

CHOL – Community History On-Line

A forum for those involved in preserving the footprint of Southern African Jewish community life in digital form

Community History On-Line CHOL Newsletter #11 November 2024

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The High Holydays in South Africa in the 1950s

We hope you have had meaningful High Holydays, though our thoughts, wherever we are, must be in a turmoil as to where we are going – and what will be the future for our children and grandchildren, in such a fragile and fractious world. It is indeed comforting to look back at the time and place we lived that nurtured a few generations of Jewish South Africans and enabled them/ us go out into the world and do good in numerous ways.



Rosh Hashanah at the Beth Hamedrash Doornfontein Synagogue 1959

This picture above is from Rosh Hashanah at the Beth Hamedrash Doornfontein Synagogue showing the cantor and choir in 1959. The little chap in front on the right, as you look, is Jose Stern, still active and passionate about the music of the synagogue today. The chazzan is **Leibele Schwartz** and the choirmaster is **Marcus Levy, Gus Levy's** elder brother. Leibele was succeeded a short time later I think in 1962 by **Moshe Stern** with **Nathan Baleijkin** as choirmaster. **Jose Stern** remained one of the boy soloists throughout this period.

Does anyone remember this congregation and recognise any of the choristers?

Selichot from Schoonder Street with Cantor Simcha Koussevitzky and choir

Sometimes miraculously there are recordings of special services in South African shuls with great choirs and cantors. From Australia we have found a clandestine recording of a selichot service with Cantor Simcha Koussevitzky and choir. one of the choristers in the Schoonder Street shul hid his tape recorder under the bimah.



Ivor Kosowitz from Perth Australia wrote of the golden age of shul-going in Cape Town: 'When Rosh Hashana came around, the shuls were full to overflowing with standing room only. I remember that every year, the Shamash, Mr Rivkin, blew the Shofar. Except for one year when our Rabbi decided to try. Well, he should have thought otherwise. He could not get even one note out properly. We, in the choir loft, above him could not contain ourselves, and just cracked up laughing actually rolling on the floor! What an embarrassment.

'When we were little, we would get our box of chocolates on Simchat Torah, from the Round Shul. Then we would run as fast as we could to Vredehoek Shul. Once there, we slipped in by a side door to join the line to get our slab of chocolate (the box from the Round Shul was carefully packed into our tallis bags!)

Ivor told us: 'I joined the choir at Schoonder Street and sang for ten years with our famous cantor, Simcha Koussevitzky, who had joined our shul in 1953. I joined in 1965 when I was 15 and sang with them until I was 25 in 1975 shortly before I left for Australia. The choir comprised about twelve adults and fifteen schoolboys. We were all paid for rehearsals and services – I forget how much. There were three tenors, six what we called 'Melody', and three baritones. The boys were the sopranos. The age group of the choir was from 8 to about 60. When I joined, the choirmaster was Simcha's son, Jeff Koussevitzky. He had no special qualifications but had imbibed the liturgy from his father and from singing in the choir with the previous choirmaster.

'The Saturday night **Choral Slichot Service** was the highlight of the year, especially if you were in the choir. We arrived at about 8pm. A 16mm black and white movie was shown, usually a B-rate western 'flick'. We had to hire a projector in those days, and the movie was on large reels of celluloid. After that, a large spread was put on for us by the Ladies Guild.

'As Slichot is at midnight, it was an effort to keep the sopranos (boys under 12) awake, and in any event they were tanked up with sugar so it was extremely difficult for the choir master, Jeff Koussevitzky, to keep them under control. (Later, the kids were 'banned' from the choir.)

One Slichot service, my friend and I smuggled a cassette tape recorder into shul and put it under the bimah. This way we recorded the service which was full of amazing choral pieces. My friend, in Sydney, and I still have this recording today, about 43 years later. So the only two copies in existence, are in Australia

But wonder of wonders in modern technology – you can hear this historic service with Cantor Simcha Koussevitzky and choir, including Ivor, by clicking the link below:

To hear that famous Slichot service with Cantor Simcha Koussevitzky and choir including Ivor Kosowitz click here [📎 SlichotKoussevitsky1970.MP3](#)

To read the whole history of the three big Cape Town bowl synagogues – where they started and where they moved to – and where they are now, see our CHOL 'communities' page for Cape Town or click here [The Great; Vredehoek; Schoonder Street](#)

Maybe you have some recordings of services in South African shuls. Let us know – this is the forum that would appreciate them.

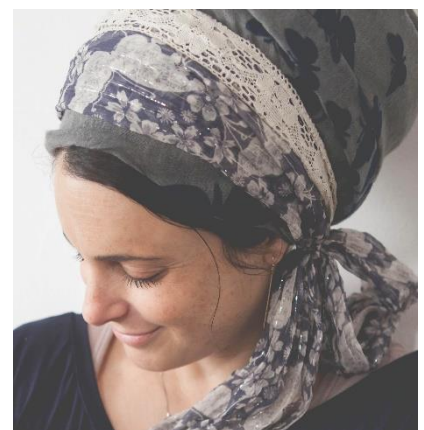


Sessions on New Research on South African Jewish communities

It's wonderful that more and more people are discovering our CHOL – Community History On-Line site, and are asking to be on the mailing list for our zoom sessions.

Many have asked to hear **Reviva Hasson** next Wednesday 6 November 7.00pm (South African time) speak about **The Paradox of South African Jewish Emigration**.

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



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

This talk is one of three sessions looking at academic research into South African Jewry. The link will be given to you by email. Write to info@chol.website to be put on the mailing list. The other two talks in this season are:

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

Full details of these events on the CHOL website home page or here [Next Chol Events](#)

Share Your Stories – a new Zoom meeting, 20 November, 21.30 SA time

Gail Lustig, in Israel, who created and curates the CHOL 'Share Your Stories' programme has arranged a special *Share Your Stories* Zoom meeting for Wednesday 20 November at South African time 21.30.

Gail writes: *This session will be a different format from our previous sessions in that I have invited two women writers, both of whom I know personally, to talk to us about how they got into writing, what they write, and the books they've recently published.* 😊



Natalie Conyer, a 'landsman' originally from Bellville and who's been living in Sydney, Australia, for many years, writes Crime Novels. I've just finished **Shadow City** on my Kindle which I found both fascinating and gripping. Thanks to Schalk Lourens, the detective in the novel, my mind was kept off the awful News broadcasts for large chunks of the day. Natalie's books have been warmly received with her first book 'Present Tense' winning her the Ned Kelly Award in 2020 for the best debut Crime novel of the year! Natalie will be talking to our CHOL stories forum on how she got into writing and specifically the genre she's chosen.



In addition, **Orna Sandler Klein**, an Israeli born to South African parents will share her story of how she also came to write Crime Fiction, Orna's book **A Spy in the Shadows**, has recently been translated and published. It draws on real life experience of working as a Mossad agent for several years.

Gail has a separate email list for the storywriters and readers and listeners. There are some crossovers with this CHOL main list, but if you want to be sure to be informed of story sessions and updates, or send your stories to Gail, please write to gail@chol.website who will also give you the link to the *Share Your Stories* sessions

In the meantime, you can read the amazing collection of stories. Just in the last couple of years, Gail has assembled over a hundred and fifty original stories written by South Africans all over the world today, including Gail herself. The latest nine stories are by **Harry Friedland, Beulah Gross, Lynette Karp, Brenda Kerbel (Kaye), Karine Schomer and Russel Sacks**. They have been posted,

just this week, on the site. <https://www.chol.website/stories.htm> by clicking the first column with the number, you will get the latest stories uploaded at the top. Click the 'writer' column to find the authors in alphabetical order. By clicking a link in the last column you can see and hear the author reading their story.

Gail says: *I so enjoy receiving your stories and formatting them for posting. They've been a wonderful distraction from the tense and traumatic days we're living through.*

gail@chol.website

Welcome to New Members who have joined the CHOL Forum:

Many people have joined the CHOL family via a post on a number of forums and Facebook sites as well as by word of mouth. These include **SAJAC** South African Jews in America run from San Diego, the **Ontario Jewish Archives** and the huge **JewishGen** interactive mailing list on which there are many South Africans. Let me introduce you to some of them. (If you want to be in touch with any of these people, I can pass on your message.)

Gerald Schneider said: I received a copy of your latest posting from Joel Klotnick in Israel. He was visiting us in South Africa for a family function and **mentioned CHOL**, and how interesting and entertaining your postings were. My wife, Zelda (nee Pulerewitz) and I currently live in Johannesburg and of course our parents and grandparents lived in many country towns and places in South Africa, such as Bethal, Reitz and many others. We have a huge interest in the history of the Jews in South Africa.

Lorraine Shapiro, wrote; Thank you for adding me to the mailing list. To give you a little background on me, I was born in Cape Town. My grandparents were all Jewish Immigrants to South Africa, from Lithuania and Palestine (paternal) and East Prussia and England (maternal). I now live in Ann Arbor, Michigan, USA and have been here since my late husband and I emigrated here in 1979. We both were professors at the University of Michigan in the Faculty of Medicine. I **heard about CHOL** from a posting in JewishGen. I had not heard of the organization previously and am slowly working my way through the website. My interest in genealogy goes back about 25 years which, sadly, was too late to interview any of my grandparents. I have an interest in the history of Oudtshoorn where my maternal grandfather, Robert Wolff, was raised. I have written a vignette about his interesting life. I'm trying to collect stories from the Oudtshoorn days via personal histories and newspaper articles. I'm also trying to collect information about my other grandparents' places of birth.

Laurie Budgar wrote: I live in the USA (currently in Colorado, though I grew up in Rochester, NY) and am interested in South African genealogy because one of my ancestors (Alex Eliyahu Budgor) immigrated to Port Elizabeth. For a time, I was communicating with a gentleman named Cecil Lewus, who seemed to have quite a bit of knowledge about the family, but it's been over a year since I last heard from him. I learned about CHOL through the JewishGen mailing list. I haven't had much time to **look at the CHOL website** yet, but I hope to spend some time with it soon. Looking forward to learning more about CHOL's upcoming presentations.

Susan Rand-Lakritz wrote: Hi Geraldine, thank you for adding me to your mailing list. I am originally from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA and have been living in Israel in the Western

Galilee for the past 36 years. My father always told me that there was a branch of the family, my great-grandfather's generation, that emigrated to South Africa. The last contact had been around 1930, and they had lost touch. He tried to find them but wasn't successful. It's a convoluted story, but I was able to find a descendant, now living in London, which was confirmed through DNA testing. I would like to learn more about the South African Jewish community. Full disclosure - I am a **volunteer with the JewishGen Education department** and this knowledge will help me mentor others trying to trace their South African roots. I look forward to attending this lecture series!

Laurence Rabinowitz wrote: I am an ex South African Jew (Johannesburg) now living in London, having left Johannesburg in 1983 to go to Oxford and then stayed in England. **Professor Alan Pinshaw alerted me** to your wonderful newsletter (and sent me a copy). May I be added to the list of recipients please? I think what you are doing is wonderful and so very interesting.

Cyril Milunsky wrote: I was once a chorister at the Oxford Synagogue in Johannesburg for many years so hearing the various cantorial compositions at the Park Avenue Synagogue (PAS) New York was dear to my heart. My father was passionate about chazzanut. I spent my early years in Florida, SA. In 1948 We moved to Greenside so that my brother Aubrey could attend Parktown Boys High School. My life changed dramatically after this relocation as most of the kids at school were now Jewish. After attending high I completed a BA in Liberal Arts at Wits and then went on to Wits Med School. I did my internship at Baragwanath Hospital and then had to do military service in the SADF for one year as an officer. I left South Africa in 1972 for a Residency and Fellowship in Diagnostic Radiology, Nuclear Radiology and Ultrasound in Boston. My wife was from Bangor Maine and we moved to Wilmington Delaware which is 25 miles south of Philadelphia to take up a Radiology hospital position. We still live here happily in Delaware 2 miles from Joe Biden's residence and have two sons and two daughters-in-law and four grandchildren. I love reading History and have become an avid Canasta player and grandfather to our grandkids. **Talking about CHOL**, I have enjoyed this community immensely. Alan Pinshaw a 1969 med school co-graduate of mine recently forwarded a message to me about an upcoming CHOL session.

Ed Goldberg wrote: I was born in Que Que, Southern Rhodesia in 1950 and also lived in Bulawayo and Salisbury for periods of time. In 1973 I moved to Cape Town and emigrated to Canada in 1980. I live in Vancouver. I heard about your presentations from the Jewish Genealogy Society of Oregon mailing list. I have **explored your CHOL website**. I have been involved in genealogy since I was 12 years old, and my website is www.edgoldberg.com

Even more exciting was a message from a long-time member (who wants to remain anonymous) offering a **generous donation to CHOL**. He said 'I should like to do this as a token of my deep appreciation to you and Gail for what you have done and continue to do for our community. We were so touched. We told him that CHOL is of course a labour of love, but that we recognise that even modest amounts of money can kick-start big things. In fact, CHOL itself grew out of somebody, out of the blue, offering me a donation in view of my work on the Kimberley website on which his family appears. I had to think how I could use it to further the aims of putting communities online. That is when I contacted the Kaplan Centre and the South African Jewish Museum (SAJM) and from this contact **CHOL was born** and I was able to send some funds from the donor to both the SAJM and Kaplan Centre for their digitizing projects. Our new donor told us that he would hope that having funds in the bank might give Gail and me, impetus to develop further when an idea springs to mind! So, we are open to ideas.

And it was really heartwarming to receive an email this week from **Caryl Wolff** who was so pleased to find a story on our CHOL memoirs page, written by Beulah Gross, about a famous musician in South Africa called **Olga Ryss**, to whom she was related. Caryl said: *I can't tell you how excited I am to have found an actual person instead of pouring through documents!!!* We have put Caryl in touch with Beulah, whose **story in CHOL** gave her a lead to family she's been looking for! So, as Gail says, the spinning wheel will turn between Los Angeles and Sydney.

Please tell your friends and communities about CHOL.

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**Your feedback to the CHOL Newsletter** is always welcome. Please send to [info@chol.website](mailto:info@chol.website)  
Please keep us informed of your own 'Community History On-Line' activities and interests.

If you know people who might be interested in CHOL activities, please forward this Newsletter to them or pass on their details to CHOL.

You can also say if you would prefer not to receive post from CHOL

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Checkout the CHOL website: www.chol.website which now has on it:

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

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



**SAJM**  
South African Jewish Museum