

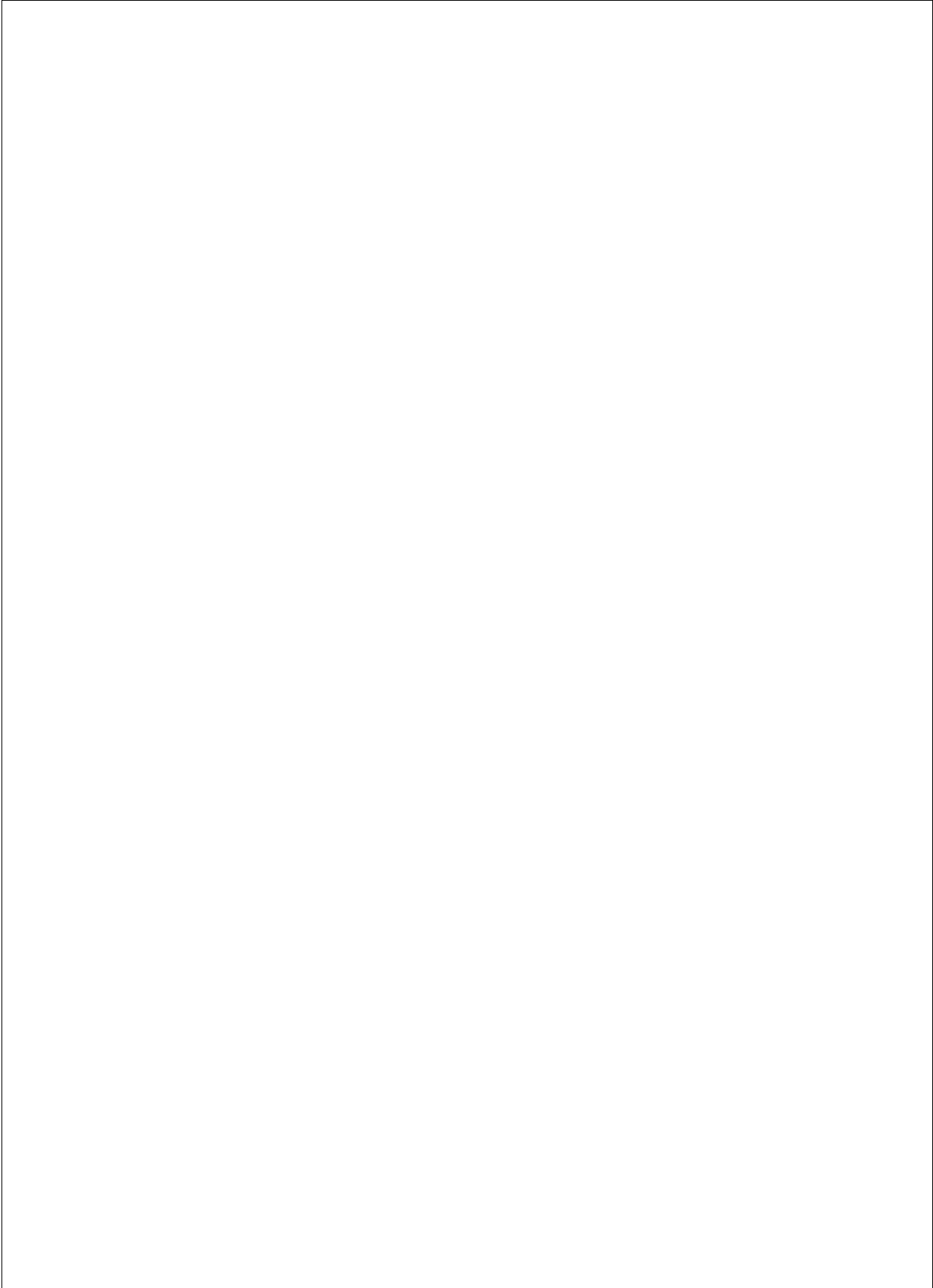
# Latvia SIG

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## Table of Contents

President's Report	2
Editor's Comments	3
Rav Meir Simcha	4
Chicago's Landsmanshaften	5
Human Rights in Latvia	8
Latvian Integration	11
Operation Last Chance: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Beyond the Baltics	15
Anti-Semitism in the Baltics	21
IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy	21
Membership Fees via PayPal	22
Latvia SIG Membership Questionnaire	23
Rezekne: The History of Jews in the City of My Roots	A
Family Finder	B



## President's Report

Shalom Chaverim!

First of all, I hope that all of our families had a happy Pesach. The fact that Pesach is the celebration of our going out from slavery to freedom should have poignant significance to us this year. I look upon our endeavors in genealogy as a sort of year round Pesach. As I watch my family grow more numerous with the more research I do, I feel that we have, indeed, been freed from slavery. Although Hitler and his collaborators tried to erase the names of the Jews from the face of the earth, our continued efforts in genealogy totally remove that possibility from reality.

What are some of our recent accomplishments? First of all, we have incorporated Estonia into the SIG and we are data basing material on the Jews of Estonia. Some of that material is already up on the website. Ultimately, we'd like to have a web page within the auspices of the current SIG Latvia web page, which would house all the databases from Estonia. If anyone is interested in working on that, I would appreciate your getting in touch with me. Within this same framework, we have members who are particularly interested in certain areas within Latvia, who are obtaining information and data basing sources to put up on a web page for those particular villages.

Currently, we have groups working on the areas of Dvinsk and Rezneke/Ludza. Thanks to Eric Benjaminson, Goldingen already has a web page. This reminds me that if you go to the Courland web page, you will find a newly posted list of Jewish heads of households in Goldingen from 1844, along with notes about those families who went to Cherson.

Once again, anyone interested in working on a particular area within Latvia, please let me know and we will do everything we can to help you move forward and to put up a page dedicated to your area.

We have several irons in the fire, so to speak, and are working on joint projects with Yad Vashem, with the Association of Latvians and Estonians in Israel, with the University of Latvia, and so forth.

There is no limit to the projects that we can accomplish, as long as we have volunteers and your financial and intellectual backing. The SIG has developed a name for itself as a serious academic and archival resource. You can be proud of the distance we have traveled in just a few short years!

As you know, the 23<sup>rd</sup> IAJGS International Conference of Jewish Genealogy will take place in Washington, DC during the week of 20 July of this year. We are proud to be an active part of that conference. Throughout the week, you will find numerous lectures of interest. In addition, we have scheduled a luncheon just for the Latvia SIG on Tuesday, 22 July, so be sure to save the date.

Mike Getz will give a talk at the luncheon entitled "Zionism and Jewish Genealogy." Before the Jewish community was destroyed in the war, Latvia had a number of very active and popular Zionist groups. This talk should add another dimension to your family knowledge!

At the conference, I will be giving a talk entitled: "Where do I go from here: Germany, Lithuania, Belarus, Poland? What were the origins of our Latvian ancestors?" I hope to allow the listeners to make an educated guess as to which country they should gravitate for further family research. I will compare the histories of each area of Jewish settlement in Latvia to enable you to come to an intuitive understanding of why and how your family got to Latvia! None of the material is presently available in any single source and much of it was gleaned from my own research and sources.

At the conference we will also have our annual meeting, so arm yourselves with ideas for moving the SIG forward!

You might be interested in knowing that there will be an IAJGS sponsored genealogical 4-day cruise from 1-5 December 2003 to Key West and Cozumel. In the USA you can call 1-888-840-5240 or visit the IAJGS website at [www.iajgs.org](http://www.iajgs.org) for further information.

This is the time of year when we promise, NEXT YEAR IN JERUSALEM! And so the 2004

IAJGS International Conference will, indeed, be in Jerusalem. Plan on it! Israel has unique archival sources available nowhere else in the world!

We look forward to seeing you in Washington! Any ideas or comments you care to make before then can be addressed to the SIG discussion



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Chag sameach!

Martha Levinson  
Lev-Zion, Ph.D.

## Editor's Comments

Once again I am pleased to thank the contributors to this issue of the Latvia SIG newsletter and I am happy to bring material of such diversity and importance to the readership.

Esther Rechtschafner, from Kibbutz Ein-Zurim, has written two interesting and moving articles about the city of Rezekne and the connection between Rezekne and Ein Zeitim in Israel. The first article, appearing in this issue, traces the history of the Jews in Rezekne and the second article, to appear in the next issue, describes the connection with Ein Zeitim. Esther's research was motivated by her love for her paternal grandmother, after whom she was named, and her desire to learn more about her grandmother's life in Rezekne. (*Because this work was submitted in hard copy, I have included it as Appendix A to this issue.*)

Rav Meir Simcha was one of the most influential rabbis of the early 20th century, and we are fortunate that Professor Chaim Oscar Jacob, of the University of Southern California, submitted his biographical account of the rabbi for this newsletter. I am particularly pleased since Rav Simcha was a leading rabbi in Dvinsk when my

ancestors resided there.

Jumping about 100 years to the present, Sidney Sorkin provides us with an illuminating view of the importance of Chicago as a destination for so many Jewish immigrants, and a wealth of information that will assist many in their genealogy research.

Continuing our concerns about Jewish life in the Baltics, we are including two articles that appeared recently in Latvian newspapers. The first is an interview with Grigorijs Krupnikovs, the former head of the Riga Jewish Community, which focuses on human rights in Latvia. The second concerns the integration of minorities into Latvian society and is an interview with the Latvian Minister of Integration, Nils Muiznieks. Both articles are important in light of Latvia's desire to become a member of the European Union and of the EU's anti-discrimination requirements.

Operation Last Chance, the controversial program sponsored by the Simon Wiesenthal Center (SWC), which offers \$10,000 to anyone providing information leading to the conviction of Nazi war criminals, has been opposed by the Jewish Communities in Estonia and Latvia and ads for it have been refused publication in some newspapers in Estonia and Latvia. We have included articles concerning these events, one submitted by Efram Zuroff of the SWC and the main proponent of the advertising campaign.

Anti-Semitism in the Baltics continues to be an issue and we are again including coverage of events that display such behavior.

Finally, once a year we provide our database called Family Finders, which consists of genealogy researchers and the families and towns being researched. We hope that this database will provide family links to other researchers and interested parties. Rhea Plottel maintains this database for the SIG and we appreciate all the work that she does on our behalf. See App. B.

We are continually looking for interesting and informative articles for the newsletter and we can only be successful if you identify and submit

material to us. Please submit such material to me at [barry.shay@ieee.org](mailto:barry.shay@ieee.org) or to Mike Getz at [mgetz@erols.com](mailto:mgetz@erols.com).

We hope to see many of you at the IASJGS in Washington.

Barry Shay

## Rav Meir Simcha

by Chaim Oscar Jacob

An important sociological phenomenon in which an unexpected concentration of intellectual and cultural creativity originates in one place or at one time has been coined as “clustering.” Within Jewish intellectual history, one of the more recent periods of “clustering” occurred in Jewish Lithuania from the middle of the nineteenth century until the Holocaust. Based upon considerations of population, economics, social structure and political influence, one would not have anticipated to find such a high concentration of authentic Jewish cultural originality during this period of time within the Pale of Settlement of the Russian Empire. But this unique phenomenon has more than pure historical relevance. The writings and teachings of the rabbis of this epoch have a very real presence in contemporary religious life and strongly influence the way Orthodox Jewry relates to the wider world in the present day. Understanding the lives of these rabbis, their teachings, and the circumstances that influenced them is therefore not only of narrow theoretical interest, but might be critical for an intelligent assessment of the state of contemporary Jewry.

Beside the hagiolatrous “lives of the saints” style “gedolim” biographies that fill the shelves of Jewish bookstores, and some scattered monographs, almost no critical biographies of the Lithuanian rabbis have appeared which would present not only their lives but also the intellectual and historical context in which they lived.

Among this prominent group of Lithuanian rabbis, the persona of Rav Meir Simcha Hacoen, the leader of the Mitnagdic Jewry of Dvinsk for nearly forty years (1887-1926), stands out in its uniqueness. Meir Simcha is not only an out-

standing Talmudist, leading halakhic (Jewish law) authority and beloved leader of a large urban Jewish community during incredibly complicated and critical times, but he is arguably the most original thinker of Rabbinical Judaism at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Rav Meir Simcha is also exceptional in being a true autodidact. He did not attend any type of school, not even a formal Yeshiva, and it is questionable if he ever read any books outside the accepted traditional Jewish rabbinical literature. It is even uncertain whether he spoke any language beside Hebrew and Yiddish to the level of being able to understand any classical piece of literature or philosophy. In spite of these particulars, he stands out as a great rationalist in an era of irrationality, a very profound scholar of human psychology and a humanist.

Meir Simcha was born, most probably, in 1843 in the small town of Baltrimintz (south of Vilna) to Osnat and Shimshon Kloynimus Kalman. His father was a well to do merchant but also a learned Litvak mitnaged. His grandfather, Rav Chananiah Cohen was considered a great Talmudist himself and Meir Simcha mentions in his writings Torah novelleas that he learned from his father or his grandfather. In all probability, he had a much older brother who lived in the town of Kracz with whom the young Meir Simcha lived and spent some time learning. Sometime after his barmitzvah his father sent him to Eyshishok, a town known for its Kolel Prushim and its Jewish Torah scholars. There, Meir Simcha came closer than ever to any formal education, studying with Rabbi Moshe Denishevsky, a very well respected Talmudist. At the age of 17 he married Chaia Makovsky the younger daughter of Zvi Paltiel Makovsky from Bialystok and moved there. For the next 26 years he stayed in Bialystok studying every aspect of traditional Jewish literature, while his father-in-law financially supported him and his wife. We know very little about these years but it is clear that during this time he earned the recognition as an extraordinary scholar and his name became known among the learned Jewish Orthodox elite. Despite never being officially ordained as a Rabbi, it was very apparent to both the religious lay leadership, as well as the yeshiva leadership of the time, that Meir Simcha was well

1.	AJC Yr.Bk	American Jewish Congress 1939 Yearbook
2.	ALJC	Association of Lithuanian Jews of Chicago
3.	<b>BAC</b>	<b>Bridges To An American City (New)</b>
4.	<b>BGN</b>	<b>U. S. Board of Geographical names. Available from the U.S.GPO</b>
5.	CJFYr.Bks	Jewish Federation of Chicago Yearbooks
6.	CJSB	Chicago Jewish Source Book
7.	Cons & By-Laws	Society constitutions and By-laws
8.	FGJ Yr.Bk	Farband Golden Jubilee Yearbook
9.	HCH	History Of Chicago Jewry
10.	<b>HIAS Yr.Bks</b>	<b>Chicago Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (New)</b>
11.	INCORP	Incorporated in the State of Illinois
12.	JEW Encyc's	Jewish Encyclopedias 1903,1940, 1972
13.	<b>JLC</b>	<b>Jewish Labor Committee Microfilm (New)</b>
14.	JNWA Yr.Bks	Jewish National Workers Alliance
15.	JPI Yr.Bks	Jewish (Hebrew) Peoples Institute
16.	JPS Yr.Bks	Jewish Publication Society
17.	LDN	Local Death Notices
18.	LQ	Landsmanshaften Questionnaire
19.	MGC	Menorah Gardens Cemetery
20.	<b>MBX</b>	<b>Dr. Mishkin Papers (New)</b>
21.	MRW	Brotherhood Of Memory
22.	<b>OWC</b>	<b>Oak Woods Cemetery (New)</b>
23.	ORAL H	Interviews / Oral Histories
24.	PCG	Piser Cemetery Guide, 1999 edition
25.	Photo	Cemetery Gates and Markers
26.	P.Ref	Personal referrals
27.	SFG	Shetl Finder Gazetteer
28.	<b>SYN/C</b>	<b>Synagogues Of Chicago (New)</b>
29.	VER.PAPS	Verein papers, books and documents
30.	VER.PICS	Verein pictures
31.	VER Yr.Bks	Verein Yearbooks
32.	WALDHM	Waldheim Cemetery, Forest Park
33.	WCM	Workmen's Circle Magazine
34.	WODLWN	Woodlawn Cemetery
35.	<b>WOW</b>	<b>Where Once We Walked (New)</b>
36.	YIZ Bks	Asher Library - Spertus and the Silber Library of the Hebrew Theological Seminary, Skokie

qualified and ready to embark on major leadership positions. In the early 1880s he was considered for the position of chief Rabbi of Bialystok, but eventually the position was offered to somebody else, not so much because of his relatively young age, but possibly because he was erroneously considered “too anti-Zionist.” It should be emphasized however, that with time his attitude toward Zionism changed considerably, although it is doubtful whether he ever really was anti-Zionist.

Immediately after the famed rabbi of the Mitnagdic community of Dvinsk, Rabbi Reuven HaLevy, known as Rabbi Reuvele Dunanburger, died the eminent Rav Yankel Charif, the chief Rabbi of Zagar suggested offering the position to Meir Simcha Hacohen. When two of the most prominent Yeshiva leaders, Rabbi Josef Ber Soloveichick (the Beit Halevi) and Rabbi Isaac Yerucham Diskin full heartedly concurred, the position was offered to Meir Simcha. Only days before Passover 1887 Rav Meir Simcha arrived in Dvinsk, where he remained for the rest of his life. This is how the almost 40 years long “love story” between Rav Meir Simcha and the people of Dvinsk started. It is incorrect, however, to consider Rav Meir Simcha as just the “local hero” of Dvinsk. In fact he played a central role in the key events and issues of the time in the whole of Latvia and far beyond as one of the central leaders of Orthodox Jewry of his generation.

His world famous books are the *Ohr Sameach* on Rambam, published in his lifetime and *Meshech Hochma*, published shortly after his death in 1926. When choosing titles of their works, Torah scholars often play on Hebrew words or biblical phrases related to their own names. Meir means “radiant” and Simcha means “joy” thus, the book *Ohr Sameach* (Joyous Light) is a variation on the author’s name. *Meshech Hochma* (Price of Wisdom) is based on the phrase from Job 28:18 “meshech hochma mipnanim” meaning the price of wisdom exceeds that of pearls. But “**Meshech**” is also the acronym of his name **Meir Simcha** Cohen.

Rav Meir Simcha is known today only among the learned Jewish non-Chassidic Orthodoxy and even there almost exclusively (just) as an ingen-

ious commentator on the Pentateuch. It is ironic that many supernatural anecdotes circulate about the life of this profound fighter against any type of mysticism in Judaism. Not only because of the inaccessibility of the Rabbinic Hebrew practiced by Rav Meir Simcha in his writings, but also because of his personality, the tragedies of his life, and the fact that he had no descendants or followers that survived, his philosophical legacy is mostly unknown.

In this way, I perceive my project in trying to put together a realistic portrait of this complex man, his times and his unique thought, and hopefully paint an accurate picture of this vibrant Jewish community in stormy times. In this context I respectfully invite any useful input from you, the distinguished readers of Latvia SIG, to me directly or if you would prefer, to Mr. Mike Getz.

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## **Chicago’s Landsmanshaften: New Sources For Chicago’s Vereins and Societies**

By Sidney Sorkin

Shortly after *Bridges to an American City* was published in 1993, the only definitive survey about Chicago’s landsmanshaften, a friend called about a memo she found on her desk, a memo that was a decade old. The follow-up on that memo was the impetus to write an *Annex* to *Bridges*, with new sources, adding new vereins with hundreds of new names of landsleit who were members of these landsmanshaften.

The names of these vereins and most of the other pertinent and general information have been written onto my file of 5” X 8” lined cards. The original list of abbreviations had only twenty-seven items, while the list found below has thirty-six. Only five of those nine will be discussed here and they are: No.3, BAC, No. 10, HIAS, No. 13, JLC, No. 20 MBX and No.28 SYN/C.

The first one No.3, BAC, *Bridges to an American*

*City* can be ordered at Barnes & Noble, Borders and Amazon.com or through your local library, has been but briefly mentioned. The second one No. 10, HIAS, the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society was obtained through that decade old memo. The memo was about contacting Mrs. William Wantamaker, the sister-in-law to Sam Wannamaker the Chicago born actor and her father-in-law Maurice Wantamaker the treasurer for decades and an active member for over thirty years of the Nickolaever Untersteitzung Verein of Chicago.

The elder Wantamakers had moved to California and when they passed away the William Wantamakers inherited all their papers. Among the photocopies sent to me were a photograph and additional news about a Nickolaever branch in California, as of 1948. Included were copies of the 1935 and the 1954 Chicago edition of the HIAS yearbook. What should be noted was that the 1935 HIAS yearbook was mostly in Yiddish; the 1954 edition was mostly in English. These traditional yearbooks were replete with organizational achievements, acknowledgements of donors and advertisements. This new information was added to thousands of my 5" X 8" cards. The Chicago Jewish Federation disposed of the local collection of HIAS yearbooks when the HIAS organization was absorbed. A former Chicagoan now living in New York City currently holds the only known set.

The third item No. 13, JLC, the Jewish Labor Committee was new to my resources. This material is on microfilm and is housed in the Robert Wagner Labor Archives at New York University in New York City. The Jewish Labor Committee was founded in the midst of the Great Depression in 1934 and by the 1940s had 292 landsmanschaften affiliates, of the hundreds in the city, not including fifty-five Cousin Clubs and Family Circles. The local contact of the Jewish Labor Committee is Dr. Sue Weiler, through the Chicago Jewish Historical Society. The letters, telegrams and other communications between the Jewish Labor Committee and survivors in the DP Camps who were looking for relatives in Chicago, is new material for those who are tracing family and Holocaust survivors. How the Jewish Labor Committee files were brought to my attention

was through the next item, No.20, MBX.

Rabbi Leonard Mishkin was head of the Associated Talmud Torahs of Chicago for more than a quarter of a century. Dr. Mishkin was also an historian, a noted scholar and a collector. Scraps of papers with notes from phone calls are in the three boxes among yearbooks from Associated Talmud Torahs, the Workmen's Circle and the Jewish Labor Committee. Flyers and other items relating to unions and synagogues that tried to help distressed workers during those years of the Great Depression are also in the boxes.

But these documents traveled a circuitous journey. Many of Dr. Mishkin's books were sold in Great Britain, while the University of Florida, in Gainesville, bought the bulk of his papers. After sorting and cataloguing all of his papers, they found that there was a large cache of items that were directly related to Chicago. When the Chicago Jewish Historical Society was notified that these items were available, the three boxes were quickly purchased and deposited in the Asher Library at the Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies.

The fifth item No. 28, SYN/C is a two-volume compilation of the *SYNAGOGUES OF CHICAGO*, edited by Dr. Irving Cutler, Norman D. Schwartz and Sidney Sorkin and supervised by Clare Greenberg for the Chicago Jewish Historical Society. It was published in 1991. For the genealogist looking for rabbis serving in Chicago, congregational leaders and locations, this is a major place to start. Some of these "shuls" originated as minions of landsleit, that were to become landsmanschaft congregations

With some trepidation I use the FBI motto, "The Past is Prologue." There was a death notice in the Chicago Tribune dated December 8, 2002 for Mrs. Lillian Rubenstein, who was buried in the Lukover Society Cemetery. Her family was contacted because there was a Mrs. Hilda Rubenstein listed among the directors of that society in 1958 in *BRIDGES*. Through the family contact, her son explained that Lillian was his mother and that Hilda was his grandmother. The verein papers are in the care of the cemetery sexton.

There are eight new items and their abbreviations that have been added to the original resource list

from BAC. They are: BAC, BGN, HIAS, JLC, MBX, OWC, SYN/C, and WOW. Five of them have been expanded entities above, the entire list of abbreviations and their brief explanations are listed in the table on Page 6.

## Human Rights in Latvia

*The former chairman of the Riga Jewish Community has said that although there have been a few instances of anti-Semitic expressions in Latvian society over the last 10 years, there are no substantial problems for the Jewish community in the country. In a newspaper interview, Grigorijs Krupnikovs also said that he does not agree with the tactics of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, which seeks to bring former Nazi war criminals to justice. The following is the text of the interview by Voldemars Hermanis, entitled "Jews are thankful to Latvia's humanists" and published in the Latvian newspaper Neatkarīga Rita Avīze on 21 February, p 6; subheadings inserted editorially:] This is an interview with businessman Grigorijs Krupnikovs, the former chairman of the Riga Jewish Community.*

[Hermanis] The Jewish and German minority groups in Latvia are ones, which, for various reasons and under different circumstances, have dramatically diminished in numbers in comparison to the period before World War II. The Jewish community in present-day Latvia, however, is one of the best-organized minority groups in terms of public life, and it has been one of the most noticeable groups in politics. Why is that?

[Krupnikovs] Jews have traditionally been survivors. The Jewish community has lived in exile for more than 2,000 years, and that has apparently created a certain level of immunity, a certain ability to survive. Even small communities can live in other countries, not in their own land.

[Hermanis] The size of Latvia's Jewish community diminished once again in the early 1990s. Has this process stopped?

[Krupnikovs] It basically stopped quite a while ago. The last dramatic reduction was between 1989 and 1991, when the Iron Curtain fell. Nobody knew what would happen tomorrow or the next day at that time. Would tanks arrive? Would

communists retake power? Would we be moving toward an independent Latvia? Nobody knew how the days of January [1991, when an attack was made by Soviet special forces against the Latvian Interior Ministry] or August [1991, when the Soviet coup took place] would end. People - not only from Latvia, but also from other parts of the USSR, and not only Jews - took flight whenever they could. They did not know what they could expect.

### Depictions of Jewish life

[Hermanis] The exhibition "The Latvian Jewish community: History, tragedy and rebirth" has been seen in several towns. How have people received it?

[Krupnikovs] The exhibition has left a great impression, because people in small towns perhaps have little information about what happened to the Jewish community. They do not know about the community between the two world wars, during the first republic. They do not know what the Jewish community did, how large it was. What happened on 14 June 1941 [the major deportation during the first Soviet occupation], what happened during the years of Nazi occupation. A total of 3,500 Jews were sent to Siberia in cattle cars, and a few less than 80,000 were killed right here in Latvia.

[Hermanis] The Riga Jewish High School was one of the first schools of its kind in the former Soviet Union. How has it developed, and what role does it play in preserving the Jewish identity?

[Krupnikovs] Back then it was the very first Jewish school, and it was opened on 1 September 1989. We did not know how many parents would want to send their children there. Today it is an accredited high school which is housed in two buildings and which is attended by more than 300 children. The school has completely become a part of the bilingual process. Most of Latvia's Jews were killed. In the post-war period, Jews from other parts of the Soviet Union came to Latvia and Lithuania, because the level of state-sponsored anti-Semitism here was considerably lower than in Ukraine or Leningrad, for instance. The Russian language was the native language for

many of these people. Today [the American philanthropist] Ronald Lauder has set up a fund which finances the establishment and maintenance of Jewish educational institutions in Central and Eastern Europe. He has already built schools in Krakow, Budapest and Berlin. We are near the end of negotiations with Mr Lauder about the construction of a new school in Riga. The City Council has promised to give us some land. Right now the elementary school is in Dzirnavu Street, in the old Jewish elementary school. The building is in horrible condition. The high school is in [the Riga neighbourhood of] Jugla.

### **The structure of the community**

[Hermanis] A Judaica Center was opened at the University of Latvia a few years ago. The Riga Jewish Cultural Center is operating, the Jewish community's building at Skolas Street 6 [in Riga] has been recovered. Is anyone coordinating this network of cultural and educational institutions?

[Krupnikovs] There are between 13 and 15 Jewish organizations and institutions in Riga - a Jewish school, a Jewish hospital, a museum, an organization for war veterans, a social aid organization, a youth center, a cultural center, a library. All of these organizations merge into the Riga Jewish Community, which is centered at Skolas Street 6. Also there we find the documentation center "The Jews in Latvia", along with several of the aforementioned organizations. The community also includes the Bikur Holim Jewish hospital in Maskavas Street, as well as the Jewish school. The hospital is owned by independent legal entities. It is the only Jewish hospital in the formerly communist part of Europe. It was returned to our community by virtue of a special decision by the Saeima [parliament].

[Hermanis] That happened

[Krupnikovs] There is, you see, a problem with property transfer here. The law says that property can be returned to religious, but not to social organizations. The situation with the Jews, as always, is somewhat different. In a normal Jewish community of the kind that existed in pre-war Latvia, there could be no strict division between religious and social organizations. The same is

true with respect to the Bikur Holim hospital. It is a medical institution, yes, but it used to have a small synagogue and a kosher kitchen. Boys were circumcised and people were buried in accordance with religious rituals. The same was true with a senior citizens' home at Pernavas Street 70. It also had a small synagogue.

[Hermanis] In the mid-1990s, [researcher] Leo Dribins published a book called "Jews in Latvia", and it contained this statement: "There are no differences of opinion between Latvia's government institutions and the Riga Jewish community on the condition and prospects of the Jewish minority in Latvia." Can the same be said today?

[Krupnikovs] It can be said with respect to all of the years of independence. The Jewish community was restored almost at the same time as the national renaissance [the period before Latvia regained independence] began. This was a very natural process. On 2 June [1988], the Association of Creative Unions held its plenary session at the Hall of Congresses [a speech that was delivered at that meeting was the first time that anyone in Soviet Latvia spoke publicly about the Soviet-German pact to carve up Europe]. At the beginning of July, a group of Jews came together and decided to restore the Jewish community in Latvia. On 8 October, the Latvian People's Front [the main pro-independence umbrella organization] held its first congress. In the latter half of October, the Riga Jewish Community held its founding congress. If you look at photographs in the Jewish museum, you will see that at the first mass demonstration on the shores of the Daugava River, alongside the red-white-red flag of Latvia, there is the flag of the Jewish community. The Jewish community completely supported the activities of the Latvian People's Front and the efforts of Latvia to regain independence. We did what we could. We gained the support of American Jewish organizations, for instance. The same is true now with respect to Latvia's attempt to join NATO. The American Jewish Committee has expressed very active support for this, and it is one of the most influential organizations in America.

## Nazi war crimes

[Hermanis] At the same time, however, the Simon Wiesenthal Center is accusing Latvia of insufficient and unsuccessful attempts to investigate Nazi war crimes. These accusations cause Latvians to think that people such as [Ephraim] Zuroff [the Israeli director of the center] are purposefully or unconsciously trying to foment hatred between Latvians and Jews.

[Krupnikovs] As the former chairman of the Riga Jewish Community, I cannot be held responsible for the things that Mr Zuroff does. Neither can the Jewish community as such. You [as a Latvian] probably cannot be held responsible for things that are done by [Alfreds] Rubiks [former leader of the Soviet Latvian Communist Party]. Zuroff and I are both Jews. Rubiks and you are both ethnic Latvians. Do you want to be responsible for him or for Viktors Alksnis [an ethnic Latvian who is a vocally anti-Latvian member of the Russian parliament]? Of course not. I have said several times in public that I do not agree with Mr Zuroff's position. The same just happened in Estonia. The chairwoman of the Jewish community there, Cilja Laud, protested against Zuroff's activities. As far as I am concerned, he is damaging the idea which is the leitmotif of his activities. I do not believe that there is any concept of collective guilt. That is something that was thought up during the era of Stalin and Hitler. There are individual criminals, not collective guilt.

At the same time, however, nobody can keep Mr Zuroff from saying what he wants to say. The only thing that we can discuss is our approach toward his activities.

[Hermanis] At the same time, there were Latvians who saved Jews. The best-known ones are Zanis Lipke and Arturs Krumins, among others. Do you think that these names are sufficiently well known among Jews and Latvians?

[Krupnikovs] Jews who live in Latvia know about these people. We have a museum; it has a list. When the saviors of the Jews receive diplomas or medals from Yad Vashem [an organization which seeks to perpetuate the memory of the Holocaust], from the Israeli state, there is a public

ceremony. Of course, the medals are most often presented to the children of the saviors. We know about these things, we talk about them. In the early 1990s I was speaking about two groups of people about whom nobody in Latvia was talking - the saviors of the Jews, beginning with Zanis Lipke, and the [anti-Nazi] opposition movement that was headed by Konstantins Cakste. How much did anyone know about the Latvian Central Council [an anti-Nazi opposition group during World War II] before the committee to set up a memorial [to Cakste] was established? These are the people who are Latvia's greatest pride. They are humanists and democrats in the highest sense of these words. There is a memorial to Lipke at the Forest Cemetery, but we are thinking about setting up an even larger memorial for him.

## The Jewish community elsewhere in Latvia

[Hermanis] One of the largest Jewish communities in Latvia exists in [the far eastern town of] Daugavpils. In 1897, 46.5 per cent of the town's residents were Jews; they have always made up a significant share of the population. One of the streets in Daugavpils is named for the Jewish theatre director and anti-Fascist activist [Solomon] Mihoels. There is a Jeruzalemes [Jerusalem] Street in Riga. Apparently your community cannot complain about any lack of support from local governments.

[Krupnikovs] I think that the Jewish community in Latvia as such has very constructive relations with the institutions of government at all levels. To be sure, not all issues can be resolved. We do not always have enough money. I like to remember that when the Vilnius 10 [a group of NATO candidate countries] met in Bucharest last year, the American Jewish Committee set up a parallel event, bringing together the leaders of the Jewish communities from the NATO candidate countries. A brochure was published about each candidate country. The American Jewish Committee's statements about the Jewish situation in Latvia were fairly positive. We can object. Not everything is ideal, not everything is rosy. There can be an offensive article in the magazine Kapitals [which published an article several years ago that was called "Jews control the world" and suggested that Jews themselves were to blame for the

Holocaust]. There can be things that the [radical Latvian nationalist] publisher [Aivars] Garda has said. Sometimes there are stupid situations. The situation with the restored memorial at Rumbula is one such example [there was a dispute over the text on the memorial - whether it should say that Nazis killed Jews or that Nazis and their local supporters killed Jews; the latter version was engraved on the monument in the event]. The main thing is that there are no fundamental contradictions.

More than half of Latvia's Jews are now citizens. In 1995, only 44.7 per cent were citizens. There are Jewish communities not only in Riga and Daugavpils, but also in [the Latvian towns of] Liepaja, Jurmala, Ventspils, Jelgava, Jekabpils, Rezekne and Ludza. The Latvian Jewish Community and the Council of Congregations bring all these groups together.

[Hermanis] Do you have a vision about the future of the Jewish community in Latvia?

[Krupnikovs] I see it somewhere between Stockholm and Copenhagen. Stockholm has a big Jewish community, Copenhagen has a small one, but it is well organized, active, open and integrated into government structures. The former chief rabbi of Denmark, Bent Melchior, enjoys the highest respect of the Danish people.

## Latvian Integration

"I want to rehabilitate the concept of integration," says the Latvian integration minister.

*[The Latvian integration minister has said that one of his goals in office is to help people to understand the true meaning of integration - that it is a process that involves working together and tolerating one another. In a newspaper interview Nils Muiznieks said that another key goal for him is to elaborate on ethnic minority integration programs, but he added that he also thinks about groups such as disabled people, prisoners and others. The following is the text of the interview by Ruta Kesnere, entitled "So that each person in Latvia feels that he or she belongs, is understood and is respected" and published in the Latvian newspaper Latvijas Vestnesis on 13 March, pp 1,*

*13; subheadings inserted editorially:]*

[Correspondent] For the first time in the 12 years of Latvia's independence, we have a minister of public integration. Why now? Is the situation with integration so poor?

[Muiznieks] I think that the situation is not bad, but it could be better. I did not take part in the discussions when the government was being established, but there was the question of whether we will enter the European Union as a split or unified society. Does everyone in Latvia feel that he or she belongs here? Has there been sufficient integration between those who are in power and the people? Answers suggested that much remains to be done, and there must be a politically responsible person who develops and supervises the integration process.

In establishing our ministry, we took over many issues from other ministries and government institutions. These include the development of the Liv Shore [a territory once populated by Latvia's other indigenous ethnoses, the Livs or Livonians]. That was formerly an issue for the Ministry of Environmental Protection and Regional Development. The Naturalization Board had a Minorities Department, but many members of ethnic minorities are citizens, so why should the Naturalization Board have to deal with their issues? A key direction for our work will be the emergence of the civil society, looking at ways in which nongovernmental organizations can be involved in the taking of decisions that are important for the state. The integration programme particularly accents the issue of civic participation.

[Correspondent] You have said that you want to rehabilitate the concept of integration. What does that mean? What are the values that are included in this idea?

[Muiznieks] First of all, integration is a process. It means the cohabitation of various groups in society, working to build up a democratic country together, not alongside one another. Integration speaks to values such as cooperation, active participation and - and this is very important - tolerance for that which is difference. The Latvian language is not so much a goal as a resource in the

integration process, because it is very hard to cooperate and take part in public processes in Latvia if you do not speak Latvian.

### **Tolerance for integration**

[Correspondent] You said that an important aspect of integration is tolerance for that which is different. From the perspective of tolerance, is our society ready for integration?

[Muiznieks] The situation in society is fairly contradictory. There are many areas in which our society is very tolerant. Latvians have long-standing traditions of co-existing with other nationalities. Extremist groups in Latvia are very weak. Ethnically mixed marriages are common, which indicates that there is no radical polarization in society.

Sociological surveys tell us, however, that there is a great distance among some ethnic groups. There are less than clear attitudes toward Gypsies, black people and Jews. Society holds a fairly intolerant attitude toward social groups such as immigrants and homosexuals. We have quite a bit to do yet before everyone in society feels that he or she belongs, that he or she is trusted and can feel secure. Over the last few years I have taken part in various events that have been organized by the Council of Europe and the United Nations to counter racism, intolerance and xenophobia. On April 4, in collaboration with the Council of Europe, there will be a major conference here in Latvia, "Public integration - promoting tolerance." We will talk about ways in which Latvian laws seek to prevent discrimination, among other things. This conference might be the first step before the elaboration of a national action plan against racism and intolerance. Racism involves not only biases against people of a different skin color; in Latvia's case it also includes things such as Russian chauvinism, Russophobia and anti-Semitism.

[Correspondent] People in Latvia do not have nearly as favorable an attitude toward refugees, sadly, as do people in Sweden. How can tolerance in society be promoted?

[Muiznieks] That is a long and difficult process. You must understand that there is no reason to

expect any great inflow of immigrants or refugees into Latvia in the immediate future. If, however, we join the EU, we will have more and more frequent contacts with people of different cultures, religions and skin colors - in culture, in the economy in tourism, for instance. Then we will have to face the issue of living with these people, working together with them in a single company. We will have to learn to respect these people. That is an issue of education, cultural experience and frequency of contacts.

### **The European minorities convention**

[Correspondent] If we are talking about ethnic integration, you support the ratification of the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. There are polarized attitudes with respect to this matter in society and in the governing coalition [the right-wing For the Fatherland and Freedom-LNNK party in particular is firmly opposed to ratification]. What is it about the convention, in your opinion, which causes people to dislike it, and why should it be ratified anyway?

[Muiznieks] I think that dislike is the result of a lack of information. People are afraid that someone might push something upon Latvia. The point to the convention is that it lists a series of general principles. Ethnic minorities should not be assimilated; there should not be discrimination against them. There should be an effort to support their efforts to preserve their culture. Latvian law is in line with the requirements of the convention already. In order to avoid speculations, let me say that the convention should be ratified with one opt-out; street signs in Latvia should not be in two different languages. Many people, upon hearing about the convention, are concerned about the status of the Latvian language and about the fact that there are places in Latvia where Latvians themselves are in the minority. Such situations, however, are addressed in the convention. It says very clearly that minority rights must be observed only to the point that they do not harm the official state language.

The convention should also be ratified because Latvia promised to do so in 1995, when it signed the convention. Latvia is the only EU candidate country that has not ratified the convention. That

causes us to be a negative exception, which is completely unnecessary. In terms of domestic policy, ratification of the convention forces government officials to pay attention to the lives of minority groups in Latvia, to our legislative practice, to things which happen in relation to the convention in relation to the police, the courts, the local governments of the country. It is very healthy if government officials have an interest in the way in which people live. The convention is a framework for dialogue between the government and minority nationalities and between the government and the Council of Europe. There have been attempts to push the Macedonian model onto Latvia, which I think is completely destructive. I think that the convention should be ratified during the term in office of this Saeima [parliament, due to remain in office until 2006], but only after the referendum on accession to the European Union.

[Correspondent] If the convention is ratified, what will be the practical benefits for a Pole or a Gypsy?

[Muiznieks] There will basically be no benefits. Let me stress that the convention is essentially a very weak instrument in the shaping of minority nationality policies. People will benefit from the fact that government officials will be forced to pay attention to their lives and to their rights - what are the abilities of minority representatives to take part in government and local government work, what is the practice of language use in local governments, what are the criteria on the basis of which financing is granted for the development of minority culture, for instance.

### **Benefits for Russians**

[Correspondent] Is it not true that the greatest benefits from the convention will be received by the Russian minority, leaving other minorities in the shadows?

[Muiznieks] It is clear that Russians do not need the same protections as other minorities. I know of no other minority in Europe whose language is more common than the official state language. More people in Latvia speak the Russian language than the Latvian language. The convention was drafted with the aim of protecting those mi-

norities that face the threat of assimilation. The convention is also based on the idea that minority nationalities are bilingual. Sadly, that is not really true in Latvia. That means that there may be a few opt-outs on these questions.

[Correspondent] Will Latvians gain something from the ratification of the convention?

[Muiznieks] Minority rights are not meant just for minorities, they are meant for societies at large so that they might be more stable, so that there might be civilized dialogue.

[Correspondent] Will ratification of the convention threaten the transfer of schools toward classes that are taught in Latvian [as is planned for 2004]?

[Muiznieks] Absolutely not!

[Correspondent] Ratification of the convention, in other words, will not be the only way to shape minority nationality policies. How will that happen? What will be the main emphasis?

[Muznieks] Our country has never had a minority nationality policy. First of all, the Latvian state must aid in preserving the language, culture and religion of minority nationalities. We have to analyze the way in which government financing is awarded for the development of minority cultures. Last year, for instance, the Latvian-French Association received money from these funds. One may ask how necessary that was in the context of Latvia's minority nationalities. I would like to launch a discussion on the criteria that are applied when financing is given for the development of minority cultures.

I am also responsible for anti-discrimination policies. Our new labor law, for instance, is fully in line with EU requirements in this area, but if all signs of discrimination are to be eliminated, we must have not just laws, but also information and education program for people. An important aspect of my work will be to ensure dialogue between the government and the minorities. Under the auspices of the ministry, I have set up a consulting council that mostly consists of minority representatives. I want to involve them in the taking of decisions that affect minority ethnic

groups. There are also representatives of the various regions of Latvia, and of nongovernmental organizations.

### **Social integration**

[Correspondent] In addition to ethnic integration, there is the very important issue of social integration. This is the international year of the disabled. Will you be working on the integration of people with special needs into society?

[Muiznieks] Sadly, that is not one of my jobs, although the issue of disabled people is a part of the integration program. The Public Integration Fund awards money for the integration of the disabled, too. This year we will accent the inclusion of disabled people into educational institution, and we are planning to spend 65,000 lats [around 108,000 dollars] for this purpose. Social integration issues will largely be handled through the Integration Fund. As far as I am concerned, the issue of disabled people relates to my job in the sense that I have to analyze the implementation of the integration program. The Association of the Disabled is one of the NGOs, and it is my purpose to see to it that the sector is sustainable and can take part in the taking of decisions. I am particularly concerned about financing for NGOs, because until now they have been dependent on foreign funding. Once we join the EU that will no longer be true. Beginning in 2007, there may be a great lack of knowledge about where we can find financing for nongovernmental organizations. By that time, we have to arrange tax laws, promote philanthropy and think about ways in which companies can be encouraged to help this sector.

### **Poverty**

[Correspondent] If we talk about public integration in the sense that, as you put it, everyone must feel respected, there is a big gap between the rich and the poor. Children in particular feel this gap. There have even been times when children from poor families refuse to go to school because they face mockery there. Do you think that there can be any integration among these parallel worlds?

[Muiznieks] Yes, I do. As the social protection system is strengthened and as we enter Europe, the gap between the rich and the poor will diminish. In Riga, at least, I see the emergence of a

middle class, although its development is proceeding in an unforgivably slow manner. At the conference on 4 April which I mentioned before, one of the discussions will focus on the way in which tolerance can be promoted at schools - how teachers and children accept someone who is different in terms of religion, skin color or other social aspects into their midst.

[Correspondent] What do you think about the placement of poor families into social homes and flats? Will that not make the gap in society even deeper?

[Muiznieks] Our country has not developed housing policies to any great extent over the last 10 years. The housing market is only now beginning to develop, and social homes are just one of the solutions. The state and local governments must offer long-term and inexpensive loans to poor families. There must be a support system that helps the poor to deal with housing problems. The problems of the poorest people in Latvia - the situation in which families are evicted from their homes, for instance - should not be an issue only for the courts and for the National Human Rights Bureau. We need long-term and national social policies.

### **Other groups**

[Correspondent] Will you also work on the integration of marginal groups such as prisoners, drug addicts, alcoholics and homosexual people into society?

[Muiznieks] Certainly I will. At the Cabinet of Ministers, for instance, I had very strict objections against the way in which the Justice Ministry was developing rules on the handling of people during pre-trial investigations. That was a repressive document that spoke to the housing of people in the pre-trial status under horrible prison conditions, with virtually no contacts with the outside world. I am happy that I stopped the acceptance of one bad document. I think that it is my job to help other ministries to overcome obstacles against the integration of society, too. My priorities at work, however, are to rehabilitate the concept of integration and to shape minority ethnic policies, as I said before.

[Correspondent] You said that work with local government is an important aspect of this work.

[Muiznieks] We just concluded a cycle of seminars for local governments that are on the country's borders. Local governments are the missing phase in the integration program. Many social issues are resolved at the level of local governments, not the national government. Cooperation among neighboring parishes is important. One problem for local governments in border regions is that in many places people cannot tune in to Radio Latvia and Latvian Television, and that means that they are forced to live in a certain vacuum. This means that they do not develop a sense of belonging in our country. I have spoken about this situation with deputies and ministers, and I am sure that we will deal with the problem. Cooperation with local governments involves enormous potential in terms of integration, but this potential has not been used so far.

[Correspondent] To summarize - what are the conditions for the successful integration of all people in Latvia?

[Muiznieks] There has to be knowledge, there have to be skills, and the main thing is that there has to be a desire to work together. There must also be an ability to take part in the taking of nationally important decisions.

## Operation Last Chance

### Estonia

*From the London Jewish Chronicle, January 31, 2003*

Controversy and hope marked this year's Holocaust Memorial Day across Europe, observed for the first time in several countries.

It had an inauspicious inauguration in Estonia, where its low-key observance was overshadowed by the blocking of a Simon Wiesenthal Center advertisement campaign offering cash rewards to catch war criminals.

The Baltic state decided last year to institute January 27<sup>th</sup> as the day on which to commemorate the Shoah. But the row over the advertisement led

to suggestions by the Wiesenthal Center that the former Soviet republic was motivated more by a desire to ease its entry into NATO than to examine its role in genocide. Of the 1,000 Jews who remained in Estonia during the war, seven survived.

Dr Efraim Zuroff, head of the Simon Wiesenthal Center in Israel, said: "I think it's outrageous that the ads won't be run. If the police had a Nazi walk in the door and say he was a Nazi, they still wouldn't find him. They're more interested in protecting Estonians' reputation than in finding war criminals."

Estonia's Security Police Board criticized the advertisement for the center's Operation Last Chance, which offers \$10,000 to anyone providing information leading to the conviction of Nazi war criminals. Similar campaigns have been launched in the other former Soviet Baltic republics, Lithuania and Latvia.

In a letter to the Estonian advertising agency Media House, which later turned down the Wiesenthal campaign, the security board wrote: "We are of the opinion that the included allegation - 'During the Holocaust, Estonians murdered Jews in Estonia and in other countries' - is de jure incorrect."

Saying it did not have information about Estonians' having being convicted for murdering Jews in other countries, nor evidence to suspect citizens of such crimes, the letter said the "allegation invades the constitutional rights and liberties of all Estonians."

The local Jewish community also opposed the ad campaign, amid concerns it might cause anti-Jewish backlash in Estonia. Its chairman, Cilja Laud, told the JC: "If it were printed it would create a big tsores. We have no security. If people started to bomb the community, who would be responsible? Efraim Zuroff?"

Dr Zuroff said that an historical commission set up by Estonia's president in 1998 had shown that the country's police were involved in the killing of Jews both in wartime Estonia and Belarus.

Commenting on Ms Laud's concerns, he added:

“My contention is that in the long run, the best defense for the Jewish community is to expose murderers and show why the Holocaust was such a terrible event.”

Submitted by Nickolai Butkevich, Research and Advocacy Director UCSJ: Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union)

### Latvia

*Dear Friends and Colleagues,*

*Attached is a translation of an article, which appeared in the right-wing Latvian daily Neatkarīga. It includes very negative and nasty comments by the current and previous chairmen of the Latvian Jewish community and by Prof. Aivars Stranga, who heads the Latvian historical commission, established by President Freiburga to investigate Nazi and Communist crimes, about "Operation Last Chance" and myself personally. Your comments and feedback are welcome.*

*With best wishes,*

*Efraim Zuroff*

**Zurofs nepalīdz patiesībai; vins to sadulko  
(Zuroff doesn't help the truth;**

**he stirs it up)**

**Neatkarīga Rita Avize**

**March 17, 2003**

Dainis Lemesonoks

It has already become a yearly tradition in Latvia in the spring that Efraim Zuroff makes an accusation. The hyperactive leader of the Jerusalem office of the Simon Wiesenthal Center thoroughly prepares it in order to time it to coincide with the historic events of March 16. Maybe we ourselves, Latvian society, are guilty that we have become afraid of the phantoms of the past and thought that this man is a regular inspector of the capital.

Efraim Zuroff, in his desire to find some more war crimes in order to arrange a show trial, has become hysterical. His enemies are now not only any Balt or Eastern European, but also influential leaders of American Jewish organizations who refuse to adopt the position that a nation must ac-

cept collective and eternal blame for the crimes committed by a minority of that nation.

It seems that the extremely moralizing hunter of Nazi ghosts is likely to soon become a persona non-grata among his own people since his activities which are destroying the reputation of the Wiesenthal Center, seem more than anything else to be an anti-Semitic provocation.

The word is that our reverence and responsiveness are paying off very well. We did not realize in time that Zuroff is no more than the director of a non-political organization, which is trying to attract donations by staging various demonstrative actions. Through his search for money, he has become certain that the Latvians are the nation of Kalejs and Arajs, whom it is easy to push to the wall.

Estonia was the first country to understand how to respond to Zuroff's activities. The influential newspapers there have refused to publish the advertisements for Simon Wiesenthal's "Operation: Last Chance" – the appeal for information about those who shot the Jews in return for a reward of 10 thousand dollars. This took place, moreover, after the categorical request of the Estonian Jewish community's leadership [to refuse to publish the ads] because their text accused all Estonians of collaborating with Nazi Germany, an accusation which could arouse ethnic hatred and is prohibited by Estonian law.

This month, in Latvia, only Kurzemes Vards refused to publish Zuroff's offer of bloody money. Several other regional newspapers have already published it; probably for fear that a refusal to do so would create an unpleasant scandal or arouse international problems for Latvia.

These advertisements, however, are no longer being submitted for publication to the largest national newspapers, since these papers consider the publication [of the ads] last year to be a mistake which they do not intend to repeat.

It would be inaccurate to claim that the Estonians treat their minorities with kid gloves. The attitude there is not ideal. Estonia's naturalization policy is more liberal [than Latvia's]; non-citizens can

elect their own institutions and the treaty on national minorities is implemented, but I cannot say that Estonia has fully eradicated everyday anti-Semitism. And the privately built monument “for all WW II participants” in Parnu, where only a man in a German uniform is pictured, doesn’t promote public harmony. In spite of that, the Estonian Jews considered it their civil duty to “shock” Zuroff, as he himself admitted.

Why are the Estonian and Latvian positions towards Zuroff’s activities so different? I will try to answer this question after having listened to the responses of three well-informed persons on these issues to the following questions:

1. Why do you think that the Estonian Jewish community exhibited such strong solidarity with its country and turned against its compatriot Zuroff? What is the reason that Latvian Jews are not acting or do not want to act in the same way?
2. What is your assessment of “Operation: Last Chance”? What results do you think it will achieve?
3. The annual arguments about March 16<sup>th</sup> – including it on the list of memorial days or removing it from the list, permission or prohibition of a public procession, meetings of former soldiers, newspaper publications and discussions about the [Latvian] Legion, collaboration and military crimes – have greatly developed over the past years. How have these developments influenced Latvia’s international reputation? How have they affected the attitude of Latvian Jews to the Latvian state?

**Prof. Aivars Stranga (Latvia University):**

The Estonian Jewish community is different than the communities in Latvia and Lithuania. Before the war it was very small and had only four thousand members. It also was the richest in the Baltic States, had very few Communists, was very loyal to Estonia, and had a very pronounced tendency toward assimilation (in contrast to Latvia). The Germans conquered Estonia at the end of August 1941 and therefore three thousand Jews were able to save themselves and later returned to the country. The majority of the Latvian Jewish community is composed of people from the old republic

[Soviet Union], who have Soviet conceptions of contemporary history, and a Soviet mentality. People such as Pliner and Cilevich conduct themselves as if Latvia were still an outlying district of the Soviet empire. Many Latvians believe that all Jews think this way.

I don’t want to say anything bad, but the Estonian Jewish community is less Soviet. I have no right to interfere in the affairs of the Riga Jewish community, but I think that it was a mistake to allow Zuroff to use its premises to make unfair accusations about hundreds of [Nazi war] criminals walking freely in the streets [of Latvia]. Zuroff, as a private person, can claim what he wants if the government admitted him here. The [Jewish] community, however, must distance itself from such statements [actions], must realize that Latvia is a free state which defends Jewish interests, and they must not permit [anyone] to slander it. The state authorities have been responsive to the needs of the Jewish community. If there are claims against the government, then I don’t know what to say.

There will not be any results. There will not even be any historical findings, only a scandal. Zuroff’s behavior has already made this clear when at an academic conference he shouted at people from the Baltic States and from Poland.

Yes, [Nazi] war criminals must be prosecuted, regardless of how old they might be. That is the principle, but in practice things are different. Kononov’s partisans, who sought to take revenge against the brutality of the [Nazi] occupation burnt alive a woman who was nine months pregnant, but Russia has protested and the court canceled its [guilty] verdict. The trial of one criminal must not be transformed into the shaming of an entire nation. Then we can also look for those who signed the deportation orders in Latvia. We know about only four, but three of them were Jews. And maybe, for example, Zyama Krivickis who signed the list of six thousand people, is still alive and walking the streets somewhere.

An academic approach is needed, scientific investigation and the historical commission established by the president, which will deal with these issues. If the investigation will indeed discover, for

example, that the murder of Jews was sometimes carried out upon the initiative of Latvians, a fact which has still not been proven, such a fact will certainly be noted, regardless of how unpleasant it might be.

The court case, which started in Lithuania, and in which the accused died in prison, has already proven that a show trial only makes it more difficult to establish historical truth.

The old Legion members are smarter than those who one day admire them and the next day are ashamed of them. It would be barbarous not to remember those who perished; but it must be done in a proper manner. It seems to me that a [memorial] service for the dead is more respectable than a street procession, which is joined by those who have no sentiment for the Volhov swamps or Kurzemes copper, people who shout only because they feel out of danger.

How can the events of March 16 influence Latvia and the ratification of the NATO agreement in the US Congress? There are politicians who haven't yet decided – March 16<sup>th</sup> can have an influence – one more public march, and they will vote against. It is difficult to explain to the Americans that there were bad Nazis and good Nazis and we will not change their attitude with any convictions.

**The general secretary of “Faunais laiks”  
Grigory Krupnikov:**

The Latvian Jewish Community has publicly stated that it has no connection to Zuroff's activities. I think that this position has been sufficiently made clear.

This project is immoral. The goal that Zuroff wants to achieve is noble. In the same manner those of Stalin's men who murdered and deported [innocent civilians] must be prosecuted. But first their guilt must be judicially proven, and no baseless accusations should be made. To offer money for information against such individuals, in these cases is immoral.

Too much attention is paid to Zuroff - out of all proportion. He is a representative of a private organization, loud and talkative. Our reaction to

him is free-of-charge publicity. I admit that there might be someone who must be prosecuted, regardless of his being old or ill, perhaps Kalejs or Farbtuch. Yes, [Operation Last Chance] might be beneficial if it produces evidence of the murders, but Zuroff's organization has not produced anything. This is not only immoral, but also ineffective.

It is all the same with the 16<sup>th</sup> of March or without it, the Jewish community is loyal to Latvia. It identifies with the history of the state. The Jewish community's flag flies at the public meetings on the banks of the Daugava; the community supports the “Tautas front” and is now helping Latvia be accepted into NATO. The American Jewish Committee, the largest Jewish organization in the US, certainly supports the ratification of the agreement between Latvia and NATO – and it would do nothing of the kind without consulting our community.

We highly appreciate the balanced attitude of Legion members – the manner in which they observed the 16<sup>th</sup> of March last year and how they planned to do so this year – which highly improved Latvia's image, especially in America and in the circles which must decide on the ratification of the NATO agreement.

It is natural that the 16<sup>th</sup> of March upset Latvian Jews. This is their reaction to the uniforms, which the people wore – and it is the same uniform as the one worn by the people from the nation that killed their relatives, friends, and kinsmen. And how do former prisoners of Kolima feel when they see the NKVD uniform?

It is only normal to conduct a religious service to honor the memory of those who perished. But there must not be any celebration or boasting.

**Arkady Suharenko, Chairman of the Riga  
Jewish Community:**

All the questions concerning the position of the Estonian Jewish community should be presented to the Estonian Jewish community.

I believe that it is right to look for Nazi war criminals. In such cases there is no fixed limit.

Those who killed innocent civilians only because of their religion and nationality must be punished for their crimes. And all of those who have not been punished should not feel secure and think that they managed to escape unpunished.

At the same time, I consider that E. Zuroff's methods and style are unethical and inadmissible. The Riga Jewish Community and I, as its chairman, do not support Zuroff's activities.

As for the 16<sup>th</sup> of March, I am against celebrating this day in any form. I think there should not be any street processions. It is clear that such parades harm Latvia's image abroad.

Latvian Jews are and will be an integral part of the Latvian state. Integration will continue and will increase. Today the Jewish community enjoys a very good level of cooperation with the Latvian state and its leaders. We constantly feel their responsiveness and genuine concern for our needs. And in that regard, the 16<sup>th</sup> of March does not in any way influence the relations between Latvian Jews and the Latvian state.

**Kurzemes Vards,**

*Submitted by Glenn Richter, from the Associated Press*

RIGA, Latvia - A newspaper in this ex-Soviet republic said Tuesday it has refused to publish an advertisement offering \$10,000 for information about Nazi war criminals, calling cash rewards an improper way to hunt down Holocaust perpetrators.

*Kurzemes Vards*, a newspaper in the port city of Liepaja - about 200 kilometers (120 miles) southwest of the capital, Riga - is the only one of several newspapers in the country of 2.5 million residents to not publish the war-crimes ad.

"The Holocaust was too horrifying to try to find those who are to blame by using such methods," Kurzemes Vards editor Andzils Remess told The Associated Press. "There are proper investigative offices for this purpose."

He said the newspaper regularly publishes articles about how Jews in Liepaja were killed during the 1941-44 Nazi occupation of Latvia.

Four other regional newspapers said they would run the ads this week. Four newspapers in Riga printed similar ads in January.

Remess said the paper would consider printing the ad if the reward offer was removed.

The advertisements are the centerpiece of "Operation Last Chance," an effort to prosecute any still-living Nazi war criminals in the Baltic states - including Estonia and Lithuania - led by the Los Angeles-based Simon Wiesenthal Center.

The ad that Kurzemes Vards refused to run includes a grainy, black-and-white picture of two nude Jewish women, their hands bound with rope, being led to the edge of a sand pit on a Liepaja beach to be shot. Most victims were buried in mass graves near the beach, just outside Liepaja.

"This is about your Jewish neighbors... the ones who were murdered," boldface text above the photograph states.

Some 7,000 Jews from Liepaja were killed during the Nazi occupation, with both Germans and Latvians taking part in the killing.

In all, approximately 80,000 Jews in Latvia - 90 percent of the prewar Jewish population - were killed.

Lithuanian newspapers ran similar ads in December, but Estonian papers refused to run them after police officials complained that their phone numbers on them intimidated they had sponsored the campaign.

Efraim Zuroff, head of the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Jerusalem office, criticized Kurzemes Vards for holding the ad.

"We're going to do whatever we can to get them to run it," he said from New York.

Zuroff said the Baltic states haven't done enough to prosecute Nazi war criminals since they gained independence during the Soviet Union's 1991 collapse.

Soviet prosecutors tried and convicted hundreds of people accused of Nazi atrocities in Latvia,

Lithuania and Estonia immediately after the war.

### **Lithuania**

There has been little response from the Lithuanian public to the 10,000-dollar reward offered by the Nazi-hunting Simon Wiesenthal fund for information leading to the conviction of former Nazi war criminals, the Lithuanian LNK television channel has reported. The Nazi hunters > have received 174 leads over nine months, but only one of them has been sent for further investigations by the Prosecutor-General's Office.

Consequently, the fund has offered additional smaller awards for information that would enable it to at least initiate legal actions against Nazi suspects. The following is the text of the report broadcast on 8 April:

[Presenter] There has been little response [in Lithuania] to the Simon Wiesenthal fund's award of 10,000 dollars for information leading to the conviction of former Jew-killers, which was offered nine months ago. The fund has decided to ease the formal terms of awarding the money.

[Correspondent] The 10,000-dollar award had been allocated only for information leading to the eventual conviction of persons who have committed war crimes. Since the beginning of this campaign, the Wiesenthal fund has received reports of about 174 suspects. However, only one lead, dealing with killings of Jews in Rokiskis District [northeastern Lithuania] in 1941, has been sent to the prosecutor's [prosecutor-general's] office. Efraim Zuroff [Israel director of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre] says some reports are still being investigated; some of the suspects have died by now, while still others had been sentenced in the Soviet era. [Efraim Zuroff, Israel director of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, speaking in English, with Lithuanian translation superimposed ] The way that the offer was formulated, it may have seemed impossible for people to receive. That might have stopped people from coming forward.

[Correspondent] Although almost all of the informers to date have refused money for the information provided, the Wiesenthal fund has decided to ease the terms and offer awards of 1,000 dol-

lars and 1,500 dollars for information that would lead at least to legal actions being taken against Nazi suspects.

[Zuroff] Some people elsewhere - in Latvia for example - say that this is immoral. OK, but I do not see any people with posters in their hands going to the US embassy to protest because the United States has offered an award for Osama Bin-Ladin. Meanwhile, if an award is offered by the Simon Wiesenthal Centre, that is immoral.

[Correspondent] The chairman of the Jewish community in Lithuania admits that such campaigns may provoke outrage among some members of the public.

[Simonas Alperavicius, chairman of the Jewish community in Lithuania] I have come here without much enthusiasm. However, I have my duty and my conscience. Fifty relatives of mine were murdered in Kaunas and Vilnius, and I cannot stay indifferent to those facts.

[Correspondent] According to the Prosecutor-General's Office, 17 legal actions on Holocaust charges have been brought up in Lithuania to date. Two of them - on [Aleksandras] Lileikis and [Kazys] Gimzauskas - had been sent to court. However, Lileikis died before a verdict was delivered, while Gimzauskas was declared unfit to be tried due to his poor health, even though he had been found guilty of crimes.

### **Beyond the Baltics**

A Nazi-hunting program may be extended to other European countries. The Simon Wiesenthal Center said this week (April 10) that it might extend its Operation Last Chance program, which has been operating in the Baltics, to countries such as Belarus, Ukraine, Germany and Austria, an official with the center, told Reuters. The center announced this week that the program had led to tips on more than 2,000 suspected war criminals in Latvia and Lithuania.

## Anti-Semitism in the Baltics

*Submitted by Nickolai Butkevich, Research and Advocacy Director, UCSJ: Union of Councils for Jews in the Former Soviet Union.*

### Estonia

Two young men were arrested in the Estonian city of Sillamae earlier this month on charges of inciting ethnic hatred, according to UCSJ's Baltic Bureau's summary of an article in the March 13, 2003 edition of the local newspaper "Valgamaalane." According to the Security Police, the men wrote the words "Jews Out" along with swastikas on the walls of apartment buildings.

### Latvia

RIGA, Jan 23 (AFP) -- Around 20 youths on Thursday [23 January] protested outside Latvia's parliament against a proposal to ban the display of symbols similar to the Nazi swastika or the Soviet hammer-and-sickle.

"The swastika is by no means something Hitler thought of," Dzintars Raivis, leader of the All for Latvia movement, told the Baltic News Service.

The youths displayed copies of Latvian folk songs bearing reversed versions of the swastika associated with Hitler's Nazi regime, which would be banned from public display under amendments approved by the parliament in a second reading on Thursday.

The reversed version of the swastika, known in the Baltic country as a "fire cross," is a symbol of "old Indo-European tribes or cultures" but should not be banned, Ina Druviete, a deputy who backed the amendments told AFP.

Supporters of the two ideologies have already banned swastikas and hammer-and-sickle symbols, exactly analogous to those used by the Nazi and Soviet regimes, in Latvia since they appeared throughout the 1990s at protests and marches.

Western countries led by the United States have urged Latvia to do more to increase recognition of atrocities committed by the Nazi regime and the Holocaust in particular, as many Latvians

fought on the Nazi side in World War II.

## IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy

The 23rd annual IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy will be held July 20-25, 2003, in Washington, DC. This year's event is expected to be the biggest yet, with 1,200-1,500 attendees.

### Registration

Register and book rooms online at the conference website <http://www.jewishgen.org/dc2003>, which also contains detailed information on tours, speakers, topics, research facilities and restaurants. And if you need more information not listed, write to [jgsgwdc2003@aol.com](mailto:jgsgwdc2003@aol.com).

Washington offers a large number of major archival repositories with Jewish-relevant records. These archives represent vast opportunities to fill the holes in your genealogical tree. The JW Marriott Hotel is within walking distance or a short Metro-ride from the Holocaust Memorial Museum, National Archives and the Library of Congress. Others are the Library of Congress Local History and Genealogy Reading Room (which contains numerous city directories), or its Hebraic Section, covering Jewish studies and Israel, and offering access to hundreds of Yizkor books, the Jewish Historical Society of Greater Washington, and several Baltimore repositories. Conference orientation sessions have been scheduled to help researchers.

### Major speakers

Chief Archivist of the US John W. Carlin will launch the event. He is the head of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA), the US's record keeper.

The week culminates in the closing evening and banquet. IAJGS uses the occasion to commend genealogical societies and individuals for their achievements and contributions to Jewish genealogy.

This year's banquet speaker is Hadassah Lieberman, wife and campaign partner of US presidential candidate Sen. Joseph Lieberman. Born in

**Latvia SIG Membership Questionnaire**

NAME:..... PHONE:.....  
ADDRESS:..... FAX:.....  
CITY:.....STATE/PROVINCE:.....  
ZIP/POSTAL CODE:.....  
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email address:.....

Whom are you researching? (Latvian cities only) Please use location names/spellings as found in *Where Once We Walked*.

NAME:..... LOCATION:.....  
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Bibliographical or archival sources used in your Latvian genealogical research:

Information on Latvian Jewish communities, history of Jewish presence, current status, contacts:

Cemeteries, travel experiences, etc:

Suggested newsletter topics:

Translation skills: Hebrew, Latvian, Russian, Yiddish, Other (specify)

I would be willing to volunteer for the following activities:

Please return your completed questionnaire, along with a check for U.S. \$20 (U.S. and Canada, \$30 for overseas members) payable to Latvia SIG, to:

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