

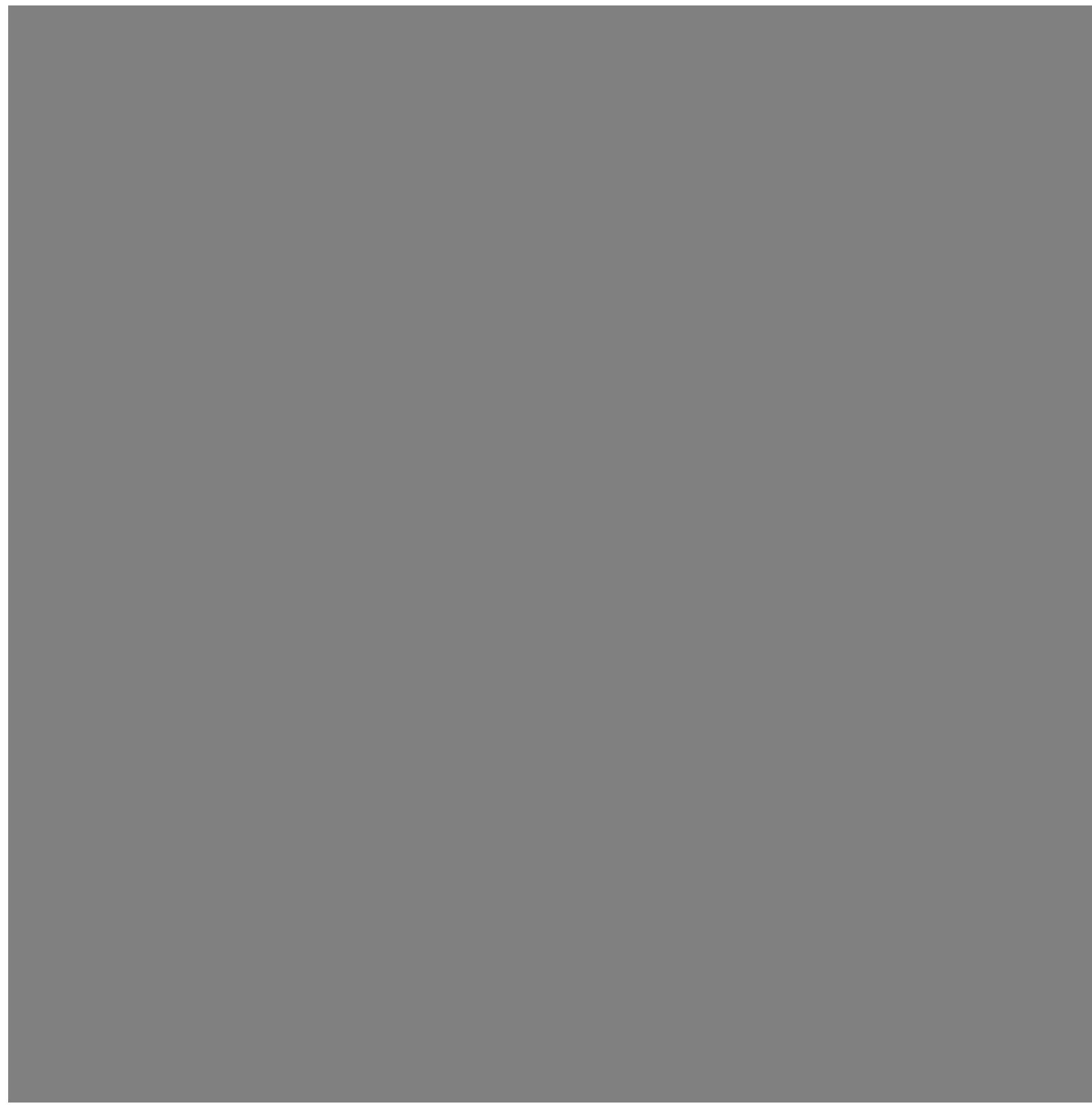
The Bernitz Family History

Latvia, South Africa and Beyond

Charles Bernitz



Michel Behr Bernitz



© 2012 Charles Bernitz. The book author retains sole copyright to his or her contributions to this book.

The Blurb-provided layout designs and graphic elements are copyright Blurb Inc., 2012. This book was created using the Blurb creative publishing service. The book author retains sole copyright to his or her contributions to this book.



Each time I have uncovered the name of one of my long-forgotten ancestors I have been filled with the mystical feeling that I was indeed rescuing that ancestor, not from the hellfire perhaps, but from oblivion.

Dan Rottenberg

One is not truly dead until one's name is forgotten

Talmud

For my siblings, our children and our grandchildren

Second edition
London December 2012

Prologue

I feel a duty to ensure that my children are properly aware of our ancestors' strivings over the years and the challenges they faced – often for sake of descendants whom they would never meet. With this in mind I've sought to recount the history of four sets of ancestors - my father's parents (one born in Latvia, the other in London) together with their respective ancestors; my mother's parents, both born in Lithuania, plus their ancestors; and also Ruth's parents and grandparents, all of whom were born in Germany. I was particularly interested in uncovering their reasons for leaving their homelands and emigrating to South Africa. I shall accordingly include descriptions of their day-to-day lives and domestic circumstances where known to us from contemporary or historical sources.

In particular, I shall follow the histories of:

1. My father's father - Herman Bernitz, and his parents Michel Bernitz and Ernestina Herzenberg, both from Latvia.
2. My father's mother - Kate Cohen, and her parents Maurice Cohen, born in Latvia, and Louisa Cohen, born in Holland.
3. My mother's father - Chaim Abelsohn, son of Yehuda Leib Abelson from Lithuania.
4. My mother's mother - Sara Tsipe Chasan, daughter of Meyer Moshe Chasan, and his second wife Ita, both from Lithuania.

Ruth's parents fled Germany in 1936. For Ruth's family I will follow the histories of:

1. Her father's father – Benjamin Blum, son of Meier Blum and Marjamme Plaut.
2. Her father's mother - Rickshen Hammerschlag, daughter of Moses Hammerschlag and Margolies Katzenstein.
3. Her mother's father - Jakob Goldschmidt.
4. Her mother's mother – Jettchen Plaut, daughter of Wolf Plaut and Betty Moses Frank.

They all lived within a small area in central Germany.

As adults, Ruth and I also emigrated with our children. We knew why we chose to leave South Africa, thus leading to a further question - why were we repeating the actions of previous generations of our Jewish ancestors. When I began the process of retiring, I at last had the opportunity to seek the answers. It is my hope that my children and grandchildren will read this, and better understand their origins and heritage. I have tried to uncover where my ancestors and Ruth's came from, to describe how they lived and how their lives were constrained by the circumstances affecting the Jews of their time.



A Brief History of Latvia, Courland and the Jews

As a child I had been told that my grandparents - Bernitz, Abelsohn and Chasan - had all immigrated to South Africa from Russia. Many of my friends spoke of their father's and grandfather's as also having come from "Russia" - a fact that was recorded in shul records, naturalisation certificates, passports, etc. I came to realize that "Russia" was a convenient collective name for a large Eastern European territory with a complex and ever changing political history, which officials in South Africa (and indeed England and the USA) simply did not understand; they conveniently called this diverse region Russia. I noticed also that each immigrant had a fierce loyalty to their Jewish roots in their own home countries. They would proudly proclaim that they were Kurlanders, or Litvaks - certainly of better stock than fellow Jewish immigrants who were not! My Grandfather was a Latvian Jew, specifically a Kurlander (Courlander).

We are therefore partly of Latvian Jewish descent.



Prior to the arrival of Jews in Latvia the country was ruled by a German Knightly Order (1201-1561). They imposed a total ban on the presence of Jews (1306). Neighbouring Polish Lithuania had a large Jewish population from the 13th century. In 1561 Poland annexed the provinces of Livonia and Latgale, but Kurland remained an independent Duchy. The history of the Jews from then on was different in each of the three Provinces as they were ruled by different people.

Present day Latvia has four regions:

- (1) Kurzeme in the North West and
- (2) Zemgale in the south west were previously named Kurland (Courland). The largest towns were Libau and Mitau. Courland was a semi-independent duchy linked to Poland (from 1562-1795) but with a prevailing German influence. The local Jews were closer to German Jews than to Lithuanian Jews.
- (3) Livonia (now Vidzeme) where Jews were forbidden to engage in commerce or act as farmers, and which was interpreted by local authorities as a ban on living in the country at all.

This resulted in Jews being treated as aliens, and nobles exploited the situation by levying all kinds of residence restrictions, license fees, etc. This continued for hundreds of years under the rule of Poland (1561), Sweden (1621) and Russia (1710). There was a fairly modern Jewish community from 1840.

- (4) Latgale. Unlike the rest of Latvia, it was included into the Pale of Settlement that was established in 1804 (the Pale is discussed later. It was an area outside of which Russian Jews were not allowed to settle.) The Latgale province of Latvia was home to many Yiddish speaking Jewish communities identical to those in Lithuania-Byelorussia, though the intelligentsia spoke Russian).

JEWS IN COURLAND

This is the most ancient Jewish community in Latvia. Courland was never part of the Pale of Settlement. From an early stage it consisted of two separate political entities.

The Province of Piltene (Pilten) included the districts of Grobin and Hasenpoth (from where the Bernitz family originated). It is believed that the first Jews arrived in Piltene around 1571 and settled in the districts of Grobin, Hasenpoth (now Aizpute) and part of Windau (now Ventspils). When the Piltene district was sold to the Polish king in 1685, Polish legislation was extended to the Jews of the Piltene region and its neighbourhood. Wealthy Jews were allowed to settle in and contribute to the region's development. Since Pilten lies near the sea, Jewish merchants probably settled there from Prussia. Politically, Pilten was ruled directly by Poland while Courland Duchy (capital Mitau) was ruled by local nobility. The reason for Poland's special interest in Piltene was obvious – all-season sea-ports such as Libau (now Liepaja) and Windau were of utmost importance to trade. In Pilten, taxes were not imposed on Jews until 1717. Decrees of expulsion followed, between 1727 and 1738, but were never fully enforced. In 1708 permission was granted for the establishment of Hasenpoth's first synagogue.

Jews were given the right to permanent residence in Courland in the 18th century. Especially favourable was the ruling of Duke Ernst Johann Biron who had nominated a Jew to be his chief financial advisor. In the 18th century many skilled Jewish workers and artisans (construction workers, roof-makers, inlay workers, tailors) arrived in Courland from Germany, as well as a number of medical doctors. The latter formed a core of Jewish intelligentsia, actively confirming and bearing the ideas of Jewish enlightenment (Haskala).

The German way of life dominated in Courland, having a great impact on the Jews. German (not Yiddish) was the spoken language of the Jewish community - this continued until World War II.

Courland had become part of Russia in 1795. The Russian Emperor Paul, under the pressure from Haskala Jews, promulgated a law in 1799 according to which Jews in Courland obtained legal status as permanent inhabitants, but were subjected to double taxation. This allowed Jews to participate in local government elections and stimulated the integration of Jews into German society in Courland. (By 1852, 22% of the inhabitants were Jewish). In 1780 the first Jewish school was opened in Mitau with 3 teachers.

In 1835 a new Code was published allowing permanent residence to the Jews living there with their families, as long as they had already been registered locally according to the last population census. Jews paid 500 rubles per person to avoid conscription into the Russian army.

In 1893 more Jews were able to move to Courland and Livonia (Riga) from the difficult conditions in the Pale of Settlement (see next page). More than 40% were involved in artisanal or industrial professions, while 35% were involved in trade. Libau port had an important role in trade. By WWI approximately 25% of all industrial enterprises in Libau belonged to Jews.

Culture / Education

In 1850 there were five secular Jewish schools supported by the State (Libau, Mitau, Goldingen, Tukums), as well as religious schools (Talmud torahs).

The Pale of Settlement

In 1804 Alexander I, intending to protect the Russian population from the Jewish people, issued a decree that prevented Jews from living outside the territories of the Pale. The Pale of Settlement was the term given to a region of Imperial Russia, along its western border, in which permanent residence of Jews was permitted, but beyond which Jewish residence was prohibited.

Though comprising only 20% of the territory of European Russia, the Pale corresponded to historical borders of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and included much of present-day Lithuania, Belarus, Poland, Bessarabia, Ukraine and parts of western Russia. The word pale derives from the Latin word *palus*, meaning stake. (Palisade is derived from the same root - the phrase "beyond the pale" derives from this meaning, referring originally to the English Pale in Ireland). From this derivation came the figurative meaning of 'boundary', and the concept of a pale as an area within which special local laws could be applied. This statute was one of many designed to limit the freedoms of Russian Jewry. With more than five million Jews eventually living and working within its borders, Russian lawmakers used the confines of the Pale as an opportunity to limit Jewish participation in most facets of social, economic, and political life.

With few exceptions, Jews were forced to reside within the Pale's overcrowded cities and small towns called shtetls; they were restricted from travelling, prevented from entering various professions (including agriculture), levied with extra taxation, forbidden to receive higher education, and kept from engaging in various forms of trade to subsidize their livelihood.

Tsar Nicholas 1 (1796-1855) removed the exemption of Jews from military service, hoping that separation from family would lead them to convert to Russian orthodoxy. Conscription of Jews was set for up to 30



The Pale of Jewish Settlement 1772 -1917

years. Exemptions applied only to single sons in a family and to some merchants. To escape this system, young men changed their names, moved about internally, or emigrated. By 1874 Jewish conscription was brought into general conformity and service was reduced to 6 years. The Russo-Japanese war of 1904 was a crisis point, with further conscription: Jewish conscripts feared that they would not be able to observe Kashrus, and would never see their families again – this was a huge motivating force to emigrate.

Although Jews in the Pale were destined to endure a life of poverty and restriction, most managed to make their way into the local economies by working as tailors, cobblers, peddlers, and small shopkeepers. Others, who were less fortunate, survived only by committed mutual aid efforts and strong local support networks.

Maurice Bernitz - his Ancestors and descendents

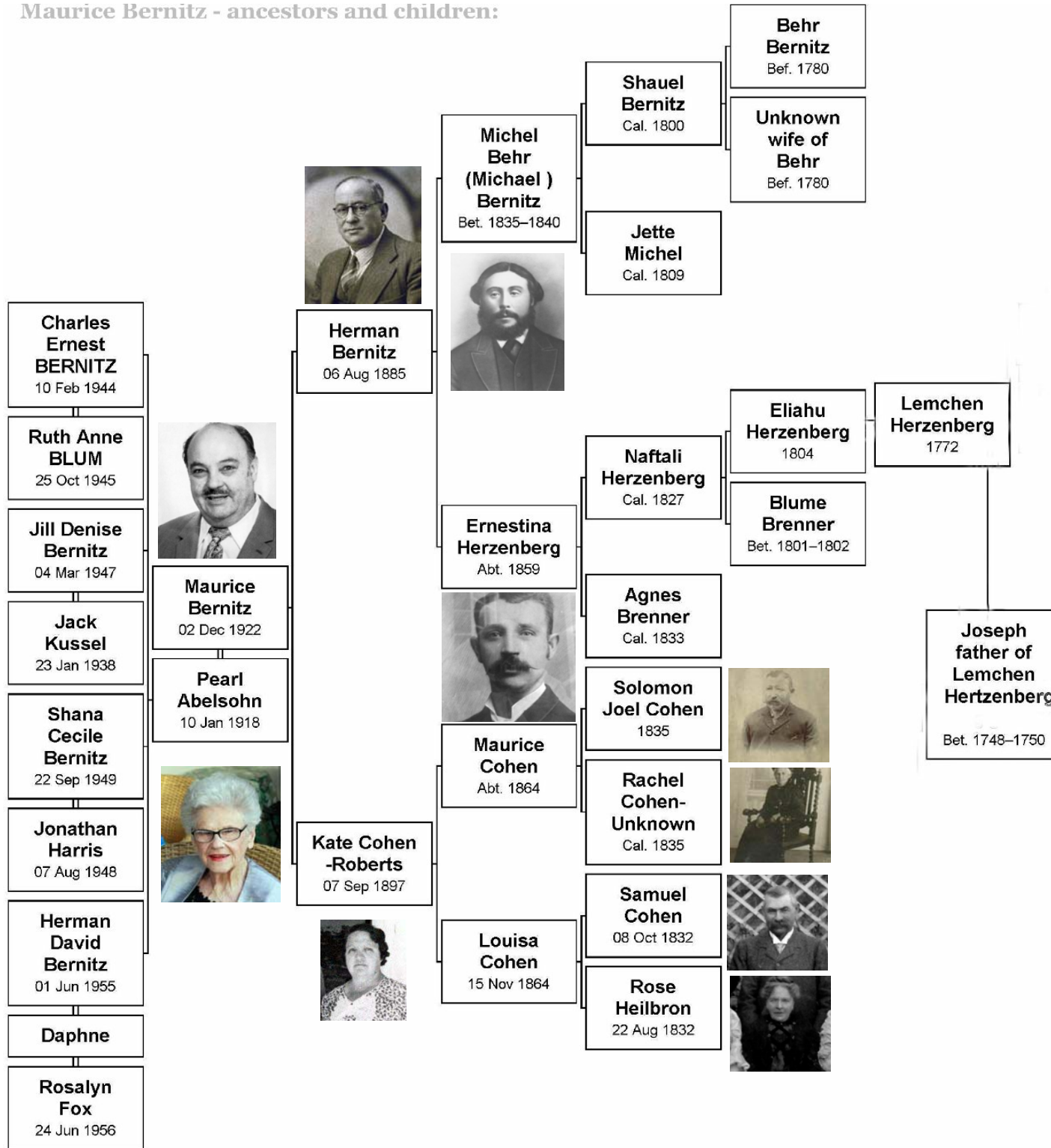
My father, Maurice Bernitz, the second son of Herman Bernitz and Kate Roberts (born Cohen) was born in Pyramids, Transvaal, South Africa in 1922.

His father Herman (my grandfather) was born in 1885 in Latvia. He had immigrated to South Africa in 1906. He married Kate Cohen (Roberts) in 1919 in Johannesburg. He was 34, she 22. Herman's parents were Michel Behr Bernitz and Ernestina Herzenberg, both Latvian; his paternal grandparents were Shaul Bernitz and Jette Michel; his maternal grandparents were Naftali Herzenberg and Agnes Brenner, also Latvian.

Kate (my grandmother) was born in 1897 in England, during a visit by her parents to London. They had both originated from London, but were living in South Africa where they had been married. Her father Morris Cohen (no relation to her mother's family) was actually born in Latvia, but the family had immigrated to London when he was aged between 14 and 20. He re-emigrated to South Africa in 1890, aged 25/26.

Maurice Cohen's parents were Solomon Joel Cohen and Rachel (also known as Rala, maiden name unknown), and nine of his ten siblings were all born in Polangen, Latvia - the town where Solomon and Rachel were married. Kate's mother Louisa Cohen was also born in London. Her parents Samuel Cohen and Rose Heilbron were both born and married in Holland. They immigrated to London, around 1857, with one daughter; later they re-immigrated to South Africa, with their family, including 11 children!

Maurice Bernitz - ancestors and children:



THE BERNITZ FAMILY

A note on the Surname.

Jews in the Russian empire received their permanent last names approximately 150-200 years ago. From the end of the 18th century to the first half of the 19th century, the majority of the Ashkenazi Jewish population was in Russia (800,000 people), Austro-Hungary (470,000), and the German states (180,000). Inherited last names as we know them did not exist. Each individual had only their own first name, to which the father's name may have been added in official and synagogue documents.

In the mid 19th century Russian authorities launched an effort to assign heritable last names to Jews. This was an extension of a practice started by Austro-Hungary in 1797 and the German government between 1807 and 1834. Last names were used in business transactions, registration of legal documents, tax and administrative matters, etc. The Russian officials, who were assigned the task of "naming" Jews, had to assign last names that reflected an ethnic association and conveyed some meaning. The authorities first employed simple German or Yiddish words, as the foundation to construct last names.

The practice of allotting people last names according to their professional activities was widely prevalent. Last names often indicated the family's place of origin. Some families kept their old German last names, which verified that their ancestors were emigrants from Germany. Jews were also named for Belarusian localities of origin. In addition many Jewish last names have Hebrew roots. The Twelve Tribes each had a sacred symbol of a wild animal which was often used to create a last name. The symbol of Yitzhak's tribe was a bear - from this symbol come the prefixes Dov (bear, Hebrew) and Ber (bear, Yiddish), and many derivatives.

One theory assumes that Bernitz is an indication of origin, and looks for a place of origin linked to the name.

The *Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Russian Empire*¹ states:

"BERNITS (Courland) Toponym from the village Bernotse (Shavli district)." This is possible, but unlikely.

Another theory proposes that the name had a meaning in itself and was derived from a word in one or another local language (German, Latvian, etc.); in this instance Bernitz would be an occupational descriptive name, based on the fact that the families were brewers.

According to Robert Herzenberg² "Our family was distributed throughout the Pilten area in the estates of the barons such as Baer, Ropp, Osten-Laken, Vietiunhof, etc. They were dairy and wood retailers, but predominantly, distillers (Schnappsbrenner) and brewers (bierbrauer), as indicated by the family names Brenner, Bernitz, and Brenson."

The exact spelling of the surname Bernitz has no significance. Consistent spelling of surnames is a 20th century invention. Names are seldom spelled in a standard way in earlier records. For example, it is not unusual for the same individual to be known as Bernitz, Bernic, Bernica or Berniker. The languages used by our ancestors at the time included Latvian, Russian, German and Yiddish, and transliteration from one of these languages to another leads to infinite variation.

¹ *A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Russian Empire (1993)*, Alexander Beider, Avotaynu, Inc.

² *The Reminiscences of Robert Herzenberg*, translated by Leonardo (Leonard) Herzenberg

There is no evidence of the actual origin of our Bernitz surname, but there are a number of theories. The archivist, Rita Bogdanova, does not think that the name originated in Latvia at all, but that it is of German origin. This is possible. Many Jewish Germans had surnames much earlier than in Latvia. Because there had been a large influx of German Jews into Hasenpoth after the Plague (1660-1680), it is possible that a Bernitz male had arrived in Hasenpoth bearing the surname.

Bernic (Latvian) is spelled differently for a males and females, Bernics being the male form (German Bernitz), and Bernica the female (Berniker in German). Few families had surnames before 1800, when they became legally obliged to adopt them. The same provisos apply to the spelling of first (given) names. Certain first names were commonly used within a family, repeated from generation to generation. There were evolutionary changes in the names and their spelling in the local languages across generations. In addition, as mentioned before, names were almost never spelled consistently in records, and transliteration between languages compounds the problem. In translated records available we find Shaul/Shaul/Schaul/Schael used for the same person, also Hirsh/Hirsch, and Maurice/Morris. The Latvian Given Names database yields the following information on Michel: Gender: Male Similar Names in Latvia: Mikhaeyl, Mikhl. Yiddish Names: Mekhele, Mekhl, Mekhle, Mikhael, Mikhal, Mikhel, Mikhke, Mikhl, Mikhle, Mikhoelke, Mikhol. European Secular Names: Michael, Michail, Michel, Michol, Mikhael. Local Secular Names: Michails, Mihail, Mihle, Mikelis Hebrew Origin: Mikhaeyl - European Origin: Michael – Germany

Other Bernitz Families

Whatever the origin of our Bernitz name, it probably had multiple origins in multiple countries, not all of them Jewish, and many of them unrelated.

I have found other Bernitz families from the same period living in Austria, Poland, Germany, Sweden and Russia. They can also be found amongst emigrants to the USA and elsewhere during the mid-1800's to early 1900's. Although there is evidence that a number of members of the Hasenpoth Bernitz family converted to Christianity (Lutheran and Russian Orthodoxy) in the 1850's it is improbable that they were the ancestors of all of the other non-Jewish Bernitz families, or vice versa.

Huge amounts of irrelevant data are to be found through internet searching for Bernitz in publicly available data (a broad search of the databases available through ancestry.com yields over 12 million entries!). Judicious searching reveals an increasing quantity of relevant information through the Jewish SIGs (special interest groups). There is sufficient information to see that there were a substantial number of other Bernitz's who emigrated to the USA and South Africa for whom no connection to our ancestors has yet been found. It is of course possible that there was a single Bernitz from whom we are all descended, but I think this unlikely.

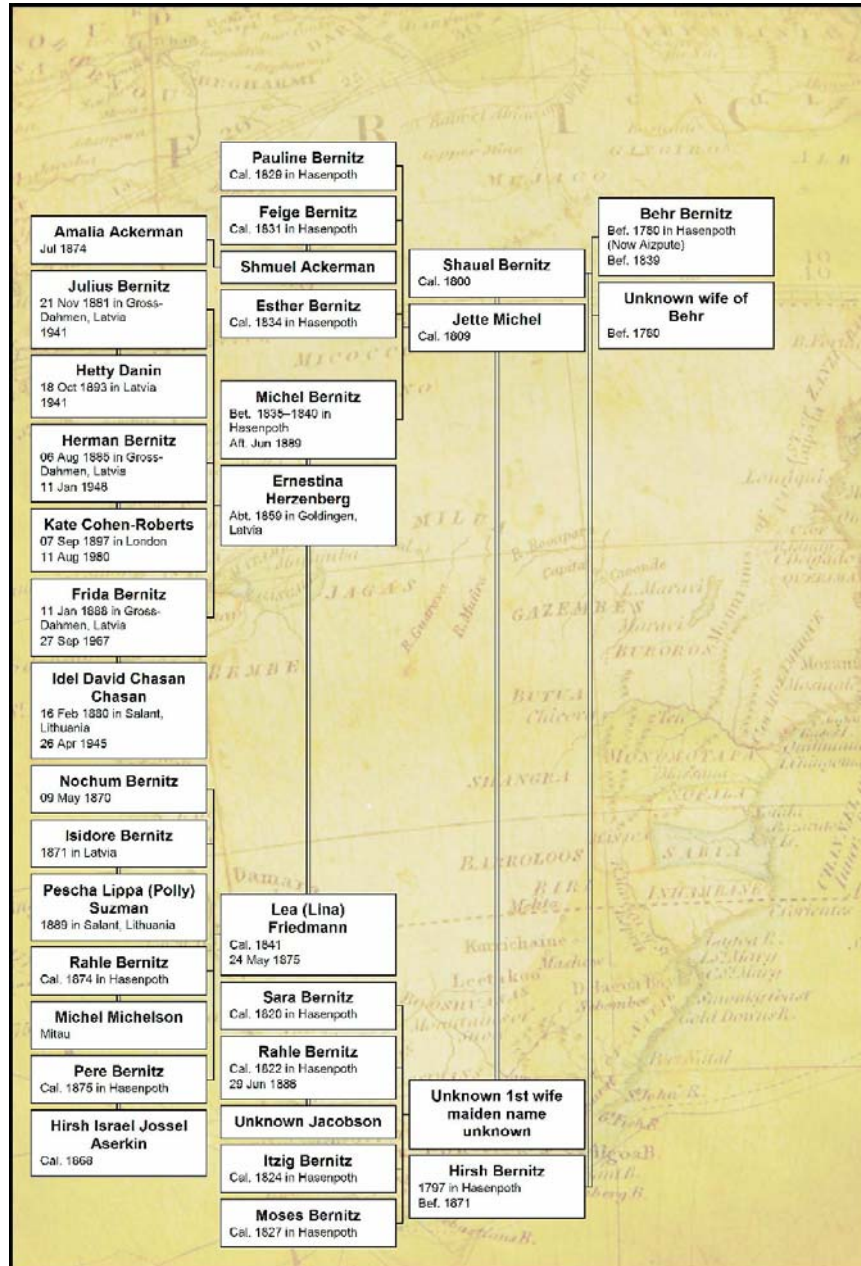
Other Bernitz families in South Africa.

There is a record of Mr. I Bernitz, married male, who arrived in Cape Town aboard the Saxoro from Southampton in 1904. This was not Herman's half-brother Isidor, who had arrived earlier in South Africa. There was also a Mr. H. Bernitz, a labourer aged 18, who sailed from Southampton to the Cape aboard the Tintagel Castle in 1902. This was not our grandfather Herman, but could well have been any one of three Hirsh Bernitz's, all born in the late 1800's in Latvia, all cousins to Herman.

According to Pearl there was a Bernitz family living in Cape Town – the old man was a friend of Chaim Abelsohn. He looked like and sounded like "Pop" Bernitz. She believes that they were related. There was also a Bernitz family in Bulawayo.

The first known Bernitz from whom our branch of the family is descended was Behr Bernitz, born approximately 1780 in Hasenpoth, Latvia.

Our Bernitz Ancestors



The Shtetl of Hasenpoth



Now known as Aizpute, Hasenpoth is a town in western Latvia's Liepaja District, between Kuldiga and Liepaja. Teutonic knights founded it in the 13th century. The imposing ruins of their castle still remain. It had a large Jewish population. I have visited the town, the very overgrown Jewish cemetery and the museum, which has interesting exhibits on many of the trades carried out by the Jews in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

Hasenpoth lies between Riga and Liepaja, surrounded by forests of Beech, Birch and Pine, as well as large fields of wheat. These are nesting grounds to large colonies of White Storks. Their big open nests abound on high structures. The birds breed in Latvia and Lithuania in the summer, and then migrate as far as Southern Africa in the European winter.

Above: A street in Hasenpoth, 2008. These original old wooden houses now have modern roofs. Originally wooden shingles were used.

Jews bought land for the first synagogue in 1752, and founded the first cemetery in 1792. Records show that in 1788 there were 140 heads of families, and a total of 209 Jews, of whom 33 were traders. It is therefore reasonable to assume that at this early stage of the community, unmarried men were predominant.

In 1796 many privileges were extended to Jews, and there was a large immigration from East Prussia, including Jews from Hamburg, Dresden and other German cities. In 1819, when Hasenpoth was incorporated into the Russian Empire, most of the privileges were removed.

It is therefore conceivable that the Bernitz family did migrate to Hasenpoth from Germany at the end of the 18th century. And then in 1840, 96 families were forcibly moved from Hasenpoth and Kurzeme to new land in Russia. Again, the possibility that the Bernitz name was amongst them and made its appearance in Russia cannot be excluded. Nevertheless, the position of Jews continued to improve. By 1863 half of the population was Jewish and the community as well as the town became prosperous.

The more affluent Jews lived in the town centre in mainly wooden, multi-level houses, with the trading premises on the ground floor, and dwelling space above. Special areas of “social” housing were built for the poorer Jews, many of whom were new immigrants from Russia. In 1870 an order was published, ordering that the Jewish population be reduced to 35%. Many Jews moved to villages surrounding Hasenpoth. It is possible that it was this event that led to Michel Behr leaving Hasenpoth and settling in Gruz-Dimene (see below).

Hasenpoth, like all other Jewish communities had a Kahal, an elected communal authority, responsible not only for administering their own affairs, but also for collecting and remitting taxes to the gentile authorities. Taxes included poll tax, householders' tax, food taxes, box taxes, etc. It was the council's job to tax each community according to its size and wealth. Poor Jews were exempt from taxes. The Kahal also collected charitable donations to assist the poor, with volunteer collectors going from door to door.

In 1861 there were three shuls (described as one synagogue plus two minyanim). The main synagogue, still an imposing building, was created by combining two of the synagogues into one. It is picturesquely sited on the steep banks of the river Tegra. At the river level are the remains of what was once a large mikvah complex. Although now in a state of disrepair it was comparable in size and architecture to a modern spa complex.



*Above: A street in Hasenpoth circa 1900.
Below: The Jewish cemetery, originating from 1795, is very overgrown and in a poor state. There are supposedly about 100 graves remaining., with stone and iron headstones.*



I was not able to find any gravestones of the Bernitz family, although records show that at least two were buried here, Abraham Dov b. Moshe Bernitz d. 5672 (1912) and Shmuel b. Abraham Zev Bernitz d. 5629 (1869). The only remaining marker indicating that this was a Jewish cemetery is a small plaque in the grass indicating that this had been a Jewish cemetery between 1796 and 1941.



Above: Hasenpoth Synagogue. Right A cobbled street in Aizpute.
Below left: Hasenpoth shipping terminal, almost unchanged since the late 1800's. From here, with bands playing, most Jewish emigrants departed Liebau for new homes abroad.





AIZPUTES SINAGOGA

1752-1941

1941. gada vasarā un rudenī no savām mājām un šīs ēkas savā pēdējā ceļā tika aizvesti vairāk nekā 300 aizputnieku, kurus noslepkavoja tikai tādēļ, ka viņi bija ebreji.

AIZPUTE SYNAGOGUE

1752-1941

From their homes and this building, more than 300 Aizpute residents were taken on their last journey in the summer and autumn of 1941. They were murdered only because they were Jews.



בית הכנסת באייספוטא
(תק"י"ב - תש"י)

מבתייהם ומבנין זה, יותר משלש מאות (300) מתושבי אייספוטא נלקחו למסעם האחרון בקיץ וסתיו של תש"א/תש"יב (1941). הם נרצחו רק משום היותם יהודים. יהי זכרם ברוך!

Michel Behr Bernitz



Michel, also known as Mikhail and Michael (my great-grandfather) was married twice, and had children in both marriages.

Michel's birth date is not known, but can be calculated as being between 1830 and 1840. He grew up in the Jewish community in Hasenpoth (now called Aizpute). We know that the children from his 2nd marriage to Ernestina were born in Gros-Dahmen (Russian: Gruz-Dimena), in the Hasenpoth district; we can therefore assume that he settled there around 1884. It is located 5 km from the current civil parish of Gramzda. This was a small place without authorities with whom to register births.

Michel only obtained a certificate regarding his children's birth registration from the Rabbi of the Skude district (which is currently across the border in Lithuania) many years after they were born.

He was known to be a brewer, and the certificate mentioned above refers to him as the Hasenpoth petit bourgeois Michel Behr, an indication that he had been admitted to the merchant class. Gros-Dahmen was a large country estate, belonging to Baron Nicholas Schroder. It did not have (and still does not have any large town). Michael had two marriages, with children from each marriage. He married Lea Friedman in 1862, when she was 21 years old. He was either of a similar age, or up to 10 years older. They lived in Hasenpoth, and had 2 boys and 2 girls – Isidor (birth date unknown), Nochum (1870), Rahle (1874) and Pere (1875). Both daughters married in Latvia.

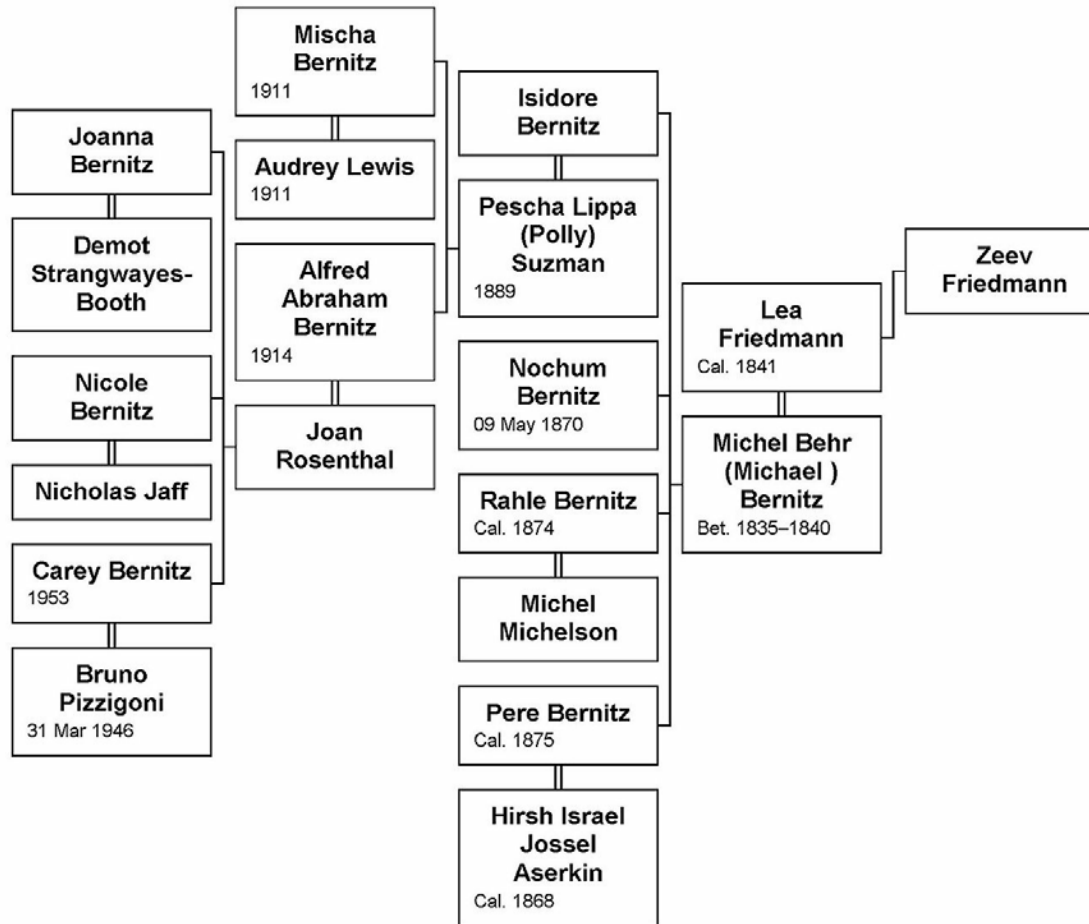
No further records have been found for Nochum – he probably left Latvia. As we have not yet located any birth documents for Isidor, there is a possibility that Nochum and Isidor are in fact the same person.

Lea died on the 24th May, 1875, the year that Pere was born. I suspect that she died in childbirth. The death certificate of Isidore Bernitz names his mother as Lena Bernitz, born Friedman.

I have been puzzled by a number of issues relating to Michel Behr's history.

1. The lack of birth documents for himself, as well as for the second son from his first marriage.
2. The fact that he chose not to register the births of any of the children of his second marriage for many years (I believe that the birth certificate that was eventually issued by the Rabbi in Skude was only issued after Michael had died, probably at the request of his then widow Ernestina).

Michel's first marriage to Lea (Lena*) Friedman



3. The fact that he moved from Hasenpoth, where he had been an established merchant (brewer), to Gruz-Dimene after his second marriage to Ernestina.
4. The stories, retold independently by both Ernie (as heard from Herman), and by Joanna (as heard from

Isidor), that Michel and Ernestina socialized with the nobility, or that he was possibly even ennobled himself, with the title of Baron. Though intriguing, this is extremely unlikely. But was there any basis for the stories?

The fact that neither the birth of his second son, nor subsequent children's births were registered was not in itself unusual. Records may simply be lost or destroyed. As described elsewhere, conscription laws for Jewish boys were draconian, and parents took many risks and used many ploys to protect their sons from this. Failing to register a birth was one device; it exposed the father to financial punishment, but possibly protected his son. Moving away from Hasenpoth with a new bride certainly provided an opportunity to hide his new sons from birth and conscription registers. Whether this was the reason that Michel Behr moved is not established, but I think that it may have been.

The move to Gros-Dahmen is itself of interest. Situated in Courland, close to the current Lithuanian border, it was a large country estate belonging to a Baron Nicholas Schroder. It is known that on the estate he farmed sheep, pigs, carp, and honey. There was a large mill, and also a very large house. There are early descriptions of large buildings that provided housing for hundreds of servants and farm staff. The estate itself was one of many similar ones. There are descriptions of large parties held by the landowners, horse riding and hunting and other entertainments.

The Herzenberg's may well have facilitated the move to this estate. Robert Herzenberg had recorded that "Our family was distributed throughout the Pilten area in the estates of the barons such as Baer, Ropp, Osten-Laken, Vietiunhof, etc. They were dairy and wood retailers, but predominantly, distillers." He recalls further that ". . . there was a converted (from Judaism) "frau", the cousin of my mother, Rosa Herzberg, the daughter of great-aunt Balkan Herzberg (born Herzenberg) who had married the Baron Lowenstein of Kokenhusen. I knew this baroness personally." Schroder was a Christian German landowner. Ever since the crusades, many Germans had lived in the Baltic provinces of the Russian Empire. Riga was practically a German city. The Germans were not the majority but they were the

rulers. The Nobility as well as German members of the Great Guild (merchants) and the Small Guild (organized craftsmen) were responsible for promulgating the laws and rules in the cities and provinces. The Baltic Germans, especially the nobility, also frequently held high positions in the Tsar's government. This is not surprising, as almost all of the Tsars of the Russian Empire during the 19th century were ethnic Germans.

Nicholas Schroder had acquired the estate in 1878, and the family continued to own it until the Russian occupation in 1940. This estate as well as the surrounding estates, together with their employees, required the supply of numerous goods and services. These were provided by traders and artisans living on small settlements on land belonging to the estate.

Gros-Dahmen, as it was, no longer exists, and cannot be found on a modern map of Latvia. With the aid of Rita Bogdanova and Elena Spungina we were able to narrow the search to a small town with the modern Latvian name of Gramzda. I visited this, found the local municipal offices, and through the translation skills of Elena, I received confirmation from the "mayor" of the town that the site of the estate still existed.

With his kind assistance I was able to meet the current owner, Irena (no surname given) and her family who have been living there since 1953. They now occupy a very much smaller house that was built above the previous cellars of the estate, and which they built themselves over many decades. They have also restored the fish ponds. She was visited in 2000 by a descendent of Nicholas Schroder, a man at that point 99 years old. As a boy he had lived on the estate and she told us how he vividly described life on the estate.

"The house was very large. It was built at the water's edge, and was surrounded by water. There was a large carp pool, servant's buildings, and a timber workshop.

The beautiful garden was huge, and had many gardeners". Irena remembers that when she was a child that the gardens were still beautiful.

The house and all of the buildings were burned down in 1905. They were rebuilt, but again destroyed by the Russians, who then erected a small number of military hangers, still to be seen. Very few people lived in the area during communist times, nor live there now. The countryside still consists of forests and open fields. Around the estate the remnants of the gardens and ponds can clearly be seen, with beautiful winding drives lined with 200 year old trees.



Pictures:

Top Right - The remains of the tree lined carriage drive to the estate, over 1km long.

Bottom Right - Gramzda,(Gros-Dahmen), where Michel Behr had his business, and where Herman and Frida were born.

With this information available, I believe that there is now a plausible explanation for the previously mentioned puzzling issues. Michel Behr never did register the birth of his son Isador, in order to protect him from conscription. After Lea Friedman, his first wife died (1875), Michel remarried. He used the opportunity to leave Hasenpoth with the children from his first marriage. With his new wife Ernestina, he settled on the estate of Baron Schroder, around 1880/81 (probably soon after Baron Schroder himself arrived in 1878). He was able to establish a business based upon brewing. Typically in those times, licenses were granted to Jewish merchants to own a tavern and brew beer. They were heavily taxed for this privilege, whilst at the same time providing a useful service to the workers in the area.

Michel and Ernestina had 3 children - Julius, Herman and Frida. They were far from any Jewish community. The closest was at Skude, now called Skudodas (and in Lithuania). It was about a day's journey away. They would have had to travel about ten kilometres, by carriage, to join up with the railway line from Libau. Skude had a sizable Jewish community, and was under the auspices of the Rabbi of Telz. Telz, was a major centre for Jewish study, with a number of famous yeshivas.

They would not have had much opportunity to attend the synagogue, but at the same time would have been "conveniently unable" to register the births of their children. Michel died around 1889 while his children were still young (Julius 8, Herman 4 and Frida 1).

Unable to continue running the business, they had to leave Gros-Dahmen, and Ernestina went back to Goldingen with her children. It was during this same time frame that Isidor had either already left or did leave for South Africa. Like so many of his compatriots, economic opportunity as well as the avoidance of conscription would have been the motivating factors.

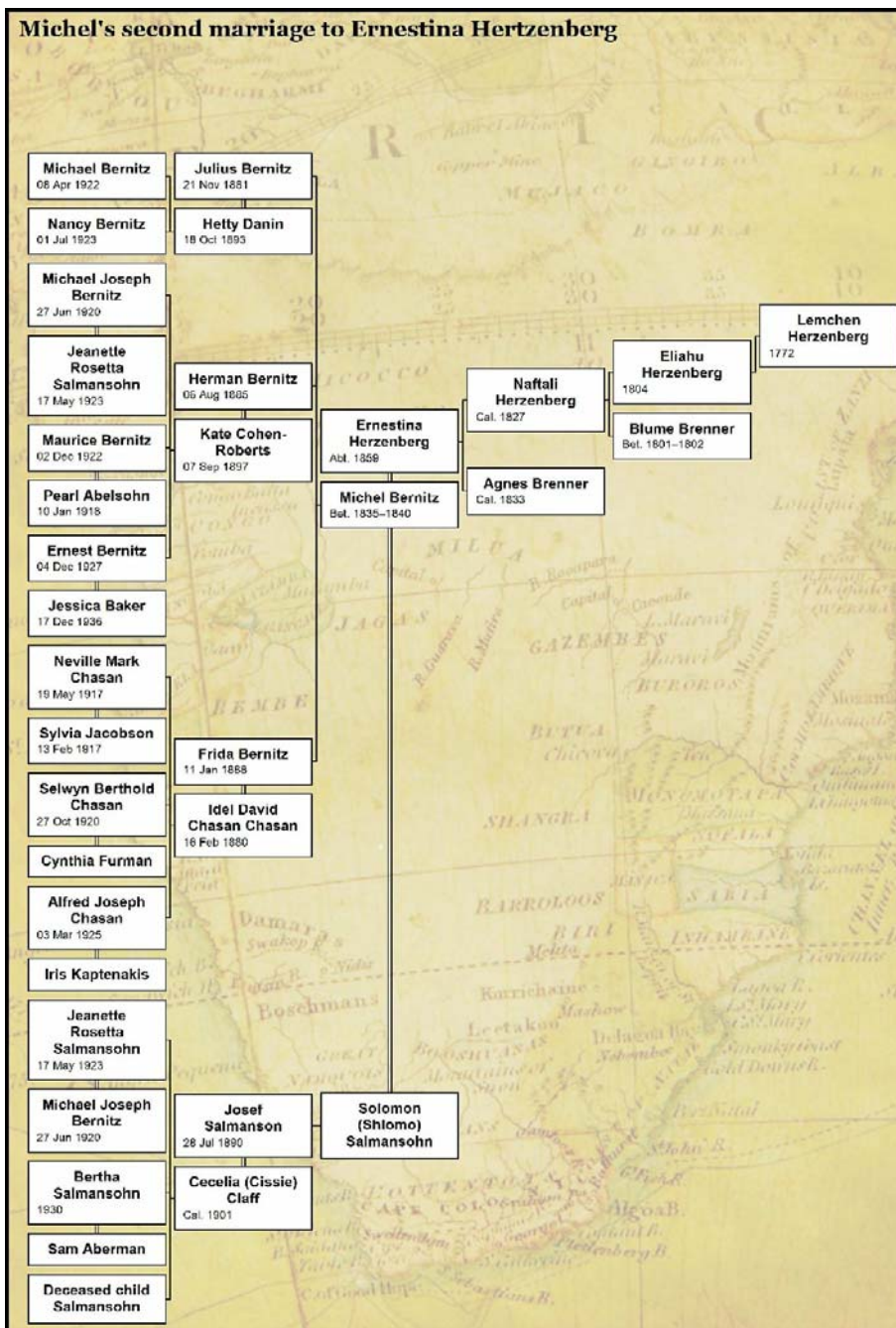
I have been unable to trace the burial place of Michel. His body would have been transported to an approved Jewish cemetery, probably some distance away. I believe that the birth certificate issued by the Rabbi at Skude was only done after Michel died and probably given to Ernestina.

The children would have observed a great deal about life on the noble estates. Their father as a merchant may well have had close contacts with the Baron.

Many of the Barons had good relations with the Jews. They may possibly have had contact with Ernestina's great aunt Rosa Herzberg, who had converted to Christianity and married the Baron Lowenstein of Kokenhusen, and was herself now a member of the noble classes

These childhood memories, retold many times, could have been the basis for the stories of the grand life they had remembered. In any event, it all ended when Michel died. As the lives of Ernestina and Herman are well documented after that time, there was certainly no evidence of further grandeur or titles.

Michel's second marriage to Ernestina Hertenberg



Ernestina Herzenberg

Ernestina was the sixth child of Naphtali (Naftali) Herzenberg and Agnes (Nese) Brenner. Naftali and Nese had four sons and six daughters: Leonhard, Joseph, Ignatz, Leopold, Sarah, Ernestine, Sophie, Fanny, Dora, and Lina. The Herzenberg's were a large family in Kurland. Their history has been well documented by the Herzenberg descendents. Robert Herzenberg, of the same generation as Herman Bernitz and his brothers and step-brothers wrote his reminiscences in the 1940's. These were translated into English by his son Leonardo in the 1990's. They provide much information about Ernestina and the Bernitz family. They further provide a fascinating view of the lifestyle of our ancestors' generations in Kurland

Ernestina's birth date is unknown. Her eldest brother Leonhard was born in 1856. As she gave birth to Julius in November 1881, she must have been fairly young when she was married (say 21). Therefore she probably married Michel around 1880/81, and was born in approx 1859/60. She was certainly much younger than Michael, possibly by 20-30 years.

Ernestina gave birth to three children with Michel - Julius, Herman and Frieda. She was also stepmother to Michel's four children by his first marriage to Lea Friedman - sons Isidore and Nochum and daughters Rahle and Pere. She was mother to a further child (Josef Salmonsohn) as well as three step-children in her second marriage. After Michel Behr Bernitz had died, Ernestina remarried. Her second husband was Shlomo Salmonsohn (Salmonson), a widower.

Left top. Ernestina, unknown child.

Left bottom: at the seder Table, 1919, Latvia.

Ernestina is first left. The man far right is her second husband Shlomo Salmonsohn; between them is one of their sons (Elias or Louis).



The following account is from the Reminiscences of Robert Herzenberg:

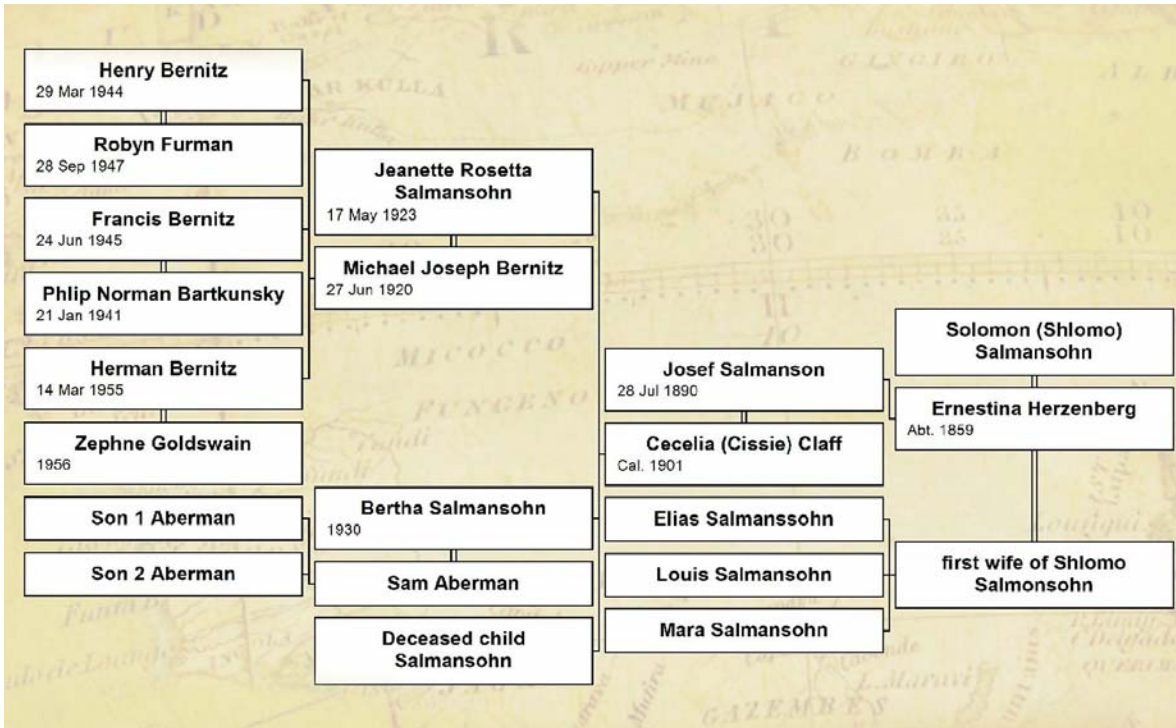
“Aunt Ernestine’s first husband was Michael Bernitz, who was a widower with many children. From this marriage came my cousins Julius, Herman (Hemske), and Frieda. Uncle Bernitz, also a brewer, died young. Aunt Ernestine stayed with the younger children at Grandmother's in Goldingen, cousin Julius came to my father and was raised with me. He was a little older than I, attended Blumenau's cheder, and then in 1895, when my father and uncle Joseph founded the firm Gebruder Herzenberg, he became an apprentice in the business. He stayed there a few more years after the death of my father with my brother George. He lived in our home, sharing my room until I left home in 1902. Soon after that my brother George drove him out of the business. He had a small factory making coconut mats in Libau. He had two children in his marriage, Mischa and Nancy. Mischa supposedly plays cello, of Nancy I know nothing. When cousin Herman became older, he also came to Libau as an apprentice at Gebr. Herzenberg and uncle Joseph took him into his house. Times there were not good for him. But he was so cheerful and imperturbable that he tolerated it very well. He immigrated to South Africa still before the first world war, where he became fat and wealthy. His sister Frieda also followed him there, where, as far as I know, she is married and happy. Aunt Ernestine, in a second marriage, married a widower, Salmonsohn, with whom she had a son, whom I hardly knew. He worked in my father's business, and he was also driven out by my brother George after father died. I don't know what became of him.”

Photo left:

The grave of my great-great- grandmother, Ernestina (Nese) Herzenberg, born Brenner. She is buried in a plot in Libau Jewish cemetery next to her father Naftali Brenner. The cemetery is well preserved, and there are a number of other family members buried there.



Ernestina's second marriage to Shlomo Salmansohn



When Ernestina married Shlomo (his first wife had died), she also became stepmother to his children from his first marriage, a son and a daughter.

In all, Shlomo had 6 children, sons Louis and Elias, daughter Johanna, Sofia and Mara by his first marriage, and Joe with Ernestina in his second marriage.

We know that Elias and Louis both immigrated to South Africa, whilst Mara remained in Goldingen in Latvia. There is no evidence that she ever married, and she did not have children. Her handwriting and letters indicate that she was not well educated; perhaps she has some learning difficulties. She probably died during the Holocaust.



A photo from Mara, with a handwritten inscription on back:

*Dear brother.
I am sending you my picture. Hope you will appreciate it. Write how you find it - does it do me justice? I am well and hope you are the same.*

*Many regards
from your sister
Mara*

The Shtetl of Goldingen



History of the Jewish Community in Goldingen

It is believed that the first Jewish settlement in Goldingen began at the end of the seventeenth century. From 1799 Jews in the region were granted civic rights, and Jewish communities here grew quickly. In 1800, there were 658 Jewish merchants and craftsmen living in the Goldingen district (fifteen percent of the total population). In 1801, the first official synagogue was built and a burial society (chevra kadisha) was founded. A short while later a "Talmud Torah" school was built and a society for help to poor brides (gmiluth Hassidim) and other Jewish social organizations were formed. The first rabbi assumed office in 1826.

Above. The main square and Town hall of Goldingen.

Now called Kuldiga, Goldingen was part of Courland. Ernestina and many Herzenbergs originated there. After Michael died Herman grew up and went to school in the town. Today it has a well preserved old town centre, and is an important historical travel destination in Latvia.

As had his mother before him, Herman grew up in a vibrant Jewish community. The family were well to do. Jews enjoyed relative safety. Herman had had a good early childhood, and attended Blumenau's cheder - a Hebrew school in Goldingen.



Above: Jewish school, built next to the main and the summer shul and Rabbi's house.

By 1835, the Jewish population had grown to 2330, fifty-seven percent of the population. The first state school for Jewish boys was organized in 1850. By 1901 there were three private Jewish schools in the town; one for boys and the other two for girls. The languages of instruction at the school were German and Hebrew. Goldingen Jews were strongly influenced by German culture.

From the end of the 19th century their economic situation began to improve, and the Jewish merchants in some cases supplanted the Baltic German businessmen. Jews built a flour mill and factories for the manufacture of matches and needles and established a credit fund for Jewish merchants and tradesmen. However, as economic and political

times became more difficult in the latter half of the nineteenth century, Goldingen Jews began to emigrate. Some stayed in Latvia but moved to the larger port cities of Windau or Libau (as did Herman and some of the Herzenberg family) where there was greater economic activity. Many others emigrated to the U.S.A. or South Africa. Steamship services become more affordable, more regular and safer.

Agents of European shipping lines encouraged potential emigrants to travel to destinations according to the economic needs of the shipping companies. "Package deals" for Baltic Jews to South Africa, travelling via England, were one such incentive; passage to the U.S. via Hamburg was another.

Julius Bernitz



Julius was the eldest son of Michael and Ernestina. When Michael died life was obviously difficult for the family. Julius being the eldest was sent to live with his uncle Leonhard in Libau, where he was raised with his cousin Robert. Robert recollected “he was a little older than I, attended Blumenau's cheder, and then in 1895, when my father and uncle Joseph founded the firm Gebruder Herzenberg, he became an apprentice in the business (aged 16).

According to Robert Herzenberg “Julius became an apprentice in the business. He stayed there a few more years after the death of my father with my brother George. He lived in our home, sharing my room until I left home in 1902. Soon after that my brother George drove him out of the business”.

Julius married Hettie Danin in Riga in 1921. He founded a factory making coconut (coir) carpets in Libau. When the Soviets nationalized the factory in 1940, they appointed him to manage it, which he did until the arrival of the Nazis in 1941.



Above left: Julius, Liebau, 1901

Above right:

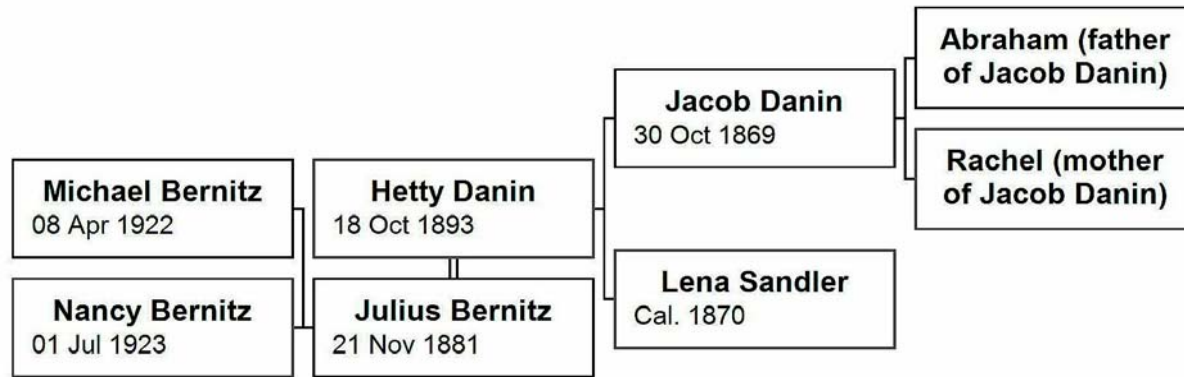
The inscription on the back of this photograph reads:

Geschäfts Personal, in firma “Gebruder Herzenberg”
Libau 29 März 1906

As numbered in picture.

1. Mark Schwarz (1st apprentice)
2. Joseph Herzenberg
3. Leonhard Herzenberg
4. Joseph Pecker (2nd apprentice)
5. Herman Schwarz
6. Adolph Jacobsohn
7. Leopold Hirschberg
8. Rudolph Gittelsohn
9. Julius Bernitz
10. Joseph Perlman
11. Salomon Schachter
12. Samuel Katz

Hettie Bernitz, born Danin



Hettie (Hetty, Harietta) was born in Latvia in 1893. She was one of eight children born to her father Jakob Danin and her mother Lena, nee Sandler.

Her family immigrated to England around 1910 (when she was 17), to follow her father, who as a Socialist had been forced to flee Latvia to avoid arrest. Jakob dealt in amber, and after becoming a British citizen he used to visit Libau to make purchases. As a young adult Hettie had accompanied him on one of his periodic trips to Libau. She met Julius; the two courted and were eventually married in Riga in 1921.

They had 2 children, Nancy and Michael (Mischa). They were accomplished musicians, Nancy on the cello, and Michael on piano.



Right: Hettie Bernitz (born Danin)

Life in Liebau

Unlike his siblings, Julius had decided to remain in Latvia and make his life there. After the independent Republic of Latvia was proclaimed on November 18, 1918, Jews were granted full civil rights for the first time. Interwar Latvia was a comparatively pleasant place for Jews to live in. A right-wing takeover in 1934 was not accompanied by anti-Jewish violence. By the time that Jewish community life was interrupted by Soviet occupation in 1940, it was too late for most to leave.

Libau (now called Liepaja) is a Baltic port city on the northern end of Lake Liepaja. After Courland passed into the control of the Russian Empire in 1795 the city had grown rapidly. Breakwaters had been built and by 1876 the construction of a number of railways ensured that a large proportion of central Russian trade passed through Liepaja.

Early in the twentieth century the port of Liepaja became a central point of embarkation for immigrants travelling to the United States. By 1906 the direct service to the United States was used by 40,000 migrants a year.

Immanuel Blauschild reminisced about his youth in Liebau: "Libau was a beautiful city. There was a belt of parks between the town and the sea with its clean white beach. We used to swim for hours in the balmy sea and then lingered on the beach eating sandwiches which our mothers had prepared from fresh barley bread still warm from the bakery. Summer was a wonderful season. In the park, where mothers wheeled their babies and where lovers sat on benches, there was a fairytale pavilion and a bathhouse built in neo-classic style." "From the main harbour there was a huge port for ocean liners but there was also a small fishermen's harbour permeated by the smell of smoked cod".

The parks, beaches and bath house are still in use today, much as Blauschild described them.

"Kornstrasse and Grosse Strasse had rich shops, most of them owned by Jews. There were cafes, and we used to sit in Stein's cellar or at Peter's opposite the Post Office. Libau had many schools, Jewish and gentile and many synagogues, and beautiful churches of many denominations".

Julius and Hettie had two children, Michael and Nancy, both gifted musicians. The city possessed good music facilities, a great orchestra, good teachers. The children excelled at music, often playing with the city orchestra.

Julius was the commodore of the local yacht club. For a long time they would have lived well, whilst he would have known that life for his brothers and sister in South Africa was not always easy. He doubtless heard of both good and bad experiences from cousins who had gone to the USA. We know that he received visits from his own family (his nephew Alfred visited from South Africa) as did Hettie's family (see the account written by Philip Shapiro of his visit) shortly before WWII. They urged him to at the least send Nancy and Michael to either England or South Africa. He initially refused, believing that the Latvian Jews would not be affected. By the time he acquiesced and asked the family to take his children, it was too late. They were all murdered in 1941.

A visit by Philip Shapiro to Libau.

Philip is the son of Hettie's late sister. This visit took place shortly before the start of WWII. He described it thus: "The eldest of the Danin children was Hettie, who was one of three daughters, the others being Pauline and my Mother, Rose. Mother had corresponded regularly with Hettie, since she had married Julius Bernics and settled in Libau (also known then as Liepaja). In addition to his nautical activities as Commodore of the Latvian Yacht Club, Julius had a thriving business, manufacturing raffia and coconut matting which he exported all over the world.



Post Card Images of Old Liebau

*Clockwise from top left:
South Liebau c. 1900.
Bridge across the Liepaja canal.
The old fishing harbor, suffused with the aroma of smoked fish
Rose square was, and still is the centre of Liepaja's social life.*



He and Hettie had two fine children, Michael (known as Mickey, or Mischa) and Nancy, aged 20 and 19 respectively. (Note: I believe they would have been younger; they were born in 1922 and 1923 respectively). They were both outstanding musicians, Mickey a cellist and Nancy a pianist and they played regularly with the Latvian State Symphony Orchestra. They were anxious for all of us to go over there for a holiday with them and Hettie pressed Mother constantly in her letters. Father refused to go, but, he allowed Mother to go, taking Tina and myself with her.

The ferry from Harwich to the Hook of Holland and the long, long train journey to Berlin is somewhat hazy now, but my memories of Berlin are as clear as if they were only yesterday . . . later that magic day, we boarded our connection for the long, boring train journey through the Polish Corridor, Memel and finally Libau.

“. . . arriving at Aunt Hettie's was really wonderful. I remember the delicious smell of real coffee brewing, (something we never ever had at home) and the enormous kringl (a traditional plaited honey-cake made to welcome visitors).

The Bernics' house was shabbily elegant, warm and comfortable, a place where, even as a child, I felt there was love in abundance. It was set among lovely gardens with orchards full of fruit trees and soft fruit bushes, a delicious place for a child to get lost in. Sometimes, in the evenings Mickey and Nancy would play for us, to my particular delight, with my leanings towards following a career in music even at that young age.

The family dog was Bubitchka, a bad tempered little black and brown elderly Dachshund who would lurk under the table and nip any ankles or hands which came his way. I gave him a wide berth. Custor, the factory guard dog, was altogether different. He was an enormous German Shepherd with a reputation for being unapproachable, but with me, he was a 'pussy-cat'.

That dog adored me and followed me everywhere. He even let me ride on his back, jockey-style. The workers in Uncle's factory looked on in sheer amazement at the spectacle of a thin, pale boy astride an enormous, ferocious dog.

The factory wasn't too far from the house and was full of wonderful machinery for making coir and raffia mats, which were exported all over the world.

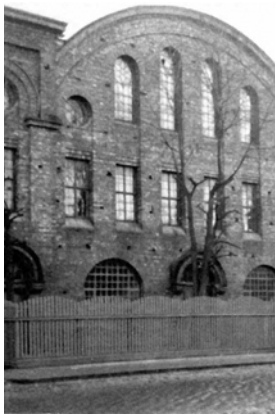
Uncle Juley would take all of us out for long, warm, sunny days, sailing up the long peaceful rivers. We would moor up somewhere and picnic, and there were always wild strawberries and blueberries to be found in the woods. Other times we would go to the sandy beaches to paddle in the Baltic Sea and pick up the abundant amber washed up by the tides. But all too soon our idyllic holiday came to an abrupt end. The Nazis had become all-powerful in Germany and Uncle Juley thought it best that we make tracks for home and safety. That was easier said than done, as it would have been foolish to attempt travelling across Germany with their violently anti-Semitic regime. In the three short months that we had been there, things had changed dramatically.

Uncle Juley used influence in maritime circles to get us passage on a cargo boat of the Baltic Line, a scruffy old 'tub' named 'Baltanglia', which plied regularly between Memel and London. We had to take a train from Libau to Memel and board the boat there.

The goodbyes were harrowing and tearful. I think they all must have had a presentiment of what was to come. After we got back, Mother had only one more letter from Aunt Hettie. Because of censorship, she had written cryptic messages such as, 'It looks as if our neighbours are planning to move in with us. At least they will be better than our other neighbours' Mother could only interpret the first set of 'neighbours' to mean the Russians and the second set the Nazis - the rest is history! We heard nothing more from Aunt Hettie and her family.

Top Row, from left:

Liebau house of Prayer. One of Liebau's shuls. Julius, Michael and Nancy in Liebau, circa 1940. The beach, as it is today.



Bottom row, from left.

Wooden villas in Liebau. These were built by wealthy Jews near the beach, and are still being used. The bath house, next to the beach; Jews would go here every Friday afternoon for their weekly bath before Shabbat. It is rather delapidated now. The beach, early 1900's.

The Soviet Occupation of 1940-1941

Although there were growing levels of anti-Semitism (in common with other countries in central Europe at that time), life was tolerably good until June 1940 when the USSR occupied Latvia. Latvia had effectively been ceded by Hitler to Stalin under the Molotov/von Ribbentrop pact. The annexation by the USSR split the Jewish community. Many working class Jews (and many Latvians) initially welcomed the Red Army, trusting communist claims of social justice and worker power. Other Jews feared persecution as Bourgeoisie and class enemies. It soon turned out that persecution also extended to others including Zionists, religious Jews, moderate leftists, former politicians etc. Under the Soviet occupation, mass deportations to exile or Gulag camps in Siberia became the order of the day. Some 15,000 people were deported at this time - with Jews being nearly three times over-represented in the deportations. With hindsight, perhaps they were the lucky ones - although many of them would not have survived either. Records show that 60% of those who fled to the Soviet Union survived the War. (compared to just 2% who survived the Nazi killings in Liepaja).

The Nazi Occupation of 1941-1945

The Soviet occupation lasted almost exactly one year. Germany occupied Libau on 29 June 1941. By that time the remaining Jewish population of Libau numbered 6500, with many having been previously deported by the Soviets, killed in the battle for Libau or having fled to the Soviet Union in the days immediately preceding the German invasion. More might have fled the Nazi invasion but men were not allowed to leave (other than party and government officials) and others were turned away at the Latvian/USSR border for lack of proper papers. Besides, many Libauer Jews remembered their affinity to Germany and its culture and language as well as the benign occupation of 1915-18, and they expected nothing worse than discrimination and perhaps forced labour. This hope was soon to be brutally shattered.

In 1941 Liepaja was among the first cities captured when Nazi Germany began the war with the Soviet Union. The first SS Einsatzgruppen arrived on the very first day of the Nazi occupation, killed a number of Jews and recruited volunteers for the Latvian "Self-Defence" unit. Some 47 Jews were shot by the Einsatzgruppen and their Latvian collaborators on 3 July 1941 and from then on mass executions became commonplace.

Executions took place every few days. Jewish families were evicted from their apartments and were forced to live on rations that were just one-half of the skimpy Latvian rations. The synagogues were razed on the order of the SS, who forced Jews to trample on their sacred scrolls.

Mass round-ups and shootings (now including women and children) continued first near the Libau Lighthouse, then by the nearby fish factory, then by the Navy base and finally on the sand dunes of Skede. The victims were force marched to Skede, made to undress in the freezing wind and snow and shot in front of mass graves. During a three day period from the 15th to 17th December 1941, in the height of a freezing Baltic winter, 2749 Jews (mainly women and children) were killed by three German and Latvian firing squads.

We do not know exactly when and where Julius, Hettie, Michael and Nancy were murdered. The archival records do have an entry to show that Julius Bernics and Michaels Bernics were arrested. And a further record states that Julius Bernics, together with his wife, daughter and son were shot during the period of German occupation. According to testimony given to Yad Vashem by her brother Adolph Danin, Hettie was murdered at her home together with her husband and children.

They are all commemorated on the Wall of Remembrance in the Jewish Cemetery in Libau. The wall lists the names of the over 6500 Libau Jews who died during the Nazi occupation.

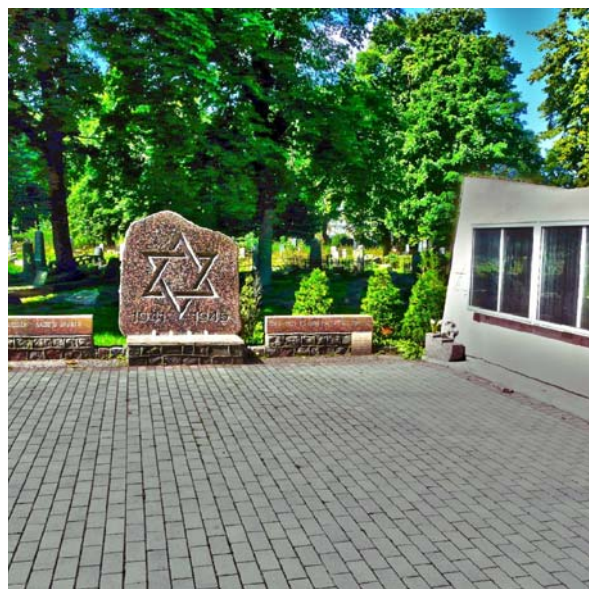


Above: The sand dunes at Skede. During a three day period in December 1941, at the height of a freezing Baltic winter, 2749 Jews (mainly women and children) were killed by German and Latvian firing squads.

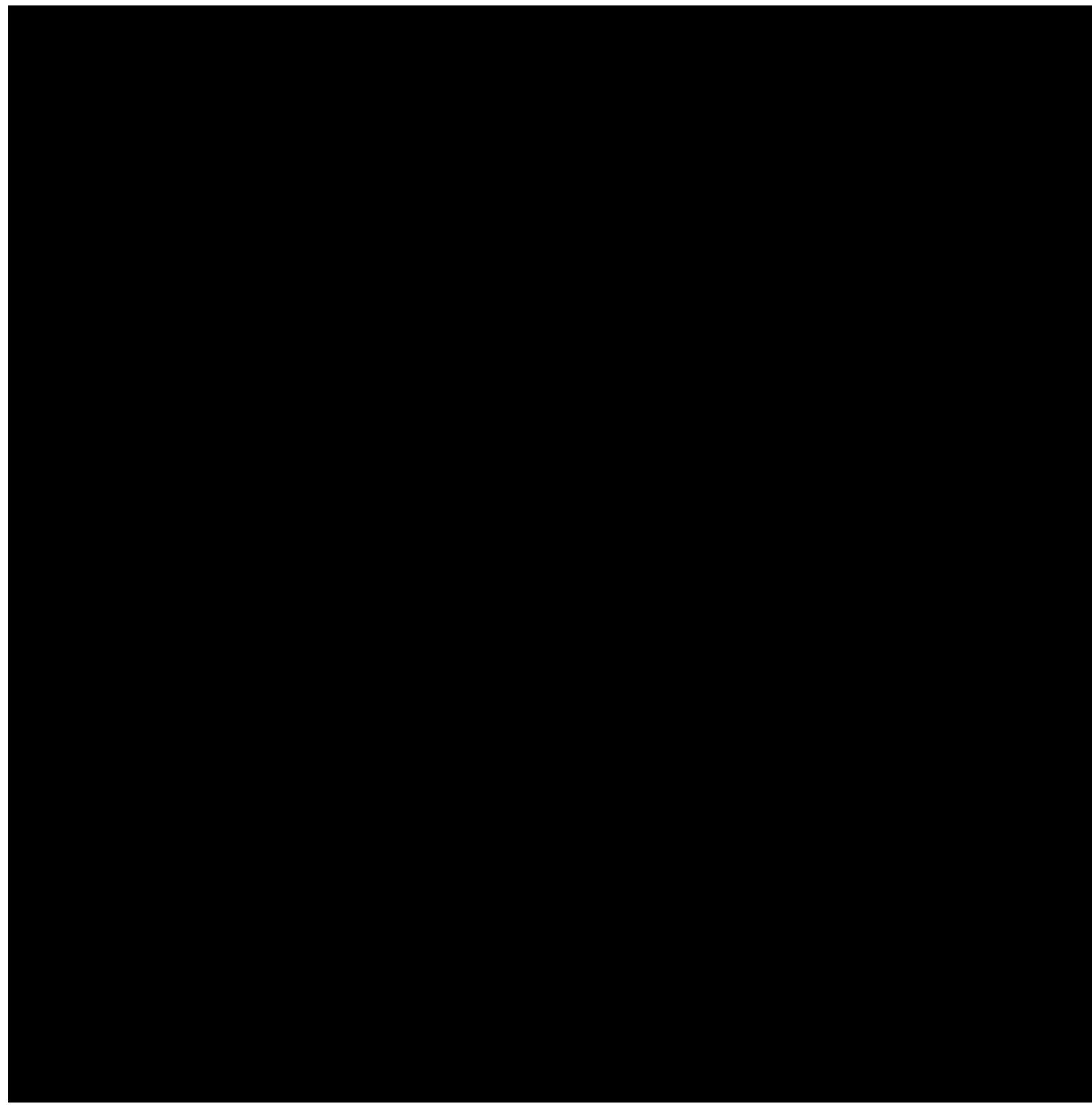
Photographic evidence of these Nazi atrocities exists. The photos of the killings at Skede are amongst the most notorious images of the holocaust. In recent years, the Jewish community in Libau have erected a memorial at Skede, in the form of a vast stone menorah lying in the sand (see next page), and a memorial wall at the Liepaja cemetery .

In June, 1942, a ghetto was established. This ghetto was liquidated in October, 1943, with the remaining Jews sent to the Kaiserwald camp, near Riga. When the Red Army entered Liepaja on May 9, 1945, there were no more than 30 Jews remaining.

Left: The memorial wall at the Liepaja Jewish Cemetery includes the names of Julius, Hettie, Nancy and Michael Bernitz.









Isidor Bernitz



Isidor, son of Michel Behr Bernitz and Lea Friedman, was a half-brother to my grandfather Herman, and my grand uncle. He was the first family member to immigrate to South Africa.

The dates are uncertain. But according to his daughter Joanna, "Isidor was definitely one of the first Jews in Smithfield prior to the Boer War, definitely fought in De Wet's Commando, owned the farm Caledondraai, which he had to mortgage to Lewis Suzman in the 1920's, was President of the Smithfield Zionist Movement and was also a Freemason.

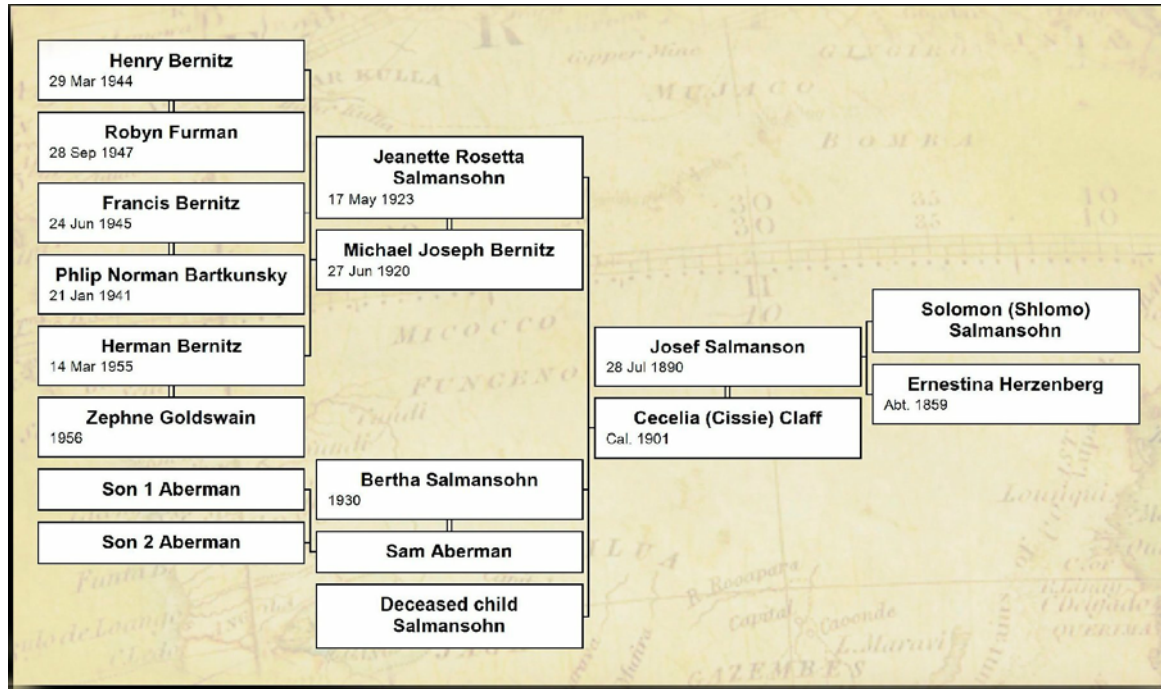
Smithfield had a small congregation of 40 Jews and a Rabbi. Isidor owned a store and the first garage in Smithfield".

My grandfather Herman travelled to South Africa to join Isidore and worked in Isidor's store. Isidor married Polly (Pescha Lipka) Suzman who was born in 1889 in Salant, Lithuania (the same shtetl that my maternal grandmother Sara Tsipe Chasan originated from).

The photograph above was taken on an occasion when rifles were being surrendered by the Boers to the British. The army camp can be seen in the background. Isidor is right of centre with his hat raised. The corrugated iron building is Isidor's Smithfield Supply Store, Below: Smithfield Supply Store, early 1900's. Central in doorway wearing a white hat is Isidor. To his right, hand in pocket is my grandfather Herman Bernitz.



Josef (Joe) Salmonsohn

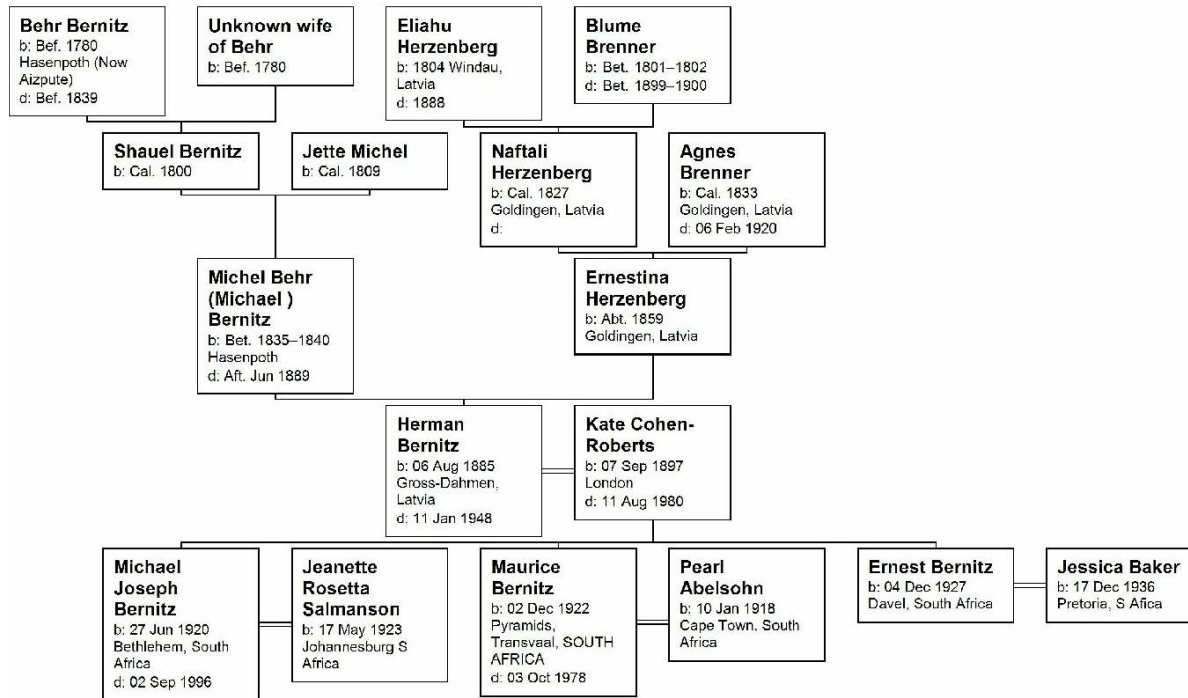


Joe Salmomonso(h)n was born in Goldingen, Latvia on July 28th, 1890, the eldest son of Ernestina from her second marriage. He was a half-brother to my grandfather Herman Bernitz. Joe died in Johannesburg in April, 1967. Before he immigrated to South Africa, Joe worked in the Herzenberg family business. From the Herzenberg reminiscences: "Aunt Ernestine, in a second marriage, married a widower, Salmonsohn, with whom she had a son . . . He worked in my father's business, and he was also driven out by my brother George after father died." Throughout his early life in South Africa Joe corresponded with his family. From his correspondence we know that life was difficult for the family in Latvia.

Right, Joe married Cecelia (Cissie) Klaff on 9 March 1922. They lived in Johannesburg.



Herman Bernitz (My Paternal grandfather)



We know from the Certificate issued by the assistant to the district Rabbi of Telz that the second son of Michel Behr, himself the son of Shaul Bernitz and his wife Esther, (the daughter of Naphtal) was Hirsh (written in German as Herman). He was born on August 6 1885 in the estate Gross-Dahmnen; and he was circumcised on August 13 by Morduch Shatz.

The certificate itself was issued on June 25th 1889, probably to Ernestina after Michel had died. We can calculate that Michel died around that date, possibly even before Frida was born in January 1888. We know that Herman went with his mother and sister to live with their grandmother in Goldingen whilst still young children. There Ernestina married Shlomo Salmonsohn, and their son Josef was born in 1890.

Herman lived in Gros-Dahmen until the age of four. He was sent to Libau as a young man to be apprenticed at Gebr. Herzenberg, and lived with his uncle Joseph. Robert Herzenberg wrote that “times there were not good for him, but he was so cheerful and imperturbable that he tolerated it very well.”

Right: Certificate issued by the assistant of the Telz district rabbi in the estate Shkud. Translation: I certify that I know that the Hasenpoth petty bourgeois Michel Behr son of Shaul Bernitz and his wife Esther daughter of Naphtal had two sons and one daughter born in the estate Gross-Dahmnen: the first son Joel was born on November 21, 1881 and was circumcised on November 28 by Hirsh Kobrya, the second son Hirsh listed in German as Herman born on August 6, 1885 and circumcised on August 13 by Morduch Shatz, and the daughter Frida was born on January 11, 1888. Certified by me on June 25, 1889. (Signed) Jankel Joffe

Судамосная

Дано сия ома Намощника Минусовской уездной прав-
 бина Ник. Шугда в том что по свидению Ми-
 ио доверенным своим ома у Засконица проку-
 ратора Тогенпотера о выезде Микела Кера
 Шугрова Бернца и жена его Петра наф-
 толовца рогнува в уиение Сроудинена двух
 етновей и одна год, первый сина Тона
 рогнува в 1881 году в январе на дора 21^е дня
 и обрада оформления совершено Туринкоре
 в январе 28 дня, второй Туринкоре гуарит
 ся попперка Туринкоре рогнува в 1885 году
 в январе Августа 6^е дня и обрада оформления
 совершено Нордка гуаца в 13^е Августа
 а год срига рогнува в 1888 году в январе
 Января 11^е дня в том свидененном
 Рассина ном. Шугда Тона 25^е мая 1888 года

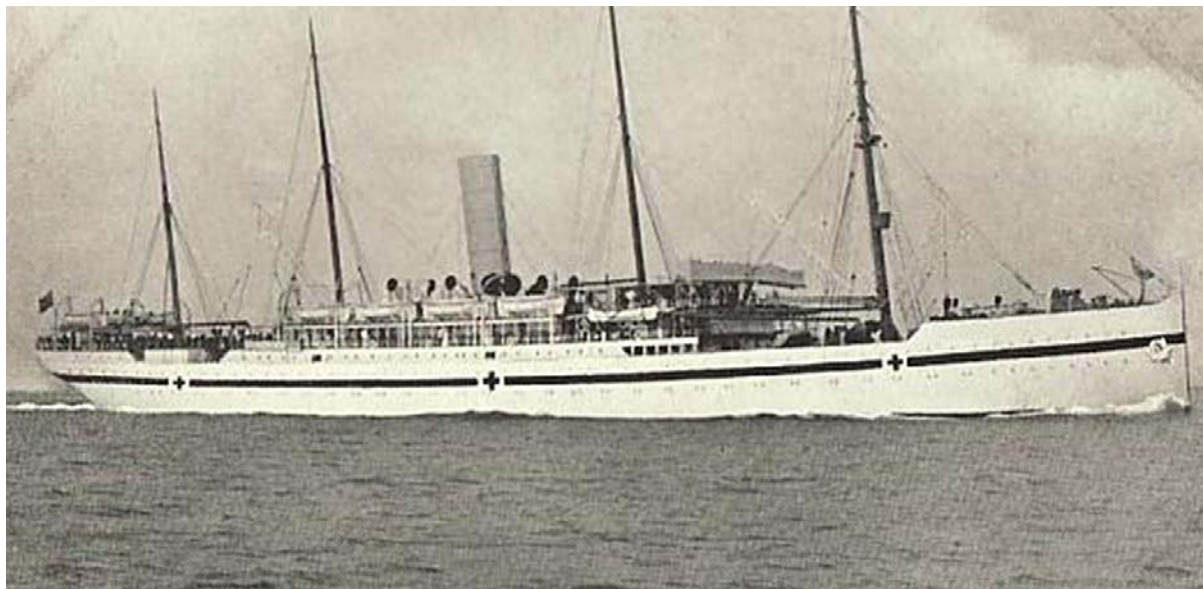
Секрет Шугра

Судамосная

№ 41



Emigration to South Africa.



Above: The Union Castle Line ship Braemar Castle.

Herman's passport was issued in 1906. He would have travelled initially to England, probably from the port of Libau. He sailed from London to Cape Town aboard the Braemar Castle, and then travelled overland to join his brother Isidor. Ship's records described Herman as a draper (this follows from his apprenticeship at Gebr. Herzenberg).

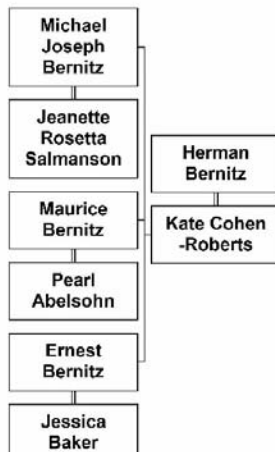
The fare included "every requisite for the voyage, including bedding, linen, all cabin fittings and three meals daily.

His ticket showed that he had paid for the transport of a saddle and a plough as excess baggage. I do not know whether these were intended for personal use, or were trade goods.

After Herman had arrived in Cape Town, he travelled overland to join Isidor in Smithfield. He travelled by steam train to Ladybrand and continued from there by horse and carriage. The journey from Libau took about 2 months. Herman joined Isidor in Smithfield in 1906.

Early Life in South Africa

According to Ernie Bernitz - "I don't know how long my father Herman remained in Smithfield- probably until he married Kate Roberts. He then went to Pyramids where grandpa Joe Roberts had a store." My cousin Prof. Herman Bernitz has a silver trophy presented to Herman Bernitz, on September 1st 1911 for achieving first place in a billiards tournament at the Royal Hotel, Smithfield. Herman married Kate Cohen-Roberts on the 15th September, 1919 in Johannesburg. They had three children.



I am not sure whether Herman went to work for Joe Roberts because he married Kate, or whether he met Kate when he went to work for Joe. Pyramids is a very small town in the Transvaal, not much more than a railway stop. The store was probably a general dealership supplying the local farmers. It was called 'Pyramids' or 'Pyramid' as a reminder of the discovery by the Voortrekkers, in about 1840, of a river flowing northwards, which they believed to be the source of the Nile.

Ernie continues "They must have stayed in Pyramids until at least after Mo was born (1922). I don't know where Mickey was born. It could also have been in

Pyramid in 1920. I do know that Mickey went to school in Bethlehem, and Mo was sent to Bethal. Herman must have left Pyramid after 1923, when he went to Davel where he took over the 7-roomed Davel Hotel. Davel was a very small town, between Bethal and Ermelo in the Transvaal. This part of the Transvaal was farming country, including potato farming. They struggled there until 1934 when he and Kate went to Johannesburg to start an agency for the big potato farmers, a business that never took off during the two years they were there.

Below: Herman married Kate Cohen-Roberts on the 15th September, 1919 in Johannesburg.



He was then financed by a liquor company to buy the Carlton Hotel in Witbank. When they took over the hotel in Witbank I joined them.”

The early Carlton Hotel

From the Witbank News Centenary edition:

“The Carlton Hotel was a centre for travellers en route to the then Lourenco Marques (Maputo) and the hub of social activities for miners, farmers and local socialites. It was situated on the corner of Main and President Streets and was housed in the first building that was made from wood and iron. After the railway line from Pretoria to Delagoa Bay had been completed in November 1894, there were regular trains running from Pretoria to Delagoa Bay and back, which took in coal at Witbank Station. The area in the vicinity of the station was still underdeveloped. One of the strong points of this hotel was that a porter would meet guests at the station. Each room was provided with hot and cold water on tap and electric lights and fittings. The hotel had 60 rooms, two large dining rooms and a beautifully furnished public lounge as well as a large hall for concerts and dances. Next to the hotel a large concert hall was erected, which was later known as the Carlton Theatre. As from 1909 regular electric bioscopes were shown in the theatre.”

From Ernie Bernitz: “When Dad took over, the original building had been demolished, and the new double story building had been built. It was of brick construction, but it had wooden outside passages, as the sewage system was the old style bucket system. The municipality would come around at night and collect the buckets. They used mule drawn carts, with African labourers carrying the buckets. This was changed to a motorized system (tankers with petrol suction pumps) a year or so. Later a proper water borne system was installed. Imagine, you could not have en-suite bathrooms; they all had to be built on to landings and passages accessible to the "Shit" (unseen and unsmelled heroes.) It was in 1939 that the big changes came. The building 'Escombe Chambers' next to the then 'Witbank Theatre', later to become the 'Carlton Theatre', was demolished. We built the 'New Wing' - fourteen new rooms, six toilets, four bath-rooms (communal) plus a room en-suite for my Mom and Dad. The entire wooden framework was removed, and the toilets would be connected to the newly laid town waterborne sewage system. All this was completed before the war. The Carlton was now state of the art, and was more than my Dad had ever dreamed of”.

Below: The early Carlton Theatre (called the Witbank Theatre in its earliest days – pre 1939).



The Bernitz and Blum Families

It was at this point in time the Bernitz and Blum families (Ruth's parents) first came into contact.

Ernie continues: "I first met Ruth's parents, Paul & Bobbie in 1940 or 1941. Witbank was very different in the pre war days, the Carlton was the hub of the business and social scene, amongst the then mainly Welsh and Scottish coal mining community, the Bar trade was the back bone of the business, and was totally run on credit, using bar Cards which were paid at month's end). Mom and Dad (Herman and Kate) were so busy trying to run the business, that they needed a Bookkeeper and someone in the office. I don't know if Dad advertised, but Max Frenkel (see Blum history for relationships) arrived, and took over all the office and bookkeeping functions. The business needed more staff, and Frenkel recommended the Blums who were at the time working at the Alexander Hotel in Germiston for a Mr. Shatz. The Blum's then came to the Carlton in Witbank. Paul took over the bar, and kitchen while Bobbie helped Paul with the kitchen and Frenkel in the office. They were experienced, and did not need any coaching; they proved to be popular and polite. They spoke English well (with an accent). Max then married Irma, who was appointed as a housekeeper (the Hotel by then had 76 rooms and was always full)".

"Granny Louise, after becoming a widow lived with Mabel (now married to Lou Tyler) in Bethlehem. Later Mickey and I lived with them there. Your Dad was in boarding school in Bethal. Later Mickey went to WITS University and your Dad to Pretoria Technical College. I went to school in Witbank.

In December 1936 the Tyler's re-located to Witbank, together with Granny Louise. Mabel and Lew helped in the Hotel for a while, and then they left to take over the Central Hotel in Newcastle. Granny Louise remained with Kate in the Carlton. In those days the

family had a flat in the Hotel. A new wing was added where my Dad & Mom built an en-suite room with an adjoining room for me. I well remember Dad recovering from his first heart attack, coming up every afternoon for his rest, and you and Henry being brought to him so that he could play with the two of you. You were only a few months old, so that must have been at the end of 1944."

The War Years

"My experience of the war was limited. We had a RAF flying school in Witbank, Most of the Witbank locals were serving in the the Sixth Armoured division, which took a terrible beating from Rommel at the beginning of the desert campaign. My eldest brother Michael was a bomber pilot in the Desert campaign, while Maurice was also in the air force, as an armourer in the Italian campaign. I used to go to the Natal South coast with my Aunt and Uncle every year on holiday. It was packed with wives and children who were evacuated from London during the Blitz.

All the men were in service, so I was a volunteer teenage life saver, and I pulled many kids and mothers out of the unfamiliar surf they had never before seen. (Ernie had contracted polio as a child and has always had a severely wasted leg. He has never allowed himself to be handicapped, and as a child he compensated by becoming an extremely strong swimmer. His lifesaving in spite of this handicap is a testimony to his determination).

"Dad was persuaded to move out of the Hotel, and to go home every night, and so they bought the house at 21 Rhodes street. And for the first time in the history of Herman's Dynasty, the Bernitz's had an official home. Sadly it was too late. Although he moved in he never enjoyed the genuine pleasure of retirement. Granny lived her last few years, as did Dad, in Rhodes Street. He passed away in your Granny Sara Tsipe Abelson's house in Sea Point. Your Dad and Mom, you and Jill, moved in with Kate, until moving to your own new house in Plumer Street (1949).



Above: Herman Bernitz, circa 1944

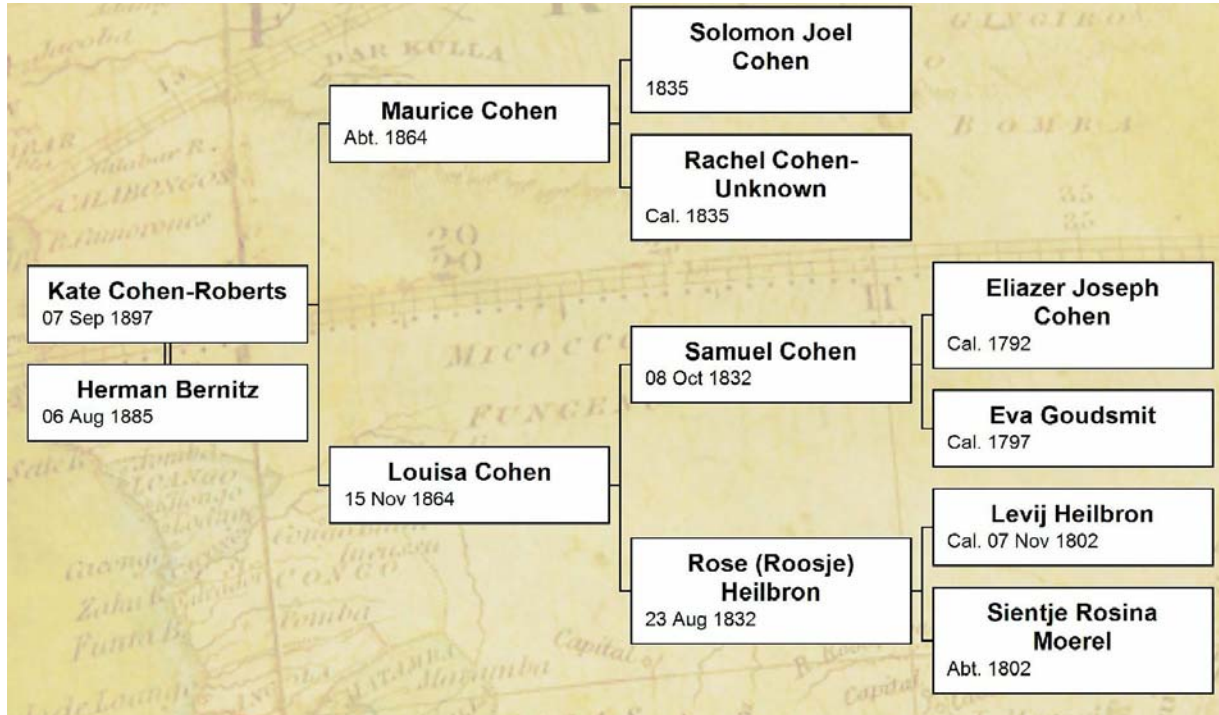
Below: Herman with Mickey and Mo.



*Above: Herman and Kate with Mo, Mickey and Ernie., and Frieda Chasan (born Bernitz) with Alfred Bernitz and Neville Chasan, 1930.
Below: Herman and Kate.*



Kate Cohen (Roberts) – My Paternal Grandmother

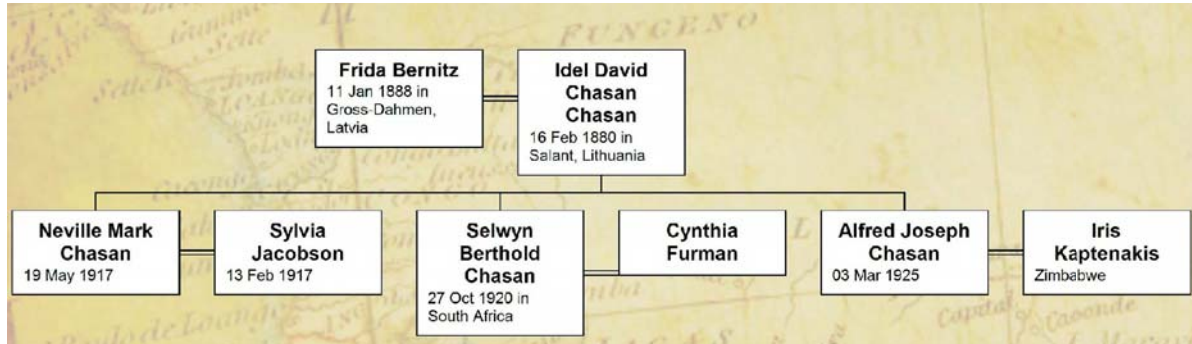


See History of the Cohen Families for full details.

My paternal grandmother Kate (Cohen) Roberts, was born in England in 1897, during a visit by her parents to London. She was descended from two different (and unrelated) Cohen families. Her paternal grandfather Solomon Joel Cohen, a boot-maker, was a Latvian Jew. Her maternal grandfather was Samuel Cohen, a Dutch Jew, who at various times made a living as a bootmaker, and also as a cigar maker. Her parents had both originated from London, but were living in South Africa when they were married. Kate's mother was born Louisa Cohen in London in 1864, the 4th of 11 children. Louisa's parents were Samuel Cohen and Rose Heilbron, both from Holland, who had settled in London between 1856 and 1858 with one child. They went on to have 10 more children in London, before the entire family immigrated to South Africa around

1890. Louisa married Joe Guites, and they had two children, Theodore (b.1882) and Rose (b.1885). She had married before she turned 18. They were later divorced, and Joe went to Australia. Louisa Guites (née Cohen) as she now was, married her second husband Maurice (or Morris) Cohen. Morris was born in "Russia", probably Polangen in Latvia, the ninth of twelve children to Solomon Joel Cohen and Rachel (known as Rala – maiden name unknown). The entire family left Latvia some time after 1878, and they settled in London where their twelfth child Lazarus was born in 1884. I am uncertain how much time Morris (born 1864) spent in London before himself immigrating to South Africa. Maurice and Louisa had four children - Minnie, Sam, Kate (our grandmother) and Miriam (Aunt Mabel). Kate therefore had two sisters, a brother, a half-brother and a half-sister.

Frida (Frieda) Bernitz - Herman's Sister



Like Herman, Frida lived with her mother at the home of her Grandmother (Agnes Herzenberg, née Brenner), in Goldingen. She was probably educated in the Jewish Girls school. She apparently had a good, classical education; like most Kurlanders she considered herself of fine stock.

Jac Herberg recalls: "Frieda Chasan (née Bernitz) told me that her own family used to have Heinrich Heine soirees whereas the Litvaks she married into had never got much further than the Talmud". Mary (Herberg) confirms Frieda had an "echt-deutsch" accent unlike the Slavic of the Salanter Zusmans.

She immigrated to South Africa around 1912, where she married Idel David Chasan on 21 Feb 1916 in South Africa.

Idel, was born in Salant, Lithuania. He was the brother of my maternal grandmother, Sara Tsipe Abelsohn (née Chasan), born in Salant, Lithuania. (see Abelsohn - Chasan Family History for further details.)

Frida was issued with a passport by the Russian Consulate General in London on the 30th March 1912, authorizing her to travel.



Idel David Chasan

Idel (Tzvi Hirsh ben Meir Moshe) was born in Salant on the 16th February, 1880. He immigrated to South Africa in 1895 (aged 15). This could have been to avoid conscription, and was made possible by the fact that his half-sister Rieva was already living in Cape Town, where her husband Lewis Suzman had established a business dealing in tobacco products.

Lewis and Rieva were instrumental in introducing Idel to his future wife Frida Bernitz. They were married on the 21st February 1916.

They had 3 sons, Neville, Selwyn and Alfred. Idel was to remain employed in the Suzman businesses for the rest of his life.



The wedding of Frida Bernitz and Idel Chasan, Feb. 1916.

On Ground (in sailor suits): Mischa & Alfie Bernitz

Seated: Isidore Bernitz, Rivke Suzman, Lewis Suzman , Sima Suzman

Standing Children (on left): Arthur & Mosie Suzman

Standing Adults: Louis Leftin, Saul Suzman, Polly Suzman, Paula Leftin, Idel Chasan, Frieda Chasan (née Bernitz) , Sarah Suzman, Sappe Suzman

Back: Row: Fanny Claff, Harry Claff, Barney Suzman

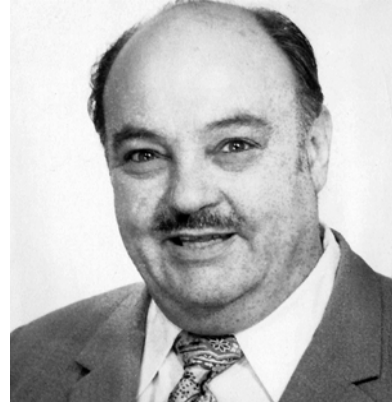
Maurice (Mo) Bernitz - my Father

My father Maurice (Mo) was born in Pyramids, Transvaal on 2nd December 1922. As described earlier this was a small settlement on the railway line from Pretoria to the North. I know little of his earliest years, or schooling; he went with his parents to Davel in 1923 and then to Johannesburg in 1934. He always had an aptitude for all things mechanical and was sent to a technical High School in Pretoria as a boarder. He completed an apprenticeship before joining the South African Air Force at the outbreak of WWII.

Because of his skills and trade qualifications he was made an armourer, responsible for all weapons and bombs required for combat in military aircraft. He was posted to Bloemfontein and Kimberly, and also managed to get a posting to Cape Town (to be near Pearl). He had met her when her parents had invited him home for a Shabbat meal. They were married on February 7th 1943, shortly before he was posted to North Africa and then on to the Italian theatre of war. They were briefly in Kimberly prior to the posting. I was conceived before he went, and was born whilst he was "up North".

I asked Ernie for his reminiscences of his brother. He wrote: "Your Dad, as you well know, had wonderful sense of humour, and was loved and respected by all who knew him. If he had a fault it was his "the glass is always half full" way of life. While all the brothers were handy at doing things, Mo was way ahead of all of us. He preferred practical jobs to paper work. This naturally drew him to a technical education, which he completed at the Pretoria Tech (the best facility at that time).

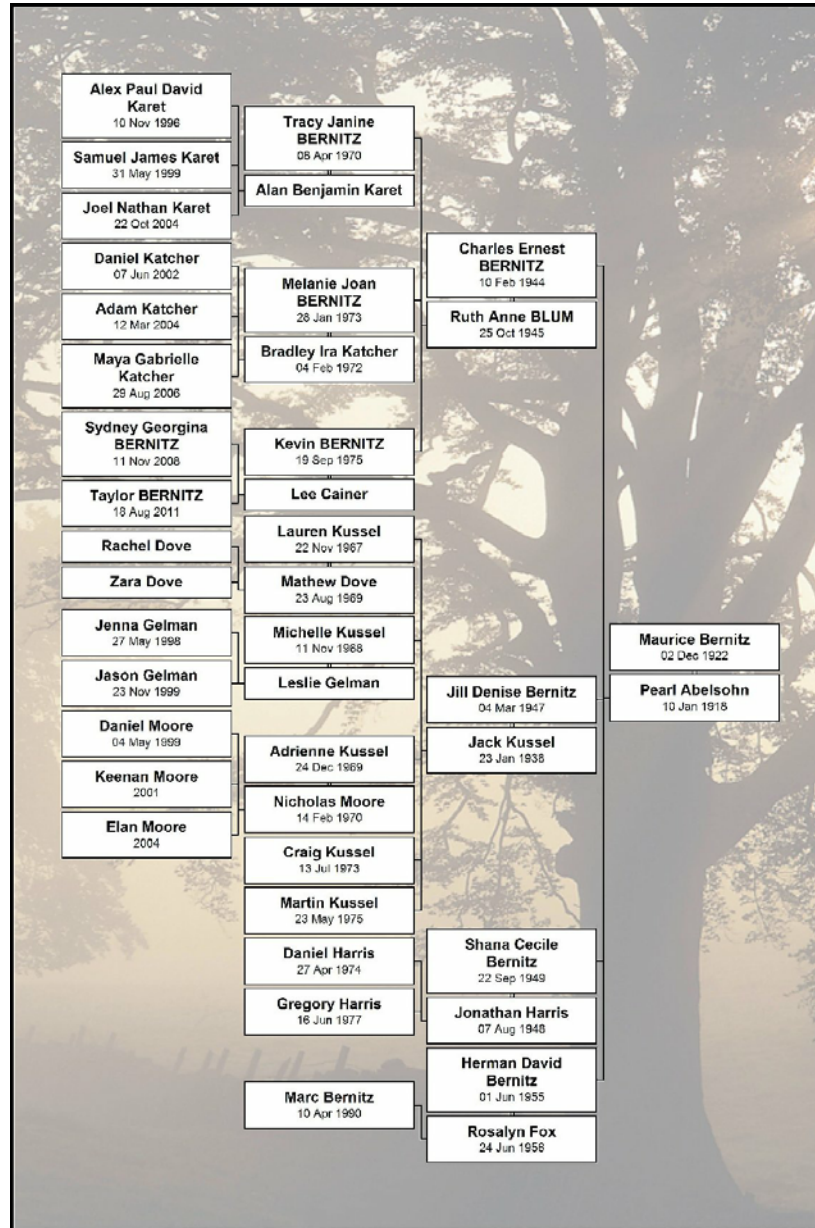
"He worked for a time at a coal mine. He was not there for long, because when war was declared, both he and Mickey were the first in line to sign up. Dad had no objection, but was bursting with pride that his sons (together with almost every able bodied young man in Witbank) were eager to join up.



"Mickey, who had qualified as a private pilot was awarded his wings and was posted to the desert as a bomber pilot. Perhaps because of our breeding, and sense of duty, every member of our entire family who could, did join up. Three out of three Chasans, both of Isidor's' sons, four out of five Suzman brothers, Jac Herberg's father, his sister and brother-in-law, two out of three of Herman's sons, just about everybody without exception."

I also asked Ernie about Mom and Dad's wedding. He wrote: "I did not attend the wedding. It was not considered a "must see event" by my folks; there was no one to take me to either the airport or station (Ernie was 15 at that time), nor was the cost of this event warranted. Those were the days where nothing was or could be taken for granted. I was lucky I was invited to Mickey's wedding in Jo'burg, even being allowed to be a pole holder (but no new suit!)." Maurice returned to Cape Town shortly before the end of the War. Pearl was very ill (her gall bladder was removed). He was given compassionate leave to visit her in Cape Town, and hitched a ride in a transport aircraft from Italy. He kept a log of the journey on the back of a brown paper airsickness bag. It took 7 days to fly back to Cape Town with numerous refuelling stops

The Descendants of Maurice (Mo) Bernitz



After demobilisation Mo, Pearl and myself (aged two) went to Witbank. With thousands of servicemen returning, all with high expectations and with few opportunities, things were hard. Herman purchased a building (previously a hardware store) next to the hotel. Using these premises Mo together with an experienced motor dealer named Lourens Prinsloo started a business called Carlton Motors. The only source of stock was from army surplus sales - used vehicles, Jeeps, trucks, motor cycles and sundry items. Whilst the business started off quite well, before long before the two parted company.

When the Hotel was sold by the estate, Mo took over the theatre. It was totally remodelled; a sloping floor and proper theatre style seats were installed, together with a larger screen, a stage and curtains. It had state of the art projection equipment. Mo was one of the first cinema owners in the country to install the new, widescreen Cinemascope system, which was introduced in 1953. He built the screen, and installed the projection and sound equipment himself. He also made and installed his own air-conditioning system, again a first for the town, which was not equalled for many years. The newly renovated cinema opened with the screening of "The Robe" starring Richard Burton and Jean Simmons. The Carlton Theatre was undoubtedly the centre of social life in Witbank for many years.

Herman had purchased a farm between Witbank and Middelburg, which he used as a retreat from the demands of the hotel. He had found a large clay deposit, useful for making quality bricks. After he died Mo took possession of the farm as settlement of his share of Herman's estate (not including the Carlton Hotel). He continued to run this business (Witbank Brick and Tile) for a number of years, before he and Bernitz Properties partnered with a syndicate consisting of two very large brick-making companies from Johannesburg, and three local businessmen - Julius Khan, Phillip Shill and Sam Young). Mo would run the business for a number of years before it too was sold, with the syndicate

purchasing a citrus and banana farm near White River. When export sanctions against south Africa started to take hold, the business became unviable, and the farm was sold to a property developer.

The cinema, like most country cinemas, changed programs thrice weekly - Monday and Tuesday evenings; Wednesday and Thursday evenings; and Friday evening, Saturday matinee and evening performances. In addition, there was a special Saturday morning performance, - usually a Western - (admission fee six pence) aimed at the youth. Performances always included a newsreel and at least one serial episode, followed by an interval, and then the screening of the main movie. To publicise the weekly program Mo had been having simple advertising leaflets printed. To make these more attractive, he became a self-taught printer. He acquired a small, used printing machine, and started printing ambitious programs with pictures in one of the cinema offices.

Ever the optimistic entrepreneur, he soon started doing commercial printing for others, purchasing larger machines, which he usually refurbished himself. He soon ran out of space. Expanding his printing business, now called Carlton Copying Centre, he moved into larger premises, purchased a large two-colour printing press and typesetting equipment, all the while teaching himself. Only when he believed that he was proficient in a trade would he employ a tradesman to work for him. Soon the printing works had a large staff.

Once again Mo re-invented himself, and got involved in the travel industry. He was appointed by Kuoni in South Africa as marketing director. In the mid-1970's, with the backing of his friend Issy Snipelisky he purchased a travel agency in Miami. This was used to bring groups of American Jews on tours via Israel to South Africa. He and Pearl lived for a few months in Miami. Before the business could be fully established, Mo died tragically of a heart attack, at the age of 55.

*Top: Wedding of Mo and Pearl,
Cape Town, 7th February 1943.
Evelyn Abelson was Matron of
Honour.*



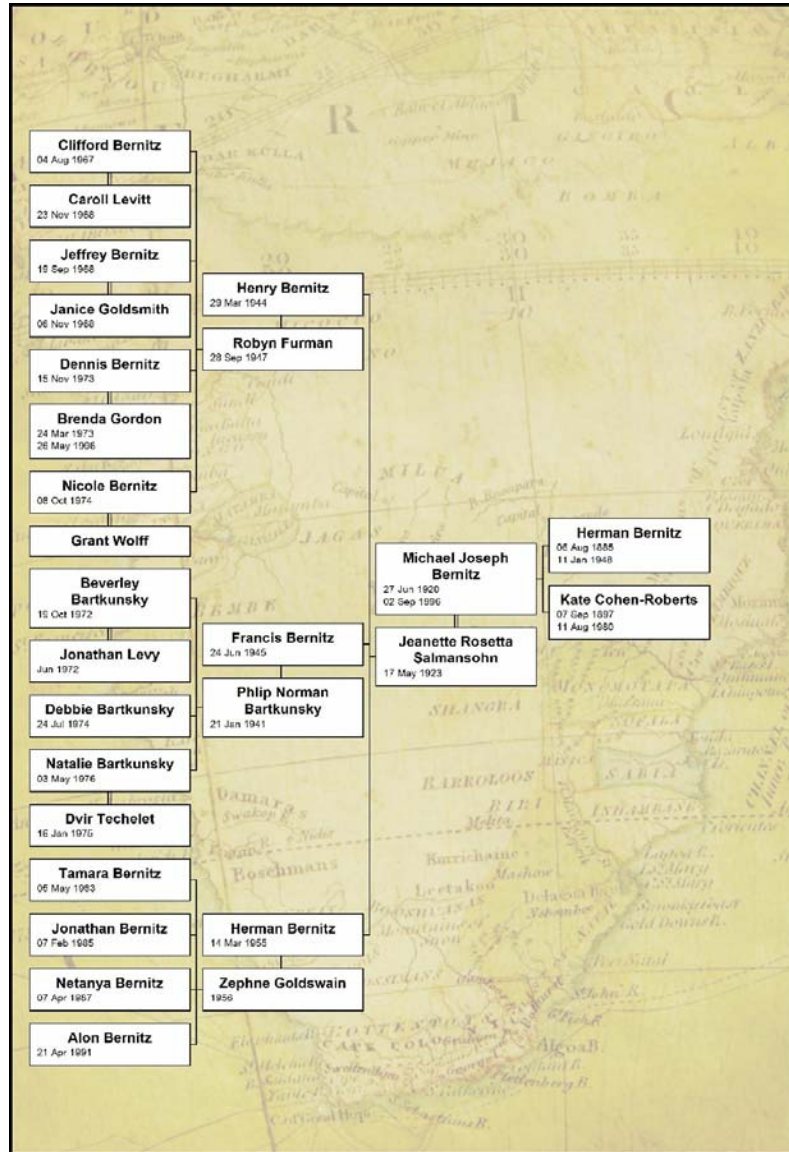
*Middle: The Bernitz Family, 1965 in
Kate's garden, Witbank.
Front: Herman (Middelburg),
Harold, Renee, Herman (Witbank)
Middle: Jessie, Francis, Jill Shana,
Charles
Back: Ernie, Jessie, Henry, Mickey,
Kate, Pearl and Maurice.*



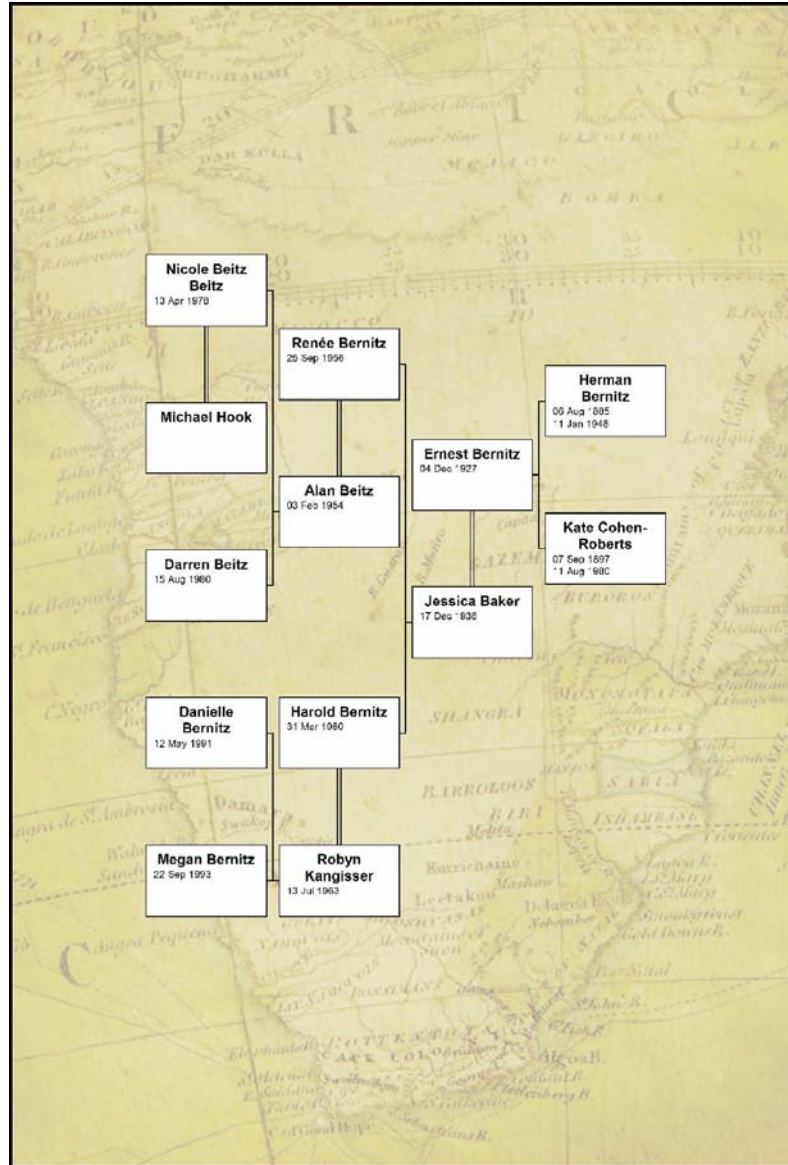
*On holiday at the Coast.
Back row : Mickey and Maurice
Front: Muriel Tyler, Ernie, Louise
Tyler*



The Descendents of Mickey Bernitz



The Descendents of Ernie Bernitz



OTHER DESCENDENTS OF BEHR BERNITZ

Hirsh BERNITZ (1797) was the first son of Behr BERNITZ (our Patriarch). Our line of the family is descended from his brother Michel Behr, who was the first member of the family to be registered using the surname Bernitz. Hirsh and his descendents also lived in Hasenpoth at that time. All of this family are therefore close relatives (great-great-grand uncles, great-great-grand uncles, etc, or cousins within each generation.

The following family information was obtained from Latvian records including the recruits' enlistments of Hasenpoth for 1841 and 1871 and birth, marriage and death records of the Jewish community in Hasenpoth and Libau, as available (see appendices for details):

1. Hirsh son of Behr Bernitz was born in ca 1797, and died before 1871. His wife Taube (maiden name unknown) was born in ca 1794, and died on January 21, 1859 in Hasenpoth of old age. Hirsh and Taube had 3 sons and 5 daughters, all born in Hasenpoth.
 - 1.1. son Abraham Bernitz, born 1811 (*see 1.1 below for his descendents*)
 - 1.2. son Moses Bernitz, born 1816. He died on April 6, 1871 in Hasenpoth of fever. (*see 1.2 below for his descendents*)
 - 1.3. daughter Basse Bernitz, born 1818
 - 1.4. daughter Hanne Bernitz, born in 1819
 - 1.5. daughter Haja Bernitz, born 1821
 - 1.6. daughter Debora Bernitz, born in 1823
 - 1.7. daughter Henne Bernitz, born 1825
 - 1.8. son Itzig Bernitz, born in 1836

This research was conducted for me by Rita Bogdanova, Sector Manager and Archivist at the State Archives of Latvia and a member of the Board of the Centre for Judaic Studies at the University of Latvia. During the course of this research, we established that we have common ancestry through the generation of our great-great-grandmothers (the Brenner family from Goldingen).

The first son of Hirsch Bernitz

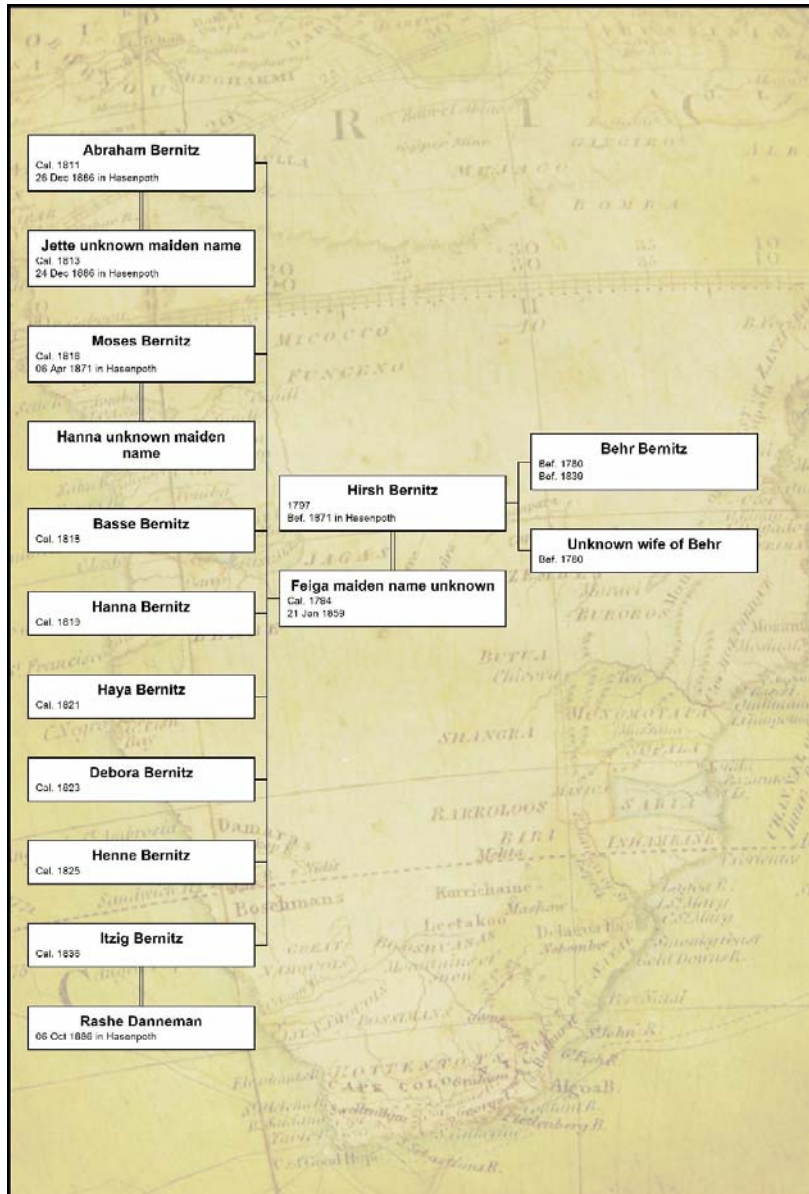
1.1. Abraham Bernitz, was the eldest son of Hirsh. A merchant, he married Jette, also known as Feige (born 1813, maiden name unknown). He died of old (aged 78) on December 24, 1886 in Hasenpoth. Abraham and Feige had 10 children, also all born in Hasenpoth:

1.1.1. son Behr Bernitz, born in 1839, was a shoemaker. He died in Hasenpoth on May 10, 1891 of lung disease; He appears to have been named after his grandfather Behr. We can therefore assume that Behr had died by 1839. He married Lea (maiden name unknown). They had at least one child

- 1.1.1.1 daughter Rivke Bernitz, born November 26 1853
- 1.1.2. son David Bernitz, born 1842, a carter, was married to Beile (maiden name unknown). They had at least 2 children, born in Hasenpoth:
 - 1.1.2.1. daughter Ita Hanna Bernitz, born on August 5, 1866 in Hasenpoth,
 - 1.1.2.2. son Hirsh Bernitz, born on April 7, 1868 in Hasenpoth
- 1.1.3 daughter, Hanna Bernitz. She was married at the age of 20 on October 7, 1862 in Hasenpoth to a widower - Nochum Mangeldorf, then aged 36. He died in Hasenpoth on March 15, 1886. As she was married age 20 in 1862, she was probably the twin sister of David
- 1.1.4. son Wulf Bernitz, born 1849. A carter, he was married to Sheine daughter of Hirsh Mau, and they had 4 children born in Libau:
 - 1.1.4.1. daughter Taube Bernitz, born on July 18, 1880 in Libau
 - 1.1.4.2. daughter Rashe Bernitz, born on February 13, 1882 in Libau
 - 1.1.4.3. son Hirsh Bernitz, born on March 11, 1884 in Libau
 - 1.1.4.4. daughter Reise Bernitz, born on October 24, 1898
- 1.1.5. son Hosias (Josua) Bernitz, born on June 24, 1854
- 1.1.6. daughter Haya Bernitz, born on February 6, 1857, died in 1857.
- 1.1.7. daughter Esther Bernitz, born 1858, she died in Hasenpoth on May 7, 1861 aged 3 years.

The Family of Hirsh Bernitz, son of Behr Bernitz

Hirsh BERNITZ was the first son of Behr BERNITZ, and the brother of Behr (My great-great-great-grandfather).



1.1.8. son Jossel Bernitz, born on September 27, 1862, died in Hasenpoth on October 28, 1862 of heart disease.

1.1.9. daughter Taube Bernitz, born on April 28, 1865,

1.1.10. son Shaul Markus Bernitz, a tailor, was born on April 11, 1867. His first marriage was to Rosa (b. 1875, d. February 13, 1924). Rosa was the daughter of Jankel Stusser. In 1906 the family were living in their own house in Juras Street in Libau.



*Shaul Max Bernitz
Stusser*



Rosa Bernitz born

After the death of wife Rosa in 1924 Shaul Markus Bernitz remarried. His second wife was Ita Rozhinsky, born in 1892. They had a son Haim Bernitz, born on June 18, 1926 in Liepaja. The family perished in the Holocaust in Liepaja in 1941-1943.



*Ita Bernitz, born Rozhinsky
(aged 6)*



Haim Bernitz

Shaul and Rosa Bernitz had 5 children, all born in Libau:

1.1.10.1. son Abram Bernitz, born on January 23, 1905, perished in 1941 in Liepaja. He married Gertrud, born on January 27, 1897 in Germany.

1.1.10.2. son Sholem Bernitz, born on March 6, 1898,

1.1.10.3. daughter Taube Bernitz, born on October 1, 1901, died on November 11, 1901 in Libau,

1.1.10.4. son Shiye Bernitz, born on Dec 17, 1899.

1.1.10.5. daughter Bluma Bernitz, born on Jan 2, 1894.



Sholem (son of Shaul) Bernitz



Abram (son of Shaul) Bernitz

The second son of Hirsh Bernitz

1.2. Moses Bernitz, born 1816. He was a merchant, and married Hanna (maiden name not known). They had 6 children, all born in Hasenpoth. Two of their sons converted to Christianity.

1.2.1. son Abram (Adolph) Bernitz, born 1849, died on March 9, 1912 in Hasenpoth. He married Marianne (maiden name unknown) who was born on June 6, 1857. They had 7 children, all born in Hasenpoth.

1.2.1.1. son Moses Bernitz, born on January 22, 1878, a tailor. Moses converted to the Orthodox church in 1902 in the town of Samara; he changed his name to Maxim, son of Leonid.

1.2.1.2. son Sholum Bernitz, born on June 5, 1879,

1.2.1.3. daughter Gitel Bernitz, born on October 15, 1880,

1.2.1.4. son Hirsh Bernitz, born on November 11, 1882,

1.2.1.5. son Jacob Bernitz, born on January 26, 1884 in Hasenpoth, died on May 1, 1884 aged 3 months,

1.2.1.6. Sheine Bernitz, born on February 21, 1886 in Hasenpoth, died on August 25, 1893 in Hasenpoth of dysentery

- 1.2.2. daughter Rosa Bernitz, born 1855 in Hasenpoth
- 1.2.3. son Jossel Bernitz, born on December 10, 1857 in Hasenpoth, died on June 7, 1861 of diphtheria.
- 1.2.4. daughter Sharlotte Bernitz, born in 1850 in Hasenpoth, died in Riga on March 4, 1936. She was married to a Hirshfeld from Goldingen.



1.2.4.1 They had a daughter, Minna Ravich, born in 1874 Frauenburg (now called Saldus). By 1940 Minna was a widow, living in Riga at Visvalza Street 7.

1.2.5 son Isidor (aka Isaac aka Israel son of Moses also Martin Bernitz), born before 1854 (no birth records were kept before 1854). Isidor converted to the Orthodox Church. He married Serafima Borisova and they had 3 children: Michail, Ilya and Yelena. The family lived in Simbirsk and belonged to the merchant's guild. In 1890 the head of the family asked the Hasenpoth Tax Administration to give him a certificate of permission to belong to the Merchant guild of Simbirsk. The address where the family lived in Simbirsk was Bolshaya Saratovskaya Street, in the house owned by a man called Busko. In 1893 he applied again to the Hasenpoth Tax Administration, this time in regard to an inheritance from the estate of his late brother Hirsh Bernitz

1.2.6 son Hirsh aka Hugo Bernitz, born around the same time. He died sometime between 1890-1893. Hirsh initially belonged to the Jewish community in Hasenpoth and then later also to the Libau Jewish community. He then converted to the Lutheran Church, and took the Christian name Hugo son of Martin Bernitz.

The third son of Hirsch Bernitz

1.8. Itzig Bernitz, born in ca 1836 (aged 33 in 1871) belonged to the Hasenpoth merchants guild from 1872. He married Rashe Dannemann on August 20, 1857 in Hasenpoth. She died on October 6, 1886 in Hasenpoth, aged 49 of a stroke. They had 5 children:

- 1.8.1. son Hirsh Bernitz, born on July 14, 1858 in Hasenpoth (*see below for his descendents*)
- 1.8.2. daughter Gite (Gitel) Bernitz, born on November 29, 1861 in Hasenpoth. She married Max (Mendel) Stender (1858-1821)



Max and Gittel (born Bernitz) Stender

1.8.3. daughter Keile Bernitz, born in ca 1864 (aged 28 in 1893),

1.8.4. daughter Feige Bernitz, born in ca 1865 (aged 24 in 1889)

1.8.5. daughter Hanna Bernitz, born on July 9, 1867 in Hasenpoth, died on July 4, 1871 in Hasenpoth, cause of death diphtheria.

1.8.6. son Shmuel Bernitz, born on May 28, 1870 in Hasenpoth, married on March 5, 1902 in Libau to Elisabeth daughter of Maxim Jacobson aged 27 from Mitau,

1.8.7. daughter Hinke Bernitz, born on March 1, 1873 in Hasenpoth, died in Hasenpoth on January 30, 1877 of "weakness"

1.8.8. son Moses Bernitz, born on December 11, 1876 in Hasenpoth

1.8.9. son Shalum Bernitz, born on July 1, 1879 in Hasenpoth (aged 10 in 1889)

1.8.10. son Zacharias Bernitz, born on June 17, 1883 in ca 1884 (aged 5 in 1889).

The Descendents of Hirsch Bernitz

1.8.1. Hirsh Bernitz (*see above*) was born on July 14, 1858, A merchant, he was married in Hasenpoth on October 21, 1892 to Sara Shore (aged 34), daughter of Joel Lein Nathanson. Hirsh and Sara had children born in Hasenpoth:

1.8.1.1 son Daniel Bernitz, born on September 16, 1894 in Hasenpoth. He married Sara Blumenthal born August 30, 1894 in Goldingen.



Above: Daniel Bernitz and Sara Bernitz, born Blumenthal.
Below: Sara and son



Max and Sara had two children:

1.8.1.1.1. son Michail Bernitz, born on May 25, 1922 in Liepaja,

1.8.1.1.2. son Artur Bernitz, born on November 9, 1923 in Liepaja.

1.8.2. Gite (Gitel) Bernitz, born on Nov 29, 1861. She married Mendel Jankel Stender, a merchant from Hasenpoth on December 24, 1891 in Hasenpoth to Mendel Jankel Stender, aged 32. She died in Liepaja on October 11, 1925.

Other Bernitz's

Hasenpoth Tax Administration documents contain information about the family of Herman (also known as Gersh Itzka), Gershon Bernitz and his wife Emilia Goldrat, who had lived in Lodz, Poland, where their children were born

- daughter Isabella Bernitz, born on November 2, 1876 in Lodz

- son Moritz Bernitz, born on July 1, 1878 in Lodz

- son Julius Bernitz, born on July 23, 1879 in Lodz

- daughter Salomea Bernitz, born on June 10, 1882 in Lodz

- daughter Elsa Bernitz, born on Febr 1, 1892 in Lodz.

A Julius Bernitz appeared around 1920 in Riga, and applied in 1921 for Latvian citizenship. He provided the following details in support of his application: He claimed that he had been living for the past 20 years in Germany. He gave his address as 43/II Kapuziner Street, Munich, where he claimed to have been employed. He had received a general education, and spoke German, Russian, Polish, and was widowed. As he had never lived in Latvia the Ministry of Home Affairs refused to give him Latvian citizenship.

A Shaul Michel Bernitz, son of Behr Bernitz (*see document in appendices*) was living at 86 Petrakov Street, Lodz in 1905. He could very possibly have been a son of Behr Bernitz of Hasenpoth.

Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed towards my research, and towards this history, and I am indebted to them all for their help, assistance and advice. In no particular order, my thanks to

Jac Herberg, whose research on the Bernitz family provided the framework for my own research.

Leo Herzenberg, for providing the translation of his father's memoirs

Patricia Tabak and Philip Shapiro, for their contributions to the history of Julius Bernitz and his family.

Elena Spungina, my guide and advisor on Jewish Latvia.

Rita Bogdanova, Jewish researcher and archivist in Latvia.

Ernie Bernitz, for a steady stream of family stories and pictures

Joanna Bernitz for information and pictures

Louise Berzen and Willie Swilling – for information, documents and photographs.

Bus Graumann, Frankie Hellerman and Raymond Coffey, for help with reading and translation of handwritten documents.

