

# Latvia SIG

May 2009  
Volume 13, Issue 3



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## President's Report



Two very interesting books have been published about two remarkable Jews from Latvia.

One book deals with a young man who was trapped in Latvia and Russia during World War II, and against all odds rose to a commanding position in the Red Army and then after retirement from the army has striven to memorialize those who were murdered in Latvia.

The second book deals with a young man who managed to leave Latvia and despite initial hardships in the U.S.A. became immensely wealthy and a patron of the arts.

The first book, a memoir by Vladimir Bahns is entitled, *My Life: Latvia-USSR-Latvia* and covers the years 1926 to 2008.

Vladimir was born in Liepaja and he describes his early life in Liepaja, his remarkable survival in the USSR and his experiences in the Red Army. After the war he was in the Officers' School in Leningrad and was an officer in the Soviet Armed Forces from 1949 to 1968. He rose to the rank of Battalion Commander.

In Liepaja, after his retirement, in the 1980s he became Chairman of the Latvian Society of Jewish Culture in Liepaja. Of significance was that he was involved in the erection of the memorial in the Jewish cemetery in Liepaja dedicated to the more than 7,000 Jews murdered in 1941. He contracted with a design company and a construction firm in Liepaja and supervised the entire project to completion. He was also involved in two smaller projects for rescuers Roberts and Johanna Seduls who saved 11 Jews by hiding them in a cellar, and also a memorial stone in Skede commemorating those murdered there. He also facilitated installing memorial plaques in Grobina and Aizpute.

Previously, in Grobina at the mass grave there

was only a simple stone engraved with: "To the Victims of Fascism." He negotiated with the City Council of Grobina and with their assistance a plaque listing the names of all the Jews who were murdered was placed at the mass grave. From what I have been able to ascertain, the plaque listing the names of all the Jews murdered at a mass grave is the first to have been erected in Latvia.



**Vladimir Bahns in Red Army Uniform**

His memoir represents a fascinating story of survival and endeavours against great odds. He tells his story with humility, frankness and amazing detail.

I had the privilege of meeting Vladimir and his wife, Vera, during each of my visits to Liepaja and was surprised to discover that I have known his first cousin Dr. Gina Schocket for many years. We both came from Cape Town and she also now lives in Toronto.

In, *Little Man in a Big Hurry*, Gene Hirshhorn LePere tells the story of Joseph H. Hirshhorn who donated an immense art collection to the people of the United States.

He arrived in the U.S.A. from Latvia, barely 8 years old, in 1907. His mother, a widow, and his two sisters worked in sweatshops and Joseph, from that extremely humble beginning, set out to lift his family out of poverty.

Ms. LePere tells how in 1907, “knowing just a few words of English, and living with nine members of his family in a three-room apartment, Joe was left to sink or swim on the strength of his own wits and adaptability. He triumphed over hardscrabble beginnings, and like so many before him, Joe became an immigrant success story in the land of opportunity.”

The book tells of his incredible financial acumen, his achievement as a stock broker and later his enormous success in gold and uranium mining in Ontario, Canada. It details the struggle to balance family life with his work and also his four marriages.



**Joseph H. Hirshhorn**

In writing about her father, her considerable research is clearly evident. She describes in detail many of his financial endeavors, his mastery of stock brokering, mining and the world of art.

His financial acumen is also evident in that before the stock market collapse in 1929,

Joseph was worried about the state of the market and was able to “feel the collapse coming.” Accordingly, in August 1929 he sold his holdings for four million dollars. He was still a young man, having been born on August 11, 1899, and at that time four million dollars was a considerable amount of money.

The vast collection of contemporary art which he collected can now be seen in the Joseph H. Hirschhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden on the Mall in Washington, D.C. (For current information about the museum, please go to: <http://hirshhorn.si.edu/>)

The author is correct when she writes, “this seventy-four-year journey taken by a Jewish immigrant child from a small *shtetl* in Latvia is a story worth telling.”

### **Articles in Avotaynu:**

I am pleased to advise that two of the papers presented at the IAJGS conference in Chicago last year have been included in Avotaynu, the International Review of Jewish Genealogy. (Vol XXIV, Number 3). The first is entitled: “*A Website List of Latvian Jewry Prior to World War II*” by Rita Bogdanova and Ruvin Ferber, which was adapted from the lecture delivered by Ruven Ferber at the Conference. (A reprint of this article was included in the last issue of the Latvai SIG newsletter.)

The second paper is, “*Jewish Genealogical Search Engines, Databases and Social Interaction Networks*,” which is based on the paper that I delivered at the conference.

### **29<sup>th</sup> IAGS Conference:**

This 29<sup>th</sup> International Association of Jewish Genealogical Conference meets in Philadelphia from August 2-7, 2009 at the Sheraton Philadelphia, City Centre Hotel. Please go to: [www.philly2009.org](http://www.philly2009.org) for a complete description of the conference.

There is an interesting article on Jewish Philadelphia by David Minsk in the fall 2008 edition of Avotaynu. He mentions the rich Jewish history of Philadelphia and states that it predates William Penn’s presence in 1682 and Jewish traders were in the Philadelphia area before Penn took possession of the land. He also refers to repositories for research in Philadelphia and the U.S. National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) Mid Atlantic regional office is located near the conference hotel. There, NARA houses copies of national censuses on microfilm and many other records. There is also the Philadelphia Jewish Archives Centre which is well worth a visit.

### **SIG Meeting:**

We plan to have a SIG luncheon on the first Monday at the Conference and conduct our annual meeting after the SIG luncheon. Please contact me with ideas for issues you would like discussed at our annual meeting.

Constance Whippman, a co-founder of the All

Latvia Database with an extensive background in Latvian genealogical research will address the Latvia SIG meeting. The title of her presentation is, “*My life as a Project Manager: Past, Present and Future of Latvian Genealogical Research.*”

Constance will refer to the All Latvia Database “origins, early challenges, and development with a focus on how documents and records are identified, chosen, translated, extracted, and then converted into database format. She will with emphasize how this resource can be used to help you write your family history and preserve material for future generations”

Later in the afternoon, as part of the Latvia SIG Program, she will discuss: “*Wider and Deeper Searching: Past, Present and Future of the All Latvia Database.*”

Her talk is intended to provide a guide to wider and deeper searching of the All Latvia Database and the critical assessment of search results. The presentation will review the context of documentation reflected in the database and how to use the search results and other internet based material to reconstruct a sense of past generations and their experience of Jewish life. This is a practical lecture using visual aids with the intention of both enhancing search skills and appreciating the context of search results.

After the Latvia SIG luncheon, I will present: “*Step by Step: A Personal Journey of Discover - Reconnecting Past and Present.*”

As stated in the brief abstract to the presentation, it provides a step by step journey of discovery that started with a few faded photographs and “no one to answer questions.” The presentation examines the methodical and exciting genealogical research that led to connecting the past with the present - the valuing of my heritage and establishing meaningful contact with my extended family in Latvia, Israel, USA, Australia, France and Canada. My talk traces the migration of my immediate family from 1796 in Grobina, Latvia to New York and then South Africa and finally to Canada. I try to show that genealogy is far more than just a numbers game.

Again thanks to Barry Shay, our editor, who has produced yet another splendid edition of our newsletter. There are a number of past copies on the website for easy reference.

All the best and with SIG’s greetings.

Henry Blumberg  
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### Editor’s Comments

Supplementing the Latvia SIG agenda for the IAJGS conference in Philadelphia that Henry mentioned, I’d like to emphasize that Lois Rosen, a member of the Latvia SIG board, will be presenting a workshop entitled, *Creating a Family Tree Scroll*, on Friday August 7th. Those of you who have seen an early version of the scroll or heard Lois speak at the SIG luncheon at the IAJGS conference in Salt Lake City will surely be interested in learning how it was done.

Quoting from the conference syllabus, “this workshop will explore the options available to those who would like to create a paper print-out of a family tree. I will explain how I did it myself, and will look at the ways I made it easy, personal, and affordable. I will also compare other printed options, with no particular bias. I use the Mac program Reunion, but will explain the method so that users of PCs and other genealogy software will be able to use my tips and suggestions.”

A major effort is underway in Latvia, under the auspices of Shamir, to commemorate Latvian Jews and the memory of the Holocaust. Part of that effort is to prepare and publish a Jewish Encyclopedia of Latvia. It is planned to cover the more than 400 years during which Jews lived in Latvia and documenting their contributions to science, technology, medicine, music, culture, trade and industry, not only in Latvia but worldwide. (Joseph H. Hirschhorn, mentioned in the President’s Report, will certainly occupy a prominent place in this encyclopedia.) Gary Feitelberg, whose article about the names project was featured in the last issue of the newsletter, has taken an interest in this project and has described it in more detail in this issue. As Gary indicates, please go to the Shamir website and consider sub-

mitting information about you and your family in Latvia and beyond.

The All Latvia Database (ALD) has been a valuable resource to the anyone doing genealogical research concerning Jewish Latvia. Personally, I got hooked after getting a positive result after searching a few variations of my surname. In Gary's second article in this issue, he discusses the ALD, now renamed as the JewishGen Latvia Database, and its value to researchers. Gary gives an overview of the database while presenting an historical account of its origin including those organizations that helped in its development. I'd like to note here that Constance Whippman and Arlene Beare, along with Mike Getz, played crucial roles in bringing the database to fruition. As Henry mentioned earlier, Constance will be a featured speaker at the Latvia SIG luncheon at the upcoming IAJGS conference in Philadelphia.

In his third article, (I believe that is a record for this publication.) Gary presents some of his personal research concerning Harlem Kurlander Cemetery Burials and provides useful information and research tips for us all, including a comprehensive list of Kurland burial societies.

Genealogists interested in Jewish Latvia are fortunate to have a number of websites that are easily accessible and crammed with useful information. In the last issue we included the paper by Rita Bogdanova and Ruvin Ferber describing the names project, which can be found at: <http://names.lu.lv/en.html>. Another site of interest is being developed by the Latvian State Historical Archives in Riga and is called *Raduraksti*. It can be found at: <http://www.lvva-raduraksti.lv/en.html> and is well worth examining.

This site contains the Rabbinat's vital records (birth, marriage, death (BMD)) for many of the shtetls from Aizputes to Vishki. The records are mainly in Russian and need to be transliterated. Luckily, Christine Usdin took it upon herself to transliterate some of them, including BMD records for Vishki from 1899 to 1904 and birth records for Dvinsk from 1868 to 1895. (Not all years covered.) Go to: <http://pagesperso-orange.fr/vishki/rigavitalrecords.html> to see Christine's work and go to: <http://www.lvva-raduraksti.lv/en.html>

to see the original data. This site requires the user to establish a username and a password to access the data. You can contact Christine at:

[usdine@yahoo.fr](mailto:usdine@yahoo.fr) for more information.

Christine's announcement on the Latvia SIG listserv about the work she is doing resulted in a number of inquires about whether the SIG is planning a project to translate and index those records that Christine is not working on. This is certainly a worth-while project and if you are interested in helping on such a project please contact either Henry Blumberg or me. One project we are working on is creating a database of the 1897 All Russian census for Dvinsk. We will discuss the status of this project at the Latvia SIG meeting during the IAJGS conference in Philadelphia.

Another site of interest is run by one of our members, Mitchell Lieber, who is the director of the Rumbula Educational Site at: [http://www.rumbula.org/rumbula\\_homepage.shtml](http://www.rumbula.org/rumbula_homepage.shtml). Mitchell was kind enough to provide the following information that can be found on the "What's New?" link on the site: ([http://www.rumbula.org/whats\\_new.shtml](http://www.rumbula.org/whats_new.shtml))

### **Zanis Lipke Museum to be Built in Riga**

The Zanis Lipke Museum is being constructed in Riga, on the site of the Riga dockworker's former shed. It will chronicle how the inspirational Lipke, and his wife Johanna, saved Jews (and others) during the Holocaust. When the bunker under his shed became full with hidden people, and conditions in Riga were becoming difficult, Lipke rented houses in a rural area so he could rescue and harbor more Jews. Zanis Lipke worked with as many as 25 assistants and hid 55 people during the war, a very large percentage of all of those hidden throughout the country. Zanis Lipke is among those honored by Yad Vashem as a Righteous Among the Nations.

The Riga City Council appropriated 11,000 Lats (about \$20,000 U.S.) for the memorial. Additional contributions are needed to help build the museum and are being accepted at its web site, <http://www.lipke.lv>. The wonderful web site also

showcases the design of the museum and provides information about the Lipkes. The option to change from Latvian to English is in the upper left hand corner of the page.

Information supplied by Eliahu Valk about the Lipke Museum, and other new content will be added to the Rumbula web site this week. Recent additions are always listed at What's New?, accessed from the link under the left hand menu.

### **Escaped Riga Jew's 1942 Report the U.S. To Be Posted at Rumbula Web Site**

Gabriel Ziwjan escaped the Riga Ghetto in December 1941, and passing as a Christian, worked in Latvia until June 1942. During this time he collected information about the fate of Jews in the country by cultivating numerous sources. He then managed to get into Switzerland, where he prepared a written report and accompanying affidavit. It describes the murder of nearly all Latvian Jews in uncanny breadth, depth, detail and accuracy. His report to the allies is chillingly congruent with modern scholarship about the Holocaust in Latvia. Gabriel Ziwjan's September 1942 statement was given to the U.S. Consul in Geneva in September 1942 and forwarded to Washington, D.C., informing the government about the genocide of nearly all Latvian and Lithuanian Jews, which it also mentions.

This copy of Gabriel Ziwjan's statement was supplied to [www.Rumbula.org](http://www.Rumbula.org) by Professor Edward Anders. To view it later this week, see: [http://www.rumbula.org/whats\\_new.shtml](http://www.rumbula.org/whats_new.shtml)

I am sure that many of you have visited the Museum of Family History website at: <http://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com>. Recently, Steven Lasky, who runs the site, has added material of particular interest to the Latvia SIG community and he has allowed me to include some of that material in the newsletter. For example, see: <http://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/mfh-latvia.htm>, *The Jews of Latvia*. In particular, I am happy to include the Foreword and Preface to Max Kaufman's 1948 book entitled, *Churbn Lettland: The Destruction of the Jews of Latvia*.

Max Kaufmann was once an inhabitant of the

Riga Ghetto and wrote a very informative book about what occurred in the Riga Ghetto during WWII. An English version of the book is now available on the website at: <http://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/mfh-churbn-lettland.htm>. The material included in this issue appears on this website.

Finally, I am happy to include the third and final segment of the testimony of Simon Gutman. As in the previous two segments, Sofia Kagna has enhanced the translation with editorial comments that include historical context and other supporting material.

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### **Encyclopedia of Jewish Latvia By Gary Feitelberg**

An ambitious enterprising, important, special, and worthwhile project is underway to document the Jews of Latvia. The mission is a marvelous effort or Riga's Shamir Religious Community to record our history and past and pay special tribute to the community that once thrived prior to the Shoah and has now sparked a renaissance of activity in recent times.

According to the conception and creation, this encyclopedia has to cover the period of more than 400 years long residence of Jewish people in Latvia and to reflect its contribution to culture, medicine, music, science, technology, trade and industry of this country. It has to be a new source of valuable information not only about the Jews in Latvia but also about their impact on the world's Jewry.

This project is extremely important and substantially contributes to a culture of Jewish people. To download a questionnaire for submission go to <http://www.shamir.lv/en/menu/4-.html> and complete it to the best of your ability. You can submit the questionnaire directly on the website or return your written account by email to [shamir@apollo.lv](mailto:shamir@apollo.lv).

One should admit and note for the historical record that the last comprehensive Jewish encyclopedia in Russian depicting the life of Jews in Latvia was published more than a hundred years ago in the beginning of twentieth century. The information that is recorded and relevant is barely historical presently. For the moment, there is not even one encyclopedia specifically concerning history and achievements of Latvian Jewry and also including profiles of its outstanding members.

The *Jewish Encyclopedia of Latvia* is aimed to be an anthology about Jews of Latvia, a compendium of facts that have been accumulated to the present moment and also a universal book of reference in this field. One can appreciate the unique character and exceptional importance by considering following facts:

In this encyclopedia the progressive impact of Latvian Jewry on various aspects of social life in Latvia is brought to light for the first time in history.

The fate of Jews in Soviet Latvia (in years 1917-1919, 1940-1941 and 1944-1991) is illuminated including all personalia concerned with Latvia till 1991. This year is separating modern Latvia from its last Soviet period that already belongs to history.

The names of the Jewish victims of Stalin's regime are retraced and preserved for descendants.

The Shoah subject matter in Latvia receives wide coverage, the names of Jews- victims of Nazism.

Along with thematic articles (scope of activities, center of population, business organizations, public organizations etc.) there is a special emphasis made on importance of Jewish contribution – personalities as well as the whole nation- to every field of modern civilization. In the context of information volume there will be three types of biographical articles:

The working process, organization, and formation of its structure and financing the publication are planned according to the following principles:

1. Rabbi Menachem BarCohen, is chairman of

the “*Shamir*” society (Latvia), and also initiates and administrates the publication of the *Encyclopedia of Jewish Latvia* project.

EJL publication. “Shamir” society (Latvia) is the base institution that provides the work of editorial staff.

2. The editorial staff which determines the type and the character of the encyclopedia and consists of outstanding authorities in the field of Judaica in Latvia . The authors' core group includes professionals in areas like history, literature, medicine, natural science, economics, culture, religion, etc.

3. At the present moment the work proceeds on the topics of centers of population, business, public, enlightenment and culture organizations, political parties etc.

4. The publication of encyclopedia summarizes the period of Jewish presence in Latvia up to an end of the twentieth century.

5. Preparation of the *Encyclopedia of Jewish Latvia* is first prepared in Russian and when all the preparation material is ready it is planned to then start the translation into English.

6 Anyone who identifies himself or had been identified with the Jewish nation may be included in the encyclopedia (Halakhic rule is not applied). The number of persons is not limited.

7. In the process of writing thematic as well as biographical articles data from Latvian State Archive is widely used (in particular from Communist Party of Latvia Central Committee Archive and KGB Archive of Soviet Republic of Latvia). As a result, information about tens of previously unknown personalia is gained.

General information about EJL is available at the website [www.shamir.lv](http://www.shamir.lv) . The Jews of Latvian origin and all interested parties can submit their proposal by email [lee@shamir.lv](mailto:lee@shamir.lv)

Autobiographies, Biographies, Correspondence, Documents, Family Tree Charts, Photographs and other materials are welcome for review and submission.

*Below is the project description from the Shamir website. Ed.*

For the last five years the Jewish Religious Community “Shamir” (Riga, Latvia) has devoted itself to the perpetuation of the memory of Latvian Jewry and the victims of the Holocaust, as well as the advancement of Jewish history and culture in Latvia. The community has published over ten books on the history of Latvian Jews and Jewish tradition, held several workshops for teachers and designed a series of educational programs for high school students on the history of the Holocaust.

At the moment the Jewish Encyclopedia of Latvia is the flagship project of “Shamir”. This encyclopedia will cover a period of over 400 years of Jewish presence in Latvia and will reflect the Jewish contribution to Latvian science, technology, medicine, music, culture, trade and industry. This will be a new source of invaluable information not only about Latvian Jews, but also about their impact on world Jewry.

It should be taken into account that the last comprehensive Jewish encyclopedia in Russian that had also reflected the life of Jews in Latvia was published nearly 100 years ago – at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and at the present time its only value is historical. The Concise Jewish Encyclopedia published in Israel at the turn of this century is, by virtue of its specificity, unsystematic and fragmentary with regard to its information about Latvian Jews. The same can be said about the recently published YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe (Institute for Jewish Research, New York). To this day there is not a single encyclopedia devoted specifically to the history and achievements of Latvian Jewry that would also contain biographies of its distinguished members.

The compilation of our future encyclopedia already numbers over 3500 entries – feature stories and individual biographies. Over 1000 articles (more than 800 printed pages) have been received from authors and are ready to be edited. Dr. Grigory Smirin is the science editor of the encyclopedia, and the editorial board consists of Prof. G. Branover, Prof. L. Dribins, Prof. A. Klyotskin,

Prof. R. Ferber, R. Bogdanova, B. Volkovich et al. The project coordinators are Dr. Batiya Valdman in Israel and Dr. Ivar Brod in the United States. The encyclopedia is intended to be published in Russian and English.

We present several experimental pages of the Jewish Encyclopedia of Latvia for your consideration.

We would greatly appreciate it if you could find the time to provide us information about your parents, yourself as well as the Jews whose biographies are tied to Latvia and who, in your opinion, deserve to be included in this publication. We have attached a questionnaire to this pamphlet, but if your information extends beyond its scope, that will benefit the entire project. We would also be very grateful to you for any graphic and documentary materials related to the life of Latvian Jews.

We welcome your contributions of copies correspondence, documents, family tree charts, and photographs as well which will be part of the archive and Jewish Museum in Latvia.

## **JewishGen Latvia Database** **By** **Gary Feitelberg**

The JewishGen Latvia Database, originally called the All Latvia Database, has opened many doors and research possibilities for those individuals researching their roots in their ancestral home of Latvia. One can link to this very powerful research tool from the Courland Research Group and the Latvia SIG websites, as well as directly from JewishGen. The link to the database is: <http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Latvia/>

The monumental achievement of this research tool is due to the initiative of the Latvia SIG, the Courland Research Group and numerous volunteers who have contributed resources and time to this valiant effort. The project includes the Courland Gubernia (area and region), Livland Gubernia, and Vitebsk Gubernia.

Amazingly, one can simply search a surname or shtetl, by entering the name into a search field, click away, and then receive a quick reply as to

which database it is in and how many records are available.

This database was originally composed of “The Courland 1907 Duma Voters List (including the 1905 List of Windau Voters), the Courland Family Lists, Passlosen – Jews Without Lawful Permit, Jews in Hasenpoth/Aizpute 1834, Jewish Inhabitants of Riga 1885/1886, The Jewish Police Lists, and Riga Tax Administration List [Fond 1394], Soon thereafter, other databases were established including, The Jewish Families of Dvinsk/Daugavpils, the Kurland Young Men’s Mutual Aid Society (KYMMAS), The Courland Vedomosti Database, and the Extraordinary Commission Lists - Riga. Also added are the Riga Passport and Travel Documents Registration List 1900; and The All Russian 1897 Census – Latvia.

Others include those which apply to the whole of Latvia and its neighbors. These are the Jewish Religious Personnel in the Russian Empire, 1853-1854, the JewishGen Family Finder (JGFF); and the JewishGen Online Worldwide Burial Registry (JOWBR).

This ever-expanding special research tool has grown considerably since that time and many other resources and sources have been added and continue to be added.

Two relatively new and important databases containing information not available elsewhere are the Marriages in Riga, 1854-1921 and the Jewish Family Lists of Rēzekne.

One of the most important and valuable databases is The All Russia 1897 Census–Latvia. Hopefully this work in progress can be expanded to all Latvian cities where there was once a Jewish presence. An ongoing project of the Latvia SIG is to bring the All Russia 1897 Census for Dvinsk online as part of the JewishGen Latvia Database.

The All Russia 1897 Census-Latvia includes detailed family data for 7,000 individuals living in Riga; Rezekne and Krustpils (Vitebsk Gubernia); and five towns in Courland, as recorded in the All Russia Census of 1897. An ongoing project is to extract all surviving material from this important source.

Thee following is a summary of each component of the database.

## **Courland Gubernia**

### The Courland 1907 Duma Voter’s List (Including the 1905 List of Windau Voters

This database consists of Jewish males eligible to vote in the elections to the 1907 Russian Duma (Parliament). Each of the twenty principal cities and towns of Courland Gubernia (Province) are included except Liepaja (Libau), Lavia. In addition, the database includes Jews registered to vote in Ventspils (Windau) in the 1905 Russian Duma elections.

### The Courland Family Lists & Enlistment/Recruit Lists

This database consists of names of adult family members extracted from official Jewish Military Recruits Registers from ten major cities of Courland, together with an 1874 family census list from Bauska. The Recruits Enlistment Registers are from Frederickstadt (Jaunjelgava), Goldingen (Kuldiga), Hasenpoth (Aizpute), Libau (Liepaja), Grobin (Grobina), Pilten (Piltene), and Windau (Ventspils). Contains some 8,000 entries and over 11,000 named individuals.

### Passlosen - Jews without Lawful Permit

This database consists of 900 male Jews, declared to be “Passlosen” or “without lawful permit” in the official Russian Gazette for Kurland Gubernia “*Kurlandskaya Gubernskie Vedomosti*” in the summer of 1855.

### Jews in Hasenpoth/Aizpute 1834

This database contains over 1,000 Jewish males living in Hasenpoth (Aizpute) in 1834. Jewish males of all ages are listed, including a four-day old infant not yet given his name. The names of female children

### The Kurland Young Men’s Mutual Association (KYMMAS)

This database consists of of 1,225 names if members of KYMMAS together with their families. It

is compiled from the 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Booklet of this landsmannshaftn which existed in the United States between 1889 and 1945. This is part of an ongoing project.

#### The Courland Vedomosti Database

Over 2,000 entries giving details of news reports and listings from the official Russian News Gazette from Kurland between 1853-1860. Another ongoing project, one day it will eventually extend to 1900. Perhaps one day this will be combined with Passlosen – Jews Without Permit.

### **Livland Gubernia**

Jewish Inhabitants of Riga, 1885/1886  
2,650 entries, both male and female, listed as lawfully residing in Riga in or about 1885. References to over 4,000 individuals.

#### Riga Tax Administration List

Over 12,000 entries, males and females, taken from the Riga Tax Administration records compiled and amended during the years 1858-1917. References to over 23,000 individuals living and working in Riga.

#### The Extraordinary Commission Lists: Riga

Over 2,000 individuals residing in Riga who are recorded as having perished at the hands of the German forces, most during 1941.

#### Riga Passport and Travel Documents Registration List 1900

Information on over 12,500 persons from throughout the Russian Empire, who resided temporarily in Riga in 1900 and registered their presence and travel documents with the police.

#### Marriages in Riga, 1854-1921

Index of a register of 9,241 marriages, from the Latvian State Historical Archives in Riga, dating from 1854-1921. There are nearly 20,000 given names and surnames, listing the names of both the bride and groom.

### **Vitebsk Gubernia**

#### The Dvinsk / Daugavpils Family Lists

Over 8,200 entries providing some 14,000 names of members of the Jewish community of Dvinsk, in Vitebsk gubernia [now Daugavpils, Latvia]. The list includes excerpts from Merchants lists, lists of petit bourgeois, tax and military recruits lists.

#### Jewish Family Lists of Rēzekne

Over 6,600 entries, members of the Jewish community of Rēzekne (Rezhitse, Rossitten), in Vitebsk gubernia. Detailed information on each family, from 1898.

#### Vsia Rossiia Business Directory - Vitebsk

Data on 3,611 businesses in Vitebsk Gubernia, from the 1911 "All Russia" business directory.

GOOD LUCK!!! HAPPY HUNTING!!!

### **Harlem Kurlander Cemetery Burials By Gary Feitelberg**

The Harlem Kurlander landsmannshaftn organization had burials at Riverside Cemetery, 12 Market Street, Saddle Brook, NJ 07633. The telephone number is (201) 843-5266. Because the cemetery receives many requests, they are unable to offer research services for free. The cemetery asks for a charitable donation and contribution of \$35.00 to the cemetery to help cover maintenance costs. For this fee, you shall receive an eighteen year perpetual yahrzeit sheet for the individuals searched.

One can certainly supplement details and facts for these individuals with information from such resources and sources such as newspaper obituary notices, vital records (birth, marriage, divorce, death), immigration and naturalization, censuses, and last but not least, especially from the Social Security Death Index (SSDI) and the original application.

Suggested additional details may include other

names such as Hebrew name, middle names, maiden names, date/place of birth, date/place of death, cause of death, name of father, name of mother and maiden name where known, name of spouse, date of marriage, name and address of next of kin/perpetual care provider, social security number, address of last known residence, survivors (from obituary notices), cemetery, section, plot and grave number, date of burial, funeral director, gravestone/tombstone inscription, etc.

Perhaps a volunteer or teams of volunteers would be willing to walk the Latvian landsmannshaftn cemeteries to begin commencing this important and worthwhile project in the very near future. Photographing each and every maskevah can be a vital part of this computer database and project.

It is my hope, goal, and dream that all this information will be created and compiled into a database that will be included in the JewishGen Latvia Database!!!

## Riverside Cemetery Burials

1. Harry N. Berman	27. Yetta Jackalow	53. Paul Rabinowitz
2. Roslyn Cecelia Brown	28. ? Kahn	54. Dora Roloff
3. Michael Blumenthal	29. Louis K. Kramer	55. Leo E. Roloff
4. Tillie Blumenthal	30. Mollie Kramer	56. Phillip Roloff
5. Harry Cohen	31. Simon Krame	57. Charles Rosenberg
6. Lena Cohen	32. Sylvia B. Kramer	58. Emma Rosenberg
7. Lillian Cohen	33. Freida Kupler	59. Jennie Rosenberg
8. Bertha Davidoff	34. Harry Kupler	60. Louis Rosenberg
9. ? Dulitz	35. J. Kutzin	61. Robert Rosenberg
10. Ida Feitelberg	36. Ruth Kutzin	62. Yetta Rosenberg
11. Joseph Feitelberg	37. ? Lazurus	63. Benjamin Saal
12. Hattie Freedman	38. David Lazurus	64. Freida Saal
13. B.N. Glassman	39. Helen Lazurus	65. Joseph Saal
14. Rose Glassman	40. Louis Lazurus	66. Joseph Sackman
15. Solomon Glassman	41. M. Lazurus	67. Max Shalwitz
16. Joseph Gross	42. Rebecca Lazurus	68. Helen Sneider
17. Betty Grossman	43. Hyman Levenson	69. Samuel Sneider
18. David Grossman	44. Yetta Levenson	70. Meyer Smulian
19. ? Hoviss	45. Jacob Maklan	71. Samuel Smulian
20. Samuel Hyman	46. Jennie Mantus	72. Lena Spotkov
21. Mr. Insler	47. Robert Mantus	73. Morris Spotkov
22. Mrs. Insler	48. Gertrude Michaels	74. Hannah Steinberg
23. Harold Jacobowitz	49. Sam Michaels	75. Paul Steinberg
24. Isadore Jackalow	50. Rose Park	76. Jack Weitzman
25. Jennie Jackalow	51. William Park	77. Slova Weitzman
26. Paul Jackalow	52. Hannah Rabinowitz	

## Kurland Burial Societies

Society Name	City	State/Country	CEM NAME	NOTES	Society Type
Courland Ben. Society (post)	KURLAND	LAT	Mt. Carmel - Queens	Block E, Map 56	Landsmanshaft
Glenwood Ben. Association Inc. (post)	KURLAND	LAT?	Mt. Golda	Cemetery Road - Left	All Others
Congregation Agudas Achim Anshei Kurland & Lida	KURLAND	LAT & LIDA	Mt. Lebanon (NY)	Block K, Section 22	Synagogue
Kurlander Lodge (map 2)	KURLAND	LAT	Grove Street & South Orange Ave	Grove Street - Map #30	Landsmanshaft
Chevra Agudas Achim Anshe Kurlander (post)	KURLAND	LAT & LIDA	Washington (B'klyn)	Section 2, Post 156 & 228	Landsmanshaft
Congregation Khal Adas Kurland	KURLAND	LAT	Beth David (Elmont)	Section B, Block 11	Synagogue
Harlem Kurlander Young Men's Aid Society	KURLAND	LAT	Mt. Moriah	Section J	Landsmanshaft
Harlem Kurlander Young Men's Aid Society	KURLAND	LAT	Riverside (Saddle Brook)	Block C, Map #65	Landsmanshaft
Independent Kurland Benevolent Society	KURLAND	LAT	Riverside (Saddle Brook)	Block A, Map #105	Landsmanshaft
Kahl Adas Kurlander	KURLAND	LAT	Washington (B'klyn)	Section 2, Post 202	Landsmanshaft
Kurlander (map)	KURLAND	LAT	Mt. Golda	Cemetery Road - Left	Landsmanshaft
Kurlander Ben. Relief Society (post)	KURLAND	LAT	Mt. Carmel - Queens	Block E, Map 59	Landsmanshaft
Kurlander Brueder Verein (post)	KURLAND	LAT	Mt. Zion	Path MR LB, Gate 26	Landsmanshaft
Kurlander Young Friends	KURLAND	LAT	Mt. Hebron	Block 11, Path 1	Landsmanshaft

## Kurland Burial Societies

Kurlander Young Friends	KURLAND	LAT	Mt. Hebron	Block 11, Path 1	Landsmanshaft
Kurlander Young Friends Ben. Association of Brooklyn, Inc.	KURLAND	LAT	Mt. Hebron	Block 109, Path 22	Landsmanshaft
Kurlander Young Men's Mutual Aid Society	KURLAND	LAT	New Mt. Carmel	Section 2, Block 9, Map 9	Landsmanshaft
Kurlander Young Men's Mutual Aid Society	KURLAND	LAT	Mt. Zion	Path 27 Right, Gate Road; Path 34 Right, Gate Road	Landsmanshaft
Kurlander Young Friends Unt. Verein of Brooklyn (post B)	KURLAND	LAT	Mt. Zion	Path B Left, Gate 7	Landsmanshaft
Independent Kurland Benevolent Society of the Bronx (post)	KURLAND	LAT	Washington (B'klyn)	Section 1, Post 54	Landsmanshaft
Courland Ben. Society (post)	KURLAND	LAT	Mt. Carmel - Queens	Block E, Map 56	Landsmanshaft
Cravats Norman Kurlander Glenwood Haass Ben. Association, Inc.	KURLAND	LAT?	New Montefiore	Section 5, Blocks 3, 5 & 8; Section 6, Block 1	Landsmanshaft
Cravats Norman Kurlander Glen	KURLAND	LAT	Mt. Zion	Path B11 Left, Gate 7	Landsmanshaft
Chevra Agudas Achim Anshe Kurland & Leda	KURLAND	LAT & LIDA	Mt. Zion	Path 39 Right, Gate 9	Landsmanshaft
Newmark Young Men's Benevolent Association	KURLAND	LAT	Beth David (Elmont)	Section E, Block 5	All Others
Newmark Young Men's Benevolent Association	KURLAND	LAT	Mt. Neboh (NY)	Path 16 Right	Landsmanshaft

# **Churbn Lettland: The Destruction of the Jews of Latvia**

by  
**Max Kaufmann**

## **Foreword**

The Association of Liberated Latvian Jews in the US-occupied zone of Germany warmly welcomes the publication of their comrade Max Kaufmann's book, in which he recounts the tragedy of Latvian Jewry, which was once so splendid and flourishing. The decision to write such a work and the author's creative power are equally admirable.

The homeland of Latvian Jewry is soaked not only with the blood of innocent Latvian Jewish men, women and children; in addition, countless transports of Jewish men, women and children from nearly all the countries of Europe were murdered on Latvian soil by the bestial, cowardly German and Latvian Nazi bandits.

The work of our comrade Max Kaufman is the first to recount, more or less comprehensively and objectively, the sufferings and tragic destruction of the splendid Jewry of Latvia, and to inform the world about the role played by the local Latvian population, which largely shares the blame for this tragedy with the rapacious and bestial Nazi bandits.

We are absolutely convinced that Max Kaufmann's work will receive a very strong response and that the world will at last understand the depth of the tragedy that has affected, among others, the small band of surviving Latvian Jews.

Jeannot Lewenson, Lawyer, Chairman of the Association of Latvian Jews in Germany

The martyrology and the destruction of the Jewish community in Latvia is connected with the fate of a part of the Jews of Vilna, who were brought to Riga on 29 September 1943 after the liquidation of the Vilna ghetto and who shared with the Latvian Jews the final path of martyrdom and all the stages of destruction.

The Kaiserwald concentration camp in Riga, with its divisions-the HKP, Strazdumuiza, TWL,

HVL, ABA, Dünawerke, Lenta, Meteor, the Balast dam etc. - and, later on, the concentration camps in Germany-Stutthof, Magdeburg, Burggraben, Riben etc.-are the milestones along the cruel, thorny path walked by the Jews of Latvia and Vilna. The book, *Churbn Lettland*, which describes the destruction of the once-splendid Jewish community in Latvia, is also part of the history of the destruction of Vilna Jewry. A specific and precise picture is provided in the descriptions of the Stutthof and Buchenwald concentration camps, in which I lived through difficult times together with the author.

The author, Max Kaufmann, is the only person to date who has told the story of *Churbn Lettland*.

We salute him and hope that his work will be well-received.

Nochum Senitzki, Engineer, Chairman of the Association of Vilna Jews in Germany

## **Preface**

*"Ani Hagewer raa oni baschewer ewrato!"* (I am the man who has known affliction, I have felt the rod of his wrath.) (Lamentations of Jeremiah, 3:1) This book describes one of the gravest crises - in fact, the near-extinction - of our Jewish-Latvian *kibbutz* (community).

Let the book speak for itself!

I would like to preface it with a few words of a personal nature.

I do not want the reader to regard the following report as a memoir in the proper sense of the word, but rather as the outpourings of a heavy heart that wishes to rid itself of all these terrible experiences and to forget them.

Six dreadful years lie behind me, and only now am I beginning to write down my memories in *Churbn Lettland*. I often tried to do so during those years of suffering, but every time I was dragged from one ghetto to another, from one concentration camp to another, I had to destroy what I had written down. The same thing happened to many of my faithful friends from Riga who were good writers and kept diaries or wrote

down their impressions. All of these documents are either buried in the earth or have disappeared altogether.

This is the only explanation of the fact that although I have read a number of books about ghettos and concentration camps since I have been living abroad, the world still knows little about the fate of us Latvian Jews. Therefore, I decided to fill that gap and to describe in my book the destruction of the once so beautiful Jewish community of Latvia.

It is a very, very difficult task, even if I were a great poet or writer.

Who can understand or believe that so much cruelty was at all possible in the twentieth century?

However, unfortunately, the events I have described here are facts.

I wish to build, in my own way, a lasting memorial to all those who have perished.

I wish to provide material to the future historians who will one day describe the great destruction of our Jewish people.

I wish to give to those of my countrymen who have not been in Latvia during the past few years a clear picture of the misfortune and the sufferings of the Latvian Jews.

For the few remaining Jews who survived their persecution, I wish to hold up a clear mirror to the difficult time they have lived through.

I wish to let the world know how large a role was played by the native Latvian population in our tragedy, and above all I wish to give our young people a true picture of the martyrdom and destruction of their brothers and sisters, their parents and grandparents, so that they will always remember their sufferings and prove worthy of them.

*"Zchoir et ascher oso Icho Amolek!"* (Remember what the Amalekites did to you!) (Deuteronomy 25:17)

Whole countries are in ruins, a whole world was drowned in blood and tears and the Jewish people

with it. Yes, in this catastrophe they paid the highest price. Nonetheless we, the remaining Latvian Jews, hope that a new and free life may come for us all!

Finally, I wish to remark that it seems an irony of fate that I am writing my book in Germany - in Munich, the very place where Hitler, the originator of all our sufferings, came to power.

*"Ki eichcho uchal weroisi beroo ascher imzo et ami? Weieichcho uchal weroisi bawdoin moladi?"* (For how can I bear to see the calamity which is coming upon my race? Or how can I bear to see the destruction of my family?) (Esther 8:6-7)

Munich, July 1947

### **An Interview with Simon Gutman Part 3**

Recorded 7 February 2002

Interviewed by Ayna Antane

Translated from Russian to English by Sofia Kagna

Later his mother came to Gudkin, who after the war was managing our advertising department; to receive a pension for her son.

In Pskov in the turmoil I finally found the car where my wife was. Bombing began again. The German Army was bombing Pskov this time. Later we have reached to the railway station, got on a train and began our long way through Yaroslavl' and Gorky (*now Nizhny Novgorod, the fourth largest city in Russia. From 1932 to 1990 the city was renamed Gorkiy (Горький) after the writer Maxim Gorky (1868 -1936) who was born there*). We unloaded in Shar'ye, Gorkiy region (*now Shar'ye, Novgorodskaya Oblast', Russia*). The summer heat was awful, all the time we were thirsty. They have ordered us to stay near the lumber plant where we worked. They placed us to live at a school building and gave us some bed linen. We worked for several weeks there, preparing the logs. Where, do you think, those logs were supposed to go? That was a lumber for Donbass (*Donets Basin, commonly referred as Donbass, is a geographical region on the South-East of Ukraine. Historically this region is distinct from the rest of Ukraine by the Russian-speaking populace, which is half-Russian, half-Ukrainian*

*ethnically, and by being one of the richest coal-mining areas in Europe.* The front needed a lot of coal and we needed to deliver! Where is Donbas? Where is Yaroslavl? They needed a lot of lumber! There with us worked several women, they were very thin, all of them were Tartars. They could lift the logs, two at once, put them under their armpits and on their shoulders, and carry them! An ordinary man would just kill over! They did it - joking and playing!

In August there was an order that everyone who was from Latvia should join the Latvian Division and I was enlisted as well to go there. There came the moment of farewell! We went to Gorkiy. I should tell you that when the train approached to the station... there was this scream, an unbearable female cry: the women saw off their men to the war! It was a nightmare! Perhaps there is no other country where women scream as loud as in Russia.

Most of my friends did not have children before the war. All of them were born after the war. This is the great law of nature!

From August until December of 1941 I was in Gorokhovetskiye camps. The Latvian Division was being formed there. How can I describe our everyday life there? There is not much to tell you. They washed us in a tent with a hot shower. There were four of us at a time, standing. Those who were taller than me were all right, but in that process my leftovers were the splashes of dirty water. Then we were jumping out of that tent, barefoot, in October, in a forest, and were running over the cones and thorny grass. There was only one pot that was used to prepare our dinner, and we also used it for washing ourselves, then we rinsed it and cooked dinners in it again. After that story the one who was responsible was tried in the military tribunal.

On December 3rd 1941 we approached the river Nara, to the city of Narofominsk (*Naro-Fominsk (Russian: Наро-Фоминск) is a small city in Moscow region. It is located in about 70 km (43.5 miles) southwest from Moscow*), the city where the Latvian Division was fighting. Those who survived during our ordeal there could remember how we lost, how we were continuously moving

in circles before we arrived there. I was a private and I had remained in this rank during the entire war. For us, the inexperienced new recruits, the rookie soldiers the first impression of the war was seeing the trucks coming from the front line with soldiers covered in blood that were standing and seating there. When I saw that, I immediately understood what was it all about.

There were Russian troops, and we arrived there to replace them. I was lying in a hole on the frozen winter ground. It was freezing, 30-40 degrees (*he uses here degrees in Celsius, -30-40 °C equals -22-40 °F*); it was hardly daylight. The commander of Russian troops with a gun in his hand led us to the front line, to the river. There we were laying, they have brought for us those white robes, the camouflage. I had fired couple of times from my Tula's rifle (*the well-renown Mosin-Nagant rifle also called the Three-Line Rifle was used in different issues from 1891 and until the 1960s, it was manufactured in the city of Tula*) to the direction of the woods. It is possible that I had killed a German soldier, but it is equally possible that I did not kill anybody. Most likely I did not.

When all of us charged forward during the attack, I had got myself caught in the barbed wire, and because my white camouflage was stuck there I was not able to free myself for a while. Dead Germans were lying around us. They were nasty and repulsive. My comrades run and they were caught in the line of fire. Then the wounded started to scream. The soldiers crossed the line, then went over, and remained there constantly moving. Shortly after all of these I fell ill; I had an acute condition of dysentery. It was horrible: to be sick when it was freezing and on the move! When we were not moving, I had told the commander that I was unwell. However it was not accepted that anyone could be "unwell" during the military operation. During the war on the front line you are either wounded, or healthy.

We were laying there and "Katyusha" (*"Katyusha" was a "pet" name for the multiple rocket launchers that were invented, built and tried out in the Soviet Union at the beginning in the WW 2. The trademark sound of "Katyushas" was unique and the infantry sol-*

diers loved it because it was a sure sign that their artillery was supporting them. That is why they fondly nicknamed them "Katyusha" from a popular song about a girl named Katysha, the tender nickname for Katherina, who was singing a song about her beloved soldier fiancée) suddenly struck! There was a huge explosion and the flame was rising around us! I was barely moving and had no strength left. We started our move on the 6th of December and it was already close to January 1st. I was not sent to hospital immediately. I was directed from one emergency medical station to another before they sent me to the hospital. On January 1st, 1942 I was at some medical unit, and they gave me a bowl of hot tea with a lump of sugar! I have not ever drunk a tastier cup of tea! It was hot! It was sweet!

Finally I reached the hospital. It was the hospital for infectious diseases of the Western front. Almost all staff there was from Belarus. When the commissar (the officer responsible for ideological support and education) learned that I was an artist, he gave an order right away: "Leave him here! We need this guy." A countrywoman from the nearby village worked as a nurse in this hospital. This is the way she made a bed for me: she lifted me with her left hand and held me under her arm and made a bed with her right hand. She was like a man! This is how weak I was at the time! There I stayed for a long time, I stayed at the same hospital until summer. They put me to take care of linen in the laundry. It was very important to be diligent in this duty. If my superior would spot an insect, I'd be dismissed for sure.

Then I was transferred to the region of Vязьма (*Vyazma* (Russian: *Вязьма*) is a medium-size town in Smolensk region in Russia that historically stood in the way of the enemy's invasion from the West on the road to Moscow), and again I was on the front line. I was enlisted to the Ural division: I did not want to be in the Latvian division any more. We found ourselves on the Central front. We were ordered to start the developing attack. We did not have any artillery support, and neither planes, nor tanks to cover us; there were only us there armed with machine-guns. In the evening we went ahead and stayed on the front line all night long. The village was just ahead of us, and the Germans were there. Ahead was a

plane field. We were lying there. The mine exploded, and many of us were killed. In the morning the reconnaissance plane appeared in the sky, and after that there were about 40 planes and they were bombing us. I was lying there in a trench hole.

In 1943 on September 12th I thrust myself out from the entrenchment, and I was shut in my left arm, and my arm was broken. Stained with blood I came crawling to my comrades where they gave me the first aid: someone quickly bandaged me – my arm was twisted the wrong way. The cart was going to the medical post, and they took me there. Then I was put on a special medical train, and I found myself later in Kuybyshev region (now Samara region (Russian: *Самарская область*, *Samarskaya oblast*) is located in the South of Russia along Volga river. In 1936 - 1990 the region was renamed after Valerian Kuybyshev (also Kuibyshev; Russian: *Куйбышев*) (1888 - 1935) a Russian revolutionary and a famous Red Army military commander during the Russian Civil War. In 1990 the city and region had their original name returned to them on the waive of *Pereestroika*), at the station of Shantala in a hospital. I stayed in that hospital from September [1943] to February 1944.

My brother Solomon was in such a hurry escaping from Daugavpils that the only things he took with were the family photographs! He said, "We could always get anything, except the photographs!" My mother and sister were running away from Daugavpils too. That was a separate saga. My brother was on the different front. He was in Nizhniy Volochek (*There is no "Nizhniy Volochek"*. Probably he means here *Vyshniy Volochyok* (Russian: *Вышний Волочёк*). *Vyshniy Volochyok* is a medium size town in Tver region of Russia. A highway and a railway that connecting Moscow and Saint Petersburg pass through the town. "Nizhniy" and "Vyshniy" are Russian words that mean just "lower" and "upper"), then their unit was moved to the Balkans. He was in the technical unit that was repairing tanks and they moved together with the army.

My mother and my sister were with Salya's (brother Solomon) family. Some acquaintance from the military helped them. They started to

move on their foot. Nyuta (the sister) was always limping, and then they traveled by a horse (carriage?) Salya had two little boys by then. How we got in touch with his family by mail, how we had found each other after the war, even now I cannot recollect. The fact is, that I had visited them (my mother and my sister) in the Chelyabinsk region (*Chelyabinsk Oblast* (Russian: Челябинская область, *Chelyabinskaya oblast*) is located in the North-East area deep inside of Russia.) in 1943. The family of my brother Solomon went even further. My wife went via Tashkent to Stalinabad (now *Dushanbe* (formerly *Dyushambe* (before 1929) and *Stalinabad* (1929 - 1961), the capital of *Tajikistan*). There she found a job in the management of a power station construction project. She had a room there. I went to her when I recovered after my injury.

My sister had never married. She had a boyfriend, as she told me shortly before her death. He was a businessman from Dvinsk. He courted her for a long time, they seemed to be in love with each other, but when he understood that she does not own any real estate property, he ended their relationship and did not see her anymore.

My brother already passed away several years ago because of a pancreas disease. He got married even earlier than I. My brother was a very good artist. His son – Naftoliy Gutman – is also an artist, he often makes advertisements for our community, and he is himself already a grandfather. Naftoliy's son is an artist too. And my son, Naum, is an artist. Salya's daughter - Asya - is a musician, her parents had to push her in this direction, but anyway she has become a good musician. Now she is a teacher in a music school. Asya has left for Germany with her second husband and their children. The widow of my brother now lives in Germany too. The eldest son of my brother for some reason was named Seryozha (*Seryozha* is a short form of Russian name *Sergey*. Mr. Gutman here probably said "some reason" because it is not a traditional Jewish name). He was ne'er-do-well kind of guy. They put him to work on a railway freight terminal; he worked as a train coupler. And there he was squished to death, and he was only eighteen years old

My wife and I returned to Riga from Stalinabad in March of 1945. We were living in an apartment at Akas Street. Gudkin invited me to work at the film distribution committee. I continued working there until my retirement. I became a member of the Union of Artists of Latvia. I had many art shows. There were exhibitions of caricaturists and poster artists, special exhibitions with works by the artists who were the war veterans.

In 1945 my first son was born, it happened just before May 1st, exactly before Victory day (*in the Soviet Union May 1st was the International Labor Day (May Day) and May 9th was the Victory Day* (Russian: День Победы, *Den' Pobedy*) that marks the capitulation of Nazi Germany to the Soviet Union in the Second World War in May 1945). The name of my son is Lyova or Lev. This name is inherited from our Jewish grandfathers; almost all of them had double names. My brother's name is Solomon, in honor of our grandfather his full name is Zalman-Mendel. My name is Simon, in honor of our grandfather I am Simon-Shleme. Lev was first named Ruvine-Leybe, after my wife's father, but later we decided to change his name in honor of Leo Tolstoy (*Count Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy* (1828 – 1910) (Russian: Лев Николаевич Толстой), commonly referred to in English as *Leo* (*Lyof*, *Lyoff*) *Tolstoy*, was a Russian writer – novelist, essayist, dramatist and philosopher). He graduated from the Polytechnic Institute where he mainly studied at the Department of Energy Resources Engineering. He served in the Soviet army in Kaliningrad region (*Kaliningrad* (Russian: Калининград) is a seaport in the Russian territory that is separate from Russian mainland and located between Poland and Lithuania on the Baltic Sea. After the Second World War the largely destroyed Prussian and German town of Königsberg, that was occupied by the Soviet Army in 1945, was given together with adjoined territory to the Soviet Union according to the agreement between the allies (Soviet Union, Britain, United States and France). The city was renamed *Kaliningrad* in 1946 in honor of the Soviet revolutionary and politician *Mikhail Kalinin*). He worked here [*in Riga?*] and then got married. His daughter was born here too. After some time his wife decided to leave for the USA. There they first lived in

Houston. They were working under the contract. Then they moved to Denver, Colorado. Now he is working as a translator in The Hague, Holland. He translates from English to Russian. But he divorced his wife. His little girl, his daughter is probably already twenty-three.

My second son, Naum, was born in 1951. He's got everything from his mother, and his mother was very pretty. He was named in honor of my wife's grandfather Nahman. Naum is very devoted to me. He is a very important person for me; I even consider him "senior" to me. I am not his senior now, but he is my senior. Naum was not admitted to the Academy of Arts, he did not get enough examinational points to get in there. He worked as an artist at "Aurora" cinema, but when all movie theaters were closed (*probably at a time of the big economic recession in all post-soviet republics in the beginning of 1990<sup>th</sup>*), he had lost his job. He is married and has a son.

During the Soviet time after the war I worked mainly in the film industry – in the film studio in Shmerli (*area in the south part of Riga*). I made posters for movies, and then those posters were printed in the printing-house. I made big well-made posters for the Latvian films, later I presented my originals of these posters to the film-archive.

My mother and sister Nyuta returned to Riga in the fall of 1945, they joined us at my place at 8 Akas Street. In November 1946, on the eve of the November holidays (*November 7 is the anniversary of the Great October Revolution of 1917 It was an official holiday in the Soviet Union*), my mother died in a hospital; she was extremely exhausted during her time in the evacuation.

My sister had been very devoted to our mother, and my mother was extremely concerned that she would have to leave my sister alone when she died. Nyuta passed away about five years ago. She was more than 90 years old when she died. She worked as a nurse in the outpatient hospital. She was often sick; during her life she spent a lot of time in different hospitals.

My twin brother, Salya, was nothing like me. However somehow our ideas developed in the

same way. First, he was taller than me. Our father brought our mother to a maternity ward, when later he went back there on the horse carriage to find out who was born, they told him: «A Boy!» - and he answered: «Oh, it's so good!» Then, a couple of hours later, my father was back again with a question: «Well, how is the boy?» — «You now have the second one!» they answered. It sounded like a joke and my father told to his cabby: «let us not go to that direction again!»

In the beginning my brother was fanatically religious, but when we both changed our ideas during our time in Pavlovskiy Posad and Dvinsk, he became an outermost left-winger! He always was much more liberal than I, but police never touched him. I was a less active komsomolets (*a member of Komsomol Organization*) then Salya, but still I managed to be put in jail several times. He had very severe and intense character. He was a very strict person. Also he was an erudite. His apartment was full of various books; he was very interested in politics. His face did not look like mine. After the war Solomon returned to Riga and worked in the advertisement department in the film distribution company – he created large posters for movies; he worked at the movie theater "Lachplesis". My brother worked there for a long time and had earned a good reputation. He did not like melodramas and emotional anguishes. For example, he contemptuously apprehended Sergey Bondarchuk's famous movie «Destiny of a Man» (1959, *USA title is "Fate of a Man"*). Director and actor Sergey Bondarchuk received an Academy Award for the Best Foreign Film in 1968 for the phenomenal epic "War and Peace", the adaptation of Leo Tolstoy's novel). "Too much anguish! Boo!" He did not care much about himself, he was not much interested in his appearance, but he was very devoted to his children and he was giving everything to them.

Along the street there were moving cars disguised by bushes and trees, there were sailors and others, who ran from Kurzeme (*Kurzeme is one of five Latvian regions. It is situated in the West part of Latvia - washed by the Baltic Sea in the West and the Gulf of Riga in the North*). And one week before there was very heavy artillery that carried tractors; they went to the future front, through the bridge, through Daugava and to Lithuania! You

can imagine, what had happened to them later! Everything had ended! (*Here Mr. Gutman probably lapses in another reminiscence of the WWII*).

During the Israeli-Palestinian conflict of 1967 (*The Six-Day War, the 1967 Arab-Israeli War*) I was telling everybody, that now I am not Simon Israelevich, now I am Simon Aggressorovich (*he makes a joke here playing with his patronymic that in Russian is "Israelevich". Patronymic is created from a person father's name and is added to a given name to make "an official name" that is written in the documents and considered to be a polite, official way to address a person. "Israel" (the name of Mr. Gutman's father) with added suffix "vich", that is one of the most common suffixes in Russian, creates his patronymic. Then he added that suffix to the word "aggressor" getting "Aggressorovich". Official point of view of the Soviet propaganda was that Israel was an aggressor during this war.*)

I retired very late. I worked for 45 years.

Purvit (*Vilhelms Purvītis (1872 - 1945) was an artist most famous for his landscape paintings. He also was a founder the Latvian Academy of Art and was its rector from 1919 to 1934*) together with Suta visited our exhibition in 1932. Then they chose several of our pictures for the museum. I will show you photograph of this work. I created this painting in my mind, when they were taking me from Dvinsk's jail to Riga's main prison. In nowadays they transport prisoners by a special vehicle, but backs then the guards were simply convoying me along the roadway under their escort. It made a great impression on me! Afterwards sitting in the solitary cell I started to make sketches for this painting. In the spring they let me out of prison and in the summer I was able to finish this picture. And when there was an exhibition of our studio that was managed by Roman Suta, this painting was bought for the Art Museum. The picture title was "Escorting of a Prisoner".

I am a humorist, an actor, and a director and when my emotions are high I can even write poems. Not so long ago I wrote a poem. I performed in hospitals. And when I worked for the film company, I acted for our amateur performances.

My wife worked in the ticket office at the "Pioneris" movie theater; she worked there for a very long time.

I met my future wife in Stropy (*an area and a lake near Daugavpils*) in 1931. How wonderful is Stropy Lake! She was sitting on a small bench near a little cabin for summer residents. I approached her, and we started a conversation. I had an atrocious character. I loved to fall in love! I had fell in love regardless of age! That is the reason why I had two heart attacks. A countryside romance started – I took her on a boat trip, though now I do not understand how I did it because I hardly could row at that time.

I was enlisted in the army service that year [1931]. Ida used to visit me at the Dvinsk fortress where I served in Zemgalskaya division (*main military force in Latvian Army in 1919-1940*). Once we lost track of time while visiting, so I was late coming back to my garrison. After that an order was issued to punish me! I had a watch that I have won in a soldier's lottery – this watch worked fine while I was walking, but it did not work when I was sitting. That is why I was late. It was a romantic story!

Let me tell you a story about Israeltans – who were the family of my mother's stepbrother. They are the most evident victims of the Holocaust among all of my family. If you remember, as I have already told you, about my aunt - Bella Karpovna Rabinovich – my uncle's wife. She called me in the 20th dates of June of 1941 and asked, whether it was possible to evacuate together. Solomon Velvel Izraeltan was a half-brother of my mother. They had different fathers. The state of Israel was not established yet, but this last name already existed. We called him Uncle Sam. He had traveled to America several times. They lived at Antoniyevska Street in Riga in a beautiful big apartment with wall paintings, ornaments and pictures. It was at his place where my sister Nyuta settled after her return from Switzerland, he gave her a place to stay. Whenever I came to Riga, I stayed with them in that apartment. My uncle was the manager of a large textiles shop; the owner of that business was Kazatsky, a Jew. That big shop was located on the corner of Krishyan Baron Street and Elizavetinskaya Street.

When the Soviet Government here was established, after nationalization they appointed my uncle the manager of that shop.

The relatives of my uncle's wife – the Rabinovich family - lived in Dvinsk and they were engaged in the trading business. Uncle Sam sent them the goods. His wife, Bella Karpovna, was not very beautiful, but she was imperious and clever woman. They had two wonderful, well-educated sons Yulik or Yuliy and Vovik or Velvel. They spoke perfect German, Latvian, and Russian. They did not speak Yiddish. At home my uncle and my aunt spoke only Russian. Velvel married a nice girl in May 1941; I visited them on the occasion and we had a lot of fun. He sent her to a sanatorium in Sigulda (a little town about 50 kilometers from Riga); she was pregnant then. You can imagine that situation: the war begun, and she remained alone expecting a child in Sigulda. I was told that Nazis shot Yulik and Vovik at the very beginning of the war. Aunt Bella and Uncle Sam perished in the ghetto. In the 1960th I accidentally met right on the street their former housemaid, Tanya, a simple Russian woman with a specific (*that retains the unstressed \*o\**) Nizhny Novgorod's accent. She told me that she was very afraid at that time, but anyway she smuggled the food for them to the ghetto.

My brother Salya and I liked to draw since we were children, but he drew much better than I. He copied the paintings of Russian artists from the postcards. He liked watercolors, but he did not use water, he used his own tongue instead of water. His lips were always colored with different paints. And I used to copy only simple flowers from the cards. Our mother found the drawing teacher for us in Berdyansk. I also created sculptures from clay. I used to draw portraits of my teachers and classmates during drawing lessons in Dvinsk: I did it just to improve my drawing skills.

I remember the studio of Yan Liepin that was on Mariinskaya Street, right in the courtyard. When I came there, a few more or less skilled students were sitting there and drawing. I sat down; they gave me a sheet of paper. And at that very moment a naked model entered! Oh my, I held my breath! I nearly fell down from the stool! There

was an incredible thing happening! Boys usually spied looking through the hole in the fence, and here the model stood in front of us completely naked! I started to draw, and then during break I began to look around at the sketches of my classmates. The others students presented the model not in a very realistic way, like I did, but made her larger – her legs and arms were weightier. I asked, “Where have you seen this kind of arms and legs? The model looked quite normal!” And they answered me, “You should draw what you imagine, rather than what you see!” Well, that is the perfectly Latvian style! Later I got used to it. Later I studied in the studio of the Riga's graphic artists, I was acquainted with Strunke (*probably he means here the famous Latvian artist Niklavs Strunke (1894-1966). He was engaged in graphic arts, painting and stage design*) and Roman Suta. Suta and his wife, Beltsova (*Aleksandra Beltsova-Suta (1892 –1981), Latvian painter*) had been very kind to me.

*Not only did Sofia Kagna do a wonderful job in translating the testimony from Russian to English, but she also provided historical context to many of the events that Simon Gutman experienced. Additionally, Sofia went out of her way to locate clips of the movie Michael Strogoff on You Tube to further illustrate Simon's experiences with the theatrical stars he came in contact with. I strongly suggest that you access the following links provided by Sofia, which also provide views of Latvia where much of the filming took place.*

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Z\\_Pu7ZOLSS](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Z_Pu7ZOLSS)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LsFZfAqwGuE>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rsUhfjJHF9U>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bzojTbiRBY>

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Z\\_Pu7ZOLSS](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7Z_Pu7ZOLSS)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LsFZfAqwGuE>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rsUhfjJHF9U>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3bzojTbiRBY>

You can also find these clips, and others, by searching for *Strogoff* on the *You Tube* home page.

*Also mentioned in the testimony is the famous Russian/Yiddish actor Solomon Mikhoels, who was born in Dvinsk, and Sofia was kind enough to provide the*

*following link which highlights the life of Mr. Mikhoels.* (this form can also be found on the Latvia SIG web site) and include Family Finder information

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solomon\\_Mikhoels](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Solomon_Mikhoels)

*A recent article about Mikhoels appears in the July 10, 2008 issue of Haaretz online at:*

<http://www.haaretz.com/hasen/spages/998756.html>

### **Membership Fees**

The new membership year begins on 1 July 2009 and ends on 31 June 2010. If you have not done so already, please renew your membership in the Latvia SIG for 2009/2010. Dues may be paid for multiple years. Yearly fees are US \$25 for the US and Canada, and \$35 (bankable in the US) from elsewhere. If you wish to renew your membership for multiple years, the first year will be \$25 (\$35 outside North America) and \$20 (\$30 outside North America) for each additional year. Please make your check payable to Latvia SIG and mail it to:

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

USA

You can also remit your payment through PayPal to: **MikeGetz005@comcast.net**. Directions for using PayPal can be found on the Latvia SIG website or follow the directions below:

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 e-mail 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

**Latvia SIG Membership Questionnaire**

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

Whom are you researching? (Latvian cities only) Please use location names/spellings as found in *Where Once We Walked*.

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

Bibliographical or archival sources used in your Latvian genealogical research:

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

Cemeteries, travel experiences, etc:

Suggested newsletter topics:

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

I would be willing to volunteer for the following activities:

Please return your completed questionnaire, along with a check for \$25 (U.S. and Canada), \$35 for overseas members payable to Latvia SIG, to:

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Enter contact information in FF: Yes \_\_\_ No \_\_\_

Please circle newsletter preference: PDF Hard Copy

Note: If you prefer to join or renew your membership for multiple years, please submit \$25 (\$35 overseas) for the first year, and \$20 (\$30 overseas) for each subsequent year.