Latvia SIG
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Table of Contents

Co-Presidents’ Reports 2
Editor’s Comments 3
IAJGS Conference in Los Angeles 4
Latvia SIG at the IAJGS Conference 4
Using Genetics to Enhance Genealogical Research by Judith Simon 5
My Second Trip to Latvia by Bruce Dumes 8
Rumbula Updates 12
Shamir Updates 13
Lo Tishkach Foundation 15
Dankere (Part 2) by H. Ehrlich 19
Membership Fees 31
Latvia SIG Membership Questionnaire 32
Co-Presidents’ Reports

As many of you know, Christine Usdin has done and is doing a remarkable job in translating and transliterating birth, marriage, and death records that the State Historical Archives of Latvia has placed on their Raduraksti website: http://www.lvva-raduraksti.lv/en.html. In the May 2009 issue of this newsletter I suggested that a good project for the SIG would be to extend the work that Christine was doing for Vishki to the remainder of the shtetls for which data are available on the Raduraksti website. While Henry and I have been waiting to hear from volunteers who would be interested in leading such a project, Christine has completed the work she began for Vishki and other shtetls and has committed to doing the same for the remainder of the shtetls listed—all twenty-eight of them. Christine estimates the project will take her about two years to complete. Those of you who follow her work via the Latvia SIG listserv, should have noticed that Christine has now attached photos to some of the records and has added a searching capability to her website. Go to: http://www.premiumorange.com/rigavitalrecords/ to see the photos and searching tool.

Anyone who subscribes to the Latvia SIG listserv knows that Christine Usdin has helped many of us who are interested in Latvian Jewish genealogy. Because of the great work she has done, and continues to do, the SIG has invited her to speak at its annual meeting at the IAJGS conference in Los Angeles, and we are extremely happy that Christine has accepted our invitation. Christine also submitted an abstract for the general session and I am pleased to report that I have just learned that it was accepted.

As for past invited speakers from overseas, the SIG would like to subsidize the costs associated with Christine attending the conference. Consequently, we have set up a Speakers Account on the JewishGen website and we encourage you to donate to this account. To access the account please go to the JewishGen home page at http://www.jewishgen.org/ and click on “DONATE.” This will bring you to the JewishGen-erosity page, and under the Special JewishGen Projects list click on Latvia SIG. This will bring you to the JewishGen-erosity—Latvia SIG Projects page where you can now donate to the Latvia SIG Speakers Bureau (not sure why it is called bureau). If donating to more than one fund, please do it sequentially. You can also go directly to the JewishGen-erosity—Latvia SIG Projects page by clicking here: http://www.jewishgen.org/JewishGen-erosity/v_projectslist.asp?project_cat=16 or by putting this URL into your browser.

While you are on the JewishGen-erosity—Latvia SIG Projects page, please consider donating to the Latvia SIG Dvinsk Census Fund, which is also listed on this page. As you know, the Latvia SIG rarely solicits donations from its members, but the money we collect for dues is insufficient to cover costs associated with major projects. The Dvinsk Census Project is one of those projects, and its status has been written about in this newsletter from time-to-time. Arlene Beare has been heading this project and it is in the last stages of completion. At the moment, about 6,000 names have been transferred from the Latvian State Historical Archives in Riga and have been paid for, with 2,000 more names on offer and an additional 7,000 names to be acquired. In the near term, we need to raise about $700 for the 2,000 names and later, an additional $2,500 for the remaining 7,000 names. This will complete the Dvinsk Census Project with a total of about 15,000 names.

I am sorry to report the passing of Zalman Jakub, the great ethnographer and historian from Daugavpils. I met Mr. Jakub when I traveled to Daugavpils in the summer of 2001. He was introduced to me by Sofija Meyerova, head of the Jewish community in Daugavpils at that time. In the photo below, taken at the Jewish Community Center, Mr. Jakub is signing his book for me.

I am very proud to say that in the October 2005 issue of this newsletter we published the first English language translation of Mr. Jakub’s oral
testimony, which was conducted by the Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Latvia, in Riga. This testimony was first of a series of testimonies that we continue to publish in this newsletter.

Barry Shay
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Editor’s Comments

I’ve delayed releasing this issue of the newsletter because I wanted to hear from the IAJGS about whether Christine Usdin’s proposal for a presentation at the conference’s general session was accepted. As you now know, the SIG is extremely happy that Christine’s proposal was accepted. I am sorry for the delay, but I think it was worth it.

Judy Simon, a long-time member of the Latvia SIG, has written about genetics and DNA analysis and its role in genealogy research for this newsletter and has presented many of her findings at the IAJGS conferences as well. The work that most intrigues her is finding Ashkenazi Jews with Sephardic Roots, and that was the subject of her article in the July 2008 issue of this newsletter. In this updated article, Judy extends that work in trying to determine her family’s possible migration from Spain to Latvia, using a combination of traditional genealogy research as well as modern DNA testing and analysis.

With some prodding, Bruce Dumes has agreed to write about the results of his second trip to Latvia, which is a sequel to the article he wrote for the June 2007 issue of this newsletter. Quite different from his first trip as a neophyte, he embarked on this trip with much more information about his ancestors and knowing that he would be meeting long-lost relatives for the first time.

As in the last issue, I am including some material provided by Mitchell Leiber, founder of Rumbula.org and the producer of the upcoming film, Rumbula’s Echo. I highly recommend that you access the 1942 report prepared by Gabrial Ziwi-jan who escaped from Riga Ghetto. The URL is provided and can be accessed from the Rumbula.org website.

Many of you know about, and may have contributed to, the Encyclopedia of Jewish Latvia being produced by the Shamir Religious Jewish Community and Association in Riga. The Shamir Community is engaged in much more than producing the encyclopedia, although that is their main focus. Another very important project of the Shamir Community is to develop and build the Riga Ghetto Museum, on the site of the original Riga Ghetto. I have included some material about the museum from the Shamir website as well as material provided by the USHMM in Washington.

The Lo Tishkach Foundation has taken it upon themselves to guarantee the effective and lasting preservation and protection of Jewish cemeteries and mass graves throughout Europe. Some of the cemeteries for which they are taking responsibility include those in Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia. Lo Tishkach also sponsors educational projects in Latvia and Lithuania, which should help improve the quality of the data on Jewish cemeteries and mass graves in these two Baltic States.

Andreas Becker, the Program Manager for the Lo Tishkach Foundation, has kindly given the Latvia SIG permission to use material from the Lo Tishkach website: http://www.lo-tishkach.org and we thank him for that.
Finally, I am happy to include the second installment of English translation of the book, *Dankere* by H. Ehrlich. The book, originally published in Yiddish, can be found at the National Yiddish Book Center in Amherst, Massachusetts. I strongly suggest that you visit the book center’s website at: [http://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/](http://www.yiddishbookcenter.org/) if you haven’t done so already.

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**IAJGS Conference in Los Angeles**

The Jewish Genealogical Society of Los Angeles welcomes you to Los Angeles from July 11 – 16 for an extraordinary series of presentations by renowned scholars, archivists and research specialists from around the world. The conference will include enlightening films, methodology workshops, evening musical and dramatic performances, and opportunities to network and schmooze with a friendly, global community of Jewish genealogists. The resource room will be staffed by representatives from the US Holocaust Memorial Museum, the Shoah Foundation, the Steven Spielberg Visual History Archive, the Jewish Genealogy Learning Center in Warsaw, and Yad Vashem, ready to provide you with one-on-one assistance with your research.


In addition to full conference registrations, spouse/domestic partner discounts, full-time student and under 18 pricing, film festival and daily passes, plus evening-event-only registrations will also be offered. SIG lunches and dinners are available for purchase now, with Breakfast-with-the-Experts, Midnight with the Mavens, computer lab and tour options coming soon.

It has recently been announced that the keynote speaker will be Daniel Mendelsohn, author of, *The Lost: A Search for Six of Six Million*, the international best-seller about the world-wide search for information about the fates of six relatives who perished in the Holocaust. Winner of the National Book Critics Circle Award, Mendelsohn’s book was acclaimed by Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel as a "vast, highly colored tapestry...a remarkable personal narrative, rigorous in its search for truth, at once tender and exacting." Anyone who has ever heard him speak has been mesmerized by his words and insights into the world of family history research, memoir writing, and the quest to know the unknowable. If you've never heard him before, you are in for a treat. Mr. Mendelsohn is also a founder of the Bolechow Heritage Society, which will be meeting at the conference.

**Latvia SIG at the IAJGS Conference**

As in previous conferences, the Latvia SIG will be having a SIG luncheon and its annual meeting and will also be participating in the SIG fare. Of course, we are thrilled to have Christine Usdin speak at the SIG meeting and also make a presentation at the general session.

Christine was born in Paris and in 1963 her family moved to Lyon where she graduated from high school. Returning to Paris, she studied Russian and Chinese at the Institute of Eastern Languages, where she graduated with a degree in Russian in 1971.

She studied the foundry process for creating artistic works at her father’s foundry and in 1981, 1982, she trained at Northern Michigan University in Marquette Michigan, the Banks Foundry in Grandview, Indiana, the Hoka Hey Foundry in Texas, and in New Mexico.

For the past 23 years, Christine has been running an art foundry in Perouges, a medieval village in Ain, where she specializes in Jewish Art. See [http://usdin.dumes.net/linkeightd.html](http://usdin.dumes.net/linkeightd.html) for examples of her work. In 1981 Christine won the “Award of Excellence,” from France’s Foreign Ministry and, as far as she knows, is the only foundry-woman in France. Christine has traveled throughout Latvia and Russia researching her ancestral history.

Christine will talk about her work in transliterating recently released material available on the
Raduraksti website: http://www.lvva-raduraksti.lv/en/login.html, as well as what motivates her in helping so many genealogists in their research. She will also discuss her travels in Russia and Latvia and what she has discovered in those trips. See: http://usdin.dumes.net/ for more information about Christine and her work.

The Latvia SIG is also pleased to announce that Bruce Dumes, the Latvia SIG webmaster, will be its luncheon speaker at the IAJGS conference. Bruce is a musician and software engineer who graduated from the Berklee College of Music in Boston and played Jazz piano professionally for 30 years. He became interested in computers in the early 80’s and has been programming ever since.

Three and a half years ago, Bruce discovered the Latvia SIG on the JewishGen website thanks to a web search for a place called "Viski" and the name "Dumes." At that time, he didn't know that his grandfather had emigrated from Latvia, only that he came from a place called "Viski," which, his grandfather had told him, rhymed with "whiskey."

Bruce will be talking about his travels to Latvia and Vishki. In telling this story, Bruce hopes to convince people how ephemeral time is. If he had waited, he might never have found his cousins or had the opportunity to meet with all of them in Latvia. In telling his story, Bruce will access the Vishki shtetlink on JewishGen and the Dumes family website, both of which Bruce designed and maintains. See: http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/Viski/ and http://dumesh.dumes.net/.

Using Genetics to Enhance Genealogical Research
by Judith Simon

I have been able to trace my maternal ancestors back to the late 18th century in Rezekne, Latvia using traditional archival research. With much information from the JewishGen all Latvia database, a lot of help from Aleksandrs Feigmanis, and the recent translations of records by Christine Usdine, I have filled out the last three generations of the Latvia branch of my family tree, and have been able to go back seven generations on some lines. What do genealogists do when we fill in substantial parts of our family trees and seem to have used up all the available records? Are we satisfied and rest on our laurels? Of course not! We dig deeper.

Among the helpful tools we can use for digging deeper is the DNA that has been passed down the generations from our ancestors to us. Several kinds of DNA are useful for ancestral research. Males carry Y-DNA which is passed along generally intact from father to son. Using Y-DNA, males can trace their direct paternal ancestry, that is, their father’s father’s…father’s line. This is the same line that surnames are passed down from one generation to the next. Most Eastern European Jews did not have inherited surnames before the early 19th century, so Y-DNA can tell us about our families before they adopted surnames.

DNA results do not come with identifying labels of the sort that say “your ancestor has a Jewish gene” or “your ancestor has a Latvia gene.” What we get from our DNA results are connections to a group of other people who have the same or similar results as we do. Based on what each of these people knows about their recent and distant ancestry, we can begin to put together a picture of where our ancestors lived and migrated. The bigger the DNA database, the more information we can glean from it.

Another kind of DNA that is useful for genealogical research is mitochondrial DNA, or mtDNA. Males and females both inherit their mtDNA from their mothers. mtDNA is passed from generation to generation by mothers to all their children, but only their daughters pass it down to the next generation. The company that I prefer to test with for tracing Y-DNA and mtDNA is Family Tree DNA, since they have the largest database of Ashkenazi Jews, and their Sephardic database is growing.

A third kind of DNA that is now being used to trace ancestry is autosomal, or recombining DNA. This is DNA from all the chromosomes that we get from both our parents. Unlike Y-DNA and mtDNA, which is passed relatively intact
from generation to generation, our autosomal DNA is a shuffled mix of DNA from both of our parents, which is in turn, a shuffled mix of DNA from their parents, etc. What we find when we test our autosomal DNA results is a group of people (a very large group for Ashkenazi Jews) whom we are related to. We cannot tell which ancestral line our DNA matches are on, so good traditional genealogical research is necessary to complement the genetic genealogy in order to sort out the tangle of ancestral lines. The testing company which is leading the pack in autosomal testing for genealogical purposes is 23andme. They already have a database that includes a large number of Ashkenazi Jews; most Ashkenazi Jews who have tested with 23andme are finding 500-1000 predicted relatives, including estimated 2nd, 5th cousins and beyond. These are relatives on all ancestral lines, not just you mother’s mother’s…mother’s or father’s father’s…father’s line. If you are a woman and want to trace your father’s line, your father’s mother’s line or your mother’s father’s line, autosomal testing may be an option for you to consider.

Here is how I was able to use DNA to solve a mystery in my family. My maternal grandfather, Saia Brozgol, said we were Marranos (a term which is considered derogatory today and has been replaced by the preferred terms conversos, crypto-Jews or anusim). It was a story that was carried from generation to generation for 500 years, that our family left Spain during the Inquisition. We have records of my grandfather’s family in Rezekne, Latvia as far back as the late 18th century. Believing that we were from Spain, several cousins of my grandfather’s in Rezekne moved “back” to Spain, to Barcelona, at the time my grandfather emigrated from Rezekne to the US in 1909. For years we had contact with these Spanish cousins but still, this was not proof that any of us were of Sephardic ancestry.

Since it was my maternal grandfather’s father’s father’s…father’s line that was assumed to be Sephardic, I had to find a male along that line to have his Y-DNA tested. Many Sephardim in Iberia already had surnames in the fourteenth century and if they left Spain after the expulsion, their surnames may or may not have traveled with them. Some Sephardim changed their surnames during the Inquisition to hide their Jewish ancestry, and some may have lost their surnames altogether, particularly if they assimilated into Ashkenazi culture, where surnames weren’t adopted until much later. However, there is evidence that at least some of the Ashkenazi Jews with Sephardic roots retained their Sephardic surname. In our case, we are not sure whether the surname Brozgol migrated with my ancestors from Spain to Latvia. Broz was a surname that was documented to have been used by both Sephardim and conversos in the Navarra region of Spain during the 14th and 15th centuries and it is possible that my ancestors could have brought it with them, adding the suffix “gale,” (meaning “land of”) in Latvia. Alternatively, there is a village in Latvia near Rezekne called Berzgale (land of the birches) and the name Brozgol could have been taken from this village.

My grandfather had one son who had one son (my first cousin) and this cousin agreed to have his Y-DNA tested. Most of his Y-DNA matches were Ashkenazi Jews from villages near my grandfather’s, in the region of Eastern Europe where the borders of Latvia, Belarus and Lithuania meet. But not all his matches were Ashkenazi. There were three Hispanic males among his close Y-DNA matches with ancestry from Spain, Mexico and the Southwest US. I contacted each of these men and found that they were perplexed that their Y-DNA matched that of Ashkenazi Jews. They each had clues that they might be descendants of converso families and expected to find Sephardim among their matches. My family’s oral history solved their puzzle. Their matches were Ashkenazi Jews with Sephardic roots.

Of the cluster of Ashkenazi Jews who matched my cousin, one other family knew of Sephardic roots on their paternal line. This family had recent ancestry from Belarus, not far from the village in Latvia where my grandfather was from. But this close Y-DNA match knew something else- he knew that his ancestors came to Belarus from the Ottoman Empire. They fled Spain during the Inquisition to the Ottoman Empire, and sometime by the early 19th century, the family had migrated to Belarus. The Y-DNA match between this family and my Brozgol family is so close that the
common ancestor most likely lived in the last 250-300 years. Assuming our common ancestor left Spain around 500 years ago, my Brozgol ancestor must have fled Spain to the Ottoman Empire.

As a result of the DNA test, we now know the general route my Brozgol ancestors took from Spain to Latvia, and can use historical perspective to speculate when they might have left the Ottoman Empire, and how long they remained culturally Sephardic before they were absorbed into the Ashkenazi culture. In 1492, the year of the expulsion from Spain, Sultan Bayazid II welcomed the Jews to the Ottoman Empire, and many Sephardim settled in what is now Turkey and the Balkans. Conditions for the Jews were relatively good in the Ottoman Empire as compared with Christian Europe. But between 1699 and 1827 the Ottoman Empire stagnated. There were Ottoman wars in the 18th century that likely caused the Sephardim who had settled in Ottoman lands to migrate again. This could explain why my Brozgol ancestors left the Ottoman Empire. The historic time frame agrees with our earliest records of the Brozgols in Latvia in the late 1700’s.

If my Brozgol ancestors were Sephardic until the late 1700’s, when did they marry into the Ashkenazi community, and when did they lose their Sephardic identity? We had traced my grandfather’s paternal line using DNA, but what about his maternal line? Were they Sephardic also? I was able to contact a second cousin whom I had not seen in at least forty years to have his mtDNA tested. His mother’s mother’s mother was my grandfather’s mother and thus, his mtDNA represents my grandfather’s maternal line. His mtDNA test results showed that this family line was likely to be Sephardic, since most of the mtDNA matches were from the Middle East, with very few Ashkenazi matches. My grandfather’s maternal grandmother was Ita Rapoport, and according to family oral history, Ita was the daughter of a rabbi Rapoport. The Rapoport family was an Ashkenazi rabbinic family, but many of the large Ashkenazi rabbinic families had Sephardic branches. Could Ita Rapoport have been on a Sephardic branch of the Rapoport rabbinic family, if there was one?

It could be a coincidence that my grandfather’s parents were both Sephardim, or it could be that their families were still arranging marriages among other Sephardic families, even after they had already migrated to Latvia. My grandfather’s generation could have been the first one in his family since the expulsion from Spain to marry Ashkenazi Jews. This is, of course, just speculation, but it makes it more believable that they were able to remember that they were Sephardic.

### Location of Ancestral Villages of Brozgol Y-DNA Matches in Spain

![Map of Spain showing locations of ancestral villages](image)

- [Location of Ancestral Villages of Brozgol Y-DNA Matches in Spain](image)
Jews for 500 years and pass the story on to every generation from the 15th century to today.

As we continue our genealogical research using traditional archival records and DNA, we are hoping to put together more pieces of our family history. For anyone interested in DNA testing to learn more about their possible Sephardic ancestry, I administer two Iberian Ashkenaz projects at Family Tree DNA with Schelly Talalay Dardashti. For Ashkenazi males with possible Sephardic roots on their paternal line, see the following:

publicwebsite.aspx

and Ashkenazi males or females with possible Sephardic roots on their maternal line, go to:

publicwebsite.aspx

If you would like more information on either of these projects, please contact me at:

heyjude0701@gmail.com

My Second Trip to Latvia
by Bruce Dumes

My second trip to Latvia was, from the outset, destined to be quite different from my first. In the first place, I was traveling to Latvia in order to meet my cousins, who I discovered a few months after returning from my first trip. In the second place, I had much more information than I did on my first trip – for example, addresses of family members that lived in Riga and Daugavpils before and during the war. In the third place, I would be traveling alone. We decided that it was too expensive for both my wife and me to travel. We were worried about money because of cutbacks at my job – layoffs and cuts in pay - both of which eventually took place. I experienced the latter but thankfully not the former. I had put off traveling in 2008 because of the same concerns, but I felt strongly that I must go in 2009 and my wife encouraged me to do so.

I arrived in Riga on Friday evening 26 June 2009. My friend Leizer Dumesh’s son Genrich (Henry) met me up at the airport and took me to my hotel. It was extremely nice of him, especially since the plane was one and a half hours late. The next morning Genrich and Leizer picked me up. I’d sent Leizer a list of places I’d like to see, places where some of my cousins lived before and during the war. Leizer had arranged them in logical order and we set out to find them.

If you would like to see photos of these places, please visit:

http://triptolatvia2009.wordpress.com/where-they-lived/

We went to what had been the Jewish Ghetto of Riga to find some of the locations. The area is not far from the main city, but it is a very sad and dangerous place. I don’t think that Genrich and Leizer had ever been there, and Genrich said that he certainly would not have gone there at night. Even in the daytime, Genrich and Leizer seemed a little nervous and stayed in the car while I stepped out to take the photos. The people that live there are in abject poverty: dirty, dressed in rags, horrible living conditions. There are ghosts from the Riga Ghetto, where great suffering occurred and you can still hear the cries in the air of those that lived and died there.

Leizer was eager to show me Jurmala. Jur, Leizer told me, means sea and mala means shore in Latvian. Jurmala was, during Soviet times, one of the most popular resort destinations in the Soviet Union, especially with the party leaders. Genrich told me that when the highway from Riga to Jurmala was built in 1968, it was the nicest highway in the Soviet Union, and was often used in films when they wanted to portray an American highway.

Genrich remembered as we were on our way that there was a large Harley Davidson gathering go-
ing on with 5,000 motorcycles and all the main roads would be closed except to choppers. But he took another road which brought us to the shore and we had lunch there. We sat outside, even though it was a bit cool. The waitress came over and put a blanket around each of us. I asked Genrich and Leizer if this was a Latvian tradition. They in turn asked the waitress if this was a tradition, and she said, "Well, only when it’s cold." After our lunch, we headed back to Riga where Genrich drove around the city showing me various buildings and Leizer pointed out interesting things about the city. Some of the architecture in Riga is amazing.

June 29, 2009: A Happy Family

Tolstoy wrote in Anna Karenina: ‘‘Все счастливые семьи похожи друг на друга, каждая несчастливая семья несчастлива по-своему,” which basically translates as “Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.” My cousins in Daugavpils are a very happy family. They are not without burdens, of course, and perhaps more than their share, but they make each other happy when they are together. Marina had told me, prior to my visit, that her father, Leonid, is very loud and funny and makes them all laugh, and the family does love to laugh with each other.

I was honored to be welcomed into this close family. Julia, the matriarch of the family, told me at the train station that she welcomed me not as a cousin but as a brother. I felt this deeply; Julia grew up with her sister and mother, and their family was all they had in the world. Family means everything to Julia, so for her to think of me as a brother is a great honor.

When Julia was growing up, she had friends in Vishki who had relatives in America. Julia often asked her mother if perhaps they had family in America and her mother would sternly say, “No!” For Julia’s 60th birthday last year, I sent her this photograph, taken at our last Dumes family reunion in 2006:

The caption says, “Dear cousin Julia, Happy Birthday from Bruce, Debra and all your American cousins! May 2008. Love and the very best wishes for many more birthdays!” Julia framed this photo and it hangs in the center of her dining room.

They all greeted me at the train station. I brought yellow roses for Julia, Tanya and Marina and boxes of chocolates for the kids. We went to Julia’s house for dinner, which was really wonderful. They asked if I’d be afraid to eat mushrooms that Leonid found, but I knew that they know their mushrooms and the soup that Julia made with them was wonderful. We had blin,
which is very much like a blintze with sour cream. There is a Russian expression, “Первый блин камом,” which means the first blin is a lump, which my Russian teacher told us after the first quiz of the second year of Russian. It described very well the results of the quiz. The word “blin” is also a mild swear word, as in “Blin, I locked my keys in the car!”

We had a very tasty fish called линь, that Leonid caught. My Russian/English dictionary says it is “tench fish,” though I’ve never heard of tench. It’s very tasty. We had tomatoes and cucumbers, sliced kielbasa, chicken in a jelly made from consommé, which also was very tasty. So much food! Julia loves to see people eat. For dessert we had wild strawberries that Leonid had collected. These look very much like ornamental strawberries, very small and round, which my wife says are inedible, but these are delicious. Julia is diabetic and doesn’t (well, isn’t supposed to) eat sugar, so she puts these strawberries in her tea to make it sweeter.

It was a wonderful introduction to everyone and I feel as though I’ve always known them.

June 30, 2009: The time has come to talk of Vishki

Vishki holds a rather large place in my consciousness these days. For most of my life, until June of 2006, Vishki was just a half-forgotten name that my grandfather said I could remember because it rhymed with “Whiskey.” When I think of what brought me to Vishki in 2006 and then to find my cousins in Daugavpils, I can hardly believe it. It’s as if it was just a story that I made up, because it sounds too linear and perhaps even too easy.

My cousins thought it would be nice to have all the family meet in Vishki. The day started by meeting another part of the family. Julia’s sister Raisa had two daughters, Valentina and Elena.
Waiting outside the hotel were Elena (Lena) and her husband Sergey and Valentina’s daughter Svetlana (Sveta) and her husband Sandris and their son Artyom (only one and a half year old). We looked at each other but didn’t say anything because we weren’t sure who each other was until the others arrived a minute later. Then there were introductions and photographs. We parked in Vishki and walked up the street. Julia spoke about each house, who lived where and her memories of them. She showed me where her grandfather Nota’s house was. It’s only a field now. The contents of the house were taken when the family was killed by the Nazis. When Tanya, (Nota’s daughter, Julia’s mother) returned to Vishki after the war, she found her home destroyed and her family killed. She asked the people if she could have some of the things from the house returned to her. They gave her a chair and a piece of cloth that she had embroidered.

Julia showed me where, in the center of town, there were shops, a movie theatre, a club, etc. As we walked through town, various people from Vishki recognized Julia and come over to greet her. We walked to the house that belonged to Tanya Dumesh’s uncle Israel. After the war, she worked there and Tanya, Julia and her sister Raisa lived there for a time.

We drove towards Vishki and stopped along the way to collect some wildflowers to place at the memorial to the Jews of Vishki and stones for the cemetery. It’s hard to describe just how beautiful the countryside is around Vishki, but one can easily imagine how my ancestors living in Vishki in the 19th century must have felt they were living in a paradise. Except for the winters!

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Latvia. It’s rare to get many sunny days, I’m told, and temperatures this high are extremely unusual. Today we were told it got to 43 C (107 F!!), with a lot of humidity. In fact, several of us got sunburned at the picnic. It is, I think, the height of irony when a guy from Southern California goes to Latvia to get a sun tan!!

(To be continued!)

Updates at Rumbula.org

Rumbula and Skede Anniversaries

At the World Reunion of Latvian Jewry, a few years ago in Israel, Professor Moshe Arens spoke of how at this time of year our thoughts turn to the killing fields of places such as Rumbula, Bikernieki and Skede. Between 25,000 and 27,800 were murdered in two days at Rumbula, and nearly 3,000 in four days at Skede.

The Second Rumbula aktion took place on, December 8, 1941, on the secular calendar (on the Jewish calendar, on the 18th of Kislev, which was Saturday, December 5, 2009).

The mass shootings at Skede, near Liepaja, took place December 14-17, 1941 (the 24th—27th of Kislev, which was December 11-14, 2009).

At this time, we wish to remember those who perished. We also are thankful for and appreciate those who survived to enrich the world and our lives.

Information Available About the Holocaust in Latvia in 1942

A 1942 report, prepared by escaped Riga Ghetto Jew, Gabriel Ziwijan, documents the situation at that time. When compared with more than 60 years of subsequent scholarship, it is amazingly accurate. It was submitted to the U.S Consul in Switzerland and forwarded to Washington in 1942. It is compelling to read an account prepared by a Jew who spent six months living as a Christian in Latvia and collecting intelligence about the Holocaust there. The report has been made available by Edward Anders and can be accessed at:


Re-dedication of Riga's Peitav Shul

The only synagogue in Riga, and the only one to survive the Shoah, has been beautifully refurbished. It was re-dedicated on August 26, 2009. Events began when Rabbi Mordechai Glazman led the ceremony of the affixing of mezuzot to the doorposts. The first mezuzah was affixed by Arkady Suharenko, chairman of the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia, who was instrumental in raising and contributing funds for the project. Participants in the formal ceremony included leaders of the Jewish community in Latvia and Europe, representatives of the state of Israel and the president of Latvia. Numerous dignitaries and ambassadors, including the new U.S. Ambassador to Latvia, attended this joyous occasion. The formal ceremony included bringing the Torah scrolls to the Aron Kodesh after the re-dedication, speeches and chazzanut by Cantor Zev Shulman and the Balsis choir.

In conjunction with the shul's re-dedication, an academic conference, Jews in a Changing World, was presented by the University of Latvia's Judaic Studies Center. The conference took place in the synagogue's upstairs social hall on August 27, and featured fascinating presentations and papers by Latvian and European scholars. The first Shabbat in the beautiful synagogue after re-dedication was very moving and special. Then on Sunday, a second re-dedication event was held for members of the Jewish community of Riga,
all of whom could not be accommodated at the August 26 event due to limited space.

**Rumbula’s Echo**

A screening of footage from *Rumbula's Echo* was featured at this year's annual memorial service of the Jewish Survivors of Latvia - USA, in New York City. The service was held November 15 at the Park East Synagogue. Many of the group's elderly survivors were unable to travel to Riga for the August re-dedication of its synagogue, after a total restoration. Of the 40 synagogues and minyanim (daily prayer groups) in Riga, this was the only one to survive the burning of synagogues on July 4, 1941. *Rumbula's Echo* filmed the restored shul and re-dedication ceremony, and so was able to share this with the survivors. Only a minute or so of this footage will be in the documentary. So we hastily (for filmmaking - about 100 hours of work) assembled footage about the synagogue for the survivors. Called *Renewal on Peitavas Street*, it is about how the survival of a synagogue symbolizes the survival of a community and of Jewry. After filming more interviews, we expect to make *Renewal on Peitavas Street* into a separate, short documentary that is a "daughter film" of *Rumbula’s Echo*.

In September, Lina Ferbere became *Rumbula's Echo's* researcher in Latvia. Ms. Ferbere is also interview coordinator and translator during the films' shoots in Latvia. She has worked for the Council of Jewish Communities of Latvia and as a translator. Ms. Ferbere spent a great deal of time helping out on the set of the Hallmark/CBS-TV movie, *The Courageous Heart of Irena Sendler*, starring Anna Paquin, and filmed in Riga. Lina Ferbere's 7 year old daughter played the role of Miriam, the first girl saved by Irena Sendler.

Please go to: [http://www.rumbulasecho.org/news.shtml](http://www.rumbulasecho.org/news.shtml) for additional information about *Rumbula's Echo*.

**Shamir Updates**

**Riga Ghetto Museum**

The event that occurred on the February 2, 2010 in the Council of Riga, was important for the Jewish community of Latvia and descendants of Latvian Jews and for all others for whom the memory, history and culture are important. The vice-mayor of Riga, Ainars Slesers and Chairman of the Jewish community “Shamir” Rabbi Menachem Barkahan signed a protocol of intentions to create the Riga Ghetto Museum.

The area of the Riga Ghetto is unique in Europe, because it has not undergone any architectural changes within last sixty years. There are still small wooden houses with woodcarving shutters (the suburb of Moscow, Russian merchants and poor Jewish families once settled here), the roads are paved with cobblestones, but in the courtyards rusty sinks are still hanging. Not all the residents of that area know what happened there in 1941.

But tourists who walk there to find out where their relatives spent the last months of their life, know. More than 70,000 Latvian Jews were killed during the Holocaust, 20,000 Jews from Germany, Czech Republic and Hungary passed through the Riga Ghetto.

The Riga Ghetto Museum will be located in the historical part of the city, behind the Central Market, not far from the cultural center “Spikeri,” in the building with a a large courtyard and a total area of more than 1,000 square meters. The ghetto area is only a five minutes walk from the
museum. This district belongs to the development priorities of the Riga’s Council, but now the movies about the Second World War could be filmed here without any difficulty; the district has its own atmosphere.

**Motivation for the Project**

Preservation of the memory of the Holocaust demands developing tourism in the Riga Ghetto district. The Riga Ghetto museum will be opened in the former Moscow area of Riga and become a tourist center for the historical district, for the following reasons:

- The appearance of the territory has hardly changed since the end of WWII.
- The Riga Ghetto was the fourth largest in the former USSR after the Vilnius, Kaunas and Minsk ghettos. The Warsaw Ghetto, the largest one, was destroyed after the uprising in 1943. After the war, residential houses were built in its territory. Buildings of the Riga Ghetto are preserved now and the number of new houses is small.
- The district is historically well-researched.
- There exists scientific literature and a number of memoirs about the Riga Ghetto.
- The visit to the museum should raise personal interest in the history of the Holocaust through the story of the Riga Ghetto and force people to understand the Holocaust in a way that is unlike traditional expositions, while still conveying the tragic essence of the event.

The design and construction of the museum will occur in three stages:

- Reconstruction of the ground floor and the yard
- Building of the second floor
- Building of glass windows and roof

The first part of the museum may be opened in September 2010 and includes: the reconstructed yard, the exposition inside the yard, the reconstructed ground floor, the wagon, the stone road inside the yard, and the original house from the ghetto area.

Please go to: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWdsoDbz4ml&feature=player_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aWdsoDbz4ml&feature=player_embedded) to see a video depiction of the envisioned museum.

**Artist’s rendering of the Riga Ghetto Museum**

**Seminar on the History of the Holocaust in Yad Vashem**

On the 1st February 2010 the first group from Latvia, consisted of 25 history teachers, arrived at the memorial Yad Vashem in Jerusalem for a ten days long seminar about the Holocaust. The project was realized in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Science of Latvia and with the support of the company air Baltic. The seminar consisted of lectures on the history of the Jews and the Holocaust from the best Israel researchers, as well as excursions around the country and Jerusalem.

**Jewish Encyclopedia of Latvia**

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. To this day there is
not a single encyclopedia devoted specifically to the history and achievements of Latvian Jewry that also contains biographies of its distinguished members.

The future encyclopedia already numbers over 3000 entries, including feature stories and individual biographies. Over 1,000 articles have been received from authors and are ready to be edited.

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 would also be very grateful to you for any graphic and documentary materials related to the life of Latvian Jews.

Among the materials falling to the editor of the Latvian Jewish Encyclopedia, is information about people who lived in Latvia in the mid 20th century. Most information is not complete, because the lives of these people continue. If you find your name or the name of your relative in the list, we would welcome any additional information. The list of names is in Russian and can be accessed at: http://www.shamir.lv/en/item/94-looking_for_people.html or at: http://www.shamir.lv/images/soviet%20period(2).pdf

The development of the project demands financial support. It’s an enormous amount of work in public and private archives, translation into the Russian and English, pre-print preparation, printing and distribution of the book. So, we welcome your financial contributions to the project.

Please visit the website: http://www.shamir.lv/en for more information concerning contributing historical information as well as financial support or contact Rabbi Menachem Barkahan, shamir@apollo.lv.

Lo Tishkach Foundation

More than 60 years after the destruction of Jewish communities in the Holocaust, the last remnants of what was once a vibrant Jewish life in the shtetlach and towns of eastern and central Europe remain at risk. Lo Tishkach has been tasked by the international Jewish world to preserve this heritage and they are in a race against time to prevent the ravages of vandalism, neglect and economic development from erasing the last vestiges of this heritage.

The Foundation has developed an online database of more than 10,000 Jewish cemeteries located throughout Europe. It also includes information about mass burial sites in Eastern Europe. Many entries include pictures of the cemetery as it exists today. In addition, Lo Tishkach has published a number of Preliminary Reports on Legislation and Practice Affecting Jewish Burial Grounds throughout eastern and central Europe. In particular, these reports include one for Latvia, dated June 2009 and one for Estonia, dated August 2009. With the permission of Lo Tishkach, the executive summaries of both publications are shown on pages 17 and 18. The complete reports can be accessed from the Lo Tishkach website at: http://www.lo-tishkach.org/en/index.php?categoryid=42.

An example of the type of information associated with Jewish cemeteries in the Lo Tishkach database is the following for the cemetery in Talsi.

Talsi Jewish Cemetery
Talsi, Kurzeme
Latvia
Lo Tishkach ID: 5976

Alternative/Former City Names: Talse (German), Талсы/Talsi (Russian)

First Jewish Settlement: Unknown

Jewish Community Established: Mid 19th century

Present Usage of Cemetery: Unprotected Jewish cemetery
Location & Demarcation: Located inside a forest, the cemetery is not identified by a sign. Access to the site is open at all times. The cemetery area is partially demarcated by the foundation remnants of a stone wall.

Gravestones, Memorial Markers & Structures: About 100 gravestones remain at the site, half of which are still standing. In early October, the Jewish cemetery in the Latvian town of Talsi was vandalized. Unknown perpetrators toppled and broke numerous gravestones and destroyed the cemetery’s entrance gate. The acts of vandalism occurred barely three months after the cemetery had been restored by Latvian and German youth in the course of the project led by German pastor Klaus-Peter Rex. The project participants had cleared vegetation overgrowth and fixed toppled gravestones at the site. The organizers are prepared to repair the damaged gravestones next summer, the cost of which would be 5,000 Euros. Building a 400m fence around the site would cost another 2,000 Euros. Contact Lo Tishkach at info@lo-tishkach.org for further details on how to help save this site.

History of the Jewish Community: Both the cemetery and the Talsi Jewish community were established in the mid-19th century. In 1881, about 1,400 Jews lived in Talsi, 41 per cent of the total population. By 1920, the Jewish population had dropped to 637. A Heder opened in the town in 1905, followed by a Jewish school in 1920. The community’s last rabbi was Boruh Zelig Levenberg, who perished in the Holocaust.

Latvia/Lithuania Educational Projects 2009-2010

Lo Tishkach also sponsors educational projects in a number of countries in Europe, including Latvia and Lithuania. These projects will help improve the quality of the data on Jewish cemeteries and mass graves in these two Baltic states.

Riga Jewish Community

In the course of the project year, more than 40 Latvian youth will visit and survey about 250 Jewish cemetery and mass grave sites during two residential trips and a number of one-day visits.

The project will verify and update previous research on Jewish cemeteries and mass graves conducted by the ‘Museum Jews in Latvia’. Any additional sites will be added.

The participants, who are divided into seven regional working groups, will visit and survey about 380 Jewish burial grounds (200 Jewish cemeteries and 180 mass grave sites).

The surveys will be preceded and accompanied by a series of seminars given by historians and Jewish heritage specialists to develop the motivation and the skills of the survey group plus another 60 young people, which will include sessions – given by rabbis – on the halachic aspects of working with Jewish burial grounds. The seminars will be followed by visits to Jewish sites in Riga to develop practical skills.

Lithuanian Jewish Community

In this project, 100 Lithuanian youth will attend seminars, conduct research on Jewish burial grounds in Lithuania and participate in burial ground surveys. At the beginning of the 2010-11 school year, participants of this project will make 10-15 presentations in local non-Jewish schools.
Preliminary Reports on Legislation and Practice Affecting Jewish Burial Grounds

LATVIA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

• **Numbers**: The number of known Jewish burial grounds in Latvia currently stands at 170, including 70 cemeteries and 100 mass graves. Up to 100 additional mass graves are believed to be located in Latvia, which would increase the total number of Jewish burial grounds in the country to 270. Only eight cemeteries are still in use.

• **Ownership**: Municipalities own the majority of Latvia’s Jewish cemeteries. Four Jewish cemeteries are the property of Jewish communities or private individuals. Similarly, municipalities or other public bodies own most mass grave sites, less than twenty of which are located within the property of private individuals.

• **Maintenance**: Maintenance varies greatly from one site to another. More than half of the Jewish cemeteries receive no maintenance at all. Approximately twenty, including all eight cemeteries currently in use, receive basic maintenance. Up-to-date information on the state of maintenance at mass grave sites is lacking, except for the forty sites at which memorial markers have been placed over recent years and where most municipalities have agreed to provide basic maintenance. Maintenance of both cemeteries and mass graves may be provided by Jewish communities, private individuals, youth projects, etc. on a voluntary basis.

• **Legal situation**: A number of provisions in different bodies of law may be used to campaign for better protection and preservation of Jewish burial grounds in Latvia. They include the Latvian constitution, legislation on minority rights, cultural heritage legislation as well as the criminal code.

• **Recommendations**:
  - Identification and demarcation of all Jewish cemeteries and mass graves sites in Latvia;
  - A negotiated solution between the Jewish community, municipalities and the national government to extend the protection granted under cultural heritage legislation to Jewish burial grounds in order to protect them from further decay, vandalism and encroaching development;
  - Continuous signposting of mass grave sites, both to afford better protection and to protect the memory of those who perished in the Holocaust.
Preliminary Reports on Legislation and Practice Affecting Jewish Burial Grounds

LITHUANIA

Executive Summary

1. **Numbers**: The exact number of Jewish burial grounds in Estonia is unknown. Whilst the Jewish community holds information on eleven Jewish cemeteries, data is lacking on the exact number and location of mass graves. This is mainly due to the fact that although mass killings occurred at several camp and execution sites, a number of victims were reburied elsewhere during and after World War II. According to data of the Estonian Jewish Museum, World War II mass killings of Jews in Estonia occurred at ten different sites; further killings happened at an unknown number of concentration and labour camps, of which the Germans established twenty-four.

2. **Ownership**: Municipalities are the main owner of the land of both Jewish cemeteries and mass graves in Estonia. The Jewish cemeteries in Parni and Taru (New Cemetery) belong to the Jewish community. The land of Tallinn Magasini Jewish Cemetery is privately owned. The land of most mass grave sites is owned by municipalities.

3. **Maintenance**: Most Jewish cemeteries receive basic maintenance provided by municipalities. The level of maintenance varies from one site to another. Up-to-date information on the state of maintenance at mass grave sites is lacking, except for eight sites at which memorial markers have been placed over recent years and where most municipalities have agreed to provide basic maintenance.

4. **Legal Situation**: A number of provisions in different bodies of law may be used to campaign for better protection and preservation of Jewish burial grounds in Estonia. They include the Estonian constitution, legislation on minority rights, cultural heritage legislation as well as the criminal code.

5. **Recommendations**:
   - Proper demarcation of all Jewish cemeteries in Estonia;
   - Identification and demarcation of all mass grave sites;
   - Close co-operation between the Jewish Community and local municipalities to ensure regular maintenance according to mutually agreed standards, throughout the country;
   - A negotiated solution between the Jewish community, municipalities and the national government to extend the protection granted under cultural heritage legislation to Jewish burial grounds;
   - Continuous signposting of mass grave sites, both to afford better protection and to preserve the memory of those who perished in the Holocaust.
Part 2

DANKERE

Types and episodes in a Latvia town sixty years ago
by
H. Ehrlich

"Kayor" Publishing House
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1956

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Poor Strangers

As was the case in many towns, Donkere was constantly besieged with beggars. They would go from house to house with sacks slung over shoulders, begging for alms. As they came in, they would greet you with a hello and say, "Give something to a poor man." Some would not speak at all but waited at the door and waited till they were given something. The donations consisted of certificates that were distributed to people by the Society for the Poor which were worth a quarter of a ruble, or a piece of bread. And when the sack became filled with bread, the beggars would sell it to the neighboring gentiles or to the housewives who kept cows.

They would go singly. It also happened that occasionally husband and wife would go together; then, a double donation was requested, and, when it was not granted, they departed with loud, vehement curses, as for instance: "May the worms devour you," "May you crawl on all fours," "May you be plagued even after death" and other such impressive curses...

There was also a more elegant type of poor. It manifested itself in a better type of dress and a more dignified manner. Each one of them had a story to tell: One -- the victim of a fire; another -- a business man in financial straits; a third -- had to marry off a daughter, and so on. To this type of poor should perhaps be added many of the itinerant preachers who went from town to town delivering sermons, and the next morning two townspeople would make the rounds with a red kerchief to collect contributions. In truth, these preachers were glorified paupers, but under another name...

A few times a year there would appear a blind man with fiddle in hand, led by a young boy. He came into the house without waiting for an invitation and immediately started to sing and play the fiddle. The most popular song was "The Eye," that consisted of three verses. I bring you the first two:
How lovely it is to see all of you,
To behold you is such a delight.
The eyes that shine like two diamonds,
Sparkling by day and by night.

Joy and sorrow the eye expresses
Lucky is he who eyes possesses.
-- Do tell me, oh eye
The reason why, oh why
As you laugh with glee
A lone tear-drop I see...

Incidentally, talking about poverty, this is an interesting case: A poor man from a nearby town had the exclusive privilege of reading, for a fee of 50 kopeks, the chapter of curses and punishments in the Torah. Once he stubbornly insisted that he be paid a whole ruble. A furor arose in the synagogue, and there was no choice but to promise him a whole ruble. After that incident, a deaf man in our town said that he would be happy to read the chapter for only 50 kopeks.
Purim Players

In talking about my town, I do want to record how the holiday of Purim impressed me.

When I was a child, I considered Purim the nicest holiday of all. First of all, the haman-tashen. With eager anticipation I would watch my mother, wearing a white apron, pound poppy seeds with pestle and mortar; from time to time she would let me lick and taste. Even though the poppy paste was bitter, I nevertheless found it lip-smacking delicious. Then there was the grogger that my Uncle Tsalle made for me, a new one every year. As I twisted the noise maker, I imagined Haman standing at my side, laughing and thinking how I, a mere slip of a boy, could possibly confuse him. Thirdly, the Purim toys, candy ducklings and especially the little roosters from which I could elicit a long drawn-out crowing noise. And, oh, the little watches! Even though I knew that they were made from sugar, I nevertheless looked at them every once in a while to see what time it is. I tried to imitate the grownups with their real watches. Let me not forget the shalich-mones. With eager eyes I would wait and watch for a child to bring a white-covered plate and say: “Happy Purim to you. My mother sends you shalich-mones” and my mother would remove the contents of the plate and put something else into it.

Most important, however, were the Purim players. With childish wonderment I would see how the players came into the house, joyous, lively, singing and dancing. Heading them was Yisroel, the chimney-sweep, a tall Jew, disguised as Mordecai wearing a tri-cornered hat made of cardboard, sporting a pasted-on beard that resembled a broom, and he had a wooden sword at his side. After him came Haman, face besmeared with soot. Mordecai looks at Haman and sings:
Hey! Hey! Oats and jute,
Haman has saddled a fly to a flute.

Then Haman sings:

Oh, woe is me; Mordecai the Jew
At the feast, haman-tashen will chew.
Esther, in finery adorned, will bring
Haman to the gallows, watch him swing.

Present also is Veshti, a Jewish man costumed as a woman with a potato tied to her forehead. Veshti doesn’t sing, but every once in a while shakes her head to bemoan what so unfortunately had grown out of her forehead...

I had caught on to the ditties, and when no one was around I would try to sing them and imitate the Purim players. This I enjoyed very much.

When I saw for the first time a printed, illustrated megillah picturing Haman and his ten children hanging on a tree, pity overtook me. Well, granted that Haman deserved to be hanged, but why the children?...
The Bast Shoe Trade

One of the commercial enterprises in our town was the trading of bast shoes. The peddlers would buy up the footwear, go from village to village and exchange them for other commodities. Friday afternoon you could see the peddlers coming from the villages with large sacks of bast shoes. It was mostly the poor shopkeepers who were thus occupied, because this did not entail a large investment of capital. The merchants, however, had large stores where they kept the footwear.

It was in these stores where goods were sorted out: Wool with wool, linen with linen, etc. The poorest people in town did this work. Men, women, Jews, gentiles, and even children worked there. From morning till late into the night they sat in the stores with sharp scissors in hand and cut the goods. The pay was a pittance, about 20 or 25 kopeks a day. Although the work was not hard, it was nevertheless tedious and dangerous, because the dust from the materials in the unventilated shops consumed the lungs; many workers developed consumption and constantly spat blood.

A strike was called when the revolutionary movement began in the town, and the bosses were approached for a raise. Unfortunately, however, nothing could be done to improve the hygienic conditions, and, because of that, the Angel of Death demanded more and more victims.

* * *

Always, when I read about the mine workers who inhale the gold dust and develop phthisis, I recall the men and women in my town of Dankere sitting in the damp shops, ripping the materials, coughing and coughing until they spit out their souls...
Thieves in Town

The only thieves in town were a few horse dealers who also happened to
be horse thieves. They would bring the horses to market. Often a peasant who
came to market to buy a horse would recognize one of his own wretched
animals. The peasant would then grab the thief and give him over to the
police; and if the peasant didn't do that, he personally delivered some hard
blows to the thief and reclaimed the horse. It often happened, also, that the
horse dealer would return from market all roughed up, but this did not deter
him from stealing again.

Usually, all the stealing took place in the dark of night. A joke
circulated, that once a horse thief did not feel like getting up, and his wife
reproached him: "Look here, husband mine, on such a moonlit night you sleep!

A husband and wife settled in Doniøre, and to all appearances they gave
the impression of honest, decent people. No one knew where they came from.
The man had a sympathetic mien, good manners and a heart of gold. He did
favors for people and gave generously to the poor. From time to time he went
away for a while and then returned. No one suspected him of anything. One
tine day the police came and arrested him. Then it was learned that this fine,
upstanding man was no more, no less than a common pickpocket. He traveled
on trains and stole from the passengers.

His arrest created a sensation in the town. No one believed that this
good-hearted person could be a thief. They went to the police to inquire
whether perhaps it was a mistake that caused an innocent man to be arrested.
But, to no avail. Those he helped through a favor or through a gift of needed
money sought to come to his defense. True, they claimed, he is a thief. They
wished, however, there were more thieves such as he...
The Music Box

This occurred even before any of us in Danker had seen what a gramophone looked like. A man appeared in town with a box under his arm and told us that it plays and sings. As always in such cases, there were those who made sport of it. One said it was all a lie. How can a box sing? Another declared that there was a demon in it who did what he was told to do. A third insisted, on the other hand, that this Jew must be thoroughly searched, because this is was an evil being disguised as a person. Special attention should be given to ascertain for sure that he did not have chicken feet... in such manner did people jest about this person. He learned about this and smiled...

A few days later he was invited to a home and was requested to show the wonders of this box. A houseful of people gathered together and waited breathtakingly to see what would happen. The Jew put the box on a table, put on the record, turned the spring, and at the same time announced that whoever wants to hear it play, must first pay ten kopeks. For the moment, no one responded. Then, two young, healthy butchers daringly took the first risky step. The Jew gave them two small wires to put in their ears, and when they heard the first sound they got so frightened, they threw down the wires and fled. Soon there arose other interested persons who, with trembling heart, listened to the way the box played and sang. Only then was everybody convinced that the Jew was not a charlatan, a demon, or a swindler. The eager curiosity increased, and the Jew left the town with a goodly packetful of rubles.

Several years later a Jew came to the town with a gramophone and with a large horn. He rented a house where he set up viewing boxes, and for the price of two kopeks one could see Moscow, Kiev, London, Paris and other large
cities. But the main attraction was the gramophone which played many things. Since I was a friend of the owner's son I had the privilege of being admitted without even paying a groschen. And whenever I had time, I sat mesmerized listening to the melodies of Kulduniya, Shulemit and others. When the owner let me wind up the gramophone, I felt like the luckiest person in town...
Theater in Town

The first time I saw Yiddish theater was actually in Donskere. In the apothecary there worked a druggist, a young man from Dvinsk, by name of Bernstein. He was very talented. He could sing, play, dance, mimic other people, and he knew how to act in Yiddish theater. When the bikur-holim society found itself in need of funds, Bernstein volunteered to produce a play, with all the proceeds to benefit the society.

Bernstein met much opposition in town in the beginning. Primarily, he was considered a flighty person. He never went to the synagogue on the Sabbath, and always had a cigarette dangling from his mouth. Secondly, they were simply scared of him. Although he was a druggist, he nevertheless was a Dvinskker rogue. Bernstein had an inspiration. Since it was just before Purim, he proposed producing a Purim play especially for adults. It was not too long before the Ahasuerus-play was presented in the women’s synagogue. The play evoked such hearty laughter that people almost fainted.

This created greater trust in him. Soon after this he gathered some boys and girls around him, selected the more talented among them and began rehearsing the role of Bubbe Yechne. He himself played the role of Hutsman. With rehearsals completed, a small building was somehow put together in the market place. The interior was decorated with various colored lanterns that threw light on the actors. The actors were dressed in cardboard hats and colorful clothes. Wonder of wonders! The production was such a great success that young and old, observant Jews and freethinkers came to see the play and left with satisfied smiles. It is interesting to note that the owner of the apothecary, a Pole who understood a bit of Yiddish, attended the performance. At the scene where the girl who measures the fabric is cheated, and later where the peasant at the market place is cheated, the owner grew
very angry and cried out, “You scoundrel of a Jew!” and stalked out of the performance.

The few days that the play was in town created a holiday mood. Wherever you went, you could hear people singing Bubbe Yachne’s songs. The name, Hutsnach, became so familiar, that when one wanted to kibitz somebody he would call him Hutsnach.

After this success Bernstein began making plans to produce something else. Unfortunately, he was transferred to another city. It was then that we keenly missed the Dvinsker rogue who had brought some joy to the town...
A Peasant Exercises Evil Eyes

The formula for averting the evil eye is comparable to the _shir-ha-mo'edos_ chanted at the bedside of a woman in labor. Both formulas served the same purpose: To drive away the "evil spirits" from the patients. The method was as follows: When a child became sick, the mother took a scarf and brought it to a pious Jew. The Jew took it in hand, chanted certain mysterious words, and then returned the scarf to the mother. The mother wrapped the scarf around the child's neck, murmuring: "May this be the cure for you."

This charm, however, was not always effective and other methods had to be sought.

A rumor once spread around town that there was a peasant in a nearby village who performed wondrous deeds: Exorcised evil eyes, drove away toothaches, headaches and other pains, and the point is -- that it helped. Instead of going to the Jew to drive out the evil eye, the townspeople started to go to the peasant. The first thing he did was to instruct the patient to look deep into his eyes. Then he started to move both hands back and forth several times over the patient's face, and it didn't take long before the sick one began to feel better. Understandably, no miracle occurred. The peasant apparently possessed hypnotic powers of which he himself was not aware.

When the Jews started to go to the peasant to have him drive away the evil eye, it created a stir in town. How come! Exchange a Jew for a peasant? A desecration of the Name! They consulted the rabbi on this matter. The rabbi, it appears, was powerless to do anything about it, because when dealing with a sick person, the patient is the boss. Not only did the sick Jews go to the peasant's house, they even started to bring the peasant into their homes. Little by little the furor subsided.

After a short time the peasant died, and many mourning townspeople attended his funeral...
Membership Fees

The new membership year began 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. If you live outside of North America (NA), the fee is $35 (bankable in the US) if you prefer hard copy (HC) versions of the newsletter and $25 if you prefer PDF versions via e-mail. If you wish to renew your membership for multiple years, the first year will be $25 ($35 for HC outside NA/$25 for PDF ) and $20 ($30 for HC outside NA/$20 for PDF) for each additional year. Please make checks payable to Latvia SIG and mail 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 (this form can also be found on the Latvia SIG web site) and include Family Finder information.

Special Appeal

As always, the Latvia SIG is happy to accept additional payments to the SIG to help pay for expenses associated with projects and day-to-day activities, like testimony translations, reproduction and mailing costs, and database acquisitions. The SIG has now established two accounts on JewishGen to supplement the Latvia SIG general fund, also under JewishGen. These accounts were described earlier in the newsletter and donations to them will be used to help fund the Dvinsk Census Project and the Speakers Bureau. Please note that you can also support these two worthy causes by contributing directly to the Latvia SIG as described above. Simply state which of the projects you wish to support along with your donation. For U.S. taxpayers, contributions to the SIG via JewishGen are tax deductible, whereas direct contributions to the SIG are not.
# 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.**

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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:**

**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 outside of North America for hard copy and $25 if you prefer PDF versions. Make checks payable to Latvia SIG and send 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 HC outside NA/$25 PDF) for the first year, and $20 ($30 HC outside NA/$20 PDF) for each subsequent year.