

CHOL: Community History On-Line: Newsletter #31: Oct 2026

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Who We Are ….

Thank you so much to all those who have already answered our questions about getting to know who we are, where people are based, and what their particular interests are.

Well, not surprisingly we are widely spread around the world. Many of you are in South Africa – mainly in Cape Town – several in Sea Point – with some in Johannesburg. There have been lots who have made Aliyah over the years from the sixties to quite recently, some to join their children who were already in Israel. You are spread all over from Jerusalem and Tel Aviv areas and the Herzliya area to Ra'anana and Modiin.

In the UK we South Africans are mostly in London though we have a few 'natives' on our list in Cambridge and Manchester. Canadians seem to be clustered around Toronto with a few in Vancouver. In America you are spread all over – from cities in Arizona and Texas, to Salt Lake City, Baltimore, Cleveland, Boston, Washington DC, New York, and up and down the West Coast from San Diego via Los Angeles to San Francisco.

Many of these Americans are doctors who with their excellent training at Wits and UCT have contributed enormously to the furtherance of medical knowledge and practice in the USA and the world. Others are retired professors of psychology, psychiatry and chemistry, optometrists, business executives, lawyers and more than one retired High Court Judge. We also have librarians, a charter jet pilot, a rabbi, a tour guide and homemakers. We are all brought together through our love of our Jewish past in Southern Africa.

Thank you for not being shy about how old you are. I was delighted to see that several are in their sixties, but 70s or 80s are more the norm and we have a few very active people well into their 90s! 'Kol Hakavod!'. Many have said they are willing to present something at a CHOL seminar and we welcome that. Please be in touch and tell us what you would like to talk about and for how long you would like to speak, and we will arrange something for February and March 2027.

Many of you have told us who 'you' are – but who are 'we'?

When we first set up CHOL – Community History On-Line, in 2020, the founding committee consisted of Professor Adam Mendelsohn, director of the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies at UCT, Gavin Morris, director of the South African Jewish Museum (SAJM) and their archivists Katie Garrun KC and (at the time) Leila Bloch SAJM as well as Eli Rabinowitz genealogist and traveller from Perth who built the Kimberley website for me, and myself, retired founder director of the

Jewish Music Institute at the University of London and creator of the Kimberley Kehilalinks website with Eli. Since then, we have happily coopted Gail Lustig (Share Your Stories) Dave Bloom (Zimbabwe Jewish Community site) both from Israel, Richard Mendelsohn – Emeritus Associate Professor, History Department, UCT in Cape Town, Jeremy Hodes – Retired librarian and historian in Australia and Bramie Lenhoff in Delaware – who offered to build our CHOL website – www.chol.website – which many of you have said you enjoy visiting regularly.

If you would like to join the committee, (we meet only once or twice a year) please contact info@chol.website. We welcome Naomi Schamroth Rapeport to the committee from 2026.

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Our current Oct / Nov 26, Zoom sessions are called: 'Who Are We?'
curated by Gail Lustig

As we all know, the South African Jewish community has been through many different experiences from the end of the 19th Century to where we are spread around the world today.

In the current season of Zoom meetings, we will focus on getting to know our members even better and hearing the stories of our members themselves. We've called the Series: 'Who Are We?' This initiative will include South Africans everywhere who have had lives of interest, self-discovery and creativity.



For October and November 2026, we planned sessions presented by our fellows in **Australia and New Zealand**. South Africans there are mainly collected round Sydney and Melbourne with a sizable number also in Perth.

The Series began in October with Geoff and Barbara Solarsh, based in Melbourne who spoke about Geoff's time as a doctor in a famous mission hospital in Kwa-Zulu Natal. The alternately read stories of their young family's experiences from their book 'Beyond the Buffalo River'.

This was followed by **Cathy Miller a** graduate from UCT Medical School in 1975, now based in Auckland, New Zealand where she worked in Palliative Care. Cathy shared the story of discovering her 'Grampa's' Jewish roots. Also in this session, **Janina Kahn-Horwitz**, originally from Johannesburg who is the Vice-Rector for International Engagement at Oranim International College in Northern Israel, spoke about the part she has played in the teaching and research of English as a foreign language especially for Hebrew and Arabic speakers.

Both of these sessions can be accessed on the 'Presentations' page of the CHOL website www.chol.website at number 49 and 50.

Previously in our CHOL presentations we have not catered well for Australians timewise, so these talks will hopefully make up for this and be at a comfortable time for them. We will be very happy if all Australians including the speakers will spread the word so that we are sure to have a strong Australian attendance at these sessions, to reward our efforts to accommodate you timewise.

The next presentations are due on 3, 10 and 17 November at the following times. The presentations will be recorded for those not able to join, eg from America.

When	'Who Are We?'	UK	SA	Israel	Perth	Sydney/Melb	Auckland
3 Nov	Robert Kaplan /Nat Conyer From Sydney	9:00	11:00	11:00	17:00	20:00	22:00
10 Nov	Jeremy Hodes, Beulah Gross and	9:00	11:00	11:00	17:00	20:00	22:00
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	others convened by Marvin Cohen From Melbourne						
17 Nov	Gail to compile	9.00	11.00	11.00	17:00	20:00	22.00

The speakers on 3 November will be: (the link is in the email)



Robert Kaplan is a Forensic Psychiatrist and Clinical Professor at the Western Sydney University. He grew up in Somerset West. After studying Medicine, he specialized in Psychiatry. As he says, his 'dark side' came come out and crime, killers, genocide and other such cheerful topics became his subject! His most well-read article has been about the sex slaver and psychopath who could, just, have been Jack the Ripper. He has been trying for many years to write a book *Helderberg Life* .



Natalie Conyer was born and grew up in Bellville. She decamped to Sydney in the early seventies and has been there ever since. She's a late starter when it comes to writing, and since 2020 has produced three books: *Present Tense*, *Shadow City* and *Finding the Bones*. Natalie's short stories have featured in several anthologies and a collection, titled *The Book Club & Other Stories*, was published in 2024.

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For those who have not yet answered our few questions: here they are again: (just hit reply, fill in your answers, and send this back to me)

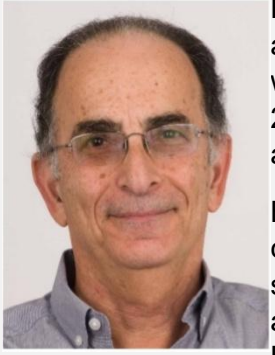
1. Where are you based now?
2. Where were you born and where did you grow up?
3. What are your main interests in CHOL?
4. What is your occupation?
5. Dare we ask how old you are? (It's quite relevant as we seem to be oldies that still have memories of South Africa – so please say).
6. Are you willing to present something that may be of interest to other CHOL-nics in person in your area or on Zoom?
7. Have you looked at the CHOL website lately? www.chol.website
8. Do you like writing?

If you know anyone who is interested in South African Jewish community history – do steer them our way (they can write to info@chol.website) – or you can send us their details.

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Latest Website activity:

Philip Stodel is refining Maitland and launching a website for Robertson



Philip Stodel, whose family lived in **Maitland** and is now in Israel, has created a fulsome and detailed site for the place where he grew up. Having assisted with creating a magnificent physical reunion for Jewish families of Maitland in 2005, Philip was keen, in 2024, to use the CHOL platform to update and make all this material available in a user-friendly and communicative way.

Bramie Lenhoff has been a great partner, fulfilling all Philip's interesting and challenging desires, including making a detailed annotated plan of Maitland showing where the Jewish families had lived. Expat Maitlanders have been so appreciative. You can see their comments in the Maitland website 'Visitors Book'.

While remaining focused on Maitland, Philip has now turned his attention to the Jewish Community of Robertson. I for one never knew that there was a town in South Africa called Robertson – or where it was. Now I know that the Jewish community of Robertson was one of the oldest and most enduring country communities in the Western Cape. Situated in the fertile Breede River Valley about 150 kilometres east of Cape Town, Robertson developed into an important agricultural and commercial centre during the late 19th century. Jewish settlers from Eastern Europe were among the town's early traders, merchants, artisans, farmers, and professionals, and for many decades they formed an integral part of local civic and economic life.



Philip says:

It all started just over a year ago when a cousin of mine in Johannesburg asked me if I knew anything about the Robertson Jewish community. She sent me a picture of the Shul property that was up for sale. I thought I'd be smart and point her to the Robertson page of CHOL – but lo and behold – there was nothing there. I was stumped, but undeterred I looked for some information on the internet. There was a considerable amount to be found, and I thought it could benefit from treatment according to the CHOL community protocols.

My research led me to Solly Epstein's Facebook page. Solly is a grandson of Reverend Josefowitz who served the Robertson community for some 50 years. Also, Solly's family had once owned the Commercial Hotel. I made contact with him, and he was able to provide photos and answer my questions.

I passed everything on to Geraldine, with the suggestion that we create the Robertson platform with whatever we had. She, of course, batted the project straight back to me and Bramie. While still developing Maitland is my main activity, I accepted the challenge.

I didn't want simply to regurgitate what others had published. Instead, I wanted the content to be as unique as possible, without losing what I had found in the public domain, and hence I included much of that material as links or attachments.

So that random enquiry from my cousin ultimately led to the creation of the Robertson website. It also led me to the current owner of the Shul property, who, believe it or not, got married there earlier this year! You can read more about this and see the pictures at no 1 on the Articles page – in an article called 'Robertson Synagogue – Two Anecdotes'.

Go to the CHOL website www.chol.website click 'communities' and then in the search space ask for 'Robertson 'and enjoy the pages of the timeline, the synagogue saga and some of the people who lived there.



Calitzdorp and Rustenburg Communities websites launched:

Naomi Schamroth Rapeport who is the 'driver' of both these detailed and copious sites which we are also launching in this Newsletter says:

I am a third generation South African with family roots in Calitzdorp and Rustenburg. My great grandfather emigrated from Horodok,

Belarus and initially settled in Calitzdorp, Cape Colony. After the collapse of the ostrich feather industry in 1916, the family moved to Rustenburg in the Western Transvaal. I was born in Rustenburg, schooled in Durban and graduated in medicine at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg.

After I married in 1981, my parents emigrated to Israel to join 2 of my 3 siblings. They would visit South Africa regularly and during their visits always met up with their extended family. In 1988 the genealogical software programme, Brothers' Keeper was released and I embarked on tracing the families back to Eastern Europe and within South Africa. When my parents died in the 1990s, their family trees had been recorded. This culminated in 2014 in the compilation of a book 'The Rapeport Meyer family sojourn in South Africa'

Calitzdorp



In Calitzdorp, confusion reigned regarding the Rapeport family as some descendants who had left Calitzdorp for the USA were of the opinion that they had been abandoned by their father who they thought was my great grandfather. It was subsequently established that there were in fact 2 Rapeport families, resident in the village, Lazarus Rapeport and Louis Rapeport. The two men were probably cousins or landsleit. They both left the village and are buried in Cradock and Pretoria respectively.

I first visited the village in 1982. I returned 46 years later in 2026 and visited the Calitzdorp Museum. The curator kindly gave me a list of the Jewish families who lived in the town. The family names were corroborated with those published in Jewish Life in the South African Country Communities. Volume II, 2004. As the community basically imploded after the collapse of the ostrich feather industry, I traced the progenitor families and their descendants.

Rustenburg Naomi writes:

The Rustenburg community was obviously chosen as four generations of Rapeports lived in the town from 1916 until 1966; Louis Rapeport, William Rapeport, Jack Rapeport and my sisters and I. The Jewish community was a cohesive community and although my family left in 1966, contact was kept with members of the community – in particular the Cantor, Epstein, Kramer, Sichel and Wulfsohn families.

CHOL's cemetery project on Rustenburg was used as a blueprint to trace our families. However, as a number of the families were transiently resident in the town, they also needed to be tracked. In the past one had to visit the National Archives of South Africa to get information about families. Today with the assistance of scanned archival documents on-line and various genealogical internet sites, it is possible to get verified and accurate information about the families. Tremendous thanks to Bramie Lenhoff for putting together these two websites and for his infinite patience while I collated the information on both towns. Although it was said of Rustenburg that 'only two things happen in that dull dorp every day - the sun rises in the morning and sets again at night', growing up in the town in a cohesive community was wonderful. There was a tremendous sense of freedom and camaraderie. All that one had to do to socialise was get onto a bicycle and ride to cheder at the shul, to a friend, or to the local bioscope. Naomi Schamroth Rapeport, Ramat Gan, Israel.



This picture from about 1925 shows children from 12 Jewish families with Abraham Herman Wulfsohn, who was President of the Rustenburg Jewish Community at the time. The children were from the families of Solomon and Malka Been, Morris and Lily Chatzkelowitz, Adolf and Sarah Cohen, Bernard and Polly Harris, Isadore and Lena Liebenthal, 'Udie' and Rebecca Lifman, Isador and Lily Lederman, Wolf Herman and Julie Mundel, Ralph and Lizzie Pleskus, Abraham Herman and Nora Wulfsohn, Moses Simon and Flora Wulfsohn and Philip and Mary Wulfsohn.

Both Philip and Naomi hope that more descendants of the families of Robertson, Calitzdorp and Rustenburg will give their input about their families who lived in these towns.

These sites now join over sixty communities commemorated on the CHOL website. They stretch geographically from Cape Town to Mauritius and alphabetically from Beaufort West to Zimbabwe. **Another site new on the CHOL list** is the revamped CHOL site of **Bloemfontein**.

Fast on their heels will be CHOL websites for Montagu, Benoni and Germiston. To search for your community, go to www.chol.website and choose communities. There is a search facility there. If you spot any missing information, let us know and, by the way, if there is a missing community, maybe you can see what you can find in your family archives or on the internet and start a CHOL website for it too, just as Philip and Naomi have done. Bramie and I and others, now experienced, are here to help guide you through the process.

It has been a huge pleasure for us all to work with Bramie, creating and refining the protocols and the layout of the CHOL website in general and each of the CHOL community sites, for easy and clear navigation. His patience, skill and guidance have been awesome, working with all the different 'drivers' who have been inspired to memorialise their families and communities.

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Featuring South African Jewish Community Cemeteries
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One of Bramie's special interests is in the cemeteries scattered about South African small towns. Often, they are the only evidence that a vibrant Jewish Community had lived there. He has undertaken an immense project of collecting all the data and has created tables for each place showing the grounds and itemising each death in as much detail as is possible linking also to the picture of gravestones where available. Bramie says:

The smaller Jewish communities beyond the major South African centres were established in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and most of them had dwindled and disappeared by the late 20th century. Today the Jewish cemeteries are all that remain as evidence of most of these Jewish communities' existence, and many of these cemeteries are threatened by neglect, the elements and vandalism.

Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft of the Small Jewish Communities Association of South Africa (SJCA-SA) is the Spiritual Leader of these dwindling and erstwhile communities, providing pastoral care and preserving the Jewish heritage across South Africa and other Southern African countries. Since 1993 he has led the mission of preserving and documenting cemeteries, including unmarked graves, in addition to ministering to and supporting remaining Jewish residents.

***This cemetery section of the CHOL website** contains tables and photographs of graves for a large fraction of the smaller Jewish communities of South Africa as well as for Jewish cemeteries in other Southern African countries. The tables can be sorted by surname, first name, date of death and age of death by clicking on the column headings. Clicking each surname that is a link will bring up a photograph of the gravestone if we have access to one. If you have more information on the lives of the people lying in these cemeteries, you could help to create a more meaningful memorial to them by providing material to create a town website; please write to info@chol.website.*

I am very grateful to have permission to use the records of the South African Jewish Rootsbank at the Kaplan Centre for Jewish studies at the University of Cape Town; these searchable records provide the most comprehensive coverage of Southern African Jewish cemeteries. Photographs have been kindly provided by Rabbi Moshe Silberhaft of the Small Jewish Communities Association of South Africa (SJCA-SA); some additional photographs are obtained by linking to the eGGSA web site. Most of the cemeteries also include unmarked graves; these are not included in the tables. Go to the CHOL website www.chol.website and click the 'Cemeteries' page.

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CHOL Newsletter #31, October 2026, compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London.
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 contact info@chol.website. CHOL Facebook Group

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www.chol.website now has on it: (refresh your browser to see the latest uploads)

- 64 Communities
- 69 Memoirs
- 202 original Stories
- 50 Videos of Presentations
- 30 Newsletters

Feel free to browse also the **resources** and **journal articles** on the CHOL website

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Kaplan Centre JEWISH STUDIES

SAJM South African Jewish Museum
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