Latvia SIG

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As is customary, after two terms, I am stepping down as president of the Latvia SIG. Two years ago I considered myself a neophyte as I accepted the role of president. Now, I almost feel qualified to be president. But it is time for a change and I can say with high confidence that our next president and his cabinet (of which I still plan to be a member) will ably carry the SIG to the next level.

In the last issue of this newsletter I summarized some of the accomplishments over the last year or two, so I will not repeat them here. In my first President’s Report, written almost two years ago, I indicated that I would attempt to enlist “activists” who could help move the SIG forward. In all honesty, attaining that goal was only partially successful. A number of SIG members did come forward with ideas, suggestions, and actual efforts that have improved the usefulness of the SIG to its members.

Of course, Mike Getz has been most helpful in providing historical background and insight as well as in maintaining contact with personnel at the USHMM in Washington. Arlene Beare has continued to bring extant Latvian databases online under JewishGen that benefit all of us. Henry Blumberg has communicated his concerns and ideas and has contributed articles to the SIG newsletter. Don Hirschhorn, a long-time member, has expressed concerns and ideas to remedy those concerns. As webmaster, Sarah Krein has agreed to update and modernize the Latvia SIG website and has already improved the site. Dave Howard started a construction site for developing a Dvinsk Shtetlink, but was slowed down because of a severe injury to his right hand. We all hope that Dave can resume his efforts during the next year. Susan Terkel, a professional writer and new member, has just recently agreed to help out with the SIG newsletter. So, I believe we are moving in the right direction, but more coordination, project definition, and specific goals need to be addressed.

As has been pointed out by Don Hirschhorn, although nearly 600 people are registered for the Latvia SIG listserv, the Latvia SIG usually has only between 75 and 100 active dues-paying members at any given time. Obviously, there are many potential members who are not supporting the various activities that the SIG provides and hopes to provide in the future. I am planning to contact and encourage former members and other interested parties to become active members again.

One task that I did not envision when I became president was coordinating SIG activities for the annual IAJGS conferences. Nor was I aware of the importance of that conference to our membership. After a late start, I was able to arrange for the SIG luncheon and meeting at last year’s conference in Las Vegas and I predict that this year’s conference will be even more successful. Even so, I suggest that one person - other than the president - attend to that job for future conferences.

As you know, our membership year runs from 1 July through 30 June so membership dues for 2006/2007 are now due. Please send your payment to:

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

New members and those who wish to update their membership profiles, please complete the membership questionnaire included in the newsletter.

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
6. Barry Shay, Newsletter Editor, bbshay@starpower.net
7. Sarah Krein, Webmaster, kreinfly@yahoo.co.uk
8. Barry Shay, Web Page Editor, bbshay@starpower.net
9. Dave Howard, Shtetlink Coordinator, dshoward@usa.net
10. Elsebeth Paikin, Listserv Moderator, elsebeth@paikin.dk
I look 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 the annual meeting.

Barry Shay, bbshay@starpower.net

Editor’s Comments

With this last issue of the membership year, I am again including the Latvia SIG Family Finder (FF). The utility of the FF has come into question and, if it is to remain a useful tool for SIG members, it needs to be improved and updated. In this issue, I am only including additions to the last FF, which was published in the March 2005 issue (Volume 9, Issue 2), since that issue is now available for viewing on our website.

One major problem, is that many people who submit family information for the FF continue to use the ancient names for towns and shtetls in which they are interested. That makes it very difficult for our membership chairperson, Rhea Plottel, to organize and sort the data in a useful manner. In addition, for some reason, respondents did not care or do not care to include contact information so that they may be contacted by interested parties. (On the membership form in this issue, I have included a box to check if you would like your contact information to be included in the FF.) Additionally, JewishGen provides a searchable FF function on the JewishGen website, so providing a separate Latvia SIG capability may be redundant. Please let me know how you feel about these issues.

Henry Blumberg was kind enough to write about his trip to Grobina and his success in meeting and learning about long lost family members. His experience mirrors those of many other SIG members who have used the resources of the SIG and JewishGen to locate and learn about ancestors and relatives, both living and dead.

Mike Getz forwarded me an email from his friend Ittamar Avin about his recent trip to Daugavpils, and I thought it would be worth including in our newsletter. Ittamar’s observations concerning the city agree with those of many other visitors to Daugavpils. It is heartening to hear about the renovation of the synagogue in Daugavpils. You may remember that photos of the synagogue before and after its renovation appeared in this newsletter some time ago.

I am particularly happy to include the announcements of three books written by active members of the Latvia SIG, including two by past presidents of this organization. Martha Lev-Zion’s book, “Taking Tamar,” Arlene Beare’s book, “Jewish Ancestors: A Guide to Jewish Genealogy in Latvia & Estonia,” and Charles Nam’s book, “The Golden Door,” have all been released fairly recently and each promises to be well worth reading. Gary Mokotoff was kind enough to provide the material concerning Martha’s book.

Thanks to Mike Getz and Vadim Altskan of the USHMM, I am able to include a partial list of the Jewish Collections that reside in Central State Historical Archives in Riga. The list has been translated into English, but not the actual content. Mike tells me that the disposition of the material is being considered by the Latvian Parliament. Hopefully, some or all of the material will be available to the USHMM for subsequent translation.

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 documents possible, and we can not thank them enough for their efforts. These accounts have become a regular feature of this newsletter, and I am particularly happy that the inclusion of Grobina coincides with Henry Blumberg’s article about his visit there.

Barry Shay bbshay@starpower.net

Latvia SIG Events at the IAJGS Conference in New York

The Latvia SIG luncheon will be held on Monday, 14 August at 12:30 PM in the Brecht Meeting Room on the fourth floor and is scheduled as Session Code 3006. David Michaelson will be our guest speaker and 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.

The annual meeting of Latvia SIG will take place on Tuesday, 15 August at 3:15 PM in the Herald meeting room on the seventh floor. It is scheduled as Session Code 1020. I have reserved the meeting room for two consecutive time-slots, which will give us plenty of time for our business meeting as well as for two scheduled presentations. The business meeting will cover the election of new officers as well as the status of various projects and database activities. Below is a tentative agenda for the meeting. A more detailed version will be distributed via the Latvia SIG listserv.

**Agenda**

- President’s Report
- Treasurer’s Report
- Membership Report
- Editor’s Report
- Database Update and Status report
- Review of Ongoing Projects
- Issues and Concerns
- Election of Officers

Following the formal meeting, Henry Blumberg, will present 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, and following Henry, Bella Zisere will talk about and answer questions concerning contemporary Jewish life in Riga and other parts of Latvia.

I have arranged with Pamela Weisberger, film coordinator at the conference, to show the documentary film, "My Jewish Grandfather" at a time that is compatible with our meeting schedule. It will be shown at 5:15 PM in the Zeigfield Room, following our meeting. This will give us close to two hours to complete our business meeting and the two presentations/discussions.

The film was made about 10 years ago by Danish filmmaker Casper Hoyberg. He was born in Israel to a Danish mother and Jewish father, and the film deals with his tracing the origins and fate of his Jewish grandfather who was born in Riga. The film includes historical footage of Riga and current video of his trip there.

On Wednesday, 16 August, from 8:00 AM until 9:15 AM, Bella Zisere, a current resident of Riga as well as a Ph.D. candidate at the Institute for Political Studies in Paris, will present 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 and will be held in the Westside Ballroom-Salon 3 on the fifth floor.

Bella’s presentation focuses on questions and the debate concerning the Holocaust in Latvia within different ethnic communities after Latvia’s democratization, including the role of the local Latvian population in the event. The analysis of this debate is based on the study of Latvian media and recent scholarly research, as well as on oral interviews with members of the Latvian Jewish and non-Jewish population. It will demonstrate how a historical conflict can influence inter-ethnic relationships within a state more than 60 years after the conflict.

Our sister organization, the Courland Research Group, will be meeting on Monday, 14 August in the SOHO Room on the 7th floor. Nick Evans will be speaking on The Port Jews of Libau: Typical or exceptional? This illustrated presentation will discuss current research into the Jewish merchants who traded at one of Courland's lead-
As well as being involved with the emigration trade, the Jews residing in this Baltic port also benefited from the freedoms they had been granted to trade in agricultural exports.

Barry Shay
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Reconnecting with Grobina
By
Henry Blumberg

My wife, Marcia, and I visited Grobina two years ago, more than a century after my father Julius left at age ten. He told me very little about his family in Grobina and had early memories of living close enough to a castle to hear Nobles playing lawn bowls. Little else was told and after the war he tried to find members of his family in Europe without any success.

We had no idea where Grobina was situated; it lies about ten kilometers from Liepaja (Libau). Originally a Viking settlement, the town had a rich history and over the centuries it was known as Grobin, Grebin, Soeborg and Seeburg. It has been recorded that during the Viking Age, Grobina was a centre of Scandinavian settlement on the Baltic Sea with many burial mounds scattered among three cemeteries in the vicinity.

Grobina Castle ca 1900

The castle sat atop the hill, as seen in this postcard circa 1900, and inside the walls there is now an outdoor theatre. I was so excited to see what my father had remembered from the 1880s and described to me during the 1940s in South Africa.

The view from the inside the ruins is, of course, very different from the picture-postcard view taken from a distance many years ago.

View From Inside the Castle Walls

In a little garden in the town we found a stone sculpture. A crane holding a stone in its lifted foot, Grobina’s emblem, is on the right stone signifying that inhabitants of Grobina should be vigilant. In 1695 the Duke of Kurzeme, Friedrich Casimirus, granted town rights and arms to Grobina, then called Grobin in German.

Grobina has a population of between 4000 to 5000 people. For such a small town it is surprising that so many Jewish families originated there. There were the Blumberg, Hirschhorn, Michelsohn, Bub, Friedman and Judelowitsch families and as I have since discovered my relatives among some of those families.

Fifty years ago my late father, Julius (Sundel) Blumberg, was unable to find any surviving family in Latvia. With the passage of time and with the help of the internet, Google, websites, JewishGen and assistance from fellow researchers I have been able to learn about the family that lived in Grobina.

With the assistance of a recently discovered cousin, Rita Bogdanova from Riga, I connected with and last summer met a cousin, Minna Reichert, and her daughter Pauline Crane. Minna, to my amazement, had direct knowledge of the family and life in Grobina. Her grandmother was Masha Blumberg, my father’s aunt and my great-
aunt. Having immigrated to Canada from South Africa, I was surprised to find a cousin alive and living in California. Masha, my great-aunt, had lived and died in Grobina; her daughter Livia (Minna’s mother) was also born there.

Minna told me about her grandparents, Masha and Peretz. It was not unusual in Grobina for members of the Blumberg family to marry into the Hirschhorn family. While Peretz Hirschhorn married Masha Blumberg, another Peretz Hirschhorn, a nephew, married Reche (Rochel) Blumberg. In addition Scheine Hirschhorn married Chaim Blumberg (a nephew of Masha).

As a result of connecting with Minna and Pauline we were invited to become “honorary Hirschhorns” and attended their reunion in New York last year. We met special members of that family including Gene Hirschhorn who has extensively documented the family history and Donald and Sandra Hirschhorn who, with Pauline Crane, were the main organizers of the very successful event attended by over 100 family members. We then discovered that a nephew of my great-aunt was Joseph Hirshhorn (originally spelled Hirschhorn). He was an avid art collector and in 1966 donated his collection of 4,000 paintings and 1,500 sculptures to the Smithsonian Institution. In 1966 the Congress of the United States authorized funding for the Smithsonian’s Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, which now stands proudly on the National Mall in Washington, DC.

Joseph Hirschhorn went to the US in 1905 with his widowed mother and twelve siblings. He began to work as an office boy when he was 15 but two years later became a stockbroker and was soon a wealthy man, unaffected by the 1929 crash. He engaged in gold mining in Canada as well as in uranium ventures, eventually consolidating his Canadian mining interests in Canadian Rio Tinto.

Fortunately Vladimir Baans, who lives in Liepaja, put us in contact with a person who was able to show us the cemetery in Grobina. It is located a few kilometers from the town itself and is in a very bad state of repair. Most of the gravestones are no longer legible and the vegetation has grown unchecked. We could not find any grave belonging to a family member.

Jewish Cemetery in Grobina

It was much more difficult to find the site in the forest of the mass grave of all the Jews murdered in 1941. While we were given directions there was no road sign indicating the turn-off into the forest. We drove along a number of different dirt roads without finding the mass grave. Eventually we managed to obtain directions from an elderly lady on a bicycle who knew where the turn-off was. After driving along yet another road into the forest we eventually found the site and the stone marker. Sadly, the stone marker did not indicate
that it is a memorial to the Jews who were murdered there in 1941.

Stone Marker

After many meetings with the Grobina Municipality, Vladimir Baans was successful in finalizing negotiations and obtaining their agreement to erect a memorial at the site denoting it as a Jewish memorial for victims of the Nazi murders. The Municipality and a few donors contributed to the making of the memorial; it lists 87 people from Grobina who perished at the site of the mass grave on the 27th October 1941 as well as the names of other Jews from Grobina who suffered a cruel fate but might not be buried at the site.

Memorial for Jewish Victims

The wording at the top refers to the reality that Grobina Jews were murdered by the Nazis. At long last there is recognition, through a Jewish memorial to the dead, that these Jews were specific victims of the Nazis.

The wording at the bottom translated literally by Vladimir Baans says, “nobody is dead if his memory is kept.” But as Vladimir wrote to me, the wording in Latvian sounds better than the English translation.

Reconnecting with Grobina was a very moving experience. Weaving small threads of memories together with archival research created in this short visit a rich personal tapestry that we can treasure and pass onto our family.

Trip to Daugavpils

My dad, Zalman Avin, was born in Dvinsk (now Daugavpils) in 1906. At the age of twenty he arrived in Cape Town, South Africa, as a certificated Hebrew teacher. He taught at and, for many years, was the principal of the Cape Town Talmud Torah.

In the 1940s he was a leading member of the pioneering group that lobbied for, and finally established the Herzlia School, which was the first Jewish Day School in South Africa. In the late 1940s he became the second principal of the school. While principal, and at a crucial phase of the school's development, he steered it into relatively safe waters. From small beginnings, Herzlia School in Cape Town became a highly successful and much-envied institution with outstanding facilities and an academic record second to none. In tribute to my late father, the school's boardroom is named after him.

In the sixties and early seventies my dad served in the Hebrew Department of the University of Cape Town, and for a number of years was head of the department. Upon his retirement in 1976, he and his wife Claire (originally from Kovno, Lithuania) became "Olim", and settled in Tel Aviv where he passed away in May 1988.

Dear Mike

I got back to South Africa a few days ago after a seven-week trip through Eastern Europe, beginning in Slovenia and ending up in Latvia. I spent
the 24th and 25th of June in Daugavpils (Dvinsk). Thanks for putting me in touch with Sofia Mei-jerova. She arranged for a competent guide, Yosif Rochko, to escort me to sites of Jewish interest and to some with a purely family connection; my father having been born in Dvinsk (as it was then) in 1906.

Beginning in the city, which struck me in general as rather down-at-heels and very much the poor relation compared to Riga, we visited the one operating synagogue left in town. It was heartening to see that this unassuming building has been renovated and freshly painted; it's probably in better condition than the diminishing community it serves. Next we went to Mikhools iela to see the building (again standing out from the other rather scruffy buildings in the street by reason of its fresh coat of paint) bearing the dedicatory plaque to the noted theatre director, Zalman Mikhoels. Above the plaque is a low-relief medallion bearing his likeness.

After World War II, the Soviet Union once again incorporated Latvia within its borders. In the 1950s, the Soviet authorities decided to sweep clean the existing Jewish cemetery, and turn it into a public park. Communist doctrine naturally makes little (or no) allowance for the religious associations of cemeteries; and as for its community associations, too few Jews were left in Daugavpils after the war to uphold those in the face of the authorities. Anyway, numbers of gravestones were relocated to other sites, where they were re-erected. That's how the two luminaries of Dvinsk Jewry at the turn of the 20th century, Rabbi Simha Meir and Rabbi Yosef Rosen (the Rogachover Gaon), have come to rest side by side (at any rate, their tombstones have); in the old cemetery that was not the case. About 10 metres from their tombstones I found the re-erected tombstone of the father of my late father's cousin (now over ninety, and living in Israel). Of the Avin family home on Offizierskaya 49 (now Lacplesa iela), no trace remains. The street numbers on Lacplesa iela don't even reach 49. So it's possible that an open patch of ground opposite the bus station is where the family home once stood.

The forests outside Dvinsk were killing fields where the Nazi occupiers and their Latvian accomplices murdered tens of thousands of the city's Jews between July 1941 and July 1944. Thousands of Soviet prisoners of war were also summarily shot in those forests. Since the Soviet authorities regarded the singling out of the Jews for special mention as victims of Nazi terror as a manifestation of "nationalism", and therefore unacceptable, their memorials in the forests refer blandly to the "victims of fascism". This formula recurs all over Eastern Europe in memorials erected by the Soviets. There are, however, also a few memorial tablets in Hebrew in the Dvinsk forests, so maybe those were put up after the Soviets left in 1990-91. Latvia clearly was pleased - and relieved - to see the back of the Soviet occupiers; witnessing to this was the immediate removal of Russian-language signs and placards in all public places. Daugavpils is predominantly a Russian-speaking city, but not a single Russian-language sign or placard is to be seen in any public place or public facility. The same holds true for Riga.

Returning to the city from the forests, we passed by a large prison compound. Before the war, too, it served that function. During the Nazi occupation its function was modified for it became a holding centre for prisoners who were not criminals - unless being born Jewish is reckoned a crime. In other words, it became the locale of the Jewish ghetto in Dvinsk. I guess there's a certain grim appropriateness in its return after the war to its earlier role as a prison.

Best regards from Durban,
Ittamar Avin

Books by Latvia SIG Members

Avotaynu has published its first book that has nothing to do with genealogy. It has to do with a genealogist. Martha Lev-Zion of Omer, Israel, is very active in Jewish genealogy. To highlight just some of her activities, she is founder and president of the Jewish Genealogical Society of the Negev-a branch of the Israel Genealogical Society, and she is on the Board of Directors of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies. She was on the committee that made a
success the 2004 International Conference on Jewish Genealogy held in Jerusalem and is a past president of the Latvia Special Interest Group.

Twenty years ago, Martha, a single woman then in her 40s, heard about a TV documentary regarding 22 children with severe birth defects who had been abandoned by their birth parents in Israeli hospitals. Martha applied for one of those babies and got no immediate response. Eventually she was told that of the 65 applications received, hers was the last one considered; likely because of her age and marital status. In the end, with only one baby remaining, Martha took into her care a 14-month-old girl with Down syndrome. This book relates the amazing journey of Martha's life raising her adopted daughter Tamar.

Interwoven with her experiences fighting Israeli governmental authorities, school systems, the birth family, and even the U.S. government, was her commitment to bring up her daughter as normally as possible, and the incredible accomplishments her daughter has achieved.

Typical of her problem with agencies was the United States government who initially refused Tamar a visa because "the United States of America is not required to allow visas to the following categories of applicants—ex-convicts, dope addicts, or the mentally retarded." (Tamar now has dual citizenship Israeli and American).

I have always told people that genealogical research requires persistence and patience. Martha has demonstrated she is the ultimate genealogist through her persistence and patience to maximize her daughter's potential.

The book includes a photo album of Tamar (and Martha) in the 20 years of Tamar's life. It is easy and enjoyable reading; enjoyable because you know the ultimate outcome will be success.

Additional information about the book, including excerpts from the book, can be found at http://www.avotaynu.com/books/tamar.htm

Taking Tamar by Martha Lev-Zion

In 1986, Martha Lev-Zion, a single woman in her 40s, heard about a TV documentary regarding 22 children with severe birth defects who had been abandoned by their birth parents in Israeli hospitals. Martha applied for one of those babies, but was told that of the 65 applications received, hers would be the last one considered. In the end, with only one baby remaining, Martha took into her care a 14-month-old girl with Down syndrome. This book relates the amazing journey of Martha's life raising her daughter Tamar.

Interwoven with her experiences fighting Israeli governmental authorities, school systems, the birth family, and even the U.S. government, is her commitment to bring up her daughter as normally as possible, and the incredible accomplishments her daughter was able to achieve.

Excerpts from the book

“I was determined to make this a success and to give it all I could so that this child, who had been abandoned since the day of her birth fourteen months earlier, would know that she was loved, would learn to be as independent as she possibly could, and would live up to whatever potential she had inside her.”

“Every second of Tamar’s wakeful hours was spent in stimulation. We didn’t go down the stairs without counting the steps; I pointed out every leaf form, color, texture; we smelled flowers and trees; we looked at soft earth and cement; we looked at angles and shapes of every single thing; we spotted different birds and listened to their various chirping patterns…”

“He held it up in front of my eyes and I read: the United States of America is not required to allow visas to the following categories of applicants—ex-convicts, dope addicts, or the mentally retarded.”

“Other parents, seeing Tamar as she progressed, insisted that she was exceptional, and that their children never could do as well as she. I am convinced that it is this very attitude that hobbled their children. If you expect nothing, you get nothing.”

Announcement and overview submitted by Gary Mokotoff of Avataynu.
“I bless the day that Tamar’s abandonment led to my taking Tamar.”

**The Golden Door by Charles Nam**

Relatives of three immigrants from Eastern Europe await their arrival in New York in 1893. When passengers from their ship are ferried from Ellis Island to the Battery, the three immigrants are nowhere to be found. Ship line officials inform the relatives that the three had died at sea and their bodies dropped overboard, but how they died was not known.

Flashbacks describe the lives of the three persons up to the time of their deaths, revealing their character and behaviors that might influence what led to their deaths. The grieving relatives are determined to find out how they died in order to have closure and peace of mind. Sara Newman, the sister of one of the deceased, locates the ship’s captain and gets his explanation of what happened to her brother and the others. She then finds the ship’s purser, who tells her a different story about what took place. Later, she speaks to a neighbor’s sister, who had been on the ship, and gets a third account of how the three immigrants died.

Being unable to achieve closure, Sara’s family hires an immigration lawyer to investigate and determine what the real explanation was for how the deaths happened. The lawyer’s research leads to a court hearing that uncovers the facts, but not before some intriguing developments.

*Charlie’s book is available from Ingram Book Group, Baker & Taylor, and from iUniverse, Inc. To order call 1-800-AUTHORS.*

**Jewish Ancestors: A Guide to Jewish Genealogy in Latvia & Estonia by Arlene Beare**

This is a copy of the press release for the updated guide, which is now available from the Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain (JGSGB). All proceeds of the sale go to the JGSGB.

**Arlene Beare, UK**

**Description**

This is the eighth publication in the Jewish Ancestors series published by the JGSGB. The intention is to provide an insight into Jewish genealogy in the former Russian Empire with special reference to the laws governing Jews in the Baltic countries of Latvia and Estonia. Subjects include a brief history of Latvia, information on archival research inside and outside Latvia, conscription, emigration, the Holocaust in Latvia including the Rumbula memorial, cemeteries, museums and libraries. The Internet section has been updated with useful URLs and details of databases available on the net. There is a short guided tour of what Jewish sites to see when visiting Riga and includes a number of maps and colored pictures. A listing of Jewish Firms in Riga in 1891 has many names and addresses.

The Estonian section includes a short history of the country, archives and resources, Holocaust, Jewish schools and education, bibliography and references.

The author, Arlene Beare, is a past Chairman of the JGSGB Latvian Special Interest Group and Past President of JewishGen Latvia SIG. She is the Latvia SIG’s coordinator of the JewishGen Latvia Database and has extensive knowledge of research in this part of the world.

**Jewish Collections in the Central State Historical Archives in Riga**

The following is a partial list of the Jewish collections in the Central State Historical Archives in Riga, Latvia. Marina Mihailec, musicologist at the Latvian National Library, compiled the list. The list presented here represents only a fraction of what actually exists at the archives. Entries in the collection cover the period from the late 18th century until 1941.

**Partial List of the Titles in the Collection**

- Kurzem province revision lists.
- Riga Jewish social gymnasium and primary school
- Latvian art, literature, theatric, music dramatic and museum societies
- Latvian agricultural societies
- Latvia consumers societies
- Latvia societies and clubs for sport and tourism
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 2006 through June 2007. 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.

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 runs
from July 1 to June 30, so dues are now due for
the 2006 / 2007 membership year.
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.
COMMUNITY NUMBER: 10530
COMMUNITY NAME: DOBELE

DOBÈLE
(ACCORDING TO JEWISH SOURCES: DABLEN; IN GERMAN: DOBELN)

A TOWN IN THE JELGAVA DISTRICT, ZEMGALE REGION (FORMERLY KURLAND), SOUTH WEST LATVIA, U.S.S.R.

DOBÈLE WAS FOUNDED IN THE 14TH CENTURY BY THE LIVONIAN ORDER (AN ORDER OF CHRISTIAN KNIGHTS, FROM GERMANY). LATER IT WAS SEPARATED FROM THE DUCHY OF KURLAND AND CAME UNDER THE PROTECTION OF POLAND. IN 1783 IT WAS ANNEXED BY RUSSIA. FROM 1920 TO 1940 THE TOWN WAS PART OF INDEPENDENT LATVIA.


IN 1915, DURING WORLD WAR I, THE JEWS OF THE TOWN WERE EXPULSED TO THE INTERIOR OF RUSSIA TOGETHER WITH THE REST OF THE KURLAND JEWS.

IN 1920, FOLLOWING THE ESTABLISHMENT OF INDEPENDENT LATVIA, THERE WERE 25 JEWS IN THE TOWN. IN 1930 THE NUMBER HAD INCREASED TO 80 OUT OF A TOTAL POPULATION OF 2,152.


BETWEEN THE TWO WORLD WARS THE ZIONIST IDEA GAINED STRENGTH IN THE COMMUNITY. AT THE BEGINNING, THE MAJORITY SUPPORTED THE REVISIONIST MOVEMENT, BUT DURING THE THIRTIES THE MAJORITY IDENTIFIED THEMSELVES WITH THE ZIONIST SOCIALISTS. BEFORE WORLD WAR II A NUMBER OF HALUTZIM (PIONEERS) WENT ON ALIYAH TO ERETZ ISRAEL.

IN 1935 THE COMMUNITY NUMBERED 72 OUT OF A POPULATION OF 2,470.

THE HOLOCAUST PERIOD
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COMMUNITY NUMBER: 10530
COMMUNITY NAME: DOBELE

+---------------------------------------------+
|                                           |
|                                           |
| IN AUGUST 1944 THE TOWN WAS LIBERATED BY THE RED ARMY. |
| IN MEMORY OF THE JEWS OF DOBELE, A MONUMENT WAS ERECTED IN |
| THE JEWISH CEMETERY IN RIGA.                |
+---------------------------------------------+
COMMUNITY NUMBER: 10531
COMMUNITY NAME: DUNDAGA

DUNDAGA
(IN GERMAN: DUNDAGEN)

A SETTLEMENT NEAR THE COAST, IN THE VENTSPILS DISTRICT (FORMERLY VINDAU) KURZEME REGION (FORMERLY KURLAND), LATVIA, U.S.S.R. FROM 1920 TO 1940 IT WAS PART OF INDEPENDENT LATVIA.

IN 1925, THERE WERE 30 JEWS LIVING IN THE COUNTRY AROUND DUNDAGA. IN 1930 THIS NUMBER HAD INCREASED TO 63. THEY MADE A LIVING IN THE LUMBER TRADE.

IN 1933 THE JEWS OF THE TOWN PARTICIPATED IN THE ELECTIONS TO THE ZIONIST CONGRESS. THE MAJORITY VOTED FOR THE REVISIONIST LIST.

THE HOLOCAUST PERIOD


THE PLACE WAS LIBERATED BY THE RED ARMY IN 1945.
COMMUNITY NUMBER: 10532
COMMUNITY NAME: DURBE

DURBE
(IN GERMAN: DURBEN)

AN URBAN SETTLEMENT IN THE LIEPAJA (FORMERLY LIBAU) DISTRICT, KURZEME (FORMERLY KURLAND) REGION, SOUTH WEST LATVIA, U.S.S.R.

DURBE WAS FOUNDED IN THE 13TH CENTURY BY THE TEUTONIC ORDER (AN ORDER OF CHRISTIAN KNIGHTS IN GERMANY). IN THE 16TH CENTURY THE PLACE DEVELOPED AND BECAME A SETTLEMENT FOR SKILLED ARTISANS.
DURING THE PERIOD 1920-40, DURBE WAS IN INDEPENDENT LATVIA AND WAS GIVEN THE STATUS OF A CITY, BEING THE SMALLEST BY FAR IN LATVIA.

IN 1920 THERE WERE 30 JEWISH INHABITANTS OUT OF A POPULATION OF 453. BY 1935 THE NUMBER OF JEWS DROPPED TO 8 WHICH WAS UNDER 2% OF THE 525 INHABITANTS.
COMMUNITY NUMBER: 10533
COMMUNITY NAME: EGLAINE

EGLAINE
(AN ADDITIONAL NAME IS JELOWKA)

A SETTLEMENT IN THE ILUKSTE DISTRICT, THE ZEMGALE REGION (FORMERLY KURLAND), LATVIA, U.S.S.R. DURING THE YEARS 1920-1940 IT WAS PART OF INDEPENDENT LATVIA.

IN 1925 THERE WERE 25 JEWS IN THE PLACE, WHICH HAD A TOTAL POPULATION OF 511.
AS WITNESS TO THE ATTACHMENT OF THE JEWS OF THE PLACE TO ZIONISM, TEN OF THEM PARTICIPATED IN THE ELECTIONS TO THE 18TH ZIONIST CONGRESS WHICH WAS HELD IN 1933. NINE OF THEM VOTED FOR THE ZIONIST SOCIALIST LIST AND ONE VOTED FOR THE GENERAL ZIONISTS.

THE HOLOCAUST PERIOD

FOLLOWING THE RIBBENTROP-MOLOTOV ACCORD, SIGNED BY GERMANY AND THE U.S.S.R IN AUGUST 1939, THE RED ARMY ENTERED LATVIA.
IN THE SUMMER OF 1940 A SOVIET GOVERNMENT WAS INSTALLED.
COMMUNITY NUMBER: 502
COMMUNITY NAME: GOSTINI

GOSTINI
(AN ADDITIONAL NAME: DANKERE; IN JEWISH SOURCES: DANKERE; IN RUSSIAN: GLAZMANKA; IN GERMAN: TRENTELBERG).

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


DURING THE YEARS 1920-40 THE TOWN WAS PART OF INDEPENDENT LATVIA. GOSTINI UNITED WITH FLAVINAS IN 1927, BUT LATER SEPARATED FROM IT IN 1933.

JEWS BEGAN TO SETTLE IN THE PLACE AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 19TH CENTURY, AND IN 1847 THEY NUMBERED 192. MOST OF THEM WERE TRADITIONAL OBSERVANT JEWISH.

AT THE BEGINNING A SYNAGOGUE, HEVRA KADISHA AND "BIKUR CHOLIM" (SICK VISITING SOCIETY) WERE FOUNDED. BENEVOLENT INSTITUTIONS INCLUDED "HACHNESAT HAG'DOLAH" AND "MALBISH ARUMIN". AT THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY THERE WERE FOUR SYNAGOGUES IN THE TOWN; TWO WERE USED BY THE MITNAGDIM AND ONE BY THE HASSIDIM.

THE COMMUNITY WAS HEADED BY A RABBI AND PRESIDENT. THE RABBI, DOV-BAR ZEIGMAN, HELD THE RABBINICAL CHAIR FOR 41 YEARS FROM 1875.

A FIRE, WHICH BROKE OUT IN 1888, DESTROYED A NUMBER OF JEWISH OWNED HOMES AND SHOPS.

IN 1897 THE COMMUNITY NUMBERED 1,064, BEING 46% OF THE POPULATION. DURING WORLD WAR I, MANY JEWS WERE FORCED TO FLEE THE TOWN BECAUSE OF THE BATTLES WHICH RAGED IN THE AREA.

AFTER THE WAR JEWS BEGAN TO RETURN TO THE TOWN AND COMMUNAL LIFE WAS RENEWED. WITH THE HELP OF THE "JEWISH" (A RELIEF AGENCY OF AMERICAN JEWRY) A CREDIT FUND WAS ESTABLISHED, AND ONE SYNAGOGUE AND 220 PRIVATE HOMES WERE RENOVATED.

IN 1920 THERE WERE 544 JEWISH INHABITANTS WHO COMPRISED 61% OF THE TOTAL POPULATION OF GOSTINI.


THE COMMUNITY ORGANIZED A THEATRICAL TROUPE AND IN 1930 OPENED A CLUB, NAMED FOR BIALIK.

JEWS FIRST MADE A MEAGER LIVING AS TRADESMEN, SUCH AS: TAILORS, SHOEMAKERS AND BUTCHERS LATER, MOST OF THEM BECAME MERCHANTS.

JEWISH BUSINESSMEN IMPROVED: AS DID THAT OF PROPERTY OWNERS.
ONE OF THE MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY OWNED SEVERAL STORES,
AND LATER HE ESTABLISHED A LEATHER TANNERY.
AFTER THE SEPARATION OF THE TWO TOWNS THE INCOME OF THE JEWS
DECREASED.

THE "BUND" WAS ACTIVE FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE 20TH
CENTURY. ITS MEMBERS HAD A CENTRAL ROLE IN THE 1905
REVOLUTION.
THE "TSE'IREE ZION" PARTY WAS ORGANIZED IN THE 1920S, AND
MOST OF THE PUBLIC LIFE OF THE JEWS WAS CONCENTRATED IN IT.
FOR THE YOUTH, BRANCHES OF "HECHALUTZ" AND THE JEWISH SCOUTS
ASSOCIATION "BAR KOCHBA" WERE OPENED. LATER ON "HASHOMER
HA'TSA'IR-NEZACH", "GORDONIA" AND "BETAR" WERE ORGANIZED.

IN 1935 THE JEWISH POPULATION WAS 504 OUT OF A TOTAL OF 933.

THE HOLOCAUST PERIOD
FOLLOWING THE SIGNING OF THE ACCORD BY RIBENTROP AND
MOLOTOV ON BEHALF OF GERMANY AND THE U.S.S.R. RESPECTIVELY
(AUGUST 23, 1939), THE RED ARMY ENTERED LATVIA AND INSTALLED
A SOVIET GOVERNMENT IN THE SUMMER OF 1940. JEWISH
ENTERPRISES WERE NATIONALIZED AND JEWISH PUBLIC LIFE WAS
DISSOLVED.
ABOUT TEN DAYS AFTER THE GERMAN INVASION OF THE U.S.S.R.
(JUNE 22, 1941), THE TOWN WAS CAPTURED BY GERMAN FORCES. ALL
THE JEWS WHO WERE FOUND IN THE PLACE WERE MURDERED.
GRIVA

A TOWN IN THE ILUKSTE DISTRICT, ZENGALE (FORMERLY KURLAND) REGION, SOUTH EAST LATVIA, U.S.S.R.

GRIVA IS SITUATED ON THE SOUTHERN BANK OF THE RIVER DAUGAVA (OR DUNA). IN THE 19TH CENTURY IT WAS CONSIDERED A SUBURB OF Dvinsk (LATER ON DUGAVPILS), WHICH WAS ON THE OPPOSITE BANK OF THE RIVER. THE TITLE OF CITY WAS CONFERRED ON IT IN 1912. DURING THE PERIOD 1920-40, IT WAS PART OF INDEPENDENT LATVIA.

JEWS SETTLED IN GRIVA FROM THE BEGINNING OF THE 18TH CENTURY. THE COMMUNITY WAS ORGANIZED IN THE 19TH CENTURY. A JEWISH CEMETERY WAS CONSECRATED ABOUT 1720. IN 1831 THE NEVRA KADISHA WAS FOUNDED TOGETHER WITH THE OPENING OF A NEW CEMETRY.


IN 1897 THERE WERE 3,027 JEWS LIVING IN THE TOWN, COMPRISING 30% OF THE TOTAL POPULATION.

THE SEVERE FLOODS OF 1903 CAUSED THE DEATHS OF A NUMBER OF JEWS. IN 1910 THE COMMUNITY NUMBERED 5,207.


IN 1930 THE COMMUNITY NUMBERED 229.

MOST OF THE JEWS LIVED IN THE MAIN STREET OF THE TOWN. THEIR
COMMUNITY NUMBER: 10534
COMMUNITY NAME: GRIVA

Income was derived mainly from small scale business and from various trades. In addition, there were 5 doctors, an advocate and three Torah scribes. Many found employment as laborers in the factories of the nearby town, Dvinšk.

The Russian Revolution at the beginning of the 20th century saw an increase in anti-Semitism from 1913. At this time several Jewish families left Griva for the U.S.A. and South Africa, and others went on aliya to Eretz Israel. Political parties were not organized, but there were Zionists and Bundists (socialists and anti-Zionists).

On the eve of World War II there were 116 Jews in the town.

The Holocaust Period

Following the Ribbentrop-Molotov accord, signed in August 1939 by Germany and the U.S.S.R., the Red Army entered Latvia. In the summer of 1940 a Soviet government was installed. A number of Jewish businesses were nationalized. At the end of June 1941, following the outbreak of war on June 22 between Germany and the U.S.S.R., German forces captured the town. Immediately Jews were murdered, among them children who had been members of communist youth movements.

On July 10 the Jews were impressed into doing forced labor. At the end of July the few remaining Jews were transferred to the ghetto in Daugavpils. They were murdered together with the rest of the Jews of the area in the 'action of the provinces' (actions to liquidate the Jews of the provincial towns) in August 1941.
COMMUNITY NUMBER: 10535
COMMUNITY NAME: GROBINA

GROBINA
(IN JEWISH SOURCES: GRABIN; IN GERMAN: GROBIN)

A TOWN IN THE LIEPAJA (FORMERLY LIBAU) DISTRICT, KURZEME
(FORMERLY KURLAND) REGION, WESTERN LATVIA, U.S.S.R.

THE TOWN WAS ESTABLISHED AROUND AN ENCAMPMENT, SET UP BY THE
LIVONIAN ORDER (AN ORDER OF CHRISTIAN KNIGHTS FROM GERMANY)
IN THE MIDDLE OF THE 13TH CENTURY. FROM 1561 TO 1795 THE
DUCHY OF KURLAND WAS UNDER POLISH RULE. IN 1796, AFTER THE
THIRD PARTITION OF POLAND, KURLAND WAS ANNEXED BY RUSSIA. IN
THE 19TH CENTURY, WITH THE EXPANSION OF THE NEIGHBORING PORT
TOWN OF LIBAU, GROBINA LOST SOME OF ITS IMPORTANCE AND THE
POPULATION DECREASED.
DURING THE PERIOD 1920-1940 THE TOWN WAS PART OF INDEPENDENT
LATVIA.

THE JEWISH COMMUNITY WAS ORGANIZED AT THE BEGINNING OF THE
19TH CENTURY. THE FIRST RABBI WAS APPOINTED IN 1819, AND THE
COMMUNITY HAD THE SERVICES OF A SHUCHE (RITUAL
SLAUGHTERER).
IN 1835 THE JEWISH COMMUNITY NUMBERED 499. IN THE MIDDLE OF
THE CENTURY THE NUMBER WAS REDUCED AFTER TWO FAMILIES LEFT
TO LIVE IN AGRICULTURAL SETTLEMENTS IN SOUTHERN RUSSIA, AND
FOLLOWING AN EPIDEMIC OF CHOLERA WHICH BROKE OUT IN THE AREA
IN 1846.
IN 1861 THE JEWS NUMBERED 597 OF THE POPULATION, COMPRISING
42% OF THE TOTAL.
DURING THE 1880S A JEWISH SCHOOL WAS OPENED. THE FOLLOWING
INSTITUTIONS WERE ACTIVE IN THE TOWN: A YESHIVAH FOR
BEGINNERS, AND FOR ADVANCED STUDENTS THERE WAS THE YESHIVAH
"BA'ALEI MUSAR".
IN 1897 THERE WERE 370 JEWS LIVING IN THE TOWN.
ON THE EVE OF WORLD WAR I THERE WERE A SYNAGOGUE AND A BETH
MIDRASH (SEMINARY) IN GROBINA. DURING THE COURSE OF THE WAR
A "RKKUR CHOLIM" (SICK VISITING SOCIETY) WAS ESTABLISHED.
AFTER THE WAR THE NUMBER OF JEWS IN THE PLACE DECREASED.
DURING THIS PERIOD THE SYNAGOGUE WAS USED AS A GRAINS
WAREHOUSE, AND THE JEWS ORGANIZED A MINYAN (RELIGIOUS
QUODRUM) ON SABBATHS IN THE BETH MIDRASH. THE JEWISH SCHOOL
DID NOT OPERATE.

AT THE BEGINNING THE JEWS WERE ENGAGED IN PETTY TRADING AND
IN THE SALE OF SECOND HAND CLOTHING.
STUDENTS OF THE YESHIVOTH, MAINLY THE SONS OF THE WEALTHY,
DISTANCED THEMSELVES FROM ORTHODOXY AFTER THEIR RELIGIOUS
STUDIES AND BECAME MEMBERS OF THE FREE PROFESSIONS: DOCTORS,
ADVOCATES AND ENGINEERS. MANY LEFT THE PLACE TO SETTLE IN
THE LARGE TOWNS.
IN THE 1920S THE FACTORIES AND BUSINESSES OWNED BY JEWS WERE
COMPARATIVELY IN EXCESS TO THE NUMBER OF JEWS IN THE
COMMUNITY NUMBER: 10535
COMMUNITY NAME: GROBINA

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POPULATION OF THE TOWN.

MEMBERS OF THE COMMUNITY DONATED MONEY TO KEREN KAYEMETH L’ISRAEL.

AT THE ELECTIONS TO THE 18TH ZIONIST CONGRESS IN 1933, 42 JEWS OF GROBINA VOTED FOR THE ZIONIST ORGANIZATION (HISTADRUT HA’ZIONIT) LIST, 8 VOTED FOR THE REVISIONISTS AND ONE FOR MIZRACHI.

ON THE EVE OF WORLD WAR II THE COMMUNITY NUMBERED ONLY 58.

THE HOLOCAUST PERIOD

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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. i.e. the modern names of the cities as used in Latvia today.

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

Bibliographical or archival sources used in your Latvian genealogical research:

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

Cemeteries, travel experiences, etc:

Suggested newsletter topics:

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

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

Include contact information in the SIG FF?

_____ Yes  _____ No
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<td>Bauska, Riga Ogintz, Ogints, Hofschwowitz</td>
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<td>PERLA</td>
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<td>Harold</td>
<td>Riga Weitzman/Waitsman, Bader</td>
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