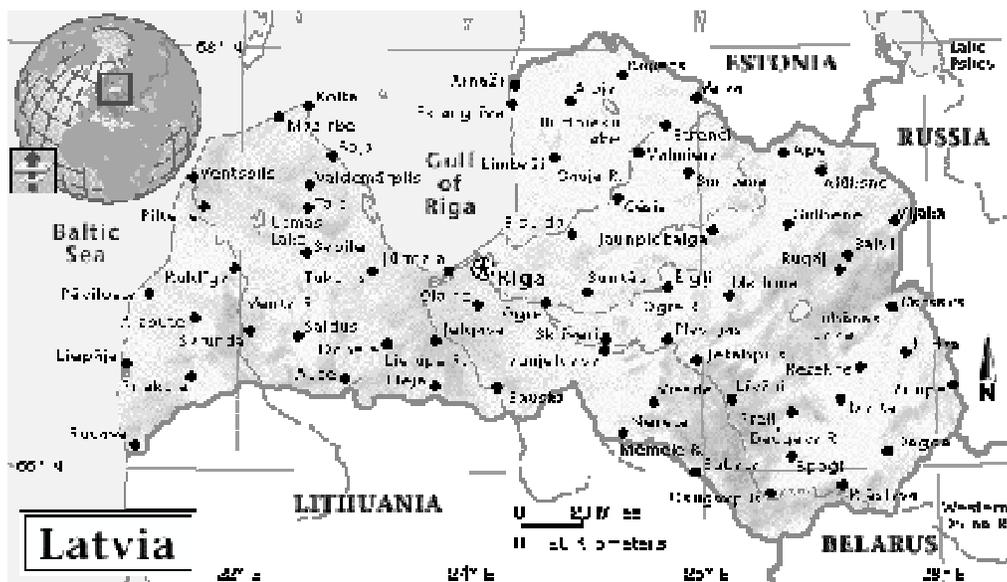


# Latvia SIG

November 2003  
Volume 8, Issue 1



## Table of Contents

President's Report	2
Editor's Comments	2
A Pilgrimage to Lativa (in two parts)	3
A Plea for Rezekne	6
Rezekne Update	6
More to Come on Rezekne	7
Auce Update	8
The Archive of Latvian and Estonian Jewry in Israel	9
Foreign Ministry Says Russia Outraged by Honors Paid to Latvian Legion	10
Estonian Security Police Wont Press Charges Against Anti-Semitic Web Posters	10
Latvia's SS Cemetery Draws Ire	11
Latvian Security Police Do Not Charge Anti-Semitic Newspaper Editor	12
Vandals Desecrate Jewish Graves in Latvian Capital	12
IAJGS 24th International Conference on Jewish Genealogy	12
Mystery Man	13

## President's Report

Shalom Chaverim!

I am writing this President's Report from New York City where I have come for a board meeting of the International Association of Jewish Genealogy Societies. High up on the agenda of the board meeting is the 24<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of Jewish Genealogy to take place in Jerusalem in July. Since I am on the organizing committee of that conference, I intend to ensure that we have a good representation of lectures of interest to Latvian descendents. We also are working on bringing in one of the archivists from Riga, which I find very exciting!

As our membership grows, so do our resources. We should be able to look forward to more databases on our growing website. Unfortunately, I have not seen very much movement on our specialty areas. To remind you, we were interested in people specializing in different areas of Latvia that interest them, so that we could cover each area in depth. Interested people had volunteered to undertake expanding our databases and Web-Pages on Estonia, Dvinsk, Goldingen and Ludza/Rezneke, but not much progress has been made, alas. Once again, anyone interested in such a challenge, please get in touch with me!

Our officers are elected for two year terms. This July, we will need to elect a new president and treasurer. We would appreciate your suggestions for successors! We need active, interested, enthusiastic and creative people to either volunteer for the positions, or to be nominated for them.

You may recall that at our annual meeting two years ago, we created an advisory committee for the SIG. It was my hope that that committee would be creative and help inject new life into the SIG. However, the committee chose to be mostly passive, which unfortunately rather defeated the purpose of having it. I would like to remind you that the more active you are in our SIG, the more the SIG can work for you in obtaining and making public more sources for our research. After all, you are the SIG! Become active! Help us to help you!!

You can always contact me at my email address.

My door is always open, so to speak!

Next year in Jerusalem!

Martha

martha@bgumail.bgu.ac.il

## Editor's Comments

This edition of the Latvia SIG newsletter again includes a number of articles about personal visits to Latvia. Susan Levy's excursion, all the way from Perth in Western Australia, may be the longest to date of those of us who have traveled to Latvia to seek a personal connection with our ancestors. Sue's trip also reinforced to me the idea of how small the world Jewish community is in general, and the Latvian Jewish community in particular.

In my e-mail correspondence with Sue, I mentioned that I have a cousin who lives nearby Perth whose name is Edna Fisher. Within a few minutes I received an e-mail from Sue saying that she and Edna are good friends and work closely together in support of the National Council of Jewish Women in Australia. Amazing! Even more amazing is the fact that Edna's maternal grandparents as well as her mother, my first cousin, were all born in Daugavpils (Dvinsk).

Some time ago David Michaelson visited Rezekne and was so moved by the condition of the single remaining synagogue that he decided to do something to improve its condition. I have included his account of the progress made and what yet needs to be done. A short account, accompanied by photos of the synagogue, by Lavi Soloway, who had contacted David about his trip to Rezekne, is included in this issue. I look forward to Lavi's more detailed article for the next issue.

Jerry Kahan's research into the massacre at Auce, which appeared in this newsletter, precipitated an invitation to him to attend the ceremony for the unveiling of a monument in Auce to memorialize that event. Jerry's correspondence with Meijers Melers (also mentioned in Sue Levy's article) is included. We hope to get a description of the event for the next newsletter.

Unfortunately, anti-Semitism continues to show its ugly head in the Baltic countries and Nickolai

Butkevich continues to monitor the situation. He and Glenn Richter provided most of the material documenting those disturbing events.

I am pleased to include an invitation to each and everyone of you, by the hosts of the event, to attend the next IAJGS in Jerusalem. Finally, I ask each of you to contribute articles, ideas, areas of special interest, and anything else you would like to see covered in the newsletter.

Barry Shay  
barry.shay@ieee.org

## **A Pilgrimage to Latvia, Part I**

by Susan Levy

Latvia is one of the world's undiscovered treasures for tourists. Julian and I decided to go there, to see the country and visit the village where my grandmother was born in 1886. Now called Jaunjelgava, it was known as Friederichsstadt until the Latvians changed all the German names in an effort to reclaim their identity in the 1920s. Today the village is a backwater, and is probably little changed since 1900 when my grandmother left for England.

It has an air of resigned poverty about it. The buildings are original, and many show the lack of a coat of paint, or even a good clean. Except on the main street, the houses are well spaced, and most have a vegetable garden and small orchard attached - these were very pretty with the spring blossoms profuse on the trees.

As in most small towns in Europe, it has its market place. Nothing grand, just a concreted rectangle with a very good statue of a reclining lion in the center of it. At one end is a cluster of graves of Russian servicemen, dated 1941, guarded by mosquitoes the size of helicopters. Across the square stands the mandatory church, and beside it the grandest building in the village. Now a bank, it was probably the civic building in times past.

The main road is a one-way loop. Small roads go off to one side, away from the Daugava River, but these appeared not to promise much. Having no map and no Latvian language, we couldn't communicate at all with the people. So we left the town armed with photographs and an impression of what it once might have been. Unfortunately

our stay in Latvia was not long enough to allow a return visit to Jaunjelgava, once we knew more about it.

The next day we spent in the Old Quarter of Riga. This is an amazing collection of buildings ranging from 1600s (the oldest building in the country) to the Art Nouveau of a hundred years ago. A tourist map gives a very good list of buildings of different eras, and the walk is well worthwhile. Like the rest of the country it is flat, and walking is easy, marred only by cobbled streets which are hard on the ankles.

After walking and exploring all morning, we examined our city map over lunch and located the synagogue. It was a short walk from where we sat, in the Old City, so we made it our next stop.

In a rather neglected part of the city, the Shule stands in a quiet street. A police van was parked outside. The gates were open and nobody seemed interested in our arrival, until a man emerged from a side room inside the Shule and greeted us in perfect English. We talked for a long time, and he turned the lights on so we could take photos.

Like many Latvian Jews no doubt, he had grievances to air, and we were a willing audience. His views on the European Community were unequivocal - it would be yet another blow to Latvian sovereignty if the country joined, yet he saw it as inevitable.

When we asked him the location of the Bikerniecki Forest Holocaust memorial, he clammed up. We were not sure why, and knew it would be impolite to insist, so we changed the subject, and found it out later at the Museum of the Occupation.

The Shule is the only surviving one of seven that existed before the War. It was not the main one, but is more than adequate for most services during the year. It is well-kept, light and airy. The Rabbi is Lubavich, and has established a Chabad in a newer part of the city, including a Hebrew School. The other Jewish facility of interest is the Community Center/Museum, where we went after leaving the Old City.

But first we visited the Museum of the Occupa-

tion. It is not far from the synagogue, in a conspicuously ugly Soviet-built black, rectangular building. Originally designed by the Russians for their displays of conquest, it now depicts the succession of occupations this valiant country has suffered over the past hundred or more years. Everything is exposed, by way of photographs, memorabilia, letters and static displays. Translations are available in a selection of languages. One must sympathize deeply with a country whose identity has been stripped away so many times, and whose people have been so brutalized in the process. It is all there in the museum for the visitor to see and learn from.

The Latvian people are divided on whether to keep this building or tear it down and relocate the collection. If they did the latter, who could blame them for wanting to remove such a hideous reminder of the Soviet occupation? (Not that the country is short of these, as we were to discover. Everywhere we went, we saw the huge, ugly, cheaply built apartment buildings and factories, mostly abandoned since the breakup of the Soviet Union.)

The Jewish Community Center and Museum building is over in the New City, a more modern area relatively speaking. We entered the building, again surprised by the scant security, and climbed a rather grand staircase to the second floor. There, a pleasant lady who spoke no English, guarded the entrance to the museum. I told her I hoped to find information about Jaunjelgava, and she showed me a photo, about 100 years old, on the wall. When I asked if it could be copied, she led us through to a back office, to meet a research officer, whose name was Inese.

With this young woman, whose excellent English was the result of an American university education, we learned a great deal about the Latvian Jewish community and its 20<sup>th</sup> century history. I left my family tree with her to photocopy, and in return received a list of Holocaust victims from Jaunjelgava and a copy of the archive catalogue. Inese asked us to come back a couple of days later, to collect our photo, and also meet a man, Mr Mejers Melers, an authority on Jewish cemeteries in Latvia.

So it was that we came back on the Friday afternoon to meet Mr Melers. We parked our rental car around the corner, and feeling the need for lunch, noticed a strong smell of food coming from nearby. There it was - the L'Chaim Kosher Cafe, down a narrow concrete stairway a couple of meters from the car. Fortunately one of the customers spoke excellent American English, and helped us to order a meal - soup with kneidlach, falafel and freshly squeezed juice. It was a delightful surprise in a city where we would not have thought it possible. Even more surprising was the price, for the food was as cheap as any we had found anywhere in the country. It was a pleasant little cafe, incorporating some display cases of prayer books and Judaica for sale.

Our meeting with Mr Melers at the museum was most enjoyable. A delightful little old man, he speaks only Latvian and Yiddish, and has a lovely sense of humor. My Yiddish was put to the test and scraped a pass, while Inese interpreted the Latvian part of the conversation for us. In a way it was disappointing not to learn anything specific about my forbears, but I feel I came away with some clues that might one day lead to something more definite.

Meanwhile, it is a great feeling that I have touched my roots in a country where I have the names of ancestors going back five generations. I know the names of assorted relations who were alive when my aunt visited the country in the 1930s but did not answer letters after the War. It is fairly certain these poor people perished in the Holocaust. But that is another story.

## **A Pilgrimage to Latvia, Part II**

by Susan Levy

I had always believed that my family was personally untouched by the Holocaust, until last year when I read parts of letters my aunt, Hetty Finley wrote to my grandmother in England during her visits in 1933 and 1937 to relatives in Latvia. She visited numerous places in Latvia, as well as Berlin. One must question the sanity of a single Jewish woman traveling across Nazi Europe in 1937, but she got away with it!

After the war my grandmother wrote to these relatives, but received no replies whatsoever. We

can only assume they lost their lives at the hands of the Germans and their collaborators. There must have been plenty of the latter, for I can not be convinced that murder on this scale was kept secret from the gentile population.

Julian and I set off on our last day in Latvia, to visit three Holocaust memorials - Salaspils, Rumbula and Bikernieki. These are all located in the forests a short distance from Riga, and are easily found on main roads.

Salaspils was our first stop, and I have to say I was totally unprepared emotionally for the experience of being there. From a large car-park one reaches it down a wide path. At the end of the path there is a gateway/building in the design of a propped-up fallen tree. As we approach we see what appear to be human figures underneath and beyond it - these, as we move closer, turn out to be giant sculptures of human beings in poses of agony and distress. It is a most moving sight.

The area itself is a clearing in the forest, the size of several football fields. It is grassed with paths here and there. Scattered around are low walls, each one like a shrine to the building that once stood there, decorated with visitors' tributes of flowers, candles and stones. This is the site of the Salaspils forced labor camp. Here, Jews were brought between 1941 and 1944 in their thousands from distant parts of Europe and made to labor on a number of projects.

Markings on the walls of the archway are tally marks representing the victims.

To one side, there is a massive black polished stone box, measuring perhaps 10 meters by 3 meters and a meter high. Inside it, a metronome ticks, and in the silence of the compound one can hear the giant heartbeat.

There is more. Inside the fallen log building, a gentle series of steps takes us to the high end, where an opening in the wall affords a view of the whole area. On the walls are display cases with a map of the camp, photographs and descriptions in four languages.

In the compound we spoke to a woman who was the English-speaking guide to another couple, the

only other visitors to the place. She gave us a little background to it, and explained how to find our next destination, Rumbula. Her driver, waiting in the car-park, gave us full directions.

Rumbula is another, even more shocking example of the atrocities committed between 1941 and 1944. Here the entire Jewish population of the Riga Ghetto, 25000 in all, were taken into the forests and shot in one week of December 1941, together with a thousand others deported from Germany. In 1944, hundreds of Jewish men from the Riga Kaiserwald concentration camp were murdered here.

The miracle of the place now is the sense of peace that pervades it. Numerous polished black quartz plaques in a variety of languages give explanations, and inside, the centerpiece is a tall menorah made of the same twisted black metal pieces that comprise the distinctive semi-archway at the entrance from the main road. Below this menorah stand clusters of low quartz rocks, very like groups of people. The outside rocks have polished faces bearing the names of some of the victims. Nearby there are several raised grass beds, each bearing a single large standing rock. To add a human touch, each of these beds has a tiny floral tribute growing - a single, perfect tulip, or a row of five perfectly matched flowering calendulas.

As we left this area, we saw the visitors from the Salaspils memorial arriving.

Our final stop was the Bikernieki Forest memorial, at the place where thousands of Jews from all over Europe met their deaths. After examining the maps closely, we took a shortcut, and came out on the Bikernieki Road. By turning right instead of left we missed it, but after we turned around, we found it easily, closer to Riga than we expected. This place was marked on the main road by a very large polished stone entrance. As we arrived, the visitors from Salaspils were just leaving. They didn't get lost!

The layout was similar to Rumbula, only this time, the clusters of stones represented the victims' home towns, dozens of them, including Vienna and Prague.

There were no English explanations here, except for a plaque to say that the memorial was an initiative of the German War Graves Commission and was funded by Germany, Austria and other 'participant cities'.

After finishing our film, as light rain started to fall, we left this area feeling somewhat gratified that public acknowledgement was at last being given to at least some of the victims of the Holocaust.

## **A Plea for Rezekne**

by  
David Michaelson

I recently returned from a very moving trip to Latvia to discover my roots. My great grandmother and great grandfather came from the town of Rezekne in Latvia. My wife and I were shown around the town by the current head of the Jewish Community of Rezekne, Rashel Kuklya. There is a Jewish cemetery that has been in continuous use for 250 years. Many of the brick buildings from 100 years ago, when my family lived there, are still intact. There are two mass graves of Jews killed in the Holocaust as well as one surviving synagogue, possibly the one that my family used.

Today the synagogue is condemned. We went inside anyway and looked around by candlelight. It still contains many decorations from its time in active use. It is a wooden structure, which looks like it was once very beautiful inside. It survived WW II, when all the other synagogues in the town were destroyed, because the Nazis used it as a holding pen for Jews in transit from all over Latvia on their way to death camps. Standing inside, thinking that my great grandparents probably had been married in this synagogue and thinking about the thousands of Jews who stayed there on their way to death was a moving as well as chilling experience. Realizing that only fifty Jews remained out of 20,000 and thinking about the similar history of Jews elsewhere in Latvia as well as Poland and Ukraine, I realize that Hitler's dream of eliminating the Jews from Europe is slowly coming to pass.

I am writing this because the head of the Rezekne Jewish community told us that at one time the Latvian government had considered restoring the

last remaining synagogue of Rezekne as a museum, but balked at the cost (estimated at about \$100,000). My wife and I, as we stood in the synagogue, promised that we would contact Jewish groups in America who might be interested in contributing to the restoration of this synagogue. It is truly a very meaningful piece of Eastern European Jewish history that will probably be gone within a couple of decades - much like the Jewish community of Rezekne itself, if left in neglect.

If you are interested in helping to preserve this synagogue, please let me know. I have never done anything like this before and don't really know how to go about it, but if I can find a handful of groups who are interested, I can contact the Jewish Community of Rezekne and the Latvian government of the Latgale province and see if something can be done to save this synagogue.

Please let me know if you are interested or if you know of any other groups I can contact. Thank you.

## **Rezekne Update**

*To all those who have expressed interest in the preservation of the Rezekne synagogue, here's an update from David Michaelson. -Ed.*

I have good news regarding collection of funds for the synagogue. I don't know what the final details will be, but it looks like there is a good chance that the US Commission for the Preservation of American Heritage Abroad (a US Government organization with full tax exempt status and a member who is helping us) will be able to handle the money we collect. This might increase the red tape a little, but it will mean donations will be tax exempt and everything will be done properly. Also, unlike some groups that I have been looking into to help us, they wouldn't take any commission.

Right now this US Commission will be looking at a report on the synagogue that is being put together now. When necessary I will also write them a letter as "a concerned citizen". Once a decision is made by the Commission, I will let you know the details and we can start making donations.

Prior to this last previous update, I had gotten no response from the various agencies I contacted, but there are two promising leads. First is the World Monuments Fund. This is right up their alley. However, I think that the nominating letter has to come from the Rezekne Jewish Community itself, not from myself, if I understand their process. So I forwarded the information and application procedures to the president of the Rezekne Jewish Community with an offer to help her with the form if she needs it.

The second lead is the US Commission for the Preservation of America's Heritage Abroad. I have contacted a person there who is very interested in this project and is, in turn, contacting people in Latvia, including the US embassy in Riga, to see about the site and what can be done. I am optimistic about this lead! His enthusiasm was encouraging.

Some people have offered donations if things get to that level. The US Commission I mentioned above asked me if I could help raise money when the time came. If the US Commission does take this up, I will be asking each of you if you can either donate money or perhaps talk to your congregation or friends to raise money for this project. At that point the project would have a more official status and we would all be assured that the money would be going where we intend it to go and would be effective. I think that will address some of the concerns some of you raised earlier.

Hopefully I can soon contact you to say that this project is now real, rather than just an idea I am kicking around the internet. At that point I will ask your help in raising funds and in contacting local congregations and media as well.

Thank you all for your interest.  
David Michaelson

### **More to Come on Rezekne**

*Dave has informed me that Lavi Soloway recently returned from Rezekne and is interested in contributing an article to the newsletter about his visit. We hope to include that article in the next issue. In the meantime, Lavi has provided a short summary of his trip along with a number of photographs of the synagogue. I am pleased to in-*

*clude a couple of them in this issue. –Ed.*

I recently visited Rezekne, for several generations the home of my great-grandfather Chaim Zussman Soloway's (~1855-1923) large extended family. Located near the Russian border, Rezekne is a town of about 30,000. In 1897, Rezekne had a population of 6,500 Jews (out of a total population of 10,800) and boasted ten synagogues. Today, only about fifty Jews live in Rezekne and the single remaining synagogue (see photos), built in 1845, needs restoration.

The Jewish community, led by Rashel Kuklya along with allies in the Latgale regional government (especially Rashel's neighbor and friend Inta Rimsane), are trying to preserve the building and return it to use as a synagogue and a museum of Jewish heritage of Latgale region. In the next issue of this newsletter I hope to provide a detailed account of my recent trip to this region of Latvia.

Lavi S. Soloway  
New York, New York

### **Rezekne Synagogue**



## Auce Update

*In the January 2003 issue (Volume 7, Issue 2), Gerald Kahan wrote a moving story about the massacre of Jews in Auce. Recently, Gerald received a communication from Auce indicating that a monument to the Jews killed in Auce would be unveiled and inviting him to the ceremony. Unfortunately Gerald could not attend.*

*Since the ceremony, Gerald has not heard from Auce but I thought the correspondence between Gerald and Mr. Melers is an interesting follow-up to the original article. The correspondence follows. -Ed.*

Dear Gerald Kahan,

We hope to unveil a monument on the murdered Jews mass grave near the town "Auce" on the first days of October this year. Would it be possible for you to come to "Auce" on the 9th and 10th of October?

Would you be so kind and write to us about how did the exact place look like. There has been found the approximate place, using the information given by other eyewitnesses. I appeal for your written notes about exact location of the place of murder.

I did not receive an answer after our fax, sent on 14 July, 2003 to nr. 1-801-409-6476. I fully understand, that it is emotionally very hard but there is a need to overcome oneself and to give the real facts about this tragedy to the next generations.

Sincerely Yours  
Meijers Melers  
Museum "Jews in Latvia"

=====

Dear Mr. Melers,

Your letter came as quite a surprise to me. I had no idea anyone in Auce was interested in the events that took place there during WWII, much less placing a monument there in memory of the Jews. During the past several years, I was in touch with Askolds Berovskis, a man who runs a website from a high school in Auce, and he knew very little about the events that took place. In fact he told me that most of the people who would

have known had long since passed away - which of course came as no surprise.

Fortunately, during my research, I came across a book written by Dr. Andrew Ezergailis, a professor of history at Ithaca College in upstate New York. Although the book made no mention of the events in Auce, I was able to do research with Dr. Ezergailis and ultimately published the article that I have attached to this letter. The article was published in the Latvia SIG (SIG stands for Special Interest Group) just this past January. It explains in detail all that I know about the events that took place in Auce, and it also explains how I came to do the research. The victims of the massacre are buried in Putni Woods located about 4 kilometers northwest of town and about 150 meters beyond the old German cemetery. It was a swampy place, filled with brush and small trees. This is really all I know because this is what the eyewitnesses gave as testimony at their trials. You will see this in my attached article. I have no idea if "the old German cemetery" still exists or can even be located.

Putni Woods appears as "Putnu mezs" on modern Latvian maps. I was able to get some maps from a dealer in Riga. On the maps Putni Woods appears to be a fairly large area and, as the eyewitnesses testified, it is located northwest of town. My maps also indicate that Putni Woods are located beyond Vecauce and two small areas or towns marked Gulbisi and Putni. All lie along highway P104. I hope this proves helpful. I would love to come to Auce but unfortunately will not be able to make it. Although I am 60 years old, I am not retired and I am even attending school in the evenings and weekends. I am working towards a degree in computer software development.

Please tell me who you are and how and why there is this interest to mark the location of the massacre with a monument. Also, do you have any other records of who was murdered in the massacre? By any chance, do you even have a phone book from 1940-41? As you will see in my article, I mentioned the names of those people who were murdered in a Postscript at the end of the article. These names come from eyewitnesses. However, the name Michaovitz (my grandparents'

name) does not appear because the eyewitnesses never mentioned them. At the trials, eyewitnesses were asked to recall names from memory and I assume they simply did not think of the name Michalovitz at the time.

Needless to say, I am delighted that you are laying a monument and I would appreciate knowing all the details that led up to this event. I am EXTREMELY sorry I cannot be there because my sister and I may be one of the few links left to that history.

I am very much looking forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,  
Jerry

### **The Archive of Latvian and Estonian Jewry**

*Esther Rechtschafner, who previously had contributed two wonderful articles about Rezekne asked if we would be interested in information about the Israel-based Archive of Latvian and Estonian Jewry. Here is her description. –Ed.*

I enjoyed visiting this Archive very much. Therefore, I have decided to write something about it, in order to inform people who don't know about the existence of this nice place.

I first heard about the Archive from Professor Dov Levin, of the Modern Jewish History Department, Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

The Archive is situated in the central building of the compound of the Regional Council of Shefyim, at the entrance to Kibbutz Shefyim, which is just southeast of Natanya. There is a regional school here also, as well as a monument in memory of the Jewry of Latvia and Estonia, who perished in the Holocaust. The three buildings here are modern, and clean and airy. This is also true of the Archive, and therefore upon entering there is a nice atmosphere (not dusty, dark or moldy as an archive might be).

The Archive was founded about 30 years ago in the early 1970's, by the Organization of People

from Latvia and Estonia. Since some of the founders of Kibbutz Shefyim, were originally from Latvia, it was decided that it should be situated in this place. The Archives is sponsored financially by this Organization.

The material in the Archives is arranged nicely in files. There are files for every place in Latvia and Estonia where there once was a Jewish community, and a possibility to collect information about. Each file contains a history of the Jews, newspaper articles (many of which are over 100 years old), and written memories by people who once lived in the particular community. There is also information about the people of each community, and what happened to some of them after they left the community. The material is in various languages: Hebrew, Yiddish, Russian, Latvian, Estonian, and a bit in English.

The material was/ is gathered by the person who worked/works in the Archives. At first, requests were sent to all the members of the organization. Sometimes, after a person who originally came from one of these communities dies, his collection of information, about his former community is sent to the Archive. The people who have worked in the Archive do so on a voluntary basis. The first person worked there for over ten years, the second person for over two years, and Mr. Shlomo Courlander for over fourteen years. He just retired from this job about a month or so ago. Now there are volunteers from the Organization of People from Latvia and Estonia who work in the Archive. Unfortunately, these people are not professionals, as the predecessors were.

Mostly people who are looking for their roots, and who want information about the community that their family came from use the Archives. In addition to Israelis of all ages, there are visitors from outside of Israel, mostly from USA, Canada, and South Africa; the counties which Jews from Latvia and Estonia immigrated to. There are not many visitors in the Archives.

The Archive is decorated nicely with pictures of Jewish life in various Communities. Among these, there is a picture of school children from Rezekne, and a Certificate issued to members of the Jewish Society in South Africa about 100

years ago. There is a photocopy machine in the Archive, for the convenience of the visitors.

The Archive is usually open two mornings a week. It is in easy reach of Tel Aviv, about a half an hour north by bus. The direct telephone number is: 09 95596532. The telephone number of the Regional Council is: 09 9596517.

As happens to be the case, I visited the Archive, a few times, when I was doing research about the city of Rezekne, Latvia. Now, I think I would be happy to visit it again: and therefore my problem is to decide what I would like to research there.

Esther Rechtschafner,  
Kibbutz Ein Zurim

### **Foreign Ministry Says Russia Outraged by Honors Paid to Latvian Legion in Riga**

MOSCOW. Sept 29 (Interfax) - Russia has expressed outrage over the opening of a memorial cemetery for Latvians who fought in the Waffen SS Nazi forces during World War II. The memorial was opened outside Riga on September 27.

"The tradition of paying tribute to victims of WWII is a normal thing which needs no comment. But opening a memorial for Latvia's Waffen SS soldiers is yet another attempt to distort history and to instigate ethnic enmity and hatred of Russia," the Russian Foreign Ministry said in a commentary circulated on Monday.

"People are being told that all those who served in the Waffen SS's 19th and 15th divisions fought only at the front. Archives suggest, meanwhile, that the Latvian Legion which, incidentally, took an oath of allegiance to Hitler, was attached to Hitler's SD security police in 1943-45 and is remembered for its notoriously punitive actions in Latvia, Russia and Belarus. These 'heroes' took part in massive executions and guarded Nazi death camps," the Foreign Ministry said.

"Surprisingly, not only national-radical forces, but also other Latvian political, public and religious figures, including the Latvian culture minister and the Defense Ministry official for Latvia's integration with NATO, supported the revanchist tonality of the event. The military honors pro-

vided by the national armed forces to those who served Nazi Germany go beyond the generally accepted European standards," it wrote.

The Foreign Ministry described the praise given to members of the Latvian Legion as an act which profanes the memory of victims of fascism and of fighters against fascism.

### **Anti-Semite in charge of Latvian Contemporary Arts Center**

Director of the Latvian Contemporary Arts Centre (LLMC) Solvita Krese still keeps the post of LLMC director despite of the violations detected by the State Control. One of the three centre's founders - Soros Foundation - Latvia assures that the centre and its management are working well. Krese devoted harsh words to the Jews already when she was a student. In 1995, the newspaper Santa printed an article Apartment Full of Energies, in which Krese spoke about furniture in her apartment and its energy. She noted that the negative energy of a chair must come from some rich Jew to who the chair may have belonged. The newspaper was unable to find out whether Krese has changed her anti-Semitic views since then, as she never answered the phone. The newspaper questioned various people liked with culture to find out whether anti-Semitism is still alive in Latvia's cultural environment. Deputy executive director of Soros Foundation - Latvia Pēteris Viņķelis says that anti-Semitism is not typical of Latvia's cultural environment and the intelligentsia has always been immune to the manifestation of anti-Semitism. Director of the museum Jews in Latvia Mārgers Vestermanis admits that each individual has his/her own views depending on the environment. He believes that Latvia's community is on its way to overcoming the prejudices, and President Vaira Vīķe-Freiberga is doing much work so that Latvia could overcome anti-Semitism prejudices on a national level.

### **Estonian Security Police Won't Press Incitement Charges Against Anti- Semitic Web Posters**

Anti-Semitic and anti-Israeli comments have literally flooded Estonian Internet portals over the past two years, but the Estonian Security Police have refused to bring incitement charges against

the authors, viewing it as a free speech issue, according to an August 15, 2003 report by the RUJEN news agency. Efraim Zuroff, director of the Jerusalem bureau of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, which specializes in hunting Nazi war criminals around the world, has been the subject of most of the verbal anti-Semitic attacks posted on popular Estonian web portals like Delfin, where at least one poster called for a second Holocaust and another denied it ever happened in the first place.

### **Latvia's SS Cemetery Draws Ire**

Latvia's dedication of a special cemetery for SS-Latvian Legion veterans has cast a pall over Israeli-Latvian relations, with the foreign ministry calling the Latvian ambassador to a meeting Thursday to protest the memorial.

The SS-Latvian Legion unit was created in 1943 and was a part of the Waffen SS.

The dedication ceremony at the end of September in the town of Lestana, some 70 kilometers from Riga, was attended by Latvian Culture Minister Inguena Ribena and members of the Latvian Parliament.

David Peleg, the ministry's deputy director-general for Europe and Euro-Asia, formally registered a protest to Latvian ambassador Janis Lovniks for the government sponsorship of the ceremony.

Peleg said Israel is "very concerned" about what appears to be a Latvian attempt to run away from a true accounting of its past, and instead rewrite its history. Peleg also said Israel is concerned that Latvia is rehabilitating elements who were involved in war crimes.

Latvia, which is already a NATO member, is slated to join the EU next year, and Peleg said there has to be a correlation between the country's joining these two bodies and an honest accounting and grappling with the past.

Lovniks said that Israel and Latvia are looking at the issue "from different angles." She told The Jerusalem Post that the Latvian Legion did not take part in atrocities against the Jews because it

began to work with the Waffen SS only in 1943, "a year after the last mass-scale murder of Jews in Latvia."

Lovniks said Latvian soldiers did not take part in repressive operations. "Not a single Latvian Legion member has ever been tried in any court for war crimes committed in the context of the activities of the Legion."

Lovniks said the Legion fought alongside the Germans not because it agreed with the Nazi ideology, but rather because it wanted to fight Soviet occupation.

To support this argument, Lovniks referred to a report written by the commander of the 15<sup>th</sup> Division of the Waffen SS in January 1945, in which the officer said the members of this unit "are Latvians above all. They want a sovereign nation-state of Latvians. They regard the fight against Russia their duty to the nation."

Lovniks rejected Peleg's charge that Latvia was not dealing honestly with its past, saying Latvia has established an historical committee which has done exhaustive research and already issued eight volumes dealing with the period.

He also said Latvia welcomes a dialogue with Israel on the issue.

Efraim Zuroff, director of the Israeli branch of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, dismissed the argument that the Latvians were not fighting for Nazism, but rather against the Soviets. In the final analysis, he said, they fought with the Waffen SS and wanted "the Third Reich to win and rule for 1,000 years."

Although Zuroff said that the unit was indeed established after most of Latvia's Jews were already massacred, many of the Latvians who took part in the killing of the Jews volunteered to join the Latvian Legion.

Latvia, Zuroff said, has "failed to prosecute a single Holocaust perpetrator despite the active participation of thousands of Latvians in the mass murder of Jews in Latvia and in other countries during World War II."

## **Latvian Security Police Do Not Charge Anti-Semitic Newspaper Editor**

According to an October 18, 2003 report by the Baltic News Service, an appeal to the general prosecutor's office by Latvia's Special Minister for Integration Nils Muiznieks to investigate a newspaper that printed an article denying the Holocaust has been denied. Latvia's security police reportedly see no signs of an incitement to ethnic hatred in an article from earlier this year (as is all former Soviet states, Latvia has a law banning the public incitement of ethnic and religious hatred).

The article in question, 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."

The security police justified the decision by arguing that: "the main theme [of the article] is a criticism of the foreign policies of major states, only in one paragraph does the author indirectly [!] touch on the question of problems of the history of the Holocaust, using according to his own understanding the freely arrived at conclusions of other authors."

Minister Muiznieks responded to the decision by countering that the article "creates potentially dangerous consequences for broader society, as well as insulting the honor and dignity of a concrete ethnic group."

## **Vandals Desecrate Jewish Graves In Latvian Capital**

According to a MIG news report, citing a Jewish Agency representative in the Baltics (Shlomo Kim), 25 gravestones were vandalized with swastikas and the words SS and the cemetery syna-

gogue was vandalized as well.

As of September 13th, five residents of Riga were arrested in connection with the desecration at the Bikernieki Jewish Cemetery in Riga where swastikas were drawn on a number of gravestones with abusive words. Ilze Zvidre, head of the press centre of the main Riga police administration, told the BNS agency that the act of vandalism took place at Lizuma iela 4 where the Jewish cemetery is located. Swastikas were daubed in red paint on the overturned tombstones. Zvidre confirmed that the police are about to start a criminal case. The minister with special responsibility for social integration, Nils Muiznieks, surveyed the scene of the crime to ascertain the damage.

## **IAJGS 24th International Conference on Jewish Genealogy**

The Israel Genealogical Society is delighted to invite you to the IAJGS 24th International Conference on Jewish Genealogy, which will be held on July 4-9, 2004, in Jerusalem.

Jerusalem: home to unique archival and family history resources including Yad VaShem, the Jewish National and University Library, the Central Zionist Archives, the 3,000 year old Cemetery on Mount of Olives, and more...

The hotel: The conveniently located Jerusalem Marriot Renaissance offers a complete range of facilities and services--and special rates for conference participants.

The program: a wide selection of lectures on family genealogy, community studies, genealogy and DNA, Sephardic studies, Holocaust research, genealogy for beginners and much more...

For more details, questions and discussion join our mailing list: Jerusalem 2004, simply go to

[http://www.jewishgen.org/listserv/sigs\\_add.htm](http://www.jewishgen.org/listserv/sigs_add.htm)

and fill in your name and e-mail, go down the page and choose Jerusalem 2004\* - a mailing list devoted to questions and issues about the 24th IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy to be held in Jerusalem, July 2004. Choose your subscription mode (individual mail, digest,

etc.), and submit.

See you in Jerusalem in July 2004!

Jean-Pierre Stroweis, Prof. Daniel Wagner, Eitan Shilo

24th IAJGS Conference Co-Chairs

### **Mystery Man**

The following photograph was taken in late 1905 either in Dvinsk or St. Petersburg. My father and one of his sisters are in the photo, along with nine unknown people. The newspapers on the lectern are *Nachalo (Beginning)* and *Novaya Zhizn (New Life)*. Can anyone identify the gentleman in the center of the photograph? Please e-mail your suggestions to me. Thanks for your help. The results will be discussed in the next newsletter.

Barry Shay, Editor  
barry.shay@ieee.org



### **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 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](mailto: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:

Latvia SIG  
5450 Whitley Park Terrace, #901  
Bethesda, MD 20814-2061