



# 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 #16 February 2025

---

In this issue Geraldine Auerbach reflects on a visit, after a 13-year gap, to Johannesburg, Plettenberg Bay and Cape Town

---



I am always excited by the first view of the Johannesburg skyline on the way from the airport, nestling in a saucer, flanked by the Ridge of White Waters.

It's daunting meeting family and friends, specially elderly ones, after a long period as there are bound to be shocks, but luckily all had matured well and were looking good and feeling strong. People happily seemed to say the same about me.

---



## Beyachad Johannesburg

I was pleased to have a chance to meet David Saks, who is the Editor of *Jewish Affairs*, and Associate Director of the South African Jewish Board of Deputies. He is also the author of a number of books on South African political, military and Jewish history. (CHOL invited David to compile the excellent CHOL Newsletter #14 in January this year, about *Jewish Affairs*.) He offered to show me round the substantial South African Jewish Board of Deputies archives at Beyachad.



The BEYACHAD building in Raedene, Johannesburg, houses numerous Jewish organisations, including the South African Jewish Board of Deputies, the Community Security Organisation, South African Zionist Federation, United Israel and Communal Fund, Union of Jewish Women of South Africa and the South African Friends of Beit Hatefutsoth.

The building, behind a big grey wall, has no street presence except the address blazoned on the wall: 2 Elray Street. Of necessity, sadly, there are formidable security procedures at the gate there. But once given entry, the surrounding car park, largely vacant when I visited, is bleak with uneven concrete and puddles after rain.

It is not easy to know how to enter the building. Nearest the entrance gate is a dirty glass door with derelict items visible through it – but no means of access. It transpires you have to walk round to the back of the building and up some steps to gain access to the building.

Once inside there is a spacious foyer and staircase leading to the various offices. I saw hardly any people in the building and even David had limited time to be there.



There is a vast amount of material housed in the SAJBD Archives such as congregation minute books; collections of correspondence and collections of newspaper-cuttings all carefully boxed and shelved and stored in secure conditions. As is inevitable in archives of this nature there is much more material than there is currently skilled staff able to sort, catalogue and place it all, in the most

useful places. Very little of the material is digitised, however it is available for researchers to peruse. There are many crates waiting for somebody to work on them, but at least the material is there in a secure environment.

Also in the building is the substantial South African Zionist Federation (SAZF) Library named in 1995 for famous legal mind Isie Maisels who was also a chairman of SAZF. This library had previously been housed in the Zionist building in De Villiers Street on the fringe of Johannesburg's CBD. It contains precious historical material. When all communal organisations came together in Beyachad in 2014, the library went under Beyachad's auspices. This was not ideal; the library suffered neglect and was not on anyone's radar. Funding fluctuated and it could not decide whether it was a lending library or a reference library. When there is a librarian there, requested material can be

forthcoming. It seems one cannot browse the reference collection. As I see it, the fact that hardly anyone comes to the Beyachad building, unless they work there or have some specific business, a library like this is not going to flourish as a lending library.

Rose Norwich and Adrienne Kollenberg, of the SA friends of Beit Hatefutsoth were thanked in 2014 for helping to recreate the library. (They too have their own vast archive collections of taped interviews, photographs and letters sent by former residents of small communities.)

In the picture of the re-established Zionist Federation Library space is Isie Maisels' daughter, Helen Maisels-Trisk (from the South African Jewish report 2014).



You can read more about this library here: <https://www.sajr.co.za/beyachad-library-not-just-a-collection-of-books/>

---

## **New Kimberley community items found – the very first shul 1876**

I was pleased to find in the SAJBD archives, some material on the Kimberley community that I had not come across before.

**A big surprise was a sketch of a Yom Kippur service in the Kimberley synagogue in 1881.** This was the only image I have ever seen of the first synagogue built in 1876 (in use until 1902) which we understood was a corrugated iron and wooden structure much too small for the over 1000 Jewish males in Kimberley at the time.

The sketch below shows a vast interior filled to the brim. Around it are sketches of the movers and shakers in the community of Kimberley at the time. the names are not familiar to me except for the Minister Meyer Mendelssohn, as all the old minute books and papers were sadly, given to the war effort in the 1940s.

This building was superseded in 1902 by the opulent Memorial Road Synagogue, and we had found no picture of the original synagogue, inside or outside until this one.



The letter below, describes the Yom Kippur service in Kimberley in 1881 with a densely packed synagogue and the temperature on 4 October of 103 degrees in the shade! It says that 'business was at a standstill as the diamond market was deserted, showing how strong a hold the Jewish people have succeeded in establishing in Kimberley.'

Whoever wrote it – maybe for the London Jewish Chronicle, warns young men not to set out for Kimberley as the 'place is greatly overstocked' and 'they are likely to fare very badly – except for the capitalists'

**KIMBERLEY: YOM KIPPUR SERVICE**

On Monday 1st, the day of Yom Kippur, the synagogue was densely thronged with members and non-members, many of the latter coming very long distances to be present. The service was impressively read by the Rev. M. Mendelsohn, assisted by the Messrs. Lazarus and Wulfsan. It was extremely hot, the thermometer registering 103 degrees in the shade. The Diamond News yesterday, 4th October, says: "The last days have been almost like a couple of successive Sundays in camp, owing to the observance of the Jewish period of fasting. All the house of business were closed and the diamond market was deserted, a proof how strong a hold the Jewish people have succeeded in establishing in Kimberley." I send you a further paragraph from the Diamond News on the subject of employment here. I wish strongly to point out that the place is already greatly overstocked, and to advise young men who may be contemplating a visit here in the hope of meeting with some desirable employment, that they are likely to fare very badly. Many Jewish young men who have arrived can get nothing to do, and are either seen to be hanging idly about the streets, or calling at the various stores in hope of obtaining work. A friend of mine who advertised for a young man last week, received no less than 37 applications for the vacant post, and a great many of the applicants were Jews. The time for making rapid fortunes here has past expect for the capitalists, and it is very difficult even to obtain a living. Moreover, the expense of coming here is so great, that, with the amount so expended, much good might be done in England. I would specially wish to point this out to the various Jewish Emigration societies. Mechanics can nearly always get employment, and it is a good act to send them here, but the "jack of all trades" and master of none, is frequently squandered up that he has resorted to the gambling table in the hope of winning a meri. The Diamond News says: "Want of employment. - The number of Europeans out of employment in Kimberley is lamentably great and their chances of obtaining it, it is to be feared, is at present very small. It is to be hoped that South African journals, more especially those published at the ports, will unite with our local paper in dissuading all, ~~xxx~~ except handicraftsmen and mechanics, from visiting the Fields ~~xxxx~~ until business improves as such a step is almost certain to involve them in difficulties."

133 66, 66, 67 + 68 omitted: 20-1-82 Page 6 col 2, + Page 7 col 1  
17-2-82 " 7 Col 1 + 3-3-82 page 6 col 2  
10th March, 1882. p. 5, col 2.

CAPEX

## The Baronial Street Shul, Kimberley

There was also a picture of the 1908 plan for the Baronial Street Synagogue that looked ever so grand – it never got to be built quite so fancy, though it is clearly recognisable



from the picture below of the 'Greene shul', in its latter days, after it had ceased all activity. The last services were held there in 1982. Later it was sold and demolished. The proceeds propping up the remaining community for many years.



~~~~~

After a delightful family bar mitzvah in Johannesburg, I spent quality time in Plettenberg Bay with my brother and sister-in-law with wonderful memories of Rabbi Silberhaft conducting the wedding of one of their sons on the beach there in 2008.

## Visiting the Kaplan Centre



In the few days I had in Cape Town, I was pleased to visit the Kaplan Centre in a beautiful building on the upper campus at UCT and meet with Professor Adam Mendelsohn, Katie Garrun, Reviva Hasson and other members of staff. We had a good chat about the exciting activities of the centre and campus politics that are concerning.

I told them about the considerable Jewish music archive that Fay Singer had donated to Stellenbosch University in 2011, and we spoke about making a connection between the Kaplan Centre and the music department at Stellenbosch.

Key persons in this relationship are Ivor Joffe – cantor at Marais Road and Jewish music director for schools and Santie de Jongh, curator of the special collections. Ivor who was a founder member with Fay Singer of the South African Jewish Music Centre has much more material collected since then and is in touch with Santie at Stellenbosch. It will be good to get some research going on South African Jewish music.

## Talk at the South African Jewish Museum (SAJM)





I was delighted to have the opportunity to both visit the excellent Parow exhibition and to talk about CHOL at the South African Jewish Museum (SAJM). Most of the 20 or so people who attended were members of our CHOL community, so it was good to meet face to face those we meet on Zoom. It was more of a chat than a lecture. Jos Kahn ('driver' of the Ceres site) and his wife came from near Ceres and Natie Finkelstein ('driver' of Beaufort West) and his wife were there, as was Professor Richard Mendelsohn ('driver' of Parow) and Anthony Pam who wrote a biography of his father, Matthew Pam, on Memoirs. Afterwards we had lunch together at Café Riteva.



In the picture above are my cousin Molly Kretzmer, Mrs Kahn and Jos Kahn, Richard Mendelsohn, me, Cantor Ivor Joffe and Gavin Morris in the Courtyard of the South African Jewish Museum. Some of us are below as well. The pickled fish was amazing!





I was also pleased to replenish my book collections with some spares purchased from the wonderful Gitlin Library.

What a difference this Jewish 'campus' in Cape Town is to Beyachad in Johannesburg. Here once through the same robust, but comfortable and friendly security, you come to a superb, curated courtyard with trees and water features. From the pictures you can see on one side the back of the Gardens Synagogue, another the Jewish Museum, and a third side houses the excellent Café Riteve and the entrance to the auditorium and Holocaust centre, as well as to the wonderful Jewish lending and reference library – the Jacob Gitlin Library. The place was thronging with life and laughter

with people attending activities in several of these buildings.

Three cheers for Mendel Kaplan whose foresight and funds made all this come to pass.





Pictured is the entrance to the campus at 88 Hatfield Street.

Finally, full of warmth and sunshine, and armed with the important South African goodies including Peck's Anchovette, Bauman's Lemon Creams and Baker's Tennis Biscuits as well as dried mangoes, Peppermint Crisp and biltong, I was happy to leave the iconic mountains and beaches, and with temperatures in the 30s, I was ready to come back to some cool weather in London.

We hope to keep up the contacts and meet again soon in person or on zoom.



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

---

CHOL Newsletter no 16 compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London February 2025

Checkout the CHOL website: [www.chol.website](http://www.chol.website) which now has on it:

- 60 communities <https://chol.website/communities.htm>
- 60 Memoirs <https://chol.website/memoirs.htm>
- 158 original stories <https://chol.website/stories.htm>
- 40 Videos of presentations <https://chol.website/presentations.htm>
- 15 Newsletters

also on the site are resources and journal articles and all our CHOL newsletters

---

**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).

