

Latvia SIG

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Editor's Comments

This is the last issue of the membership year, which normally ends with the annual meeting of the Latvia SIG at the IAJGS Conference. This year's conference will be in Salt Lake City from July 15th until July 20th. I hope to include a summary of the SIG meeting and other activities in the first issue of the new membership year.

Don Hirschhorn provided an outline of the Latvia SIG's program for this year's conference and, as you can see, almost a whole day is devoted to SIG activities. We hope to see many of you in Salt Lake.

A major project undertaken by the SIG and directed by Arlene Beare, is bringing online the 1st All Russian Census for 1897 for Dvinsk. Arguably, Dvinsk was the center of Jewish life in Latvia at that time and many of you have roots in Dvinsk. Unfortunately, acquisition of these Dvinsk records has been delayed somewhat, as discussed by Arlene in her status report.

I recently received an email from Dave Michaelson, which updates his ideas concerning the renovation of the Green synagogue in Rezekne. I have included the main points in this issue, in part because of the activities that are getting underway concerning the synagogue in Kuldiga. You may remember Dave's inspirational talk at the SIG's luncheon last year and the article on which it was based that appeared in this newsletter. On the Kuldiga symposium website, http://www.bueroschwimmer.de/Kuldiga_introduction.html, I noticed that Gita Umanovska will talk about the possibilities of cooperation between municipalities and the Council of Jewish Communities and Religious Organization (CJCRO) focusing on the case of the Rezekne synagogue (Eastern Latvia), that has been reconstructed by financial help of CJCRO. She is vice director of the Council of Jewish Communities and Religious Organizations in Riga. Is this the Green Synagogue? We don't know. I have tried to contact Ms Umanovska, but she has not responded yet.

Eric Benjaminson, who has written for this newsletter in the past, will be attending the Kuldiga Symposium, as will Martha Lev Zion, and I have

included a synopsis of Eric's presentation. (You can find the complete agenda for the Symposium on their website.)

The response to my announcing the Symposium on the SIG listserv resulted in a number of interesting comments and I have included some of them, without attribution, in this issue.

I hope most of you have had a chance to visit the new Latvia SIG website, which I am proud to say is one of the best SIG sites anywhere. We owe a debt of gratitude to Bruce Dumes for bringing this site to fruition, and now we can see the remarkable journey he is taking in discovering his family's history. His article should be an inspiration to many of us as we run into "brick walls" as we pursue our own research.

Finally, I am including another of the testimonies of Latvian Holocaust survivors in this issue. Hannah Cherfas life story from early childhood to almost present-day Latvia is long and detailed, so I will include the remainder of the interview in the first issue of the new membership year.

Please remember that the yearly membership is now ending so please rejoin or renew your membership in the SIG. Details are included later in this issue and can be found on the SIG website.

Barry Shay
bbshay@starpower.net

IAJGS Conference in Salt Lake City

Thursday, July 19th is LATVIA SIG DAY commencing with exciting programs starting at 11:15 a.m. and ending at 4:45 p.m. Whether this is your first conference or you are a seasoned genealogist, if your interest is Latvia this should not be missed.

The Latvia SIG formal annual meeting will be held from 11:15 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Board members will present status updates for this past year's projects and activities. Future plans will be discussed and the election of officers will be held.

The SIG luncheon will follow the formal meeting from 12:30 p.m. to 1:45 p.m. Lois Ogilby-Rosen is our special guest and she will discuss her 2006 trip to Latvia and Lithuania and her research con-

cerning the ROZINKO family. Lois has done a remarkable job in researching the ROZINKO family in Latvia and Lithuania and has written about her work in the JGSLA and Latvia SIG newsletters. Lois's presentation will provide information that will help both neophyte and experienced genealogists in their own research. The luncheon will also be the perfect time to mix with other Latvian Genners.

Following the luncheon at 2:00 p.m., Henry Blumberg, president of the Latvia SIG, will give a presentation entitled, "The Latvian Shtetls of our Ancestors at the Beginning of the 20th Century." Henry has made several trips to Latvia and is on the board of the Leipaja Holocaust Memorial and a major supporter of the Grobina Holocaust Memorial. He has probably the world's largest collection of Latvian shtetl photographs and picture postcards and will include many of them in his power point presentation. If you want to view a specific shtetl, please let us know and if Henry has it he will include it.

From 3:30 p.m. to 4:45 p.m. Sandra and Donald Hirschhorn will discuss their Latvian family reunion that was attended by 141 descendants and spouses of Levin Hirschhorn (1798-1861) from Hasenpoth (Aizpute). Using JewishGen, Latvian Historical Archives, Yad Vashem, and oral histories from relatives, the reunion was a remarkable success with 75% of the attendees meeting relatives for the first time and the younger generation overwhelmed with enthusiasm. More than 40 wall displays featured at the reunion have been adapted for Power Point and will be presented.

Project Status: The 1897 All Russian Census for Dvinsk
by
Arlene Beare

In 2006 after much negotiation the SIG was sent a letter from the Director of the Latvian State Historical Archives offering to sell us the microfilms of the 1897 Dvinsk census. We accepted with great joy.

Shortly after this the director of the Archives decided that the archivists should prepare the 1897 database for the Archive site on the Web. The site is of course in Latvian, which means that unless

one can understand Latvian one cannot search the site. The reason he gave was that the Archive had received a donation from the State, which meant he did not have to rely on money raised from selling the microfilms to us.

The director withdrew his original offer but agreed that we could buy the data once their site was online. This work will not commence until 2008 and so I cannot promise you a JewishGen searchable 1897 Dvinsk database in the near future. Even if we start to receive data in 2008 it will probably take a year to get the database online. We always receive the data in batches of about 2000 names and we pay for each batch as we receive it.

Donations to the project will still be gratefully received and will be designated for the 1897 census project whenever the donor requests this.

The Latvia SIG can be proud of the fact that we have in the past few years acquired a great deal of data and made really worthwhile searches possible on the JewishGen site. We do not have the manpower that some of the other large SIGs have which makes it easier for them to form active working coops that acquire and distribute data. They also have much more cooperation from the directors of their Archives.

Green Synagogue Update
by
Dave Michaelson

I met with an NYU professor, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, who has some interest in this kind of project, though her connections are all in Poland. I came across her through two routes: someone who read my articles on the synagogue suggested I contact her, and I came across her name because she wrote an introduction to the 1995 edition of the famous anthropological work on shtetl life, *Life is With People*. She in some ways had little material to offer in terms of connections, but she had one excellent idea. Very briefly, she suggested focusing on the cemetery first because it provides an opportunity that could well attract more interest (and funds) later but would not take much money now. I immediately realized there could be a great link with Latvia SIG that could be expanded later.

The Jewish cemetery of Rezekne is run down and decaying. It needs to be restored and maintained. Barbara suggested creating a partnership involving a local school in Rezekne, the Jewish community and the local historical society whereby the school, under guidance, could clean up and document the tombstones of the synagogue, the grounds etc as an ongoing project. She suggested a local high school adopts the cemetery and the historical society and Jewish community work with them. I would add that the Latvia SIG could post the documentation of the synagogue online. I can work with websites like Culture Kitchen to give the whole project wider exposure. Ideally we could also link living descendents of Rezekne Jews with tombstones and, in the process, link that living descendent with the kids who worked to clean and document the tombstone. That might be a bit harder. This could be the next step in a broad project (The Rezekne Project I am tentatively calling it) that includes the synagogue later when we have a broader range of connections. Of course if we can get those connections faster, all the better!

Symposium for the Reconstruction of the Kuldiga Synagogue

Eric Benjaminson, a member of the Latvia SIG and the sponsor of the Kuldiga Shtetlink under JewishGen, has informed us that the City Council of Kuldiga is planning to reconstruct the Kuldiga Synagogue into a concert hall. As you may know, by the beginning of 1942 most of the Jewish residents of Kuldiga were killed and their property was divided among their murderers and the Torah scrolls were put into the municipal archives.

Agnese Kusmane, the town landscape architect in Kuldiga and Mr. Sven Eggers of the Berlin architectural and curator firm of Buro Schwimmer, are organizing a symposium from September 2nd through September 9th to determine how the new concert hall should convey Kuldiga's Jewish history and the memory of the Shoah. They are trying to find survivors and/or relatives of survivors of the Holocaust in Kuldiga and other interested parties who may be interested in participating in the symposium.

Kuldiga Symposium (from the Symposium website)

After the independence of Latvia, a discussion started about the joint guilt of Latvians in the extermination of Jews. Again and again the discussion was instigated by Jewish historians such as Margers Vestermanis.

There is conspicuous defense for this controversial dispute in Latvian Society, showing historical parallels to German society's denial of blame in the years after 1945. The discussions concerning Auschwitz as a crime against mankind, only started in the late seventies. Latvian society, however, now receives a great deal more international pressure. As a result of this pressure, at last, a special state commission has been set up to deal with the question of how to create a suitable memorial of Auschwitz.

In contrast to Germany, in many Latvian towns the synagogue buildings still exist and are owned by the communities. In Sabile, where discussions about how to handle their synagogue buildings resulted in it no longer being used as a gymnasium, but after an extensive renovation, as a communal Jewish museum.

In Riga remains the only Jewish community nowadays still using their synagogue. In the rest of the country the synagogues just remain as ruins or have different uses. A public debate about how these places should be used as landmarks of the memory, has not begun yet. Right now, there is no indication that in Latvian towns, Jewish communities will appear again. A discussion about ways of keeping and shaping the memory cannot exclude the possibility of Jewish life in Latvian towns in the future.

In Kuldiga the synagogue building was used as a cinema up to the middle of the nineties. When it was shut down, plans followed to set up a nightclub. The May family heard this and started a petition around Riga's art scene, suggesting a transformation of the building into a concert hall. Leo May was born in Kuldiga and survived Auschwitz. In the summer of 2006 sociologist Mike Hartwig met with art historian and landscape architect Agnese Kusmane from the town council of Kuldiga. Since then there has been a debate

over how the synagogue building could become place of memory, a place to memorialize the murdered Jews of Kuldiga. Since the autumn 2006, historian and publicist Jens Hoffmann and the architect and curator Sven Eggers joined in the discussion.

In the late summer of 2007 an interdisciplinary workshop will take place in Kuldiga with the support of Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. The results will be presented to the public in Kuldiga. The discussions concerning Kuldiga's synagogue are intended to provide a template for future discussions in other locations. What is the responsibility of a society for its own actions? Are some memorials more of a burden to society than a force for reflection? Is it adequate to install a Jewish museum in a place where 'Jewish life' occurred? Is the plan to build a concert hall in the former synagogue in Kuldiga, a physical demonstration of Adorno's objective, "to do everything to make Auschwitz not happen again"?

The Perception of Kuldiga in the Memory of Jewish Ancestors

Eric Benjaminson, Namibia/USA

In memory of Bernhard, Joseph, Esfir, and Ruth Benjaminsohn (Kuldiga, Aizpute, Riga)

(This is a synopsis of the talk Eric will deliver in at the Symposium in Kuldiga. Ed.)

I can only speak for my family and myself, but I hope that there are areas of agreement between our perspective and that of other descendants of Kuldiga Jews

My paternal grandfather and many previous generations in my family were born and/or lived in Kuldiga, beginning in the early 18th century

I believe, and I heard my grandfather say, that their lives there until the 20th century were measured and in some ways idyllic, with certain advantages over the lives of other Jews who lived deeper in the Czar's Russian Empire

In town, they lived lives as tailors, musicians, and general store owners; earlier, they worked on German estates, perhaps in the lumber trade and in distilleries

Many of my ancestors were professional violinists, and this appreciation for the memory of music in my family makes me personally interested in any future connection of the former synagogue with music

They and other Jews made up fully half the population of Kuldiga until the 20th century. My ancestors served as officers of the synagogue (one as Treasurer), others provided housing for Russian soldiers, and still others served on the road paving committee of the city. One of my great-uncles was a Guild merchant who had direct contacts with Czarist officials on behalf of all the citizens of the city

Given the history of the 1940s, my family was fortunate enough to have, in most cases, immigrated to South Africa or the United States by the year 1920. Others, however, chose to seek their economic betterment in Liepaja and Riga, where they were caught by the Nazi invasion.

Of those relatives who went to South Africa, especially my great-grandfather and grandfather, until the Second World War they returned on visits to Latvia several times. Clearly family ties drew them back, but the perception they had of the town cannot have been negative

Their memories of the town were tied directly to their mental picture of "Courland." Courland was a word I heard often as a child – "Courlandish weather", the forests and rivers of Courland, our relatives in Courland. Many of my relatives were buried in the U.S. in grave plots arranged by the Courlander Society. My great-grandfather, a professional musician in South Africa, arranged a series of concerts to raise relief funds for Courlandish Jews during the First World War. Home was clearly home.

But with all that, their memories were deeply affected by the Holocaust. Kuldiga became a mental image of dark and mysterious horrors, of the imagination of torture and death and uncertainty for those relatives that had been caught there by the war. The decade from 1940 to 1950 was filled with attempts to understand what had happened and whether there were any survivors. As time went on, and as it became clear that there were no

survivors, the losses transformed themselves into memory.

Memory has always been an important concept for Jews, given our common heritage and ties to centuries of common histories and legends. The Holocaust forced a new role for memory, as we tried to use memory to provide a certain honor and remembrance for those who had died. The synagogue project in Kuldiga is a microcosm of that effort, and we greatly appreciate the role of the City of Kuldiga. In my own view, what is most important about the synagogue renovation is that it provides a site where the pre-war Jewish population is memorialized, perhaps through a name book or plaque, while creating an environment that honors their presence in what was the center and the heart of the now-destroyed community.

Editor's Note

Since I disseminated the information concerning the *Symposium for the Re-construction of the Kuldiga Synagogue* on the Latvia SIG list-serve, Eric and I have received a number of comments concerning the reconstruction. The comments focused on whether a concert hall was the proper venue for a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust in Kuldiga. In the meantime, a proposal to convert the synagogue to a library has also been put forward. As of this writing, no decision has been made and, I suspect, that decision will depend quite heavily on the results of the symposium.

In lieu of reproducing the comments in their entirety, I have included excerpts of some of the responses below.

Other memorials in the Baltic countries: *Most aim to create a memorial recording the names of victims, occasionally with information on the sponsors. As an example, in Lithuania there are a number of monuments featuring victims' names at a central point in a few towns. In smaller centers, museums encompassing the Jewish presence as well as the Holocaust have been a focus. In some cases disused, neglected synagogues were adapted for this purpose. Planned educational sessions on the history, life and the holocaust experience are often part of these projects.*

As a principle, or a precedent, none is identified or associated with a possible place of entertainment.

Response: *I think you have to look at the alternative—which is nothing in Kuldiga. I think something similar to what you stated, "Most initiatives have translated into museums and educational centers covering the history and role of the Jewish communities concerned," could certainly be incorporated into the concert hall. Such a use would certainly be more appealing than a stone monument on a street corner somewhere. I think the intent of the planners should be encouraged and I would suspect that they are open to suggestions like yours. Certainly more (non-Jewish) people would be made aware of Jewish life and death in Kuldiga. I don't think non-Jewish tourists or residents of Kuldiga would flock to a static memorial statue. Some concerts could even feature works by Latvian Jewish composers, a couple of whom were listed in Feigmanis's book.*

What should be included: *I took it as a given that the project would include prominent recognition that this was a synagogue and would include both historical information and records to this effect plus a memorial to those killed in the Holocaust. If this is not part of the picture currently, I feel that we need to contest it in the strongest possible terms.*

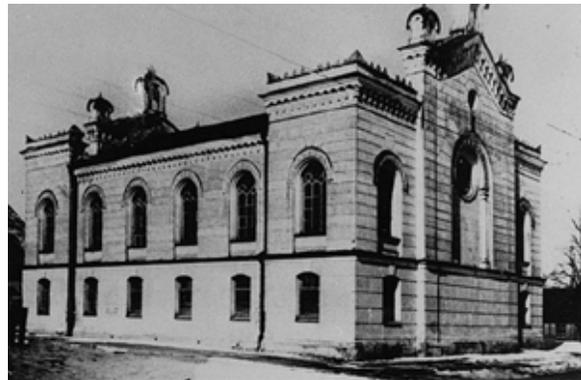
Other converted synagogues: *We just returned from Latvia, where we participated in the unveiling of a memorial plaque on the synagogue at neighboring Aizpute/Hasenpoth. The event was quite well reported in the Latvian press, e.g. in the "Kurzeme Vārds" and in the local "Aizputes Avīze".*

The synagogue at Aizpute, which dates from 1752, had already been converted into a theatre, but until we pressed for one, there was no sign to say what the building had been. With the help of a wonderful and effective Jewish resident of Liepaja, we managed to establish a good working relationship with the town authorities. Now a memorial book has been compiled, which contains the names of all the Jewish victims murdered in Aizpute, and a copy is to be kept in the museum.

Visit to Kuldiga: *We used the opportunity to see Jewish landmarks, visit the local museum and speak to its curator about establishing a similar memorial plaque on the synagogue building there (not then knowing about the symposium) He mumbled that, "the synagogue is a problem for the town," when we entered his office - remember, this was only a week ago. There we noticed a large cabinet with card index files arranged by year, and this included two full boxes labeled 1940-1941. We requested access to these files, but were rudely ushered out of the building. You should press for access to the information kept in the Kuldiga archives relating to its former Jewish inhabitants.*

I am not inclined to participate in the symposium, which seems to me to be an excuse by the town's authorities to gain rubber stamp approval from "the Jews" for their concert hall project. It would be far more appropriate to turn the synagogue building into a local Holocaust museum.

Consensus: *Insist at the symposium to include the names of the Kuldiga Jews as a memorial and to release all pertinent information in the town archives. At the same time, I think that some bridges would be built through the town council's idea to make the building recognizable as a former synagogue and memorial, while still making it a place where the current town residents (almost all of whom were born after the War) can enjoy its presence. I would guess that many Latvians in Kuldiga don't even know it was a synagogue, since it's been a cinema since the 1960s.*



Kuldiga Synagogue after the Shoah

Extraordinary Commission List for Kuldiga

(Provided by Mike Getz)

The USSR established the Extraordinary State Commission in 1942 to investigate and document events and crimes in Soviet territory under the Nazis. NKVD teams (formerly KGB) in every locality of the Soviet Union recorded names of victims. The records that I have were copied at the USHMM and are in Russian. I remain grateful to Vadim Altskan and Peter Lande for their help and guidance in obtaining these records. Vladimir Salita, whose voluntary expertise is highly appreciated, insightfully translated the records we have for Kuldiga.

While most of the victims in this list are Jewish, there are probably a few non-Jews listed as well.

<u>Surname</u>	<u>Given Name</u>	<u>Father</u>	<u>Born</u>	<u>Residence</u>	<u>Executed</u>
ABOLS	FRIDRICH		1917	KULDIGA	1941
AKMENTISH	EDUARD	VALDEMAR	1923	KULDIGA	1943
ANEKS				KULDIGA	
ANSIS	MIKELIS			KULDIGA	
AUSS	YANIS			KULDIGA	
BOGDANOV	YAN	DONAT		KULDIGA	
BRUDER	YAKOB			KULDIGA	1941
BULAVA				KULDIGA	
CHANKEVICHEVA	NATALIA	STEPANOVNA	1944	KULDIGA	
DYATLOVSKAYA	ANNA	SERGEY		KULDIGA	1942
EGOROV	GEORGIY	VLADIMIR		KULDIGA	
EGOROV	NIKOLAY	VLADIMIR		KULDIGA	1942
ENGELIS	YANIS			KULDIGA	
ERMANS	FRITS	YAN	1923	KULDIGA	1944
FELDMANIS				KULDIGA	1941
GOLDINGEN				KULDIGA	
GOLTSMAN	LEOPOLD			KULDIGA	1941
GOTSHALK	MOISEY			KULDIGA	1941
GRUNDMANIS				KULDIGA	
IBIN'SH	GENRICH	NIKOLAY	1908	KULDIGA	1941
ISAEV	IVAN	ARSENI		KULDIGA	1941
IVANOV	IVAN	STEPAN	1874	KULDIGA	1942
KAZHMER	EMILIA	YAN	1894	KULDIGA	1945
KESTER				KULDIGA	
KLOK				KULDIGA	
KRAVIS	MALVINA			KULDIGA	1944
KRAVIS	LAVISA			KULDIGA	1944
KRAVIS	SILVIA			KULDIGA	1944
KRAVIS	IRMA			KULDIGA	1944
KRISTANSON				KULDIGA	
KURNAKOVA	ANASTASIA	MIKHAIL		KULDIGA	1942
LANGMAN	KARLIS			KULDIGA	
LAPKOVSKI	YAZEK		1902	KULDIGA	1942
LEYGMAN	KARLIS	YAN	1908	KULDIGA	1943
MEDINSKI	YAZEKS		1897	KULDIGA	1941
MEZHLAUKS				KULDIGA	
MISHENKO	VARVARA			KULDIGA	
MISUNAS	YANIS			KULDIGA	1941
MUTSINIEKS	KATRINA		1906	KULDIGA	1944
PIRTNIEKS				KULDIGA	
ROSTOVSKI	IOSSEL		1861	KULDIGA	1941
RUTENS	ALBERT	FRIDRICH	1910	KULDIGA	1944
RUZHITSKI	ARNOLD	KARL	1914	KULDIGA	1944
SALIN'SH				KULDIGA	
SARKIS	ALFRED	ERNEST	1923	KULDIGA	1943
SHENKTON				KULDIGA	
SHVAN	ARNOLD	TEODOR	1911	KULDIGA	
SPROGIS				KULDIGA	
STALS		YAN		KULDIGA	1944
STOKMANIS	KRISTALS			KULDIGA	1944
TITAR	KARLIS			KULDIGA	
ULMKALN	PETR	YAN	1906	KULDIGA	1941
VALKOVSKI	VILIS		1941	KULDIGA	
VILMUT	GARALD		1914	KULDIGA	

You may ask yourself, well...How did I get here?

by
Bruce Dumes

(With Apologies to Cat Stevens and David Byrne)

A year ago I didn't know who I was or where I came from. This, however, had nothing to do with amnesia. I grew up being told my name could not possibly be a Russian name and it must have been changed and I was told we came from a small village in Russia called Visky, but no one knew where it was or if it still existed. I only knew that my grandfather said I could remember it because it rhymed with "whiskey."

I started doing family research about five years ago. My dad had been keeping family-tree data on his PC through the 90's. We became aware that my dad had Alzheimer's sometime in 2000 or 2001 and I thought someone had to take over his genealogy work. I'm a computer programmer by profession, and I really hated the software he was using. I decided that I'd just write my own and put the data on the web. The result is my family website, <http://dumes.net>. I had no idea what a journey I was undertaking!

**Who could imagine I'd be wand'ring so,
far from the home I love - Bock/Harnick**

Sometime in 2002 or 2003 I discovered the Ellis Island website (<http://ellisland.org/>) and Ancestry.com and set out to find my family in those records. I thought it would be easy since "Dumes" is a relatively rare name. If you search on the Ellis Island site, you'll see half a dozen Dumes possibilities but none with a first name that I recognized. I didn't know at that time that they traveled under what was sometimes referred to as their Yiddish name and didn't take their American names until after they were in America. I despaired of ever being able to find anything! However, I found that if I carefully reviewed each record, there was much more to be found.

For example, one of the Dumes records is for "Taubs Dumes" from "Wiskey, Kowno". "Wiskey" sounded promising; remember that my grandfather said he came from a place that rhymes with whiskey. I started reading more of the Taubs re-

cord and found a notation that her final destination was Suffern, N.Y., where she was meeting her brother-in-law J. Kaplan. My grandfather's oldest sister was married to a fellow named Jacob Kaplan. I noticed then that Taubs was traveling with someone named Stive Kopeleuskaja. Stive noted that she was traveling to meet her brother, Jacob Kaplan. Jacob Kaplan is a very common name, but it was pretty compelling evidence. Taubs listed the "nearest relative or friend in country whence alien came" as "Sch Dumes, Wisky Wit. Gub." My great-grandmother was called Sadie Silk Dumes, but my cousin Lillian Zoll had referred to her once as Shaina Freida, so that seemed even more compelling. I didn't know what "Wit. Gub" meant at that time, but soon understood.

Brother-in-Law J. Kaplan

Sch Dumes



**Rebecca Dumes Leiberman,
born Riva-Taube Dumesh**

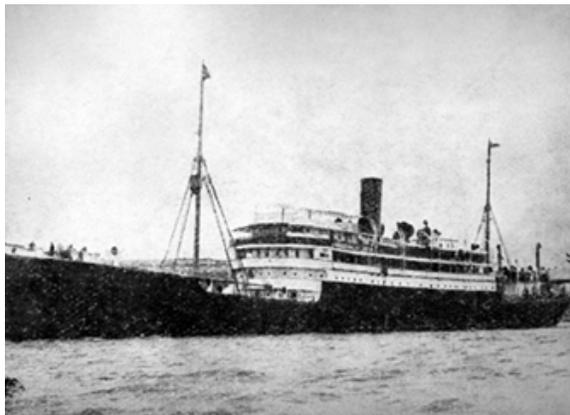
Interestingly, my cousin Phyllis Miller told me, after I'd been able to prove that the "Taubs Dumes" record was really my father's aunt Rebecca

Dumes Lieberman, that she'd seen this record in her research, but had discounted it because her mother told her that Rebecca came to America with Fannie (Phyllis' grandmother) and so she assumed this record was not for our family. It's a good lesson; never trust family stories **too** much when doing genealogical research.

I was able to find more and more records as I learned how to use the search tools better and allow for alternate spellings and sometimes wrongly transcribed names. I later learned that naturalization papers often provide help in specifying the date, port and ship name, especially the so called "2nd papers."

Finding these ship manifests was amazing! I could see images of the ships in which they came to America and the (very few) stories my grandfather told of his trip to America came to life for me. My grandmother retold some of these stories. You can hear her and read a transcript, from a recording made in 1977: http://www.dumes.net/oral_histories/Freda_Dumes_interview.shtml.

The Prinz Adalbert, which carried my grandfather, his mother and two of his siblings to Philadelphia in August 1912 is shown below.



The Prinz Adalbert

Whiskey River don't run dry – Willie Nelson

But I still didn't know about Visky. And I didn't know how they came up with a name like "Dumes" in Russia.

I had one clue regarding the name "Dumes": a photograph of what was supposed to be my great-grandfather's grave in Russia. I'd seen a copy of this when I was a kid. My grandfather showed it to me once and said that it had been sent before the war with a note saying, "We are taking care of the graves. Send money." He said they never got any notes after the war. I hadn't seen this photo for almost 35 years. My cousin Phyllis invited me to scan some photos she had for the family website. One of the photos was of this grave and she wasn't sure from where it came.

At that time I didn't know about JewishGen and that nice people were out there happy to help with translations! But with the help of my wife, my neighbor and info from Google, I finally had a translation.



איש
 A man
תם זישר מוה
 simple and honest, our teacher and rabbi
חיים יהושע
 Chaim Yehushua
בר זאב דומעס
 Bar Zev Dumes
נפטר כד שבט
 died 24 Shevat
שנת תרסד
 year 5664
תנצקה
 an abbreviation of a verse from the Bible, the first
 book of Samuel, 25:29, "May his soul be bound up in
 the bond of eternal life"

Notes: "Bar Zev" means "Son of Zev", so we must
 assume that Zev was his father's Hebrew name, or at
 least part of it. 24 Shevat 5664 correlates to Feb 10,
 1904.

Translation

So they had been using the name Dumes in Russia, at least by 1904!

My dad had listed the place of birth of my ancestors in Vitebsk in his database. By this time, he didn't remember enough to answer any questions regarding Visky vs. Vitebsk and I was completely unaware of the Vitebsk Gubernia and what that meant.

Using Alexander Beider's book, "*A Dictionary of Jewish Surnames from the Russian Empire*. Teaneck, NJ: Avotaynu, 1993, I found the following about the name Dumes.

Domashevskij (Vilna, Mogilev, Ekater. gub.)
 T: from the village Domashi (Novogrudok d.,
 Disna d.) {Dumashevskij, Dumesh (Dumes)}.

Dumes (Dvinsk) T: see Dumesh. T: see Domashevskij.

Dumesh (Dvinsk) T: from the village Dumsy
 (Dumsie in Polish) (Kovno d.) {Dumes}. T:
 see Domashevskij.

I also started reading about how the Russian Empire was divided into Gubernias, and the Gubernia was named for the largest city in it. The Vitebsk Gubernia ("Vit. Gub" mentioned in Taubs'

ship manifest) was huge and comprised what is today Belarus and parts of Latvia, Russia and, I think, Lithuania.

Doing some Google searches, I found a place called Domashi in Belarus. I recalled that my grandfather had said something about White Russia. White Russia is Belarus! So I started searching Belarus and found all sorts of places that could have turned into the word Visky, like "Vishkoye". But I found there were about 15 places with names similar to Vishkoye, and again I despaired of ever being able to sort it out.

Back Home Again in Indiana-MacDonald /Hanley

Meanwhile, the family website had brought together cousins who had not seen each other in decades, and many who had never met. My cousin Art Lieberman was organizing a family reunion, the first one in 26 years. The reunion was to be held June 23-25, 2006 in Indianapolis, Indiana (As I write this, it is June 23, 2007, exactly one year to the day after the reunion!) and Art asked me to put together a multi-media presentation of the family's history.

In early June, I was doing web searches and I tried the name Viski. I had once seen, on a web search, a place called Viski in Latvia, but of course I ignored that because we didn't come from Latvia, we came from what is now Belarus (or so I thought). But as I read more, I realized that I had been looking in the wrong place. Viski (pronounced "Vishki") was in Latvia, about 14 miles northeast of Daugavpils.

After realizing this, I searched the Latvia SIG pages in JewishGen and found something in a newsletter index: "Viski Cemetery Data, contributed by Marion Werle" and I also saw the entry about the Latvian Archives.

On June 13, I wrote Arlene Beare with this message:

"Hello! I was very excited to come across your webpage. I have been looking for something about my family history in Europe for a long time, but never could find it because I'd always been looking for Viski in Russia or Belarus. I had no idea

that it was now part of Latvia and still existed!"

Arlene responded quickly and was so welcoming and encouraging. She told me how to contact the Archives and advised me to search the JewishGen databases as well.

Still on June 13, I wrote back to Arlene:

"I am going to join the SIG today and I also wanted to get a back issue of the newsletter which deals with the town where my family said they were from, Viski. The newsletter was Volume 4, Number 1 - June 1999. I see that this one doesn't have a PDF yet. Is there any possibility that you have a PDF for it, just not online? My family is having a big reunion next week (June 23-25), our first in 26 years, and I'd love to be able to present information to them regarding Viski."

Arlene very kindly made a quick PDF of the relevant pages, which included a history of Viski and the Viski Cemetery Data. I will be forever grateful to her and also to Marion Werle. Without them and everything they've done for the SIG, I wouldn't be anywhere with this research.

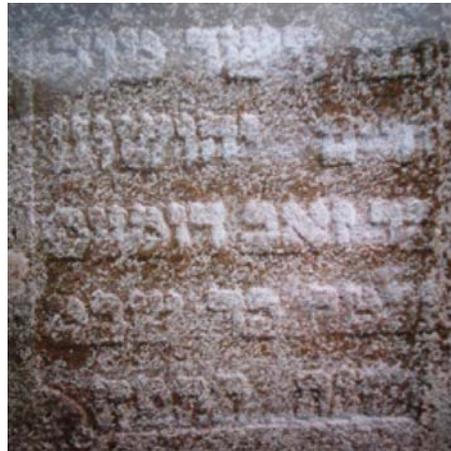
It goes without saying that my heart rate was a mile a minute by this time in hopes of seeing the name Dumes on this list. Not to be overly dramatic, but I hit the jackpot. As I scanned the list, I saw this entry:

Hayim Yehoshua bar Zehev Dumes died 5688

The names match the photo I had of my great-grandfather's grave! But the year did not. But of course, I don't know what condition the grave would be in now -- perhaps the numbers were difficult to read. I contacted the researcher Aleksandrs Feigmanis, who collected the cemetery data and took photos of each grave. He sells the pictures from his website (<http://www.balticgen.com/>). I explained that I urgently wanted to get a copy of the photo of this grave. Recall that my family reunion was 10 days away...

I wired Aleks the money realizing that if he waited for confirmation I would not have the

photo in time for my reunion; he kindly emailed it to me anyway. After seeing the grave stone, I was convinced it was the same grave.



By the way, Aleks mentioned that they often painted the stones to make the letters more legible, which is why the old picture is so readable.

So I had some quick re-writes to the family history presentation I was making for the reunion! I was able to tell my family:

- 1) Viski is found! We know where we came from.
- 2) The grave of our common paternal ancestor survived time, WW1 and WW2. I was able to show my family a contemporary pic-

ture of the grave. It was a very moving moment.

Here is an example of what Aleks sent me. This is the report of my great-grandfather's family from the 1897 census:



Dumes Family Reunion, June 23, 2006

There is an annotated version of this photo on my website if you're curious to know who we are.

And so begins the task – Crosby/Stills/Nash

I hired Aleks to begin researching my family history in Viski. After a few agonizing months, the report finally came. Aleks said that he had succeeded in tracing my family back to circa 1780! In reflection, this was somewhat optimistic. A more realistic view of what can be proved by documentation would be circa 1820, but of course I was still delighted.

Aleks sent back an amazing report of all of the Dumesh (the pronunciation of Dumes before my family came to the US) families that lived in Viski. According to the 1897 All Russian census, there were six Dumesh households in Viski, including the family of my great-grandfather. Because of this, I was able to get the Yiddish names of some of my grandfather's siblings, which had been lost. Two of the households belonged to my great-grandfather's brothers, we believe, because of data from the 1875 census that showed the three brothers along with the names of their father and grandfather.

In Vishki on Rizhskaya Street in the house of Dumesh (the house was wooden and covered by wooden tiles) lived:

1. Dumesh Chaim, son of Schaye-Wulf, 40 years old, born and registered to Vishki, literate in Hebrew, learned at home, glazier and cabman
2. his wife Sheina-Freida, daughter of Abram, 35 years old, literate in Hebrew, born and reg. to Vishki, learned at home, at husband
3. daughter Sora-Tzipa (*Sarah Dumes Kaplan*), 16 years old, illiterate, at father
4. son Avram-Leib (*Louis Dumes, called "Leib" by family*), 12 years old, literate in Hebrew, learned at home, merchant
5. daughter Riva-Toiba (*Rebecca Dumes Lieberman, called "Toiba" or "Taube" by family*), 8 years old, at father, illiterate
6. son Artsik (*Arthur Dumes*), 4 years old
7. daughter Feiga (*Fannie Dumes Fishman*), 2 years old

Aleks also listed the information from the 1875 census and also the names of Dumesh homeowners from 1875, a listing that a J. Dumesh in a 1921 directory had a business at Peterpils Street 39, and a listing of Dumesh families that owned homes in 1935. Aleks provided excellent information and I am very grateful for his service. I also purchased a DVD from his site that features Latgale, the district of Latvia that includes Viski, and I learned a great deal from that.



**Dumesh Family, in Viski, c. 1908.
The young boy is my grandfather, Wulf**

So quick bright things come to confusion - William Shakespeare

Through some tenuous and overly optimistic guessing (I've learned better along the way), I tried to match up the other Dumesh families. They all lived on the same street in Viski, adjacent to each other, so I imagined that they were all related. Genoch Dumesh and his family lived adjacent to my great-grandfather.

A couple of months later, I received an exciting email from Vadim Dumesh of Riga, who was descended from the Genoch Dumesh who lived very close to my great-grandfather! We were certain that we were cousins, though the connection to Genoch didn't have solid documentation. We decided to do a Y-DNA test with FamilyTreeDNA.com.

When the results came back, Vadim and I found that not only were we not related through our Y-DNA, but we had not had a common Y-DNA ancestor for at least 10,000 years!

In retrospect, this is less surprising than it seemed. Since Jews didn't use surnames in this area until about 1840, assuming a genetic relationship based on a common surname with people born in this time period is problematic.

JewishGen connected me with another person doing research in Viski, Christine Usdin. Christine's grandfather Zalman was born in Viski and she has been researching Viski for some time. She traveled to Viski in the 1990's and took pictures and movies. On the Viski shtetlink, <http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/viski>, you'll find pictures, stories, documents and a short movie that I put together from Christine's movies of Viski. I also provided some web space for Christine on my site, <http://usdin.dumes.net>, and she has created a very moving tribute to her family. Thanks to JewishGen, Christine and I have become great friends and colleagues.

To speak the dead man's name is to make him live again – Ancient Egyptian proverb

I decided that I needed more information to "connect the dots." I learned that the Latvian State Historical Archives had birth, marriage and death records for Viski, so I contacted them and requested a search. The report they generated was amazing. They found 21 vital records - some of them were not for my ancestors, but for Vadim Dumesh's family, which I only know because of the DNA test.

There were some amazing new things.

I'd heard a story that another child was born to Chaim Yehushua and Scheina-Freida (my great-grandparents), but died as a baby and the name was lost. The name is no longer lost! The baby was Mowscha, born on July 1, 1904, and I now have an image of his birth record. The story was that while the baby was nursing, Scheina fell asleep and the baby suffocated. The death records from the early 1900's are incomplete so this cannot be confirmed.

Poor Scheina! Chaim died in February 1904 and baby Mowscha was born four months later and died shortly thereafter.

I now know my great-grandmother's family name, and have begun researching her family. She was born Scheina-Freida Nowoselok. Her brother Mowscha-Selik lived in Viski. I knew his Yiddish name but not his family name because Sadie listed him on the Philadelphia ship manifest for the closest person in the country from whence she came as "Selig Moishe."

I now have names of many of the descendants of Chaim Yehushua's brothers, including names of our cousins who died in the Holocaust in Viski. I must say, I found it very emotional entering the names of these people into my database and thinking of what they must have gone through - and where we would be if not for Sadie and her children making the trip to America. With each name I entered and made part of our family website, I felt as if they were no longer lost. I don't normally get so soppy, but it really felt very spiritual. I didn't expect that.

The Archives found a couple of pictures of one of my cousins, Jossel Dumesch, born 1908, son of Shender, brother of Chaim who is my 1st cousin removed two times, which means he was 1st cousin to my grandfather.



Jossel Dumesch

The Archives provided an extremely detailed listing of my family tree in Viski, along with the fates of many of my family. It appears that all who stayed in Viski died in 1941.

This is an example of some of the data that the Archives sent, just to demonstrate the attention to detail. I am deeply thankful to Jelena Polovceva and Rita Bogdanova of the LSHA for the hard work that they do so very well.

In 1926, Jossel moved in Riga, the capitol of Latvia. Jossel, his wife Dina, daughter Baschewa and sister Mnucha-Liba lived in Riga at Stabu Street 75, apt. 2. After October 7, 1941 Mnucha-Liba was registered as living at Ludzas Street 11-10 (territory of Riga ghetto during Nazi occupation). Jossel and Dina Dumesch were struck off the house register of Stabu Street 75 on September 10 of 1941. From September 27, 1941 Dina and Baschewa were registered as living at Katolu Street 2, apt. 7 (territory of Riga ghetto during Nazi occupation). The museum "Jews in Latvia" keeps the lists of Central prison's inmates, set up on August 4, 1941, where Jossel Dumes was registered under Number 249.

Jossel's brother Leib-Wolf also moved to Riga. Leib-Wulf's was a schoolteacher.

According to the census for 1935, Leib-Wulf and his sisters Haya and Mnucha-Liba lived in Vishki at Rigas Street 127.

From December 30, 1940 the family of Leib-Wulf Dumes lived in Riga at Jumaras Street 18, apt. 6 (previous address was Stabu Street 75, apt. 2). Leib-Wulf, his wife Schula and daughters were struck off the house register in October of 1941 and moved to the ghetto. From October 7, 1941 they were registered as living at Ludzas Street 11-10 (territory of Riga ghetto during Nazi occupation).

Leib-Wulf was still alive on July 20, 1942 when he was registered in the lists of Jews - forced labourers of Missa Torfwerk (peat factory). His address in the ghetto at that time was Vilanu Street 16-2 and his occupation was a glazier.

It is possible that Leib-Wolf's daughters, Yeva and Nechamia (born 1938 and 1939) and Jossel's

daughter Baschewa, born 1941, are still alive. After all, my friend Vadim Dumesh's family that moved to Riga survived the war. His great-grandfather Genoch refused to leave Viski, however, and was killed there.

Christine Usdin appears to have a link to my family as Leib-Wulf married Shula Usdin of Viski. Interestingly, Vadim's Dumesh family in Viski also appears to have a link by marriage to the Usdin family.

*Get back to where you once belonged – Lennon/
McCartney*

I'm teaching myself Russian so that I will be able to read and translate more of these documents.

Mike Getz very kindly sent me pages from the Soviet Extraordinary Commission report dealing with Viski and I'm in the process of translating them. Since I'm a beginner at Russian, it is slow going, but it's good practice. Many of these documents were very poorly microfilmed. I spoke with Megan Lewis from the **United States Holocaust Memorial Museum** and she said there was a rumor that Yad Vashem was going back to the Russian Archives to redo the microfilm. I wrote to Yad Vashem to ask if there were any plans to redo the microfilm but did not get a response.

In August, I am traveling to Latvia for the first time and will be visiting Viski, of course. I will try to photograph each grave and document them on the Viski shtetlink site. I am eager to visit the Archives and meet Rita and Jelena and the other amazing people who do such incredible work.

I'm also going to meet Vadim Dumesh's family in Riga. Even though we are not cousins, we are descended from people who were neighbors and no doubt friends in this small village.

*The work goes on, the cause endures, the hope still
lives and the dream shall never die. – Ted Kennedy*

I have a dream of creating a kind of virtual map of Viski as it existed in 1897. I hope to get all of the census records for Viski and list the inhabitants of each house. I don't know if this project is financially realistic, but it is something I hope to

achieve. This was a city of 959 people in 1897, 668 of them Jewish and there are but a handful of Jewish occupants of Viski today.

My goal with the Viski shtetlink and the virtual map is to create a tribute to this village where so many lived and tragically died. I want to show that once there was a town filled with people, not just an abandoned cemetery. I'd like to speak the names of those who lived in this town, to remember them so they will never be forgotten again.

Hannah Cherfas

Recorded on March 14th, 2000
in the Judaic Center of University of Latvia, Riga
Interviewed by Aina Antane
Translated into English by Inga Long,
Falls Church, Virginia

H. C. My mother's name was Sarah. Actually Sarah Miriam, that means she had two names and when she had to change her passport for the Soviet one it wasn't allowed to have two names. My mother regretted very much that it wasn't allowed to keep her second name. And for some reason her boss insisted that she keep the first one, but my mother didn't like it as much as Miriam. That's how she became Sarah. Sora Mirke (used at home, in Yiddish-edit.)

A.A. What's your father's name?

H.C. Ders (bear), so actually I am Medvedeva.

A.A. Do you know anybody whose name is also Hannah Cherfas?

H.C. I have been told about her, but I don't know her personally.

A.A. That means there is. Is she your relative?

H.C. Yes, she is. She is from my father's side one of my grandfathers or great-grandfathers – I don't know exactly – had eight sons and one of them also had eight sons. Which means all Cherfas living in Latvia --- all of them are my relatives. All of them from that large branch.

A.A. But who exactly is she, do you know?

H.C. No, no. I just know that there is such a per-

son. And Dr. Daniel Cherfas also told me that there is such a person—he knows her. I think she is a little bit older than me. But I haven't seen her.

A.A. Have you changed your last name?

H.C. No, I haven't.

A.A. When were you born?

H.C. July 11th, 1937.

A.A. Place of birth?

H.C. Rezekne.

A.A. Do you remember the address? Where did you live when you were a child?

H.C. Ludza, Baznicas Street. I don't remember the number, I think it was nine.

A.A. Date and place you were married?

H.C. The last on probably – isn't it?

A.A. You can list them in order.

H.C. No, I won't in order. My husband gets upset about that. The thing is my husband and I had lived together without getting married for 25 years, and if this situation didn't change we wouldn't register our relationship. We just simply didn't need that. But since I knew he wouldn't get citizenship I wanted to secure him somehow. That's why in 1992 we officially registered our marriage. Actually I'll tell you the exact date – August 23. But legally – in 1992.

A.A. Name and surname of your husband?

H.C. Igor Bukin.

A.A. Names and surnames of your previous husbands?

H.C. Only names or with surnames?

A.A. Names with surnames.

H.C. Name and surname. Alexander Civin and that's enough – the other marriage wasn't registered either.

A.A. Any children?

H.C. No.

A.A. Education – when and where have you studied?

H.C. Only college?

A.A. No, everything you remember in order.

H.C. All in order? Well, I started to go to school in Ludza. I don't know if the school had an address or not. Then from 1946 I attended the school in Riga. School number 71, it was 7th grade, and then

A.A. Pardon me, what was the number.

H.C. Number 71, later it was converted into a High School. Number 13. Right in 7th grade. We graduated and switched to that High School. High School Number 13. In 1955 I graduated and entered the University of Latvia in the Physics-Mathematical faculty.

A.A. In 1955?

H.C. Yes. And graduated in 1960.

A.A. So your profession is

H.C. A mathematician – programmer.

A.A. Geography of your life? Something we already know – you lived in Ludza. You were born in Rezekne.

H.C. I was born in Rezekne. There was living – how is it in Latvian – my grandmother's sisters. My grandmother's sisters and my grandfather's brothers. I often spent summers with them.

A.A. We can speak in Russian.

H.C. Good.

A.A. Your recent address, phone number – I'd better write it down now.

H.C. Brivibas Street 52, Apt. 16. Phone #7288419

A.A. Is the Zip Code LV-1010?

H.C. No, my mailing address is different. LV-1050. P.O. Box 205

A.A. And now, please let's start talking about something other than the present day; let's try to return back in the past as far as we can. What do you remember about your mother's and father's ancestors – what details?

H.C. I will start with my mother's relatives, even though I know less about them than I'd like to. My grandmother comes from Piltene. In Piltene there was one of the first Jewish settlements in Latvia, as far as I know. My grandfather's ancestors obviously came from Germany. Last name Vaispap in German means white bread, even white soft bread a Vaispap. Probably our ancestors were bakers who were baking delicious bread or quite opposite – wealthy people who often ate this bread, I don't know since I couldn't ask him myself ... Our family was very well educated, they were believers but not orthodox, but social believers, as were almost all Jews who came from Germany. I think it is called Haskalah, isn't it? – Well his ancestors were the supporters of Haskalah. And at home he always had everything - the latest technological inventions. He had a phonograph – that was what my mother told me. There was always a piano and every child had a bicycle. He was educated in Germany and London. He was a highly qualified tailor.

A.A. What was his name?

H.C. His name was Simha. Probably he had a middle name too, but I don't remember, then I have to look into my mother's birth certificate. In Ludza they honored him as a wise man – hohe. Still in 1970 I met some people, when they learned that I was Simha Vasman's niece, they didn't know how to please me – such a wise man he was. Back then people from educated and cultural families in the society – well in Jewish society – were kept in higher regard than doctors who were from the simple people. And that was even after the war, they were telling me about somebody and said – well he has a higher education. It doesn't matter that he is poor now, but he is a well deserved, he has a higher education. Actually, my grandfather was quite a patriarch but not the orthodox, I told you that already. He arranged

the marriage for his oldest daughter; he saw that she wasn't happy with that marriage even though her husband was a good man. But for the rest of his children he (my grandfather – edit) allowed them to marry whoever they wanted. He supervised the morality of all of his children, but see – my mother got skating and riding the bicycle and they attended different balls. He let his youngest daughter to go to Riga and attend the barefoot girl classes - as they called them back then. It was Beatriss Vigner, the follower of Isidora Duncan. So my youngest aunt attended classes in her studio. My grandmother was a very beautiful woman, as I said, she was from Piltene and they had very interesting facial features. Their skin was light, skinny – they seldom were overweight. Vaispops – they had brown hair and the eyes were either gray or brown. I have a photo that was taken in 1930. There is all of my family – my grandfather, my grandmother and all of their surviving children. I can show it to anybody and they'll tell that it is just an average European family. They didn't have any Southern or Eastern facial features.

A.A. What was your grandmother's name?

H.C. Her name was Riva Lea.

A.A. Do you know anything about your grandmother's parents?

H.C. No, I don't. The only thing I know is that they were from Piltene. One of my grandfather's ancestors – well, I think that was from my mother's side because his father was from Germany – he was one of Czar Nicolay's soldiers. It was grand, grand, grand – probably it needs to be three or four “grand” there. He served full Nicolay's service – 25 years and obviously was a good one if he survived. And as a reward, all of the Czar's veterans received very good positions. And he got a ranger position somewhere near the Volga forests. My mother told me all that. She didn't know the name of the town because when she heard that she was young. Of course, if there was no war and the death of all my grandfathers and grandmothers I could tell you much more.

He married a very young girl – 15 or 16 years old – as it was a custom back then and he was, of

course, already over 50, probably. But he stayed in faith for all those years, in spite of the years in service. His wife gave birth 16 times and each time around New Years either in December or January. Regarding the Jewish traditions, she was unclean after giving the birth until she dips into the mikvah, but mikvah has to be running water. Of course, he couldn't build such a pool. That's why every time somewhere on the forest lake he was cutting an ice hole, then brought her there cuddled in the sheepskin coat, then she dipped and after that he cuddled her back in the sheepskin coat and run the horses back to home. And she was alive, blossoming woman, of course and of the 16 children somehow only eight survived. Such a fatal number – eight.

A.A. Do you know anyone of those who survived?

H.C. No, I don't know either their first or last names. I only know they are from the Vaispap's side of the family, that's all. Because they were ancestors, their last name probably was different, so. Wait – one of my grandmother's sisters immigrated to Canada, yes, and even got married there. Her last name was List, - no, I don't know my grandmother's maiden name. And I have nobody to ask. Maybe I will find it somewhere in the old papers that survived. Even though my grandmother was only a housewife, she also had an outstanding personality. They had a big household.

A.A. Are you talking about your grandmother Riva Lea?

H.C. Yes, my grandmother Riva Lea. Back then all Jews living in Ludza definitely had a garden for vegetables and some kind of cattle, because it was just impossible otherwise. My grandmother liked cows very much and always she had exceptionally pedigree ones – Siemental breed – they were ordering them from abroad. As a rule, cows had to be champions. Well there were as well turkeys and chickens – those were in every household. And, probably, until the oldest son grew up and demanded that my grandfather hire a housekeeper, my grandmother herself did all the jobs. But her nature was heroic. When she was 43 years old she gave birth to her last girl, who

was named Lea. Well, it didn't turn out very well with that name. The name Lea was the middle name of a grandmother and knowledgeable people were saying that it isn't good to name a baby after somebody who is still alive. But Lea was the same as her grandmother, whom was very honored. In her offspring memories she left as a dominant woman. I can't tell about her anything, but grownups sometimes, when they were talking about somebody very dominant or determined, maybe even harsh, used to say: "Like Lea!" So in her honor little girl was named after, but she got sick and died. Those were years of revolution, civil war and probably in all Ludza they couldn't find medical help and my grandmother took her to Riga alone. Somehow nobody could accompany her. Well, yes – the oldest son was in the army – Independence Fights (fights for the Independence of Latvia – edit.), but grandfather for some reason just couldn't. Doctors said that girl had meningitis. And she died right in the doctor's office during the checkup. My grandmother had to take her back to Ludza. With somebody's help she barely got into the overcrowded train, but she couldn't say she is carrying sick child. At that time there was the Spanish flue epidemic and they would throw her out of the train. And all the way from Riga to Ludza she pretended to carry a live child. And right then her hair turned completely gray. In all pictures she appeared with gray hair. Beautiful, young face, well – it was visible she wasn't young, her face was young, her skin was ideal and her body was very nice and totally gray hair, like some empress with powdered hair. Well, that is probably all I remember about them.

A.A. Do you remember their children?

H.C. Well, I can name the ones who survived. The oldest one was Isaak, he was a grownup at the time of the war in 1914. Was he the first (son of my grandmother –edit.) or wasn't, I can't tell you that, I just simply don't know. I know my grandmother had eight children, four died four survived. No, six survived – what am I saying. So, Isaak was the oldest one, he participated in the fight for Independence (of Latvia – edit) and he has even written about in the encyclopedia which was printed and released recently. He was an engineer, lived on Alberta Street in Riga. He got married late to a very young Jewish girl from

Courland. She was blond with blue eyes – real Grethen – and very young. At the beginning of the marriage she was about 20 years old, I think, 20-21. Well that’s all from my mother’s stories, I don’t remember exactly. And a little girl named Ilana – then it just started to become fashionable to name in those new Jewish names – Ilana, Aviva – such non-traditional names were given to children.

A.A. Was it Isaak’s daughter?

H.C. It was Isaak’s daughter, but the wife’s name was Cilia, Cecilia. Actually, here native tongue was German, she was from, well, very Cortland’s family, where there was spoken, as my mother was saying, in “Hochdeuch”, in refined German. And, of course, she spoke Yiddish and Latvian, but she couldn’t speak Russian.

A.A. Who was the next, well Isaak

H.C. Samuel was the next. He died recently, in 1983. He lived for 83 years – he was born in 1900, he was very handsome. He was even voted as “Mr. Handsome” in Ludza, I even have a photo, I can make a copy ... I promised Vesterman (directory of the museum “Jews in Latvia” – edit), but still haven’t got time to make a copy ... Very handsome, he was a captain of the artillery and before the war he was in the militia.

A.A. Where did he live?

H.C. He spent part of his life in Riga. In Ludza he only spent the years of his youth, then he visited, but he worked in Riga. And before the war, from 1940 he got into militia. But after the war – in the beginning he was hired by KGB. At that time they were hiring a lot. When the deportations started in 1949, he wrote an application to be discharged – he didn’t want to take any part in it. They didn’t want to let him go, but he left. So, who wanted that could be discharged. And there were no repression from the Party. After that he was working in lots of different places. The last place was Engure’s collective farm specializing in fishing. He was working there as an expeditor. They (colleagues – edit.) even attended his funeral, and... well, he was their man. He was extremely honest, precise and always

kept his promises.

A.A. Was his last name Vaispap – the same as everybody’s?

H.C. Yes, his last name was Vaispap. Did he have a middle name – I don’t know. Everybody called him Vaispap Samuel.

A.A. Who’s next...?

H.C. Then there was another Vaispap – Boris. Was his name in the papers as Boris or Ber, I don’t know. He was the youngest among the surviving brothers. Well, he was a different type of man – life, joyful – I remember him very well. In the beginning he was working as a librarian – after the war... he also went to the war – he was a sergeant of artillery, not a captain. Even though he had medals and injuries and everything, he survived. So, after the war he was working as a librarian in the hospital, but after – in different stores of city. They were selling sporting goods, radios. The last place he was working was the sport goods store on Kirova Street. He had a wife, well, probably we shouldn’t talk about them.

A.A. No, let’s talk everything you remember.

H.C. His wife’s name was Luda, she also was from Ludza. All her life she had tuberculosis and was very sick. Back then they couldn’t heal tuberculosis and I was always thinking with an amazement how she, who was sick, was able to flee. Did he carry her or what... And of course in my childish foolishness I didn’t ask him how it happened. But the fact was he took her out – he saved her. During the war she was living somewhere in the Gorky area. There was something like a boarding house for people sick with tuberculosis. He took her there and went to sign for the army. Well, those were three brothers.

A.A. Yes, about Samuel. Did he have a wife?

H.C. He had... Well, because of all the manly beauty thing, he was full of love, but his biggest love ended unhappily. There was Nina Krumin in Ludza – incredibly beautiful. Even at my age of 7, I understood that she was beautiful. She had black hair and blue eyes. But she had a sick hus-

band and because of that she couldn't leave him. Back in those days there were such women... And when my uncle eventually left Ludza, he changed lots of wives. I can't even remember all of their names. Well, the very last was Nina. He had a daughter named Ilana with her. But because of Nina's temperament we weren't close and didn't have any relationship. But on my uncle's funeral Nina played a very bad, evil joke with my mother. I don't even want to remember that. And after that all relationship ended.

A.A. Any more children?

H.C. No, he didn't have any – only this daughter.

A.A. No, to your grandfather.

H.C. My mother's oldest sister was Bluma, she was very pretty, and therefore she got such name. She was studying in gymnasium in Ostrovo because there was no place in Latvia ...well, at least not in Ludza. I don't know how it was in Riga, where a Jewish girl could get a solid education. I was once in Ostrovo, we were going to Pushkin's hills and the guide was showing us that gymnasium. It was famous in all Baltic. There were coming Jewish girls from wealthy families from Latvia and Estonia, too, probably. Well, in Lithuania there was (place where to get such an education - edit.) In 1918 or in 1919 together with the Communist Youth League she left for Russia. And year or two later, when they started to return she came back sick with typhus, unconscious. My mother remembered that she was in the sack – she didn't have any dress on her, the sack was put on instead. She got better. She was an excellent musician, and the thing happened to her that grandfather arranged the marriage for her to a very good man who was lot older than her, but wasn't a match to her in spiritual qualities. He was a businessman, an engineer working in timber export. His last name was Drujan, first name Moses. They lived in Ventspils. He had a high position in some timber exporting company. But she was an artistic person. Even though they had two children, they... well, she was crying and friends were telling that he was abusing her and was unjust towards her. And after that grandfather to the rest of his daughters to live lives they chose. He was learning from his own mistakes.

A.A. Do you know the names of their children?

H.C. I know their names. So, Noma – Benjamin or Venjamin – I don't know how was written in his papers. And Akiva – also a fashionable name. When the war started one was 15 years old and the other was 17. But I can be mistaken a little.

A.A. Which one of them was the oldest?

H.C. Vovochka was the youngest. They were musicians – with musician talent – just like their mother. One of them was amazingly talented – everybody was saying that. What would happen if they stayed alive, I don't know. They didn't flee because one of sons had the appendix removal surgery right before June 22nd. They couldn't transport him. They only could take him with the car to get to my grandfather's. Moses stayed in Ventspils and that's where they burned him. But the rest of them died together with my grandfather...

The next daughter was my mother, Sarah Miriam. They were calling her Sarah Mirke. She was studying in gymnasium in Ludza. After graduating she was working as a phone operator. And all the rest of her life after the evacuation she was working in Latvia's postal office. She married my father – they both were in the same class. As everybody was saying – my mother was very pretty – boys were following her around. But why did she choose my father – I don't know. But she chose him. They were same age, same class. They were born in 1910.

A.A. Were they born in Ludza?

H.C. Yes, they were born in Ludza. And the youngest, Bella...

A.A. Maybe, tell us about your brothers, sisters, if there were any...

H.C. I have nobody. I have no brothers and no sisters. As my mother was saying, if my father didn't die in the war then I would probably have had a brother or sister, but... My mother didn't remarry. But the youngest (mother's sister – edit.) Bella was born in 1912, she was the family's favorite. Naturally – since Lea's death she was the youngest. Yes, Lea was born either in

1919 or 1918, if my grandmother was 49 years old then. My grandmother was born in 1868 or 1870. But I will check that, well, - sometime between 1868 and 1870. Both my grandparents were born then. They were same age – grandmother and grandfather.

A.A. Very interesting. What else about Bella?

H.C. So, about Bella – she had an artistic nature. She was studying in the art studio, but, obviously didn't have a big talent and she understood that herself. Later on she was working as a teacher in kindergartens and nurseries. But during the evacuation of Molotovsk she was working in the orphanage for Spanish children. It was very interesting for her – she had lots of pictures from those times. She was directing plays there – they were living interesting artistic lives as strange as it sounds. And she stayed there till the war ended. She was a very interesting person – a Vaispap type person, but her eyes – each eye had different color. It is very rare, usually piquant women had such eyes. After the war she came back and continued to work in the nursery in Zaslauks, then in Majori. But when they required a higher education for that job she became a hat maker. And till her retirement she worked in the hat salon on Blaumana (street –edit.) And sometimes after the work they took me to meet her - my mother and me, we stopped by. I was trying on all hats; I liked that so very much. It was such a wonderful life! And that aroma – back then they were making everything from natural materials, I don't know how it is now... They were working with such little irons...and all those conversations, French, German pre-war fashion magazines, which were there just lying around. It was such a unique atmosphere. But her husband was a head of that Spanish orphanage. Sokolovskiy, Nicolay Grogorevich. He was one of the Calabanin students, who was a student of Macarenko himself. It was the same school of re-education for homeless, abandoned children and problematic teenagers. And all children adored Nicolay Grigorevich. He had a wife sick with tuberculosis, he wouldn't divorce her, back then it was... well, he couldn't do that. So he was my aunt's boyfriend, he could come here only during summer vacations. They had a son – my cousin, he was born... just a second, I will tell

you... in 1945. She had several abortions before that because officially she would be a single mother. And society's attitude was much different back then. But my mother said to her; "Are you crazy? You are 35 years old. Couple more years and you won't be able to give a birth anymore!" So that's when my cousin was born. His name is Semen, in honor of grandfather. In papers he is Semen, but non officially Simha, Semen Nicolayevich. He was a principal of children's sport school. He liked sport since he was a pupil.

A.A. Was he born in Riga?

H.C. Yes, he was born in Riga. No, sorry, he was born in Ludza. She went to Ludza to give birth. Yes, and the first year of his life he spent with us. And I was walking with him in the stroller and was trying to choose darker streets because I was afraid that people would think it was my child, but I had no husband! Can you imagine that! I was eight years old. Such a silly girl!

A.A. What you are telling is so interesting! So who of your grandfather's and grandmother's children survived the war?

H.C. Samuel and Boris – they fought all war. My mother Sarah and her sister Bella. The rest died. Moses together with other famous Jews was burned the day the Soviet Army left the city of Ventspils. Isaak was taken from his home by some dregs and torn in pieces as soon the army crossed Ludza. By the way, even the newspaper "Pravda" ("The Truth") was writing about that case during the war. My mother found out about all that in 1942 or 1943. Sometimes I am thinking – were there among those who killed him, his comrades in arms from fights for Latvia's independence. But the rest were put in the common grave near the lake. They were living till August 18th – my grandfather and other honorable men were called in by those guards – dregs. They forced them to lick their boots, to clean the roadway with toothbrushes and so on. And then they took them all and shot them. And they shared all their belongings. After the war when my mother went to Ludza, some people came to bring some things my grandfather and grandmother gave

them for saving – they were sure that Red Army will come back. So those who were honest those came. I remember one woman was giving us milk, cream, yoghurt from grandmother's cow. But what happened after that – did my mother sell that cow to her or what – I simply don't remember that. We didn't spend much time there, soon after we left Ludza. I am just amazed of my mother's strength – how could she walk those streets. I wouldn't be able to. Even though sometimes I was spending summers there when I was little – there were living my mother's good friend, now I can't do that. And even can't imagine doing that. I can't imagine myself going to Ludza.

My grandfather owned several fields of land that were nationalized. But he wasn't so rich to be deported. When I am reading Kovals memoirs, I am thinking I would be happy if my grandfather was deported. Then I would have some chance to see him alive. I don't even remember him - I was too small then. I remember neither his face nor how he looked – nothing, only what my mother was telling me. Don't remember even the address, only my mother said it was Baznicas Street. And nothing from what they owned I can get back, because then I have to go to Ludza, but I can't do that. Neither morally nor financially – I simply can't. My cousin and I, we sent all documents and they just sit there in Ludza's court. And I think that is outrageous. Government of Latvia should give to descendants of the survivors everything on the plate, but not to demand us to go through the humiliations. Imagine – we applied to the archives then, at the first we got the answer that Simka Vaispaps didn't own anything, nothing was nationalized. Then I found some acquaintance who knew somebody in the archives. Then we got a paper saying my uncle had property on Baznicas Street. A year later we got another paper saying he had several more fields of land. What does it mean? Every time my stomach was turning upside down and I don't want get all that bloody property. To fight and pay lot of money... I won't get happiness from all that anyway. Let's change the subject.

It's better if I tell you a little bit about life in Ludza after the war, what I remember.

To be continued in the next issue

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Bibliographical or archival sources used in your Latvian genealogical research:

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

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

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