

Latvia SIG

July 2003
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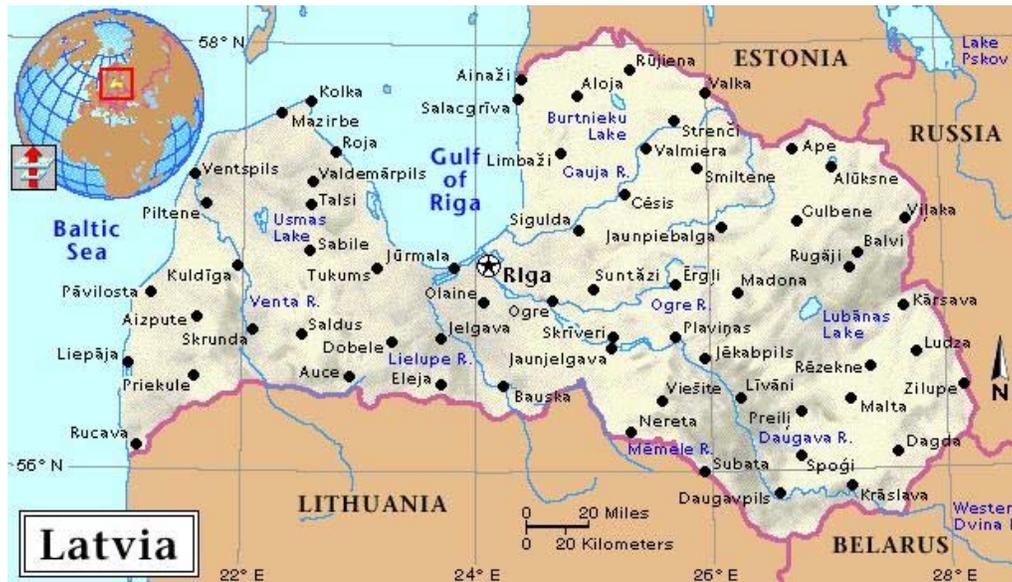


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President's Report

Shalom Chaverim!

Although I am still recovering from that amazing conference in Washington, DC, our editor tells me that the President's Letter is due! For those of you who attended the conference, and there were a fair number of us, I am sure that you were as exhilarated by the entire affair as I was!

As you know, we are trying to break down the areas where Jews settled in what is today Latvia and Estonia, so that we can be more thorough in obtaining and data basing resources. To date, the following areas have been engaged and materials are being worked up for new web page links:

Dvinsk: Donna Dinberg, <donna.dinberg@nlc-bnc.ca>; Judy Brandspigel <judyb843@aol.com>

Rezekne and Ludza: Paul Chefitz <pcheiftz@global.co.za>

Goldingen [Kuldiga]: Martha Lev-Zion <martha@bgumail.bgu.ac.il>, Eric Benjaminson, <oregon81@yahoo.com> Eric has already put up a page for Goldingen.

Sassmacken: Betsy Thal Gephardt, <bgephart@comcast.net> Betsy has for quite some time had a web page for Sassmacken.

Estonia: Adam Katzeff, <adam.katzeff@mail.bip.net>, Len Yodaiken, <shoshly@kfar-hanassi.org.il>

Those are the areas of which I am aware. If there are others of you involved in some special niche, please let me know so that we can all work cooperatively! Kindly contact the people I have noted next to the areas involved, if the area was connected to your ancestors! They can use your help and your ideas! If your area is not yet covered, perhaps you should consider undertaking the project! What about Mitau, Hassenpoth, Windau, Pilten, Tuckum? Has someone thought of exploring a project on the estates where 80% of our ancestors first lived and worked? What about Riga?

I would also like to see links to possible family histories in each area. We can brainstorm about

this on the Latvia and Courland discussion groups, if you would like. You can join the discussions whose addresses are: <latvia@lyris.jewishgen.org> and <courland@lyris.jewishgen.org>.

Next year's 24th Annual IAJGS Conference on Jewish Genealogy will take place in Jerusalem. More than any other conference worldwide, you should make a special effort to attend this one! Did you know that Latvians were among the founders and/or the early settlers of Hadera and the kibbutzim of Ashdot Ya'akov, Afikim, Kfar Blum, Kfar Gila'di, Shefayim, Geva, Kivutzat Kinneret, Mishmarot, Ein Gev, Ginossar, Galilyam, etc. Even though the Jewish Agency has incomplete data from 1919 - 1941, they still have the names of 4,547 Latvian Jews who settled in Eretz Yisrael during those years between the world wars. How many of your missing family members might have settled in the Land of Israel? The conference organizers in Israel are making special efforts to try to reunite new Olim and residents of the former USSR with their lost families in the west. This is just one of the very exciting projects they have undertaken. Every kibbutz has an archive and an historian. Imagine how much research you could get done, how much family you could meet!

Please remember that this is your SIG! We want to know if there are areas of dissatisfaction as well as areas that are gratefully covered! Only by working together can we rebuild the lives of our Jewish ancestors! Help us grow and let us help you.

Next year in Jerusalem!

Martha
martha@bgumail.bgu.ac.il

Treasurer's Report

As of July 1, 2002 our bank balance stood at \$4,100 and on June 30, 2003 it was \$3,400. Our income from membership and \$150 in donations totaled \$1,700. Both membership income and donations were at a lower level than last year. Newsletter expenses were approx \$1,350 for the three issues printed and mailed. These included several back issues called for by institutions that

carry the Latvia SIG newsletter in their archives. An additional \$900 was spent on research and database preparation. Other expenses included membership in the USHMM and the United Council for Soviet Jewry as well as items to prepare for the IAJGS Conference. Expenditures totaled \$2,400.

During the past year we had 67 paid-up members. This is a decline from previous years, particularly from Europe, Israel and South Africa but we need to recognize that we have had an inadequate system to promote renewals, let alone solicit new members and those who have not renewed despite an initial appeal. The financial reality is that we must review priorities for the coming year and plan accordingly.

Many of us opposed e-mailing our newsletter for a number of reasons, including its possible availability to non dues-paying readers. If we can formulate membership benefits over and above provision of a newsletter, we should consider a PDF e-mail version or web-based access in the interest of using our financial resources to better effect. Web-based access to the newsletter would only be available to dues-paying members. Whichever route we choose to go, enlarging our membership base is critical.

Martha and Cindy have been extremely active and reasonably successful in their recent recruiting. As matters stand we have 8 new members and 2 renewals signed up for the 2003/2004 year. This effort needs to continue and if possible be intensified. This calls for publicity and promotion on our website and discussion group to support the follow-up calls and initiatives that Cindy has led. I hope this important work is expanded and supported.

I would like to thank Martha, Cindy as well as Rhea and Barry for their efforts in recruitment, not to mention putting together the newsletter, which has been a cornerstone of our activities and income.

I look forward to any questions or comments and suggestions to strengthen our financial backbone.

Mike Getz, Treasurer
mgetz@erols.com

Editor's Comments

I am sorry for the delay in distributing this issue of the newsletter, but I wanted to include some material from the IAJGS International Conference held in Washington, DC, which ended on 25 July. As a first-time attendee at one of these conferences, I can only say that I was overwhelmed. The range of topics covered, the experts in genealogy research, the computer-based facilities, the genealogy resources available, the locally available archives and research facilities, and the more than 1,200 attendees made this conference an outstanding genealogical event.



Mike Getz, Arlene Beare, Barry Shay, and Don Hirschhorn man the Latvia SIG table at the SIG Fair—part of the IAJGS Conference.

As you can see from the photo, the Latvia SIG was well represented at the conference. In addition to the SIG Fair, Latvia SIG members Mike Getz and Martha Lev Zion presented interesting and informative material at the SIG luncheon and general session, respectively. I am happy to be able to include their contributions in this issue of the newsletter. Additionally, presentations of interest to the Latvia SIG community were made by Howard Margol, Blake Eskin, and Gilbert Herbert.

The SIG Fair attracted many people to the Latvia SIG table, resulting in the addition of twelve new members to the SIG. Arlene Beare went back to England with a lighter load, after selling out all of her instructional books on Jewish genealogy research in Latvia and the UK. She also won a

beautiful suitcase at the banquet drawing.

On Sunday, the first day of the conference, the Latvia SIG held its annual business meeting. Here, for the first time, I met Martha and Arlene, both of whom I correspond with regularly, and other Latvia SIG members. A main issue of discussion was how to attract more dues-paying members to the SIG by providing benefits and services in addition to the newsletter.

One effort that continues and is crucial to the SIG is the maintenance of existing online databases and the bringing online of new databases of importance to the membership. Thankfully, Constance Whippman and Arlene Beare are doing a wonderful job in this area. Arlene, in many cases at her own cost, has facilitated the acquisition, translation, and distribution of databases and maintains an excellent working relationship with the archivists in Riga. (See Constance's update that follows these comments.) This job is too big for one or two people, and we are looking for volunteers to assist Constance and Arlene in these efforts and in new efforts to acquire material from the Belarus archives and the Belarus SIG that relate to Latvia.

Another ambitious project is the development of a web-site devoted to Dvinsk/Daugavpils. Donna Dinburg and Judy Brandspigel have taken it upon themselves to develop such a site. They, too, need help in identifying and providing material in support of this effort. See their article for more information.

One question that we all have is what were the origins of our Latvian ancestors? Martha Lev Zion answered many of these questions in her presentation at the IAJGS conference and I am happy to include her more formal write-up of that presentation in this newsletter.

Those of us lucky enough to get a ticket to the Latvia SIG luncheon, heard Mike Getz give an eloquent talk about the role of Zionism in Jewish Genealogy. Mike's talk was interspersed with personal accounts of his life in South Africa as a young boy and I am happy to include his remarks in this issue.

Many of you have read Esther Rechtchafner's article about Rezekne in the last issue of this newsletter. I am happy to include Part 2 of the results of her research concerning the relationship between Rezekne, in Latvia, and Ein Zeitim. Esther, who was born in New York now lives on Kibbutz Ein Tzurim in Israel and works at Yeshivat Hakibbutz Hadati. Information about the Yeshiva can be found at <http://www.ykd.co.il>.

Some of the most interesting and useful articles published in this newsletter have been personal accounts of trips to Latvia by descendants of Latvian Jews. In each and every case, my own included, these trips provided a personal connection and closeness to our ancestors that archival records alone could not provide. The articles by Yehuda Weinstock and by Sarah and Charles Orlove (whose trip closely paralleled my own), certainly attest to that fact. I hope these articles provide the impetus for more of you to make the plunge and visit Latvia. And when you return, please write an article about your trip and let us publish it in the SIG newsletter.

Unfortunately, the newsletter concludes with descriptions of more anti-Semitic events and continuing efforts by some Latvian and Estonian officials to minimize or deny the role their citizens played in the Holocaust.

Again, I'd like to thank the contributors to this issue and ask the readership to submit additional material for publication.

Finally, please note that a new membership year began on 1 Jul 2003, so for those of you who have not yet paid for the new year please send your payment to: Latvia SIG, 5450 Whitley Park Terrace, #901, Bethesda, MD 20814-2061. Checks should be made payable to Latvia SIG. Alternatively, payments are still being accepted via PayPal. Please update the membership questionnaire on Page 38, if necessary.

The All Latvia Database 2003 Progress Report and Update

By
Constance Whippman
All Latvia Database Coordinator

The All Latvia Database, a joint project of the Latvia SIG and the Courland Research Group (CRG), was launched in 2000 with JewishGen, providing the infrastructure and technical support. It presently consists of 12 component databases and includes nearly 70,000 records and references to over 100,000 named individuals. You can search it on-line at: www.jewishgen.org/databases/latvia

The database continues to grow, thanks to volunteer efforts and the donations of individuals, particularly our past Latvia SIG president Arlene Beare who has continued to commission work directly from Latvia, which continues to come online at regular intervals.

Complete and Ready to Go ONLINE

Rezekne Family Lists, 1896

2,500 entries relating to families living in Rezekne in 1896. Target date 30 September 2003. Extensive social detail including occupations, family relationships, place of birth and origin and general family connections. This list was made possible by a generous donation from Arlene Beare, past president of the Latvia SIG.

Kurland Bay City Cemetery Lists, Michigan

231 burials transcribed and translated including headstone photographs donated to Courland Research Group and the IAJGS for inclusion in the JOWBR project.

Mitau Voters Eligibility Lists, 1877 Municipal Elections

A list of approximately 1,200 eligible voters including women, provided they met the property or business ownership qualification applicable to men as well. This source was discovered in the State Historical Library, Riga and extracted and transcribed by volunteer efforts. Target date for online availability is 30 September 2003.

All Russia Census 1897 - New Additions

Further data from the All Russia Census of 1897 for the Talsen [Talsi District], which is part of the ongoing project led and supported by Arlene Beare. Updates for Riga have recently been added to this database.

Courland Voters Eligibility Lists for 1907

The CRG has completed the whole of the 1907 Voters lists including some 5,000 new records for Libau/Liepaja.

New Projects and Material 2003-2004

Voters Records Vitebsk Area

Voter's Eligibility Lists for the 3rd Duma [Russian Parliament] including Dvinsk, Ludza, and Rezekne [some 8,000 records in Cyrillic]. The templates are ready for this project and we are working on the scanning of documents so that they can be transmitted to volunteers via PDF files. We need people interested in transliterating from Russian to English and able to enter data into Excel files. Full instructions are available and this is not as hard as it sounds.

These records will greatly increase the information we have about Jewish families living in these voters registration districts. The list includes the basis of eligibility, e.g. property ownership, business ownership, military pension, etc. I am hopeful that we can build good links with the Belarus SIG since they also have an interest in this area.

These records were obtained through Michael Steinore's efforts and the costs were born by the Latvia SIG.

The Courland Picture Database

Over 150 photographs of Courland contained in the book *Das Schone Kurland*, published in 1915. These photos have been scanned, edited and enhanced with PhotoShop techniques by Michael Franks in London. The book was donated by Stanislav Gorbulev, Germany.

Kurland Vedomosti Documents, 1860-1870 Extracted Jewish Material

Our research assistant in Riga continues to send material from the official Russian Gazette published during this period for the various Gubernias of the Russian Empire. These are full of social detail relating to the Jewish Community and

contain many thousands of records relating to tax, military service, legal disputes, charitable donations, synagogue appointments, etc. It is a rich and varied source of material.

Livland and Vitebsk Vedomosti, 1855-1865

We are making efforts to collect the relevant equivalent material for these areas. The documents are held in the State Historical Library in Riga and are delicate, but efforts are being made to see if they can be made available.

Dvinsk Cemetery Records

A Herculean task led by Martha Lev Zion to transcribe the existing cemetery lists for Dvinsk (Daugavpils). This has proved to be a real challenge but it is coming along.

Dvinsk Website Development

By

Judy Brandspigel and Donna Dinberg

We are in the process of putting together a website for the city of Dunaberg/Dvinsk/Daugavpils which will include:

AN HISTORICAL TIMELINE: This is proving to be one of the more complicated parts! Daugavpils, as it is now known, has changed names, administrative districts, provinces, countries an incredible number of times in the past few centuries. These political changes directly affected the Jewish people in Daugavpils and surrounding areas.

RESEARCH IDEAS: We intend to include Latvia as well as other jurisdictions that once administered Daugavpils. For example, Dvinsk was in the "province" of Vitebsk when it belonged to Russia; but Vitebsk is now part of Belarus. Another example is finding Shtetlach in Lithuania to which Daugavpils in Vitebsk/Latvia was the closest city.

CEMETERY LISTS

FAMILY FINDER: Names of families being researched; the names of the researchers.

LINKS: to whatever else is available to facilitate research on Daugavpils, including Holocaust research.

PHOTOGRAPHS: (if we can resolve potential copyright problems)

We will accept any and all assistance, especially for contributed content. Get in touch with:

Donna Dinberg, Librarian, JGS of Ottawa (Canada) <donna.dinberg@nlc-bnc.ca> or Judy Brandspigel, JGS of Montreal (Canada), <judyb843@aol.com>.

Getting beyond the obvious. Where should you look for your Latvian ancestors?

Presented at the

23rd IAJGS International Conference
July 24, 2003

By

Martha Levinson Lev-Zion, Ph.D.

The history of the Baltic States is the story of unceasing struggles to dominate Baltic ports and outlets. There was never a time that Moscovy, or Russia, as she was later known, did not covet dominance over the warm water ports on the Baltic Sea. At different times, different areas of the Baltic States were in the hands of the Germans, the Swedes, the Danes, Poland-Lithuania, various princes and mar dukes, and Moscovy-Russia.

Present-day Latvia was never a homogeneous land. It is comprised principally of three different areas, each one with a dissimilar history and made up of different population sources. One needs to understand the background of each area where one's ancestors settled, in order to determine the likely place to look for earlier generations. I would like to take these three areas: Livland or Livonia, Latgale, and Courland and briefly discuss their histories with relation to the lives and treatment of the Jews in each. The discussion should enable you to make progress in your next step in searching for those ancestors whose tracks have disappeared, whether it be in Russia, Belarus, the Ukraine, Poland, Lithuania, Prussia, Germany or elsewhere. And the contrary would also be true: If you have lost track of ancestors in any of these areas, you might consider looking for them in the various provinces of Latvia. This talk should point you in the right direc-

tion!

The difference in the Jewish populations can clearly be seen in the birth, marriage, divorce, and death records from the different areas. For instance, if we look at the difference in ages at which couples marry and have children or the reasons given to the rabbinate for divorce, we can point out the historical differences that I want to discuss. The social history of our families was written by the historical accidents that impacted upon them. These caused them to wander further or to stay put; to pursue a particular occupation or to become involved in something else; to choose a spouse from one family or from another and so forth.

The German Knights began penetrating the areas we're dealing with from the 2nd half of the 12th century. The German Knights [Schwertritter] joined with the Teutonic Knights and together they took over Courland and Livland [or Livonia]. In these areas, there developed an independent power in the Burghers, or the permanent city citizens. They had civil rights to vote and to serve in the local councils. As you will see, these Burghers later played a very heavy-handed role in the fate of the Jews.

As the princes of Moscovy put more and more military pressure on the area, especially in Latgale, the knights found themselves in an untenable position and they turned to Poland-Lithuania for help. The result was that the rule of the knights was effectively ended in 1561 in Livonia and their lands went to Poland-Lithuania. Courland, with the exception of Pilten, which was privately owned, was declared a Dukedom under the nominal protection of Poland. The deal was sealed when the Poles guaranteed to keep the rights of the knights as rulers and the Lutheran Church as the predominant religion. They also promised to continue the knights' law forbidding the settlement of Jews.

Polish rule in Livland continued for around 60 years more, until the Swedes conquered it in 1629. Due to the so-called "Northern War" and the fall of Sweden in the Battle of Poltava [1709] to the Czar Peter I of Russia, the area passed into Russian hands in 1721 and became the Lipland

Gubernia. Already by 1710, Riga had surrendered to Russia.

Courland had only had a few years of skirmishes with her big neighbors, essentially with Sweden, Denmark and Poland. Courland flowered under the mercantilist rule of Duke Jacob who intensively developed industry, and both a merchant and a military fleet. Everything continued as it had been under the Germans – the Landtag, or German Parliament, sat in Windau [Ventspils] and served the interests of the landed gentry and the nobles, just as it always had. All decisions of the Landtag were subject to the approval of the Duke of Courland.

In the middle of the 18th century, Courland became more and more pressured by Russia. In an agreement in 1783 between Courland and Russia, the Baltic coast around Riga passed into Russian hands, including the settlements of Schlock, Dobeln and Mariorenhoff. Finally, in the third partition of Poland in 1795, the entire Dukedom of Courland was absorbed into Russia.

What about Pilten, which as I mentioned, had still another independent history? Pilten, which included three noncontiguous parts: Grobin, Hasenpoth [Aisenpute] and a part of Windau district, was owned by the Bishop of Pilten. He sold it to the King of Denmark, who made a gift of it to his brother Magnus of Holstein. With Magnus' death, Pilten, too, passed into Russian hands in the third partition of Poland.

As for Latgale, Russia was constantly trying to take it over, but in 1582, it was incorporated into a special Polish district called Inflantckie Ksienstwo or Inflantia, for short. The King of Poland appointed the ruler of the area. A sort of local parliament for the nobles was formed. They were very cruel and they oppressed the Latgale peasants to such an extent that even visiting gentry to the area were appalled. The Latgale peasants were forced accept the Catholic religion. The Polish government in Latgale continued for many generations, until the first partition of Poland in 1772. The Latgale peasants only managed to cast off their servitude in 1881.

So, by the end of the 18th century, the entire area

of modern day Latvia was integrated into Czarist Russia. The administration was divided into Lipland [Vidzeme], Courland, and Latgale. Latgale was included in the district of Polotsk, and after 1802, in the district of Vitebsk.

Russification took place systematically, mostly by governmental functionaries. In the villages, the Germans still had the greatest influence, especially in local councils where the German nobles and Burghers sat. As a rule of thumb, the further away from Russia, the greater the German influence. In the regions further west, i.e. Courland, in village and city alike, German influence held sway. These areas experienced a westernized lifestyle, as far as the economy and the public organization of society went. This was totally different from that experienced in Russia. The law, the courts, and the schools all continued to be run according to German standards and expectations.

Mainly because of her ports, and because of the industrial infrastructure that had been established there for years, the economy of Latvia flowered. The Jews had more than a little to do with the economic success of Latvia.

On the eve of World War I, there were about 2.5 million souls in Latvia – there were 782 factories employing some 93,000 workers in this little land. World War I, which saw the expulsion of the Jews from Courland with only 24 hours notice, totally destroyed Latvia's economy. All the basic, vital industries were moved inland to the Russian interior. The rest were destroyed in the war. Commerce froze and around half of the agricultural farms were destroyed. The general population was reduced to about 1.6 million.

At the beginning of the war in Latvia in 1915, Courland was conquered progressively by the Germans; after the Russian Revolution of 1917, so was Riga. I don't want to go into a lot of detail about what followed, but briefly, Karlis Ulmanis declared a provisional independent government of Latvia, which seesawed between the Russia taking over Riga and Germany taking it back again. In the end, in 1920, an agreement was signed between the independent state of Latvia on the one hand, and Russia and Germany, on the other.

The Jews in all areas of Latvia numbered around 142,315 in 1897, which means that they accounted for about 7.4% of the general population. As I mentioned before, the Jewish population developed according to the development of each area and therefore, at least up to 1920, each area's Jews must be considered separately.

So now, let me describe the development of Jewish life from each of the three administrative areas of Latvia.

The Jews Of Lipland Or Livonia

These Jews probably came from Lithuania and Poland already in the days of the Knights, who treated them as unwanted enemies. Proof that the Jews were already in the area in the 16th century is the agreement that was drawn up between the Teutonic Knights and the King of Poland in 1591. This agreement forbade the Jews of Livonia to work in commerce and to farm taxes or collect customs taxes. Even so, Jews continued to come into areas under Polish rule. The Jews dealt mostly in petty trading, peddling in the villages, leasing inns, and so forth. This commerce brought them into contact with the landowners and local nobles, a fact that served them in good stead.

During this time, the Jewish merchants were dealing with agricultural products from Poland-Lithuania. In exchange for grain, flax, wood, honey and so forth, exports of coffee, tobacco, salt, steel and the like were imported into Poland-Lithuania, where they were in great demand. Jewish merchants took their products overseas as well, thereby increasing Polish and Russian exports via the port of Riga.

Needless to say, Jewish success in these areas awakened the jealousy and hatred of the local townsmen, especially of the German merchants. It is in light of the great success of the Jewish merchants that you should understand the complaints of the townsmen and German traders, when they made repeated requests for the Jewish traders to be forbidden in the area, forbidden both from living and from entering the area, especially Riga. From 1592 onward, the Burghers constantly exerted pressure to have the Jews expelled and their trade prohibited. Every now and again, the

nobles would assent to limit the peddlers, but within a short period of time, things reverted to what they had been. The Jews continued to act as a bridge between the city and the village within the Feudal framework. During this period, the number of Jews increased, in spite of their inferior legal status.

During the Swedish period in Lipland [between 1629 – 1721], the Jews experienced no relief in the difficulty of their status. Nonetheless, they kept coming into the area due to their ties with the Poles and the Litvaks and their excellent commercial talents. Swedish encouragement of the Jews to convert to Christianity characterized this entire period. Swedish efforts were not successful in large part. Generally it was the lone Jew, the socially problematic one, that they could convince, and then they would baptize him in a public ceremony for all the Jews to see and feel humiliated.

Russia took over Livonia in 1721. However, no changes were made in the legal status of the Jews until Katherina I, in 1727. She declared that Jews would be expelled from cities in Russia. In Lipland, this expulsion finally took place in 1743, after a long series of attempts, especially by the local governor, to thwart or divert the decree on the grounds of the economic damage that would ensue, especially to Riga.

A number of Jews returned to Lipland in 1764, when the attempt was made to have the Jews move south to settle “New Russia” [Cherson, the Crimea, etc]. A way to return legally was found in 1785, when Shlock and some other areas around Riga came under Russian rule. Katherine II offered open settlement with no note taken of “race or religion”. Jews from Courland and elsewhere were included in this offer. By 1811, 430 officially took up residence as “Citizens of Shlock” or “Merchants of Shlock”. Even though Jews were limited to a stay of between 3 and 8 days in Riga in 1788, the “citizens and merchants of Shlock” were given permission to remain there in 1822, along with their children. On market days, they even had permission to trade anywhere in Lipland, town and village alike. By 1834, there were 532 Jews in the province.

Once again, there was animated discussion in Petersburg debating whether Jews could stay or should be thrown out. Finally, it was decided to allow even those Jews with no legal status to stay. By 1881, the Jewish population of the area had shot up to nearly 26,000! Jews were drawn to Riga from Kovno, from Vitebisk, and from Courland. Indeed, even though the Census of 1897 showed nearly 26,800 Jews in Lipland, all but about 4,800 of them were living in Riga!

Courlander Jews

It would appear that, even though Jews were forbidden to settle in Courland during the time of the Teutonic Knights, they came anyway sometime between the 14th to the 16th centuries. They came via the sea from Prussia and what later became Germany. The Jews first settled in the Northern areas, in Hasenpoth and Pilten. Due to the autonomy of Pilten, Jews settled there as Schutzjuden, protected Jews, and they were able to work in commerce and handicrafts and were allowed to develop kehillot or communities, with everything that that entails, such as synagogues, mikvah, cemetery and so forth. By the end of the 17th Century, a great many Jews of the area already possessed immovable property.

To the southern part of Courland, the majority of the Jews came from Lithuania, Zamot or Samogitia especially, and from Poland, particularly after the murderous pogroms of Chemelnitzki. The Jews from this period generally concerned themselves with peddling, leasing inns, making wine and brokeraging.

Here too, the local city burghers rose up against the Jews in the 17th century. The nobles, however, wanted the Jews for their trading talents and connections and for the money they could squeeze out of them for a Schutzbrief or letter of protection. Although the Jews were allowed to stay and trade, there was constant pressure from the merchant class to get rid of them.

In 1719, the Landtag wanted to give the Jews the right to settle legally in exchange for 400 Albert Thalers. [As a peg, a horse at that time cost 10 to 12 Albert Thalers] The argument went back and forth for 20-odd years, and during that entire period, the powers that be squeezed individuals and

communities for Schutzgelt, making the Jews pay higher and higher prices for the right to stay. The pressure became so great on the Jews that many chose to leave, albeit temporarily. Meanwhile, the argument drifted down to the public at large. Pamphlets began to appear on the subject. The first of them came out in 1787 and was entitled "In Favour of Tolerance Towards the Jews in the Duchy of Courland and Zamgaleen." Note that a parallel phenomenon was occurring in Germany at this time. This was the period of Mendelssohn and a philosophy of tolerance for Jews. However, the Landtag kept delaying a decision on the status of the Jews from one sitting to another, until the Landtag came to an end, along with the Duchy of Courland, in 1795.

When the Russians took over the Duchy and the area of Pilten, about 10,000 Jews lived there. Only about 20% of these lived in the towns of Mitau, Hasenpoth, Goldingen and Jacobstadt. Aside from the few hundred Jews living in Mitau and the Pilten district who had the right to declare themselves officially merchants, the remaining city Jews occupied themselves with petty trading: buying and selling used clothing and brokering, even though these trades were expressly forbidden to them. It was even harder for the rest of the Courlander Jews who lived on estates and in the villages. They worked distilling wine, rented inns, they were petty traders and part of them was forced to earn a living as traveling peddlers wandering from village to village.

When Courland became an integral part of the Russian Imperia, the Jews requested that a decision be made regarding their status, since most of them had been living in Courland for more than 2 centuries with no legal status at all. Their petition went unanswered, but finally on 12 May 1799, a law was enacted in Petersburg, pushed through by the Courlander Karl Heinrich Heikings, which finally, after 200 years of struggle, gave the Courlander Jews the right of citizenship, the right to live in Courland, and the right to do business and handicrafts without interference. Even so, the non-Jewish merchants [all 832 of them as opposed to the 101 Jews] kept pressuring the government to limit the rights of other Jews to enter the area. The government caved in to the pressure and decided that only those registered

around the time of the law's passage in 1799 could stay. That law passed the senate.

The merchants in Mitau then lobbied for still more restrictions and a new law was passed in 1835, stating that only those Jews who had been counted in the last census could be considered locals and all the others would have to be expelled to the Pale of Settlement. That law was in effect the entire time the Russians were in power in Courland.

The Jews were encouraged, indeed pressured, to leave Courland to colonize new areas, but there were no deportations. They went to "New Russia," especially to Cherson province. From the 10 towns of Courland, 2,530 individuals left in 1840 for Cherson. This amounted to 341 families or 11% of the entire Jewish population of Courland. Many of those who remained in Courland were killed from a cholera epidemic that broke out in the area in 1848.

Even though the number of Jews left in Courland was reduced, the threat to the Jews who arrived after 1799 did not abate. The Jews continued to flow into Courland because it was close to the Pale of Settlement and because the established or legal Jews were fully integrated into the economy of Courland and were in its forefront. The newcomers could attach themselves to these established businesses and eke out a far better living than would be possible in the Pale, despite the threat of expulsion hanging over their heads. At one point, in 1904, Russia thought to include Courland in the Pale of Settlement, but the Germans living there objected so vociferously, nothing ever came of it. At that time, about 2/3 of the Jews of Courland were living in cities and towns, as opposed to estates.

The fear of competition with the Jews by the Burghers was sorely felt. From time to time, the police expelled Jews who either were there illegally, or who were actually permitted Courlanders, but only had a handicraft license, for example, and not a license for commerce. Even though the Minister of the Interior Stolipin ordered them to stop deporting Jews, the expulsions continued as long as Russia was under the Czarist regime.

But the really brutal and vicious mass expulsion of Jews from Courland took place at the beginning of World War I when the army needed a scapegoat for its losses and it claimed that the Jews sympathized with the Germans. The expulsions took place on the 14th and 15th of May, 1915, during the festival of Shevuot. The Jews were given 24 hours to leave and that went for all Jews, legal and illegal. The only Jews spared this brutal uprooting were those living east of Bauske and about 10,000 Jews from Libau, Hasenpöth and Grobin, because they were in areas already occupied by the German Army.

The Jews were viciously uprooted and were shoved into railroad cars and shipped to several districts in Poltava, Ekaterinoslav, and to Adimer and Veroneze in the Russian interior. Some died in the railroad cars on the way; some had to go long distances by foot, trying to carry their peckalack and their small children. Some became ill from various diseases and others had nervous breakdowns. The Jews were allowed to bring only clothes and food. Anything of any worth – any work tools, valuables, and merchandise – had to be left behind, as did all communal possessions. The locals, like locusts, descended and striped everything clean, stole everything they could see. Until recent times, this period was the worst the Jewish Courlanders had ever known, as opposed to other parts of Russia where pogroms were not infrequent.

In the end, about 40,000 Courlander Jews were expelled and the few who remained suffered greatly at the hands of the Russian Army. From the time that Russia took over Courland, there was a marked tendency for the Jews to move from the estates in the countryside to the cities. If, in 1797, only 20% of the Jews lived in cities, a hundred years later, 67% of the Jews lived in cities. There was a flowering of culture and commerce, which drew even more Jews to the city. The Jews became firmly established in business, and if you look at the directories from Courland, you will find that many Jews were property owners.

In spite of everything, the Jews of Courland and Lipland achieved a high degree of civil rights, especially when compared to other places. The lan-

guage spoken by the majority of the Jews in Courland was German, with some Yiddish.

Latgale Jews

Because of its great distance from the large centers of Poland and Lithuania, Jews were not particularly drawn to settle in Latgale, or Inflantia as it was known, and a mass movement of Jews began only in the latter half of the 17th century, pushed by the destruction of the communities in the South by Chemelnitzki. Those that did come involved themselves in inn keeping, leasing taxes, making wine and doing the same type of things as Jews did in the other areas I already mentioned. Most settled in small villages and estates. In the 18th century, a large number of traders, craftsmen and other Jews were already moving into population centers of the area – into Dvinsk, Kreitzaburg or Krustapils and Kraslava. According to the 1766 census taken for tax purposes, only about 3,000 Jews were in the area, excluding infants.

When Russia took over in 1772, Latgale was included in the Pale of Settlement. It soon became crowded with Jews and suffered from the same maladies as other areas of the Pale: overcrowding, difficulty in eking out a living and so forth. Latgale has to be looked upon differently from Courland and Lipland. Its Jews were more connected with White Russia and in religious practice, to Lithuania, for instance. In Courland, in particular, Chassidism made no inroads, and the Jews were what I would call “laid back” about religion, whereas the Jews of Latgale were more deeply rooted in rigid religious practice. The language of Latgale Jews, both at home and in society, was Yiddish. In Courland, whereas the majority spoke Yiddish, as late as a century after Russia took over, a full 30% still considered their mother tongue to be German.

Growing numbers of Courlanders and Liplanders were university educated, especially at Tartu University in Dorpat, Estonia. Latgalis had no such opportunity. They should be considered as fully integrated into Russian Jewry as opposed to the two other provinces with their Germanic culture and traditions.

Hopefully, I have provided you with enough background to help you use your intuition about

where to go next to search for traces of your early ancestors. Please use this information as general guidelines and not as gospel! Good luck in your searches!

Zionism and Jewish Genealogy

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By
Mike Getz

Migration to Zion has been both a choice and an obligation among Jews for a very long time. It is a trend throughout our history and the pattern is reflected in every known center of Jewish life.

The topic is a vast one, so today I will focus on Zionist and pre-Zionist activity from Eastern Europe, which ultimately relates to the Baltics, the United States and South Africa. A common thread will be the key elements of genealogy that link them. Zion and Jerusalem have a place in Jewish identity and survival that has been tested and endured.

Jews journeyed to Israel throughout the ages from many places to their holy destination, motivated by faith and hope despite many trials and much hardship. But the historic significance of Ashkenazi immigrants from Eastern and Central European Jewry begins with the arrival of Rabbi Judah Hasid and his followers from Vitebsk in 1700. They were broadly admired and supported by Jewish communities in Europe. They also created a foundation for the settlement and immigration of Jews to come.

Perhaps an easy way to enroll Zionism in the cause of Jewish genealogy would be to declare that all Jews are related and illustrate our connectedness by DNA. But a sense of personal and family identity demands more. We need to review a few other elements that bind us. The Crusades took a heavy toll of Jewish life in Europe. The actual number of survivors may have been as low as 100,000 and we are largely descendants of those survivors. For centuries, out of choice or otherwise, we remained cohesive entities, insulated from and isolated by our European

neighbours. They would be both accommodating hosts and brutal oppressors throughout Jewish life in Europe.

In order to identify our own linkage to those who would build and populate Palestine as well as the State of Israel, we need more evidence than the wonderful acts of pilgrimage that characterized Jewish immigration during the 18th century. The settlement was relatively small, exceeding 10,000 in 1840, mostly in Jerusalem, and constrained by Ottoman rule. But events in Europe would bring about profound change.

In 1869, George Eliot, a great English novelist, wrote "Daniel Deronda" about an Englishman who is brought to his Jewish identity and Zionist zeal by Mordechai, a Jewish mentor. This novel, barely known to day, had a profound influence in the English-speaking world and endorsed influential support for a Jewish homeland in Palestine. That support would mature into the Balfour Declaration and a British mandate to succeed Ottoman rule. In 1862 Moses Hess a leftist enrolled in the ranks of German Jewish assimilation, authors "Rome and Jerusalem." He writes, "After twenty years of estrangement, I have returned to my people" and "my nationality is irreparably connected with my ancient heritage, with the Holy Land and the Eternal City" also "The Jew in exile, who denies his nationality, will never earn the respect of the nations among whom he dwells."

In this period many Jews in Germany and France saw their hopes of emancipation dwindle. Anti-Semitism and discrimination did not abate as more and more German Jews looked for comfort and acceptance in assimilation and conversion. The trial of Dreyfus rewarded similar hopes among French Jewry.

Movements such as Bilu, Chovevei Zion and Dorshei Zion among others, functioned throughout Jewish Europe to promote and support settlement in the Holy Land. Lord Rothschild was similarly responsible for significant achievements through the organization he financed and directed, while providing assistance to these movements. 1881 saw the First Aliyah from Bilu in Kharkov, Russia – mainly students as opposed to religious pilgrims and an important change. 300

began the journey via Constantinople but only 16 would arrive.

Between 1890 and 1895, 4500 younger people dedicated to a life in agriculture, arrive. They are followers of “Chovevei Zion” principally from Russia, Poland and Vienna. Although facing restrictions from Ottoman rulers, many hardships and strife within the Jewish Community, they were the beginnings of a meaningful Ashkenazi presence from Eastern and Central Europe.

In 1895 the trial of Dreyfus and the emergence of Theodore Herzl change the nature and role of immigration to Palestine. Zionism becomes integral to the creation of a Jewish State – its lack marked Jews as a nation without a home. Zionism generated significant support among World Jewry. It united and coordinated efforts to establish a Jewish State in Palestine. Support also came from non-Jewish thinkers and leaders in the US and England. Zionist youth movements begin to develop and eventually reflect a range of national, political and religious ideals.

The first Russian pogrom was in Odessa during 1871. There were pogroms in 100 centers throughout Russia in 1881 – both Tolstoy and Turgenev were silent. After 1904 and driven by further pogroms, the Second Aliyah (Paul Johnson in his “History of the Jews”) brings 40,000, mostly young immigrants to Palestine . Some of them will set up a suburb of Jaffa in 1909, which they named Tel-Aviv. We need to view these developments against a background of 5.5 million Jews in Russia and 2.5million in the Austrian Empire. 2.5 million had left Europe between 1881 and 1914. But hardships would reduce the Jewish population in Palestine from 85,000 to 60,000 by 1914.

At this stage we visualize affinities between Jews in the Holy Land and the Diaspora become stronger and more substantial. Zionist activity was at the core of Jewish life in most of Europe. Support for the Zionist ideal had developed among the British. It would mature into the Balfour Declaration of 1917 that undertook, on behalf of Britain, to reconstitute Palestine as the Jewish national home. The 2nd Lord Rothschild and Chaim Weizman, eminent scientist, and Zi-

onist leader of Russian origin, were instrumental in bringing the Declaration to reality. Palestine would be mandated to British rule by the League of Nations in that framework.

The third and fourth Aliyah would add 100,000 Jewish settlers in Palestine between 1920 and 1926. They came principally from Poland and Russia and by the mid twenties only 1/3 were “halutzim” dedicated to the land. The majority consisted of tradesmen, shopkeepers and many with roots in the middle class. Hitler comes to power in 1933 to motivate the fifth Aliyah of 38,000 immigrants mainly from Austria and Germany. The British now curtailed immigration.

It would be useful to examine the character and scope of Zionist activity in Latvia, which in many ways typified its role in Jewish communities. In Riga, Ze’ev Jabotinsky leader of the Zionist Revisionists, opponents of Zionist Socialism, founded the Betar in Riga in 1923 as a youth movement. Zionists were elected to the Latvian Parliament and were prominent in all aspects of Jewish life. Their important contribution to Palestine and eventually Israel can be noted from the following: Jews from Riga founded Hadera in 1891. Others from Rezekne were very much involved in the establishment, costs, trials and hardships of developing Ein Zeitim, a settlement that did not succeed. Halutzim from Latvia developed the kibbutz movement and helped to found Afikim, Ashdot Ya’akov, Kfar Blum, Kfar Giladi, Shefayim, Ein Harod and others. In 1904 Rabbi Kook of Bausk arrived in Jaffa and would become the Ashkenazi Chief Rabbi – an office he filled with distinction. Many were prominent in all spheres of the Yishuv’s life. Latvian Jewry was intensely Zionist as were the Jews of Lithuania.

For South African Jews the significant links with Latvia and Lithuania spell out linkages in Israel. Among the family records I have studied from Subate in Latvia, where my parents were born, a pattern seems to emerge. In a typical family of 6 to 8 siblings, the elder two or three would travel to the US. After the 1920 US quotas, particularly during the middle or late 20’s, one or two came to South Africa and some went on aliyah to Palestine. Those who remained largely died in the Holocaust. In this example the linkage of the US,

Israel and South Africa is manifest. Cousins on both my maternal and paternal side followed this pattern. I would first meet them in Israel in 1956.

At the tender age of 10 or younger most of my generation in Cape Town were members of Betar or Habonim – the former founded in Riga, the latter in England. I belonged to the Betar together with my sister, cousins and neighbours. We attended weekly meetings and annual camps where Jewish as well as Zionist history was taught together with the ideology of our movement. Memories of those summer days, campfires and wonderful singing still resonate. We received an education and outlook on the Jewish experience that our day and afternoon schools no longer provide.

The debate on how and what kind of Jewish State to build was ongoing in our community. Early in 1942, my barmitzvah year, my mother received a letter from a cousin in Palestine. It described dreadful events in Subate, birthplace of my parents, when their neighbours murdered its Jews in 1941. As members of Betar we remembered Jabotinsky's burning words in the 1930's when he warned of the peril facing European Jewry.

The urgency of a Zionist solution to Jewish vulnerability influenced all our thinking and impacted on the choice of studies and careers among young Jews in South Africa. Many of our parents, uncles and older cousins had belonged to Betar, Shomer Hatsair, and others as well. This mustering of generations facilitated a well-organized Zionist Federation in South Africa. The Federation promoted Aliyah, particularly after 1945 that would continue at a rate unmatched in the Anglo-Saxon diaspora.

1948 brings the Independence of Israel. By 1970, 600,000 European Jews reach Israel, two thirds of Rumanian and Polish origin. By 1974 another 120,000 arrived mainly from Russia. They would be augmented by a strong and steady flow from the former Soviet Union. These numbers consolidated and updated familial connections.

1947 and 1948 is a time when numbers of South African Jews were prepared for and eventually joined Machal to fight for Israel when it was in-

vaded by seven Arab armies in 1948 and many remained. A steady flow of olim from the youth movements and its graduates settled in Israel. With only a few exceptions Cape Town Betar's leadership up to and beyond the 1950's would settle there as well.

In the late fifties my mother received a letter from her aunt Frieda, part of the Subate family, who had survived Siberia and come to Riga with a son and daughter. Her husband Hirschel, died in a Russian prison camp after the family was exiled to Siberia in 1941 by the Soviets. The letter warmly greeted my mother, reminding her of another life and expressed a hope that they would meet again. I was puzzled at the naiveté of this hope. My mother explained that the statement was an expression of plans to reach Israel. Some years later the family received permission to do so. Frieda died in a Riga hospital days before their departure. I meet her son, married daughter, son-in-law and grandson as well as other recently arrived Latvian family in Israel shortly after.

Not unusual among Jewish families, my mother and father were related. Effectively my family tree has 10 relatives of my parents' generation who were born in Latvia and live in Israel. Four that I know of arrived during the twenties. Six others came in the late sixties and seventies. A South African cousin and her two daughters settled with their families in the late seventies. In my experience this is not particularly unusual and illustrates that the two or three generations preceding my own, were likely to have familial links in Israel.

This filial connection with the Holy Land and Jerusalem strengthens as the pilgrimage and settlement of Jews from Eastern and Central Europe gains momentum in the eighteenth century. An important influx from Russia and Central Europe builds a substantial Ashkenazi presence in Palestine. 19th century pogroms in Russia brought significant numbers to Palestine that shared more diversity than the Jewish pilgrims who preceded them. Herzl and Zionism add a sense of national mission to aliyah and take forward the work and dedication of an earlier time. The 20's and thirties add another generation from Europe. Survivors of the Holocaust add to their numbers.

We already have a considerable base that reaches into Jewish families almost everywhere. The freeing of Soviet Jewry would be a further and critical consolidation and puts beyond doubt the fact that all of us with European roots have familial links in Israel. The Jewish family is at home in Israel.

Many thanks for your patient attention and interest. We hope to share the opportunity next year to explore and study the wonderful resources Israel has to offer in this very important aspect of genealogy.

The Connection Between Rezekne and Ein Zeitim

By

Esther Rechtchafner

This article is dedicated to the memory of my friend Riva Lutfi, whose house I slept in, in Jerusalem while doing much of the necessary research. Riva was the one who suggested that I should do more research on EinZeitim, and then write about my findings.

Introduction

A few years ago I became interested in Rezekne, the city in Latvia that my maternal grandmother came from. I tried to find information about it, and at first didn't find too much. Upon looking harder, I did find information and therefore decided to write about it. The reason for doing so, and doing so in English, was so that other members of my family who share these roots could know about the place that our family came from.

While writing about Rezekne, I became interested in the settlement of Ein Zeitim, which was at first founded by people from Rezekne, among others. I was previously familiar with the place Ein Zeitim, as one of the places where my husband used to do his army reserve duty. In the connection between Rezekne and Ein Zeitim, I found a link with my past. For this is a true story of true Zionism, which is the word that I would use to summarize the way that I was brought up.

Ein Zeitim is noted in a few books and articles and letters, though some are hard to find^[1]. In addition to those listed in my bibliography, I believe

there may be others. Some are mentioned by Harozen^[2], (see Appendix: Book List) and among these there are a few that are not available today, for they were printed and in Europe and few copies (if any) seem to have reached this country. It seems though, that at the beginning of the twentieth century the settlement was well known of in Zionist circles in Eastern Europe^[3].

I translated myself to English, the names of books that were written in Hebrew. I used the spelling of "Ein-Zeitim," as it appears in *Encyclopedia Judaica*.

When I found all the information I could about Ein Zeitim, I was in a dilemma for I wasn't happy with the information that I had found. The facts that the settlement wasn't successful, and some of the reasons for its' failure bothered me. I would have wanted to find a happier, more successful history. Even so, I enjoyed doing the reference very much and going through books about the beginnings of the Jewish settlements here. Then decided that instead of keeping all the written material in a folder, and in my memory, I should write it up. Here is what I have found.

Ein Zeitim In History

Ein Zeitim (see map in appendices) is located about three kilometers northeast of Safed, on the same side of the road as Meron, and is 725 meters above the water level of the Mediterranean Sea. The name "Ein Zeitim" comes from the Arab version "Ein Zeitun," which was the Arab name of the Arab village which was built on the remains of a settlement from the middle ages. Ein Zeitim remained Jewish, despite all the hardships that the Jews of this land went through^[4]. It was always thought of as one of the holy places in the country. To the east, there is a cave which is the burial place of Aba Shaul, and nearby in Meron, Rabbi Simon Bar Yochai is buried There are also many Arabs, as well as Jews who honor his grave Its closeness to Biryah, where Rabbi Joseph Karo finished writing the "Shulchan Aruch" (*Code of Jewish Law*) adds to its importance. According to legend, there was a continuous Jewish community here from the eleventh through the eighteenth centuries^[5].

After the expulsion of Jews from Spain, those

that were interested in making a living from agriculture in this area, settled here^[6]. According to tradition, Rabbi Joseph of Sargasso was buried here. He was known both to the Jews and the Arabs of the vicinity, for his good advice and for his peaceful ways. Therefore for centuries, both paid respect to his grave^[7]. Ben Zvi, in his book, *The Land of Israel and Her Settlements*, wrote about how people from Safed came to settle in Ein Zeitim^[8]. In the sixteenth^[9] and seventeenth centuries there was a Jewish settlement here of about forty families of Moraiscus Arabic-speaking Jews. Although most of them worked in agriculture or trades, Ein Zeitim became a center for Jewish learning^[10]. There was a synagogue with twenty-six Torahs, which had many legends that interested both Jews and Arabs attached to it^[11], and the printing press of the Ashkenazi brothers^[12]. There was a Yeshiva, which was headed by Rabbi Moses Ben Makir^[13]. His son-in-law, Rabbi Solomon Nachmias went abroad to collect money for this growing Yeshiva^[14]. There was a Jewish cemetery^[15] here, and there are many legends about important Jews who lived here and were buried here. Since many important people from Safed were buried here, many visited their graves for many generations^[16].

Visitors in the area, such as Rabbi Basula of the sixteenth century, and Rabbi Simcha Ben Joshua, of the eighteenth century wrote about the importance of Ein Zeitim, in connection to legends, graves of important rabbis, synagogues, and a spring of water^[17]. Many Jews left Safed, for temporary refuge, at the time of plagues, or when there were Arab uprisings^[18], or at the time of the earthquake in Safed (1837); and some remained in Ein Zeitim^[19]. Among them then was Israel Bek^[20], who moved the remains of his print shop here^[21]. During the nineteenth century many Jews left Ein Zeitim^[22].

The Planning Of Aliyah To Ein Zeitim

In the beginning of the 1890's there was a wave of "Aliyah" known as "the Toimkin^[23] Aliyah." The "Chovevei-Zion" (Lovers of Zion) Organization acquired land in the Land of Israel. At this time many Jewish Congregations in Eastern Europe tried to form "Organizations for Settlement"^[24], that were to be financially independent

and to reach a membership of a particular number. Therefore they were called this way, i.e. "Organization of the Thousand"^[25]. The original plan for this particular settlement was made by the "Dorshei-Zion" Organization. This organization was founded in 1889, in Minsk^[26]. The plan was organized by Dov Selifin of Minsk^[27]. This was done under the leadership of Joshua Sirkin, who had a written agreement with Baron Rothchild^[28] on the conditions of settlement and the "Organization of the Thousand" of Minsk^[29].

The regulations of the organization appeared in the Hameletz newspaper, in the beginning of 1881. There were favorable replies from all over including the enlightenment writer Moshe Lilienbaum of Odessa. Selifin and Hefetz were among the members, and later among the first to come to start working the land^[30]. The plan was for every member to pay in forty rubles per year for five consecutive years. The Committee would use this money to buy land, prepare it for use, plant on it, build a house, and after eight years the land would be ready for residence^[31]. This organization, sold land to members of the Jewish community of Rezekne, in 1891. The "Partners In Ein Zeitim Committee" was elected at a community meeting, and economic as well as practical conditions were agreed upon. The goal was to start an independent settlement.

The representatives from Minsk, who set out to buy land, didn't succeed in doing so, after they tried for a few months^[32]. Therefore they turned to Austofsky^[33], who was a clerk of the Baron Rothchild, in Rosh Pina, and he was put in charge of buying the land. He acquired land from the Arab villages of Biryah and Ein Zaitun, for he couldn't find land in Judea. Sirkin bought the land. The settlement was so be called "Nahalat Joshua" in honor of Sirkin. The land (fifteen thousand dunam) was bought in 1892^[34]. The decisions that were made at a general meeting of "Dorshei-Zion", in Minsk, in the winter of 1892 were to buy the land, and the electing of the ruling body. Land with a rocky terrain was part of this; it was bought because it was cheap^[35]. Selifin was to be the clerk and Hefetz in charge of work and property. A committee was chosen, with Sirkin as director, and Heiphen as secretary^[36].

The Beginning Of The Settlement

The work started as planned. A vineyard was planted, and a fence surrounding the area was put up. There was a problem with the people^[37] of the neighboring village, who stated that not all of the land of the village had been bought. These Arabs showed there hate for new Jewish settlers. There was an incident, where they placed an Arab body in the field, and tried to prove that the Jews had murdered him. Luckily, the missionaries' doctor, Dr. Henerson^[38], identified the Arab as having died in his hospital a few hours earlier. The Jews brought this matter to court, and the verdict was that this particular field could not be farmed, and according to Ottoman law houses couldn't be built^[39] there. A while later permission was granted. The matter was sorted out after Sirkin, who asked if the organization wasn't doing a "Sisyphean" task, went to Paris to speak to the Baron^[40], and received a promise from him to this affect. This cost the Baron a good deal of money^[41].

Two members of the Jewish community of Rezekne, who had purchased land here, came on Aliyah and were to supervise the development of the settlement and the care of the land that belonged to the Jews of Rezekne, until the others would arrive. They didn't actually know too much about the managing of the settlement^[42]; though expert agricultural advice was sent by telegraph^[43]. One was a storekeeper who became the manager, and the other his son who was sick with tuberculosis, and it was believed that the climate here would be healthy for him, but he soon died because of the cold snowy winter^[44]. Unfortunately the agriculture was planned without advice from experts who were present and understood the conditions. At a general meeting of the organization it was decided to send experts, but the committee decided that this wasn't necessary^[45]. They did buy and bring European plows, which did work well, and amazed the local Arabs^[46].

There were two other Jewish workers who had previously settled here, from Safed, with their families. They had previously been pupils of Rabbi Israel Bek^[47], and were followers of Eleazar Rokeach, and possibly descendents of

Rabbi Isaac Luria; and they were devoted workers^[48]. They stood bravely against the Arabs^[49]. Letters were sent to "Dorshei-Zion", by the new settlers committee (Feliner (secretary), Metipol, from Rezekne, and Raskin, from Warsaw) in Ein Zeitim, and by individual new settlers, expressing their opinion as to these workers. They thought that these workers would try to take over the settlement, and that they weren't using fair methods to try to do so^[50]. The new managers told these Jews that they were to leave, for they had received payment from the administrators of ICA.^[51] And the land was now under the auspices of the Dorshei Zion Organization. Yet, these two workers were the ones who actually worked the land and understood what they were doing. Together with Arab workers, grapevines, olive and fruit trees were planted and two houses were built^[52]. The settlement of Ein Zeitim received much encouragement from Shulman, who was considered the living spirit behind the settlements^[53].

Then an agreement was come to, between the manager and Dorshei Zion on one side and these two Jewish workers on the other, saying that these workers and their families could stay and become members of the organization. The two workers became the actual managers and the shopkeeper's job was only to check the accounts and be aware of what was going on.

After enquiries, the Committee in Rezekne sent a representative to check up on the manager. He uncovered how Ein Zeitim was actually managed, and the additional fact about the workers that were being brought in.

He, in turn, became the new manager; he had been a teacher in Rezekne^[54]. He found that the two workers were more than just members, for they were the ones who already had experience living there, and that their decisions on what to do were the ones that were followed. They (Levinson and Rosenblum) understood that they were in control of the situation and the settlement; for the making of a proper decision had to go to and through many committees, in various areas, and would take much time. They planned that in the long run the settlement would belong to them. They used disgusting physical methods (stealing, damaging the vineyards, arguing, ridi-

culing, hindering the manager in doing his work and in his private life, dogs, Arabs, gun-point, beatings, stealing of important documents^[55]) to try to get rid of the manager-teacher. He was tough though and from the “old-school” of the “Lovers of Zion” and therefore believed the “the land of Israel is bought by suffering.”

The two workers, with the help of the “crooked” (this was a shmittah^[56] year [a year when the land was to rest] but he tried to do some trading with crops) Rabbi and Judge Ridba’z of Safed (who was a specialist in the Jerusalem Talmud) tried to outsmart the manager in matters of finance and property rights. The two workers promised the Rabbi-Judge that he too would become a member of the settlement and therefore be receiving property in the future, a parcel of land of 6,000 dunam from the “Dorshei-Zion Organization”. There were many trials and decisions by both secular and religious courts. The two workers tried to prove that the land belonged to them. In one trial, they tried to show that the land belonged to ten, and not to 1,000; and that they were two of the ten. They brought in appraisers to estimate the value of the settlement. The problem was presented to the committee in Rezekne, representatives of the ICA, the religious courts of Safed and Jerusalem (the latter under Rabbi Joel Moshe Solomon), and the British counsel in Beirut^[57]. The committee in Rezekne tried to bring the Rabbi-Judge to trial. The representatives of the ICA in Rosh Pina, tried to emphasize the fact that the settlement was the property of the “Dorshei Zion Organization”. They didn’t manage to bring the matter to have a trial straight away though, due to the interference of the other side. A representative of ICA fell off his horse and broke a bone, while traveling to Ein Zeitim to try to solve the matter.

At this stage the problem became only ethical, for legally Ein Zeitim was the property of the Jewish land owners^[58] from Rezekne. It was obvious that very few of them had come, and that many more wouldn’t come and settle here in the near future due to age, capability, or financial problems^[59].

The outcome, decided upon by the British Consul in Beirut, was as follows: According to the law, the two workers had no rights to acquire the land.

However, as far as the practical side of the settlement went, 99% of the rightful owners had given up hope and the remaining one percent were made up of a very few who had no idea how to organize and how to work such a settlement.

The people who knew how to work the land were the two workers. The solution was that these two settlers were officially accepted as members of Ein Zeitim. Therefore it was decided that the two workers, who did lose in the trial, except for receiving reparations for being fired, would be accepted as members of the settlement. It seems that later on Levinson^[60] even became the secretary of the settlement^[61].

There were reports of proper development. In 1894 two stone houses and two wooden houses were already built. As far as agriculture went, 115,000 grape vines were grafted, and 7000 strawberries, 120 etrogim, 9400 fruit trees of various species, including 1600 olive trees, 200 nut trees, and 350 date trees were planted^[62].

It seems that the two workers had told^[63] the directors that the land was not fit for vineyards; but they in turn were divided in their opinion: Selifan was pessimistic about agriculture succeeding here, and Hefetz thought himself an expert. The committee didn’t know who was to be considered right. Sirkin and the Baron’s secretary came to observe the problem. Sirkin brought in three experts: Nigo-the head of Mikve Israel Agricultural School, and the agronomists Kaiserman and Meirovitz. After testing, they declared the land not fit for the type of planting that had been done, and especially not fit for vineyards. The agricultural problem, with the vines and orchards, which were to have been of the important things here, was due to the layer of stone in the ground. Because of the agricultural problem, the social problem, and the economic problem, the heads of the organization stated that all work should be stopped^[64].

Understanding That The Settlement Was Not Successful

Thus in 1896, after four years, it was decided that the first stage in the development of Ein Zeitim was not successful and that there was no hope for the continuation of the settlement. It was clear

that the land was not suitable for this type of agriculture^[65], and it was now known that the Baron didn't plan to build winepress in Rosh Pina^[66]. There were also socio-economic problems with the members of the organization in Rezekne, for they were late with their payments and there was little hope of a continuous strong Aliyah. The idea of small payments didn't prove successful^[67].

This was taken badly by the members here and those abroad. Selefin went abroad and complained, about what had happened, for he was the one who had agreed to the buying of this land, because of the recommendation from the clerk of the Baron. He left the organization, feeling sad about what had happened to the settlement, and what hardship he had caused the people who had invested in it. Many other members left the organization. They claimed the representatives of the Baron guilty, and demanded that he give them land elsewhere. They asked for Horon, on the other side of the Jordan River. Few remained in Ein Zeitim^[68]. It was hard for the heads of "Dorshei-Zion", and the sub committees to realize that they hadn't succeeded and they hoped to succeed at a later date, here or in another location^[69]. Most of those who had settled there went to other places in this country or back to Europe^[70].

Then Sirkin sent a letter to all the members asking them to decide what to do: to break up the organization and return the money that was left to the members; or to try again. The answer of the majority was to try again, and to send a committee to the Baron asking that he give other land, or pay for the land of Ein Zeitim so that other land could be bought. The organization had invested about a quarter of a million franks in Ein Zeitim.

Sirkin went to Paris with his secretary in 1895, to meet with the Baron. According to the agreement that was reached, the Baron gave a loan of fifty thousand franks to the "Dorshei-Zion" Organization for acquiring other land. For this, he received the right to reorganize, what was left of Ein Zeitim, for a period of two–three years, without currently asking for a fee for managing it. The "Dorshei_Zion Organization" received the land of Hadera^[71], after thinking of Be'er Tuvia and Horon. This was agreed to, by about half of the

members of the "Dorshei-Zion" Organization, at a general meeting in the beginning of 1895, in Minsk. The two members from Rezekne that were present, unofficially gave themselves the right to vote for their community^[72]. The other half of the members decided to leave the organization. It was decided that all the remaining members would pay in twenty rubles for acquiring the land in Hadera. Thus the "Dorshei-Zion" Organization became a small group, due to trying to manage a large scale operation with a small amount of funds and know-how. The Baron took the land of Ein Zeitim under his control, and paid workers from Safed to try to save what there was, along the side of the few who did chose to remain there.^[73]

Trying to Save The Settlement and Abandonment

The Baron was trying to save the settlement, and therefore there was more planting: 40,000 grapevines – in place of those that had died, 5,500 strawberries, 2000 olive trees, 2,000 fig trees. About 2,300 Malaga grapevines were grafted, some of the grapes were already eatable (aralala)^[74]. Twelve families from Safed came to settle. During the next ten years, the number of families reached 18, and they lived in six stone houses^[75]. In 1897, a few of the members of the organization from Rezekne came on Aliyah and there was again a problem about whom the property belonged to. The ICA^[76] pressed that the members of the organization who still lived in Rezekne should give up their rights or come on Aliyah and use them. It was felt that it was a shame to reject worthy settlers who already lived on the land. This dispute continued for quite a for years. The two groups continued to live together, but the number of residents on the whole dwindled. In 1910, there were only four farmers left. In 1912, the RIDBAZ (Rabbi David Ben Zev Vilovsky) settled here. He was previously the Rabbi of Slozak and the head of a Yeshiva in Safed^[77].

Because of the enthusiasm of Rabbi Fishman-Maimon, there was a new interest in Ein Zeitim. Rabbi Fishman Maimon, who was one of the great (religious) Zionist leaders, became fascinated with Ein Zeitim. He was among those who tried to help this settlement in order to make a

historical sight reborn.

This connection began when Raskin was a guest of Rabbi Mimon. He sold him a few hundred dunam of land in Ein Zeitim, for the Jews of Besaraabia. Then the Rabbi also became a potential settler in the settlement. Rabbi Berenblat who was influenced by Rabbi Maimon, came to Ein Zeitim, and others were to follow. Rabbi Maimon visited the settlement a few times, when he visited Safed, and dreamed of the past and the future of this place. He visioned the great Rabbis in Safed of the sixteenth century among them Rabbi Jacob Berb. It is possible that this was what caused him to fight for the rebirth of Sanhedrin (the ancient law making body)^[78].

The first stage of abandonment officially took place during World War One, because of the security situation, in addition to taxes, a dwindling population, and agricultural problems^[79]. During the British Mandate, Ein Zeitim signified a dangerous place for the travelers to and from Safed^[80]. Yet, it is known of an Aliyah from Rezekne at this period, by members of families that had previously acquired the land. A member of the Harmatz family came to live in Ein Zeitim^[81]. More members of the Mann (Mantipol) family planned to come, and had three portions of land reserved for them; but they were killed in the Russian Civil War of 1917^[82]. The Feliner Family came on Aliyah to Ein Zeitim and the husband was in charge of the land that belonged to the Rezekne community^[83]. A member of the Lieb Vachnin Family came to settle in Ein Zeitim in 1925, but moved on to Tel Aviv a while later. Their daughter^[84] and her husband tried to receive the money for the value of their land in Ein Zeitim after the State was founded. The matter was checked out in the "Tabu" office in Tiberius. It seems that people from Safed took over the property and, in the end nothing could be done^[85].

A few attempts were made to resettle Ein Zeitim, but none of them have been successful. Some of the old settlers and some new ones from Safed resettled it in 1925. They renovated the houses, cared for the planted trees, and dug a well in the neighboring valley. The settlement was gaining strength^[86]. Before the settlement took root it abandoned again during the riot of 1929. On the

day of the riot, the Arabs of Safed and Ein Zaton attacked it. Then there were only a few residents there, for some had gone to help the police in Safed. An old couple was burned to death inside their house, which was tied with a metal cord^[87]. It is known that Haim Feliner and his wife were burned to death in this riot, as was Hornheim. There was a memorial service for the couple in Rezekne^[88]. All the houses were ruined. A few of the residents managed to escape. Only after a week, was it possible to examine the damage done^[89].

It was resettled again in 1932^[90], by a group of young people from Safed; and again abandoned in 1936 because of the riots. It was resettled again in 1946 by Kibbutz Maganim of the Kibbutz HaMa'uchad organization. Members of the Palmach founded Kibbutz Ein Zeitim. The kibbutz was located nearby and not actually on the site of the original settlement. It was a stronghold of the Palmach, which captured the land of the original settlement of Ein Zeitim during the beginning of May, 1948 and then from here, succeeded in freeing Safed^[91]. Then it was again abandoned during the War of Independence, when it was almost completely destroyed, as it was associated with the blockade on Safed^[92]. The Palmach abandoned their Kibbutz, for they had come as soldiers, and not as settlers^[93]. In 1955 Ein Zeitim was resettled again as a Moshav Ovdim, but was again abandoned due to agricultural problems^[94], and was turned into a Gadna base^[95] - but this also failed^[96]. A large part of the area that was once Ein Zeiim is now a part of the Biryah forest^[97].

Conclusion

It is important to remember Ein Zeitim, as part of the history of Zionism, Israeli history, our history; and for me history that I am related to- my history.

The fact that the settlement of Ein Zeitim was not successful was hard for me to grasp. I suppose it natural that I should want everything that I am associated with to be successful, particularly something as dear to me as the building of this country.

While doing the research however, I began to realize that Ein Zeitim was not the only settlement that was not successful, and the reasons that

many settlements at this time did not succeed were quite similar. At first it was hard for me to decide exactly what went wrong, and who if anyone was guilty for the failure of the settlement. Sometimes, I thought it was due to a practical problem that developed in this country, and sometimes due to a theoretical problem that developed abroad. Then I realized that this could actually be the opposite for there were also practical problems abroad, as there were theoretical problems here. I realized that the people who went through these problems were in the same dilemma.

Sometimes I thought that the organizers and managers of the organization abroad were being a bit corrupt in their management and sometimes it was clear to me, that corruptness was the problem here. It is also important to remember the physical problem of the fitness of the land for agriculture, as well as the problems of the Jewish workers.

I began to realize that there is a lot in common between the problems of then and the problems of now, except for the fact that we have their experience to learn from. We must also learn from their desire to build up our land, and their willingness to start again many times. I want to add here a line from the poem "If" by Rudyard Kipling: "if all the things you work for broken, then stoop and build them up like fall down stones". I remember when I was young I asked my mother what this meant and her answer was, "what your father would do if the state of Israel would not be successful," - my father a descendant of the Zionism of Rezekne, and now I have closed the circle.

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- [1] VS, p. 315
 [2] Ibid, pp. 312-317
 [3] Ibid, p. 314
 [4] Even more so, than Baram, Shaferam and Pekin. VS, p. 308
 [5] MBZ, p. 81
 [6] VS, p. 309
 [7] The modern French historian Franco wrote about this. Ibid, p. 310
 [8] MBZ, p. 81. VS, p. 310
 [9] There were forty families in 1522, and fifty-two families in 1555. EZ, p. 173
 [10] EZ, p. 173

[11] According to Franco this later became a Mosque. VS, p. 310

[12] According to Franco, this is considered the first printing press in the east. Ibid, p. 310

[13] EJ, V.5. p. 540, He was the author of a book entitled Order of the Day. EZ, p.173

[14] VS, p. 308

[15] MBZ, p.81 The place was important in the period of the Mishnah, and the middle ages due to the Rabbis that were here, and the graves of those that were buried here of in the near vicinity. Many of them were important to the Arabs as to the Jews. VS, p. 308-10

[16] EZ, p. 173

[17] VS, p. 310

[18] Rabbi Israel of Shklov (He was one of the followers of the Gaon of Vilna who settled in Safed, in 1810. EJ, V. 14, pp. 628-9), in his book The Table's End tells of such a situation after the riots of 1834. EZ, p. 173

[19] Ibid, p. 173

[20] Bek was known and liked by the Jews and Arabs of the area. He was also known for his method of herb healing from plants found in the area. VS, pp. 323-5

[21] MBZ, p. 81; VS, p.308

[22] EZ, p. 173

[23] The founding of the settlements of Rehovoth, Hadera, Mishmar Hayarden and others signifies this. EZ, p.173. Tiomkin initiated private land purchases (without the help of the Baron) in the Land of Israel. He sent experts to examine the land, and local representatives to check out the areas. ZM. P. 65. However, his plans were soon spoiled by land speculations and the financial losses incurred by many of his investors. EJ, pp. 1148-9; He used the invested money for the expenses of the organization. ZM, pp 122-3'

[24] Ibid, p. 65. A number of these didn't succeed. MZ, pp. 122-3

[25] EZ, p. 137

[26] Ibid

[27] VS, p. 311

[28] The Baron was usually willing to help with the buying of land, but not to help new settlers financially. ZM, p.180; He did however ask that sixty workers from Rehovot be given work in Ein Zeitim, when their situation was very bad in 1892. Aside from helping to find work, he wasn't allowed by the secretariat of the settlements to help them in other ways. ZM, p. 205

[29] Most of those who invested were from the middle class. It was examined by agronomists, from Europe, and declared fit for the planned type of farming. MBZ, pp. 82-3

[30] EZ, p.137

[31] MBZ, p. 82; AR, p. 474; four years EZ, p.137

[32] A the acquisition of land was difficult during this period, for sales of land had been canceled, and the entry of Jews to the country was not always allowed. ZM, p.

123

[33] AR, p. 274

[34] EZ, p. 138. It was twenty thousand dunam, according to ZM. ZM, p.123

[35] Ibid, p.123

[36] Ibid, p. 24

[37] The Arabs of the area believed in the holiness of the area because of the great Jewish saints who had lived here, and were buried here. Therefore they wanted it to be theirs. VS, p. 312, f. 7

[38] He was known to be a "saint". Ibid, p. 316

[39] The common solution was to put up a frame and a roof during the night Ibid, p.316

[40] ZM, p.124. The Baron helped those who looked up to him and not those who insulted him [for example the incident of acquiring the area of Machaniam and a group of Moscow Jewry). ZM, p.65^[41] Ibid, p. 124

[42] MBZ, p. 83

[43] VS, pp. 313-4, f. 7

[44] BH, p. 138

[45] ZM, p.276

[46] MBZ, p.83

[47] EZ, p.124; True only of Levinson. VS. pp 320-1

[48] VS, p. 312

[49] Ibid, p. 321

[50] Ibid, p.318-9

[51] Israel Colonizing Organization, MBZ, p. 83. This was an organization that helped settlers, but at their own expense. AR, p. 475

[52] EZ, p. 174

[53] VS, p. 312

[54] BH, p. 139

[55] VS, p. 320

[56] There was a big argument in all the Jewish settlements about the doing of agricultural work, because of the new agricultural developments in the country and the hard economic situation the Jewish workers were in. In Ein Zeitim, it was decided that work to keep the trees alive was to be done. ZM, p. 329

[57] Levinson's father, Rabbi Nahum was a friend of Motefiore's. Queen Victoria therefore received him. The next time they met, Her Majesty asked him to make peace between the Rabbis of India. Because of his success in this matter, he was granted British citizenship. Afterwards all his sons received special rights, according to the laws of the colonies. Therefore Levinson was able to bring the dispute to the British Consul in Beirut. VS, p.321

[58] Letters were sent by those who had come, to try to speed up the Aliyah of those who found it difficult to leave Rezekne, and other places.Ibid, p. 313

[59] Many of them weren't faithful to the payments. VS, p. 312

[60] He stayed in Eun Zeitim, until his death, and he was always willing to tell about the settlement. Ibid, p. 312

[61] BH, pp. 139-141

[62] AL-1894, p. 427

[63] VS, pp. 211-2, f. 7

[64] ZM, pp. 276-7

[65] EZ, p 174

[66] ZM, p. 176

[67] Ibid, p. 276

[68] EZ, p. 174

[69] MBZ, P.83: BH, p.143

[70] MBZ, pp. 83, 276-7

[71] BH. p.143

[72] This meeting wasn't organized or run fairly. This is according to a letter sent by Rabbi Yona Blumberg-Harari to Rav Kook, in 1899, who was then the Rabbi of Jaffa. He states here that he believes that this was an organized way to cause innocent members who weren't present to lose money, and that in addition Ein Zeitim was bringing in money, at this later date. AR, pp. 476-8

[73] MZ, p. 277

[74] Al-1895, p. 397

[75] EZ, p. 174

[76] AR, p. 475

[77] EZ, p. 175. See p. 9, of this article

[78] VS, pp. 321-2

[79] Rabbi Berenblat and Rabbi Maimon were forced to leave the country. VS, p. 322

[80] EZ, p. 173

[81] The author doesn't recall the year. LR, p. 2

[82] Ibid, p. 1

[83] Ibid. p. 4

[84] Dina was a midget, and became deaf. She married a wagon-driver from Petach Tikvah. He seemed to have been interested at first in the money she would get, for this property. As happens they got on quite well. They dealt with this matter for a long time. Ibid, pp. 2-4

[85] Ibid, p. 3

[86] VS, p. 323

[87] EZ, p. 175

[88] LR, p. 4

[89] EZ, p. 175

[90] 1931,. Ibid, p. 175.

[91] EZ, p.175

[92] AA. p.136; EZ, p. 173

[93] EZ, p. 175

[94] EZ, V. 5, p. 540

[95] MBZ, pp. 85

[96] EZ, V. 15, p. 175

[97] Ibid, V. 5, p. 540

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Latvia Inside of Me

By
 Yehuda Weinstock

On the Way

I am onboard American Airlines flight 56. It is an odd thing to actually be taking this trip after so long, almost a year of planning, researching, studying, and several years, if you count when I started looking into the Marchefsky side of the family. But this trip actually began, in a sense, 80 years and 2 months ago, when Ben Marchefsky, my maternal grandfather, left Latvia to seek a different life in America.

We will arrive in London in the early morning, and I will connect to Riga late in the evening. In the meantime, I will spend a few hours in a dreary airport hotel eating a plain baked potato and peas (simple starches and protein—I've been suffering from a bad intestinal bug for the past week) and watching British television.

I am feeling quite exhausted (due to the traditional last-minute rush to get everything done at work, pay bills in advance, and pack for 3 climates, not to mention 5 days of diarrhea). I am also still not quite grasping that I am finally "going to Latvia, ... to Latvia." It is a place that has loomed in my family's memory for 80 years. It is somewhere "over there," "on the other side," almost in another world. The Iron Curtain that separated it from the West for 50 years only

added to its remoteness. Could there actually be a Latvia? Is it a place I can actually touch? Or is it just a mythical place that stopped being, stopped changing, stopped existing 80 years and 2 months ago when my grandfather, Poppy, left?

But, no, there really is a Latvia. I have my Riga hotel confirmation and my rental car printout in my carry-on bag. I have three guidebooks that write about the places, which, in my mind, were imaginary, and otherworldly all these years. I even have the phone number of a local guide who will be driving with me to eastern Latvia, to the region of Latgale, to visit the little towns where my grandfather and his nine siblings were born.

On my first day in Riga, I will meet Zalman, Poppy's first cousin; three of his sisters left Riga in the 1970's for Israel and one in the 1980's for Washington, D.C. Another of the cousins is in Melbourne, Australia.

Poppy's only surviving brother is in Florida. There is a sense that Zalman is the last authentic link to that generation. He is the one who never left; after fighting the Nazis in the Red Army, getting shot twice and living for 50 years under the Soviets, Zalman is still there. I have a lot to ask him, his daughters, grandchildren and great-granddaughter I bear gifts, in the finest Marchefsky tradition: a coffee table book of *America from the Air*; a Polo shirt and sweater; a copy of our home videos showing 30 years of my grandfather, parents, brother and me; an Israeli pop music CD for Zalman's granddaughter, about to make aliyah; and about 20 pounds of "American candy" for the other children in the family.

I am staying in the Grand Palace Hotel in Old Riga. It is one of the best hotels in the city and I have chosen it deliberately. I know that Poppy passed through Riga on his way to America in 1923, but I have no idea how many days he spent there. I tell my mother that he would have been proud to see his grandson staying at such a fancy place in his country.

Twelve years ago I made a similar trip to Slovakia to research my father's family, meet some long-lost cousins and visit the shtetls where my grandparents were born. It was a rich and deeply

emotional visit. However, I barely knew these grandparents before they died. Poppy was the only grandparent I grew up with and the only one I truly remember, beyond fleeting shadows of memory of the other three. The family tells me I bear an uncanny resemblance to him, too. I keep telling my friends and coworkers that this makes this trip even more “special.”

I write in my journal that there is a sense of going to a “nice” country, an “underdog” country, one that has been victimized by history and its neighbors. And the facts seem to bear that out— invasions by the Russians, the Germans, and the Russians again followed centuries of Swedish and German dominance; mass deportations of intellectuals and “cosmopolites” to Siberia, and of course, the Shoah, in which approximately 90-95% of Latvian Jews were slaughtered. In everything I read it is mentioned again and again that this was the highest percentage lost of any Jewish community in Europe. It is the prism through which I will see much of this trip.

“There but for the grace of G-d go I,” I think, not knowing if that is a Jewish or Christian reference. It is very clear that the Latvian populace at large helped the Nazis carry out their plans, so this is not a saintly place, but the overall vibe I get, the general feeling I have when I think of Latvia, even now on the way, is small, charming and maybe a little feisty. Something like Zalman’s sister Fanny in Tel Aviv. Latvia as a tsatskele.

Part of me seeks a Big Dramatic Moment (BDM). Part of me wants to feel that same rush I felt upon uncovering hundred year-old documents in the Municipal Archives about my father’s family. Part of me wants to feel again that odd mixture of pain and joy standing outside the remains of a long-abandoned synagogue where his family once prayed and celebrated.

I wonder how it will be with Zalman and his family. I wonder if I will find anything valuable in the Riga Historical Archives. I review my guidebooks for the thousandth time and decide what I will and will not see. Part of me is frightened of visiting Rumbula, the forest on the outskirts of town. It is a place where 24,000 Jews were shot in 1941, including, undoubtedly, some of our

family. A different part of me very much wants to go there and feels awful about it.

In the Heathrow Airport hotel, eating peas and potatoes, I watch “To Hell and Back—The Audie Murphy Story” and get choked up. Partly at the naive sentiment the film portrays, and partly hazily remembering my dad telling me about Audie Murphy as a child. Mostly, I think about what’s ahead in the next few hours and days. As I wait for the shuttle to take me to my flight to Riga, I remember seeing one of my favorite movies on TV this week, “The Shawshank Redemption.” In the final scene, Morgan Freeman’s character is on the bus to Mexico to meet his old prison buddy and says, “I am so excited, I can barely sit still.”

Yehuda goes to Latvia. Yehuda is going to the other side. In truth, I wouldn’t have to seek out the BDM. It would find me easily enough.

Latvia Inside of Me

When we land in Riga, I wonder for a moment if I should kiss the ground. There is a sense that I am going “home,” I am going to “my place” and a million photo images of refugees and political exiles returning to their homeland flash through my mind. It is a corny thought, but definitely would make a great BDM. In the end, I decide not to, partly out of embarrassment and partly because I realize this is not, after all, holy ground. The English soccer hooligans storming off the plane behind me also help me make up my mind.

When I hand my passport to the Latvian immigration official, I am excited beyond words. As he examines it, I picture him saying, “Welcome to Latvia” and me bursting into tears or, alternatively, into a Latvian folk song. I do not know any Latvian folk songs and I do not cry. He hands me back my passport and mumbles something unintelligible. I shuffle with the rest of the passengers and get my baggage.

Finally in the hotel, I wash 20 hours of grime off my face and brush my teeth. CNN, BBC News and a 30-second preview of in-room German porno movies are on TV. I collapse into bed (“a Latvian bed,” I think) and fall asleep in 20 seconds flat.

I awake to a brilliant blue sky and a crisp, June morning. I walk slowly down the small street of the hotel into Doma Laukum, one of the two main squares of the Old Town. It is an enormous open space, dominated by the Riga Cathedral. A street musician is playing the cello, unseen, in the distance and it is a perfect moment. I say the words “I am in Riga” to myself and get goose bumps. I walk around and around the square, trying to take it all in—the ornate Riga Stock Exchange in use during the first Latvian independence period in the 1920’s and 30’s, then closed by the Soviets and reopened in the very same building after the fall of the U.S.S.R; the beautiful Latvia Radio building with the balcony where Karlis Ulmanis (president, then dictator, of independent Latvia) made his proclamations and where independence activists in the 1990’s hid from the Soviets.

I walk down the street and find myself at the corner of Kalku iela, the main pedestrian street of Old Riga. I have been studying city maps and guidebooks for six months and finding myself here is almost like finding an old friend. I know that at the end of the street is the Freedom Monument built in 1935 and affectionately known as “Milda.” She will be standing triumphantly on a pedestal in the middle of a large square. I know all the stories about how the invading Russians wanted to tear it down (as a symbol of now non-existent Latvian independence) but didn’t dare, fearing public reaction. Instead, they built a statue of Lenin back to back with the Freedom Monument—Milda facing Europe, Lenin facing Moscow. Needless to say, Lenin is no longer there.

As I walk towards Milda, I pass the Laima clock. Laima is a brand of chocolates much beloved throughout the former Soviet Union. A Latvian Jew owned the factory until it was nationalized by Karlis Ulmanis in the 1930’s. I later learn that the owner’s daughter immigrated to Israel and founded the giant Elite factory, which fills the air of Ramat Gan with the smell of sweet chocolate. For years, Riga’s citizens have used the Laima clock as a meeting place (“Meet me at the Laima”). Later that week, I make plans with Zalman’s daughter and when she insists on picking me up at my hotel, I tell her, “No, we should meet at the Laima, just as everyone does”. She throws

her head back in laughter but I know she is proud.

In Soviet times, it was forbidden to lay wreaths at the Freedom Monument. Rigans used to call Milda “the travel agency,” since laying a wreath there bought you a one-way ticket to Siberia. These days, the monument is full of wreaths, especially this week, which marks the anniversary of the first Soviet deportations to the gulag.

I approach Milda in silence. While it is not as awe-inspiring as, say, the Washington Monument or the Arc du Triomphe, it is tall and grand and somber. It is also Latvian, and that says something very deep to me. There is a small changing-of-the-guard ceremony taking place. I watch quietly as three young Latvian soldiers march in unison to replace the soldiers on duty. I realize they are goose-stepping and I shiver. I leave quickly.

At lunch, I mention to the young waitress how beautiful Riga is—its parks, the river, the town squares, and the Art Nouveau architecture. She thanks me and asks where I am from. When I tell her the United States, she comments, “Oh, you’ve come such a long way.” Yes, I say, but my grandfather was born here. She remains quiet for a moment, and then says, “So you have a little piece of Latvia inside of you.” This sentence moves me to tears. She has summed up in a few short words what I have been unable to express: Latvia is inside of me.

Meeting the Family

I am in a taxi with Aleksandr, my local guide and translator. He is a Jewish academic who supplements his income by helping the descendants of Jewish Latvians research their family history. He will come with me to Eastern Latvia, to Latgale, for two days later this week. We arrive at Zalman’s apartment, in a modest neighborhood. I have photos, a recorded greeting in Yiddish from my mother, my video camera, gifts, and a bouquet of red lefkoyas. Everyone in the streets in Riga seems to be carrying flowers, and there are vendors everywhere you turn. The flower vendor on Kalku iela assured me that five red lefkoyas (always bring an odd number!) were the appropriate offering for Zalman.

I knock on Zalman’s door with my heart in my

throat. Despite being a blood relative, he is, after all, a stranger. Zalman was a baby when my grandfather left Latvia in 1923, but they met as adults in the late 1960's, when Poppy went back for a visit to the homeland. Zalman opens the door, I give him a hug and a kiss and he says "You look just like Ben". Maybe the resemblance is true, then.

We sit in Zalman's small living room with his daughter Bella, and great-granddaughter Lena. Zalman speaks no English, and remembers little Hebrew from his studies - 65 years have passed since he graduated from one of Riga's famed Jewish schools. (On the other hand, his sister Basheva in Washington, D.C., had long elaborate conversations with me in near-perfect Hebrew—with a 1920's twist). My Russian is limited to 40 words picked up from Russian friends in Israel—most of them related to food ("Sit! Eat! Potato! Apples! More tea? Cheese!"). But lack of a shared language does not stop us from communicating. We use pantomime, broken Russian, Yiddish, Hebrew and English. Aleksandr tries to keep up with 3 simultaneous conversations and translates the best he can. It is hilarious.

Zalman shows me his Soviet Army uniform. When the Nazis entered Riga in 1941, Zalman, his mother and sisters fled east, to Russia. He heard there was a Latvian unit in the Red Army and managed to find it. It probably saved his life. Zalman's father, however, was killed in the battle for Moscow. The uniform is covered, literally covered, with ribbons, medals and brass. To my uneducated eye, it looks like those uniforms you see worn by sad old men in Russian veterans parades. Later Aleksandr tells me that Zalman was a colonel and that his uniform impressed even him.

Zalman tells me amazing stories about the war. He talks about being in a trench in battle and finding his father (also a soldier) a few feet away. About his father running into daughter Basheva (now in Washington) at a train station after losing contact with her months earlier. About all the sisters and his mother fleeing thousands of miles into Russia as the Nazis were rounding up the Jews of Riga in 1941.

We eat, drink toasts to our family and look at old photos. Zalman listens to my mother's taped greetings in Yiddish and records a short message for her. He watches part of our home videos, and a Technicolor scene of me learning how to swim in a 1960's Long Island pool flashes on the screen. I am embarrassed. The lives of my family in the U.S. and my family in Latvia have taken such colossally different paths.

We take photos with our arms around each other. I wonder if this is forced intimacy. I wonder if these photos will be the ones our descendants will look at in 80 years. I still cannot quite fathom that I am in Latvia with Poppy's first cousin. But it feels right and good to be here, and putting my arm around Zalman makes me feel closer to my grandfather.

My great-grandmother Braina's name comes up. She left Latvia later, in 1926, after two of her sons (my grandfather and his brother Irving) had settled in New York. Zalman recalls going to Braina's goodbye party as a little boy in Riga, which she passed through on her way from Eastern Latvia to America. He tells me that one of Braina's brothers, Benzion Berzon, was a well-known teacher at the Tushia (Wisdom) Jewish school in Riga before the war. There is a moving tribute to him written by his daughter Ida in a book I read about Jewish education in Riga. When Zalman's mother and sisters fled to Russia, Benzion sent his children with them. The young cousins survived the war on a collective farm deep in Russia and remained lifelong friends. Benzion and his wife Basya stayed in Riga to tend to his mother, Bluma, who was over 80 and could not travel. Later, Zalman tells me, when the Nazis herded up the Jews in 1941 and moved them to the ghetto, Bluma could not walk and was shot on the steps of her home. Benzion and Basya were later killed in the forest. I shake my head in sadness. I have already started to feel a closeness with Benzion—a Hebrew speaker, Zionist, and educator. To hear of his death, and the death of his mother, an elderly woman shot in front of her family, is horribly painful. Only the next day do I realize that the elderly woman was my great-great-grandmother, the same woman who raised my grandfather Ben.

Zalman, Bella and I laugh as they recall the visit of Ben and his brother Charlie to Riga in the 1960's. He arrived with terrible diarrhea (maybe I do resemble him...) and the Intourist Hotel he was forced to stay in was unequipped with satisfactory toilet facilities. "Cauchemar, cauchemar," Bella mutters, using the Russian/French word for "nightmare." She was a girl of about 21 when her father's cousins visited from America and she gives me a beautiful photo of her beaming with her American uncle.

We say goodbye. It has been a warm reunion. We make plans to meet the next day when Bella will take me on a walking tour of some of the neighborhoods where the family lived before and after the war.

The clouds shrouding my family history have started to part. It seems the BDM is arriving.

Finding Bikeva

All families have their stories, their legends, their great truths and half-truths. Our story is that my grandfather was from Bikeva, or more precisely, from Bikevawald—the Bikeva Forest. We speak of it in almost mythical terms. Before my trip, I spend hours going over the map of Latvia, and cannot find Bikeva anywhere. None of the relatives I contact have ever heard of such a place. Is it a myth?

My cousin Robbie has sent me an email with the birthplaces of Poppy and his 9 brothers and sisters. Some were born in Varaklani and some in Vilani, including Poppy—not in Bikeva. It is strange to read this, like cracking a myth open. When I tell my mother, it seems difficult for her to adjust her perception—her father was from Bikeva, after all, which after 70 years of repeating, has become a familiar place, even while being completely unknown.

Through an Internet search, I find the new name for Bikeva: Gaigalava. It is close to Vilani and to Varaklani. It seems to make sense. I strike up an odd email correspondence with the assistant headmistress of the Gaigalava Elementary School. She confirms that her town was, indeed, formerly known as Bikeva and invites me to visit when I am in Latvia.

Aleks picks me up at the hotel on a crisp Tuesday morning. I have been in Riga for four days and it is now time to head east, to Latgale, the province my family comes from. The guidebooks tell me that Latgale is the poorer, more Catholic, more rural Latvia. I cannot even imagine what it looks like.

This is the part of the trip I have been waiting for. I have been mouthing clichés to my friends and family for weeks: "To see the places our family is from," "to walk in their footsteps," "to understand where we come from." These are banal, trite ways of saying what is in my heart. I need to go and see these places.

On the outskirts of Riga, we pass Rumbula - the forest where thousands of Jews were marched from the ghetto and shot. This is the place where my Berzon cousins were taken and killed. I shudder involuntarily and make a mental note to stop there on the way back.

Driving to Latgale, Aleks and I talk about economics, politics, university studies, prices of apartments, but most of all, about Jewish Latvia. Road signs tell me we are getting close. All the homework I've done is paying off as the names and places I've read about for months pass before my eyes.

We arrive in Varaklani in early afternoon. I dash from the car and Aleks takes my picture in front of the *Welcome to Varaklani* sign. Our first stop is the Jewish cemetery, and as we turn off onto the dirt road, I brace myself. I have been to old Jewish cemeteries in Eastern Europe before, and they are usually in horrendous condition. But the cemetery in Varaklani is surprisingly well-kept, even tidy.

We go through the gate, with Lions of Judah and Magen Davids carved in the bricks. Aleks has a list of all the graves in this cemetery and I look for recognizable names. An almost impossible task since, following Jewish tradition, the older headstones only list the deceased person's first name and that of his father. Perhaps with time, I can piece together the clues and find a great-great uncle, but today I am distracted.

The cemetery is orderly, with graves in equidistant rows and columns. The wind has picked up and is blowing eerily through the trees. The effect is at once spooky and very beautiful. We wander through the cemetery and find the Holocaust memorial in the very back. As always, it resonates through me in an odd, sharp way, like a tuning fork struck against a glass. Aleks and I read Tehillim and El Male Rachamim together. I translate the Psalm for him, one of the most beautiful, and my voice starts to break. Min hametsar karati Ka. "In my anguish, out of the narrow place, I called to G-d." As I explain the meaning to him, I feel my arms start to gesticulate almost out of control, like a preacher at an oldtime revival. Later that day, we drive to Vilani, my grandfather's birthplace. At the town entrance, Aleks films me. I mention my favorite verse from the Book of Esther, read at Purim: U'zichram lo yasuf mizar'am. "And the memory of these days will not die out from their offspring." This verse has always meant so much to me and has become a symbol of this trip—as long as we speak of these places and these people, they continue to live on.

At the Archives in Riga, I had found the name of the street where the Marchefskys lived in Vilani. We stop several old ladies walking by and ask for directions, but they tell us the street no longer exists. They offer to take us to a friend of theirs, an even older woman, who knows much of Vilani's history. They pile into the backseat of the car and chatter away in Latvian.

We find their older friend and she spends an hour showing us the former synagogue (was Poppy's bris there?) and the "old Jewish bath" (the mikve, I presume). We make our way through a field and look at the synagogue from a distance. It was burnt down and a house sits on its foundations. The mikve is falling to bits, full of rubble and dirt. A cow stands 20 feet away from me and moos loudly. 3 young children play in the adjacent fields. I find it hard to associate this place with my grandfather's previous life.

Aleks points up a dirt road where we leave our car. We make our way to the Vilani Holocaust memorial, in a clearing in the forest. The memorial was erected only in the last year or so, I learn.

In Soviet times, there were no "Jewish victims" of the war. All those killed were "Soviet patriots" fighting the "fascist invaders". We read more Tehillim. I am starting to get overwhelmed, exhausted.

On the way out, we stop in a clearing with tall trees. A Northern European forest of birch on an early summer afternoon, with sunlight streaming in between the branches. It is almost too beautiful for words. But these are the killing fields of Vilani, where most of the local Jewish community was massacred. Aleks explains that at the end of the war, the Germans bombed the area to destroy the corpses. Afraid of the Western powers and the advancing Soviet Army discovering their crimes, the Nazis planted hundreds of trees that still stand today.

Jews and forests have always conjured up dark associations for me. When I attended a conference in Hungary several years ago, the sponsors took the participants to a castle in the forest on the outskirts of Budapest. A friend of mine remarked nervously "So, the Hungarians are taking the Jews to the forest?" But it is not until I visit this spot in Vilani that I truly grasp the meaning of the forest and the Jews. These woods are not lovely, dark and deep. They are frightening and horrific, the place of nightmares and horror stories. I want to leave.

I am growing tired of cemeteries and memorials. I want to sit down and clear my head. My feet feel heavy. My soul feels weighted down with lead.

We do not stop in Rumbula on the way back to Riga.

It's a Long Way

The next morning, we drive to Bikeva. At the entrance to the town, I remember a story I've been meaning to tell and Aleks films me.

The day I was accepted to Yale was a very momentous occasion for my family and me. I ran home from school at lunchtime and left a note for my parents to tell them the big news. When I returned home from school that afternoon, my mother was waiting for me at the door with tears

in her eyes. "It's a long way from Bikeva to Yale," she said, referring in equal portions to our family's history and to the seemingly unlimited possibilities the U.S. offered. If in only two generations from Bikeva, I could be accepted to an Ivy League college, the sky was apparently the limit.

I tell this story to the camera as I stand at the entrance to Gaigalava, today's Bikeva. It is a long way from Bikeva to Yale, I say, and it is also a very long way back. Not only physically, but in terms of the personal, spiritual journey that brought me to this place. I am now facing a moment I have been anticipating for years. 80 years since Poppy left; 25 years since that letter came from Yale. I am reluctant to go into the town, not sure what I will see, not sure if the spell will be broken.

We go to the Gaigalava Elementary School and find my email friend, the assistant headmistress. She introduces us to the principal of the school and a charming woman named Anastasija, the local English teacher. Anastasija will spend an hour and a half showing me my grandfather's mythical town.

She takes us into the forest, into Bikevawald. I feel like I have literally crossed to "the other side," like I am on the moon. How can I actually be walking in Bikevawald? Surely this is a place which only existed in stories, in memory, in shadow. I pick up a small stone and put it in my pocket.

Poppy's father, Shmuel Marchefsky, produced turpentine for years in Latgale. Anastasija takes us to the part of the forest where turpentine was made. She turns and shows me some delicate white flowers. She tells me these are Mayflowers, typical of this region of Latvia, and forbidden to be picked. But she bends down, picks some and fashions them into a bouquet, which she presents to me with a sweet smile. This simple gesture moves me to tears. She has connected me to this place.

We drive back several hours to Riga in pouring rain and near silence. The stone from Bikevawald is in my pocket. I look at it now as I

write these words.

The BDM

On my last day in Latvia, I meet Edith Bloch, the principal of the Chabad school in Riga. The school is in a building that housed a Jewish school one hundred years prior. Traditions cut short, traditions renewed, I think. Edith takes me on a three-hour walking tour of the old Jewish ghetto, but first, I want to see the synagogue. Of Riga's 30 synagogues before WWII, only one is left. The others were destroyed by the Nazis (including the Great Choral Synagogue, famously burnt down with 300 Jews locked inside), but they feared that setting the Peitavas Street synagogue on fire would endanger nearby buildings in the Old Town. Today, it is the only synagogue in Riga.

Edith describes a pre-WWII ceremony she recently reinstated. On September 1, pupils from all the Jewish schools in pre-war Riga would gather at the synagogue for a ceremony inaugurating the new school year. The only remaining synagogue today is too small, so they gather at the memorial to the Great Choral Synagogue, at the spot where it was burnt down on July 4, 1941. Wherever they are studying, 400 or 500 Jewish children come together at the memorial, sing Hebrew songs, say prayers for the victims of the Holocaust, for Israel and for a successful school year. Traditions unraveling and re-raveling.

Zalman has told me that when Isak Morein, another of the first cousins, married Gittel Lieberman, part of her dowry was a 5-story building across from the synagogue. When we visit, there is, indeed, such a building across the street, and it is magnificent. Again, the details I am seeing continue to fill in the gaps.

At the Municipal Archives, I have been given copies of the Latvian ID cards of my grandfather and many of his cousins, as well as his grandmother Bluma. They are in wonderful condition and bear original photos. I ask Edith to take me to the various addresses I found in the documents. Having seen the photos and ID cards of these people, having visited Bikeva, Vilani and Varaklani, it is time to come full circle and see how and where my relatives lived.

We stand outside Lacplesa 77/79. According to the archive documents, Benzion, Basya and Bluma lived here in Apartment 1 until the Nazis shot Bluma on the steps and took Benzion and Basya away. I was told that the building no longer exists, but here we are, unbelievably, standing at the entrance for Apartment 1. Edith says she can't swear this is the same apartment numbering system used in 1941, but, here is the sign, and when I look down, I see 4 steps leading up to the entryway. It fits the story. I put on my kippa to say some Tehillim. Realizing I have forgotten to bring my prayer book, the first one that comes to mind is Psalm 128, which begins "Happy is he who fears G-d". This is a Psalm I say every night before bed and I know by heart. When I get to the last verse of the Psalm, "U'reh banim levanecha," I freeze. These are words I've said hundreds of times - beautiful, stirring words sung at weddings and other celebrations. But only today does the full meaning of the words become clear to me. "U'reh banim levanecha." "May you see your children's children." For I am the children's child, standing here at what may be the very spot where my great-great-grandmother, was killed. I start to weep.

There is an old woman in the window on the second floor eyeing me suspiciously. I find a small stone and place it by the door at the top of the stairs. The stone is a Jewish sign left at a grave to show (the dead? The living?) that someone was there. I was here, I want to shout, I am here, we are still here.

Edith films me as I try to make sense of what this moment means for me, for my family. I mumble something about how being here is, in a sense, a victory. Our family is still alive. The Jewish People is still alive. Jews are free from fear in most parts of the world. I can come to this place, as a Jew, with a kippa on my head, and pray unmolested. But what a tragic victory, I think.

I look up at the building, at the sky, and try to memorize each leaf, each stone in the building's facade, each cloud. It is too much and it is not enough. It is unbelievably, almost impossibly, raw. It is as fresh today as it was in 1941. One by one by one, I think., Bluma and Benzion and Basya. Isak and Gittel. Shlome. This is the Big

Dramatic Moment and it came when I least expected it.

These days, I still read Psalm 128 before going to bed each night. Its words are clear, poetic and precise. "You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you. Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table. May you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!"

As long as we speak of these people, they are still alive. As long as we feel their presence, they are not forgotten. As long as we remember, they are still with us.

Looking For Records In Latvia

by

Sarah and Charles Orlove

We went to Latvia in search of information about the Chiam Zeleg Orelovitz family. Seven offspring of Chiam Zeleg, and their mother, immigrated to the United States in several waves, the last wave being in 1913.¹ Two Orelovitz brothers, and their families, remained behind. Chiam Zeleg died in his forties, around 1908. The family, we believe, was from Dvinsk, as it was called in Tsarist Russian times; now, after Latvian independence it is called Daugavpils.² We say we believe they were from Dvinsk, but there are snippets of information to indicate they had come from a *shtetl* in Lithuania. Daugavpils is at the southeastern tip of Latvia, only a few kilometers north of the borders of Lithuania and Byelorussia. In particular we were looking for any information about Avram Orelovitz, now known as Albert Orlove (Charles' Father), and Solomon Orelovitz, now known as Sam Orlov (Charles' Uncle). We also hoped to get information about two Orelovitz brothers who had remained in Latvia.

We learned very little about our family, but in the search we got a sense of what life was like at the turn of the 20th Century. We also learned a bit more about how to pursue research on Jewish life in Riga and Daugavpils. We hope this will assist others.

The Latvia State Historical Archives³ is the es-

sential beginning of any research, because, we are told, all historical records, including Tsarist Russian records and Nazi Ghetto records are kept there. Barry Shay, whom we learned of by reading this valuable newsletter, gave us information about contacting the Archives. Also, we were fortunate to have a first generation born Christian Latvian friend, make some inquiries on our behalf via e-mail and in Latvian. In that fashion we made contact with Gita Umanovska⁴, a leader in the Jewish community in Riga. Gita was helpful in confirming an appointment for us with the Archives. She also recommended Jevgenija Rastopcina, a tour guide with information about the Jewish experience in Riga.⁵ Through a friend we learned of another guide, Juris Berze, who is very knowledgeable about Latvian history.⁶

The Archives building is on number 16, Slokas Street. It is an institutional-looking building without a street number, but the building follows the sequence of numbering, and is across the intersection from number 14. There were no signs, and the door was locked. We rang the doorbell. A woman appeared and we asked for Rita Bogdanova, whom Gita said was to be our contact in the Archives. In a few minutes Ms. Bogdanova appeared.

If anyone wishes to use the Archives, note the following. It is very important to contact the Archives before your visit, and include all the information you have, and all the questions or areas you wish to explore. If one has any copies or original documents from the period to be searched, copies should be included, as they are most valuable clues for the archivist. In that fashion the staff at the Archives may – hopefully – have engaged in the search before you get there, and have information waiting for you. We had e-mailed the Archives a few weeks earlier, requesting an appointment, as we were told one must do. We did not get a reply. Gita made an appointment for us, and when we arrived Ms. Bogdanova had our unanswered e-mail in hand. We remain puzzled over why we had not gotten a response. Without Gita's involvement we would not have known the time of the appointment, or even if we had an appointment.

A word of advice: write, e-mail or call well in ad-

vance for an appointment, include any information and questions you have, follow up your request if you get no reply. If still no reply, try contacting Gita, Jevgenija and Juris, in that order. If all else fails, as someone told us, show up anyway, hope the building is open, and if so, enter and ask for help.

Once past introductions we found Ms. Bogdanova to be very pleasant. She speaks English quite well, she translated Russian documents, and we presume she speaks Latvian. We don't mean that as a joke. The majority of residents in Daugavpils are Russian speaking, and not citizens of Latvia.

In our unanswered e-mail we had included the registration numbers of birth certificates we had from our relatives. Ms. Bogdanova had the registration books available. She called them police records. We got the impression they were the official government books in which all births were required to be recorded. Each page had printed across the top the following column headings: Entry# for a female/ Entry# for a male/ The one who performed the circumcision/ Christian DOB/ Jewish DOB/ Place/ Parents Names/ Child's Name. One fact we learned was that Chiam Zelig's father, was listed in the birth record as being from a place called *Abeli* (Phon.). Ms. Bogdanova said it was a small town in the Kovno province of Lithuania. If correct, that would indicate this Orelovitz family had moved from Lithuania to Dvinsk.

It is essential in understanding the Jewish experience in Latvia to have at least a general overview of the history of that country. Latvia became independent from Tsarist Russia in 1917. It issued paper passports from 1918 until the mid 1920's. Accordingly, the Archives have no passport records before 1920. Thereafter it shifted to the now common book style. Ms. Bogdanova excused herself to look for other Orelovitz records. She returned with a number of envelopes which contained passport papers of another branch of the Orelovitz family, Albert and Sam's cousins.

She also found emigration papers for an Orelovitz family, not known by us, with the following names and birth dates: Mendel, married to Pesa

the daughter of Joseph with children: Joseph ('03), Elke ('05), and Yudel ('08). They were from Friedrichstat (the German name for Jaunjelgava in Latvia). We observed, obviously, our forebears were not the only Orelovitzes in Latvia. They are likely to have been distant relatives.

Ms. Bogdanova searched her records for the year 1935, looking for the name Orelovitz, and found nothing. She said she also had access to ghetto records, but found no record of any Orelovitz. There is a book dealing with the fate of the Jews in Latvia during WW II,⁷ in which the name Scholem Orelovitz appears as being among a group of men in Riga's so-called "small ghetto" who were executed in retaliation for an unsuccessful uprising. But, who knows? As shown above, there were other Orelovitzes.

We asked for copies of the documents she had found. Ms. Bogdanova said it would take some time for her "to have it scanned." We suppose that means "copied." And, she said, she would write a report on what she searched and found. We paid for this service, but as of this writing we have not received the promised report and copies.

Near our hotel was a synagogue. It was guarded by a police van outside its gate with one officer. We were met by a young *Lubavitcher* Rabbi from New York. On a later visit to the synagogue we were met by an attendant, an elderly Jewish resident. He told us this synagogue survived WW II because, as the Germans were going to set it afire, the minister of a nearby Lutheran Church persuaded them not to. The man said perhaps it is a fairy tale, perhaps the minister did it to save the synagogue, or perhaps the minister feared the fire would spread to his Church. In any case, the synagogue building remained, but was used as a stable by the Germans.

On another day we walked to the Jewish Museum at Skolas Street, number 12. It is rather small. It contains pictures of street scenes of various Jewish communities in Latvia before WW II. Dvinsk was a large city, the second largest in Latvia. It was quite a large community for Jews as well, as we learned with more particulars when we visited there.

On another day we took a tour with Jevgenija. She took us to an interesting part of Riga which flourished in the late 1800's. The area contained five story apartment buildings, with richly decorated exteriors, in the Art Nouveau or *Jugendstil* style. Many of the professional and wealthier Jews lived in this area. To name a few: Philosopher and Oxford professor Isaac Berlin, and Michael Eisenstein, father of Sergei Eisenstein.

Jevgenija explained the German occupation, which began on June 19, 1941. At that time Riga had a population in excess of 500,000, of which 33,000 were Jews. Latvia's total Jewish population was 170,000. Most of the Jews in Riga, including the less affluent, lived in an area called Moscow. Jevgenija believed it was called Moscow because many of the residents were from Russia. It is not clear whether that area, southeast of the center of the city, was part of the city or a suburb.

One of the first acts of the Latvian Fascist Police, with the consent of the Germans, was the destruction of the main synagogue. It was a scene of horror. The Germans and their local collaborators herded in about 300 Jews, the doors were locked, and grenades were shot into the building. Anyone attempting to flee the resulting fire was shot. We visited that site, rebuilt from an empty lot to resemble the ruins of the building. It is now a memorial. Nearby is the old Jewish Cemetery, but most of the tombstones are gone. It is along a street called Jewish Street, so-called because it was a route used by the Jews.

On August 25, 1941 the Germans required every Jew in Riga to move to the so-called large ghetto, an area of approximately three by five blocks. It contained approximately 30,000 persons. It was established in the Jewish neighborhood called Moscow. Most of the structures were wooden. Four thousand able bodied men, to be used for forced labor, were removed to the so-called small ghetto nearby.

The large ghetto experienced two liquidation actions. The first was in late November 1941. Somewhere between 14,000 and 15,000 persons from the large ghetto, mostly women, children and the elderly, were force-marched eight kilome-

ters along adjacent railroad tracks. They were told they were going to the rail station for relocation. Near the rail station was Rumbula forest. They were forcedly marched into the forest and murdered. Squads of Latvian Police were among the executioners.

The Latvian murderers were deemed so able by the Nazis that they were used for similar actions in Byelorussia and the Ukraine. A second action took place one week later with another equal number. The ghetto was thus cleared to make way for Jews being brought to the Riga ghetto from Germany and Kovno, Lithuania. When the Rumbala forest was filled they used the Bikernieki forest. Most poignant memorials were established after the end of the Russian occupation.

Next we visited Dvinsk, now Daugavpils. It is in the process of pulling itself out of 45 years of Soviet rule. Streets are rutted, chunks of the sidewalks are missing, some buildings are restored, and others are in poor condition.⁸ By previous arrangements we met and spent a half day with the Director of the Jewish Community Center, Sofija Mejerova.⁹

The Community Center is on a second floor, behind another building. It is well maintained, and nicely decorated with Jewish flags, learning materials such as a large poster of the Hebrew alphabet, and pictures of Israel. It serves as a school for the children and a clinic to provide medical assistance to the elderly. Their pension and the health benefits are inadequate, says Sofija. Also present was a woman to serve as an interpreter. Her name is Farida (“Ida”) Zaletilo.¹⁰ We speak only English, and an insufficient amount of Yiddish. Ida spoke Russian and English.

We began by explaining that Albert and Sam left Dvinsk in 1913, and two older brothers remained there and raised families. We were searching for anything that existed about the Orelovitz family before or after 1913. We explained that there was very little information from the Archives. It appears Ida has helped others in this connection, because she explained that there were Tsarist Russian census records at the Archives, but we needed an address or an occupation. Sofija said the oldest living member of the current commu-

nity was born after Albert and Sam left, and she doubted she could get any information. Sofija made a phone call, presumably to an old member of the community. She returned and said the person did not know anybody with the name Orelovitz.

Sofija gave us a short history lesson. Many Jews migrated to the area in the 16th and 17th centuries when Latgale¹¹ was ruled by the Kingdom of Poland. Sofija explained that before WW I, Dvinsk was an area of great growth principally because of a rail line that had been built. We guess, from looking at a map, that it was the rail line from Moscow to Vilnius. Dvinsk always had been a major political, commercial and military center due to its location on the Dvina River, now called the Daugava, and its proximity to Lithuania and Byelorussia.

We learned later that Dvinsk was part of a line of fortresses established under Tsarist rule as a major line of defense in the 18th or 19th century. Before WW I the population of Dvinsk was over 100,000, and nearly one-half were Jewish. Jews owned much of the commerce and production. At its peak Dvinsk had forty synagogues, and a number of renowned Rabbis were born there.¹²

We speculated on why Jews would have left Dvinsk if it was a time of prosperity. With Sofija we came up with a number of reasons. Not all Jews, of course, were well off. There was fear and instability at that time. Sofija said there were no pogroms in Dvinsk, but there were elsewhere, causing general fear.

Dvinsk was a major battlefield in WW I, given its critical location, and Russia had “relocated” Jews to Russia for fear that they would collaborate with the Germans. Military service for a Jew in the Tsarist army, with a term up to 25 years, was a virtual death sentence. One of the Orelovitz brothers left for America to avoid the Russian draft. And because Chiam Zeleg died in his forties in Dvinsk, we speculate that the death of the breadwinner was another and substantial reason for his family to leave.

After Latvia’s independence in 1918 Jews became part of what Sofija called the bourgeois.

But around 1934 or 1935 Latvia became a dictatorship, and fascist, with resulting anti-Semitism. In June, 1941 the city was quickly overrun by the Nazis. Executions were swift. A ghetto was established up river from the city, and it included Jews from a town across the river, Grivne. The events at Daugavpils, related by Sofija, were similar to what we had heard in Riga. And, why not? The same people were carrying out the same program.

Jews were systematically taken to the forest and murdered, first the elderly and then the remainder. Some children were simply thrown into the Daugava River. Later, Jews from other countries were brought in to be exterminated. Local police and volunteers did most of the killing. Sofija was narrating this in Russian, and Ida was translating. At this point Ida simply broke down and began sobbing. She excused herself, left the room for about five minutes, and upon her return she apologized. Of course, we all were emotionally moved, and understood the depth of Ida's feelings.

Sofija explained the current situation. In 1990 there were about 3000 Jews in Daugavpils. Today there are about 600, 30 of whom are children. Sofija estimates there are about 6000 Jews in Latvia, one-half living in Riga. Today there is one synagogue, and the community center. All the young people want to leave, for Israel or elsewhere. The Jewish cemeteries have been eliminated. The government gave people notice and an opportunity to remove and rebury loved ones, but because so few Jews survived there were virtually no removals.

At this point we want to share a story within the story. Shortly before we left Chicago, and in the course of our making arrangements to meet Sofija, she got word back to us that we should contact a woman by the name of Frances Peshkin. She is the contact person for her temple in Oak Park, Illinois and also active in a program called *Yad L'Yad*, operated by an organization called Chicago Action for Jews in the Former Soviet Union. The Oak Park Temple and *Yad L'Yad*, provide aid and support to the Daugavpils Jewish community.¹³ Ms. Peshkin asked us to deliver generous cash contribution from her temple. We

were pleased to do so. Near the end of our visit at the community center we gave Sofija that contribution, as well as one of our own.

It was Saturday, and Sofija invited us to attend evening services at the synagogue. It was raining, which made everything look dismal. But it is dismal. Things are either in rubble or in the process of being restored. We met Sofija and Ida at the synagogue. As the members were coming in Sofija asked them whether they ever heard of the Orelovitz Family. No one did. We walked halfway down the block where Sofija pointed out what was once another and larger synagogue. Now it is converted to some business use.

The existing synagogue was used by the Nazis as a stable. There were ten men at services, including Charles. One was a young man, the others were ancient. There is no Rabbi. There is one man who served as the *Gabi*, or reader. Sofija pointed out a man who was in his nineties. The synagogue was unkempt, and many things are in need of repair or cleaning. The yard outside the building was filled with rubble.

Charles stayed for the chanting, and Sarah went with Sofija and Ida around the corner to a room upstairs, formerly the women's balcony. It had a windowed wall overlooking the sanctuary. They went there not because of any religious requirement of separation, but simply because they did not want to participate in the prayer session. The upstairs room was being renovated. It looked clean and redone. Sofija said it was being fixed up to serve as a meeting room or community room. Meet for what? We didn't inquire.

That evening we parted with Sofija and Ida, warmly exchanging little gifts. We felt we were witnessing the death of a once large and vibrant Jewish community.

On the next day guides we had hired took us to two Holocaust Memorials. Regrettably Sofija was unavailable, taking an out of town guest to Riga, but she gave our guides directions. There was no road signage, and they were not sure exactly where to go. But with little searching we arrived at one site to which one had to walk about one hundred yards through some wooded area.

Again, there was no signage, and a simple wood-chip path. What we saw, however, was moving. There was one stone, about four by three feet on which was carved a Jewish star. Beyond it were many tombstones, but not in any particular symmetrical pattern. On each was the name of a country and a number, e.g. Poland – 3,000,000. As is our custom, we left pebbles on the large central stone as symbols that there are those who still remember.

Our guide took us to another memorial nearby. Again, there was no road signage. There was one large memorial stone. From pictures we had seen on the Internet it seemed to be missing some of its parts. Our guess is it had been damaged or vandalized. There was some wording in Latvian. We did not ask our guide to translate. She was standing near the car, leaving us to our thoughts, respectfully, we think. One didn't need a translation anyway; it was pretty clear what the message conveyed. Our guess is that this was the discreet memorial to the Daugavpils victims. We suppose these were the sites of the executions. We don't know; we doubt our young guide knew. In hindsight we feel fulfilled to have made this search.

Although we didn't find much about the Orelovitzes, we have the satisfaction of having looked. And, we came away with a clearer picture of the Jewish experience in Latvia, and a sense of where our family may have fit in. We hope this information will be useful to the reader, and indeed, encourage all of us to engage in the search, and share the results. If anyone wishes anything further, feel free contact us at: sarchar@aol.com.

End Notes

(1) Of course, the Orelovitzes anglicized their names from the Cyrillic. Some transliterated it to Orelowitz, others chose Orlove, Orlov, Orelove or Orel. Why? We don't know. Our guess: it was simply the act of an immigrant being asked to spell his name in English, or having an immigration officer spell it. Nevertheless, we still cannot understand why Albert and Sam, who came over together as children, opted to spell their names differently, and, regrettably, no one asked.

(2) We will use the name Dvinsk when referring to Tsarist Russian times, and Daugavpils when referring to present days.

(3) Skolas Street 16, LV – 1050, Riga, Latvia. Phone: 371 7612406 or 371 7613118; Fax: 371 7612406; E-

mail: histarch@com.latnet.lv.

(4) Cell Phone: 371.945-2273

(5) Jevgenija can be reached at: Phone: 371.746-6448; Mobile: 371.965-0410; E-mail: jenniferas@tvnet.lv.

(6) Juris can be reached at: Phone: 371.242-4075; Mobile: 371.946-0809; E-mail: jberze@parks.lv.

(7) Bernhard Press, *The Murder of the Jews in Latvia 1941-1945*, Northwestern University Press (2000).

Originally published in German as *Judenmord in Leitland, 1941-1945*, Metropol-Verlag, Berlin (1992).

(8) Previous visitors had stayed at the Hotel Latvija. When we were there it was closed "for renovation," they said. We question whether it will be renovated. It looks like a Stalin era sooty-concrete structure. We stayed at "a three star" hotel, Hotel Leo. Three stars is rather generous. Clean and spacious, but that's all. No phone, and no English speakers. The food offering is poor, but there is new and nice supermarket nearby where one can get the necessary bottled water and decent "take outs". However, the Hotel Leo is in comfortable walking distance to the Jewish Community Center and synagogue. Gubanators restaurant, not far from the synagogue, is a fine place to eat, and they will offer a menu in English.

(9) The spelling is from her business card. For the benefit of those who wish to contact Sofija, she is the "Direktore" of an organization called "Ebreju Kopiena", (the Jewish Community Center), located at Saknu 29, Daugavpils, LV-5403, Latvia; telephone and fax: 371 5420092; mobile: 9 577824. She speaks Yiddish and Russian, but not English. She is a lovely woman, with a rich soul.

(10) Ms. Zaletilo is a curator at the Daugavpils Museum of Regional Studies and Art, Riga Street 8, Daugavpils LV-5400, Latvia; Phone: 5424155; Fax: 5422709. Her e-mail address is farida@daugavpils.lv. Ida is also the project manager for a Mark Rothko Centenary. Rothko was born in Dvinsk, and left as a child. He never returned. Ida, though not Jewish, volunteers her time to help Sofija.

(11) Latgale is the name of the area in which Daugavpils is located.

(12) Meir Simcha HaKohen, Abraham Isaac Kook, and others.

(13) Frances Peshkin can be reached through *Yad L'Yad*. The e-mail address is Chicagoaction@ameritech.net; phone: 847.433-0144. Needless to say, contributions are always welcome, and tax deductible.

Latvian Minister Calls for

Investigation of Newspaper for Anti-Semitic Article

Latvia's Special Minister for Integration Nils Muiznieks has appealed to the general prosecutor's office to investigate a newspaper that printed an article denying the Holocaust for inciting ethnic hatred, according to a June 13, 2003 report by the Baltic News Service (BNS). The article, entitled "Falsifiers of History," appeared in the newspaper "DDD," published by Aivars Garda, whose Vieda publishing house has printed books in the recent past calling for Russians to be expelled from Latvia and defaming homosexuals.

In the article, author Karlis Rebins claims that "the richest kikes in the world, Churchill and Roosevelt" started World War II, not Hitler, and that Jews spread "legends about gas chambers in which six million kikes died. That is a historical lie composed by kike historians."

Mr. Muiznieks told BNS that such an article "may inspire dangerous consequences for the broader public and publicly undermine the honor and dignity of a concrete ethnic group." In reply, Mr. Garda called on Mr. Muiznieks to study world and Latvian history more thoroughly. The BNS story did not report any reply yet from the general prosecutor's office.

Baltic States Receive Mixed Marks For Nazi Prosecution

The Simon Wiesenthal Center gave Lithuania and Latvia "C" grades in its annual "Worldwide Investigation and Prosecution of Nazi War Criminals" report (see above), while Estonia received a "D." Only two of the 39 countries listed in the report were given grades of "A" or "B." The center termed "encouraging" the opening of 24 new investigations of possible Nazi war criminals in Lithuania, second only to Italy for the period reviewed, but noted that "to this day...not a single Lithuanian Nazi war criminal has ever sat one day in jail." Latvia was criticized for its failure "to take legal action against a single Holocaust perpetrator" despite the "large number of Latvian Nazi war criminals and collaborators still alive all over the world." Estonia, meanwhile, exhibits a "total lack of political will" to prosecute war

criminals, according to the report. The report noted the positive results of the center's "Operation: Last Chance," which was launched in the Baltic states in July 2002. The operation, which offers financial rewards for information leading to the investigation and conviction of Nazi war criminals, has led to the naming of 174 suspects in Lithuania, 37 in Latvia, and six in Estonia.

RJC on Estonian SS Monument

The Russian Jewish Congress expresses its concern by the fact of persistent attempts of the Estonian authorities to commemorate the Nazi criminals of the Second World War. The working group that installs a monument "To those who died for freedom of Estonia in the Second World War" gathered on its first session on July 30, 2003 in the Estonian city of Pyarnu. The memorial board was established last year, but they had to remove it in a week's time.

On the board there was the image of a soldier in uniform, with a rifle directed to the east, and an inscription "To all Estonian soldiers, who died on the fields of the Second World War for the native land and free Europe (1940 - 1945)." This caused an international scandal. Today many countries of the world hold litigations concerning the former Nazis. Acting in such a way, authorities of Estonia say that they are not guilty. The country that wants to become a part of the civilized world and a part of the incorporated Europe, justifies misanthropic ideology of Nazism.

This position is offensive for us, the organization representing both Jews and Russians, whose fathers and grandfathers lost their lives to free the world of the fascist threat. Estonia will soon become the full member of the European Union. We hope that the European authorities will immediately react to the situation in the country. We assume that if Europe accepts Estonia, whose authorities openly promote the ideology of Nazism, it will mean that the lessons of the Holocaust are completely forgotten

These articles were provided by Nickolai Butkevich, Research and Advocacy Director UCSJ. He can be reached at: nbutkevich@ucsj.com

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.

It is important that new members complete and mail the membership form on the following page — this form can also be found on the Latvia SIG web site — so that we can enter family names and locations on our Family Finder. Also, please include the other information requested on the form to help us make the Latvia SIG an even more effective resource for genealogical research.

Latvia SIG Membership Questionnaire

NAME:..... PHONE:.....
ADDRESS:..... FAX:.....
CITY:.....STATE/PROVINCE:.....
ZIP/POSTAL CODE:.....
COUNTRY (if other than U.S.):.....
email address:.....

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

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

I would be willing to volunteer for the following activities:

Please return your completed questionnaire, along with a check for U.S. \$20 (U.S. and Canada, \$30 for overseas members) payable to Latvia SIG, to:

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