

South Africa: Jewish Family History Research Guide

Brief Historical Background

The first Jews to explore South Africa were map makers, navigators and sailors who participated in the early voyages of exploration around the Cape of Good Hope in 1452 with the Portuguese voyages. Later, with the first settlement of Dutch colonies in 1652, there were at least four Jews who later converted to Christianity. After the British government took control of the Cape Colony in 1806, and granted people land in which to settle, at least five Jewish families that are known as the “1820 settlers” settled there. Other Jews had arrived in South Africa from Germany and Holland by the 1860s.

Benjamin Norden founded the first Jewish congregation in Cape Town in 1841, and, by 1880, about 4,000 Jews lived in South Africa. Jewish immigration to South Africa increased after the pogroms (of 1881-1882) and natural disasters in Russia.

According to the 1911 national census, there were more than 47,000 Jews in South Africa, mostly Jews who previously lived in the Russian Empire and identified as Litvaks, mainly from Grodno, Kovno, Vilna, Minsk, Mogilev, Suwalki, and Vitebsk. Between 1925 and 1938, approximately 15,000 Jews entered South Africa. Restrictions on immigration were put in place in the late 1930's and, during the Holocaust, fewer than 500 Jews entered South Africa.*

Based on the 1980 census, approximately 50% of South African Jewry lived in Johannesburg, 10% in the Johannesburg metropolitan districts of East Rand and West Rand, 20% in Cape Town and the Cape Peninsula, and the remaining 20% of Jewry were spread throughout the rest of the country.**

*Sack, S. A. & Mokotoff, G. (Eds.). (2004). *Avotaynu guide to Jewish genealogy*. Bergenfield, NJ: Avotaynu.

**Cohen, S. (1986, May). The Jewish community of South Africa: An outline. *AVOTAYNU, II* (2), 13-14.

Primary Records

Vital Records

The Republic of South Africa, Department of Home Affairs

The Department of Home Affairs (<http://www.home-affairs.gov.za/>) possesses birth, death, and marriage certificates. The records are available to persons who are either South African citizens by birth or naturalization or children of South African citizens who were born abroad.

Family History (FHL) of the Church of Jesus Christ of the Latter-Day Saints (LDS)

The Family History Library of the Church of Latter-Day Saints has microfilmed a number of South African records. The website is <http://familysearch.org>. To identify the relevant microfilms, first click on “Catalog” and do a “Place” search.

For a list of microfilms on long-term loan at the Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute, see <http://www.jgsny.org/microfilms-at-cjh>. Microfilms that are not on long-term loan at the Genealogy Institute can be ordered for viewing at any LDS Family History Center, including the Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute, at <http://www.familysearch.org/films>. For further instructions on ordering microfilms, see <http://www.cjh.org/p/34#microloans>.

The Family History Library has been digitizing their collections and, therefore, many records are already available on their site either image only, index only, or both image and index. To browse the digitized collections by country, visit <http://familysearch.org/search/collection/list>.

The following are helpful articles about LDS microfilms containing Southern African Jewish vital records:

1. Friedlander, A. (1990, Summer). Southern African research. *DOROT*, 9-10.
2. Meyerowitz. (1992, Summer). South Africa. *AVOTAYNU*, VIII (2), 44-45.
3. Issroff, S. (1992, Winter). Augments South African resources. *AVOTAYNU*, VIII (4), 67.
4. Issroff, S. (2003). South Africa. In S. A. Sack & G. Mokotoff (Eds.), *Avotaynu guide to Jewish genealogy* (p. 520). Bergenfield, NJ: Avotaynu.
5. South Africa. (Online), Retrieved on August 5, 2012. The International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (IAJGS).
<http://www.iajgsjewishcemeteryproject.org/south-africa/index.html>

Cemetery & Burial Records

- The Genealogical Society of South Africa documented headstone inscriptions of all South Africa cemeteries. These are available online on the National Archives of South Africa databases – Data of the South African Genealogical Society on Gravestones at <http://www.national.archsrch.gov.za/sm300cv/smws/sm300dl>.
- The LDS Family History Library microfilmed the Jewish Helping Hand and Burial Society (Johannesburg) burial register for the period of 1877-1930 (microfilm 1259151), and the Cape Town cemetery registers for the period of 1886-1953 (microfilms 1259122-1259124 and 1258779).
- The Chevrah Kadisha, a Johannesburg Jewish welfare organization, can be contacted for information about burials and tombstones at <http://www.jhbchev.co.za/pages/default.aspx> The JewishGen Online WorldWide Burial Registry database (JOWBR) includes more than 1.8 million names and other identifying information from cemeteries and burial records worldwide. It is available online at <http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Cemetery/>.

Census records

General note: Census enumerations are destroyed in South Africa; however, statistics from each census are kept.

Census and tax records (South Africa as a whole*):

Central Statistical Services, Demographics
Postal Address: Private Bag 44, Pretoria, 0001
Physical Address: 170 Vermeulen St, Pretoria Central, 0002
Telephone Number: 27-12-310-8911
E-mail: info@statsa.gov.co.za

*For more information about census records read: Issroff, S. (2003). South Africa. In S. A. Sack & G. Mokotoff (Eds.), *Avotaynu guide to Jewish genealogy* (p. 516). Bergenfield, NJ: Avotaynu.

Jewish Genealogical Societies

- *Jewish Family History Society of Cape Town*
P.O. Box 51985, Waterfront, 8002, South Africa
Telephone: +27 21-4344825, +27 21-4230223
E-mail: jewfamct@global.co.za
Newsletter: Journal of the Jewish Family History Society of Cape Town
- *Jewish Genealogy Society of Johannesburg*
P.O. Box 1388, Parklands 2121, South Africa.
E-mail: evancol@iafrica.com
Newsletter: Yichus 99. Maurice Skikne, Editor - moski@global.co.za

Naturalization Records

- The National Archives holds naturalization records and the state archives hold copies of them.

National Archives Repository The Head

Postal address: Private Bag X236, PRETORIA 0001
Street address: 24 Hamilton Street, Arcadia, PRETORIA
Tel: (012) 441 3200. Fax: (012) 323 5287
Fax to e-mail: 086 529 6414
E-mail: enquiries@dac.gov.za

- Family Search Library (Latter Day Saints) holds ‘Applications for letters of naturalization (1883-1908) of the Cape of the Good Hope’ on microfilms 1281593 and 1281594.
- SA Jewish Rootsbank contains the following databases: Jewish naturalization records (1902-1907) and Pretoria naturalization records. For more information, check this guide under “Web Resources.”

Ship Passenger Lists

General information:

Researchers can find information more easily at the port of departure, as finding immigrant arrival records for South Africa cannot be easily found. For example, passenger lists for ships leaving the UK (1890-1960) to all destinations, including Africa, can be found online at <http://www.findmypast.co.uk/> (subscription is required). Likewise, the Hamburg Passenger List (1850-1934) includes passengers leaving Germany to all destinations, including Africa, and is available at <http://www.ancestry.com/> (subscription is required).

Jewish Immigration:

- The Poor Jews' Temporary Shelter (1896-1914) in London assisted many Jews on their way to South Africa. The records of the shelter's inhabitants are available online. For more information, see the "Web Resources" section of this guide.
- The Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, associated with the University of Cape Town, is creating a comprehensive database of South African Jewish immigration in the period between 1850 and 1950. Consult the website <http://www.kaplancentre.uct.ac.za> for more information.

For a sample database, check 'South Africa Jewish Board of Deputies Immigration Registers 1924-1929' in the "Web Resources" section of this guide.

Sources at the Center for Jewish History

Archival Collections*

In search of Gustav: The story of the Lilienfeld (later Lynfield) family covering the last 200 years 1800-1920. This is the first of three books about the history of Geoffrey Lynfield's family. (LBI ME 1519; Digital version is available online at <http://digital.cjh.org/1051409>)

Jews in South Africa collection 1954-1994. Memorial Album of the Hebrew congregation "Etz Chaim," Johannesburg 1954. (LBI AR 490)

ORT-OZE vocational training, South Africa. 1946/8/9. The collection contains images of several young men working at various machines. (YIVO RG 380)

Rosenstein, Willy. *Autobiographical note 1892-1936.* Biographical/Historical Note: "Willy Rosenstein was born in Stuttgart in 1892. He was a pilot in World War I. After World War I he became the secretary of the "Salamander" shoe company and a partner in his father-in-law's leather business. He emigrated to South Africa in 1936 and founded a pilot school there." [LBI Biographical/Historical Note]. (LBI ME 527; Digital version is available online at <http://digital.cjh.org:1801/webclient/DeliveryManager?pid=406821>)

Wischnitzer, Mark. *Bericht ueber eine Informationsreise nach der Suedafrikanischen Union, den beiden Rhodesien und Kenya (Britisch-Ostafrika).* The collection consists of three reports on visit to South Africa, Rhodesia, and Kenya (1936), to explore possibilities for Jewish emigration from Germany. (LBI MS 695; Digital version is available online at <http://digital.cjh.org:1801/webclient/DeliveryManager?pid=546470>)

*For family collections, check the CJH catalog at <http://search.cjh.org>.

Books

Belling, V. (2008). *Yiddish theatre in South Africa: a history from the late nineteenth century to 1960.* Cape Town: Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research. (YIVO 000126265)

Belling, V. (1997). *Bibliography of South African Jewry*. South Africa: Jewish Publications-South Africa, Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research, University of Cape Town. **(YIVO REF DT 764 J4 B4 1997)**

Berger, N. (1977). *In those days, in these times: spotlighting events in Jewry-South African and general*. Johannesburg, South Africa: Kayor. **(YIVO 000118974)**

Kuper, S.M. (1949). *South African Jewry today*. [Johannesburg]: S.A. Jewish Board of Deputies. **(YIVO 00037724)**

Sandler, D. S. (2011). *The Ochberg orphans and the horrors from whence they came : the rescue in 1921 of 181 Jewish orphans by Isaac Ochberg, the representative of the South African Jewish community, from the horrors of the 'pale of settlement'*. Wanneroo, W.A.: David Solly Sandler. **(YIVO 000130954)**

South African Jewry: a survey of the Jewish community: its contributions to South Africa: directory of communal institutions: and a who's who of leading personalities. (19--). Johannesburg: South African Jewry and Who's Who. **(YIVO REF DS135 .A26 S6 1976)**

Newspapers and Periodicals**

Afrikaner. Johannesburg. **(YIVO 000001528; 1964-Y-309.319)**

Der Tsienist. Yohanesburg : aroysg. durkh di Zid afrikaner tsienistisher federatye. **(YIVO 000002645a)**

Foroys. Yohanesburg: Aroysgegebn durkh Yidishn kultur-farayn in Yohanesburg. (In Yiddish. **YIVO 01500221)**

Hashalom. Durban: The Circle. (In English. **YIVO 015005532)**

Idishe sh'time. Johannesburg. **(YIVO 000001295; 1964-Y-352)**

The Jewish herald: organ of the New Zionist Organization of S.A. Johannesburg: Newzo Press. **(YIVO 00005068)**

South African Jewish times. Johannesburg: Union Publications. **(YIVO 00005067; 00000969)**

The South African Jewish year book. Johannesburg: Fieldhill Publishing House. **[YIVO 0001507460 (PER); 0001503736 (PER)]**

United Mizrahi Organization newsletter. Houghton: United Mizrahi Organization of South Africa. **(YIVO 015010019; 01510019)**

Unzer veg. Yohanesburg. (In Yiddish. **YIVO 01503268; 1966-Y-717)**

Yidishe post. Yohanesburg : s.n. **(YIVO 01502220)**

**For more information about Jewish newspapers and periodicals published in South Africa in English, Hebrew, and Yiddish that the CJH possesses, check the CJH catalog at <http://search.cjh.org>.

Web Resources

A comprehensive and useful blog describing sources of information for South African Family History and Genealogy by Anne Kemkuhl can be found at

<http://southafricanresearcher.blogspot.com/2010/04/sources-of-information.html>

International Jewish Cemetery Project. This project resides on the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies' website, and includes articles and list of Jewish cemeteries in South Africa.

<http://www.iajgsjewishcemeteryproject.org/south-africa/index.html>

Master of the High Court of South Africa's ICMS Web Portal. The Master Office Web Portal includes indexes to trusts, liquidations, curators, insolvency, and deceased people from the year 2000. It requires registration prior to starting your search.

http://www.justice.gov.za/master/m_main.htm

The Poor Jews' Temporary Shelter (London) Database (1896-1914). This database was developed as a project of Professor Aubrey Newman and Dr. Graham Smith, both of the Department of History at the University of Leicester in the United Kingdom. The Poor Jews' Temporary Shelter was founded in 1885 to accommodate Jewish immigrants to London. Most immigrants were Lithuanian and headed to South Africa.

<http://chrysalis.its.uct.ac.za/shelter/shelter.htm>

South Africa Jewish Board of Deputies Immigration Registers 1924-1929. The immigration registers are from bound books and include about 16,000 entries. They are available at the Kaplan Center Archives, although no researchers are allowed to make copies, only staff. There is a sample database that includes 537 entries, which is available to download at the Southern Africa Jewish Genealogy SA-SIG Webpage.

<http://www.jewishgen.org/safrica/sa.htm>

South African Jewish Museum. The museum's website provides links to more information on Jewish origins, migration, and settlement in South Africa.

http://www.sajewishmuseum.co.za/familytrees/geneology_links.asp

SA Jewish Rootsbank. This site is the project of the Centre for Jewish Migration & Genealogy Studies, which is under the umbrella of the Isaac and Jessie Kaplan Institute for Jewish Studies at the University of Cape Town. It includes a database which encompasses cemetery and community records, military records, naturalization records, passenger arrival, and vital records.

http://chrysalis.its.uct.ac.za/CGI/CGI_ROOTWEB.exe?entry_point=Home

SA-SIG. Southern Africa Jewish Genealogy Special Interest Group's website includes articles, commentaries, and links to relevant resources on South Africa.

<http://www.jewishgen.org/safrica/>

South Africa: Virtual Jewish History Tour. This site includes historical background about the Jewish settlement in South Africa and Jewish community in the country. Also included are community contacts and a list of sources.

http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/vjw/South_Africa.html