



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 Newsletter # 13 December 2024

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Progress Report for the year 2024

2024 has been an active year for CHOL.

‘Membership’

Our membership (as reflected in our email list) has grown from just under 250 at the beginning of the year, to just over 600, as more individuals and organisations around the world, get to know about our activities and ask to be included. We have connected with Jewish South Africans via SAJAC – South African Jewish Americans, the JewishGen discussion group and various individual and Facebook community groups.

The CHOL website www.chol.website

The CHOL website was initiated in 2022. Such a site had become necessary as there was no other suitable place online to focus on all the community websites or store and publish the original stories that Gail was eliciting from writers. We conceived the CHOL website as a portal where stories, memoirs and other information about South African Jewish communities could be logically and easily accessed, from any online place. When Bramie Lenhoff offered to create the site and manage it for CHOL – it took off. It now comprises: (click the links to go to each page)

1. What CHOL is [about](#) and who is involved
2. [Stories](#) shared by South Africans everywhere who enjoy writing
3. Personal or family [memoirs](#)
4. [Presentations](#) by members and guests on CHOL international Zoom seminars
5. Links to [journals](#) with articles of South African interest
6. Links to the websites of South African Jewish [communities](#)
7. Links to [resources](#) for further research and information
8. The CHOL [Newsletters](#)
9. How to [Contact](#) CHOL

Communities

In this section we bring to life again the people and activities of many Jewish communities across Southern Africa. From **Beaufort West** (driven by Natie Finkelstein) and **Bellville** (driven by Stan Loon) to **Worcester** (Jeremy Hodes) and **Zimbabwe** (Dave Bloom) residents or former residents conjure up the heydays of these communities and the people who made them tick. There is a **CHOL template** for new community websites that is growing apace as new 'drivers' come along to memorialise their communities. Some of the 'community' entries are based on previous platforms such as JewishGen's Kehilalinks. Others are based on essays, and some, such as **Durban** and **Pietersburg**, on PhD theses. All these community sites, document the timeline of the community, the religious life, the people who lived there and their activities and also the cemetery.

In January 2024, there were 45 'Communities'. By December, as new drivers have approached us, there are now 57. The latest is the comprehensive CHOL website for **Maitland**, being created by former citizen Philip Stodel. For **Roodepoort** driven by Geoff Boner and other places, entries are being added as the families are becoming aware and offering their stories. We are also in talks with 'drivers' from **Riversdale**, and **Woodstock and Salt River**, on creating CHOL sites for their Jewish Communities.

If you are thinking, why is my community not there? – it is because nobody has yet come forward to ask or to provide the material. CHOL does not choose or look for the content for the community sites. CHOL is a 'platform' for those who are interested in recording the footprint of their community. We are ready to guide and help you to do so.

We are all extremely grateful to Bramie Lenhoff, who with patience and skill, uploads this precious information, onto the CHOL website, in a way that it is sensibly and easily accessible.

Stories

The stories section is absolutely unique to CHOL. It was Gail Loon Lustig's dream and idea in 2022 to nurture story writers, like herself, to share their efforts in all genres of writing, in practice, mainly creative non-fiction. These 'from the heart' stories shed light on the past and the present and mostly feel familiar to our readers. Working out how to store, and as it were, 'publish' the stories, led to the creation of the CHOL website as a repository and access point. This has grown even beyond Gail's expectations. Already after just 18 months by the beginning of 2024 there were 111 original stories posted on the site. Today this has grown to 153 Stories and more individuals who write stories are getting in touch with gail@chol.website. During the year – even though a tense and uncomfortable year especially for Gail and others in Israel – two wonderful sessions were hosted in March and November where writers read their stories or spoke about their writing of books that have recently been published. You can re-live them on the presentations page at numbers 26 and 36. And in the previous **CHOL Newsletter, no 12**, Gail took you on a tour highlighting the stories.

Memoirs

There are now 60 memoirs on the CHOL website (up from 28 in January this year). They

include personal bio-sketches, diaries of soldiers and POWs, doctors' reminiscences of training and practice and family sagas from Lithuania and Latvia via a sojourn in South Africa, to America, Israel and elsewhere. There is a powerful search engine on each page of the website so if you are looking for references to 'women', 'Latvia', 'military' or 'medicine' etc the relevant articles will come up. We are adding keywords to the descriptions of each memoir, and we also tell you the number of pages in each – which range from 7 to 300.

Presentations

CHOL members connected several times on Zoom during the year. With attendances usually numbering in the 60s, the forum has been steadily coalescing, with members getting to know one another.

1. **In November / December** last year CHOL ran 8 sessions on South African Jews associated with music. Seven of these were recorded and can be instantly seen under 'music' on the presentations page. (numbers 17 to 23)
2. **In February** this year, CHOL presented a session where Rabbi Silberhaft of the South African small communities' association (SJCA), and Barney Horwitz the Chairman of SJCA and also and the Chairman of the remaining Kimberley community, 'blessed' the virtual cemetery of Kimberley, and some of its long-standing residents spoke about their families buried there. (no 25)
3. **In March and April 2024**, Mark Wade presented three sessions about *Legends and Legacies*, the amazing film series that he had produced on the history and scope of South African Jewish life. You can see these presentations and excerpts from the films at numbers 27, 28 and 29.
4. **In September** Gail Lustig curated a series of three events: Naomi Schamroth Rapeport on South African Second World War veterans' role in the fledgling State of Israel; Professor Richard Mendelsohn on his work for the celebration of the Jews of Parow (numbers 31 and 34); and Danielle Lockwood spoke again on her father the journalist and lyricist from Kroonstad Herbert Kretzmer. However, Danielle preferred this not to be recorded.
5. **In November /December** professors Shirli Gilbert of University College London (UCL) and Adam Mendelsohn of the University of Cape Town (UCT) co- curated a series on academic research on South African Jewish life that can be seen again (as with all our CHOL presentations via the South African Jewish Museum YouTube channel) on the CHOL website at presentations number 35, 37 and 38.

Resources, journals articles

Also on the CHOL website www.chol.website are resources and journal articles that can help individuals with their own research into their families and communities. These include a link to the journal Professor Shirli Gilbert mentioned **Jewish Historical Studies: A Journal of English Speaking Jewry** of which **Volume 55 • Issue 1 • 2024** is a special edition devoted to [South African Jews](#).

What Next for CHOL?

CHOL is proving to be a very good platform for amassing and preserving documents and presentations of personal and family information that may not be available elsewhere. It is also a useful forum for young scholars to present their work.

Suggestions for forthcoming Zoom series that have cropped up **include Jews and Agriculture** – smouse and general dealers supplying farmers, Jewish farmers, introducing innovative stock, crops and processes, milling, irrigation and creating and supplying implements. Another suggestion was to have some sessions about **Yiddish life and activity in South Africa**.

There are many subjects to be tapped: Do you have suggestions of topics for future Zoom seminars? We invite all those with knowledge, experience and information to please offer to participate in presentations such as the above.

Should CHOL raise funds or special projects?

CHOL is run by a few individual volunteers. Nothing we do or have done, has required funds to operate and we don't intend to change that. All participants do so without charge. Yet, some of our members have been moved to offer funds to CHOL. One member offered and has given a sum of £500 'as a token of my deep appreciation to you and Gail for what you have done and continue to do for our community.'

That has presented us with a conundrum. What could we spend it on which took forward the mission of CHOL and allowed organic growth? I know from experience that even a small amount of money can kick-start big things. We must think carefully how to use funds.

Shirli Gilbert, at our last zoom, mentioned that support for young scholars to undertake research on topics of South African Jewish life and times, could be very helpful in bringing more scholars to the table. It seems clear that if we can offer some funds, say even just say £2,500 a year to a PhD student, this might just tip the balance of helping them to embark on such a course.

So, the question is, are there more of you, who are reading this Newsletter who might want to subscribe to a CHOL fund, which could in the first instance support scholars into South African Jewish research? Please, see my little questionnaire at the end, to say if you would like to contribute to such a CHOL fund. Scholars can then apply to CHOL for support. You might have some projects to suggest where a few hundred pounds might make a difference.

CHOL Forum Interactive list:

With a forum of people with a focused interest like this, I want you to have instant access to each other. It is exciting to see questions posed and answers coming – immediate research that can only come from this possibility. The system I use is run by an academic Institute in the UK. I run such interactive lists on JISCmail for 'Suppressed Music' and for the

'International Ernest Bloch Society' that are very successful and appreciated. I feel it is time to off you again the benefits of an interactive list for CHOL.

This will not replace the existing mailing list that you are on and via which we send you Newsletters and other information, which will continue, though there may be some overlap. There needs to be some robust guidelines as to behaviour on such an interactive list such as: posts to be positive and relevant to South African Jewish Community History On-Line, no rudeness and no personal attacks allowed. List members must be aware of whether they want to reply to an individual or to the whole list and act accordingly.

It's not compulsory to be on the CHOL interactive list however it will be useful if I could add everyone (unless you specifically ask me not to). There are easy ways to manage the list, eg by opting for a weekly digest so you don't get emails as they come through. And its super easy to unsubscribe by scrolling down to the bottom and clicking 'unsubscribe'

I feel we should give it another go and see how it works out. Let me know on the questionnaire below how you feel about this.

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### Your answers please?

It will be really helpful if you can give me an indication of how you feel about some of the things I have suggested in this Annual Report/Newsletter

|                                                                                  |              |          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|----------|
| Name                                                                             |              |          |
| I'd like to contribute to the CHOL scholarship fund                              | Yes[ ] no[ ] | Comment  |
| I would like to contribute something to a seminar on Jews and Agriculture        | Yes[ ] no[ ] | Comment: |
| I would like to contribute something to a seminar on Yiddish life and activities | Yes[ ] no[ ] | Comment: |
| I'd like to suggest the following topic/s                                        |              | Comment: |
| I would like to be on the CHOL interactive list                                  | Yes[ ] no[ ] | Comment: |
| Any other comments                                                               |              |          |

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CHOL Newsletter no 13 compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London, December 2024

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

- 57 communities <https://chol.website/communities.htm>
- 60 Memoirs <https://chol.website/memoirs.htm>
- 153 original stories <https://chol.website/stories.htm>
- 38 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).  
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