

# JEWISH AFFAIRS

# Chanukah 2015



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# JEWISH AFFAIRS

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JEWISH AFFAIRS aims also to publish essays of scholarly research on all subjects of Jewish interest, with special emphasis on aspects of South African Jewish life and thought. Scholarly research papers that make an original contribution to their chosen field of enquiry will be submitted to the normal processes of academic refereeing before being accepted for publication.

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The SA Jewish Board of Deputies is committed to dialogue and free enquiry. It aims to protect human rights and to strive for better relations among peoples of diverse cultural backgrounds in South Africa.

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### Erratum

In the article by Leon Levy in the Rosh Hashanah 2015 issue, the lady in the photograph with Mr Levy was incorrectly identified as Joy Kropman. It is, in fact, Joy Coplan. The editor apologises for the error

Original, unpublished essays of between 1 000 and 6 000 words on all subjects are invited, and should be sent to:

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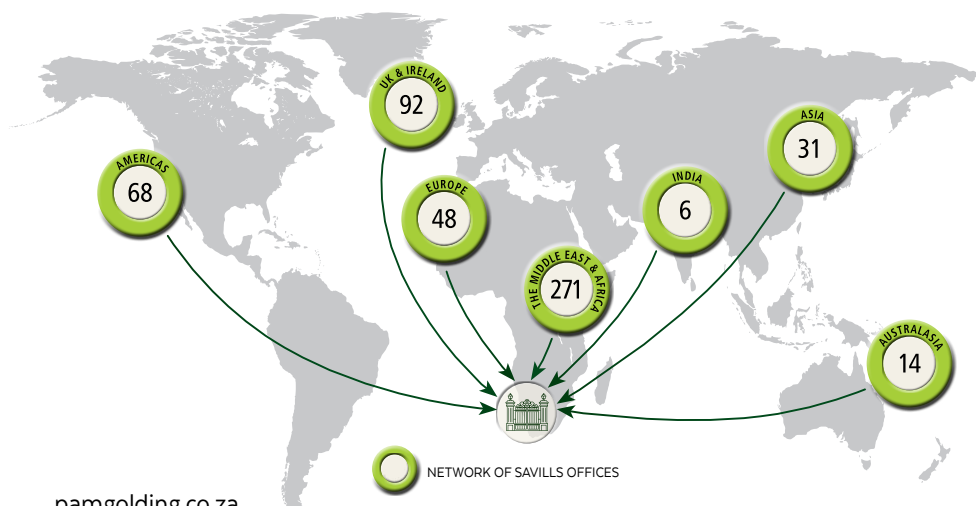
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# JEWISH AFFAIRS

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Editor: David Saks

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## OBITUARY:

**MARCUS ARKIN (1926-2015)**

We are greatly saddened by the passing of Professor Marcus Arkin in Durban on 3 September. Professor Arkin was a distinguished academic, specializing in the field of economic history, and also served as Director-General of the SA Zionist Federation from 1973 until his retirement in 1985. His research and prolific writings continued throughout his career, earning him world-wide acclaim. Over many years, he generously contributed many scholarly articles to *Jewish Affairs*, and was also a long-serving member of its Editorial Board.



Marcus Arkin was born in Cape Town in 1926, matriculating from Sea Point Boys' High School. He read economics and history at the University of Cape Town (UCT), gaining the degrees of BA and BCom, both with distinction. After further research in London on a British Council Scholarship, he was awarded his doctorate in economics by UCT in 1959. He served successively as junior lecturer (1948-52), lecturer (1955-62) and senior lecturer at UCT (1963-66). His focus during this period was on the history of the English East India Company's activities at the Cape and resulted in a standard four part economic history: *John Company at the Cape* (1962, awarded the Founders' Medal and prize, Economic Society of South Africa); *Supplies for Napoleon's Gaolers* (1964), *Agency and Island* (1965) and *Storm in a Teacup* (1973). Other publications included *South African Economic Development: an Outline Survey* (1966), *Economists and Economic Historians* (1968), *Introducing Economics: the Science of Scarcity* (1971) and *The Economist at the Breakfast Table* (1971). He was also a consultant to the *Dictionary of South African Biography*.

In 1967 Dr Arkin was appointed to the Chair of Economics and Economic History at Rhodes University, Grahamstown, where he also became Dean of the Faculty of Social Science.

In 1973, he took up the position of Director-General of the SA Zionist Federation. His research shifted more to a

study of Zionism and Jewish economic themes, resulting in the publication of the collection of essays, *Aspects of Jewish Economic History* (1975) and the editorship of *South African Jewry: A Contemporary Survey* (1984). His final book, *One People - One Destiny: Some Explorations in Jewish Affairs* appeared in 1989.

Besides his numerous contributions to journals, Professor Arkin also broadcast talks on the SABC English Service. Six of these were published by SA Zionist Federation in 1977, under the title *The Zionist Idea: A History and Evaluation*. In 1973, he became a member of the Jewish Agency's higher education committee and regularly attended conferences of the World Zionist Organisation and Jewish Agency in Israel. He was the only South African member of the President of Israel's ongoing seminar on 'Israel and World Jewry'. He served on the board of directors of the Jewish Telegraphic Agency, New York, and was a member of the Scientific Advisory Board of the Institute for Interdisciplinary Research on the Jewish Family and Communities in Israel and the Diaspora, attached to Tel Aviv University.

After his retirement from the SAZF and relocation to Durban, he served as Professor in the Department of Economics, University of Durban-Westville, from 1986 to 1991 and was also a member of the Durban Transport Management Board. From 1991 to 1995, he acted as Chairman of the Natal Zionist Council. In his final retirement, he took up the position of Chairman of the Editorial Board of the periodical *Hashalom, Monthly Journal of the KwaZulu-Natal Jewish Community*, to which he contributed a typically erudite column on a broad range of Jewish themes for over twenty years right up to the time of his final illness.

Marcus Arkin married Suzanne Mirvish in 1948. She predeceased him in December 2000. He is survived by his children, Anthony (who likewise became a Professor of Economics) and Glenda.

\*

Naomi Musiker



# HERMAN KALLENBACH – LITHUANIA REMEMBERS A FORGOTTEN SON

\*

Kathy Munroe

Friday 2 October 2015 was Mohandas Gandhi's birthday. The man who became the great Mahatma Gandhi was born in 1869 in Porbandar, Gujarat, in Western India, to a Hindu merchant class family. Some two years later, on 1 March 1871, Herman Kallenbach was born in Žemaičių Naumištis in the then Russian empire (today Lithuania), the third of seven children of a German-Jewish family. His father was a Hebrew teacher and, later, a timber merchant. The birthplace of Kallenbach was also known as Neustadt and in fact went through several name changes.

Gandhi became a lawyer and studied law at the Inner Temple in London. Kallenbach became an architect and studied architecture in Stuttgart and Munich. Gandhi first arrived in South Africa in 1893 and left to return permanently to India in 1914. He was assassinated in 1948. Kallenbach immigrated to South Africa in 1896 to join his uncles and practised successfully as an architect in Johannesburg over the period 1896 to his death in 1945. Kallenbach's niece Hanna Lazar subsequently transported his ashes to Israel for burial on Kibbutz Degania and crated the Kallenbach library (some 5000 books) as a bequest by Kallenbach to the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Gandhi married and had four sons and many descendants. Some of his descendants still live in South Africa and are active in efforts to commemorate the life and work of Gandhi in this country. Kallenbach did not marry and had no offspring, but Kallenbach relations (nieces and nephews) still honour his memory.

Kallenbach is primarily remembered today because of his friendship with Gandhi. Also of importance, however, is the subject of the architecture of the various firms and partnerships formed by him with others (Phillips, Reynolds,

Kennedy, Furner) and some not unimpressive works of architecture in Johannesburg that came out of the creative practices. This writer is currently researching the architecture of Kallenbach and his partnerships.

One starts with the bare bones of chronology, profession, national origin and religion because Gandhi and Kallenbach were very much contemporaries whose paths, despite the geographical distance of their roots, crossed in South Africa in 1904. For ten years, theirs was a close and intense friendship – they were 'soulmates'. For much of this time, they lived together in Johannesburg - in Orchards, Mountain View and at the community they created south of Johannesburg, Tolstoy Farm, near Lawley. Kallenbach became the devotee of Gandhi and together they embraced a simple ascetic lifestyle - home grown farm vegetables, hand crafted sandals and communal living. Their pet names for one another were "Upper House" (Gandhi) and "Lower House" (Kallenbach). Both were great followers of Tolstoy and of his philosophy that urged a move back to the land and a communal and self-sufficient way of life.



**Satyagraha House in Orchards, Johannesburg, where Gandhi and Kallenbach lived in 1907-8 (photo courtesy of The Heritage Portal)**

**Kathy Munro** is an Honorary Associate Professor in the School of Architecture and Planning at the University of the Witwatersrand. Having trained as an economic historian, she now researches and writes on historical architecture and heritage matters and has a regular book review column on the online Heritage Portal (where an earlier version of this article first appeared). She is a member of the Board of the Johannesburg Heritage Foundation and a voluntary docent at the Wits Arts Museum. Currently, she is researching a selection of Johannesburg architects, including Herman Kallenbach and his partnerships.

Kallenbach was a successful architect and property investor and developer in Johannesburg. It was his income and capital that financed Gandhi's living expenses and the purchase of land for the creation of an ideal community, Tolstoy Farm. The friendship between Gandhi and Kallenbach was based on strong mutual attraction, shared interests in diet and vegetarianism and the enduring of physical tests, and deep philosophical debate about

human values. Together they hammered out the tactics and organization of passive, non-violent resistance and Satyagraha (devotion to the truth), and applied these evolving methods to oppose the Transvaal government's new law insisting on the registration of the Indian population. It was the start of an eight year battle for civil rights for Indians and human equality.

This is the background to the event that took place in Rusne, Lithuania at the beginning of October. Rusne, a small town of about 3000 people, also claims to be the birthplace of Hermann Kallenbach. It is located on Rusne Island in the Nemunas Delta, Šilutė district municipality, nine kms from Šilutė, the capital, and borders on the Russian oblast of Kaliningrad on the Baltic. In a prime spot alongside the Skirvyta River and close to the historic Jewish synagogue, a 1.9 metre bronze life size statue of Gandhi and Kallenbach has been erected. On 2 October, it was unveiled by the Prime Minister of Lithuania, Algirdus Butkevicius, together with Gandhi's grandson, Gopal Krishna Gandhi and one of Gandhi's great grandsons. The focus on that occasion was on the link between Lithuania and India via Gandhi and Kallenbach, but Johannesburg, the place of their close friendship, and the South African link in general seems to have been missed. I wondered whether a South African diplomat or a South African Jewish institutional representative had

been invited to the prestigious event.

There is a fascinating story as to how the statue came to be commissioned. A local teacher of ethics, Vytautas Toleikis, was inspired by Gandhi's philosophy and the Lithuanian origins of his close friend Kallenbach to initiate the project to immortalise the friendship between the two men through a bronze statue. The statue's sculptor, Romas Kvintas, made a close study of photographs of Gandhi and Kallenbach, and also watched the 1982 Richard Attenborough biopic of Gandhi.

"The monument comes as a testimony to Indo-Lithuanian friendship. Above the many things that connect our two nations, the monument to Gandhi and Kallenbach will tower as a symbol epitomising a single individual's impact on the larger history of mankind," said Lithuanian ambassador to India Laimonas Talat-Kelp ša, who turned fundraiser to bring this project to fruition. The local municipality contributed €10 000 to landscape and create a pedestrian walkway. Another source of funding was the Good Will Foundation, a Lithuanian Jewish body which itself is funded from state compensatory funds for the disastrous losses of the Jewish population in the Holocaust.

The sculpture, symbolising peace as much between Russia and Lithuania as between Lithuania and India, is expected to become a major tourist attraction. During summer, 32 cruise liners dock at the Klaipeda seaport, each carrying around 3000 passengers, and local officials anticipate a threefold increase in tourism.

"While Gandhi gave the world the concept of non-violent resistance, which Lithuania also successfully employed during its struggle with the Soviet oppression, Kallenbach was pivotal in shaping Gandhi's ideas and testing them in practice. We believe this monument in Rusne will serve as a powerful reminder that one man also matters in history," added Laimonas Talat-Kelp and quoted in *The Times of India* report (available online).

In 1914, Kallenbach planned to accompany Gandhi to India and they left South Africa together by ship. However on reaching Southampton, while Gandhi and his wife proceeded to India, Kallenbach was interned as a German enemy alien (World War I was by then underway) and spent a considerable stretch of time on the Isle of Man between 1915 and 1917. He returned to South Africa after the war and resumed his architectural practice in Johannesburg, with partners A M Kennedy and Furner. He also purchased farm lands and saw through the proclamation of the township of Linksfeld Ridge, built his own house on New Mountain Road and worked with labourers to make the lane that became Kallenbach Drive. It was not until 1937 that Kallenbach again connected with Gandhi when he visited him at his Indian ashram. He visited India again in 1939.



**Monument to Herman Kallenbach and Mohandas Gandhi in Rusne, Lithuania. The backdrop is the Skirvyta River (photo Martynas Ambrazas)**

I draw attention to this fascinating item of international news because it is surely the right time for Johannesburg to honour Kallenbach, just as it has honoured Gandhi with the figure on Gandhi Square and the bust at the Constitutional Court. The first home in Johannesburg that he and Gandhi shared, for some 18 months, was The Kraal, in Pine Road, Orchards (built by Kallenbach in 1907). It has now been restored (architect, the late Rocco Bosman) as a guest house with the appeal of a peaceful Gandhi-force retreat and named Satyagraha House. The house received a prestigious blue courtesy of the City of Johannesburg a few years ago. We also have Kallenbach Drive and Hannablen Street (named for Hanna Lazar, Kallenbach's niece) and the suburb of Linksfield Ridge is Kallenbach's legacy. But we do not have a statue to Kallenbach. Alkis Doucakis has written a local history of the North-Eastern suburbs from the perspective of the Kallenbach-Gandhi friendship, which includes some excellent photographs,<sup>1</sup> and Shimon Lev's *Soulmates: The Story of Mahatma Gandhi and Hermann Kallenbach* (Orient Blackswan, 2012) likewise explores the details of the friendship.

There is a strong Lithuanian-South African connection, because so many Jewish pioneers emigrated from Lithuania to South Africa. They were part of that late 19<sup>th</sup> - early 20<sup>th</sup> Century diaspora, when being Jewish in the Russian Romanov Empire did not offer certain prospects for a settled life, when young Jewish men were subject to military conscription and Jewish communities felt unprotected from pogroms. Another South African with Lithuanian roots was Sammy Marks, who immigrated to South Africa in 1869 and who hailed from the small town of Neustadt in the same Silute district as Kallenbach. Neustadt was the birth town of Kallenbach [this has been confirmed by others]. It has had several names through its turbulent past, one being Kudirkos Naumištis, or Naishtot. The Polish name was Władysławów.

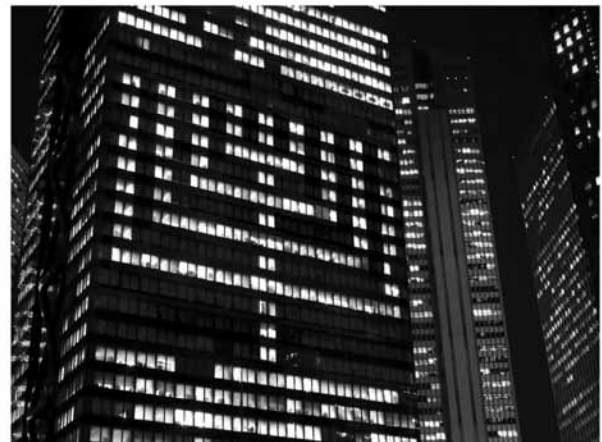
Almost as a footnote, there appears to be a certain inaccuracy in the Gandhi-Kallenbach statue in that it casts Gandhi as the iconic 'cotton-robed' Indian politician fighting British colonialism in India and Kallenbach as his acolyte circa 1937 or 1939, when Kallenbach went to India and reconnected with Gandhi. The inspiration is the portrayal of the two figures by Ben Kingsley (Gandhi) and Gunter Maria Halmer (Kallenbach) in the 1982 Attenborough film. However, the period of the intense friendship between Gandhi and Kallenbach was in those pre-World War I years in Johannesburg, when Gandhi was still attired in Western garb (a business suit, albeit that one photo shows him in a suit combined with sandals). On his return to South Africa, Kallenbach reverted to the rather more formal dress of a prominent and busy city architect. Bernard Cooke, a South African architect who worked for Kallenbach in

1929 as a junior first year student, remembered Kallenbach as "a stocky, burly man who wore coarse tweed suits smelling like haystacks".<sup>2</sup>

I have always wanted to visit Kaliningrad because of its ancient roots as the German Hanseatic town of Königsberg, its more recent Russian history and, finally, because of its being the "amber capital of the Baltic". Now, I am attracted and enticed by the Gandhi – Kallenbach monument. Perhaps even more significantly, here is the moment to tie in friendship India, Lithuania and South Africa with a South African version of the Rusne monument. Kallenbach's association with Kallenbach Drive and Linksfield Ridge also deserves commemoration in a couple of blue heritage plaques.

## NOTES

- 1 Alkis Doucakis, *In the Footsteps of Gandhi: An illustrated history of Johannesburg's Linksfield Ridge and environs*, 2007, published by Colors, illustrated, 80 pp.
- 2 Letter from B Cooke to Flo Bird, 7/4/1999.



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## **“THERE WAS ONCE A HOME....”**

### **MEMORIES OF THE LITHUANIAN SHTETLS IN THE AFRIKANER IDISHE TSAYTUNG, 1952-54**

\*

Veronica Belling

On 20 February 1953 A. Sarid, editor of the *Afrikaner Idische Tsaytung* ('African Jewish Newspaper', 1932-1985), appealed to readers to send in information and photographs of their home towns in Eastern Europe for a forthcoming series, subsequently entitled, *Iz Geven Amol a Heym* ('There Was Once a Home'). This series followed on a photographic series, *Bilder Fun der Alter Heym* ('Pictures of the Old Country'), that had begun the previous year – comprising photographs of groups of people in Lithuania taken in Ponevezh, Shavli, Kupishok and Shatt in the 1920s and 1930s. The series of photo reportages that followed incorporated a far larger number of towns: 25 in Lithuania – Aniksht, Birzh, Kelme, Kovarsk, Krakinova, Kupishok, Kurshan, Linkova, Oren, Plungian, Ponevezh, Poshelat, Poshvitin, Posvol, Radvilishok, Rakishok, Rasin, Shavli, Shidlova, Vashki, Vilkomir, Yanishok, Yanova, Yurburg and Zhager, and four in Poland – Lodz, Ostrolenka, Rozhan, Vashilkova. It is very likely that the series was inspired by the appearance in 1952 of the memorial book to Rakishok and its environs, published by the Rakishker Landsmanshaft in Johannesburg.<sup>1</sup> Rakishok itself is included among the articles in the series, with an article published in the Rakishok Yizkor book by Berl Stein describing the life of the Chassidim in the town.

My attention was first alerted to this series, the references to which are listed on the Jewishgen website, by Ann Rabinowitz of Miami Florida. It was she who suggested that I translate them. The result was a modest publication by the Isaac & Jessie Kaplan Centre at the University of Cape Town, launched in June this year.

Besides the information, what makes this series invaluable is that they include a total of 67 photographs. With the exception of the towns of Oran, Shidlova and Yanova in Lithuania and Lodz in Poland, there are photographs attached to all of the articles. Of these, seven

are of views of the towns and six are individual portraits. The remaining 54 are of groups of people belonging to the various organisations that proliferated during the period between the two World Wars, when Jewish life flourished in an independent Lithuania and in Poland. Each photograph has captions with the names of every single individual and, if the information was available, where they were living at the time of publication – South Africa, Israel, North and South America – or whether they had perished during the Nazi Holocaust.

By far the most popular organisations are those of the Zionists (11 photos), including Ha-Shomer ha-Tsa'ir, Hechalutz Ha-Tsa'ir, Herzlia and Bnoth Zion; next come the Yiddish Theatre groups (8); students and teachers of the Folkshul (6); Maccabi sports groups (5); a kindergarten group in Kupishok (2) and a Hebrew High School or Gimnasye in Yurburg (2). Others are of lesser known groups, such as the Jewish People's Bank, of which there were eighty branches in Lithuania; an Esperanto Group in Vilna; Linat Ha-Tsedek – the Home for the Sick in Vashki; a Library Committee in Yanishok; the Yiddish reading room in Shatt; the Borochoy Study Circle, a Memorial evening to the Yiddish author, *Ba'al Machshoves* and the Fire Commando (a very important group in Lithuanian towns, where the houses are made of wood and where fires were endemic) in Ponevezh; the Community Council and the Management of Oze – the Society for the Protection of the Health of the Jews – in Radvilishok and a Soup Kitchen in Ostrolenka, Poland.

Some of the people in the photos, such as the musician and composer Hirsh Ichilchik (who became a well-known personality in early Johannesburg) is featured in the photograph of the Fire Commando in his native Ponevezh; Mr Blesovski, who would become a well-known Hebrew teacher in Cape Town, is featured as the Director of the Hebrew school in his native Posvol; another Cape Town Hebrew teacher, Mr Achron, appears among a group of teachers in his native Yurburg. The book has a detailed index of names and places to facilitate a search for relatives. Already, members of our community have identified their relatives in the photographs.

The articles are preceded by an introduction

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*Dr. Veronica Belling is the author of Bibliography of South African Jewry (1997), Yiddish Theatre in South Africa (2008), and the translator of Leibl Feldman's The Jews of Johannesburg (2007) and Yakov Azriel Davidson: His Writings in the Yiddish Newspaper, Der Afrikaner, 1911-1913 (2009).*



**The Fire Commando in Ponevezh. The leader of the orchestra, the musician and conductor, Hirsh Ichilchik, is seated, centre, wearing civilian clothes. *Purim-shpils* in Ponevezh were often held in the hall of the Fire Commando**

that states the purpose of the series:

One often hears people say, Lithuania is no more, the old country is no more. What this really means is that the *Jews* are no longer there. Because 'Lite-land' with everything in it is still there. Woe to us – it is *Juden rein*, empty of living Jews. The aim of this series of articles, which will begin in the next issue, is not to mourn the unparalleled destruction of the Old Country. However as it is not possible to describe the extermination of the Jews in every shtetl, instead we would like to tell you about the Jews who were living there, and to describe the contours of the shtetl, the landscape, hill and dale, forest and stream, the memories that we who came from there brought along in our hearts.

The selection of the shtetls does not necessarily reflect the main shtetls from where the Jews of South Africa originate, but seems to have been dependent on the editor's own knowledge, as well as the information that was sent in to the newspaper. The cities of Vilna and Kovno are conspicuous by their absence. On the other hand, there is an article about Vashki, one of the tiniest of the shtetls. Of the larger towns, there is only a very brief report on Shavli, although Ponevezh and particularly Vilkomir are well covered.

#### **Who was the editor, A. Sarid?**

The majority of the articles were written by one person, the editor, A. Sarid. Fourteen of the total of 25 villages and towns in Lithuania that are described are based on his personal experiences and his acquaintance with the inhabitants of the shtetls. These are the articles on Aniksht, Birzh, Kovarsk, Krakinova, Kupishok, Kurshan, Linkova, Ponevezh, Poshelat, Posvol, Shavli, Vashki, Vilkomir and Yanova. In the articles on Kupishok, Shavli and Posvol, he describes

the desperate plight of the Jewish refugees who had fled Hitler's invasion of Poland in 1939 and who were massing on the Lithuanian border in the area of No Man's land. Other articles, such as his piece on Ponevezh and on Aniksht, depict romantic interludes, while the article on Yanova describes how a dispute between two Jews was settled on the eve of *Yom Kippur* before the *Kol Nidre* service.

Unfortunately, I was not able to establish the identity of A. Sarid. He is not listed among the official editors of the newspaper.<sup>2</sup> The Sarid family in Israel is well known for having been in possession of the Gandhi-Kallenbach correspondence, that they sold a couple of years ago. However, attempts to make contact with them yielded no results. There was some biographical information for A. Sarid in his articles which provided several clues. He was a journalist in Lithuania and had been part of a delegation that was sent to speak to the Jewish communities in the different shtetls at the time of the outbreak of World War II. He was in Lithuania until approximately 1942 when, according to one of his articles, he was in the Shavli Ghetto during the week of Passover. However, there the trail dries up. How he managed to leave and when he immigrated to South Africa is not revealed.

There was always a possibility that A Sarid was a pseudonym, as in Hebrew it means 'A Remnant'. It is the name that was adopted by the family of the Israeli politician and former leader of the Meretz Party, Yossi Sarid. Since the publication of *There Was Once a Home*, I became more and more convinced that A. Sarid must have been a pseudonym for Levi Shalit (born 1916), as only a native Lithuanian and a journalist who had made his mark even before the outbreak of WWII could have been privy to so much inside knowledge of his fellow countryman. With the German invasion in June 1941, he was interned in the Shavli Ghetto, where he became active in an underground movement, known as 'Masada'. In 1944, he was sent first to the Stutthof concentration camp near Danzig and then to Dachau, where he was liberated by the Americans in 1945. After the liberation he went to Israel, where his mother had made her home. His father had been murdered in Dachau. In 1951, he came to South Africa on a cultural mission under the auspices of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies. While in South Africa he was invited to edit the *Afrikaner Idishe Tsaytung*, which he did until the newspaper's closure in 1985.<sup>3</sup> Levi Shalit died in Israel in 1994.

In June this year I attended a Jewish Library convention in Washington, and through an American author who had researched the Shavli Ghetto whom I met there, I was able to contact Levi Shalit's brother, Dov, in Israel. Dov Shalit<sup>4</sup> had also written for the *Afrikaner Idishe Tsaytung* and was also in contact with his

brother's wife in Israel. He did not remember the series, and initially completely denied the possibility of A. Sarid, being a pseudonym for his brother Levi. However, when on request I sent him a couple of the articles in the original Yiddish, he acknowledged the similarity in style. Moreover, I subsequently discovered that some of the personalities mentioned in Levi's Yiddish diary of the Shavli Ghetto, *Azey Zaynen Mir Geshtorben – So We Died*, published in Munich in 1949,<sup>5</sup> are also mentioned in the articles. However, whether the articles were indeed written by Levi Shalit will never be known for sure as the answer has been taken to his grave.

Besides the articles by Sarid himself, another six articles are based on material that was sent in to the newspaper. The information for Poshvitin was provided by L. Chazan (of Port Elizabeth). Mordechai Jubiler (Johannesburg) reported on Radvilishok; Yosef Yitskhok Shein (Johannesburg) described the adjacent shtetls of Shidlova and Rasin; Mr Yakov Lerman, a former teacher at the Hebrew gymnasium in Yurburg, wrote the article on Yurburg; L. Goldberg sent the material for Kelme; Yerakhmiel Green (Boksburg) sent the material for Yanishok; and both V. Sachar (Rondebosch, Cape Town) and Sarid wrote about Kupishok.

The articles on Plungian, Zhager, Oran and Rakishok were written by journalists or writers in their own right. The article on Plungian was written by Zalman Levi, the last editor of the South African Yiddish literary journal *Dorem Afrike* (1948-1991); that on Oran was by Israel Kurgan, who later published his stories and reminiscences in a book, *Zikhroynes fun Shtetl* (Memories of the Shtetl, Tel-Aviv, 1971). The article on Zhager was by Solomon Fedler, whose description of his shtetl was published under the title, *Shalekhet* (Falling Leaves) in Johannesburg in 1971 and the poems of his wife, Chaya, that he quotes, were published in two anthologies, *Shtile Gezangen* (Quiet Songs, Johannesburg, 1951) and *Bleter Fal* (Falling Leaves, Johannesburg, 1954). As mentioned above, the journalist Berl Stein was responsible for the section on Rakishok.

Some descriptions are very brief and are confined to a single episode, such as that of Yanova or Shavli. The most comprehensive descriptions of the Lithuanian shtetls are those of Kupishok, Plungian, Radvilishok, Rasin, Shidlova, Vilkomir, and Yanishok.

Almost as a postscript, the series also includes three very brief descriptions of the Polish shtetls of Ostrolenka, Rozhan and Vashilkova, as well as a brief description of the city of Lodz. These were sent in by readers from Poland and, although not as full or as rich as those of the Lithuanian shtetls, they do give one an idea of the place. Sarid apologises for this shortcoming, stating that he knows little about the Polish shtetls and can therefore do little to enhance these descriptions.

As indicated in the introduction, the descriptions are extremely broad. Although there are descriptions of the landscape, and occasionally of the physical layout of the town, the main focus is on the people who were living in the shtetl and who were murdered by the Nazis and their Lithuanian collaborators. They include personalities such as Dr Ganandski, a Jewish military doctor in Vashki, who dedicated his life to treating the Lithuanian peasants as well as the Jews; Shaytele, the beautiful young manager of the Jewish People's Bank in Vashki, who extended easy credit to the Jews, and who loved to party through the night; Mrs Gelbart, an exceptionally beautiful and fashion conscious woman with excellent taste and European manners, whose home was the most modern in the shtetl of Kurshan; Ari Glazman from Posvol, who wrote full-blooded stories about the Lithuanian people and the landscape, that were not appreciated by his Jewish compatriots; Sore Pogrimanski from Poshelat, a brilliant intellectual, and an activist in the international Orthodox women's movement, Beys Yankev. But descriptions also include the humblest of Jews, the water carrier, the shul caller, the coach driver, the stoker in the *Besmedresh*, the porter and many others.

Some shtetls are distinguished by their adherence to a particular type of Judaism. Examples are Ponevezh, famed for its *yeshiva*, headed by Rabbi Yosef Kahaneman, whose fundraising campaign, extended as far afield as Umtata and Windhoek in southern Africa. Although the Gaon of Vilna, Eliyahu ben Shlomoh Zalman (1720-1797) spearheaded the ideological battle against the spread of Chassidism, as we read in Berl Stein's description of Rakishok in north-eastern Lithuania, it reigned supreme over there. Lithuania was also famous for the development of the Mussar movement. The latter is attributed to Rabbi Israel Salanter (Lipkin, 1810-1883), whose followers established their own *yeshivas*, one such is described in the article on Kelme. My successor in the Jewish Studies Library, Juan-Paul Burke, a graduate of the Johannesburg Yeshivah, was particularly thrilled to find an "extraordinary description of an individual, Reb Motel Pogrimanski z"l, who was a legend... A Rabbi and Gaon of whom stories heard in Yeshivah are here corroborated besides those that have been passed down from Telz to Cleveland to Johannesburg."

But even more than the physical descriptions, the articles convey a feeling of the quality of life: the fear of officialdom, the isolation, the tedium of daily life, where even a fire serves to break the monotony and weddings were week-long celebrations. Yet despite the poverty and the daily struggle, the writers recall their former homes with nostalgia and the longing is poignant, as can be seen in this description of the shtetl of Aniksht: "Give me these Jews, the



dim *Besmedresh*, together with its enraptured listeners and uplifting speeches. You can have your big cities with their brightly lit halls. Oh! If it were only possible to change places!"

Finally more than anything else, the South African connection is evident in the reciprocal relationship that existed between the Jewish communities of Lithuania and those in South Africa. As Sarid portrays in his description of the small shtetl of Krakinova, neither could have existed without the other and each enriched the other in different ways.

The support from Africa was a great help to many families in Lithuania. There were villages – and Krakinova, in particular – where the majority of the families survived only thanks to the help that they received from the other side of the ocean. When one considers the matter more profoundly, one realizes that those who were giving assistance were in turn supported by the ‘inspiration’ of the Lithuanian shtetls. The Jews of Africa exported pounds to the shtetl, but in return they imported Jewish spirituality, warm bonds, and a great deal of love that was conveyed in heart-warming letters and close family ties.

Despite the fact that Sarid states explicitly in his introduction that his intention is not to describe how, when and where the Jews in each individual shtetl were killed, this cannot be avoided and allusions to these tragic events are contained in most of the descriptions. Even before Lithuania was occupied by the German forces in June and July 1941, pogroms that claimed thousands of Jewish lives erupted throughout the country. With the arrival of the armed forces, the deliberate killing was taken over by detachments of German *Einsatzgruppen* (mobile killing units), supported by Lithuanian auxiliaries.

Jews were incarcerated in concentration points intended to serve as sites for mass shootings. These included the Ponary forest near Vilna, the Kuziai forest near Shavli, and the Ninth Fort near Kovno. By the end of 1941 about three quarters of Lithuanian Jewry had perished in pogroms and organised mass killings. The surviving 40 000 Jews were concentrated in the Vilna, Kovno, Shavli and Shvencion ghettos, and in various labour camps in Lithuania. Yet during periods of relative calm in 1942 and early 1943, social and cultural life was reorganised and religious observance was possible. In September 1943 the Vilna and Svencion ghettos were destroyed, and the Kovno and Shavli ghettos were converted into concentration camps. Some 15 000 Lithuanian Jews were deported to labour camps in Latvia and Estonia. About 5000 were deported to extermination camps in Poland, where they were murdered. Shortly before withdrawing from Lithuania in the fall

of 1944, the Germans deported about 10 000 Jews from Kovno and Shavli to concentration camps in Germany.

Soviet troops reoccupied Lithuania in the summer of 1944. In the previous three years, the Germans had murdered about 90 percent of Lithuanian Jews, one of the highest victim rates in Europe.<sup>6</sup>

Sarid, A., “*There Was Once a Home....*”: *Memories of the Lithuanian shtetls published in the Afrikaner Idishe Tsaytung – African Jewish Newspaper, 1952-1954*. Compiled, introduced and translated by Veronica Penkin Belling. Cape Town: Isaac & Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies & Research, University of Cape Town, 2015. Available from the Isaac & Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, University of Cape Town. E-Mail: [Janine.Blumberg@uct.ac.za](mailto:Janine.Blumberg@uct.ac.za)

## NOTES

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# HANUKAH WITH SHMUEL AND HIS FAMILY

\*

Alec Natas

**Editor's note:** The following is taken from Alec Natas's *Almost Yesterday – Memoirs of a Lithuanian Childhood* (SA Jewish Museum, Cape Town, 2014), and is reproduced with the kind permission of the publishers. The memoir first appeared in Hebrew in 1981, published by Hakibbutz Hameuchad. This English-language version by the author was edited by Evelyn Benatar. Born in Lithuania in 1907, Alec Natas immigrated as a youth to South Africa, where he died, aged 106, in 2007. He was the brother of the eminent Judaic scholar, writer and educationalist Moshe Natas (who likewise lived to be over a hundred).

I was invited to spend Hanukah with my relatives. Hanukah, the holiday of miracles and the pride of the Jewish nation, when the Maccabees defeated the Greeks and saw the miracle of a small jar of oil burning for eight days.

That year I was to have my own private Hanukah miracle. I was told Shmuel would also be there. Shmuel was the only Jewish banker in Kovno. He was driven through the streets in his own automobile, puffing a fat cigar and sitting behind a chauffeur who was dressed in black leather uniform. Shmuel! His name had a magic sound to his family, a name to bring smiles to the lips and tears to the eyes. He was their biblical Joseph. They bowed to him. "Shmuel is coming! Shmuel is coming!"

And in expectation of a visit from him his father, with his myopic eyes, would run about the house, stopping now and again, nervously combing his scraggy beard, perpetually asking, "Ha? Ha? Where is he? Where is Shmuel?" His mother had already combed her hair, put on a new dress and a special smile, a Shmuel smile! And when Shmuel strolled into his father's house, his four sisters and three brothers greeted him and trailed behind him.

Shmuel was a broad-boned man, short and rotund, serious and unsmiling. "Bankers don't smile", he appeared to be saying. Money is too serious a matter to be taken lightly. Shmuel came for lunch one day when I happened to be there. I was afraid to utter a sound that might distract the family from the glory that was Shmuel. Nobody spoke while waiting for him to sit down. His silences were truly golden in a way that pleased me. I could eat as much as I wanted. Nobody saw me. I was invisible behind the aura of light that was Shmuel.

Shmuel had offered to give me a lift back to the studio in a blizzard one day. Since then my prestige with the family had grown. I had sat in a car for the first time in my life, afraid to breathe, afraid to inhale the air from Shmuel's car, afraid to exhale and pollute the gleaming interior with my own insignificant breath. The

interior smelled of benzene, hair lotion, expensive leather and cigars.

That Hanukah, I didn't change my suit since I had no other. I didn't shave because I didn't grow hair on my face. The only thing I had was an enormous appetite. My stomach was full of butterflies on that great day. The colourful Hanukah candles burned brightly, reminding us of miracles past and a promise of miracles in the future, perhaps.

The family was nervous. As always, they stood at the windows waiting for Shmuel. The old man kept milking his sparse ginger beard. "Nu? When? Where is he? Where is Shmuel?"

The table was set for Shmuel. It was piled high with crispy rolls. The smell of fried potato fritters caused my head to float free of my body. Only my appetite remained rooted to my stomach.

"Shmuel" someone shouted. "Shmuel is coming!"

Everybody ran out to greet him. We sat round the table. The food was choice and savoury, sweet and filling. I ate as much as my stomach could accommodate. No one looked at me.

"Another latke, Shmuel? More soup, Shmuel? Eat, eat, Shmuel."

After the meal, Shmuel took out his cigar and ten hands stretched out towards him with lighted matches.

"Children," Shmuel said, "let's play Hanukah dreidlach." He included me in this invitation. I felt very bad as I didn't have a cent in my pocket. Shmuel took out a wallet so fat with money that I thought he had brought all his money, afraid of leaving it in his bank. He dished out fifty *lit* to each member of family, including me. Fifty *lit*!! A month's wages! I wished I could have taken the money home with me.

The game commenced.

It could have been fun but for my fears at seeing my money disappear. I looked up to the Hanukah candles and wished for a miracle. And my miracle happened. Suddenly I was winning! The small jar of oil was burning brightly that Hanukah. Mounds of *lits* were piling up in front of me. But the fear of losing was bulging in

my heart like the money in Shmuel's wallet.

I wished the game were over. But Shmuel wasn't in a mood to lose. He dipped into his black wallet and took out more money. He didn't seem to be a bit nervous. Or was he pretending, I wondered? His mother kept saying, "Perhaps you'll stop now, Shmuel? You're losing too much money." But he never wavered. He certainly had nerves. But then, a banker has to have nerves.

Suddenly, he said, "Enough, children, I'm tired. Have a happy Hanukah." Everybody gathered their little piles of winnings and put them in their pockets.

Now tea and cakes were served. And again, Shmuel pulled out his wallet and held out a wad of notes. "Here mama, Hanukah money."

Tears flowed from her eyes. She hugged and kissed him. "Oi, my child, how good you are to us! May God repay you and bless you for

being such a good son."

May God bless him indeed! I ran all the way home, the money burning a delicious hole in my pocket. I was a banker!

How much? How much did I win? The temperature was far below zero but I felt like a burning brand as I ran into my garret. I lit the candle, bolted the door, emptied my pockets and piled my treasure trove before me. Fifty! Sixty! One hundred! One hundred and fifty *lit*! A fortune! I had never held so much money in my hands before. I was rich! One hundred and fifty *lit*! One hundred and fifty coupons for borscht and bread at the Workers' Kitchen! Or a pair of trousers, or a pair of warm shoes to walk in the snow! How lovely to lie in my cold, narrow bed and dream such warm dreams. And I had the power to make those dreams come true.



*The Natas family leaving Lithuania for South Africa*

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## FROM KOVNO, A SURVIVOR

\*

Masha Geer

*Editor's Note:* A typed version of this letter, translated from the original Yiddish, was found in the archives of the Beth Din by Isaac Reznik, a former Director of the Union of Orthodox Synagogues and noted historian on South African Jewry. From the context, it appears to have been sent sometime in 1947 by Masha Geer, then living in Kovno (Kaunas), Lithuania, to her cousin, identified only as 'Gershon', in Johannesburg. It records the almost total annihilation of the Jewish population of her home village – unnamed, although the reference to Zelenaya Street and other clues suggest it may have been Budslaw in the Wilno District of what was then Poland and is today part of Lithuania. It further records the names of various gentile neighbours who collaborated with the German occupiers in the massacres.

Dear Gershon,

Your letter came some time ago, but I had no time to answer it. Some changes have occurred in my life.

I can well understand your grief, but it is not so difficult for you, because it did not happen in your presence. It is hard for you to believe it. You think you will still meet your dear ones. You did not live in the German inferno. You cannot imagine what we have suffered and how we lived through it all.

I have told you in my last letter that I stayed with your people till the last days of their lives. Your mother (God rest her soul) was afraid to go to sleep without me. If I happened to be late, she used to sit up and wait for me. I used to tell her, that there was no danger, that all stories were invented, that soon we would be safe. Then only would she quieten down and go to sleep.

On the 26<sup>th</sup> of May, 1942, I happened to be away. That's how my life was saved. My mother was in the hands of the murderers. The family Markman lived with your people. They all perished on the 27<sup>th</sup> of May, 1942, at four o'clock in the morning. Opposite the cemetery of the Roman Catholics on the field adjoining the wood all were brutally murdered, except for a few, who managed to escape and lost their lives avenging the wrongs.

Your wife Sonya worked with my sister. They were killed in the autumn of 1942. Sonya worked on the iron bridge. She saw the murderers approaching and guessed their purpose. She jumped in the river... the butcher shot her, while she was in the water. Workers who were present then dragged her body out of the river and buried her near the bridge.

In the summer of 1945, my father and I transferred the bodies of my ill-fated sisters and other young girls to the Jewish cemetery. We tried to dig Sonya out, but the water had flooded the place. We could not get at her body. We decided to fence in the place.

Fruma and Leah Silber are alive. They are in Poland. Beines Blachman, Sarah Katz, the daughter of the blacksmith, Kleiner Leiba and Sheeah Katzovith, Nathan and sons Shleima and Juda and Meim, the son of Utzefich Meisha, have survived. They live in Vilna and the sons of Sonya Lidahi Israel and little Simcha Sachick, Abraham and \* Lieberman. That is all. At this time in our village are only alive my father and Sarah Katz. She is teaching school.

The people, who used the house next door to you, are now owning your property and working your ground. All your belongings are with the Lushinovitches, the washerwomen from Zelenaya street, and the washerwoman Rene (I don't know her surname). They all ran to Poland, when the Russian occupation was expected. Gleb has Sonya's fur coat and many other things. My father asked them to give up the things, but they refused. Father wanted to sell the things and use the money for fencing in the cemetery. A tombstone is needed for the common grave, and he is not in a position to do it himself. So the old man went to the woods, cut down some trees and brought them to the cemetery. He put a wooden fence up temporarily.

We thank you for your offer to help us by sending us parcels. We appreciate it greatly, dear Gershon. Thank God we live well materially, and are not in want of anything.

I was married nearly two years ago. My husband is a good lad. Only his health is bad. He served on the front for four years and was twice heavily wounded. He is working now and earns good money. Our son was born on the 26<sup>th</sup> December, 1946. We named him Faivka.

We live together with Shifra. Meer works on the old job. Their son is a good boy. They were evacuated to Kazakhstan during the war, so they missed most of the horrors.

I went through untold sufferings. I have told you about it. When everybody else was killed I managed to run to the partisans in the woods. For some time I participated in their activities. Then I was called up in the army. I was on active service for two years. After demobilization

I worked in the factory. So you see, I have an eventful life.

We live in Kaunas. It is the Lithuanian U.S.S.S. My father visits us often. Eli David is in the army. He is serving the fourth year. Father and Eli David were partisans too.

Eugenie Kaminsky was with the Germans. She has brought upon us dreadful sufferings. Edya Kosach was commandant. His Lieutenants were the butcher Tolya Kotkovitch, Peter Ostpovitch and his family. Anya Kotkovitch, Vera and her brother (I don't know his name) May he be damned, Kopsovitch, Petchack, the younger Kotkov Peter, Basil's son, Kostevitch Ches, son of the cook of the Manor house, the son of Andreiki with his prostitute sisters. They are the ones, who brought the Germans to us. Please, remember the names well. They are the executioners of the ones, who were near and dear to you. It is a pity that they are all alive and live well in Poland. They escaped there before the Russian occupation. Your "Kamenik" played his part, damn him. A lot of your things are in his possession and the Matsulevitches, Marissa the midwife. I cannot count the lot. They are all to blame.

I am sending you Sonya's photograph. I have cut it out from the one, where she is together with my sister Chaika. It was taken in Vilna at the time she ordered her fur coat.

I am closing this letter. My son is awake and is calling me.

Keep well and may you be happy. Write to us often. Don't wait for an answer. Let us know everything about yourself. Everybody is sending you the kindness regards and we all wish you the very best.

Your cousin  
Masha

# REMEMBERING BIRZH

\*

Bennie Rabinowitz, Gwynne Schrire, Veronica Belling

“Forgetting the extermination is part of the extermination itself”

Jean Baudrillard

Birzh. Few people have heard of it. It is a town forgotten, partly through the great gulf of time separating this generation from the Holocaust and partly through the even greater gulf between ourselves and those who managed to leave Lithuania before South Africa and America closed their doors to East European Jewish immigration.

Birzh is located in Northern Lithuania, seventy kilometres from Panevezh and near the Latvian border. To Lithuanians, it is well known for its beer and breweries. To Jews, whose families had lived there since the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, it is the town where their Lithuanian neighbours helped massacre its entire Jewish population of 2400 in 1941. The present day residents are unlikely to have ever met a Jew, let alone know that at one time half the population used to be Jewish. Out of sight, out of mind – but no longer, if a group of descendants of former Birzh Jews have anything to do with it. The group was assembled by Cape Town’s Bennie Rabinowitz, with the help of Glenda and Abel Levitt and Dr Veronica Belling. Their forebears were amongst those who had the foresight, ambition and luck to leave Birzh as part of the Eastern European Jewish migration between 1880 and 1929.

An account of the journey from Birzh to Cape Town has come down to us from a letter written

by one of those immigrants in January 1900:

To my well beloved wife Taube Kretzmar, I left Birzh on a Sunday Rosh Chodesh Elul and arrived in Panevezh on the Monday from where I took a train to Sadorah. There I hired a car to go to town but at that moment I was approached by a man who looked very decent and asked me, ‘Young man, where are you going?’ As an inexperienced traveller, I had a rule to be very careful. I gave him a good look, scratched my ear, and answered coldly, ‘What difference does it make, I am going to town.’ He understood, however, that the transport was going further, so he said to me, ‘You are going to an agent, please tell me to whom you are going because he is from our company. I am also going there.’ I told him that I was not a man to tell lies. I told him that I was going to Hirsch Katz, so he said, ‘That’s good as I am his brother and we can go together because we are leaving tonight by train so you can go immediately.’ That night we left by train. I was very afraid lest we should meet with a goy who would ask where we were going that night but the agent must have taught the goyim and replied with an excuse that they should not ask questions - so we travelled until Abel<sup>1</sup> where there were another two persons on the other side (of the border and we crossed) without any problems. From Thursday to Saturday night we were together in a house that was not very big and there were 200 men. There was no room to sit or stand or sleep and the noise was up to high heaven in a house without a ceiling and a draught from all the windows and doors so I caught a cold from which I suffered for the next three weeks until I arrived at the big boats in London. My heart was sore enough ... I have also left children at home and who is going to bring them up with character and good manners and belief in G-d?

Your ever loving husband,  
Tevya Kretzmar<sup>2</sup>

**Bennie Rabinowitz**, a Rhodes Scholar with a BA with distinction in Constitutional Law (UCT) and an MA in Jurisprudence (Oxford), is a retired attorney and property developer. He has received many awards for his philanthropy, as well as the prestigious UCT President of Convocation Medal.

**Dr. Veronica Belling** is the author of *Bibliography of South African Jewry (1997)*, *Yiddish Theatre in South Africa (2008)*, and the translator of *Leibl Feldman's The Jews of Johannesburg (2007)* and *Yakov Azriel Davidson: His Writings in the Yiddish Newspaper, Der Afrikaner, 1911-1913 (2009)*.

**Gwynne Schrire** is Deputy Director of the Cape Council of the SA Jewish Board of Deputies. She is a regular contributor and a member of the Editorial Board of *Jewish Affairs* and has written, co-written and edited various books on aspects of local Jewish and Cape Town history.

Another immigrant who came from Birzh to Cape Town was Fivel Rabinowitz, who arrived at the turn of the century and opened a grocery store in Long Street. He brought out his wife Dora (nee Eilberg), two sons, Adolph and Abraham Lazar (AL), a daughter Pauline

(Stern) and a Sefer Torah written in splendid calligraphy. A fourth child, Cecil (Bennie Rabinowitz' father) was born in South Africa in 1907. The family lived above the shop. Bennie never met his grandparents - Dora was one of the casualties in the 1918 Flu Epidemic and Fivel, now called Philip, died in 1926. A devout and highly respected man, his coffin was taken past the synagogue on its way to the cemetery so that the worshippers could pay their respects, an honour given to few.

Philip Rabinowitz' children had opportunities that would not have been available to them in Birzh. Cecil and AL both became attorneys, practicing in Goodwood and Bellville respectively, while Adolph became a pharmacist. Bennie's father would tell him that their family had come from Birzh and that, as an attorney, he would be sent by the Jewish Board of Deputies to meet *landsleit* off the boat to help them through the dockside bureaucracy and find them accommodation. Among the latter were Abe Shapiro of Birzh and industrialist Philip Frame – people who never forgot the help he gave them. To Bennie, however, apart from a photograph of its main street in the early 1930s given to him by Dan Rabie, Birzh was just a name. More than that, he did not really know until he met Abel Levitt and his wife, Glenda, now living in Israel, in 2014.

"We've just been to Lithuania", they told Bennie. On learning that Bennie's family had come from Birzh, Lithuania, they said that they had been there only the previous week. There, they had seen the mass graves and the Birzh Museum in the fort that had records of Catholic

and Protestants, but none of a Jewish presence. They also told him of the Birzh High School, whose headmaster wished to turn a classroom into a Tolerance Centre to teach the children about their vanished Jewish neighbours.

The idea interested Bennie. For people whose roots were in Birzh, this was an attainable legacy to put together in memory of their ancestors – both those forbears whose graves were in Birzh and those who had been cut down before their time.

Jews and Karaites had settled in Birzh in the late 16<sup>th</sup> or early 17<sup>th</sup> Centuries. In 1683, the residents obtained an official resolution prohibiting Jews from buying the right to settle there or acquire property. That resolution was revoked, but in 1700 and again in 1711, the civil rights of Jews in Birzh were cancelled by the church. Six years later, Jews were forced to pay a "skull tax" of 1500 roubles, in addition to the special tax of 350 roubles they already paid the Great Hetman of Lithuania.<sup>3</sup> By 1766 there were 1040 Jews in Birzh.<sup>4</sup>

Even then, the Birzh Jews were keen Zionists and travelling *meshulachim* would arrive soliciting funds for poor relief in Israel. In 1784, the community agreed to donate money "until Mashiach arrives" to two funds for the poor in Israel, the one just for those living in Jerusalem.<sup>5</sup>

By 1804, Birzh had a Chevrah Kadisha that attended to its own poor and sick. There were 1685 Jews there by 1847, and in 1897, 2510 of the town's 4413 (57%) were Jewish. By 1934, Birzh had 9000 residents - because of emigration, the Jewish percentage had dropped to 36%. The Jewish community supported five



*The main street in Birzh, early 1930s.*

welfare organisations, including an aged home, attended Zionist congresses where they supported five Zionist parties, had five Jewish youth movements,<sup>6</sup> and a Maccabi and a Hapoel sports club. When minorities were granted autonomy in Lithuania and community committees were elected, most were elected on Zionist platforms. When elections for the first Parliament took place in 1922, the Jewish votes in Birzh went to the General Zionists (426 votes), Ben Gurion's *Achdut HaAvoda* (125) and Democrats (13).<sup>7</sup> In the 1931 municipal elections, three Jews were elected onto the 12-man town council.

Jews were part of the Birzh economic fabric, trading in flax - Birzh was famous for its white linen - and timber, crafts, farming, light industry and peddling. There were weaving and knitting workshops and two Jewish-owned flour mills whose flour was sold throughout Lithuania. Jewish involvement in the Birzh economy could clearly be seen in a 1931 government survey showing that they owned 77 of its 99 businesses. These included the only ones dealing with flour, grain and flax, heating materials, tool and steel products, radio, bicycles and electric equipment, machinery and transportation, books and stationary, food products, watches, jewellery and optics. Jews owned 12 out of 14 groceries, 9 out of 12 butcheries, 11 out of 12 textile and fur products, 7 out of 8 leather and shoe businesses and 3 out of 4 haberdasheries. They also owned 28 of the 45 factories in Birzh, including 11 leather works, 5 dealing in clothing and shoes and 7 flour mills and bakeries. There were 63 Jewish artisans - tailors, woolworkers, shoemakers, bakers, butchers, wigmakers, saddlers, tanners, hatters and tinsmiths, two Jewish doctors, two lawyers and two engineers.<sup>8</sup> There were also Jewish musicians with barrel organs who would visit markets and fairs using copper cymbals to attract audiences. Rabbits and white mice would be removed from the barrel organ and, for a fee, these would bring out a fortune-telling note.<sup>9</sup>

But does it make sound business sense to wipe out the economic competition by massacring all the Jews? One month after the Nazi troops entered Birzh in June 1941, the Jews were moved into a ghetto. Fifteen were shot by German soldiers in the Birzh Jewish and Karaite Cemetery in July 1941; on 8 August the remainder - some 2400 people, including 900 children - were stripped naked and shot into two pits in the Astravas forest, 3.5 kilometres north of the town, by Gestapo officers with 30 Lithuanian helpers from Linkuva and 50 others from Birzh. They were shot in groups, starting at 11 a.m. The pits had been dug the night before by 500 Jews and prisoners.<sup>10</sup> Having completed the task by 7 p.m., the killers returned to the town, singing.

In a 2013 visit to Birzh, in which she had roots, Natalie Ginsberg wondered how the local helpers had felt when killing their Jewish

neighbours:

And when the church bells rang on Sunday morning did the church bells ring while the Germans and Lithuanians killed their victims? Did they maybe stop to cross themselves? Did they go to church in the morning after they had shot thousands in cold blood? Did they confess to the priest... and did he give them absolution time and again?<sup>11</sup>

Sheyne Beder escaped from the killing field and gave her testimony after the war in 1946. Bennie was sent a copy of her harrowing statement.<sup>12</sup> Sheyne reported that four thousand Jews lived in Birzh before the war. There were three synagogues, two elementary schools - one Yiddish and one Hebrew - a large Yiddish-Hebrew library, a community bank directed by Lifshitz and a joint stock bank directed by Elye Kaplan. When Germany attacked the Soviet Union and invaded Lithuania on 22 June 1941, two thousand Jews from outlying districts poured into the village seeking refuge. Three days later the Germans entered and went with the Lithuanians to find and rob the "rich Jews". Antisemitic laws were passed. Able-bodied Jews were conscripted for forced labour. Sheyne's teenage cousins Sore and Miriam Zerkowitz were sent to clean toilets; they were forced to use their underwear for this and to put the filthy garments back on afterwards. A few days later, they were raped and killed. Sheyne's brother and father were shot, as was Dr Avrom Levin while Rabbi Bernshteyn was ducked in the lake, his beard set on fire and shot. Such brutalities conducted by the Lithuanians were common. Sheyne fled to a Lithuanian engineer and married him, hoping that thereby she could save her parents, but was betrayed and returned to Birzh. There she found that all the Jews had been herded into the synagogue with armed Lithuanian guards outside and she joined them. The following day, the prisoners were driven out of the synagogue, beaten, robbed and herded into the Ostgravos [sic] Forest. There, they were forced to strip naked and shot into the pit, first in groups of 16, then of 25. Sheyne told a guard that she had hidden gold with an acquaintance and a drunken Lithuanian was sent with her to collect it. She grabbed some clothes from the pile to cover her naked body, walked with the guard and managed to run away while he was distracted. She was arrested later, but fled and returned to the engineer, who rejected her. She was in the Siauliai ghetto, several camps, Dachau and on a death march before being liberated.

Once the decision had been made to get involved in restoring the memory of the lives and destruction of the 400 year-old Jewish community in Birzh, Bennie and the Levitts contacted historian and Yiddishist Dr Veronica Belling,



who had just published a book of translations of Yiddish articles, including one on Birzh, that appeared in the *Afrikaner Idische Tsaytung* between 1952–1954. She had subsequently gone to Lithuania and visited Birzh (where she had found the lake as beautiful as her Birzh grandmother had described it).<sup>13</sup>

The question was what would be the most appropriate form for such a commemoration to take? The number of monuments and memorial spaces dedicated specifically to the mass murder has begun to reach into the thousands, some occupying the former sites of destruction and including hundreds of unofficial memorials erected by Jewish families to mark the killing fields in the forest. James Young, who has examined and analysed the meaning and significance of such memorials, believes it likely that as many people now visit Holocaust memorials every year as died during the Holocaust itself. Memorials by themselves, he contends, remain inert and amnesiac. Whatever memory they finally produce and how viewers respond to them depend on how they are used politically and religiously in the community, who has seen them and under what circumstances. Memory is never shaped in a vacuum. Some memorials are erected because of the Jewish injunction to remember. Others are built to educate the next generation and to inculcate a sense of shared experience and destiny while others are designed to expiate guilt - even to attract tourists.<sup>14</sup>

Bennie and his group did not want their contribution just to be another heap of stones visited by families on a once-in-a-lifetime trip to *der heim*. Or, in the words of the French philosopher Pierre Nora, “Under the illusion that our memorial edifices will always be there to remind us, we take leave of them and return only at our convenience. To the extent that we encourage monuments to do our memory-work for us, we become that much more forgetful”.<sup>15</sup>

Lithuania has done more than any other country to distort the history of the Shoah and the role of its nationals. Its government has rewritten the past, considering themselves to be the victims of a double Holocaust - firstly by the Soviets, who occupied the Baltic States through the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact at the outset of the Second World War, and secondly by the Nazis, who invaded in 1941. With Germany’s defeat in 1945, Russia took over again. It erected memorials to acknowledge the massacres, but classified the victims as Soviet citizens, not as Jews.

There are no Jews living in Birzh today. One lone Jew returned to Birzh and continued to live there, dying in the town a few months ago. He was Sheftel Melamed, who escaped by fleeing across the border into Russia with some friends in a car belonging to one of their parents. He joined the Russian army and returned

after the war.

In 1991, Lithuania regained its independence and a Vilna Museum of Genocide Victims was established. But its genocide victims are the Lithuanians; the perpetrators are the Communists. Lithuanian perpetrators who killed Jews have been hailed as national heroes, with statues erected and schools named in their honour. The current government emphasises Soviet crimes. Horrible as the Soviet occupation was, the largest group of genocide victims in Lithuania were the Jews murdered by the Nazis with the help of the local population. These, of course, were Lithuanian citizens and had been for centuries. The government fails to acknowledge the scale of the Holocaust in Lithuania or the role of Lithuanians in the mass shootings on Lithuanian territory.<sup>16</sup>

Efraim Zuroff, director of the Israel Office of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, has complained about the ongoing efforts of Lithuanian governments to minimize the role of Lithuanian Nazi collaborators in Shoah crimes, including the nearly total annihilation of Lithuanian Jewry - 96.4% were killed, more than in any other country. He points out that every single Lithuanian government has failed to acknowledge the complicity of their own citizens in the killing of the Jewish citizens or to punish a single Lithuanian war criminal, including any of the more than dozen deported there from the United States. In addition, a list of 2055 local perpetrators compiled by the government’s Center for Genocide and Resistance Research Center three years ago, which only named a small number of the criminals, has been suppressed, rather than being acted upon.<sup>17</sup>

Knowing this, the team decided that any memorial they erected in Birzh should be designed to contribute to educating the Lithuanians themselves about the Jews who been living among them for centuries before their grandparents had helped to murder them. Abel and Glenda had seen and established tolerance education centres in schools and met with the co-ordinators of the Birzh Ausra High School. Students at that institution had collected names of former Birzh Jews and painted them on stones, which they took in a procession, accompanied by the deputy mayor, from the Birzh ghetto to the mass grave, where they were solemnly placed. The school had also been engaged in cleaning the old Jewish and Karaite Cemetery together with a Christian-Jewish society from Lippe, Germany, and members of the Lippe Reformed Church. The Ausra School had identified a large classroom that could be used for such a tolerance centre. It would require multi-media facilities to enable the students to be taught about the Holocaust and life in the town before the war. The Ausra School co-ordinator had mentioned to the Mayor that it was a pity that in the Birzh Town Museum was no mention of

the Jewish community who lived there from the 16<sup>th</sup> Century; the mayor agreed that this was not normal.<sup>18</sup>

What was decided then was that the Birzh commemorative project would aim:

- a) to create a memorial with the names of the murdered Jews, placed at the killing site just outside the town, as had been done in other Lithuanian towns;
- b) to assist the local Birzai Ausra School to establish a Tolerance Centre and,
- c) to arrange an exhibit about the Jews, to be placed in the local Birzh museum.

Glenda and Abel immediately wrote to their contacts in Birzh and Dr Belling started to compile lists of names of the murdered Jews, contacting the Yad Vashem's central database of Shoah victims' names.

When visiting Birzh, Glenda and Abel met with Vidmantas Jukonis and his son Merunas, history teachers at the Ausra High School who cared for the Jewish and Karaite Cemetery. The school headmistress showed them the empty classroom that could be made available for the Birzh Tolerance Centre. She was happy to give the Jukonises a free hand with the teaching of tolerance as an ongoing subject, along with an annual art competition arranged by Glenda.

The Birzh Museum has three floors. There is a room for Catholic artefacts and one for Lutherans. In a corner is a cabinet with five Hebrew prayer books, a photograph of a synagogue, a Kiddush cup and a scrap of blood-stained Torah parchment. No other signs of the existence of a former vibrant Jewish community are present. Glenda and Abel met with the museum director to discuss creating an exhibit to represent the history of the Jews of Birzh. The director wanted a portable exhibition that could be shown in the outlying areas as well. He proudly told them that he felt a special interest in the proposed project as his grandmother had hidden a young Jewish girl during the war.

With the groundwork done, Belling arranged for Saul Issroff to publicise an appeal on Jewishgen's Litvasig special interest website and for Eli Rabinowitz to post an appeal on his Birzh kehilalink. These released an outpouring from all over the world from interested people with roots in Birzh - family trees, photos, videos, history and a valuable testimony. One wrote that he lived a part of each day in Birzh and in trying to understand what happened there. He held the Lithuanians accountable for all the murders that happened that one day and had not yet heard one word about responsibility, nor about reparations.<sup>19</sup> Rosalie, whose grandmother was born in Birzh, recalled that what happened in Lithuania was never discussed in the house - it was only later that she discovered that her Great Uncle Ruben, his wife and children were

shot in August.<sup>20</sup> Mina Tillinger<sup>21</sup> wrote that her mother was the only survivor of her immediate family from Birzh - she survived because she was away at college, and also survived the Vilna ghetto and some camps. Another, in Israel, got the message via the Hebrew Order of David in Johannesburg. She was hungry for information - her father and his brother never mentioned one word about their past in Birzh or their family left behind.

Knowing that the Levitts would be visiting Cape Town, Bennie hosted a cocktail party for Cape Town Birzh descendants to publicise the project. Over 40 turned up and listened spellbound as Glenda and Abel gave a powerpoint presentation explaining their commemorative projects in Lithuania and their Birzh visit. The report of the party in the *Cape Jewish Chronicle* brought more Birzher descendants to light. In Johannesburg, which once had an active Birzher *landsleit* society, they gave a similar presentation, also enthusiastically received. Since the cocktail party, a committee has been formed in Cape Town to take the project forward. Further details will become available towards the end of 2015 after the Levitts return from their next visit to Birzh.

There is another memorial of Birzh in Cape Town. The Sefer Torah which had been brought from there by Bennie's grandfather has been repaired and - adorned with a beautifully embroidered cover made at the Astra Jewish Sheltered Employment Centre - donated by Bennie to the Highlands House seniors' home. There it is in regular use, except for the High Holy Days services, when it is used by the Tikva Tova Congregation's Egalitarian Synagogue.<sup>22</sup>

Today Lithuania is trying to whitewash its enthusiastic involvement in the Holocaust. This project will help to create the tolerance necessary to prevent such crimes taking place and restore the memory of the Jewish citizens to the youth growing up in *Judenrein* Birzh.

*"What we all have in common is an obsession not to betray the dead we left behind, or who left us behind. They were killed once. They must not be killed again through forgetfulness."* (Elie Wiesel)

- *The authors would like to hear from you if your ancestors came from Birzh. If you have any photos, documents or artefacts from Birzh, please let us have them for possible use in the Birzh Museum or in the Tolerance Centre. If you have the names of any ancestors who were killed in Birzh, please let us have them so that we can add their names to the Memorial Board at the site of the mass graves. And if you would like to make a contribution to this project in honour of your ancestors, please give us your details. The project organisers can be contacted at michelle@abbeygroup.co.za*

or veronicabelling21@gmail.com asil

## NOTES

- 1 Now called Obeliai
- 2 Kretzmar, T. Unpublished letter. (undated - September-October 1899), by kind permission of the late Dr J Kretzmar, Cape Town.
- 3 Highest-ranking military officers, second only to the King.
- 4 Rosin, Yosef, History of Birzh (Birzai), Lithuania, translated by Sarah and Mordehai Kopfste in Josef Rosin, 'Birzh (Birzai) Lithuania', in *Preserving Our Litvak Heritage: a History of 31 Jewish Communities in Lithuania*, Jewishgen, 2005.
- 5 Two supervisors per fund were appointed - Ma'oth Eretz Yisrael and Ma'oth Yerushalayim. The money was sent first to Vilna, later it was sent to the Rabbi of Brisk to await the arrival of the *meshulachim*. Rosin, p5/26
- 6 Hashomer Hatzair, Hechalutz, Bnei Akiva, Betar and Gordonia, Rosin, Yosef, p 16/26
- 7 Rosin, p9/26
- 8 Rosin, p11, 12/26
- 9 Sarid, A, *There was once a home... Memories of the Lithuanian Shetlts published in the Afrikaner Idish Tsaytung - African Jewish newspaper, 1952-54* translated by Veronica Belling, Jewish Publications, Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, Cape Town, 2015, p66
- 10 Lithuanian Holocaust Atlas, pp 130-1
- 11 Belling, Veronica and Ginsburg, Natalie, 'A Very Personal Journey', *Jewish Affairs*, Pesach 2014, pp14-15
- 12 Copy of Sonia Beder's Testimony belonging to her cousin Grant Arthur Gochin sent to Saul Issroff, by e-mail, 25 April 2015. The signed testimony was related to L Koniuchowsky at the Landsberg Cultural Commission, Epsenhausen, 25/12/1946 and attested to by the Epsenhausen Jewish committee.
- 13 Belling, and Ginsburg, p15
- 14 Young, James E, *The texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, Yale University Press, 1993, the information comes from the preface, pages ix-xiii
- 15 Young, p5
- 16 Snyder, Timothy, Lithuania neglects the memory of its murdered Jews, 29 July 2011, [www.theguardian.com › Opinion › Second world war](http://www.theguardian.com/Opinion/Secondworldwar)
- 17 <http://www.i24news.tv/en/opinion/85805-150915-why-israel-fails-to-confront-lithuania-over-the-holocaust>
- 18 E-mail from Ingrida Vilkiene, 29/10/2014
- 19 Ivan Sindell, by e-mail, 13/4/2015
- 20 E-mail, 11/4/1 2015
- 21 E-mail from Mina Tillinger, 11/4/2015
- 22 'New Year and New Home for Sefer Torah', *Cape Jewish Chronicle*, September 2015, p67

## new POETRY

### Oif Litte

Mir hobben zig dort gevoint eibikeit  
Vos hot geven uns baloinung?  
Gespolter kep und geshorene borden  
Und a hogelen fun koilen

Secheiniem hoben uns geshon  
Secheiniem vie geven bakant!  
Goyim geven freint.  
Kinder vie geven shpiledik  
Blitzdik unz geveden

Gribber gevorren bagrobt  
Tsu bahalten unser gebrogene kerper  
Und farfoilte geshmiel  
Denkmoil tsu unzer neshomes  
Faloren tsum himmel!

Zey hobben farmogen unz elteren voiningen  
Obgedekled unzer farmegen  
Farnichten und leikenen  
Kedelnit in Hell tsu Brennen!

### (On Lithuania)

We resided there for eons/What was  
our Reward?/Broken Heads, Shorn  
Beards/And hail of bullets

Our neighbours beset us/Neighbors  
who were known/Goyim who had  
been friends/Children which were  
playmates/Suddenly turned on us!

Pits which were dug/To hide our  
broken bodies/And rotted flesh/  
Memorials to our spirits/Abandoned  
to heaven

They possessed our parental homes/  
Stripped of what was owned/  
Destroyed and looted/Taken and  
denied/Lest they burn in Hell!!

*Maurice Skikne*

# THE PROTOCOLS OF THE ELDERS OF ZION COMES TO SOUTH AFRICA

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Hadassa Ben-Itto

*Editor's Note:* The following constitutes the first of a three-part feature reprinting (with slight editing) Chapter 10, as well as the relevant section of Chapter 12 of Hadassa Ben-Itto's landmark book *The Lie That Wouldn't Die: The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (Valentine Mitchell – London, 2005). A best-seller on its publication, *The Lie That Wouldn't Die* has since been translated into ten languages, and is regarded as being one of the definitive studies on *The Protocols* and its pernicious influence worldwide. The book focuses mainly on the 1934 trial in Bern, Switzerland, in which the Jewish community successfully took the local Nazi party to court for publishing *The Protocols*. In Chapter 10, however, the author exams another *Protocols*-related trial, one that took place in Grahamstown, South Africa, and which concluded shortly before the Bern trial commenced in October 1934. That case was brought by the SA Jewish Board of Deputies (SAJBD) on behalf of Rev. Abraham Levy of Port Elizabeth after local pro-Nazi activists had accused him of authoring a document whose contents were based on the antisemitic conspiracy theories of *The Protocols*. In its judgment of 21 August 1934, the court ruled against the defendants, finding that the document in question was a forgery and condemning *The Protocols*. In Chapter 12 of her book, Ben-Itto recounts how in 1991 the SAJBD, this time together with the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists (South African Chapter), successfully made representation to the Publication Appeal Board for *The Protocols* to remain on the list of banned publications

The Editor wishes to thank Judge Ben-Itto for kindly allowing *Jewish Affairs* to reprint the above extracts from her book, which provide the most thorough analysis to date of one of the most significant episodes in the 175-year history of the Jewish community in South Africa. Thanks, also, to Rodney Mazinter of Cape Town, whose idea it was that *Jewish Affairs* republish the chapter and who to that end made the initial contact with the author.

*The Lie That Would Not Die* is available through the publisher (frank.cass@vmbooks.com), from the distributor in the USA (wendy@isbs.com) and at Amazon.

Like in Bern, it started with a public meeting, or rather, two meetings, one on 27 March 1934, in Aberdeen, and the other, on 4 April 1934, removed to the Feather Market Square of Port

Elizabeth, when town-hall denied the organizers the use of the Feather Market Hall.

The meetings were advertised, stating that only Christians would be allowed. It was at these meetings that the speaker, one Johannes Strauss Von Moltke, read aloud in the Afrikaans language the contents of a document, originally written in English, alleging that it had been stolen from the Western Road Synagogue in Port Elizabeth. The document had been delivered to him, Von Moltke revealed, by Harry Victor Inch, who had himself committed the theft. *Die Rapport*, a news sheet published weekly in Aberdeen in both Afrikaans and English, printed the same document, in an Afrikaans version, on 6 April, and in the original English version, on 13 April, repeating both times, in print, that the document had been procured by theft from the Western Road Synagogue. On the front page the paper carried this statement, in bold letters:

**FOR THE FIRST TIME IN THE HISTORY OF SOUTH AFRICA A DOCUMENT HAS COME INTO THE HANDS OF GENTILE SOUTH-AFRICANS, WHICH THROWS LIGHT ON THE PERSECUTION OF THE**

**Hadassa Ben-Itto** served as a judge in Israel for 31 years at courts of all levels. She served twice as a member of Israel's delegation to the UN General Assembly and Israel's delegation to the UNESCO conference on human rights, Paris, 1982. As well as heading various committees, she has taught criminal procedure at Bar-Ilan University, and since 1988 has served as World President of the International Association of Jewish Lawyers and Jurists. In 1999 she was awarded the Zeltner Prize, a most prestigious prize awarded in Israel to an outstanding jurist, and in 2003 was awarded the Women in the Law citation of merit by the Israel Bar Association. For her book *The Lie That Wouldn't Die*, she received, at the President's mansion, the prestigious Herzog prize in 1997. From 1998-2002 she served as the only woman on the Claims Resolution Tribunal in Zurich, that adjudicated claims against the Swiss banks concerning dormant accounts after World War II.



**GENTILES BY ORGANIZED JEWRY  
THROUGHOUT THE WORLD.**

Von Moltke was the leader in the Eastern Province of an organization called *South African Gentile National Socialist Movement* whose admitted object was 'to combat and destroy the perverse influence of the Jews in economics, culture, religion, ethics and statecraft and to re-establish European Aryan control in South Africa for the welfare of the Christian peoples of South Africa'.

*Die Rapport*, the organ of the organization, which propagated its opinions and principles, was owned, edited and published by David Hermanus Olivier.

Inch was the leader of a subsidiary of the organization, the *South African Grey Shirts Movement*, in the Eastern Province, which was said to provide the 'Body Guard' of the other movement. Its aim was 'to combat the pernicious influence of the Jewish race'.

Like other countries, South Africa also had its share of newly formed Nazi-oriented organizations that surfaced boldly since Hitler's rise to power in Germany. As early as 1 November 1933, the Minister of Justice, General J.C. Smuts, had issued a statement warning against attempts to work up an anti-Jewish feeling among the public by the dissemination of leaflets and in public meetings, where 'wild charges are made against the Jews as a community which are calculated to create ill feeling and racial prejudice...' There were indications, General Smuts said, that these charges represented an organized movement, which, lamentably, had its origins abroad and was an attempt to import into South Africa 'the alien hatreds and rancors of the old world'. The Minister of Justice warned that if his appeal to the peoples of South Africa went unheeded, those who were spreading the anti-Jewish poison would find themselves in trouble.

But the Nazis were on the move and nothing would stop them. The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which came to be known as 'The Bible of the Anti-Semites', and strongly promoted by Hitler and his disciples, were widely distributed. It was for good reason that the Jewish community kept ordering from London hundreds of copies of the Philip Graves articles published in the *Times* pamphlet, in an attempt to prove the falsity of the *Protocols*. Little did they dream that a four page local document would soon prove to be much more dangerous to the Jewish community of South Africa than the widely distributed *Protocols*. It was therefore with profound horror that the shocked leaders of the Jewish community in Port Elizabeth learned of the document that was allegedly signed by the Reverend of a large and prestigious synagogue. The word *Rabbi* appeared at the end of the document and was read by Von Moltke and published by Olivier

as part of the text. No name was mentioned, but it was public knowledge that Reverend Abraham Levy was considered as the Rabbi of the Western Road Synagogue in Port Elizabeth.

The first report came from some Jews who had attended the Nazi rallies out of curiosity. Aileen Pearson, a local Jewish housewife, supplied a copy of the document, which had been distributed at the April rally. She had also made notes of the inflammatory statements and the derogatory terms used by the speaker, aimed at the Jews. Jacob Cohen a farmer near Aberdeen, reported that he had attended the Aberdeen meeting, but as he thought he was the only Jew present, he had to restrain himself. He reported that the speaker at the meeting had appealed to his race, the Nordic people of South Africa, to form a Racial Patriotic Organization, in self-defense, against this occult alien organization harbored in the Jewish synagogue.

Cecil Neethling McDermot, a non-Jewish clerk, who had also been present at one of the meetings, was so shocked that he immediately wrote a letter to the editor of the *Eastern Province Herald* stating his firm belief that the document read at the rally was a forgery, and expressing his shame, as a British citizen. He was not taking up the fight for the Jew, he wrote, but his love for honesty, freedom and British fair play compelled him to come out and cry halt. He felt shame for the Christian race of South Africa, he wrote. The Jews had been instrumental in the development of this country; trade and commerce had progressed through the Jew, who had built up their great cities. Instead of running the Jew down they should respect him and raise themselves to his level.

A small group convened at the synagogue, which also served as the community center. Reverend Levy studied the document in utter disbelief. Surely somebody was playing a joke on him, he thought. No joke, they told him. But who would believe such utter nonsense; who would take seriously such a crude forgery, he cried. At the time Jews had ignored the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, they reminded him, also believing that people of common sense would realize immediately that it was a false document. This new document was more dangerous to the Jews in South Africa than the *Protocols*, they feared. Even those who had ignored the alleged existence of a world conspiracy aiming to undermine all Christian governments would hardly dare ignore 'proof' of a local conspiracy aiming to attain Jewish domination of South Africa. This document, they said, was an ingenious libel, based on the *Protocols*. It purported to be proof of the local application of the international plot. Using the tactics of the forgers of the *Protocols*, this document was not what others said about the Jews, this was the so called 'Jewish Secret Plan' itself, stolen from the synagogue and published,

in the nick of time, by a patriot who had put himself in danger in order to save his country. This was how it would be presented, they warned.

As they only had one copy and no immediate means of making a photocopy, they passed the document around and examined it. It looked like a carbon copy of an original document, typewritten on four pages of foolscap. At the top, in the right-hand corner of the first page, appeared the words 'copy of M. Lazarus'. (But Mark Lazarus was a printer, who did not even belong to the congregation, somebody remarked). Immediately below these words were badly formed Hebraic characters handwritten in real ink, signifying 'Fit for Passover' (*Kosher Lepesach*). Then came words written in similar characters making up the words 'The Book of Memorial or Remembrance' or 'The Book of Chronicles'. On the left side, similarly written, were Hebrew words meaning 'Holy Congregation'. After the words 'copy for Mr. M. Lazarus', came the heading 'Lecture No.2' and the title: 'Subject: Our Plan of Attack.'

To save time, one of them was asked to read to them the whole document, and as he did, they hung their heads and sank deeper and deeper into their chairs. They thought they had heard the worst libels, but these had always been imported repetitions of old. This one was new, and it was so close to home. It threatened to disrupt the very fabric of their lives in South Africa.

After the whole document had been read

out loud, each one insisted on examining it and reading it with his own eyes. Still, it was hard to believe that even a Nazi anti-Semite could concoct such nonsense. It was such a crude forgery. Only an ignorant and careless forger would use the words 'Fit for Passover' in a document that had nothing to do with food. They could just as well have written 'Buy Nestle milk', somebody remarked. But they knew that non-Jews would hardly notice such a detail.

The alleged Jewish 'Plan of Attack' listed the following subjects:

Our attitude to the Christian faith: the Unholy Christ; We are the Chosen of God; Division of the Churches; the Rebirth of Catholicism; the *Greys* Menace and how it will be combated; Gentile Decay; 'Live and let live' - Our greatest asset; our Imperial plan in comparison to other Empires; our attitude to World Socialism; the next attack and riot; how we shall achieve our wish; how the gentile dogs shall crave the mercy and our refusals; our Bolshevik propaganda scheme.

This general plan was followed by a detailed one, appearing to be a record of an address delivered by the Rabbi to the members of the Council. It read as follows:

#### A. Our attitude to the Christian faith.

As I have explained to you in previous meetings, our attitude to Christianity is one of great interest to the High Circle of the Jewish citizens of Port Elizabeth. As you all know the divisions in the Christian Church were of our construction. It was our ancestors that urged Luther and the other reformers to break from the Mother Church, i.e., the Roman Catholic Church, for our own private purposes, which would hasten the fulfillment of our World Imperialism. The Roman Catholic Church was severely wounded in the head (that is, literally), and the Protestant Churches are as dead as mutton. But, my beloved Council, the R.C.C. has been unconscious for countless centuries, but it is beginning to stir to life again. It has awakened after a long and great sleep and its influence is beginning to be felt throughout the Earth. (Did not the Fascist, Mussolini, make treaties with the Pope, and is not Hitler a Catholic?) We must destroy it. It is interfering with our world socialism.

I mentioned to you before several times at our council meetings of the select that we are the pure people. The Nordics in our eyes are in no wise different to the Chinese Dogs or the Turks. They are all our destroyers, our enemies. The Christian religion is wrong. Christ, in the Jewish sense, was a false prophet born of the womb of a foul bitch whose husband was in our eyes never married to Joseph. In our *Talmud Torah* and other holy books it does say that the gentiles will be made to drink the piss and eat the dung of the Jews.

'PHARAOH'.

#### 2. 'Lectures on Judaism V. Christianity'

##### **Anti-Semitism and the South African Greyshirts.**

Pharaoh, the King of Egypt was the first Anti-Semite, and I can assure you that Hitler will be the last. As far as the *Greyshirts* are concerned, we shall cripple them as follows:

We have received information through A.4 that the *Greys* are to have a meeting in the Feather Market Hall after the Christian holidays. All preparations are being made, disguising a crowd of our most trusted servants as *Greyshirts*. We shall see that they are supplied with Swastikas and gray ribbon. Their duty is to hackle the speakers, kick up a row, and sing so-called patriotic songs, that to us, internationals as we are, have no meaning whatever, in preparation for the greatest riot

ever witnessed from Cairo to the Cape. We are prepared for homicide, murder and manslaughter. Hit right and left, wherever you see a Gentile face. The equipment that must be brought are to be pepper pots, blackjacks, knuckle dusters, revolvers, lead piping, sticks, stones and boxing gloves. We have arranged, that if there are no police around, for a contingent of our fellows, to be near the parapets ready to fling rocks and boulders through the opposite windows. We are confident in our success. We always get through unscathed. We who boast of our survival over all empires. We the Chosen of the Almighty, who guides and approves of our every action. Our cult is gold. These Greydogs are to us as the sowing of the wind on a wintry day - we who control, financially and even politically behind the scenes, yea, the chosen, who were promised all these things. Earthly pomp, splendor, imperialism, and ever lasting sovereignty over the animals of the earth.

Christianity, I repeat, is Satan's religion, the religion fit only for the dogs that they are, who go to their churches to see whether their neighbor has on a Paris model or print dress. What foolishness. What utter foolhardiness.

The 'live and let live' motto of the churches is our greatest asset I can assure you. The British Imperialism was one of help to Christian Civilization, but ours is the direct opposite.

We stand for World Communism, for dictatorship of the proletariat. Our Imperialism of *Pax Judaica* is one for the downfall of western civilization and its replacement by the eastern or Japanese system. We have seen the progress of the U.S.S.R. since 1917 when our agents, Lenin, Stalin, etc. murdered the Tsar. The Pope is a religious Imperialist, and that interferes with our world plan. As we have got control over Russia, so we will also control the Union, and so achieve our object in the destruction of the British Empire by making propaganda for wars that as a result it will fall to bits as did mighty Rome. Yet we survive and our object has been fulfilled. Such is the mission of Judah. It is our plan to give South Africa to the natives. 'South Africa and Africa for the Black Man' said Abdurahman and our several loyal agents. However, we have the prospect in view that if South Africa is given to the Sons of Ham, we shall not be in any way molested.

Of the British we may say that they are innocent of our plan to deprive them of the countless possessions she has herself developed, and of the Dutch we may say that they are the most lovely of our specimen of Gentile decay, and are of as much account as the unclean meat, pigs flesh that they consume in such large quantities. The natives are of no account. They are as brainless as their Teutonic cousins - rapers, blackguards, thieves and spies.

The following papers which financed us are the Empress (Mr. Barlow editing with our approval The Socialist Review, The Anti-Nazi, and Mr. Lazarus' Propaganda Scheme).

We will fool the public, so that their belief in 'Live and Let Live' will be intensified a thousand fold. We will make them digest as much silly rot as their decayed and filthy minds are capable of understanding. Hitler, Lunatic Goering, Von Papen and their co-lunatics, with the Asylum Contingent (namely the Brown shirts) are guilty of devastation, and crimes against civilization, which we have built up. They raped our women, murdered our old men, bombarded and dynamited our synagogues, threw our children to our hunting dogs, made our little ones to dance on hot coals until they fried, made our husbands run the gauntlet in the passage ways in our clubs while they themselves struck them as they passed. These low common sons of a filthy womb know not the Japanese menace that is upon the face of Europe and Africa.

Brethren, although for countless centuries you have been despised and hated, in the near future the races of the Earth will kiss your feet and worship you, they shall bow down before thee and exult and praise thee. They shall beg mercy of thee and thou shalt refuse. They shall acknowledge that thou art the chosen, the infallible. Our elected leader will be the first sovereign over all the earth. The Communist World, and at last the *Talmud Torah* and prophecies will be fulfilled. I may say that we are on the threshold.

On our very life take care of these instructions; do not mention a word to not even your own what is contained in these pages. You know our law. You know the result. The propaganda that would shortly arrive from Moscow, that will be in our safekeeping in the *Syn. West. Rd.* will be handed to trusted members of the local and Cape Trade Unions and F.S.U. as soon as the appointed time arrives. We shall instill into the warped minds of Goya then that we are the proverbial 'now know-alls.'

Issued by the select high circle of the anti-Nazi propaganda vigilance committee c.x.v.o. 3838 and authorized for use by the trustee and the six council members only.

#### **RABBI**

A stunned silence followed the reading of the document, then a hot debate. Some of them suggested that the incident be ignored. It will blow over, they said; nobody in his right mind will believe it, they argued; only a limited number of bigots attended the rallies, they maintained,

legal action will only publicize the document; the Nazis will not dare print it in a newspaper, they assured each other. They decided to sleep on it, not make hasty decisions. But a few days later the full document was published in *Die Rapport* and they learned by word of mouth

that the document was beginning to have its impact. Stephen John Moore, a contractor from Aberdeen, a former policeman who belonged to the Apostolic Church, was overheard telling a neighbor how impressed he was with Von Moltke's message. 'We were told that it was *John Bull* (meaning the English) who persecuted us and stole our diamond fields, but it had always been the Jew under the mantle of *John Bull*, he said bitterly. He was also upset by the fact that the Jews were calling them *Goy*, he took it to heart, he said, for 'Goy' means animal. (What a joke, they said!). A mechanic who had attended the rally, Ellis Charles Simpson, confided to a co-worker how upset he was 'that there should be such a low thing floating about the world reflecting on Christians about the undermining of British Justice, which had been protecting them for many years'. 'I told my Jewish neighbors', he told his friend, 'that if that was proved as such I would not say good morning or good afternoon to them. I was inflamed against the Jewish people. I understood it to be a world plan with South African conditions super-imposed.' Ebenhaezer Fourie, a pupil studying for matriculation, had also attended one of the meetings. He described to his friends in school how they all wore swastikas. He had read the document carefully, he explained, and understood that the Jews were filled with hatred to the Christians. Only after the meeting did he realize that the Jews had all the possessions worth having in South Africa. Jacobus Petrus Johannes Kruger, a bachelor farmer, read about the document in the paper. Now he was finally convinced, he told his friends over a beer, that all the Jews were in this terrible conspiracy. 'I believed in the document seeing what happened in our place', he said, 'the Jews are progressing and getting possession of our farms.'

It took the community leaders only a few days to come to a decision. They had been educated in the British system and had great confidence in the legal process. They knew about the Bern trial but the South African legal system was different. They knew that this was not a personal attack on the Rabbi, the real target was the whole Jewish community, but since the document appeared to be a record of his address to the council, signed by his title, although not by name, the complaint would have to be filed by him.

Before long Reverend Levy filed in the local division of the Supreme Court, sitting in Grahamstown, Eastern province, civil actions for damages naming as defendants Johannes Strauss Von Moltke, David Hermanes Olivier (Junior) and Henry Victor Inch. The Rabbi was represented by Mr. Reynolds K.C. (King's Counsel) and Mr. E. Stuart.

The trial date was set for Tuesday 10 July 1934, before the honorable T.L.Graham and honorable Mr. Justice C. Gutsche. The claims

against all three defendants were consolidated.

As it was not a private matter of the Rabbi, a committee was appointed to instruct the lawyers. They convened in the synagogue to decide on trial tactics. The pleadings of both sides had been filed, defining the conflict and the issues. The trial would begin in a few weeks and it looked as if the judges intended to dispose of the case as quickly as possible. The issues seemed to be clear-cut: had the document, admittedly published by the defendants, originated from the synagogue, and had it been stolen from there by Inch on Saturday afternoon, 24 March as Inch maintained, or was it a false document, forged and fabricated as a means of inciting against the Jews, as the Rabbi asserted. In the regular course of the disposition of court business the case should take up no more than a couple of days.

They thought they were meeting to prepare the list of possible witnesses, but a hot discussion developed. Some argued that they should keep a low profile. This was a simple case, the court would not allow it to become a Dreyfus Trial, they argued; It was not the function of the court to combat anti-Semitism, the judges would only admit facts relevant to the issues set out in the pleadings; The defendants did not mention in their pleadings the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* or the existence of a *Jewish World Conspiracy*. This was a local issue and the court would not appreciate it if they dragged the problems of world Jewry into this court.

Others insisted that they would be missing the whole point of the trial if they allowed it to be limited to the stealing of a document; The document was the talk of the town and was causing harm to all of them; the fabricated facts did not concern the Rabbi in his private capacity, they were horrible lies about all Jews; It was their duty to confront not only the technical issue of the theft, but the false allegations which would somehow stick in the minds of people; they were not equipped to confront the Nazis in the public square, they argued, this was a unique opportunity to confront them in a court of law, open to the public; the forgers would soon realize that here the rules of the game were different, and they could not get away with crude lies; they must use this arena to confront the rising tide of Nazi anti-Semitism, they might not have another such opportunity.

In the end it will be up to the court, the lawyers said, the decision might not be theirs. So they decided to be prepared. They would line up witnesses to testify on the bigger issues, if the court would allow it.

*Studying the transcript of the trial I was greatly impressed. Lawyers usually drag out trials arguing that they needed long periods of time to prepare their case and line up witnesses. Yet this unusual trial, which lasted 10 full days, from 10 July to 24 July, with a record exceeding*



*700 pages, was prepared by the litigants in less than two months. And it took the court less than a month to deliver, on 21 August a detailed, well reasoned, 31 page-long judgment.*

Had the defendants been represented, their lawyers would probably have advised them to limit themselves to the technical facts. But when the day arrived they marched into court, Inch and Von Moltke in uniform.

They had no money to engage lawyers, they announced, it was the Jews who had all the money. They raised all kinds of technical points, including the argument that there was no proof that they meant that particular Rabbi.

The lawyers realized that it was the defendants who would define the scope of the trial, as it soon became apparent that they viewed the court as a proper arena for their propaganda. As the evidence unfolded, the issue was no longer limited to the authenticity of the document or the identity of the Rabbi. It became clear that the court would have to address itself to the alleged existence of an international plot, to a Jewish conspiracy to gain domination of the world. The defendants maintained that the said document was only the local application of this international plot. It became clear that the court would have to rule not only on the authenticity of a local document, but on that of the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*.

When it was their turn to present their defense, Von Moltke, speaking for all the defendants, officially requested the court to allow them to amend their plea. They now pleaded justification, he said, they would prove and argue that they had been justified in whatever they had done, for it was all for patriotic aims. They now officially pleaded the existence of a dangerous international 'Jewish Plot'.

*Was it a coincidence, a friend asked me, that the two most important trials of the Protocols took place at the same year, independently of each other, in two countries, on two continents?*

*No coincidence, I assured him. Hitler had caused a revival of the 'Protocols'. There was ample proof that the Nazi propaganda machine targeted the 'Protocols' as their strongest argument in the attempt to convince the world that the Jews constituted a grave danger not only to world peace, but to the very existence of legitimate Christian governments. Here is what they will do to you, the Nazis cried, if they are not dealt with. The Weltdienst in Erfurt, headed by Ulrich Fleishauer, was given the task of promoting the 'Protocols' around the world, as part of their anti-Semitic drive to de-legitimize the Jews and place them beyond the pale of legitimate human society. The unsuspecting world, and even the naive Jewish communities, perceived this phenomenon as yet another routine outburst of anti-Semitism. Blaming the*

*Jews was not a newly invented tactic; Jews had been persecuted and even massacred before; this wave will pass, like all its predecessors, they tried to convince themselves. Not only was there no premonition of the coming Holocaust, but there was no suspicion that the 'Protocols' were more than just another tool in the hands of anti-Semites. The idea that Hitler was not only using the 'Protocols' as a tool against the Jews, but had actually adopted the so called Jewish plan of world domination, would have sounded preposterous, had anybody voiced it in those first years of the Nazi regime. Nobody in his right mind would have dared announce that Hitler was using the 'Protocols' not only as a common denominator which would serve as a basis for the organization of Nazi parties in other countries, based on the logic that both Jews and anti-Semitism existed everywhere, but that he was using the 'Protocols' to mask his own plan to attain world domination. They could not have known of the conversation with Hitler, reported by Hermann Rauschning in his book *Hitler Speaks*. 'I have read the Protocols of the Elders of Zion', Hitler told him, 'it simply appalled me. The stealthiness of the enemy, and his ubiquity! I saw at once that we must copy it - in our own way, of course.'*

*In 1934 Jews were not aware of the approaching disaster. Like the law-abiding citizens that they were, they thought that they could combat the Nazis in courts of law. Reading the record of the orderly conduct of the trials, the polite questions put to Nazi bigots, who were openly uttering the most unspeakable libels against Jews, and the learned and well reasoned judgments, I suddenly thought of a man carefully and meticulously plugging up a small hole in his boat, not realizing that in no time at all a huge wave would sweep it and throw it on the rocks, with no survivors.*

- **The second part of Hadassa Ben-Itto's account of the Grahamstown libel trial, dealing with the first part of the trial itself, will appear in the Pesach 2016 issue of *Jewish Affairs* and the final instalment in the Rosh Hashanah 2016 issue.**
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# CHIEF RABBI NATHAN MARCUS ADLER – AN APPRAISAL ON HIS 125TH YAHRTZEIT

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David A Sher

On Rosh HaShanah, one of the most celebrated prayer books used by South African Jewry was taken down from shelves and placed on the burnished pews of countless congregations across the country. Affectionately known as ‘The Adler *Machzor* [Festival Prayer Book],’ this volume has been in use in South Africa for well over a century and, despite its majestic high-Victorian English, it remains popular even amongst the community’s youth.

The end of the Jewish month of *Teveth* last year marked 125 years since the passing of Chief Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler, *zt”l*, the father of the author of this *Machzor* and who himself had a decisive influence on the form it took. It is likely that without Rabbi Adler’s input, the Jewish communities of Britain and the former British Empire, including South Africa, would be far less religious and Orthodox Jews would be heavily outnumbered. This article will examine the life and achievements of this ‘eagle’ (Adler meaning eagle in German), who tenaciously fought for authentic Judaism in a challenging arena.



**Chief Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler, 1803-1890**

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Nathan Marcus Adler was born on 21 *Teveth* 5562 (1803), three years after the passing of his close relative Rabbi Nosan Adler, educator of the *Chatam Sofer*. As the latter died childless, R. Mordechai Adler, Av Beth Din of Hanover, named his son Nosan (Nathan) in the hope that the boy would follow in his family’s illustrious paths. The Adlers had lived in Frankfurt-am-Main for centuries. They were *kohanim* - in fact, their surname was originally Kahn or Kayn. An ancestor was Rabbi Shimon HaDarshan, author of the famed *Yalkut Shimoni*, and they counted among their relatives and connections R. David Tevele Schiff, Chief Rabbi of London’s Great Synagogue from 1765-91, and the Rothschilds. Nathan’s brother, Gabriel, was a Rabbi and another brother, Baer, was a Dayan.<sup>1</sup> The family motto was *K’nesher ya’ir kino* - “as an eagle stirreth up her nest” - from the verse in Deuteronomy.<sup>2</sup>

Nathan sedulously learnt Torah from his father, and then progressed to the respected Yeshiva of R. Avraham Bing in Würzburg. He obtained *semicha* (rabbinic ordination) in 1828. Other graduates of this illustrious institution were R. Yaakov Ettlinger, whose masterwork *Aruch LaNer* is used in *yeshivoth* the world over to this day, and R. Isaac Bernays (Chacham Bernays), mentor of R. Samson Raphael Hirsch. During their spare time, these young prodigies studied in nearby universities in order to understand the pervading zeitgeist and to influence the highly-cultured German Jews to remain faithful to Torah (an approach later outlined by R. Hirsch in his epic work *Chorev – ‘Horeb’*, as it is commonly referred to). R. Adler learnt in four universities: Göttingen, Erlangen, Würzburg and the much vaunted Heidelberg. At Göttingen, he developed a rapport with Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg, who eventually became Queen Victoria’s husband. R. Adler showed uncanny ability in the field of languages, which would later assist him in his rabbinic works. It was not long before he accepted his first rabbinical position, as Rabbi of the Oldenburg community. When his father died shortly afterwards, he assumed his position as Rabbi and Dayan of Hanover. On his advice, his former community appointed a young man, 22 years old to be exact, to be his successor. He was the afore-mentioned R. Samson Raphael Hirsch, a name soon to become synonymous with erudition and piety throughout Europe.

In 1829, Rabbi Adler married Henrietta

Worms; they had five children. He had another three children from his second marriage, to Celestine Lehfeldt.

During his fifteen years in Hanover, R. Adler gained influence in governmental circles and established a warm relationship with members of the British Royal Family (who, being themselves of Hanoverian origin, naturally enjoyed close ties with Hanover). His father had also been a confidant of previous British Viceroys of the city. Upon the death of the respected Rabbi of London, Chief Rabbi Solomon (Shlomo Zalman) Hirschell, the community set about finding a new Chief Rabbi. Out of thirteen initial candidates, the choice was narrowed to four: R. Adler, R. Samson Raphael Hirsch, R. Zvi Binyomin Auerbach (author of *Nachal Eshkol*) and R. Tzvi Hirschfeld of Wollstein. R. Adler was chosen by an overwhelming majority. Among the letters that he presented to S H Ellis, President of the London Great Synagogue, was one from the former Viceroy of Hanover, then the Duke of Cambridge and Queen Victoria's uncle. It is said that the Queen herself championed R. Adler's candidacy, in appreciation for sagacious advice he had once offered her. Victoria had been visiting Hanover whilst expecting a child and become aware that she would be unable to return to England in time to give birth. British law then dictated that to be eligible for the Crown, a child had to be born upon British soil. With much perspicacity, R. Adler advised her to board a ship flying the Union Jack: this would be considered English territory. The Queen followed his advice and remained grateful to him ever after.<sup>3</sup> In 1850, when the Duke of Cambridge was presenting prizes at the Western Jewish Girl's Free School, he announced - perhaps with some complacency - that he had been instrumental in R. Adler's appointment.<sup>4</sup>

Upon his arrival in London, R. Adler found the community in a state of disarray. The *shuls* were not unified and each had its own schooling arrangements. Moreover, the Reform movement had just been launched by several disgruntled former members of Bevis Marks, who had moved out of the City and established their own synagogue named the West London Synagogue of British Jews. With these threats to his faith, R. Adler made education one of the key missions of his Chief Rabbinate. He was also loath to sanction liturgical changes in the Great Synagogue, despite coming under increasing pressure to do so.

To prevent the spread of the Reform heresy, R. Adler endeavoured to unite the various synagogues under one body. This idea he broached one morning in 1866 to guests in his *Sukkah* and in 1870, the three East End *shuls* and two synagogues in the West End became the United Synagogue (by Act of Parliament no less!) Meanwhile, the Reform movement

utilised the *London Jewish Chronicle* as a venue to express their anti-Orthodox feeling and to wage an intensifying campaign against Chief Rabbi Adler, who was regarded as someone who professed views not conducive to 'social progress'. This assertion can only be regarded as spurious. R. Adler's term saw the complete emancipation of British Jewry, with Sir David Salomons becoming the first Jewish Lord Mayor of London in 1855, the first Jewish MP, Lionel de Rothschild, taking his seat in 1858 and Nathan Mayer Rothschild becoming the first Jewish member of the House of Lords (1885). In addition, R. Adler was a founder of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty and Better Protection of Children, which attempted to assuage the terrible neglect of children in the Victorian era.

When it became known that the fledgling Reformist movement intended to repudiate the second day of Yom Tov (*Yom Tov Sheini*) as observed in the Jewish Diaspora and as codified in the *Shulchan Aruch*, R. Adler expounded forcefully against this attempted uprooting of Jewish law. The Reform leader was a *semicha*-less David Woolf Marks, a prominent *baal-koreh* (Reader) in his youth who was (presumably) dismissed from the Liverpool Old Hebrew Congregation when he refused to read on *Yom Tov Sheini*. He became a cleric at a temple reviled by the Orthodox religious community. Sir Moses Montefiore once said to the president of that establishment "I do not consider the place of worship in Burton Street referred to by you to be a synagogue."<sup>5</sup> Reform members again used the *London Jewish Chronicle* as a forum to disseminate views casting ridicule upon R. Adler and his defence of preserving *Yom Tov Sheini*. Nonetheless, R. Adler remained unmoved and upheld the January 1842 *herem* (ban) of Chief Rabbi Solomon Hirschell and the Sephardi Dayanim against the Reformists. R. Hirschell had declared "certain persons calling themselves British Jews...reject the Oral Law...any person or persons publicly declaring that he or she rejects and do not believe in the authority of the Oral Law, cannot be permitted to have any communion with us Israelites in any religious rite or sacred act."

In order to ensure that as wide an array of *shuls* as possible would benefit from his stirring sermons, R. Adler made a point of not being confined to addressing only one congregation. His addresses, delivered whilst clad in a flowing black ministerial cap and gown (as was *de riguer* in Germany), inspired even some of the most assimilated members of the community. In his sermons, the concept of an inviolable *mesorah* (tradition) stretching back to Mt. Sinai was often stressed. R. Adler would be able to say that he fulfilled Isaiah's injunction to be "a light unto the nations."<sup>6</sup> Gentile commentators noted in veneration how his assertion of Judaic values

was printed alongside the likes of (*L'havdil!*) the primary Westminster and City gentile ecclesiastics in the London newspapers: "...he never fails to implore his flock to be true to the model of Judaism which is known as Orthodox... there is in his manner no vehemence, nor even rapid fluency, but there is evidence of deep feeling and genuine meditation", declared an impressed reporter for the *Liverpool Daily Post*.<sup>7</sup>



*The Great Synagogue, originally built in 1690, where R. Adler ministered.*

R. Adler would travel the length and breadth of Great Britain to ensure that new congregations founded in the provinces would also receive his sermons. His schedule was demanding as far as synagogue consecration was concerned; he opened most of the resplendent Victorian synagogues in Great Britain, such as Birmingham's Singer's Hill in 1856 and Liverpool's Princes Road in 1874. In 1863, accompanied by his son, he opened Sunderland's Synagogue and in 1874 he officiated at the opening of Middlesborough's, on which occasion the mayor came to the station to wave him goodbye!

The Chief Rabbi's influence now extended across a rapidly developing British Empire, 'upon which the sun never set.' He received *halachic* questions from across the globe, with his role sometimes combining expounding *halacha* with providing psychological encouragement to colleagues in distant colonial outposts. He once solicitously informed a distraught Cape Town Rabbi in 1860 that if he wished him to speak with his community, "...I will readily do so, I will support you wholeheartedly and encourage them to pay attention to you and to strengthen what you have established." He

advised the Rabbi to stay in South Africa and continue his work.<sup>8</sup>

In 1847, to ensure that even the most far-flung colonial stations would remain true to the Torah, R. Adler instituted a list of '*Takanoth*', entitled *Laws and Regulations for all the Synagogues in the British Empire*, which demanded that synagogues at all times conform to *halacha*. He approved of better decorum in synagogue and likewise supported regulations prohibiting talking during services and leaving before the very end of the service. Fines of half a crown were imposed for chewing tobacco in synagogue. R. Adler was *halachically* inflexible; for example, he ordered the removal of a stained glass window depicting G-d's "All-seeing eye" because he deemed it to be a direct contravention of the Second Commandment.<sup>9</sup> The Prince Consort, the Queen's husband Prince Albert, shared a convivial friendship with R. Adler, and recruited him to assist with the Great Exhibition in 1851. It was arranged that Jews would not be obligated to sign the entry book of the Exhibition on their Sabbath.<sup>10</sup>

To ensure that no Reform challengers would emerge in any synagogue under his jurisdiction, R. Adler insisted that he would be the only British Minister to be entitled 'Rabbi'. All other ministerial colleagues were to be entitled 'Reverend'- even if they had *semicha*. Due to his towering stature, this arrangement to negate Reform credibility produced surprisingly little conflict.

The famed Rev. Simeon Singer (who married a descendant of R. Jonathan Eybeschütz) obtained his *semicha* from R. Isaac Hirsch Weiss in Vienna in 1890. R. Weiss, who's most well-known work, *Dor Dor ve-Dorshav*, traces the history of the Oral Law from its inception until the expulsion from Spain, taught at the Vienna *Beth HaMidrash*. Singer spent two months being meticulously examined by him. However on his return, in deference to Chief Rabbi Adler's directive, he continued to use the title of Reverend. His respect for R. Adler was evinced with the publication that year of his *magnum opus*, the *Authorised Daily Prayer Book of the British Empire* (based on the '*Abodath Israel*' *Siddur* accepted by German Jewry). It appeared after R. Adler's death, but the preface nonetheless declares, "As it was practically complete before the death of the late Chief Rabbi, Dr N. M. Adler, it was enabled to receive, and to be issued with the stamp of his sanction and authorisation." The Singer *Siddur* became the most widely used Jewish prayer book in history, and is still in use.<sup>11</sup>

The orders of service R. Adler compiled reflected the national history of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. Special services were composed for British victories in India, the birth of Queen Victoria's children, cholera, famine, the sickness of Lady Rothschild, Sir Moses Montefiore's journeys



abroad, the funeral of the Prince Consort and, in later years, prayers for Jews in Russia.<sup>12</sup> R. Adler's seal of office had an eagle on it and it was said of him that he "watched over his international flock with the bird's intensity."<sup>13</sup> He also attempted to better standards of *kashruth*, in which regard he opposed a certain method of slaughtering calves which involved stunning them before *shechita* (religious slaughter). Although the practice was upheld by certain members of the Sephardi community, to minimize the possibility of *halachic* inconsistency, he wrote, "Despite all this I said, perhaps there has been left for me an area in which to set a *geder* [*halachic* boundary] and I told the *shochtim* here not to slaughter calves such as these." On occasion, his stringencies regarding *kashruth* provoked legal and bureaucratic challenges from his opponents but he remained resolute. His expertise on the *kashruth* of different species of birds led his office to receive enquiries from across the world and *Gedolei HaDor* (eminent rabbinic leaders) did not hesitate to consult him on such matters.

In all his endeavours, not least his war against Reformist deviations, R. Adler could count on his trusted and faithful confidant, Sir Moses Montefiore. The editor of Sir Moses' diaries maintained that whenever Sir Moses, in his capacity as President of the Board of Deputies of British Jews, was called upon to make a decision on religious matters, he invariably referred to R. Adler for guidance, regarding "a word from him as decisive and obeyed its injunctions at whatever cost to himself." Elections to the Board of Deputies in 1853 produced four people who proclaimed they would represent the Reform secessionists. Sir Moses was adamant that they would not, pointing out that the first clause of the Board's constitution aimed to prevent "infraction upon the religious rites, customs and privileges of the Jewish community". Sir Moses held that the Reform breakaways had themselves committed this infraction and thus could not be represented! The arguments grew so fierce that Montefiore had to summon police to the hall where the meeting took place. Sir Moses eventually emerged victorious, having represented R. Adler's views while keeping him out of the tempestuous confrontation.<sup>14</sup>

Anxious to improve the derisory Jewish educational scene in England at the time, R. Adler struggled from 1852-55 to raise enough funds for a decent Jewish religious school. He initially wanted to expand the Great Synagogue's *Beth HaMidrash* to start a school or college, but this idea was scrapped due to objections from donors. When eventually R. Adler managed to open what was entitled Jews College, he recalled with displeasure that "some regarded [the school] unnecessary, nay injurious, to the progress of the community." Even then it was a constant battle to keep the institution afloat. Indeed, it was a feat to have opened a religious

college and school at all in the London of the mid-1850s, where there were only around 3700 synagogue pews available for approximately 23 000 Jews! Nonetheless, Jews College eventually helped train some of the world's most outstanding *chazanim* and scholars, amongst them R. Immanuel Jakobovits, Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth from 1967-1991 (whose training was supplemented by Etz Chaim Yeshiva).

R. Adler was desirous of Torah instruction for all ages and himself delivered informed *shiurim* (lectures) in *Gemara*. In order to provide children from impecunious backgrounds with a decent Torah education, he began a free schooling system. There is little doubt that he would have wholeheartedly supported Sarah Schenirer's *Beth Ya'akov* movement for girls' education. "Those who believed that the destiny of a girl was poverty - that her destiny was an inferior one - might entertain such an erroneous opinion; but those who knew that she was fashioned for a higher life - for a better life - could not doubt that schools for girls was of the greatest moment" he once declared. He asserted that those not educating women about Judaism were "not in accordance with the spirit of the Torah."

R. Adler made sure that the religious knowledge of his son Naftali (Hermann) would not be sacrificed because of the community's failure to establish a *yeshiva*. Young Hermann was despatched to Prague in 1860 to receive a respectable *semicha*. Upon his return two years later, he often deputised for his sixty year-old father, became principal of Jews College and was appointed Rabbi of the affluent Bayswater Synagogue.

Despite his burdensome schedule, R. Adler found time for writing. This included a most scholarly commentary, entitled *Nethina LaGer*, on the Targum Onkelos, the famed Aramaic translation of the Torah by Onkelos, who converted to Judaism despite being the Roman General Titus' nephew. *Nethina LaGer* was published in a special edition of the Pentateuch during 5634/1874 by the prolific Rohm ("Brothers and Widow") publishers of Vilna, who also published the renowned Vilna edition of the Talmud that is used to this day. R. Adler utilised this opportunity to view some ancient Hebrew manuscripts from the Bodleian Library in Oxford and London's British Museum to complement his work. He also composed a short commentary on the exposition of Rav Hai Gaon on *Seder Taharoth*. Many of his works were also published in the vernacular for the benefit of the community.

Most unfortunately, the majority of R. Adler's Torah works were never published. He left many of his own novellae on Talmud and the *Poskim* (religious rulings), and *halachic* questions and responsa in his own handwriting.

His commentary consisting of a staggering thirty volumes on Targum Jonathan on the Prophets (named *Ahavath Yonathan*). He also completed a German and English translation of Rabbi Judah HaLevi's classic *Kuzari*.

Rabbi Adler was well known to the rabbinic leaders of the generation. The *Chatam Sofer* recorded how he had once given sanction to a German translation of the Talmud because it had been incorrectly pointed out to him that "a group of *Gedolei Olam* [world authorities] and *anshei ma'aseh* [distinguished men]" were partaking in this initiative; as an example of such leaders, he mentioned "*HaRav HaGadol HaTzadik Morenu HaRav Nosan Adler Kohen Tzedek, Av Beth Din of the holy Kehilla of Hanover*". Continued the *Chatam Sofer*, "[because] according to my opinion, this Rabbi was held as a *tzaddik* [righteous man] and a *talmid chacham* [wise scholar], I said the one part would testify on all" (i.e., that R. Adler would testify to the suitability of the rest of the participating scholars). Whilst the facts regarding the edition had been incorrectly presented to the *Chatam Sofer*, nonetheless, the way he viewed R. Adler is noteworthy, particularly as the latter was only 32 years old at the time.<sup>15</sup>

Similary R. Yosef Shaul Nathanson, in his work *Shoel U'Mashiv*, wrote regarding a divorce case that he had been very cautious about delivering a ruling and therefore decided to ask "*Morenu HaRav Yaakov Ettlinger... Av Beth Din...of Altona and the great eagle, HaRav Morenu HaRav Nosan Adler...Av Beth*

Din...of London if they agree with me."<sup>16</sup> The author of *Melamed Leho'il*, R. David Hoffman, also mentions R. Adler in glowing terms, while the illustrious R. Ezriel Hildesheimer called him one of the "*Geonei Yisrael*."<sup>17</sup> R. Isaac D. Bamberger, author of *Yad Halevi*, frequently sought R. Adler's advice and advised others to turn to the "the Great *Kohen Morenu HaRav Nosan Adler...Av Beth Din of the Kehilla Kedosha* [holy community] London."<sup>18</sup>

When it came to any matter that would assist his brethren, R. Adler was at the forefront of efforts to such ends. Thus, he established the Jewish Hospital in London, and worked hand in hand with Sir Moses Montefiore to assist Jews across the Diaspora. Towards the end of his life, he withdrew somewhat from the public's eye and some of his duties were assumed by his son R. Hermann Adler. He finally retired to Brighton where, on 29 *Teveth* 5650/21 January 1890, at the age of 87 years, he returned his soul to his Maker. According to accounts from his descendants, Chief Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler expired whilst attired in his *Tallith* (prayer-shawl) and *Tefillin* (phylacteries) for the *Shacharith* prayers at the Brighton Synagogue. When he commenced the recitation of the *Shema* passage and reached the word '*Echad*' [the Lord is *One*], he recited it in a fervently piercing voice and his soul left him at that hallowed instant. Numerous European Rabbis and communal leaders from across the world travelled to London to pay their respects at his funeral.

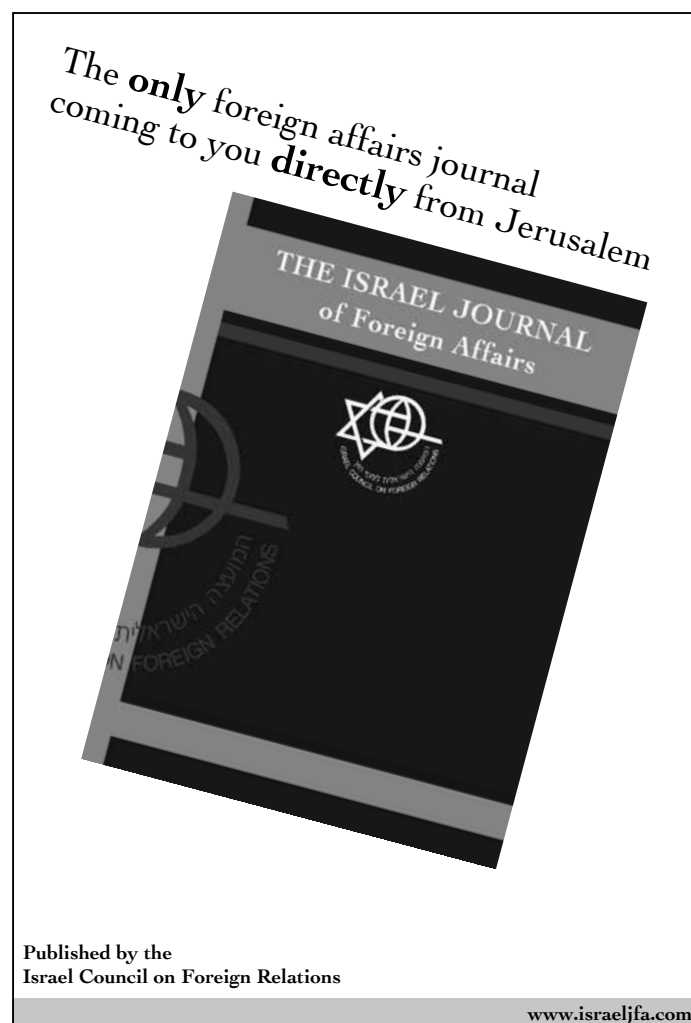


Grave of Chief Rabbi N M Adler, in London's Willesden Jewish Cemetery.

What was the legacy of Rabbi Nathan Marcus Adler? Quite apart from the road named after him in London, his heritage is primarily spiritual. In January 1890, in a wise editorial comment, the *London Jewish Chronicle* declared: "Had a man of smaller ability and with a less commanding personality occupied the Rabbinical chair, it is probable that the wholesale Reforms and the undesirable extravagances that characterise American Judaism would have found their way into our community." Perhaps R. Adler's real *tour de force* was that through his strong, united governance, the great majority of British Jews remain Orthodox (unlike the United States, where Reform Judaism is overwhelmingly the largest sector). R. Adler's life was a source of great *Kiddush Hashem* [Sanctification of G-d's Name] and remains of profound inspiration for those who know his story.

#### NOTES

- 1 Derek Taylor, *British Chief Rabbis 1664-2006*, Edgware, Vallentine Mitchell, 2007, p238. This was a primary source for quotations of R. Adler.
- 2 Deut. 32:11. See Raymond Apple, *United Synagogue – Religious Founders & Leaders*, in *A Century of Anglo-Jewish Life: Lectures to Commemorate the Centenary of the United Synagogue*, London, published by the United Synagogue, 1970.
- 3 Eliyahu Meir Klugman, *Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch - Autobiography*, New York, Artscroll-Mesorah Publications, 1998, p80. See also Cecil Roth, 'Britain's Three Chief Rabbis', *Jewish Leaders*, pp 479-80.
- 4 Taylor, p237.
- 5 Raymond Apple, *Professor Marks and the Oral Law Controversy*, Jerusalem, self-published, July 2008, p5.
- 6 Isaiah 42:6.
- 7 Taylor, p258.
- 8 *Ibid*, p247.
- 9 See *Liverpool Mercury*, 11 September 1857.
- 10 Taylor, p242.
- 11 From Rabbi G. Shishler, *The Life of the Rev. Simeon Singer*, London, lecture given at the New West End Synagogue, 28 March 2004. Available from Rabbi G Shisler.
- 12 Raymond Apple, 'Nathan Marcus Adler – Chief Rabbi', <http://www.oztorah.com/2009/08/nathan-marcus-adler-chief-rabbi/>, 2015, (Accessed 3 June 2015).
- 13 *Ibid*, p241.
- 14 *Ibid*, p249.
- 15 *Likutei Teshuvos Chasam Sofer*, Chelek HaMichtavim, Siman 38.
- 16 *Shaalos U'teshuvos Shoel Umeshiv*, Telisa'ah Ches Gimel, End of Siman 126.
- 17 *Igros Rav Eziel Hildesheimer*, p112.
- 18 He was titled the *Ga'avad* of Würzburg. See *Sha'alos U'Teshuvos Yad Halevi*, Chelek Aleph, Yoreh Deah, Siman 37.



# DARDANELLES, DRIED FLOWERS AND A DRIED LEAF: WHO WAS J RABINOWITZ DRECHSLER?

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Gwynne Schrire

What are the Dardanelles, who was J Rabinowitz Drechsler and what is the significance of an old brown leaf?

These were the questions that came to mind when opening the book *Blumen von Heiligen Lande* (Flowers of the Holy Land). Previously donated to the old Jewish Museum in Cape Town the book, which is in German, Hebrew and English, was taken over by the Cape Council SA Jewish Board of Deputies, the trustees, because it did not fit into the collection of the new SA Jewish Museum.<sup>1</sup> It contains twelve thick plates, separated by protective tissue, of pictures made of pressed dried flowers, and has olivewood covers with the word *Jerusalem* inscribed in a rectangular floral parquetry border.

Books like this brought back by early 20<sup>th</sup> Century tourists to the Holy Land can be found in museums, libraries and collections in many countries.<sup>2</sup> There is something unique about ours. Glued onto the first page is a red, white and blue British military ribbon that would have held the miniature 1914-1915 Star Medal.<sup>3</sup> The ribbon has been tied onto a small dried leaf with a few insect holes on the sides and the tip missing. Written on the leaf are the words *Dardanelles 1915*. That makes the leaf one hundred years old! Inside the book is stamped the name *J Rabinowitz Drechsler*.

Why did Rabinowitz Drechsler stamp his name inside? Who wrote the words *Dardanelles 1915* on the leaf, using expensive gold ink? These



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questions set me on a trail to find some answers.

The Dardanelles Strait runs along the south of Turkey's Gallipoli Peninsula and controls the entrance to the Black Sea. 2015 is the centenary of the Gallipoli campaign, which took place during the First World War when the Ottoman Empire, which included Palestine, sided with

Germany and Austria. Winston Churchill, then First Lord of the Admiralty, thought that by seizing Gallipoli the Allies could knock the Ottoman Empire out of the war and obtain a clear sea route to their Russian allies.<sup>4</sup> Unfortunately it did not work out like that and the Gallipoli, or Dardanelles Campaign was one of the great Allied disasters of the war. It took place between 25 April 1915 and 9 January 1916 and was a fiasco, poorly planned and badly executed. By the time it ended over 100 000 men were dead, including 56 000 – 68 000 Turkish and some 53 000 British, Commonwealth and French soldiers.<sup>5</sup>

Vladimir (Ze'ev) Jabotinsky, the writer Israel Zangwill, Mrs Vera Weizmann and Zangwill's cousins Monty Eder and Joe Cowen had been trying to persuade the British to recruit a Jewish battalion, hoping to increase Jewish post-war influence in Palestine.<sup>6</sup> In Alexandria in British-occupied Egypt were about 11 000 Jews, who had been deported from Tel Aviv and Jaffa by the Turks.<sup>7</sup> In February 1915, Jabotinsky and Joseph Trumpeldor approached General Maxwell, the British commander, suggesting that they help recruit a Jewish legion among the deportees to fight in Palestine. Maxwell rejected the idea as the British Army did not accept foreign nationals into its ranks. However, knowing that most of the roads on the Turkish side were little more than cart tracks, Maxwell proposed instead that they form a 'mule corps' to serve somewhere other than Palestine.<sup>8</sup> This in due course led to the creation of the Zion Mule Corps (ZMC). It would be the first time in British history that non-Britons or non-colonials would participate as a unit in the British forces.<sup>9</sup> Other motives were at play. As General Sir Ian Hamilton, Commander-in-Chief of the Anglo-French Expeditionary Force in the Dardanelles, noted in his diary, "the Corps may serve as ground bait to entice the big Jew journalists and bankers to our cause; the former will lend us colour, the latter the coin."<sup>10</sup>

Jabotinsky resented the idea that his proposed Jewish Legion would be a Mule Corps. "What a shocking combination," he wrote, "Zion, the rebirth of a nation, the first really Jewish troop in the whole history of Exile, and 'mules'".<sup>11</sup>

Trumpeldor better understood the realities of war. After qualifying in law and dentistry, he served in the Russian army, losing his left arm in action and becoming one of only two Jews to be promoted to the rank of officer (and this by royal order). He responded, "We've got to smash the Turk. On which front you begin is just technique; any front leads to Zion."<sup>12</sup> He further told Jabotinsky, "Trenches or transport is practically the same – all so essential that you can't do without it; and even the danger is often the same. You are just afraid of the word 'mules' and that is childish."<sup>13</sup>

Jabotinsky refused to enlist in the ZMC

but Trumpeldor began recruiting and training volunteers from the Alexandrian refugees along with other Jews hoping to assist the British in taking Palestine from the Turks. Was one of the deportees who joined the ZMC Rabinowitz Drechsler?

On 23 March 1915, in the presence of many local dignitaries, Grand Rabbi Raphael della Pergola administered the oath of obedience to the 650 new recruits, who swore obedience to the officer commanding the Corps and to such officers as should be placed over them. An emotional telegram of encouragement from Zangwill referring to a happy return to Palestine was read out. Zangwill later complained to the *Jewish Chronicle* that his "telegram had been toned down by the local military censor."<sup>14</sup> (In August, he contacted the War Office in London with funds to recruit Jews from other countries, especially Italy, into the ZMC. The War Office took them into the Italian army instead.)

Five British and eight Jewish officers were appointed - the latter were not permitted to eat in the British officers' mess and received 40% less pay. The Commanding Officer was an Irishman, Lieutenant-Colonel John Henry Patterson, with Trumpeldor as Second-in-Command. Patterson later described Trumpeldor as "the bravest man I ever knew".<sup>15</sup> Intense training went on for only three weeks as the men were under orders to sail for Gallipoli to supply front-line troops with food, water and ammunition. Patterson wrote that "never since the days of Judah Maccabee had such sights and sounds been seen and heard in a military camp - with the drilling of uniformed soldiers in the Hebrew language." Orders were given in English, Hebrew and Yiddish as 75% of the men were from Russia. (Petrov, the Russian Consul in Alexandria, demanded unsuccessfully that the latter be sent back to enlist in the Russian army.)

The ZMC was allocated twenty horses for officers and NCOs and 750 pack mules. Wooden carriers to fit the pack saddles were made locally, each designed to carry four four-gallon water-cans (also locally made). The Grand Rabbi was nominated Honorary Chaplain and for Pesach, Patterson obtained kosher food and matzah and attended the *Sedorim*. The badge of the ZMC was the Star of David, with a blue-and-white Zionist flag alongside the Union Jack. It became the first regular Jewish fighting force – with a distinctively Jewish emblem and flag - to take active part in a war since the Bar Kochba Revolt more than 1800 years before.

At the end of their training, on 17 April, the Corps marched three miles to the Alexandria Great Synagogue, where they were blessed by the Grand Rabbi and cheered by the local population before setting sail for Gallipoli.<sup>16</sup> By 25 April, 562 members of the ZMC had been sent to join the Australian, New Zealand and Gurkha units on the Gallipoli Peninsula.



"The Zion Mule Corps went ashore under the deafening roar of artillery, machine guns and rifles... It took them three days to unload in the badly organized shuttle of lighters moving to and from the shore, and carrying ammunition boxes was made more difficult by the behaviour of the animals which, terrified by the gunfire, were running and stumbling into craters and over muddy beaches, having to be pursued and calmed before they were fit for service. By this time the Corps were badly needed to take up supplies to the front-line trenches holding the bridgehead, and once ashore they went straight to work, forming a human chain from ships to shore passing supplies and water onto land, all the while under enemy fire... The Corps worked all night and through the next day taking supplies up to the front, now in pouring rain and biting winds which made the rough paths into mud slides. Men and animals walked up and down wadis and hillsides, through thick bush and across rock strewn slopes, often unknowingly passing through the wire and trenches into the no-man's-land between the Turkish and Allied lines and being shot at by both sides in the darkness, rain and constant shellfire. Yet by the following dawn, when they were stood down exhausted, only a few men and mules were found to have been wounded."<sup>17</sup>

Patterson described to the *Jewish Chronicle* how "(t)hese brave lads who had never seen shellfire before most competently unloaded the boats and handled the mules whilst shells were bursting in close proximity to them ... nor were they in any way discouraged when they had to plod their way... walking over dead bodies while the bullets flew around them ... for two days and two nights we marched."<sup>18</sup>

While some slept, parties of men and mules took turns bringing up forage, water and ammunition from the beaches to the front throughout the day and following night. The Corps was the only transport available and was constantly at work. Brigadier-General Aspinall-Oglander acknowledged that "(s)pecial recognition is due to the Zion Mule Corps for their untiring energy ... bringing up ammunition and water to the forward positions and carrying back the wounded, under very heavy fire."<sup>19</sup> On one occasion the men refused to unload sides of bacon until the Grand Rabbi granted dispensation – the Rabbi even allowed them to eat it if necessary. A New Zealand officer later wrote that the troops were amused to see the Jews of the ZMC returning to their cookhouse with little bags of bacon.<sup>20</sup>

The *Times* war correspondent wrote, "Water was severely rationed, every drop having to be carried to the front lines. Sanitary conditions were literally appalling; latrines consisting merely of holes in the ground, where the flies

bred ceaselessly".<sup>21</sup> Dysentery became endemic. Cpl Riley described it as looking like a midden and smelling like an open cemetery.<sup>22</sup> Almost as many casualties came from the intense heat and flies as from enemy action. By the end of July, casualties and illness had reduced the ZMC to less than half its original strength, although it had to carry out the same volume of work. By the end of the campaign, fourteen of its men had been killed and over sixty wounded (a hundred mules had also been lost) in action. In November, Hamilton wrote to Jabotinsky that "(t)he men have done extremely well, working their mules calmly under heavy shell and rifle fire, and thus showing a more difficult type of bravery than the men who were constantly in the trenches and had the excitement of combat to keep them going."<sup>23</sup>

Hamilton later wrote in his diary, "I have here, fighting under my orders, a purely Jewish unit - the Zion Mule Corps. As far as I know, this is the first time in the Christian era such a thing has happened. They have shown great courage taking supplies up to the line under heavy fire" and proved "invaluable to us".<sup>24</sup> Patterson said that everybody, from General Hamilton, the Commander-in-Chief, to the private in the ranks gave the ZMC unstinted praise.<sup>25</sup> He wrote, "Many of the Zionists whom I thought somewhat lacking in courage showed themselves fearless to a degree when under heavy fire, while Captain Trumpeldor actually revelled in it, and the hotter it became the more he liked it". (Trumpeldor was once shot through the shoulder but refused to leave the field.) Major F. Waite, wrote of "the risks run by the ZMC ... they carried their lives in their hands ... for the enemy had the range to a yard of every landing stage, dump and roadway" which they used.<sup>26</sup>

On 28 December, the order came through for the ZMC to be disbanded. They were among the last to leave. Before doing so in January 1916, they paid formal tribute to their dead comrades, and then, having slashed the throats of mules too ill to evacuate, departed – one of them taking with him a leaf. Did it fall in his pocket? Did it represent a near miss, the tree above him taking a Turkish bullet, leaves fluttering around him? Was it to remind him of the hell hole they had survived with their reputation flying high?

Sidney Moseley, a War Office representative, said that "the Zion Mule Corps became indispensable in Gallipoli."<sup>27</sup> Despite this, Britain later refused to grant the men of the ZMC regular British army pensions and the Corps was disbanded. Trumpeldor and Jabotinsky moved to London and continued to lobby for a Jewish Legion. One of those he interviewed was General Smuts (whom he thought "a lovable personality of the continental type"). Smuts told him, "That Jews should fight for the Land of Israel is the

finest idea I have heard in my life.”<sup>28</sup>

The British then decided to attack the Turks in Palestine and, being short of soldiers, to make use of Russian Jews in England whom they were not able to enlist before. No fewer than 120 of the ZMC re-enlisted in the newly formed Jewish Battalions of the Royal Fusiliers (38<sup>th</sup>-42<sup>nd</sup>) who were to fight in Palestine as the Jewish Legion or ‘Judeans’,<sup>29</sup> with Patterson commanding the 38<sup>th</sup> Battalion. This time Jabotinsky was prepared to join up, was appointed a Lieutenant and commanded a company, headed by Patterson, which was the first to cross the Jordan in pursuit of the Turkish forces.<sup>30</sup> Some of its men later formed the core of what was to become the modern Israeli army.

As T H Huxley has reminded us, the great tragedy of science is “the slaying of a beautiful hypothesis by an ugly fact”. No Rabinowitz Drechsler is listed in the *British Jewry Book of Honour* as a member of the Zion Mule Corps and, as he was already living in Jerusalem in 1888, he would probably have been too old to enlist.<sup>31</sup> If he was not the soldier who carefully preserved a leaf from the campaign knotted into his campaign ribbon, however, why is his name stamped in *Blumen von Heiligen Landen*?

Thanks to the Internet, we learn that J Rabinowitz Drechsler was living in Jerusalem in 1888, and that he was in financial distress. Charity in the form of *halukah* - distribution of funds collected for indigent ultra-orthodox Jews in the Holy Land - was common before the advent of Zionism (which opposed the system). Both the German Orthodox newspapers, *Der Israelit* in 1888, and the *Israelit und Jeschurun* in 1889, published lists of donations subscribed for him - two marks from Rosenthal in Holzappel, three marks from David Bauer in Frankfurt am Mein, five marks from Baum, etc.<sup>32</sup>

We also know that the Cape Council is not the only possessor of a book with J Rabinowitz Drechsler’s name stamped inside. The special collection library at the Yeshivah University Center for Jewish History in New York City has a copy of *Blumen von Heiligen Lande* with the identical stamp on a blank page.<sup>33</sup> So has the Jewish Museum of Maryland’s *Haggadah* (published by S Zuckerman, Jerusalem, 1896).<sup>34</sup> Both books, like ours, have handcrafted covers of cut, bevelled and polished olivewood with a rectangular parquetry border enclosing the word *Jerusalem* in Hebrew and English. So, did J Rabinowitz Drechsler publish them?

Books of pressed flowers with similar olivewood covers were such popular tourist souvenirs that they can be found in several international museums and libraries and are for sale on rare book and Judaica auctions. The educator and botanist John Edward Dinsmore worked in Jerusalem for a time, and there exists a photograph dated about 1920 showing such a book on a table surrounded by pages of

pressed flowers and plants.<sup>35</sup> The books have almost identical titles, although the languages can differ - Russian/ English or German/ Hebrew, and identical variants of pressed flower pictures. Strangely, though, the name of the publisher on the title page (when not absent altogether) differs. They include Ephtimi Freres, Jerusalem<sup>36</sup>; Avraham Moshe Lunz<sup>37</sup>; Gebr Baltinester<sup>38</sup>; A L Monsohn, Jerusalem<sup>39</sup>; Antoine Sfeir, Jerusalem<sup>40</sup>; O J Jerusalem<sup>41</sup>; N P, London<sup>42</sup>; “printed in Germany for the Editeur N. De Simini” and Atallah Frères<sup>43</sup> (a Palestinian Arab company). Even the American Colony in Jerusalem - a utopian Christian commune that did charity work from 1881 to the early 1940s - published some. None bear the name J Rabinowitz Drechsler.

The production of such a book requires more than just a firm to publish it. It requires people to collect the flowers and ferns, dry and press them. Then there is the painstaking labour of delicately gluing the flowers according to a pre-selected pattern onto the pages, after which the pages must be bound together, the tissue paper between the leaves inserted and, of course, the cover attached - not just conventional cardboard covers, but ones beautifully made of olivewood.

We do find the name J Rabinowitz Drechsler in The *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern* newspaper from Wisconsin, America. On 29 March 1892, it reported, “WG Brauer received a unique gift from Jerusalem yesterday. It was a short branch of an olive tree neatly carved. The carver was Joseph Rabinawitz (sic) Drechsler, a Jew expelled from Russia. The gift was sent as a specimen of his work in the hope of securing orders.”<sup>44</sup> From this we learn that his first name was Joseph, that he came from Russia, and that he carved olivewood and wanted to export his work.

In 1895 and 1896, Rabinowitz Drechsler sent a number of letters, in German, from Jerusalem to the Danish Chief Rabbi, David Simonsen.<sup>45</sup> Three such letters are housed in the Royal Library of Denmark.<sup>46</sup> The rabbi is thanked for sending five marks, with the hope expressed that the Almighty will likewise thank him. Three marks from the rabbi had also been received via Mr Gottlieb. The following month, Rabinowitz Drechsler sent Rosh Hashanah greetings, mentioned the steady Russian immigration and advised that he would be sending the rabbi an *etrog* container made from olivewood. A further letter also mentioned that he was working in olivewood. In April 1900, he also sent a letter from Jerusalem to Herr Leon Israel, Diedenhofen, Lothringen, in the former Alsace Lorraine - the envelope is on sale in philatelic auctions.<sup>47</sup>

A carved olivewood plaque of the *Kotel Hamaaravi* (Western Wall) advertised in an antique catalogue, bears the name “JOSEPH RABINOWITZ Drechsler JERUSALEM” imprinted in an oval stamp on the back. The catalogue illustrates the mark with a photo of a

clearer impression from another item.<sup>48</sup> This is the same oval stamp he imprinted onto a letter to Rabbi Simonsen on 9 October 1896. The name Drechsler is printed in small letters, while RABINOWITZ is in capitals. Drechsler means lathe operator in German, and olivewood covers could be made by lathes which can turn, sand and work in wood. Does the name thus indicate his profession, rather than an additional surname? Probably, because two similar olivewood plaques of the Western Wall, Jerusalem, offered for sale elsewhere have “Joseph Rabinowitz Olive Wood Productions in the Holy City of Jerusalem” printed on the back.<sup>49</sup> (EBay offers a carving of the tomb of Absalom, Jerusalem, by Jacob Rabinowitz Drechsler – certainly a mistake.<sup>50</sup>)

With the influx of poor Jews into Jerusalem in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the Haskalah movement tried to break their dependence on *halukah* and hence, efforts were made to encourage the production of decorative and religious objects for sale to pilgrims, tourists and for export. By the 1870s, there were about one hundred Jews manufacturing olivewood souvenirs in Jerusalem.<sup>51</sup> In the 1880s, the Alliance Israelite Universelle started a trade school, Hatorah Vehamelacha, to teach religion and trades like woodwork and goldsmithing. Gideon Ofrat has identified Rabinowitz as being one of the people who had an olivewood workshop making round plaques of the Holy Places.<sup>52</sup>

One of these ‘paper weights’ with a carving of Jerusalem was displayed in the Silesian Museum of Applied Arts and Antiquities by the Breslau Jewish Museum in a 1929 exhibition of ‘Judaism in the history of Silesia’.<sup>53</sup> The exhibition catalogue states that on the back there is a stamp in Hebrew and Latin script stating that it was custom-made in Jerusalem by Drechsler Rabinowitz. It was probably turfed out four years later when Hitler came to power and Jewish history was erased.

With this knowledge, we can conclude with reasonable certainty that Joseph Rabinowitz, a Drechsler by profession, was an Orthodox Jew from Russia who had probably arrived in Jerusalem in the late 1880s as a penniless refugee, and that after subsisting on *halukah* from Germany, he started a business working in olivewood, manufacturing religious objects like etrog containers, curios, plaques and book covers for popular tourist souvenirs published by different publishers. He had enough entrepreneurial initiative to try to export these to contacts in America, Denmark and Alsace Lorraine, and had sufficient pride in his workmanship to stamp his name and trade J Rabinowitz Drechsler on some of the books and plaques.

Unfortunately, the brave soldier who owned the book and the leaf remains nameless, but thanks to the Internet we now know much more about the person who owned the stamp with

the name. Whoever the owner, it is a unique souvenir of the Gallipoli campaign and of an enterprising woodcarver who left Russia to make a new life for himself in the Holy City of Jerusalem.

## NOTES

- 1 The Board has two copies, this one in Hebrew and German, and another in English and German, with a dedication dated 1905. Both have the pages of pressed flower labelled in Hebrew, German, English and French. The Hebrew version opens from the right, the English from the left. Neither has the name of a publisher. The Australian War Memorial has a similar book of flowers bought by 1134 Private Hubert Arthur Lawler, a baker of East Davenport, Tasmania, who landed at Gallipoli on 12 September 1915 after training in Egypt, and was later invalided out. However, as our book was donated to the Cape Town Jewish Museum, not to an Australian or New Zealand institution, it seems safe to assume that the owner was Jewish and therefore very likely fought in the ZMC.
- 2 University of Glasgow Library special collections: <https://universityofglasgowlibrary.wordpress.com/.../new-acquisition-flo...> Similar acquisition: Flowers and Views by Julie Gardham on September 23, 2009 • ( 10 ) University of Liverpool Library, Special Collections & Archives, Flowers of the Holy Land, London: A Atallah Frères [1900?]. Classmark: Printed Books SPEC Y.90.3.379 Australia War Museum: Souvenir album with olive wood covers ‘Flowers from the Holy Land’: Private H Lawler, 26 Battalion AIF [www.awm.gov.au/collection/REL34211/](http://www.awm.gov.au/collection/REL34211/); The Center for Jewish History Museum. Dr. W. Martin Wadewitz Book Collection Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville [toto.lib.unca.edu/findingaids/books/.../default\\_wadewitz\\_flowers.htm](http://toto.lib.unca.edu/findingaids/books/.../default_wadewitz_flowers.htm), Dr. W. Martin Wadewitz Book Collection Ramsey Library, University of North Carolina at Asheville; Saint Augustine’s University, Raleigh; Saint; Columbia University Libraries, New York
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- 4 ‘Gallipoli’. *HistoryLearningSite.co.uk*. 2014. Web
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- 7 Formerly part of the Ottoman Empire, Britain occupied Egypt in 1882
- 8 Monick, S, ‘Gallipoli: The Landings of 25 April 1915’, 26018340, South African Military History Society *Military History Journal*, Vol 6 No 4 - December 1984
- 9 Sugarman, Martin, ‘The Zion Muleteers of Gallipoli’, (March 1915 - May 1916) [www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsources/History/mulecorp.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsources/History/mulecorp.html)
- 10 Sugarman, M, op cit
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- 12 Jabotinsky, op cit., p42

- 13 Jabotinsky, op cit. p12
- 14 Sugarman, op cit
- 15 Jabotinsky, V, op cit p70
- 16 Sugarman, op cit
- 17 All of this from Sugarman, op cit
- 18 Sugarman, op cit
- 19 Sugarman, op cit
- 20 Major F Waite, *The New Zealanders at Gallipoli*, (Auckland, 1921), quoted in Sugarman
- 21 Monick, 'Gallipoli: The Landings of 25 April 1915'
- 22 Monick, op cit
- 23 Jabotinsky, op cit, p44
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- 25 Patterson, Col., J, Foreword, in Jabotinsky, Vladimir, op cit, pp. 18-19
- 26 Sugarman, op cit
- 27 Quoted by Col John Henry Patterson, Jabotinsky, op cit, p19
- 28 Jabotinsky, op cit p87
- 29 Sugarman, op cit
- 30 Musiker, Naomi, 'Jack Rich's career in the Jewish Legion 1917-1920', *Jewish Affairs*, Chanukah, 2014
- 31 Reverend Michael Adler Editor, *British Jewry Book of Honour*, 1922. London
- 32 Der Israelit, Vol 29, Issue 2, s.n.1888m pp1451-1452., <https://books.google.co.za/books?id=hp8WAQAIAAJ&q=rebinowitz...> Der Israelit, Vol 30. Issue 1, p 732 Google Books, pp Israelit und Jeschurun, pp 978, <https://books.google.co.za/books?id=DaAWAQAAIAAJ> 2015/01/31, Both Google books, both in the University of California
- 33 With thanks to the most helpful librarian, J.D. Arden, Genealogy & Reference Services Assistant Centre for Jewish History. The History Museum is a partnership between the American Jewish Historical Society, American Sephardi Federation, Leo Baeck Institute, Yeshiva University Museum and YIVO Institute for Jewish Research. He put me in touch with Bonni-Dara Michaels, Collections Curator, Yeshiva University Museum, which has the book blumen des heil. landes - CJH Museum Collections – Center who provided this information by e-mail on 12.1. 2015. [museum.cjh.org/web/pages/cjh/Display.php?irn=13470...%2Fquery](http://museum.cjh.org/web/pages/cjh/Display.php?irn=13470...%2Fquery):
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- 44 With thanks to Sonya Kirchner for translating the letters. Rabbi David Simonsen was the Danish Chief Rabbi from 1892-1902. During World War I, he acted as 'communication central', maintaining all the important contacts in Denmark and abroad, between organisations and individuals. He was also able to relay messages between relatives on different sides of the front, and after the war, he continued to be active in different relief organisations, both in Denmark and abroad.
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- 46 Envelope 9/4/00 to D.L. offered for sale. Philasearch.com - German Post in Turkey [online-auktionen.com/en/i\\_9367\\_2915/Old.../michel\\_11a.html](http://online-auktionen.com/en/i_9367_2915/Old.../michel_11a.html)
- 47 Antiques Online Catalogue – IMEXCO General Ltd, [www.imexco.com/antiques/imx-israeliana-bezelel-wooden.html](http://www.imexco.com/antiques/imx-israeliana-bezelel-wooden.html)
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- 49 [www.ebay.com](http://www.ebay.com) 225 x 169
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- 52 Exhibition of Judaism in the history of Silesia. Hintze, Erwin, 1929, Katalog der vom Verein "Jüdisches Catalogue of the association "Jewish Museum Breslau" in the premises of the Silesian Museum of Applied Arts and Antiquities [www.sbc.org.pl/dlibra/plain-content?id=3938](http://www.sbc.org.pl/dlibra/plain-content?id=3938)

# KEEPER OF THE HEARTH: THE ART OF GWEN VAN EMBDEN

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Ute Ben Yosef

*"It is about what's left over"*<sup>1</sup>

Gwen van Embden's creativity centres in her search for the self. Her visual language ranges from conceptual and performance art to silver pen drawing and painting in oil. Artefacts relating to her identity as a woman are excavated from her personal past and from the depth of her sub-conscious. She presents them as mnemonic devices, inviting the viewer to share with her in an act of visual participation.

Van Embden is distinctly South African, having absorbed the socio-political history of the country with its pains and triumphs from the era of institutionalised racial segregation to her profound experience of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. She participates in acts of healing in her curatorship of exhibitions and through her art.

Gwen was born in Pretoria, the fourth of six children of Walter Murray Adcock and Shirley Joyce, née Bower. Walter Adcock was a cartographer. During WWII, he served in the Allied forces in the British surveying corps of the 8<sup>th</sup> Army under General Bernard Montgomery and participated in the famous Battle of El Alamein. His strategic maps of North Africa are characterized by a unique sense of vista, capturing intricate detail with a macroscopic and microscopic perspective. During most of the war, he was stationed in Italy. After his marriage to Shirley, he worked in Pretoria as a town planner and dairy farmer.

Gwen studied and qualified as a nurse. In her relationship with her mother, which during her childhood was strained, religion had played an ambivalent role. She took the decision to

embrace Judaism, and gladly submitted herself to the rhythm of ritual observance of her new faith. In 1980, she married Marco van Embden and was accepted and welcomed by his Orthodox family. She has supported him in all his communal involvement, including his chairing the United Herzlia Schools and the United Jewish Campaign. They have three children, Casey, Jacques and Sam.

Ever restless in her search for answers, Gwen began to study in the humanities, majoring in philosophy and graduating with a B.A. (Phil) at the University of South Africa in 1990. Her studies opened her mind to a new world of critical thinking. She was influenced by the existentialists, especially Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980) and his work on freedom and responsibility and on man's conscious process of self-transcendence. A further major impact came from Sartre's life-long companion, Simone de Beauvoir (1908-1986), whose writings about the secondary role assigned to women by social customs and institutions contributed greatly to the feminist movement.

Gwen's penchant for scientific thought was guided by Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), whose work on logic, the philosophy of mathematics, the human mind and the limits of factual language had a profound impact on her thinking. But the philosopher who influenced her most profoundly was Jacques Derrida (1930-2004). Born into a Sephardic Jewish family in Algiers, Derrida's vast writings and teachings on deconstruction went beyond the confines of traditional philosophical thought. He deconstructed accepted ideas of aesthetics, literary criticism, architecture, law, gender, racial differences and, most especially, political theory. He studied the concept of identity under which the worst violence of xenophobia, antisemitism and religious fanaticism was unleashed during the 20<sup>th</sup> Century. Derrida also participated in political activities. He spoke out forcefully against antisemitism, the death penalty, nuclear weapons, apartheid and Mandela's imprisonment. His integration of thinking with action would impact on Gwen's future work.

The discovery of Gwen's artistic inclination happened suddenly. A family trip to Mauritius coincided with a spell of incessant rain, driving the family into a daily practice of drawing and

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engaging with art. There they discovered books on the world's art treasures. From that point onwards Gwen, Casey and Jacques became absorbed in the urge to creativity, an urge which led Gwen to enrol in the University of Cape Town's Michaelis School of Art in 1989.

### Return to the Source

In his book *Mandala*, Carl Gustav Jung<sup>2</sup> describes the individuation process undergone by one of his patients, an American intellectual who at the age of 55 had reached her limit of self-understanding. Throughout her life she had enjoyed a strong relationship with her father but had little rapport with her Danish mother. Before going to Zurich to consult with him, she made a detour to Denmark and began to paint the countryside, which filled her with immense satisfaction. One of her paintings depicts a vision in which her lower torso is stuck in the earth, while she clings to a cliff by the sea. When Jung saw the painting, he encouraged her to create a follow-up. In the second image, her outline erupts into a sphere within a flash of lighting. The lightning to her was the rod of Moses bringing forth the waters of life. Under the analysis of Jung, she painted a remarkable mandala series (the vision of her 'self'). Jung indicated that only after re-connecting with her mother could her path of individuation commence.

Gwen van Embden had a similar experience at the point in her life when she started her fine art studies at the Michaelis Art School. She had begun to feel that her "past and the future of that past"<sup>3</sup> had left a gap in her life. Wanting to confront challenges, she began her search into this other past which she felt she had suppressed. Marco became a positive driving force in her journey and he urged her to reconcile with her mother. So, in her old age Shirley Joyce came to live in their home with their family and a new bond of love and understanding developed between mother and daughter.

For her Master of Fine Art's thesis,<sup>4</sup> awarded cum laude, Gwen assembled artefacts of the life of her mother and father. The theme of the project was focused on identity and memory and follows her autobiographical path. It highlights the question of how her identity was constructed by "using myself as a woman, convert and mother as the subject".<sup>5</sup>

The thesis is entitled: "*Blue Mary: Handwork for keeping the House*". Its embroidered, digitally photographed sub-title reads: "*The maid is not dead but sleepeth. Gwendoline*".

The work is based on her parallel between displays in a public museum and in a home. The meaning constructed in both is, according to Gwen, distilled into ideology. In both, museum and home, truth is unearthed through the narrative of life. Gwen's home narrative stretches over three generations of women, her mother's, her

own and that of her daughter. Stitched wall hangings, hand embroidery, crockery and family photographs constitute the maternal side of her work.

### Blue Mary

The title of Gwen's thesis refers to Mary, the Christian mother of God with her traditional blue mantle. In her image manifested within the tradition of Western art, the archetype of the Great Mother has come to assert itself.<sup>6</sup> Mary (Maria) is the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew Miriam. In the Hebrew Bible, Miriam the Prophetess is the elder sister of Moses and Aaron. A woman of vision, dreams and ecstasy, she is concerned with life in the face of death, with survival and with continuity.<sup>7</sup> Miriam's namesake of the Christian era has given birth to the godhead and become part of his numinous presence. Her iconography in Western art has undergone metamorphoses from early medieval times to the modern age. During the Middle Ages she is the personification of divine wisdom and is depicted as regal, majestic and withdrawn. In the Gothic era her image is the epitome of beauty, of the unreachable female ideal mirroring the courtly age of the troubadour. More and more her features begin to radiate love and motherliness. Gradually she becomes the mother of all, bestowing her protection on lowly people sheltered under her blue mantle. At this point she comes to stand outside the New Testament tale and the liturgical cult of the church. As in the pieta figures, her person becomes a devotional image, representing a mythical being. Thus, unobtrusively, she comes to embody the Great Mother as conceived in man's collective sub-conscious, but appears under the guise of institutionalised religion. As the figure of mercy she connects ever more closely with the viewer in her female presence. In the concept of the worshipper she has become the divine intercessor between the supplicant and the distant, unapproachable patriarchal godhead. This is how Gwen van Embden regards the figure of Mary, and how she identifies with her.

In her thesis, a reproduction of the painting *The Adoration of the Magi* by Andrea Mantegna (1500, Getty Museum, US) is featured. Mary shows her infant to the three legendary wise men from the East, Casper, Melchior and Balthazar, who present their royal gifts, gold, incense and myrrh, to the infant godhead. This figure of the Madonna has for Gwen become a manifestation of an unexpressed subliminal feeling, "a kind of sublimation of my guilt and power in making this book".<sup>8</sup>

### "Memorializing Myself through my Mother"

One of the digital photographs in the thesis is entitled 'Memorializing Myself through my

Mother'. It is the recording of a performance, of body art, in which the artist represents herself as the subject and the object, using her body as a living tool. The influence of Joseph Beuys (1921-86) is evident in this and other of Gwen's conceptual works. He was a leading figure in the *avant-garde* art in Germany during the 1970s and stood between conceptual art and performance art. In conceptual art works the emphasis is shifted from the art object to the idea which it embodies. As Professor of Fine arts at the Düsseldorf academy, he liberated his students by extracting from them their own statements based on actions around a personal narrative. Joseph Beuys himself became somewhat of a cult figure. His life, from his youth as a pilot in the Luftwaffe in WWII, how he was shot down in the Crimea and his mythical rescue by Tartars who purportedly saved his life by rubbing his frozen body with fat and covering him with felt, was related over and over again in his performances. He enjoyed a vast resonance among young artists, who transformed their own life's experiences by means of conceptual statements and performance art.

'Memorializing Myself through my Mother' lasted for three days. During that time, Gwen physically identified with her mother, whose life was filled with embroidery work for the embellishment of her home. Her artist-daughter, by way of a ritual act, had the shape of a heart embroidered onto her chest. This was entrusted to a plastic surgeon, who first had to be taught the art of cross stitch and then to carry this out on her skin.



**'Memorializing Myself through My Mother', 2000, digital photograph.**

After the photographic recording of this performance, the stitches were removed in order to prevent scars in the physical and the metaphorical sense. With this very powerful artistic statement, in which she physically

connected herself to her mother, Gwen investigated the fine line between subjective experience and art.

### **Restoring the memory of her father**

In Gwen's thesis, her father Walter Murray Adcock is memorialised through images created by him as a boy in his home town of Ladybrand in the Orange Free State. He made drawings on labels for medicine bottles and boxes for the pharmaceutical company Norwood Coaker. One of the medicines was called Felaform, which he marked with the drawings of a bird released from a cage. Another contained rosehip, a vitamin C nutrient for children. These labels are housed in the local museum collection. He also left behind the striking maps which he drew as cartographer under the Allied forces. By means of a special technique of firing into ceramic glaze, Gwen printed the pharmaceutical labels and her father's maps onto her continental china dinner service and Wiesenthal platters. Holding the past within the family ritual of eating and drinking, the crockery is used to harbour her father's memory. Some of them were broken into shards and have become part of her conceptual works.

### **Discovering a grave and a name**

The personality of Gwen van Embden is characterised by a combination of intellect and emotion. Her family's albums play a vital part in her work and are reflected upon from both a personal and an anthropological angle. To her these albums present an idealised group persona and "how these memories and stories are fictions which we parade as a kind of truth".<sup>9</sup> They bear witness to facts and at the same time act as a cover-up of these facts.

By deconstructing in the sense of Jacques Derrida, and reassembling in juxtapositions according to the artist's own design, they take on a new life and meaning, akin to fiction.

"Fiction is, I believe, the only truth that is possible when representing the past", she says.<sup>10</sup>

A key event in Gwen's search for her roots from her father has become the nucleus of her thesis. In 1998, she undertook with him a trip to Ladybrand in search of his childhood. They found the bottles adorned by him in the local museum and the grave of an infant marked Number 522 in the cemetery. This was the resting place of Walter's baby sister, who had died aged six months. Her name was Gwendoline. Gwen realised that she had been named after this little infant; she had never been told about the origin of her name. She had inadvertently been part of a family tragedy which had been kept from her. What was the reason for this? Her father had been a little boy when his baby-sister died, but he still remembered her. What had gone on in

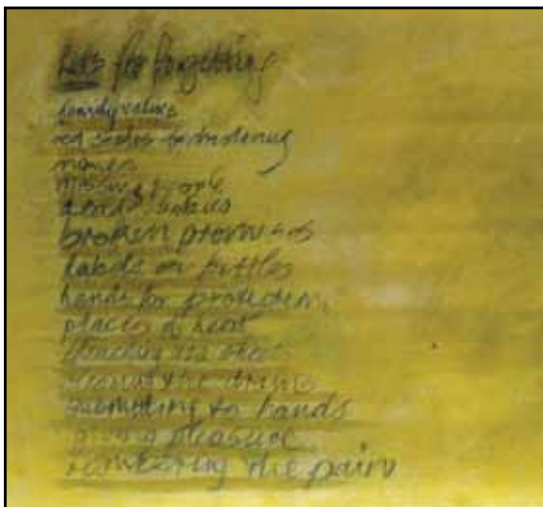
his mind when he gave Gwen her name? And later, when he called her by this name? What was the cause of the deadly silence that had encompassed her up to that point and of which she had been made an ignorant part?

Gwen felt an urgency to make contact with her deceased namesake, buried in this little grave 73 years previously. First, she consulted an archaeologist on the rules of opening a grave. Then she obtained permission from the authorities to re-commemorate this grave. She reflected on the ease with which it was possible: "One can now exhumate human remains with very little motivation. In my case no one questioned the right to do this on ethical or religious grounds".<sup>11</sup>

After this, capturing each step photographically, she opened the grave, assisted by an archaeologist and local grave diggers. She noted down each part of the infant Gwendoline as proof of the existence of her life on earth. With a collection of gifts and a shroud placed in the newly exposed grave she rendered homage to the infant. After a ceremony, the grave was gently closed again. It was meaningful for Gwen that the African assistants had accepted and understood this as an act of paying respect to her ancestor. With this ritual act, the artist felt that she had come full circle within the personal narrative leading to her roots. She could now recognise herself as a conduit between past and future generations. Gwen recorded a subsequent conversation with her father, who expressed his satisfaction with her act of unearthing a family secret which he could never forget.

With this, the artist has created her personal family album, which she divided into six chapters, or 'Lists':

1. List for forgetting; 2. List for the genealogy of the fathers; 3. List for not knowing; 4. List for finding the form; 5. List for exhumation; 6. List for restoration.



**List of Forgetting. 1999. Pastel and ink on cotton paper. 35x50cm**

In this performance, the artist invites the viewer to follow her in her memory work, of things not spoken about, artefacts of family taboos, silence and death, secrets and lies, suppression of undesirable memory and, finally, creating a new fiction based on new facts that have come to light through this happening.

### The Curiosity Cabinet

As part of a solo exhibition entitled "Hand Work" which took place in 2000 in the Art on Paper Gallery, Johannesburg, in 2002 in Durban's NSA Gallery and then in the Olievenhuis Gallery, Bloemfontein, Gwen displayed a cabinet of curiosities which had formed part of her life as a woman and mother. Behind its glass panels were displayed baby bottles, booties, porcelain shards and other artefacts, some of them difficult to make out because they were so personal ("Women don't only collect objects but also secrets and lies ...").<sup>12</sup> She was portraying different levels of reality in which the concept of time became an underlying driving force.

Gwen has curated and co-curated a number of exhibitions, which became a hallmark of her philosophical insights and political thinking. In these, Derrida's influence and his concepts materialized. Her aim was to transform the South African present as deconstructed from the burden of the past. Cultural and historical facets were examined from different angles and juxtaposed with corresponding artefacts to form new interpretations.

### Walking the book

This exhibition (co-ordinated by Lianda Martin) was a literacy project, entitled *Masifunde Sonke* ("Let us all read together"), conceived for the National Library of South Africa in 2001. The challenge was to place the culture of reading in South Africa into the context of past, present and future. In her unique display of books, combined aesthetically with visual material, she identified with the millions of South African children who were illiterate due to lack of formal education. She received warm accolades for the richness of content and the beauty of her display.<sup>13</sup>

### A Shade of Grey

In 2002, Gwen designed, curated and installed the book collection of medieval and Renaissance manuscripts and rare books that had been presented by Sir George Grey, Governor of the Cape Colony from 1854 to 1961, to the National Library of South Africa before his return to England. The exhibition was entitled *A Shade of Grey*. In her notable display of these books, she skilfully connected the spirit

of the past with the optimism of the present, with a view to the South African future. In her mind objects speak of their time. Her visual challenge was the white space in which these books had to be exhibited. The outcome was a fusion of erudition and aesthetic beauty. The lasting impact of this exhibition reached into the theme of her solo exhibition at the Irma Stern Museum in 2015, entitled “Hours of the Day” (see below).

### Mapping in and of Africa

During the same year (2002), Gwen was appointed curator of the Parliamentary Millennium project based on an initiative by the then Speaker of the House, Dr Frene Ginwala, with Dr Rayda Becker as special adviser. The display was entitled *Mapping in and of Africa: A Mapping Exhibition*. Her background with her father’s profession as cartographer served her well. In the display, she imprinted her personal style, connecting the past and future with rich visual material and her own aesthetic imprint.

### University of Cape Town 175<sup>th</sup> Anniversary

Gwen is influenced by the artist Fred Wilson and his dictum that archives and museums are places in which meaning is reconfigured.<sup>14</sup> In 2004, together with Prof Pippa Skotnes and Fritha Langerman, she assembled an exhibition, entitled *Curiosity: Curating Collections at the University of Cape Town*, for the University to commemorate its 175<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This wide ranging and multifaceted presentation displayed in a fluidium of historical events and scholarly highlights objects and discarded artefacts unearthed from the deepest drawers of university offices and store rooms. The display took into account infinitesimally small objects, such as the teeth of a dassie or the macroscopic historical view of UCT’s anti-racist stand during the years of legalised segregation. It was accompanied by a catalogue entitled ‘*Curiosity CLXXV – A Paper Cabinet*’, produced as a parallel to the visual display.

### Time Machine

In 2007-2009, Gwen participated in the project *Time Machine* under the auspices of the archaeologist Prof J. Parkinson of UCT, who has developed a field school of archaeology in the old St Johns school in Park Street, Clanwilliam. The geological landscape around Clanwilliam is about a billion years old, rich with fossils, artefacts, and ruins. The passing of time is demarcated in this area and teaching about the environment, past and present, and the dangers of future global warming were central to the project.

Much emphasis was placed on the life of

the pre-colonial hunter-gatherers who inhabited this area, the San people, their rock art and the plants they used as foods and medicines. These were grown in a special garden which was connected to the school curriculum. Gwen was entrusted with the visualization of the field school, which she reinterpreted with art works constructed around the theme of ‘*Time and Landscape*’. The aim of this exhibition was to reclaim and restore a sense of time and to place within a new context.

### Bits, Bites and Tweets

In 2010, Gwen was entrusted with the curatorship of an exhibition to mark the 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of UCT Summer School. It was entitled *Bits, Bites and Tweets*, which revolved around the question of resilience and change. She chose as her theme Charles Darwin and his discovery of the finch which sparked off the theory of evolution. The title is a word play for the bar-coding, tweet and web site activity in the course selection for Summer School lectures. Ten thousand LED lights represented the seven symbolic species according to Darwin. These stood for the different faculties and areas of study. A gradual process of change gravitated in a luminescent helix pattern which rose up in a column. The students were invited to participate in building the Finch’s nest with their registration cards embellished with a coded Darwin finch. The relational nature of this work of art, with its juxtaposition of aesthetics and science and coevolution and mutuality, impacts through its freshness and originality.

### Art exhibition: “Hours of the Day”

Gwen’s latest solo exhibition *Hours of the Day* at the Irma Stern Museum in Cape Town (2015) shows the artist at a crossroads between conceptual art and the return to brush and paint.

The assemblage DD Series 1-5 (2013) reveals the metamorphosis between Gwen’s past stage of creativity and the present. Crockery, shards and artefacts of the artist’s home appear together with a tiny collage-like photocopy of a painting of a

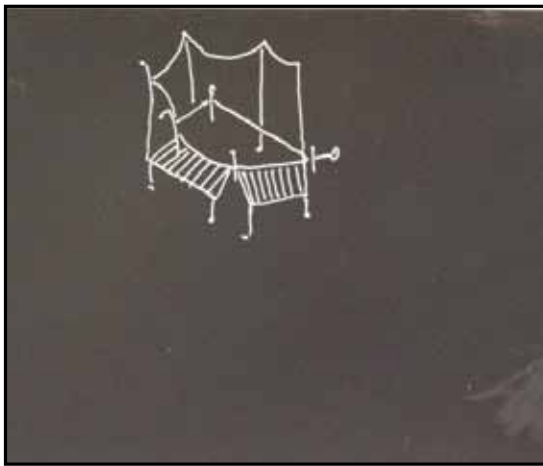


**DD Series 1-5 (2013)**  
**Mixed Media. 52x34cm.**



17<sup>th</sup> Century Dutch Master depicting the outline of a woman with her back to the viewer. The woman stands at a doorpost leading to further interiors through open doors, a metaphor of the artist's state of mind. The work is interspersed with angry titles which convey the artist's inner ferment. On the other end of the spectrum a new configuration appears: the motif of the cot drawn in silver pen on black carton.

Gwen's 2013 cots series is a new breakthrough. The cots appear in infinitesimal size, their still somewhat jittery geometric delineation appeal to the senses, but are at the same time deeply disturbing and assert themselves through a membrane of darkness.



*Cot. From the cot series. 2013*  
Silver pen on cart. 250x20mm

Gwen's cot motif has associations with childhood and security. Yet a sense of imprisonment and extreme loneliness is expressed in these silver pen drawings.

### The Saltimbanque series

In 2013, Gwen took a further step towards self-expression, returning to brush and palette, oil and board to pronounce her humanism and empathy towards others. She created a series entitled 'Saltimbanques', which harks back to Picasso's 'Blue' and 'Pink' periods (1905/06). The meaning of saltimbanque is "one who jumps upon a bench", and the term was used by Picasso for his subjects of circus performers and acrobats. They were the *artistes*, poor and isolated bohemians, yet creative and independent from mainstream society which in turn was in need of their art. Is this not the everlasting plight of every artist? Gwen van Embden's eight diminutive paintings under this metaphorical title who face the viewer in frontal sorrow are people on the fringes of society, yet indispensable to their well-being, rendered with intense sensitivity and aesthetic mastery. They resonate in a receptive South African climate and reveal the artist's ever present social consciousness.

### Dahlia

Gwen's mentor, supervisor and friend Pippa Skotnes found some containers of colour pigments when she packed up the studio of her late father, the great South African artist Cecil Skotnes. He had labelled them 'Dahlia' in his own handwriting. Pippa gave them to Gwen as a present. For Gwen, this honour had a highly symbolic significance. Her mother had grown dahlias which she sold on the flower market at Church Square, Pretoria. Making use of Pippa Skotnes' precious gift, she combined the memory of Cecil Skotnes with that of her mother. Continuing to pursue her newly discovered return to the brush, she used these pigments to paint her series. Tiny bursts of an explosive force so personal that they assume a sense of the elusive have come to being through this gesture and its memorialisation.



*Dahlia. 2014*  
Skotnes pigment on cotton paper. 100xx70cm



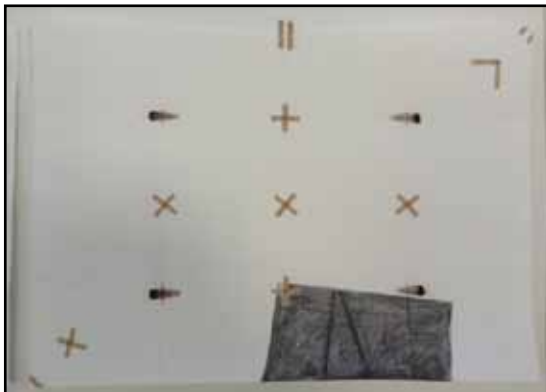
*Hybrid. 2014 Monotype, oil on paper*



From this a new genre, in which the artist continues pursuing her closeness to nature, evolved into the monotype and digital print. These tiny paintings of a hybrid plant life exude a spirituality akin to Far Eastern art. Lately Gwen has immersed herself into the philosophy of the Far East and these delicate images seem to echo her new insights.

### Back to Beuys

As a young girl, Gwen helped her father fold the maps which he had put together as town planner and cartographer. Through him she learned the exactitude of his craft. In the tradition of the conceptualism practiced by Joseph Beuys, she reconstructed this memory of her father using his own mapping paper left behind after his passing. She connected the folds of the paper with cross markings. In the folds themselves appear marks which have the element of a mystery of the interspace, the space between.



**8. Falling Square. 2014**  
Pencil, oil and tape on paper. 40x30cm

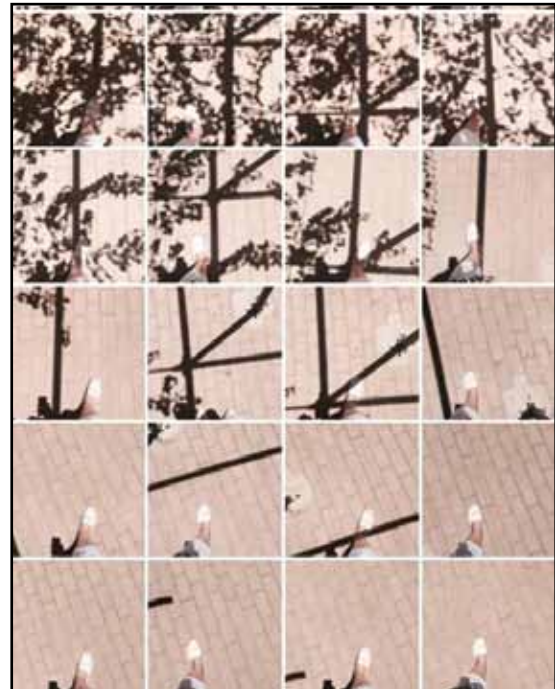
### Return to the conceptual statement.

When Gwen curated the SA Libraries' *A Shade of Grey* exhibition, she was struck by the eight Books of Hours in the collection, made between 1498 and 1530. The Book of Hours was a medieval manual for daily Christian devotion containing holy texts, prayers and psalms to be recited at certain times of the day. For Gwen, it had a specific significance to women. When the royal princesses of a court were married off to a sovereign in another country in a political deal, they took along their Book of Hours in order to remain rooted to the spirituality of their familiar world. Through their Book of Hours, they would adhere to their daily devotions within the concept of time. The concept of time based on the medieval Book of Hours flowed into Gwen's Irma Stern Museum exhibition of 2015, corresponding to the artist's encounters with the spirituality of Europe's art treasures.

*In Search of Art* (2015) shows a screen-shot; a recording of the artist's steps throughout one

day to mark the time. She is moving her steps forward in a ritualistic manner in quest of art. In the course of this movement she photographs her feet advancing during different hours of the day. She records these steps towards her art experiences as units within grids, defined spaces in time. In this way her steps between the art museums and biennales, recorded with a cell phone, convey her experience of a time-space continuum in her daily practice.

In recent times Gwen van Embden has become part of a group of women artists around Rosemarie Shakinovsky and Claire Gavronsky's workshops. Here she received much stimulation and freedom to develop her art. In this sharing environment her creativity has flourished and she is presently feeling new impulses which turned her attention to the philosophy and the spiritual in the practice of art.



***In Search of Art. 2015***  
Series: Looking for art.  
Screenshot. 1 of 72. 21x29cm

### Summary and Conclusion

Gwen has rebelled against the once hallowed feminist ideal of the superwoman in grim competition with patriarchy. She found this era of the feminist movement insincere and life-draining. In a paradigm shift, the woman as keeper of home and hearth, the preserver of traditions, has crystallised in her art. This housewife-woman, also seen in a warmly humorous light, is the preserver of family traditions transmitted from generation to generation. They are punctuated by a woman's daily menial chores of cleaning, emptying and filling the dishwasher, with dishwasher proof

crocery, as she whimsically adds. Such little absurd details reveal the artist in her playfulness, her sense of humour.

Apart from a playful humour, in which she probes the boundaries of self-expression, Gwen van Embden is not frivolous; there is a total absence of cynicism or irony in her work. As an academic, she is forever questioning, and as artist is in the process of evolving towards realms as yet unknown yet fermenting within her creative being. Her work is powerful, and also disturbing, and bears witness to a titanic inner struggle whose source lies in her womanhood.

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## HONEY-CAKE

\*

Eugenie Freed

*Abie, Abie, Abie my boy,  
Vot are you vaiting for now?  
You promised to marry me, sometime in June,  
It's never too late, and it's never too soon!  
All the family  
Keep on h'asking me,  
Vitch day? Vot day?  
I don't know vot to say ...  
Abie, Abie, Abie my boy,  
Vot are you vaiting for now?*

Zaideh Zalman sings along with me as we sit next to each other, me perched high on a big cushion, the swing-seat on the stoep rocking and scraping as he booms out the words and my little-girl voice dances on top of his. And when we finish the song, we laugh and laugh because we sound so funny singing together.

\* \* \* \* \*

My mother and I live at Zaideh Zalman's house. I have never lived anywhere else. The Deeb family are our next-door neighbors. Every day I hear Mrs. Deeb and her mother-in-law shrieking at one another in Lebanese, as they hang up the washing on the clothes-lines criss-crossing their back yard. Zaideh Zalman says that's why Mr Deeb leaves home so early in the morning – before it's light – and comes back from his business so late.

Dina lives here too. She arrived about a year ago, and now she is like a part of the house. My Ma says she's "family", but she seems to me like the upright piano in the living-room, covered with a faded fringed shawl. No one ever lifts that shawl. No-one lifts the lid of its keyboard. The living-room is locked and its dark-red velvet curtains stay closed. Once a month Jim, our servant, unlocks the door and lets in daylight while he swishes around with a feather-duster. I try to get in there when he cleans, because I have so many questions to ask about what's there. I wish I could play on that piano. When Jim's finished dusting he closes the curtains, and as he locks the door I can feel the darkness settling back, thick and dark-red like the curtains.

Zaideh never goes into that room. If he has visitors, they sit on the stoep in front of the house in summer, or in the dining-room if the weather is cold. My mother pours tea and offers the sponge-cake she bakes every Friday, with icing-sugar on the top – always the same cake. I asked her why she doesn't bake a different kind of cake sometimes, like the chocolate cake I had at my friend Lulu's house, but she didn't answer me. I know by now that when my mother doesn't answer, it's because she can't understand what I mean – so if it's important, I must ask Zaideh Zalman.

Dina has never had a visitor that I can recall, and when people come to visit Zaideh, she stays in her room. She comes out to have tea after they have left. Once I heard her whisper to my mother, in Yiddish, that she should try using bigger eggs for her sponge-cake. Dina hasn't

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learned much English, so far. Maybe that's why she doesn't want to meet our visitors. But I know she wants to learn, because she tries to talk to me in English. On my birthday she baked biscuits, with raisin eyes and noses and orange-peel smiles, and she gave them to me in a little box tied with a pink ribbon. I like Dina.

Last night, as I passed Dina's room, I noticed that her door was standing open. Mostly she keeps it closed. I could see her narrow bed, all smooth under a white counterpane. She was sitting in a chair in the corner of the room, still dressed in her black blouse and long black skirt. I wondered why she wasn't getting ready for bed. She was staring at something in the middle of the room, though there was nothing there that I could see.

\* \* \* \* \*

*This is my bedroom. I never had a room to myself at home, in Libau. A bed, a chair, a table, all for my own use. In the cupboard clothes are hanging, clothes that Reb Zalman paid for. When I came to this house, I had only what I was wearing, and my black woolen shawl, plain linen underclothes and a night-dress.*

*Rivkah showed me this room and pointed to this clean white bed. She said: "Papa says you'll sleep here." I asked "But where does your Papa sleep?" Her forehead wrinkled; she didn't understand what I was asking.*

*Rivkah told me "You can hang your clothes here" - and she opened the empty cupboard. But I didn't have other clothes. When Rivkah told Reb Zalman this, right away he gave her money, and told her to go with me to the shop. I bought two long black skirts, one for every day and another for Shabbos, and three blouses, two black and one white for Shabbos.*

*He's a good man, Reb Zalman. He has given me a place to live in this new country. It's safe here, it's clean, there's always food in the house. The black man cooks and does all the house-work.*

*But I like cooking and baking, I love the smell of bread baking. Sometimes I patzkeh in the kitchen here. Chayaleh tells me the English names for ingredients, and I write the words down, in Yiddish. I like to breathe in the aroma of seasoned minced beef when I spoon it on to pancakes. Then I fold them into little square parcels before I fry them again in oil to make the meat blintzes, crisp and crunchy, to pass around the table with fragrant golden chicken-soup.*

*When I fold up the blintzes, I dream about having my own family to feed on a Shabbos evening - on any evening. My aunt Malkah in Libau always used to say I would be a Beria. Aunt Malkah brought me up, and she taught me to cook. She thought she knew everything about Africa, because her son sells second-hand furniture in Port Elizabeth. Drom Afrika, it's a good country to live in, her son wrote to her - there are no laws forbidding Jews to set themselves up in business or send their children to good schools. The weather is mostly warm, there are servants to help in the house. People who came here from Lithuania did well. "Just look how well my son did!" Malkah would say - anyway, that's what he told her in his letters.*

*And she said to me: "Reb Zalman Schnaier is a good man. I knew the mishpochah from alte yoren - I knew him and his brother Ben, before they went to Africa. Decent men, honest, hard-working. And Zalman's wife, Shaina ava-sholem, such a lovely woman. Five years she waited - and then when Zalman sent for her, she took the ship from Libau to London with their three children, and then another ship to Africa. I heard they had more children after she got there. Sad that she died so young. She was clever, and she loved music."*

*Well, what my aunt told me was true. Reb Zalman, he's a good man. But I thought my new life in Africa would be different. Not like this, no, not at all. There was one thing Malkah didn't tell me - but how could she have known? On the stone at the grave in Brixton Cemetery that Reb Zalman visits every month, it says "Shaina, daughter of Reb Yitzchak the Levite". What Malkah didn't know ... is that Shaina's not lying under that stone. Shaina never left this house.*

\* \* \* \* \*

This morning, I was sitting in the kitchen, spooning up the sweet nutty mabela porridge that Jim cooks for breakfast, and thinking about Dina in her room the night before.

"Ma, what kind of 'family' is Dina?"

My mother was rolling black wool into a ball, her hands flying. Knitting is what she does most of the time, though nothing she knits ever seems to get finished. She glanced at me under her heavy black eyebrows, then turned back to the wool draped over a kitchen chair.

"Dina? She's - uh, she's from the family of - uh - your Bobba Shaina *ava-sholem*."

Mentioning the name of Bobba Shaina was almost like uttering the name of Hashem. It was something you didn't speak out loud when Zaideh Zalman was around.

"Why did she come to live with us?"

"Well ..."

The wool slipped off the chair and tangled on the floor. Drops of sweat rolled down my mother's forehead as she bent to pick up the skein, clucking with her tongue. It's hard for her

to bend down because she's so big and heavy.

"I was just wondering ...."

"No time for that now, Chaya, you'll be late for school!"

\* \* \* \* \*

*They'll think I'm meshugah. But does it really matter? No one in Reb Zalman's family cares what I do. The only one I can talk to is Rivkah, and half the time she doesn't know what I'm talking about. Her situation is almost the same as mine, except she's got a child. I wish I had a child. Even without a husband, like poor stupid Rivkah. So here I am - a married woman, but without a husband or a child.*

*Just think, Shaina had eight children with Reb Zalman. Three born in Lithuania, and five more after she joined him here in Africa. Five sons she gave him - two in the old country, another three here, and three daughters. He's so proud of those sons. Three of them doctors, two working in his business. When they visit, I don't think they see me even when they look straight at me. Zalman loved Shaina so much, there's no love left in him for any other woman. When he married me everyone said he was doing a double mitzvah, because he saved my life - the Litvaks never liked the Jews anyway; already, they're pushing them into camps. (May God take my poor Aunt Malkah away before **they** take her!) And it's a mitzvah for a widower to marry a woman from his late wife's family.*

*Oh yes, Reb Zalman is a good man. He's a gabbeh in the shul - he looks so dignified in his black satin top-hat on the High Holy Days, tall and upright, so handsome, with his grey hair and those sharp green eyes. Everyone respects him. I see the women in shul looking at me sideways, and I know what they're thinking ... "Zalman Schnaier - a good-looking man, with a good business, he could have anyone, but he takes this plain woman with no money - a 'grüner' from Lithuania ... why?"*

*But this man whom everyone respects - do they know the way we live in his house? I came here to be his **wife**, he had agreed to that. I was just a little girl when he left Libau to come to Africa, he hadn't even noticed me.*

*And he still hasn't. Two hours after Reb Zalman and Pinchas, his eldest son, met me by the docks, I was standing under the chupah next to him in an empty shul before a strange rabbi with a tattered beard - just so that the immigration police couldn't send me back on the next ship. I looked up at Reb Zalman when the rabbi recited the wedding brochas, and there were tears in his eyes. The rabbi and my new stepson wished us both "mazel-tov" afterwards, but Zalman said nothing. We got on the train and travelled for two nights and two days. Such a big, hot, empty country! Two nights I slept in a train compartment with five other women, and Zalman and his son slept in a compartment with other men in another carriage. When we got out at the Johannesburg station, he brought me to this house. And I thought, surely I'm a lucky woman, coming to a new country to be the wife of such a fine man, to live in this nice house!*

*But now I know why he wept under the chupah.*

*Tonight I must speak to him. Before he goes to his bed, I'll tell him where I'm going tomorrow and what I'm going to do.*

\* \* \* \* \*

*I was giggling to myself as I walked into the kitchen after school. Our teacher's name is Miss Gertrude, but one of the cheeky boys had called her "Miss Beetroot". I wanted to tell Zaideh Zalman - he likes to hear school jokes. And then there's this important question I have to ask him.*

*But something felt different today. My mother was sitting where she always sits at the kitchen table, her bottom spilling over the kitchen chair, knitting fiercely and frowning down at the knitting-needles dancing in her hands. Dina wasn't there. Zaideh was at his place, at the head of the table. Every morning he walks up the street to the family business; my uncles Pinchas and Jake run it now. Zaideh comes home for lunch, and after that he sits in the kitchen and reads the morning newspaper before he takes his nap.*

*When I open the kitchen door he lifts his shaggy grey head - "Ja, Chayaleh, you doing good?" he says, with a twinkle in his green eyes. He never waits for a reply, but goes back to his newspaper. Today when I come home from school the newspaper is lying on the window-sill, still rolled up. He doesn't speak to me. He sits looking down at the linoleum covering the table. When I try to talk to him, he shakes his head. Maybe I should wait with my big question...*

\* \* \* \* \*

*On Monday morning I leave the house before anyone but the manservant is up. It's a cold, windy day, and I wrap myself in my shawl. I walk down the street and across the railway bridge. I am going to Mr. Deeb's shop, the "Terminus Café", by the tram-terminus in Central Street.*

*As I walk, I'm thinking of what happened last night with Reb Zalman. We had hardly exchanged*



a word since he brought me to his house, but last night I had to speak to him. He was reading the Sunday paper after supper when I told him what I was going to do. I didn't ask "What do you think?" I just told him, in plain Yiddish. The newspaper dropped to the floor, and for a few minutes Zalman was silent. Finally he said, "Why do you want to go out and work? Deeb won't pay. You don't have to earn money. I support you." And I replied, "Reb Zalman, in this house there's no place for me. I have to do this for myself." And he shrugged as though to say "What does this woman want of me?" Then he bent to collect his newspaper from the floor, piece by piece. But I believe he understood what I wanted to tell him.

There's a wooden bench outside the "Terminus Café" where people sit while they wait for the tram. A man in an overall is mopping away mud outside the entrance to the shop. They haven't opened yet. A woman is sweeping a soapy cloth over the letters "TC" painted on the inside of the glass door. Chairs and tables are stacked against one wall of the shop. A glass counter runs along the wall to the left as you come in; behind it, shelves with the goods people buy while they wait for trams - newspapers, cigarettes, sweets, packets of potato chips, dried peaches, pieces of the dried meat they call "biltong". Another woman is scrubbing the floor, splashing water everywhere. Near the door, a bosomy lady fills the space behind the till. The shop looks overcrowded even with no customers in it.

"Good morning, lady. I can speak with Mr. Deeb?"

She looks me up and down, at my pinned-up braids and my long black skirt and my black blouse buttoned up high, and she pulls her mouth as though she wants to laugh out loud. But she calls to the man with the mop "Ask the boss to come to the front, will you, Sam?"

Mr. Deeb appears, small, dark and edgy. Is he shocked to see his stay-at-home Jewish neighbour in his non-kosher eating-house?

I tell Mr. Deeb, in any English words I can find, that I can cook, and I want to work for him. At first he doesn't understand what I'm saying - then he acts like I'm making a joke. But I won't stop talking, in English or Yiddish, until at last he listens. He says, "Mrs. Schnaier, I'm sure you're a fine cook, but we don't serve fancy food here. Only a simple menu"

But I won't go away, and he can't get rid of me. He may think I'm crazy, but he doesn't want trouble with Reb Zalman. Everybody in the neighborhood knows Mr. Zalman Schnaier, and his family has business connections in the community. So Mr. Deeb says "Alright, come to the kitchen."

He takes me through a swing-door in the back of the shop, and there is the kitchen. Dirty, cramped, dishes piled in the sink. The woman I saw washing the front door, a fat black woman with a striped scarf over her head and a soiled apron across her hips, is now unpacking the sink, giving each dish a quick wipe with a grubby cloth before stacking it on the granite draining-board. Cockroaches scuttle past. A black mess surrounds the coal stove in the corner. I hope the cleaning-woman will come to splash some water in the kitchen.

Mr. Deeb says, "You want to cook here?"

He wants to put me off. But I won't let go.

"Let me see what spices you have."

"Spices? Umm - don't use them."

"And honey - do you have any?"

He shakes his head.

I look around the kitchen. One rickety cupboard stands against the wall dividing it from the main shop.

"Can I look in there?"

I don't wait for his response, I start rummaging. They do have spices, at the back, in jam-jars without labels. I have to smell each one to find out what it is. Cinnamon, ginger, allspice ... there's honey too, it's been hidden away so long it's crystallized solid, but I can get it liquid again by heating it. It's a miracle the ants scurrying around the kitchen haven't found it yet. A few oranges in a splintering basket on the window-sill; I'll need those too. I'm going to bake a ginger lekach, the honey-cake we make for Rosh Hashanah, for a year of sweetness. I need some sweetness in my life. First I have to **find** everything - eggs, flour, brown sugar, baking powder, baking soda, bowls, spoons, forks, in that kitchen where nothing has a place. Tryphena, the woman who was washing dishes, won't help me. I say to her "Please, Tryphena, where you keep flour?" - and she mutters in her own language, and turns her back on me. She thinks I'm trying to take her job.

But I find what I need at last. I feel triumphant as I mix flour with sugar, leavening and spices. I squeeze the oranges by hand - if there is an orange-squeezer in this kitchen, Tryphena's not going to show me where it is. I mix the juice with warm liquid honey, make a well in the flour mixture, pour them in, and swirl them together. Now if only they have some whisky .... I go to ask Mr. Deeb, who is now behind the counter, leaning against the bosomy lady. He chuckles, winks at her, and produces a bottle from a locked cupboard. "Arak," he says, and unstoppers the bottle for me to smell. Oh no, that peppery licorice-tang will kill the other spices. I'll have

to leave the liquor out this time.

I've found a bread-pan to bake in. I can't even walk out of the kitchen for a moment while the lekach is baking, for fear of burning it. The scent of the fresh spicy loaf as it comes out of the sooty oven (when last did Tryphena clean it?) is like a breath from the garden of Paradise. I take it to Mr. Deeb; he sniffs its spicy fragrance. "Mmm-mm," he says. He cuts himself a slice, and offers another to the bosomy lady.

"Too good for my customers!" he says, and laughs. I tell him, "Tomorrow it will taste even better." And I can see I have given him an idea.

"Why you don't give your customers something they can't get other places?"

"Like what?" he says.

"Like blintzes - meat blintzes, with chicken soup, cheese blintzes, with cinnamon sugar."

"What's 'blintzes'?"

"I'll make, if you get me things I need. We have to make chicken soup. But first Tryphena must scrub kitchen." He raises his eyebrows and shrugs his shoulders.

So I tell him: beef chuck for the meat blintzes, and soft cottage cheese, eggs, and sour cream for the cheese blintzes. I remember the names of the vegetables for the soup - onions, carrots, leeks - and I want a big chicken. "A whole chicken?" He wrinkles his nose, but he writes it all down on the back of a till-slip.

"See you tomorrow, Mrs. Schnaier," he says.

I am exhausted when I start walking up the hill back to Reb Zalman's house. But I feel stronger than I ever have since I came to that house.

Tuesday morning early I'm at the "Terminus Café" again. Mr. Deeb did get everything on my list - I almost expected him to change his mind, but he didn't. First I must get the soup going. Talitha, who was washing the floor, doesn't mind helping me. She washes the vegetables and the chicken, and cuts up everything for the soup. I put the beef in a pot to braise, with onions and carrots. I put eggs and flour in a bowl with a little oil, and make a double recipe of pancake mixture, half with milk for the cheese blintzes, and the rest with water for the meat blintzes. The pancakes I have to fry in a little pan I brought with me, only on one side to start with. That pan is milchik, so I have to set it aside carefully; it must go back to the kosher kitchen at Reb Zalman's house. First the cheese blintzes: I make the cheese mixture, put a spoonful on the side of the pancake that's been fried, and fold it up into a little parcel. Then I fry the parcels gently in butter. By that time the beef pot-roast is ready. Talitha helps me to mince chunks of cooked meat with fried onion in the mincing-machine she found for me in the kitchen cupboard. I season the mince with salt and pepper, and moisten it with chicken soup. I show Talitha how to fold the blintzes into parcels and fry them in the big pan. When I give her a meat blintz to taste she's delighted. Tryphena won't even try one.

The smell of the blintzes - milchik and vleischik - wafts out of the shop; passers-by in the cold and wet outside sniff the delicious scents, and flock inside.

Mr. Deeb has a blackboard to put up on the pavement outside. He reads aloud to me what he has written on it:

**SPECIAL: TODAY ONLY!**

**DELISHUS BLINTZES!**

**MEAT BLINTZES WITH CHIKEN SOUP**

**CHEESE BLINTZES WITH SOUR CREEM FOR DESERT.**

My blintzes fly out as fast as we can fry them. I have to make another double recipe of pancakes, and we run out of soup.

\* \* \* \* \*

Today's Friday, and when I come back from school I must speak to Zaideh Zalman. I should ask my mother as well, but she never knows the answers to important questions. This is the question I have to ask: where is my father? Lulu asked me that on Monday at break. We were sitting together on the dry grass, eating peanut-butter sandwiches. She said, "You tell me about your Mama, and your Zaideh, but you never talk about your father. Where does he live?" I know where my mother is, and I know my Zaideh is *her* father - but I never thought of asking anybody, where is *my* father? This is something I should know. So I must ask Zaideh, because he knows everything.

But when I ask Zaideh this question, his face goes dark and he covers his eyes with his hand. And he doesn't give me an answer. He says "Erev Shabbos we don't talk about these things."

"What things? Why not?"

"Because it's not fit."

"So Zaideh, will you tell me after Shabbos?"

He lifts up both his hands and looks at the ceiling. I don't know whether that means "Yes" or "No".

And I don't understand what's happening in our home. Dina looks different. She's been going out every morning early, and when she comes back she's tired, but more alive, somehow. This Shabbos Zaideh Zalman doesn't say a word after *Kiddush* and *Ha-Motzi*. He never has anything to say to Dina, and not much to my mother, but usually he talks to *me*, he tells me a joke, or he asks about my day at school, and he listens to my funny stories from school and laughs at them. This Shabbos night - no jokes, no stories. I'm wondering, is that because I asked him about my father? Everybody else has a father - why shouldn't I know about mine?

Dina talks to me at the Shabbos table, she's trying out new words in English. She asks me a question:

"If two blintzes cost a shilling, and you give me a half-crown, how much change must I give you?"

"You're not my teacher," I say, and she laughs, and says "That's right, Chayaleh, you're *my* teacher!"

Zaideh Zalman says nothing at all, and he doesn't eat much either. He doesn't even bentch after supper, he just gets up and goes straight to his room. What's the matter with these grown-ups?

\* \* \* \* \*

*Mr. Deeb's employing me, and I'm earning money! Only a little, and I can tell he won't pay much more, but I'll keep at it and I'll make out, somehow. Next week I'll cook a good thick vegetable soup, with potatoes for thickening, and maybe make bread to serve with it. But first Tryphena has to clean up that kitchen - I'll have to win her over. I have to make this work.*

*Now I must speak with Zalman again.*

*What I have to tell him will be much harder to say than speaking to Mr. Deeb with my little English. But I've been burying my pain and anger deep inside me, and by now it's breaking out and burning up my soul.*

\* \* \* \* \*

Zaideh Zalman has hardly said a word to anyone for this whole Shabbos. Most of the time he was behind the newspaper. Uncle Pinchas and Auntie Ida came over for tea. Uncle Pinchas is short and fat, and Auntie Ida is tall and thin; they look so funny together. They sat with Zaideh on the front porch and tried to talk to him, but he only grunted. Later I heard Uncle Pinchas asking my mother whether Zaideh was well, but I didn't hear her reply. Maybe it was one of those questions she couldn't answer.

Dina slept late this morning - usually she's up and dressed before anyone else, even on Shabbos. We had lunch together, and talked and laughed. Now Dina is trying to learn how to write in English, and she asked me questions about the alphabet. Zaideh didn't open his mouth at lunch-time except to put food in it. After lunch Dina went to her room, but when she heard the voices of my uncle and aunt she came out to say "hello". She even went out to the stoep with them and Zaideh for tea, with my mother's Shabbos sponge-cake. I don't think she likes that cake much, and I know I'm tired of it. I'll ask Dina to bake us a chocolate cake. I'm sure she knows how. But this is the first time I've seen her joining in when we've had visitors.

When Shabbos was out, after my uncle and aunt left, I thought that would be a good time to ask Zaideh Zalman about my father. But when I found him in the kitchen behind his newspaper, Dina was there too. I've never seen them alone together before. And I didn't want to talk to anyone except Zaideh about my big question, so I went away.

\* \* \* \* \*

*After all this time, we started talking, Zalman and I. Not right away, but later that Saturday night, when at last he put down that newspaper. He's not a stupid man, Reb Zalman, he did understand what I meant when I told him there was no place for me in his house. And it's not easy for a man like him - he's a leader of the community, the patriarch of the family - it's hard for him to admit that he did wrong. And he had to confess that what he thought of me was wrong too. He thought I was brainless and a nothing; he brought me to this country, saved my life by marrying me, only to honor the memory of his Shaina. In his mind he kept faith with her in the spirit when he stood under the chupah with her younger cousin.*

*He said to me at last, "I'm sorry, Dina. I'm sorry you were unhappy. But ..." - he turned as though he was about to speak to someone invisible beside him - "but I have to go to the cemetery tomorrow."*

*Yet that was the first time he spoke my name.*

\* \* \* \* \*

I had to wait most of the week-end to ask Zaideh Zalman my big question. Before I was awake on Sunday morning, he went off to the cemetery, and he stayed there a long time. Lulu had asked me to come for lunch, so I left before Zaideh had come back, and when I got home my mother said Zaideh was taking his afternoon nap. When he came out of his bedroom at five o'clock, I followed him to the kitchen.

"Zaideh, I can't wait any longer! You have to tell me about my father, I want to know now!"

He looked at me in a strange way.

"Come, Chayaleh, let's sit in the swing on the stoep."

It was cold outside, but I fetched my big cushion and we sat on the creaking swing-seat, side by side, moving slowly backwards and forwards.

Zaideh spoke as though he was having trouble getting the words out.

"Your father's name was Lazar Plotkin. He and your mother were married only for a very short time. Rivkah was always ... slow, but this Plotkin promised to look after her. But just one week after the wedding, he brought her back to this house. They had an argument, but Rivkah couldn't tell us exactly what happened. Then he disappeared. Nine months later, when Rivkah gave birth to you, I didn't know where he was. I still don't know. As far as I'm concerned, that father of yours was dead before you were born. That's all I can tell you about him."

I felt cold for a moment. But when Zaideh spoke again he sounded more like himself.

"Something else I can tell you, Chayaleh: we all love you, your mother, your Bobba, and me. From the day you were born. Bobba Shaina *ava-sholem* used to play on the piano and sing for you. You were just a baby, but you loved music as much as she did: you would sit on the floor and sing and clap."

I had to think about all of this for a long time. But I couldn't help noticing that this was the first time I had ever heard Zaideh say Bobba Shaina's name.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Even now there are things I need to settle with Reb Zalman. He's still not my husband, and I'm not his wife. There's more to a marriage than a wedding. In his heart, Shaina is still beside him. I can't spend the rest of my life waiting for Zalman to let her sleep in peace in her grave. But I think something is moving: he's unlocked the living room and pulled back the curtains there.*

*As for me - with those five working days in Mr. Deeb's little kitchen, even with Tryphena and the cockroaches, I moved out into the world. And something in my head tells me never to move back. To come home after a day's work, yes; but never again to live as I did.*

*It was Zalman who found a way forward.*

*"You can't go on working for Deeb," he said. "That mamzer will use you up and pay you nothing. You must work for yourself. If you want, I can rent a shop for you with a kitchen, and you can open a decent business to sell good food. Maybe I can be your business partner. There's a place up the street, near our business premises - a small shop, it was an eating-house - I can ask Pinchas to find out."*

*"Yes, yes, please do that!"*

*"Dina - I'm happy that you are friends with Chayaleh. She needs someone ..." he didn't say that Chayaleh needed more than poor Rivkah could give her, but I knew that's what he meant.*

*"I love her very much."*

*"It's funny, I never knew you could cook!"*

*"I never got the chance before. The Yomtayvim are coming - I'll make you a ginger lekach. A honey-cake for a sweet year."*

\* \* \* \* \*

Well, I found out who my father is, even if Zaideh couldn't tell me *where* he is. Lazar Plotkin. I've been thinking about him ever since Zaideh told me his name - for months now. Does he even know that I was born? Maybe one day I'll go find him, and tell him who I am. Maybe.

Anyway, I feel better now that I know.

These days the living-room door is open, and the curtains are drawn back to let the light in. And now I'm allowed to play the piano - and I'm taking music lessons! My teacher Mrs Burstein comes to the house twice a week, and I practice every day.

And Dina has opened a little shop, just up the street, called "The Honey-cake". A lady called Talitha helps her, and they sell delicious things that they make, like cheese blintzes, and cakes, and home-made bread. On the afternoons when I don't have a music lesson, I love helping them at the shop. Dina always has chocolate cake for me - or honey-cake.

# *new* POETRY

## **Daylight after Darkness**

For no life is without heartache or pain  
And from it we gain  
Some essence of resilience and courage  
As we put one foot in front of the other  
And slowly recover  
Until we are able to walk again and discover  
The veracity that time itself is the salve

We step tenuously in a new direction  
With an altered self for support and protection  
We find ourselves in another reality  
Where the legacy of precious memory  
Binds us and reminds us  
In lasting connective continuity  
To look back honouring that which has been lost  
Yet making our own life up to the task

Securely tucked in our backpack of sorrow  
Is the direction which prompts us not to borrow  
Time from the past and that which is gone  
But to move forward and painstakingly press on  
To the progression of our own story  
- and another tomorrow.

And though the view ahead is sometimes obscured  
By the intermittent blurring of recollective tears  
With no conception of how our journey ends  
Still meeting cliffs and dips and slides and bends  
And building blocks masked as blows and knocks  
We continue to explore what lies before

And just as there are set-backs and grief  
There is aspiration, hope and satisfaction  
Of a job well done, of hardship overcome  
And of kindness, strength, love and appreciation

*Charlotte Cohen*

## **Silence - Auschwitz-Birkenau**

If trees could speak I dread what they'd tell me.  
With the wisdom of age  
With the hind and foresight of sage  
With courage  
An explanation:

Multitudes of beings metamorphosed  
Hairless, stripped of individuality  
Skeletal, starved of spirituality  
Nameless, deprived of dignity  
Crippled by the beasts that rule as man over man  
And never seen again.

Multitudes of beings were exterminated  
Herded into the place  
The place from which beings do not return  
Unless in a pillar of smoke  
But we reaped the fertile rewards of their ashes  
Silent observance- we tree-beings cannot speak.  
But, multitudes of human beings can.  
They allege, articulate, assert,  
Converse, communicate, convey,  
Deliver, declare, enunciate,  
Express, pronounce, state,  
Shriek, whisper, gasp,  
Demand, command, and  
Pray

Multitudes of beings- bystanders  
Without protest or analysis or criticism.  
Dumb. Voiceless. Mute.

Today, not only us trees bare witness.  
Evidence remains.  
Human beings' ash, human beings' testimony,  
human beings' atrocities against human beings  
remain.  
And again-  
Human silence

I hear it. It's deafening.

*Gabriella Hyman*

## READERS' LETTERS

\*

The Machalnicks story by Barbara Rigden (Rosh Hashanah, 2015) evoked poignant memories. When we, of the Yeshuv, stood against superior forces intent on throwing us into the sea, it was wonderful to know that Diaspora Jews stood by us.

It is a pity, though, that the contribution of Gachal (*Gios Hotz Laretz*) has been forgotten. Gachal consisted of young survivors of the Holocaust who upon arrival in Israel joined the Israeli army. Many of them paid the supreme price.

I am often surprised at how when people speak of WW2, they seem to ignore the terrible dangers in which the Yeshuv found itself.

On 17 May 1939, the British government issued the White Paper which to all intents and purposes annulled the Balfour Declaration. Eretz Israel (Palestine) was to become a two-nation state, with the Jews kept as a perpetual minority. The Yeshuv rose in protest and vowed that illegal immigration, which started in 1933-4, would increase, as would the buying of land. When war was declared in September that year, the Yeshuv was in a quandary – do we fight the British or the greater enemy, Germany? The decision was, “We fight the White Paper as though there is no war; we fight the war as though there is no White Paper.” About 20 000 young men and women joined the British army. In fact, when Greece fell in 1941, 1500 of the many prisoners of war that the Nazis took were from the Yeshuv. It is important to note that Palestinian Arabs did not contribute anything to the war effort.

In September 1940, the Italian bombarded Haifa and Tel Aviv. 137 people were killed in Tel Aviv, about 100 of them children. These bombardments continued on and off until the Italians became too busy in North Africa.

From 1940 onwards, Syria and Lebanon were ruled by Vichy France. Palestine and Transjordan were now threatened by Nazi Germany. The Haganah, which at the time was illegal, was legalized and the Palmach (the commando force of the Haganah) was sent by the British to carry out sabotage action in Syria.

In 1941, the British trained 23 young men from the Yeshuv to carry out sabotage in Lebanon. They were sent in a small boat to Lebanon, but unfortunately were lost at sea. David Raziell, the brilliant head of the Ezzel (Irgun Tzvai Leumi) who was in a British jail at the time, was freed and sent to Iraq to help the British deal with the situation. Unfortunately, he and a companion were killed en route by a German bomb.

In 1942, things went from bad to worse. By then, the Allied forces had suffered defeat after defeat in North Africa, and after the fall of Tobruk the only barrier between the Nazis and the Yeshuv was Al Alamein. There is no need to spell out what would have happened to the small Jewish community of the Yeshuv if the Nazis won.

The Yeshuv was in panic. There was even talk of a second Masada. A few plans of defence were formulated. One was to concentrate the entire Yeshuv on the Carmel mountains and hold out until Britain gained the upper hand. On 4 November 1942, Britain won a resounding victory at Al Alamein. The Yeshuv, and the world, could breathe easier. For the Yeshuv, it was time to fight the White Paper.

Victory Day on 7 May 1945 was a sad day for the Yeshuv. As Geula Cohen, a schoolgirl, wrote, “Today, flags of all countries are flying high; only ours is flying half-mast”.

It took 4-6 years of hard struggle and bitter warfare for us to be able to fly our flag proudly again.

**Shulamit Kagan**  
Johannesburg

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Far be it for me to have belittled David Sandler's work in a footnote (Readers' Letters, Rosh Hashanah 2015). See my glowing review of his book *The Pinsker Orphans* in *Jewish Affairs* of Pesach, 2014.

However, there has been confusion between the two Oranjia books, and it was essential to point out the difference. Whereas the official Oranjia book was entirely original, the committee believed that their book should be equally balanced between the history of the institution and the memoirs. David is incorrect in stating that the committee wanted to silence the children. If he had read the authorised Oranjia book more carefully, he would



have noticed some extremely critical, if not damning, memoirs by former residents as far as the early days are concerned, when institutional child care was simply a case of providing a roof over the children's heads and food on the table, and when discipline was harsh. The book documented the change in the approach to childcare in the 1980s, as well as the move from the large Montrose Avenue building to three smaller cottage homes (today reduced to one).

David Sandler's focus, however, is only on memoirs, and he has collected a large number of these. However, he also reproduced a large number of original sources verbatim without having obtained the permission of Oranjia, which holds the copyright. These included a chapter of Eric Rosenthal's history of Oranjia for their 50<sup>th</sup> Jubilee, Oranjia's annual reports and a private children's publication *The Flag of Oranjia* that include personal contributions by numerous residents whose permission had not been obtained. When he finally approached Oranjia (at my urging), they asked him to delay his own publication to allow them to launch their own long-awaited official history first, to give their fund raisers the opportunity to benefit from it.

David is also incorrect in stating that all the money from his Oranjia publication goes to Oranjia. Those sold in Johannesburg or America benefit other organisations. Only the proceeds from books sold in Cape Town go to Oranjia.

All the Oranjia committee was asking was that David respect the institution that had provided for all its former residents - his contributors - a roof over their heads, food on the table and education - and give Oranjia a chance to maximise its own publication instead of undermining it with a rival publication and by making implications that Oranjia wished to silence its former residents. This David refused to do. He even refused to give Oranjia a copy of his publication. Nor, as he has done, can he claim copyright over material produced by Oranjia.

David Sandler deserves respect for the work he has done in preserving the memories of former residents in our Jewish orphanages. However, it is also necessary for him to show respect to the conventions associated with such publications.

**Veronica Belling**  
**Cape Town**

- *This correspondence is now closed – ed.*

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## SOUTH AFRICAN JEWRY – 175

2016 marks the 175<sup>th</sup> year since the founding of the Cape Town Hebrew Congregation and the holding of the first formal Jewish religious services in South Africa. This marked the formal birth of South African Jewry as an organised, distinct community. To celebrate this milestone, the Rosh Hashanah 2016 issue of *Jewish Affairs* will be devoted to reflections on what it has meant, and means to be Jewish in South Africa and the role that Jews, as individuals and as a collective, have played in the unfolding story of their country.

The *Jewish Affairs* editorial board cordially invites readers to get in touch via the editor regarding any ideas – or even better, contributions – they might have for this special issue.



*Market day in Krakenova'*



*Maccabi orchestra, Rakishok*

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