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President's Report

Shalom, Chaverim!

This is my first missive to you as your newly elected president. I want to thank you for your confidence in electing me at the International Conference in Toronto. Although Arlene left huge shoes to fill, I will try my best to maintain her high standards!

I would like any of you who have ideas about what different directions you would like to see the SIG include, to write to let our committee know about them. At Toronto, we decided to develop an advisory committee of members who would help to steer the SIG and to help implement new directions, ideas and projects. For all of us to function in the best possible way, we need your input and cooperation. My idea for this SIG is that it should be run by and for its members and not by a directorate pulling it

along.

As I mentioned at our well-attended meeting in Toronto, over 98% of the Jews in Latvia were murdered in the Shoah. Those numbers represent the largest percentage loss of any Jewish community in the world during the Shoah. Our remaining numbers are few. We will have to work even harder on the various projects that we undertake to rebuild the history of our communities, to help rediscover the lives of our forefathers, and to make sure that every Jew who once lived in present-day Latvia will have his name remembered and his life described. To do this, we need all the resources at our disposal. We need you to volunteer both your time and your money in order to capitalise on those resources. Help us to help you! Together let's make our SIG a valuable contributor to the knowledge of Jewish genealogy!

I look forward to a challenging and fruitful year

with you! May this New Year bring all of us peace, progress and health!

Martha Levinson Lev-Zion
email: Martha@bgumail.bgu.ac.il

Treasurer's Report

As of July 1, 2001 the bank balance was \$4,159 and as of June 30, 2002 it was \$4,429. Our income during the period totaled \$2,650, which included \$2,000 in membership dues and \$650 in donations.

We spent some \$2,000 on research and preparing databases. Newsletter expenses amounted to \$700; only two issues were published during the year. Approximately \$300 donated to the SIG by Jewishgen is not yet on hand. We should consider maintaining membership of the USHMM and YIVO as well as the United Council for Soviet Jewry.

I would like to acknowledge the work and achievements of Arlene Beare during her term of office. Regrettably she could not be here, but I am sure I speak for all in thanking her for so much done, so well. We are happy to have her commitment to be involved and supportive as only she can.

Arlene advises that exciting new databases are in the pipeline - possibly further material from the 1897 All Russian Census. Earlier this year the 1897 data for Rezekne was launched together the Riga Passport Registers for 1900 that covered those visiting Riga from other parts of the Russian Empire.

Constance Whippman has been the architect and builder of some of our most important records and database. We remember with her, and honour the memory of Micheal, a wonderful partner in significant accomplishment.

Our gratitude goes to Warren Blatt and Micheal Tobias of Jewishgen for getting these records into its search engine, making them accessible and meaningful. There is also important work in progress on the All Latvia Names Project as well

as the Family History Project being run by Prof. Ferber of Riga University.

Work to add to and develop our databases continues. Looking at the future, and expressing a personal view, we need to consider co-operation with the Belarus and Litval SIGs. Significant elements on Dvinsk (Daugavpils), Rezekne and their major peripheries are listed on the Belarus site. The Minsk Archives has major repositories of interest to us.

The history and tenure of Jews in Latvia is perhaps best symbolised in efforts to memorialise those who were lost. But their memory will not be served by documentation alone. We need to make serious, planned efforts, as others have, to identify and record locations of Jewish interest in Latvia. Those of us with an interest in Latvian Jewry must endeavor to reach the highest level of Governmental, Civil and Academic leadership to support such an initiative.

A first step should be to prepare a map that will reflect the relevant sites and locations and to vigorously promote their maintenance and preservation in Latvia. A mission of such importance cannot be left to even the best-intentioned historians alone.

I have earlier acknowledged the generosity of members who contributed directly to the SIG. I need to mention the quite significant contributions made by individuals directly that have facilitated the creation of a number of important databases. We owe them a special debt of gratitude.

Clearly we will need to define our funding goals and decide how best to achieve them. I have suggested as possibilities the identification and mapping of Jewish sites in Latvia and a joint project with the Belarus SIG on locations of common interest.

Rhea Plottel has overseen our membership record, including our Family Finder as well as reliably providing the mailing labels for our newsletter - always in a spirit of building and supporting the Latvia SIG.

Leslie Leven edited two of our newsletters. Unfortunately, there were more urgent needs on her time and we are happy to welcome Barry Shay as editor. He was responsible for the last issue and we look forward to his editorship and the contribution he can make to our larger goals.

I also want to acknowledge, with appreciation, the support of our members whose interest and involvement, however modest, has helped to structure our achievements as a whole.

Mike Getz
IAJGS, Toronto
August 2002
email: mgetz@erols.com

Editor's Comments

Marsha, Mike and I wish all of you a very happy New Year. Shana Tovah!

While the Latvia SIG Newsletter comprises articles pertaining to Latvian Jewry and its associated genealogy, its readership and its contributors constitute a diverse group. The articles in this issue reflect that diversity.

First, we have Brad Elterman's account of his recent trip to Riga and the events leading up to it. His story is especially interesting to me since we appear to have taken the same path from similar starting points, motivated by similar circumstances. Like him, I first realized I had roots in Dvinsk when I found an old photograph with the photographer's name, W. Steinberg, Dwinsk, on it.

Ed Sternin was referred to the JewishGen web site to answer his questions about the events surrounding the liquidation of Riga's remaining Jewish population as the Red Army approached in the spring of 1944. He couldn't find the answers he sought at that site, so he turned to the Latvia SIG membership. Jack Efrat, who is writing a novel covering those events, responded with a detailed chronology based on his own personal experiences during that period. I am pleased to include both Ed's questions and Jack's response in this issue.

Professor Dov Levin, of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, addresses the controversy concerning the fate of Latvian Jews who were deported to the Soviet Union in the early years of WWII. His detailed article supports the case that the Jewish exiles faced a far worse fate than people of other nationalities who were deported from Latvia.

The article is based partly on the findings of the following two studies: Dov Levin, "The Struggle for Survival in Siberian Exile—History of Latvian Jews Exiled to the Interior of the USSR in the Second World War," in Geoffrey Wigoder, ed., *Contemporary Jewry—Studies in Honor of Moshe Davis*, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Jerusalem 1984, Hebrew section, pp. 125–146; Dov Levin, "Arrests and Deportations of Latvian Jews by the USSR during the Second World War," *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 16, no. 1, New York, 1988, pp. 50–70

This newsletter doesn't contain the references and sources Professor Levin provided in his complete manuscript; if you wish to see that material, contact me and I will send it to you via email.

I am happy to include the conclusion of Isaac Fanaroff's poignant memoirs. Part 2 begins with his arrival in South Africa as a young boy in the early part of the 20th century and ends when Isaac was a young man completing his university studies. Unfortunately, at this time we have little information about the remainder of Isaac's long and productive life.

As in previous issues of this newsletter, Nikolai Butkevitch has provided interesting information about Jewish life in the former Soviet Union (FSU). Of particular interest is the dearth of information provided by Latvians about Nazi war criminals in response to solicitations by the Simon Wiesenthal Center.

In Daugavpils last summer, I learned that Jewish men from Dvinsk who served in the Red Army had a much better chance of surviving the war than the Jews who remained in Daugavpils. And on a wall at the Jewish Community Center on Saknu iela I saw many photographs of Jewish

Red Army heroes from Dvinsk, taken at an awards ceremony a few years ago. One of the heroes was a gentleman named Abraham Kanolik, who I had the pleasure of meeting just a short time earlier, so I was excited to receive the database containing the Jewish fighters from Dvinsk. Sure enough, A. Kanolik was on the list and I felt yet another attachment to that far-away place called Dvinsk. (My meeting with Mr. Kanolik is described in the article *Back to Daugavpils*, which appeared in the April newsletter.)

We thank Shlomo Kurlandchik for providing this database from the Archives in Shefayim of the Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel to our president, Martha Lev-Zion.

Please remember to request permission from me or Mike Getz if you wish to reprint an article in whole or in part from this or any other edition of the Latvia SIG newsletter. Also, I'd like to reiterate that opinions expressed in newsletter articles are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Latvia SIG, the board, or the editor.

Finally, I'd like to remind all members of the Latvia SIG that membership fees are now due. I have included a membership questionnaire at the end of the newsletter that can be used for renewals and for new memberships. Please take the time to fill it out and return it to the address listed on the form. Alternatively, PayPal can now be used to submit membership fees to the Latvia SIG. See Page 27 for details.

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Latvia, Lithuania and Belarus: Affinities and Common Interests

Presented at the
22nd IAJGS International Conference
Latvia SIG Luncheon
August 6th 2002

By
Mike Getz

On behalf of the Latvia SIG, I would like to

welcome you to this luncheon and very much appreciate your attendance. Let me also welcome Martha Lev-Zion, a dear colleague, as the newly elected president of our SIG.

The roots and links of a family often reach beyond most borders, as we know them. They are rather defined by access and common interests. In this context, Jewish identity determines a set of needs and common interests that can only be accommodated among Jews. It is however necessary to define issues of affinity, common interests and access.

The practice of Judaism was inseparable from the Jewish way of life for most families until well into the twentieth century. Communities therefore required the services of Rabbis, Cantors, Shochtim and teachers. They would have pivotal roles in the Jewish life cycle as well as sustaining and maintaining institutions of learning and other communal activities. We will note examples of their mobility and influence.

Latvia today has three major provinces. It is divided by the river Dvina, which course from Riga on the Baltic, deep into Belarus and White Russia. Kurland is west of the Dvina and Latgale is to its east. Riga and its region of Livonia constitute the third province of Latvia in its current borders.

Latvian Jewry is a part of Jewish migration in Eastern Europe over the centuries. But it also enjoyed a distinctive pattern of its own. German Jews first settled Kurland in the 16th century. Riga attracted Jews from White Russia as well as those of Kurland in their Germanic mould. Dvinsk, with its background in the Vitebsk gubernia, would be home to a large Jewish community strongly linked to today's Belarus and Lithuania. Liepaja, Kurland's largest city was also a haven for many Litvaks. Under the Russian Empire, Kurland was excluded from the Pale of Settlement.

I recall as a child in South Africa hearing about friends and family in Subate with another tier in Rakishik (Rokiskis) and Abell (Obelai) of today. Later I would learn that in terms of Jewish

linkage these three locations – Rokiskis and Obelai in Lithuania and Subate in Latvia were almost neighbors. The Getz family reputedly is Rakishiker, although I have thus far found no records to substantiate the claim. But I do know that Subate drew its shochet from Obelai and its chazzan from Rokiskis. Together with the teachers who came they were all part of the Lithuanian Jewish renaissance.

In a regional sense it was Latvia's three cities: Riga, Dvinsk and Libau that were prized destinations for different reasons and from various locations. Clearly Riga, both a cosmopolitan city and major port had universal appeal. Dvinsk, Daugavpils today, was perhaps the most Jewish of the cities, second only to Riga in size. Jews there were prominent in vibrant commercial and industrial sectors. Dvinsk was originally in the Vitebsk gubernia before the Russian Revolution of 1917. It was an important Jewish center of opportunity. Libau, Liepaja today, a major port on Latvia's western Baltic seaboard would draw its Jewish population from Kurland, but as we shall see, not only from there.

Throughout the 19th century significant numbers of Lithuanian Jews entered Kurland. The general area of Bausk in Latvia was also an important Jewish location in Lithuania, its Latvian status only occurring in 1919. There were no Yeshivot in Kurland. Rabbis and teachers were increasingly brought from Lithuania. Wealthy Kurlanders sent their sons to Slobodka and Mir and sought husbands for their daughters among students at these and other Yeshivot. Remarkably, the profoundly Germanic Jews of Kurland accepted the traditions of Vilna without conflict. It is important to note though that Bar-Aron Nurock, Chief Rabbi of Liepaja from 1907, came from a well-known rabbinic family in Mitau. His predecessor was Yehuda Leib Kantor, from St. Petersburg originally, destined to be the chief Rabbi of Riga. Rabbi Kook, Israel's first Chief Rabbi, served in Bausk, was born in Grivo outside Dvinsk where he was the pupil Rabbi Reuvele Dinaburger, himself a major figure.

My wife Hilda's family, the Shaffs, have beginnings in Shkoud, at one time part of Kurland

but now in Lithuania. The shtetl is 50 or 60 km from Liepaja. Her paternal grandfather Boruch ben Tsiyon, qualifies as a baker, marries at the age of 21 and moves to Liepaja. In the early 1900's he takes his eldest son Leo, aged 12, to South Africa to keep him from 25 years in the Russian Army. Hilda's father, Falk, a younger brother would follow some years later. The series of moves beginning in Shkoud were a key to this family's continuity.

Dvinsk, now Daugavpils, was the most Jewish of Latvia's cities. It had a developed infrastructure of commerce and industry where Jewish owners and workers were numerous and prominent. Moshe Amir describes it in the *Jews of Latvia*, "The Dvinsk to which memory returns is the famed City and Mother in Israel, teeming with Jews, hospitable beyond belief, bubbling with communal activities." Positioned on the Dvina between Riga and its course into Belarus, Dvinsk was an important rail, road and river junction. Sons and daughters of the region, where the city was pre-eminent, traveled from far and wide to work, study and experience the urban life of a Jewish community. Travel to the city from adjacent Novo-Alexandrovsk passed through three gubernia – Kovno, Kurland and Vitebsk.

Dvinsk was famous for its Rabbis. Their distinction in Latvia and beyond was unrivalled in the last century or so. Meier Simcha Hacoen was the Rabbi of Misnagdim and Joseph Rosen, the Rogachover was Rabbi of Dvinsk's Chassidim. There were no disputes between the Rabbanim or their followers, differences being minor in synagogue usage and the reciting of some prayers. Meier Simcha was tall, friendly and widely respected. I remember his picture in South African homes, always in a place of honour. The Rogachover was short, with a noble head and shoulder length hair. Chaim Bialik is reputed to have said of him, "From the brain of the Rogachover one could make two Einsteins." Meier Simcha was deeply loved for his courage in times of adversity. At the urgent behest of his community he turned down an invitation to Jerusalem.

Latgale, Latvia's eastern province, with its

communities of Glazmanka, Gostini, Dagda, Lutzin and Varklan, were in the provenance of Dvinsk, which with Rezekne were in the Vitebsk gubernia. This is apparent in marriages, trade and Judaic traffic of the area – mostly but not entirely in the tradition of Vilna. Equally the influence of Dvinsk, its resources and rabbis, spread into Kurland especially the area of Illukste, Subate and Akniste.

Riga is a centerpiece in the history and development of Latvia and is therefore pre-eminent in shaping the presence and history of Jews in Latvia. They did have a presence in Riga throughout the nineteenth century and earlier but it was always subject to many constraints. The first Jews in Riga, from whom the community developed, came from Kurland - their German culture and background fitted the prevailing and established Germanic environment. That influence would dominate the development of early Jewish schools; the inclusion of Russian only occurs late in the 19th century.

The Jews of Reissen came from the Pale, arriving from the gubernia of Minsk, Vitebsk and neighbouring White Russia in the northeast. Timber trading along the Dvina brought Chabad Chassidim, among them the Schneiersons of Lubavitch, to Riga. There they would add to Chassidic practice the dedicated intellectual rigor of Talmudic study that characterized Litvak Misnagdim and the tradition of Vilna. Schneierman would bring the special potential of Lubavitch to the United States from Riga.

It is in Riga that there is a full blossoming of affinity rooted in the diverse cultures and traditions of Germany, Lithuania and Imperial Russia. Mendel Bobe, in that fine study *The Jews of Latvia*, gives a detailed account of Riga Jewry's achievement in the arts, sciences, commerce and industry. He recalls synagogues that were hosts to great cantors and a remarkable tradition of classic choral liturgy. Especially remembered is Isaiah Berlin, whose brilliant work as a historian and scholar are uniquely distinguished in our time. He would attribute his achievements and recognition to an upbringing rich in German and Russian culture built on a

platform of Jewish tradition.

As with other communities, Latvian Jewry retained its diversity and community in transition and migration. Throughout our world we have echoes of identity and community in their landsmanschaftn, synagogues, mutual-aid associations and the cemeteries they maintained. These testimonies of their beginnings are a valuable and valued component of the complex affinity, distinct identity and proud heritage that Jews of this region share with Jews everywhere.

My Trip to Riga

By

Brad Elterman

I was never a religious person. In fact, I never had a Bar Mitzvah or attended shul more than a couple of times.

Last month, as I stood in front of the Torah at the old Riga shul and as Cantor Zeev Shulman prayed for my grandparents, Zeev and Chaju Rivka (Ida) Elterman, I felt that it was a special moment in my life; one that will remain with me always. As Cantor Shulman prayed I tried to get a sense about life in the old country and how difficult it was for my grandfather to leave his family, his ancestors and his language in the old shtetl of Griva.

My grandfather Zeev Wolf Elterman arrived in Manhattan on July 4, 1904. I never knew him since he passed away in 1933. Even though I did not know him, I have always felt his presence in a way that could not be placed in words. I know that if it was not for his long hours of tireless work I would not have the freedom and lifestyle that I enjoy today. I know that he gave up everything in Latvia for his dear family.

Both my parents are deceased and I have found it increasingly important to learn more about my roots. Where did I come from? How did my grandparents get here? Where did they live? My father never spoke about his parents and when I would ask about where they came from and what they did he said that they rarely spoke about it, because life was so difficult back in the Old

Country.

According to Ellis Island documents, he arrived with \$13 in his pocket, a rich man compared to others on the boat. He had to travel solo and leave my grandmother Ida and my two aunts, Mollie and Anna, back in the village since he could not finance a trip for the entire family.

I was always under the impression that all of my grandparents' travel documents were lost when my aunt passed away. However, when my cousin Roy died a few months ago we discovered these treasures in his New Jersey apartment.

Uncovered were my grandparents' wedding contract, the Katuba and my grandfather's travel pouch. Inside the pouch was an old faded photograph of a young girl with a stamp showing the photographer's name, W. Steinberg Photography, Dvinsk (Dvinsk).

Dvinsk? Where is this? I was always under the impression that my family came from Russia, but never knew exactly where.

Also in the pouch was the long missing passport. In the passport were several stamps and a folded faded document. With the help of Paul Berkay, I was able to learn more about the documents and that my family came from Dvinsk or actually Griva in Latvia.

That was all I needed to know and I was hooked. After several months of research, I booked a trip to Europe with a stopover in Riga.

I arrived in a tiny prop plane from Stockholm and could not believe my eyes at the new modern and contemporary airport in Riga. Besides the airport, Riga is a breathtaking city. I have been to Paris about twenty times and it reminded me of a Paris of the East, only more intimate.

My first stop was the synagogue where three gentlemen standing outside greeted me. They were curious as to who I was since everyone in Latvia told me that I looked like a foreigner.

I just smiled and said Shalom, I am the grandson

of Zeev Wolf Elterman from Griva who left in 1904 and I am the first in the family to return. Needless to say, they were delighted and we became fast friends. One of those gentlemen was Rabbi Aryeh Bekker, the Deputy Chief Rabbi of Riga.

I showed him all of my grandparents' documents including the Katuba from 1897. He was really amazed and shared them with other members in the Shul. I told him that I was kind of surprised with his excitement since he must have met other grandchildren returning to Latvia. He explained that not so many actually do return and very few bearing such documents that are over a hundred years old that were created right in his own backyard.

We chatted for a while and he arranged for the cantor to come in to do a special prayer for my grandparents and suggested that I visit Griva, if I could.

Later that day I met with Rita Blum at the State Historical Archives in Riga. She knew that I was coming since we had been emailing back and forth for several weeks. She showed me the Elterman family tree most of which I already had, thanks to my friend Paul Berkay. The only thing that was still missing, for me, was whether my grandfather had any siblings.

I shared with her the travel documents for my grandfather. She studied the stamps in the passport and commented that he was in a hurry to leave since on May 31, 1904 he had his stamp to leave Dvinsk and we know that four days later he showed up in Liepaja, since there is a clear stamp in the passport indicating that he left the country on June 4, 1904. I asked her how Wolf got to Liepaja in four days. She said that he could only have made it by horse-drawn carriage and that he would have had to travel day and night. Incredible!

She brought me into a research room where I was alone except for one older woman doing research. I had anticipated loads of visitors to be there looking for long lost families, but that was not the case. Rita left and brought back a rather large,

heavy book. This was the Griva family book circa 1878. It must have had more than 500 pages and all the entries were done by hand in beautiful penmanship.

Rita explained that they had not really had a chance to do much research on my family, but since I had the afternoon free and I had traveled from so far I might as well look through the book for myself. I asked her who kept this book. Did the local Rabbi keep it? No, she explained, it was kept by the local Griva police. They wanted to keep track of all the Jews and wanted to know who was living in the house and who had traveled overseas.

She told me to check it out and she would look for my grandfather's birth records and would be back in half an hour. Well, I got to page 450 with no luck and thought that I would not find anything, but when I got to page 452 I found my family. My grandfather did have brothers and sisters. It was incredible. As it turned out I already had a 1929 passport photo of a Pinkus Elterman that I found on the Internet and it turned out to be my grandfather's brother.

Rita came down with the birth records of my grandfather and I held the original document in my hand. She was very happy for me that I had found Wolf's family in the Griva book and we both commented that he must have been the explorer of the family since he was the only one, except for a second cousin, who left for the New World. Sadly, Rita commented that no one else would have survived after 1941.

The next day I stopped at the Jewish Center. I went upstairs and saw the little museum. I met an elderly Jewish woman there who was a volunteer. She sold me a brochure about the museum. She must have been about 85 and had the most beautiful blue eyes.

I showed her the city of Griva on the map. In her broken English she told me that she had been there and she seemed puzzled as to why I would want to go there. I explained to her the reason and that I did not know if I should rent a car, take a bus or go by train. I had been researching the

transportation down to Daugavpils since my arrival in Latvia.

I know that she could tell that I was a bit stressed about how to get there and also as to what I would find there. She looked at me and said don't go there, there is nothing there for you and everyone is gone. I could not believe what I was hearing. She continued that there were only three streets in Griva and that instead I should look forward in life and not back and that I should spend my last day in Latvia at the beach of Jurmala. I do not think that I will ever forget her and at the end of the day, 80-year-old Jewish women do know what they are talking about and they should be respected for that.

Since there was a heat wave that week, I did just as she said and it was delightful. I spoke to Rita later that day and told her what the woman said at the Jewish Center. She said that if I gave her time, she could probably find the home address for my family.

As I definitely plan on returning to Latvia, maybe as early as this December, it seemed to be an excellent plan for the future.

Before I left I made a trip back to see Rabbi Bekker and told him how moved I was with the visit and that I felt it was extremely important to do something to help the local Jewish Community in memory of my grandparents. I am now working with him to make a donation in memory of my grandparents.

The shul needs funds for a future remodel, but in the meantime I would like my donation to help the local Jewish Seniors of Riga who may need to come by for a meal or other support. I urge others to join me. For me personally I feel that I need to give something back since I have been lucky in my life and that it is the least that I could do for what is left of our community.

Rabbi Bekker's email: aryebekker@hotmail.com

Brad Elterman's email: brad011@aol.com

Ed Sternin's Question: Liquidation of Riga's remaining Jewish Population

The time is spring 1944; Riga ghetto is pretty much gone, Mezhaparks (Kaiserwald) camp is being closed up, with rail transports out to Stutthof, and some killings in the Bikernieku forest (although the majority of those had already happened in 1942-3, as the big ghetto was emptied). Apparently the loading onto rail transport takes place at the Zaslauks train station, just outside Riga. This is a LOOONG march from Mezhaparks, by the way.

Eventually, the Red Army overruns the German defenses, and a large German army group is cut off in Kurzeme, where some German resistance continues for many months. The only route out is by sea from Liepaja (Libava, Libau).

Dundaga camp (in Kurzeme, near Valdemarpils) is also being emptied; the remaining prisoners are marched towards Riga, presumably to be sent to Stutthof; many die along the way. There is a recent account of the final march, which runs into the front line and is abandoned by the Germans to the oncoming Red Army.

Now the questions: Were the Germans more successful in liquidating the remaining Jews of Riga? Did all of them get shipped out to Stutthof, or killed on the spot? Did any end up in Kurzeme with the surrounded German troops, and even perhaps got shipped out to Germany from Liepaja? [hard to imagine, but it's a pretty short sea voyage, and the Germans may have needed some slaves to help evacuate their army by sea]

As far as I know, there are very few records from Riga, although Peter Lande reported recently that some survivor lists for Riga do exist (I do not know which records these are). There are some transport records into Stutthof in a recently acquired USHMM collection of 189 rolls of film. As far as I know, none of it is accessible electronically.

If there are any experts on Kurzeme (in 1944-45)

out there, or anyone who knows something about the timeline of the above events, or some other details, from their personal research, I would love to hear whatever you know!

Jack Efrat Responds

In reply to your question, please let me introduce myself. I am the President of the Association of Latvian Jews in South Africa, which was established in 1979. I was born and brought up in Riga. I survived a selection in August 1944 in the camp Strasdenhof where 1,300 out of 1,800 were taken away to be "liquidated." On the 6th of August, we were taken on board the boat Bremerhaven to be taken to Stutthof concentration camp. From there I was taken to Magdeburg to "Poltwerke Magdeburg" where I miraculously managed to escape and was liberated by the Americans. Both my parents and most of my family perished in Rumbula.

Please note that the Russians nearly managed to cut the Germans off in the vicinity of Jelgava as early as June 1944. Regrettably, the Germans repulsed them and managed to hold a thin corridor to the rest of Kurzeme. Apparently, a number of Jews were sent through this corridor by rail to Liepaja. The majority of Jews from Dundaga were also sent to Liepaja, from there to Stutthof and some to the prison in Hamburg.

At that time, there were still approximately 12,000 Jews in Latvia, including German and other Jews. The SS were panicking as they had very little time and no means to transport this many people either by boat or by rail to the Reich, resulting in rushed "liquidations" as was the case in Strasdenhof [Strazdu Muiza], from where approximately 1,300 people were taken. It is believed that the Germans had established a small gas chamber in Ludzas Street in the previous ghetto.

The last executions took place in the Biekernieku Forest. The same applies to some of the prisoners of Kaiserwald and from other places [kazernierungen]. Some 5,000 Hungarian women arrived in Riga at that time. They worked at the Spilve Airport and some were also sent to

Dundaga. Apparently, only 3,000 of these women were sent back to Germany; we can assume the other 2,000 were killed.

After the fall of Riga, the Russians managed to cut off Kurzeme, which became the famous “Kurlandischer Brickenkopf” [the Kurland Bridgehead] which the Germans managed to hold until the 10th of May 1945 when the Germans surrendered. Whether there were any Jews still working in Kurzeme at that time is uncertain. There were certainly a number in hiding.

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Mass Deportations of Latvian Jews to Remote Areas of the USSR: 1941

by
Prof. Dov Levin
The Hebrew University of Jerusalem

As we know, the percentage of Jews murdered in Latvia in World War II was one of the highest, if not the very highest, in all of Europe. Unsurprisingly, then, general and Jewish historiography on that era in Latvia tends to focus on the implications of this blood-curdling fact but hardly relates to the deportation of thousands of Jews from that country to distant parts of the Soviet Union. Apart from a few articles published in Israel, the deportation is mentioned generally and mainly in publications of Latvian emigrant circles that fled from the Soviets to the West for political and legal reasons. These publications, however, portray Latvian Jews as collaborators with the Soviet

authorities in the mass deportation of Latvians to Siberia in 1941. The fact that the Soviet authorities inflicted much more suffering on the Jews that year, in proportional terms, than on members of other nationalities whom they deported from Latvia, and the specific fact that their dose of hardship was several times greater than the other groups, has been totally obscured.

Only recently, upon the sixtieth anniversary of the great exile perpetrated in Latvia on June 14, 1941, did the Latvian State Archives state officially that the Jews of that country were proportionally the largest national group among the masses who were deported on that day.

This revelation, by a respected organ of state, is undoubtedly an important and courageous step that deserves commendation. However, it does not suffice. Therefore, the article that follows will focus particularly on the severe personal tragedy that befell the Jewish refugees and their unique fate from deportation day to the day on which those who were privileged to survive returned to a Latvia bereft of their pre-war compatriots and families.

The Sovietization of Latvia (1940–1941) and the Jews

When the Soviet Union annexed Latvia (August 1940), the Jewish community in Latvia numbered about 95,000 persons or 4.8 percent of the total population, including several thousand refugees from Central Europe and Poland. More than two-thirds of Latvian Jews lived in the three largest cities: Riga, Daugavpils, and Liepaja. The rest were scattered in about fifty small and medium-sized communities.

About half of the Jews engaged in commerce and about one-third practiced industry and crafts. Many were involved in community life and culture. Many belonged to various branches of the Zionist movement, especially the Revisionist Zionists, the General Zionists, the Labor Zionists (or Socialist Zionists—ZS), and the Religious Zionists (the Mizrachi). Others belonged to non-Zionist Yiddishist parties, foremost the Bund, or the Orthodox Agudath Yisrael.

In the Sovietization of Latvia in 1940/41, private industry and commerce were nationalized and all Jewish parties and political organizations were suppressed. In this respect, there was hardly any difference in Soviet policy toward Latvian organizations and Jewish ones. To avoid jeopardizing anyone, some representatives of the disbanded organizations refrained from handing over their membership lists to the authorities, even though all were ordered to do so. However, this did not prevent the Soviet authorities from carrying out mass arrests.

By the spring of 1941, leading members of the disbanded parties and organizations had already been sent to prisons and labor camps in the Soviet interior. They included the former chairman of the Association of Jewish Lawyers and the State Controller of Latvia, Professor Paul Mintz; the leader of the Mizrachi and a former deputy to the Latvian Seim, Rabbi Mordechai Nurok; the leader of Agudath Yisrael and a former deputy to the National Council, the Constituent Assembly, and all four Latvian Seims, Mordechai Dubin; the leader of the General Zionist party, Zalman Rabinovitz; the chairman of the Revisionist Party, the engineer Elhanan Halperin; the commissioner of the Betar organization, David Wahrhaftig; and the leader of the Zionist Labor Party, a member of the Jewish Community Council in Riga and the Riga Municipal Council, and the editor of Jewish daily newspapers in Latvia, Yerahmiel Vinnik—to name only a few.

At first, these imprisonments affected neither the low echelons of these parties and organizations nor the leaders of other disbanded parties and organizations. However, they had an intimidating effect on some, especially those of similar political or social background.

The Mass Deportation of June 14, 1941: Patterns and Methods

A much more horrible action took place on the night of June 13–14, 1941—the mass deportation of more than 15,000 Latvian citizens, so-called “undesirable elements” from the standpoint of the Soviet authorities, to Siberia and other remote

areas in the USSR. Since many of these people were affiliated with the state establishment and the civilian and military apparatus, it is no wonder that a large majority of them—more than 80 percent—belonged to the majority people, the Latvians. The proportion of Jews among the deportees, according to official published figures, was 11.7 percent—more than twice their share in the population at large. A different source estimates the number of Jews who were arrested and herded into freight cars bound for the Soviet Interior in 1940–1941 at 4,000–5,000. The authorities considered their attitude toward the new regime hostile or disloyal.

Generally speaking, the deportees fell into two categories. One was made up of members of the wealthy classes—mostly important merchants, industrialists, bankers, and businessmen; they were treated as “socially dangerous elements” (*sotsial-opasnyi element*). A second category was composed of former leaders and active members of banned Jewish parties, organizations, and institutions, high officials in the national Governments of Latvia, and activists in community politics. Those in this category were referred to as “traitors to the homeland” (*izmenniki rodiny*).

The following belonged to this second category: almost all leaders of the Zionist movement, including virtually the entire leadership of the Revisionist party Ha-Tzohar, its youth movement Betar; and its student organization Hashmonea (among the members were Aron-Ber Gamzo, Rudolf Kaplan, Nathan Michlin, Mulia Markovitch, and Baruch Minkovitch), the leaders of the Labor Zionist party (Zvi Gorfinkel, Philip Latzky, Zeev Levenberg, Abraham Ribovski, Dr. Mordechai Zand), and the leaders of the Mizrachi (Reuven-Zvi Hovsha) and of the General Zionists (Leo Levstein, Mark Rozovski, and Dr. Hermann Wassermann). The deportee population also included a remarkable number of Bund leaders and former Bund activists (Isaac Berz, Senia Braun, Meir Kotcherginsky, Noah Maisel, and others).

In the first stage of the deportation, which generally speaking lasted several days, myriad

deportees from all districts of Latvia were transported in several hundred carriages to main assembly points, such as the shunting station in Skirotava that was used for deportees from Riga. The separation of heads of household from the rest of their families, and their assignment to different destinations in the USSR also occurred at this stage.

Despite binding instructions and the standardization of the deportation procedure, implementation took place in various ways, as much depended on the arresting officers. While some deportees were permitted to take with them a relatively large number of personal effects and were even helped to pack and carry them, others were removed from their apartments in their bathrobes and with nothing else. In the family of Philip Latzky, a former member of the National Assembly of Latvia, one son was allowed to remain. (Local police later killed him in Riga.) The family of Ezra Rusiniek (a former secretary of the Betar organization and the owner of a watch factory in Liepaja) was permitted to give relatives formal power-of-attorney in regard to forty-one carefully listed items of property. Some refugees were deprived of all documents, others had to forfeit some, and a few reached at their destinations with all their documents in their possession.

The separation of heads of households was similarly inconsistent. In some instances, heads of families destined for deportation who were not at home during the arrests were pursued and arrested elsewhere. There were also instances of mistaken deportations of people whose names resembled others on the list.

Due to surprise and the relative speed with which the deportations were carried out, the deportees seldom comprehended the meaning of the event. For example, the mother of the head of the student organization Hashmonea, Mulia (Shmuel) Markovich, parted from her son with the words, "Mulia, the important thing is that you continue your university studies."

These words undoubtedly typify the naiveté of many Jews who trusted the assurances that the

arrested persons were merely being administratively transferred to other regions of the USSR, where everyone is free to choose his occupation and his future in life. However, some reactions were less naive, like that of a pharmacist from Riga, Nachum Moskovski, who managed to swallow a lethal dose of poison when the arresting team came to his house. There were also instances in which deportees' relatives or friends attempted later, usually in vain, to persuade the Soviet authorities to revoke the deportation decision.

Since Jewish political organizations and newspapers, as well as industry and trade, were concentrated in the three largest cities of Latvia—Riga, Daugavpils, and Liepaja—it is not surprising that most Jewish deportees came from centers of culture, politics, and finance. However, some of the deportees were small shopkeepers from provincial areas and even people "...who never made enough money to support their large families." Furthermore, some fairly well known factory owners and men of wealth, such as Mizrach and Shmulian, were sometimes overlooked (even in the cities). There is little doubt that the Soviet authorities committed all kinds of errors and that personal considerations influenced their critical approach.

The day after the German invasion (June 23, 1941), some 250 Jewish refugees from Germany and Austria, some of them Communists, were arrested in Latvia and deported to Siberia, some accompanied by their Latvian-born wives.

Nevertheless, most of the deported Latvian Jews belonged to economic and political elites. As a result, this wave of deportation deprived Latvian Jewry of its traditional leadership and made the remaining Jewish population less able to resist the mass murder campaign that began in Latvia on July 1, 1941, at the hands of the German troops and their local accomplices.

Destinations

Many Jewish deportees, particularly heads of households from Liepaja and various villages in Kurzeme and Latgale, were sent to so-called Labor Camps for Rehabilitation (in fact,

concentration camps) in different locations in the USSR, such as Vyatka in the Kirov District (the forests of Sulikams), Vorkuta (Komi ASSR) in the far north of European Russia, and other remote parts of the USSR.

As told by Baruch Minkovitch in “Latvian Jews in Siberian Exile.”

Some women, children, and other relatives who had been deported from Latvia with the men were sent to the Narim, Novosibirsk, and Krasnoyarsk areas of Siberia.

Hundreds of heads of households and individuals, mainly from Riga and Daugavpils, were first brought to the small train station at Babinino (via Vitebsk and Smolensk). From there, they went on foot to the camp near the town of Juchново in Kaluga District, where they stayed for about a month. As the German army advanced into the Russian interior, the deportees were again loaded into freight cars and taken to places even more remote.

The journey ended in one of the peripheral railway stations of Moscow. We heard the noise of the engines and the sound of explosions: Moscow was being bombarded from the air. Most of Latvians did not hide their joy. But for us Jews there was no reason to rejoice. In the morning we continued on our way.

This journey lasted several days and some deportees died on the way. When the surviving deportees arrived at their destination, they encountered Jews who had been arrested and deported there in 1940 from eastern regions of Poland. From their appearance and their horror stories, the newcomers from Latvia realized what awaited them in the four camps to which they had been assigned in the forests of Sulikamsk: Sormog, Ost-Sormog, Chertioz, and Prizhim. Conditions in the two last-mentioned camps were particularly horrific, with mortality (mainly from pneumonia but also from pellagra and other conditions) exceeding 60 percent during the first year. Ironically enough, the name of one of the camps Prizhim, means “oppression” in Russian while the prisoners interpreted the abbreviation of

another (Sormog) as *Surovaya Mogila*—“a stern grave.”

The Reckoning

In the spring of 1942, by which time a large proportion of inmates in the camps had died without knowing why and wherefore, the Soviet security authorities instituted an inquiry into the deportees’ files. This inquest, carried out by the so-called Troikas between June and September 1942, resulted mostly in deportation sentences of five years or more, the usual basis being political involvement before the Soviet annexation of Latvia.

Occasionally, these reviews ended differently. A former leader of the Zionist Betar organization, who was sent to Vorkuta after being found guilty according to Paragraph 58/4 (Socially Dangerous Element), claimed during his interrogation that Betar was antagonistic to the USSR and also worked for British intelligence. Since England became a Soviet ally in the war against Germany, his case was reopened and after spending three years in the camp, he was re-sentenced to “deportation for life.” Formally, deportees were referred to as “special settlers” (*spets’ pereselentsy*). However, since they had no rights they could be recruited for any kind of work.

The Daily Struggle

for Survival in Siberian Exile

Typical in this respect was the fate of deportees who found themselves in the small town of Kansk in the Krasnoyarsk district of Siberia. In January 1942, entire families from Kansk were recruited among the special settlers from Latvia for forestry work, i.e., cutting down trees in the coniferous forests of the Siberian marshes. Hundreds of elderly, the ill, and families with small children remained behind.

In September 1943, a number of people were transferred to the Soviet Far East, including Vladivostok, to build the railway line from Sobgabino to Komsomolsk on the Amur River. Men were also sent to an area of extreme hardship in Tomsk District, mainly for auxiliary work in coal mining. Subsequently, about 300 of them returned and resumed residence in Kansk.

A few families had the good fortune to welcome their loved ones back from the camps, but most of those released were physical and mental wrecks. One of the returnees, Zalman Slivkin, a former businessman from Daugavpils, had been employed in the camp as a repairman of stoves and thus stayed close to the mess hall. Although he managed to survive, he was in wretched health when he reached his family in the “special settlement,” as his son describes:

When he came to me, he was half dead. He had no flesh on him and from behind everything was open. His eyes bulged. The Russian neighbors pleaded, “We have nothing to give you, but your father shouldn’t leave the house because his appearance frightens the children to tears.” Indeed, he looked ghastly.

Slivkin eventually recovered and lived for another twenty years. That was unusual; most of those released in such condition survived no more than a year. According to testimonies collected by this author, the conditions of each family in “special settlements” were determined by a combination of factors: family size, age, health, skills, ability to persevere at work, amount of money and possessions they had managed to remove from their homes, and the quality of the settlement and of their labor assignments.

Usually people started working almost as soon as they were resettled. Most were assigned to farm labor; many felled timber in the forests, and a few were given skilled or clerical jobs. In many instances, the workplace was far away with no transport other than the deportee’s own feet. The labor was grueling and the pay meager, perhaps enough for the purchase of bread on the black market.

On collective farms, payment was usually made in kind: daily portions of wheat, potatoes, or bread. Until the harvest, they were given advances in the form of bread and such farm produce as had ripened. These advances were subsequently checked and corrected in accordance with each worker’s output. Ration coupons were important for all. All the deportees

were hungry, and this motivated them to persevere at work.

Although the old and the ill were not obliged to go out to work, they were forced to do much to assist those who worked and to contribute to the family budget by selling personal effects, if they had any. Those with no possessions and no relatives to support them were doomed to die of starvation and disease. Entire families disappeared as their members died one by one. Accordingly, the persons most likely to survive the critical stage of the first years in the “special settlements” were those in large families, especially those fortunate enough to avoid separation.

Manifestations of Assistance and Solidarity

Soviet Jewish relatives, who in some instances appealed to the authorities on behalf of their kin, helped some deportees. The Jewish “special settlers” maintained close relationships with long-time Jewish residents of Siberia. Latvian Jewish deportees in Kansk were particularly appreciative of the affection they received from these compatriots. Some of the latter were descendants of Cantonists, i.e., Jewish conscripts who served about twenty-five years in the Russian Army during the nineteenth century and then were permitted to settle in areas outside the Jewish Pale of Settlement. Most of them spoke only Russian and had typical Russian surnames. Nevertheless, they had “warm Jewish hearts” and did much to help their fellow Jews. This may have contributed significantly to the concentration of “special settlers” in Kansk. By the end of World War II, this town had Jewish community life involving mutual aid, social relations, and joint observance of holidays and religious customs. A number of deportees from Latvia would often get together with local Jewish residents on various occasions such as birthdays and wedding parties.

Although many deportees were not religious, they often celebrated Jewish festivals (Passover, Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Hanukka, etc.) together with the Latvian Jews of Kansk and vicinity. During the year of mourning after the death of a relative, a *minyán* (the quorum of ten men

required for public worship) would gather so that the bereaved could recite the Kaddish prayer. There were few prayer books, but a few old-timers remembered the prayers by heart and were the unofficial sextons of the community. Some local old-timers in the town also participated in religious ceremonies. Latvian Jewish exiles in other places in the heart of Siberia were also somewhat active in these respects.

Relations with and Assistance from Fellow Jews

As time passed, the deportees began to obtain growing amounts of assistance from relatives and friends or from philanthropic institutions in Palestine, the United States, and other countries overseas. Apart from the regular and special packages that they received from these quarters, some deportees corresponded intensively with relatives and friends abroad.

During most of the war, the postal services operated in a relatively orderly manner, though very slowly. It is possible that some of the Soviet censors were concerned primarily with military matters. Occasionally, they erased words that were written in a language unknown to them, but they did not interfere with descriptions of living conditions, references to friends, and even opinions. To be sure, the letters were always written with a measure of self-censorship, since they might occasionally “disappear” en route to their destinations.

The first attempts to contact relatives and friends abroad started relatively early: practically as soon as the deportees reached their first destination. The precondition, however, was to know the correct addresses. However, since much of Latvian Jewry had corresponded with overseas relatives and friends before the war, many did remember the addresses. There were also instances in which contact with relatives abroad developed as an outgrowth of other deportees’ correspondence with their families. Sometimes, Jews from abroad were able to locate relatives or acquaintances in Soviet exile or prison.

One of the institutions that sent packages to

Latvian Jewish deportees in the USSR during the war was the Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Tel Aviv. Subsequently, this organization established one of the best channels of correspondence with Latvian Jews in the USSR and became important as a communication center between them and their foreign contacts. The contents of letters that survived make it clear that, in addition to economic matters and anything pertaining to parcels, communication concerned many other things as well. Thus, attitudes were expressed about Jewish life in the Jewish homeland, Hebrew songs, prospects for aliya (immigration to Palestine), etc.

At the end of 1944, when news of the liberation of Riga from the Germans reached the deported Rigaites, a flood of letters ensued in the matter of seeking relatives and friends who remained alive. In most cases, there was no reply. Afterwards, it was discovered that of nearly 50,000 Jews who had lived in Riga before the Nazi occupation, only about 150 survived—seventy originally from Riga before the war and eighty from other places in Latvia or from abroad.

Hardly any Jews from provincial towns and villages survived. Moreover, the atrocity stories that they had heard previously proved to have been true “to the last bitter detail”—the taking of the old and young for execution, the brutal rape of young girls, the abuse of rabbis, etc.

Repatriation and Rehabilitation of Survivors

In the second half of the 1940s, rumors had it that the files of “special settlers” and various deportees were being reviewed. Irrespective of their truth, they seemed to point to an opportunity to submit complaints, motions, memorandums, and personal inquiries to local and central authorities. Thus, the deportees approached various personalities in the Soviet hierarchy, such as the writer Ilya Ehrenburg (who had been elected as a representative from one of the Latvian districts). However, only in extraordinary cases did these appeals affect people’s possessions at this stage.

The deportees remained under mobility restrictions for years and required permission even to visit a nearby village.

In 1946, the Government of Soviet Latvia established a committee to locate and repatriate children, mainly orphans, of Latvian origin in Siberia and other places throughout the USSR. Many youngsters leaped at the opportunity. One of them was Gesia Kamaiski (*n'e* Teitelbaum) of the town of Ludza, Latvia. Gesia's father David had been incarcerated in the Vyatka camp (in Kirov District) and her mother, brother, and sister lived in special settlements in Krasnoyarsk area. She says:

I found out that there would be some committee searching for orphan children to bring them in Latvia. My mother and I agreed that if they came to search for me, she should say that I had disappeared.

Thus, Gesia Kamaiski managed to join a group of about fifteen orphans and by October 1946 had already been moved to an orphanage in Riga. Later, she was admitted to law school but was expelled from the university in 1948, probably because of a denunciation about her past, possibly related to her family's deportation from Latvia.

The plight of the deportees worsened during the "black years" of Soviet Jewry—from the end of 1948 until the death of Stalin. Severe measures were taken in regard to political prisoners. Nearly all those who served out their sentences in the camps automatically became deportees for life. Also, many deportees from Latvia who had managed to return to Riga by various ruses were apprehended or arrested and sent back to Siberia in prison carriages.

A much hoped-for change for the better was augured by the beginning of the "thaw" (so named after the title of Ilya Ehrenburg's story) that followed Stalin's death. The release of ill detainees from camps was expedited, sentences were shortened, and a new concept of rehabilitation gained support. Subsequently, prisoners' convictions were reviewed and, insofar as "mistakes" were acknowledged, the rights of

these deportees were restored and they even received some compensation—a sum equal to two months' salary, depending on the work they had performed during their incarceration. Thus they were remunerated for fifteen to twenty years of unwarranted confinement in camps. This hardly enabled them to begin a new life. Furthermore, many were rehabilitated only posthumously; their families were given even a less generous sum of money in compensation.

The problem of rehabilitation was particularly complicated for "special settlers" because only someone who had been sentenced, i.e. a former prisoner in a camp, could submit the requisite application. This kind of procedure was not possible for "special settlers," since their deportation had been ordained without an administrative decision let alone a trial, even in the barest formalities. The decision could be annulled, in which case the deportee found himself free but uncompensated. Neither could those who had been imprisoned but died before sentencing apply for rehabilitation. Their families received nothing. Only one man from Riga, Yerahmiel Vinnik, is known to have been rehabilitated in this fashion; his widow obtained a document that entitled her to an apartment in Riga. Most "special settlers," however, did not even receive an answer to their letters on this subject from the state attorney.

Much more organized and, therefore, much more effective was the struggle against Soviet rule in Riga and in Moscow that took place in the 1970s after Israel's resounding victory in the Six-Day War. This struggle focused on Latvian Jews' right to emigrate to Israel, i.e., to repatriate themselves in the full value sense of the term. The struggle was spearheaded by the last survivors of the deportations to the Soviet interior, such as the aforementioned Gesia Kamaiski among many others.

The Final Tally

By the late 1950s, most surviving Latvian deportees were allowed to return to Latvia. Among them were about 2,000–2,500 Jews (40–50 percent of the Jewish deportees from that country). Some 500–1,000 (10–20 percent) remained in Siberia or elsewhere in the USSR;

some of them returned to Latvia later on. About 1,000–1,500 (20–30 percent) had died of illness, hunger, accidents, and other causes in their labor camps and other places of exile.

Even if one presumes some inaccuracy in these data on the survival of Jewish deportees, the deportation of the Latvian Jews, as inhuman as it was, probably helped many of these Jews to escape the horrors and the extermination campaign that the Nazis and their local collaborators wrought in Latvia during World War II.

Memoirs of Isaac Fanaroff

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.

Part 2 Arrival in South Africa

Our boat docked at Cape Town on Wednesday, early in December, probably the first Wednesday in the month. We were met at the station by Mrs Kushlick, Isaac's mother, who took us to her home and fed us, gave us food for the rail journey and put us on the train for Benoni. I was intrigued by the sight of coloured people. It was my first sight of black people.

We arrived in Johannesburg the following Friday and were disappointed that father was not there to meet us. But somehow we managed to transfer to the Benoni train and again we were disappointed when father didn't turn up. Mother again managed, however, and we arrived by cab at the

Salkows in Lake Avenue, where my father was staying. Soon after my father arrived and explained that there had been a mix-up in the times of the arrival of the train from Cape Town. I remember that he came in a flurry on a bicycle.

Mr. and Mrs. Salkow welcomed us very warmly and we remained friends for many years. In fact, from ten years after this I taught about five of their seven children at various times from 1922 to about 1934. Mr. Salkow was a Boer-War veteran, having fought on the side of the Boers, and walked about with a limp due to a bullet still embedded in his leg. Although old enough to be my father, in later years he insisted on calling me Mr. Fanaroff instead of Isaac or Itske. He farmed at, I think, Putfontein, a few miles outside Benoni. He was one of a fairly large number of Jewish immigrants who became farmers and many of them married their Afrikaans neighbours' daughters. Indeed, they were much sought after as husbands because they offered economic security and a stable family life, and to the Afrikaner people just emerging from a devastating war, this was a supreme need. Both Mr. and Mrs. Salkow were genial, kindly, hospitable Jewish people and my father had lived with them as a boarder and lodger for some years.

Soon after my father took us to our own house at 88 Amphill Avenue, to a new semi-detached house. It consisted of three or four rooms (I'm not quite sure of that), plus a kitchen and bathroom, a luxury I had never even dreamt of! At the back was fairly large yard enclosed by a corrugated iron fence, a novelty as far as I was concerned, a room for an African or, as we used to say in those days, a native servant. There was also an outside lavatory of the bucket variety with a sanitary lane outside the fence to enable the sanitary men to remove the buckets once or twice a week.

I can't recall my reaction on meeting my father after eight years' absence. From four to twelve is a long gap and my father was a stranger to me. He too, as I vaguely recall, seemed ill at ease, due probably to the tension between him and my mother. He bathed each of his three children in turn and carried us from the bathroom to our bedroom so that we should not catch cold after a

hot bath. Considering his poor means my father had managed to furnish our house adequately with mostly second-hand furniture.

What my reaction to this rapid transition from one world to another was I can't recall, but at this distance in time, 64 years, the change seems to have been smooth and natural. Both my brother and sister and I seem to have glided into the new life and world without any difficulty. Even language wasn't a barrier for long; it seems as if we started speaking English almost immediately. It was only some years later that I became aware of the lack of certain words such as the names of some objects of everyday use.

Shortly after our arrival in our new home we saw a little procession of children making their way across the muddy street to our house carrying varying dishes. It was the Toker children who lived across the road to us bringing fish and other Sabbath food to the new arrivals, and as the road was unpaved and muddy in those days they had laid a series of bricks and stones to make a path over the mud. From that time on we became firm friends of the Tokers and I certainly gained a great deal from that contact, especially with the child Max. But more of that later.

Not long after our arrival we children became friendly with Ronald Davis and his sister who lived next door. They were a couple of years younger than my brother and me. They used to get comics every week and we used to wait impatiently for Wednesday when the English mail would be delivered. Tiger Tim was probably one of them. After a few years the Davis family went to Springs where the father became MPC for Springs as a Labour man. *(And a very poor one at that.)*

Others in the same street whom we met were the Markses and their daughters Ray and Ellen, who are still alive and still friends with my sister; the Noons, ex-London, who regarded themselves as a cut above Lithuanian and Latvian Jews, with their four children, the eldest child a boy who died as a young man, an older sister, a younger son, Lazarus, who went to Jeppe High and first introduced me to punning and generally gave me

an idea of what high school was like, and a sister Becky. We never became close friends of the Noons.

In those days I was very religious and tried to observe every precept of the law. I even slept in a yarmulke. One Saturday morning not long after our arrival I set out for shul with my new clothes and a pair of white shoes, then very fashionable. I had not gone far when, on the path through an open piece of ground, I spotted a golden sovereign on the ground. Probably there were others nearby, but as it was Sabbath I could not handle money and so put my foot on it. I stood thus for some time, not knowing what to do when a gentile boy came along, asked what I was standing on, and stood alongside of me. Oddly enough I don't remember the outcome, but most likely I "took the credit and let the cash go."

I was also soon after introduced to our kosher butcher, Mr Hirshowitz, who gave me a number of lessons in the Talmud, but these for some reason soon came to an end. In about February 1913 I became bar mitzvah and as my father didn't go to shul it was a quiet affair. I required no special preparation and went to shul as usual and was called up to the reading of the law. After that, though I continued to go to shul, I began to feel my religious faith slipping steadily from me and I often wished the slide would stop somewhere. But it did not, and although I continued going to shul I spent more time outside playing and talking to the other boys than inside. Finally after three or four (perhaps fewer) years I stopped going, much to the regret of my mother who remained an observant Jewess till her death. But she accepted the situation with good grace as both my father and my brother and I respected her views and at home observed the dietary laws and other customs and practices of a pious woman.

The reason for my change of faith, for such it was, from religion to socialism, was my father's influence. Though brought up and educated in a strictly Orthodox tradition and after years spent studying the Talmud, by the time of my arrival my father had already acquired a knowledge of Darwin and Haeckel and other works on evolution, had read Bradlaugh and other

Rationalists, Tressel and Henry George and works by Marx, Engels and some Russian radical writers like Prince Kropotkin. It was from him that I acquired my introduction to Marxism and Socialism in general. To this add his interest and faith in science and his typically nineteenth century optimism that the latter will help to solve the many social and economic problems. It will be apparent from this why I have been so interested in and fascinated by science and mathematics.

At the time of our arrival my father was one of a number of Jewish artisans and manual workers in Benoni, mostly in the building trade. There were the partners Hoff and Solomon and Toker and Reichlin, all carpenters building solid, semi-detached cottages still occupied by tenants in Benoni and some at least mortgaged to the United Building Society; Rutzkin, bricklayer and plasterer sometimes jokingly and by some sneeringly referred to as “der laimpatser” (lime slapper); Noon, a cabinetmaker together with his brother-in-law; Fanaroff, painter and plumber and Krasnik, a painter. Reuben Meltzer and his elder brother Abe were farriers and coachbuilders. The Shalekoffs and Shapiro were bootmakers, as was also Grigulevitz, “der Karaim”, the Karaite. The Karaites were reputed to be the descendants of the Khazars, themselves conjectured to have sprung from Hun or Turkish stock who were suddenly in the 18th century converted to Judaism and whose vast Jewish kingdom at one stage stretched from the Crimea to Kiev. They were rejected by the Jews and within the Jewish ghetto lived in a separate enclave.

But of the children of these families, not one son has become a manual worker. Five of them became doctors, two pharmacists; others took law, teaching, accountancy and other white-collar jobs. As in other similar communities, these workingmen played a lowly role in the community, the leading men being shopkeepers, lawyers, property owners and white-collar workers.

I became very friendly with the Tokers and spent many a Friday evening with them reading two of the best-known American Yiddish publications,

the socialist Forward and the “Kundes,” a sort of Jewish Punch. The Tokers also possessed a set of volumes of extracts from famous International Literature. As I mentioned before, Max had a great deal to do with my early secondary education: he introduced me to Macaulay and his style, taught me my first Latin during the latter half of 1916 to such good effect that six months after, with lessons from one of the teachers at the school I attended, I was able to get about 35% on the matric Latin paper set the year before. From him I also learnt to build up vocabularies in Latin and Hollands to such good effect that I still retain a pretty useful vocabulary in both languages. We often discussed topics of general interest. He was about three years older than me.

It was with his brother Philip that I became more intimate friends and shared studies later when he worked for his Junior Certificate and I for my matric. Later we played football for a team we formed with the grandiloquent name of the Junior Springboks. For some unaccountable reason I was made captain and, because I was left-footed, I played left wing. I was not much of a player and never did learn to kick a ball properly, but as I was older than many of the other players I relied on kicking and running and did manage sometimes to centre the ball for the inside forwards to score. In spite of my lack of skill I always looked forward to a game or even to just kicking the ball around. But I am running too far ahead.

With the opening of the school in 1913 soon after our arrival the previous December we started school in the grades. Our teacher was Mrs Wright, a rather big motherly woman. We sat in desks standing on series of platforms rising from the blackboard to the back of the room. One incident sticks in my mind: I wanted to leave the room but did not know the word “leave.” But I did know that to send a dog out of the room you said “voetsak,” so I raised my hand and said, “May I voetsak the room?” I don’t remember the reactions of the teacher or of the other children. I didn’t stay too long in that class and was soon moved to standard one under a sweet, charming Mrs Lawrie. My sister and I still think of her with affection. There I ended the year with four prizes,

one of them for drawing, an achievement I was not to repeat again, and the following year I was placed in standard four under Capt. Fred Jack Hamm

Capt. Hamm was a kindly, cheerful, good-natured little man, quick and neat in his movements and, in many respects an excellent teacher. Even when he used the cane, which was not too often, he was never harsh or bad-tempered. The children loved him and no other teacher in the school was able to handle the so-called "hard-cases" better than and more sympathetically than F.J. Hamm. If such an easy-going man had any ambition at all it was to shine as a military officer. His commission, I believe, was confined to the school cadet corps, but he was immensely proud of it and put all his energy and enthusiasm into training a smart and efficient detachment. In his zeal he even taught girls to shoot at the police butts. Yet he was by no means a militarist. Quite the contrary, generations of schoolboys and girls enjoyed many happy school years thanks to the warmth and breeziness of his personality.

The one obvious weakness in his make-up was his fondness for the bottle; he would often slip away from school during playtime to the police canteen near the school and at home time some of the children often walked home with him until he left them at the Whitehouse Hotel. It was thanks to his example that I first realised that the so-called tough boys were not to be handled harshly and as potential or actual wrongdoers but as ordinary children who respond to understanding and kind and just treatment. I am afraid that his true worth was not always recognised.

The following year, in standard five, I had my first and last temporary teacher, Mr. Percy Bradbury, a tall, lanky man, well over six foot, with sharp features and restless manner. He was as different from Mr. Hamm in appearance and temperament as he was in size, yet the two were firm friends. Although he was a poor teacher I remember him for introducing me to the magic and power of Shakespeare when he read us Henry the Fifth's address to his troops before Agincourt. "Once more unto the breach, dear friends, once more," with its force and the majestic sweep of

the verse left a lasting impression on me. There is nothing I enjoy more at a production of a Shakespeare play than to hear the familiar lines well spoken.

My permanent teacher in standard five was Tom Newby, a recent arrival from Yorkshire, who became principal of the school when I started teaching in 1922. Looking back over the years I realise to what extent he became an unconscious master-figure to me. He was kind to me but induced a fear of not measuring up to the requirements of the job. I don't remember a word of encouragement from him ever, yet when I left at the end of 1939 he complained to one of my colleagues that he was annoyed to lose his best (or one of his best) teachers. Had he said one encouraging word like this to me he would have saved me a lot of anxiety and soul-searching. However, at the time I was in his class in Standard Five in 1915 I learnt how to summarise a short passage and make notes – a most valuable study tool and a difficult one to teach children to use – and set out problems with full logical statements, a practice largely neglected by many teachers today.

During his lessons in hygiene I learnt where to sit in relation to the main source of lighting when reading and writing. As his monitor in the stockroom I learned how to deposit money in the bank and this together with the courses I took at night classes at the same time gave me a good introduction to elementary bookkeeping. Every school day, a little before playtime at about eleven I used to "slip up" as he phrased it to his house in Elston Avenue to pick up from his wife Lorna his sandwiches. His teaching and supervision were sound and his discipline strict but not harsh.

The following year I was placed in standard six where I was taught among others by Tom Newby (until he joined up and went to East Africa) and J. C. Norval, a dour, blonde, close-cropped almost six-footer who taught me Arithmetic and the elements of algebra and geometry and gave me a lasting interest in physics and a good basic training in the subject. Dutch I was taught by a Mr Badendorst, and he and Mr Norval took me

through to the matric in the following two years, 1917 – 1918. But of this more later.

Among those in the parallel standard five were Emanuel Meltzer, Harry Solomon and Polly Epstein. My chief and probably only rival for the top position in the two classes was Manuel and I remember lying awake one early morning after the June exams wondering whether Manuel had beaten me. My fears proved groundless, but then I was about four years older in 1916 when I was sixteen and from 12 to 16 at that age is a tremendous handicap in spite of the fact that M. was a very bright boy.

About halfway through the year I began learning Latin with Max Toker and under his able and friendly guidance I made rapid progress and have since retained a strong liking for the language. We used Bell's Latin Primer and I learned by heart many of the Latin tags such as *Si vis pacem para bellum* and *Dulcis et decorum est pro patria mori*. I often think of Max with gratitude and affection. At the end of that year I obtained my Std Six School Leaving Certificate and as I was too old to go to high school and spend four years on my matric it was decided that I should study privately for the exam and try to do it in two. But of that later on.

I am going back now to 1914. I think it was in that year that we shifted from Amphill Avenue to 36A Rothsay Street, near the open veld in Benoni South. From the corner of the house we could see the Kleinfontein plantation and the headgear of the old Benoni mine and some mine dumps. Often I used to walk across the veld, cross the Apex railway, climb over the barbed wire and walk over the rusting machinery and other discarded mine gear. On my left, not far off, was a humble native (African) church. Later the market was built there. Next door to us lived an elderly ex-miner, a phthisis (pneumoconiosis) sufferer who coughed up his lungs until he died.

In the same year, August 4, Britain declared war on Germany. I took a great interest in the events leading up to it, from Sarajevo through all the tortuous negotiations until the shooting began. I remember reading about the battle of the Marne

where the French stopped the German advance and saved Paris by mobilising all Paris taxis and transporting the garrison to the front. In the following year I remember going to the newly opened municipal reading room to read the Rand Daily Mail and the Transvaal Leader.

One day I met there with Lily Meltzer and one of her sisters, either Annie or Fanny. That day the paper carried a report of the battle raging at Loos, a mining centre in Belgium. The carnage was dreadful, the daily casualty lists revealing losses of several thousand dead and many more wounded. Three or four thousand dead a day was not unusual; and this referred only to British losses. There were quite a number of volunteers from Benoni for service with the South African contingent, among them young Fred Shelley who was never heard of again, Dick Pearce and his father, both of whom survived; and "Bill" Bailey, who subsequently became the Town Clerk, returned with a badly crippled leg. I often looked at these men in their khaki uniforms with a certain amount of fascination and awe, as a different breed of men not of my world.

Among these volunteers were many Afrikaners, in spite of the fact that many of their fellow Afrikaners were in open rebellion and some had been shot by the Botha-Smuts government. Why these people joined it would not be difficult to guess: Nationalist feelings and loyalties had not yet been cultivated; Afrikaner patriotism had not yet reached its peak, so these individuals joined for adventure, to escape their problems and probably from their failure to recognise the dangers involved and also because of the effects of the powerful anti-German propaganda. The word "khaki" came to possess political dynamite when it was used by General Hertzog, who broke away from the South African Party and formed the Nationalist Party, to describe the British soldiers as "khaki pests".

In that year, 1915, I had my first experience of an election when I assisted one of the candidates in the general election. The candidates were W.B. Madeley, who was the idol of Benoni Labour and who represented Benoni in the Union Parliament from its inception until his death during the

Second World War; a member of the South African Party; Van Schonken (Nationalist) and Bill Andrews, one of a group of Labour members of Parliament who broke away and formed the War-on-War group. Madeley was elected with a large majority over his SAP opponent.

Benoni was probably Labour's greatest stronghold in the country and continued to be so until the death of Madeley. As an important centre of the mining industry it also had a strong and loyal trade union tradition based on the British immigrant workers in the gold industry. Street corner meetings were held frequently during the long summer evenings and election meetings were enthusiastically supported. Labour continued to hold Benoni in two more elections won by Tommy Osborne and after him Leo Lovell, then the rot set in: the UP won the following election and the Nationalists (commonly referred to as the "Nats") took over and have held the seat since. This was not surprising as the Labour Party was deeply compromised by its adherence to the white labour policy.

Benoni was also the centre of a strike on the goldfields in July 1913. It all began on the New Kleinfontein Mine which dominated Benoni both physically, with its ever expanding mine dump, and economically and socially, because so many of the inhabitants of the town were either directly or indirectly dependent on it for their livelihood. The immediate cause of the strike was a dispute between the mineworkers and the management, which later resolved itself into a struggle for the recognition of the mining unions. Soon the strike spread along the Reef, which in those days stretched from Randfontein on the West Rand to Springs and Nigel on the East Rand.

Smuts called upon the Imperial troops, then stationed in the country. Riots broke out. The Star newspaper's office was set on fire; an attempt was made to burn down Park Station, and the Rand Club, home of the "Randlords," was attacked. Scabs were attacked and their houses burnt down. In Benoni lorries carrying furniture belonging to some of the scabs were intersected and burned. In other cases, furniture was thrown

out of the windows and set on fire. For some reason the Benoni Produce Company's store and another store were set on fire and looted. I saw men and women carrying bags of sugar and other goods from the store. The name "scab" was the worst insult one could hurl at an opponent. I happened to be walking near the Kleinfontein Mine compound when a white miner was bayoneted by a British soldier. In the end I believe the miners won.

The following year in January a strike broke out on the coalmines in Natal and soon involved the railways. A general strike was declared but Smuts imposed martial law and deported nine leaders to Britain.

I mentioned before the impact of the Kleinfontein mine on the everyday life of the community. Here are a couple of examples from my own experience. The mine crusher house was situated on the edge of the town and worked twenty-four hours a day except on Good Friday and Xmas Day when it was shut down. On those days without the ever-present background noise the silence was uncanny. The manager of the battery on a neighbouring mine, Mick Vandecar, told us one day that he was a sound sleeper except on the nights when the battery was silent. He just could not sleep.

Then there were the hooters. We regulated our day by them. When I was working at home for my matric I had no watch so used the hooters and the sun for determining the time. In the morning I used to mark the position of the shadow cast by one of our verandah poles at the time of one of the morning hooters. Then later to tell the time I used to measure the angle through which the shadow had moved and, allowing four minutes for each degree, I was able to estimate the time of the day to within four minutes. After some time I was able to get an idea of the movement of the sun from north to south or vice versa through the seasons. Occasionally the hooters at an unusual time would induce a feeling of anxiety: it was the first warning of an accident on the mine, a rock fall, an explosion or an over wind.

During the gusty winds in August and September

we suffered a great deal from sand, which was whipped from the dumps and hurled in our faces with such force that it stung and made walking difficult. Everything in the house was coated with dust. When the streets were macadamised and tarred the position was greatly improved but the mine dust still made things uncomfortable during the windy, gusty months. In the school that I attended and subsequently taught in for eighteen years a large percentage of the boys went to work on the mines in the neighbourhood in various capacities: as miners, blacksmiths, fitters and turners, carpenters, reduction workers, engine drivers, timekeepers or storekeepers. And facing the compounds were rows of shops devoted entirely to what was called the native trade and the goods sold often referred to as Kaffir truck.

They were ill treated and conned in a shocking, disgraceful manner. It was a common practice, for example, for the shopkeeper or his assistant to agree to sell an article of a certain quality and, while packing it, surreptitiously substitute one of inferior quality. Short-changing was another form of cheating and when the customer complained he was accused of being cheeky and manhandled. It is therefore not surprising that many Africans acquired a deep suspicion of Jews in general and Jewish shopkeepers in particular and the term "Majut" became a term of abuse and contempt.

When I left the Benoni Primary School at the end of the 1916 school year I spent the Xmas holiday on the farm Knoppiesfontein occupied by a very good friend of ours, Mr. Isaac Bresgi and his family consisting of his wife, sons Harry (2 yrs), Alec (4 yrs) and Sarah (6 months). Also working and living on the farm were his brothers Barney and Boruch. The farm was rented from the youngest son Boet of the well-known Van der Walt family. Boet's elder brother was a SAP (South Africa Party) M.P. and a loyal supporter of Botha and Smuts. In the 1914 rebellion he supported the loyalist forces under Botha and Smuts, while Boet took the field on the side of the rebels. When the rebellion was suppressed he returned to another farm he owned near the Bresgi's farm.

It was my first visit to a farm and, as I set out for

a walk on the morning after my arrival, I was almost overwhelmed by the sights, sounds and scents that came flooding in upon me. Although it was December, the air was cool and fresh, the doves in the trees in the plantation were courting and the other birds noisily busy at their nests. From the orchard the breeze brought the strong scent of the oleander. Oddly enough I have retained no memories of any farming activities and few other impressions of my visit.

1917

I was now seventeen and too old to go to school for four years for my matric. As I described before, it had originally been decided that I was to take two years for my matric, but as I was making good progress my teachers decided to let me write at the end of one year. I passed all subjects but came down in my aggregate. I was heartbroken for a few days but soon recovered and settled down to work on my own with only a few lessons.

The new setbooks in English and Dutch I had to do on my own. I enjoyed the work greatly and look back on those days with pleasure. The result: a second-class pass. Bertie Ostrofsky wrote the same exam, and it was his father who came rushing up one early morning about 6-7 shouting, "You have passed. You have passed." He must have run all the way from his home to our verandah, out of breath and excited. Mr Ostrofsky was a London tailor, battling for a living but public-spirited and, together with his wife, an ardent supporter of and worker for all good causes in the Jewish community. And their sons followed their example.

This year, 1917, opened a new era in the history of mankind. It was the year of the Russian Revolution. The Czar was overthrown in February and on 7 November the Bolsheviks took power. The event was hailed with joy by many sections of the community, especially by the Jews in the country, most of whom were either themselves immigrants or the first generation born of immigrants. Now there would be an end to the pogroms, the ghetto, the numerus clausus and other forms of discrimination and oppression, not only of the Jewish people but of all the people

of the Russian empire. Both my mother's parents died during this year, within a matter of months of each other. Otherwise I have few clear memories of this period.

My life was circumscribed and confined within the narrow scope of my immediate interests: my studies and the daily routines and contacts with the people in Rothsay Street where we lived, and a few friends like Philip Toker, Harry Solomon and Alec Hirshowitz. Near our house, next to the municipal storeroom, was a vacant piece of ground and there we boys used to play soccer and cricket. My brother Lewis was the leading spirit in this: he it was who looked after our gear, mending and patching the football covers and bladders and stitching up the seams of the crickets balls (when we could manage to get hold of a leather ball). Philip and I often swotted together. Looking back now I am surprised to find that the war made so little impact on us, mainly I suppose because none of our relatives and friends was in the army, so that we did not experience the daily anxiety and apprehension of casualties.

Sometimes I used to spend a weekend with my great uncle and aunt in Doornfontein. My aunt was a very motherly, kindly person, and my mother often came to her for a heart-to-heart talk when she found life with my father a little difficult. My father did not make a very comfortable or even adequate living and many was the time when we wondered where our next month's rent would come from or whether the baker would stop delivering bread until his account was paid. As regards money matters my father was easy-going and did not unduly exert himself. He was more interested in discussion than in looking after his work and often fell foul of those he worked for.

By the family he was regarded as having a good head and highly regarded. When one of his cousins, Lena (Lipke) became engaged, she and her future husband, Sam Joffe, refused to be married in accordance with religious rites, but at the insistence of her parents they compromised and allowed my father to conduct the ceremony at home.

This granduncle and his wife had brought seven surviving children with them from Latvia. I believe five of them had died when young. In order of seniority (as far as I can remember) were Abe (Faifke); Minnie (Menuche) who was Lily Levin's mother; Barney (Berke), the father of "little" Cyril; Fay and Minnie; Lena, the mother of Jock and Blume; Jack, father of Avroy and Melanie; Philip (Pinkel), father of Stanley and Mervyn; and Anne (Sore Hanne) who never married. Abe's children are "big" Cyril, Rosalie and Noreen.

Philip and Anne were a few years older than me. Philip worked as an assistant in the native stores (as we used to call them) and was a very keen physical culturist. He was a very good amateur wrestler and retired as joint amateur lightweight South African champion with a Dr Vercuil. He and I were very friendly and I used to listen with admiration to stories of his fights with hooligans and anti-semites. On occasion he used to slip me a couple of bob as pocket money. His brother Jack and he used to share a room, a rather above average size room, untidy and with school textbooks scattered on a table and chairs.

These books belonged to his brother Jack. This boy worked as a barber but his heart was set on becoming a doctor and he studied assiduously for many years and wrote examinations year after year, but the much-coveted Matric eluded him. He began long before me and when I began to work for the same exam I often discussed the various problems with him and his friends. Even after he left Johannesburg and went to work for his brother-in-law Solly Goldman in Bloemfontein in the bakery he continued to write. It was pathetic to watch him craving for that elusive matric. He retained an interest in education over the years and his yearning for success was richly rewarded when his son Avroy graduated in medicine and he lived long enough to see him rapidly acquire a reputation as a pediatrician.

Berke (Barney) was intellectually the most advanced in that family. He was also reputed to have "a good head" and as a youth must have

studied the Talmud in Latvia. But when he came to South Africa he learnt enough tailoring from his father to become a trouser machinist. I am not sure whether he had ever learnt to cut out a pair himself. Like his elder brother Abe and, to a lesser extent, his father, he was rather fond of the geegees. His was definitely a waste of a good brain. He married late in life, a woman young enough to be his daughter. In the end she left him and, as he could not look after the three young children himself, he placed them in the Arcadia Jewish Orphanage where they were well cared for and given every opportunity for education. For a short period I used to visit the orphanage to give my young second cousin Cyril extra lessons in maths. He was at that time at Parktown Boys' High.

Sometimes after these visits to Johannesburg I used to grumble at home when things were not the same as in Johannesburg and my parents used to tease me by saying "Pitsere bay," a Latvian phrase meaning "He's been to St Petersburg" (now Leningrad). There is an interesting bit of Russian social history behind this phrase.

Periodically peasants would be recruited for road works and other forms of unskilled labour in St Petersburg and other urban areas and it was inevitable that on their return from the wide world of the city they should find fault with the humble primitive conditions in the poor peasant villages. And the reply to their grumbles was just as inevitable: "Pitsere bay" (he's been to St Petersburg).

1918

When I failed to get my matric in one year, at the end of 1917, I settled down to work on my own, with only a few lessons to help me with the Dutch setbooks. Although, as I stated before, I enjoyed the work, I used to find the heat in the summer a bit too much sometimes, when I would put a wet towel round my head. My target was eight hours a day. This extra year gave me a chance to revise the history pretty thoroughly and I did largely towards the end of the year while walking in the veld with a book in one hand and a stick in the other and occasionally a couple of dogs at my

heels. For revising the Revolutionary and Napoleonic Wars I employed a simple technique. I memorised every date from 1789 onward and used these dates as pegs on which to hang what I knew about the events concerned.

This year marked the end of the First World War on Armistice Day, 11 November at 11 a.m. It also marked the outbreak of the terrible epidemic of flu, which swept across the continents and killed millions. Benoni did not escape. Schools were closed and used as temporary hospitals. I went down with it and, I suspect the dyspepsia and indigestion I suffered from for many years was in large measure a legacy of that bout. For years after that I could not tolerate a piece of fresh cucumber, because I experienced the first feeling of nausea and the onset of 'flu' after eating some. Fortunately it did not seem to affect my performance in the matric exam, though I'm not sure whether I wrote before or after the attack.

At about the same time Mrs. Rose Wainer, who lived round the corner to us, in Harpur Avenue, and with whose family we had become very friendly, gave birth to a son and I was asked to be godfather at his circumcision. The baby was named Israel (Izzy). This baby is now (16.2.77) 58 and principal of Primrose English Media School, Germiston. His elder brother Maish became very attached to my late brother Lewis and called his eldest child Wiz, after my brother's nickname. The name Wiz itself was derived from the word Liz, which Lewis was inclined to pronounce Wiz. His L's were often W's. The Wainers also had two daughters, Sonia and Freda, the latter now dead. We were very close friends with the whole family until they left for Boksburg.

At the end of the year we were thrilled when I obtained a second-class pass in my matric. In those years a matric certificate in a poor working class family was not so common, standard six being accepted as sufficient schooling for the children.

1919

My father was not in a position to pay for my university education and got me a job as a clerk

with the Benoni, Brakpan and Springs Board of Executors, Building Society and Trust Company Limited. This was a comparatively new firm with Mr I. Kuper as the head. Ike Kuper was one of the leading members of the Jewish community, a prominent Labour Provincial Councilor for Benoni and a one-time mayor of the town. By profession he was an attorney, a partner in the leading firm of attorneys Kuper and Reid. His wife Celia was a liberal, Socialist-minded woman and at her hometown in Russia must have been a member of one of the Socialist movements. She was a freethinker and in that respect the very antithesis to her husband, who was a strictly observant Jew and the son of a well-known Johannesburg Talmudical scholar.

Although socially Celia Kuper and my father were poles apart they had many intellectual and political ideals in common and were very, very good friends. Later, when both families went to live in Johannesburg Fanny and I taught some of their grandchildren and the grandchildren of another branch of the Kupers. One day there came into my classroom at Saxonwold a normal college student, Teddy Gordon. He was Celia Kuper's nephew, and since then he and his wife Lorna have been amongst our dearest friends.

I did not stay too long at the Benoni Board. For one thing, Alec Tamaris, the young manager, did not seem very keen to give me much opportunity for learning my job; I literally had to find work for myself. I did so and was soon in charge of the savings accounts cashbook. For another, I missed my studies, and when I came from work my books seemed to reproach me for neglecting them. I remained at the Board in all for about six months and at the end of July in the same year I was enrolled as a student at the Johannesburg Teachers' Training College.

At that time the college provided a two-year course for the T3, the Transvaal Third Class Teachers' Certificate. The course consisted of two parts: part I the academic, and part II the professional. But for 1920 and onward the academic subjects would be taken at the University of the Witwatersrand or, as it was known in those days, the Johannesburg

University College. We were instructed to choose only three subjects and limit our choice to Arts subjects but I applied for and was granted permission to take three Science subjects – Maths I, Physics I and Psychology I – and one arts subject – English.

Among my contemporaries in the English class were Seymour Heyman, who after the first six months switched to medicine and became the leading paediatrician in his day; Herbert Frankel who later became Professor of Economics at Wits and subsequently a don at Oxford; and Harold Hanson, later a leading advocate. I was one of the very few who passed the June tests in English, much to the chagrin of Frankel who failed and quite unjustifiably accused me of swanking. Coming as he did from a rich and well-known family of forage merchants he was in no doubt that he was more entitled to a pass than that shabby-looking student in a second-hand coat who used to come by the early morning train from Benoni.

Indeed my only income after my university fees were paid by the College out of a grant from the Johannesburg City Council was a free second-class railway season ticket and one shilling and sixpence a day for food from the College. I am afraid that the usual pleasures and privileges of a university student were far beyond my means. Of the social and sporting opportunities offered by the University I enjoyed very, very little. Still, I enjoyed my studies and established friendly relations with my lecturers and some of my fellow students.

Updates of Jewish Life in the FSU

Books Presented to Riga Schools

The Board of Trustees of the Riga Jewish Religious Congregation, the Latvian Old Believers Association and publisher Margarita Saltupe presented several books to the schools of Riga. Each school received a historic research in three volumes with testimonies of the people that had experienced the Holocaust, as well as the book by Jevgeny Klimov *Russian Artists*, and two more books *Russian in Latvia* and *The Fundamentals of Democracy*.

Little Response to Zuroff's

“Informers Campaign”

Within two months, only one person from Latvia has replied to the call of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre to provide information on Nazi war criminals.

The project *Operation: Last Chance* was announced in all three Baltic countries in July, offering a \$10,000 reward for information leading to the conviction of Nazi war criminals.

In all, 51 suspected Nazi war criminals in Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia have been identified by a total of 17 informants from the Baltic states. Efraim Zuroff, the head of the Israel office of the Simon Wiesenthal Centre noted that in addition to the one person from Latvia, one person from Estonia and 15 from Lithuania responded. Zuroff explained that the low activity of residents was due to “technical problems.”

Of the 17 people who responded to the request, only one person was willing to accept the promised \$10,000 reward.

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Newsflash: Latvia SIG Now Accepts Membership Fees via PayPal

In an effort to simplify the process of submitting membership dues, especially for people who reside outside the United States and Canada, the Latvia SIG now accepts payment via PayPal. PayPal is a web-based service that facilitates paying bills and fees via email.

With PayPal, you can send money to anyone with an email address by simply signing up for a PayPal account. To do this go to the PayPal web-site, <http://www.paypal.com>, and follow the directions provided to create an account. Once you have an account, log into your account and click the Send

Money tab. Now enter the Latvia SIG email address, which is mgetz@erols.com, and enter the amount you would like to send. To fund the payment, add a credit card to your PayPal account by entering your credit card number as instructed.

After reviewing the details of your payment, click the Send Money button. The Latvia SIG will immediately receive an email explaining that it has received a payment from you through PayPal.



Jewish Fighters of Dvinsk

Abramov	S.	Fisch	S.	Joffe	M.
Addelsberg	S.	Fridland	Roza	Joffe	S.
Afremovitz	M.	Fridman	I.	Kadischevitz	A.
Alperovitz	Sh.	Galperin	D.	Kafel	I.
Altshuler	H.	Gandler	D.	Kagan	A.
Aranovitz	M.	Ganz	B.	Kagan	Ch.
Averbuch	B.	Ganz	P.	Kagan	I.
Averbuch	S.	Garinkol	M.	Kagan	P.
Bank	J.	Gavartin	L.	Kagan	R.
Baron	I.	Gavendo	B.	Kagan	S.
Bechtin	M.	Gavendo	M.	Kagan	Sch.
Beilin	Z.	Geler	G.	Kagan	Z.
Berenschtein	M.	Gelman	M.	Kanolik	A.
Berger	S.	Geltman	G.	Kantorovitz	F.
Bergerman	D.	Gelvan	I.	Kapisovitz	I.
Berman	G.	Gendel	B.	Kaplan	B.
Berolski	B.	Gerenrat	M.	Kaplan	I.
Beskin	E.	German	S.	Kaplan	P.
Biks	O.	Geskin	Ch.	Karpus	
Bilson	B.	Gilenson	S.	Katz	I.
Bitner	A.	Gindin	P.	Katz	M.
Blium	P.	Ginsberg	J.	Katz	S.
Blius	S.	Ginzburg	L.	Kazin	A.
Bonks	J.	Glezerov	A.	Kirkilovitz	I.
Bor	F.	Gnisel	Sch.	Kit	B.
Bor	M.	Goland	I.	Kit	I.
Borok	I.	Goldin	I.	Kit	M.
Borovik	M.	Goldin	O.	Kit	P.
Brin	A.	Goldman	L.	Kit	Z.
Bun	M.	Goldman	P.	Kleinschtein	I.
Butin	A.	Goldschmit	D.	Kleinschtein	N.
Butin	E.	Gordin	Ch.	Kleinschtein	P.
Chabinski	M.	Gordin	I.	Kliazkin	M.
Chain	N.	Gordon	I.	Kliumel	A.
Dameschek	O.	Gordon	M.	Kogan	Z.
Davidovitz	A.	Gordon	S.	Komrac	M.
Deitz	M.	Gordon	Ch.	Kopelevitz	M.
Deitz	P.	Greis	J.	Kort	M.
Dorin	Z.	Greisdorf	B.	Kosba	L.
Dorum	I.	Grinberg	Sch.	Kosba	Z.
Dovgard	M.	Grinvald	J.	Kostilevski	M.
Drujan	G.	Grok	I.	Kuklia	L.
Dubaschinski	I.	Grubin	K.	Kuklia	S.
Dumisch	I.	Gudovski	L.	Kur	B.
Dunavezki	Ch.	Gurevitz	More.	Kvin	Z.
Efun	G.	Gurevitz	Movscha	Landsberg	Sch.
Eruchimov	A.	Gurvitz	I.	Langer	M.
Feigelson	Ch.	Gutner	M.	Lanzat	B.
Feitelbaum	G.	Igol	M.	Laznik	Ch.
Feldman	A.	Joffe	G.	Lekuch	L.

Jewish Fighters of Dvinsk

Lempert	I.	Pliner	B.	Zilber	A.
Lerner	E.	Podles	D.	Zubovitz	I.
Levin	A.	Portnoj	M.	Zuser	J.
Levin	Ch.	Rapoport	F.		
Levin	D.	Resnik	J.		
Levin	J.	Rubin	Z.		
Levin	M.	Rusoni	P.		
Levis	B.	Saltuper	N.		
Levitan	L.	Schapiro	A.		
Levschtein	Ch.	Schlifer	I.		
Liachin	P.	Schpungin	Sch.		
Lieberman	L.	Schtern	I.		
Lisitzin	J.	Schuel	B.		
Lit	S.	Schuel	E.		
Liustikman	M.	Schuel	L.		
Lunzik	Sch.	Schuel	M.		
Lurje	B.	Schuel	N.		
Magarschal	P.	Schulman	Elisavet		
Magasil	N.	Schulman	M		
Magid	Ch.	Skutel	I.		
Magid	K.	Skutel	L.		
Magid	M.	Skutel	S.		
Maron	I.	Sluzkez	B.		
Maron	K.	Smuschkovitz	Sch.		
Mazkin	M.	Snipelischek	I.		
Michelovits	Sch.	Soizski	Boris		
Mintz		Soltz	M.		
Mostov	D.	Srizski	Berl		
Motov	B.	Starkovitz			
Munitz	I.	Svirski	G.		
Murovitz	N.	Trok	N.		
Murowitz	Ch.	Tveigorn	M.		
Murowitz	D.	Tzernin	I.		
Murowitz	G.	Vainer	L.		
Muschkat	I.	Vaisman	P.		
Nachimovski	B.	Varschavski	A.		
Nachimovski	M	Vasner	M.		
Nadel	M	Vilentzik	J.		
Neischtat	I.	Viltz	M.		
Novik	Z.	Vinokur	J.		
Nudel	M.	Vovsi	I.		
Palei	B .	Zelikovitz	S.		
Peisachovitz	M.	Zhiv	A.		
Perelman	P.	Zhiv	J.		
Plakchin	G.	Zhiv	Z.		

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

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NAME:..... LOCATION:.....

Bibliographical or archival sources used in your Latvian genealogical research:

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

Cemeteries, travel experiences, etc:

Suggested newsletter topics:

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

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