethel Jones			
.....	4	Stan Brenner			
.....		+Gillian			
.....	3	Joe Brenner			
.....	3	Isaac Brenner			
.....		+Mary Lewis			
.....	4	Ernie Brenner			
.....		+Elinor Yudelman			
..... 2	Unknown Brenner				
.....		+Miss Brenner			
.....	3	Leibe Brenner			
.....	4	Miriam Brenner			
.....		+Leslie Vides			
.....	4	Joe Brenner			
.....		+Ann Vides			
.....	4	Ginger Brenner			
.....	3	Ruby Brenner			
.....	3	Max Brenner			
.....		+Lydia Ralstein			
.....	4	John Brenner			
.....	4	Sylvia Brenner			
.....	3	Sotze Brenner			
..... 2	Third Brenner				
.....	3	Barney Brenner			
.....		+Sadie Glick			
.....	4	Charlotte Brenner			
.....	4	Paulette Brenner			
.....	4	Lynette Brenner			

### 1] The ISRAELSOHN/EICHHOLZ family:

The Israelsohn/Eichholz clan was pioneered by Max ‘Maake’ Israelsohn, who came to South Africa in 1888<sup>2</sup>. His brother Wolf went to America, but did not stay there long before coming to South Africa and joining Max<sup>3</sup>. Max Israelsohn married Betty Israelowitz and they had three children, daughter Helena and twin sons Solly and Lazar. Helena married Max Miller, who came to Pietersburg in the mid-1920s. Max’s uncle, Moses Miller lived in the Pietersburg area and fought for the Boers in the Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902. Moses married Rebekah and their daughter Sarah married Harry Gifter and they lived in Pietersburg.

Max's brother Wolf Israelsohn married his late brother Morris's wife Bertha [nee Wilson] who had come from England<sup>4</sup>. Previously living in Syferkuil, Wolf moved to Pietersburg with Bertha and his stepson Julius and travelled to his farm at Goudplaas<sup>5</sup>. Max retired ten years before his death on 10 November 1930 and also moved with his family to Pietersburg.

In 1898 Max and Wolf brought out their sister Clara's husband Herman Eichholz and set him up in a trading store in Haenertsburg. In 1903 Herman brought his wife Clara and eight year old daughter Helena from Riga, Latvia, as well as his nephew Benjamin Meyer<sup>6</sup>. Ben Meyer later brought his own sister Hannah out from Lithuania and she married Meyer Tankel, who had a trading store at Sandfontein near Matlala. Herman and Clara Eichholz's daughter Helena Eichholz married Benjamin Levy on 26 December 1920. Ben had come to South Africa from Shukjan [Saukenai] Lithuania in 1898, lived in Cape Town for a short while, where he worked as a *smous* selling trinkets from house to house, before joining an uncle on a dairy farm near Benoni. He then came to Pietersburg in 1905 as too many of his brothers were working on the farm and he had heard that Pietersburg was a prosperous area. He opened a shop in Mare Street, Pietersburg selling cattle feed and donkeys<sup>7</sup>. Ben Levy was a partner in Haenerts Mills with his father-in-law Herman Eichholz and a Gentile Tom Haenert from about 1918. They sold the mill in 1933 to Louis Brenner for £4000. They also ran stables on the corner of Market and Jorissen Street, Pietersburg. Ben's Levy's brother Sidney worked for him in Pietersburg for a short while. Ben and Lena Levy had three children, Wally [married Sheila Blecher], Leon [married Rene Sussman] and Ruby [married Aron Golach].

Max and Wolf Israelsohn brought out their three younger brothers Morris, Adolph [nicknamed little Adolph] and Rudolph, the first two trading in Haenertsburg and Ga-



Ramokgopa, as well as in Pietersburg. Rudolph joined Ben Meyer at Soekmekaar. Rudolph married Ethel, who died in 1948 and then he married a Scottish woman, Mabel Cohen. A cousin of Max and Wolf, Adolph Israelsohn [nicknamed big Adolph] also came to South Africa in the 1890s and farmed and traded at Groot-Spelonken. Adolph brought three of his sisters out to South Africa to join him. The one sister Male married Sidney Sacks, Ida married Solomon Solomon and Fanny married her cousin Benjamin Meyer, Clara and Herman Eichholz's nephew. Ben and Fanny Meyer joined Fanny's brother Adolph on his farm Boskoppies and managed the four trading stores while Adolph attended to the farming. Smulka and Harry Solomon were brought to the area by their uncles Solomon and Sam Solomon. Ben Meyer brought out Fanny's sister Chaiah's son Aaron Ellison from London to join him at Grootspelonken. Aaron's brother, Maurice Ellison also came to Pietersburg in the 1930s and started a ladies and gents hairdressing salon. He married his cousin Minna Eichholz, daughter of Herman and Clara Eichholz in 1939.

The Brenner family also joined the Israelsohn/Eichholz family. Louis, Isaac, Chaim and Joe Brenner were brothers. Louis Brenner married Bessie Eichholz, daughter of Herman and Clara Eichholz. Isaac Brenner married Mary Lewis, sister of Abe Lewis. Isaac had a trading store near Boyne, between Sovenga and Haenertsberg, which was later taken over by his brother Louis Brenner when Isaac moved to Pietersburg. Joe Brenner also came to the area in the 1920s and traded in a shop near Dwarsriver, where a cousin Leibe Brenner and his family lived before moving to Rhodesia. Leibe had two brothers Ruby and Max Brenner and a sister Sotze, who also married a Brenner. Max Brenner [born 5 December 1905] came to Dwarsriver in 1924 and married Lydia Ralstein. They later lived in Pietersburg. Barney Brenner, who was a cousin to Isaac, Louis, Joe and Chaim Brenner, although through his mother's side, came to Pietersburg in the late 1920s to work for Isaac Brenner. Three Zaacks

brothers also lived in this area, one owning a hotel at the bottom of the Ysterberg, halfway between Pietersburg and Potgietersrus. A second brother Abraham, who farmed and traded at Smitsdorp, married Millie, the daughter of Eve Blumenau, who was a cousin to the Israelsohns.

### ***Descendants of Isiah Hirschmann***

- 1 Isiah Hirschmann
- ..... 2 Johanna Hirschmann 1870-1961
- ..... +Joseph Kallmeyer -1931
- ..... 3 Bertha Kallmeyer
- ..... +Simon Palte
- ..... 4 Rhoda Palte
- ..... +David Rabinowitz
- ..... 4 Lorna Palte
- ..... +Natie Rabinowitz
- ..... 5 Anne Rabinowitz
- ..... 5 Basil Rabinowitz
- ..... 4 Ziffie Palte
- ..... +Arthur Lurie
- ..... 4 Joy Palte
- ..... +Hymie Philip Mervis
- ..... 4 Eleen Palte
- ..... +Harold Stein
- ..... 5 Lionel Stein
- ..... +Diane Rosen
- ..... 5 Joan Stein
- ..... +Alan Weissman
- ..... 3 Annie Kallmeyer
- ..... +Leo Salomon
- ..... 4 Theodor Salomon
- ..... +Toni Pimstone
- ..... 4 Julian Salomon
- ..... 4 Joselyn Salomon
- ..... +Gunter Friedland
- ..... 3 Jack Kallmeyer
- ..... +Sophie
- ..... 3 Harry Kallmeyer
- ..... +Berchon
- ..... 3 Shaiah Kallmeyer
- ..... +Gita Ezekov
- ..... 2 Jacob Hirschmann
- ..... +Erna Ethel Raick
- ..... 3 Samuel Hirschmann
- ..... 3 Edward Hirschmann
- ..... 2 Joseph Hirschmann
- ..... +Rachel
- ..... 2 Herman Hirschmann 1879-1922
- ..... +Doris Thal
- ..... 3 Jack Hirschmann 1898-
- ..... +Sadie Emma Kark
- ..... 4 Herman Hirschmann
- ..... 4 Richelle Hirschmann
- ..... 4 David Hirschmann
- ..... 3 Hylda Hirschmann
- ..... +Mr Elkin
- ..... 3 Isaiah Hirschmann
- ..... +Cecily Goldblatt
- ..... 4 Harley Hirschmann
- ..... 4 Lesley Hirschmann
- ..... +Henry Stonefield
- ..... 3 Bertha Hirschmann
- ..... +Max William Meskin
- ..... 3 Morris Hirschmann
- ..... +Edith

.....	4	Louis Hirschmann
.....	4	Dickie Hirschmann
.....	4	Rosemary Hirschmann
..... 2		Bryna Hirschmann
.....		+Mr Rakusin
.....	3	Kuba Rakusin
.....		+Lilly Levine
.....	4	Lena Rakusin
.....	4	Brian Rakusin
.....	3	Samuel Rakusin
.....		+Francis Tager
.....	4	Hedda Rakusin
.....	4	Bertha Rakusin

### *Descendants of Joseph Kallmeyer*

1		Joseph Kallmeyer
..		+Johanna Hirschmann
..... 2		Bertha Kallmeyer
.....		+Simon Palte
.....	3	Rhoda Palte
.....		+David Rabinowitz
.....	3	Lorna Palte
.....		+Natie Rabinowitz
.....	4	Anne Rabinowitz
.....	4	Basil Rabinowitz
.....	3	Ziffie Palte
.....		+Arthur Lurie
.....	3	Joy Palte
.....		+Hymie Philip Mervis
.....	3	Eleen Palte
.....		+Harold Stein
.....	4	Lionel Stein
.....		+Diane Rosen
.....	4	Joan Stein
.....		+Alan Weissman
..... 2		Annie Kallmeyer
.....		+Leo Salomon
.....	3	Theodor Salomon
.....		+Toni Pimstone
.....	3	Julian Salomon
.....	3	Joselyn Salomon
.....		+Gunter Friedland
..... 2		Jack Kallmeyer
.....		+Sophie
..... 2		Harry Kallmeyer
.....		+Berchon Rosenberg
..... 2		Shaiah Kallmeyer
.....		+Gita Ezekov

#### 2] The KALLMEYER/HIRSCHMANN family:

Herman Hirschmann came out from Latvia to Woodbush [Houtbosdorp] near Haenertsburg in the Northern Transvaal. He received his South African naturalization papers on 12 August 1895<sup>8</sup>. He established himself in Woodbush where he owned a farm and a general dealer store. Later he ran the Tzaneen Hotel. Farmers unwilling to travel the large distance to Pietersburg used to do their shopping at Hirschmann's general dealer's store at Woodbush, buying on credit<sup>9</sup>. When the debt went as high as £150, Hirschmann would apply pressure

and the debtor would be forced to relinquish his farm. When Herman's brother visited him from Russia, he despaired at the lack of Jewish girls for Herman to marry. On his return to Russia, Herman's brother found him a suitable wife, 17 year old Doris Thal from Mitau, Latvia. Doris arrived in 1897 on primitive roads by ox-wagon. Herman and Doris spoke German to each other but as she was a cultured lady she brought out an English governess from England to Woodbush to teach her children English. Herman and Doris Hirschmann's wedding in 1898 was the first Jewish wedding in the Woodbush district. They married in Woodbush Village at the residence of Herman's sister Mr and Mrs J Kallmeyer. The civil portion of the wedding was performed by landrost G G Munnik and the religious ceremony by Rev Friedmann<sup>10</sup> from Pretoria. Mr Hirschmann's father and brother travelled from Russia to be at the wedding. There was no honeymoon and the couple spent the day 'frolicking and feasting followed by a dance in the evening'<sup>11</sup>. Herman and Doris Hirschmann's five children were Jack, Isaiah [nicknamed Charlie], Hylda [married Mr Elkin in the Pietersburg Synagogue August 1929]<sup>12</sup>, Maurice [Mo] and Bertha. When Herman died in 1922, Doris moved into Pietersburg. Jack kept the farm at Woodbush and the family went there for two months during the polio epidemic.

Herman Hirschmann was instrumental in bringing several other Jewish settlers to the district of Woodbush. These included the Kallmeyers, the Perlman, the Paltas and Mr Thal. Herman Hirschmann's sister, Johanna Hirschmann was born in Talsen in the Baltic States in 1870. Johanna married Joseph Kallmeyer in Amsterdam in 1891 and they immigrated to Johannesburg in 1892, moving soon after to Middelburg. There Mrs Kallmeyer was hostess to President Paul Kruger on his visit to the town<sup>13</sup>. Joseph Kallmeyer came to Houtboschdorp and in 1896 Johanna Kallmeyer came by ox-wagon to Houtboschdorp with their two daughters to join her husband. They shared a house with the Hirschmanns. During the Anglo-

Boer War [1899-1902] the family was moved into Pietersburg by the British and placed under house arrest. They started their own business, African Stores, in Pietersburg<sup>14</sup>. In 1929 Johanna Kallmeyer started the Star Seaside Fund in Pietersburg and the Jewish Orphan's Fund of which she was chairlady for several years. Mrs Kallmeyer died on 25 May 1961 aged 91<sup>15</sup>. The six Kallmeyer children were Bertha, Annie, Morris, Jack, Harry [married Berchon, daughter of Marcus Rosenberg], and Isaiah. Harry and Jack Kallmeyer were in the family business, African Stores, with their brother-in-law Sam Palte for a short while. Doris Hirschmann's brother Maurice Thal established a shop at Chief Mamabula's village. He married a Mrs Lief and had two children, Ruth and Bella<sup>16</sup>. Later, together with his second wife Yetta, Maurice lived with Jack and Sadie Hirschmann. A Mr Thal was also a bookkeeper for S S Himmelhoch in Louis Trichardt<sup>17</sup>.

Herman Hirschmann's brothers and sisters also came out to the Pietersburg area. His brother Jacob married Erna Ethel Raick, who died at a young age. They had two sons Samuel [Chummie] and Edward. Another brother Joseph [Brahle] married Rachel [Rahel] and they brought up Jacob's children Chummie and Edward when Jacob died in 1935. Brahle also brought up his relatives Solly and Sarie Levy. Herman's sister Bryna married Mr Rakusin<sup>18</sup> in Poland. Their children came out to the Tzaneen area where they owned a store. They were Jacob [Kuba], who married Pietersburg's long-serving minister, Rev Levine's daughter Lily and Samuel Rakusin, who married Francis Tager, daughter of Ellis Tager of Pietersburg. Both families later moved to Pietersburg, where they bought SB Cash Stores from Mr H B Sadovsky. Samuel also owned the Empire Bioscope. The Perlman and Berman families of Tzaneen were cousins of the Hirschmanns. Regina Michaelsohn married Israel Berman and lived in Tzaneen. Bertha Michaelsohn was married to Abraham Perlman [Perlie] who ran a business in Tzaneen. They had three children Thelma, Jackie and Paddy.

## *Descendants of Jacob Himmelhoch*

1 Jacob Himmelhoch  
 ..... 2 Yosef Himmelhoch  
 ..... +Kiele 'Clara' Israelowitz  
 ..... 3 Mary Himmelhoch  
 ..... +Herman Bloom  
 ..... 3 Beatrice Himmelhoch  
 ..... +Lewis Bloom  
 ..... 3 Danie Himmelhoch  
 ..... +Yosef Israelsohn  
 ..... 3 Suzanna Himmelhoch  
 ..... +Alec Karp  
 ..... 4 Montey Karp  
 ..... 4 Jack Karp  
 ..... 4 Eddie Karp  
 ..... 3 Rachel Himmelhoch  
 ..... +Sascha Schmahmann  
 ..... 3 Charles Himmelhoch  
 ..... +Olga Roberts  
 ..... 4 Janie Himmelhoch  
 ..... \*2nd Wife of Charles Himmelhoch:  
 ..... +Annie Elsie  
 ..... \*2nd Wife of Yosef Himmelhoch:  
 ..... +Dina Brenner  
 ..... 3 Ettie Himmelhoch - 1943  
 ..... 2 Tsemach Himmelhoch  
 ..... 2 Sachne Simon Himmelhoch 1846 – 1921 Louis Trichard  
 ..... +Feige Asne 'Fanny' Weinberg 1850 – 1931 Louis Trichardt  
 ..... 3 Solomon Wolf Himmelhoch 1874 Sassmachen - 1896  
 ..... +Yetty Schmahmann 1877 Courland- 1970  
 ..... 4 Ethel Himmelhoch 1896 - 1898  
 ..... 3 Tesse Himmelhoch - 1876  
 ..... 3 Shore Lena Himmelhoch 1877 - 1960  
 ..... +Abraham Galant -1924  
 ..... 4 George Galant  
 ..... 4 Jack Galant  
 ..... 4 Miss Galant  
 ..... 3 Danie Himmelhoch 1879 -  
 ..... +Joseph Palte  
 ..... 4 Jack Palte  
 ..... 4 Sydney Palte  
 ..... 4 Ellis Palte  
 ..... 3 Max Himmelhoch 1882 -1945 Pietersburg  
 ..... +Ann Serman 1902 - 1939  
 ..... 4 Nathan Himmelhoch  
 ..... 4 Stanley Himmelhoch  
 ..... 3 George Himmelhoch 1885-1917 Louis Trichardt  
 ..... 3 Betsy Himmelhoch 1890 -  
 ..... 3 Hyman Himmelhoch 1894 -  
 ..... +Jane Illman  
 ..... 4 Phyllis Himmelhoch  
 ..... +Solly Herr  
 ..... 4 Shirley Himmelhoch  
 ..... +Jack Sachs  
 ..... 3 Olga Himmelhoch 1896 -  
 ..... +Joseph Adolph Melman  
 ..... 4 Eric Melman  
 ..... 4 George Melman  
 ..... 4 Selwyn Melman  
 ..... 3 Merri Himmelhoch  
 ..... 2 Wolf Zeev Himmelhoch 1857 - 1906  
 ..... +Minna Schmahmann 1870 - 1944

## *Descendants of Yeshia 'Bern' Schmahmann*

1 Yeshia 'Bern' Schmahmann  
 .. +Ette Hartsburg  
 ..... 2 Nachman Schmahmann 1839 - 1897  
 ..... +Sophia Dinah Friedberg 1842 - 1913  
 ..... 3 Minna Schmahmann 1870 - 1944  
 ..... +Wolf Zeev Himmelhoch 1857 - 1906  
 ..... 3 David Schmahmann  
 ..... 3 Ariyeh Leib 'Arthur' Schmahmann 1873 - 1939  
 ..... +Josephine Behrmann 1889 - 1974  
  
 ..... 3 Yaakov 'John' Schmahmann 1879 - 1935  
 ..... +Henrietta 'Yetty' Brenner 1885 - 1966  
 ..... 2 Leib Levin Schmahmann 1852 - 1898 Pietersburg  
 ..... +Minna Horner 1855 - 1941 Libau, Latvia  
 ..... 3 Emma Schmahmann  
 ..... +Joseph Guinsberg  
 ..... 3 Lily Schmahmann  
 ..... 3 Bernard Schmahmann  
 ..... +Bertha Zweibeck  
 ..... 3 Rosa Schmahmann 1874 - 1876  
 ..... +Isidore Harry Lewsen 1878 - 1955  
 ..... 3 Yetty Schmahmann 1877 - 1970  
 ..... +Shlomo Solomon Wolf Himmelhoch 1874 - 1896  
 ..... 4 Ethel Himmelhoch 1896 - 1898  
 ..... \*2nd Husband of Yetty Schmahmann:  
 ..... +Robert Behrmann - 1920  
 ..... 4 Edythe Behrmann  
 ..... +Eric Certer Johnson  
 ..... 4 Samuel Lionel Behrmann  
 ..... 4 Tecla Lily Behrmann 1900 -  
 ..... +James Shirtcliffe  
 ..... 3 Herman Schmahmann 1878 - 1941  
 ..... +Esther Sachs 1877 - 1941  
 ..... 3 Sacha Schmahmann 1882 - 1963  
 ..... +Taube-Rivka Dubrovitsch  
 ..... 4 Tereze-Miriam Schmahmann  
 ..... \*2nd Wife of Sacha Schmahmann:  
 ..... +Rachel 'Rae' Himmelhoch 1902 - 1980  
 ..... 4 Margaret Schmahmann  
 ..... 4 Ian Schmahmann  
 ..... +Joan Grimbeck  
 ..... 3 Jeannot Schmahmann  
 ..... 3 Danie Schmahmann 1889 - 1941  
 ..... +Morduchs Hillman 1875 - 1940  
 ..... 3 Alex Schmahmann 1890 - 1989  
 ..... +Minna Kramer  
 ..... 3 Zelma Schmahmann

### 3] The HIMMELHOCH family:

The Himmelhoch family was a pioneering family of Louis Trichardt as they were already well established there in the 1890s<sup>19</sup>. Jacob [Yankel] Himmelhoch came from Goldinger [Kudinger], Sassmachen, Courland, Latvia. He fled the army in Russia for the United States of America, where he died in 1903. Four of his six sons came to South Africa - Sachne Simeon, Yosef, Wolf Ze'ev and Tsemach.

1] Tsemach Himmelhoch's whereabouts are unknown, but an unidentified

S Himmelhoch was buried in Pietersburg cemetery about 1897 and this could be [T]semach.

2] Yosef Himmelhoch's first wife Dina Brenner died in Latvia. They had a daughter Henrietta [Ette], who died in Latvia during the Holocaust. He proposed to his second wife Kiele [Clara] Israelowitz in Tuckum, Latvia after knowing her a week. Clara's sister Betty Israelowitz married Max Israelsohn, thus joining the Himmelhoch and Israelsohn families. Yosef and Clara Himmelhoch moved to Belfast, Transvaal in 1892 and had six children – Mary, Beatrice, Danie, Suzanna, Rachel and Charles. Charles [Charlie] Himmelhoch became a dentist, married a gentile woman Olga Roberts, and moved to Pietersburg. Rachel [Rae] Himmelhoch married Sasha Schmahmann, born 1882 in Riga, Latvia [the son of Leib Schmahmann and Minna Horner of Slypsteendrift]. Sascha Schmahmann fought in the Anglo-Boer War for the Boers. He died on 17 February 1963 in East London.

3] Wolf Ze'ev Himmelhoch married Minna Schmahmann [daughter of Nachman Schmahmann] in Amsterdam, Holland and they immigrated to Middelburg, Transvaal in South Africa.

4] Sachne Simeon Himmelhoch came to South Africa in 1892 with his wife Feige Asne 'Fanny' [nee Weinberg]<sup>20</sup>. At the time of the Second Anglo-Boer War 1899-1902, he owned a general dealer's store in the village of Louis Trichardt and two in the district at Boschkopjes and Schoemansdal<sup>21</sup>. He employed Mr Thal as his bookkeeper. He also became a butcher and large property owner. He was one of the pioneers of the Jewish community in Louis Trichardt. His wife was the first Jewish woman to live in the town<sup>22</sup>. Most of Sachne Simeon and Feige's children married Jews from the Northern Transvaal, interlinking many of these families. They had nine children and adopted two more. Amongst them were Solomon Wolf, Tsesse, Lena, Danie, Max, George, Bella, Hyman, Olga, Merri.



1] Their eldest son Solomon Wolf Himmelhoch married Yetty Schmahmann [daughter of Leib Schmahmann]. They lived in Ruigtevlei, Spelonken, in the Louis Trichardt-Soekmekaar area, where Solomon Wolf died. His tombstone in Pietersburg states: 'In memory of Solomon Wolf Himmelhoch. Died 1897 age 23.' [However SA Archives MHG 11931 states he died on 19 October 1896 aged 23]. Because the tombstone reads 'in memory of' it's possible that the tombstone was only erected later. His wife and their daughter Ethel returned to Slypsteendrift where Ethel died on 30 April 1898 and was buried there<sup>23</sup>. Yetty then married Robert Behrman and they had three children.

2] Tsesse Himmelhoch died on 19 May 1876 at the young age of two months in Latvia.

3] Sarah Leine [Shore Lena] Himmelhoch married Abraham Galant from Louis Trichardt, who had a postal agency in his general dealer's store in 1918. They had three sons George, Jack and another. Jack's wife died whilst he was on active service during World War II.

4] Danie Himmelhoch married Joseph Palte, from the Pietersburg area and they moved to Rhodesia [Zimbabwe]. They had a son Jack and two daughters. Danie was on holiday in Europe with the two girls during WWII and sadly the girls died of starvation. Two more sons were born later in South Africa: Sydney and Ellis.

5] Max Himmelhoch married Ann Serman in 1923. Anne's father and uncle were Nathan and Louis Serman who ran a general dealer's business called Serman and Serman in Louis Trichardt in the early 1920s [later sold to the Wolf family], as well as the business Serman and Son. Ann's sister, Minnie married Abraham Sax and her brother Louis Abe married Lena and lived in Louis Trichardt where they had two children Julian [Boet] and Betty. Anne's two other brothers Jack and Harry Serman married two sisters Rose and Essie Lipshitz from Nylstroom. The Lipshitz's sister Doris Lipshitz married Charles Whyte, a cousin of the Donde family of Potgietersrus, and they lived in Settlers. Their brother Abe Lipshitz, a principal of King David School in Johannesburg, married Daphne Menaschewitz, the

daughter of Herman and Dora Manaschewitz of Pietersburg. Daphne's sister Laura married Moss Cohen, who became a Mayor of Pietersburg.

6] Gerson [George] Himmelhoch was unmarried. He died in Elim aged 32 and was buried in Louis Trichardt 7 April 1917.

7] Bella [Betsy] Himmelhoch was born on 17 January 1890 in Sassmacken.

8] Hyman [Chaim] Himmelhoch [born 28 March 1894 in Sassmacken] married Jane Illman in Johannesburg and lived in Bandolierkop, 35 kilometers south of Louis Trichardt, for some years where they ran the Bandolierkop Hotel. Jane became interested in cattle farming and built up a large herd. The family later moved to Marble Hall.

9] Olga Himmelhoch [born 28 May 1896 in Lithuania, died in Johannesburg] married Joseph Melman in Greylingstad and lived in Pietersburg for a while.

10] Sachne's youngest daughter was Merri, birthplace unknown.

The Schmahmann family was connected to many Jewish families in the northern area of the Transvaal through intermarriage. Leib Levin Schmahmann<sup>24</sup> [died March 10 1898 in Slypsteendrif and buried in the Pietersburg cemetery] married Minna Horner. He came to South Africa in 1895<sup>25</sup> and lived in Slypsteendrif, near Potgietersrus, presumably without his wife as his son Alex, who came to Slypsteendrift in 1895, reports that he sent money back to his mother in Latvia. They had eleven children – Emma, Lily, Bernard, Rosa, Yetty [married Solomon Wolf Himmelhoch], Herman, Sacha [married Ray Himmelhoch], Jeannot, Dani, Alex, Zelma. Hermann, Jeannot and Danie died in Latvia. Emma, Rosa, Yetty, Sacha, Alex and Bernard lived in South Africa.

## APPENDIX IV

### TRADERS IN THE PIETERSBURG AREA UNTIL THE 1930s

Herman Barnett Sadosky was a general dealer in the building trade. David Israel Lewis and his son Abraham opened Pietersburg Creamery in 1923 [sold to Max Friedel in 1925] and the first malt factory in 1925. Abraham and his brother S Wolpe arrived in 1916 and opened Wolpes Fruit and Vegetable Market in 1925. Their relatives Joseph and Gertie Feinberg opened Venus Café in 1920. Leon Danzig ran Danzig's Delicatessen in 1922 and later sold it to his brother Harry. Ellis Levin bought Pietersburg Mineral Water Factory in 1923. Max Korber owned a shop in Woodbush in 1920, before moving to Pietersburg. He and his two brothers-in-law, Dave Lifschitz and Boris Bloch, all had shops next to each other in Market Street, Pietersburg. Max's shop was called Maxims, Lifschitz's was OK Stores and Bloch's was Ray's Fashions. Max's wife Gittel had a sister Fanny, who together with her husband Abraham Notelovitz, ran Notels clothing store. Max Cowan owned Pietersburg Garage, together with Sam Palte and a gentile Mr Perucatti. Hugo Kohn owned Kohn's Produce Agency, B M Levitan owned Produce Markets, J Zwilling had Pietersburg Produce Company and Israel Mereine and B M Levitan were produce and grain merchants. Adolph and Herman Skok were hide and skin merchants and Leopold Skok was a bookkeeper. A Rosenthal and J Shames were general dealers. Lazar Jacobe was a transporter and W S and Nathan Schott were commercial brokers. John Edelman was an auctioneer and estate agent. Abraham Amdur and Issy Hoffbrand were tailors. Max Lange was a watchmaker. I Pleaner was a painter.

Solly Marcus started a milling business. He then bought the derelict *Zoutpansberg Review* newspaper in 1923<sup>26</sup> and transformed it into a successful newspaper and printing works, with

Joe Edelman as the editor. Mr Solomon<sup>27</sup> owned the Grotto Bioscope in 1920. Ellis Tager owned the Empire Bioscope. Max Brenner first traded in Dwarsriver in 1924, then in 1928 opened the Pietersburg Sweet factory with Paul Fainberg. Harry Niss and Alec Steele began Remmers and Niss Furniture Store<sup>28</sup> and Maloon Bros also had a furniture store. The business Central stores, was sold by Louis and Isaac Maloon on 1 November 1929 to Haymen Dinner who then called it Central Fisheries<sup>29</sup>. Haymen Dinner sold Central Fisheries to Jacob Golach who then sold it in 1932 to Dora Glass, wife of Aron Glass. Max and Phyllis Conley owned Conleys Department Store. Asher Susser owned A Susser & Co in Sterkwater. He then came to Pietersburg in 1924 and owned Northern Transvaal Agencies. He later took Solly Mymin in as a partner<sup>30</sup>.

Practically all the mills in the area were owned by Jews, many of them by the Brenner family. Louis Brenner owned Pietersburg Milling Co Pty Ltd, previously called Haenerts Mills run by Ben Levy, Herman Eichholz and Tom Haenert [a gentile]. Berel and Sadie Brenner owned Brenner Roller Mills, Chaim Brenner owned Louis Trichardt Mills and Zoutpansberg Milling in Louis Trichardt. Brenners also owned Progress Milling. Ellis Levin owned Smythe's Mills. Flats Milling Company in Potgietersrus was owned by Max Gordon, Brenner and Smythe.

Notices appearing in the *Zoutpansberg Review* indicated that several Jews had trading stores on farms in the Pietersburg area before 1930. The business J Katz & Co operating at Piesanghoek, Gordon and Fleurfontein was sold by J Katz, I Katz and S Katz on 1 February 1930<sup>31</sup>. Saul Zway also traded at Piesanghoek in 1920 and Leib Zway at Sibasa. Oscar Heymann and Hermann Hirsch traded as Oscar Heymann and Co on the farms Lissa, Buffelshoek, Inveraan, Bouwlust, Gemarke, Borkum<sup>32</sup>. Oscar Heymann transferred Madyetane Trading Store at Matala's 'location' to Max Hirschowitz, Lissa Store to Max

Miller and Tibanefontein Trading Store to Louis Mincer<sup>33</sup>. Mr Hirschowitz's Matala's Trading Store and Madyetane Stores were sold to I H and S Solomon respectively<sup>34</sup>. Kalkbank Trading Store owned by Ellis Selek Tager was transferred to Elchon Rubin Hirschowitz on 1 July 1931<sup>35</sup>. Solomon Harris Solomon was a butcher and produce dealer at Kalkbank in 1916. Samuel Louis Solomon's Leshoana Store on the farm Doornfontein was abandoned in 1930. Louis [Leibe] and Max Brenner traded as Brenner Brothers at Matoks Location<sup>36</sup>. Abe and David Israel Lewis owned Bridge Trading Stores<sup>37</sup>. D Lewis sold his store to I M Kahan on the farm Koedoes River. A small store in Moeketsi owned by I M Kahan was destroyed in a fire started by burglars. Joseph Orkin and Julius Lissoos had a 'native eating house' trading as the Harper Mine Store on the farm Vogelsang in the Zoutpansberg district which he sold to Abraham Theodore Daniel<sup>38</sup>. Yudel Smuskowitz had a general dealer store on the farm Nooitgedacht. A Fischer and Co at Naapoort was sold to Joseph Halperin<sup>39</sup>. The same month the partnership between B Bloch and Judel Bloch was dissolved. Mr E Toderovitz had a burglary at his Legalies Store, the first burglary in twenty years of business. Blankets, clothing, suitcases, biscuits and sweets were stolen<sup>40</sup>.

The business called Alec Lurie at Maastroom in the Potgietersrus district was sold to his wife Jane Lurie. The general dealer store called P Boyarsky and Son on the farm Lanark number 971, district Pietersburg was owned by Peretz and Abram Boyarsky. The partnership between Adolph Israelsohn and Benjamin Meyer who owned a general dealer store at Deelkraal and another at Vlakfontein was dissolved in December 1929 and only Meyer continued to run the business<sup>41</sup>. Jacob and Bertha Albers came in 1918 to a farm 50 kilometers from Pietersburg to work for Mr A Zaacks, then they opened their own business. Julius and Manny Kruger were produce and grain merchants at Legalies in 1916.

The South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives recorded the names of several Jews owning trading stores in remote areas of Pietersburg, who donated to Zionist funds. Gershon Feldman had a shop in Nobody in 1919, M L Kruger at Legalies, Louis Brenner at Syferkuil, Abraham Zaacks at New Smitsdorp and Louis Sieff and F Morris were general dealers at Dendron. Paul Fainberg had general dealer shops at Dwarsrivier as did Meyer Tankel at Dwarsrivier and Sandfontein. Jacob Kaufman was a general dealer at Palmietfontein mine and Simon Kaufman at Sandfontein in 1914. Heyman Herman had a general dealer store at Grootspelonke, Gerald Jacobson at Munnik and W Halberstadt at Sekukuneland. Isaac and Adolph Abramowitz had Abramowitz Bros in Louis Trichardt and E and R Abramowitz had shops in Duiwelskloof, as did Sam Fine, who then moved to Tzaneen. John Gluckman and Mr Judas were the managers of Union Citrus Co near Tzaneen in the 1920s. Max Henschell was a general dealer at Mara. Max Miller and Cecil Gifter owned a general dealer store and butchery at Ontevrede in the Pietersburg district. Herbert Goldman was the postmaster at Bandolierkop.

In the Potgietersrus area in the 1920s, Hersov Bros owned several trading stores in the northern and eastern areas of the Transvaal. They employed Jews to run their businesses, giving them an option to buy after a year. These included Charlie Bailey, Max Smolson and Solly Colman, A Duchon at Gravelotte and Sol Daven at Molsgat. A Fisher and C Zway also traded at Molsgat. Abe and Charles Dondé traded at Mapedi and farmed near Potgietersrus. The Herr brothers traded at Gilead, A Liebson, Lionel Lisoos, Isaac Levin, George Susser and Arthur Vos at Zebedelia, Leon Karol, T Tankelowitz and S Geselowitz at Sterkwater and Solomon Hurwitz and M Algie at Beauty. Jacob Urson traded at Rosencrantz Trevers, then at Riete Dorpenso, 30 kilometers from Pietersburg. Abraham "Perlie" Perlman was the first trader to settle in Tzaneen. At the 1920 auction he bought stand number 54 where he built his

shop<sup>42</sup>. Harry Crown of Tzaneen owned 22 trading stores throughout the district<sup>43</sup>. Hyman Orkin was a pioneer of the tea-growing industry in Tzaneen. His concession to plant tea and coffee in the Lowveld was spoilt by the Anglo-Boer War [1899-1902] and never reached fruition<sup>44</sup>.

Several Jews were farmers in the Pietersburg area. T and S Rosenthal were farmers at Marabastad in 1904, W Herschenson at Houtbosdorp in 1904. Sidney Saks, who came from England, was a farmer at Lasfontein in 1905, then at Bandolierkop. S Hayman was a farmer at Bandolierkop in 1922. Max and Wolf Israelsohn farmed at Syferkuil, Turfloop. F D Cohen farmed near Potgietersrus in 1904 and the Glassers at Sterkwater. E S Tager farmed near Warmbaths and at Sibasa in 1924. Solomon Hurwitz farmed tobacco at Swartwater.

Jews were also involved in many of the mines in the district. Charles, Jack and Bob Hersov farmed at 'Haakdoorn' in the Northern Transvaal. Bob learnt a great deal about asbestos in the Chuniespoort and Malepsdrift districts, which later led him to take up a large claim in the Northern Transvaal, resulting in the formation of the Consolidated Asbestos Mines Ltd<sup>45</sup>. Mr H Friedman was the manager of the Consolidated Asbestos Mine at Malips until he left in 1930. Albert Schechter was the manager of Cape Asbestos. Harry and Cecil Gifter had an asbestos mine near the Olifants River, as well as the Gifter Corundum Mine at Bochum. Bill Levine was on the asbestos mines at Bewaarkloof.

Almost every hotel in the Northern Transvaal was owned by a Jew. In Pietersburg Barney Herman owned the Café Royal Hotel in 1890. Sidney Adler came to Pietersburg from Johannesburg to manage the Café Royal. He had arrived in South Africa in the 1870s from England and travelled to a number of towns, before settling in Johannesburg, where he owned

the Red Lamp Bar in Commissioner Street. When the stock market crashed around 1890, he came to Pietersburg. Adler was commandeered to fight in the Malaboch War in 1894, after which he returned to Johannesburg<sup>46</sup>. Mr E Horwitz owned the Transvaal Hotel in 1910<sup>47</sup> and Harry and Sarah Gifter ran the Royal Hotel in 1918 with Solly Marcus and A Josephy. Barney Edelman was employed at the Royal Hotel. In 1921 Mr S Solsky ran the Royal Hotel and he was followed in 1930 by Harry Bernard Miller. After that Mr Cohen and Mr Silverman in 1937 ran the hotel. Peretz and Grace Buchman owned the Great North Road Hotel. Howard Greenberg owned the Goldfields Hotel from 1932-47.

In Tzaneen, Mr H Hirschmann, then S Hirschfield, ran the Tzaneen Hotel at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, after which the partnership of I Berman and B Horwitz ran it. In the early 1900s a small canteen, Strangers Rest Store, was run by a Mr I Hirschfield in Tzaneen and he may have been one of the first settlers in Tzaneen<sup>48</sup>. Isaac Kahan owned the Soekmekaar Hotel and then sold it to Genia and Isaac Katzman. Gertie and Jack Freedman owned the Messina Hotel in the 1920s. In Louis Trichardt, Charles Edward Schlesinger owned the Zoutpansberg Hotel. Mr Davids owned the Louis Trichardt Hotel and the Grand Hotel, which he sold to his brother-in-law Mr Marcusa. Hyman and Jane Illman owned the Bandelierkop Hotel, later owned by Sydney and Deborah Sacks. Mr and Mrs Lisoos and then their son, Lionel, owned the Zebedelia Hotel. In 1949 Mr L Lisoos bought the Duiwelskloof Hotel as well as a hotel in Messina and the Goldfields Hotel in Pietersburg<sup>49</sup>. In Potgietersrus Mr L Brodie owned the Queens Hotel in 1922, the forerunner of the Grand Hotel. Jacob and Morris Polovnik owned the Potgietersrus Hotel in 1925. Mr Brown and then Jose and Marcelle Fisher owned the Jones Hotel in Potgietersrus in the 1930s. The Fishers also owned the Orinoco Hotel. Solomon Susser owned the Groenfontein Hotel at Sterkwater from 1914 to 1944. In Settlers, I Goldberg owned the Settler Commercial Hotel and Charles and Doris



Whyte owned the Settlers Hotel in the 1920s. Philip Cohen opened the Naboom Hotel in 1910, the first hotel in Naboomspruit, and Mr Kaufman had an inn and stables for horses. Mr and Mrs E Morris owned the Naboomspruit Hotel together with Mr N Weiner in the 1940s. Mr M Pack owned a hotel in Nylstroom in the 1920s. Morris and Sarah Schlosberg and Mr P Slesing owned the Nylstroom Hotel in 1903 and then Harry and Jacob Serman bought it from Mr Slesing in 1922<sup>50</sup>.

Very few of the early immigrants to Pietersburg were professional men. Joe Edelman was a lawyer, who sold his practice to Max Chaitow. He then became the editor of the *Zoutpansberg Review*. James van Mentz, Gerald Susser and Bertie Goldin were lawyers in 1920s. Ed Young was an accountant. Dr P Hack was a doctor at the Pietersburg Hospital from 1923 -1937. George Eichholz was a pharmacist. Herman Manaschewitz was a land surveyor.

## APPENDIX V

### CHAIRMEN/PRESIDENTS OF THE PIETERSBURG HEBREW CONGREGATION<sup>51</sup>:

Kallmeyer, Joseph	1904-?1916
Kaufmann, S	1917-?1918
Herman, Barnard	1917-1918? 1916-1950
Levy, Ben	1950-1952
Cohen, Moss	1952-1953
Sacks, A	1954
Rakusen, S	
Brenner, Max	1959-1960
Colman, S	1960-1962
Benjamin, George [source SAJBD]	1961
Chaitow, Max	1962-64
Meyer, Julian	1964-1966
Beron, Harry.B.	1966-1968
Kier, Eddie [source SAJBD]	1967
Mendelsohn Gerald	1968-1970
Schechter, Monty	1970-1971
Levy, Leon	1971-1973
Notelovitz, Hymie	1973-1975
Levy, Leon	1975-1981
Meyer, Julian	1981-1982
Dubb, Mark	1982-1983
Stein, Arnie	1983-1985
Levy, Leon	1985-1987
Starkowitz, Harold	1987-1989
Levy, Leon	1989-1992
Starkowitz, Harold	1992-1993
Levy, Leon	1993-2002
Levy Wally	2002

## HONORARY LIFE PRESIDENTS OF THE PIETERSBURG HEBREW CONGREGATION:

Sam Palte, Ellis Levin, M H Cohen, Louis Brenner, Adolph Sacks, Max Brenner and Samuel Rakusin 1962, Solly Colman 1963, Max Chaitow 1966, Julian Meyer 1968, Monty Schechter Honorary Country Life member 1977, Leon Levy Honorary Life Vice-President.

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### NOTES:

<sup>1</sup> C Wiener questionnaire to Jewish residents and ex-residents of Pietersburg.

<sup>2</sup> *Northern Review* 11 November 1930, p. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Wally Levy, Pietersburg.

<sup>4</sup> Marriage certificate 16 June 1921.

<sup>5</sup> Interview with Wally Levy.

<sup>6</sup> Permit granted by the French consul in Johannesburg on the 27 April 1903 for Keile Malke Eichholz and two children.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Wally Levy.

<sup>8</sup> South African National Archives Reference Ref R6457/95.

<sup>9</sup> Wongtschowski B.E.H. *Between Woodbush and Wolkberg: Googoo Thompson's Story*. Review Printers: Pietersburg, 1987, p. 38.

<sup>10</sup> His first name is not mentioned.

<sup>11</sup> *Zoutpansberg Review* 23 August 1923, p. 1.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid* 23 August 1929, p. 3.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph's obituary in the *Zoutpansberg Review* 3 April 1931 states that Mr Kallmeyer came from Mapok's territory in 1889 to join H. Hirschmann, his brother-in-law in the Woodbush district. However this date is incorrect as Hirschmann was only 10 years old in 1889 and was in Houtboschdorp only in 1895.

<sup>14</sup> Wongtschowski B E H, *op. cit*, p. 19.

<sup>15</sup> *Northern Review* 2 June 1961, p. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Richelle Hirschmann.

<sup>17</sup> South African National Archives, Reference Ref CJC 1603

<sup>18</sup> His first name is unknown.

<sup>19</sup> Martha Lev-Zion who lives in Israel has compiled an extensive family tree of the Himmelhoch and Schmahmann families who were scattered throughout the Transvaal.

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<sup>20</sup> Simeon Sachne Himmelhoch claims in his application for compensation after the Anglo-Boer War, that he had been residing in the district of Louis Trichardt from 1891 [South African National Archives Ref CJC1603], but his children are recorded as having been born in Russia as late as 1896.]

<sup>21</sup> South African National Archives Source KG reference Ref 9635/99.

<sup>22</sup> *Jewish Life in the South African Country Communities: Vol 1*, researched by South African Friends of Beth Hatefusoth. South African Friends of Beth Hatefutsoth: Johannesburg, 2002, p. 126.

<sup>23</sup> Estate Archives MHG 31637 Supreme Court, Pretoria.

<sup>24</sup> Interview with Martha Lev Zion, Israel 2002.

<sup>25</sup> Leib Levin Schmahmann's brother Nachman Norman Schmahmann [born 1839 in Latvia] married Sophia Dinah Friedberg in Middelburg and later lived in Dullstroom, South Africa.

<sup>26</sup> *Northern Review* Pietersburg Municipality 1903-1973 Souvenir Edition. 1973.

<sup>27</sup> Wherever names are without initials, their first names are unknown.

<sup>28</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives, File L 1929-31, p. 36.

<sup>29</sup> *Zoutpansberg Review* 6 December 1929, p. 4.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.* 7 February 1930, p 4.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.* 10 January 1930, p. 3.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.* 30 May 1930, p 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.* 10 February 1931, p. 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.* 25 November 1930, p. 3.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* 19 June 1931, p. 3.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* 25 July 1930, p. 6.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.* 17 January 1930, p. 4.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.* 7 March 1930, p. 4.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.* 29 August 1930, p. 4.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.* 17 October 1930, p. 2.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* 6 December 1929, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup> *Tzaneen-75 1919-1994*. Edited by Changuion, Louis. Letaba Printers: Tzaneen, 1994, p. 100.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.* p. 166.

<sup>44</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives, Anglo-Boer War File.

<sup>45</sup> *South African Jewish Year Book* 1959/60. Edited by Leon Feldberg. Fieldhill Publishing House Ltd: Johannesburg, 1960, pp. 45-46.

<sup>46</sup> *South African Jewish Times* 27 April 1951.

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<sup>47</sup> Changuion Louis. *Pietersburg: Die eerste eeu 1886-1986*. V&R Printers Pty Ltd: Pretoria, 1986, p. 97.

<sup>48</sup> *Tzaneen-75 1919-1994, op. cit. p. 100*.

<sup>49</sup> South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives A30/10/66.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.* file S p. 299.

<sup>51</sup> The information comes from the Pietersburg Hebrew Congregation minute books and the South African Jewish Board of Deputies Archives file SA.