President's message:

As we begin our second year...

by Mike Getz

One of our goals, to build a comprehensive resource on the Jews of Latvia in English, is closer to realization. Our good friend Dov Levin, and Yad Vashem, are allowing us to use and translate Pinkas ha-Kehilot, Latviyah ve-Estonyah, the collected history of the Latvian and Estonian Jewish communities. Martha Lev-Zion in Israel, was an enormous help in bringing this about and has our special gratitude.

As we approach our second year, it is pleasing to see the growth and scope of our membership which includes the UK, Europe, Scandinavia, Iceland, Australia, South Africa, Israel and Latvia itself. There are also signs of more participation. The extent and quality of that involvement will determine our effectiveness.

A number of us will be meeting in Paris, with a few going on to Latvia. That may be an opportunity to build further links with communities there. It would be useful to discuss the best means of achieving this when we are in Paris and could be a report back feature after our return.

I would like to acknowledge the generosity of several members in response to providing them with information and/or requested copies of material. These contributions could be helpful if we decide to fund projects of interest and value to the SIG.

Marion Werle is editing this issue, which means all the hard work. She is doing this in addition to leading and managing our active, and admired web presence. I am singularly fortunate, and grateful, in a versatile and energetic Vice President. Many thanks to Debby as well for taking us thus far.

In this issue we publish Marion Werle's bibliography on Latvia. It represents an intense effort within exacting standards. As an important resource in English it will add to our knowledge of the Jewish presence in Latvia. Recent contacts with Latvia indicate that we need to encourage such projects and identify opportunities which will add to the sum of our knowledge.

To all and your families a happy and fulfilling Passover.
FROM THE EDITOR’S DESK

As you know from last issue, Deborah Levine Herman has resigned after putting in a full year’s service as our editor. It was not until I assumed the responsibility as temporary editor that I began to appreciate the hard work she has done in bringing this newsletter from dream to reality. Robert Heyman has generously volunteered to become our next editor, and will assume his responsibilities as of our summer issue.

We hope you like the new look of the newsletter. Our masthead has the same logo that we use on our Internet home page. We hope that the changes you see have resulted in better readability and higher quality print. We would like to begin receiving articles in machine-readable format, either via e-mail or on diskette, to relieve the editor of having to retype everything from scratch. We also now have the capability of scanning printed materials into machine-readable text. The article ANTI-SEMITISM IN LATVIA: a Report to the Secretary of State from Riga, May 27, 1940 was scanned from a photocopy of a National Archives microfilm. Members without computers may submit hard copy (paper) articles for scanning—due to the poor quality of reproduction, we would prefer not to receive fax input.

We are introducing a new feature, which we call Shtetl Focus, where we will profile one shtetl per newsletter. We were very fortunate to receive permission from Yad Vashem to translate sections of Pinkas ha-kehilot. Latviyah ve-Estonyah, edited by Dov Levin. Thanks are due to our translator, Martha Lev-Zion. We will be pairing a translated section of this book with information submitted by our members, who have either researched the shtetl and/or actually visited their ancestral town. This material may include such things as photographs, maps, interviews, cemetery listings and other pertinent information. Mike Getz has provided a wealth of material on Subate for this issue, and I have already received material on Varaklani our next issue. We invite other readers to submit their input. We also hope to put some of this information on our web site.

Our bibliography is now complete and appears in this issue. It turned out to be much larger than I had intended, and hopefully, our members will find it useful in their research. I have also written a review of Andrew Ezergailis’ new book, The Holocaust in Latvia, 1941-1944, and Mike Getz presents impressions of a lecture given by Prof. Ezergailis at the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum. We are also including an index of articles published during the first year of our newsletter.

A very happy Pesach to all!

Marion Werle, Acting Editor and SIG Vice President
FROM OUR MAILBOX--IN APPRECIATION

Dear Latvia SIG Friends,

Please accept this informal way of reaching everyone who inquired about the health of my father, Jack M. Levine. It is with great sadness I write that on Sunday, February 16, Dad died [unexpectedly]. This was just three weeks before my son Seth married Renay Tooch in Los Angeles (on March 9).

Your notes and kind words were truly appreciated, and I send my heartfelt thanks to you all.

Sincerely Yours,

Debby

Deborah Levine Herman
(retired Latvia SIG Editor)

P.S. Thanks also for all the wonderful compliments regarding the first four issues of Latvia SIG which I edited. Your comments were greatly appreciated.

HAVE YOU RENEWED?

Membership renewals were sent out with the last newsletter. If you received a renewal form, and have not yet renewed, please send your check, payable to LATVIA SIG, to Deborah Levine Herman, Treasurer, 22449 Douglas Rd., Shaker Hts., OH 44122-2058

DUES: $20.00--Regular $30.00--Family or Overseas members
THE JEWISH OF LATVIA: A BIBLIOGRAPHY

compiled by Marion Werle

This bibliography was prepared to assist those doing research on Latvian Jewish genealogy. It is intended to be an ongoing project, to be updated as new material becomes available. The scope has been limited to include only books, not articles or periodicals. Researchers visiting Washington, DC or New York City may want to check the Library of Congress and New York Public Library, respectively, since both have holdings of Latvian Jewish periodicals on microfilm. Special thanks are due to Aleksandr Feigman, who has written the summaries for the Russian titles I sent him, and who has added a couple of additional references of his own. Felix Rabinowich of Los Angeles provided information on the Veltman walking tour guide, and the translations of the Russian titles. I have provided summaries of those books I was able to examine personally. In a few cases where I was unable to obtain a copy, I have included a one-line summary based on the subject classification, where the subject matter was not clear from the title.

These entries were obtained from a number of different sources, and most have been verified in various online library catalogs. A list of these libraries is found at the end of the bibliography. The information on library holdings is not intended to be complete, but will hopefully be useful to some researchers. Most of these titles are fairly specialized, and may not be available in the average public library system (New York being the exception). Many are out of print. If you live in an area that does not have a large university or Judaica library, you should be able to request materials through your public library on Interlibrary Loan. The entries in the bibliography follow standard library cataloging format, in case the interlibrary loan librarian has any questions. There may be a nominal fee for ILL service. I am especially indebted to the MELVYL system (online catalog of the University of California library system), which I use in my own research. I decided to include the location and call number information supplied by MELVYL and have supplemented it with information from other online catalogs.

Please send any corrections, additions and comments to werle@pacificnet.net, or to:

Bibliography
Latvia SIG
P.O. Box 3581
Granada Hills, CA 91394-3581

Avtinsky, Levi
Toldot yeshivot ha-Yehudim be-Kurland mi-shenat 321 [1561] `ad 668 [1908]. Vilna : [s.n.], 672, 1912 (series: Hebrew books from the Harvard College Library ; HI 0041-0042)

- Brandeis BM440.H28 HI0041-0042 - Microfiche
- UCLA SRLF A 0001683135 (cataloged under Ofschynski, Levi)
(also available through interlibrary loan from the Center for Research Libraries, Chicago)

Berman, Shevach

- LC DS135.133 B473 1995
- NRLF (UC off campus storage facility) B 4 133 207
- NYPL *PWZ(Berman,Sh.) 95-2727

Survivor's story of a Riga Jew.
Bobe, Mendel

Perakim be-toldot Yahadut Latviyah (1651-1918), 'arikhah, Y. Har-Even. Tel Aviv: Reshafim, c1965.
Brandeis DS135.R93 L25
LC DS135.R93 L25
Yale FHY5520

Bobe, Mendel

Yidin in Letland. Tel Aviv: Reshafim, 1972.
Brandeis DS135.R93 L253
UCLA URL DS 135 R93L35b

A comprehensive history of Latvian Jewry, covering the regions of Latvia (Kurland, Livonia and Latgale), history from the time of Catherine II through the Holocaust and the postwar Soviet period, and cultural and political life. Includes a large section on famous people and a bibliography. This book is a continuation of works on the history of Latvian Jewry that began in 1955 under the auspices of the Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel.

Buchholtz, Anton

Geschichte der Juden in Riga bis zur begründung der rigischen Hebraergemeinde im j. 1842. Riga: N. Kymmel, 1899.
Brandeis DS135.R9 B8
LC DS135.R9 B8
LDS microfilm 1183577 (item 6)
UCLA SRLF AA 000 200 778 9
Yale DS135 R9 B88 1899

Dribins, Leo

Ebreji Latvija. Riga, 1996

Good book in Latvian (117 pages), about historical and contemporary Latvian Jewry, written by a professional historian. Includes biographies of the 24 most well-known Latvian Jews, with a summary in English. [A.F.]*
Available for purchase from Aleksandrs Feigmanis.

(subject: Workmen’s Circle Dvinsker brentsh 75—Anniversaries, etc.)
NYPL

UCB Main DS135.L32 D38 1993
(Translation: Jews in Daugavpils: Historical Essays.)

The best book about Jews in Daugavpils (Dunaburg/Dvinsk). Included are articles by Zalman Jacub on the history of the Jewish community in this city from the end of the eighteenth century through World War II, and on Jewish merchants, craftsmen, workers and capitalists, including the worker’s movement. B. Volkovich wrote an article about the Zionist movement from 1900 to 1940; A. I. Stimam wrote about Jewish communal life between 1920 and 1940. Another article of Zalman Jacub is dedicated to the history of the Daugavpils ghetto during the Nazi occupation. The book includes a long list of factory owners and manufacturers, as well as many illustrations. [A.F.]

Ezergailis, Andrew

This is the first comprehensive work in English about the Holocaust in Latvia. It draws on a vast range of both documentary sources and survivors’ depositions and testimonials. The author also benefitted from archival materials available only since the demise of the Soviet Union. The first part of the book describes the complexities of Latvian politics, especially during the post-World War I era, and attitudes toward the Jews in Latvian society. It then provides a detailed chronicle of the course of the Holocaust in Latvia, analyzing the Latvian and German bureaucracies responsible for the implementation of the extermination of the Latvian Jews, and describing the events that took place in both the cities and the provincial towns. The final chapter describes the Riga ghetto and the Latvian labor camps. Appendix material includes demographic statistics on Latvian Jewry. There is an extensive bibliography.


A dictionary of Latvian place names and their German equivalents. It has both German-Latvian and Latvian-German sections. The German names are in Fraktur (old Gothic script), probably because this is a reprint of a 1938 edition.

Foner, Sarah Feige (Meinkin)

Mi-zikhnoron yeme yaldut : o, Mar'eh ha-'ir Dvinsk./Warsaw : Bi-defus ha-Tsefirah, 663, 1903.

Brandeis BM40.H28 BL0400 — (Microfiche) — Non-Circulating

LC DS135.L3 F6 (Hebr)

UCLA URL DS 135 L3F6

The author’s recollections of Dvinsk (Daugavpils) between 1862 and 1871, written in very old-fashioned Hebrew. Mentions prominent families in Dvinsk.

Flor, Yudel

Dvinsk; the rise and decline of a town. Translated from the Yiddish by Bernard Sachs. Johannesburg, Dial Press [1965].

LC (2 copies) DK651 .F7 and DK651.D3 F73

UCB Main DK651.D4 F73

This book, written by a 43-year resident of Dvinsk who immigrated to South Africa in 1928, is a memoir rather than a scholarly work. It does an excellent job of conveying the flavor of Jewish life in Dvinsk from the turn of the century through World War I. It gives a portrait of the daily life of the Jews, against the background of the larger social changes occurring in Russia.

Gordon, Frank, 1928-

Latvians and Jews between Germany and Russia, [translated by Vaiva Pukite and Janis Strauberghs]. Stockholm: Memento, c1990.

LC DS135.R93 L26 1990

NYPL

UCB Main DS135.R93 L268 1990

UCLA URL DS 135 R93 L26 1990

Yale DS135 R93 L26X 1990
LC DK504.22 .G85 1995

This is the only tourbook I have seen that is devoted entirely to Latvia. It is available at Borders Books.

Huttenbach, Henry R.

(OCLC lists this book in two libraries: COLLEGE OF THE HOLY CROSS (MA) and SARAH LAWRENCE COLLEGE (NY), the latter is listed as ILL supplier.)

Professional catalog of documents and testimonies collected by an organization of survivors of the Riga ghetto, mostly German Jews transported to Latvia during World War II. The catalog includes a list of interviewees, which includes Latvian Jews as well. [A.F.]

Iwens, Sidney

Brandeis DS135.R95 I945 1990
LC DS 135 R95 I945 1990
NYPL *PWZ (Iwens, S.) 92-3387
UCLA URL DS 135 R95 I945 1990
UCSC McHenry DS135.R95I945 1990
USHMM **Iwens .AU 1990
Yale DS135 R95 I945X 1990

This book is an account of the author’s Holocaust experiences, about half of which took place in the Dvinsk Ghetto. Following the German invasion of Russia, the author left his home in Lithuania, intent on enlisting in the Russian Army, but ended up fleeing to Daugavpils (Dvinsk). The book describes his arrival in Dvinsk, the rounding up and imprisonment of the Jews, the realization that the Jews were being shot in mass graves that had been dug by forced labor, the reality of ghetto life and labor battalions. After plans were made for the final liquidation of the Jews remaining in Daugavpils, and the author and a friend stayed in hiding until they were able to escape to the Siauliai ghetto in Lithuania. The remainder of the book does not take place in Latvia.


Brandeis DS135.R93 L27
LC DS135.R93 L27
NYPL *PXW 76-5880
UCB Main DS135.R93 L271
UCLA URL DS 135 R93L35

A good introductory book on the Jews of Latvia. Discusses the history and characteristics of the three regions of Latvia—Livonia, Kurland and Latgale—and the differences in the Jewish experiences in each region. Describes the political and social situation of the Jews throughout Latvian history, as well as Latvian Jewish cultural institutions. Profiles the major Jewish communities of Latvia, especially in the larger cities. There is also a chapter on famous Latvian Jews, which gives mini-biographies of men famous for their accomplishments and leadership. Book includes photographs and an index (including names).

Jussmann, Max
A genealogy of the Jussmann family of Riga.

Katz, Josef

Kaufmann, Max

Levin, Dov

Levin, Dov

The story of a Jew from Lübeck who was sent to Salsapilis in 1941, and spent time on labor details in Latvia (based, at various times, in Salsapilis, Riga ghetto, Kaiserwald, and Liepaja), ultimately being sent to Stutthof in 1944 along with others from Latvian camps, ending up on a death march before being liberated in 1945.

In a very personal memoir dedicated to the memory of Latvian Jewry, written just after the war, the author has attempted to document the events of the Holocaust throughout Latvia. Includes a forward and afterword in English and a list of names (which are not indexed).

A collection of twenty essays previously published by the author in various journals. They discuss the situation of the Baltic Jews from the time of the Soviet occupation in 1940, through the aftermath of World War II. Two of the essays are specifically about Latvia, one about the 1940-41 period, and the other about the arrests and deportations of the Jews that occurred just prior to the German invasion. Other articles, while not specifically about Latvia, discuss issues that pertain to Latvia, including a discussion of the conflicting versions of the reponsibility for the Holocaust in the Baltics.

Series title: Sidrat mehkarim be-toldot ha-hitnagdut ha-meziyenu shel ha-Yehudim be-’et ha-sho’ah.
A study of Latvian Jewry and its participation in armed resistance against the Nazis. This includes the role of Latvian Jews in Latvian divisions of the Red Army, resistance activities in Latvia while under Nazi occupation (including ghetto resistance groups in the Riga and Dvinsk ghettos), as well as partisan activity in Latvia. Includes a bibliography and lists of both names and places.

Levinson, Isaac
NYPL*PXW (Latvia) 91-308

LC DS135.R93 D3184
UCLA URL DS 135 R93D181

A short (63 page) yizkor book for Dvinsk (Daugavpils). A collection of essays, recollections and poems about Dvinsk, past and present (1970's), covering the history and cultural institutions and Dvinsk during the Holocaust, including the Dvinsk ghetto. Contains a few photos, but no index.

Levinstein, Meir.
LC DS135.R93 R534
UCLA URL DS 135 R93R534

Roused in Kuldiga as a young child, and living in Riga in 1941, Meir Levinstein describes his experiences in the Riga ghetto, Riga work camp, Kaiserwald, deportation to Stutthoff and other camps, and his ultimate return to Riga after the war. There is also a chapter describing events in Kuldiga, and a final chapter written by Avraham Ati, about the history of the Jews in Latvia prior to the Shoah.

Mark, Mendel
LC LC746.L37 M37 1973
Brandeis LC746.R8 M37
UCLA URL LC 746 L3M34

A history of Yiddish secular schools in Latvia between the two World Wars. Covers the establishment of Yiddish schools, the Latvian educational laws of 1919 establishing instruction in ethnic languages, school administration and organizations, Yiddish book publication and libraries, curriculum and teacher training, and types of schools in the Yiddish secular school system. Includes a section on statistics.

Mikhelson, Frida.
Brandeis DS135 .R93 R413
LC DS135.R93 R53513
UCB Main DS135.R93 R53513
UCSB Main Lib DS135.R93 R53513
USHMM **MIKHELSO FRIDA .AU 1979
Yale D802 L32 R53 M551713

The second volume of Gertrude Schneider’s trilogy of survivor stories of both Latvian Jews and Jews from other parts of Europe sent to Latvian labor camps after the German invasion of Latvia. Includes photos and and index of names.

Ovcinskas, L.
[Toldot ha-Yehudim be-Kurland. Yiddish.]
Di geshikhte fun di Idu in Letland. [1928].
LC DS135.R93 C66 (Hebr)

LC DS135.R93 L315 1988
NYPL *PXK 96-1252 v. 7
UCB Main DS135.R93 L315 1988
UCLA (In Process)
Yale DS135 E83 +P55 6

A comprehensive overview of the Jewish communities of Latvia and Estonia. Provides an overview of the history of Jews in both countries, as well as detailed descriptions of each community. Includes name and place indexes for Latvia and Estonia, respectively. The alphabetical section on communities is arranged by modern names, but includes all alternative names in other languages (e.g., Yiddish, Russian and/or German). Provides population statistics, history and communal descriptions for all locations.

Press, Bernhard
Series title: Reihe Dokumente, Texte, Materialien ; Bd. 4.
LC DS 135.L32 R547 1988
UCLA URL DS 135 R93 R5355 1995
Yale DS 135.L32 R457 1988

This appears to be a reissue of the author’s Judenmord in Riga, but without the survivors’ stories.

Press, Bernhard
Brandeis DS135 .R93 L322 1988
LC DS 135 R93 R5355 1988
UCLA URL DS 135 R93 R5355 1988
UCSB Main Lib D810.J4 P73 1988
Yale D810 J4 P69736 1988

Narrative of the Jews of Riga following the German invasion. Includes a section on survivors’ stories.

NYPL *ZAN-*P574 Lfg. 1-3.
*ZZAN-13685 Lfg. 1-3. MASTER NEGATIVE (of *ZAN-*P574)

Schneider, Gertrude.

Brandeis D810 J4 S365
LC DS135.R93 R536 1979
NYPL *PXW 82-1222
UCSD SSH DS135.R93 R536 1979
USHMM DS135.S72 L22 RIGA S36 1979

Schneider, Gertrude

The author's doctoral dissertation from the City University of New York. Available through interlibrary loan, or directly from University Microfilms. Contact University Microfilms at UMI, 300 North Zeeb Road, PO Box 1346, Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346; telephone (800) 521-0600 or (313) 761-4700. May also be ordered through their web site at http://www.umi.com. Order number is 7322744; cost is approximately $25.00.

Sherman-Zander, Hilde
Series: Ullstein Buch ; Nr. 20386.
Brandeis DS135 .R93 L316 1984
LC DS135.R93 R5363 1984
NYPL *PXW 85-2052
UCLA DS 135 G33 S54 1989

Story of a German girl deported from the Rhineland in 1941. She lived in the Riga ghetto until October 1944, spent part of 1944-45 in Libau, and ended up in Sweden in April 1945, at the age of 22.

These names accuse; nominal list of Latvians deported to Soviet Russia in 1940-41. Stockholm: 1951.

UCB Main D810.D5 L3
LDS microfilm 1183655
another edition, with an additional list of names:

LC D 810 D5 T43 1982
UCLA URL D 810 D5 T43 1982
Yale D810 D5 T43 1982

On June 13-14, 1941, the Soviets deported about 14,000 Latvians, mostly to Siberian labor camps, to purge the country of 'counterrevolutionary elements'. Most of these people were never heard from again. Approximately 5,000 of those deported were Jews. The first list in this book was compiled in 1942 from an inquiry conducted from relatives and friends of those deported [although it is questionable how many Jews were left in Latvia at that point to report their relatives missing]. This list, published by a Latvian emigre organization, contains 30,000 names of those who were deported, murdered or reported missing due to Soviet activity during the entire period of the Soviet occupation during World War II (1940-41). A supplemental list collected by the World Federation of Free Latvians is included in the second edition. The second list includes postwar deportations as well as earlier
ones not reported in the first list. Many of the surnames are Jewish—note that the Latvian spellings are used, e.g., Feldmanis, Bergmanis.

(no publisher name, total of 36 pages, 25 in English, 2 in German, 9 in Hebrew, with a name index).

A yizkor book for Libau (Liepaja), a copy of which is available in the library of the JGS of Greater Washington, located in Rockville, MD. Has not been found so far in any major online library catalog.

TSeitlin, Shmuel'.
Dokumental'naia istoria evreiv Rigi. Izrail': [s.n.], 1989.

LC DS135.R93 R357 1989
UCLA URL DS 135 R93 R357 1989
(Translation: Documentary History of Riga Jews)

A richly illustrated book on the history of the Riga Jewish community from the sixteenth century to the present, written by Zionist activist Bubi Tseitlin. The book includes a list of Jewish families comprising the Riga Jewish community in 1840. [A.F.]


Brandeis DS135 .R93 L327 1991
LC DS 135 R93L327 1991
NYPL *PXW 92-3313
UCB Main DS135.R93 L327 1991
UCI DS135.R93 L327 1991
UCLA URL DS 135 R93L327 1991
UCR Rivera DS135.R93 L327 1991
UCSB Main Lib DS135.R93 L327 1991
UCSC McHenry DS135.R93L327 1991
USHMM DS135.S72 L2 U64 1991
Yale DS135 R93 L327X 1991

The final volume of Gertrude Schneider’s trilogy. Survivor’s stories of Latvian Jews (mostly from Riga), and Jews from other parts of Europe who spent time in Latvian ghettos and labor camps, including Kaiserwald, Dundaga and Salaspils. Includes photos and an index of names.

Vesterman, Marger

LC: DS135.L32 R54917 1992


Vesterman, Marger

Brandeis DS135.L32 R549 1991
LC DS135.L32 R549 1991

Mr Vesterman is one of the most knowledgeable historians on the subject of Jewish history, and is also a very active member of LOEK (Latvian Jewish Cultural Society). He has collected much information on the history of Holocaust in Latvia. [F.R.]
Volkovich, B

A 16-page book devoted to the subject of rabbis and synagogues in Dvinsk since World War I. Written by a professional historian, with many references, the book contains history, a complete list of synagogues and minyanim, and detailed information on rabbis. The list of synagogues includes the name of the head of the synagogue, the address, year it was built, and number of members. The rabbinical information includes name, year and place of birth, number of children, educational background, time of service in Dvinsk, and address of the rabbi’s synagogue.[A.F.]* Available for purchase from Aleksandrs Feigmanis


  *Brandeis   DS135.R93 L32*
  *LC       DS135.R93 L32*
  *UCLA URL  DS 135 L3Y12*
  *Yale Hbr1513R (y)*

A Yizkor book about Latvia, including chapters on the cities of Riga, Dvinsk, Libau, Bauske, Shimberg (Schönberg), Lutsin and Windau. Includes biographies of rabbis and a list of names.

Zilberman, David

  *LC   DS135.R93 L33 1989*
  *NYPL *QYN 92-4090*
  *UCB Main    D810.J4 Z53 1989*
  *UCD Shields DS135.R93 L33 1989*
  *UCLA SRLF*

(Translation: And you saw it)

Collection of stories of Riga ghetto survivors. Dedicated to the memory of Zanis Lipke, a Latvian worker who saved 55 Jews during World War II. [A.F.]

Zvonov, M.

  *UCLA URL   D 802 L3 Z86 1993*

(Translation: "To the Jews - Aim - Shoot!")

A book on the Nazi terror in Latvia and the Latvian holocaust. The author singles out the activities of Latvian Nazi collaborators in the killing of the Jews of Riga and the provincial cities, particularly Liepaja and Aizpute. [A.F.]

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**Library abbreviations:**

*Brandeis - Brandeis University*
*LC - Library of Congress*
*NYPL - New York Public Library*
*UC - UC Berkeley*
*UCxx - University of California at (campus location)*
*USHM - U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum*
*Yale - Yale University*
BOOK REVIEW

Ezergailis, Andrew
The Holocaust in Latvia, 1941-1944: the Missing Center
(Washington, DC: Historical Institute of Latvia, 1996)

reviewed by Marion Werle

Despite the proliferation of books on the Holocaust in general, there is comparatively little material specifically about Latvia. With the exception of survivor stories, most of the material that does exist is in languages other than English. A book recently published by Andrew Ezergailis, *The Holocaust in Latvia, 1941-1944* goes a long way toward filling this gap.

The author, professor of Russian and Soviet history at Ithaca College in New York, has published a scholarly and extremely comprehensive work that draws on a wide range of sources. These include archival materials that were only recently made available with the demise of the Soviet Union. In addition, he draws on war crimes trial records, survivor depositions and testimonials, and captured German documentary records to trace the course of the Holocaust in Latvia.

This is not an easy book to read. The story is told with scholarly detachment, yet many of the atrocities, especially in the cities, are enhanced by the eyewitness tales of those who survived.

The book begins with an analysis of the political situation in Latvia following World War I. The author takes the reader through the complexities of Latvian politics, and the various factions that were active during the interwar period. He also describes those segments of the Latvian populace that were most susceptible to becoming Nazi collaborators. He describes the Nazi policies toward Latvia following the German invasion of Russia in June of 1941, which came only days after massive Soviet deportations of Latvians to Siberia. Despite the fact that this number included about 5,000 Jews, the Nazis appealed to Latvian nationalist sentiments by branding the Jews as Chekists and Bolsheviks.

The chronicle of the Holocaust begins with a description of the organizations primarily responsible for the destruction of the Jews, the SD and the Einsatzgruppen, especially the notorious Arajs Commando. Then the actual events are documented, first the events immediately following the German invasion, a description of the massacres in the provincial areas (“The murder of the provincial Jews was merciless, and, unlike in the large cities, total.”), and finally, events that took place in the larger cities. The Rumbula *Aktion* is described in vivid detail, drawing on both survivor testimony and documentary evidence. Extermination activities are also described for Daugavpils, Rezekne, Liepaja, and Ventspils.

The role of the Latvian auxiliary police (*Schutzmannschaften*) is described, including their activities in the Riga ghetto, in Belorussia, and as guards in the Warsaw ghetto. The final chapter describes the ghettos and camps in Latvia, including the transportation of about 20,000 Reich Jews to Latvia in late 1941 and early 1942. There is a chronicle of the Riga ghetto, and a discussion of the various concentration camps: Mezaparks (Kaiserwald), Salaspils, Strazdu Muiza, and Dundaga. There
is a discussion of the policies of Hinrich Lohse, Reichskommissar of Ostland, whose policies of ghettoization and labor camp establishment contrasted with SD Commander Stahlecker's implementation of the Führerbefehl (Hitler's extermination order). The book concludes with a description of events in Latvia during the final stages of the Holocaust. There is also a series of appendices which contain a good deal of additional data, including detailed demographic data on the Jews of Latvia prior to World War II. There is an extensive bibliography.

The subtitle of this book is "The Missing Center", which explains the author's attempt to cut through propaganda-motivated interpretations of the history of the Latvian Holocaust. To quote from the preface: "The memory of the Holocaust in Latvia has alternated from denial to exaggeration, from the impossible to the impossible. The purpose of this work is to bring the debate and the memory towards the center, the realm of the reasonable." The author then describes the attempts of the Nazis to escape accountability, primarily through the lack of written orders (while they paradoxically kept daily summaries of Einsatzgruppen activities), and the postwar self-serving aspects of Soviet accounts, which perverted interpretation of the Holocaust even further. As such, the Nazis tried to incite and lay blame on the native populations, and the Soviets, threatened by nationalist sentiments, blamed the local populace as well.*

Some readers may feel that the author minimizes the existence of Latvian anti-Semitism prior to World War II, and he cites the lack of documentary evidence for spontaneous Latvian atrocities prior to the arrival of the Germans. In all fairness, the author describes varying historical points of view throughout his text, and in his conclusion, states that these subjects merit further investigation. Even if one disagrees with the author on these points, this in no way diminishes the value of this book. Professor Ezerzailis has made an invaluable contribution toward the understanding of the Holocaust in Latvia, and has made it accessible to an English-speaking audience.

This book was published fairly recently, and may not yet be available in libraries. It is available for purchase from the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum gift shop in Washington, DC., telephone: (202) 488-6144 fax: (202) 488-0438.


ANOTHER VIEW: EZERGAILIS SPEAKS AT U.S.H.M.M.

by Mike Getz

The Holocaust in Latvia 1941-1944, The Missing Center, by Andrew Ezerzailis is a comprehensive study by a non-Jew of Latvian birth who is also an authority on that country's history. Marion Werle reviews the book in this issue. The author spoke at the Holocaust Museum on February 27th to an audience of 25, including Holocaust survivors. Prof Ezerzailis acknowledged that the Holocaust Museum, having located in Washington DC, has gained a central place in awareness at the confluence of diplomatic and political activity. It was therefore an appropriate place to address the many issues faced by Holocaust historians. Since much is
unknown, events must be protected from both revisionist denial and sweeping accusations against Latvians that characterize the debate. However many details were known quite early.

Winston Churchill, although informed promptly of the killings in Eastern Europe, remained silent, neither warning nor hindering the killers. That silence did not imply anti-Semitism or consent. Ezergailis went on to mention categories and sources of anti-Semitism, “eliminationist” being the most radical by Goldhagen’s definition. Others were:

I. Christian.
II. Protocols of the Elders of Zion, perpetuated by the Russian Civil War and both Hitler and Henry Ford, whose support facilitated large circulation in Latvia.
III. Racial.
IV. Communist.

While none of these manifestations could be defined as eliminationist, anti-Semitism as state policy leads to eliminationism. In Latvia all the categories of anti-Semitism existed but were generally not focused. However the Protocols were influential, leading to Jews’ being identified as Chekists. After the Soviet occupation, the Germans exploited and promoted anti-Jewish feeling. Eliminationism made its appearance. A linkage between Jews and the Soviet occupation was used to promote vicious round of killings in 1941. Many emigrant Latvian communities have since maintained this linkage as a justification, for the acknowledged murder of Jews by Latvians.

In referring to his search for the “missing center” Prof Ezergailis recounted that expatriate Latvians in the US and Canada have been sniping at his book because it was “too gentle on the Jews”. There remains in those circles a tendency to minimize and whitewash criminal acts under Nazi rule. Nevertheless, he firmly rejected that killing of Jews occurred before the Germans arrived, also dismissing claims that the Holocaust was a rising against Jews. He maintained that no state sponsored anti-Semitism occurred during Latvia’s independence, nor are pogroms recorded in its earlier history.

Essentially in seeking the “center” the author implied that German presence and support was necessary for Latvians to murder Jews. Without this condition the spontaneous component for “eliminationism” was lacking. There was also no documentary evidence in the known records of killings before the Germans arrived. The Ulmanis dictatorship, although promoting Latvian nationalism aggressively, was not vociferously anti-Semitic.

My parents came from Subate, a village on Latvia’s border with Lithuania. Some 300 of its Jews, probably including others from neighboring communities, were rounded up two days earlier, shot and finished off with clubs on Monday June 23rd 1941. This date corresponds to the yahrzeit commemorated in Israel since 1942, when details, including names of the killers, also arrived in South Africa. Ezergailis and others present disputed the date, since there were no Germans in Latvia at that time. A member of the audience pointed out that similar killings took place in Lithuania at the same time.

Our family group visited Subate in June of 1992. There are three mass graves, the third for children, identified by standard Soviet memorials. A villager recalled the killings which he and a friend witnessed. That the killings occurred is indisputable. This event therefore puts into question any thesis that Latvians only killed Jews under the cover of German presence and encouragement. The Subate murders occurred one day after Germany attacked Russia in 1941, and before Riga was occupied on July 1st.

The work that Prof Ezergailis has done will remain incomplete and perhaps flawed until killings such as those at Subate are acknowledged and given their place in the Latvian Holocaust. It may be necessary to re-examine the real consequences of the relationship between Ulmanis and Nazi Germany. Also John Wiley’s letter from the Riga Legation in May 1940 to the Secretary of State on “Anti-
Semitism in Latvia" (reprinted elsewhere in this newsletter) deserves more attention than it received in this book. Specific acts and policies of the Ulmanis regime prejudicial to Jews are described to the extent that in October 1939, Alfred Valdmanis, Minister of Finance, resigned in protest.

To take its place in the family of nations, Latvia cannot avoid confronting its Holocaust. It owes a full account to its youth and needs to move away from the umbrella of “Soviet terror” so freely used to shelter and excuse some of the most dreadful brutality in the Holocaust. In this context The Holocaust in Latvia is an important book, not without courage.

Cape Town Society Formed

(this announcement was posted on JewishGen by new SIG member Paul Cheifitz)

We are very excited to announce the long awaited establishment of the Jewish Family History Society of Cape Town. A group of dedicated and experienced genealogists and family historians have gotten together to assist interested parties in Cape Town and indeed throughout the world in locating information about their families. Although we do not yet have a facility to conduct research on an individual basis we can send you in the right direction and recommend experienced researchers who will help you with your research. We will answer all of your requests and will help you ourselves if we are able to do so.

The ninety thousand or so Jews in South Africa are mainly of Litvak descent and thus anyone researching their Lithuanian and Latvian ancestry should not rule out the possibility of locating long lost relatives in South Africa. Our Jewish Community, however, is made up of a mixture of Ashkenazim and Sephardim from all over the world.

Members of the Society will receive a quartely newsletter and advance notice and discounted prices on any publications which we produce. The first project that we have undertaken is assisting the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies, at the University of Cape Town, with the computerization and eventual inclusion on the JewishGen search engine of 'a record of Jewish Immigrants landing at the port of Cape Town, 1924-1929'. Included are approximately 15000 entries of people who entered the country from all over the world. Another project that we are working on is a guidebook of Genealogical Resources in the Cape Town area.

Our seven founder members are Paul Cheifitz, Lauren Fabian, Ben and Idafay Mirvis, Debby Myers, Richard Newman and Jeff Osrin.

We can be contacted at:
The Jewish Family History Society of Cape Town, P.O. Box 541, Sea Point 8060, SOUTH AFRICA.

Phone: 21-451546.
Fax: 21-4393768.
email: jewfamct@global.co.za

We look forward to hearing from you all very soon.
PINKAS HA-KEHILOT: SUBATE


SUBATA (German: Subbat; Jewish: Shuvitz or Subitz)

City in the Ilukste region which is in Zamgale (Courland), on the border of Lithuania.

*Map 1, from Bartholomew European Travel Map—Larvia, 1966. 1:400,000*

<table>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Entire Population</th>
<th>Jews</th>
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<td>In numbers</td>
<td>In percentages</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1935</td>
<td>1,489</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Up to the end of the First World War

History of the City

Old Subata (S.) was founded in the year 1550 on the bank of a lake. In the year 1685, German barons, the brothers von Ost Sachsen, founded New S. on their property on the other side of the lake, and published the foundation regulations of the city. In the year 1795, S. passed over to Russian control. In the year 1819, the two parts of the settlement, the old and the new, comprised 350 inhabitants. In the second half of the nineteenth century, the number of local inhabitants grew rapidly. The population of S. was heterogeneous from a national point of view and included Jews, Russians, Latvians and Poles. In the year 1894, the two parts of S. united into one administrative unit, and the settlement received the status of a city.

After the First World war, S. received the standing of regional city. Although the population of the city decreased after the war, the previous national composition was preserved: three national groups, almost equal in size. In the year 1925, the composition was as follows: Russians - 489 souls; Jews - 495 souls; Latvians - 435 souls. In addition, there was also a Polish minority which amounted to some 151 souls. During this period, the city did not develop. The majority of homes were constructed of wood. The only local enterprises were flour mills.

The Jewish Settlement and its Development

In the foundation regulations of New S., from the year 1686, was a section which forbade Jews from purchasing a public house. We have no information which would allow us to pinpoint when Jewish settlement began in S., however at the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was already a Jewish community in place which employed a teacher [moreh tzedek] and a ritual slaughterer and inspector by the name of Avraham ben Moshe. During the century, the Jewish settlement in S. grew rapidly and towards the end of the century they were half of the entire population of the city. They earned a living through trade and labor. They had an especially large role in the linen trade.

The Jews of S. were pious in their religion and were given to being influenced by Torah learning on the one hand and Chabad hassidism on the other. With the city's rabbis was appointed the Rabbi Eliyahu-Shmuel Lieb, who officiated locally in the middle of the nineteenth century, and after him - his son-in-law, the Rabbi Moshe. The latter also willed his chair to his son-in-law - the Rabbi Moshe Rabinovitz.

In the year 1898 until 1915, the rabbinical chair of S. was occupied by Rabbi Avraham-Benjamin Teitz, who was known for his religious and communal influence in the Jewish community. Among other things, Rabbi Teitz nurtured the activities of the local welfare and even contributed to it from his own pocket. At his initiative, a new beit midrash [religious house of learning] was built. One part of the building was for the Chabad hassidim and the other - to the prayers of the "Mitnagdim". In the second half of the nineteenth century, a Jewish doctor, Dr. Julius Aberfeld, was active in the area. On the eve of the First World War, 100 Jewish children studied in three "chedderim" [small one room school]. Girls received their education at the local national Russian school. At the beginning of the First World War (1915), the Jews of S. were deported to the interior of Russia. Their community rabbi, the Rabbi Teitz, was appointed the rabbi of Poltava, which is in Russia, and subsequently made aliyah to the Land of Israel. During the course of the war, 7 Jewish public structures and 11 private Jewish houses were destroyed.

BETWEEN THE TWO WARS

After the First World War, the number of Jews in S. diminished. This downward trend continued into the '20's and '30's due to the Jews moving to other cities in Latvia, to emigration across the waters, and aliyah to the Land of Israel. In the year 1935, the Jews constituted 26 per cent of the entire population. In the same year, they were owners of 33 stores and businesses out of a total
of the 80 stores and businesses active locally. Alongside the merchants were also local Jewish skilled laborers, who in 1928, formed their own organization. In the '20's, local anti-Semitic activity increased: the flagbearers being among others, members of the local Organization of Latvian Youth. They tried to interrupt Jewish events. However, the citizens of the city had reservations about their activities and the police took steps to prevent public disturbances.

In the beginning of the '20's, the Jewish community began activities for rehabilitation and reorganization, with the aid of the "Joint" and with the help of the organization of former Subateans in the United States. In the year 1921, the rabbi of S., Rabbi Ya'akov Epstein, represented the city's Jews at the National Congress of Jewish Communities in Latvia, which took place through the inspiration of the Joint in Riga. The following year, this organization awarded 36 thousand ruble to the coffers of "Gimilut Chesed" [interest free loan society] of the S. community. An additional development in this matter took place in 1928 with the foundation of the bank "Loan and Saving". In its first year of existence, the bank counted 100 share-owning members. Jews in the small surrounding settlements also asked to utilize the bank's services. Jews in the town of Akniste entered into partnership with the institution. Due to squabbles and poor management, the bank fell on hard times. A loan received from the "Joint" didn't help the situation and the bank stood on the verge of dismantlement. However, through the intervention of Rabbi Epstein, the bank received an additional loan from a rich Riga Jew by the name of Feldhon, thanks to which the bank succeeded in continuing its regular activities. The Organization of Skilled Workers, which was founded, as was already mentioned, in 1928, aspired to form its own bank. The fear of excess competition between the banks raised a public outcry against such a step.

From the beginning of the twenties and up to the destruction of the community, Rabbi Ya'akov Epstein, who was mentioned above, served as the community rabbi. He was born to a rabbinical family in Bakesht, which is in the district of Vilna, was trained in the Slobodka and Slutzk Yishivot, and was killed with his entire household in the holocaust. In addition to the rabbi, the community also employed a ritual butcher and inspector. This role was filled by Avraham Yitzhak Katzovitch. In S., there were three houses of prayer.

In the first years after the First World War, the teacher Israel Katzovitch and his father (mentioned above) established a popular school, in which the languages of instruction were Yiddish and Hebrew. In 1926, the institution had six classes. Part of its budget was covered by City Hall. Nearby, summer advanced study programs for teachers were conducted. In 1930, at that location there was an active Jewish school whose language of instruction was Russian. In cultural and welfare endeavors the local Women's Organization ("Freuein Farein") was active. In the 1920's, a branch of the Zionist organization, "Hashomer", was active in the area. One of its founders was the teacher Katzovitch mentioned above. 40 of the Jews of S. participated in the elections to the Zionist Congress which took place in 1933. 35 of them voted for the "List of the Land of Israel Labors", 4 for the Revisionists and one vote was given to the list of "Hamizrachi".

WORLD WAR TWO AND AFTERWARDS

The Period of Soviet Government (1940-1941)

As a result of the policy of general Sovietization, step by step the Jewish public institutions were also destroyed. 120 of the Jewish students studied in the city school, which was reorganized, and counted three national sections, which related to the composition of the local population: Latvian, Russian, and Jewish. Each one was, in affect, a separate school with its own director. The city council also included Jewish members, including the director of the Jewish school.

At the time of the war between Germany and the Soviet Union, the city suffered from German air
raids. Jewish refugees from bordering Lithuania arrived. Part of the refugees and some local Jews, among them those who held public positions, escaped to the interior of the Soviet Union. The remainder of the local Jews and the refugees remained in the city.

Under the Nazi Conquest

At the end of June, 1941, the German armies conquered S. In summer or fall of the same year, the local Jews and the Lithuanian refugees were murdered in the forest bordering on the city. At first they took the children out to be killed, in plain sight of the parents, in two pits. Afterwards, in two separate pits, they killed the parents. According to one version, even before the "Aktion", some Jews of S. were expelled to the Dvinsk Ghetto, and their fate was as the fate of the rest of the Jews there.

On 31 July, 1944, the Red Army conquered S. Almost all of the Jews of S. who returned after the war from the Soviet Union settled in Riga, and did not return to their city. In the cemetery a memorial stone was raised. Each year, the Subateans would come back to their city, to hold a service next to the memorial stone, for the memory of the Jewish victims.

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SHTETL FOCUS: SUBATE

Subate is a small town in Latvia, 40 km NW of Daugavpils on the border with Lithuania. Its geographic location is 56 degrees N and 26.17 E. Its lake (see below) is a prominent feature. The following recollections of Subate residents were contributed by Mike Getz.

*Figure 1 - View of Subate in the 1920's. Photo courtesy of Mike Getz.*

The following edited extract was written by Meishe Ber Fisher, born in Subat in 1901. He came to South Africa in 1926. The translation from Yiddish was done by his son Dr. Yona Fisher of Johannesburg in June 1993.
Shubat was divided by a lake (ozere) as though there were two towns. There were two different rabbis, different shochtim, teachers, Beit Midrashim. The eastern part of the town was the more significant in respect of the commercial center. The rich (gevirim) also resided in the eastern part close to the Market Square. The well known wealthy of the town were the Factors, Abrahamson, Marienburg, Rubanenko and others. It was a quiet Jewish town with the exception of Monday, the market day, one rarely saw a strange person. The majority of the town was occupied with labor and transport. There were also "Lufismenschen" and retailers. There was no shortage of "Karabelnikers" who used to leave with a heavy pack on their shoulders from early Monday till Friday and traverse through the villages and farms.

The surroundings of Shubat were extraordinarily beautiful and healthy. The lake which was to be found in the middle of the town added much to the beauty of the town. It used to attract many visitors who enjoyed the summer months.

From the year 1915, when Shubat was occupied by the Germans we were totally cut off from Courland. At that stage Rakishik was the nearest center with which we were connected commercially and which influenced us spiritually. Teachers, cantors and orators were brought from there. Generally we were influenced by the Lithuanian Jewish Renaissance. We also made adjustments to the modernization of our education and established national culture organizations according to the Lithuanian style.

Our old rabbi, hagaon Rabbi Moshe Zacher was known as "Gadol Batorah". I once heard from the Rogevitscher Gaon, Joseph Rogen, that Moshe could "lernen". Our well known Chazan was Avraham Yitzchak Katzeltz (the shochet from Abel in Lithuania) a type of "Berele Chagi". He also served Rakishik with his beautiful davening.

After the first World War a modern Hebrew School was organized via the brothers Cohen (currently residing in Johannesburg) and the son of the shochet, Israel, was the principal. Our school produced a large number of Hebrew speaking pupils. Israel (Katzeltz) was a fine "Maskil" with unique pedagogic abilities and was caught up somewhat excessively in the Haskalah movement. His initiative led to a well organized Zionist organization and also a theatrical group.

In this theatrical group his wife proved to be outstanding, Pearl the "rebbes" with her occupational talent. She was also the first female member of our democratic community. The chairman was our last Rabbi, Hagaon Yaakov Epstein (nephew of Gaon Rabbi Moshe Epstein, Rosh Yeshiva of Hebron).

As far as the existence of genuine Judaism in the Jewish street was concerned, it is worth remembering a certain incident. A well known shopkeeper who conducted classes in Meshniot on Saturday and Sunday, had a liking for the Omed (bimah) and was a very pleasant davenor without payment. When it became known that his two sons, students at the Lithuanian Gymnasium, were writing on Shabbat, he was no longer permitted to approach the Omed.

May the above sentences remain as a memorial to our most beloved and dear holy ones (Kedoshim) who lived a true Jewish life and raised their holy souls (Al Kiddush Hashem). May their blood be avenged.

Mike Getz made the following notes during a conversation with his aunt Annie (Chaike) Rosenthal, the younger sister of his late mother Hodel. Their father Avrom Leib Gelbart and his brother Zusman came to South Africa in the early 1900's.

When Avrom Leib was in South Africa for the second time, around 1911, we lived with Bobbe Esther and Zeide Meier Gelbart. Our mother, Henne Riva moved out with us - your mother
Hodel, uncle Mike and I - into an unfinished house, then a shell with a roof, our father was building. The house, which would include a shop, was larger than planned because my father did not want to cut the beams he had bought. After the Germans occupied Subate in 1915, Henne Riva set up a canteen, baking and selling to them out of the area intended as a shop.

At this time Hodel, your mother, goes to a school put up by the Germans in the damaged Chassidic shul. Our mother Henne Riva asks them to post a letter to her husband in South Africa. When the letter reached him, Avrom Leib realized his family was alive. But Henne Riva had died during a flu epidemic in 1916. Hodel, the eldest at 14 and head of the family now, struggled to collect ten pounds sterling our father had sent, because it was addressed to Henne Riva.

The Germans wanted to commandeer the house for use as an army kitchen. Our aunt, Hodel Getz, my mother's half-sister, pleaded with the commander not to throw three children out of their home and we were given a room to live in.

Uncle Mike was mostly brought up by Bobbe. Aunt Hodel moved in and lived with us until her marriage. We received money regularly from our father. Your parents married and your father left for South Africa in 1926. We followed in 1928.

This account of how the Jews of Subate died in June of 1941 is based on a conversation with Avrom Kur who was conscripted by the Russians and survived the Holocaust. He was badly wounded during the war and highly decorated. Mike Getz interviewed him in his Haifa home.

The two mass graves in Subate, one 60m by 4m and the second 30m by 2.5m, contain almost 1200 bodies, including Jews from Akniste (a neighboring town) and the Lithuanian Shubitz. The graves are located near the school and the Jewish cemetery. Fit males were shot first and finished off with clubs. The killers were local Latvians led by Tsourikis and Zandenans, the local photographer. Rav Epstein was made to watch. Sources of this information were Weilke Benorovitch a Pole and Maskolov a Russian. The grave coverers were Russians living in Subate, under orders of local Latvians.

Returning from the war and living in Riga, Avram Kur went to his family's Subate grave, as is customary before Rosh Hashanah, and found the sites neglected and overrun. He petitioned the Latvian authorities without result. Eventually he took his case to Moscow stating that the neglect of his family's burial place was offensive and humiliating to him as a soldier of the Russian army who had unhesitatingly risked his life in its cause. The response was prompt and effective with improved care of the grave sites while he remained in Latvia until the early 70's.

Note by Mike Getz: Our family group from South Africa visited Subate in 1992 and once again the mass graves were overgrown and neglected. With help from the Jewish community of Daugavpils, we replaced the bland Soviet memorials with Jewish tombstones and arranged for proper maintenance of the grave sites. We found a smaller third site where children are buried. A villager confirmed details of the killings as Avram had described them.

SEND US YOUR SHTETL’S STORY

We encourage members who have visited their ancestral towns, or who have material to contribute on their family shtetl, to send us photos (color copies are fine), cemetery lists, property records, interviews, and other materials, and become a part of Shtetl Focus. We intend to make this a regular newsletter feature, and will also profile these shtetls on our Internet web site.
ANTI-SEMITISM IN LATVIA: a Report to the Secretary of State from Riga, May 27, 1940

The following is reprinted from correspondence found in the National Archives--"The Jews of Latvia" in Records of the U.S. Department of State relating to...Latvia. Film M1177, Roll 17, frames 0340 ff. The remainder of the document contains population statistics and other information about the Jews in Latvia prior to the German invasion.

[declassified by the State Dept. 6/2/79]

The Honorable
The Secretary of State, Washington,

Sir:

I have the honor to report that anti-Semitism appears to have been adopted as the policy of the Latvian Government. No official pronouncement on the subject has been made and officially the existence of such a policy is denied. In private conversation, high officials of the Government do not, however, deny that such such [sic] a policy is being pursued. In Latvia as elsewhere there has probably always been some anti-Semitism.
Before 1914 there appears to have been good and mutually beneficial relations between the dominant German Baltic class and the Jewish commercial and professional community. The Latvians and the Jewish minority seem on the whole to have lived together in relative harmony. The fall vigor of the present anti-Semitic drive seems to date only, curiously enough, from the recent "repatriation" of the Baltic German minority.

According to reliable information, the Government decided upon an anti-Semitic policy last September and the resignation on October 24, 1939 of Alfred Valdmis, the Minister of Finance, was made by him as a gesture of protest.

The application of anti-Semitism in Latvia is made very easy by the administrative technique of the country. Nearly everything is permitted but only on the basis of a special permit. If a Jew wishes to establish a business, dismiss or engage employees, move his residence, transfer his business premises, or perform any of the other innumerable functions of life or business, such a permit is usually withheld without explanation. In addition, under the pretext of recruiting additional labor for the land, Jewish households are being deprived of their servants under 50 years of age. There is, moreover, discrimination against Jewish lawyers, doctors and dentists. I am informed in this connection that no Jewish lawyers have been admitted to practice since the coup d'état on May 15, 1934.

The The [sic] imposition of taxes on Jewish business is described as confiscatory and many Jewish industries are prevented from obtaining sufficient raw materials, while Latvian and state owned competitors receive ample stocks.

A leading member of the Jewish community who belongs to an industrial family which has been established in Latvia for 200 years, is the only one who, in private conversation, has struck an optimistic note. He does not believe that anti-Semitism in Latvia will ever achieve the proportions which it has reached in Germany. As for the measures applied to the lives and property of the Jewish community, he insisted there was a saving grace in Latvia, namely, corruption; that by greasing the proper palms there was almost nothing that could not be arranged. This refuge from oppression may indeed exist but I doubt very much whether it is readily available to the Jewish community as a whole.

The leading anti-Semites are said to be President Ulmanis, the Minister for Foreign Affairs, M. Vilhelms Munters, and M. Alfreds Berzins, the Minister of Public Relations. The President, however, has close personal relations with M. Morduch Dubins, President of the Riga Hebrew Council and a former member of the defunct Latvian parliament. Through his intervention a certain alleviation has been obtained in respect of a few special cases. His influence, however, is not described as effective in respect of the President's attitude towards the situation in general.

In In [sic] a subsequent dispatch I shall endeavor to assemble statistical data with regard to the extent to which Jewish property interests have been affected by Latvia's "cold pogrom", as well as to give the Department an estimate of the extent to which the Jewish community has participated in the commercial, industrial and professional life of Latvia.

Respectfully yours, [signed] John C. Wiley
LATVIA ONLINE:

http://www1.jewishgen.org/latvia

The beginning of 1997 saw the launching of our new web site. JewishGen has generously allowed us complete autonomy in this effort--our SIG is entirely responsible for the content and presentation of our site. I compose the pages and upload them to a directory on one of the JewishGen web servers. The first order of business was to introduce ourselves, with a statement of purpose and general information for prospective members. This has already had a beneficial effect in recruiting new members. We also publicized the Latvia SIG JewishGen mailing list, which had been dormant for months, and all of a sudden has come back to life with renewed vigor. We published an index to all our newsletters (this is also published in this current newsletter), which has resulted in both membership inquiries and requests for reprints of back issues.

Our next objective was to provide a repository for data that we wish to make generally accessible to the public. In this effort, Harold Rhode agreed to make his subscription list database available, and I took care of the technical details of reformatting and uploading the finished product. For those of you who had trouble reading the diskette that was distributed, you may now view the data from your web browser. You may not only issue 'finds' for particular names from your browser, but you may also save the data to your hard drive, where you may import it into your database or spreadsheet program of choice. There is now a new introductory page for all of our (future) databases, and the Riga consular data compiled by Mike Getz for the September 1996 newsletter has just been added. There is also a link to the JewishGen HaMelitz database of Lithuanian and Latvian names of contributors, published in the Hebrew language newspaper HaMelitz between 1893 and 1903. If you haven't already seen this database and search engine, you should take a look. As a general policy, we will not publish any data on our web site that has not already appeared in our newsletter, and there may be differences in what goes on the web site, both in presentation and content.

I also included a page of Latvian Resources, which includes addresses for Aleksandrs Feiganis, the Latvian Archives, and the regional Rezekne archives. Mike Getz and I receive many e-mail inquiries for information of this type, and inclusion of this data on the web site hopefully cuts down the number of inquiries to which we have to respond personally. If you have any resources that you feel are worthwhile for inclusion on this page, please send me an e-mail with the information. There is also an Announcements page, where messages of general interest to members are posted from time to time. Please let me know if there is anything that you feel should appear on this page. This newsletter introduces a new feature called Shtetl Focus. We expect to institute a similar feature on our web site, although in a slightly different format (we will not be reprinting translations of Pinkas ha-Kehillot, but expect to include a combination of data on Latvian towns, member-contributed photographs and experiences, and other information) that will be accessible both from our home page and from the JewishGen ShetLinks web site. There are other future enhancements planned, and if you have any suggestions, please don't hesitate to make them.
On a final note, JewishGen has provided us with disk space for our web site at no charge to us, and also hosts our mailing list. We made a donation to them last year, and will do so again this year. I strongly recommend that each of us who uses JewishGen make an annual donation, if you haven’t already done so. The JewishGen home page (http://www.jewishgen.org) has a link called JewishGenerosity, which gives you details about making donations and where to send them.

Marion Werle
werle@pacificnet.net

E-mail Address Verification

The following is a list of e-mail addresses of Latvia SIG members. If you have an e-mail address that does not appear this list, or if your address has changed, please notify Marion Werle at werle@pacificnet.net, so that our records can be updated. These addresses are on a mailing list that is used to inform members of changes to the web page and other announcements of general interest. Most of the problem/misspelled addresses have been corrected. The addresses that are still having problems are noted below.

adelmans@adelvx.citadel.edu
jaronsom@world.std.com
102010.3127@compuserve.com
ccoplinbaker@earthlink.net
geth91a@prodigy.com
blumenau@eecs.berkeley.edu
MMBlum@aol.com
nlbrown@aol.com
lincan@amanda.dorsai.org
pcsheifitz@global.co.za
daniel9@aol.com
evdickman@aol.com
hepstein@gsu.edu
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fitleberg@aol.com
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BasGinger@aol.com
74557.1335@compuserve.com
renee@teleport.com
pdgreene@aol.com
dheltzer@sparc.isl.net
ihh@aol.com
robeh@mindspring.com
Saul@Swico.demon.co.uk
giljacob@cfj.noli.com—this address has had delivery problems
jpjeu@netvision.net.il
eugenej@ashur.cc.biu.ac.il
stanjudd@aol.com
bkahn@servtech.com
gkkapp@roanoke.infi.net
dkates@primenet.com
mike@order.ph.utexas.edu
martha@bgumail.bgmu.ac.il
dovlevin@cc.huji.ac.il
ilevy@gwis2.circ.gwu.edu
cmenetwork@mindspring.com
j.j@swipnet.se
lippman@panix.com
huhk72a@prodigy.com
homargol@aol.com
remker@netvision.net.il
maxmich@aol.com
mishkinma@aol.com—this was flagged as an unknown address
cnam@css.fsu.edu
kossey@nr.infi.net
melpag@starnetinc.com
robres@user1.channels.com
hrhode@capaccess.org
annr0613@aol.com
abby@figtree.com
rosie@bc.seflin.org
maxsax@aol.com
72377.2777@compuserve.com
emlriver@aol.com
sleselis@mich.com
shaffer@ums1vma.umsl.edu
abshearer@aol.com
iris@maccie.microserve.com
FEEFHS Fourth Annual International Convention
at Best Western Salt Lake Plaza Hotel (formerly Howard Johnson's),
Salt Lake City, Utah.
Saturday, September 27 -- Tuesday, September 30, 1997

PRIMARY EMPHASIS: Learning from Professional Genealogists in Utah and the West. Learning from the Family History Library (FHL) Staff. Convention coordinated with Patron Class sessions on Saturday and Monday. Learning from FEEFHS Professionals, Specialists and Linguists. Central and Eastern Europe -- especially the German, Austro-Hungarian and Russian Empires. Use of gazetteers and maps to find places of origin in Central and Eastern Europe. Use of finding aids and research tools at the FHL and in an FHC environment. Effective use of your research time at the Family History Library. Effective use of Archives worldwide in conducting genealogy record searches. Overcoming Central and East European language problems. Problem solving lectures and workshops with real world examples.

For details, see the FEEFHS (Federation of East European Family History Societies) web site (feefts@feefhs.org) or contact Marion Werle c/o LATVIA SIG, P.O. Box 3581, Granada Hills, CA 91394-3581. NOTE: Erev Rosh Hashana is October 1, 1997.

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PARIS '97 AND BEYOND

The Fifth International Summer Seminar on Jewish genealogy will be held in Paris on July 13-17, 1997, hosted by the Cercle de Genealogie Juive (Jewish Genealogical Society of France). This will be a bilingual seminar with simultaneous translations in French and English. It will also be the first time that a seminar will be held in a location that directly suffered the effect of the Holocaust. The seminar plans to open on Sunday evening, July 13, and end with a closing dinner on Thursday, July 17. Plenary lectures will be held every afternoon and evening.

FEES:

After March 31, 1997
Individual: 800 French francs
Couple: 1,200 French francs
(It will be possible to purchase daily registrations on site during the seminar)

Hosted by:
Cercle de Genealogie Juive - Seminar Registrar -
14, rue Saint-Lazare,
75009 Paris, France.

Immediately following the Fifth International Seminar on Jewish Genealogy in Paris, July 13-17, 1997, Jewish genealogists have the opportunity to participate in one of several unique, week long research mini-seminars to eight (8) Eastern European destinations in the following countries: Belarus, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, eastern Romania and Ukraine. Group leaders are Vladislav Soshnikov for Belarus, Aleksandrs Feigmanis for Latvia, Harold Rhode for Lithuania, Gary Mokotoff and Eileen Polakoff for Poland, Rick Bercuvitz for Romania and Dr. George Bolotenko for Ukraine.

Please contact Mike Getz if you are interested in a trip to Latvia following the seminar:

e-mail: mgetz@capaccess.org
mailing address 5401 Whitley Park Terrace #901
Bethesda, MD 20814
phone (301) 493-5179, fax (301) 493-9081

For registration details, see AVOTAYNU, Vol. XII, No. 4, Winter 1996 or, on the World Wide Web: http://www.uniglobe-dynamic.com/paris97/paris_master.html