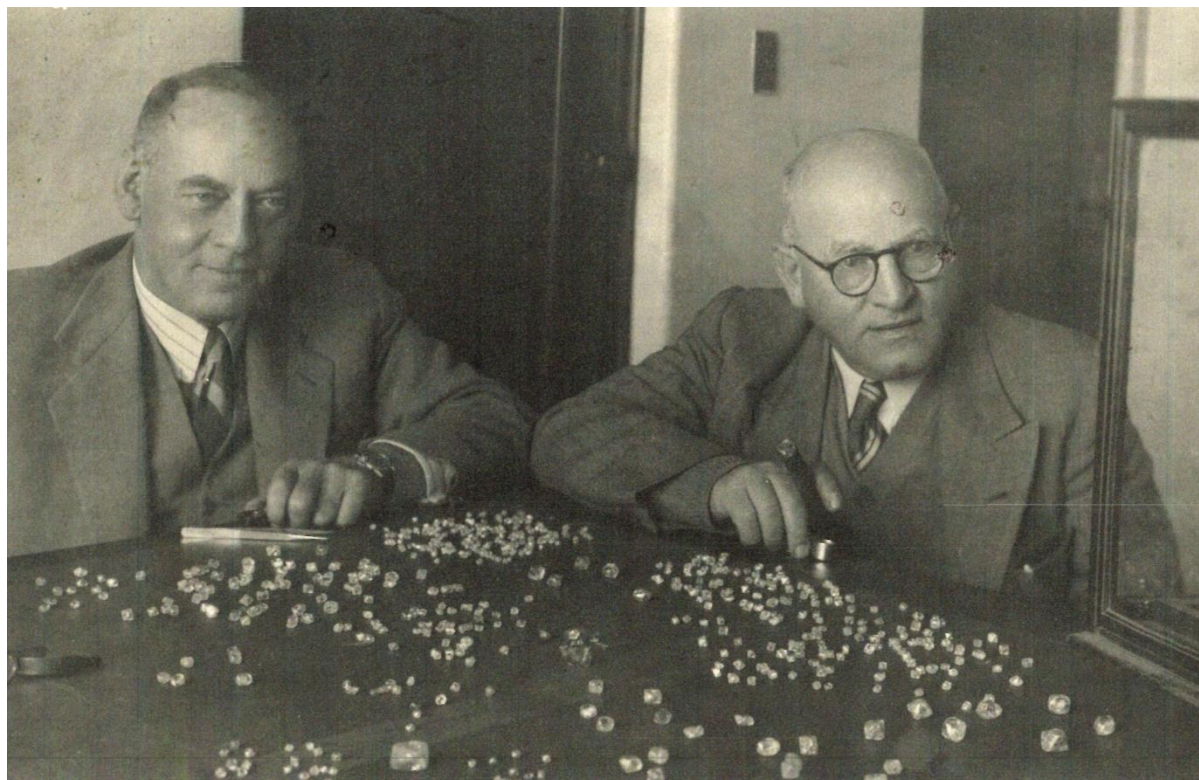


Simon and Gladys Rosenstrauch and family

Simon with brothers Joseph and Bernard were Diamond buyers, cutters and polishers



Simon Rosenstrauch 1888 – 1952 (right above) and his brothers Joseph 1891 – 1947 (left above) and Bernard 1893 – 1947 (pictured below) managed to open an independent diamond cutting and polishing factory in Kimberley in 1928.

Simon was born in Antwerp. He had four brothers: Henri, John, Joseph and Bernard, and two sisters, Rosa and Bertha. Their parents Naftali and Dora Rosenstrauch were both born in Krakow, Poland. Their father Naftali was involved in cutting and polishing diamonds. At an early age, Simon and his brothers began cutting and polishing diamonds too. The young brothers were sent on frequent trips to the Americas between 1906 and 1927 to purchase rough stones. They travelled regularly to **Georgetown, British Guiana**, which was part of the mainland British West Indies, and situated on the northern coast of South America. Spectacular coloured diamonds have been mined there for the past century from alluvial gravels along the rivers and creeks deep within Guyana's Amazon rainforest.

The young brothers had to undertake a difficult and dangerous journey in a small boat travelling far upstream into the mosquito infested interior to locate the local tribes with whom they traded food for diamonds. The trip took several days because they encountered strong currents and waterfalls. In certain places, they had to get out, and carry their boat over rapids, to reach their destination. They used to spend two months at a time in British Guiana buying goods. They would make this trip upriver several times during those two months, returning to Georgetown in between to ship the stones to Belgium.

To South Africa – and Kimberley



In 1927, the family was approached by a banker from South Africa, Mr Korb, who suggested that they should try to get a contract from the South African Government to establish a diamond cutting industry in South Africa. Simon and Joseph (pictured above) and Bernard (pictured left) formed a company on 26 April 1927 called **Rosenstrauch Brothers**. They approached the South African Parliament to discuss the possibility of establishing the diamond cutting and polishing industry, and of obtaining their rough diamonds from the South African Government mines in Namaqualand.

Sir Ernest Oppenheimer, Chairman and Director of De Beers, in Kimberley, was very much against the Rosenstrauchs gaining permission to purchase diamonds from the government, as they wanted to keep their buying and selling monopoly. However, the brothers were finally granted the rights on 3 August 1928, and later that year they opened a cutting and polishing factory in Kimberley. The Rosenstrauchs had to train 400 new apprentices within a certain time to do the work.



Pictured above, we see the Hon F W Beyers, Minister of Mines making the inauguration speech on the occasion of the Foundation Stone laying of the diamond cutting factory in Kimberley in 1928.

Simon's Marriage to Gladys Cohen

Also in 1928, Simon met and married Gladys Cohen, and they settled and made their home in Kimberley. Two of Gladys' sisters, were already married and living happily in the high society of Kimberley: Lily married to lawyer, Charles Hertog, and Gussie married to entrepreneur, Philip Sussman. So, it was very comfortable for Gladys to have readymade family in Kimberley. You can read about each of them here [Hertog, Lucien](#) and [Sussman, Philip and Augusta \(nee Cohen\)](#)

Gladys' parents Lewis Asher Cohen and Eva (née Prince from Canterbury England) went to live in Pearston (Eastern Cape Province) after they married in Port Elizabeth. Lewis started a general dealer's business under the name of 'Cohen & Nathan' (with his sister Hannah Cohen's

husband Louis Nathan). At some point Lewis then went to Somerset East and started a new business 'Cohens Corner' where he also sold produce but was also a big dealer in Ostrich Feathers, wool and mohair. He was also a judge in the Agricultural Show for ostrich feathers, mohair and wool.

Lewis Asher's parents were Hyman Cohen and Golda Molevenska both born in Gorz Germany - Lewis was also born in Gorz. Eva Prince was born in Canterbury England. (Both passed away in Somerset East).

Gladys was born in Pearston on 3 November 1892 and grew up in Somerset East. She was one of eleven children. Her sisters were Augusta (Gussie) Born 1883, Madeleine (Mattie), Violet, Hannah (Puddie) Eleanor (who died in childhood) and Lily. Her brothers were Eddie, Marcus (b March 1894) Hyman and Leo. Two of Gladys' sisters Madeleine (Feltman) and Violet (Singer) when they grew up, ran a hotel in Somerset East.

This is a picture of Lewis Asher Cohen, and Eva Cohen and ten of their children taken in about 1900 in Somerset East, South of Africa.

Back row Gussie then Marcus and Hyman (with mortar board) Then Helen, Eva (mother) holding baby Violet, Gladys, Lily. Louis (father) holding toddler Eddie. Sitting in front are Hannah (Puddie) and Madeleine (Mattie)



Louise Goldschmidt, daughter of Marcus Cohen who was born in 1893 in Somerset East says: The house they lived in there was called **Cassell Lodge**. I think my father, Marcus was the boy in the frilly top in the middle near the back.

Below is a picture of Simon and Gladys at their wedding in 1928



In October 1929 - a year after they married, the Rosenstrauch identical twins, Andrew (Adolph) and Henry were born in Kimberley. Their sister Eva was born in January 1932.

Right is a picture of the exterior and the interior of the factory opened in 1928.

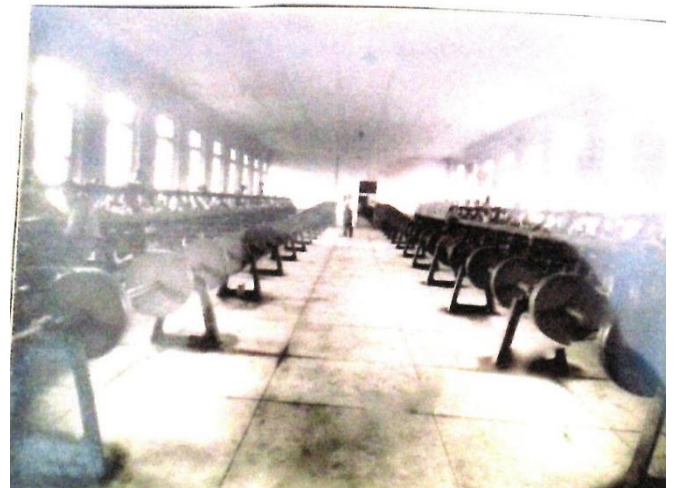


A VIEW OF THE CUTTING FACTORY (UNDER THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE UNION GOVERNMENT OF S.A. FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE DIAMOND CUTTING INDUSTRY WITH ROSENSTRAUCH BROTHERS, INC. AUGUST, 1928.)

Return to Antwerp

In 1932, there was a severe depression in Kimberley and the Rosenstrauchs suffered heavy financial losses. They decided to close the factory in Kimberley and Simon took the whole family back to Antwerp.

Once again Simon had to return to his old and dangerous travels to the interior of British Guiana to purchase rough diamonds. At one stage, Simon had an accident on board ship, and Gladys took the children and went to Georgetown to be with him. They remained there for approximately nine months.



When Simon returned with the family to Antwerp, on 1 October 1935, he installed two benches and a cutting machine at his house on Conscience Straat and began cutting and polishing diamonds once again. This was fine until, with war looming in 1939 and they realised they had to get out of Belgium – and Europe, in a rush. They managed with great difficulty and stress to get onto a train from Antwerp to Brussels and from there over the border into France. They eventually arrived in the South of France.

Louise Goldschmidt, daughter of Gladys's brother Marcus says: My father Marcus (now called Clayton not Cohen) who was living in London with his wife Phyllis, and me, his daughter, managed to get Aunt Gladys and her family out of France on the last train to London that left before the Nazis swept into France. That saved their lives. They came to our house in Hendon and stayed in my bedroom overlooking Endersleigh Gardens. After a while Hannah (Phipps) another of Gladys' sisters, who was living in South Africa, contacted the South African government and managed to get papers for them to re-enter South Africa.

They travelled from London via Portugal and then by sea, via Lourenco Marques, to South Africa. The family settled back in Kimberley. Simon, with his brother, Joseph started cutting and polishing diamonds yet again and together they re-established a factory called '**Pioneer Diamond Cutting Works**' in Kimberley. Louise continued: 'My mother told me that she and my father Marcus used to stay with the Rosenstrauchs in Antwerp the 1930s. The house in Antwerp had beautiful smooth wooden floors on which the children used to skate. After the war, Uncle Simon, Aunt Gladys and children Henry, Andrew and Eva used to come to London, from Kimberley for visits so Simon could do business.

I remember once going shopping in Harrods or a dress shop in Piccadilly with Aunt Gladys in about 1962, when I was pregnant with my first child David. Eva and I remained friends for the rest of her life. When she was very ill and dying, I used to send her perfume to cheer her up. These memories were lost but prompted now by what you have just sent me.'



Henry, Eva and Andrew Rosenstrauch with their mother Gladys

Louise also wanted to say that all the family used to come to them when they were in London. 'I still have the lovely Madeira tablecloth that Eva and Aunt Gladys gave us for a wedding present. The twins made my engagement ring, but I didn't have a chance to choose the design.

Ginette Rosenstrauch, who was married to Henry, twin son of Simon and Gladys, and who has provided most of the material and pictures for this Rosenstrauch family story, writes: Simon passed away in Kimberley on 15 September 1952, aged just 64 and is buried at the Green Street Cemetery. After Simon passed away, Gladys and the children remained in Kimberley until March 1956, when they moved the Pioneer Diamond Cutting Works to Johannesburg. Gladys died of Kidney failure in Johannesburg on 27 September 1975 and is buried in the West Park Cemetery in Johannesburg.

Simon's two younger brothers **Joseph** and **Bernard** had predeceased him in 1947, Joseph at the age of 56 (in Antwerp) and Bernard at 54 (in Kimberley).

Henry passed away on 19 August 2014 in Austin, Texas. Ginette still lives in Austin. She and Henry had four sons. Ginette now has eleven grandchildren and three great granddaughters, all of whom live in different parts of the USA. Twin brother **Andrew**, died in Johannesburg on 20 June 2016. Their sister **Eva** also passed away in Johannesburg on 14 March 2014.

The Great Kimberley Diamond Robbery

A true story pertaining to the Rosenstrauchs, told by Kimberley-born Trevor Toubé



I am not sure exactly which year this happened, but it must have been about 1950.

One evening, two strangers appeared for prayers in the beautiful Victorian synagogue in Kimberley, South Africa. In small communities, such as this was at the time, visitors were always welcomed – and subjected to extensive quizzing to find out who they are, where they have come from, to whom they are related, and why they are there. In this case, though, there was a problem: neither man spoke English (nor Afrikaans!)

It just so happened that the rabbi had a part-time job teaching French at the local Technical College, and that was the language these strangers spoke. They asked the rabbi where they could get kosher food, so he invited them to dine with his family in the Shul House, his home, a large bungalow with the typical Kimberley corrugated iron roof, situated right next to the

synagogue.

Over the meal, the guests explained that they had come to Kimberley to buy some really good diamonds. Now, although the city was still one of the major centres of diamond mining in the world, and the headquarters of the De Beers Company was in the town, there was only one independent firm of diamond cutters in Kimberley. The rabbi undertook to take them over and introduce them to the Rosenstrauchs the following morning.

The Rosenstrauch Brothers firm was at that time run by the twin brothers, Henry and Andrew, born in Kimberley in 1929. The business had been founded by their father Simon, who had come to South Africa sometime in the 1920s but had subsequently returned to his native Belgium. When the Nazis invaded Belgium, as his wife, Gladys told my mother, 'We ran, with just the clothes we stood up in.' (These clothes appear to have included two fur coats!) They also filled their pockets with diamonds and lived on the proceeds of their sale.

The next day the rabbi collected the two strangers and drove over to the diamond-cutting works. There Henry showed them what he had in stock and the visitors selected a few stones of high quality and considerable value.



Now, one would not of course be carrying around large sums in cash on the off chance of finding suitable gems for purchase, and clearly a cheque with no backing would not do. In such cases, there is a clear procedure. The diamonds are folded into a special 'diamond paper' and placed in a stout envelope. Both parties to the sale examine the seal carefully and both sellers and purchasers sign across the seal. The buyers can then go away to raise the required money, secure in the knowledge that the stones cannot be exchanged for any others. And that was what was done.

That night, just as the rabbi was about to doze off, he suddenly had a thought. Had he – or had he not – noticed that while examining the seal on the envelope, one of the visitors substituting for the envelope an identical one he'd removed from the breast pocket of his jacket? The more he thought about it, the more convinced he became that an exchange had in fact taken place. What should he do?

He got out of bed and telephoned the Rosenstrauchs. Now, there was a problem: at this time, phonecalls went via an operator at the exchange, so he could not say too much in case the operator happened to overhear his comments. He explained that he needed to speak to them about that morning's events and arranged to meet them at the cutting works.

When they got there, the brothers opened the safe and took out the envelope. They felt it with their hands and noted there were the expected number of hard objects within. But they could not, of course, open the envelope to check, because, if the diamonds were in fact inside, when the buyers came back to collect them, they might legitimately suspect that the gems had been replaced by inferior stones and a valuable sale would have been lost.

There was, however, a possible solution. Diamonds are made of pure carbon, and carbon is a light element (Atomic Number 6), which means that they are essentially transparent to clinical X-rays, whereas stones are opaque to X-rays, so all that was required was an X-ray of the envelope and the answer would be known.

X-ray? Hospital!! The Chief Surgeon of Kimberley Hospital was Noel Kretzmar, one of the rabbi's prominent congregants and a near neighbour of mine; [his daughter, Geraldine (Auerbach) was the founder of the Jewish Music Institute in London]. So off they went to rouse Noel from his bed. Once they had explained their dilemma, Noel was very sympathetic – but explained that the X-ray Department at the hospital was closed at night so that nothing could be done until morning.



Then he remembered: his brother, Dr Julius Kretzmar, had a small X-ray apparatus at his consulting rooms in DuToitspan Road. He phoned Julius. Cautiously (in case the operator was listening in to this phonecall between two of the prominent medical men of the city), he said, "Julius, I have someone here and I suspect he may have some stones. May we meet you at your rooms so I can take an X-ray" – and off they all went!

At Julius's consulting rooms in 'Pan Road they found the doctor waiting for them, with the machine already switched on and warming up. He was expecting ... someone with a suspected kidney stone? – gall stones? – certainly not a brown envelope! The situation was explained to him, the X-ray was duly taken and the film developed.

And it showed several dark shadows! The envelope contained pebbles, not diamonds. The seal was torn open and the truth confirmed. The diamonds had gone.

At once the police were informed. A watch was placed on all ports and airports to intercept the perpetrators. It was all in vain. They had already left the country.

Some years later, one of the men was arrested in South America and deported to France, where he was wanted for some similar crime. Henry was flown to Paris to see if he could identify him – at the expense of the South African Police if he was in fact one of the thieves, but if not the Rosenstrauchs would have to pay. The identification was positive but no diamonds were ever recovered.

Louise Goldschmidt of London

Writes about her father Marcus Clayton formerly Cohen and his wife Phyllis née Hart

She says: My father Marcus, brother of Gladys Rosenstrauch, was born in Somerset East, South Africa in 1893. He came to England to study medicine including specialist dentistry. He was also an inventor of the Clayton Amalgam Carrier for filling tooth cavities.

Marcus married Phyllis Hart in London in 1929. She was the daughter of Esther nee Sussman and Philip Hart, born in London, England where her family had lived since the 17th century. Phyllis's family were partly Sephardi and she came from the Nunez Martines family and Abendana family, a very aristocratic Spanish Portuguese family. Her father's Hart family came from Prussia.

(Incidentally, because of my genealogical research my family are now entitled to Portuguese nationality. I already acquired a South African passport in 1939 through my father Marcus Clayton previously Cohen , in case we needed to move to South Africa to safety, if the Germans invaded England. I married Alfred Goldschmidt, born in Hamburg in 1959 . His life was saved by coming to England to safety with the KinderTransport. Sadly his parents perished in Aushwitz.

This is very much a story of people saving their lives - finding safety by travelling to another country, often through their network of caring family.

All his life, my father Marcus missed South Africa, but his wife preferred to stay in London. He adored his four grandchildren (Louise's children) and loved nothing better than to sit in the sand pit and walk and play with them in the sand pit at Golders Hill Park and in Regents Park. He had been a brilliant rigger player in his days at Gill College, South Africa, and the training hospitals in London. He was adored by everyone he met and always available to his patients until his death at 81. He was sad that his grandsons were not at that time, athletes like he had been, but would have been so proud of our second son Robert and his triathlon successes for charity.

I wrote this poem in Regent's Park which he loved and frequented with us all. During World War 2 he had been in a warden in the Air Raid Precautions, and I thought of him out there during the raids and mentioned him in my poem 'Now and Then'.

Now and Then - by Louise Goldschmidt

There are blossoms down the path along the
Lakeside where we sat,
And sitting in our place,
A man,
With a battered old brown hat.

A battered old brown hat
Is what my father wore
When he tended to his roses
Or came in through the door.
To take his beloved grandchildren
To play upon the sand.

A battered old brown hat
He wore
When he took them by the hand.
Sat amongst them in the sand pit,
Dreaming of another land

He went away before the spring had come,
The violets and the marigolds,
Could turn –
Their faces to the sun.

Simon and Gladys Rosenstrauch & Family

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

From information supplied by Ginette Rosenstrauch, Austin Texas, with additional thoughts from Louise Goldschmidt, London UK with suggestions from Philip Mayers, Melbourne, Australia.