

Maresky Family

A History of the Maresky family

as told by Shim Maresky to his son David Maresky with contributions from Delia Benn and Cherille Berman.

Pictured right David, Delia and Cherille and Jennifer's beloved grandparents)

Jacob (Jack) and Dvora Maresky



Shim Maresky, in talking to his own children and to his sister, Helen Brown, née Maresky's children, Delia, Cheryl and Jennifer, says: Your great-great-grandfather on your mother's side, **Aaron David Karelitzky** was born in the early 19th century. As a young man he was grabbed and forced into service in the Tzar's army. After 20 years of military service and because he had acquitted himself well, he was granted a smallholding in Karelitz, in Belarus (Minsk Gubernia, between Mir & Novogrudok). This was on the border of Russia and Poland where he lived with his wife Hannah. The family adopted the family name of **Karelitzky**, later shortened to Carr (as in cousin Simon Carr).

Their daughter **Shulamit Karelitzky** (Delia, Cherille and Jennifer's great-grandmother) married **Avraham Leib Maresky** (b 1856 possibly also in Karelitz). The Mareskys also lived in that area and were probably first cousins to the Karelitzkys.

Another Karelitzky daughter Chanah, also married a Maresky – **Yitzhak Maresky** – but they died in the Russian famine of 1922. The third Maresky brother **Shmuel Maresky** was born in 1882 in Pinsk, Belarus (Russia, Minsk). He went to the USA from South Africa around 1905. He died in 1952 in Edgemere, Queens, NY. He was married to Rachel Rose Wolkawitski, born in 1878 in the Minsk area, Russia. She died on in 1958 in Miami Beach, Miami-Dade, Florida, USA.

Delia, Cherille and Jennifer's great grandmother **Shulamit (Shula) Karalitzky** married to **Avraham Leib Maresky** lived and farmed in the Karelitz area, doing all the chores themselves. Great Grandfather **Abraham Leib Maresky** developed skills as a blacksmith as, in the army, he had had to shoe the horses and learned how to fix the outer rims of the wagon wheels. Because of these skills, neighbouring Russian peasants paid him for doing jobs for them, and he was known as Napach (blacksmith).

They had 6 children all of whom sadly died of sickness within 3 years. They went to the Rabbi to seek advice and he said they were young enough and should have more children.

They did indeed have more healthy children. This second family were given names from the Bible after people who had lived to an old age, as well as nicknames such as 'Hodda' meaning to thrive and grow and 'Alter' meaning the old one.

1. First **Hilda Hodda Maresky** was born. She married Abraham Emdin in 1913 in Cape Town and died in 1971.
2. The next child was a son, (**our grandfather to be**) born in 1890 in Lukha Belarus. They went back to the Rabbi to ask whom he should be named after. The Torah portion of the week was Vayechi, about Jacob, so he was called **Yakov (Jacob) Alter Maresky** (known as Jack). The Rabbi said that he would be blessed to reach old age and that people would call him Yechiel-Yakov. He married **Devorah Rivka Chessen** (daughter of Shimon Yehudah Chessen and Jessik Turesky) in 1913 in South Africa in the Western Cape. She was born in 1885 also in Karelitz. She died on 28 May 1938 in Kimberley, Northern Cape, South Africa. He died on 31 May 1969 in Kimberley, Northern Cape, South Africa at 78.
3. Then **Aaron David Maresky** (known as David) was born in 1895. He died in 1980 in Western Cape, South Africa. He married **Sarah Edith Lansman** (daughter of Shimshon Landsman). She was born in 1904 in Lithuania. She died on 23 Nov 1982 in Western Cape, South Africa. David Maresky, had three children, Manny, Lampie and Rae. David called his younger son Abraham Leib Maresky after the boy's grandfather. He was known as 'Lampie' and became a much-loved physician in Cape Town.
4. **Isaac** was born in 1902. He was married to **Annie Sacks**. Isaac was killed by a passing tram in Johannesburg in 1936. His widow remarried and his sons, **Lionel** and **Harold** took on the last name of their new father, Sacks,.
5. The youngest child was **Sarah Sadie** She married **Channoch Damelin**.

Abraham Leib Maresky goes to South Africa in 1896

Anti-semitism and pogroms against Jews and poor economic prospects, led **Abraham Leib Maresky** to take his savings and travel to the "goldene medina" of South Africa. He planned, as so many of his landsmen, to go ahead of the family, working there to save money to pay for the passage of his family who were left behind.

Before his departure, he took his two sons, Jacob (Jack) now (6) and David (5) to Rabbi Baruch Kamai at the Mir Yeshiva who took them in. The boys studied, ate and slept at the Yeshiva – living there for 10 years. Jacob in that time got smicha as a shochet, moyle, baal kriya and teacher. In addition to religious education, since the Head of the Yeshiva also had an interest in secular studies, they also received a broad education.

A Wagon and Gun fixer for the Boers

Abraham Leib Maresky, our **Great Grandfather**, arrived in Cape Town, South Africa and decided to settle in Beth El, in the Transvaal. This was Boer territory and after the recent Jameson Raid (29 December 1895 – 2 January 1896) war was looming and broke out between the British and the Boers

(1899-1902). The Boers needed a blacksmith and so they conscripted Great Grandfather and sent him to Potchefstroom to fix their guns and the spokes of their wagon wheels. At the same time, a Scottish carpenter named Bill Kerr, was also conscripted.

The Boers lost the war after the British brought in more troops from England and Australia and once the Boers were routed, Great Grandfather and the Scotsman, Bill Kerr were free and decided to join forces and go into the wagon making business together. With Great Grandfather making the chassis and wheels, his partner would build the body of the wagons. Since diamonds had been discovered in Kimberley and with the mines needing wagons, they headed there, setting up business off Transvaal Road.

Jacob (Jack) Alter Maresky arrives in South Africa aged 16

When he had accumulated enough money, great grandfather sent it back to Russia via the post office, to bring out the rest of the family. In 1906, his son Jacob (Jack) now aged 16, arrived by ship in South Africa. He was already a qualified Rav or Reverend, so he was sent to the Chief Rabbi of Johannesburg, Rabbi Landau, for placement. He was sent to various communities, ending up in East London where there were already two shuls, because of a split in the community.

Jack Alter Maresky was Rabbi Altshuler's assistant in East London and liked this Rabbi, however he did not care for the conditions and the climate in East London was too moist, so he went to Kimberley, to his father's business, earning a living by taking wagons into the countryside and selling them. While in Kimberley, Jack married Devorah Rivkah (Dora) (née Chessen), also born in Karelitz. On the right is a picture of Jack and Devorah at the time of their marriage.



They settled in Kimberley working for his father. They had four children Helen b c1920 Shim b1922, Itta and Phyllis.

After World War 1, Great Grandfather **Yehudah Leib Maresky** suffered a long illness and gave up making wagons, instead becoming a scrap iron dealer, also selling bags, bottles and bones. (he died in 1928 in Kimberley, South Africa).

Jack's Copper Mining Company

Yehuda Leib's son **Jack Maresky**, who had travelled widely selling wagons, including to South West Africa, had discovered old copper mines which had been started but abandoned by Germans. They were on a farm whose owner was disinterested in mining. Jack returned to Kimberley to raise capital for the mines, persuading his friends to invest in his company. This was in the 1920's, and Jack was the secretary of the company. He supervised the mining and the first shipment of copper to Britain. In

1929, with Black Friday and the collapse of the economy, he was not paid for the copper and was forced to return penniless to Kimberley.

Jack arrived back from South West Africa devastated by his financial loss on a Thursday. Shim, his own son, aged 8, had to go out and borrow money so that the family would have food for Shabbat. John George, a local Greek café owner loaned them money for milk and bread. They sat on the floor, using a box as a table, as they made Kiddush over the milk.

In this picture below, Shim, Helen, Phyllis and Itta are seen as adults with their father. Dvora passed away very young in 1938.

The Dairy



The next week, when Jack was in the dairy buying the milk for Shabbat, he met a farmer, Mr Yonker who farmed in the Content area, located North East of Kimberley, on the road to Potchefstroom. Jack asked the farmer if he had enough milk to supply him in a dairy business. Yonker explained that he brought his milk to Kimberley twice a week, sending it on other days on the train. He would be able to supply another dairy.

Now Jacob needed a place for his business. A prominent Indian, Raja Gopul Pilay, also a commissioner of oaths, had a large store on the corner of Bultfontein Road and Jones Street, and

lived next door. He had vacant premises there and agreed to extend credit, agreeing that Jacob would pay him as he earned money. This was not a good location for a business, so in the 1930's Jack moved more centrally.

Jacob (Jack) Alter Maresky became a highly respected member of both the Grinne Shul and Memorial Road Synagogue congregations, in Kimberley. He was well known and revered for his knowledge and observance.

At one time, he suffered from duodenal ulc Odes, Solly, Sheila and Familyers and was taken to Groote Schuur Hospital in Cape Town for surgery. He was so weak at that time that he needed to be carried onto the train to go to Cape Town. During this time his wife, Dora ran the dairy. The Griqua workers who were employed at the dairy were unreliable about turning out early enough to make deliveries, so at four am Helen and Shim would wheel their bicycles laden with bottles to make deliveries and pick up the empties.

The Children

Despite the hardships, the children got on exceptionally well as school. Helen matriculated from Girls' High School at the young age of 15, Shim at 16.

Shim recounted this story: Once he and Itta went to the movies and saw a short with Charlie Chaplin flying with an umbrella. When they returned home, they decided to experience flight. Taking Helen's umbrella Shim climbed onto the roof and jumped down, then helped Itta up to the roof. She was scared to jump so Shim demonstrated again, this time the umbrella turned inside out and he fell spraining both wrists, while Itta sat on the roof crying. Helen came out furious to find that her umbrella was ruined.

Helen Maresky – Brown



Helen got her licentiate Diploma from Trinity College of Music, London (which sent adjudicators from England to different parts of the British Empire. She was 15 or 16 at the time. This enabled her to make a living from teaching piano. She helped Shim and Itta. With her financial assistance, Shim was able to attend University, and she was able to pay her father's medical expenses. She was the first girl to pass matric Hebrew.



Helen married **Harold (Ikky) Brown**, in Kimberley in 1940. He was the younger brother of Benny Brown. Both were sons of Harry

Brown, who, together with Raphael Awerbuck, had started the wholesale business Awerbuck, Brown & Co. In the next generation, Benny, Ikky and Frank Awerbuck were Directors of the company. Read about the Kimberley important wholesalers on this link. (and see the picture of the firm below)

They had three daughters **Delia** born 1945, **Cherille** 1948 and **Jennifer**, born 1951.



Above, we see Harry Brown and Jack Alter Maresky with Harry's second wife, Clara, and their granddaughters, Helen and Ikky's three beautiful little girls: from left, Jennifer Cherille and Delia, Read more about them on their links. Berman (nee Brown), Cherille and. Benn (nee Brown), Delia

Helen, was a very beautiful, brilliant and talented woman and a tireless worker for education and culture. There was always music in their home. The living room was dominated by a handsome Bechstein piano, played by Helen and in later years, expertly by the youngest daughter Jenny. Helen always played the piano at communal functions and events – which she probably had a big hand in organising. She was a powerful and dedicated leader of the Union of Jewish Women in Kimberley.

She also contributed greatly to the cultural life in the city. She realized that in order to attain excellence in the arts, children needed to work towards a goal. So, singlehandedly, Helen organized an annual Eisteddfod in Kimberley, the Northern Cape Arts Festival that drew several hundred entrants each year. She contacted De Beers and had them underwrite the costs of bringing in leaders in the fields of music, drama and dance to Kimberley each year, as judges.



Shim Maresky

Shim Maresky became an engineer. He married Rina Cvi of Kimberley and they went to live in Vanderbijlpark, working at Eskom. He married Rina Cvi in Kimberley in 1952. (right)

And (below) with Delia and Cherille as flower girls

Both Ikky Brown and Shim Maresky went 'up North' on active service during WW2. Ikky was first an aerial photographer and then in charge of a mess. Shim was an engineer in anti-aircraft. Shim was shot through the face and flown back to South Africa to be treated.



You can read their war stories on the website.

[Kimberley Jews and the Second World War](#)



Brown Family Reunion in Irvine, California

Helen Brown (née Maresky) passed away in Kimberley in 1989. In 1990, Ikky Brown, with oldest daughter Delia, husband Bobby and their three children including the dogs left Kimberley to go to America. Also going with them were Helen and Ikky's youngest daughter, Jennifer and her family. They all met up with middle daughter Cherille in Irvine, California. And so, the Kimberley saga of the Maresky family came to an end with the family reunited in Calofornia.

Cherille said: 'We all lived in Irvine, and it felt like being back in the old days in Kimberley. My Father, Ikky lived with my family, and made an incredible adjustment. He drove on the "wrong" side of the road, made new friends at the senior center and was a role model of flexibility.

He accepted retirement from Awerbuck and Brown, adapted to living with a young noisy family, and embraced everything that Irvine offered and did not hanker for the past. He died in Irvine, aged 85'.

Below is the picture and article in the Diamond Fields Advertiser on the eve of their departure

News

Browns going to US . . . and poodles, too

WHEN Mr Harold Brown, his daughter Mrs Delia Benn, her husband Bobby and their younger daughter Justine fly to America on Friday their departure will cut a very long association with Kimberley.

Harold, a director of Awerbuck and Brown, a firm established in Kimberley in 1907, has worked for the firm for the past 50 years.

'The business will go on as usual under the guidance of my nephew Ivor Brown who is the managing director, but we are emigrating, so that all my immediate family can be together,' says Mrs Brown.

Harold and his late wife Helen have three daughters of which Delia is the eldest.

Second daughter Cherille Berman has lived in America for the past 18 years, the last four of these in Irvine,

where her husband is Dean of the Southern California College of Optometry. They have three children.

Youngest daughter Jennifer Goldin, her husband and their son and daughter left Johannesburg for the States last week.

When Delia and Bobby and their two daughters and son depart from Kimberley it will sever a long association with Girls' High School, Christian Brothers College and the Boys' High School.

The late Mrs Brown attended GHS, as did her three daughters and Delia's two.

Harold and Bobby are former CBC pupils, Bobby's son Arnold was at KHS.

Delia, the first woman head of a department in the history of KHS has taught there for 12 years.

She was head of the school's cultural port-

folio, head of computers and subject head for mathematics.

This year Mr and Mrs Benn's elder daughter Lara will complete her honours degrees in Drama in Education at the University of Cape Town, where her brother Arnold is writing his BSc, with chemistry as a major subject.

An important part of the emigrating party are Oscar and Roger (named after Rogers and Hammerstein) two Maltese poodles.

'We are flying KLM so that the dogs can be in the cabin with us,' says Justine.

The family originally contemplated settling in the States some 10 years ago. Now in possession of the necessary work permits, Delia plans to teach mathematics and Bobby to practise as a pharmacist.



MR Harold Brown (centre front), his daughter Delia Benn (front right), her husband Bobby (back right) and their daughters Justine (front right) Lara (centre back) and son Arnold (back left) are leaving Kimberley to live in America. Going with them are their Maltese poodles Oscar (left) and Roger.

Delia continued, 'Kimberley, being the place of my youth, has a special place in my heart. I often think of it with nostalgia. In 2010 I took a trip to SA and visited Kimberley. The number of Jewish families had dwindled to about five. I was sad to see that the cemetery wall needed replacing but the beautiful synagogue was sparkling and Barney Horwitz, the Chairman of the community, with a few stalwarts still runs services each Friday night. It is hard to accept that you can't go back to a place that no longer exists as it was when we grew up.'

The sisters are fortunate to be in close contact with each other – though they are all now living in different parts of the USA, Delia is in Baltimore; Cherille and family are currently living in Boston, and Jenny is in Irvine. Read more about them on their links. [Berman \(nee Brown\), Cherille Benn](#) (nee Brown), Delia

Maresky family story and pictures supplied by Shim's son David Maresky and Helen's daughters Delia Benn and Cherille Berman

Compiled and edited by Geraldine Auerbach MBE, London, April 2021