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We as genealogists have a passion for names, which remains a mystery to all our nongenealogical contacts. When I receive a new database of names, dates, places of origin and occupations, a glow pervades my being and a sense of belonging with the past overcomes me. But how do you explain what is so exciting about the quest for details of lost relations and past generations? How can you say what is so rewarding about being instrumental in helping others trace their ancestors? The truth is, you can't—unless your listeners are similarly consumed with a passion for genealogy.

The group I never have to explain myself to are the members and volunteers who work so diligently to bring new information online. (For those not on the Internet or those who have missed the messages on the newsgroups, new databases have recently been added to the All Latvia Database.) The new information includes: a large Dvinsk database, names from the Extraordinary Commission, new database entries for Jacobstadt (now Jekapils) dating from around 1871, Jewish families of the old capital of Courland, Mitau (now Jelgava), circa 1845, 390 records from the small shtetl of Grobina just outside of Libau (now Liepaja), and a substantial database of names from Tukums and the surrounding area. In addition, the Latvia SIG and Courland Research Group have combined forces to produce what promises to be a historical database of Latvian Jews.

Thanks Volunteers

For all of her hard work, bringing this new information to the Web, I would especially like to cite the database coordinator, Constance Whippman. On behalf of all of us, I thank her and her volunteers for everything they have accomplished.

I am also grateful to Mike Getz for his contribution to the excellent Dvinsk database introduction and, with the assistance of Vadim Altskan.

See NAMES page 3
Jekabpils Cemetery Data Coming Online

 NAMES from page 2 of the USHMM, for being instrumental in acquiring the names for the Extraordinary Commission database.

 Marion Werle is also appreciated for her hard work in getting the Jekabpils cemetery data—commissioned from Aleksandrs Feigmanis—into a database format. This database will be attached to the Jekabpils shtetlinks page and also donated to the world cemetery database of Jewishgen. This is a more detailed and comprehensive database than the existing one, compiled by some members of the Jekabpils community a few years ago. Aleksandrs took many photos of the cemetery and translated the tombstones that were still legible. He has done an excellent job.

 And Don’t Forget... The Jewishgen newsgroup is now so large it is often difficult to find messages about research in Latvia. Thus, SIG members would be well advised to subscribe to the Courland newsgroup, as well as the Latvia SIG newsgroup, and to post messages on both sites. Both newsgroups are excellent forums for discussion and for publishing your research interests. The Oral History Project in Latvia is progressing very well and an update by the project coordinator, Aina Antane, can be found on page 13 in this issue.

 If you have recently travelled in Latvia and have information of value to other Latvian researchers, please post a message on the newsgroups or send an article or query to the newsletter editor, Leslie Leven.

 Latvia Conference

 The 4th Conference in Latvia, “Jews in a Changing World,” will take place Nov. 19-22 in Riga (see page 15). The conference is organized by Prof. Ruvin Ferber of the Centre for Judaic Studies at the University of Riga and Prof. Branover from Israel. I attended the last conference, found it very interesting and well organized and hope to go again. I will publish details of the program once it is finalised.

 I hope you were all united with your loved ones at the Pesach Seder this April. As our ancestors came forth from bondage, may we all remain free from persecution and may peace come to Israel.

 BE A SIG HERO...

 If you would like to make a donation to support the SIG, please contact: Mike Getz, mgetz@erols.com; if you wish to help with database translations, email: Constance Whippman, cwhippman@aol.com; other SIG projects: Arlene Beare, arl@dircon.co.uk; or to submit newsletter articles, Leslie Leven.
Why Read About the Holocaust?

"... to remain silent and indifferent, is the greatest sin of all."

Elie Wiesel, Spring, 1993
at the opening ceremony of the
Holocaust Museum, Washington, D.C.

By Leslie A. Leven
Latvia SIG Editor

This story takes place in a woods just outside of Dvinsk, ancestral home to many of us in the Latvia SIG. In my mind’s eye, it is early morning, a little hazy, the time of day when the body is still not fully awake or alert. A group of workers step through the mist, there to clear the land which will soon be covered in concrete and brick. It is Spring 1988.

Raising their pick axes high, the workers attack the earth, peeling back the mossy covered ground. Soon, chunks of soil, deadened leaves and knotted roots fill the air. One man’s axe hits something hard, impeding the course of his tool through the softening earth. He kneels over and reaches toward the errant object, a rock likely. But, it’s not a rock. It’s a bone. He tosses it aside.

Five minutes later, another worker exclaims, “Look at this!” Another bone. And then another...and another. The workers had disturbed a killing field—the uneasy resting place of hundreds of Dvinsk Jews, slain during the nightmare years of the Holocaust.

What contemporary Jews make of the story is this: the bones had a story to tell and pushed upward through the earth to proclaim the truth, to tell the world what happened that last day—to declare that the shocking, incriminating truth cannot be covered over any longer.
These Stories Are Not Easy to Read

COMMENT from page 4

And, indeed, today after 60 silent years, the echoes of 6 million stolen lives, are finally being heard. Accounts from Dvinsk, Poland, Lithuania—even from the US—dispel the lies that many have attempted to forget. In an explosive book, "Neighbors: the Destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne", historian Jan T. Gross accuses Poles of massacring their Jewish neighbors. Many were beaten to death, others herded into a barn that was set aflame—1,600

"I have included them because they are Truth... the truth that the bones of Dvinsk sought to tell."

Jewish lives snuffed out in one terrible afternoon. Then, from the U.S., a highly charged assertion accusing IBM of creating technology that enabled the Nazis to track Jews down throughout Europe and the Soviet Union. Beatings, burings, slaughter. These stories are not easy to read. They are painful, depressing, and often agonizing—even for those of us whose families were spared.

In 1894, my great-grandfather Yitzak applied to the Office of the Czar in Dvinsk for an "Internal Passport." This document gave him leave to travel for six months with his family throughout the Russian Empire. The consequence of exceeding the six months was extreme punishment.

On Nov. 12, 1894, Yitzak and his young family—my great grandmother Liba and their two small sons, Gersh (my grandfather) and the baby, Pinouch—surreptitiously left Widze, a mostly Jewish shtetl in then northwestern Lithuania. By 1895, Yitzak was "Issac"; Gersh, "Harry"; and Pinouch, "Paul." Yitzak and his family had arrived in America.

But for the Widze Jews left behind—and their offspring to come—blind fate was relentlessly cruel: the closing of the century and the dawn of the next brought them humiliation, starvation, brutality and death. In June 1941, the Germans invaded the town and within a short time enclosed the Jews in a ghetto in the worst part of town. The beatings and killings commenced. Not two years later, the Jews remaining were wrenched from the ghetto and transported to the Ponar woods near Vilna, where their lives and dreams came to an end.

Were it not for Yitzak's courage and foresight, our family saga would have died in Widze, too. Thus, I "feel" the Holocaust—surely not as a wretched Jew facing a firing squad in the Ponar woods—but still, a survivor blessed with life. How could I ever be indifferent? How could any of us ever be indifferent?

In this issue of the Latvia SIG, two stories relate to the Holocaust—both translations from Extraordinary Commission reports. The first details the slaughter of Vil'ani's Jews; the second, Gostini's Jews. While the stories reveal truths that should be told—and heard—it was no small decision to publish them here—the Vil'ani account is surely one of the most horrific descriptions of the Holocaust I've read—and I have read many.

Certainly, it will be your choice whether to read the accounts or not. I have included them because they are Truth—a painful, aching, tortured truth—the truth that the bones of Dvinsk sought to tell.

But if you can, read them, acknowledge the loss of 6 million Jewish ancestors, and never ever forget the women and children, husbands and wives who lost their lives because they were just Jews—just Jews like you and me. This is the very least that survivors can do.
LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

The Fairest Solution: Anders-Fitleberg Debate

The president comments on the rebuttal from Ed Anders (below) in response to statements made by Gary Fitleberg in the December 1998 issue of this newsletter.

The Holocaust in Latvia is a very sensitive subject for discussion. A publication by Andrew Ezergailis caused a furious reaction by many who felt that he was minimizing the Latvian involvement prior to the arrival of the Germans and placing the blame for the massacres totally on the Germans.

There can be no doubt that certain Latvian groups did carry out atrocities and I do not think that this is in dispute. The argument as I see it is the degree of involvement of the total Latvian population prior to the German arrival.

We as a SIG do not wish to become embroiled once again in a heated exchange on this subject, as it has already taken place. I for one do not have the extensive knowledge that is required to give an informed opinion on the text of the book. The Latvian SIG Board wishes to state that the views expressed by both Gary and Ed (below) are theirs alone and not the opinions of the board. We will not publish any further correspondence on the particular issue of whether the Latvians killed Jews before or after the Germans arrived, as this has been extensively written about in previous newsletters.

Ed Anders feels that statements made by Gary Fitleberg in reviewing Ezergailis' book were incorrect and maligned the author's character by misquoting and misrepresenting him. Ed asked to publish a rebuttal based on his knowledge.

Dear Editor:

ANDERS: Correction Long Overdue

Two years ago in this journal (Latvia SIG, December 1998), Gary Fitleberg wrote a three-page diatribe against a book written by a distinguished Latvian Holocaust scholar, Andrew Ezergailis. Fitleberg falsely accused him of fabricating a reference. I wrote to Fitleberg to defend Ezergailis, stating that the reference was real and invited him to publish a retraction. He chose not to reply to three successive requests, and when I offered to write a correction myself, the officers of the Latvian SIG stalled for 18 months and then refused to publish my letter. Thus, the accusation remains, which could give some an excuse to reject Ezergailis' work.

A Summary:
In the Introduction of his book, Ezergailis wrote: "The Latvian-Jewish relationships in the 1920's were not without their problems but there was nothing that would have predicted the murders of 1941 [71]." Footnote 71 reads: "For example, from the Jewish perspective, Latvian Jews in America who wrote a memorandum ‘The Jews of Latvia’ in 1940-1941 (Records of the US Department of State relating to...Latvia. Film M1177, Roll 17, frame 0340ff) do not consider the possibility that Jews would be murdered in Latvia."

See DEBATE page 8
See ANDERS page 7
ANDERS: Overdue

ANDERS from page 6

Fitleberg contends that “Roll 17, frame 0340ff” refers to a 5/27/40 letter by U.S. consular official John C. Riley (reprinted in Latvia SIG 2 [1], April 1997) and that Ezergailis’ claim of “a memorandum written by Jews in America” is a gross falsification. Fitleberg does not seem to know that “ff.” means “and the following.” Indeed, the 60-plus microfilm frames following the Riley letter contain a second, 11,000-word document, “The Jews of Latvia 1919-1940”. Obviously the reference “340ff” covers not a single document but an entire folder.

I actually have this second document and shall publish it as an appendix to the English translation of "History of Latvian Jews" by J. Steimanis, which I am editing. And, the Courland Research Group posted this document on its website in October 2000, eliminating all doubt about its reality: http://www.jewishgen.org/courland/consular/cons_jews.htm.

The document was written in 1942 as a chapter for a book—perhaps Latvia in 1939-1942 (Washington, D. C., 1942), the very first reference cited. The author(s) of the document are not named, but their intimate knowledge of Latvian political history and Jewish life points to well-informed academics, such as the former parliament member Max Laserson, who was a professor at Columbia University at that time.

In this document, there are only two sentences dealing with the Holocaust. Referring to the fears Jews had before 1940, the author(s) wrote: “Nazi conquest meant physical extinction.” But when describing the actual situation in 1941/42, they say: “. . . in view of the early and complete segregation of the Jewish population by the Nazis, it appears doubtful whether any considerable number of Jews could have joined the partisans. Only “segregation”, not a word about killings by either Germans or Latvians, and no inkling that more than 1,000 Latvians had turned into killers. That was Ezergailis’ point: there certainly was anti-semitism in Latvia, but in contrast to other Eastern European countries, it had never led to pogroms or synagogue burnings. The 1941 mass murders by Latvians (and Germans) were a bolt from the blue.

Clearly, this is a separate document, written long after the Riley letter. Consequently, Fitleberg’s ad hominem attack on Ezergailis, dripping with sarcasm, was totally unjustified. Moreover, his accusation that Ezergailis fabricated data is a grave offense defined as “scientific misconduct” by the US National Academy of Sciences and by numerous other organizations and government agencies. If proven, such charges could ruin a scholar’s career.

Fitleberg’s innuendoes:
- Fitleberg’s title, The Missing “Truth” About the “Missing Center”, implies there is no truth in Ezergailis’ book, which has the subtitle The Missing Center.
- In response to Ezergailis’ remark, “I could not avoid showing my Latvian past and colors,” Fitleberg says: “This becomes clearly and transparently evident.”
- Fitleberg: “On face value, this appears to be an authoritative statement . . . Unfortunately, the reader of Mr. Ezergailis’ work of scholarship must trust the author’s analysis . . .”
- Fitleberg: “One can clearly see just on its face that the so-called memorandum was written neither from the Jewish perspective, nor by Latvian Jews in America, as Mr. Ezergailis asserts, and leads the reader to believe . . . the actual truth of the contents is finally exposed for all to see.”
- Fitleberg: “A completely contradictory state-

See ANDERS page 8
Faitheberg: A Correction

Mr. Edward Anders complaint, in defense of his colleague, Mr. Andrew Ezerzgalis, appears to be that I confused two documents resulting from an “ff” reference in a footnote appearing in my article: “The Missing Truth From the Missing Center” in the December 1998 issue of this newsletter.

In my article, I questioned the authenticity and veracity of the source Mr. Ezergailis cited. In his letter, Mr. Anders points out that the letters “ff” mean “and the following.” Thus, the “f” footnote reference is not a single document but, in this case, an entire folder. One document is the memorandum, “A Report of Anti-Semitism in Latvia,” by John Riley. The other is a 27-page report, “The Jews of Latvia 1919-1940”, an 11,000-word document that he assumes is written by Max Laserson.

Anders makes an assumption, albeit an erroneous one, that I do not understand what the “ff” reference means and that I made an assumption as to which document Mr. Ezergailis intended as the source of his statement. It is clearly not advisable to assume anything. Here, I agree with Mr. Anders.

In any case, it is solely the burden of the author and esteemed scholar Andrew Ezergailis to specify to which document he refers in his work of scholarship. It is not my responsibility to ascertain or discern his intentions or meaning. See FITLEBERG page 9

Anders: Overdue

ANDERS from page 7

ment by author John Riley of the State Department emerges and shows the misleading nature of the Ezergailis’ text and corresponding footnote.

It is bad enough that Fitleberge launched a tirade of false charges on the most specious grounds—his own ignorance of the widely used abbreviation ff. In civilized countries, the judicial system is built on the presumption of innocence, and this principle has carried over to the sciences, mass media, etc. Common courtesy and common sense require that a critic check with the presumed offender before going public, lest his criticism turn out to be groundless.

It is worse that Fitleberge ignored all appeals for a retraction and that it took more than two years to get a letter published in this journal to set the record straight. Fortunately, the SIG’s new administration has a different notion of fairness and has devised an even-handed way to settle this ugly incident.

Edward Anders
Dear Editor:

Kudos to Arlene

I know all of you will be as excited as I am to see the publication of a really useful guide to researching our Baltic ancestors. Arlene Beare has just published, "A Guide to Jewish Genealogy in Latvia and Estonia", the third in the series "Jewish Ancestors?" published by the Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain, under the general editorship of Rosemary Wenerul, chairman, JGSGB Education Committee.

This is an excellent guide for researching your family. Everything is in one place: background information, addresses, references to the web, sources, practical tips, etc. This book would have saved me hours of time when I started [my research] and as I read through it now, I see loads of tips and tricks I hadn't even begun to think about.

What can I say except WOW! and warmest congratulations. I think I am required by JewishGen rules to point out, I don't have any financial interest in this book, nor does Arlene, since the profits are going to the JGSGB.

This book is another wonderful example of how far Jewish family history research has come over the last year.

Constance Whippman
London

conclude this matter once and for all. I also wish to commend Mr. Anders for his worthy efforts and projects, such as the database of Libau victims of the Shoah, as well as editing an English edition and translation of "The History of Latvian Jews" by J. Steinmanis. Both are noteworthy accomplishments.

I strongly urge Mr. Anders to utilize his time and energies in a more constructive and "positive" manner by focusing his attention on worthwhile projects such as these. I will extend my full assistance and cooperation to Mr. Anders in that regard and have only the highest respect for these accomplishments.

Lastly, I urge Mr. Anders to make his Libau (Liepaja) Survivors and Victims database available to the Latvia SIG as a contribution to the "All Latvia Database."

In the end one thing is absolutely certain: We can all agree to disagree!

Gary Fitleberg
California

Regardless of which document to which Mr. Ezergailis refers, the "Missing Truth From the Missing Center" remains exactly what it is. Nothing more. Nothing less. One cannot cleverly disguise or erase the truth from a presumed historical work of scholarship, which will serve as the basis for people's future beliefs.

I believe that without the truth eventually coming to light, individuals who are not familiar with the sources cited or who cannot take the time and energy to explore the details of the footnote, could easily be deceived and formulate an inaccurate opinion based entirely on a distortion of the facts.

This could possibly lead to denial or revisionism by scholars worldwide both now and in the future. That is ultimately dangerous.

Lastly, I wish to thank the Latvia SIG for giving both parties the opportunity to express their "editorial opinions", which will
New Latvian Sourcebook for Novice to Expert

SIG President Arlene Beare Writes One-of-a-Kind

Constance Whippman
All Latvia Database Co-ordinator

Arlene Beare’s new book, “A Guide to Jewish Genealogy in Latvia and Estonia,” will be enjoyed not only by beginners but also by more advanced researchers seeking information about Jewish roots in Latvia. It is 75 pages of essential information, clearly written and logically arranged. Every page benefits from Arlene’s expertise, enthusiasm and practical hands-on research experience. The book is the only one of its kind and the material about Estonia, one of the least well known of the Jewish communities of the former Soviet Union, is particularly welcome.

The book is ideal for beginners, but even experienced hands will find useful information and advice. There is simple practical background into the historical parts of modern day Latvia, a thorough review of available resources and ongoing projects, tips on getting started in family history, information about getting the most out of state archive sources—including a particularly useful translation of a typical archive bill.

There are maps, names of the principle towns—both in their German form and modern Latvian—and dozens of other topics which are concise and to the point. It is completely up to date with a good review of Internet resources and an excellent bibliography. This is a book that would have saved me hours of time when I started researching our family history but also one that I have referred to on several occasions since receiving my copy a fortnight ago. Everything is there to hand and easy to find.

Sharing a Passion

This is a book about sharing a passion for family history and the right of every family with a Jewish ancestors or connections to know their heritage. Reading it reminded me again how far Jewish family history has come since the Latvia SIG was founded in 1995. Arlene has used her year’s presidency of the Latvia SIG to advance the cause of Jewish family history and to build a rock solid foundation for the future. It is obvious that this book has been a labour of love.

Arlene’s book is published by the Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain. It is the 3rd in the excellent series “Jewish Ancestors?” under the general editorship of Rosemary Wenzel. Other titles in the series include: “A Beginners Guide to Jewish Genealogy in Great Britain” and “A Guide to Jewish Genealogy in Germany & Austria.” All three are available from JGSG (address in box this page) for £6 or $10. The price includes postage. All profits go to JGSG.
In the first issue of the Latvia SIG newsletter published in January 1996, then president Mike Getz proudly reported 19 fully paid memberships—18 from the U.S. and one from London. At $20 per member, that meant $190 went to support operations and further the SIG's ambitious goals. In just over five years, many of those goals have been realized and, in some cases, far exceeded.

While membership expanded from the first year onward, it also diversified. According to an April 2001 report presented by Rhea Plottel, the SIG's membership chairman, our nearly 150 paid-up members now represent 30 different states in the U.S. from Alabama to Wisconsin and eight foreign countries. Most foreign members come from Canada-6, Israel-6, England-5, South Africa-3, and Thailand, one.

In addition to individual memberships, five foreign organizations, seven U.S. organizations and selected individuals in Latvia receive copies of the newsletter. Year after year, these special relationships have continued to promote our activities and projects and generate new memberships.

Below are listed our most current new members, along with the names and towns they are researching. We welcome each of them to the Latvia SIG and thank all long-time members for their continuing interest and support.

We also wish to acknowledge Betsy Thai Geephart and Judy Miller for their generous donations. We are indeed grateful.

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<tr>
<th>New Member</th>
<th>Surname Researching</th>
<th>Town Researching</th>
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<tr>
<td>Stanley Baron</td>
<td>Barron, Bender, Katcher</td>
<td>Daugavpils, Aizpute</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portland, ME</td>
<td>Katzer, Mansfeld, Mansfeld</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Joyce Black</td>
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<tr>
<td>Boca Raton, FL</td>
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<td>Zev Moshe Lipschutz</td>
<td>Sidlin</td>
<td>Dvinsk</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rochester, NY</td>
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<tr>
<td>Judith Miller</td>
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<td>Alexandria, VA</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lisa Newman</td>
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<td>Toronto, Canada</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Soley</td>
<td>Berman</td>
<td>Dvinsk, Kurland</td>
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<td>Portland, ME</td>
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<td>Arnold Tolkin</td>
<td>Tolkin</td>
<td>Jakobstadt, Jacobpils</td>
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<td>Palm Beach Gardens, FL</td>
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<tr>
<td>David Zubatsky</td>
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<td>Lancaster, PA</td>
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Registration Soars for 21st Annual Event

By Arlene Beare
Latvia SIG President

Registration for the 21st International Conference on Jewish Genealogy, July 8-13, 2001, is going well and there are still places available. You are well advised to book your hotel as soon as possible—early registration ended April 30—as July is high season in London. Cheaper accommodation is available if you do not wish to stay in the conference hotel, the Intercontinental. Check the conference website, http://www.jewishgen.org/london2001, for alternative accommodations. The Intercontinental Hotel is also offering the conference discount (per night) for three nights before and three nights after the conference.

The program has been organised as a series of streamed topics. For example, there will be a Poland stream, a Litvak stream, a Migration and Transmigration symposium, etc. The full program should be on the conference website by the time this newsletter is published. Be sure to check the site from time to time because the schedule will be updated regularly.

At the time of this writing, presentations and SIG meetings on Latvia are scheduled for Wednesday, July 11. Additional information on the webpage includes:

* An updated speakers list.
* Registration forms for attendees and speakers.
* Genealogical sources in the UK
* Highlights of London.
* Details of Wimbledon bookings. The matches begin the week before the conference, with the men’s single finals beginning Sunday, July 8.
* Description of the Shtetlscheleppers tours to Eastern European countries after the conference.

Fare Discounts Negotiated with British Airways

If you have not yet made airline arrangements for the conference, you may be eligible for a discount on British Airways. A 10 percent discount on published rates is offered to delegates and accompanying persons travelling from July 1 to July 20 in World/Euro Traveller, World Traveller Plus and Club World/Europe (economy and business). Use exclusive booking reference #CIC*115/46.

Individuals or groups of nine or less are eligible for the discount but groups of 10 or more should be negotiated with their local BA office. There are no discounts on child/infant fares or bookings through travel agents. First and Concorde are also not applicable.

All published fares are apex levels and above on all

See FARES page 16
Aina Antane, who has undertaken the Oral History Project on behalf of the Latvia SIG, has sent the following update to SIG president Arlene Beare.

According to Aina, the aim of the project is to reconstruct the history of Latvian Jewry (including its social and cultural life), as well as develop genealogical charts of respondents. She reports that at this point in her work, the project is progressing very well, and says the stories she is collecting will be a valuable contribution to the documentation of life as it was then and is now in Latvia.

From Aina:

"Oral History projects, such as ours, usually include the following stages:

1) defining the focus of investigation
2) developing the questionnaire form
3) defining respondents to be interviewed
4) filling in questionnaires
5) interviewing: recording life stories
6) processing results: developing data basis: this step includes inputting questionnaires in computer; inputting interview texts in computer; editing the texts; formation of genealogical charts and systemizing obtained data.

"Once we develop a data basis—the project's goal—the next and final stage can begin. This will be to analyze the data and develop conclusions. As a final result of this part of the project, I will submit the following in electronic form:

1) 30 questionnaires in Russian or English
2) 30 edited interviews (life stories) in Russian
3) 30 short descriptions of interviews in English
4) 30 genealogical charts (in English).

"I will also send photos of our respondents, made during the interviews.

Where are we now?

"In addition to 19 previous respondents, we have filled in 32 new questionnaires, of which 12 have been selected for interviews and eight new interviews have been conducted. We have also:

1) filled in 53 questionnaires in Russian;
2) entered 20 interviews into the computer in Russian and edited

See AINA page 14
Oral History
Project
Documenting
Latvian Jewry

"To obtain and process data from one respondent takes at least 25-30 hours, and this without any translations."

AINA from page 13

10 of them;
3) recorded 27 interviews in audiocassettes, either in Latvian or Russian;
4) entered 2 interviews into the computer in Latvian;
5) entered 12 questionnaires into the computer in English, with
6) 11 short descriptions entered in English.

"I have interviews with the following respondents:

1) Boris Aronov, born in Riga in 1908
2) Zalman Ansin (Anshin), born in Riga in 1913
3) Zalman Joffe, born in Rezekne in 1915
4) Taube Lifsic (Litvish), born in evacuation in WW I in Jekaterinburg, Russian 1917
5) Leo (Leib) Izrael, born in Jelgava in 1919
6) Motl Bliznanski, born in Riga in 1920
7) Cale Cukerman, born in Riga in 1921
8) Hone Spungin (Shpungin), born in Krustpils in 1922
9) Izrail Goldblat, born in Riga in 1923
10) Abram-Mordehai Kit, born in Silene in 1923
11) Leibe Sapiro (Shapiro), born in Daugavpils in 1924
12) Girs (Girsh, Hirsh) Prezma, born in Rezekne in 1925
13) Jakov Polak (Poljak), born in Rezekne in 1925
14) Tamara Spungin (Shpungin), born in Daugavpils in 1927
15) Girs (Girsh) Sorkin, born in Riga in 1928
16) Jakov Sac (Shac), born in Riga in 1929
17) Meier Meler, born in Riga in 1929
18) Josif Safro (Shafiro), born in Druja in 1932
19) Hanna Cerfas (Cherfas), born in Rezekne in 1937

"All the respondents are rather elderly members of the Jewish Community. They were born in Latvia and are able to tell something about pre-war life there. We try to question persons from different layers of the Jewish Community, orthodox as well as those who simply keep to traditions but are not so religious.

"There are also some persons who are not so strict towards the religion or national habits and traditions. The respondents also come from different social layers. So as you can see, we have tried to cover as wide a scope of people as possible.

"The most time-consuming of our work is the processing of results, especially entering the interview texts into the computer. This takes at least twice the time of doing the interviews and

See AINA page 15
The Latvia SIG is proud to announce that its president, Arlene Beare, and the All Latvia Database Coordinator, Constance Whippman, have been appointed to the International Advisory Committee of a major international conference, The History and Culture of Jews in Latvia and the Baltic Region, which will be held in Riga, Latvia at the Centre for Judaic Studies in November 2001.

This is the 4th International Conference on the theme "Jews in a Changing World." It is timed to coincide with the commemoration of the 800th anniversary of the founding of Riga. The conference is being sponsored by the Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture, New York. The honorary president of the conference is N. Barkan, chief rabbi of Riga and Latvia; the co-chairmen are Prof. H. Branover (Israel) and Prof. Ruvin Ferber (Latvia).

Papers are being invited over a wide range of conference topics, principally Jews in Latvia from the 16th Century to 1918; Jews in Lithuania and Estonia until 1918; Jews in the Baltic States between the wars (1918-1940); the Holocaust, Secular and religious philosophies and Jewish mysticism.

The program has yet to be finalised but it is bound to be a major review of research in the area involving academics from Latvia, Israel, the USA, UK and the former Soviet Union. Previous conferences have involved over 50 lectures during three intensive days and speakers from eight different countries.

Additional details on the conference will be available on Arlene Beare's Riga website, which has just moved its url address so please bookmark: http://www.sbetalinks.jewishgen.org/riga/rigapage.htm (or go into the JewishGen website and follow the directions to the new page).

Progress on the Oral History Project

AINA from page 14

includes editing the translation into Russian, if necessary, and entering the questionnaires and short descriptions.

"Thus, to obtain and process data from one respondent takes at least 25-30 hours, and this without any translations. In addition to myself, the entire project is being worked on by Sofija Pogodina from the Jewish Community and the student, Laura Druviete.

"Unfortunately, we have no full-time persons employed on the project, which slows down the process even more. However, the work is continuously ongoing.

"I will keep you informed of further developments.

"Sincerely, Aina"
Thanks to All-Latvia Database Volunteers

The Latvia SIG says a warm thank you to the volunteers whose work, efforts and donations have helped create the All-Latvia

Abraham Lenhoff    Kathy Wolfson    Myra Miller
Arlene Beare       Leslie Ann Leven    Naomi Freistadt
Carmen Wiseman     Lorraine Bertelson    Osnat Ramaty
Charles Nam        Margaret Kannensohn    Paul Berkay
Constance Whippman Maria Kane    Peter Lande
Dara Pearlman      Marion Plotkin    Phillip Seeburg
Evelyn Waldstein   Marion Werle    Richard Sinclair
Felix Rabinovich   Martha Lev Zion    Robert Heyman
Frank McNulty      Marty Mishkin    Sam Vass
Harold Rhode       Max Michelson    Sheila Bresler
Iris Sitkin        Michael Whippman    Sherri Goldberg
Ivars Sulcs        Mike Getz    Stansilev Gorbulev
Jerry Becker       Murry Plotkin    Vadim Altskan

Opportunities for Research, Kosher Food

FARES from page 12

BA flights. Through fares providing all sectors are on BA flights. One way/return is permitted and open jaw between cities of the same country. Normal fare rules and regulations apply.

For changes, appropriate fare rules apply and will not be waived. Refund requests must be submitted through the issuing office. Normal fare rules apply. Re-routing is not applicable.

Genealogy Research

London, in particular, and the UK, in general, have wonderful resources, genealogical and otherwise. For conference attendees interested in doing genealogical research, we are receiving a great deal of cooperation from the appropriate centers, which should ensure a very worthwhile trip.

Kosher Food

Kosher restaurants in London, and kosher meals can be pre-ordered in the hotel by contacting a designated representative of the conference. Details are on the website and will be included in the welcome pack upon arrival.
Sarah Menkin Foner
By Constance Whippman
Latvia SIG Database Coordinator

Women's voices are usually lost to history, so discovering the life and works of Sarah Faiga Foner was one of the best surprises to come out of researching and producing the introduction to the Dvinsk Family Lists. Sarah Foner was one of the earliest and most prolific woman Hebrew novelists of the late 19th century. That she also left a substantial account of her childhood in Dvinsk is an added bonus and greatly adds to our knowledge of the Jewish Community of this important city.

Sarah Foner, née Sarah Faiga Menkin, was born in Zagare in 1855. Her family moved to Dvinsk in her early childhood where she lived until 1871 when the family moved again, this time to Riga. She describes her father as learned in Torah, yet a more interesting detail is that her mother also read and spoke Hebrew. Apparently, Sarah's gifts were so great that she was allowed to sit at the back of the otherwise all boys' Heder school. She also records that her mother sat with her every Saturday afternoon teaching her the week's Parsha, and as she grew older, the commentaries of Rashi and Ibn Ezra.

On the assumption that Sarah's mother learned written Hebrew during her own childhood—and achieved a high standard—it is worth noting that this could be achieved by a woman in the 1830's community of Zagare was a remarkable feat in itself.

Sarah Foner's account of how she learned Hebrew as a child in Dvinsk can be accessed on the Internet at http://www.fonerbooks.com/youth.htm.

This autobiographical account was first published in "Shaharut-The
See SARAH page 18

Finding Sara Foner:

... Just Serendipity

Q “Constance, you said that discovering the life and works of Sarah Menkin Foner was one of the best surprises that came out of the research you did on the Dvinsk Family Lists. How did you happen to find her story? Can you explain your process?”

A “Well, it's serendipity. But, I always research a little for odd connections and things that are unusual. In this case, I used the search engine Google and looked for 'Dvinsk' and 'Jewish’ and the website devoted to Sarah Foner's work came up. Then I corresponded with Rosenthal, the relative of Sara's who translated her work. Once I found out more about her, I did other searches on Hebrew women writers and discovered that she wasn't part of the usual lists from that search. So I knew I had found something rare.

I also searched the British Library catalogue to see if they had purchased any of her books... then a little look at some of the specialist Yiddish websites. This was nothing that magpies haven't done for a million years! I was just lucky.

Actually my best 'find' using this technique is a site that gives you the weather in Courland every day for the last several hundred years... you can see if it was snowing on the night your grandmother was born! Or correlate cholera death returns with weather patterns—if ever one had time to get round to this sort of thing. There is a link [to that site] on the Courland website.”
Sarah Foner’s Childhood in Dvinsk Recalled


From our point of view, the account Sarah Foner published in 1903 in Warsaw of her childhood in Dvinsk is the gem of the discovery. This densely written memoir of about 40 single spaced pages (printed out) was intended by its authoress to be a portrait “without cosmetics” of Dvinsk, a town she clearly loved.

Filled with detail and incident, her history includes descriptions of the great rivalries between the Hassidim and Mitnagdim, which sometimes went beyond public debate to violent clashes. Sarah eventually allied herself with the Haskalah, the Jewish enlightenment movement and was quite sharp in her observations of what she regarded as religious excess and narrow mindedness.

Part of the fascination of this document is the wealth of incidental detail about Dvinsk and its residents during the 1860’s. For example, in the course of the narrative, she refers to many family names including Friedlander, Hoshovitz, Gordon, Roshkash, Gloskin Valvel, Gittel Lieberman, Meir Katzbaum, Neissen Bach, Fishnickm, Horowitz, Rabinovitz, Kloyna, Lebovitch and many more.

Even as a child Sarah was impressed by the stone buildings and grand layout of the town centre. The custom was that dwellings should have an odd number of windows: 3,5,7, etc., and where houses had been built with even numbers, a further false window would be painted on in red paint to ensure that the tradition was kept and the evil eye could not find rest in the dwelling.

In the mid-1800s, the city buzzed with news, gossip, piety and superstition. First, there was a crime wave by the Rayphali, the inhabitants of a neighbouring town. The Rayphali were so bold that at one point they managed to kidnap the local police under the guise of taking them for a drink, tie them up and then make off with their police uniforms and accoutrements using them to gain access to properties in order to burglar them. The triumph of Dvinskers over the Rayphali is one of the great ongoing stories in her memoir.

Famine in the countryside had its impact during the period. Poor harvests meant that the rural poor made for the city in hopes of finding work or charity. The effect was an inflationary cost spiral so that the price of even the most basic of goods including bread became too expensive for many to buy. At the same time, quality plummeted.

Sarah’s own brother was taken

See SARAH page 19
A Portrait of Dvinsk in the Mid-1800s

SARAH from page 18
violently ill from eating bread that
had been adulterated by ash and
chopped dried leaves from the sta-
ble courtyard. Money lost its
value and the money changers
openly swindled those seeking
their services. Despite this, many
acts of charity and kindness are
also recounted.

Changes in educational atti-
dudes are remembered in a num-
ber of telling anecdotes. As part of
the rising influence of the
Haskalah movement, Jewish boys
were to be offered places at the
gymnasium. When the strictly
pious Hassidim failed to take up
the places, the education minister
decreed that families that had sev-
eral sons must send one to study
at the exclusive and selective gym-
nasium. A Committee of four
prominent community leaders,
including Rabbi Tzvi-Hirsch
Rabinowitz, went out amongst
the people to persuade them that
this was a genuine opportunity for
the Jewish community. “But,” she
tells us, “the majority, above all
the Hassidim, withheld their chil-
dren from this and hid their sons
from them. If a man had three
sons, he would say that he only
had one and that he was needed
in his business.” So strongly did
the Hassidim feel about this that
they took to seeking substitute
“scholars” from the poorest classes
to put forward in place of their
own sons.

The story of how the difficult
and troubled child of a widow,
who was virtually uncontrollable
became a scholar when given the
opportunity to study, is both
moving and funny. When the rich
man approached the widowed
mother to allow her son to go to
the gymnasium in place of his
own son, the widow wept and
begged that her son would not be
taken. When she went home and
told her child what had been
asked, she expected that he, too,
would cry and refuse but we are
told that instead he ...

“jumped and leapt like a
goat from great joy. He didn’t
delay a moment but ran to the
Hassidim and said with open joy,’
Mother told me what you want to
do with me and here I am your
ture and simple servant in all that
you command, only send me to
school’.”

From that day, the child
achieved and prospered. Still, the
Mother could see no advantage
and complained constantly, “If
only my husband had not died,
then my son would not be having
to go to the gymnasium.” We are
told that eventually the son won
60 silver coins as prize money for

See SARAH from page 20
Full text of Sarah’s Memoire on the Internet

Sarah Foner’s Work

1880: The Love of the Upright, written in Vilna. Sarah was 26.
1880: A Righteous Love, also written in Vilna.
1886: The Children’s Path, first children’s story in Hebrew by a woman.
1886: Letter to HaYom: “all Jewish children must learn Hebrew.”
1903: Memories of My Childhood, Sarah’s early memoir.

Her work has remained little known until the translations of a descendant, Morris Rosenthal, to whom we all owe a great debt.

Sarah’s Memoire was published in Vilna when she was 26. She married Yhoshua Mezach, a divorced Hebrew and Yiddish writer, 20 years her senior. The marriage failed catastrophically when he left her pregnant and destitute to marry someone from a neighbouring town. She then married Meyer Foner, a Hebrew playwrite and newspaper journalist. Eventually making her home in the US, where she continued her writing career. She died in Pittsburgh in 1936, having published many works of romantic fiction, Bible stories, and the memoir of her childhood in Dvinsk, referred to above. Her work has remained little known until the translations of a descendant, Morris Rosenthal, to whom we all owe a great debt. Thanks to his work, her memory truly is a blessing to each of us.

Morris Rosenthal translated Sarah’s memoir from one of the last remaining copies of the Hebrew document. The full text as well as links to Sarah’s work can be accessed on the Internet at http://www.fonerbooks.com/memoir.htm.

Morris Rosenthal’s book based on Sarah’s memoir will be published by Dailey International Publishers. Available the first part of June at online bookstores for $11.95, or for a discount around the same date at www.fonerbooks.com.
A Meeting Point:

Haggadah and the Land of My Birth

By Gabriel Goldberger

It is that time of year again. Four weeks between the two holidays of Purim and Passover—one of deliverance, the other of the Exodus and a birth of our people. As such, I am again looking for a possible contribution to my cousin Ruth’s seder, which I have attended for 23 years (for the past 14 years with my wife and later with our daughter and son).

Some years ago, we came across different translations of Haggadah (the ancient seder organizer in Hebrew and Aramaic) and recited the "Four Questions" (Ma Nishtana), in addition to Hebrew and English, in Russian, Yiddish, Ladino, Judeo-Italian and a few others. This year, I decided to add Latvian, a language I lost rather promptly some 32 years ago upon arriving in the U.S., a language that tiptoed back during my returns in 1998 and 1999.

I have unsuccessfully tried to find a Latvian translation of Haggadah before. But still hopeful, this year I wrote to an acquaintance who works at the university library in my hometown of Riga. She emailed back:

“Sorry for the prolonged silence. Was trying to find [the translation]. Since 1998, we have had a functioning Jewish Center here at the University. Professionals, historians by education, a very enthusiastic bunch, work there. They organize lectures, gather materials, documents. I turned to them. They had only a Russian translation. They were surprised and even astonished [at my request], as nobody had ever asked for this text in Latvian. Today my mom went to the Synagogue.

She has some acquaintances there. [They were] also surprised, they said it had never been necessary but, if needed, it could be translated."

In turn, I am taken aback that my request astonishes anybody because:

- Jews had lived in Latvia since the XVI century (thousands by mid-19th century; some 90,000 on the eve of WWII);
- Latvia has been a multi-ethnic region and its language came into its own two centuries ago. Does absence of Haggadah translation indicate an apparent mutual indifference of Latvians and Jews?
- While the Exodus story is found in the Bible, the Haggadah is its ren-

See HAGGADAH page 22
The Latvian Haggadah

HAGGADAH from page 21

dition by the Jews after they became long-time practitioners of the quest for internal liberation and return home. Hence, I think that Haggadah's tradition is germane to Latvia's current quest for national self-realization;

- Passover—and the implicit retelling of the Exodus—is documented in the life of the most famous Jew, Yashua, at the Last Supper. I think religious Latvians might be interested to hear Ho lakhmo anyo (“This is the bread of affliction”) in Jesus' native Aramaic or Ma nishtana [halaila baze] (“Why is [this night] different?”), and perhaps learn about Passover which, except for its lunar calendar dating, turned into Easter for most Christians some 17 centuries ago and has only recently returned to a few.

Still unsettled by my friend’s reply, I escape to the Net searching for Jewish history and Latvia sites. I come across the address by Dr. Vaira Vike-Freiberga, president of the Republic of Latvia, at the conference "The Issues of the Research of the Holocaust" in Riga on Oct. 16, 2000.

I read it because it feels irresistible and I am surprised. The depth and intensity of the president's emotion touch me deeply, yet the substance leaves me unmoved. While she earnestly and passionately urges Latvian's to reach for the truth, to become free, to do right and do good, her words feel remote, abstract, and pass me by. Perhaps she is appealing to a more dutiful, ethical and/or higher-minded person than I. Then I note an intriguing omission: her call for a profound, taxing and healing reconsideration of the past does not mention a destination, a meeting point, or a vision of the future with a map or guide for getting there.

I think of a future where Jews and Latvians can acknowledge, accept and contribute more to each other—a future that, in getting there, could add common ground for present ventures and a context for (re)considering the past. I wonder whether a Latvian translation of Haggadah might be another touching point of Jews and Latvians and thus provide a bit of the map to a shared future and a shared past in the land of my birth.

I again muse about the absence of a Latvian translation of Haggadah and wonder if this is due to ignorance? (I was born and lived in Latvia till age 20, yet I did not have a sense I knew Latvians.); arrogance? (What was not their own, the ancient Greeks and Chinese considered inherently inferior and, hence, useless.); or insecurity? (Does this explain the recent purge of Russian as a language of societal discourse in Latvia?)

It then dawns on me that the omission in the president’s speech is mine. That each of us needs to create our own guidelines. I write my acquaintance in Riga, this time, to help me find a Latvian translator to turn Ho lakhmo anyo into Ta īr ciesanu maize and Ma nishtana [halaila baze]? into Kapec atskiras [si nakti]? It feels I made a step towards both my future and my past—just in time for my cousin’s seder next week.

Editor's Note:
In addition to writing the “Haggadah” article, Gabriel Goldberger is the translator of “Witnesses Document Destruction of Vil’ani’s Jews”, beginning on the next page. When asked why he wished to tackle this project, Goldberger said at first he wasn't certain, but then realized: “I felt drawn to the great beyond that preceded me.”
Witnesses Document Destruction of Vil‘ani’s Jews
From the Central State Historical Archive of the Latvian SSR

Notes of translator Gabriel Goldberger:
“The text [in this document] is of a rather poor literary and grammatical quality, occasionally difficult to understand and/or to translate accurately. I tried to be closer to the original rather than to maximally clarify the text as I understood it. The translation of the text—originally in Russian—was very difficult and did not get easier.”

(Fund R-132, Description 26, File 20, Leaf 2-19)
Matter of the Extraordinary State Commission of the Latvian SSR investigating murderous atrocities of the German-fascist occupants.

Summarized evidence about victims of the German-fascist murderous atrocities in the town of Vil‘ani.

Murdered, tormented to death peaceful civilians: 680 people, among them children: 200 people
POW killed: 6 people
Deported into slavery: 25 people

Act # I/3
On September 16, 1944, we the undersigned: chairman of the Vil‘ani town council and the Commission chairman Yegorov, Potapiy Pavlovich; members of the commission, Pyotr* Borisovich Luban, Nikita Artemeyevich Onufriyev, Pavel Avgustovich Ivanenko, Dionid Mitrofeyevich Mitrofanov, Anisim Petrovich Sorokin, and NKVD representative** Semyon Yekimovich Katalazov, composed the following act [Act # I/3] about murderous atrocities of the German-fascist occupants and their collaborators in the town of Vil‘ani in the Rezekne county of Latvian SSR during the period of German occu-

pation, about the shooting of the citizens of the town of Vil‘ani in the Rezekne county of Latvian SSR.

Repression and shootings started on June 3, 1941, as soon as the German fascists spilled over into the town. Just upon one’s saying “this is a communist or an activist”, [the person] would be shot without any questioning. Thus, two young Krein brothers, Avgustov, Grunin et al were shot; these actions excited horror and panic in the civilized part of the population. This, however, soon turned into a mere shadow in comparison to what was to happen: people were arrested on the streets, at home, in gardens, and wherever they could be seen. Shortly thereafter, an order was issued that all citizens of Vil‘ani of Jewish origin were to be registered, all at the same time. From this moment on the tragedy of Jewish population in particular and of the rest of the population [in general] had ensued.

Upon return from the registration, the Jews found their houses and their possessions pillaged, and produce and other possessions plundered. This registration was organized to that aim, and with it the first stage of murderous brutality ended for several hours. The best of Soviet people and best friends of the working people were promptly begun to be arrested. They were send to labor where they were hit, tortured with impossibly heavy labor, tormented with deprivation of food and water, and every day this group was replenished by new ones and everyday a group [of people] was disappearing not to return alive anymore.

Soon the approach was changed from retail to wholesale, and all the town’s Jews were arrested

See VILANI page 24
VIL'ANI'S JEWS

VILANI from page 23

and herded into one place. Then they were again released home except for those from the Bol'shaya street; afterwards a ghetto was organized on less prominent town streets where all Jews of Vil'ani lived in grave circumstances, overtaken by grief, gloom, and uncertainty.

Profound melancholy and horror descended upon the Jewish people. The women were driven to a lighter labor while the men driven to a heavy labor. After work, some young maidens aged 14-15 years were raped to senselessness, men were beaten, spat into their faces, they had their faces smeared with the tar, and were tortured by humiliating in every way. Shots were fired above people's heads when they worked so as to affect further their shattered nerves.

Leaf 30

It is told that during the work at the airport the people who passed themselves for defenders of the clergy, forced Jewish Rabbi Platinski to open his mouth and stuffed it with pork, and to further torture him his beard was cut. Preparations for shooting of all Jews were underway in parallel with their torment at labor.

Again [all Jews] were gathered at the building of the Russian School, were they were again tortured by humiliating, men had their beards cut, young women were taken away to be raped. The whole town was drowning in the screams of innocent people, mothers and parents. Having satiated themselves with all that brings a murderer pleasure, [the Jews] were being prepared for the last shooting. In order to extract everything including possibly hidden valuables, all were released home for a short while under the pretext that all are going to go to Palestine, that they should take more goods along and furthermore that name tags were to be attached to the sacks in order not to get it mixed on the train. This was the trick of Hitlerian monster-henchmen and their friends.

On August 4, 1941, all were told to have their luggage and valuables ready and be prepared for departure by 2 a.m. Trucks with avenging squads arrived, and having the people loaded they were taken not to the train station, not to Palestine, but to a pit ...

Leaf 31

...dug beforehand that togeth-

er with the henchmen was awaiting its victims. Everybody was undressed by the pit, all rings and all that was on them were taken off; afterwards [all were] shot with dum-dum bullets while the children were thrown alive into the pit filled with water. The trucks began to move one after the other feeding the ferocious beast its booty. Upon hearing the shots, foredoomed Jews understood their fate, and tremendous shocks took place. During the breaks, when the booty accumulated, the surrounding friends of the fascists raped maidens of childhood age, knocked golden teeth from the mouth of the living as well as shot. The blood spilled all surrounding trees and the glade at tenth of meters. This way it lasted till the very end when the pit was superficially filled with the earth. After that the parceling out of belongings, clothing, shoes, overcoats, suits etc. took place. Everybody took according to his height, everybody tried shoes for himself and for the kids.

After finishing this little scene that in some cases ended with screams and arguments, the henchmen and their friends embarked upon a new path. It was a beautifully set banquet

See VILANI page 25
VIL'ANI'S JEWS

VIL'ANI from page 24

where vodka with a flavor of blood flowed like a stream. Chicken, geese, ducks were fried, toasts for the health of Hitler and other henchmen alike were made, and even those who were unhappy with the parceling of the spoils were appeased by the tasty dinner, fried on the blood of the innocent, defenseless ones befallen like heroes with their breasts forward thinking that though they have fallen, their blood will be avenged by their remaining brothers, sisters, children and the entire civilized soviet people, the entire civilized world.

But Hitler and his German-fascists collaborationists wanted not to be recognized by the world in all their fine colors becoming fascism. [Accordingly] the pit was ordered to be undug and [the bodies] burned to cover up traces of their murderous brutalities. But they failed at that for all know this deed, even the little Christmas trees turned yellow and the nature has refused to hide the henchmen's traces. It is clear to the world now and all the atrocities have been exposed and at the site of burned up children and parents our government will erect a becoming monument. We note the families of Gypsies were shot in a similar beastly fashion five months after the Jews. Altogether shot were 480 adults, 200 children, total of 680.

Chairman of the Vil'ani
Town Council and Commission Chairman: Potapiy Pavlovich Yegorov


Secretary: Ivanenko, Pavel Avgustovich

Town of Vil'ani
Act #1/3

On October 20, 1944, we the undersigned: Commission chairman and the chairman of the Vil'ani town council Potapiy Pavlovich Yegorov, and members of the Commission Nikita Artemyevich Onufriyev, Pavel Avgustovich Ivanenko, Dionid Eranyechev Mitrofanov, Anisim Petrovich Sorokin, Lev Borisovich Luban, and NKVD chairman*** Semyon Yekimovich Katalazov composed this act (Act #1/3) about the murderous brutality of Germano-fascist invaders in the town of Vil'ani. Based on the documented data of the investigation by the detective offices, the Vil'ani town commission for investigation and determination of brutality by the German-fascist invaders has established that the Hitlerian henchmen tortured, destroyed peaceful citizens. From the first days of the occupation and on the Hitlerian henchmen having formed avenging squads, began to deal a bloody vengeance upon the peaceful citizens.

Breaking into the homes of peaceful citizens, Hitlerian henchmen grabbed absolutely innocent citizens and took them out to be shot. The henchmen showed mercy to none, not to the women, not to the old men, not to the babies. On the first day of occupation on July 3, 1941, 14 people of Russian, Latvian and Jewish ethnicity were shot near the bridge over the river Malta at the end of the Ugrenitskaya street.

On August 4, 1941, 460 Jews were shot in the forest on the Rezekne paved road between the Old Believer's and the Military cemeteries. (the pit size is 60m in length and 4m in width.)

See VIL'ANI page 26
VIL'ANI'S JEWS

VIL'ANI from page 25

On the January 4, 1942, 87 Gypsies were shot at the same spot. The shootings in the vicinity of Vil'ani were uninterrupted during the occupation by the Germans.

680 Soviet citizens were shot: men 280, women 200, and children 200. The blood flowed like a river. In their inventiveness of tortures, annihilation of people, the Germans reached such a degree that for several hours prior to shooting the people were promised to be delivered to their homeland. Hence the citizen of Vil'ani Potapiy Yegorov tells: "Two days prior to shooting, Jews were told that they would be taken to Palestine. To cover up intended brutality many were released to visit their apartments to search for bread for the journey, even the accompanying aizsargs themselves asked them, exhorted them that they don't have any bread yet the road ahead was a long one; then whoever had anything hidden away was sent out under the aizsargs supervision to collect all goods; it was ordered that all luggage be well packed and that tags be attached so that nothing gets lost along the way. This way all the belongings were gathered and ended up in the hand of the police.

The first truck was send off loaded with children, children were happy, rode with singing but when they were brought to the site of shooting they raised a terrible scream and cry.

The resident of the town of Vil'ani, S. Stepanov tells: "The children and women were shot separately from the men; when [they] were brought to the pit, all were ordered to undress. The mothers were crying, pressing their children to their breasts. The children were falling into the pit alive for they were falling together with shot mothers, and Town Hall where from the 2nd store I observed as the aizsargs were loading the Jews onto a truck, most [of the Jews] were undressed, whenever somebody bent over the side, the aizsargs would hit them in the back with a rifle butt, the children were hurled by the hand like firewood.

Resident of the Vil'ani Nikita Artemyevich Onufriyev tells: "In the middle of the month of July, 1941, the occupants burned down the Jewish synagogue together with all the religious objects, forcefully taken women and male teenagers were driven to a hard [peat] labor 4km away from the place of their residence. There, women were taken into the night guard booth and raped till senselessness. Thus [were dealt with] teacher Kagan, the wife of Abrashka Mindel', two maidens of Abram Krein, the wife of Khazan, the wife of Feinshay, daughter of Lotsov. Every evening the aizsargs would lead [people] to shooting. Before others two Shwal'bs, Shats, Gorgel' Gurvich, A. Mindel', B. Mal'tinskiy, Kul'a, Ruvin Luban were shot.

"In the end of July, all Jews were ordered to appear with their families at the house of Feiga, a former Russian school. Yakov Zilberbrant leaving the house, Yakov Zilberbrant, Yudel' Zilberbrant, the wife of Gorgel', Abrashka Mindel' asked me to keep an eye on their houses. When the owners left the houses, the Germans under command of their officers appeared at once, [they] broke the doors, looted. They took everything of value. [They] climbed into the attics, broke the doors of sheds.

There was a complete chaos that night, drunken Germans went to other apartments as well and at the same time the aizsargs appeared and a real See VIL'ANI page 27
VIL'ANI’S JEWS

PLUNDERING ensued. The next day the Germans robbed from stores and storages, carried (the goods) away on trucks. As a deflection, the Germans invited the civilians to the stores and gave the stuff but the best and the most valuable they took for themselves and carried (it by trucks). When the peaceful populace began to grumble and the rumor spread throughout the town, the Latvians said that a death battalions will arrive for [spravy] with the rest, and on August the 4th the entire peaceful populace was forced out to the outskirts of the town and at once the Jews were moved [by trucks] to be shot. The first truck with two aizsargs per truck, the following cars carried Jews with their backs bent and heads down so they could not look sideways, two groups [of people] were walking, children were thrown into the pit alive. The last one led was Russian Yemelyanov.

"In the middle of the month of April, 6 POW’s shipped from Riga to Rezekne were shot on the train station Vil'anyi. They somehow acquired several kilograms of sugar, for that sugar they were taken off the train and shot. The shooting was done by aizsargs: Ivanov from the village of Tevany and Vutsan from the village of Mozhkany. The sugar taken from the POWs was taken by Ivanov and Vucan, kumushka**** was brewed and a feast took place.

"On May 23, 1942, selection of people for Germany took place. It was done in secret so that no one from the peaceful populace would know, all of the aizsargs were mobilized to help the police. Busy as a beehive, large squads of aizsargs were driving through the town, the entire population was in panic, something menacing was felt [to happen]. The night of May 23, aizsargs were going through apartments, took people directly from their beds and herded them into a single building. There they were kept under guard, not allowed out, they were kept 3 days in 3 buildings: in the Town Hall on the Varaklynskaya street, in the Russian school on the Market square and in the house of Kupsik on the road to the mill near the Vil'ani regional council.

"Night time the aizsargs would walk through these buildings and pick girls they would take and rape. One of these girls was taken by assessor of the flax reception center Chakov with the help of two policemen. Though this girl screamed loudly and protested, still she was taken to a hotel where she was tortured by humiliation. Chakov was showing how he would shoot the Russians. The girl was returned to the place only on May 24. Having heard of this hideous conduct, people got terribly agitated and demanded the guilty ones be put on trial. The Germans seeing such a terrible agitation promised to take [some] measures.

"Chakov was arrested, in front of the entire population his hands were tied and at the town square the Germans promised to shoot him, but they did not shoot him but put him into a car and took him to Rezhitsa***** where they promised he would be shot. But Chakov was back [in] Vil'ani accepting flax the very next day. Thus Chakov was not punished, the aizsargs also remained unpunished.

"On May 27, 1942, a second group of people was selected for deportation to Germany, also this time people were taken at nighttime, from their beds, being threatened with weapons, and herded like habitual criminals. [They were See VILANI page 28 being] locked in the
400 VIL'ANI JEWS KILLED

VIL'ANI from page 27

being] locked in the same building, and until departure kept under guard, on the train both groups were sent under enforced guard and put into freight wagons that were also guarded by the Germans accompanying the train".

In the spring of 1944 the Hitlerian henchmen sensing that their end is near tried to cover up the traces of their crimes by burning the bodies [of the shot].

"When [they] heard it clearly that their army failed through, they tried to hide and camouflage their dark deeds. They surrounded those graves with guards, dug out the bodies and burned [them] down. This lasted for three days. The Germans evened out [the ground above the] graves, planted trees over them, and covered freshly turned over earth with moss" the eyewitnesses told.

The beautiful town of Vil'ani is turned into a pile of ruins, everything is plundered, everything is annihilated. For all these murderous atrocities perpetrated by the German-fascist invaders on the town of Vil'ani, for the destruction of cultural and material valuables, torture and murder of peaceful citizens the following bear the responsibility: Hitlerian government, the supreme military command and the following organs and the immediate executors of the atrocities: the commandant of the town of Vil'ani Pinkan, in whose presence the first 14 people were shot, the district physician Pinkan who freed from the pit 2 people: Peter Izov and Klementiy Isayev. The shooting of the rest of Jews, Gypsies and others were directed by the head of police Dubrovskiy.

Chairman of the Vil'ani Town Council:
Commission Chairman Yegorov, Potapiy Pavlovich

Commission Members:
Luban, Lev Borisovich  D. Mitrofanov
A. Sorokin            N. Onufriyev

Commission Secretary: Pavel A. Ivanenko

* Lev in other places
** chairman in another place
*** representative in another place
**** probably a local moonshine
*****Rezekne

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List of the Jewish Residents of Vil'ani, Latvia, and Family Size Before the War of 1941

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Family name</th>
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<th>Business/Trade</th>
<th>Family name</th>
<th>Family size</th>
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<td>1. Adirim, Eliezer</td>
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<td>10. Berman, Ishike</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Alterman, Moyshe Its/del</td>
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<td>12. Brakhman, Nosn</td>
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<td>5. Alterman, Shloyme</td>
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<td>14. Bravornik, Meir</td>
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<td>6. Alterman, Tuve</td>
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<td>15. Daniavski, Khaim</td>
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<td>8. Avin, Mendl</td>
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<td>17. Fayshtein, Hirsh</td>
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<td>9. Band, Yaakov</td>
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</table>

See VIL'ANI page 29
## VIL'ANI'S JEWS

### VILANI from page 28

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<td>25. Gasul', Gershon</td>
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<td>76. Shaybl</td>
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See VILANI page 30
# VIL'ANI'S JEWS

*VIL'ANI from page 29*

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Latvians Found Route through Sweden

Roland Johansson from Gotenburg, Sweden has sent us a database of people who emigrated to the U.S. via Sweden, but were originally from other countries. He found 52 Latvians and, since almost all the names seemed to be Jewish, he thoughtfully sent the information to us.

The home country for all of the emigrants is listed as Latvia. No towns were mentioned. All exits were from the port of Gothenburg on the Swedish west coast.

One name, Elna Pettersson, is almost certainly a mistake. The entry says “Latvia” for home country, but the name is very Swedish. The fields below are: name, sex (“?” means not listed), age, day of sailing from Sweden, and destination in the U.S.

1. Ilse Adam, F, 57, 1926-08-07, Philadelphia.
2. Karl Adam, 60, M, 1926-08-07, Philadelphia.
12. Tainara Dell, F, 19, 1921-01-22, Boston.
17. Elisabeth Franskevitch, 60, F, 1921-01-22, Baltimore.
22. Katharine Hege, F, 53, 1923-08-21, Minneapolis.
23. Konstantin Hege, M, 63, 1923-08-21, Minneapolis.
42. Roche Schogat, F, 19, 1921-10-22, Baltimore.
43. Abraham Skok, M, 9, 1922-08-03, Baltimore.
44. Betty Skok, F, 21, 1922-08-03, Baltimore.
45. Chaja Feige Skok, M, 14, 1922-08-03, Baltimore.
47. Pinkus Weinberg, M, 18, 1923-10-27, New York.
Eyewitness Report:

July 1941 Killings of Gostini Jews

A summary of KGB Jekabpils regional department investigator Ushinsky’s interrogation of Peteris Reinfelds, a member of a Latvian “self-defense” group. The subject is the shooting of Jews in Gostini, Latvia.

At the end of July 1941 the local Jewish population was assembled on the market place of Gostini. When all Jews were gathered, the place was surrounded by members of a Latvian “self-defense” group so nobody would escape. The men were drawn into one synagogue, the women into another. [note: this could mean the men and women were led into different sections of the same synagogue.] Then, from each family one person was chosen who would go with a member of the “self-defense” group to their home in order to retrieve personal things and food for the family. Altogether, about 300 Jews were assembled. In the meantime, precious things were taken away: watches, rings, brooches. When members of Jewish families who were sent to bring food and personal things came back, guarded by the “self-defenders,” all Jews were taken into a special quarter [of the city], which was watched by armed members of the “self-defense” group.

In this quarter of Gostini the Jews lived about two weeks. They were sent to do agricultural jobs and to clean up the ruins of the neighboring town of Plavinas.

One night in August 1941 at 11:10 p.m. the head of the police of Krustpils [a big town 15 km from Gostini] arrived. He was named Krumis. He ordered the movement of all Jews to an area of swamps called “Ka_i_i,” a former range of Latgales artillery detachment of the Latvian army. The Jews were told that they would be transferred to a new work place, but in reality Krumis confided to the members of the Latvian self-defense group that there would be shooting.

The Jews were divided into three groups: the first composed of men, the second of women, and the third of the elderly, the sick and the children. A truck was made ready for transporting the Jews. In the convoy were also the members of “self-defense” groups from Gostini and Aiviekste.

In approximately four to five hours all groups were sorted out, and the first group of men went in the direction of the swamps of “Ka_i_i.” In 20 or 30 minutes the second group—the women—left Gostini in the same direction. After walking 10 km the groups were stopped near the swamps “Ka_i_i,” where the Jewish population from Krustpils and Jekabpils was already gathered. About 300 meters from the forest, the arrested Jews were directed to dig pits.

In two to three hours a truck

See GOSTINI page 33
Eye-Witness Report: Gostini, Latvia Jews

GOSTINI from page 31 arrived with about 30 people dressed in the summer uniform of the Latvian army. The shooting was ordered by a Latvian in civilian dress. These people were members of Victor Araj's commando formed in Riga in July [see Latvian State Archives, 1986-1-45035(9)]. He ordered each group to be divided into smaller groups, 30 people in each. When these groups were formed, all Jews were told to lie on the ground, face down, in successive order: the first group near the pit, the second group behind the first, and so on.

The rank of executioners [see Latvian State Archives, 1986-1-45035(9)-38] stood 10 meters from the pit in two rows: the first row shooting from the knee, the second, standing up. The first row aimed at the heart, the second one, at the head.

After the first group of Jews were thrown down into the pit, the second group [was ordered] to rise and stand facing away from the pit [Note: the report is unclear as to whether they faced into the pit or away] and was shot.

After several groups of Jews had been shot, the executioners from Riga proposed to the members of the "self-defense" group to change with them in their bloody job because Araj's commando men were getting tired. Several members of the "self-defense" group, including Peteris Reinfelds, accepted this offer to shoot Jews. Altogether on this day about 300 Jews from Gostini and 300 Jews from Jekabpils and Krustpils were shot.

After the shootings, the corpses were buried. All personal things were put in a heap, but all precious things were taken by the men who ordered the shootings. Gathering up the remaining personal things of the slain Jews, the members of the "self-defense" groups returned to their homes.

Because he participated in the shootings, Ziede Oskars-Oswalds, son of Julis, born in 1917, was sentenced by the Soviets to 25 years of imprisonment. The following also participated in the shooting of Gostini Jews, but no information about their sentences exists in the checked file:

* Reinfelds Peteris [son of Janis, born 1907, witnessed the shootings]
* Pleš Peteris
* Pleš Janis
* Vinters Janis
* Skuja Peteris
* Krumi Otomars

The translator, Aleksandrs Feigmanis, is a researcher at the Museum and Documentation Center “Jew in Latvia.” He is available for genealogical research and as a guide in Latvia and Lithuania. His address is Grestes 2-12, LV-1021, Riga, Latvia. Phone: (371)7246 893. Email: aleksen@mailcity.com.
LATVIA SIG MEMBERSHIP QUESTIONNAIRE

Name: ..........................................................................................................
Address: ....................................................................................................
City: ........................................State/Province: ..............................
Zip+4/postal code: ........................................
Country (if other than u.s.): .................................................................
Phone: ........................................ Fax: ..............................................
Email: .........................................................................................................

Whom are you researching (in Latvian cities only):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name: ..........................................................</th>
<th>Location: ..........................................................</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name: ..........................................................</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name: ..........................................................</td>
<td>Location: ..........................................................</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

* Note: please use location names and spellings as found in “Where Once We Walked.”

Translation skills: (circle all that apply):
Hebrew  Latvian  Russian  Yiddish  Other (specify)

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