

Table of Contents

Editorial	2
My Childhood in Riga	3
Liepaja Passport Books	5
Jewish Resistance in the Baltics	8
Revival in Riga	15
Overview of Archives Holdings	20
Back to Daugavpils	26
Membership Report	30

President's Message

The next IAJGS Conference will be in Toronto from the 4th -9th August. The new Officers for the SIG will take over from that date. I will no longer be President, as the term of Office is for 2 years, and I am calling on someone who has the interests of the SIG at heart to come forward and offer their services. Mike Getz and I will always be there to offer advice and help.

A nomination form is enclosed with this newsletter and I urge you to send it in as soon as possible.

My close relationship with our friends-the Latvian Archivists- will continue as before.

The launch of the 1901 Census in the UK was an eagerly awaited event. Unfortunately the PRO (Public Records Office) underestimated the demand and has had to withdraw the site temporarily. Many of you will have ancestors who either stayed a short while or lived permanently in England and this will be an excellent resource for pursuing your research. We all hope they manage to sort it out quickly.

Irina Veinberga (Chief Archivist) has submitted an excellent article on the Liepaja passport project that was generously funded by Edward Anders. The article appears on page-3 of this issue.

The really informative presentation by Rita Bogdanova (Archivist) at the London Conference in July 2001 is on page 17.

The 1897 All Russian census provides a great deal of information as it included many questions that had to be answered by the population.

In February we launched our two latest databases including in this new launch the 1897 data for Rezekne and Krustpils and also the Riga Passport Registration database for 1900. I must stress that this is not a passport application database. The names are those of people visiting

Riga in 1900 who had to register passports or other travel documents with the Police. It is thus an excellent source of information and you may find relatives who lived in other parts of the Russian Empire which will give you a

new avenue for your research.

Exciting new databases are in the pipeline and our All Latvian Database will grow each year. Once again thanks must go to Constance Whippman who coordinates the database. She lovingly writes the Introductions giving great detail about the construction of the database and historical background. We also thank Warren Blatt and Michael Tobias the Jewishgen webmasters for the hard work involved in getting the data into the search engine on the net.

I must say how much I appreciate the donations made to the SIG and thank all the people listed for their generous donations. We need funds to carry on expanding the database and as data acquisition costs money your contributions will be of inestimable help. I also urge you to pay your subscriptions and help us attract new members to the SIG.

We have just celebrated the festival of Passover at this difficult time in our history. The Seder reminds us that we were slaves in Egypt and were then set free. The ceremony of the Omer heralds a new beginning. May this message of peace come to all in the Middle East.

Arlene Beare

Editorial

Regrettably and for personal reasons Lesley Ann Leven has been unable to continue as editor. Her absence is obvious in the presentation and format of this issue. We shall miss her editorial accomplishment, remain grateful for the innovation she introduced and wish her well.

The efforts of our president, Arlene Beare, raised the standards and content of our resources to a new level. They will stand for all time as an example of commitment and dedication. Constance Whippman was critical in making this material available and accessible through her own, and the late Micheal's, equally dedicated efforts and commitment. Arlene and Constance, with the help and good offices of Jewishgen continue to add to these

accomplishments. On behalf of our members and the broad community of Jewish genealogists, I want to record our deep appreciation and regard.

Arlene has also contributed significantly to important features in this issue of the newsletter. The articles by Irina and Rita of the Latvian Archives were largely her doing. They are helpful and informative to all in this field of research. Our long-standing friend and member Dov Levin is represented by his outstanding presentation on Resistance in the Baltics during the Holocaust. We have included contemporary accounts of Jewish life in Latvia, as well as Barry Shay's visit there and his follow-up..

It remains important to prepare for Toronto and commence structuring, as Arlene has suggested, for the future of the SIG. We need to add involvement in our affairs to support the small team currently initiating our projects, seeing them through quality assessment, processing and preparation for general availability. In the coming weeks we hope to let members have details on a SIG meeting in Toronto and features of the plenary session. Included in this issue is a copy of the Home Page for that event. We look forward to a representative presence in Toronto to plan and participate in the important work to be done.

We find ourselves in a solemn and testing time for Jews everywhere, as Israel faces a threat to its existence. The emergence and birth of Israel have been a central concern of Latvia's Jewry who also contributed significantly to its development. This is a time to identify strongly with that commitment and to be heard in its cause.

Mike Getz

My Childhood in Riga

During Pre-War Years

**by
Jack Efrat**

I was very lucky to survive the Holocaust in Riga and, later, in Magdeburg in Germany where I was liberated by the American forces on the 19th April 1945. I landed in an American DP camp, Zeilsheim near Frankfurt. We were desperately trying to get out. I remembered I had a cousin in Johannesburg, Zundel Per, and even remembered his address. I wrote to him and he offered to bring me to South Africa where I arrived in September 1947. Right from the beginning I was active in Jewish life - speaking about my experiences during the War ... which I still do up to today. In 1953 I formed the Association of Holocaust Survivors and in 1979 I formed the Association of Latvian Jews in SA. Our members were mainly immigrants from Latvia who had come before WW2. We were very active and in close contact with Zwi Segal of the Israeli Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews, Steven Springfield of the Jewish Survivors in New York, and Jasha Lossos of the Association of Baltic Jews in Great Britain. Periodically, we all had get-togethers in Israel. Our association contributed a lot towards the museum at Kibbutz Shefa'im. We are in close contact with Marger Vestermanis of the Jewish Museum in Riga

If any of your readers will require more information about our association or any Latvian Jews in SA, they can contact us or you and we will try to assist. I trust this serves your requirements

My postal address, and that of the association, is:

*P.O. Box 2501
Houghton 2041
Johannesburg, South Africa*

My first childhood recollection when I was

about three years old, was of our three-story brown brick building - which was built in 1869 - with a very big yard and a big wooden wall around it. It was in Valkas Street which was a small street and very few people knew where it was.

Another one of my first recollections is our poverty. Our flat was very small - just one bedroom and a kitchen. There was no bathroom - when we wanted to wash, we put an iron bath in the kitchen. The toilets were outside on the landing.

My father was a clerk in the flour factory called "Amermilti" which belonged to a cousin of his, Beril Levitas. The wages were very low. To ensure that we be fed and clothed, and to be able to pay our rent, my mother had to take in washing - even doing some sewing and alterations on a small Singer machine which was paddled by foot. She worked very hard... the poor woman!

Although we were poor and the building was old, it was situated in quite a good part of Riga and belonged to the Froeses, a German family. We only managed to rent a flat there at a cheap rate because on the ground floor was a glove factory. The leather had to be tanned and dipped in chemicals, which had a terrible smell, and from which we had to suffer all the time. My mother always made "smoked salmon" for me for my birthday as a special treat because it was so very expensive.

Despite our poverty, we were not starving as food in Latvia, being an agricultural country, was very cheap. Most of the time, it cost san-times (cents). I remember the tasty fish we ate: the stremlings and the buten (mackerel) as well as the famous Riga sprats. Also, we could always afford to buy potatoes. My mother was an expert at making delicious potato soup, potato kugel, potato latkes, and many more.

To compensate for the unpleasant and cramped living conditions in our flat, there was a lovely park behind us across the road in Hansas Street called the Kaiserlicher Garten

(Viestur Darzs in Latvian) named after the Czar Peter the Great. Whilst on a visit to Riga, he had planted a tree right there. This tree still stands there to this day. As a little boy, I spent so much time with my friends in this park, just wandering around making use of the swings and the sand pit. The biggest attraction, however, was the lake ... watching the swans and collecting their feathers. During Sundays, there were often concerts where we used to go with my parents and friends.

Already in my early childhood, I was aware of being a Jew. When the time came to enrol me in nursery school, my parents decided to be "in fashion" and put me in a German kindergarden. However, when it came to Christmas time, being taught all the carols, I duly came home and burst into song. My parents were obviously shocked to hear me singing them, and I was quickly removed from the German kindergarden.

Riga was a cosmopolitan and multi-cultured city where many languages were spoken. This was noticeable even in our small family.

When I was ready for school, there was a difference of opinion between my parents as to where to put me. My father had been born in Tukum which is in Kurland and his mother, Berta's maiden name was Schoenfeld. She was a very well-educated woman and had grown up speaking German. My father was very proud of this background and never hesitated to point this out to my mother who came from a small Lithuanian village called Leckava near Mozaisk so that her home language was Yiddish.

So, my parents could not decide to which Jewish school to send me. This was due to there being Jewish schools in four different languages, namely Yiddish, Russian, German, and Hebrew. Eventually I was enrolled at the Hebrew school called "Gimnasion Ivrit" as both my parents were Zionists and hoped that one day I would go to Palestine.

Other Jewish schools I remember in Riga

were: "Ezra", "Torah Vederech Eretz".

Lasaretas Street was a great distance from my home. Carrying a school satchel, I had to walk all that way from home along Elisabet Street and across the Schitzen Garten. In summer it was alright - if it did not rain - but in winter it was often extremely cold: maybe even below 20 deg.C, and sometimes it was snowing heavily. Although we were warmly dressed with the additional gloves, scarves and fur-lined hats, it was not an easy task to get to school and all the way back.

School was a four-storey building. It was run by our headmaster Garfinkel. Our Hebrew teacher was Braitbard and our History teacher Piter. Karklina taught us Latvian which was the second language; Snaier taught us mathematics; and art and drawing were taught by Vespremi. Gym was taught by Mr Bagg. I personally excelled in History, Geography and Latvian the latter of which was to help me enormously during WW2. *I remember the names of many of my schoolmates: Etzia (Yeheskiel) Ziegler, Misha Risker, Grisha Rekach, Lowa Palei, Ester Grinman, Tamara Paikin, Golodjetz, and Leo Gurevitz; also, Gorodinski who was a little boy with the most beautiful voice.*

Outside the school was a big unpaved yard, where we gathered during break-time. I recall having right there my first fight with another boy, Mogilnitzki. We each landed up with a bloody nose. When I came home, I complained to my father that Mogilnitzki had started a fight with me. To my great disappointment, my father was not interested and said:

"You must learn how to look after yourself!" This was the opposite to my mother who always spoiled me by calling me affectionate names. My father did not like it, so he called me his "Mummy's boy".

On the whole, I was a fit little boy. We often had inter-school athletics competitions in Riga. At one of them, I reached my "day of glory"

when I won the 100-metre rally and my name and the name of my school were announced on the loudspeaker. My school was very proud of me.

Ester Grinman was my little girlfriend. She lived around the corner from us in Rupniecibas Street. We often went ice-skating together. In winter, they poured water on one section of the esplanade thus turning it into an ice-skating ring. There were chairs on skates for those that had to hang on and thus learnt this art. A loudspeaker “blared out” beautiful music from records. We were both good skaters and no wonder ... we had learned to do this from an early age. At a later stage we even learnt the art of skating backwards hand-in-hand. It was great fun!

However, soccer was our favourite sport. Whenever we had a chance, we would wander around the neighbourhood looking for a vacant piece of land and, on finding one, we’d start kicking a ball.

In Riga, there were two Jewish soccer teams: the first, Hakoah which was in the top soccer league; and the second, the Maccabi Sports club which was in the second league. In the first league were also the non-Jewish clubs, like R.F.K. (Riga Football Club), A.S.K. (Army Football Club), Kruzok (Circle), Drazu Fabrika (Wire Factory), and YMCA In the second league was the German Club Union.

Liepaja Passport Books at the Latvian State Historical Archives

by
Irina Veinberga, Chief Archivist

Due to the initiative of Edward Anders and his financial support, the Latvian State Historical Archives had an opportunity to research such interesting documents as the passport issuance books of the Liepaja Prefecture for 1921, 1927-1940. Mr Anders has covered the cost of all photos requested by relatives before 31.10.01 in

his really selfless activity to perpetuate the memory of the Liepaja Holocaust victims.

This initiative has received our fullest support, though, of course, we realized that it would be necessary to make a very large preliminary study prior to revealing the information. We had to look through 63000 records about issuance of (domestic) passports in order to select the necessary information and to copy photos.

at least a part of the requests by December 14, 2001 when the 60th anniversary of the mass executions of the Liepaja Jews would be commemorated at the Holon cemetery in Israel. Taking into account the special character of these requests it was impossible to limit ourselves to producing the photos. We were convinced that we should give all the information that was available in the documents to the recipients. Indeed, many of them were grateful for these data, which filled gaps and corrected errors in their family history. We also had to do it in as short a time as possible, as we wanted to complete .

As a result of this work we have located 10,116 records of passports of Liepaja Jews in 1921, 1927-1940, copied 403 photos requested by our dear clients. These have sent us a number of remarkable responses, showing deep appreciation of our work. The feelings expressed cannot leave anybody indifferent, and provide an enormous stimulus for us to do further work.

A few comments will be of interest. In order to protect the writer’s privacy, names have been replaced by initials.

“I showed the picture of I.F (born Libau, 1876 and died in Holocaust) to her son who now is 85 years old and lives in Israel. He was very moved; he was very close to his mother. He last saw her when he left Latvia for Israel, before the war, and he has never seen such a good picture of her.” (L.N)

“I was very happy to receive the pictures of my grandparents. I thank you very much...” (H.

P.).

“It's truly wonderful to have these images of my family, some of whom I've never seen photos of before”. (B.L).

The photos are one of most precious things we have ever received. It is beyond my words to express how we all felt, my brother, my father who is over 92 years old, myself and others who received them. My father could see his first wife Sheine-Libe for the first time since October 1943 when they were brutally separated. He could not hold his tears. We learned for first time where and when his father Schlomo (my grandfather) was born. There were my aunts and uncles whom I knew by name but whom I had never seen. So many contradictory emotions were aroused “. (E.B).

The archival documents we use on our site deserve to be seen by those interested, as a most interesting source for updating and specifying information, both about individual persons, and about the whole Jewish community of Liepaja during the period of the Latvian Republic 1918-1940. The passport issuance books are a component of the fond (group of stored records) of the Liepaja Prefecture, which was authorized under a 1919 law to issue passports of Latvian citizens.

Under the law of May 4, 1921 all Jews who had residence permits in the Russian empire were eligible to become Latvian citizens. Thus, according to the legislation of the Latvian republic, all persons who had reached the age of 16 years received an internal passport. This meant that information on these persons was stored in the appropriate documents and in particular, documents of the prefecture that had issued the passport.

Unfortunately, the set of passport books in the fond of the Liepaja Prefecture is not complete. Documentation on the first series of Latvian passports is fragmentary; there are only 2 books for 1921 and May-August of 1927. Records on the definitive passports that were issued in Liepaja from August 18, 1927 until September 18, 1940 have fortunately survived in better

condition and cover 63,020 passports.

What sort of information is contained in these documents, and how they can be used to reveal information about a person or a family? All books, from August 18 1927 until September 18 1940, are totally numbered, thus giving us an indirect indication of the number of adults in Liepaja.

Series and numbers of the passport. This important information can be used for cross analysis with other documents, in particular, house registers. A document certifying that a person was listed in the house register contained the series and number of the passport, as well as its date of issue.

Date of issue of the passport. This can be used as an element of research, if only the age and residence of the person in a certain period is known. Recognizing that the passports were given out on attaining 16 years of age, it is possible to try to find the appropriate record of the passport, and in this way to find the required data.

Surname and name. The official fixed spelling, which as a rule appears in all subsequent documents. In the definitive passports issued from 1927 the patronymic was no longer specified.

Birth date and birth place. The inclusion of this information in the passport allows us to establish a connection with other documents such as vital records, to obtain additional information about the parents and to establish the relationship.

Marital status. This very important information, especially for women, allows us, in combination with other data, to identify a person.

Children up to age 16 years. Under the law, passports of children under 16 years of age were listed in the passport of the mother, with the name of the child and date of his birth. These data establish the family structure in the appropriate period. If the child received a passport on reaching age 16, or in certain other cases speci-

fied by law, a special column was filled out indicating that a personal passport was issued to the child. Since this also records the date of issue and the series and number, it permits further search for information and accurate interpretation of the record.

The basis for passport issuance. This information, such as date and place of issue expands the framework of research, as there are additional data that permit a more accurate search. The passport of a child is issued on the basis of the father's or mother's passports, indicating

the number and date of issue that allows one to establish the parents of the child. The passport of a married woman is based on the passport of the husband, with his passport number and date of issue, the certificate of the rabbi who presided at the marriage, and the date and place of the event etc.

Note about a change of marital status contains information on divorces, indicating the number and date of the document of the judicial authority that has accepted the decision. The law on passport issuance prescribed that a woman after marriage—and also after divorce—should receive a new passport one month later if she did not take or keep the surname of the husband.

Note about payment of State Tax or about exemption from payment. The information in this column gives an idea of the financial situation of the family and in particular about the reason they were exempted from the payment which was 1 lat.

Note about cancellation of the passport. This very important information generally reflects a change of surname, e.g., because of marriage with a foreigner, resulting in a change of citizenship from Latvian to that of the husband's country. It also gives indirect information about emigration or change of the place of residence. If the passport was annulled because of the owner's death, we find here the accurate date of death. This is especially important for specifying the date of destruction during the Holocaust, as the exact date is specified in some cases:

Konzius Schmerl, born in Bausk 1868, has died on August 12, 1941.

Brenner Hanna born on 28 of January, 1915, killed (shot) on August 28, 1942.

Brenner Itzik, born on 10 of April, 1919, killed (shot) on August 28, 1942.

Brenner Bertha, n \grave{e} e Malet, born on 24 of May, 1894, killed (shot) on August 28, 1942

Samuel Hanna Rachil daughter of Jankel Benzion, born on 25 September, 1909 in Liepaja, unmarried, killed (shot) on April 30, 1943.

Samuel Hirsch, born on 8 of January, 1916 in Russia, Jekaterinoslavl son of Brocha daughter of Elias Samuel, killed (shot) on April 30, 1943.

Sometimes only year of death is specified in the document: Manuchowitsch Isidor son of Abram, born on 22 of December 1874 in Asite, has died (as in the document) in 1943. Even where there is not much information in the documents we can try to establish the facts, based on other documentary confirmed information.

Photographs. A very special place in these documents belongs to the photos of the owners of the passports, which are of excellent quality and are superbly kept. They give incomparable emotional coloring to the documents. This is the rare case, when the researcher not only finds information on the individual person, but also receives a real image of the person he is researching. "Wonderful, spiritual faces"... Sometimes photos are absent, but there is always a note to indicate that this is due to illness, advanced age, or poverty. A very small number of photos were lost. Of 10,116 pictures 142 are not available. Thus at present about 10,000 photos are at the disposal of the archive. We also have photos of most adult Holocaust victims, which, on our site, could serve as a worthy addition to the database created by Mr. Anders.

Autographic signature. The signed signature helps in some cases to specify the spelling of a surname, or, when parts of the document have

been lost, the signature helps establish the surname of the owner of the passport. Where a signature is absent, as when the passport owner was illiterate, a special mark was made.

Fingerprint. A print of the right index was required for such documents as passports, passport books, etc. In certain cases, where the documents contain contradictory information, it may serve as one of the most important elements of identification.

All these elements represent a database, a certain person, and each of them separately can serve as a link for updating information from other sources at the Archive and, probably, in family collections. Similar documents were kept for other places of Latvia. Their completeness and degree of preservation varies. Analysis and development of these records is the business of the future and will depend on whether any persons are interested in this information and willing to sponsor such projects.

This article adds to our knowledge

and insight of the excellence that characterises so much of the work that Irina has led at the Latvian Historical Archives. This effort has added significantly to our resources in the genealogy of Latvia's Jewry. We look forward to maintaining and building our relationship.

Jewish Resistance in the Baltic States 1941-1945

or

How Jews in Baltic Countries Took Part in Resistance to the Nazis and Their Local Accomplices -- Facts and Problems

**Lecture delivered by
Professor Dov Levin**

Of the Hebrew University to YIVO, New York

City, October 23, 2001

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Let me begin my remarks by noting that as a long-time resident of Jerusalem and a witness to the events there, I identify with you, particularly the New-Yorkers among you in your current ordeal [n.b. after the murderous terrorist attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001]. Now, I continue by retelling a brief personal episode that is relevant to the topic of my lecture.

I remember it as if it had happened this very day. When I was seventeen years old, I was ordered to take my turn at forced labor, like the other adults. It was a cold, snowy day - thirty degrees below zero. I was taken to the airport of Kovno, together with thousands of Jews from the Kovno ghetto, and we were forced to dig drainage ditches under the supervision of German foremen. They were especially abusive to the elderly and the weak, and none of us even dared to protest. At that time, I remembered the hundreds and thousands of young, strong Jews, who were outstanding athletes for *Maccabi* [Jewish Sports Organization] and other organizations in various sports, including fencing and boxing. A few of them were even champions of Lithuania.

In my bitterness, I thought then, "Where are now all those athletes and other Macho types who could help physically to rescue the beleaguered Jews from their attackers?"

It seems that a part of the answer to this odd question I received when I was subsequently accepted, with the utmost secrecy, into the fighting underground in the ghetto, -- and particularly -- when I was allowed to join the parti-

sans in the forests near Vilna. However, it was only through years of research that I became aware of the full significance and magnitude of the resistance. I am honored now to present you with the main findings of this research.

As you understand - my frame of reference will be the three Baltic countries.

In the largest of these countries, Lithuania -- there were 250,000 Jews at the beginning of the Nazi occupation in June 1941, (about **10** percent of the country's population. There were also 95,000 Jews in Latvia (4 percent of the population) and 4,500 - in Estonia (a half percent of the population), for a total of 350,000 in the Baltic states.

The long established "*Litvak*" Jewish community that spoke juicy Yiddish, had spiritual value's rooted in Hebrew-Yiddish culture, and, for the most part, lived midst a rich and long-standing tradition on the religious, secular, and national levels.

Even when political and economic factors in the inter war period caused a steady deterioration in the majority peoples' attitude toward the Jews, and even though the Jews' autonomous rights were severely reduced, the Jews still had a lengthy series of cultural and national achievements and assets. I refer, among other things, to a grand and comprehensive education system, from kindergarten to teachers' colleges, in Hebrew and Yiddish (with government support!) and, of course, famous cultural institutions. In Lithuania, the Jews had, for example, the yeshivas of Slobodka Kelm, Ponivezh and Telzh and also the *YIVO* Institute - in Vilna. In Estonia -- the University of Tartu had a Chair of Jewish studies. In Riga, Latvia, the Jews had a world-class Jewish theater and a special marine school for training sailors. Therefore, it is no wonder that even though less than two percent of world Jewry before the Holocaust lived in the Baltic countries, this community was many times more important in terms of its impact and uniqueness. It was for good reason that Jews called Lithuania the *Eretz-Yisrael of the Diaspora* and the Vilna community -- *Yerushalayim d'Litta* (*The*

Jerusalem of Lithuania).

When most difficult times suddenly came, these values undoubtedly helped to consolidate the spirit of resistance to the national repression that occurred under Soviet Rule at the -- beginning of World War II, in 1940 - 1941.

In the main, however, it helped strengthen the Jews in the face of the Nazis' campaign of physical annihilation in 1941 - 1945. Notably, much of the anti-Nazi resistance took shape on the basis of underground organizations that *Zionist* and *Bundist* groups created during the period of Soviet repression.

An important example was the debut of the underground Hebrew journal *Nitsots* (Spark) at Hanukkah 1940. This publication also continued to appear regularly during the Nazi occupation - - in the ghetto and even in the Dachau concentration camp, until the Americans liberated the camp.

There was three important aspects on the spiritual, value, and cultural levels. However, in this lecture I will concentrate mainly on the level of active armed resistance and hope to explain to what extent this phenomenon was unique in the Baltic countries as opposed to other locations in Nazi-occupied Eastern Europe.

The Holocaust in the Baltic countries began immediately after German forces stunned these countries with a surprise invasion on June 22, 1941, as part of "Operation Barbarossa". This is especially true in the case of Lithuania, which shared a border with Germany. In the border towns, SS men and Lithuanians attacked Jews on the very first day of the invasion. What is more, in at least forty localities around the country, armed Lithuanians (who called themselves "*partisans*") began to murder, rape, and loot their Jewish neighbors even before the Germans arrived. In any case, Lithuania was the first Baltic country -- indeed, the first country in Europe -- in which the Jewish community was targeted, as far back as June 1941, for the first steps toward implementing the "*Final Solution* to the Jewish Problem", spearheaded by the infamous *Einsatzgruppen*. For geographic and

strategic reasons, it took Germany only four to five days to occupy Lithuania. In more distant Latvia, the conquest took seven to eight days, and in Estonia, the northernmost of the Baltic countries, it took almost two months.

These differing periods of time had several clear implications for the Jews' ability to play a meaningful role in resistance.

- Hundreds of Jews participated actively in bitter rear-guard battles against the Germans and their local accomplices. These battles were conducted by remnants of the Red Army with the assistance of local formations such as the Workers' Guard in Latvia and the Striking Battalions in Estonia.

- *In the course of the invasion, thousands of Jews who were determined not to remain under Nazi occupation and face the local gangs that had already begun to commit massacres, attempted to escape in the footsteps of the Red Army as it retreated to the east.*

Sixty percent of Estonian Jews, 15 percent of Latvian Jews, and 8 percent of Lithuanian Jews -- some 30,000 men and women in all -- managed to escape into the Soviet interior in this manner (amidst heavy bombardments and attacks by the Germans and their local accomplices).

Notably, the act of escape was not only an example of activism *par excellence!* Eventually, it also allowed many Jews to enlist for systematic warfare in regular armies!

Eight thousand of them intended to enlist for active combat with the Baltic national divisions and other units in the Red Army. In the 16th Lithuanian Rifle Division alone, nearly 5,000 Jewish soldiers and officers saw action during the war. Since most of them joined infantry units, they had frequent opportunities to directly confront German soldiers, whom they considered personal and national enemies. In these engagements, 2,000 Jews were killed and many were wounded. Jewish fighters were awarded medals and decorations for their outstanding

service at the front and in the enemy's rear.

Much the same happened in the Latvian divisions, in which 3,000 Jews fought, and the Estonian divisions, in which 300 Jews saw action. Additional Baltic Jews fought in other Red Army units and in the Polish army.

If one includes these, the number of Jewish soldiers who found ways to oppose the Nazis and their allies in active warfare climbs to 10,000.

Thousands of relatives of soldiers and other Jews found themselves in the Soviet Union, either as deportees to Siberia as "enemies of the people" or as refugees ("evacuees") on the kolchozes and in villages and towns of central Asia. Some of them suffered severely and a few even died of starvation, cold, type and subhuman living conditions. However, most of them survived and joined the war effort.

Immeasurably worse-horrible, - was the fate of more than a quarter million Jews who remained in the Baltic countries, under Nazi occupation. Most did not survive until the end of the war. Some 94 percent of them perished in various and sundry ways, the highest proportion throughout Europe.

Unlike other Nazi-occupied countries, where most Jewish citizens were put to death in gas chambers, a large majority of Jews in the Baltic countries were slaughtered brutally with firearms and other weapons by their Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian neighbors (sometimes under German supervision).

In a brief period of time - from June to December 1941 - those remaining -- about 45,000 -- were temporarily interned in the ghettos of Vilna, Kovno, Shavli, and Sventsyan -- in Lithuania and in Riga, Dvinsk, and Libau -- in Latvia. Estonia, where there were few survivors, was declared *Judenrein* free of Jews.

Even after the mass murders -- mass deportations and executions of groups and individuals continued intermittently in the ghettos. In these actions, sophisticated deceptions were used to

take the victims by surprise. Also, the distressed Jews were informed that if they dared to resist, their families and neighbors would be first in line for execution.

Even so, in dozens of known cases, if not more, Jews responded by protesting and resisting in various ways. Consciously or unconsciously, these reactions were attempts to oppose the murder, the starvation, and the oppression. Many of these acts were impressive some were even effective. They ranged from a Jew dying in the bloodbath in the Kovno suburb of Slobodka who dipped his finger in his flowing blood and wrote " Yidn, *nekommeh*" ("Jews vengeance!") in blood on the wall, to the Jews who, on the very lip of the death pits, tore their money to shreds instead of surrendering it to the Germans.

Children in the Kovno ghetto, whose friends had been murdered by Lithuanians, wrote in Lithuanian a bitter parody of the national anthem "Lithuania, Our Homeland":

*Lithuania, Our Blood-Land,
May you be accursed for centuries
Let your blood flow like the blood of Jewish
children (and so on)*

Of course people gathered to sing this song, although only indoors and in subdued voices.

What is more, even during the first wave of riots and mass murders, Jews in several remarkable cases resisted their attackers physically. It seems that the use of force was usually limited to clearly hopeless situations -- --that is, when the Jewish principle of mutual responsibility no longer applied.

- Such an incident occurred on June 29, 1941, as the Jews of the Lithuanian town of Shkud were being taken in groups of fifty to be murdered in prepared trenches. Amidst the slaughter, *Yitzhak Malkenson*, the strongest Jew in the town, attacked one of the executioners and strangled him with his bare hands before a German bullet pierced his own head.

- A similar occurrence took place at the

extermination site near Keydan, when *Zadok Shlapoberski* dragged the German commander with him into the trench and punched one of the Lithuanian executioners in the throat.

- *Reb Leib Kamraz*, son of the aged rabbi of Uzhpole, Aharon Naftali, strangled a Lithuanian policeman named Cheponis who had raped his daughter before his eyes.

- On December 1941, two Jews in the Vilna ghetto, *Haas* and *Goldstein*, pounced with a knife and an axe on Germans who had come to take them away to murder them. Both Jews were shot on the spot, but during their funeral the following day, anonymous obituary notices were posted throughout the ghetto praising their deed.

- During the liquidation of the Vilna ghetto, an SS-man struck an old blacksmith, *Reb Baruch*, with the butt of his rifle. In a flash, Reb Baruch grabbed the rifle out of the German's hand and, like a blacksmith wielding a large hammer, he brought the rifle butt down, with a well-aimed swing, on the head of the SS-man.

In Latvia, too, there were also many acts of individual resistance:

- In July 1941, as Latvian police led the Jews of *Kraslave* to the death pits, a young Jew attacked one of the guards who had been abusing the doomed Jews being led, grabbed his rifle, and shot him. The Jew was killed on the spot.

- *Yaakov Rolof* and *Meir Markov* of Windau, who were ordered by the Germans to dig their own grave, attacked sentries with hoes and killed five of them.

- *Shlomo Berzin* of Rezhitse, known for his great strength, defended himself with a metal pole against a group of Latvians who had come to execute him and killed three of them. Afterwards, he was overcome with the same pole.

- When *Kurt Krause*, Gestapo commander in Riga, slapped the former army officer *Dr. Rantzel* in the face for smoking in his presence, the Jew responded by beating *Krause* soundly until the doctor was shot to death.

- *Stolper* and *Janovitz*, and several other Jews from Libau attacked armed Latvian guards who were leading them to a murder site. The Jews beat them, took away their rifles, escaped, and went into hiding. Some time later, they were captured and executed.

- *Jewish women* who were facing execution in the Bikernieki forest near Riga are known to have put up physical resistance.

- In the prison of Dvinsk, a physically imposing Jew named *Shaul Friedman* attacked Latvian jailers who were abusing bearded Jews whom they were about to execute. He was temporarily spared certain death when Germans demanded his services as a laborer.

There were also spontaneous mass uprisings, some of which are recorded only in German sources.

- One example occurred during an uprising at the extermination site near the Lithuanian town of Zhager on October 2, 1941. I quote from the German source: "Some Jews who had not been thoroughly searched drew pistols and amid shouts of 'Down with Hitler' attacked the police and wounded seven of them."

- Jews in small towns near Vilna, on their way to be executed at Ponary, put up a violent and unexpected resistance that led to a large-scale revolt. The Jews attacked the Lithuanian guards with pistols, knives, and even their teeth. After this clash, some six hundred Jewish bodies were left on the road. However, those Jews still alive continued to resist bitterly. At the extermination site itself, they wounded several Germans and Lithuanians.

These facts are confirmed in German documents and were also mentioned in a popular song that circulated in the Vilna ghetto at the

time.

These are only a few of hundreds of similar acts. They indicate that most such cases were the spontaneous responses of individuals or, at the most, of very small groups, to a specific horror or outrage.

In late December 1941, when the situation stabilized -- it also became possible to plan the nature of the response and to devise methods of organization to put plan into practice. In the main, there was a change from sporadic actions to systematic actions and reprisals -- to organized struggle that varied in accordance with the local situation and the way the future was viewed.

The direction of this trend in resistance was reflected clearly in a famous public event in the Vilna ghetto late 1941 -- the public reading of *Abba Kovner's* manifesto:

Hitler plans to kill all the Jews in Europe. The Jews of Lithuania are the first in line" [So] let us not go like sheep to the slaughter. We may be weak and defenseless, but the only possible answer to the enemy is resistance!

Today we know that this was the first time that Jews viewed the mass killings by the Einsatzgruppen and local murderers as part of a master plan for the destruction of all of European Jewry. It was also the first time that Jews were urged to mount an organized fighting resistance. In any case, 45,000 Baltic Jews survived the mass slaughters in 1941, and about 1,500 of them, men and women (most of them in their teens), joined anti-Nazi underground organizations in the ghettos and labor camps. The main purpose of these organizations was armed struggle, that is, an uprising in the ghetto or a armed break-out from the walled ghetto for the purpose of engaging in partisan operations on the outside. In some instances, especially in the Vilna ghetto, these two goals were combined, the uprising being followed by an organized escape from the ghetto. Although there was no uprising in the Kovno ghetto, Jews who fled from there to the forests engage in combat with German forces and local collaborators. Some

Jews who fled to the partisans from the Riga ghetto -- did much the same. Due to misfortunes, such as ambushes arrests, and betrayals by local inhabitants that occurred on the way to the forests, a large percentage of the escapees perished before reaching the forests.

Nevertheless, some 1,800 Jews escaped from ghettos and labor camps in the Baltic countries, either at the initiative on with the help of underground organizations, or as individuals or in groups of families. Most of them were taken in by units of the Soviet Lithuanian partisan movement, Soviet Latvian and Belorussian units, and in so called "*Jewish family camps*."

Although these numbers are impressive in themselves, they also underscore a significant tragedy in regard to the very possibility of armed resistance by Baltic Jews. After all, while more than a quarter million of Baltic Jews were being massacred in 1941, an anti-Nazi partisan movement worthy of the name did not yet exist !

By the time this movement began to develop in both quantitatively and qualitatively, no more than 45,000 Jews remained, and they were interned temporary in ghettos and labor camps.

Nevertheless, some surviving Jews apparently made impressive and effective use of even this belated opportunity. Study of the records of partisan activity in Lithuania shows that the majority of Jewish fighters in the ranks of the Lithuanian partisan belonged to units that had distinguished combat records.

No less important at that time, amidst of the ongoing fighting, Jewish partisans were sometimes able to settle scores with murderers of Jews, both German and local. In several cases, Jewish partisans initiated special revenge operations against identified murderers. It should also be noted, in regard to Jews who were still alive, Jewish fighters in the Vilna Partizan units disobeyed orders to stop bringing Jewish survivors from the ghettos and villages to the forest.

Many young Jews who had an opportunity to join the partisans, turned it down on moral

grounds. Some, for instance, were reluctant to abandon elderly parents to their fate. This situation was described by twenty-year-old *Abba Weinstein*, (now Ambassador Dr. *Abba Gefen*) who for three years headed a group of fighting Jewish survivors in the forests of southern Lithuania, with a rusted handgun as his only weapon. On May 31, 1944, *Weinstein* recorded in his diary:

"I went to see *Alphonse Rushkovsky*, who was active with the anti-German partisans. He said that we should start joining the partisans and should not wait. I said that this was easy for my brother Josef for Shmulik and me". We could join the partisans. But what about the others, who are not able to do so?

He answered, "Let them stay here and look out for themselves!"

He is incapable of understanding us. We are important for them as partisans, but we see things through Jewish eyes. Every Jew is important to me"

For various reasons not all members of underground organizations felt they could avail themselves at the chance to join the partisans as they wished. However after being captured, some of them carried on clandestine resistance activities even in the Dachau concentration camp in Germany. There, as I noted before, they continued to publish until liberation (!) the only permanent Hebrew-language journal under Nazi rule.

This amazing fact is only one of a considerable number of uniqueness acts that Baltic Jews performed in their resistance and active warfare - in addition to *Abba Kovner's* "Sheep to the Slaughter" manifesto, the first of its kind in all of Europe. Here are other examples:

- Messengers set out from the Vilna ghetto to underground organizations in ghettos of Poland and Lithuania, pass on the call to armed resistance and urge Jews there to implement it urgently.
- In most underground organizations in the Baltic ghettos, all political forces maintained a

wall-to-wall coalition.

- In the Kovno and Riga ghettos, there was very close cooperation between the resistance organizations and the Jewish Ghetto Institutions, especially the Ghetto Police. Because they helped the underground, their best officers and enlisted men were executed by the Germans.

This is the place to note that the Jewish soldiers in the 16th Lithuanian Infantry Division of the Red Army comprised the largest ethnic group in the division. They were so prevalent that in some formations the commanders gave orders in Yiddish and an impressive Jewish atmosphere was maintained during different opportunities. It is no wonder that even in the midst of combat one could hear such Yiddish battle-cries: "*Brider, far unzere tates un mames*" (Brethren, for our fathers and our mothers!).

The facts I have presented here, show that in addition to those who resisted by maintaining their cultural values, more than 10,000 Jewish men and women put up armed resistance to their enemies on the front and in the rear, as partisans, ghetto fighters, and soldiers in regular armies. About one-third of them perished. In the 16th Lithuanian Division alone, there a list includes the names of some 2,000 Jewish men and women.

Some may ask, to what extent the resistance and combat activity, (of whatever kind), affected the rescue of any portion of this Jewish community, whose fate seemed to be sealed back in the autumn of 1941". There is no unequivocal answer.

Against those who claim that at least 1,600 persons survived the Holocaust by joining the fighting organizations, one can counter, that thousands of Jews in fact perished as a direct result of their membership in these organizations. In the Jewish community of Olkienik, for example, only 4 percent of the dozens of Jews, who joined the partisans' ranks survived. On the other hand, a relatively large proportion of Jews (some 12 percent) survived in the Shavli ghetto,

where the resistance movement was the least developed.

Nevertheless, statistics alone do not entirely answer the question we have posed. Let us bear in mind that self-defense, resistance, and struggle were natural human reactions to the Nazis' attempt to annihilate the Jews, just as they are when Israel is under attack and in the case of America today.

I would like to conclude my lecture with a statement made by Dr. Elhanan Elkes, chairman of the "*Council of Elders*" in the Kovno ghetto:

This is the honorable road that we should choose. I will bear all the responsibility -- it is for the good of the remnant of Lithuanian Jewry and the Jewish people as a whole. Every opportunity to resist should be exploited, especially when it is a question of honorable combat!.

However, several incidents, including the example of the Vilna ghetto, where the "*battle of the barricades*" in September 1943 had meager results, suggest that the urge to fight and resist then was more emotional than logical. However it can still be maintained that the preferred course of action was the honorable one, even when it did not lead to the rescue of large numbers of Jews.

This shows why the historical importance of Dr. Elkes' words, spoken in defense of extending help to the underground in Kovno ghetto, will always outlive all other considerations. Finally I wish to say that I identify personally with what he said there, in the ghetto.

I received support for this at the time from a unique message from a schoolmate who had been interned at the Stutthof concentration camp with my mother of blessed memory, shortly before her bitter end on November 25, 1944. By then, my mother learned that I had joined (Barukh Ha-Shem) the partisans in the forests. This knowledge gave her much happiness -- and eased her suffering in her final days...

Dov Levin is a long-standing member of the Latvia SIG and has been involved and supported

tive since our inception.. with acknowledgement and appreciation Jerusalem Post

Revival in Riga

by
Elli Wohlgelernter

(January 2) - It is a Friday night in Riga at the city's 98-year-old synagogue on Peitavas Street, where close to 100 elderly men and women are sitting down to what they call "kiddush," but which is really a mini-meal.

Rabbi Nathan Barkan, chief rabbi of Riga and Latvia, walks up and down the rows of tables kibitzing, with this one in Yiddish, another in Russian, a third in Hebrew. There is soup, gefilte fish, chicken, and - no surprise - there is vodka, which the men pour into plastic shot cups and raise often to softly toast each other "l'haim."

To an outsider, it is a melancholy scene, a sad snapshot of yet another lost Jewish community from pre-war Europe, once thriving, now fading. It is not gone yet, as some 10,000 out of a pre-Holocaust Jewish population of 90,000 still live in Latvia, and there remains all the requisites of a mid-size Jewish community, including two schools, a community center, a burial society, even a museum, which documents the community's rich past and famous sons.

No one can say where the community is going, or what will be in 10 years, or 20, not unlike dozens of other cities and towns in the Ukraine, Belarus or Russia. The fall of communism opened the door for closet Jews to come forth and celebrate their religion in all those countries, or to emigrate to Israel, and the same is true in Latvia. "I believe that Latvia will become a better and better place to live, as it was before the war," says Ruvin Ferber, head of the Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Latvia. "Jews liked to live here, they enjoyed the place. So if it returns to the same shape, probably we will stay here."

WHILE Riga, where most of the country's Jews live, is not likely to return to its pre-war

standing, there is nevertheless a determined effort by the government to preserve what remains, to teach the history of the Jews in Latvia, and to confront the country's past during the period of the Holocaust (see box).

As part of its efforts to teach Latvians about the country's Jewish history, the government has just opened a traveling exhibition entitled "History, Tragedy, Revival."

The exhibit, mounted on 20 panels, begins with the first presence of Jews in Latvia in the mid-1600s, and includes photographs of people and places illustrating:

Jewish life in Latvia in the 18th and 19th century;

Before World War I; Jews in the Latvian War of Independence 1918-1920; Zionism in Latvia before 1940; religious life; Jews who served in the People's Council and the Constitutional Assembly of Latvia; the Holocaust (as well as Latvian Righteous Gentiles who saved Jews); the revival of the Latvian Jewish community since the fall of communism; and the relationship between Latvia and Israel.

"We have devoted special efforts to ensure that in our history books, and in the teachings of our schools, our past, including the two periods of occupation, gets particular attention," said Vaira Vike-Freiberga, the President of Latvia.

"Holocaust education has taken a very important place in our history books, and this has caused a complete revision of the teaching material that one had in Soviet times - it wasn't mentioned, it didn't exist!"

The main audience for the exhibition are the schools in Latvia, said Armands Gutmanis, undersecretary of state at the Foreign Ministry, which sponsored the exhibition, with help from the Jewish Museum of Latvia, the Center for Judaic Studies at the university, and the History Commission of Latvia. The American Embassy in Riga also helped finance the exhibition.

"Anyone who reads about Latvian history

knows that Jews have been here for a few centuries, and Latvian society today has to know the role of the Jewish community in Latvia's history," said Gutmanis, who is also a member of the three-year-old History Commission, which has been examining crimes against humanity during Soviet and Nazi totalitarian regimes

"Second, regarding the Holocaust, Latvian society has to study both sides - those Latvians who participated in mass murder, but also those others, like Janis Lipke, who saved Jews.

"Third, since the time of Riga's independence in 1990, we have again a Jewish community here in Riga and in other towns, and the Jewish community is well integrated and participates in all aspects of life."

The government's impetus for Holocaust education and commemoration is not just because Holocaust history is part of Latvian history, and that the freeing of the country from Soviet domination has forced the country to openly deal with that history. Latvia is also on the brink of joining the European Union, and becoming more Westernized demands a more forthright approach.

"Latvians understand much more today that by moving into the European Union, back into the orbit of democratic society, they are coming to an understanding that this is a society which is very open, very frank, and this is a society where people ask questions and demand answers," says Abraham Benjamin, Israel's ambassador to the Baltic countries, who is stationed in Riga.

"They are finding that very often the questions come from the young people. It's no longer possible, as it was under the Soviet Union, to sweep things under the carpet - this was the policy of the Soviet Union. Now that Latvia is no longer part of the Soviet Union and is going Western, then the questions will be asked and the answers have to be given," says Benjamin.

That move toward Westernization is also why the Center for Judaic Studies was started at the

University of Latvia in 1998. It is not a formal university department, and there is no degree in Jewish studies, but the center serves as a unit to initiate interdisciplinary courses in Jewish studies from the different faculties.

"A component of higher education in Europe has to have Jewish studies to some extent, because it's common in all the northern countries, as in Sweden and Denmark," says Ferber, director of the center. "And since the Baltic states want to be part of Europe, and all countries in Europe, more or less, have it, we do too. Moreover, Jewish history is a very important part of Latvia, so this is not the history of only Jews, it is the history of Latvia itself."

Students sign up for a course of Jewish studies, and are lectured by professors from the faculty of history or philosophy or theology, in courses designed by the center.

One class given is on the history of Jews in Latvia from the 16th century, which exposes students to the rich life of the Jewish community over the past 450 years. Famous personalities who were born or lived in Latvia include Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook, who was rabbi in Bausk before emigrating to Palestine; Prof. Yeshayahu Leibowitz; Sir Isaiah Berlin, Mordechai Dubin, chairman of the Riga Jewish community and a deputy of the Latvian Parliament; Mordechai Nurok, chairman of the Mizrahi party, deputy in the Latvian Parliament and later a minister in David Ben-Gurion's government; Simon Dubnow, preeminent Jewish historian who was murdered in the Riga ghetto; opera singer Joseph Schwartz and sculptor Nahum Aronson.

INDEED, when the worldwide organization of Jews from Latvia met this past summer in Riga, President Vike-Freiberga hosted a reception at the presidential home, and spoke of some of those noted Jewish sons of Latvia.

"One of the suggestions I put to them, is that we would like to have more books about the contribution to culture in this region of the Jewish community," the president told The Jerusalem Post. "There have been very many distinguished members of that community who have

gained fame, like Isaiah Berlin - of course, after leaving his birthplace, having spent just his childhood and adolescence here.

"The contribution of the Jews here in Latvia [is significant], their life in the various small towns, the small shopkeepers and the ordinary people living here, their history, their records, the old Jewish cemeteries in various small towns, many families going back several centuries; there are some very fascinating stories that would be interesting to look up in the archives. These would be interesting projects for the survivors, books of memories, memoirs of their life here, and their childhood, that should be in Latvia in the Latvian libraries.

"In other words, not just the tragic events of the past, but also the happy events, and the community's positive contributions," she said.

The university's two-semester course on Jewish history has had 40 students for each of the three years it has been taught, mostly non-Jewish. One wonders why they would be interested in taking the course

"On their final exam we ask them why they signed up for the course, and we get very different answers," says Ferber. "They are curious, as historians, to know about Jewish history - what are Jews? Some are theologians learning biblical studies, and are eager to know more.

"The course starts with a visit to the synagogue on the first day. Rabbi Barkan tells them about Judaism, about Jews, what is kosher food. He shows them the Aron Kodesh (Torah scroll repository), so they can touch it. Some want to know the differences between a synagogue and a church. They ask about Jewish music, cantorial music, the niggunim (melodies). So their eyes are opened.

"Then there was the answer from one student from the theology department, a Christian. He said: 'I just feel I should take the course because my grandmother was Jewish,'" Ferber recounts.

Latvia's Jewish community, together with its neighboring Baltic countries Estonia and

Lithuania, annually send 700 to 800 immigrants to Israel, a number that has been holding steady for the past few years. Some of the Jewish emigration is to Germany, parallel to the emigration of other young Latvians who are driven by economic considerations.

What Vike-Freiberga and Benjamin would both like to see is an increase in economic ties between the two countries.

"For some reason, this area is beyond the horizon in Israel; people are not aware of the three Baltic states," says Benjamin. "Somehow they are out of sight, and I'm not quite sure why

NATIONAL Infrastructure Minister and Yisrael Beitenu head Avigdor Lieberman recently brought a delegation of Israeli businessmen to Latvia to learn more about economic opportunities. With Latvia on the verge of entry into the EU, investments in Latvia - where the labor force and the general costs of setting up a plant or factory is cheaper - will automatically give such business ventures a foothold throughout Europe.

"Any trade with Latvia gives entry to the European common market," says Vike-Freiberga. "So you are not dealing with just a country of under two and a half million, but access to 100 million customers, all from the EU. Latvia is as good an entry door as any other."

Benjamin says that the Lieberman delegation saw firsthand the opportunities that await them by expanding trade.

"For the first time many of them got a feel for the area," says the Israeli ambassador. "And they understood - those same businessmen who are doing business say, in Poland, or Hungary or Romania - that they could do business here as well.

"I would like to see Latvia and Israel moving closer, moving within sight of each other, because the relationship could be mutually beneficial. They are a small country, and we are a small country, although they are much bigger than us - we're only a third of the geographical

size of Latvia and Lithuania. Estonia is twice as big. In combined population, they are a bit more than us. But we have something in common with the Baltic states, which includes a rich Jewish history."

Relations between Israel and Latvia on the political level are excellent, Vike-Freiberga and Benjamin maintain, with the Latvians "very positive in international forums," the ambassador says. "They have spoken out very positively, very sensibly, on issues of great concern to us," although as a potential EU member, they tend to vote along with the EU.

"We have always felt that Israel is an important player in the Middle East, and this is why it was considered a priority for us to establish relations with Israel," says Vike-Freiberga. "We have an embassy there, which for a small country, and for a place so far away, is an important step, and indicates the importance that Latvia attaches to the relations with Israel. We have offered mutual support in international votes at the United Nations and elsewhere.

"At the Durban conference I represented Latvia, and I had occasion at the time to object against the idea of including Zionism as racism. I felt this was an important statement that I had to include in my general call for tolerance and a general fight against prejudice, racism and discrimination in every shape and form."

Vike-Freiberga's view of the Middle East, and her solution to the Israel-Palestinian problem, is typically European in outlook, with an added dimension from her own childhood experiences. In her case, Vike-Freiberga says, when the Russians took over Latvia after World War II, "my parents, who were plain, ordinary folk, fled because my mother was a Christian and she couldn't possibly tolerate the atheistic propaganda, and neither of them could tolerate the tyranny they had seen in 1940-1941. They fled, first to Poland, then to Germany where we lived in refugee camps. We then went to Morocco, and when Morocco became independent we went to Canada. So it was a journeying through many countries, across three continents

"As a former refugee, I can sympathize with people who have been refugees, who have left their homeland and live in uncertainty for decades," she says, referring to the Palestinians. "This is a situation that has been going on for decades, and I think it needs a political solution. It appears to me that the Palestinian claims for an independent territory are simply not going to go away. It is going to be a thorn in Israel's side; it's going to remain a thorn in the Middle East, a festering sore that can't be healed. I think it has to be lanced, the wounds have to be cleaned, and it needs a political solution," she says.

Vike-Freiberga believes the solution to the Middle East problem is first to stop the violence, and then both sides must accept certain compromises, "even though it must be painful to both sides because each side would have to give up something they hold dear, that they feel is important to them. The alternative is continued violence."

Latvia's Holocaust lapse - As part of the acculturation of Latvia to becoming more European on the eve of its joining the EU, the country is facing head-on the history of the Holocaust on its own turf. Towards that end it set up a History Commission on November 13, 1998, to "organize research and production of a report on the theme of 'Crimes against Humanity Committed in the Territory of Latvia under the Two Occupations, 1940 - 1956.'

The commission is divided into four task forces, focusing on the Soviet occupation 1940-1941, the German occupation, 1941-1944, the Soviet occupation 1944-1956, and the "Holocaust in the territory of Latvia, 1941 to 1944," which includes investigating, among other things, the collaboration of Latvians with the SS and Einstatsgruppen.

While the aims are laudable, the commission has drawn criticism from Jewish organizations since its beginnings. Abraham Foxman, national director of the Anti-Defamation League, quit the commission shortly after being named to the panel. In a letter to Latvia's President Vaira Vike-Freiberga, Foxman said his decision was

due to the "intermingling and confusion" of the Holocaust and the Soviet occupation of Latvia.

"While I acknowledge the suffering of many Latvians at the hands of the Soviets and Latvia's desire to investigate this history, as a Jew and a Holocaust survivor, I am deeply offended by the intermingling and confusion of these two very different experiences," Foxman wrote. "I am deeply concerned that Latvia is not yet ready to truly examine and confront the experience of Latvian Jews during the Holocaust. As you surely know, over 90 percent of Latvia's Jewish population were murdered as part of Hitler's deliberate and systematic campaign to annihilate the Jewish people. In far too many cases, ordinary Latvians facilitated the Nazi effort."

Vike-Freiberga dismissed the criticism, and defended Latvia's record both in the implementation of the commission's mandate, and in the job of the prosecutor's office in tracking down German collaborators.

"Mr. Foxman objected to the fact that we were studying anything other than the Holocaust in the History Commission, and this was clearly not an acceptable position, because we established it for historical events as they happened - it so happens that we had two totalitarian occupations, and both committed crimes against humanity.

"By the way, in the deportations of 1940, there were 9,000 Jews who were deported by the Communists, before the German occupation. So it's not [as if] you can cut it up to 'crimes against Jews, crimes against Latvians,' and the ones that are important and others are not - the Communists committed crimes against both, against Jews as well as Latvians, and the Nazis committed crimes against both - Latvians were killed in concentration camps, (although) not in the same numbers; of course, there's a disproportion in numbers. But let's be clear about it, these totalitarian regimes did not spare anybody, and neither are we going to spare or exonerate any of them, under any account. We are looking at everything that happened - how it happened, why it happened, what happened."

FOXMAN says Vike-Freiberga's remarks "only reinforces my judgment to have resigned, because to this day it seems that they really are not seriously, consciously, interested in facing up to the history of the Shoah, and are very much interested in facing up to the history in terms of the communist period. Which I understand, but one of the reasons I wanted two separate commissions was that I felt it [the Holocaust investigation] would get lost, and it is being lost now. And it [the commission] isn't serious

Foxman does say Latvia should be commended for its work in Holocaust education, research and commemoration, which has been thorough and extensive, including the translations of works by Elie Wiesel and Simon Wiesenthal, contributing to the International Fund for Needy Victims of Nazi Persecution, giving state accreditation to the Jewish museum and documentation center, the restoration of memorial sites, and paying tribute to Latvian rescuers of Jews in the Holocaust, including Janis Lipke, who saved 55 Jews from death.

"That's fine, and they should be applauded for it," says Foxman. "But they are not dealing seriously - which they said that they would - with plenty of collaborators, plenty of people who took part who are walking around scot-free."

Dr. Efraim Zuroff, head of the Simon Wiesenthal Center's Israel office, feels less concerned about the dual-purpose commission than the failure of the state prosecutor's office to actively pursue and initiate cases against guilty Latvians.

"The sad truth is that since Latvia became independent, the Latvian prosecutors have never initiated a single investigation of a Latvian Nazi war criminal of their own volition," says Zuroff. "Even worse, Latvia granted rehabilitations [pardons] accompanied by various financial benefits to at least 41 men who were convicted by Soviet courts for active participation in the persecution and/or murder of civilians. I presented a list of those names to the Latvian authorities in 2000, but absolutely nothing has

been done in response to our findings

"If the Latvian prosecutors had invested a fraction of their efforts in prosecuting communist criminals to trying to bring Nazi war criminals to justice, I am certain that concrete results could have been achieved. As it stands at the moment, there has never been a case of a Latvian Nazi war criminal being tried in independent Latvia, and I very much doubt whether such a trial will ever take place."

An Overview of the Holdings of the Latvian State Historical Archives – How They are Used to Answer Research Inquiries

by

Rita Bogdanova (Archivist)

The Latvian State Historical Archives was founded in 1919 only one year after the first independence of the Latvian Republic. It is the second largest in the Europe, after the Historical Archives in St.Petersburg. It keeps about 6 million files from the time period of 1220 to 1944 and contains information on the formation of each state that existed in Latvian territory at that time.

There are 11 departments at the Archives, one of them being the Department of Scientific Information, of which Mrs. Irina Veinberga is the head. The main task of the department is to detail the archive fonds to make them more readily available; to find the needed information faster; to describe newly obtained documents; and, of course, genealogical research. Of the 15 departmental members, only 5 deal with genealogy: three with Latvian, German, Russian and Polish and two with Jewish. The genealogical research began some 11 years ago but slowed down in the 1990's because of the land reform that was carried out in Latvia. At that time, the Archives issued a lot of references proving property rights and verifying the claimant's relationship. Some of these references were similar to large genealogical research.

The real work on genealogy began in 1997 when the land reform was over and the Archives overflowed with requests. Since that time we have prepared about 2 thousand archival references, the majority having been positive. And here a special thanks is due to my colleague J. Polovceva who has researched Jewish families for more than ten years. Every single person who has applied to the Archives knows of the excellence of her work.

Naturally it requires some time to get answers from the Archives. And even though there are now two doing the research, it doesn't help because the number of requests grows very quickly, some of them being so large that months can be spent in preparing an answer. Besides, we try to avoid negative answers in our work so if someone does get a negative response, it signifies that a huge amount of work was done in looking for the information. For example, if someone informs us that his ancestor was born in Riga in 1885, we look through the Riga birth records for that year, for prior years and later years, and if the birth registration is not found, a negative answer can, of course, be given immediately. However, we try to find at least something. We start to look for where the family might have come from, to look through all possible inhabitant lists for many other places until we finally find something. Of course this requires time.

Quite often research begins with some small crumb of information on a few family members or on some small branch of the family. In quite a number of cases this develops into a large genealogy of the entire family who lived in that region. Usually, when we offer people a glimpse of the whole family, they want the family researched thoroughly, which can frequently result in research of more than a hundred individuals. We try to keep family names in mind and while doing other research, we might find additional information, which we offer to our clients. The added information often gives a good possibility to connect two or even more families and in such cases, we bring together relatives who do not know anything about one another. These are the most exciting aspects of

our archival work.

Additionally, we have created a database of all requests we received from 1994 until 2000, so we can see who was interested in the same family, and supposing that they are relatives, we can bring together people who never even suspected the existence of the other. Very helpful in our research was the acquisition of our computer and scanner, one of which we received thanks to the Courland Research Group and Constance Whippman, and the other one thanks to Arlene Beare. This not only gave us an excellent possibility to write reference information into the computer, but also to make some nice searchable databases inputting information from difficult files, which we would otherwise have to search through manually, page by page, in what was an exceedingly time consuming effort. We successfully utilize all the databases made for JewishGen, especially in cases where the place of origin is unknown.

What are the main sources we use in our genealogical research?

These are essentially all the vital records, family lists, recruits' enlistments, revision lists, different Censuses, passport registration and passport issuing books, passports, house registers, inhabitants' lists.

Vital records

The basic sources for genealogical research are the vital records books of different Jewish communities – birth, marriage and death records. They date from 1854 and unfortunately have survived incompletely. This considerably limits opportunities for researchers. The Latvian State Historical Archives hold the vital records books up to 1905. This fact is rather disturbing since it gives no possibility to establish the family after this period. The researcher is obliged to apply to the Registry Office Archives, obtain from it some family information and then come back to the Historical Archives.

Unfortunately, there are communities where the vital records are totally missing, such as Kuldiga, Friedrichstadt, Talsen. Books for the

Jewish communities of Pilten, Rezekne, Mitau, Ludza, Dvinsk have survived only partially. The fact that the Jewish vital records should be kept in duplicate – one in the rabbinate and the second in the police department, lead to the positive results – at least one of them has survived and was found in the documents of the police department or even the city board.

The vital records were compiled in Russian-Hebrew or in German-Hebrew.

The **birth records**, if complete, usually give the following information: the name of the child, the date of the birth and circumcision, names of the parents and their patronymics, occupation of the father and place of origin of the family. Such complete records exist for Riga, Bausk, and Liepaja. In the Riga birth records for the 80th the birth of the children born in Riga district and the territory of modern Estonia - Werro, Derpt/Tartu, and Fellin were registered. The books of Mitau frequently contain only one date for boys and that is the date of circumcision. Very abbreviated birth records are extent for Tukums, where even the father's name is represented only as a first letter, not to mention place of origin and occupation. Of course it makes the research very complicated, since it is difficult to establish the proper family, especially in a case where the name of wife is the same. Not all the records contain information on the maiden name of the wife, which is very important to distinguish the correct family.

The **marriage records** give the following data: the names of groom and bride, names of parents and occupation of fathers, age, date of the marriage and information on the Ketubah. Since the age was mostly approximated from outward appearance, it is not very precise in the marriage records and does not coincide with the age indicated in the revision lists or recruits' enlistments. We have also noticed that the entries in Russian and Hebrew sometimes differ from one another. The Hebrew is usually more complete as it gives the status of the bride and groom – divorced, widowed, and so forth, which is very important to the research and which in many cases does not have the Russian

equivalent.

The marriage records are a very nice source to trace the female line getting to know to whom the woman was married, since very often we have no information on the daughters at all, and in some cases it was not known to whom they were married.

The most detailed marriage records are for Jekabpils/Jacobstadt which state the names of the parents of the bride and groom, and even the maiden name of the mothers. The records for Riga, Liepaja and Bauska are more or less detailed. The marriage registers for Aizpute are very poor. Only the name and surname of the groom are stated and in some cases even the surname is not indicated; the family name of the bride usually is noted, but that is why it is difficult to establish who the parents were.

The **death records** contain information on the name, occupation, origin, age, date of death, and cause of death. These records make it possible to establish the birth date more or less precisely. It is important especially for the early period such as the beginning of the 19th century, when vital records did not exist. Death records could be considered as the only indicator of the birth date. In some cases the relationship to the dead person is stated, such as “the wife of Abraham”, “the widow of Kalman”, “the daughter of Hirsh”, or “the son of Abraham” and so forth. We also note here the complete and incomplete records since some of them contain only names without any indication of the place of origin and occupation, which is less helpful in research.

A few words about the **divorce records**. Such registers are unique to the Jewish communities. There are both divorces and the rite of Halitzah. The information in these books is more or less similar to the information in the marriage records: surname, name of the divorced people, their age, cause of the divorce. In the earlier books from 1850-1860, the cause of divorce is stated more precisely – for instance hatred of one another, adultery of the wife, childlessness, etc. These documents are the most touching of all those we have and use in research. Later on

the cause of divorce is a more common formula for all - by mutual consent. The content of these records is unique in each diverse community. One has very little information, the family names or age might not be stated, the maiden name of the wife might not be indicated, whereas another might have all the needed data.

Our experience in working with vital records shows that frequently there are errors that we can expose by comparing them with other documents. For instance, the family name in the marriage records might be miswritten (Medeigen instead Yedeikin), or might be missing entirely or instead the family name, the father's name is written. The birth entries of the same parents can be written differently when writing parents' names and surnames. The age in the marriage, divorce and death records can be stated very approximately and only by comparing different documents can we come to a conclusion as to which documents are more precise.

Revision Lists

As the vital records give information beginning only from 1854, the earlier data about a person can be taken from the revision lists and the research can thus be extended. Our Archives maintain revision lists from 1799 to 1858 and some additional lists up to 1913. The very early revision lists of Courland for 1799 contain no surnames, since the Jews had no family name at that time which complicates the research. We can generally find some family only in cases where the name was not very common. Otherwise, it is very complicated to identify the person and family when the surname is missing. These lists give also information on the dwelling place of the family, which is generally some small village around the shtetl where the revision was made.

The revision lists for 1834, 1850 and 1858, which survived mostly for Riga and Courland show the whole family. They give information on the names, relationship (sons, daughters, wives), age, which we believe is more precise than that stated in the marriage and death records. It gives the former and present family re-

vision numbers – so that one can easily identify the family. Sometimes the revision lists also give the time period that the family joined a particular community. The information on the male is written on the left part of the sheet, and information on the females – on the right. The maiden name of the wives unfortunately never is stated.

The revision lists were compiled in German. In very rare cases they are in Russian.

The additional revision lists which were recorded annually after 1858, allow one to see the movement of families from one community to another, the date when they left one community and entered the other, and show the children, which cannot be found in the vital records. The most complete revisions lists are for Riga, Mitau, and Tukums; the least complete are for Latgale.

Recruits Enlistments

Side by side with the revision lists, the recruits' enlistments were constantly updated for reasons of military service. The recruits' enlistments also allow us to trace the ancestors and to make up the deficiency due to the lack of vital records. It is especially important in case the revision lists did not survive at all, or only partially survived, such as for Aizpute, Friedrichstadt, and Goldingen.

Recruits' enlistments have following entries: serial number of the family, family number and oklad number according to the last revision (at the Archives, that means the available lists for 1868 and 1871 with the last, the 10th revision, being in 1858), surname, name, father's name, name of the wife, age according to the last revision, age for the year that the list was compiled, people who came after the list was drawn up, people who died or left, the name of the person taken as a recruit. The reference to the last revision was important in order to find the entire family, however the family and oklad numbers were not constant and changed from one revision to the next. The wife's age usually was not stated. However, the earlier lists do have the information on the wife's age as well.

Like the revision lists, the recruits' enlistments contain information only on the individuals who belonged to that particular Jewish community even though they could live in other places. But this was the list according to which they were called to military service. The big drawback of these documents is that no boys under the age of 8 years old, the age when they were eligible to be called up to the recruits, and no daughters were listed. The lists for Kuldīga for 1935 differ greatly from all other as the wives, daughters and small children along with their ages are listed. If, for a specific place, there are no other documents available, such as vital records or revision lists, it is very difficult to grasp the entire picture of the family. However, a person called to military service might be found and might not appear in the later documents.

The recruit enlistment registers have survived in different years for different towns. There are lists of 1835, 1842, 1845, 1854, 1868, 1871, available at the Archives for the Courland region. The list of Dvinsk for 1876 contains information on many families – males only, who later belonged to Preiļi, Glazmanka, Vishki, and Kraslava.

The All-Russian Census of 1897

The All-Russian Census of 1897 gives broad information on the entire family. Unfortunately the documents have barely survived. The lists of the Census were drawn up in three copies – one for the Head Census Commission, a second one for the Provincial Administration and a third for the Hamlet Administration.

Since they were drawn up mainly for the statistical reasons, quite a few were destroyed after the statistical data was extracted. Even though it is a very significant source for genealogical research, it is very difficult to use. The lists were compiled according to the address of each inhabitant, and there is no alphabetized name index so it requires a great deal of time to look through all the lists just to find one family.

The first page of the Census gives the common information on the place of Census – Province, district, town or village. The most interest-

ing information is the street because even though the name has since changed, it can be identified and family visiting the dwelling places of their relatives can, indeed, find their houses. The form of the census contains 14 columns. The first one gives the surname, name, and father's name of the head of the family and all other members. The shortcoming here is that the maiden name of the wife is never stated. The second column is for sex; the third gives the relationship to the head of the family. Next comes the age which usually is given very approximately. It still is not clear for which year is it stated since sometimes the age is the same as would be indicated for 1895 or 1896, and sometimes it is for 1897. Next is the family status, followed by estate – whether they were merchants or petty bourgeois.

Very important are the next two columns – the place of birth and place of origin. Very often they are not the same and the place of origin is significant because it gives a thread for further research. If the place is in Latvian territory, we can try to continue the research digging deeper in time, but if not, we just send people to other Archives, like the Lithuanian or that of Belarus. The place of abode was also indicated since at the moment of the Census people could live in different places. We have known instances where people lived in Palestine, America and even England. The next columns include religion and native tongue, literacy, and education. It was very common for people to get an education at home so that they could read and write especially in the larger towns. Of course it depended also of the age and the region. The column asking for principal occupation gives information on the profession of the person, the secondary occupation was filled out, but not so often. The last column about the military service gives information about what kind of service the person performed.

The Census survived partially for Riga, completely for Rezekne, Ludza, Preili, Daugavpils, and incompletely for the towns and villages of Courland, like Kuldiga, and Liepaja.

Censuses of 1935 and 1941

After the Census of 1897, the next one took place in 1935, in independent Latvia. The documents of this Census are of two kinds: there are so called apartment cards where an entire family living in one apartment was recorded. The cards contain the address, the surname and names of the family members, the birth year, religion, occupation of each person and the relationship to the head of the family. The second type of Census documents are the personal cards which can be used in addition to the apartment cards since they include information on just one person – name, surname precise date and place of birth, languages which the person talks, occupation and working place. The only shortcoming of this Census is that the wife's maiden name is not indicated. This Census has survived in its entirety and can give broad information on the population in Latvia before the World War II.

In August 1941, during the Nazi occupation, the next Census took place. This Census is not valid for the Jewish population as only Liepaja, Liepaja district and Grobina contain information on the Jews, which were still living there in that time. This Census has data on surname, name, sometime on the maiden name of the women, birth date and place, religion, address and occupation. The prior address is also noted, which gives the possibility of continuing the research on the house registers, if available.

Family Lists

The family lists were the documents used by the administration in the statistical calculations of the population. Once set up, the list was augmented during some years, but when amending it became too difficult, new lists were created. The family lists contain the more complete information on the whole family. Similar to the revision lists, the family lists were divided into two parts - the left side for males and the right side for females, for a total of ten columns. Thus they contain data on the surname, name, father's name of the head of the family, names of his sons, grandchildren, brothers with sons who all lived together. The age of the individual was given as of the 1st January of the year in which the list was set up. The information on

the death of the person was written in a special column. The next column showed the date when the person entered the military service and finished it. Columns 9 and 10 were for the information on women – names, father's names of the wife and daughters and the last one showed the fact of the marriage or death. There are such lists for Riga, Bauska, Ludza, Krustpils, and Tukums but they are few.

However, sometimes the family lists have inaccuracies: not all the family members are indicated on the list – this is very common especially for Tukums; the birth, marriage and death dates can be different from the actual dates which can be found in the vital records. The truth can be established only comparing various documents.

Inhabitant Lists

The family lists as well as the revision lists and recruits' enlistments contain data only on the families belonging to some of the Jewish communities. The inhabitants' lists also give information on individuals who were living in a particular place but might legally belong to a different place. These lists have information on the surname, name, father's name, age, name and age of wife and children. The address and occupation are stated, too. We have such lists for Riga for 1885-1886.

Similar to these inhabitant lists are the lists of people residing in Courland but belonging to other communities. These lists contain information mostly on the families, which came from Lithuania to Courland. These lists give information on how long the family lived in a particular town of Courland, where they are from, occupation of the head of the family and his economic condition. In many cases it is the only source where the information about the family can be found.

Passport Registration Books

Similar to the inhabitants' lists for Riga are the books of passport registration, where all the individuals from another town and coming to Riga were registered. These books have sur-

vived for 1876-1915. They contain the following information: surname, name, father's name, age, family status, occupation, legal residence, and address in Riga. The books differ from year to year. The books for the earlier years contain no age. The most complete are books for 1900-1915, where the whole family is noted. In many cases, these books are the only source which allows one to find a family arriving in Riga from, say, Lithuania, with the children having been born in Lithuania and which lived in Riga for a short time and later emigrated from Riga. But the books are very large. They contain about 5-8 thousand entries, have no alphabetical indices and are very difficult to work with, especially if the inquirer does not know the exact year when the family went abroad. Recently, we are trying to computerize them, but doing so is very time consuming.

Passport Books

Of late, we have spent much time looking for some new sources for our work. Knowing very well how much people enjoy seeing the pictures of their ancestors, we tried to find all possible passport issuing books, which contain the photos. If some years ago we used the passport books only for Riga and Liepaja, now we have them for Talsi, Tukums, Ludza, Aizpute, and Rezekne. Aside from pictures, these books contain very important information on the maiden names of the women and minor children who were born after 1905 e.g. the time period for which we have no vital records. Some passport issuing books indicate the addresses, but most do not. What a pity since many people who visit Latvia want to see the houses and streets where their ancestors once lived! There are passport issuing books for 1920-1928, for Liepaja up to 1939, but not complete.

Passports

A very broad passport collection has survived for Riga. It is a real treasure for genealogical research. There are about 700.000 passports of people from all over Latvia who lived in Riga in 1919-1940. We distinguish between the old and new passports. The old ones were issued be-

tween 1919-1926 and look like a sheet of paper that contains the following information: surname, name and father's name, maiden name of women, and place of origin.

Of exceptional importance are: date and place of birth, permanent residence, religion, nationality, profession/occupation, family status, and attitude to military service. The passports of women contain information on all minor children. The document upon which the passport was issued, is also noted in the passport – whether it be a certificate, a reference etc. It is of importance because if it notes that the person got Latvian citizenship, we can look for the naturalization file. On the other hand, if an archival reference is noted, we then know that the individual belonged to Riga and can be found in the Riga family lists. On the other side of the passport there was the stamp with address. In the same place, the notes about marriage, death and birth of the children were made.

The new passports were issued in 1927-1939 and had shortened information compared to the old one. They have no father's name, religion or nationality, but all the other data is the same.

House Registers

The address found in the passport can be double-checked on the house registers. These contain information about the date the person registered, surname, name maiden name - but no father's name in most registers - the birth place and date, occupation, previous address, documentary proof upon which basis the person was registered – that was generally passport or certificate of identity - and when the person was struck off the house register. The previous address is a very interesting source since knowing it, one can get information going back to an earlier time, sometimes to 1918 or even earlier, because the Archives hold house registers of Riga also for the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. The books have survived more or less well for the time period of 1919-1940. The house registers give the fate of the Jews in 1941 since there are stamps that indicate that they were struck off to the ghetto or they were de-

ported or fled to Russia. By comparing this data with the information from the documents of the Extraordinary Commission, one can formulate a picture of the fate of the Jews in 1941-1944. Aside from Riga the Archives contain the house registers for Liepaja, Daugavpils, Jelgava, along with some for Bausk, Sabile, and Ventspils.

These are the main sources we use in doing genealogical research, but of course in each case, a number of other fonds and files can be searched. The individual approach is very important here. What is good for one search might not be valid for another, so we always try to find the most efficacious way for every application.

Back to Daugavpils

by
Barry Shay

My father died more than 50 years ago, when I was about 10 years old, and we had never talked about where he was born, what he did when he was a young man or what life was like when he was my age. I did know that he was either from Latvia or Russia and I had heard that his family was from Dvinsk, wherever that was.

As an adult, every now and then I'd try to find something about Dvinsk but never came up with anything. I could never find it on the map and any relatives who may have known about it were long gone. Then one night last summer I did a computer search for Dvinsk and was led to the Jewish Genealogy web site. Here I located the Jewish Families of Dvinsk database. I punched in the name Schaia, which I thought was close to what the name Shay had been, and to my surprise up popped the family name Schaya and four family members. There on the monitor were the names of my grandparents, an uncle, and my great-grandfather along with the name of his father, and they all came from Daugavpils, since 1920 the new name for Dvinsk. No wonder I couldn't locate Dvinsk on the map.

My wife, who is Swedish, and I had already made plans to visit Sweden last summer, and after seeing how close Latvia was to Sweden, I

thought it would be quite simple to visit Latvia and perhaps Daugavpils. I contacted Mike Getz, whose name I found on the JewishGen web site, and got some background information from him about Daugavpils and the Latvian Historical Archives. He gave me the telephone number of Sofija Mejerova, the Director of the Jewish Community in Daugavpils.

From Sweden I called Sofija, who spoke little English and put her husband Isaac on the phone. His English was good enough to tell me that their daughter, Emina, lives in Riga and speaks English quite well and he gave me her telephone number. I called Emina and told her that we would be coming to Riga.

A couple of weeks before we were to leave for Latvia, Emina called to advise me to write a letter to the Archives formally requesting information about my family from Dvinsk. By the time we were leaving for Latvia we had heard nothing from the Archives. I called Mike Getz again, and he suggested that I speak to Rita Bogdanova at the Archives. She and I agreed to meet in Riga on July 25, my birthday.

It seemed easy enough. Take a week out of our month-long vacation in Sweden and fly to Riga from Copenhagen, then go by bus or train to Daugavpils. Flying from Copenhagen to Riga was too expensive, so instead we decided to fly from Kristianstad in Sweden to Vilnius in Lithuania, take the EuroLiner bus from Vilnius to Riga, and then the train from Riga to Daugavpils. To return from Daugavpils we would simply take the train to Vilnius and fly back to Sweden. Very simple, very easy!

In Kristianstad we boarded a Lithuanian Airlines plane to Vilnius, which first stopped in Palanga (a surprise), at which point we deplaned and boarded another plane to Vilnius. The final leg of the flight actually ended in Kaunas, Lithuania where we were picked up by a van and driven to the Victoria Hotel in Vilnius. We arrived at about 23:30.

After a very good Swedish breakfast buffet, we took a cab to the bus station in Vilnius to pick up our tickets that were pre-booked to

Riga. There we found that, in fact, our reservations did not exist and the EuroLiner we thought we were taking was actually a BalticLiner that looked more like a run-down metro or city bus of the sort you might find in Tijuana.

With a couple of hours to kill, we wandered around the old city of Vilnius and visited the last remaining synagogue of the 120 that existed in the city prior to World War II. The Shamas, a man of about 75 years who had lost his parents in Dachau, was very happy to talk to us (in broken English, Yiddish and German) about the synagogue, his surviving Dachau as a young child, and the plight of the Jews under the Nazi occupation. On leaving, he said a brucha for us, kissed my wife's hand and wished us mazal-tov as we left.

As the temperature soared to record highs for late July, we boarded the un-air-conditioned bus to Riga. The ride was slow and sweltering but uneventful, until we got to the Lithuanian Latvian border. Now, we had read that the border crossing could be slow, but we hadn't anticipated being forced to wait in an unventilated bus for one hour on probably the hottest day in years. On the Lithuanian side of the border the passports of all the passengers were collected and since we had no passports, we were not allowed to leave the bus. After half an hour the bus moved about 100 meters to the Latvian side of the border, at which time we were allowed to leave the bus, cool off and re-board. Shortly after the bus began to move our passports were returned, now with a Latvian stamp, and we settled in for the final leg to Riga.

Approaching Riga, the road improved and the city's landmarks appeared as we crossed the Daugava River. The cityscape was breathtaking, and I imagined how my father must have felt on his first visit to Riga about a century ago. A short cab ride later we arrived at the charming Hotel Laine in central Riga.

I had made reservations for two nights at the Hotel Laine, on Skolas, because on the map it seemed to be quite close to the Latvian Historical Archives. Shortly after arriving at the hotel I

called Emina Mejerova and arranged to meet her the following evening. During the day I planned to go to the archives and speak to Rita Bogdanova. Luckily Emina called that evening to tell us that the Archives are located on Slokas and not Skolas. That phone call probably saved us half a day of wandering around Riga.

Early the next morning I called Rita to tell her we were on our way to the Archives. After a ten-minute cab ride we arrived at Slokas iela 16 and as we entered the building I wondered about the information that we might find. After an encounter with the not-so-friendly receptionist, Rita met us. It turned out that she had no idea who we were or what we wanted. She had not seen the letter I had sent, but said she would look for it. After about 15 minutes she returned to the lobby with the letter, which had been misplaced and sent to another department.

We spoke to Rita for some time. I showed her the information about the Schayas from the Jewish Families of Dvinsk database and some old photographs and she seemed optimistic about what they might find about the Schaya family. We filled out a request form, paid the 37 lts (about \$50) and Rita said we should be hearing from them in the fall. While I was disappointed that no information was immediately available, Rita's energy, optimism and competence were reassuring.

We spent the rest of the day sightseeing around the beautiful city of Riga, and visited the Jewish Museum and the old Peitvas Shul. That evening Emina met us at the hotel, and we went to the 26th floor of the Hotel Latvia where the view of Riga was spectacular. While there we talked about my family and showed Emina old photographs of our family in Dvinsk. She thought it was wonderful that we had such a large family. We were sad to learn that most of her family had been killed during the Holocaust, and not even family photographs and other memorabilia survived.

The next morning we went to the train station to purchase our tickets for the Dinaburga Express to Daugavpils. After a harrowing walk

through a tunnel still under construction, we deposited our luggage and spent the next couple of hours at Riga's Central Market, adjacent to the train station. This enormous combination indoor-outdoor market has an incredible variety of meat, fish, vegetables, flowers and clothes. It is housed in five former zeppelin hangars used during World War I that were brought to Riga from Germany in about 1930.

The Dinaburg Express to Daugavpils was fairly crowded, hot and humid, yet the passengers were not eager to open the windows. The three-and-a-half hour trip included two movies. The first was a Russian film entitled *The Thief*, a wonderful movie about a former army officer who resorts to thievery to sustain himself and his son after the war. Incredibly, my wife and I had seen this movie in the U.S., of course with English titles. I believe it is the only Russian movie we ever saw. The second movie was *Kindergarten Cop*, with Arnold Schwarzenegger. A single male voice-over in Russian provided all speaking parts in the movie. Talk about low budget.

The countryside between Riga and Daugavpils is quite similar to that of middle Sweden, with many pine and white birch forests, although it is interspersed with remnants of Russian architectural monstrosities. As we approached Daugavpils, my heart pounded as I realized that I was the first and only Schaya to return to the birthplace of our ancestors.

The train pulled into the Daugavpils station right on time and as we stepped down to the platform we were met by two women, Emina's mother, Sofija Mejerova, and Olga Shterensuse, whom Sofija had arranged to have translate for us during our stay. Sofija gave us a very precise agenda for the next day and a half including the fact that the only train to Vilnius leaves at 02:42, that is 2:42 a.m., every other day. So we had much to do in a short time.

At this point I must admit that while I already knew the train schedule to Vilnius and had planned to take the 2:42, I had assumed that it left at 2:42 in the afternoon. Obviously the ear-

lier departure was quite a surprise, and my wife swore that she'd never allow me to make travel arrangements again!

Olga and Sofjia escorted us down Rigas iela all the way to the Hotel Latvia, providing a running commentary about the buildings, their age, and the history of Daugavpils, including the changes in the Jewish population of the city. After we checked into the hotel, Olga and Sofjia led us to the synagogue on the corner of Cietokshna and Lacpleša, just a few blocks from the hotel. It is the only synagogue that remains of the 40 the town had before World War II. Here we met Isaac, Sofjia's husband, and talked about Dvinsk, the Jewish community in Daugavpils, and what little I knew about my family in Dvinsk. The conversation was a mixture of Russian, English, Yiddish, and some German. I showed the family photos I had brought, and wandered around the synagogue. Initially hesitant at allowing me to shoot pictures inside the synagogue because of its condition, Sofjia relented. Although in need of repair and upgrading the sanctuary was simple and beautiful in what it represents to the Jewish Community of Daugavpils.

After visiting the synagogue, we saw the site of the Old Choral Synagogue that was destroyed during the Holocaust, and a former synagogue that is owned by the Jewish community but now houses a bank and offices. We wandered through a beautiful park a few blocks southwest of the hotel, where Isaac pointed out some of the stones in the roadway and walls around the pond that were taken from Jewish cemeteries that were desecrated. Hebrew characters are still visible on some of the stones.

That evening, Olga, my wife and I went for dinner at a small restaurant near the hotel. The home-style Latvian food was served from behind a counter. Each patron chose a portion size, which was then weighed (including the ketchup) to determine the price.

The next morning, Olga took us to the Jewish Community Center on Saknu. Sofjia had arranged for us to meet Abraham Kanolick and

his wife, Leah. Abraham was born in Dvinsk in 1916 and has lived there ever since, except for the time he spent in the Red Army during World War II. Like my father and his family, he was a tailor, so we thought he might know something about the Schayas. With Olga's help, we provided the surnames of some of my relatives, including Schaya, Magaram and Ichlov. Abraham knew of a tailor named Ichlov and of a wealthy family named Magaram, and he provided some anecdotal information about both. I have no way of knowing whether these families are somehow part of my family tree.

After the Kanolicks left, we met Zalman Jacob, the well-known historian and writer from Daugavpils. My wife was able to communicate with him in German and a little Yiddish, while Olga continued to translate from Russian. Zalman was gracious enough to autograph two of his books about Jews in Daugavpils, one that was a gift to us from the Jewish Community and one that we purchased.

At the center we saw the library and the small medical examination room where a young physician volunteers a couple of times a week. Much of the equipment is old and donated from the U.S. and others, including the Jewish community in Stockholm. After giving a small donation to the Jewish Community, we walked back to the hotel where we gave Sofjia clothes we had brought that we thought could be better used by the Jewish community in Daugavpils. We sadly said goodbye to Sofjia, who was planning to take the afternoon train to Riga to visit Emina for the weekend.

Olga continued to escort us around Daugavpils, pointing out historical buildings, streets, and Jewish residential areas of long ago while answering questions as we walked. We cooled off at a beautiful and elegant flower shop that was brimming with orchids, roses, lilies, and tropical plants. As we continued our walk, I wondered whether we were walking the same streets my family had walked about 100 years ago.

We left my wife at the hotel and Olga and I

spent the rest of the afternoon walking from the bank of the Daugava River to the Daugavpils Ledus Halle (skating hall) north of the railroad station and back again. Olga explained that the ice skating hall is the only one of its kind in Latvia and that many wealthy families from Riga send their children there for skating lessons, which most of the children in Daugavpils cannot afford. (It is also likely that the Latvian Olympic ice hockey team practiced there prior to competing in Salt Lake City.) We went in to cool off for a while since the outside temperature was about 95°F and the temperature inside was about 40°F. On the ice were children of all ages performing figure skating exercises directed by two or three coaches – a sight I did not expect to see in Daugavpils. We parted at the hotel where I tried to rest in anticipation of the train ride to Vilnius.

The train station, built by the Russians in 1951 and neglected since then, looked very much like the ones depicted in *The Thief*. At about 02:30 a contingent of uniformed Latvian military police, fully armed and some with dogs, arrived. They fanned out around the station and waited for the train from St. Petersburg. One officer, armed with a laptop computer, sat at the only entrance to the platform. An armed guard stood nearby. The officer haltingly entered information gleaned from our passports into his database and allowed us to enter the platform. We walked across the tracks to the platform, as a cat crossed from the opposite side, and waited. At 03:00 the train arrived and we boarded.

As the train began to move, a contingent of Latvian officers boarded and accompanied us as far as the Lithuanian border. A newly boarded Lithuanian officer checked our passports and we proceeded without delay arriving in Vilnius at about 06:30, barely one hour late.

Early in October a registered packet arrived from the Latvian State Historical Archives in Riga. It contained more information about my family in Dvinsk than I could ever imagine. I now know that my father was one of nine siblings, his grand father was Haim-Ruvim born in 1819 and for whom he was named, and his great

grand father was Meyer Schaya born in about 1795. He lived at the corner of Zhitomirskaya and Zagorodnaya Streets 131/138 Apartment 1. His uncle Leiba Schaya was called up to military service in 1892 and seems to have left no further record. Based on the information I received, I have been able to date and identify all 19 members on an old family photograph taken in Dvinsk in 1899. Spurred by the trip to Daugavpils and the information obtained, I have now entered close to 300 members on our family tree.

Membership Report

Our thanks to the many who so quickly responded to the appeal of our dear president, Arlene Beare, to those who had not yet renewed their membership in the Latvia SIG for the year 2001/2002. We hope to be hearing from more of you. We now have about 100 members, 20 of whom joined this year and we extend a warm welcome to them.

We are also so grateful to Carol Baker, Betsy Thal Gelpart, Howard Margol, Charles Nam and Arnold Tolkin for their generous donations.

Renee Rosen's family names were unfortunately omitted in the Family Finder appearing in our last issue. Her family names are: Yudelsohn, Rummel and Rummel

I will pass on to Renee members who contact me with an interest in these names. We regret any inconvenience caused.

Rhea Plottel

Membership Chair