

Table of Contents

President's Report	1
EDITORIAL	2
My Childhood in Riga by Jack Efrat	2
Memoirs of Isaac Faneroff (Part 1)	8
<i>History of Latvian Jews</i> , by Josifs Steimanis, reviewed by Arlene Beare	19
TIDBITS	21
Toronto	21
Names mentioned in the articles by Jack Efrat and Isaac Fanaroff	23
ADDENDUM: Examples of Archival Documents	24 - 35

President's Report

Arlene Beare

A number of interesting books have been published over the past year and attention to messages sent out from the JewishGen Mall or other messages on the newsgroups will keep you informed.

Ed Anders has edited an English translation of the book, *History of Latvian Jews* by Josifs Steimanis, which is reviewed in this issue.

I have also found extremely useful the three-volume, *Encyclopaedia of Jewish Life, Before and During the Holocaust*, which was originally published as a 30-volume set in Hebrew. There are about 6500 communities listed in alphabetical order. It is published by New York University Press and copyrighted by Yad Vashem.

My term of office has come to an end and I feel that the SIG is now on course to grow and develop. Martha Lev-Zion will take over as president of the SIG at the conference in Toronto in August. She is an historian and very knowledgeable on Latvian history in particular. She has made a considerable contribution to Jewish genealogy and has served as a founding member of the Courland Research Group. I feel that what has been developed over the past few years will be in safe hands.

Elsebeth Paikin will take over as moderator of the newsgroup and David Zeidman has already taken on the job of Webmaster with me as the editor. Membership remains in the capable hands of Rhea Plottel, who has done an excellent job and served the SIG well. Barry Shay has agreed to help Mike Getz with editing the newsletter.

Mike Getz, who founded the SIG, has been the

treasurer since its inception and is the backbone of the SIG. He is totally committed to seeing the SIG move forward and is always ready to step in when there is a hiatus in any department.

Bramie Lenhoff deserves recognition for the excellent work he does moderating the Courland newsgroup and as Webmaster of the Courland Research Group web page. Constance Whippman and I will carry on with the development of the *All Latvia Database*, as it is an integral part of the SIG's activities. Unlike other SIGs who through a number of co-ops can raise money for the acquisition of data, we have to rely on donations and on membership subscriptions.

Our small membership is a cause for concern. The Internet provides researchers with databases and information. We need to grow and I exhort you to go out and make an effort to recruit new members. There are still too few doing all the work and a healthy membership will serve as a base to recruit new officers and ensure continuity.

I would like to thank all the officers of the SIG and members who have given me great support and made the work so worthwhile. The messages of encouragement and thanks have meant a great deal to me.

EDITORIAL

First, let me introduce myself. I am the author of the article *Back to Daugavpils*, which appeared in the last issue of this newsletter. For those of you who have read it, you may have noticed that the title of the article was *Preface*, and that a portion of the article was repeated. Well, Mike Getz apologized to me for the editorial mishaps and in the process persuaded me to be the editor of this wonderful newsletter. However, as Arlene indicated in her report, I really feel that I am merely assisting Mike in some of the mechanical aspects of editing the newsletter and will depend on him for much of the content. In time, as I learn more about Jewish genealogy in general and about Latvia in particular, I hope to provide more substantial aid to Mike.

Jack Efrat's autobiographical article about Jewish

Riga prior to WWII and Isaac Fanaroff's memoirs of life in a small Latvian village prior to WWI and later in South Africa provide poignant reading for those of us who were born in the West. On Mike Getz's suggestion, I have included most of the family names mentioned in these two articles to, hopefully, aid readers in their genealogical research. Part 1 of Fanaroff's memoirs are included in this newsletter and Part 2 will be included in the next issue.

One of my first efforts as editor was to purchase a copy of *History of Latvian Jews*, by Josifs Steinmanis and so I am happy to include Arlene Beare's review of this important book in this newsletter. Arlene's original review first appeared in AVOTAYNU, the International Review of Jewish Genealogy, Vol. XV111, Number 1, Spring 2002.

In the previous issue of this newsletter Rita Bogdanova, an archivist with the Latvian Historical Archives in Riga, presented an overview of how the archives are used and what they contain. The article was based on a presentation Rita gave at the London conference in July 2001 in which examples of official documents were shown along with English translations of important headings on those documents. Since those examples are quite useful in understanding material obtained from the archives, they are included as an addendum to this newsletter.

To continually provide an interesting and informative newsletter, we need contributions from the membership and others who have stories to tell and information to provide about Latvian Jewry and associated genealogy. Please feel free to contact me or Mike Getz either via email or regular mail.

While we hope you find the articles in the Latvia SIG newsletter interesting and enlightening, we'd like to remind you to request permission from the editor or Mike Getz if you wish to reprint an article in part or in whole from this or any other edition of the newsletter.

And finally, we'd like to remind you that opinions expressed in articles are those of the author

and do not necessarily reflect those of the Latvia SIG, the board or the editor.

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MY CHILDHOOD IN RIGA
THE PRE-WAR YEARS
by Jack Efrat

Foreword

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 of 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. 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.

Editors note: These memoirs remain the property of Jack Efrat and cannot be copied or reproduced without his permission.

My first childhood recollection, at about three years old, was of our three-story brown brick building on Valkas Street, built in 1869, with its

very big yard and wooden wall around it. Valkas Street was so small that very few people knew where it was.

Another early recollection was 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 bathtub in the kitchen. The toilets were outside on the landing.

My father was a clerk in the flour factory called "Amermilti" which belonged to his cousin Beril Levitas. The wages were very low and to ensure that we were fed, clothed, and 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 were able to rent a flat at a cheap rate because of the glove factory on the ground floor. 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 santimes (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 on 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 big-

gest attraction, however, was the lake where we watched the swans and collected their feathers. On Sundays, we would often go with my parents and friends to concerts there.

Already in my early childhood, I was aware of being a Jew. When the time came to enroll me in nursery school, my parents decided to be “in fashion” and put me in a German kindergarten. 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 kindergarten.

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 and 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-story building. It was run by our headmaster, Garfinkel. Our Hebrew teacher was Braitbard and our History teacher Piter. Karolina 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, Lova 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 ended 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 on 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.

It was always an important occasion for us whenever Hakoah played and we would try to go and watch. This was easier said than done as most of us had no money to pay for the tickets. We had to find all sorts of gimmicks of how to get in for example, climbing over the fence and sometimes even moving some boards. But it was worth it - to see the boys in blue tops and white shorts. We always shouted in their support. This sometimes resulted in fights between the Latvian boys and ourselves. Lusia Vestermanis was Hakoah's top goal scorer. Other names that come to mind are: Tanchel, Gutman, and Levitan.

As previously mentioned, across the road from our building was a park, the Kaiserlicher Garten. When I came home from school my mother always had lunch prepared for me which I duly ate and then, straight afterwards, I took my satchel with me and went across to the park where I sat down on the bench and started doing my homework. It was so much more pleasant to do it outside in the fresh air than in our small flat permeated with the terrible smell from the glove factory below. Sometimes one of my friends joined me and we did our homework together. In this place, I had my first anti-Semitic experience.

One day, whilst doing my homework, a boy came and sat next to me. I knew right away that he was a German-Latvian as they were lately inclined to wear white socks. He looked over my shoulder at my homework and must have seen the Hebrew

lettering. He started mocking me about being Jewish. I put my papers back into my satchel and started walking away. He also got up and started following me, continuing to insult me about being Jewish. I knew that any minute he was going to hit me. He was older and taller than me. I looked down at the ground for something with which to defend myself. I spotted some stones. I grabbed one and turning around I hit him square in his face. I heard a crack. To my surprise, he started screaming and whining, "My nose, you broke my nose!!!"

I was surprised to see such a sudden change from his being a bully to being a wining ninny. I left him there with his bleeding nose and walked away. I didn't come back to the park for a while.

Outside our building on Vilandes Street was a wide unpaved sidewalk where we often played games with a number of Latvian boys. That is where I picked up the Latvian language, including the slang. At that time I did not know that this would prove of great importance to me at a later stage (during WW2).

As mentioned before, Etzia Ziegler was my best school friend. We got into the habit, after doing our homework, to go for long walks "investigating the town."

Riga is the most beautiful town and has its own character and individuality. They called it, "The Little Paris of the East." Along the Dvina (Daugava) River, in the Old City that was built by the German crusaders in 1201, there are a number of most impressive churches: the Jacob church, the Dome, and the tallest of them all - the Peter Church with its three-tiered structure pointing to the sky. There are still the lovely old castle, the Pulver tower, the very impressive historical Old City Hall known as the "Schwarzhaupterhaus" built in 1477, and many other historical sites. There were also two bridges: the impressive iron bridge and the "Pantom" bridge. How can one describe the numerous parks and boulevards located throughout the city? The Old City had numerous winding streets with fascinating old buildings and lots of little squares.

Talking of the Old City, I remember my Aunt Johanna Levitas who lived on 28 Marstalu Street. From the outside, her narrow two-story building appeared like any other in the area, but the minute you entered, it was a different story; we were impressed by the beautiful furniture and all the paintings hanging on the walls. I recall our occasional visits to my aunt and her husband, Isidor, and their two children: Abi - the son; and Lena - the daughter, both of whom were a bit older than me. We were well received, but I always felt rather uncomfortable because of the wealth, and where everyone was so well dressed. I could not help but be conscious of our poor clothing. A maid in a white pinafore served tea in a silver tea set. There was always a fancy cake with lots of other goodies, which I thoroughly enjoyed.

As I was a shy little boy, I kept rather quiet. On one occasion, somebody mentioned that Jakob (that's me) was good at reciting poetry. Johanna said, "Well, Jakob, let's hear you." I stood up and started declaiming poems by Schiller in German and Rainis in Latvian. They were all so impressed, that they said, "Bravo! Bravo!" After that, I felt much more confident at their home. Before we left, Johanna always gave us something to take home.

Etzia's and my regular explorations of Riga often led us to the harbour. It was very interesting to watch all the foreign ships, which we recognised by their flags. They were mostly Scandinavian, German, and sometimes even British. Incidentally, Riga was not the busiest harbour in Latvia, but rather Libau (Liepaja) was because the latter harbour was never frozen.

Sometimes, we would stand on the street corner watching the cars approach. It became a game to guess their makes. They were mostly Chevs (Chevrolets), Fords, and Opels, all of which had oval-shaped metal logos. The cars at that time looked like little square boxes. There was no high jacking at that time!

Whenever we had time and had saved some money, a number of boys and girls got together and went to the cinema, which we called the "kino." Opposite Vermanis Park was Splendid

Palace and kino Maska. In Marias Street next to the book and stationery shop "Shereshevski" where we bought our school and copybooks was the kino Palladium.

I remember that there was great excitement when the Latvians produced their own film called "Tautas dēls" (The Son of the People). It was a very patriotic film and there was always a very long queue outside this cinema.

With my parents, I sometimes went to the Jewish theatre at the Jewish Club where we saw some great plays: Dos groise gewins (The Great Lottery Win), Der radio spieler (The Radio Player), Der letzte tanz (The Last Dance) with Mickoels(-Vovsi) and other great actors.

Riga was such a cultural town. There was the opera, which we could never afford to go and see, the National Theatre, and German and Russian theatres, besides numerous museums. There were art schools and the conservatories with lots of Jewish students.

The Riga University had a quota of 5% for Jewish students, which was known as the "numerus clauses." The Jewish boys and girls had to study very hard in order to qualify for that 5% quota, sometimes day and night.

A major occasion, especially for the children, was the Solomonski circus in Merkela Street. As in most big European cities, over the weekends there were concerts in the parks. There was so much to see and I led a most interesting childhood!!!

As I got older, I joined Hashomer Hatzair Zionist movement. It was situated with other left-wing Zionist movements, such as Borochoy Youth and Gordonia, in a three-story building on Bastai Boulevard opposite the Bastai Berg and the city canal. I recall that there were big maps of Palestine hanging on the walls where all the new towns and kibbutzim were indicated. We sang Hebrew songs and sometimes danced the Hora. Sometimes, after the meetings we went across the road to the city canal where we hired a boat and went rowing.

There was lots of friction between the three main Zionist movements: the Centre, the Left, and the Right. Hashomer Hatzair were on the left. The General Zionists, Herzlia were in the centre and the Betar (“Trumpeldor”) were on the right. Betar was established by Jabotinsky when he lived in Riga. Sometimes the friction between the different sides came to blows. Jabotinsky was apparently once attacked and, at a later stage, when Ben Gurion visited Riga rotten eggs were thrown at him by members of the Betar.

People who applied to go to Palestine had to wait for their “Sertifikaat” and subsequently went to “Hachshara” to prepare themselves to make Aliya. There were lots of religious Jewish people in Riga and there were two religious parties: The Zionist Religious party headed by Rabbi Nurok and the Aguda party headed by Rabbi Dubin

After struggling and living in poverty for many years, our lot improved. First of all, we managed to get a bigger (two-bedroom) flat in one my cousin Berta Fried’s buildings at 80 Matisa Street at a reduced rate. It was also bright and sunny. What a luxury! Second of all, my mother managed to get a stand at the Treidelmarkt flea-market in Moscow suburb selling knitted items such as pullovers, scarves, gloves, and so on where she started earning a decent living. Often, after I had finished my homework, I would go to the market to help her.

The flea market was a favourite of mine as I always met interesting people there. One day, we came up with what seemed to be a brilliant idea, seeing that the market led to a very busy road where the farmers came into town from the countryside. My Mom put some clothing into a suitcase and I stood along that road. As the farmers passed by, I would hold up my merchandise and they would often stop to buy. There was only one little problem and that was “the Inspector.” I had no licence and was forbidden to sell on the street and he was determined to catch me. I soon realised that the inspector, a rather tall man, always wore a cap with a silver badge. His badge would glisten in the sun as he approached me, and this gave me sufficient warning to escape. But my

luck did not last forever.

One afternoon, whilst waiting in the street looking out for prospective customers, I felt a hand coming down heavily on my shoulder. Spinning around, I came face to face with the inspector who was grinning hideously. “So, you thought you could get away with this forever, didn’t you, boy? But this time, I’ve got you! Now, you’re coming with me!!!”

He escorted me to the nearest police station where I was charged a heavy fine, which my mother was obliged to pay. So ended my short selling “career.” I realised that the reason he caught me was that he was not wearing his cap with the silver badge.

Sometimes my mother sent me to town to buy some material off-cuts from a textile firm called “Muskat” which was located on Kalk Street (Kalku Iela). I was always fascinated as I walked along that street watching the numerous shop-windows of the famous men’s outfitters in Riga, like “Jockey Club” and “Gentlemen,” and also the ladies’ outfitting shops with all the beautiful clothes and hats.

Another bustling street of men’s and women’s outfitters was Marias Street which mostly belonged to Jewish people. My cousin Berta Fried was one of the owners. Whenever prospective buyers walked past the shop, assistants would get hold of their sleeves and pull them in, so they had no choice but to buy.

I always looked forward to the June-July school holidays at which time our parents took advantage to go on holiday to the Riga beach called “Jurmala.” This famous beach stretched for seemingly endless kilometres with lush pine forests running alongside it and the waves continuously breaking against the shores. The idea was for a family to rent a dacha, which is a wooden bungalow consisting of either one or two stories. Because there were only three of us, we had to share a dacha with another family who lived in our block of flats like the Lipman or Shmushkovitz families.

When we arrived, it took a while to off-load and set up the dacha. Every year, at this point, my mother would complain, "Oi, so much work for such a short time - only three weeks! Is it really worth it?" But for us children, there was no question that it was worthwhile. "Mama, how can you say that?" I asked, shocked. "We always have such a good time!" My mom would smile knowingly, for the truth was, once all the work was done, she also enjoyed the break.

On the first morning at Jurmala, we children were up bright and early for the big occasion of our first trip of the year to the beach. We would pack a basket of food to sustain us for the entire morning and we would set off on our daily adventure, our mothers shouting behind us, "Remember to put on sun tan lotion. Do you have hats with you? Please, children, the sun is very strong!"

The holiday on the Riga beach was always great fun for us all...

Author's note:

Readers who require more information about our association or of Latvian Jews in SA can contact me at:

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Memoirs of Isaac Fanaroff

Editor's note:

This contribution to the newsletter was provided by Bernie Fanaroff, Isaac's son. He informs us that the memoirs end abruptly and that some pages may be missing. The original version of these memoirs was personally typed by Isaac Fanaroff between 1976 and 1977, in London, for the benefit of his children.

These memoirs remain the property of Bernie Fanaroff and cannot be copied or reproduced without his permission.

Isaac Fanaroff died in London in 1982 at the age of 82. His sister Sarah died in Johannesburg in 2001 at the age of 97 and his brother Lewis died in Benoni in 1927.

According to the naturalization certificate issued to my father by the Union of South Africa, Number 5 dated 1911, I was born on 1 February 1901, but actually I am a year older because my father made a mistake in converting my date of birth from the Hebrew to the Gregorian calendar. I was named Isaac, after my paternal grandfather. My father was Baruch (Bernard) Fanaroff, son of Isaac and Sarah Fanaroff. Isaac's father was Monus.

By the time I arrived on the scene, my father's only surviving sibling was a younger sister, Shayne. Shayne married Isaac Dobrin and they had, as far as I can remember, two sons and a daughter. My cousins I met for the first and last time when I visited Latvia in May 1935. Since then I have heard nothing of them; they must have perished at the hands of the German or Latvian Nazis. They were apparently intelligent, attractive young people who, thanks to the Fascist regime in Latvia at the time, had no future in their own country and were refused an opportunity to seek one in Palestine.

My mother's name was Hanna Dvayre (Deborah) Mamyoffe (Mamjoffe). Both my parents must have been born c. 1870-1871, my mother dying on 1 August 1934, and my father on 29 December 1945. My mother's father was Mordechai Aizik Mamyoffe, his wife Rochel Miriam. Of their children she was the eldest, the others in order being Leah (married Benzion Wittenberg), Malkeh (meaning Queen, married Zalman Zilevitz (Z=Ts)), and Jossel or Yossel (Joseph), married Hinde.

Leah and Benzion had two daughters and three (?) sons. Malkeh and Zalman had an only child, a boy, and when I visited them in 1935 and went to the shul next door where I used to sit with my grandfather and saw this lad, gentle like his father, standing in front of my grandfather's seat, I saw myself in a flash as I had been twenty-three

years before. It was almost uncanny. Uncle Yossel and Aunty Hinde had two daughters, one of whom frequently wrote to me in English. And now all these gentle people are presumably dead.

The place where I was born was a small village, Dagda in Latvia, near the Russian border, a country of woodland and water. The house where we lived was a part of a larger, barrack-like building with a wide door in the middle leading into a wooden-floored foyer (fee-res in Yiddish, voorhuis in Afrikaans) leading left to our section of the house. In front of the building was a low mound with loose sand and there my brother and I often played by filling tall, cylindrical tins with sand.

Some distance away on our right was a large lake where, I believe, my father used to swim. It was good fishing ground. Legend had it that the ice over it in winter didn't break until some peasant was drowned in one of the holes in the ice made for fishing. When I visited the place 23 years later, before we set out, I described it as I remembered it and was amazed to find that my memory had served me well. As the houses were for the most part built of wood, it was no wonder that during those 23 years the village had burned down about five times.

For intelligent young Jewish men and women in such a rural place in a Fascist country there was no future. Jews were not allowed to own land and farm; foreign trade was state controlled and practically closed to Jews; the higher institutes of learning and training and the professions allowed very few Jews in under a very strict quota system, the old Numerus Clausus common on the continent. Nor could they migrate to Palestine as I wrote above.

My uncle had been to South Africa but returned home and I remember that he visited us some years after we left Dagda. Another visitor we had was a rather swaggering young man who boasted about his horse. He slept over and I had a vague childish feeling that he boded no good to my mother. I couldn't have been more than eight or nine but had already absorbed the mores of the community that it was wrong for a strange man to

stay overnight. My aunt, from what I gathered, was rather spoiled; she was an only girl and good-looking with a youthful slim figure and my mother didn't seem to have much time for her. My father rarely corresponded with her, if I'm not mistaken.

When I was about four or five my father, like so many Jewish young men, left the country to seek his fortune in South Africa. In order to avoid military service they had to steal across the border into Germany. To do that they used the services of agents, many of whom took their money and left them in the lurch. I remember the last night my father spent at home he put in the inner windows and pasted strips of white paper over the frames to keep out the draught. Between the two windows on the sill he had put cotton wool and covered it with long strips of coloured paper with cut-out patterns

I have no recollection of Sarah in these early years and only a shadowy memory of my mother. I can recall walking about or toddling about with a hammer, which I later learnt, I used to call a "babate."

Soon after my father's departure we left for Resekne to live with my mother's parents and I remember vividly lying on my back in a peasant cart and watching the rising sun. I next see myself standing on a wooden settee being divested of my traveling clothes.

With our arrival in Resekne began a more definitive pattern of life which dominated my existence until our departure for South Africa in the autumn of 1912. My grandfather, a rebbe (old-time teacher mostly of biblical and liturgical Hebrew), had a local reputation as a learned Jew and was one of the leaders in the local synagogue, the other being Edith Wulfsohn's (nee Kushlick) paternal great grandfather. Without being fanatical he was strictly observant and I, as his oldest grandson, was expected to keep strictly to the norm.

When I look back at those years I realize what a dominant force the three words "es past nit" (it's not nice, it's not done, it's not the thing, it is not

meet, it's not suitable for you, we expect better from you, what will people say; in fact it carries a decidedly superior, snobbish connotation) proved to be in my life. This simple phrase was probably one of the most inhibiting forces in my social and intellectual upbringing. Not for me to do what other boys did, such as going skating or do ought that shouldn't be done on the Sabbath.

It induced an attitude, not of indifference or detachment, but of I must not. I was reputed to have a "gute kop" and people often used to stand me on a chair and quiz me on my knowledge of Deuteronomy or the liturgy. That must have been when I was about 7 to 9 years of age. Later on I was sometimes referred to as the "krume kop" because I kept my head, as now, to the right. (As if I had scoliosis.) I so much wanted to skate and sleigh but hadn't the gumption to do anything about it. A little later, it must have been after I had learnt to write, I began to realize that I had developed the bad and lazy habit of substituting knowing how to do something for actually doing it, a fault I have suffered from ever since.

Another member of the family who must have had a strong influence on me was my aunt Malkeh, my mother's youngest sister. How well she was educated in non-Jewish, secular subjects I don't know. She knew Russian and successfully ran a haberdashery shop in the main street, but in her knowledge of the Testament she was better than the average Jewish woman. My grandfather, when I was older, often used to quiz us about the Pentateuch or our knowledge of the prophets and I admired her in my childish way. I think she was the first whom I vaguely became aware of as a woman. How old she was I don't know, but I suppose she must have been in the late twenties. As my father sent very little money for our support from South Africa I think she must have contributed a good deal to our maintenance.

When we first arrived at my grandfather's I now realise that we must have gone to live in a room in a house about ten minutes' walk from my grandparents. The house was situated on a street on the way to the local Jewish cemetery. At the other end of the street, nearer to my grandparent's house, on the corner at a cross road, was a public

pump which was a favourite gathering point for the children from the neighbourhood. The road from the pump sloped appreciably and when hard and frozen, was a favourite sleighing stretch. How I used to long for a sleigh, to be like the other boys. But when the thaw came and with the rains it became a sea of heavy, clinging mud.

How long we stayed in this room I don't know. We then went to live in a cottage, which was one of a row of four owned by my grandparents. They all faced a yard, which stretched from the street for about two to three-hundred feet to a small meadow, which ended in a swamp with a stream on the other side. The house fronting the street was occupied by my aunt Leah and her family. Across a dark, windowless and floorless corridor was our one-roomed house with a sleeping alcove. On the other side of it there may have been a stable in ruins and beyond that another house occupied by a bookbinder and further beyond it was my grandparents' house, which was a palace by comparison to ours. It consisted of two entrance corridors, one of which served as a storeroom for water and firewood and the other led to the living room and acted as a barrier to the bad weather outside.

The dark and the stories of robberies and murders we used to hear made us children afraid to visit our grandparents at night and often after finishing my lessons or after staying to supper till about eleven I used to insist on my grandfather seeing me home.

At the back of the house was a lean-to shed and in a corner a very large rock on which we used to smooth and round-off pieces of crock shaped roughly like buttons and with these we played a game of buttons. The last thing I did before leaving the house for South Africa was to go around the back to say goodbye to this rock. In summer or at other times when weather permitted we played a game like rounders, the only game I can remember. So much for the houses, except that each had a large brick oven, which served both for heating the house and for cooking.

Our street was a narrow roadway leading to the main street. Next to our house was the "green"

shul, so-called because it was painted green, and next to that, the Hasidic shul. The Hasidim were the adherents of a Jewish religious movement founded in the 18th century in Eastern Europe, organized into groupings devoted to a particular rabbi and generally stressing pious devotion and ecstasy more than learning. Hasidism was founded by Israel Baal-Shem and appealed specially to the poor and rejected among the Jews, with its stress on the fundamental goodness of man and the beauty of the world. It offered a livable way of life and a democratic sharing of religious experience.

Opposed to them were the Misnagdim (opponents) who laid more stress on the rational, Talmudic view of life and Judaism than on emotion and feeling. Out of curiosity we children often used to visit the Hasidic "hut," as we used to call it, to watch them dancing and singing during certain festival days. And the Hasidim were not averse to celebrating with wine and vodka. The people you see in Golders Green and Stamford Hill, with their long sideburns, long coats and round hats, are present-day followers of various sects or Hasidic groupings.

About fifty yards further our street or lane ran into the main street of the town. It was cobbled and I can still hear the clop, clop of the horses pulling heavily-laden carts or cabs. It was the chief shopping centre, not only of the town but of the district and there the peasants would come driving in from outlying farms and estates to sell their products and buy clothes and other requirements after church. Consequently shops were not allowed to be opened before the end of the service but keen shopkeepers in competition with each other would stand outside the slightly open doors and entice likely customers on their way to and from the church, which was situated a short distance away at a corner of the market.

Both my aunts owned shops on the same side of the street, a short distance from each other; neither was large or opulent, though Aunt Leah and her husband's shop did rather more trade. I used to spend some time in those shops and learnt something of the Latvian language and the ways of the peasants. There was a general feeling of

anxiety if not of actual fear of the peasants in case they got drunk and assaulted the Jews, as often happened. And Jews in those Czarist days did not possess the confidence and the self-respect they show today. It must have been some time between 1905, 1906 or perhaps a year later that we lived through a period of acute anxiety owing to reports of a planned pogrom. And this background of anxiety was a feature of Jewish life in Russia in those days.

One of the highlights of life in our town in those days was the annual parade of the volunteer fire brigade. Preceded by a brass band and followed by many of the townspeople and the children, they marched through the main street and then to the grounds of a ruined castle across the river running through the town. Those ruins fascinated and intrigued me. I felt instinctively there was a history behind them but there was nobody I could turn to, to enlighten me. Later, when I was about eleven or twelve, I managed to get hold of a brochure, which gave some information about the town, its castle and its history.

At the time of the Revolution in 1905 I was just five and my brother about 3½ or 4, yet I remember hearing some shots and telling my brother to go to see what was happening. He came back and told me he had seen men climbing over a wall. I find it difficult to believe that this is not mere imagination rather than memory and yet it all seems so real to me. As real as the general stories we heard about strikers pulling workers out from workshops and shops.

During the general strike my uncle Yossel's fiancée Hinde came on a visit to my grandparents and was forced to stay longer than she had intended as no trains were running. She made a great impression on us children because she brought us each small boxes of marmalade which one of my cousins promptly shared with the chickens. Incidentally, the latter were often kept in an opening under the oven in the kitchen. The scene is still very clear in my mind. And since I have mentioned Hinde let me go on to write about my uncle Yossel.

Yossel had already left home by the time my

mother brought her family to Resekne, for study at Vilno, where he qualified as a pharmacist. I am not too clear about details, but he must have also studied at a Yeshiva, an institution for higher Talmudic studies, for he later became the head of the yeshiva at Kursan on his father-in-law's appointment as rabbi at Mazheik, a small town in Lithuania near the German border.

Later, on the latter's death, he succeeded him as rabbi. At the end of 1912, on our way by train from Resekne to Libau to take a boat, the Perm, to London, we broke our journey to visit him. His first child, a daughter (Chave Laye), was then only weeks old. I visited him again in 1935 when on long leave. By then Chave Laye had grown into a charming, intelligent and very orthodox young woman. For some few years previously we had corresponded in English. She was genuinely religious and enthusiastic and on one occasion referred to her teachers as being inspired by the "ghost" of the Torah! By the time of my arrival both she and my uncle had formed a shrewd idea of my views but that didn't affect the warmth with which I was received or my cousin's efforts to influence me.

When I arrived from Moscow in 1935, my uncle met me at the station. He noticed that I had no hat. Later when we arrived at the house he again saw that I didn't wash my hands before a meal as required by ritual, said no prayers before eating and wore no hat. Being an intelligent and understanding man he said to me with a twinkle in his bright eyes and a knowing smile, "I know what sort of a man you are, but do me a favour. As the local rabbi it will be embarrassing for me if members of my community come in and find my nephew eating without a hat. So do me a favour and wear one when people are around."

It was true about people going in and out of the house without so much as knocking. It was a reasonable request and thereafter I kept a hat near me when eating and carried one when out walking with my cousin. There was a younger daughter, Tirzah (z = ts) who at the time was living in Riga. Before Mazheik, I sent her a wire to meet me at the station at Riga, but as it was a public holiday the wire did not arrive in time and we

never met.

Before I left, my aunt asked me to give regards to a relative of hers, a Dr Steinberg, who had been a member of Kerensky's cabinet as minister of justice after the February Revolution of 1917 and a leading member of the Social Revolutionary Party which opposed Lenin and the Bolsheviks. After the November revolution he went to London. As I was not particularly enamoured of his political views and as there were many Steinbergs in London, I did not bother to look for him. But coincidence took a hand and took me on a visit to King Alfred School at Hampstead. After being shown round the school I was asked to stay to lunch and meet members of the staff and some senior students. One of them was introduced as Steinberg, so I asked him if he was Dr Steinberg's son. He was.

Later that year I saw his father in a bus but did not approach him. But coincidence again intervened when I returned home, for on going to a meeting of the Ort-Oze at the HOD hall in de Villiers Street near Park Station, I found that the occasion was a speech by Dr I. Steinberg. His speech was in two parts with an interval, so when during that interval I saw a big black beard in the lobby I approached the owner of it and introduced myself. He recognized the name and said with a hearty smile, "Ah, you rascal, why didn't you come to see me before?" My aunt had apparently notified him before that I was coming. But to return to the main current of my thoughts...

My mind goes back to the years 1905 to 1912. I have so far said little about my other aunt, Leah, and her husband Ben Zion (Z = ts) and their family. Ben Zion had also been a student of the Talmud, though I don't know much about him except that he was a very nice person. I well remember how fond I was of their children, especially the first two, although I was only about seven or eight when they were born.

During the first World War they were forced to leave their home in the face of the German advance; the Russians made it a point to drive the Jews away, alleging that they favored the Germans and ended up in the Ukraine, where they

lived under appalling physical and economic conditions, as a result of which my aunt ended up with TB. During the Revolution my uncle and the second son landed in a prisoners' camp, as my uncle had been a bourgeois shopkeeper and therefore suspect. Partly as a result, my cousin, although a very young man, ended up bald as a coot.

The eldest boy had left for Riga when quite young. We heard afterwards that he trained as a printer, but we heard little of him afterwards. When I visited them in 1935 my uncle was night watchman at a factory, one of my boy cousins was the editor of a factory journal, and my girl cousins were also working. My aunt looked pitifully thin and emaciated and I can still see her standing and waving me goodbye as my uncle and I walked off to the station, all of us knowing I was not likely to see her again. As it turned out I heard no more from them and from my other relatives in the Soviet Union and it is very likely that they all perished at the hands of the Nazis. Inquiries through the Red Cross brought no information.

And while I am on the subject of relatives let me mention the others of whom I am aware. My mother's father had a brother Wolf, younger than he. Wolf's wife and daughter were frowned upon in my grandparent's home as frivolous and given to fashion seeking. They dressed more fashionably than was thought right.

One incident I remember very clearly. One of Wolf's sons had to report to a military board for medical examination and selection for the army. Now army service in a modern army is unpleasant enough, but for a Jew seventy years ago it was regarded as nothing short of a tragedy. And with good reason, for Jews were discriminated against. Discrimination was practiced on a large scale; wealthy parents managed frequently to obtain exemption for their sons by means of bribes and other influences, with the consequence that more of the poor boys were forced into service to make up the quota for each region.

There had been a time, nearly a hundred years earlier, to be exact 1827, when Tsar Nicholas I

introduced a compulsory service period of twenty-five years for Jewish boys from twelve to eighteen years old and officials of the Jewish communities were required to provide the necessary recruits. Terrific pressures were exerted and again the poor and the weak suffered. Young men maimed and starved themselves to escape the net but mostly to no avail. When the necessary recruits were not forthcoming, press gangs would catch boys off the streets. So you can imagine what effect the calling up of my distant cousin had on the family, although at that time the military service was for only 3 to 4 years. There was also a sister in America whom I had never seen and whose married name I have forgotten. She lived somewhere in Boston or Baltimore and a town in the area.

My grandfather also had some cousins who lived on the highway just on the boundary of the town. One of them had a daughter Rachille who must have been a couple of years older than me. I seldom saw her and never spoke to her as she went to school somewhere in Russia, but to me she became a romantic figure in the Victorian sense, although I had had no access to any books or stories of chivalry and princes and lovely princesses. I often thought about her at the mature age of nine to ten. Years later, in 1935, when I visited my aunt Malkeh, I went to the old shul next door with my uncle and cousin and there I met one of those cousins and enquired after his brothers. I asked if I could visit them and he asked me not to as one of them was dying.

The following day I took a walk to their place, stood a while outside turning over in my mind whether to go in or not, then decided not to and walked on further along the road in the direction of some peasant huts. I entered one of them on the pretext of wanting a drink and was appalled by what I saw. There must have been at the most two rooms, though I remember only one, and this was the living room for all the living beings, the people, the chickens, a pig and other livestock. Possibly there was also a goat. There was no floor and the furniture was most primitive.

On my grandmother's side there were two families: a childless middle-aged confectioner and

baker whom I remember as Uncle Behr, and his wife, and another woman and her son, also bakers. They, I think, were Averbuchs. One of that family went to South Africa and became a farmer in the Free State and was reported to have been gored to death by an ox. I met one of the Bloemfontein Averbuchs and her husband in London in 1937 and again when we all returned to Johannesburg, but I did not manage to trace if we were related. The woman, Mrs. Minnie Hurwitz, is a cousin of Dr Fanny Meltzer and now lives in Johannesburg. Then there are Sam Averbuch of Port Elizabeth and his sister Eva Freedman of Durban, and Isaac Averbuch of Johannesburg. Another cousin of my mother's whom I met recently for the first time lives in Israel.

To return to my father's family: My father had an uncle, Yisroel Lazar, a younger brother of his father. When their parents died, Yisroel was a young boy, so he was brought up by his married elder brother, my grandfather, and his wife, as a brother to my father. This boy was the grandfather of Rosalie, Cyril and Noreen, of Stanley and Mervyn, "little" Cyril and his sisters Fay and Minnie, Jock Joffe and his sister Blumy Kahn, Lily Levin of Brandfort in the OFS, and Avroy and Melanie. My cousin Anne is unmarried. And these are all my sister Sarah's and my relatives I can trace.

My Early Education

Until I came to South Africa in December 1912 the only secular education I received was from a private tutor, of whom I have not even the faintest recollection. Neither do I remember how often and for how long he or she came to the house to teach me. Until we left for England I had a reader and a Russian arithmetic textbook that I had used. My Jewish education I received from my grandfather, who ran a cheder.

It was all individual teaching, the other boys waiting while the one was having his lesson. There were only a handful of boys and from them my grandfather had to eke out a living. As a grandson who lived on the premises I was usually taught last. The curriculum was very simple: liturgical Hebrew, the Pentateuch and the Prophets and probably customs and practices. A few went on to

the study of the Talmud. I began the latter at the early age of about ten and by the time of our departure for South Africa had completed two books of the Talmud and a part of a third and had begun to attend a class in the synagogue on the market square where the rabbi was head of the yeshiva and many if not all of the students, like myself, hoped to become rabbis.

I enjoyed the study of the Talmud, with its closely-knit reasoning and argument and fine intellectual distinctions, which appealed to me and had a profound effect on my thinking. To this day I love splitting hairs, not for itself but because the fine distinctions and nuances appeal to me. One incident still stands out clear in my mind. My grandfather conducted a class of adults in the study of the Talmud in the synagogue next to our house and in the long summer evenings I often used to run barefooted and join the class for a few minutes. On one occasion I ran in just as the class was trying to unravel and explain a difficult passage that I had worked out in the morning so without hesitation or false modesty I proceeded to expound the meaning of that passage. As a result I was henceforth dubbed "the barefooted scholar."

Apart from that and the private lessons I have referred to we received no training or stimulation: no music or art, no literature – not even Hebrew or Yiddish – no physical training or education. I did learn a little modern Hebrew grammar and may have learnt to write a letter in Yiddish but certainly there was no systematic teaching of Yiddish as a language. But there was one compensation. My grandfather used to buy two Yiddish newspapers, "Der Freint" and "Haint" ("Today") and I used to read them regularly, including the weekly installment of the serial stories. I was about ten at the time and often wondered how the writer could know what two people said to each other while alone in a room. As a result of my reading these papers I became interested in and well-informed on events in Russia and abroad, an interest, which I have retained.

There were two cinemas in the town and I visited each one once only, by myself. There were many clubs in the town and I was very intrigued to

know what a club was and what people did there. Yet it never occurred to me to ask anyone about it. In fact, when I look back I feel frustrated when I think of the questions I should have asked but didn't. On the other hand the few simple Jewish melodies my mother used to sing, the gipsy melodies my uncle Zalman used to play on his violin and the Russian and Yiddish songs that "float" around made a lasting impression on me and I often when alone used to make up ("compose" is too immodest a word to use) and hum to myself various melodies in the same minor key.

One Friday night there appeared at the evening service in the shul a very young chazzan (cantor), a young man in the twenties. What particularly impressed me about his appearance was that he wore a modern lounge suit, not the traditional clerical garb. He had a beautiful tenor voice and certain of his melodies in the morning service still ring in my ears. I still sing them and often refer to my mother's prayer book to refresh my memory of the words.

Occasionally a German brass band would oompah its way along the main street. The only painting I remember seeing was the one an artist was busy on in our cheder. He originally drew me along with the other boys with a piece of my shirt, pink it was, sticking out of my "false" trouser pocket, but he apparently changed his mind and painted the bit of shirt out. I have often wondered what had happened to that painting. Has it perished in the holocaust of two world wars or the normal ravages of peace, or is it hanging somewhere for someone like me to stare at the painted figures in a painful attempt to see the living beings behind the blobs?

As I sit at my machine memories come floating up. Some in fact have been hovering over me for some time. Let me capture a few of them.

Our Meadow

I have already mentioned my grandfather's meadow, with its grass and swamp. On one side was a tumbledown wooden fence. Sometimes a pig from the neighboring meadow would squeeze its way through to our side and then all the children nearby would rush at it with sticks and

stones and chase it through the street if it was lucky enough to get away. But the real excitement would come when a straying horse or a cow would wander into our patch and wade into the swamp. Then a rescue party had to be organized.

Poles would be brought and pushed under the unfortunate animal's belly to lift it while other helpers would pull at the tail and the head until firm ground was reached. But mostly the meadow was peaceful, silent except for the buzzing of the flies. In the summer I often used to lie on my tummy and examine grass. I would break off a blade of grass and carefully examine its structure; break the stem off at a nodal point, peel off the enfolding leaves, which sheathed it and note its pale colour. Or I would watch the insects crawling along, especially the ladybirds. We had a special name for the latter: "Moses our Rabbi's beasties," and often intoned an incantation, "Moses our Rabbi's little beastie, bring me a purselet of money." Once or twice a year a mower would come with his scythe and I can still recall the rhythmic swing of his scythe and smell the scent of the freshly mown grass.

And this reminds me of my fascination with sprouting bean plants. Unseen by the other boys of the cheder so that they would not mock me, I cleared a small corner of a small neglected garden. I planted some seeds and watched with awe and wonder the emergence of seed leaves. Where did they come from? And the second pair and the radicle? I would pull them up and look at them closely and watch them grow day by day. But there was no one to satisfy my curiosity and stimulate it.

I also so wanted to go to a real "wald" (forest) and collect the various berries that were to be had for the picking. I used to know the names of these far better than I know them today. Nature fascinated me and to this day I listen to TV and radio talks on birds and animals and plants and yet I can identify few flowers. There must have been a secret naturalist lurking within me, or, shall we say, a potential one!

I Attend a Birthday Party

Whose it was I can't recall. It may have been

my sister Sarah's or my brother Lewis (nicknamed Wizz later). I was called upon to recite a Russian poem, but unfortunately my grandfather heard about it and promptly reprimanded me for doing so undignified a thing! I must have been about ten or eleven at the time, if that.

Bobbe, die Elektritseske!

One afternoon I was at my grandmother's when one of the grandchildren dashed into the house shouting, "Bobbe, die elektritseske!" I ran out after him and was in time to see a green car with brightly polished brass lamps traveling down the road, no doubt carrying a wealthy Russian landowner to see his tailor in the corner house. The tailor or his son I believe later migrated to Johannesburg. His name? Serebro or, in an English guise, Silver. When I visited the town again twenty-five years later there were still no cars to be seen in the main street and I had to make enquiries to find a taxi to take me to uncle and aunt Dobrin in Dagda.

I Get Scarlet Fever

One evening I went to buy sweets at a basement shop and on returning home complained of a sore throat. The following morning I developed a temperature and my mother called the doctor. The doctor, an imposing and important figure in those days and among people of our social standing, came in a carriage or droshky (cab), dressed in a fur coat and carrying a walking stick with a silver handle. As a result I was put into quarantine at home with my mother, so Lewis and Sarah had to stay with our grandparents. But they naturally wanted to see their mother and brother so someone would lift them to the window to look at us. They looked so tearful. As a compensation for being ill my granny sent in tort (a sort of sponge cake) and raspberry jam, a rare treat.

I don't know if my father left for South Africa to seek a fortune, but even if he did – and I doubt it – he certainly didn't succeed. For one thing he was not equipped either with a trade or profession or with the requisite temperament for making a success of life. He despised material prosperity and was too indolent to make an effort in the intellectual and cultural field. He had studied the

Talmud in his youth, and perhaps while still in Russia and certainly in South Africa had read a good deal of liberal and socialist literature and had acquired a good grasp of the basic principles of socialism, but unfortunately he did not realize that the latter did not exclude the necessity for a man to provide for his family.

His father had been a cooper and I don't know if he ever learnt that or any other trade at home, but when he arrived in Johannesburg he became a painter and a plumber, largely under the influence of an older man, a Mr Krasnik. He was not a great success at either owing to lack of application and consequently his remittances home were small and irregular. On one occasion owing to a whitlow he did not write or send money for many months and my mother was worried with anxiety. Although I was young at the time I can recall the tension and anxiety of those months.

During that time and at all times we were supported by my grandparents and my aunt Malke, and to supplement her income my mother used to bring home from a factory cut out paper bags and fold and paste them. For some reason she didn't use a brush, so after some time she developed abscesses on her smearing fingers. How much she earned I don't know, but it was very little in those days.

And now let me tell you a little story about your great grandfather. He was a gentle man, in spite of being a strict observer and smacking and slapping me on occasion for laughing at the boys who were pulling faces while he was teaching me. He was fond of a smoke but was forbidden to do so by the doctor and wary of being seen smoking by my granny, so while we were busy discussing some passage in the bible or the Talmud he would surreptitiously slip me three kopecks and I used to slink out of the house, run to the corner shop and bring back a packet of fags and hand it to him under the table - a conspiracy between grandfather and grandson. But don't imagine my granny was an ogre. She wasn't. She used to persuade Sarah to eat everything, telling her it was a sin to waste food. As a matter of fact, dropping food on the floor was almost tantamount to sinning. Thus does poverty create its own sins and its own code

of behaviour.

Friday Night

I'm on my way to visit my uncle Ben Zion and aunt Leah, about 5 – 10 minutes' walk. The night is bright and still. The snow under my feet is dazzling white and crisp and too cold to melt under each step. The clear air and the crunch, crunch of the snow induce a feeling of exhilaration and well-being. It's after supper, the first meal of the Sabbath, the day of rest and the main street is full of people strolling along taking the air. I am interested in the strollers, especially in the young men and girls walking arm-in-arm. In our puritan home, such practices are frowned upon.

Among the prominent people in our shul community was Reb Abbe Kushlick, the late Isaac Kushlick's grandfather. He was highly respected and shared with my grandfather the distinction of "Learned Jews," a sort of spiritual leader. He was a leather merchant. I vaguely remember when Isaac Kushlick left for South Africa; it must have been around 1910, 1911.

When I was about nine I regarded boys who had reached the ripe age of ten with a mixture of admiration and envy. One of these was Ardin Rubin, whom I subsequently met in Doornfontein when I used to stay at my Uncle Yisroel Lazar Fanaroff. He is the only one of the contemporaries of my Russian days whom I remember.

Reading, Writing, Drawing, and Handwork

It was my grandfather who taught me reading in Hebrew in the old-fashioned way and I don't remember any difficulties here or in leaning Russian from somebody else. Arithmetic, too, must have come painlessly. Of writing, however, I have distinct recollections. I am naturally left-handed, but grandfather firmly removed the pen from my left hand and placed it in my right. Of course he knew nothing of the psychology of left-handedness. It is due to that that there have always been complaints about my handwriting since, and a threat from my Scottish professor of mathematics to fail me in my first year if I didn't write better. My grandfather himself used to say that my handwriting was "wooden."

Drawing, painting and handwork were unknown to me and I first learnt about crayons when I came to South Africa. Nor do I remember seeing any other implements than an axe in my zeide's house. I did learn to chop wood but otherwise I never applied myself to manual work. But it would not be fair to blame zeide for this, rather my own attitude to it and my father's lack of encouragement and patience. Yet my brother was very handy.

Even in those early days I dimly realized that my brother was jealous of me and often accused my mother of favouring me. I do remember her giving me sometimes during the hot summer days some kopecks to buy myself a cold drink at a soda fountain opposite the fire -station. As the first grandson I did enjoy special status in the family. This in some respects gave me greater security and confidence, but on the other demanded of me (not explicitly) a certain amount of circumspection and caution, which have on many occasions proved a decided obstacle to decisive action.

To what extent did the political situation in Russia and the special disabilities of the Jewish people determine my outlook on life and my character? Taken in the context of my home environment it must have had a very positive influence. Looking back I can detect a tendency to compassion, but not a very marked one. I couldn't bear to see boys ill-treating a cat or a dog. Whether that compassion was extended to the pigs is less certain but most likely it was. Actually in our family-sheltered environment we witnessed or heard of very few if any cases of cruelty or brutality and there was therefore little call for the exercise of compassion.

A Flash of Memory

I've just been bought a pair of real trousers with a big lacquer belt with a big, shiny brass buckle. I'm so proud of my belt and keep on buckling it on and taking it off. I am bathing in the river. I can't swim. Suddenly I step into a pothole and begin to flounder. I go under once and come up again struggling. Suddenly a tall policeman with a big round loaf of bread under one arm wades into the water, grabs me with one hand and hauls

me out. After a short while I am none the worse for my experience. Later, in the summer of the year we left for South Africa, I went several times to swim in the river, this time in a wooden booth placed in the water, and after several visits was beginning to swim a little. Had I stayed on I'm sure I would have learnt to swim; as it is I've never mastered the art.

In 1912 we received from my father tickets for Cape Town. A "shifskarte" was something many families waited for most anxiously. It meant a ticket to a new world, free from the poverty and the oppression of the ghetto, the Czarist tyranny, the fear of pogroms and the life of the "luftmensch." I had no such visions. What I remember occupied my mind was the idea of leaving my grandparents and uncles and aunts. I was very heartsore. Before we left we had to go to Lutzin, a nearby town, to get a certificate that we were free from trachoma. It was a Monday. It was a particularly worrying day for me, for the previous Saturday one of the boys at shul saw me break off a blade of grass and threatened to tell my grandfather. I hadn't seen my zeide since then and was afraid of facing him on our return. Fortunately nothing happened.

As was the custom we packed all our bedding including "perenes" and cushions in a huge wicker basket about 4'x3'x1'6", copperware, samovar, candlesticks, pestle and mortar and silver beakers and cups. I don't remember much of the good-byes except that I took a last look at the house and my favourite spots in the yard. I was very sad until the train moved off and the trees and the farms began flying past in the opposite direction. It was all novel to me and I can still vividly recall the excitement and the novelty of a new world swirling into view, and soon my past life became little more than a blur.

Late that afternoon we reached the small town of Kursan, where my uncle was head of the yeshivah, a post he took over from his father-in-law when the latter became the rabbi of Mazheik, a town near the German border and later directly in the path of the Nazi hordes who swept into the country on the outbreak of the War with Russia in 1941. My uncle's first-born, my cousin Chaye

Leah, was then only weeks old. We stayed the night there and the following afternoon we boarded the small steamer Perm to London Bridge.

It was a small boat with the engine on the deck. It was my first contact with an engine other than a locomotive and the polished brass and copper parts and the smell of the hot oil are still vivid in my mind. The passengers slept in their bunks below deck. What my mother did about food and about Kashruth I don't know. She may have taken enough from uncle to last the voyage. Two of the passengers were an elderly Jewish lady and her attractive brunette daughter of 17 – 20. The latter we met subsequently in 1948 as Mrs. Bergman when my wife and I with our small son and my sister came to live in Sydenham, Johannesburg. As soon as the sea got rough some of the passengers became seasick, among them the old lady. As she lay in her bunk she kept on moaning, "Oi, a klog is mir!" A British sailor nearby heard her and in all good faith and innocence said, "No, it's not ONE o'clock, it is TWO o'clock."

The most memorable occasion of that voyage for me was the passage through the Kiel Canal. It was early in the morning at sunrise that we entered the canal and the rays of the rising sun and the coloured canal lights gave it the appearance of a scene in Fairyland, though in those days I hadn't heard of Fairyland or seen any illustrations of it. I was enchanted and the peaked caps and clothes of the German canal workers, so strange to me and different from those worn by Russian workers, made me wonder whether they were people like the Russians. The boat moved slowly through the Canal past the workmen standing on the banks.

When we arrived in London we were met by a representative of Shelter, a Jewish organisation for the welfare of immigrants, and taken to their quarters in the East End. There it was soon found that as my father had sent us tickets we were in no rush and we were soon transferred to a private hotel or boarding house.

We stayed there a couple of days with the Union Castle Line keeping an eye on us. One night my

mother woke up to find a man fumbling with her bedclothes, obviously intent on stealing her wallet. She screamed and the man fled. On another occasion while my brother and I were walking in the street a number of boys rushed up shouting “greenhorns” and struck my brother and ran off. One day I decided to go for a walk from the Union Castle Line office, taking as my point of reference a church in the vicinity.

On my way back I realised that there were more than one church in London. I must have looked weepy for a stranger took me in hand and guided me back to the office. Our last adventure took place on the Friday of our departure. (All U.C. boats to and from South Africa and Southampton left on a Friday at about 4 in the afternoon.) When we arrived on board the U.C. official who accompanied us discovered that he had left our tickets behind and asked my mother for money to go back to fetch them. My mother, suspecting this as a ruse to extract money from a helpless woman, resolutely refused in spite of the entreaties from her children to hand over the money and stuck to her guns. In the end the man left and brought the tickets. I am rather hazy as to whether this incident took place on the way or when we were already aboard because it is a long distance from Southampton to London.

The boat was the Union Castle liner Grantuly Castle, a 7,000 tonner. We immigrants were accommodated in cubicles below deck, with the refectory in front. I still recall the hard biscuits and cheese we used to be served at nine at night. The voyage was uneventful; as far as I remember none of us suffered from seasickness. The only incident of significance occurred when a sailor playing with an old wristwatch my aunt gave me before we left dropped it down a hatch cover on to the refectory floor below. It was an old-style watch with iron lids.

One other memory is of seeing and eating tomatoes for the first time at Las Palmas; I thought they were red apples. I can’t say I relished them then and I don’t very much more now. It was also my first introduction to bananas. I also began to learn English imperceptibly. I can say appropriately “imbibed” it, for I have no recollection of

learning it consciously. I seem to have slid into it and in a short time English replaced Yiddish as my home language in conversation with my brother and sister, though I still spoke Yiddish to my parents, especially to my mother.

End of Part 1

Part 2 of these memoirs begins with Isaac’s Fana-raoff’s arrival in South Africa.

History of Latvian Jews, by Josifs Steimanis

Published by Columbia University Press-East European Monographs, New York, 2002, 220 pp, hard cover. ISBN: 0-88033-493-2. (Regular price \$38/£27. May be bought through the Jewishgen Mall (<http://www.jewishgen.org/mall>) or from Columbia Press at a discounted price to members of the Latvian SIG stating that they are members.)

Reviewed by Arlene Beare

A version of this review was printed in- AVOTAYNU, the International Review of Jewish Genealogy, Vol. XV111, Number 1, Spring 2002.

About the author:

Josifs Steimanis is Jewish, b. ca 1923 in Libau (now Liepaja) but grew up in Dvinsk (now Daugavpils) He fled to the USSR in 1941, returned after the war, and has been professor of history at Daugavpils Pedagogical University ever since. He has written some 20 books and over 100 articles. He is officially retired but continues to teach some classes, including Jewish history

The English-language book on Latvian Jewish history, *The Jews in Latvia* (Bobe, 1971), has long been out of print. A recent book by Josifs Steimanis, published in 1995 in Latvian and Russian versions, has now appeared in English translation. The translation was done by Helena Belova, and extensively edited by Prof. Edward Anders, who also added two chapters and expanded or revised many sections.

The first quarter of the book covers the late Middle Ages to the end of World War I. Each of the three provinces is covered in a separate chapter, reflecting their initially separate political histories. The second quarter covers the First Latvian Republic (1918-1940), including the Ulmanis dictatorship (1934-1940). It also includes chapters on Jewish political parties, cultural, educational and charitable organisations, sports clubs, newspapers and scientists, scholars and artists. Of necessity, these chapters are not confined to independent Latvia, but extend back into the 19th century.

The third quarter deals with the first Soviet occupation (1940/41), the German occupation and the Holocaust (1941-1944/45), and the second Soviet occupation (1944/45-1991). The first two of these chapters have been considerably revised and expanded by the editor.

The last quarter comprises a brief chapter on Jewish religious communities, Jewish mentality, and Jewish-Latvian relations, followed by two chapters that were not in the original book. An anonymous report, *The Jews of Latvia 1919-1940* was written in 1941/42 by one or more unidentified Latvian Jews in the USA for some Jewish organization (WJC?, AJDC?). It contains a wealth of statistical tables, along with a discussion of Latvian government policies toward Jews. Prof. Andrew Ezergailis, who was the first to discover this report in U.S. State Department files, has provided some background and critical comments in Chapter 13. Readers are advised to read Chapter 14 and then the discussion in Chapter 13.

Recurrent themes throughout the centuries and dealt with in the text are the struggles, under different regimes, for residence rights, economic rights, religious freedom, and education, and the struggles against anti-Semitism, discrimination, and deadly threats such as pogroms and the Holocaust. Slow progress alternated with small or large steps backward, caused by whims of rulers or conflicting interests of nobility, burghers, and tradesmen. The ups and downs of Latvian-Jewish relations are also covered. There will always be a difference of opinion depending on which group one belongs to but there is an even-handed analy-

sis of the political figures involved.

The Zionist movement started in Russia at the end of the 19th century and many Latvian Jews joined these movements. A number of them such as Rabbi Mordechai Nurok (leader of Mizrachi) immigrated to Israel and were active in the foundation of the State. There is a good analysis of the different parties and their policies and the Betar, Mizrachi and Histadrut parties are mentioned.

The Karlis Ulmanis regime from 1934-1940 is discussed from different points of view, given that three different authors have their say in this book. Steimanis has a rather benign view of Ulmanis, and notes that at private festivities, Jews often toasted "the old man" Ulmanis. But the anonymous authors of Chapter 14 are harshly critical, accusing the Ulmanis government of seeking the economic ruin of Jews. Ezergailis takes the middle ground, criticizing Ulmanis for his suppression of democracy and nationalization policies but defending him against charges of anti-Semitism.

Although there were anti-Semites in his party and government, Ulmanis himself was no anti-Semite. He outlawed Perkonkrusts, the major anti-Semitic organization in Latvia, and threw the leadership into jail. He banned the publication of anti-Semitic literature and allowed Latvia to be used as a transit country for Jews escaping from Nazi Europe. He placed the Jewish school system in the hands of his orthodox friend Mordechai Dubin (Chabad), a move that was greatly resented by liberal Jews, but financial support by the state continued undiminished. His nationalization policy, aimed at increasing the state's role in the economy, had the greatest impact on Jews, who owned some 48% of all big businesses, but it was also aimed at German, Russian, and even some Latvian businesses.

The Holocaust chapter, as written by the author, himself a Latvian and a Jew, is very descriptive and moving. One cannot read about this period without a surge of emotions that embraces the wanton loss of life and regret for all those living, breathing human beings who were subjected to such inhumanity. The Latvian role in the Holo-

caust is discussed at length, from callous murderers who killed tens of thousands to hundreds of brave people who tried to save more than four hundred Jews, sometimes paying with their own lives for their good deeds.

Genealogists will find a wealth of Jewish names in the book and this will be of value to many who may find missing relatives mentioned. The book also answers many of the questions posed by Latvian-Jewish researchers about the early Jewish communities and their way of life. The rules of military service are among other interesting subjects that are discussed. Daugavpils, where the author grew up (he was born in Libau now Liepaja) is written about in detail and as Latgale is often neglected in other texts, he gives a great deal of useful and interesting information. The historical details of the secession of Latgale from Vitebsk Province to Latvia in 1918 are clearly elaborated in the text.

There is an extensive and up-to-date bibliography of mainly Russian or Latvian entries providing many sources unknown in the West. Anders has also added an 8-page index that was not in the original book.

I can thoroughly recommend this book to all who are interested in the history of the Jews of Latvia. There is a wealth of information that makes it not only a good and interesting read but also a reference book of value. Students of Russian history will find many interesting facts and details that are not found in the other Russian history books. The views expressed will of necessity generate discussion and dissension which can also be useful for clarification.

TIDBITS

Howard Margolies provided us with the following extracts about two witnesses from an 1844 court case held in Pusalotas, Lithuania. Perhaps some readers have an interest in or relationship to the witnesses highlighted.

Elias GUTMANOVICH, 35 years old, literate in Yiddish, belongs to community of the town Ja-

kobshtat, Latvia living according to his passport, in tavern Diciunai of Pusalotas parish, married, with children. Sells liquor.

Shlioma IOFE (JOFFE??) son of Movsha, 25 years old, literate in Yiddish, from the community of the town of Bauska, Latvia living in tavern Kruopine, a tavern-keeper, married, no children.

Nickolai Butkevich, who has been keeping us informed on Jewry in the former Soviet Union, provided the following:

Latvian Jews Protest Decision to Build Gas Station on Site of Former Synagogue

Latvian Jewish leaders are protesting a vote by the Riga City Council to allow the construction of a gas station on the site of what used to be a synagogue before it was burned down by the Nazis, according to a June 8, 2002 article in the Russian language newspaper *Chas*, which is published in Latvia. Jewish leaders are planning to appeal to the president of Latvia to reverse the decision. One leader complained to *Chas* that the community was not even consulted before the vote was taken.

Additionally, Nickolai provided the following summary of the article entitled, "Modern accents in the subject of the Jews" and published in the Latvian newspaper Diena on 22 May 2002.

The study of Jews in Latvia and their history has moved into a new phase now that Latvia has restored its independence, a notable Jewish researcher has said. In a newspaper commentary, historian Leo Dribins reviews the history of publications about Jews in Latvia, noting that for a long time they were primarily anti-Semitic in nature. The author added that a modern understanding of Jews and the Jewish community includes comprehension of the fact that the Holocaust must never be forgotten.

Toronto

Traditionally the Latvia SIG reviews activities, elects its officers and discusses matters of com-

mon interest at annual meetings of the International Association of Jewish Genealogy Societies (IAJGS). This year it is being hosted by the JGS of Toronto and I look forward to meeting our members there.

Our annual general meeting will be held at the conference venue on Sunday August 4th, commencing at 1 pm and closing at 3:15 pm. We will be taking leave of Arlene Beare whose leadership and initiatives have added significantly to our resources. Her term in office led to major advances in our website, the online discussion group and our relationship with the Latvian Historical Archives in Riga . It has been a fulfilling term and we look forward to her continued involvement in our development and progress.

Martha Lev-Zion, a long-standing member of our SIG has accepted nomination as the incoming president. She is an authority on important aspects of Jewish genealogy in Latvia. Martha lives in Israel and we look forward to meeting her in Toronto. She will present a paper entitled, "Origins of the Jews of Courland" at the plenary session Thursday August 8th.

We are fortunate as well to welcome Barry Shay as editor of this newsletter. He has much to offer and will add strength and capability to a core activity. Barry has recently visited Latvia and is an important addition to a new generation of members. The benefits of his involvement are reflected in the quality of this issue.

Our SIG is hosting a conference luncheon on Tuesday Aug 6 at 12:30 pm. I will talk briefly on "Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus – Common Interests and Affinities of Jewish Communities." I hope to illustrate the important relationships between communities and families apparently separated by today's or yesterday's borders.

As is customary we welcome any suggestions or topics you would like to see discussed at the annual SIG meeting on Sunday. Please email your thoughts to mgetz@erols.com or fax to 301-530-3618 under my name. My treasurer's report will be delivered at the Sunday meeting

I want to thank our core of long-standing members and those who have recently joined us.

In conclusion, may I remind you that it is time to renew your membership if you have not already done so. And for new members, please go to the JewishGen Website, <http://www.jewishgen.org/latvia/>, and complete the membership form. In either case, please mail the membership material to Latvia SIG, 5450 Whitley Park Terrace, #901, Bethesda, MD 20814.

Mike Getz
Treasurer
mgetz@erols.com

Names mentioned in the articles by Jack Efrat and Isaac Fanaroff

Efrat	Fanaroff	
Tanchel Gutman	Abe Meltzer	Isaac Bresgi (Harry, Alec, Sarah)
Levitan	Shalekoff	Barney Bresgi
Johanna Levitas	Blumu Kahn	Boruch Bresgi
Shmushkovitz	Jock Joffe	Bertie Ostrofsky
Lipman	Reuben Meltzer	Philip Toker
Berta Fried	Mervyn Fanaroff	Alec Hirshowotz
Lena Levitas	Stanley Fanaroff	Sam Joffe
Abi Levitas	Rosilie, Cyril, Noreen Fanaroff	Lena (Lipke) Joffe (Abe, Minnie, Barney)
Tamara Paikin	Yisroel Lazar Fanaroff	Solly Goldman
Isidor Levitas	Isaac Averbuch	Philip Joffe
Goledjetz	Eva Freedman	Rose Wainer
Ester Grinman	Sam Averbuch	Izzy Wainer
Mogilnitzk	Fanny Meltzer	Ike Kuper
Gorodinski	Minnie Hurwitz	Celia Kuper
Leo Gurevitz	Averbuch	Teddy Gordon
Lowa Palei	Wolf Mamyoffe	Seymour Heyman
Ester Grinman	I. Steinberg	Herbert Franke
Grisha Rekach	Tirzah ???	Grigulevitz
Garfinkel	Edith Kushlick	Emanuel Meltzer
Etzia (Yeheskiel) Ziegler	Edith Wulfsohn	Harry Solomon
Misha Risker	Ben Zion Wittenburg	Polly Epstein
Berta Schoenfeld	Zalman Zilevitz	Max Toker
Bertil Levitis	Hinde Mamyoffe	Lily Meltzer
Marget Vestermanis	Malkeh Mamyoffe	Isaac Bresgi (Harry, Alec, Sarah)
Jasha Lossos	Yossel Mamyoffe	Barney Bresgi
Steven Springfield	Leah Mamyoffe	Boruch Bresgi
Zwi Segal	Rochel Miriam Mamyoffe	Bertie Ostrofsky
Zundel Per	Mordechai Aizik Mamyoffe	Philip Toker
Jack (Jakob) Efrat	Hanna Mamyoffe	Alec Hirshowotz
Luisa Vestermanis	Shayne Dobrin	Sam Joffe
	Isaac Dobrin	Lena (Lipke) Joffe, (Abe, Minnie, Barney)
	Lewis Fanaroff	Solly Goldman
	Sarah Fanaroff	Philip Joffe
	Bernard (Bernie) Fanaroff	Rose Wainer
	Isaac Fanaroff	Izzy Wainer
	Lily Levin	Ike Kuper
	Krasnik	Lily Meltzer
	Abbe Kushlick	Harry Solomon
	Isaac Kushlick	Polly Epstein
	Ardin Rubin	Emanuel Meltzer
	Salkow	
	Shapiro	
	Grigulevitz	

ADDENDUM

EXAMPLES OF ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS