

**CHAPTER 8**  
**OUT OF THE FRYING PAN...**  
**1930 - 1939**

The assurances that the Jewish community had received on Jewish immigration from the South African government in the late 1920s were by the beginning of the next decade revealed to be lies. In 1930 a new Quota Act was enacted, which denied Eastern European Jews entrance to South Africa. The 1930 Quota Act was later followed by the 1937 Anti-Aliens Act that barred Western European Jewish immigration at a critical time in Jewish history. The two Acts might be taken as exemplars of the social and political climate that existed in South Africa during the 1930s. The ideology underlying the Acts was part of the racist and anti-Semitic discourse that had taken hold of the popular imagination at the time. The Eugenics<sup>1</sup> movement was sweeping across the world in the late 1920s and the early 1930s, and unfortunately even South Africa's relatively remote location did not allow it to escape the effects of this ideology. Nor was South Africa spared from Nazi philosophy and propaganda, which resulted in the creation of various 'shirt' movements. In short, the 1930s saw a huge increase in anti-Semitism both in the social and the political arenas. The South African Jewish community's reaction was to fight against the sentiment as best they could but they were constrained by fears for their safety and future both in South Africa and worldwide. Johannesburg Jewry's response to the events was to look increasingly inward and to further consolidate the Jewish neighbourhoods and enclaves in Johannesburg. As indicated earlier it is ironic that this particular decade is the one remembered most fondly by the community who lived through it.

The history of the period discussed in this chapter would, at first glance, seem inappropriate within a geographical text but it is the relationship that existed between the events of the time, and the spatial response of the Jewish community of Johannesburg, that is under discussion. As such every effort has been made to demonstrate the geographical ramifications of the political and social events of the time, and it is argued that national and international events changed the shape and nature of the settlement patterns of the Jewish community, as such some attention must first be paid to the larger picture.

**The 1930 Quota Act**

The seeds of the 1930 Quota Act had been sown almost five years earlier in the 1925 census report. There it was recommended that what was needed in South Africa were people of Western European origin who would be better 'stock' for the country's development and who shared greater genetic similarities to the dominant Afrikaans population (Shimoni, 1980;

Abrahams, 2002). The National Party, which had won the 1929 elections, had been unsuccessful in their attempt to seduce the Jewish community's vote, thus the adoption of the Quota Act in 1930 meant that the Nationalists lost none of their constituents by passing the legislation. Rather they gained a significant block of the Afrikaans and English vote when the reasons for the Quota Act were publicized and Dr. Malan 'rationally' outlined the three governing principles of the Act, which were:

- “(1) The desire of every nation to maintain its basic racial composition;
- (2) The doctrine of assimilability; and
- (3) South Africa's desire to maintain its own 'type' of civilisation, and the fact that the civilisation of Eastern or Southern Europe was, to a large extent, different from that of Western Europe.”

(Quoted in Elazar and Medding, 1983: 156).

Racial concerns were seen as completely justifiable reasons for introducing the legislation. The majority of Whites agreed with the ideas of racial and genetic homogeneity and had by then been conditioned to think of themselves as a *volk*, a people with a specific cultural and racial identity that was under constant threat from other races and nations (Saron, 1955c; Shimoni, 1980). The Quota Act was put into practise on the 1<sup>st</sup> May 1930 and made it clear that:

“ . . . no person born in any country not specified in the Schedule . . . shall enter the Union, unless his entry has been approved in accordance with such regulations as may be prescribed . . . (Clause 1 [I])

[and] . . . not more than fifty persons born in any particular country not specified in the Schedule . . . shall in any calendar year be permitted to enter the Union for permanent residence therein” (Clause 1 [II]).”

(Quoted in Cohen, 1968: 19)

The 'Schedule' of countries in the Act included those of the British Commonwealth, as well as Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Holland, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and the USA and only immigrants from these countries were given unlimited immigration rights to South Africa (Elazar and Medding, 1983). The Act did make allowances for an additional thousand people per calendar year from un-scheduled countries if they satisfied certain conditions (Cohen, 1968). These included that immigrants should be of good character, assimilable, not harmful to the economy of the country, and not have a profession that was already adequately represented in South Africa. In truth these conditions were very difficult to meet, particularly for eastern European Jews who were not considered assimilable, and who, in general did not have any unique skills or abilities, which would allow them entry into South Africa.

### Reaction to the 1930 Quota Act

The Act, couched as it was in the language of politics, was not in itself blatantly anti-Semitic and at no point does it even mention Jews. Malan, who was Minister for the Interior at the time, denied all charges of anti-Semitism arguing that the countries that were not on the Schedule had more Christians than Jews, thus surely if any accusations could be made they should be made by the Catholic and Protestant communities (Cohen, 1968). According to Malan there should have been no objection to the Act as all it was intended to do was to maintain cultural and racial homogeneity, similar to the legislation instituted in America (Saron, 1955c).

The Jewish community did not accept these reasons at all. Although the majority of citizens in the un-scheduled countries were Christians, the majority of *immigrants* from these countries were Jewish. As such the Quota Act would deny Eastern European Jews any chance of escape to South Africa. The Jews further disputed any similarity to the American model as the USA's Quota Bill included quotas for all countries and did not distinguish between one country and another and there was certainly no schedule (Shimoni, 1980). The South African Quota Act in contrast seemed to focus on countries which had large numbers of Jewish immigrants.

In a series of national meetings the South African Board of Jewish Deputies (SABJD) called on the South African Jewish community to object to and challenge the passing of the Act (Saron, 1955c). The Quota Act was denounced as "a blot on our national honour and upon our individual self-respect" and "[as]. . . 95 per cent [of South African Jews] derive their origins from these countries. The inference is that 95 per cent of Jewish inhabitants are unworthy citizens of the Union. Are we going to accept an insult like that?" were some of the sentiments raised at the meetings convened by the SABJD (quoted in Shimoni, 1980: 106). The SABJD accused the government of misleading the Jewish community by assuring them that Jewish immigration to South Africa was protected and subsequently instituting legislation that directly affected Jewish immigration.

The accusations were flung back and forth and eventually resulted in a statement by the editor of the *Cape Times*, a daily newspaper published in Cape Town, in defence of Minister Malan, describing the counter-allegations of the SABJD as ignoring the 'real' issues and principles underlying the Quota Act and rather treating the Act as if it was ". . . a vindictive measure aimed specifically against Jewish immigrants . . ." (Saron, 1955: 6). The SABJD reposted and said that was exactly the case. The Jewish community's outrage at the Act as a means of curtailing Jewish immigration was vindicated when Minister Malan, in later

years, admitted that the true aim of the Quota Act had been to reduce Jewish immigration into South Africa (Cohen, 1968).

#### Repercussions of the Quota Act

Although the Jewish community, through its many institutions, objected to the Quota Act, and protested against its implementation, in the end their words fell on deaf ears. The immigration from the ‘un-scheduled’ countries to South Africa decreased by over two-thirds while immigration from ‘scheduled’ countries increased by over 25 per cent between 1929 and 1936 (Saron, 1955c). This sense of victimization induced by the government led the Jewish community to feel betrayed and insecure, they were suddenly aware that their position in South Africa was not as safe as they had previously thought.

Malan had expected the Jewish community to have accepted the Act for reasons of “enlightened self-interest” (Shimoni, 1980: 107). He firmly believed that the Jewish community would see it as a measure of self-protection and a way of ensuring the continued prosperity of the existing community. Malan grossly under-estimated the strength of the familial and cultural bonds between the Jews still left in the Pale and those then living in South Africa. The objections that had been raised against the new legislation were perceived by Malan and his cohorts as anti-National or anti-South African sentiment amongst the Jewish population in South Africa (Shimoni, 1980).

Anti-Jewish feeling was further mobilized by the economic conditions of the time. The country was still in the throes of the Depression and unemployment, particularly amongst the poor-Whites, was high - a problem that was exacerbated by the international abandonment of the gold standard. By comparison, to other groups, the South African Jewish community during the early 1930s seemed to be doing well (Shain, 2000). A situation that was helped along in the following few years by the increasing strength of the South African economy. In a 1935/36 census of the Jewish community of Johannesburg over 39 per cent of the Jewish population were recorded as being “engaged in commercial, financial and insurance occupations” (Sonnabend, 1936: 22). Highly represented in the professional and industrial fields and almost completely middleclass, they were the ideal candidates to blame for the misfortune that had been visited upon South Africa, and Malan wasted no time in doing so. He pandered to the paranoid idea that there was a secret Jewish organization that opposed Afrikaner Nationalism, and he was quoted in *Die Burger*, an Afrikaans daily newspaper in Cape Town, as saying, “There is a section of the Jews seeking revenge on the Nationalist Party for the Quota Act, but they are, of course, afraid to come out in the open”. He ended with a chilling statement, which signalled the beginning of frank and open anti-Semitism in

South Africa, that “[it is] very easy to rouse a feeling of hatred towards the Jews in the country . . . if they want to hit us they may be assured that we will hit back” (quoted in Shimoni, 1980: 107).

### **The Rise of Anti-Semitism in South Africa – Fascist Groups and the Greyshirt Trial**

Eugenics and the ideology of racial purity had reached a large degree of acceptance worldwide by the beginning of the 1930s and South Africa was no exception. With the open endorsement of fascism by Malan and other political figures it was no surprise that such organizations began to develop and South Africa contracted a number of them. By 1934 there were four openly fascist organizations and three right-wing newspapers.<sup>2</sup> Amongst the first was the *Landsgruppe Südafrika*, established at the University of Cape Town, the *Landsgruppe* were international assemblies of people who supported the *Nasional Sozialistische Deutsche Arbeiter Partei* (NSDAP) better known as the Nazi Party (Shimoni, 1980). The founding of the *Landsgruppe* was followed shortly by the creation of the ‘Greyshirts’ so named after the colour of their uniform and their self-identification with the ‘Blackshirt’ movement in Germany. Established in 1933 by L.T. Weichardt, the ‘Greyshirts’ became an official political party named the South African National Party (SANP) in 1934 (Scher, 2000). The SANP believed in fairly traditional fascist values with nothing terribly original in their lexicon of hate; anti-Semitism, racism and, the racial superiority of the White man. These essentially Nazi groups were aided directly by Germany through the importation and distribution of Nazi propaganda in South Africa.

The Nazi movement in Germany had established a number of small international organizations all over the world. Some of their offices were sub-directories of the larger Nazi movement in the Fatherland whereas others were secretly supported and sustained by Nazi fiscal and political support (Common Sense, 1940). The *Volkischer Beobachter*, the Nazi movement’s official newspaper, boasted in 1934 that “The influence of the Nazi Party in foreign countries extends literally around the whole globe” (Common Sense, 1940: 8). In South Africa only part of the Nazi philosophy was acceptable to the right-wing faction that existed at the time. The SANP certainly subscribed to the principles of racism, anti-Semitism and racial superiority that typified the Nazi movement, however, Nazi ideology also demanded loyalty to the German state. A stance that South African nationalism would not tolerate as it in turn was rooted in absolute fealty to South Africa (Shimoni, 1980). This did not, however, deter the German Nazi’s from seeking, at least in part, an ideological ally in

South African fascists, and Nazi pamphlets and newspapers were liberally distributed throughout White right-wing circles, particularly in Johannesburg (Figs. 8.1 and 8.2).

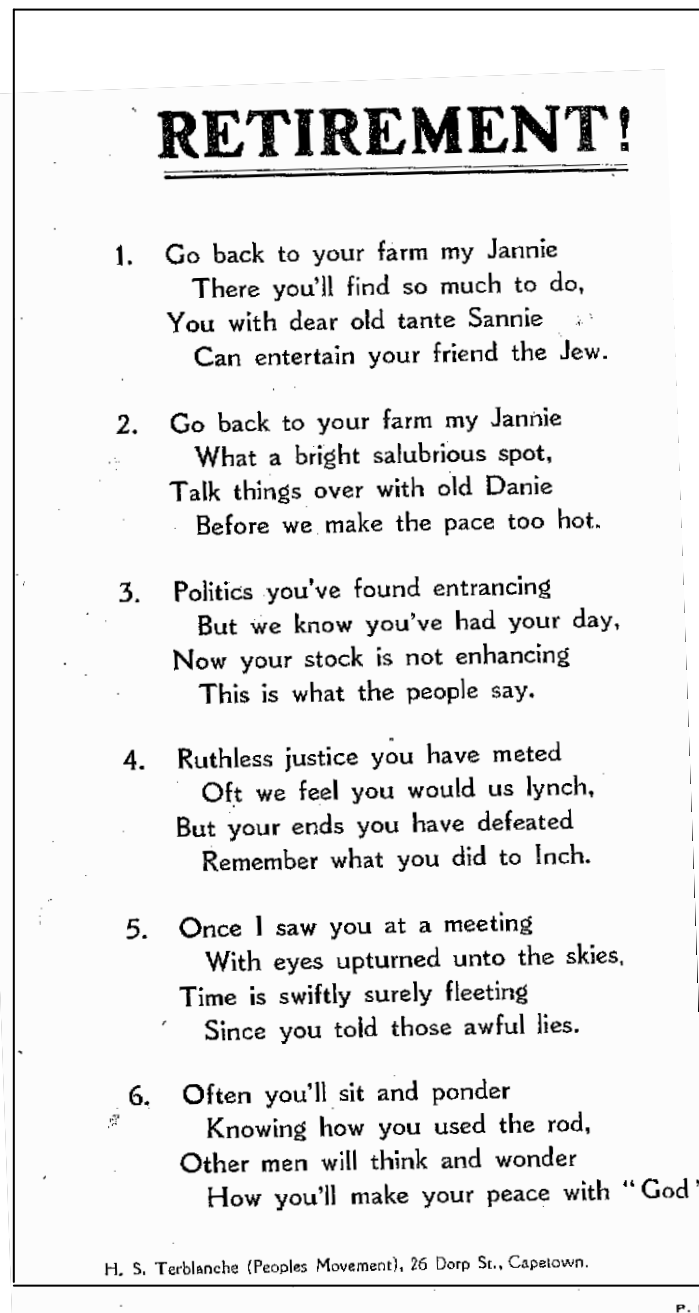


FIGURE 8.1: Anti-Semitic pamphlet distributed in Johannesburg during the 1930s. (Source: SABJD Archives)

It was in this highly explosive atmosphere of economic uncertainty and political change, filled with the continual propaganda of the SANP and other radical groups, that 'the Jew' became the symbol for the all that was wrong in South Africa. Jews were blamed for the poverty of the poor Afrikaners. The disproportionate representation of Jews in professional

and industrial fields was seen as Jewish control of the South African economy (Saron, 1955c). The 'Shirt' movements played on this and added the idea that Jews were different and could never be 'real' South Africans as they were inassimilable and essentially a race apart (Scher, 2000). By 1934, the situation was at boiling point, and boil over it did in the unlikely city of Port Elizabeth.

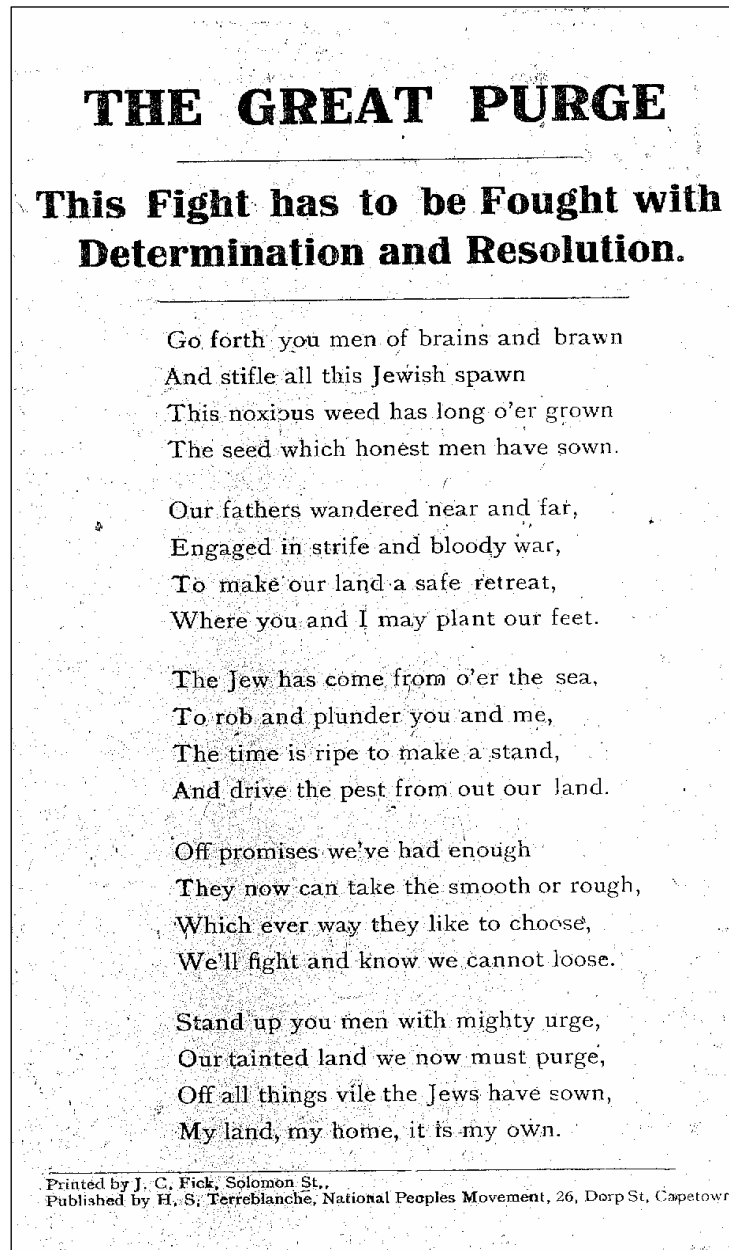


FIGURE 8.2: Anti-Semitic pamphlet distributed in Johannesburg during the 1930s (Source: SABJD Archives)

At a SANP meeting held in Aberdeen, a Greyshirt leader, the unfortunately named Harry Victor Inch, perhaps suffering under the insignificance of his surname, claimed that he could prove that the Jews were trying to take over the world and intended to destroy Christianity. Inch claimed that he had evidence, in the form of a document, which he had



stolen from the Western Road Synagogue in Port Elizabeth, and that was purported to have been signed by the Rabbi of the synagogue, Rabbi Levy (Anon., 1942). The speech was undoubtedly insulting but not actually criminal. When Inch and the Nationalist leader of the Greyshirts, Johannes von Molkte, however, published the speech in fellow 'Greyshirt' David Olivier's newspaper, *Die Rapport*, the situation changed significantly (Scher, 2000).

Inch, Von Molkte, and Olivier had made two vital mistakes in their attempt to besmirch Levy. First they had accused him personally, and second they had done so in print. As such the SABJD had a prosecutable case of libel (Anon., 1942). The trial took place in Grahamstown and provided the rare opportunity for the accusations that the Jews were trying to take over the world, and control the economy, to be tested and disproved in a court of law. Von Molkte and Inch started the trial full of bravado, confident that their bluff would not be called. The document when analysed was soon shown to be the work of people completely ignorant of both Jewish law and custom. The best example was that on the corner of each page of this so-called secret document of world domination there appeared the Hebrew words, "*Kosher LePesach*". The phrase is entirely innocuous but horribly out of context as it refers to foodstuff, and only foodstuff, that is ritually pure and allowed to be eaten over the Passover festival (Scher, 2000). Such an obvious mistake, together with a number of other 'clues' led the presiding judge to accept Levy's claim and to announce to the courtroom and the waiting press,

"A great deal of evidence was called in the cases of all the defendants with the object of proving the existence of a so-called world plot organized by the Jews, with the object as stated . . . 'to destroy the Christian Church and religion generally and to Judaize the civilised world' . . . The Defendants have failed to produce a vestige of proof to establish the existence of this plot . . .".  
(Anon., 1942: 3)

The court ordered Inch, Von Molkte, and Olivier to pay damages to Rabbi Levy. The victory, however, was far more than just the monetary reparation paid to the Rabbi. It was an open acknowledgement that there were anti-Semitic forces at work who were willing to lie under oath and produce forgeries as evidence in a court of law (Scher, 2000). It also publicly declared the *Protocols of the Elders of Zion*,<sup>3</sup> on which the accusatory documents were based, to be lies and nothing more than the paranoid ravings of anti-Semites. The leaders, and to some extent the entire Greyshirt movement, lost credibility, which is exactly what the Jewish community of South African needed.



False demographics and exaggerated Eugenics come to the Party

If the Jewish community of South Africa thought that the findings would grant them a respite from the rising tide of anti-Semitism they were unfortunately badly mistaken. The Quota Act of 1930 certainly diminished the number of Eastern European Jews immigrating to South Africa, as it was intended to do, but it was not from Eastern Europe that Jews needed to escape. After 1933, and Hitler's rise to power, Jews seeing the political climate changing in Germany began to leave. Between the years 1933-1936, some 3 615 German Jews entered South Africa (Shimoni, 1980). The Purified National Party,<sup>4</sup> which was the parliamentary opposition at that point, began to seriously consider incorporating anti-Jewish legislation into their political manifesto, setting off rumours that South Africa would shortly deny German Jews access to the 'safe' haven of South Africa (Saron, 1955c). Parliament, bowing under public pressure, expanded the rules of the Quota Act to include not just a passport from a scheduled country but the prerequisite that each immigrant had to be in possession of £100. These rules were to have been enforced from the beginning of November 1936. The British Council for German Jewry knew that the gates were closing, and immediately hired a ship to take over 600 Jews to South Africa before the deadline (Shimoni, 1980). The arrival of the *Stuttgart* in Cape Town heralded a great deal of controversy in a number of quarters.

The Jewish community already under threat from Malan and his fellow right-wing groups thought that the sudden immigration of a number of Jews might make the community's position even more precarious. At the same time they desperately wanted to aid their co-religionists' escape from Germany. With that in mind preparations were made to meet and welcome the new immigrants, hoping to make the immigration process as painless as possible in those uncertain times (Shimoni, 1980). The immigrants created such a stir that the opposition and its associated groups petitioned the government to prevent further Jewish immigration citing false figures to give credence to their argument. They claimed that Jews made up 7-7½ per cent of the White population and were increasing steadily.<sup>5</sup> These and other fictional statistics were widely distributed amongst the public. The 'demographers' made the ludicrous claim that unemployment within the Christian community was at "99 per cent"<sup>6</sup>, whereas within the Jewish community it was at only one per cent, and that the vast majority of professional positions were in the hands of the Jews while Gentiles toiled in the ranks of the unskilled.<sup>7</sup> These 'statistics' would have been laughable if they had not had such serious consequences. The government kept these figures in mind and with the up-coming election of 1938 they began to re-write the immigration laws.

By 1937 the Quota Act had been repealed and a new, stricter piece of legislation was passed (Arkin, 1966). The new legislation was known as the Anti-Aliens Act and was applied

to all immigrants. Newcomers had to be approved by an Immigrants Selection Board, a supposedly neutral committee and not aligned with any political party or cause (Elazar and Medding, 1983). After the committee was established, however, Jewish immigration decreased considerably.

The next few years saw a frightening upswing in the blatancy of anti-Semitism in South Africa. Dr Hendriek Verwoed, later the grand architect of Apartheid, wrote a vicious editorial in his newspaper *Die Transvaaler*, describing the Jews, once again, as the reason for the poverty in the Afrikaans community (Shain, 2000). It has also been argued that in South Africa anti-Semitism was not only a social movement but by the late 1930s also a political platform and a rallying point that gained the Purified National Party a great deal of support (Shimoni, 1980). By the time World War II broke out in 1939, the degree of anti-Semitism in South Africa was highly palpable and the Nazi claim that the Jews had caused the war was not entirely unacceptable to a number of factions living in South Africa (Common Sense, 1940).

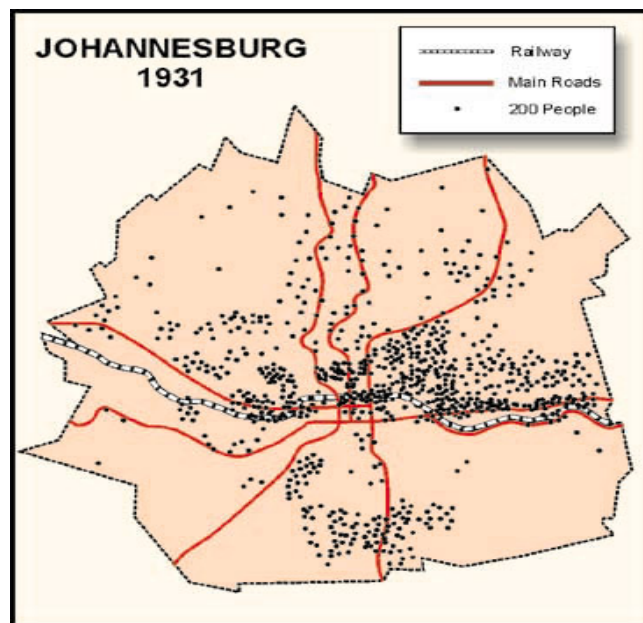


FIGURE 8.3: Residential pattern of the White population of Johannesburg, 1931. (Source: Beavon, 2000: 1 based on City Engineer, 1970)

### Aspects of Johannesburg's Geography in the 1930s

Johannesburg, by the mid-1930s, was in affect a world city (Beavon, 2003). It had a functional CBD, a variety of transport routes and modes in and out of the central area, and a wide range of residential districts. The earlier legislation which had attempted to rid the city of its slumyards and its 'excess' Black population had been unsuccessful. The government amended the legislation and the local authorities led a triumphant campaign in the eradication of the pockets of Black

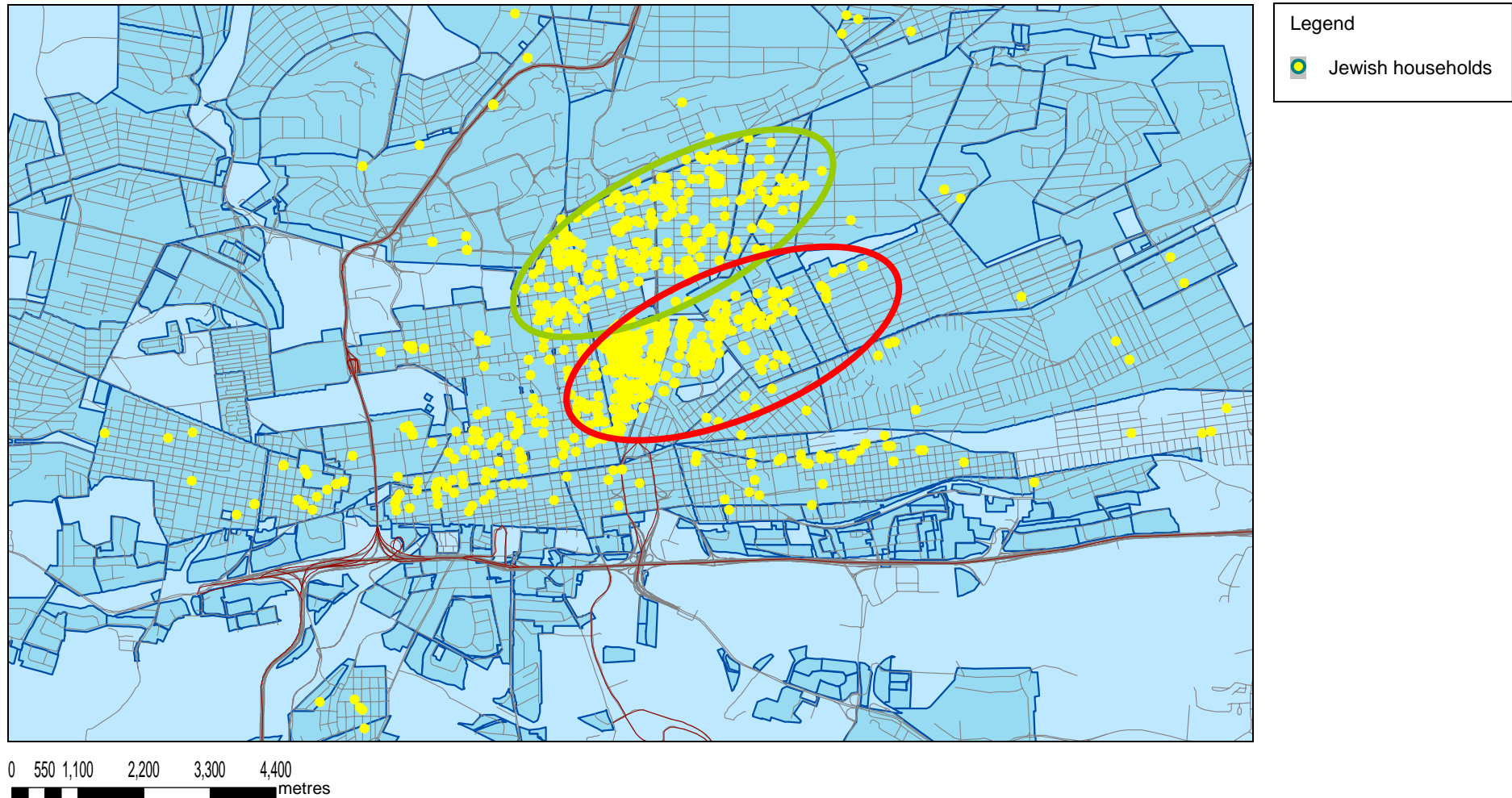


Figure 8.4: Jewish households in Johannesburg, 1930-1939.  
(Source: Appendix XIX)

residents in White areas. In the meantime the White population had been spreading north (Fig. 8.3) going farther and farther afield, facilitated by the main arterial roads and thus easy access to the city centre (Beavon, 2000). The Jews followed the general pattern but congregated more in the inner north-eastern part of the city than anywhere else. The Jewish community settled in two parallel streams in the north-eastern quadrant of the city (outlined in red and green on Fig. 8.4). Jewish families that could afford it continued to move into Yeoville, Hillbrow, Bertrams, Bellevue, and Bellevue East (outlined in green on Fig. 8.4, direction of movement indicated by the red arrows on Fig. 8.5). While Doornfontein and New Doornfontein became slightly less attractive for the middle-class Jews as the number of slumyards increased and the quality of the existing housing deteriorated. The Jewish communities in Ferreirstown and Marshallstown had begun to decline by the mid-1930s and had joined the main thrust to the north-east (Fig. 8.5). Although the majority of the Jewish community moved into these two parallel streams in the north-east there were still pockets of Jews in Jeppestown and the newer suburbs of Highlands North and Orange Grove (Sonnabend, 1936).

The Jewish community was changing and the old Eastern/Western European opposition was no longer as deeply entrenched as it had been. The children of the immigrants identified with a larger South African Jewish consciousness rather than either an Eastern or Western European tradition. Yiddish as the language of daily communication had already been dwindling for the last few years and had become less and less commonly spoken by the 1930s. The 1937 official census records 90 000 Jews in South Africa, of whom only 17 000 declared Yiddish to be their home language. The new generation spoke Afrikaans or English at work and school and communicated with the older generation in the language of the Pale. They were a generation straddling “two worlds”, at a time when only one identity, that of being South African, was acceptable to the majority of White South Africans.

“The younger elements of the new immigrants who received their schooling and/or academic education in this country and the first locally born generation, lived, culturally and linguistically speaking between two worlds. In their homes their immigrant parents were predominantly Yiddish-speaking and the young generation, too, spoke Yiddish, while in the schools, streets, and even the synagogues, English ruled supreme. The temptation to state English as their home language must therefore have been rather strong.”

(Moshe, *circa* 1935: 718)

The rise of Hitler in Germany and his attention to the ‘Jewish Question’, made a number of German Jews wisely reconsider their safety in their native land and begin the search for a safe refuge. The 1930 Quota Act allowed unlimited immigration from Germany to South Africa as it was a ‘scheduled’ country and a number of refugees took advantage of this clause to save their lives.

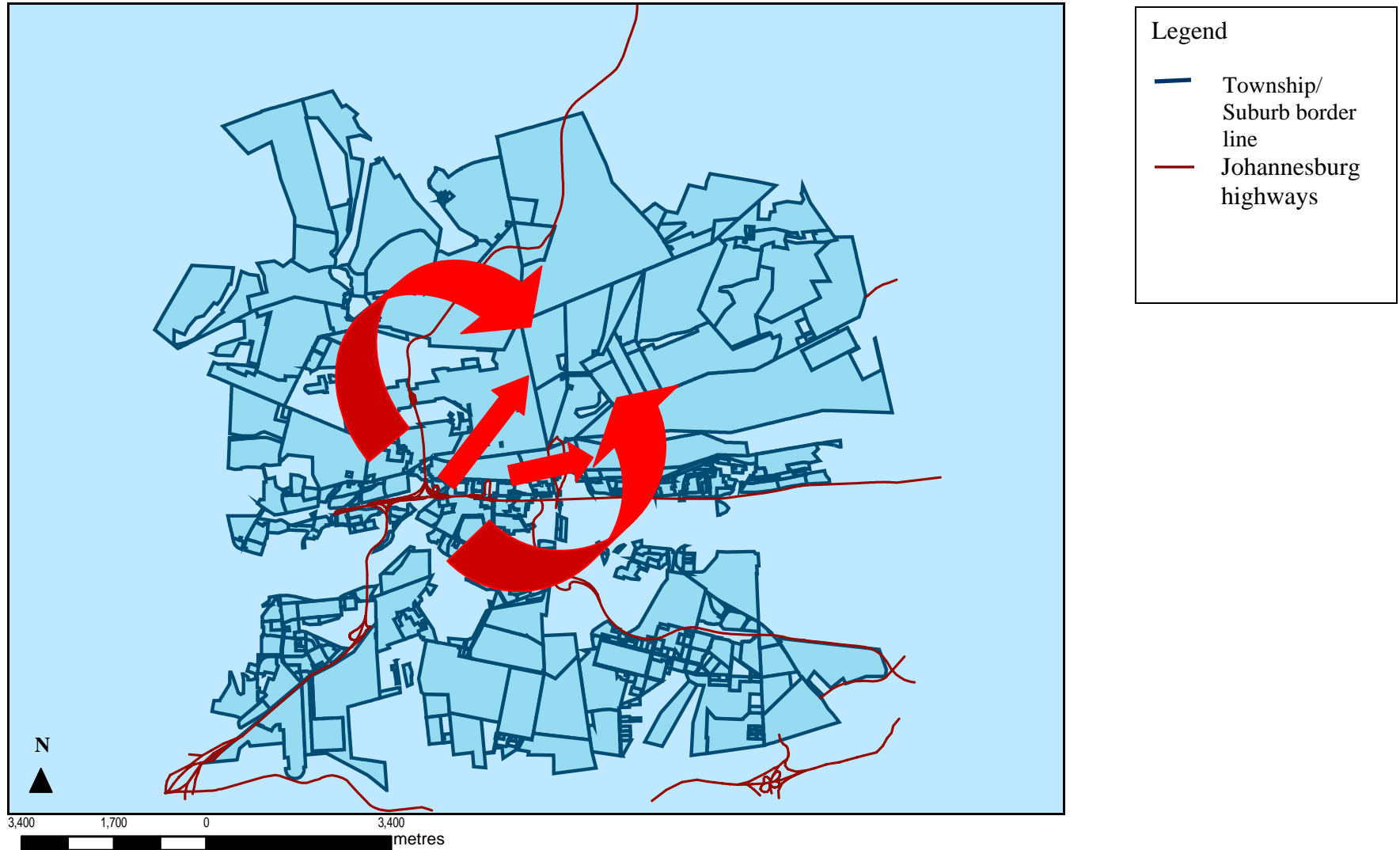


Figure 8.5: Movement of the Jewish community during the 1930s.  
(Source: Johannesburg City Council, 2002)

Many German immigrants settled in Johannesburg and added a new dimension to a community that was achieving a huge degree of homogeneity. The German Jews presence in Johannesburg influenced the morphology of the settlement patterns of the Jewish community during this decade. Their influence is discussed in greater length and detail later in the chapter.

Doornfontein and New Doornfontein – synagogues, schools, and slums.

Doornfontein and New Doornfontein remained the heart of the Jewish community in Johannesburg during the 1930s. The suburbs were dominated by the Eastern European Jewish culture<sup>8</sup> and “a typical Lithuanian life flourished there” (Wedcliffe, 1979: 9). There are literally hundreds of articles that have been written about the community of Doornfontein discussing the institutions, synagogues, schools, and the particularly Jewish ambience of the area<sup>9</sup> (see for example Rochlin, 1947; Zeederberg, 1972; Segell, 1974; Levy, 1978; Citizen, 1980; Berger, 1982; Norwich, 1992). The accoutrements necessary for Jewish life had already been established in the previous decade. The 1930s, however, saw a growth in the number of organizations, households, synagogues, and *Kosher* shops in Doornfontein.

The Chief Rabbi had moved his office to Doornfontein to be close to the majority of Jewish congregants and to be on hand for the community (Fig. 8.6, point W). There were a number of boarding houses such as the *Kosher* Boarding House (Fig. 8.7, point X) and hostels for the surrounding Jewish day schools (Fig. 8.6, point X). As befitting its mandate, which was to represent the Jewish community, the SABJD also moved to Doornfontein (Fig. 8.6, point T). Two more Zionist institutions were also established in Doornfontein; the New Zionist Organization (Fig. 8.6, point Y), met at the South African Jewish Aged Home and Habonim. The latter was a Jewish youth movement dedicated to instilling a sense of Judaism and Zionism in its youthful members. Since it was an organization devoted to the Jewish youth it situated its head office (Fig. 8.6, point Z) in the middle of the largest conglomeration of Jewish families in Johannesburg (Iton Hashomrim, 1948). The youthful members of the community were not the only ones in need of support and post-Depression Johannesburg had a surfeit of those requiring help and charity. Although the majority of charitable organizations were in the CBD, the reasons for which will be discussed below, the Doornfontein Friendly Loan Society (Fig. 8.6, point 1) set up shop in Doornfontein in order to be accessible to those Jews who needed its services.



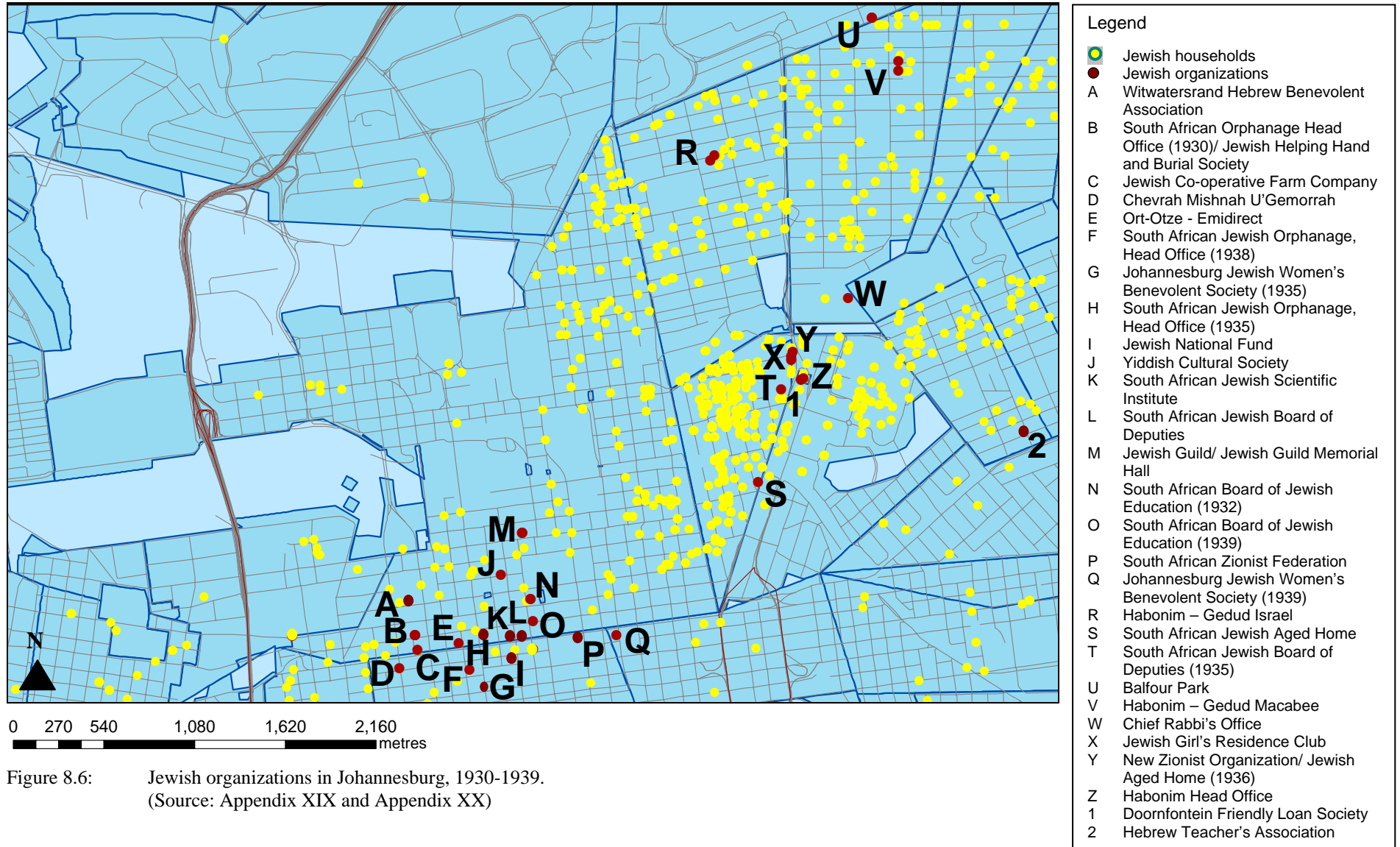


Figure 8.6: Jewish organizations in Johannesburg, 1930-1939.  
(Source: Appendix XIX and Appendix XX)



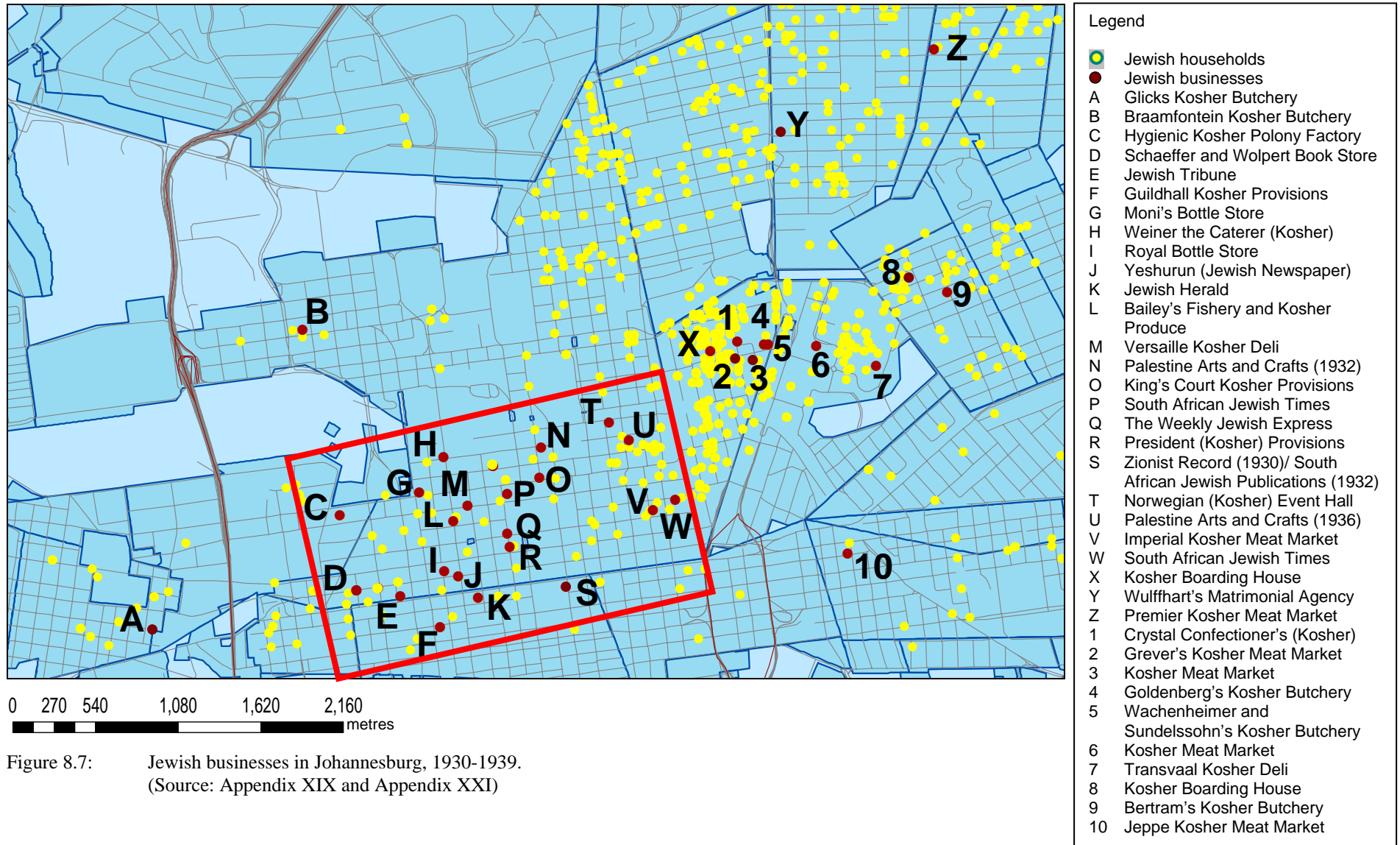


Figure 8.7: Jewish businesses in Johannesburg, 1930-1939.  
(Source: Appendix XIX and Appendix XXI)

As has already been mentioned, the orthodox Jewish community that had been living in the Ferreirastown/Marshallstown area had gradually moved north as the housing conditions in that area had worsened with the passage of time and the fortunes of the Jews had slowly improved. Ferreirastown and Marshallstown had become more and more dilapidated over the preceding few decades and by the 1930s were considered to be one of the worst slumyard areas in Johannesburg (Fig. 8.8) (du Toit, 2003). Three synagogues that had all previously been situated in Marshallstown and Ferreirastown relocated to Doornfontein during the 1930s. The Chassidic Synagogue; the Ponevez Synagogue; and the Beth Hamedrash Hagadol (Fig. 8.9, points P, H. and O respectively) all located themselves very close to each other in their new setting (Norwich, 1988).

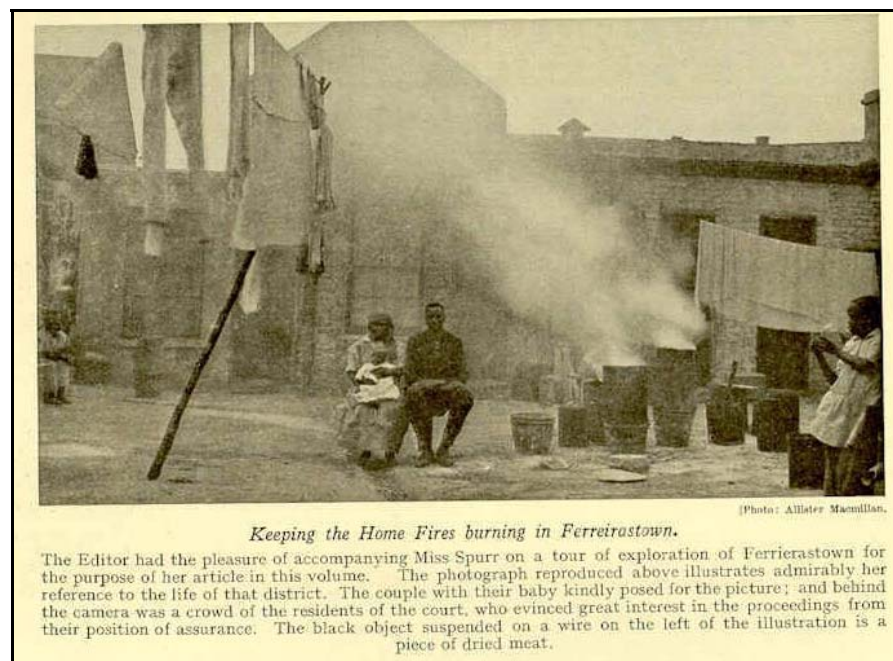
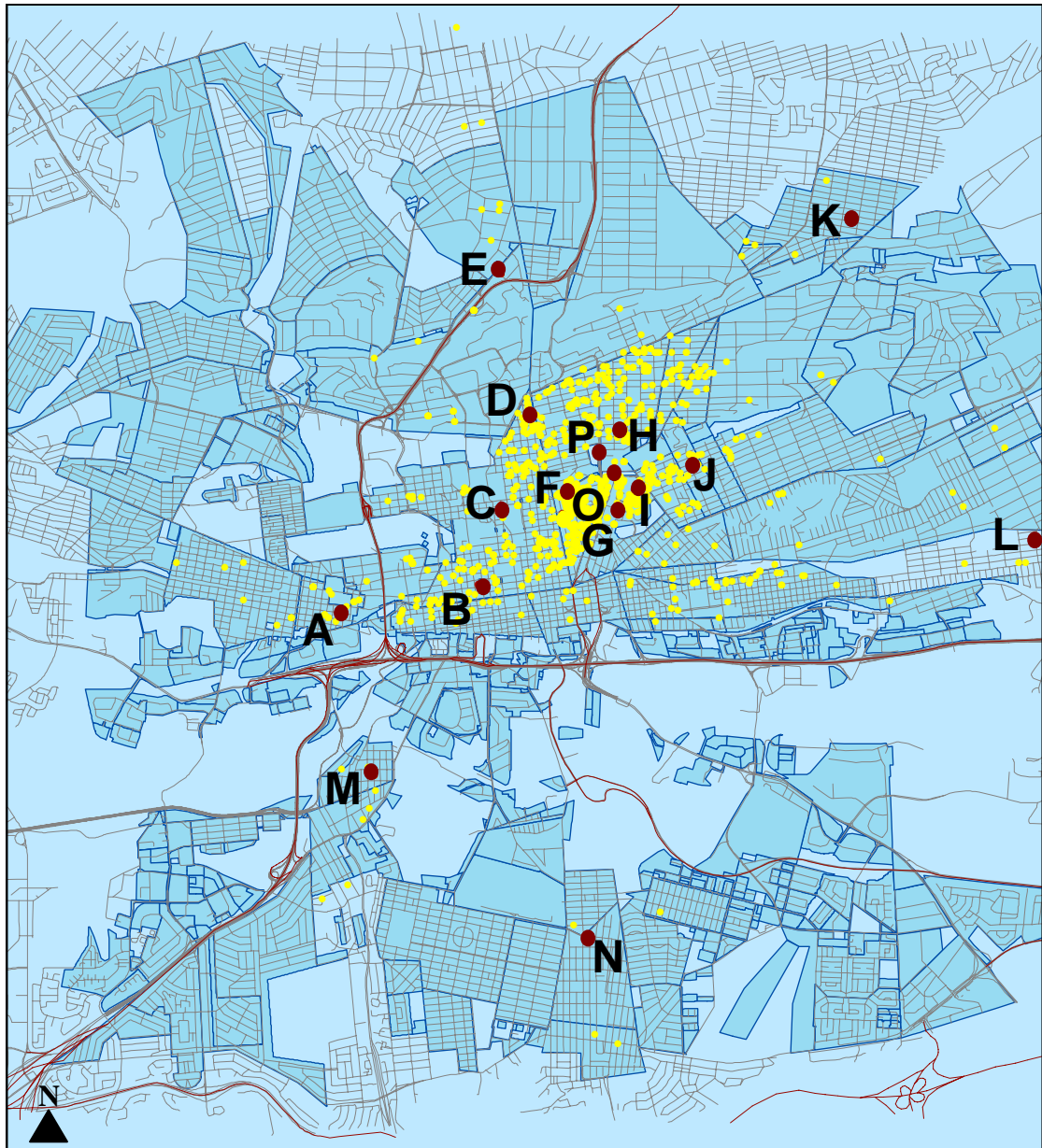


FIGURE 8.8: Photograph of a slumyard in Ferreirastown, 1934.  
(Source: du Toit, 2003: 3)

Although a few *Kosher* provision stores did remain (Fig. 8.7, points D, E, and F), the majority of Jewish shops moved from Marshallstown and Ferreirastown to the CBD proper or alternatively into the suburbs which had been ‘colonized’ by Johannesburg Jewry. A few charitable organizations had stayed in the area to mediate to the poorer Jews and non-Jews who remained, the Chevrah Mischnah U’Gemorrah (Fig. 8.6, point D), at the old Beth Hamedrash, catered for the spiritual well-being of its members whereas the Johannesburg Jewish Women’s Benevolent (Fig. 8.6, point G) looked after the welfare of whomsoever was in need in the area (Saron, 1960). The majority of Hebrew schools and synagogues also left this neighbourhood in favour of areas that had more Jewish families.



0 475 950 1,900 2,850 3,800  
metres

Legend	
	Jewish households
	Jewish schools and synagogues
A	Talmud Torah
B	Johannesburg Jewish Reform Congregation (1936)
C	Johannesburg Jewish Reform Congregation (1934)
D	Johannesburg Jewish Reform Congregation (1937)
E	Hillel College, Jewish Boarding School Temple Emmanuel High School
F	Talmud Torah
G	Doornontein Hebrew School
H	Ponevez Synagogue
I	Yiddish Folk School
J	Bertrams' Hebrew School
K	Orange Grove Synagogue
L	Malvern Synagogue
M	Talmud Torah
N	Rosettenville-La Rochelle Synagogue/ La Rochelle Hebrew School
O	Beth Hamedrash Hagadol
P	Chassidic Synagogue

Figure 8.9: Jewish schools and synagogues in Johannesburg, 1930-1939.  
(Source: Appendix XIX and Appendix XXII)

Only two *Talmud Torahs* (Fig. 8.9, points M and N) remained in the far south of Johannesburg<sup>10</sup> catering to the small number of Jews who still lived in the southern part of the city, as evidenced by the incomplete record of Jewish households in the suburb (Fig. 8.4). Ophirton Synagogue opened its own *Talmud Torah* (Fig. 8.9, point M) and the Rosettenville and La Rochelle congregations amalgamated to form the Rosettenville-La Rochelle Synagogue (Fig. 8.9, point N). The amalgamation was necessary as both congregations were declining as Jews moved north into the other Johannesburg Jewish enclaves.

Jeppestown, Belgravia, and Fairview became more and more industrialized and commercialized at the beginning of the 1930s. As a result the Jewish communities living in these areas drifted eastwards towards Malvern where they established another Jewish enclave (the small red arrow on Fig. 8.5 indicates the movement of this community). There they constructed the Malvern Synagogue (Fig. 8.9, point L) and a *Talmud Torah*, to serve its needs. There were very few *Kosher* shops for this enclave, just one is recorded (Fig. 8.7, point 10). It can be assumed that the Jews living in Malvern used the convenient electric tram system (Fig. 7.7) that ran from Jules Street in Malvern to the centre of town where there were a number of *Kosher* shops and other stores that catered for the needs of the Jewish community, all of which will be discussed below. The main modes of transport into the city centre were the electric trams, buses, the commuter railway, and by private motorcars, it was estimated at the time that over 50 per cent of the 205 379 strong White population did not need public transport and were self-reliant.<sup>11</sup> The areas where the Jews settled were well linked by the various modes of transport to the city. Most Jewish businesses, large and small, stayed in the city centre and their inertia made sense in terms of the combined forces of access and status. The CBD hosted most of the retailing functions of the city and the important municipal and organizational buildings of Johannesburg.

As a result of the ever increasing numbers of the Jewish community in the north-eastern quadrant of the city, the synagogues had no choice but to follow their congregants. The two most religious and devout congregations had been the Chassidic and the Beth Hamedrash, both of which practised a very traditional form of Judaism. The members of the Chassidic<sup>12</sup> Congregation were virtually indistinguishable by those unfamiliar to their customs, either in dress or custom, from their Lithuanian orthodox counter-parts. They had initially settled in Marshallstown and Ferreirastown and met to worship, on a daily basis, at premises on the corner of Main and Ferreira Street in Ferreirastown (Norwich, 1988). In the 1920s the majority of the community moved to Doornfontein and at first the re-settled Chassids used a shop in Beit Street for prayer, but it was decided that they needed a formal synagogue (South African Jewish Times, 1962). Thus in 1930 a new Chassidic synagogue



(Fig. 8.9, point P) was built very close to the South African Jewish Aged Home (Norwich, 1988). Following the Eastern European Jewish tradition the synagogue served the Chassidic community as a house of prayer and worship and a place of study, a communal meeting point, and a Hebrew school, it was the centre of the small but unique Johannesburg Chassidic community.

The Beth Hamedrash had been the heart of the orthodox Litvak community within the Ferreirastown and Marshallstown neighbourhood. In 1914 a *Talmud Torah* had been started to educate Jewish children and ensure their Biblical education (SAJYB, 1929). In 1928 the increasing deterioration of housing in the area and the slow invasion by commercial activities, meant that the orthodox congregation began moving out and the school and the synagogue were losing their members. It was decided by the council of the Johannesburg Orthodox Hebrew Congregation to sell the school, and the Beth Hamedrash, and to build a new school and synagogue on the same property in a suburb that had a higher number of Jews (Norwich, 1988). Four stands were therefore bought in Doornfontein and a school and synagogue were erected on the property. The synagogue was called the Beth Hamedrash Hagadol (The Big/Great House of Prayer) (Fig. 8.9, point O), it hosted a Jewish *cheder*, a place for adult education, a permanent *sukkah*, and a synagogue. Just as its predecessor had been the heart and the centre of Orthodox Judaism in Ferreirastown the new Beth Hamedrash played the same role in the Jewish enclave of Doornfontein.

The Ponevez Sick Benefit Society was one of the oldest *landsleits* in Johannesburg, having been established in 1896 in Ferreirastown (Yudelowitz, 2002). Although it originally had premises in Ferreirastown where the synagogues served as the nerve centre, house of prayer, and communal meeting place for immigrants from Ponevez, by 1930 the majority of its members had moved into New Doornfontein. As a result stands were purchased and the Ponevez Synagogue (Fig. 8.9, point H) was erected for the members of the society (Norwich, 1988).

During the 1930s the areas of Doornfontein and New Doornfontein were overwhelmingly Jewish areas, with 9 synagogues, numerous *Talmud Torahs*, *chederim*, and a number of Jewish organizations all situated in a relatively small area. The recollections of Doornfontein by people who lived in or visited the district remember it as a warm welcoming community, with characteristics *supposedly* very similar to the *shtetls* of Eastern Europe (Segell, 1974; Wedcliffe, 1979; Berger, 1982,). The number of Jewish institutions of all types, the Yiddish signs and posters, and the traditional food and garb that many of the inhabitants wore all indicated how strongly Eastern European Jewish culture dominated the area. It was described as a “*Heimische Shtetl*”, a familiar or homely village (Wedcliffe, 1979: 9). What is

fascinating about these descriptions and various texts is the nostalgia, which completely ignores the realities of the slums, racism, and anti-Semitism of the 1930s. The following is a fairly typical cameo of how the township is remembered;

“Or how one felt at home all the way through Beit Street [one of the main roads in Doornfontein] down through Doornfontein to Judith’s Paarl. The Yiddish ‘word’ was heard on every street corner. The feeling of loyalty and identification with *Yiddishkeit*<sup>13</sup> and Zionism was so strong and natural.

...this particular sense of belonging – this little bit of ‘home away from home’ in Eastern Europe – the ‘*shtetl*’.”

(Segell, 1974: 15)

It would seem that there was a degree of selection in what people chose to remember of the time. The anti-Semitism, poverty, and Afrikaner nationalism, described earlier in this chapter, are repressed into a wider discourse on the perfection of the Jewish districts and the beauty of Jewish life at this time (Shain, 2000). It is particularly strange when one considers the proximity of some of the worst slumyards in which Black residents lived were in Doornfontein and New Doornfontein and the Jewish community could hardly have failed to be aware of the vibrant sub-culture that had been born and was flourishing in their midst. Such an omission needs to be noted for further research and enquiry.

#### ‘Doornfontein yards’

The slums in Johannesburg had long been a concern of the Johannesburg City Council who preferred to control the labour force by securing them in mine hostels and Locations. Slums were spaces that could not be controlled by the council, they were areas where Black Johannesburgers who sheltered in the ‘yards’ could socialise, drink, and entertain without reference to their White ‘masters’ (Koch, 1983a). Doornfontein and New Doornfontein, which had traditionally been enclaves of the Jewish community, contained six yards of Black shelters; Rooiyard, Makapan, Molefe, Mveyane, Magonyane, and Brown ‘Yards’ (Callinicos, 1980). The slumyards were generally composed of a central court or ‘yard’ surrounded on all sides with rooms. The ‘yards’ had rudimentary communal water supplies and toilets but little else in the way of infrastructure (Hellmann, 1935). Ellen Hellmann, a sociologist of the time, made an in depth study of the Rooiyard slum in New Doornfontein over the period, 1933-4. The Rooiyard (Fig. 8.10) was representative of slum conditions that existed in Johannesburg at the time and Hellmann described the yard by saying,

“The occupants are served by six latrines, three for men and three for women, but they are usually in such a bad state of repair and so neglected that the children shun them, as is amply testified by the conditions of the alleyways inside the yard and of the pavements surrounding it. There is a ‘washing-room’ adjoining the lavatories, . . . containing two water taps, one or the other of which is never in working order. . . owing to the inevitable congestion a

long queue of women waiting to fill their paraffin-tins with water for domestic purposes is a common sight.

The cooking braziers are placed outside the rooms . . . large packing cases used for fire wood occupy much of the available space outside each room...

. . . [The] yard after it rains is like a quagmire.”

(Hellmann, 1935: 38)



FIGURE 8.10: Rooiyard, 1934  
(Source: du Toit, 2003: 1)

The conditions in the slums were a far cry from the lifestyle of the mineowners who had lived in this area a few short decades before or to the modest working-class housing in which the majority of Jews of the area lived (Callinicos, 1980). In terms of hygiene and public health regulations the slums could justifiably be condemned by the Health authorities as unsanitary environments. Such thinking became the apparent justification for removing people from the slums and resettling them in the Locations but the culpability of the authorities whose inaction had contributed to the emergence of the slums was never addressed.

In 1930 the greatest strike in the war against the slums was made. First the 1923 Native (Urban Areas) Act was amended. Then South African cities were once again given the option of using the enabling legislation to move towards the creation of Whites-only areas<sup>14</sup>. Blacks would be removed from the declared areas and unlike the earlier piece of legislation the council did not have to immediately provide alternative accommodation (Beavon, 2004). Black African slum-dwellers were therefore forced out of their homes and for the most part out of the cities themselves as it was made illegal for anyone removed from one slum to resettle in another one within the designated areas (Koch, 1983a). It was, however, apparently



completely acceptable to relocate Black people to slums that were not in designated areas such as the Western Townships of Martindale, Newclare, and Sophiatown.

Johannesburg embraced the amended legislation with chilling enthusiasm, and by 1931 a total of 93 out of 133 suburbs along with the CBD had been brought under the aegis of the Act. As a direct result 200 families a month were removed from Johannesburg's slums and placed in the new location of Orlando or in the ever more crowded free-hold townships of Sophiatown, Newclare, and Martindale (Koch, 1983a). In the mid-1930s a further piece of legislation was instituted in the form of the Slums Act, No. 53 of 1934, which specified that any premises, which did not satisfy certain requirements could be declared a slum and its inhabitants, regardless of race, removed from it without the need to provide an alternative housing (Trump, 1979). It was the Slums Act that the Council hoped would finally make it possible to clear the slums from the White residential areas. What the council had not counted on was the corruption of the landlords and the Black residents' stubborn, although completely justified, will to stay. The delay in clearing the slumyards in Doornfontein and New Doornfontein, led to an investigative team, known locally as the Murray-Thornton Commission, being given the responsibility of investigating why Government Health Inspectors had not shut down and cleared the slumyards in Doornfontein and New Doornfontein quickly enough.<sup>15</sup> The commission suggested that there had been a fair amount of misconduct but could not offer any proof and so no one was charged and no legal action was taken.<sup>16</sup> Instead the slumyards were soon cleared and many of the Black residents were removed to Orlando where accommodation had been built for them (Trump, 1979).

There is strangely enough no record of any Jewish communal responses to these events. The community which was still partially based in the zone of slumyards does not seem to have reacted at all. It can be speculated, however, that at least some of the White and Jewish residents of Doornfontein and New Doornfontein must have owned the properties on which the yards stood, as previously mentioned there is little information available but would seem to be a theme worthy of further investigation.

#### Judith's Paarl, Lorentzville, and Bezuidenhout Valley

Doornfontein and New Doornfontein were by far the most densely settled Jewish areas in Johannesburg but the adjoining suburbs of Judith's Paarl, Lorentzville, Bertrams, and Bezuidenhout Valley also had a conspicuous share of the Jewish community (Fig. 8.4). Of these suburbs Bertrams was the most recently settled but by the mid-1930s it had its share of communal balustrades: two institutions had opened up for the education of Jewish children, the Yiddish Folk School (Fig. 8.9, point I) and the Bertrams Hebrew School (Fig. 8.9, point

J), the latter having opened at the Bertrams Synagogue. The Hebrew Teachers Association was the only recorded organization that had moved into these suburbs. The *Kosher* shops had migrated eastward to service the community, and there were three *Kosher* provision stores in the area (Fig. 8.7, points 6, 7, and 9) and one *Kosher* boarding house (Fig. 8.7, point 8), for Jews who were in need of lodgings that adhered to Jewish tradition.

#### Yeoville, Hillbrow, Bellevue and Bellevue East

The suburbs of Hillbrow, Yeoville, Bellevue, and Bellevue East had held a growing and stable Jewish population since the beginning of the 1920s. These areas became more entrenched on the Johannesburg landscape. Two new businesses were established in the district, the Premier *Kosher* Meat Market (Fig. 8.7, point Z) and the Wullfhart's Matrimonial Agency (Fig. 8.7, point Y), the latter was a lonely-hearts club and had moved with the community over the preceding decades. Few of the main Jewish organizations moved this far north. One was the Balfour Park sports ground for the Jewish community. The Balfour 'club' was a communal meeting place as well as sporting club<sup>17</sup> (Fig. 8.6, U). There were two sites where Habonim Youth meetings were held (Fig. 8.6, points R and V), but for the rest the Jewish institutions remained either in Doornfontein or in the centre of town (the area is outlined in red on Fig. 8.6).

Yeoville became an enclave of the German Jewish immigrants and it was recorded that over 36 per cent of the population in this area were born in countries, other than South Africa and Britain. (Sonnabend, 1936). The German Jews brought with them their own religious and cultural practises and established the Adass Yeshurun temporary synagogue and a Reform synagogue<sup>18</sup> (Fig. 8.9, points B, C, and D) in Johannesburg. These were the first synagogues of their type in Johannesburg as the earlier Eastern European immigrants practised a different and far more conservative form of Judaism (Saks, 2002). The German Jews who had left the social and political nightmare of Nazi Germany for South Africa attempted to integrate into a country that was ravaged by anti-Semitism, and a fiscal crisis (as described earlier in this chapter). The German Jews were generally well educated and highly cultured individuals many of whom had held top management and professional positions in Germany. Unfortunately, in the South Africa of the 1930s, the refugees had to take whatever jobs they could find, "Here the battle for existence had to be fought on a different level. The immigrants had to compete without capital in fields where capital was necessary: without knowledge of the language; where knowledge was a necessity" (Jewish Affairs, 1942: 5).

To make matters worse the total population of Johannesburg had doubled between 1930 and 1936 (Koch, 1983a). By 1937 unemployment reached its highest point since

Johannesburg was established, with 100 000 unemployed Blacks on the Witwatersrand of which a high percentage were women (Koch, 1983b). The Blacks only really had one option in order to earn their wages, the sale of their labour. This was due to both the lack of education and training that characterized the Black population as well as the legislated 'job reservation' that the poor-White community insisted on (Trump, 1979). In a survey by the Non-European and Native Affairs Department of Johannesburg, it was reported, "In practically every industry semi-skilled capacity can be attained, but in very few are [Blacks] admitted as skilled workers" (quoted in Trump, 1979: 41). The economic plight of the poor Whites in Johannesburg was so bad that ways of restricting Indian trade in the city were implemented (Koch, 1983a). It was felt by the Afrikaner community that the Indians were 'stealing' trade from the Whites. The truth was that the Indian tradespeople generally had lower overheads than White storeowners and thus could under-cut the prices of their White counterparts (Koch, 1983a). The German Jewish immigrants of the 1930s had entered an economic environment of protected skilled employment and highly competitive un-skilled labour both of which excluded these new immigrants. The majority of them thus found it very difficult to gain employment in any sector in Johannesburg.

Notwithstanding the comments just made the German-Jews were greatly aided by the established older Lithuanian Jewish community and set up a number of their own organizations and institutions. The German-Jews had been far more assimilated into German society than their Lithuanian co-religionists had been and had different cultural needs. They founded the Jewish Immigrants Help, the organization that aided immigrants, either by helping remaining family members to immigrate or alternatively by providing financial aid to immigrants in need (Jewish Affairs, 1942). Later on they established their own old-age home, known as Our Parents Home and became leaders of many of the communal organizations in Johannesburg.

There were other small enclaves of Jews in Johannesburg. Mayfair still had a small Jewish community consisting of just over 150 families but it was a great deal smaller than it had been in the preceding decades (M.F., 1974). Further afield and into the areas of Houghton, Parktown, and Saxonwold there are records of Jewish households (Fig. 8.4) (Sonnabend, 1936) but no records of Jewish schools, organizations, businesses, or synagogues, these were also the areas with the highest concentrations of professionals and people involved in commerce (Sonnabend, 1936). Yet, it was the middle-income areas of Yeoville, Hillbrow, Bellevue, and Bellvue East, that housed many of the more established Jewish families (Norwich, 1988). The area was mainly composed of flats and small houses but was without question the next step in the movement away from working class origins and towards middle and upper socio-economic security.

### Commercial Jewish Johannesburg

Although the majority of Jews had moved out of the centre and southern parts of Johannesburg, and had settled in the north-eastern quadrant of Johannesburg by the beginning of the 1930s, for the most part the main commercial and organizational aspects of the community had stayed firmly rooted in the centre of Johannesburg. Of all of the *Kosher* shops, butcheries, and delis, in Johannesburg most were situated in the CBD (Fig. 8.7, points C, F, G, H, I, L, M, O, R, T, and V outlined in green). The majority of Jewish organizations, which served the interests of the Jewish community of Johannesburg as a whole were also located within the CBD (Fig. 8.6, A-Q). The most important bulwarks of Johannesburg Jewry, such as the Jewish Helping Hand and Burial Society (Fig. 8.6, point B), and the Jewish National Fund (Fig. 8.6, point I) remained in the CBD. The South African Board of Jewish Education (Fig. 8.6, points O and N) and co-ordinated and monitored the quality of Jewish education nationally.

\* \* \*

Between 1930 and 1939 the Jewish community experienced a decade of intense anti-Semitism from both national and international movements and responded by entrenching itself on a portion of the Johannesburg landscape. They consolidated their position and created Jewish spaces which were safe territories for the Jews of Johannesburg. The Jewish community became more assimilated during this time as the children of the immigrants had to establish a Jewish South African identity within this hostile environment. Anti-Semitic legislation and actions meant that the Jewish community looked inwards to take care of itself and the German refugees that were lucky enough to escape from Nazi Germany. The physical manifestation of these events was the consolidation and further densification of the Jewish enclaves in Johannesburg. During the decade of the 1930s the majority of Jews moved out of the slums of Ferreirastown and Marshallstown and into Doornfontein. The Jeppestown, Fairview, and Wolhuter communities moved east into Malvern and north into Doornfontein and its adjoining suburbs. The traditionally Jewish suburb of Mayfair declined and although there were over a 100 families still living there, it was no longer the vibrant Jewish neighbourhood it had formally been. Yeoville, Hillbrow, Bellevue, and Bellevue East had large numbers of German Jewish immigrants and Eastern European Jews who could afford to move into flats and properties in the inner north-east of the city. The pattern of settlement was an extension of the north-eastern migration that had started with the movement into Doornfontein.

The progression of Jews from immigrants to citizens had finally taken place by the 1930s – now there was at least one generation of Jews who had been born and raised in Johannesburg and could claim a South African identity. The movement of the community on the landscape demonstrates the geography of the Jews arriving as poverty stricken peasants and moving up the social economic ladder to take their position within the middle-class suburbs of Johannesburg; taking care of their own and maintaining their religious and cultural identity along the way. The relationship between the spaces that Jews carved out for themselves and the preservation of their culture and religion is the focus in the following chapter.

### Notes for Chapter Eight

---

<sup>1</sup> Eugenics was initially a study of genetics that was based on the work done by Mendel and Darwin. It was considered a scientific discipline and essentially was believed to be a way of improving humanity through breeding programmes. Later the racist implications of such work became clear and it was used as scientific ‘proof’ for the superiority of one group of people over another.

<sup>2</sup> Article found in the SABJD archives entitled ‘Composition of Anti-Jewish Movements’, circa 1934, SABJD Archives.

<sup>3</sup> The *Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is a piece of anti-Semitic literature first published in 1897 for the Prussian secret service. It details the Jews’ plan to take over the world and to convert everyone to Judaism. It was supposedly a massive conspiracy on the part of all Jews who were doing the Devil’s work. Unfortunately the *Protocols* still exist and are still used as ‘proof’ of the untrustworthiness of Jews, even though they have been disproved by a number of academics and historians (ADL, 2002).

<sup>4</sup> The South African Party and the National Party had merged in 1934 to create the United Party, which won the elections in the same year. DF Malan and a number of other members of the old National Party broke away to form the Purified National Party, which was deeply committed to Afrikaner Nationalism and felt that Hertzog had betrayed them. They attained a degree of popularity and in their first year of existence, 1934, took on the position as the official opposition.

<sup>5</sup> Pamphlet distributed in Johannesburg by the SA National People’s Movement, 1939, SABJD Archives.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> Although Marabi culture flourished in the Yards of Doornfontein and New Doornfontein – it was the Jewish community and their culture which dominated the landscape and was, at least superficially, more apparent to the casual observer than the Blacks and the sub-culture that had developed in these suburbs.

<sup>9</sup> A recent call for papers on Doornfontein for a book entitled, *The Story of Doornfontein*, elicited 118 submissions from 81 different authors and ranged from academic works to personal reminiscences. The book awaits publication.

<sup>10</sup> The maps do not accurately reflect the size and number of the households in these small southern townships. As data, which fitted the criteria could not be found, anecdotal evidence and previous research, particularly by Norwich, (1988) does provide insight into and confirmation of the nature of these communities.

<sup>11</sup> V. E. Louis, (City Treasurer), 1933, Special Report on the Transport Question, City of Johannesburg, City Treasury Department, April 1933, William Cullen Government Records Archives.

<sup>12</sup> *Chassidism* is a sect of Judaism that arose in eighteenth century Poland. It believes in the joyous practise of Judaism and that the religion should not be changed or adapted in any way. It did not

prove popular in South Africa, and traditionally was not widely practised in this country (Hellig, 1986).

<sup>13</sup> *Yiddishkeit* – is a sense of Eastern European Judaism, a spirit or an atmosphere that a place, person or event can have.

<sup>14</sup> The Native Urban Areas Act only discriminated against Black Africans but had no jurisdiction over ‘Coloureds’, Indians, or ‘Asiatics’ thus the cities that took up this legislation were only moving towards their goal of being Whites-only zones but could not achieve it through this Act.

<sup>15</sup> Muray, J.M., 1935: *Report of the Commission of Enquiry [into the] Public Health and Native Affairs Departments*, City of Johannesburg: Public Health and Native Affairs, University of the Witwatersrand, closed archives.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> Balfour Park Souvenir Issue, 1939: Opening of the Club Pavilion, 9<sup>th</sup> July 1939, SABJD Archives.

<sup>18</sup> Reform Judaism was founded at the time of the French Revolution, it was argued that Judaism had always evolved and changed over time, and the new situation in which Jews found themselves required that they continued to move forward and adapt, as such Reform Judaism proposed certain changes, such as the use of the vernacular for services, more equality in religious practises, discarding of circumcision, and the laws of *kashrut*. It was fairly popular in Western Europe but had never really found a following in Eastern Europe (American Israeli Co-operative, 2004).