# Latvia SIG

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## Latvia

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President’s Report

I’d like to wish all of you the best for the New Year and to introduce myself to you as the new president of the Latvia SIG. As some of you may know I was elected president at the Latvia SIG meeting that was held at the IAJGS annual convention this past July in Jerusalem. I am honored to be your new president and I hope that I can live up to the position, which will be most difficult since Martha has done such a wonderful job during her tenure as president.

I am a relative newcomer to Jewish genealogy, having been introduced to the subject and to the Latvia SIG by my good friend Mike Getz. Luckily, Mike and I are almost neighbors and I plan to spend quality time with him as I get up to speed on the issues that need to be addressed and the projects that need to be pursued to help make the Latvia SIG an indispensable part of your genealogy research.

In the near term I will be contacting people who I consider "activists" in Latvian Jewish genealogy, i.e. people who have already embarked on efforts and projects of importance to our community. I’d like to identify and encourage other SIG members to join these activists in pursuing those and other projects of interest. In addition, I invite each of you to consider becoming an activist by identifying issues, problems, projects, questions, concerns, etc. that you feel the Latvia SIG should address. Remember, this is your SIG and it exists to service and support your needs as you embark on or continue your genealogy research.

We all know how important the Internet has become in genealogy research and I’d like to make the Latvia SIG website, which falls under the JewishGen website, even more useful. I became “hooked” when I searched my family name on the All Latvia Database (http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/latvia/), and four family members came up. I almost fell off my chair! So I am asking you to think about what you might like to see of the Latvia SIG website and send your ideas to me. How about travel tips in Latvia, good places to stay, good places to eat, etc.? We are also considering making the newsletter available online to paid subscribers and adding links to sites of interest. Latgale? Dvinsk? Are there databases you know about that you think would be of interest to the membership? Would you like to assist in getting them on-line?

I’d also like to get our next generation of researchers involved. Have you talked to younger family members who’d like to begin family research? Show them the newsletter and the website. Maybe you can get them hooked.

Again, I appreciate the honor of serving you and I hope to hear from you as we move into the New Year. You will certainly hear from me as I formulate my ideas and describe them in more detail.

And for those of you who are U.S. citizens and eligible to vote, please go to the polls and vote on November 2nd.

Treasurer’s Report
(July 2003 to June 2004)

Our bank balance commencing July 2003 stood at $3400 ($4100 in 2002) and will probably amount to $4400 at the end of June 2004. Income from membership, donations and some newsletter sales totaled just over $2500 for the period. Expenses were close to $1500 principally for printing and mailing our newsletter. At this stage I have not been advised of expenditures related to archival research and related activities.

Our paid up membership stands at 117, an increase of 50 over last year, including 40 new members. There has been significant growth in the US and Canada with an increase as well from the UK, Europe and Israel. This growth reflects the value of Cindy Spikell’s recruitment initiatives, complemented by our President’s consistent involvement and support. Martha has maintained and enhanced the President’s role in assistance and guidance to members. The consistent quality and content of our newsletter under Barry Shay, has also been an important factor.

There have been several renewals for the coming year. A number of these have volunteered to help in our activities. It will be important to identify our priorities. Projects that need particular skills or participation need to be planned, publicized and monitored. Feedback on our list serve, web-
site and in the newsletter would boost involvement and membership. Integrating these resources as they relate to specific goals should feature in our forward thinking as a meaningful membership benefit.

We have recently had requests, some institutional, for copies of all newsletters published since 1996. This involves reprinting and mailing. It is possible to now put these on CD and made available to members and others more economically and with less effort. Barry and I will follow this up.

A significant portion of our income in the past has been devoted to archival material, its preparation and presentation. There is much still to be done in this sphere. If we wish to provide an email option for the newsletter, access should be with our knowledge and with consideration for members who fund our activities. It is my view that additional funds could be raised if we can continue to add to our resources on the web and otherwise. It will depend on our ability to structure, plan and organize accordingly.

I am grateful to Rhea Plottel for work in maintaining and updating our membership database. That information will always be key to implementing future programs which cover the interests, concerns and involvement of our members. Our newsletters, under Barry’s editorship perhaps now enjoy the widest readership we have known. Martha, our President, has been in the forefront of our activities. Her accessibility to members and non-members (who have often become members) has been excellent. This was in addition to a significant and effective role in planning the IAJGS conference.

I regret not attending the conference in Jerusalem: one of the most important conferences in the history of Jewish genealogy. Please feel free to discuss any aspects of this report. I would welcome any questions, comments or suggestions.

Mike Getz, Treasurer
mgetz@erols.com

Editor’s Comments

I am very happy to bring you the first newsletter of the new administration. No, I don’t mean the one in Washington, but rather the new Latvia SIG administration that was elected in Jerusalem at the 24th IAJGS conference. I now have dual roles as president of the SIG and editor of the newsletter. It’s good I don’t have a full-time job.

While this issue is a bit late in coming, I am happy to include interesting material about trips to Latvia by SIG members as well as the results of two individual efforts, also by SIG members.

Liepaja, formerly Libau, is prominent in three articles in which Randy Wasserstrom, Lisa Newman, and Brad Elterman’s paths crossed in their search for Latvian roots. In particular, the Jewish cemetery in Liepaja is the final resting place for ancestors of all three. Their stories of trying to find evidence and burial sites of these ancestors in the cemetery are ones in which we can all relate.

Lavi Soloway, who has a deep interest in uncovering historical data about Jewish life in Latvia, has located important documents at the Joint Distribution Committee Archives in New York City and I am happy to include one of those documents in this issue.

Finally, David Michaelson has taken it upon himself to rescue and revive the last remaining synagogue in Rezekne. This synagogue, also called the Green Synagogue, has been the subject of a number of articles in this newsletter and David’s initial efforts were highlighted in the November 2003 issue. The results of David’s remarkable efforts are slowly coming to fruition and I am delighted to include a progress report in the form of a series of updates to the project that David has provided.

SIG Activities at the IAJGS Conference in Jerusalem

by Martha Lev Zion

Shalom everyone! I have finally recovered from having been totally bereft of energy after the Conference in Jerusalem. It was an incredible conference - and for those who didn't make it, I am sorry for you! We had over 760 attendees
from 21 countries: a real international conference! Most of the lectures were on a very high level. By nighttime, when going up in the elevator to my room, people were holding their heads and saying that they couldn't absorb one more thing and how wonderful the lectures were.

Our SIG meeting was right at the beginning of the week, which was a good thing for me, because by the end of the week I couldn't even pronounce my own name, so tired was I! We had a very nice representation of members at the meeting. Professor Dov Levin, who was interested in helping people with their brick walls, graciously answered personal questions from the audience. Eli Valk of the Association of Latvians and Estonians in Israel also gave a short talk and explained how the SIG members could profit from connecting with the Association. He passed out a pamphlet on the Archives and the Association. Evelyn Waldstein briefly explained the project that she is working on, databasing all the Jewish school children before WWII in Latvia.

We had elections for president. I turned down the offer to run again and I am very happy that Barry Shay, the editor of our SIG Newsletter, was elected president. I don't think he knew that he had been nominated, but the vote was unanimous! We agreed to keep Mike Getz as treasurer. We organized a committee to work on the bylaws. The following people volunteered: Zeeva Levy, Don Hirschhorn, and Cissie Eppel. We welcome others who are interested in helping, so please contact us as soon as possible. In addition, Stan and Bobbye Hertzbach volunteered to help database the information on the Courlander section of the cemetery in New York City.

As you can see, we are moving forward and have a new core of volunteers and people with ideas. I encourage any and all of you to join us in being creative in moving the SIG forward.

The 24th IAJGS Conference
(Abstracted from Nu? What's New? News About Jewish Genealogy from Avotaynu)

The 24th International Conference on Jewish Genealogy is history. More than 750 people attended the conference; it was anticipated that only 600 would attend. They came from 17 countries: Argentina, Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, Denmark, France, Israel, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, South Africa, Sweden, United States, United Kingdom and Venezuela.

The host society, the Israel Genealogical Society, did a great job. Not surprisingly, most of the members of the conference organizing committee were well known and they took all their projects seriously. An innovation at this year's conference was the organization of lectures by themes. This allowed attendees to plan their research hours at archives, knowing that a group of lectures on a particular theme of interest appeared on the same day in consecutive sessions.

Recognizing that running a conference is an enormous task and having no experience with such an event, the conference planners gave the mechanics of producing the conference to a professional organization, Ortra, who did a great job in its role. This was evident, for example, in the professional signage throughout the conference.

IAJGS Annual Awards

Warren Blatt was awarded the "Lifetime Achievement Award," well deserved given his tremendous contribution to JewishGen and other aspects of Jewish genealogy.

The Outstanding Contribution award went to Dr. Alexander Beider in recognition of his major contributions to the specialized science of the origins and forms of proper names and surnames. Beider is the author of numerous books about Jewish names, all published by Avotaynu. They can be found at http://www.avotaynu.com/beider.htm.

The Outstanding Publication award went to the Jewish Genealogical Society of New York in recognition of its "Genealogical Resources New York" (2nd Edition).

Information about the book can be found at http://www.avotaynu.com/books/newyork.htm.

David Fox won the Outstanding Project award in recognition of the numerous projects undertaken within the Belarus SIG that have generated seventeen databases containing over 250,000 individual entries.
The 2005 IAJGS Conference
The 25th International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies annual five day conference which will be held in Las Vegas July 10 to July 15, 2005 at the Flamingo Hotel. Members of the Jewish Genealogy Society of Southern Nevada, headed by Charlotte Showel, and Michael Brenner, Conference Chairman are the organizers.

From 1200 to 1500 genealogists and family researchers are expected at the conference. Registrants, speakers and lecturers from all 50 states, each of the Canadian provinces and 25 countries are expected.

Archivists from Ukraine, Belarus, Poland, Latvia, and Lithuania just to name a few, are expected to attend. Programs from, “The History of Jews in Las Vegas” to “Jewish Genetic Diseases,” are planned. Lectures dealing with Jewish Heritage from Europe to the Middle East including Crypto Jews are being planned. Authors and researchers will present their work, including Bryan Mark Riggs whose book is entitled “Hitler’s Jewish Soldiers.”

Approximately 125 instructional programs and workshops on genealogical research and research methods, including computer workshops with online databases will be presented. Conference registrants will receive a syllabus that includes research guides edited by Hal Bookbinder, President of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies. A Resource Library under the direction of Shelly Weiner will be available. In addition about 25 vendors of Judaica and genealogical material will be present.

Meetings of Special Interests Groups (SIG) are being coordinated by Davida Noyek Handler, president of the Litvak SIG.

Jack Oliver, who was awarded 2003 Member of the Year Award, has taken on the chairmanship of the Audio/Visual Committee; Sam Showel, Treasurer of JGS is doing double duty as chairman of the Registration Committee; Marilyn Brenner heads the Purchasing Committee; and Steve Kitnick is the Volunteer Coordinator.

Mary Barkan and the Hospitality Committee are working on tours and show tickets. The conference will be capped with a gala banquet supervised by Sybil Greenberg and her committee.

The annual IAJGS Conference has been held in Jerusalem, London, Paris, Washington DC, Toronto, Salt Lake City, Boston, Los Angeles, and New York. This 25th Silver Anniversary Conference in the Silver State and in the 100th year of the founding of Las Vegas should be a very special event.

For information contact Michael Brenner, Conference Chairman, at michaelbrenner@juno.com or (702) 243-2858. Conference updates and programming information will be available at http://www.jgssn.org.

Future Conferences
The 2006 conference will be at the Marriott Marquis Hotel in New York City from August 13-18. Participants from Australia at this year's conference were seen wearing buttons that said "Sydney in 2007."

Visiting My Ancestral Homeland
By
Randy Wasserstrom

In June, 2004, I traveled to Latvia in search of my maternal roots and to see my ancestral towns of Bauska, Riga, Liepaja and Valdemarpils. Armed with a family tree provided to me in 2002 by the Latvian State Archives, I rented a car and spent twelve fascinating days on a adventurous journey in the former Courland and in Riga.

My first stop and “base” was Riga – a city brimming with tourism and confidence - and an interesting mixture of the old and the new. I stayed in a small hotel called the Felicia, about fifteen minutes from where five of my ancestors, Michelsohns, lived in various locations near the Daugava River.

I went to all of the houses and found four of them still standing, two of which are located in Riga’s Old City on Vecpilseta and Audeju streets. My cousin Hirsch Michelsohn lived in the house on Vecpilseta in 1900, and it is still in fine condition and right next door to an Indian Restaurant!! Although I love Indian food, I didn’t indulge! Just
around the corner from Hirsh’s house is the Peitvas Street Synagogue, built in 1905. I walked there along the cobblestone streets of Riga, drinking in the ambience of hundreds of years of history.

This synagogue is the only one still standing in Riga and currently serves the 10,000 Jews who now live in the revitalized community. It is a beautiful, ornate, colorful building which somehow managed to escape destruction by the Nazis. On a plaque in Hebrew near the front entrance, I noticed that a Morchechai Michelsohn was one of its founders and speculated he might have been one of my ancestors. Upon my return, I learned that he indeed was a distant cousin!

The next day, I drove across the Daugava River to the Latvian Historical Archives at 14 Slokas iela. The Archives is located in a big, impressive building, where I spent six hours researching vital records of my ancestors, aided by Gunta Minte, the reading room coordinator. I found two marriage records and one birth record. One of the marriage records was for Feige Hoffman, my great-great aunt in Valdemarpils who married a Jacobson in 1885 and received a dowry in roubles. The birth record was of Minnie Michelsohn, another great-great aunt, born June 27, 1871 in Bauska, Courland. Both great-great aunts later immigrated to the USA.

After two days in Riga, I drove fifty miles south to Bauska which is just twelve miles from the Lithuanian border, and was the home of my Michelsohn ancestors dating back to the 17th century!! I went directly to the Museum of Regional Studies near the town’s entrance on Kalna iela where I met Aigars Urants, the director, who has created an impressive Jewish exhibit, and who gave me a detailed explanation of the history of the Jews of Bauska. (translated by Dagnija Puke). The lives of my ancestors came alive with Aigars words with the vital pictures on the exhibit, leaving me with a lasting impression of their culture and lifestyle.

Aigars, Dagnija and I also toured Bauska and I saw the impressive house at 14 Rupniecibas iela, formerly owned by my ancestor Shmu Itzik Michelsohn, the first cousin of my great grandfather, a wine merchant who both worked and lived at this house. Aigars pointed out other nearby houses of Jews who had lived on this street and nearby other streets so I got a strong sense of who our “neighbors” were. We also went to the site of the former synagogue (destroyed in 1945) near the town’s square on Rigas iela and to the former cemetery on Birzu iela where ancestors such as my great-great-great grandfather, Aron Michelsohn, were buried. Not many stones are left but I took photos of a few which had been left discarded on a nearby road.

I also walked along the streets of Bauska and along the banks of its two rivers, the Memele and the Musa, which surround the town built between them. Natural tree-lined paths next to both rivers elicited a pleasant, rustic feeling, which I imagined my ancestors also experienced and I could envision them treading the very steps I was now taking.

After two wonderful days in Bauska, I drove back to Riga and picked up Aleks Feigmanis, a Jewish genealogist who had agreed to accompany me to my other ancestral town, Valdemarpils (formerly Sassmacken). We drove northwest from Riga across the beautiful, untainted countryside and arrived at our destination about two hours later. When I arrived in town, I was the first of my family to enter its boundaries since 1891! We immediately saw the former synagogue (built mid 19th century) and the bet midrash next to it. Both appeared to be in excellent condition and still in use by Valdemarpils organizations.
We stopped at the synagogue and bet midrash and took pictures as I pondered the image of my ancestors, the Hoffmans, using these buildings many times. We then walked to the center of town, only about 100 yards away, and looked at the monument to Krisjanis Valdemars, for whom the town was named after Sassmacken was no longer used. Although there was no literal monument to the former Jewish population, the synagogue is symbolically serving that purpose.

Aleks and drove I down Dzirnava iela and went to the home of Eric Prokopovits, who has extensive records on the Jews of Valdemarpils prior to the Holocaust. Although not Jewish, he developed a passion for keeping these records. He pulled out his “Jewish file” and spread it out on his living room table where we perused its contents, among which was information about the Jewish schools in Sassmacken in the 1830’s. One of the teachers was an S.I. Hoffman, very probably one of my ancestors.

Eric also took us to the former Jewish cemetery, up a hill in some woods right across the street from his house. This was a powerful place for me as many of my ancestors, including my great-great-great grandfather, Josef Hoffman, was buried there. Unfortunately few stones remain but I did take pictures of the ones we could find. Eric also plans to build a monument to the Jewish cemetery on a nearby hill overlooking the road and within view of Lake Sassmacka.

We spent that night in a hotel in nearby Telsi, about ten miles from Valdemarpils, and Aleks told me that Telsi is considered the most beautiful town in all of Latvia. After seeing its winding cobblestone streets, colorful houses, and wonderful view of the river, I totally agreed! Along one of those streets is the former synagogue with a plaque with the dates 1844-1941 – the years of its use by the Jewish community. We also went to the former Jewish cemetery, located in a wooded area just east of the outskirts of town. We walked up a steep hill and into the cemetery which had many stones, still well preserved and many with German inscriptions below the traditional Hebrew. I was stunned to find, very unexpectedly, the gravestone of my great-great-great uncle and aunt Salmon and Chasse Hoffman! I shouted to Aleks about the discovery which I savored as I had not realized some of our family had moved to Telsi! It was also the tallest stone in the cemetery, so evidently these Hoffmans were “well to do.”

With this exciting knowledge, we left Telsi and drove up the coast of the Gulf of Riga through the seaport of Roka and to the tip of northern Latvia where the Gulf meets the Baltic Sea at the town of Kolka. Coincidentally, Aleks’ ancestors who were fishermen came from Kolka, so he was familiar with the town and its nearby beach. The beach was craggy but very beautiful and I even thought I spotted Estonia in the distance! We then drove back down the coast to Riga, where I dropped off Aleks at his house.

After resting for a day in Riga and visiting the Jewish Museum, I drove “cross country” west on route A-9 to the Baltic Coast city of Liepaja (formerly Libau) where my great grandparents, Mottel and Roche Tubiansky, had lived in the early part of the 20th century. Libau was also the port of embarkation of thousands of Jewish emigrants to America from about 1880 to about 1920. Prior to the Holocaust it also had a substantial Jewish population of about 7000 persons. Today it has a renewed but much smaller Jewish community.

I drove to the Jewish cemetery on Klaipedas iela – hoping to locate Mottel and Roche’s graves. I had seen their names on a list of Jews on an internet site which said they were presumably buried here in Liepaja. I was fortunate to run into the man who had the books of Jewish gravesites and we indeed saw my great grandparent’s names but with no site information. I was disappointed at this setback but did see information for a site for an Eitel Tubiansky, presumably an uncle or cousin. With some effort and by brushing away a huge amount of ivy, we did find this gravestone and found out he had died in 1918.

In Liepaja at the Liva Hotel, I met up with a group called the Jewish Survivors of Latvia, who have an annual reunion and who were in Liepaja to help rededicate the Jewish cemetery the next day, June 9th. The mayor of Liepaja and many dignitaries from Latvia, Israel and the United States attended the ceremony, which took place
on a Sunday. The local newspaper also printed a big article about it the following day.

I was fortunate to meet people from all over the world who were Jewish survivors of Latvia or were relatives of survivors. We shared genealogical information and I heard numerous captivating and fascinating stories. This capped off my visit to my ancestral country!

My Latvian roots trip was quite an adventure and I am still absorbing the fascinating experiences that enlightened and informed me about my ancestral past. I look forward to further delving into my family’s history, enhanced by the memories of the actual places where they lived.

A Good Name
By Lisa Newman

‘A good name’ was what my late father always stressed he was leaving my brother and me, in his next breath quoting Isaiah on the values he lived by [‘do justice, love mercy, walk humbly before God’]. Our Samuel name was once well known in Latvia’s northwestern province, Kourland. My great grandfather Samuel Samuel [yes, that really was his name!] prospered there as a merchant and entrepreneur; and with his wife conceived 24 children, a full 12 of whom lived to adulthood.

Our forebears lived in Kourland since at least 1750; before that, probably Hamburg and before that, perhaps Spain or Portugal. In the 18th and 19th centuries, many male Samuel children were born, carrying the family name forward.

I thought of the importance of names as my children, cousins and I attended a recent ceremony in Liepaja [formerly Libau], Latvia. The punctilious research and awesome determination of retired U. S. chemistry professor Edward Anders, himself one of the 2% of Latvian Jews who survived the Holocaust, created a memorial in order to preserve the names of Libau’s approximately 7,000 Jewish victims, names not recorded anywhere else. The rate of Nazi extermination of Jews in Latvia was so high that too few survived to even piece together a yizkor [‘remembrance’] book.

All one hundred of us attending the ceremony were attached somehow to Libau, though very few had ever lived there and many, like my family, had never visited eastern Europe before. We ranged in age from 4 months to over 80 years, and came from Finland, Australia, France, Sweden, Israel, U.S.A. and Canada as well as from Liepaja’s present-day Jewish community of 400. We shared a handed-down family memory, of a prosperous, cultured, orderly pre-war town whose fortuitous geography made for ideal trading and shipping conditions.

I remember my father’s especially warm tone when talking of his Libau boyhood, his warm memories of the sea’s comforting whisper, and his lifelong fondness for fish, especially herring [a taste both his kids inherited]. Other reminiscences I have heard and read treat Libau as a beloved, lost mother/lover, longed for in her absence. Here we all were, generations later, bearing [and being borne along by] the memories of that long-ago, pleasant and peaceful community.

The Soviet occupiers made cosmopolitan Libau with its strategic location into a closed, high-security naval base; today Liepaja’s shabby dilapidated buildings house people traumatized by successive Russian and German invasions. Passersby hurried on without answering my innocent [“I am Canadian, therefore accepted by all…”] request for directions. My only similar experience was in the 1980’s when travelling alone in the Republic of China, another closed society just beginning to open itself to foreigners.

We saw the damage done by decades of occupation, war and trauma to the once-proud town: ornately decorated buildings are sooty and need restoration; the central rose garden [‘Rosenplatz’] needs tending; trams, the pride of the city in 1890, now look old and shabby. The fabled white sandy beach is open again to the public since the Soviet navy’s 1994 departure, but early June was too chilly for bathing.

Many know Libau as the port through which emigrant Jews streamed out of Europe for America and other lands; so many passed here that the town build a large transit centre to house them. From the late 1600s Libau and Kourland had sta-
ble Jewish populations; on the eve of World War I, Jews in Kourland numbered about 68,000, a good number of those in the town of Libau itself. Libau’s warm water port, heated by the Gulf Stream, and its proximity to both Germany and Russia made it a centre of trade and commerce: goods such as timber from Russia passed through the port in great quantity. Samuel Samuel owned variously a flourmill, a textile manufacture, a distribution agency for furs and military outfitting, and a brick factory.

Most of our Samuel family left Libau well before World War II: their lives were turned upside down by the First World War, not the Second, as well as by the following revolutionary turbulence. Our Samuel name is not being carried on in Libau today. But the tall black granite monument erected in 1910 that marks the grave of Samuel Samuel with German and Hebrew inscriptions is in excellent condition. Very moved to see it, we took photographs, said the traditional prayers, and left stones on the grave to mark our visit.

In the same wrought-iron fenced compound with the graves of Samuel Samuel and his wife Therese is another, much more modest stone so weathered that the name is illegible. Was one of their 12 children buried beside them? I will write the record keepers to try to find the names.

Samuel Samuel’s trademark for his company was “Phenix”. His reasons for choosing this symbol are lost to us his descendants, but it does seem apt for a people who, despite great odds, persist in surviving and in honouring ancestors’ names.

Looking For Pinkus Elterman
by Brad Elterman

It had been three months since I had last seen my girlfriend, Ineta. She is Latvian and lives in Riga. The last time I saw her was in New York. Funny how things happen and how people meet. I met her on my last trip to Riga in October 2003. I had just returned from visiting my grandparents’ village in Daugavpils and I walked into a coffee house and there she was with her lovely smile. We met a couple of times in Paris at the end of 2003 and of course our New York trip, but this was the first time since our meeting that we could embrace in Riga.

She knew that I wanted to see her, but also very important to me was that I could visit the resting place of my grandfather’s brother, Pinkus Elterman, who had died of natural causes in February of 1941 in Liepaja. Rita Bogdanova, once again came through for me with the exact location of Pinkus’s grave. Section O, Row #1 and Grave #4.

Intea and I packed up her car in Riga and set out on the two-hour drive to Liepaja. This was a Sunday and we knew that in three days a group of holocaust survivors, dignitaries and locals would be there to for the unveiling of the Holocaust Memorial at the cemetery. We hopped to find Pinkus and to get a chance to see the memorial.

The drive was on a two lane highway and Ineta knew the way since she had done it many times to visit her family in Liepaja. She can provide many comments about the area. We stopped on the way to have sandwiches in the forest. There was not much to see on the way only some farmland, cows and farms houses.

When we arrived in Liepaja I could see what looked like very weathered Soviet influenced buildings. All the buildings looked faded and in need of repair. Hardy anyone appeared to be on the streets. It was a Sunday, but it was an eery feeling.

Ineta knew exactly where the cemetery was and we parked right in front. As we entered, I could smell weeds being burned and I could see the smoke in the distance. We walked along a path and to my right I could see the graves in the non Jewish section of the cemetery. To our left was the Jewish Section. It is like night and day. The Jewish section looks like it had been neglected for decades. The stones were a mess and weeds were all over the place; many of them covering stones. The Hebrew writings were barley readable on many of the stones.

You could tell that someone had done a very superficial job of trying to make some kind of order here, since many Westerners and VIPs would be here in three days. Not only grass had been cut around the stones, but what appeared to be berry
bushes and small trees had also been cut in preparation. It probably looked like a forest a week earlier.

Ineta speaks in Russian to a grounds keeper and he does not have a clue about the location of anything. We see the memorial in the distance and approach. It is beautiful contemporary piece of marble or granite and there are young people there busy cleaning the stone. They are Russian Jews who have volunteered for the day. We meet Alexander Kuskovecky-Danilov and his friend Pavel Petin and they tell me though Ineta’s translations that they are studying Hebrew and would be delighted to help us. Ineta tells them he location for Pinkus and they look puzzled. She explains that they know nothing about a section O. They seem to know the grounds fairly well, but not a clue about any Section O.

Alex gets on his cell phone and calls someone and after a brief chat he asks us if we have a car and if so he will take us to someone who can help us.

We arrived at the charming apartment of Edvuard Kaplan and Rosalija Sukhar, a short drive from the cemetery. They speak to Ineta in Russian and produce the maps for the grave yard. They two boys become invisible in the corner of the room as if they are about to hear the words of wisdom of a great scholar.

The Kaplans produce lists and locations of Shepsel Elterman the father of Liebe. Shepsel is a cousin of mine. I have photographs of him and his family already in my family tree. We write down the location. Pinkus is a different matter. Mr. Kaplan explains that since he died of natural causes in 1941 his stone would not have been place on his grave before one year of his death and of course there was were no Jews left alive in Liepaja in 1942 to place the stone on his grave. The information I had was correct. There was a section O, but no markers for anyone buried there.

The Kaplans had so much enthusiasm for their work and were delighted to have a visitor from American in their home. They could not have been more hospitable and charming.

Still the the boys did not say one word. They just watched and listen. Rosalija asked me about my grandparents and I told them what I knew. I told them that I had copies of their travel documents with me and I asked if they would like to see them. Their faces look like my nephews when I tell them that I want to take them to Toys R Us or to Disneyland. It was incredible.

They poured over everything. Rosalija translated the Russian on the visa. She was fascinated with my grandfather Wolf’s exit visa from 1904. She read off the name of the officer who granted the visa. That is someone who I owe everything to as he could have denied my grandfather his exit from Latvia.

What I did not know was that the visa was issued in Jelgava and not in Dwinsk (Daugapilis) as I thought earlier. They explained that at that time there was a train from Dwinsk to Liepaja and it stopped in Jelgava. The Kaplans asked Alex and his friend Pavel to find a shop to make some copies of my documents, but it was Sunday and everything was closed. I tell them that they are a gift and they are delighted.

We bid farewell and Alex and Pavel led us back to the cemetery and Section O. It is a larger area, but I leave some stones from my garden on the grass. We then pace off where we think Shepsel Elterman is buried and leave some stones for him.
to let him know that I was there and thinking of him.

Alex and Pavel have now spent about four hours with us and their girlfriends keep calling on their cell phones wondering what has happened to them. We bid farewell, but we continue to stay in touch via e-mail. While I did not find Pinkus, I had the chance to meet some wonderful caring people who I will never forget. I am sure that Pinkus knows that I was there to see him.

Updates on the Rezekne Synagogue
By
David Michaelson

(The following is a sequence of “progress reports” on David’s ambitious efforts to save and renovate the last synagogue in Rezekne. I have included a couple of photos of the synagogue taken by Lavi Soloway. ed.)

Update 1  (June, 2004)

This is just a note to let everyone know that I have submitted an application to the World Monuments Fund (WMF) to raise money for the initial work needed to save the last surviving synagogue of Rezekne. In the process of doing this application I discovered that the official name of the synagogue is the Green Synagogue. I should mention that this application is my first attempt at this kind of application and I am not so confident that it will get funded. I expect that I will have a learning curve on how to do this, so do not be disappointed if our first attempt fails. Still, there is a chance it will get funded.

If it does, I should emphasize that this application was only for enough funding to hire an architectural firm to do the initial site survey to determine what work is needed. This is the first step, and a necessary step, before we can try to do actual restoration work. If we do get this survey done, the next step will probably be to hire someone in Latvia to handle applications to the EU for more extensive funding to get the work started.

I have been putting off as long as possible soliciting funds from all of you since I know all our resources are limited. But I think the salary of the person who would be handling the EU applications might be about the amount we can realistically raise among us. I am doubtful whether among us we could have raised enough to hire the architectural firm, which is why I went the route of applying to the WMF. So right now I expect to be asking all of you for money once the site plan is finished and we need to explore the EU funding option. That might change, but that is my plan at the moment.

I would like to thank Mr. Lavi Soloway for providing wonderful photos for the WMF application, Mr. Sam Gruber for his assistance in working with the WMF, and my contacts in Latvia, Inta Rimsane, Rashel Kuklya, Sandra Ezmale and Inese Haite for their help getting the necessary information together for the application. I am realizing that this project will take some time to accomplish, and I can't do it without the help of these individuals.

Update 2  (July, 2004)

I have not yet heard from the grants administrator from the World Monuments Fund regarding disbursement of the funds for the Green Synagogue, but I am in contact with the director of the Rezekne Business Center, the municipal government organization that is responsible for restoration of the old city area of Rezekne. The Green Synagogue is "one of the if not the most culturally historical objects in the area," according to this person and they seem very enthusiastic about our project. Obviously our job will be much easier if the local municipality is enthusiastically behind us on this project.

It is becoming clear to me what the next phase of this project is likely to be. I don't know when we reach that point, but once the site survey and restoration plan are completed (the current phase that will be covered by the WMF grant) the next phase will be the renovation of the roof which currently is in bad shape and allows water in. Fixing the roof will help to prevent further internal damage. The estimate I have for this second phase of work is $25,000. Hopefully EU funds can be used for that, but it is good if we keep in mind what the next phase will be.

I will let everyone know when the funds are go
ing to start going to work. If anyone has any contacts that could help fund the roof renovation, please look into it. Although EU funding MIGHT be available eventually, there is considerable competition for those funds and it might be better if we can raise the funds ourselves and negotiate with the firm that does the site survey for them to also do the roof work and maybe we can get a better deal if we bundle these activities. It would reduce the problems with further interior damage and save some money in the long run. For now I think I have done all I can in terms of fundraising, so if anyone has any contacts that could help with the $25,000, it would be great. In fact my hope is that if we can raise a reasonable amount more through another funding source, we can get cheaper overall prices than the $14,000 + $25,000 that the two phases would take individually. Money in hand gives bargaining power.

**Update 3 (August, 2004)**

Against all my expectations our grant application to the World Monuments Fund for the initial survey and restoration plan for the Green Synagogue of Rezekne has been approved. We will get $14,500 to do the initial work. This is only the first step, but I am elated that we have actually come this far.

The turn-around time was amazingly fast (compared with the scientific funding agencies I am more used to). I can only imagine that Sam Gruber had some hand in the rapid and favorable outcome. Thanks to all who helped put together the application.

Rashel, Inta, Sandra and Inese: I will clearly need help at the Latvian end.

I will let you all know when I hear from the grants manager and learn the mechanics of disbursing the money.

Once we have completed this step, we will need to look for larger sources of money to begin the actual restoration work. We may also finally need to call in all the promises of donations that have been made to hire someone in Latvia to handle applications to the EU. Also, if anyone has any leads to possible large donors, you might want to sound them out. Now that we have actually gotten funds to do the survey and the planning, it will give the whole project a greater sense of legitimacy and achievability and so may make people more open to donating.

**Update 4 (October, 2004)**

More good news for the synagogue. I have interested a group called the Heritage Conservation Network in the Rezekne Synagogue. They are a group that does training workshops that can give free construction work to projects such as ours.

They will need to know when is the best time to work in Latvia. Maybe spring or summer 2005 will work if that is a good time weather-wise in Latvia. I am thinking that we hope to have the survey done by spring or summer 2005 and maybe the Heritage Conservation Network can do the roof repairs.

I will keep people updated. Until then, I am waiting for more information from Latvia before we can get the WMF grant up and running.

**A Note about Goldingen**

Lavi Soloway visited the Joint Distribution Committee Archives, also called “The Fortress,” in Long Island City, NY where he has been admitted as a researcher.

Lavi managed to gain access to hundreds of documents from the JDC inter-war period. One was a January 3, 1921 report on “Goldingen,” which Lavi was able to scan and submit. This fascinating document is in two parts.

Lavi notes that reports exist for several other towns and perhaps some will be shown in future issues.
January 5, 1931

GOLDINGEN, County town.
Gourland.

The general population before the war: 11,000.
   Jewish: 2,000.

The general population after the war: 6,000.
   Jewish: 800.

ER.

The population data given above are guess work in a way. In January 1930 the government took a census and the result showed that the population consisted of 4,018 inhabitants, 448 of whom were Jews. However, the registration in connection with the election to the Jewish Kohilla in the early part of December 1930 showed the number of Jewish inhabitants to be 880.

The birth rate among the Jews in 1918 before the war: 9 (per year).
   1920 after: 9

Mortality among the Jewish population (1918) before the war: 10 (per year).
   1920 (1920) after: 14

THE SANITARY AND HEALTH CONDITIONS OF THE COMMUNITY:

Generally speaking the health condition of the population is good. In the winter of 1918 a mild epidemic of typhus swept over the town. The report indicates that 50 Jewish persons were stricken by this disease. In August, September and October 1920, a dysentery epidemic struck the town. Out of 50 persons who were taken ill with dysentery one was Jewish.

The most prevalent diseases found in the town in 1920 were:
   6 cases of fever.
   10 cases of syphilis.
   2 cases of mental disease.

ORGANISATIONS AND INSTITUTIONS FOR MEDICAL AND AID:

There is in the community a legalized Hebrew Relief Society, whose duties and functions are to grant relief to the Jewish needy. The local physician, Dr. Ullman, a German, has always been kind in rendering his services free of charge to the needy Jewish poor. In a small number of cases the Hebrew Relief Society gives the patient a small amount of money for the payment of the doctors' fees. The medical prescriptions are stamped by the organization, presented to the local druggist, to be filled out and given to the patient free of charge. The druggist allows the organization a rebate of 50% from the normal prices. Although this organization is autonomous, still it works hand-in-hand with the Kohilla, which was recently called into being.

HOSPITALS:

There is a hospital, which is partly supported from municipal taxation and partly from county taxation. This hospital was erected 30 years ago and has a total of 60 beds: 20 for medical and surgical cases, and 40 beds for 4 cases of internal diseases. The admission to this hospital is open to all, regardless of religion or nationality. The charge per day is 35 Rs., and includes the medicines used by the patient. The very poor are admitted to the hospital and are given treatment free of charge through the agency of the town administration (more through the personal influence of the city physician). In 1920 about 450 patients were treated in this hospital, 20% of whom were Jewish.

During the period of the German occupation a disinfection plant was established on the grounds of the hospital, but the same is falling to pieces because the people do not seem to have sufficient appreciation for its usefulness and value.
DISPENSARY:

The Latvian Red Cross maintains a dispensary in the town, which is open twice weekly to all people alike. The only charge made is for medicines, and that at half cost price. All the four physicians in the town serve in this dispensary.

MEDICAL PROFESSIONS IN THE COMMUNITY:

- 4 physicians
- 2 gynecologists
- 1 Jewish
- 1 midwife
- 1 trained nurse and
- 3 caretakers

DRUG STORES:

There are two drug stores in the community, both in the hands of non-Jewish private owners.

BATH HOUSE:

The Jewish community owns a very large brick building which once housed the bath house. The entire inner equipment is at the present time crumbled and broken, so that the bath is not used. At the present time the Jewish, as well as non-Jewish returning refugees are making themselves at home in this building. The dirt and smell is terrible. The Mikveh, which never was a modern plant, is in no better condition than the bath house, which once was. To put this building in usable condition will require an expenditure of 15,000 Rs. for repairs. On the yard where the synagogue is located there is a small frame building in which 8 aged poor families are being housed. They live there in a terribly overcrowded and dirty condition, but an account of lack of funds and other housing accommodations this is the least which the community can give to its aged needy.

GENERAL REMARKS:

The Jewish population of the community can be divided into the following groups as far as their economic conditions are concerned:

- 32% well-to-do
- 35% who live from hand-to-mouth
- 33% needy

Even before the opening of the J.D.C. office in Riga, Goldingen received J.D.C. appropriations. With the opening of our office the following appropriations were made to the town:

- November, 1920: General relief = 15,000 Rs.
- December, 1920: Relief = 10,000 Rs.
- February, 1921: Relief = 20,000 Rs.
- April, 1921: Relief = 5,000 Rs.
- May, 1921: Relief = 5,000 Rs.
- June, 1921: Relief = 5,000 Rs.

Our physician reports that the few poor families have been put on their feet from the J.D.C. monies which were appropriated for Goldingen. Thus, for instance, two families who were given larger one time grants from J.D.C. funds are now not only self-supporting but are contributing members to the Kehilla and at the present time help to support other needy co-religionists.

Original written in German by Dr. Lifschitz
English edition and translation by I. Rubinstein.
Membership Fees Are Now Due

This is a reminder to kindly renew your subscription to the Latvia SIG and Newsletter. Our subscription year runs from July 2004 through June 2005. Please mail your check for US $20 for the US and Canada, and $30 (bankable in the US) from elsewhere, to:

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

You can also remit your payment through PayPal to: mgetz@erols.com. We look forward to your participation and support.

New members please complete the Latvia SIG Membership Questionnaire on the following page and send it to the above address.

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, 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. Money can also be deducted from your bank account, if you choose to do so.

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.

Please note that the new membership year began in July after the IAJGS meeting in Jerusalem.
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: .........................................
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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
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Bethesda, MD 20814-2061