

CHAPTER 5
THE PROMISED LAND: EXODUS AND BACK AGAIN
1899-1910

Although progress was being made, in terms of securing full rights for the *uitlander* community in the Transvaal, it was still not happening quickly enough to satisfy the British government. Chamberlain, the British Prime Minister, suggested a policy in which five years of residency for an immigrant would entitle him/her to full rights and responsibilities as a citizen or *burgher* of the Transvaal (Saron, 1955a). Chamberlain further ‘recommended’ that the British government should have a greater say in the policies and governance of the Transvaal. Kruger and his *Volksraad*, strangely enough, refused both of these proposals on the grounds that the Transvaal was its own sovereign state, a matter which had been settled almost 20 years earlier during the first ‘*Boer War*’. Kruger effectively told the British that their interference was neither required nor welcome.

‘Oom Paul’, as Kruger was affectionately known, felt a profound sense of responsibility for the Afrikaner nation and most of his actions and policy decisions were motivated by a desire to ensure the safety and preservation of the *Boer* culture and way of life. The same pure intentions could not be said of the British, they were not simply seeking the enfranchisement of the British citizens in the Transvaal, but rather the control of the richest goldfields in the world. A small but insistent group publicly stated that the real reason for the war was so that a society of British Jewish capitalists could gain control of the mines (Benson, 1987; Shain, 2000). Neither the British nor the *Boers* were willing to back down as they both had too much to lose. The *Boers* had their very sovereignty at stake and the British would lose the potential fortune contained in the goldmines on the Rand. The British put more pressure on Kruger by importing British soldiers and stationing them, as a silent threat, on the Transvaal’s borders. Kruger demanded their removal and warned that there would be war if the British did not comply with his demands. Kruger behaved just as Milner had anticipated. Milner refused and thus Kruger was manipulated into declaring war on the British on the 11th October 1899 (Weber, n.d). The British expected to be home by Christmas and vastly underestimated both the determination and the skill of their opposition. The *Boers* fought a guerrilla war that made the British pay dearly for their overconfidence, in the end the war cost Britain £350 million and 20 000 soldiers, which was a far higher price than they had ever expected to pay (Benson, 1987).

The Effect of the War on Johannesburg Jewry

The Jewish community of Johannesburg had consolidated to a large extent by the end of the nineteenth century and there were an estimated 12 000 Jews living in Johannesburg at the time (Sowden, 1955b). There are records that show that, aside from the three main synagogues serving the community, numerous temporary synagogues had to be established for the High Holy Days during the late 1890s to accommodate the increased Jewish population (Rabinowitz, 1955). William Butler, a noted author, wrote that in 1899, the “denizens” of Johannesburg, “preferred to name it . . . Jewburg” because of the number and visibility of the Jewish community (Butler, 1913: 415). Jews formed about one-tenth of the White population of Johannesburg and were involved in every aspect of the economic, social, and political life of the city (Herrman, 1935).

Before the war had even begun thousands of Transvaal residents, including many Jews, streamed out Johannesburg and headed for the coast.¹ The authors of a brochure of the time, entitled, *Souvenir of the Refugees’ Festival Services, Good Hope Hall, Cape Town, Tishri 5661 - 1900* maintained that, “At the outbreak of the Anglo-Boer War in October 1899, the vast majority of the Jewish population were expelled by the Boer authorities and a large number took refuge in Cape Town” (Abrahams, 2001: no page number).² It is estimated that by the time war was declared only 1 500-2 000 Jews remained in the Transvaal, and it is clear from the data in Figure 5.1 that the enclaves of Jews in both the northern (outlined in green on Fig. 5.1) and southern part (outlined in red on Fig. 5.1) of the city diminished considerably during the war (cf. Fig. 4.4 and Fig. 5.1). In fact the Jewish population of Johannesburg had shrunk to between 300³ and 500⁴ people from its earlier pre-war figure of over 12 000 (Saron, 1955b). The exodus of people from the Transvaal was not only to the coastal cities. The British government took the opportunity to provide a series of inducements to repatriate all refugees to their native countries (Saron, 1955b). Not many Jews took up this offer, which is hardly surprising given their status and treatment in their native countries. Most Jewish refugees chose instead to remain in South Africa in the belief that the war would not last long and life on the Rand would soon return to normal.

Conditions in Johannesburg during the war

The once crowded, exuberant town of Johannesburg was occupied by the British in May 1900 and sat quietly through the war. “Business is quite suspended, the mines have been closed down, the bars also, all shops are barricaded, two-thirds of the White population have cleared out”.⁵ The remaining Jewish community carried on with their lives as well as they could under the circumstances. Religious rites were still held at the Park Street Synagogue and the requisite number of men could still be found for a service.⁶

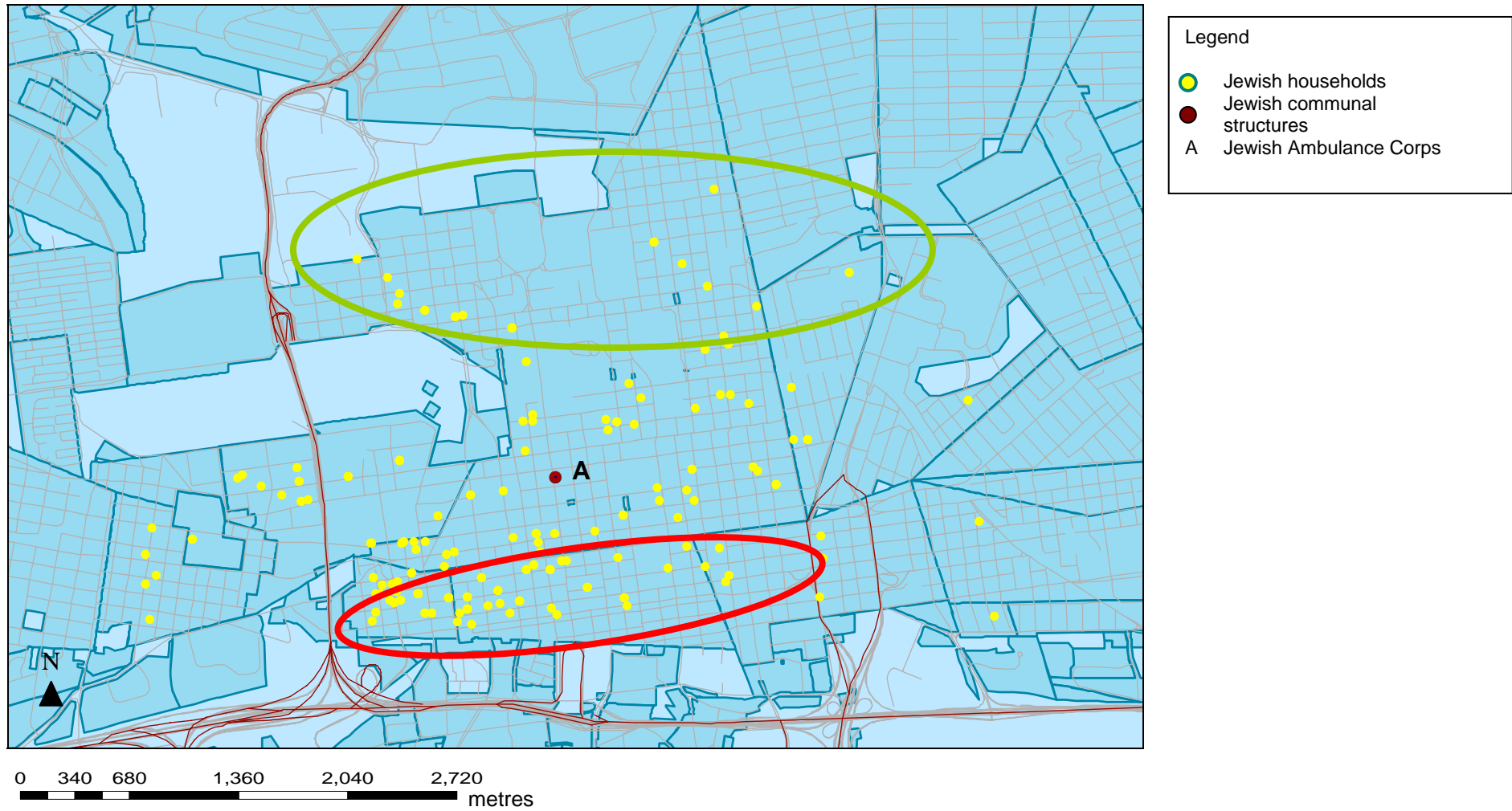


Figure 5.1: Johannesburg Jewish Community during the *Boer* War, 1899-1902.
(Source: Appendix III)

Jewish communal and charitable institutions still functioned, the Jewish Helping Hand and Burial Society, Jewish Ladies Brigade, the Ladies Society, the Benevolent Association, Zionist Association, Jewish Men’s Friendly Association, and Jewish Men’s Working Club all carried on working throughout the war.⁷ One of the most notable Jewish contributions to the war was the Jewish Ambulance Corps (Fig. 5.1 point A) established by the Jewish Helping Hand in 1899 at Aaron’s Cigar Factory. The Corps cared for both *Boer* and British wounded, and were responsible for saving a number of lives (Rabinowitz, 1955). As quiet as it was in Johannesburg the city’s residents faced a number of other problems and by 1901 food had become a scarce commodity and could only be bought with a permit from the British occupiers.⁸ The Jewish women’s associations saw the need and established soup kitchens to feed and care for all of the hungry of Johannesburg.



FIGURE 5.2:
Levitas, a
South African
Jew, who fought
for the British.
(Source: Rubin
Family Archive)

Jews fought on both sides following the dictates of their consciences and loyalties. Many of the *uitlanders*, who stayed in the Transvaal during the war, took what was called the ‘War Oath’, which was basically a statement of allegiance to the Z.A.R. while renouncing any other loyalties.⁹ Even though many of the remaining Jews took the oath and committed themselves to the *Boer* state, there were still recorded events of anti-Semitism by the *Boer* army. They commandeered property and supplies and vandalized Jewish homes and businesses.¹⁰ The Afrikaner forces apparently targeted homes of notable Jews, including the exiled Rabbi Hertz, whose home was stripped bare and severely damaged by Kruger’s men.¹¹ A number of Jews joined the British army (Fig. 5.2) in the belief that under British rule their civil and religious liberties would be entrenched and they would no longer be seen as *uitlanders* in their adopted country.

Conditions in the rest of South Africa

The Anglo-*Boer* War affected everyone in South Africa. The coastal cities of Port Elizabeth, Cape Town, and Durban were flooded with refugees from the Transvaal. In Cape Town alone there were an estimated 15 000 Jewish exiles.¹² The refugees arrived penniless and without much hope of finding employment in the over-saturated war-time job market, and signs outside of shop windows advertising jobs read, “No Johannesburgers need apply”.¹³ In order to help all of the refugees, various organizations and institutions co-ordinated aid programmes for the exiled population. In Cape Town, the Mayor’s Rand Relief Committee

issued tickets, which allowed the refugees, “nine-pennyworth of food per day” and access to a shelter that had been created in the area of the docks to accommodate them.¹⁴ The Jewish community in the various coastal towns aided their co-religionists in whatever way possible but at times the influx was too great and not everyone could be assisted.

The war came to end on the 31st May 1902 when the Peace of Vereeniging was signed. The Transvaal was handed over to the British and many of the *Boer* soldiers were exiled to Ceylon and St. Helena. British rule of the Transvaal ushered in a new epoch in the life of the Johannesburg Jewish community.

Return to the Promised Land

The war years had been difficult and the return to the Transvaal was seen as going back to a land full of potential and the possibility of a fruitful and secure future for all of the Transvaalers who had been exiled by the war. The period following the *Anglo-Boer* War was a turbulent time for the Jewish community of Johannesburg. Jews faced some major challenges on their return to the Transvaal. The Natal and Cape Immigration Restriction Acts barred all Eastern European Jews from entering South Africa at any of the Cape or Natal ports. There were even greater obstacles for Jews wishing to return to the Transvaal and Johannesburg as they needed to obtain permits to resettle and, if they wanted to reside in the Transvaal permanently, they had to become naturalized. Although the war had slowed down Eastern European Jewish immigration to South Africa it certainly had not stopped it and there were immigrant as well as dislocated Jews who needed help to settle in post-war South Africa. Ironically it was the conflict and the tensions surrounding citizenship and residency in post-war South Africa that created institutional and communal frameworks that entrenched the Jewish community on the South African landscape.

At a smaller scale the Jews of Johannesburg were experiencing greater decentralization than ever before (the red arrows on Fig. 5.3 indicate the direction of movement of the Jewish community). Smaller congregations were being established all over the city, giving rise to a new and different Jewish landscape in Johannesburg. The Jewish community spread east and west adding new dimensions to the previously existing geography of the Jewish community (cf. Fig. 4.4 and Fig. 5.3). Added to which the Jewish community that could have been neatly divided into Eastern European Jews and Western European Jews in the last century, now had a new subculture to deal with. The Eastern European Jews who left Russia *after* the turn of the century and particularly after the October Revolution in Russia and the *pogroms* of 1905 were very different from the earlier immigrants. They were better educated, more worldly and often firm advocates of some form of socialism, as such, these Jews added a new dimension to the politics, sociology, and geography of Johannesburg.

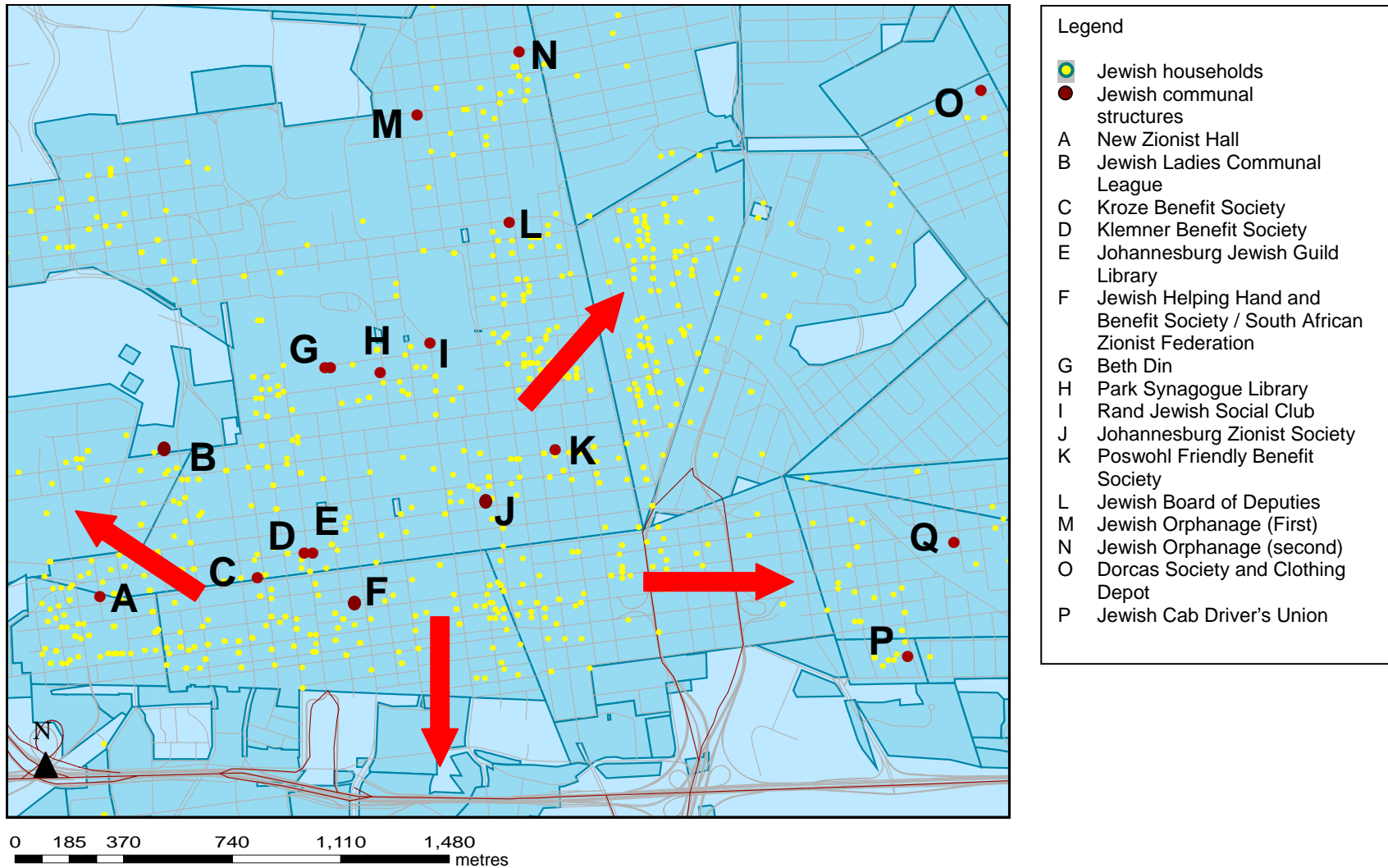


Figure 5.3: Jewish organizations in Johannesburg, 1903-1910.
(Source: Appendix IV and Appendix V)

South Africa after the War

After the war, Britain found itself in charge of a territory that was essentially four separate ‘countries’. Each ‘country’ had its own set of individual anxieties and concerns, not to mention laws and regulations (Saron, 1955b). The war had ‘given’ the British the richest goldmines at the time and assured Britain of its place as an economic power on the world’s stage (Krut, 1987). There were further plans to guarantee that South Africa became a truly British colony. The subtext was that they really wanted a White, European majority in South Africa; to that end they enacted the Natal and Cape Immigration Restriction Acts of 1901 and 1902, respectively. The Acts defined who would and would not be allowed into the country. A ‘prohibited immigrant’ was:

- “a. any person who, when asked to do so by any duly authorised officer, shall be unable, through deficient education, to himself write out and sign in the characters of any European language an application to the satisfaction of the Minister;
- b. any person who is not in possession of visible means of support or is likely to become a public charge.”

(Quoted in Saron, 1955b: 92)

Although the Immigration Restriction Act was actually an anti-Asian measure intended to bar entrance to those of Chinese and Indian extraction, it had unforeseen consequences for the Jews from the Pale of Settlement. The “visible means of support”, normally £5, would have been problematic enough, given the poverty of the Eastern European Jews but when coupled with the directive concerning an ability to write a European language, the Act made Eastern European Jewish immigration virtually impossible. The majority of Eastern European Jews had been schooled in the very traditional *chederim* and *Talmud Torahs* of their *shtetls* and were only literate in Yiddish and/or Hebrew¹⁵ (Saron, 1955b).

The new Act which came into effect on the 31st of January 1903 catalysed the fight for the recognition of Yiddish as a European language in South Africa. Immediately after the law was made public, representatives of the Jewish community were sent to the British High Commission to explain the situation to them. It was agreed, by the end of 1903, that Yiddish would be accepted in practise and by 1906, the law was officially changed and Yiddish was specifically mentioned as an acceptable European language in an amendment to the previous legislation¹⁶ (Saron, 1955b).

The Return of the Jews

After the war many of the exiled Jews wished to continue building their lives in the Johannesburg. According to Lord Milner, the High Commissioner, there would be no cause

for concern among the Jews as all Jews, irrespective of origin, would be entitled to re-enter the Transvaal and enjoy the benefits of naturalization. He maintained that, “the principles, which I have indicated are part of the long-settled policy throughout the Empire, from which no British Government would think of departing”.¹⁷ Although Milner did add a disquieting qualifier to his statement when he said he would meet, “. . . with apprehension...any sudden influx of a large alien population . . .”.¹⁸ It has also been said that the reason why Milner was so helpful in allowing the Jews back into the Transvaal was because of Rabbi Hertz’s support of the *uitlander* movement in Johannesburg. He had been the Rabbi of the Old Hebrew Congregation and his outspoken criticism of the *Boer* government, which had seen him exiled him for his trouble, had apparently endeared him and the Jewish people to the High Commissioner.¹⁹

Although official British policy may have been one of acceptance, reports in the Yiddish press acknowledged a number of difficulties that Eastern European Jews faced on re-entering the Transvaal. “The subjects of other governments, thanks to their consulates, gradually returned to the Transvaal. But the English officials look upon the Russian subjects with disgust, . . . and [Russian Jews] always receive a negative answer to their request [for re-entry]”.²⁰

Many of the Eastern European Jews found themselves in an untenable situation. A number of them had become British subjects during the war, in the hope that such an action would mean that they would not be sent back to Russia. Unfortunately the new Transvaal authorities did not recognize their adopted nationality and insisted that they apply for residency through the Russian consulate. When they appealed to the Russian embassy for help they were told that since they were now British subjects there was nothing that the Russian consulate could do for them.²¹ These Jews remained trapped in political limbo until they were either helped by one of the Jewish organizations or repatriated by the British government.²²

The Committee of Jews

In order to make the application for permits easier two new bodies were established and existing organizations turned their attention to this problem. The first was the Committee of Jews, which Milner set up to aid returning Jews (Saron, 1955b). The committee consisted of well-respected members of the Cape Town Jewish community who were mandated to decide who would be allowed to return to the Transvaal.²³ It was without question a very shrewd political tactic on behalf of Milner and his government, by allowing Jews to decide

the fate of their co-religionists it meant that there could not be any allegations of anti-Semitism. Such thinking ignored the deep schisms that existed between the two groups.

The Jewish Board of Deputies and the Zionist Federation

In Johannesburg, in response to both the Immigration Restriction Acts and the difficulties of returning to the Transvaal, a Jewish Board of Deputies (Fig. 5.3, point L) was established. Initially Max Langermann, a leading figure in the Jewish community proposed that a branch of the Anglo-Jewish Association be established in Johannesburg. The proposition was met with some hefty opposition. Many of the Eastern European Jews felt a great deal of antipathy towards the British who were seen as obstructing their compatriots from entering the Transvaal. Thus it was decided that various men would stand as deputies or representatives of the Jewish community of the Transvaal and Natal and oversee their interests.²⁴

The establishment of the Board of Deputies did not meet with universal approval.²⁵ The Zionist Federation (Fig. 5.3, point F) which had been responsible for migration and repatriation issues and had achieved some notable successes, did not see the need to establish yet another body to do the work that they were already engaged in.²⁶ Although the Jewish community in the Transvaal recognized the positive contribution that the Zionist Federation had made, it did not feel that the Federation was a true reflection of all South African Jewry.²⁷ Added to which some thought that the motives of the Zionist Federation were a bit suspicious. Sceptics argued that the Federation, by giving its aid in matters of naturalization, forced immigrants to give their allegiance to the organization. Thus the Board of Deputies who had no ulterior motives and who could be said to represent all Jews of Natal and the Transvaal was established as the *vox populi* of Johannesburg Jewry.

Naturalization in the Transvaal

An interesting irony of the war, which was ostensibly fought over the rights of the *uitlanders*, is that when it was over, only people who were British subjects or White Transvaalers were given the franchise. Anyone else was considered an 'alien' and denied the right to vote (Beavon, 2004). A number of Eastern European Jews, with the help of the above mentioned organizations, achieved naturalized status and were allowed to settle in the Transvaal but were not given the franchise (Saron, 1955b; Krut, 1987).

The Anglo-Jewish community encouraged Eastern European Jews to become naturalized. They believed that naturalization was a way forcing the Eastern European Jews to get rid of their 'embarrassing' language and customs and to join the modern westernized

world (Shain, 1994). An editorial describing the ‘Peruvian’ Jews aspirations appeared in the *South African Jewish Chronicle* and emphasizes this point,

“Gradually emerging from the chrysalis stage, he [the Eastern European Jew] is anxious to improve his intellectual and political condition, and it would appear a somewhat retrogressive step upon the part of the Board, to place him in the invidious position of being forced to revert to that language – or shall we rather call it jargon? – from the clutches of which he is endeavouring by every means in his power to emancipate himself.”²⁸

The traditions and customs of Eastern European Jewry, in fact simply being an Eastern European Jew, was seen as some type of condition, which could be ‘cured’ through the panacea of westernization. The anglicized Jews wanted the Eastern European Jews to replicate the same philosophy as the British Jews; to be citizens in the street, businessmen at work, and Jews only in the synagogue.²⁹ Some of the ‘Litvaks’ did conform but the vast majority held to their traditional values in their new homeland, much to the disappointment and disapproval of their Western European co-religionists.

Economic Conditions in Johannesburg

Johannesburg, after the *Anglo-Boer War*, was a very different place from the rag-tag boom-town that existed before the turn of the century. It was described as being “very quiet”.³⁰ Most of the mines had not operated for the previous three years and as such Johannesburg had been disconnected from its main source of revenue.³¹ The lack of economic activity affected all sectors of Johannesburg society. Those who were directly involved in mining battled to get the industry back on its feet but lacked capital and cheap labour (Krut, 1985). Retailers and artisans, who depended on the mining industry and its employees to buy their products, did not have a market. Unemployment levels were high and the labour market was saturated, a condition, which was made worse by the influx of ‘poor-White’ Afrikaners into Johannesburg. The Afrikaners had been displaced by the war and migrated to Johannesburg in the hope of making some kind of living (Sowden, 1955).

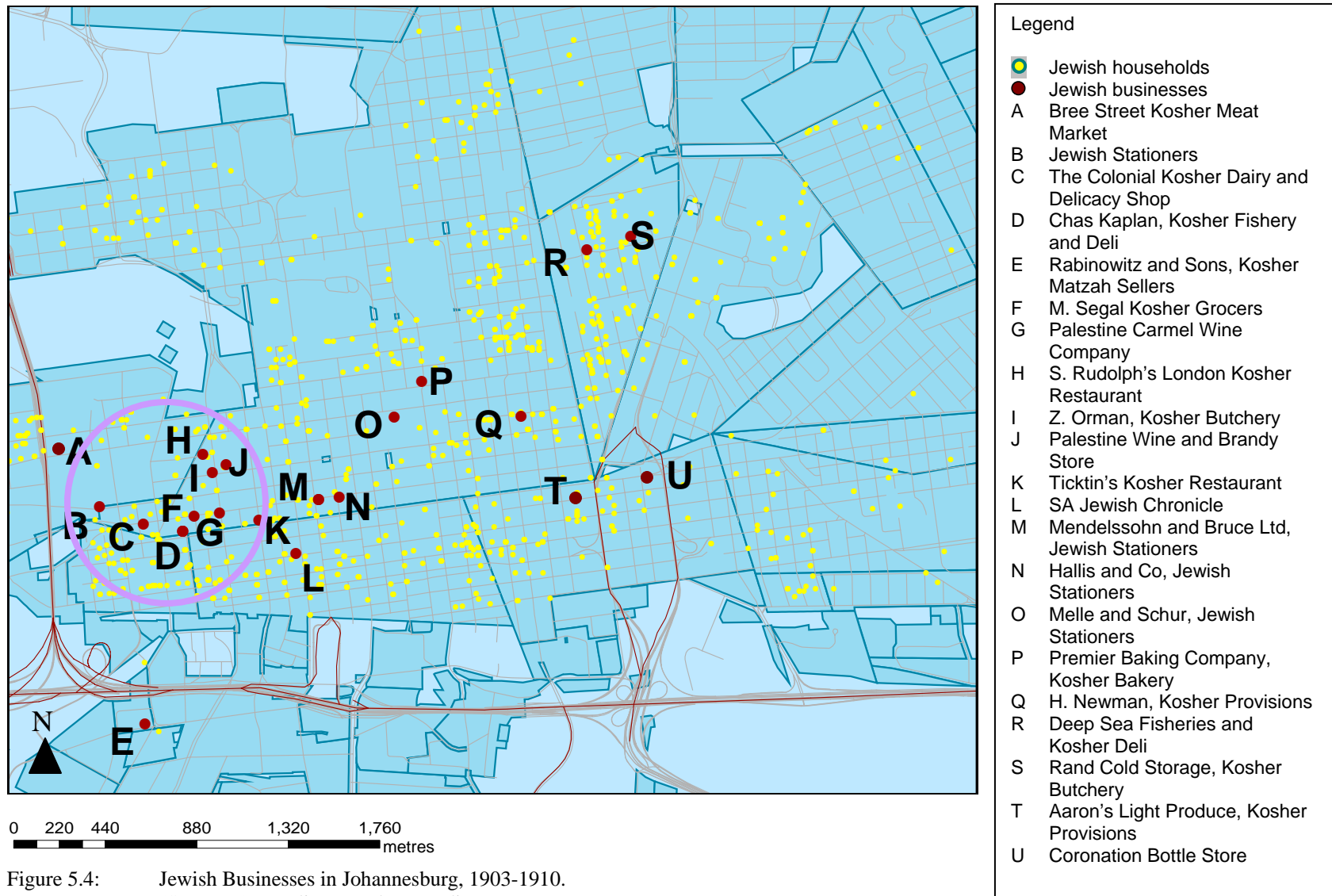
By the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century, Johannesburg was in the midst of yet another depression (Krut, 1985). The price of gold was fixed but labour costs soared as many Black South Africans refused to work on the mines if there was any other choice of employment and when they did they demanded only a six to nine month contract. The mineowners would have preferred that the Black labourers sign on for at least a year to ensure a stable and well-trained workforce. An alternative had to be found (Jeeves, 1985). The British formed a relationship with the Chinese government and by agreement Chinese labourers would be ‘imported’ to work on the mines as cheap labour.³² There were a number of objections to this plan, the first was that the import cost of Chinese labour was far too high

and it was felt that the 'Native' recruiting companies should work harder in order to ensure the provision of cheap Black labour (Yap and Man, 1996). There was an additional fear that the Chinese would take over jobs from the skilled White workers, since the cost of their labour, although more expensive than employing Black workers, was still cheaper than employing Whites.³³ The uncertainty over labour in the Transvaal made investors on the international stock exchanges nervous and led them to invest their money in more stable pursuits than gold mining on the Rand. The lack of investment only made matters worse and sent the mining industry into a downward spiral.³⁴

The effect of the Depression on the Jews of Johannesburg

Johannesburg Jewry faced the same difficulties as everybody else on the Rand with a couple of additional obstacles to their economic life; a claim that is substantiated by the work of Krut (1985). A number of Johannesburg Jews were involved in petty production and small wholesale enterprises. Their income sources included; dairies, butcheries, and livery stables, all of which required approval and certification from the appropriate authorities. Unfortunately many of the officials in charge of these authorizations were well-known anti-Semites and refused a number of applications (Krut, 1985). Jews did, however, manage to establish businesses, particularly *Kosher* butcheries and provision stores that saw to the needs of the ever growing community. *Kosher* facilities fell under the control of the Beth Din (or Ecclesiastical Court) (Fig. 5.3, point G), which was established in 1903 and was controlled by the New, Old, and Orthodox Hebrew congregations. The Beth Din was responsible for ensuring that the *Kosher* butcheries and shops observed the correct laws and rituals in their preparation and handling of foodstuffs (United Hebrew Congregation, 1947).

The growth of retailing had seen the core of the commercial district move from Market Square to Pritchard Street between Rissik and Eloff streets. With the advent of the chain store in Johannesburg, Cuthbert's and the original Stuttafords had taken up positions in Pritchard Street as they needed more frontage and space than the Market Square area could provide (Beavon, 2004). The majority of the small *Kosher* butcheries and Jewish shops, however, remained firmly fixed around Commissioner Street and Market Square (Fig. 5.4, points B, C, D, F, G, H, I, J, and K encircled in purple). As such they were situated close to the larger more observant 'Litvak' community in Marshallstown and Ferreirastown who formed their main market but were also easily accessible to the better-off Jews who had moved to the north of the central business district (CBD) and used the trams to reach central Johannesburg (Frescuro and Radford, 1982).



Jewish charitable organizations in Johannesburg

The Jewish Helping Hand and Burial Society, along with the Zionist Federation and the Jewish Board of Deputies, attempted to aid the community during these difficult times. Charity was distributed either as cash or food and clothing. The Dorcas Society, for example, made clothes for the underprivileged of the community (Fig. 5.3, point O). The women's organizations contributed food and support and the establishment of a number of new *landsleit* societies all contributed to the communal welfare of the Jewish community in Johannesburg (Fig. 5.3, points C, D, and K). From the data available the number of *landsmanschaften* established in Johannesburg peaked between 1900 – 1910 (Fig. 5.5). The huge influx of Eastern European Jews, both returning refugees and new immigrants, meant that there was a greater need than ever for organizations which could cope with the financial and social needs of this group of people (Greenblatt, 1998). The centre of Johannesburg was the heart of the city, it had been made accessible by the trams and served a variety of needs including the commercial, financial, and institutional requirements of the mushrooming Johannesburg residents. It is thus no surprise that the Jewish organizations were lodged in the same area as they had been in a decade before, readily accessible to both those who administered them and those who utilized their services.

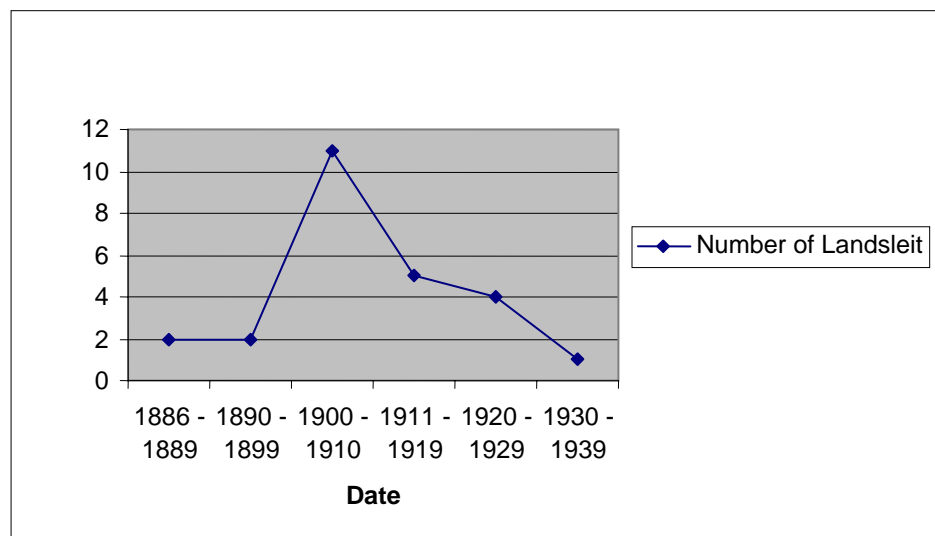


FIGURE 5.5: Johannesburg *Landsleit* Societies, 1886-1939.

Living conditions in Johannesburg

After the *Boer War*, life got worse for many sectors of Johannesburg society, as housing and facilities deteriorated (Trump, 1979). Black residents either lived in the mining compounds or in what were the worst of slum conditions (Fig. 5.6). The Black, 'Coloured', and Indian areas were of concern for the local authorities and by 1902 a Commission of Enquiry, which had been set up by the city council, declared the Locations to be unsafe and

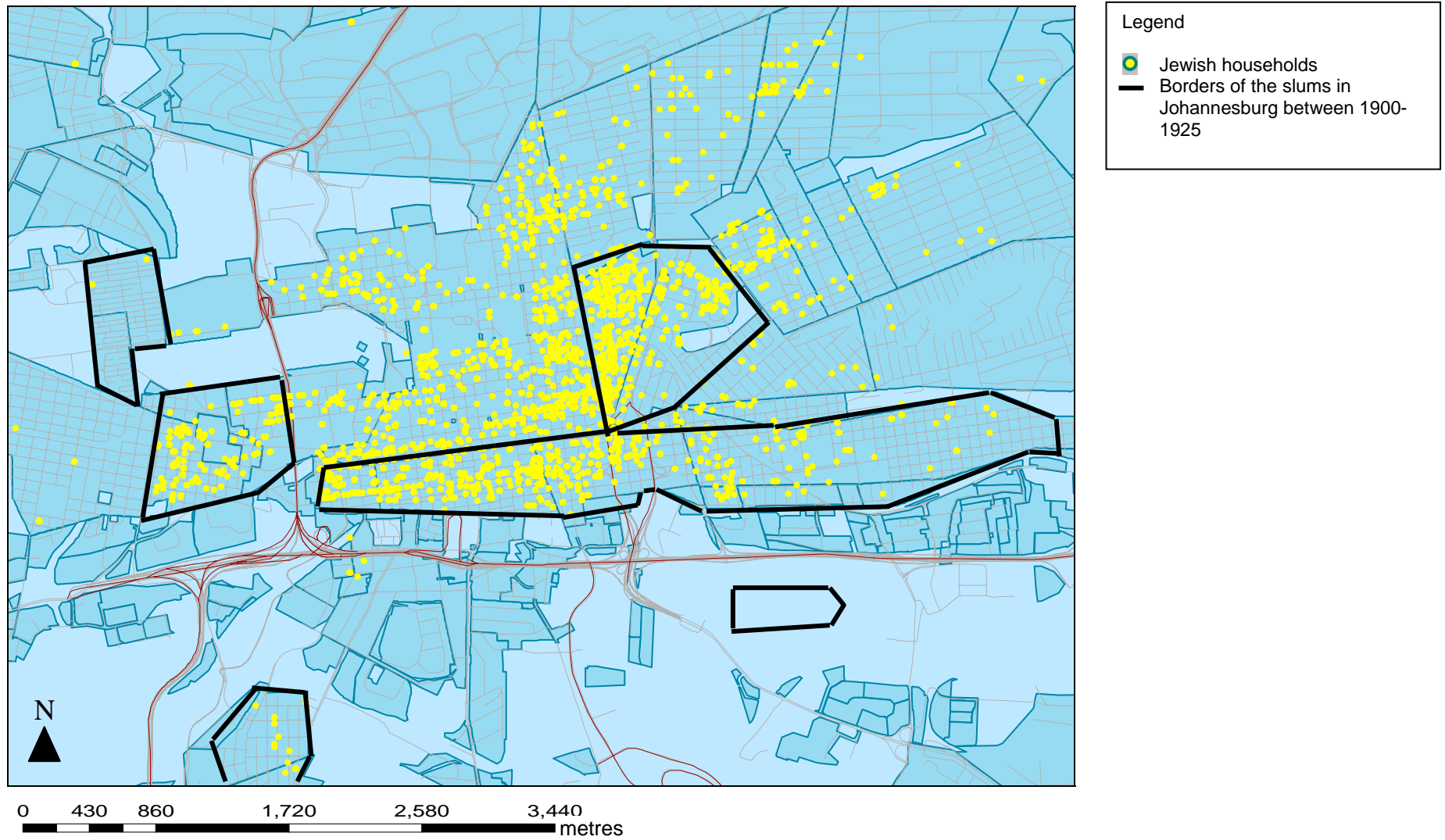


Figure 5.6: The Jewish community of Johannesburg, overlaid with designated slum areas, between 1900-1925. (Source: Appendix VII)

unhygienic. It was immediately decided to relocate the residents to a variety of sites, both within and on the peripheries of Johannesburg. A number of Black and 'Coloured' residents were removed and 'resettled' in Locations west of Vrededorp (Feetham, 1935). In 1903, however, with the outbreak of bubonic plague in the 'Coolie Location', an estimated 3 000 people were moved from the locations and installed 16 km south-west of Johannesburg at Klipspruit (Kagan, 1978).

The health and hygiene reasons given for the relocations are contentious and it has been asserted that the city administrators were actually just looking for a way of making Johannesburg into a White's only zone (Koch, 1983a; Beavon, 2004). The outbreak of bubonic plague provided the necessary justifications for the relocation of Blacks out of Johannesburg and into the more distant townships that had been established (Kagan 1979; Dugmore, 1993).

In the following few years Vrededorp and the Malay Location became more and more regulated by the authorities. 'Asiatic' traders were removed from Vrededorp. An act that worsened the economic conditions of the poor Whites who also lived there as they could no longer act as landlords, to the poor Blacks. By 1908 the Malay Location had a far higher percentage of Blacks than people of Malay extraction and was declared by the *Rand Daily Mail* of the 13th March 1908, to be "the worst slum in Johannesburg" (quoted in Kagan, 1978: 28). The racially mixed areas of Vrededorp and the Malay Location were reasons for distress for the local authorities. The racial heterogeneity and the increasing rates of urbanization made these districts and their residents difficult to control, and contravened the idea of racial separation. In an effort to combat the problem the National government passed the Urban Areas Native Pass Act. The Act gave municipal councils the responsibility for the administration and control of Black migrants seeking work in the cities and further tasked them with the supervision and organization of passes for the Black workers in their local districts (Koch, 1983a).

The housing stock in existence in Johannesburg at the turn of the century was inadequate to meet the needs of the population. There were an estimated 100 000 people living in the city after the war, but a mere 15 000 places of residence, thus there were, on average, 6.5 people per residential unit in 1904.³⁵ Overcrowding and lack of amenities, for the vast majority, meant that pneumonia and dysentery were rife.³⁶ The majority of Johannesburg residents before the war had been young and male, while this pattern continued for the most part, the number of families did increase from 12 to 20 per cent by the middle of the first decade (van Onselen, 2002).

The escalating demand for both bachelor housing and family dwellings led to an investigation of the situation as early as 1902. The findings were to be reported by the committee of the Johannesburg Insanitary Area Improvement Scheme (van Onselen, 2002). What was found is simply that for an urban centre of its importance Johannesburg was severely lacking in housing and infrastructure. As a result of these findings the British government spent over £3,5 million on the upgrading and improvement of Johannesburg between 1903 and 1906 (Maud, 1938). The city was supplied with sanitation, water, roads, flush toilets and electric tramways, in short Johannesburg stopped being an overgrown mining town, and almost 30 years after its founding, could finally justify its claim to be a ‘city’.

The Unfolding Geography of the Jewish Community of Johannesburg

The Jewish community grew and expanded during the first decade of the twentieth century and spread into most of the more popular suburbs and townships of the city (Fig. 5.3). Seven new synagogues were built in Johannesburg itself between 1902 and 1910 to facilitate the growth and movement of the community (Table 5.1) and, as already discussed, new *landsleits* appeared on the Johannesburg cityscape. If the city is divided up into the four quadrants, previously mentioned (Fig. 1.2), then the 1900s would be the period during which the Jews living in the northern suburbs of the city consolidated their position. The Jewish enclaves became even more densely populated by Jewish families, and many of the institutional support structures moved into these areas to satisfy the demands of the Jews living in these areas. At the same time the smaller Jewish communities in the south of the city beyond the line of the mines began to grow and develop. They were also joined by a small number of new communities and thus the southern sites became an important component of the Jewish community of Johannesburg during this decade.

Table 5.1: Dates of the establishment of synagogues in Johannesburg, 1900-1910.

Name of Synagogue	Date of Establishment
Jeppetown Synagogue	1902
Doornfontein Synagogue	1903
Ophirton Synagogue	1906
Fordsburg Synagogue	1907
Braamfontein Hebrew Congregation	1909
La Rochelle Synagogue	1909
Booyens Reserve Synagogue	1910
Sources: Saron, 1955a; Klugman, 1986.	

The Northern Suburbs

The townships north of the CBD, namely Braamfontein, Wanderer's View, Park Town, and Doornfontein farther to the east were settled by middle-class, middle-income families, in a pattern very similar to the one that existed before the *Boer* War. Many of the better off were either of Western European extraction or Eastern European Jews who had attained some measure of wealth and security and who could afford to move into the more exclusive neighbourhoods in the north. The communities set about consolidating their positions, they established *chederim* for the children living in these suburbs (Fig. 5.7, points J, K, and M) and a *Kosher* deli and butchery opened in the northern part of Doornfontein to satisfy the dietary requirements of the surrounding community (Fig. 5.4, points R and S). By implication there was obviously a threshold population able to support these businesses. More Jews moved into the Braamfontein–Wanderer's View district, to the extent that a new synagogue had to be built to facilitate the burgeoning community (Klugman, 1986). Unfortunately not a great deal of information exists on the communities in the area, aside from the fact that the enclaves were stable, well-off, and Jewish but not particularly devout, but had children who needed a Jewish education and who would follow enough of Jewish lore to need *Kosher* facilities close to hand.

Southern Johannesburg

It is the post-war period that sees the largest number of Jews immigrating to South Africa from Eastern Europe, most of whom were poor and traditional (Saron, 1955a). The arrival of these Jews into Johannesburg changed the social dynamics and the geographical structure of the Jewish community. In the previous chapter the two main factions, the Eastern and Western European Jews, and their cultural and spatial divisions, have already been discussed. Now the new immigrants who arrived after the war added a third aspect to Johannesburg Jewry.

Ferreirastown and Marshalltown

The slums of Ferreirastown and Marshallstown flourished after the *Boer* war. They had been home to poor and destitute Eastern European Jews in the 1890s and, unfortunately, the situation did not change with the change of governance (Fig. 5.6). The Beth Hamedrash (Fig. 4.4, point K) was still the centre of the orthodox Eastern European Jews and a new equally traditional synagogue, the Adath Ysroel Orthodox Synagogue, had been built to accommodate the increased numbers of orthodox Jews in the district (Fig. 5.7, point G). Marshallstown and Ferreirastown were part of a chain of slums that stretched from west to

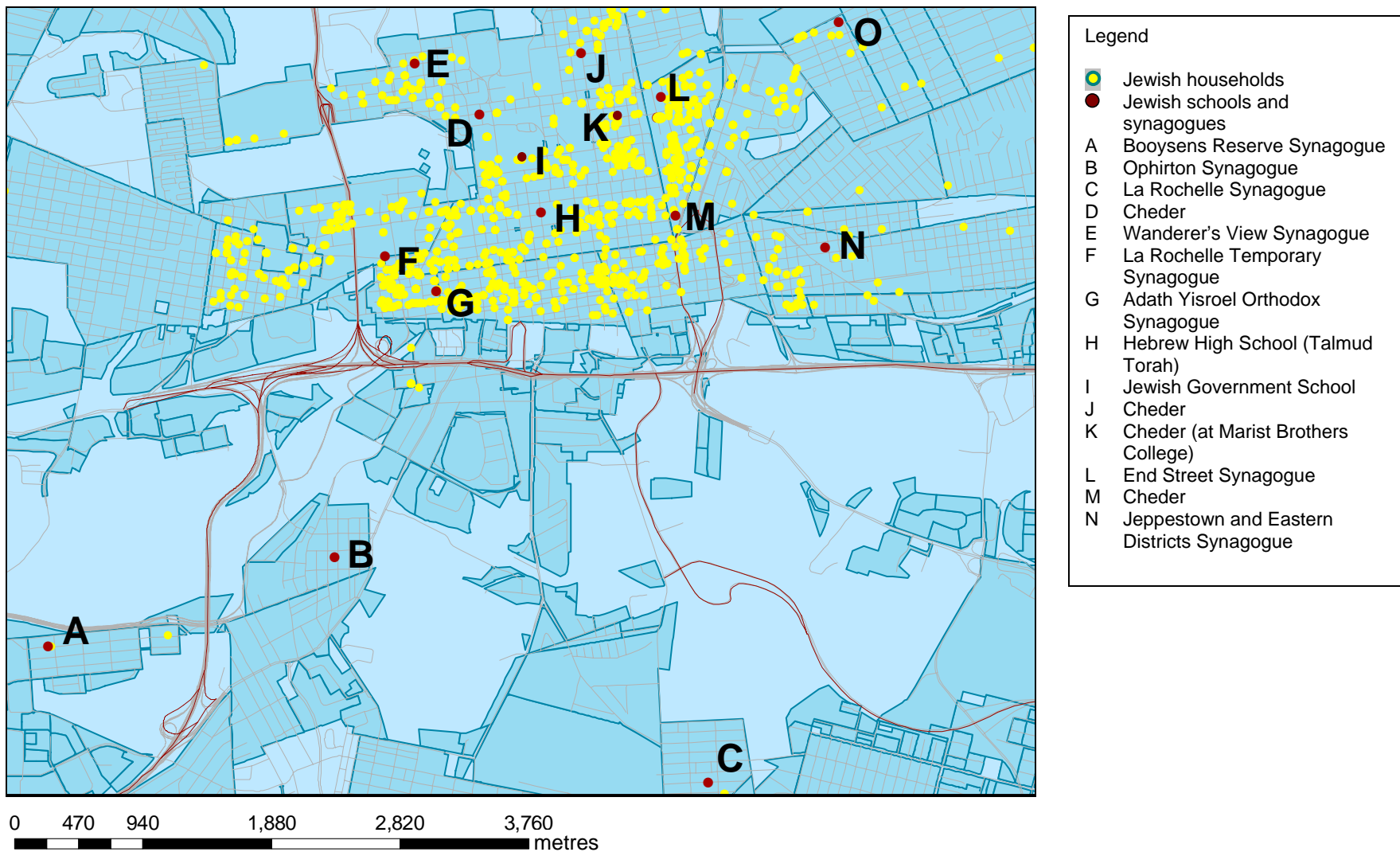


Figure 5.7: Synagogues and Jewish Schools in Johannesburg, 1903-1910.
(Source: Appendix IV and Appendix VIII)

east across Johannesburg (Fig. 5.6). The population densities in the slums were very high and the statistics from the 1903-1904 Medical Officer of Health Report seem to indicate that there was an average of 21 people per living unit. Furthermore the slums were home to various 'racial groups', with, apparently, 824 Whites in Ferreirastown and over 5 000 Blacks living in the district, although it must be assumed that the area described as Ferreira included some of the mining compounds situated in that part of the city.³⁷ The close proximity of the poor Jews to the mining compounds and large Black population becomes an important part of Jewish economic activities in the next decade.

The 'Deep South' - Jeppestown, Ophirton,
La Rochelle, and Booyens Reserve Congregations

A number of Jews who were not able to afford the rents and mortgages in the north of the city, and who wished to avoid the over-crowding and unhygienic conditions of the slums in Marshallstown and Ferreirastown, made their homes south of the mines thereby establishing small enclaves of Jews. The majority of Jews living in the area provided goods and services to the mines but very few Jews worked directly either on or for the mines themselves. Four main communities existed in the southern part of Johannesburg (as defined in Fig. 1.2) during the 1900s; Jeppestown, Ophirton, La Rochelle, and Booyens Reserve, each of which will be discussed briefly.

Jeppestown was a 'self-contained' township with its own police force and other facilities and amenities. The Eastern European Jewish population had moved into Jeppestown after the war and in 1902 set up the Jeppestown Hebrew Congregation. They built the Jeppestown Synagogue, which could hold 400 people³⁸ in 1903 (Fig. 5.7 point N) (Norwich, 1988). Two years later the community had grown and there were sufficient numbers of children to establish a *Talmud Torah* adjacent to the synagogue and a benevolent society to cater for the needs of the poor.³⁹ The idea that this community was both orthodox and flourishing is given further credence by the fact that a *Kosher* produce dealer (Fig. 5.4, point T) and a *Kosher* bottle store (Fig. 5.4, point U) opened in the area. The Jewish enclave had the full range of services and provisions needed to sustain an orthodox way of life and thus it is not surprising that by 1920 the community had outgrown its first synagogue and planned a newer larger one to serve the needs of the burgeoning Jewish community.

Ophirton township had been laid out as early as 1887 but had remained largely undeveloped until the turn of the century (Hartog, 1929). The Jewish residents of Ophirton were extremely poor and were one of the few Jewish communities that found work either on the surrounding mines or at Chandler's Brewery. Many Eastern European Jews had

experience brewing liquor in the Pale and may have put their skills to good use here. It was a very small community, poor and isolated from the larger Jewish enclaves in the north. Although the community was not particularly well-off it was still able to build and consecrate a synagogue in 1906. The Ophirton Synagogue (Fig. 5.7, point B) was small and plain and could hold a maximum of 200 people. Such was the poverty of the Ophirton Jews that they could only afford to buy the freehold rights to the site in 1920 (Norwich, 1988).

Two more congregations existed in the southern part of Johannesburg, the La Rochelle Congregation that was formed in 1909 (Fig. 5.7, point F) but only constructed their first synagogue in 1914. Regrettably very little information exists on the Ophirton community beyond the details just mentioned (Norwich, 1988). Fortunately, regarding the Booyens Reserve Congregation there is a slightly more data available. After the war 20 Eastern European Jewish families settled in Ophirton, all of them worked as dairymen and used the grounds of the Crown Mines to graze their cattle. The families lived in close proximity to each other and none of the families lived farther than 20 metres away from the main shaft of the mine. In 1909 the families had saved enough money and proudly erected the Booyens Reserve Synagogue (Fig. 5.7, point A). Later the La Rochelle Congregation and the Booyens Reserve Congregation joined together (Norwich, 1988), the details of which will be examined further on in the text.

A new kind of Jew

The last group of new immigrants to be discussed are the Jews from Eastern Europe who arrived after the war and changed the shape and nature of the Jewish community in Johannesburg. These immigrants were vastly different from their compatriots who had come to South Africa before the turn of the century. They had faced 20 years of intense political development and had adopted the ideals of socialism and the 'Bund'⁴⁰ (Sherman, 2000). They had also gone through the Russo-Japanese War in which many of the conscripted Jews had fought, and the October Revolution of 1905 (Wischnitzer, 1948). Their arrival in South Africa marked the rise of a third dimension to the Jewish population in South Africa and particularly in Johannesburg. The Eastern European immigrants who had arrived *earlier* did not understand these newcomers even though they shared a common homeland and mother-tongue. Feldman, a Yiddish writer of the time, illustrated the difficulties inherent in their relationship in his short story, *Gold and Diamonds*, using his main character to describe the situation,

“He [an Eastern European Jew who arrived in Johannesburg a number of years before] was one of the most substantial men in the city, a trustee of the synagogue, the chairman of the *Talmud Torah*, a good Zionist, who often put his hand into his pocket, a member of the committee of the orphanage and the old-age home, and so and so on...Today's immigrants were wild people.

They brought weird ideas with them. He had driven them all away, and did not want to have any further dealings with any greenhorns.”

(Feldman, 1987: 74)

Jews as Socialists

Many Eastern European Jews prior to emigrating had joined and contributed to the socialist movement in Russia and now brought their political beliefs with them. The socialist faction in Johannesburg had such a strong Jewish contingent that many of their flyers and pamphlets were printed in both English and Yiddish. At the same time a large percentage of meetings of the Socialist League in Johannesburg were held in Fordsburg to accommodate the number of Jewish Bundists who lived there, an area that has already been identified as a part of the chain of slums that ran across the city (Fig. 5.6) (Mantzaris, 1987). Socialist ideals were so common within the Jewish community in Fordsburg that at the Labour Day demonstration held in 1904 one of the speakers addressed the crowd in Yiddish (Adler, 1977). The first decade of the twentieth century also saw the growth and development of various unions in Johannesburg. Three of them were dominated by Jews, namely the two tailors' unions and the Jewish Cab Drivers association (Fig. 5.3, point P). The latter was large enough to have its own premises and apply for its own liquor license, which was refused.

The bonds between the immigrant Eastern European Jews and the communities still living in Russia remained very strong and events that occurred in their native country were occurrences of concern and discussion amongst the Eastern European Jews living in South Africa. Thus when in 1905 a series of pogroms and massacres occurred in the Pale of Settlement, in which hundreds of Jews were attacked and murdered while the police either stood idly by or actively encouraged the violence. It became an issue of grave concern for those living in Johannesburg.⁴¹ The pogroms were denounced by the Johannesburg Jewry and the Yiddish Press and calls were made for the British Government to respond to these acts of violence.⁴² To this end an organization called the 'Society of Friends of Russian Freedom' was created. In their manifesto they pledged to do what they could for their co-religionists in the Pale (Adler, 1977).

Within some of the formulations of Jewish 'Bundist' and socialist ideology was the notion of a Jewish homeland, a place where Jews could be free from persecution and would have the right and the ability to determine their own lives and futures. The 'New' Jews were often dedicated Zionists and their mistreatment at the hands of the Russians convinced them of the need for a Jewish homeland. Although the Jewish community living in Johannesburg were, for the most part, dedicated to the ideals of Zionism, the influx of the zealous

immigrants after the 1905 events resulted in the establishment of three new Zionist organizations, a peak in the number of Zionist bodies in Johannesburg (Fig.5.8).

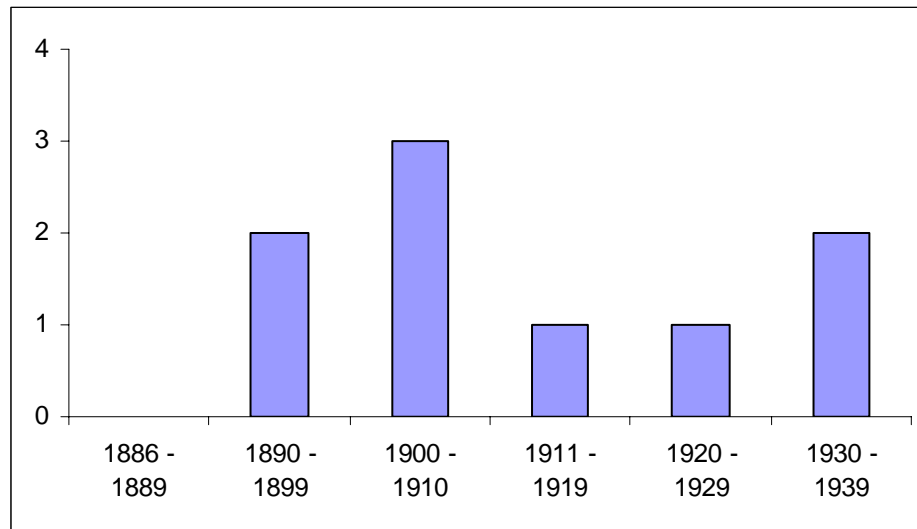


FIGURE 5.8: Annual additions by decade to the number of Zionist Organizations established in Johannesburg, 1886 – 1939.

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The Johannesburg Jewish community evolved and changed during the first ten years of the new century, becoming increasingly more heterogeneous with the introduction of the new wave of Eastern European Jews who followed a different ideology to their co-religionists who had preceded them. The community spread out across the landscape into new suburbs and townships with the more assimilated/westernized Jews, generally those of Western-European extraction, moving north, while the older immigrants or those who had been in the country longer, migrated out of the slum areas into better neighbourhoods, creating synagogues and business opportunities as they progressed to the north and east. Not unexpectantly the newer immigrants settled in the poorer sections of Johannesburg, residing first in the slum-conditions that prevailed in southern and western Johannesburg. The original opposition between the Western and Eastern European Jews had become a more a complex relationship and one that included the new ‘socialist’ Jews who arrived in South Africa after the war. The spatial divisions once again mirrored the cultural, economic, and now the political differences in the community. The different communities erected institutions, organizations, social and commercial facilities to satisfy their needs, the result was a series of small enclaves centred around a number of synagogues.

During the following decade immigration slowed and the community began the process of consolidation and entrenching itself, and its identity, on the cityscape of Johannesburg. It had new political pressures and a world war to contend with, and it is these

national and international events that helped to define the changing geography of the Jewish community in Johannesburg.

Notes for Chapter Five

- ¹ Taken from a letter from an anonymous source to Mr. Kochlin and Mr. Frankel, dated 19th September 1951, with information about the Jewish Lads Brigade and the *Boer War*, SAJBD Archives.
- ² Although no other evidence could be found to substantiate this claim.
- ³ Extract from a transcript from an interview with Paul Goodman but no record of who conducted the interview, for the South African Jewish Sociological and Historical Society interview series, 19th August 1942, SABJD Archives.
- ⁴ London Jewish Chronicle, 1900: No title, *London Jewish Chronicle*, (weekly magazine) 30th March 1900, London, 12, SAJBD Library.
- ⁵ London Jewish Chronicle, 1899: Report from Johannesburg, *London Jewish Chronicle*, (weekly magazine) 3rd November 1899, London, SABJD Library.
- ⁶ London Jewish Chronicle, 1899: The South African Crisis - Johannesburg Correspondent, London, *London Jewish Chronicle*, (weekly magazine) 20th October 1899, London, SABJD Library.
- ⁷ The Star , 1902: No title, *The Star* (daily newspaper) 21st April 1902, Johannesburg, JPL Newspaper Archives.
- ⁸ London Jewish Chronicle, 1901: The Situation at Johannesburg, *London Jewish Chronicle* (weekly magazine), 5th April 1901, London, SAJBD Library.
- ⁹ Anonymous text in the SABJD archives, discussing the route to naturalization and citizenship.
- ¹⁰ London Jewish Chronicle, 1899: The South African Crisis, *London Jewish Chronicle* (weekly magazine), 3rd November 1899, London, SAJBD Library; London Jewish Chronicle, 1899: Jewish Soldiers in South Africa, *London Jewish Chronicle* (weekly magazine) 20th October 1899, London, SAJBD Library.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*
- ¹² Ginsberg, A.L., 1901: Letter to the Editor, *Voschod* (Yiddish newspaper), no date 1901, SABJD Archives.
- ¹³ London Jewish Chronicle, 1901: The Situation at Johannesburg, *London Jewish Chronicle* (weekly magazine) 5th April 1901, London, SAJBD Library.
- ¹⁴ London Jewish Chronicle, 1899: No Title, *London Jewish Chronicle* (weekly magazine) 22nd December 1899, London, SABJD Library.
- ¹⁵ Although Yiddish does use words from Polish, German, and Russian, it is written using the Hebrew alphabet.
- ¹⁶ The Transvaal Leader, 1907: Yiddish, *The Transvaal Leader*, (daily newspaper) 6th July 1907, Johannesburg, SABJD Archives.
- ¹⁷ The Transvaal Leader, 1902: Lord Milner and the Jews, *The Transvaal Leader*, (daily newspaper) 8th September 1902, Johannesburg, SABJD Archives.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*
- ¹⁹ Extract from a transcript of an interview with Israel Hayman by Dora Sowden, for the South African Jewish Sociological and Historical Society interview series, 23rd November 1951, SABJD Archives.
- ²⁰ Ginsberg, A.L., 1901: Letter to the Editor, *Voshod* (Yiddish newspaper) no date 1902, SABJD Archives.
- ²¹ The Transvaal Leader, 1903: Expatriated Jews, *The Transvaal Leader* (daily newspaper), 4th September 1903, Johannesburg, SAJBD Archives.
- ²² *Ibid.*

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- ²³ The Transvaal Leader, 1902: Editorial - Jewish Refugees, *The Transvaal Leader* (daily newspaper) 5th September 1902, Johannesburg, SABJD Archives.
- ²⁴ Extract from a letter from H. Traub to the Yiddish newspaper, *Hamelitz*, 28th July 1903, SAJBD Archives; Rand Daily Mail, 1903: Proposed Formation of a Board of Deputies, *Rand Daily Mail*, (daily newspaper), 23rd March 1903, Johannesburg, SABJD Archives.
- ²⁵ Report of the Executive, First Annual Conference of the South African Zionist Federation, 9th – 11th July 1905, SABJD Archives.
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ Extract from a letter from H. Traub to the Yiddish newspaper, *Hamelitz*, 28th July 1903, SAJBD Archives.
- ²⁸ South African Jewish Chronicle, 1905: Editorial, *South African Jewish Chronicle*, (weekly magazine) 8th September 1905, Johannesburg, SABJD Archives.
- ²⁹ South African Jewish Chronicle, 1905: Letter to the Editor, *South African Jewish Chronicle*, (weekly magazine) 7th July 1905, Johannesburg, SABJD Archives.
- ³⁰ Extract from a transcript of an interview with Isadore Heymann but no record of who conducted the interview, for the South African Jewish Sociological and Historical Society interview series, , 6th December 1961, SABJD Archives.
- ³¹ Extract from a letter from Mr. Wulfohn to Samuel Goldreich dated 27th November 1904, SABJD Archives.
- ³² The Transvaal Critic, 1906: Editorial - Why do Magnates want Chinese?', *The Transvaal Critic*, (weekly newspaper), 27th April 1906, Johannesburg, SABJD Archives.
- ³³ *Ibid.*
- ³⁴ South African Jewish Chronicle, 1906: Exchange Echoes, *South African Jewish Chronicle*, (weekly magazine), 6th July 1906, Johannesburg, SABJD Archives.
- ³⁵ Report of Medical Officer of Health, Johannesburg, for the period from 1st July 1903 to 30th June 1904, JPL Strange Collection.
- ³⁶ *Ibid.*; Report of the Medical Officer of Health, Johannesburg, for the period 1st July 1902, to the 30th June 1903, JPL Strange Collection.
- ³⁷ *Ibid.*
- ³⁸ Rand Daily Mail, 1903: Report on the opening of the Jeppetown Synagogue, *Rand Daily Mail*, (daily newspaper) 7th September 1903, Johannesburg, 8, SABJD Archives.
- ³⁹ Zionist Record, 1953: Golden Jubilee of the Jeppe Congregation, *Zionist Record* (monthly magazine) 4th September 1953, Johannesburg, SABJD Library
- ⁴⁰ The Bund combined Jewish Nationalism and Marxist's teachings and was seen as the way to emancipate the Jews of Russia (Glenn, 1990).
- ⁴¹ South African Jewish Chronicle, 1905: Massacre of the Jews, the Aliens Bill and The Zionist Congress, *South African Jewish Chronicle*, (weekly magazine) 2nd June 1905, Johannesburg, SABJD Library.
- ⁴² South African Jewish Chronicle, 1905: Mass Meeting, the People's protest against Russian Atrocities, *South African Jewish Chronicle*, (weekly magazine) 17th November 1905, Johannesburg, SABJD Library.