

# CHOL – Community History On-Line

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

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Community History On-Line

Newsletter #6

June 2024

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## Pietersburg and the Limpopo area

I am so often amazed to find that behind (or even in front of) so many events and activities that we hear about in history, there is a member of our Community who discovered, initiated, created, facilitated or funded it. Reading Charlotte Wiener's amazing books about the Jews who settled in the northern Transvaal from the 1860s to the 1960s, I was struck by some of these:

### Cradle of Humankind:

I have heard of the treasures of human bone discoveries at **Makapansgat** 16 kilometers north-east of Potgietersrus. Professors Raymond Dart and Phillip Tobias of Wits University and their students made annual visits to the caves there. But did we know it was a Jewish schoolteacher **Wilfred Eitzmann**, in Pietersburg, who collected samples of bone in 1924/5 from Makapansgat Caves and it was he who sent them to Professor Raymond Dart at the University of Witwatersrand. Eitzmann also discovered the 'Makapansgat Pebble' which is naturally shaped to resemble a human face from 3 million years ago. It is believed that an Australopithecus found it and brought it into the cave. It has been suggested that this represents the earliest example of symbolic thinking of early hominids.

Most famous, was Dart's 'discovery' of the 'missing link' – the **child of Taung** – a bipedal ape-man. Dart was not digging to find it. It was brought to him. Dart acknowledged the crucial role played by his first female science student, Josephine Salmons. (We have found no Jewish connection to her.) In 1924, she brought to his attention the existence of a fossilised skull that she saw at the house of Edwin



Gilbert Izod, director of the Northern Lime Company and proprietor of a quarry in Taung. The skull was kept as an ornament on his mantelpiece above the fireplace at his home. In bringing the skull to show Dart, she set in motion a chain of events that led to the discovery of the 'child skull of Taung' and that strongly indicated the rise of mankind Africa. **Professor Philip Tobias** continued Dart's work in the study of paleoanthropological sites in South Africa that now have earned world heritage status as the 'Cradle of Mankind'. He inspired generations of medical science students, by visiting those and other South African caves and made the findings world renowned. (Checkout more on the pages for the Jewish Community of [Taung](#).)

## Citrus plantations in Northern Transvaal

We have surely heard of the great citrus **plantations in Zebedelia** sending South African 'outspan' oranges all over the world. But did we realise it was **Isidore William Schlesinger**, one of a large family of Hungarian-Jewish immigrants who came via America to South Africa who developed the single largest citrus estate in the world.



His Zebedelia Estate produced three million cartons of citrus annually, of which 70% was exported. Schlesinger employed thousands of labourers and brought fame and prosperity to the area. Although he had never lived permanently in Zebedelia, when Schlesinger died in 1949 at the age of 78, he requested to be buried on his citrus estate. The Pietersburg Chevrah Kadisha performed the last rites, and he was buried on a hill facing his Zebedelia Estate. A few years later when Mrs Schlesinger died, she was buried next to him. Her son John flew to Zebedelia for her funeral. In 1974, the South African government bought Zebedelia Estate for R8 million. Today, very sadly the Zebedelia Estate has been neglected, buildings burned to the ground and trees left in ruins – however, the Schlesingers' graves are still there!

We surely also know the SABC – but did we realise, I wonder, that it was Schlesinger who established the country's first chain of radio stations which he sold to the government, and which became known as the South African Broadcasting Corporation. The Schlesinger family were also pioneers in many other fields in South Africa, but these morsels have been gleaned from just a few moments delving into **Charlotte Wieners** lovingly assembled and fascinating books chronicling the personal stories of the Jews who settled in the dorps and towns of the Northern Transvaal 'Limpopo' area between the 1860s and 1960s.

**Charlotte Wiener** grew up in East London, studied Pharmacy at Rhodes and then went to work in Johannesburg. After she married her husband Dennis Wiener, she went to live in Pietersburg where they had their three children. Whilst bringing them up, Charlotte studied for her BA in Judaica and Psychology at UNISA. Her MA Thesis was on the *Jews of Pietersburg/Polokwane*. She says she had so much information about the Jewish families of the surrounding towns of Limpopo, that she decided to write a book called 'The Jewish Country Communities of Limpopo / Northern Transvaal'. Dennis and I are living in Netanya, Israel.

You can explore both of Charlotte's major works the on 'communities' pages of the CHOL website by clicking these links: [Limpopo](#) and [Pietersburg](#) I am sure you will find treasures there too.

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## New on the CHOL – Community History On-Line – website:

[Ceres](#) – new names and information, fruit growers and transport to the Diamond Fields

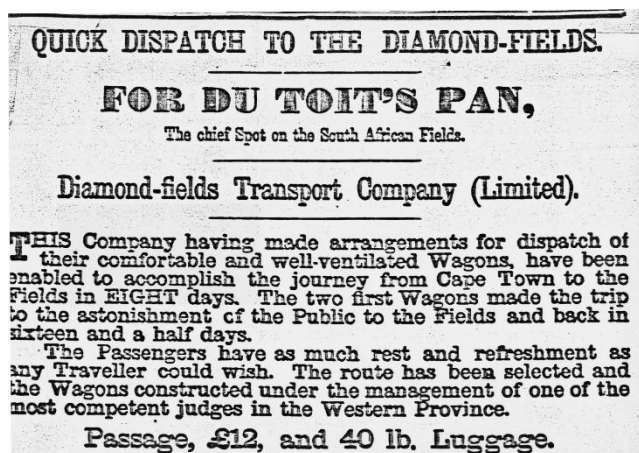
Esme Jacobson <esmejacobson@afrihost.co.za> of Cape Town writes: **Thank you for CHOL Newsletter #5** - especially on the topic of Ceres. I spent my childhood there. My parents Isaac and Hannach Jacobson lived in Ceres from 1931 to 1950. My father Isaac Jacobson was the first Jewish Master of a Freemasons Lodge in Ceres. He also ran the Jewish Benevolent Society. They bought Kirsch's store which was on the opposite corner to Baumann's stores. There was also a Jacobs family in Ceres. The late Mannie Jacobs, a prominent dentist in Cape Town, was their son. Their daughter went to study music in London and became a very prominent teacher of master pupils in London. There was also a family Kleinman and a family Friedman and a dentist called Koonin. So, the Ceres history is not quite complete!!!!!! Esme

You are quite right Esme, **no community is ever complete!** It's thanks to people like you that can spot that gaps and are able to supply information that helps to flesh out the story of these communities. All the names you have mentioned and information about the people you have given, have now been added to the list on the Ceres 'people' pages.

<https://chol.website/communities/ceres/people.htm>

## The Diamond Fields Inland Transport Company – established by Adolph Arnholz of Ceres.

Did you know that in 1870 the 'Diamond Field Inland Transport Company' was founded by Adolph



Arnholz – an early member of the Ceres Jewish Community. The company introduced a weekly service of operated horse-drawn passenger coaches between Cape Town to Du Toit's pan for hundreds of travellers. Although the head office was in Cape Town, the directors were all of Ceres. And as early as 1870, Ceres was one of the main stations on the digger's road to the North and the last important outpost before the desert-like journey through the Karoo had to be tackled. Read this fascinating description on the Ceres

Togryers Museum website <https://ceresmuseum.co.za/main/history/the-route-to-the-diamondfields/>

**And talking, as we were, of fruit estates**, it was Jewish Community members who were influential in creating the successful farms, and markets for deciduous fruits in the Ceres area. Checkout the **Sarembock** brothers who imported fruit and fruit trees from New Zealand, Australia, Canada and California. He laid out his farm near Ceres around 1906. His brother also bought farms in the area. They had learned the art of deciduous storage and marketing methods that set an example to other fruit farmers. It is largely thanks to them that Ceres became the largest producer and exporter of South African deciduous fruit. Then there was the 'Plum King' **Theo Kirsch**. He produced more plums than any other individual farmer in South Africa and represented the Union of Plum Growers on the Deciduous Fruit Board. He was a founder of Ceres Fruit Growers.

### Stellenbosch – the last resident dies

I was sad to read on the Cape Town Jewish cemetery website, that the last Jew left in Stellenbosch, passed away on 13 June. Dr Gerald Rosendorff, seen here on the right with Rabbi Silberhaft (left) and others, was the person who opened the synagogue and led the prayers on Friday nights until very recently. He was able to enjoy the centenary celebrations Shabbaton on 21/22 October 2023. (photo: Cape Jewish Chronicle) See the Stellenbosch CHOL website here [Stellenbosch](#)



### Roodepoort

Profiles of the **Blumsohn** family and of the **Josselowitz** family have been uploaded onto the Roodepoort CHOL website. They join profiles of the **Boner, Rosowsky, Nafte and Schneider** families and can be reached from the Roodepoort website 'people' page: <https://chol.website/communities/roodepoort/people.htm>

### Kimberley – famous KHS old boys and 'Favourite Home Tried Recipes'

**Marvin Cohen** ex-Upington, who had been a boarder at Kimberley Boys' High School sent us some excerpts from the KHS school magazines of his era. He says: 'I particularly enjoyed reading the articles and even obituaries of famous old boys like **Benjamin Bennett** who was a famous crime reporter and novelist in Cape Town and **Velva Schrire** who set up the Cardiac Unit at Groote Schuur – without which Chris Barnard would not have been able to conduct heart transplant operations. While the honours boards and photos highlighted the high achievers academically, and on the sports fields, there were many more who made their mark in other ways, and I have included some of these old boys who kept in touch with the school.' You can read these excerpts on the Kimberley website here: [KHS school Magazine extracts](#) 1960-1964



**The Kimberley cookbook** *Favourite Home Tried Recipes* that I contributed to the South African Jewish cookbook project, has been scanned and added to the website. It's 24 pages are there - including kitchen spills. I clearly tried to make Bessie Stoller's chocolate cake, judging by the scribbles in the margins (page 17). There is **Hannah Frank's** Gefilte Fish (page 3) **Flo Diamond's** Lemon Fish (page 4) **Gertie Sussman's** Prune Chimas

(sic) (page 6) and **Frieda Benjamin's** Apricot Chutney (page 7). This was published by the **Union of Jewish Women** just after the war in 1946 (probably the oldest of such endeavours). I particularly enjoyed the little frugal tips at the end on page 21/22 to make tea go further, to freshen stale buns and save butter etc. It is on **Gavin Beinart Smollen's** fantastic cookbook site. Be patient as it takes a while to come up. <https://sajewishcookbooks.org.za/cookbook/favourite-home-tried-recipes/>

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## South African Jewish Military History:

We have added some further military 'memoirs' to the website:

### Jewish contributions 1668-1998

Lt Col William J Bergman, who grew up in Bloemfontein and now lives in Johannesburg, wrote a booklet in 2020 called ***The Jewish Contribution to South African Military History and Other Interesting Facts***. It is described as 'A personal view of the Jewish contribution to South African military history 1668 to 1998 by Bill Bergman, who spent 25 years in the Permanent South African National Defence Force, as the Staff Officer Electrical Engineering Services. Bill has also lectured at Wits on electrical engineering in the building industry. He was awarded the South African Institute of Electrical Engineering 'Engineer of the Year Award' in 2011. (88 pp) You can read it here [The Jewish Contribution to South African Military History and Other Interesting Facts](#)

**Prisoner of War experiences** 750 Jewish men were taken prisoner at Tobruk and others at Sidi Rezegh. For her thesis Karen Horn interviewed many soldiers, Jewish and not, who were taken PoW. This paper gives one a true picture of the terrible ordeal that the soldiers underwent. (245 pp) [South African Prisoner-of-War Experience during and after World War II: 1939 - c. 1950](#)

### These new additions, join the existing military memoirs of

[Kimberley Jews and the Second World War](#) The stories of most of the 50 Jewish men who joined the South African or British army and served 'up north' in army, air force and navy and who all thankfully came home safely. (49 pp)

A [Soldier and His Diary](#) Biography of Corporal Solomon Green (1911-1982) and his war diary in Libya of 1942 (190 pp - large print)

And the presentation by Naomi Schamroth of South African Jewish soldiers in the Second World War <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=viKQ1Ud0gps>

Other memoirs include experiences in the Boer War and wars in Israel

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## Share Your Stories – ‘October 7’

It's been close on nine months since October 7<sup>th</sup>. For most Israelis who've lived through this period, it goes without saying that the general feeling amongst us all is complex- filled with sadness, anxiety, fear, frustration, anger but ultimately, hope does still exist. Hope that we will find a way to move on, raise our children safely, with smiles on their faces and happiness in their souls.



The varied accounts, feelings and opinions held by 18 of our forum of writers, submitted to CHOL, have been combined in a document for all to read.

### [October 7th – 18 Mail Entries of Members of the Forum](#)

What has happened in Israel is only part of the greater state of unrest that exists for Jews throughout the world right now. You are all invited to send your stories which might already be saved on your computers, or happen unexpectedly as the muse hits! Please send them to me at [gail@chol.website](mailto:gail@chol.website)

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## SA SIG@ the Jewish Gen South Africa Special Interest Group

In 1998 Saul Issroff and colleagues at the Jewish Gen Hollywood Chai Seminar, initiated a **South African Special Interest Group**. Their aims were to heighten interest in and create more resources for those seeking their Jewish roots. One objective was to establish a Newsletter. The first one came out in January 1999. This continued for nearly twenty years until July 2018 with up to four issues a year. These Newsletters contain articles of great interest to CHOL – which in some ways in a direct, perhaps more modern descendant of the SA SIG. (Our emphasis is of course on community history rather than individual genealogy).

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In each issue of the CHOL Newsletter we will flag up material from the **SA SIG Newsletters**. In the first issue, edited by Mike Getz (contents are displayed) there are articles on Dutch Jewry and on generations of Jews who lived in Woodstock. They are listed by the road they lived on and their professions, decade by decade. There is a list of ‘members’ of SA SIG with their email addresses (sadly I think out of date) but interesting to see their areas of interest.

SA SIG is listed on the ‘Resources’ page of the CHOL website. And you can access volume 1 no 1 directly here [SA SIG newsletter 1](#)

## Our next CHOL International Zoom Seminars – in September

Join us on Zoom to hear three of our favourite presenters in September, on Tuesdays at 6.00pm UK time (SA: 7.00pm and Israel: 8.00pm).

- Naomi Schamroth Rapeport on 10 September
- Danielle Lockwood (née Kretzmer) on 17 September
- Professor Richard Mendelsohn on 24 September

Save the dates. More details in the coming months on the content of these sessions.

To register email [info@chol.website](mailto:info@chol.website).

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Your feedback to the Newsletter would be welcome 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 would rather not receive CHOL communications please email [info@chol.website](mailto:info@chol.website))

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**CHOL Newsletter no 6** compiled by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London June 2024, comes to you with every good wish for calm and peace in a troubled world.

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

- 50 communities <https://chol.website/communities.htm>
  - 43 Memoirs <https://chol.website/memoirs.htm>
  - 142 original stories <https://chol.website/stories.htm>
  - 29 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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**SAJM**  
South African Jewish Museum