



Chai Vekayam

The Neve Shalom Synagogue Chai Members Newsletter

April 2017

Dear Chai members;

On behalf of the Board of Directors of the Neve Shalom Synagogue and the Jewish community in Suriname, I wish you and your families a **Happy and kosher Passover!!**

Before we head into this holiday, I'll update you on the more recent ones:

High Holidays in Suriname

We are grateful that Rabbi Shimon Moch again led our High Holidays in 2016. Rabbi Shimon is a long time friend of our community, since the days when he was the Rabbi of the Hebrew Congregation of St. Thomas in the U.S. Virgin Islands.



Rabbi Shimon Moch led the 2016 High Holidays service at the Neve Shalom Synagogue, Paramaribo Suriname

We had a lovely Hakafot ceremony in Simchat Torah and Sukkot was celebrated in our beautiful Sukkah, attached to the synagogue.



The 2016 Sukkot service at the Neve Shalom synagogue, Paramaribo Suriname

We also celebrated Hanukkah with our tradition of lighting the candles every night in many Menorahs.





The 2016 Hanukkah celebration

Unfortunately, this year Purim fell on a long weekend holiday in Suriname and we had to cancel our traditional community Purim party as many young families were out of town.

Visiting Suriname

In the last few months, we were blessed with the visits of Chai members and Ex members of the community who emigrated over the years to Israel.

Pearl Lipton and Henry Silver from Toronto, Canada had a wonderful visit in Paramaribo, the Jewish Savannah (Jodensavanne) and in Kabalebo, a small resort deep in the Surinamese jungle;

Sharon Valpoort from Amsterdam, Holland and her two young daughters Hava and Sarai are visiting her family;

Juliette Emanuels who lives in Jerusalem, Israel with her three daughters and their families, decided to celebrate her 90th Birthday among her family and friends who still live in Suriname. She boarded the plane from Tel Aviv to Amsterdam and then to Paramaribo all by herself and is currently having a wonderful time. She'll be back in Israel for Passover. We wish Juliette many more years of good health and happiness!



Baruch Lionarons from Jerusalem, Israel was also visiting his family and friends in Suriname. Baruch, an economist, made Aliya to Israel over 30 years ago and lives with his wife and three daughters and son in Jerusalem. Baruch was kind enough to put into writing a summary of his visit:



There are few sights in Paramaribo that give a returning former member of the Jewish community more pleasure than the stately beauty of Neve Shalom. Every time I return it fills me with pleasure and pride. Last December I was again, albeit for a short time, just like any other member of the Community and as I approached the synagogue a strong sense of beauty and pride welled up. The following two weeks I spent time in conversations with old friends, members of the Board and heard how under difficult circumstances the Community keeps together, enjoys an outstanding reputation in Suriname's social fabric and is the spiritual home for its members and friends in the society at large. Earlier in the year Rabbi Moch spent some time there and made commendable efforts to increase the number of events, including outreach activities and get members involved. On the other hand, the sudden death of long standing acting cantor, my friend and former pupil Jack Van Niel was a great loss. Most of his duties have been taken over by other members and in time, hopefully, a younger person can be prepared to continue. I had hoped to meet more of the young members, graduates of the Birthright programme, but even in limited conversations I sensed that the sweet embrace of a gentle open society like Suriname, in many ways comes at the expense of an under-association with the community. More young members will have to come forward and take responsibility as Jewish presence and a Jewish community simply cannot be taken for granted.

The schedule of services was tweaked to allow for services on two consecutive weeks and it was my great pleasure to lead shaharit with Chairman Jules Donk on Theba. On short notice we did shirat ha-yam, for many years not heard during regular services. Parashat Toldot with its unexpected blessings fit the occasion and I felt very privileged to call up for an aliya Shem Donk a recent bar mitzvah followed by Julian Franker, whose bar mitzvah in Jerusalem I attended. Both these youngsters are scions of "stonfutus", families that are pillars of the community. This I see as a sign of hope.

I must confess that since Beracha ve-Shalom, the sister Portuguese synagogue located just two blocks away which ceased to function as such, I have not had the courage to go inside anxious not to have old memories superseded by its new function as an office. The exterior has lost none of its luster and gravitas and is a true landmark on Paramaribo's main street. As a resident of Jerusalem I enjoy the privilege to be able to go regularly to Beracha ve-Shalom, that is its interior, now superbly restored and on permanent display in the Street of the Synagogues in the Israel Museum. For a native son this is a source of supreme pride.

Lilly Duym relates that no week goes by without someone, often from abroad, coming to her with a genealogical query. I was lucky to be there when such a query regarding the Sarruco family required a quick visit to Jodensavanne and I was invited to join as "general counsel". The site holds you in a historical grip and makes one feel proud and strangely empowered imagining a flowering Jewish settlement in the middle of a South American rainforest. The obvious potential for more people to come and experience

Jodensavanne, for more archeological work, for reconstructing some structures, for rediscovering and retelling the stories is there. None of this will happen by itself and standing there taking it in as a tourist I was even more aware of the continuous effort done to be able to experience Jodensavanne, now on the tentative list for the status of World Heritage Site.

The three cemeteries in Paramaribo are in very good condition, the oldest one looks better than in decades and so are the records. Walking between the rows one cannot be untouched by evocative inscriptions, the odd statue or the outstanding masonry that withstood the centuries. I also don't remember having ever visited family graves without the bother of stragglers or vandals (now nowhere to be seen) or having to navigate piles of rubbish. This too is the result of hard work by devoted individuals and lots of money.

Too soon the last day of my visit arrived and I took leave of Lilly in her little office, the gardener and watchman, familiar faces of decades, the majestic sight of Neve Shalom surrounded by imposing trees, the new monument in memory of those killed in the Shoah and gravestones bearing names of illustrious families, no longer appearing as members.

Against all the odds the community lives. How it will develop is not apparent. History and imposing monuments are not sufficient for a vibrant Jewish life. People, dedicated committed Jewish people are what will make the community. Chai has become an important platform for help and support and I appeal to all to stay involved and come up

with ideas, contacts and contributions of all kinds.

Baruch Lionarons
January 2017
Jerusalem

Remembering Mordechai Arbell ז"ל

Every time one would meet Mordechai Arbell he enthusiastically started the conversation with a new historical fact about the La Nacion, the Spanish and Portuguese Nation in the Caribbean: a document stumbled across in a lesser known archive or a connection he discovered between events. And the families, yes those double barreled Iberian names, many of them having left the fold generations ago, were for him like a magnet. He would run into members of them, often in high places, in Jamaica, Panama, Belize, and France. Invariably they would whisper some fascinating family secret or show him an heirloom testimony of their Jewish roots.

The Jewish Nation in the Caribbean captured his heart whilst serving as Israel's ambassador to Panama. Born in Bulgaria but raised in Israel, still only a teenager he was trained as a pilot in the young Israel Defense Forces, fighting in the War of Independence. After active army duty and university studies he entered the Foreign Service and thereafter morphed into senior manager in an international business conglomerate. But, as testified to by his son at a memorial in Jerusalem last autumn, La Nacion was his passion. Without formal academic training as a historian, he was nevertheless equal to the academics. And what a special place Suriname had in his heart. His frequent visits

in the 1980's and even more frequent contacts with members of the community made him many friends in Paramaribo. Forgotten Jewish settlements were discovered, with some measure of conjecture it is said, in Pomeroon and in French Guyana.

He visited Jodensavanne in a time when that was quite an undertaking and counseled the community's leaders with whom he established and maintained close personal relations. In Israel he would not hesitate to use his contacts if that could facilitate projects of interest to the Caribbean Jewish community.

"Comfortable Disappearance" is the phrase he coined summing up the existential issues surrounding the Jewish presence in the Caribbean. Mordechai's warm embrace will linger on, his words hopefully heeded, his beloved Nacion will miss him.

Mordechai Arbell 1929 -2016

Written by Baruch Lionarons

The Untold Story of World War 2 Jewish Refugees in Jamaica

Diana Cooper-Clark is a Jamaican born Chai member and a Professor at York University in Canada. In February 2017, she published her fascinating book about the untold story of Jewish refugees escaping to Jamaica during the Second World War. The name of Diana's book is: "Dreams of Re-Creation in Jamaica: The Holocaust, Internment Jewish Refugees in Gibraltar Camp, Jamaican Jews and Sephardim".

Gibraltar Camp was originally built by the British in 1940 to house civilians from the island of Gibraltar. The British decided to use the colony for military purposes to protect the strategically-located isthmus from German invasion.

The camp was intended for 6,000 people, but only about 1,800 people from Gibraltar ended up arriving. When the Jewish community heard about the extra capacity in the camp, they began to lobby the British to let in the Jewish refugees from Europe. Meanwhile, the Dutch government in exile requested that Jamaica temporarily accept the Dutch Jews who were en route to the Dutch Caribbean lands of Suriname and Curacau.

While the British let some Jews in, it was understood that this would be only for a temporary period, and not at the expense of the British Crown. The American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee financed the Jewish portion of the camp.



The Gibraltar Camp, Jamaica - (image by Willem Schpektor and supplied by Inez Schpektor as published in the Times of Israel newspaper)

There were 200 Polish Jews who were the first to arrive at the beginning of 1942, and later, in December, 172 Dutch Jews arrived. Jews from other countries came from 1942 to 1944. Altogether, approximately 1,500

Jews came to Gibraltar Camp during World War II. In the camp, families were housed together. Food was never a problem. Children attended public schools.

After the war, all the refugees moved on to other countries such as the United States, South America and other islands in the Caribbean. After the war, the Gibraltar refugee camp was converted into the University of the West Indies, the first English-speaking University in the Caribbean. Some of the camp buildings survive to this day.

After completion of her book, Cooper-Clark decided to organize a reunion in Kingston, Jamaica for the Gibraltar Camp survivors and their descendants. She spent a year organizing the reunion – which included tours of the Gibraltar Camp site, a former slave plantation and now current site of the University of the West Indies, among other memorable landmarks.

The Jewish refugees who were children and teenagers during the Second World War are now in their 80s and 90s. Four of the survivors in her book have already passed on, she said. And, although four of the survivors initially intended to come to the reunion, only one was able to attend. Due to the advanced age of all, health and other circumstances would not permit travel. However, several descendants of the former refugees did attend to learn about the history of their families.

In her book, Diana was kind enough to mention Suriname's role in giving refuge to Jews during the war and the tragic end of the 105 Surinamese born Jews and their families who were murdered during the Holocaust.

Congratulations to Diana on her exceptional research work, her book and organizing this unique reunion!

Final Comments

I'd like to thank Rabbi Shimon Moch for his great contribution to our community, to Baruch Lionarons for his articles, to Lilly Duym, for all her hard work day in and day out to ensure that the community is functioning regardless of what the situation is, to Donna Eckie, Kim Jungermann and Jennifer Wong Swie Sam for the beautiful photos and to Norma Hutchison-Steinberg for her editing this newsletter.

Please let me know if you have any comments, suggestions or ideas on how to make this newsletter better. Please feel free to contact me at: jks1111@rogers.com

Jacob Steinberg