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President’s Report

Since we are getting close to the end of the membership year, I thought I’d review some of the SIG’s pertinent membership details. Please note that election of officers will take place at the Latvia SIG annual meeting, which will be held at the IAJGS conference in New York in August. Nominations are welcomed, and please feel free to nominate yourself if you’d like to support the SIG in an official capacity.

The Latvia SIG is dedicated to enhancing the genealogy experiences of its members by providing: a quarterly newsletter, a bibliography of Latvian genealogical resources, historical information about Jewish Latvia, points-of-contact within today’s Latvia, a growing on-line database of important historical records, details of Holocaust events in Latvia, narratives of members’ trips to ancestral towns, and a Family Finder of towns and surnames.

The SIG was founded in July 1995 and the paid membership count (as of 12/31/06) is 80. There are close to 600 subscribers to the Latvia SIG listserve, and we welcome those subscribers to become paid members of the SIG. All membership applications (membership form included in this newsletter) should be sent to:

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

Current officers of the SIG are:

1. Barry Shay, President, bbshay@starpower.net
2. Henry Blumberg, Vice President, henry@blumbergs.ca
3. Mike Getz, Treasurer, mikegetz005@comcast.net
4. Arlene Beare, Database Coordinator, arl@dircon.co.uk
5. Rhea Plottel, Membership Chairperson, rivie@worldnet.att.net
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9. Dave Howard, Shtetlink Coordinator, dshoward@usa.net
10. Elsebeth Paikin, Listserve Moderator, beth@paikin.dk

In support of our membership, the SIG is trying to maintain and develop a library of useful material. Some of this material will be introduced in this newsletter, and ultimately will be available on our Website.

Members of the SIG, the JGS of Washington, Peter Lande and Vadim Altskan of the USHMM have provided materials related to the history, families and lives of Latvian Jewry as well as where they lived. Holocaust records from a number of sources indicate where many died. Much of this material is in Russian and Hebrew and remains, regrettably, un-translated.

Included are a variety of documents covering Jewish life in Latvia and also immigrant communities and their families, particularly in the United States. Typically, these families often have links in Israel, South Africa, the UK and elsewhere in Europe.

The library also contains the Beth Hatefutsoth database of Latvian Jewish communities in the Diaspora. This is a subset of the BH database covering communities from all over the world and the SIG wishes to thank Beth Hatefutsoth, Dov Levin, and Martha Lev Zion for making this database available. Since, September 2005 entries in this database have been featured in the Latvia SIG newsletter and future issues will continue this practice.

A Daugavpils Ghetto List has recently been made available to the SIG by Jacob Gorfin in Israel. The list was provided to Mr Gorfin by Mr. Josef Rochko from Daugavpils, who is very active in searching for historical documents concerning Jews of Latvia. The list has been scanned and needs to be converted to Excel. If you would like to volunteer your services, please let me know.

A major activity for 2005 has been the bringing on-line of a number of archival databases, including: Marriage Lists for Riga containing more than 9,000 marriages and almost 20,000 surnames and given names, the Family Lists for Rezekne with more than 6,000 entries, the All Russian Census of 1897 for Riga, Rezekne, Krustpils and areas within Courland accounting for nearly 7,000 Jew-
ish residents. A current effort is underway to bring on-line the 1897 census results for Dvinsk, arguably the center of Jewish life in Latvia at that time. The Latvia SIG wishes to thank Arlene Beare for her untiring efforts in acquiring and bringing these databases on-line.

Again, thanks to Arlene Beare, the Latvia SIG has acquired transcripts of the original interviews of approximately 30 Holocaust survivors done by Aina Antane of the Center for Judaic Studies, University of Latvia, Riga. These transcripts, originally in Russian, are being translated into English and are being featured in the Latvia SIG newsletter as they become available. When complete, we hope to have the English transcripts available on the SIG Web-site.

I am looking forward to seeing many of you at the IAJGS conference in New York and please notify me if you have specific concerns or issues that you would like to see discussed at our meeting there.

Barry Shay,  
Bbshay@starpower.net

Editor’s Comments

As in the last issue, I am happy to include an English version of one of the oral testimonies conducted by the Center for Judaic Studies, at the University of Latvia, in Riga. The interviews were carried out by Aina Antane, secretary to Professor Ruven Ferber - the lead researcher for the project. In this issue I am pleased to include the interview with Boris Arnos.

The material from Beth Hatefutsoth provides brief historical accounts of Jewish shtetls throughout Latvia and the effect of the Holocaust on those shtetls. Dov Levin and Martha Lev-Zion made the acquisition of these document possible, and we can not thank them enough for their efforts.

Barry Shay  
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Latvia SIG Events at the IAJGS Conference in New York

Bella Zisere, a current resident of Riga as well as a Ph.D. candidate at the Institute for Political Studies in Paris, will be presenting material based on her dissertation research. Entitled, "Memory of the Holocaust in Latvia: A Contemporary Debate," Bella's presentation is scheduled as Session Code 332. Date and time of the presentation is yet to be announced. A short abstract of the paper and a brief biography of Bella can be found at: http://www.jgsny2006.org/sessions.cfm

The Latvia SIG luncheon is scheduled for Monday, 14 August and we hope to have a large turnout. I am happy to announce that David Michaelson will be our guest speaker and he will talk about his efforts to restore one of the last wooden synagogues in Eastern Europe: the Green Synagogue of Rezekne. Those of you who subscribe to our newsletter, will recall reading about the remarkable effort made by David in fulfilling his dream. Briefly, the Green Synagogue is the only synagogue in Rezekne that survived WWII, and it is the synagogue where David's great grandparents were married. The building now stands empty and condemned. Dave has attracted the attention of the World Monuments Fund, the Heritage Conservation Network, and the Latvian Tourism Development Agency in his effort to restore the synagogue. To hear more about Dave's remarkable adventure, please register for the SIG luncheon.

The Latvia SIG has also scheduled two SIG meetings. One meeting will be primarily concerned with Latvia SIG business activities, including the election of new officers and the status of various projects and database activities. A complete agenda will be forthcoming. Highlighting the second meeting will be two complementary discussions and presentations. Henry Blumberg, the SIG Vice President, will present and discuss his rare collection of Old Latvia memorabilia including turn-of-the-century photographs and post cards of long-gone Latvian shtetls and communities. In contrast, Bella Zisere will talk about and answer questions concerning contemporary Jewish life in Riga and other parts of Latvia. Given Bella's research interests and the fact that she was born and raised in Riga, I can guarantee a lively and highly productive exchange. So please join us for what promises to be an exciting and educa-
You can sign up for the SIG luncheon when you register www.jgsny2006.org/registration.cfm or add it to an existing registration by logging in at www.jgsny2006.org/registration_update.cfm. Please note that the luncheon must be registered for as part of the conference registration procedure or by editing an existing registration. Registration for the luncheon cannot be made at the conference.

**Jewish Genocide in Latvia: A Contemporary Debate**

The Holocaust remains one of the most painful and polemic issues in modern Latvian history. Approximately 90% of the Latvian Jewry was annihilated during the Second World War. During the Soviet occupation of Latvia this issue was a suppressed subject. Today, after the democratization of Latvia, many questions concerning the Holocaust in Latvia provoke a debate within the civil society. This debate is an important vector of relations between different ethnic groups in contemporary Latvia.

The polemic aspect of the event concerns, first of all, the role of the local Latvian population in the event. Numerous Latvians participated in the collective murders of Jews in Rumbula, Shmerli, Pogulianka forests, in burning synagogues and in pogroms in Latvian cities and villages. Many Latvians joined the Latvian SS Legion or were recruited by force. Only a very small number of Jews (no more than 200-300 persons) was saved by the local citizens.

For today’s Latvian Jews, even for those of the younger generations, this historical fact seems to be an inherent part of the collective memory. Moreover, many of them stigmatize Latvians in general as anti-Semitic and potentially violent. They often evoke these facts to justify their reluctance to integrate into Latvian society. They consider themselves a distinct ethnic group and often express determination to emigrate from Latvia.

Ethnic Latvians, on the other hand, assert that their ancestors’ collaboration in the Jewish genocide was a consequence of alleged massive affiliation of the Jews with the communist party. It is believed that the Jews had enthusiastically accepted the Soviet occupation and participated in the massive deportation of Latvian “capitalists” to Siberia in 1940, the event that is today often referred to as “The Genocide of the Latvian people.”

The following analysis of this debate is based on the study of Latvian media and recent scholarly research, as well as on the oral interviews with members of Latvian Jewish and non-Jewish population. It will demonstrate to what extend a historical conflict can influence inter-ethnic relations within a state more than 60 years after.

**Interview with Boris Aronov**

Interview by Aina Antane, September 15, 2000, Riga, Latvia.

Russian to English translation by Inga Long, Falls Church, Virginia

B. A.: Our roots are in Belarus; in Latvia there weren’t any Aronovs. So, my grandfather – from my father’s side – was living in Belarus, not far from the border with Latvia, in the city of Velizhe. But later he lived in the city of Druya – it is almost on the border. On the Latvian border there is a city called Piedruya. But in Belarus it was called Druya. So, I don’t know what his occupation was. In the beginning of the 20th century my father’s brothers and sister immigrated to the United States and Canada. I don’t know anything about them.

A.: How many brothers and sisters did your father have?

B. A.: I don’t know. I know that one sister was in the United States, but in Canada there was one cousin, who was known to my mother. From my mother’s side I have a grandfather and grandmother. I think my grandfather died before I was born. But my grandmother died when I was five years old. I don’t know what their occupations were. They had seven children. My mother had three brothers and three sisters. Good family (laughing). Yes. What they were doing…

A.: Do you know their names?
B.A: Yes, please. I will tell you by age. So, Zelik is a male, the first and the oldest. Then comes Ita Hanna, Hanna Ita – the same – my mother. Then Michael, then Sarah, then Maria and then Herman. That’s all. Now – what they were doing, you will write down across from every name, yes? Zelik was a specialist in linen seed quality. In those times the laboratories weren’t so common, obviously. He told me when he takes linen seeds in his hands, tastes it, he can tell how much fat it contains. And, what’s name what the sprouting is. He diagnosed. And he worked in an export company. Russia exported large quantities of linen seeds through Riga. He was an expert there.

A.: Sarah?

B. A. : So. Clara, – did I tell you?

A. : No, you said Sarah. You didn’t tell me about Clara. Was there a Clara?

B. A. : Well, yes. Clara was a housewife. So. Next is Sarah, yes. She graduated from Harkov University and she was a doctor. During the war she didn’t practice in Riga, because she was working in the military hospitals on the frontline. Maria was a housewife. So. Who else? My mother, yes. Before she got married, she was working in the hat repair shop. In those times hats weren’t made from felt but from the cardboard sewed around with the fabric. Those were big hats and on those hats there were birds or flower bouquets, and my mother made those. So, now the occupations.

A. : There is still Herman.

B. A. : Yes. In 1916 Herman went to St. Petersburg, Petrograd and that is all I know about him. I can’t tell anything about him.

A. : Could you tell me their birth years, approximately? Or who... approximately for how many years they are older than your mother?

B. A. : Hard to tell, I don’t know completely. When I was a child that didn’t interested me – how old are my uncles…

A. : What do you know about their families, or their faith?

B. A. : Well. About their families, my uncle Zelik had five children. The older boy was a teacher and a man of letters. He died in Israel.

A. : What was his name, do you remember?

B. A. : Yes, of course – Leon. The second son was Isaac an electrical engineer, who died in the concentration camp in Germany or Austria. I don’t know, somewhere there. So. The third was Ovsey and he died when he was fifteen. The fourth was Jacob, he was an engineer in Riga’s train building factory and died when he was fifty years old. And the fifth was Pirhas, in Russian – Phiney. He was involved in Riga’s defense and died there.

A. : Was it in the beginning of the war?

B. A. : Yes, yes in the beginning – during the very first days of the war. So. And the last one was Rahil – the pharmacist, who died in Israel.

A. : Was he the sixth child?

B. A. : The sixth? Then it is – six, my mistake. Well, I miscounted (laughing).

A. : Such wonderful families!

B. A. : Now about my mother.

A. : Maybe, in the beginning about Michael and your mother’s other brothers and sisters and after we’ll return to your mother, to your family, because I will ask you more details about your family.

B. A. : Yes. So Michael was working in the dry foods warehouse. In the twenties, he - one moment. From 1922 he lived in Moscow and was a clerk in the bank. He died there, what year – I don’t know. Michael had three children. The next was Ovsey, they named him Evsey. He was a cooling engineer. He was working here in Glavigiprorem, there was a such an organization,
you know. He was my own age. He died in January 1999, in Riga. The next was Isaac, who was two years younger than we. In 1922, when the family moved to Moscow, he ran away. He wanted to be a slacker and wanderer. You know, when we lived in Riga, we were very friendly with this cousin. He visited us every day – he was younger than we. He said, “Let’s go to search for a new street.” And we were wandering the streets of the city with him - all of the neighborhoods. And the parents knew that. They promised him that they would send him to the navy so he could travel. That didn’t help. He ran away and when he was fifteen years old he died in Tashkent. The poor parents were looking for him for a whole year and couldn’t find him. Finally they got a letter from Tashkent that said their son is in the hospital and sick with typhus. His mother went there but it was too late. So, that is how the third son died. So, that was Michael.

A. : That was Isaac. Michael had three children, you said.

B. A : Three children.

A. : Evsey, Isaac and who’s the third?

B. A. : Oh, the third. Yes, I remembered – Sarah. I forgot. She was an engineer – hydrologist. She died in Moscow. Sonya was hydrologist. She had been traveling all over Russia.

A. : Sonya – is that what they called her at home? Her name was Sarah, but at home – Sonya?

B. A. : They called her Sonya at home. She traveled all over Russia, did research, participated in the project of turning the rivers. And she had either a big or small position – it doesn’t matter. That’s what she was doing there. So.

A. K. (B. A.’s wife): Later they concluded that it was wrong to try to turn the rivers.

B. A. : Well, they didn’t turn, it is not important (laughing). That’s not her fault that they couldn’t turn them.

A. : So, Clara.

B. A. : So, Clara. A housewife. She had two children. Rebecca and Yosif. So, Rebecca… I don’t even know what she did; she was still so small then. She stayed here, but didn’t get into the ghetto, but became one German officer’s girlfriend. And when he was here for a few months she lived with him. But when they sent him somewhere else, they put her into the ghetto and she died there. So.

A. A: What about Clara?

B. A. : Clara got killed here. Yes, my uncle Zelik got killed here, too. Yes. It was Clara. Did we skip my mother?

A. : Yosif. We skipped your mother on purpose. Now Yosif. Rebecca and Yosif were Clara’s children?

B. A. : Yes. Yosif was recruited to the army during the war, he was still an 18 year old boy and after the war he died somewhere in Russia, I don’t know. Too soon, he was still a boy.

A. : But he managed to flee, to leave from Riga?

B. A : Yes, yes, yes. He fled alone.

A. : Now Sarah.

B. A. : Well. After graduating the University of Harkov, Sarah was working as a doctor in the military hospital. She got married there in 1915. So. In 1918 she spent her vacation in Riga. And then she…yes, just a moment…The last location of her military hospital was in Romania. After the war she and her husband moved to Bulgaria.

A. : Was it after WWI?

B. A. : Yes, WWI, of course WWI, yes, – moved to Bulgaria. And she stayed there in Bulgaria with her husband for the rest of her life. She had a daughter Maria, who also became a doctor. And Maria also married a doctor. There were four doctors in the family. So.

A. : Is Maria in Bulgaria, too?

B. A. : Also in Bulgaria. Maria was born in Bulgaria and has lived there all her life. I don’t know if she is still alive or not – she is younger than me
by two or three years. I don’t know if she is still alive. She lived there her whole life. The last time she visited – one time she came to visit her cousin in Moscow in 1950’s. That’s all I know about her.

A. : Thank you.

B. A. : Well…now aunt Maria. Aunt Maria. She wasn’t lucky. They married her … she was from a poor family, more or less, well – they weren’t wealthy. They married her to the son of a very rich man, but he was mentally ill. Very soon after the wedding he was put in the mental hospital where he died. But she gave birth to a girl. And at the age of 28 she died of tuberculosis.

A. : Maria?

B. A. : Yes, Maria. But the daughter somehow survived. Her husband’s relatives took her in and took her with them when they fled.

A. : What was the daughter’s name?

B. A. : Her name was Vera. She graduated high school and was working in the bank. She stayed in Riga with her child when WWII started. Her husband fled, but she stayed – don’t know why. And she died here. So, those were all relatives.

A. : There is Herman left.

B. A. : Yes. I don’t know anything about Herman. I told you that already.

A. : Yes, thank you. Now, let’s start about your family, more details about your family.

B. A. : Yes. Well, I told you already that my mother was completely deaf. Well, she – my father died in 1916 from lung cancer. He left my mother alone with four little children. Marc, Ovsey, Boris and Sarah. I think my parents named their children after our ancestors. Sarah and Ovsey are names that repeat in our family. So, what have we to say?

A. : Do you know your mother’s birth year?

B. A. : Yes, yes, yes. She was born in 1874, got married in 1896. And died here in the ghetto in 1941.

A. : When was your father born?

B. A. : My father was born in 1867, and died in 1916.

A. : Yes. Now, if it is possible, tell me about your brothers and sisters.

B. A. : About my brothers. Well. After my father’s death, his guardians sent my brother to Carelia to study forestry because my father was a specialist in forestry. So – and my brother was a specialist in forest cutting, so they sent him to float logs down the river. He returned to Latvia in 1924, and worked for timber companies.

A. : Tell me, please, was he married?

B. A. : Yes, in 1937 he married Irmgard Danciger. A year later their daughter was born, but his wife died while giving birth. So he was left with a child.

A. : What was the daughter’s name?

B. A. : Her name was Irmgard, too. They named her in her mother’s honor. So.

A. : What was their fate?

B. A. : They all stayed here, in the ghetto. Father and daughter soon after, but he died in the forest…at the wood works.

A. : Now Ovsey.

B. A. : Ovsey was a food industry engineer. He got married – I am not sure – was it the summer of 1935 or 1936. He was working. Wife’s name was Lilly Botvinskina. His wife was an artist – was working a lot. But he was working in his specialty and retired when he was … I don’t know, when he was like 70 or so. He was working till 70 years of age and after that stayed at home and was reading magazines. He died in Riga.

A. : Did they have any children?

B. A. : They had one child, Leonid. An engineer. I don’t know what specialty. He is still working; he is now sixty … he was born in 1938 – sixty two years old. He is working at some kind of transportation company.
A. : Does Leonid have any children? Does this line continue?

B. A. : He has, yes, yes, yes, he has. His wife is Galina, she is retired. What are you saying?

A. K. (wife) : Her ethnicity is Tatar.

B. A. : Tatar, yes. It doesn’t matter. Their children are: Yulia, Elena and Dmitry. They all are working somewhere.

A. : Let’s talk about your sister Sarah.

B. A. : Yes, please. She was born in 1911, in Riga. Graduated English College and was working as a translator for some company. In 1936 she married a man from Tallinn.

A. : What was his name?

B. A. : Unfortunately I don’t know that. I have forgotten. In Tallinn she wasn’t working. She gave birth to two children.

A. : Do you remember what his ethnicity was?

B. A. : A Jew. They had two children before the war and in 1941 they fled on the ship to Leningrad. But in the Gulf of Finland the ship was sunk and the whole family died.

A. : Do you know what the names of the children were?

B. A. : I have no idea. We didn’t communicate with each other much. Because my wife was a Russian, and in this society it was a big shame to marry a Christian. That’s why I wasn’t at their wedding and have forgotten their last name. That’s why I have forgotten their children’s names. Even though my sister was coming to Riga to visit our mother and I met her there and met her children. But it slipped my memory because of that ethnic antagonism.

A. : Now, about yourself – your childhood memories. Was your family Orthodox Jewish, believers?

B. A. : Yes, please – I can tell everything. My family wasn’t religious, but my father was keeping the customs: on Saturdays we went to the Synagogue, and on Passover we ate Matzo, like it is supposed to be. Besides, at the beginning of Passover we always had a solemn, solemn dinner. Do you know this custom? We placed chairs, on the chairs we put feather bed and we didn’t sit, but lay down. But only men laid down. But mother was sitting on the bench and serving everything. So. When my father died I had to go to the Synagogue every day for a year to read a prayer for his soul to rest in peace. But my mother made me pray at home on Saturdays. I went to my room, put the prayer book on the table, but under the prayer book I put another book. And read. So there was a book, but under it another book I was reading, but there on the top was the prayer book. So I didn’t have any affection for the religion, but quite the opposite – I am against any rites. Jewish rites are archaic and also the views, like Muslims’ – are from the Middle Ages. And besides, because of those views I have suffered a lot for a long time. Because when I told my brother that I am getting married, but my brother told me to marry somebody else and everybody was telling me that my mother will die from the grief if I marry, but I ignored them and got married. So, … that’s what I can tell you regarding religion. I think my brothers didn’t go to the synagogue at all.

A. : That means it was more a tribute to the traditions than religious behavior?

B. A. : Exactly. Yes, only the tribute to the traditions, that’s right. It was all my religious education and religious actions.

A. : Now about the school – were you sent to the Heder?

B. A. : Yes, of course! I was studying approximately from when I was seven years old until I was ten. In the Heder.

A. : Do you remember – where it was?

B. A. : Somewhere in the center of the city, yes, I remember. One school was on Little Smith Street (Maza Kaleju iela), but the other was on Minsterejas Street, on the same block. So. During those three years I learned to read and to write, of course, and to understand and to translate. The
After that...yes, now about the education. In 1922 I enrolled in the Riga city Jewish high school’s sixth grade. The sixth grade. But though I should have studied five years, I studied only two in the school: one year in the German school and one year in the Russian school. And that was because there was a war. Germans twice occupied Riga. One time, when they occupied Riga it was the German school. Second time when they occupied Riga – there was no school. In general I was studying with interruptions. Mostly my older brother was teaching and preparing me. And in 1925 I graduated Jewish high school. In the same year I enrolled in the University of Latvia to study economics. So. But because I had to work I interrupted my studies, but eventually in June of 1941 I passed one out of four state exams. After the war I got a reference from the University. But they didn’t accept anything but math and then I enrolled in absentia one more time. That’s all my education.


B. A. : I was studying music for three years. From fourteen until I was seventeen. I was studying to play on the piano.

A. K. (wife) : I think you didn’t tell the most important thing – this love of the music, inspire of the lack of the chance to go in that direction, you still have – as you can see this collection (showing a huge collection of the phonograph records – edit.). It is such a knowledge of music…
translate; what the cashier was telling me, I was repeating it to her and she understood. I liked to walk very much, I was asking her, Let’s go to the stocking store. But that was a German store – when a woman came with a child, the child got a gift. It was a good system.

A. : Tell me, please, about your relationship with neighbours, with other kids...

B. A. : Yes. Well. In the house where we were living, there were only two neighbours. The relationships were very good, very. Not close, but very polite, good. We met. And when Bermont was attacking the city, and we got enough...he was shooting the City Hall area, but we lived nearby, we were scared to live on the third – last floor, and the neighbour lady from the second floor was taking us in during the nights. We were sleeping there. The lady’s name was Voinovskaya. The relationships with neighbours were good. In the neighbourhood I was playing with other kids. There was one Jewish family. Then my cousin was visiting me very often. We were playing a lot with kids from the neighbourhood, also we were playing on the Bastille hill, children were gathering in teams, on what teams – I don’t know. Probably on the grounds where everybody comes from. And teams were playing war. But without the fights. Only – symbolically. I was playing a lot, especially during summer and on Bastille and at home. But in winter, and the rest of the time only a little.

A. K. (wife): Children didn’t tease you?


A. : Was it more than one ethnic society or were there people – and children – of different ethnic groups?

B. A. : In our neighbourhood there were Latvians. It was very nice to live with them. There was one kid – Erih, German, a boy, German boy. And also four Jewish boys. There was never any conflict. There was no mention on any ethnic dissention. Never. So, and then, probably in the beginning of the century they installed electricity in our home. Because, when we just arrived here, I remember, we had very many kerosene lamps, big and small. They installed electricity and we had a lot of wire leftovers, some kind of switches and electric outlets. And I could spend hours taking apart and putting back together those electric outlets. I attached and disconnected wires. And I didn’t need anybody, didn’t need anything, unlike my sister, whom I didn’t like because every half an hour she approached our mother and asked, “Mom, what should I do?”

A. K. (wife): But you were giving the cat valerian drops...

B. A. : Yes, we had cats. All my hands were scratched, but that doesn’t matter really.

A. : Go on, please – that all is interesting, all that is – live history, sketches of daily life...

B. A. : Yes, yes, yes. I had cats. Once one cat jumped out the window from the third floor. Nothing happened to her. Once a cat had kittens in my bed. Yes, but that’s fine, everything turned out all right.

A. : Was that your hobby or you just had cats at home?

B. A. : They just lived at home. I don’t know my sisters, mother’s and brothers’ attitude towards the cat. I played a lot with the cat. I just remember how I played. Yes. I was always busy, I didn’t need anybody, I learned to read when I was very young. My brothers, probably my oldest brother subscribed to the magazine „Niva“ and magazine „Ogonok“ („Little Fire“). And later, when I was ten years old, I found some issues of „Niva“, Lot of issues of „Ogonok“ and magazine „Vokrug Sveta“ („Around The World“), magazine „Mir Priklicheniya“ („The World of Adventures“), then there was some literature magazine, published once every three months, and there were... I don’t know what the name of that magazine was. But there were stories in there. There were stories written by: Potapenko, Vasily Nemirovich – Danchenko, I remember, there was a writer – the brother of the director. I was reading everything. Yes, besides „Niva“ had soft – cover additions: Tolstoy, Shiller – Michailov, do you know him? Stanikovich, – I have read all of them. I’ve read Shiller –
Michailov, Stankevich, Tolstoy. I didn’t understand, but was reading anyway. Like my grandson said once: “I didn’t understand anything, but it was interesting to me.” That’s how my childhood was. I don’t remember having any bad memories. Don’t remember being cursed at, but maybe I’ve forgotten. They didn’t swear at me. The only thing,– my mother was calling me to eat; as soon as I came she told me: „Wash your hands!” Because I was playing on the asphalt. And I was surprised why grownups always had clean hands, but my hands were always dirty.

A. K. (wife): And your knees were scratched.

B. A.: And knees, well, I wasn’t thinking about the knees, because I didn’t see grownup’s knees. But hands I could see. So, I can say, I had a stormless, happy childhood. And then I started to go to school. There I had other interests. It was when I went to the Jewish school’s sixth grade. There were some very interesting teachers. I went to school with pleasure, even though my grades average was four. We had a wonderful art teacher – once a week we were drawing and once a week he was teaching us art history. He started with Renessance. Well, then we,– what I know about the Renessance, almost everything – all from that teacher. Besides, in this school,– it was Jewish High school, teachers probably could make their own standard.

A.: Where your school was located?

B. A.: Where was it? In the beginning it was on Gaizina Street, where the market is, you know, but later they moved to 18 Gertrude Street. To a private house. So, when we... I’ll tell it later. First about the teacher. Unfortunately I have forgotten his last name. He was an artist. Then we had logic for a year. And psychology. There was a teacher Vaintroob, Marc Danilovich Vaintroob. I took logic as an optional subject in the University, it was shorter course than in the school. It was the elementary, formal logic. Then I was trying to take in the University optional classes in psychology. But they were much simpler than those in the school. The teacher was giving us very much, therefore I liked that school. Because of logic, psychology, art history. Yes, we had languages, too. Lots of languages were taught: Latvian, Russian, Russian Literature– just one year, or two,– German, and later there was an option – either English or Latin. But because my brother was teaching me English at home, I took Latin. That’s what the school taught – Latin, logic, psychology, art history.

A.: You wanted to tell something else, when said that you’ll start with the art teacher ...

B. A.: I wanted to tell you about the school, the art and before that, what was there? I don’t know, ah well, maybe later I’ll remember.

A.: Good. Tell me, please, what do you remember about WWI?

B. A.: About the WWI? I remember the following. Germans occupied Riga and we were out of bread. It was when Germans occupied Riga for the first time. Then they got kicked out. In our backyard was the Russian Army’s military kitchen for a while. And citizens, who didn’t have anything to eat went there and got some soup or porridge. That was nice. We didn’t notice anything else. When they laid siege to Bermont, he was shooting City Hall, the bank of the river. One bomb got into our yard and injured my brother in the hip–in the soft part. It was a scratch – it healed quickly. It was scary only during Bermont’s siege. After that there was Soviet rule. We didn’t feel it, only one thing – we were told „If you have spare beds, give them to us. We need them for the hospital.“ We had one good spare bed – my oldest brother’s, who was in Russia. My mother gave them that bed without remorse. The rumors were, I remember, that in Phlienteveber (?) there was a women’s batallion, neighbours and friends were upset with the situation that women were taking guns in their arms. Otherwise we didn’t feel anything: nor the replacement of the government, nor the war with the Bolshevik, then, in May of 1919 we didn’t feel any of that. We only – I told you already – there was no bread. Generaly, there was starvation and when there were Bolsheviks, there was a starvation, too. But afterwards it got easier.

A.: Proclamation of the Republic of Latvia – what do you remember of it?
B. A.: Read it in the newspaper and that’s all. It didn’t touch me somehow. It was in 1920 or 1922. In 1922 was the first, don’t remember, in 1920? Judging by the newspapers Chakste had a huge respect. The rest somehow slipped by. Then I wasn’t interested in politics. In 1920 how old was I? Twelve years old in 1922…

A.: Regarding those events were there any conflicts among different ethnic groups?

B. A.: Nothing. There always has been anti-Semitism in daily life, but it was only in strict lines and if we didn’t cross those lines, and if we didn’t cross those lines we didn’t feel anything. For example, in the 1920s or 30s non-jewish companies didn’t have Jewish clerks. All jews were working – those that were hired – all were working in Jewish companies. Salesmen were an exception. Veginger or Kuze – chocolate factories and cannaries were hiring Jewish salesmen that were travelling all over Latvia and selling products. There were such people. In the state owned companies there weren’t any Jews, we didn’t know any. In Riga’s self – government was German – since pervious times – there was a tradition that health department was managed by a Jew. And that’s how it was all of the time. That was the only Jew in the office. Besides, there was one, that was in Ulmanis’s time – one Jewish clerk, a good one, who was friendly with the government. And when there was a need to ask something, people went to him, his name was Dubin. Was it smart to curse at him – they swore at him all the time, but he didn’t care, he had connections. Maybe even with Ulmanis, I don’t know, but you could ask him and everything was done. But all that really didn’t matter. For example, I had to serve in the army, they could send me to the cavalry to Daugavpils – the most difficult service, or to Cesis, or to Liepaya. But in Riga there also were two regiments. I went to Dubin, wrote him an application to let me stay in Riga, in Riga’s squadron. And it was done. So all those ethnic relationships somehow stabilized. And eventually Jews used the fact that really they can’t work in the government’s offices. And so? Even without that they lived well. So we didn’t feel anything special. Yes, what else? One year, I wasn’t a student yet, I was a pupil then, it was before 1925. Some Latvian fraternity members started beatings. They were beating Jewish students but that was only one big scandal which ended. In the University, at that time there was no mention of the nationality in the passport. In the University on the applications there was a line for nationality. University imposed that it itself but generally I can’t say anything bad. We knew our place – we could say that’s how it worked.

A.: What year did you join the Army? Please, tell me about the Army.

B. A.: I was mobilized to the Army in 1935. I served in Riga for eleven months. I have to say that in the Army we didn’t even have an idea what hazing was. They treated soldiers very politely by the way. I have to say officers were approaching us and referred to us politely. We didn’t have a lot of exercises. In Riga everybody – I was already married then – I had a day off every week, Saturday night and Sunday. And I have to say they fed us very well. They were sending Russian boys from Russian villages in Latgale to serve in Riga. They spoke almost no Latvian, almost illiterate. And in Riga, they learned some Latvian, got a little cleaned up, and were introduced to some culture. And many of them were very thin. I would say emaciated. When they left for home, they had such fat cheeks. We had rations: 300 grams of meat per person. But when I served in the Soviet Army during the war, the rations were only 150 grams of meat per person. But here we had 300. And in the Soviet Army these 150 grams very often replaced with fish, sardines; it was bad. Yes. In the Latvian Army it was easy to serve. Well, of course serving in the army is difficult. The Master Sergeants sometimes joked with us. Who loves music? I raised my hand. Let’s go to move the piano. Jokes like that. Unfortunately, officers were drinking. There was a club for the officers and soldiers where waiting on them, were feeling that officers were drinking and sometimes even fighting. It wasn’t very good. Those were young officers – Lieutenants. So.

A.: So you finished your service, and?

B. A. And came back, I had been working since 1929. I was working in the textile mill. From 1929 until 1940, well, at least until 1940, when
Soviet rule came here. (When they drafted me to the Army.) The manager, owner promised to take me back. During my absence he hired my friend, I returned, and they hired me back.

A.: What were you doing there – in the textile factory?

B. A.: I took product orders and made sure those orders were filled. It was Erpheldhun and Co. Ltd. They were producing cotton fabrics. The sales department was sending orders to our factory, short-term orders, and depending on the amount of the order they transferred them to us. Regarding the politics. There were mostly women working, almost all of them. The working conditions in the textile factory were difficult, the level of humidity in the spinning shop. High temperature, hot and such a high noise level and buzz from the spindle. All day it was very hard. The workers often wore only a dress on their otherwise bare skin because it was so very hot. Very difficult conditions. But there weren’t any strikes, and nothing special – there weren’t any outages.

The head of the spinning shop was a Russified Englishman. But he understood Latvian, learned it somehow. I went to the shop often and heard how the workers who came they were agitated and angry because some machine wasn’t working or cotton wasn’t right. But he just sat calmly, listened and answered in Latvian. In his dictionary there were three words he said: “Labi” (“Good”), which means that he’ll come and will fix everything. Or said: “Rit” (“Tomorrow”) which means he can’t fix it now. But the third word was “Nevar” (“Impossible”), and that’s all. And that worked like magic on the workers, they immediately calmed down and returned to their jobs. They knew, that he was trustworthy. It was very funny – his Latvian. Yes. That’s how it was there.

At that time there were only seven hundred people working in the factory. But one year Ulmanis signed a contract with Russia; I don’t remember what year it was. Sometime in the beginning of 1930s. And immediately we got big orders, immediately they hired workers, thousand people started to work and after that it was stable. The orders were very big. We were producing sheeting, heavy cloth. We were producing fabric for men’s shirts, cotton, flannel, baize, baize blankets. The welfare of the factory depended on the harvest. Generally, the customers were farmers in suburbs. If the harvest was poor – they didn’t buy anything. When the harvest was good – they bought a lot and we were very busy. Therefore Latvia was an agricultural country. And we felt that way very much. In 1940 together with the other workers I signed the document about the nationalization of the factory, in the name of management. Even though my position was lower. It was in 1940 when Soviet rule started.

A.: What do you remember from the coming of Soviet rule?

B. A.: What do I remember? I remember, that on June 17th Soviet forces came in Latvia. There was a tension in the air, I don’t know. After that, a few days later there were huge marches with workers, I participated, too, as a worker in the march. Then, one week later – on Sunday – there was another march and I went again. After one more week there is another march – I was tired of marches. I was thinking – enough with all these demonstrations. But it was quiet. I didn’t notice anything special. But one month later there were elections. Yes, we had at that time a temporary government with Kirhernshtein as a head. I was very satisfied with that, it was democracy there, but a month later there were elections. There was only one communist list, block of non-party communists. I didn’t like that very much. I was think-
ing that Latvian parties could have participated in these elections. But practically they weren’t allowed to. I understood, that list...non–party list was also prepared by the authorities. As soon as the first session of Saeima was convened, one former port worker, I forgot his name, suggested to join the Soviet Union. All voted “yes”, clapped their hands, and we joined. And then something started.

First of all, the prices changed. They ordered us to change the assortment of the production. We were manufacturing 76 different kinds of the fabrics. They told us that such a variety leads to machines needing to be reinstalled often. That is irrational. That lowers the work productivity. We had to reduce the variety. Let’s say if we are making sheet fabric, we continue to make them, but the flannel they’ll make in the Soviet without us. They cut our assortment and made it worse. And in Latvia it was impossible to buy those fabrics people used to buy. That was one thing. The second thing – we were ordering the materials. Those materials, which were scarce – we didn’t get them at all. But those materials that weren’t scarce – they sent us twice as much. After six months we got a huge amount of non–liquids. That was a disease of the Soviet system – lots of overstocked supplies, but the most needed ones – none. Then they made us make requests. Well, requests – we were sending those to Moscow and that was understandable. But in Riga there were several shoe factories, and one shoe–nail factory. The manager of that nail factory used to get orders from the shoe factory a month in advance. Now shoe factories were told to request the orders a year in advance, but till then they had no job. They were making requests a year in advance, but in the same time they told the nail factory :”You can’t install machines for the order.” So one month you’ll make one kind of nails and next month another kind. And then it started: there are shortage of nails and nails are overstocked. But the kind they need the most – there aren’t any. That was terrible. I was amazed watching that.

Well, the Soviet regime appointed me as a technical leader of the factory where I was working. But our boss was appointed as a chief of the supply department – they gave him work. Two months later I was sent to the factory “Riga’s manufaktura” as a director. Two month later they sent me – I don’t know why – and I became a head of the light industry’s supply trust. And then I was introduced to all the delights of the Soviet planning of funds and supplies. In the beginning everything was fine because all enterprises had huge reserves, but when the reserves were exhausted, we couldn’t give them anything, then in 1941 – I was working since beginning of 1940 – in May of 1941 at the Council of Ministers I received a reprimand. I was expecting to be fired soon, but I got lucky – the war started and that was it (laughing). That was my career. So. I was surprised, when sometimes they called me to the conference of the Council of Ministers. I was surprised about the lack of efficiency. Those were big conferences. Lack of efficiency and empty talks – I couldn’t understand that. And it seemed to me that those people leading conferences were completely unprofessional. That’s how it was. I felt that. It wasn’t a surprise that the economy was managed so poorly.

A. : Let’s come back a little, please. Do you remember what the standard of living in your family was – your mother alone with children – probably it was difficult at the beginning, and afterwards. How was it?

B. A. : Yes, I can tell you. When my father died, he didn’t leave any savings. He was an office clerk. His employers helped my mother a little. Later mostly my aunt Clare’s husband was helping my mother. He was earning very well and was giving my mother money. Then my fifteen year-old brother was giving private lessons to the children with disabilities. Then it was common – to give private lessons. Later, during two or three years, sometimes my mother was receiving $20 from my father’s sister in America. $20 at the end of…approximately in 1923, one dollar cost three lats –it was Ls 60. It was big money. And that’s how we lived - very poorly. In those times our main food was herring and potatoes.

A. K.(wife) : Herring in all possible ways.

B. A. : That’s how it was. The main food was cottage cheese and milk. Milk products were very cheap. That was our main food. Mother was buy-
ing meat once a week. And poor cuts: she was always buying lungs or heart, she couldn’t afford anything more. In 1924 my older brother came from Russia. He immediately got a good job, but we… the other brother started… no, he still… Yasha… graduated in 1927… No, he graduated earlier. My other brother probably graduated, too, well, yes – of course – in 1924 he was 23 years old, he had already graduated the University and was working. And when both sons were working we lived without worries. We couldn’t afford anything extreme, but lived well and were dressed. Were dressed and were full. What else – when my father died, my mother didn’t have any money to pay rent for the apartment. The apartment owners—they were two German brothers Kirkovius – they didn’t take any money from us for the apartment. For a whole year. My brother told me that after a year the owner told him: “Try to find another apartment, I can’t do this anymore, I will help you, I will give you money for moving and compensation.” Back then it was a custom to pay a compensation when moving – either to the new renter or whoever moved out of the apartment. I don’t know how it was. And he gave us money as compensation and paid us moving costs and so we moved. But for a whole year he didn’t ask us to pay for the apartment and didn’t touch anything. That’s how they were helping us.

A.: Where did you live when you rented from the brothers Kirkovius? Where was it?

B. A. I can’t remember. The thing is, my brother told me I was born on Dzirnavu Street, near the bank of the Daugava River. But when I was four months old, we moved to Maza Jauniela Street and lived there until I got married.

A.: Thank you. Now, let’s return to the beginning of the war.

B. A. WWII?

A.: Yes. So, you are working, there is the Soviet regime, and in Europe the war has started. What was the mood, what was said in your community? What was known and what wasn’t?

B. A. Well, we got information only from the newspapers. We knew that the fascists had already occupied France, in the beginning Belgium and Holland, then part of France and then Austria. And, of course, everybody was outraged and upset and worried. And when the war started, it was completely unexpected, a horrible event. At that time my wife was - no just a moment, I’ll tell you. The thing was: my wife was at the beach; she was pregnant. On Sunday …

A.: Excuse me, please let’s return to your marriage. Who was your first wife? Please, tell us about this page of your life and then your family and war.

B. A. Yes, of course, please. I got married when I was 21 years old. I met my wife at work. And my mother didn’t die, nothing happened, that’s all. Then both of us … we worked … she started to work there a year before me, she got me a job in the same factory, where she was working. And we were continuing to work together in Erpheldhun and Co. So, we were young and thought that a child would be too much of a burden, therefore the first seven years we didn’t have any children. Instead, we were going to the theater, to the opera, we were skiing – generally speaking – we were having fun. In 1936 our oldest son was born and then a lot of our fun ended. But in 1940, in 1941 my wife was pregnant. She was living at the beach in Bulduri. On June 22nd they called me to the people’s committee and said that the war had started. It was very alarming. I sent my friend to the beach to carefully warn my wife. He warned – he went and said, “You know, Marusya, the war with Turkey started”. That was carefully [laughing]. She didn’t get better after that, the opposite, they had to call the ambulance to take her to the hospital for labor. But in the private maternity hospital we already had a reservation. And so, at 2 a.m. on the 23rd she gave birth to a son and I immediately took her home.

A.K. (wife) And she was saying, she wanted Mashedka [female name], but Mishenka [male name] was born [laughing].

B. A. So they were bombing Riga since the first day. Every night we had to go down from the sixth floor to the basement. After a few days, on the 27th, they announced the evacuation. I had a
company car, my family and I got into the car and
had one suitcase and we fled, I thought we would
return in no more than three weeks. It’s only now
such a panic – they won’t let Germans in Riga.
But we left for Pskov, in Pskov they took the car
and put us in the heated freight car. And we were
traveling for three weeks to get to Chuvashia. My
son Michail at the time when we left was four
days old. He was very calm in the heated freight
car; he was rocked all day by the car and didn’t
even cry. And it was very good – my wife was
full, she could nurse well, thank God. They
stopped very regularly at the train stations and
delivered goods. And at all of the stations local
to us refugees. Probably it was emotional
for them to watch us.

Three weeks later we arrived at Buinsk. They
offered me work either at the collective farm, or to
produce, or to the mine – there was a mine, I
chose a mine and that was a good choice. The
collective farms were in the wilderness. Once I
went in the collective farm’s house, it was dark
there and such a hum, like some machine was
working there. I couldn’t understand, looked at
the ceiling and there was such a layer of flies
buzzing all the time. It was horribly dirty there. In
the working village it was bad too: there was
nothing, no goods, almost nobody had a garden
there. The Chavashe were raising geese and during
the summer the geese were feeding them-
sehems on the fields and meadows. And there was
such a work co–op: worker cooperative (shop) –
what was there all the time, overwhelmingly eau
de cologne, but why? I asked – they are drinking
it. Nobody is using the eau du cologne in the
other way but drinking because there was no
vodka available. I lived there for – I had a wife, I
got a big room there in a barracks: twenty meters,
with a stove. We settled in very well, as good as
possible. And I got a job in the mine, in the of-
fice.

I had been working there for three weeks when
they called me to the regional military recruiting
station and mobilized me. I left, but my wife be-
came a teacher in the kindergarten, and worked
there all her life. I was sending money from the
front. That’s how our evacuation happened. Yes,
my brothers, — I will tell you more about the
evacuation. My brother Ovsey, he fled too, only
he didn’t have a company car, he went by train.
Because there were trains in the station every-
body was going by train. All of the city’s busses
were sent to evacuate people. But my older
brother – Forsser during the Soviet regime be-
came a representative of “Dvinoles” in Latvia. He
got a very high position. And paid for that. When
the evacuation was announced he called to Mos-
cow. He was told, “Don’t leave. Wait for instruc-
tions.” He was waiting and waiting but three days
later the Germans already had started to enter
Riga – July 1st. He called again and asked for in-
structions. They told him to “Act upon the cir-
cumstances” but he couldn’t leave anymore, it
was already too late. He was stuck here, my
mother lived with him, he had a three-year-old
daughter and they all stayed. I told you already
about my sister, she died. She sank in the Gulf of
Finland. So. In the evacuation, well, my wife did-
n’t complain about food, they were getting some-
thing there. They had firewood around from for-
est, hardwood forests, very thick. They had
enough to heat with. She wasn’t complaining
about life.

When we left Riga, we took two identical suit-
cases. In one suitcase there were my clothes, in
another one clothes for her and children. As soon
as we moved from the house my friend from the
University came and said, “Take me with you”. I
said, “Fine”. I’ll leave one suitcase there because
I’ll have to join the army anyway. Instead I’ll
take my friend. That’s how we did. There were
three people in the car: three adults – my wife,
my friend, and myself and two children, and a
driver. And we drove. When we got to Chu-
vashia, I opened the suitcase and it turned out I
made a mistake. I left my wife’s suitcase in Riga,
not my own. There were no children’s clothes, no
dresses, nothing. — only my suits and overcoat.
But there was such a shortage, fortunately she
sold all my clothes and somehow got dressed.
Well, she lived there without complaints. After
the war, not immediately but for some reason,
they allowed her to return. She returned, even
though Riga was liberated in 1944 she couldn’t
return until May 1945. So. Such a war.

A. : But you returned ....
B. A. I was serving in the army. And after the war they didn’t let me go home, our regiment was located in Cesis. When my wife returned back to our apartment. It was completely empty. They took all of the furniture. They took away everything we had. Well, and we were sleeping on the floor at the beginning … or she was, I wasn’t there. And then I was asking, I wrote a report, I was asking to release me in view of having little children – they cursed me as a deserter. And they didn’t release me. And I stayed to serve in Cesis. And went home for one day every week. But later I asked for my previous job in the light industry where I was working before the war to intercede on my behalf and in July of 1946 finally they released me from the Army. Then I was discharged and went back to my work, which I – not back to my exact work. I used to be a manager of supplying trusts, but I got a position of chief of the department of finances under the ministry. In this position I worked for 34 years.


B. A. About children, please yes. My oldest son Sergey, he attended school Number 30, by the way. That is a very good school. Graduated from the agricultural academy with a degree in mechanics. He was hired as a designer in Riga’s diesel factory. It was in 1955. In this factory he worked for 41 years. He ended as a general director. Unfortunately, this factory went bankrupt, because our government is doing everything to ruin the relationship with Russia and orders ended. The factory was making diesel motors for Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States. The orders stopped and the factory was closed. Now he is working as an accident prevention engineer before retirement many years. Now she is a retiree.

A. : Do they have children?

B. A. Yes, they have a son Sergey.

A.K. (wife) It is a tragedy

B. A. The son Sergey, he was born in 1958. An engineer. He was working in RER Riga’s electromechanical factory. But then he quit RER and became a very successful businessman but unfortunately got into a car accident and died! He was 38 years old.

A. : Was he married?

B. A. Yes he was married and had a son. Now he is 22 years old. He is my great grand son. Now he is studying in the college. His name is Andrey Aronov.

A. : Twenty two years. So he was born in 1978. What was, what is Andrey’s mothers name?

B. A. Andrey’s mother’s name is Livia Lirus.

A. : Isn’t Andrey married yet?

B. A. No. Otherwise I would have a great great grandson already. That would be too much.

A. : Well, that would be wonderful! So. Now about Michail.

B. A. Michail. Yes. Michail studied in the Polytechnic Institute. He became an engineer-planner. After graduating he was serving in the Army as an officer. Two years. He was serving, was serving as a – I’ll tell you right now – what was that name … a cryptographer. In the some kind of aerospace department – in the missile department. That is not important. He was an officer. Then he finished his service. He was a designer. But when the designer job ended — he had no prospects anymore. And now he is a healer. Member of healer society. He has some kind of position in the healer society.

A. : Is he married?

B. A. He’s married for a second time. His first wife was Victoria, but the second wife is Ilga the second wife is not working. She is sitting at home. Ilga.

A. : What about Victoria, what is she doing?

B. A. Victoria. Victoria was – I will tell you in just a moment – she was working in advertising products, there was such an organization. She is a philologist, I mean not philologist, she was a teacher. She is a graduate of the Faculty of Russian Language and Literature in the Teacher’s In-
stitute in Daguavpils. So. But now she has a business. Some kind – not big.

A. : Do they have children? Michail have?

B. A. Yes he has, form the marriage with Victoria he has a daughter. Her name is Vladis Lava. She was born – this year she’ll be 33, she was born in 1967. She is an economist. She is living and working in Moscow, in some company.

A. : Michail has one daughter?

B. A. One daughter – nobody else.

A. : Does Vladislava have children?

B. A. She has Katya is ten years old. Katerina.

A. : Pupil.

B. A. Attending the school

A. : What is Vladislava’s last name now?

B. A. Feofanova.

A. : Well, thank you very much!

**Current Events in Latvia**

The following descriptions of events pertinent to the Latvian Jewish relations were gleaned for the JTA Website. Permission was granted by JTA to abstract them for this newsletter.

**Proposed Latvian restitution law would return Jewish properties**

A dilapidated wooden synagogue in Jurmula is one of many Jewish communal properties in that are in the Latvia government’s possession.

A proposed Latvian law would return some 200 properties to the country’s Jewish community -- and could go a long way toward making the community self-sufficient.

According to Arkady Suharenko of the Council of Latvian Jewish Communities and Congregations, a 1992 Latvian law allowed for the restitution of Jewish property, but required only the return of communal properties to observant Jewish communities.

Thanks to this law, a number of historic Jewish properties were regained, including Riga’s Jewish Theater and Jewish Hospital, as well as some prayer halls and synagogues around Latvia.

But at the time, Latvia’s Jewish communities were poorly organized and many missed the 1996 deadline to make their claims. Additionally, a number of communal properties in prewar Latvia were actually registered as private property and thus could not be claimed by the Jewish community under the previous law, local Jewish leaders say.

The new proposal will instead create a centralized list of all the contested properties and the compensation requested for each of them -- either in the form of the property itself, an alternative property or a monetary compensation.

By pre-negotiating the properties, the community hopes to expedite the legislative process. To further smooth the process and possibly to minimize anti-Semitic reaction, the bill will not make claims to Jewish property in private hands.

There is a parliamentary election this year in Latvia, and new lawmakers could make the law’s passage uncertain.

Ninety percent of the prewar Latvian Jewish population perished during the Holocaust. Most of the Jews now living in Latvia arrived during the Soviet period -- Latvia was part of the Soviet Union 1945 to 1989 -- and cannot make a direct hereditary claim to the property of the prewar Latvian population.

Solomon Bukiingolts, a Jewish economic adviser to the Latvian president, said the issue is being resolved "according to fair and mutually respectable principles."

Latvia’s Jewish community plans to establish a trust fund overseen by a board of Jewish organizations to manage to the assets of the restitution, which may be in the tens of millions of dollars.

"The Jewish community in Latvia has been on its way to self-sufficiency. If the restitution process goes as planned, the community will be able to fully support itself and also help other Jewish
communities,” said Andres Spokoiny, the Paris-based JDC country director for the Baltic states.

Local Jews do not believe there will be a strong anti-Semitic reaction to the restitution process. “I think there will be a reaction, but it will not be drastic,” said Chabad leader Rabbi Mordechai Glazman.

Glazman, who has lived in Latvia since 1992, said anti-Semitic reactions are quite common in Latvia. Any news touching upon Jewish life in Latvia gets some anti-Semitic comments on Latvian Internet sites and forums, he said.

In Latvia, wartime history present in controversy over soldiers’ rally

The recent uproar in Latvia over a proposed march by Latvian veterans of the Nazi SS highlighted the ambivalent relationship the Baltic nation has with its World War II behavior.

Condemning the march as an attempt to rewrite Latvian history and whitewash Latvia’s role in the war, anti-nationalist factions vowed to repeat last year’s protests and to do everything necessary to stop the march if it takes place again this year.

Fearing an outbreak of violent confrontations, Riga city officials canceled the march three days before it was scheduled to take place.

Latvia’s President Vaira Vike-Freiberga, also spoke out against it and was concerned about the negative attention the event brings Latvia and worried that it portrays the Baltic nation as a country full of fascists and neo-Nazis. Nonetheless, nationalist factions organizing the event, planned to go ahead with the march.

“We do not agree that holding this march at Riga’s Monument to Freedom is the right thing to do,” she said referring to the rally’s planned venue, because “it only politicizes the event.”

A few hundred protesters from both sides attended the banned march. After minor skirmishes and some arrests on both sides, police was finally able to quell the demonstrators and prevent the march from taking place.

Membership Fees are Past Due

This is a reminder to kindly renew your subscription to the Latvia SIG and Newsletter. Our subscription year runs from July 2005 through June 2006. 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: MikeGetz005@comcast.net. We look forward to your participation and support.

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: MikeGetz005@comcast.net, 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.

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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 Las Vegas and so to maintain your membership please submit your dues as indicated.
Latvian Towns and Cities from the Archives at Beth Hatefutsoth

The Beth Hatefutsoth Communities database provides information about individual Jewish communities in the Diaspora. It consists of more than 3,000 entries in English and Hebrew covering communities from all over the world. The database includes information about communities that do not exist anymore, as well as about communities that are still vibrant today. The following has been extracted from the Beth Hatefutsoth database of Latvian towns and cities with Jewish inhabitants and history. The Latvia SIG gratefully acknowledges Beth Hatefutsoth, Dov Levin and Martha Lev Zion for making this database available to the Latvia SIG. Additional towns and cities will be included in future issues of this newsletter.
CESIS
(IN JEWISH SOURCES: VENDEN; IN GERMAN: WENDEN)

A TOWN IN THE CENTRAL DISTRICT OF THE VIDZEME REGION
(FORMERLY LIPLAND), NORTH LATVIA, U.S.S.R.

WENDEN WAS FOUNDED IN 1200 BY THE LIVONIAN ORDER (AN ORDER
OF CHRISTIAN KNIGHTS FROM GERMANY). AT THE END OF THE 18TH
CENTURY UNDER THE POLISH KINGDOM, THE TOWN USED TO BE THE
SEAT OF THE LANDTAG (AN ADMINISTRATIVE AND PARLIAMENTARY
BODY) OF LIPLAND. IN 1629 THE ADMINISTRATION WAS MOVED TO
SWEDEN. IN 1721 LIPLAND WAS ANNEXED BY RUSSIA, AND WENDEN
WAS PROCLAIMED THE DISTRICT TOWN IN 1785. DURING THE YEARS
1920-40 THE TOWN WAS PART OF INDEPENDENT LATVIA AND ITS NAME
WAS CHANGED TO CESIS.

UNTIL THE SECOND HALF OF THE 19TH CENTURY ONLY A FEW JEWISH
TRADEERS LIVED IN THE TOWN, UNDER SPECIAL PERMITS. IN 1868
THERE WERE 18 JEWISH INHABITANTS. THE COMMUNITY WAS
ORGANIZED AT THE END OF THE 18TH CENTURY WHEN JEWS FROM
LITHUANIA AND VARIOUS PARTS OF KUERLAND CAME TO THE PLACE. AT
THE BEGINNING PRAYER SERVICES WERE HELD IN A RENTED HOUSE
BUT LATER A SYNAGOGUE WAS BUILT. AT A LATER STAGE THE FIRST
OF MANY RABBIS OFFICIATED THERE.

IN 1897 THERE WERE 368 JEWS LIVING IN WENDEN, COMPRISING 6%
OF THE TOTAL POPULATION.

DURING WORLD WAR I MANY JEWS LEFT THE TOWN.

AFTER THE WAR, IN INDEPENDENT LATVIA, THE COMMUNITY BECAME
SMALLER AND IN 1920 IT NUMBERED 244. AN ATTEMPT TO OPEN A
JEWISH SCHOOL WAS NOT A SUCCESS, AND THE CHILDREN ATTENDED A
GERMAN SCHOOL. THE BOYS STUDIED AT A HEDER IN THE
AFTERTNOONS. RABBI KATZ WAS THE FIRST RABBI. HE TAUGHT HEBREW
AND PORTIONS FROM THE BIBLE. THE TEACHERS, MARTINSON,
LECTURED ON JEWISH LITERATURE. THE TEACHERS SEMINARY IN THE
TOWN ALSO PREPARED JEWISH TEACHERS.

THE FIRST JEWS IN THE TOWN WERE SMALL SCALE MERCHANTS,
PEDDLERS AND TRADESMEN. THEY LIVED TOGETHER ON THE OUTSKIRTS
OF THE TOWN. DURING LATVIA'S INDEPENDENCE THE ECONOMIC
SITUATION OF THE JEWS WAS SATISFACTORY. THE MAJORITY EARNED
A LIVING AS TRADESMEN AND A FEW WERE MEMBERS OF THE FREE
PROFESSIONS. MOST OF THE MERCHANTS WERE LATVIANS.

THE POGROMS FOLLOWING THE REVOLUTIONS IN RUSSIA IN 1905
CAUSED A NUMBER OF JEWS TO FLEE THE TOWN. IN THE 1920S
BRANCHES OF 'HECHALUTZ' AND THE MOVEMENT OF WORKING YOUTH
'HAT'CHiya' WERE OPENED IN CESIS. AT THIS TIME ONE FAMILY
WENT ON ALIYAH TO ERETZ YISRAEL AND SEVERAL FAMILIES
EMIGRATED TO THE U.S.A.

IN THE 1930S MOST OF THE YOUTH JOINED 'BETAR'. THE MEMBERS
RECEIVED AGRICULTURAL TRAINING FROM FARMERS IN THE AREA. THE
ELECTIONS FOR THE 18TH ZIONIST CONGRESS SAW 40 OF THE 44
COMMUNITY NUMBER: 10528
COMMUNITY NAME: CESIS

VOTERS CASTING THEIR VOTES FOR THE LIST OF THE REVISIONIST
ZIONIST PARTY.

THE NORMAL RELATIONS EXISTING BETWEEN THE JEWS AND THE REST
OF THE POPULATION WORSEMED UNDER THE DICTATORSHIP IN LATVIA,
1934-40, WHEN ANTI-SEMITISM BEGAN TO REAR ITS HEAD.

IN 1935 THERE WERE 180 JEWS LIVING IN CESIS OUT OF A TOTAL
POPULATION OF 8,748.

THE HOLOCAUST PERIOD

FOLLOWING THE SIGNING OF THE ACCORD BY RIBBENTROP AND
MOLOTOV ON BEHALF OF GERMANY AND THE U.S.S.R. RESPECTIVELY,
ON AUGUST 23, 1939, THE RED ARMY MARCHED INTO LATVIA. IN THE
SUMMER OF 1940 A SOVIET REGIME WAS INSTALLED. JEWISH PUBLIC
INSTITUTIONS WERE LIQUIDATED BY DEGREES. IN THE MIDDLE OF
JUNE 1941 A NUMBER OF RICH JEWISH FAMILIES WERE BANISHED TO
SIBERIA.

A WEEK AFTER THE GERMAN INVASION OF THE U.S.S.R. (JUNE
22, 1941), THE SOVIETS BEGAN TO WITHDRAW FROM THE AREA. ONLY
ABOUT 20 JEWS TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THE LACK OF AN
ADMINISTRATION AND ESCAPED TO THE INTERIOR OF RUSSIA. THE
MAJORITY OF THE COMMUNITY DECIDED TO REMAIN WHERE THEY
WERE.

AROUND JULY 4 THE TOWN WAS OCCUPIED BY THE GERMANS. THAT
SUMMER THE JEWS WERE KILLED NEAR A LAKE, SEVERAL KILOMETERS
FROM THE TOWN. JEWS WHO HID IN THE FORESTS AND WERE
DISCOVERED, WERE MURDERED. THE MURDERERS, MEMBERS OF THE
LOCAL LATVIAN POLICE, RECEIVED A PART OF THE PROPERTY OF
THOSE WHO WERE KILLED.

ONLY 4 JEWS, WHO MANAGED TO HIDE UNTIL THE END OF THE WAR,
SURVIVED.

THE TOWN WAS LIBERATED BY THE RED ARMY DURING
SEPTEMBER-OCTOBER 1944.

SURVIVORS, MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY, SETTLED IN OTHER PLACES
IN THE U.S.S.R. AFTER THE WAR, AND DURING THE COURSE OF TIME
THE MAJORITY WENT ON ALIYAH TO ERETZ YISRAEL.

THE SYNAGOGUE BUILDING WAS TURNED INTO A KOMSOMOL CLUB (FOR
COMMUNIST YOUTH).
COMMUNITY NUMBER: 10529
COMMUNITY NAME: DAGDA

D A G D A

A SMALL TOWN IN THE DAUGAVPILS (FORMERLY DVINSK) DISTRICT,
LATVIA REGION, SOUTH EAST LATVIA, U.S.S.R.

DAGDA WAS STARTED AT THE END OF THE 17TH CENTURY IN THE AREA
OF AN ESTATE BELONGING TO A POLE. DURING THE PERIOD 1920-40
IT WAS PART OF AN INDEPENDENT LATVIA.

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY, WHICH WAS ORGANIZED AT THE BEGINNING
OF THE 19TH CENTURY, WAS IN THE MAIN TRADITIONALLY OBSERVANT
ONE. THREE SYNAGOGUES WERE BUILT; ONE OF THE MITNAGDIM
STREAM, AND TWO SERVING THE HASIDIM. THERE WERE THESE
INSTITUTIONS: A CEMETERY, HEVRA KADISHA, 'BIKHUR CHOLIM'
(SICK VISITING) AND A SOCIETY TO HELP NEEDY BRIDES
('HACHNASAT KALAH').

IN 1847 THERE WERE 77 JEWISH RESIDENTS. BY 1897 THE NUMBER
HAD Risen TO 1,026, COMPRISING 60% OF THE TOTAL POPULATION.
AT THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY, YITZHAK PANROV, A PUBLIC
OFFICIAL, WAS THE LEADER OF THE COMMUNITY. RABBI YITZHAK
SHERGIN WAS THE SPIRITUAL HEAD OF THE COMMUNITY FROM 1910
UNTIL HE PERISHED IN THE HOLOCAUST IN 1941.

IN THE 1910S JEWS BEGAN TO EMIGRATE FROM THE TOWN TO THE
U.S.A. AND TO SOUTH AFRICA. DURING THE COURSE OF WORLD WAR
I, 1915-16, MANY JEWS MOVED TO THE INTERIOR OF RUSSIA.
AFTER THE WAR, THE TOWN WAS UNDER THE CONTROL OF THE
BOLSHEVIKS AND THE JEWS WERE OPPRESSED ON THE ORDERS OF THE
LOCAL LATVIAN COMMANDANT.

FROM 1922-24 THE COMMUNITY ASSISTED MANY JEWS, WHO CROSSED
THE BORDER WITH RUSSIA, ON THEIR WAY TO LANDS ACROSS THE
SEA. SEVERAL OF THEM REMAINED IN DAGDA.

JEWISH CHILDREN WERE NOT ACCEPTED IN THE STATE ELEMENTARY
SCHOOL; THEY LEARNED EITHER IN THE HEDER OR A PRIVATE
SCHOOL. IN 1930 A JEWISH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL WAS OPENED WITH
SIX CLASSES. AT THE BEGINNING HEBREW WAS THE LANGUAGE OF
INSTRUCTION, BUT LATER IT WAS YIDDISH. FROM 1934 HEBREW
BECAME THE TEACHING LANGUAGE.

THERE WAS AN ACTIVE DRAMA CIRCLE AND THERE WERE SUBSCRIBERS
TO THE HEBREW NEWSPAPER 'HAMELITZ'.

IN 1930 THE COMMUNITY NUMBERED 668.

AT THE BEGINNING THE MAJORITY OF THE JEWS MADE A LIVING IN
COMMERCE, AS PEDDLERS AND TRADESMEN. THEY OPENED A TANNERY
AND WOOL PROCESSING WORKSHOP.

WITH THE ESTABLISHMENT OF LATVIA AS AN INDEPENDENT STATE IN
1920, THE MOVEMENT OF AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE FROM THE U.S.S.R.
stopped, as a result of which JEWISH MERCHANTS WERE
ADVERSELY AFFECTED. THEY WERE HELPED BY THE 'JOINT' (A
RELIEF AGENCY OF AMERICAN JEWRY). IN THE CONFISCATION OF
1933, THE BUSINESSES AND HOMES OF JEWS WERE BURNT DOWN AND
MANY OF THEM WERE LEFT IMPOVERISHED. THEY WERE HELPED BY
COMMUNITY NUMBER: 10529
COMMUNITY NAME: DAGDA

SEVERAL COMMUNITIES, A PRODUCERS-CONSUMERS CO-OPERATIVE WAS SET UP BY LATVIAN FARMERS FROM THE VICINITY, WHICH CAUSED ADDITIONAL HARDSHIP TO THE JEWISH MERCHANTS. A SURVEY OF 1935 REVEALED THAT 95% OF BUSINESSES IN THE TOWN WERE JEWISH OWNED.

AMONG THE MEMBERS OF THE FREE PROFESSIONS THERE WERE TWO PHARMACISTS, A DOCTOR AND A DENTIST.

LOVERS OF ZION (HOVEVEI ZION) WERE ACTIVE FROM THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY AND THEY CONTRIBUTED MONEY TO THE BUILDING OF ERETZ ISRAEL. A BRANCH OF "ZE'IREI ZION" (ZIONIST YOUTH) WAS THE FIRST TO BE ORGANIZED IN DAGDA. LATER, A BRANCH OF THE REVISIONIST PARTY WAS OPENED.

IN THE 1910S A BRANCH OF "HA'TEHIYA" (ZIONIST YOUTH MOVEMENT) WAS FOUNDED WHICH LATER BECAME THE STRONGHOLD OF BE'AR. IN THE THIRTIES A BRANCH OF HASHOMER HA'TSAIR - NEZACH (PIONEERING YOUTH) WAS OPENED.

THE BUND WAS ACTIVE IN THE TOWN, PARTICULARLY AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY.

IN 1935 THERE WERE 589 JEWISH RESIDENTS AMONG A POPULATION OF 1,104.

THE HOLOCAUST PERIOD


AFTER THE OUTBREAK OF WAR BETWEEN GERMANY AND THE U.S.S.R. (JUNE 22, 1941) 60 JEWS OF THE TOWN MANAGED TO ESCAPE TO THE INTERIOR OF RUSSIA. AMONG THEM WERE SOME 20 YOUNG MEN WHO JOINED THE RED ARMY. AT LEAST 7 OF THEM WERE KILLED IN ACTION.

THE MAJORITY OF THE COMMUNITY DECIDED TO REMAIN IN THE PLACE.

AT THE BEGINNING OF JULY 1941 GERMAN FORCES CAPTURED THE TOWN. IMMEDIATELY LOCAL LATVIANS BEGAN MURDER AND TERROR OPERATIONS AGAINST THE JEWS.

COMMUNITY NUMBER: 10529
COMMUNITY NAME: DAGDA

In July 1944 the Red Army liberated the town. The survivors, who returned to the place, gave Jewish burial to those who had been murdered during the first days of the German conquest. They also erected a monument in memory of the Jews of Dagda.
After the war, there were only a few Jewish families in the town.
COMMUNITY NUMBER: 326
COMMUNITY NAME: DAUGAVPILS

DAUGAVPILS
(IN JEWISH SOURCES AND IN RUSSIAN: DVINSK; IN GERMAN:
DUENABURG).

THE DISTRICT TOWN IN THE LATGALIE REGION, LATVIA, U.S.S.R.

DAUGAVPILS, SITUATED ON THE DAUGAVA RIVER (FORMERLY DVINA),
WAS ESTABLISHED IN THE 13TH CENTURY AND NAMED DUNENBURG, AND
WAS GOVERNED BY THE LIVONIAN ORDER (AN ORDER OF GERMAN
CHRISTIAN KNIGHTS). IN 1561 THE PLACE CAME UNDER
POLISH-LITHUANIAN RULE. DINABURG ATTAINED THE STATUS OF A
CITY IN 1582. AT THE FIRST PARTITION OF POLAND IN 1772, IT
WAS ANNEXED BY RUSSIA AND IT BECAME THE DISTRICT TOWN OF
THE VITEBSK REGION. IN 1893 THE NAME WAS CHANGED TO DVINSK. FROM
1920-40 IT WAS PART OF INDEPENDENT LATVIA, FROM WHICH TIME
IT WAS CALLED DAUGAVPILS.

JEWS BEGAN TO COME TO THE PLACE FROM POLAND AND LITHUANIA IN
THE 17TH CENTURY. THE COMMUNITY WAS ORGANIZED AFTER THE
ANNEXATION BY RUSSIA. IN 1772 THERE WERE 176 JEWISH
RESIDENTS AND BY 1805 THE NUMBER HAD SWELLED TO ALMOST 800.
THEIR RESIDENCE WAS CONFINED TO THE OLD TOWN. THE RAPID
GROWTH OF THE JEWISH COMMUNITY DATES FROM 1835 WITH THE
INCLUSION OF THE TOWN IN THE 'PALE OF SETTLEMENT', (REGIONS
IN WESTERN RUSSIA IN WHICH JEWS WERE PERMITTED TO LIVE, FROM
THE END OF THE 18TH CENTURY). IN 1847 THERE WERE 2,910 JEWs
LIVING IN THE TOWN AND BY 1897 THIS HAD GROWN TO 32,400.
IN THE DVINSK COMMUNITY, IN THE TRADITION OF NEIGHBORING
LITHUANIA, THERE WERE HASSIDIM AND MITNAGDIM (OPponents
COMMUNITY AT THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY.

IN 1865 A BEGINNING WAS MADE ON THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE
LARGE SYNAGOGUE 'CHOIR SHUL'. WITH THE PASSAGE OF TIME SOME
40 SYNAGOGUES WERE BUILT IN THE CITY, AS WELL AS THREE
TALMUDIC TORAH AND YESHIVOTH.

IN THE 20TH CENTURY TWO OF THE LEADING RABBIS OF THEIR TIME
OFFICIATED IN THE CITY. RABBI MEIR SIMCHA HACOHEN OF THE
MITNAGDIM STREAM OCCUPIED THE RABBINICAL CHAIR OF THE 'KAHAL
SHA'AR' SYNAGOGUE FOR 39 YEARS. HE WAS KNOWN BY THE JEWISH
PUBLIC FOR HIS TALMUDIC ERUDITION AS SHOWN IN HIS BOOK 'OR
SAE'ACH' (INTERPRETATIONS OF THE RABBIN). THE HASSIDIC
RABBI, JOSEF ROSEN, KNOWN AS THE 'SAGE OF ROGATCHOV', AUTHOR
OF THE BOOK 'KEEPER OF SECRETS' WAS RABBI OF THE 'PLANOVER
MITZVAH' SYNAGOGUE FOR 50 YEARS.

CHARITABLE INSTITUTIONS MAINTAINED BY THE COMMUNITY,
INCLUDED: A HOSTEL, "LITAT TSDEK", SICK VISITING "RIKKUR
CHOLIM", A FUND FOR THE PROVISION OF FLOUR FOR PASSACH, A
SOUP KITCHEN FOR THE POOR, AN OLD-AGED HOME, A SYNAGOGUE,
A LOW-PRICED CAFE AND A BENEVOLENT SOCIETY.

SEVERAL SECULAR JEWISH SCHOOLS (MOSTLY PRIVATE) WERE
OPERATIVE FROM THE 1660S. "HEDER NETUKAH" (WHERE SECULAR
COMMUNITY NUMBER:  326
COMMUNITY NAME:  DAUGAVPILS

SUBJECTS ALSO WERE STUDIED, WAS OPENED IN 1900. A JEWISH VOCATIONAL SCHOOL (CARPENTRY AND METALWORK), WHICH WAS OPENED IN 1887, WAS AMONG THE LARGEST OF ITS KIND RUN BY THE VARIOUS COMMUNITIES IN RUSSIA. IN 1901 THE MUNICIPALITY WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THREE JEWISH SCHOOLS, AND SOME OF THEM BEGAN TO TEACH HEBREW. IN 1902, A VOCATIONAL SCHOOL FOR GIRLS WAS OPENED, AS WELL AS TWO LIBRARIES. AT THIS TIME ONLY 24% OF THE JEWISH CHILDREN WERE EDUCATED AT SECULAR INSTITUTIONS. THE MAJORITY ATTENDED "HADARIM", TALMUD TORAH AND YESHIVOT. FROM 1913 ON, ONE OF THE SCHOOLS TAUGHT THROUGH THE MEDIUM OF YIDDISH.

ON THE EVE OF WORLD WAR I THE JEWISH POPULATION OF DUVINSK WAS 55,680.


IN 1920 THERE WERE 11,838 JEWS IN THE TOWN. THEY ELECTED A COMMUNITY COUNCIL AND BEGAN TO ORGANIZE THEIR LIVES ANEW. WHEN LATVIA WAS INDEPENDENT, IN THE FRAMEWORK OF A NATIONAL CULTURAL AUTONOMY FOR MINORITIES (ACCORDING TO THE VERSAILLES TREATY OF 1919), THE LANGUAGES OF INSTRUCTION IN THE JEWISH SCHOOLS AND THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS OF AGUDAT ISRAEL "TORAH VE'DERECH ERETZ" WERE YIDDISH AND HEBREW. IN TWO OUT OF FIVE ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS YIDDISH WAS THE MEDIUM OF TEACHING, IN TWO IT WAS HEBREW AND IN ONE RUSSIAN WAS USED. THE JEWISH HIGH SCHOOL BEGAN TEACHING IN THE RUSSIAN LANGUAGE, LATER BOTH YIDDISH AND HEBREW WERE ADDED. THE LOCAL YESHIVAH BELONGED TO THE YESHIVOTH NETWORK "BETH JOSEF" (NAMED AFTER THE SAGE EROM ROGAICHOV). DURING THE THIRTIES AN ADDITIONAL YESHIVAH WAS OPENED.

IN 1934 DURING THE DICTATORSHIP, INSPECTION OVER JEWISH EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS PASSED INTO THE HANDS OF AGUDATH ISRAEL AND THE LANGUAGE OF INSTRUCTION BECAME YIDDISH. THERE WAS A DRAMA CIRCLE IN THE TOWN, IN ADDITION TO A LARGE LIBRARY AND PRINTING PRESS.

THE LIVING CONDITIONS AND ECONOMIC SITUATION OF THE FIRST JEWS IN THE PLACE WERE HARD. FOLLOWING THE LAW OF 1876, MANY JEWS FROM THE FARMS AND ESTATES CAME TO THE TOWN CAUSING INTENSE OVERCROWDING. SEVERAL YEARS LATER AN EXODUS BEGAN WITH PEOPLE GOING TO THE U.S.A. AND SOUTH AFRICA. WORK ON BUILDING FORTIFICATIONS AND A LARGE MILITARY CAMP PROVIDED MANY SOURCES OF EMPLOYMENT FOR THE JEWS OF THE TOWN. JEWISH BUILDING CONTRACTORS GAVE WORK TO JEWISH LABORERS AND TRADESMEN. OTHERS WERE SUPPLIERS OF CLOTHING, FOOTWEAR, FOOD, WOOD AND METAL WORK TO THE ARMY. ONLY A FEW JEWS WORKED IN AGRICULTURE.

COMMUNITY NUMBER: 326
COMMUNITY NAME: DAUGAVPILS


FROM 1920-1934 LATVIA WAS A DEMOCRACY; THE POSTS IN THE MUNICIPAL DEPARTMENTS OF ECONOMY, ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE WERE MAINTAINED BY JEWS.


A NUMBER OF CLUBS WERE OPENED; NAMED AFTER BRENNER, PERETZ AND DIALIK, AND A SPORTS CLUB FOR THE JEWS OF DVINSK.

ANTI-SEMITISM REARED ITS HEAD DURING THE 1920S AND FROM 1934 INCREASED IN INTENSITY UNDER THE DICTATORSHIP OF KARL ULMANS. ACTIVITIES OF THE ZIONIST AND SOCIALIST ORGANIZATIONS WERE BROUGHT TO AN END.

IN 1935 THE JEWISH COMMUNITY WAS 11,116.

THE HOLOCAUST PERIOD
COMMUNITY NUMBER: 326
COMMUNITY NAME: DAUGAVPILS


HUNDREDS OF YOUNG JEWS OF THE TOWN SERVED IN THE RED ARMY, IN THE LATVIAN DIVISION. MOST OF THEM WERE KILLED IN ACTION.

ON JUNE 26, 1941, THE TOWN WAS CAPTURED BY GERMAN FORCES. BETWEEN JUNE 29 AND JULY 2, JEWISH MEN AGED 16 TO 60 WERE ORDERED TO APPEAR DAILY AT THE MARKET SQUARE. FROM HERE THEY WERE TAKEN TO THE GAOL. AFTER A WEEK'S IMPRISONMENT, A NUMBER OF MEN WERE TAKEN TO THE NEARBY RAILWAY PARK WHERE THEY WERE MURDERED. SOME OF THE PRISONERS, AMONG THEM DOCTORS AND ARTISANS, WERE RELEASED. THE REMAINDER WERE SENT TO FORCED LABOR.

ON JULY 15 ALL THE SYNAGOGUES WERE COMMANDEERED (EXCEPT FOR THE "KHAL SHAIAR" AND "PLANOVER MINYAN" SYNAGOGUES) AND THE JEWS WERE ORDERED TO WEAR A YELLOW STAR.

A GHETTO WAS SET UP ON JULY 26 IN BARRACKS AND STABLES ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE RIVER. ABOUT 15,000 PEOPLE FROM THE TOWN AND SURROUNDING VILLAGES WERE CRAMMED INTO THIS SPACE, WITHOUT PROPER SANITATION. A JEWISH COMMITTEE AND JEWISH POLICE FORCE WAS APPOINTED TO MANAGE LIFE IN THE GHETTO. DOCTORS IMPROVISED A HOSPITAL AND SEVERAL WORKSHOPS WERE STARTED.


WORK PERMITS WERE ISSUED TO THOSE WHO WERE EMPLOYED OUTSIDE THE GHETTO.

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE COMMUNITY OFDUINSK ITSELF BEGAN WITH TWO MASSIVE ACTIONS IN THE SECOND AND THIRD WEEKS OF AUGUST 1941, IN THE POGULIANKA FOREST.

ACCORDING TO GERMAN SOURCES, 10,162 JEWS OF DUINSK AND THE
COMMUNITY NUMBER: 336
COMMUNITY NAME: DAUGAVPILS

SURROUNDINGS WERE KILLED IN THE EARLY MONTHS OF THE OCCUPATION.
AFTER A FURTHER ACTION, ON NOVEMBER 8 AND 9 OF THE SAME YEAR, ONLY THOSE JEWS (AND THEIR FAMILIES) WHO WERE EMPLOYED ON VITAL WORK REMAINED IN DVINSK. THEY WERE ABOUT 1,000 IN NUMBER. ABOUT 500 OF THEM WERE ALLOWED TO LIVE AT THEIR PLACES OF WORK, OUTSIDE THE GHETTO. THE REMAINING JEWS WERE TAKEN TO THE POGULIANKA FOREST AND MURDERED.
FOLLOWING A TYPHUS EPIDEMIC AT THE END OF NOVEMBER THE GHETTO WAS PUT IN QUARANTINE FOR FOUR MONTHS. IN ADDITION TO THOSE WHO DIED OF TYPHUS THERE WERE MANY MORE DEATHS FROM STARVATION.
ON MAY 17, 1942 THE GHETTO WAS LIQUIDATED AND ALL THE INHABITANTS WERE BUTCHERED, INCLUDING THE COUNCIL MEMBERS AND INTERNAL POLICE FORCE AND THEIR FAMILIES.
ONLY ABOUT 400 JEWS REMAINED IN THE TOWN, AND THEN A RESISTANCE MOVEMENT WAS ORGANIZED. THE MEMBERS OBTAINED WEAPONS AND TRAINED SECRETLY IN THEIR USE. THE AIM WAS TO JOIN THE PARTISANS ACROSS THE BORDER. ONLY SOME 15 OF THEM WERE SUCCESSFUL.
ON OCTOBER 26, 1943, THE LAST OF THE JEWS OF THE TOWN WERE SENT TO THE CAMP IN KAISERWALD (IN LATVIAN "MEZA PARKS") IN THE VICINITY OF RIGA. SOME OF THEM COMMITTED SUICIDE ON THE WAY.
ABOUT 20 JEWS MANAGED TO SURVIVE BY GOING INTO HIDING.

IN 1972 THE CEMETERY WAS CLOSED, AND ONLY THE SYNAGOGUE CONTINUED TO FUNCTION.
Latvia SIG Membership Questionnaire

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

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