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President’s Report

My entry into Jewish genealogy is relatively recent. Four years ago, when my then 18 year old daughter announced that she was delaying college to do a Gap Year backpacking alone through Asia and Europe, my nascent interest in my roots was suddenly activated. After much futile protesting, I gave in, but she had to promise to meet my son and me in Riga on a certain date. Then I started making inquiries about how one searches for ancestors, and unearthed this amazing network of Jews in the Diaspora who had been hard at work on modern Jewish genealogy for nearly three decades. I discovered that one of the earliest Latvian researchers, Arlene Beare, came from my home town, Springs, in South Africa, and that an old colleague from my South African medical school days, Saul Issroff, is a prominent leader in the field. These two and a number of other wonderful people were very generous, first in helping me find archivists to access my records in Latvia, then in guiding me in my trip planning for the pilgrimage.

The resulting trip for us to Latvia and Israel was both exhilarating and depressing. (After some futile protesting, I gave in, but she had to promise to meet my son and me in Riga on a certain date. Then I started making inquiries about how one searches for ancestors, and unearthed this amazing network of Jews in the Diaspora who had been hard at work on modern Jewish genealogy for nearly three decades. I discovered that one of the earliest Latvian researchers, Arlene Beare, came from my home town, Springs, in South Africa, and that an old colleague from my South African medical school days, Saul Issroff, is a prominent leader in the field. These two and a number of other wonderful people were very generous, first in helping me find archivists to access my records in Latvia, then in guiding me in my trip planning for the pilgrimage.

Traveling with my adult children in search of our ancestors was a great experience that all who can undertake it, should. It also fueled my continuing interest in Jewish genealogy, and here I am, taking on this new role in the Latvia SIG, asking for you to expand your participation in Latvia SIG activities.

At the most recent meeting of the Latvia SIG, at the IAJGS conference in Washington DC in August, Mitchell Lieber presented his not-yet-completed movie, Rumbula’s Echo to a mesmerized audience. To complete the documentary, Mitchell needs to raise additional funds and donations can be made directly from the Rumbula’s Echo website, http://www.rumbulasecho.org/support.shtml. Henry Blumberg reported on a highly successful reunion and conference in Latvia this past July. The next conference is planned for summer 2014 when Riga will be one of the cultural capitals of Europe. If you are interested in attending please contact Henry at Henry@blumbergs.ca.

We also reported that finally some of the translations done by Christine Usdin have been posted on the JewishGen website for easy access, and is now part of the JewishGen Latvia Database. http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Latvia/. Christine was thanked for her amazingly generous translation marathon that continues as I write. (We plan to honor her at the next IAJGS conference in Paris in July 2012.)

As a nominee for president, I outlined my proposal that we embark on a new journey to energize the Latvia SIG, including exploring the use of social media to tell our children and grandchildren of the history of their ancestors. After the membership approved my election as the incoming president I had the opportunity to thank Barry Shay and Mike Getz for their service to the Latvia SIG for many years. I also thanked Marion Werle, D. L. MacLaughlin-Dumes and Bruce Dumes for their efforts supporting the Latvia SIG web site.

With this issue, Barry Shay ends his long tenure as editor of this newsletter and we are very grateful to him for his dedication. I will take over as editor of the newsletter for the next few issues.

The Future

Changing leadership is a good time to pause and assess where we are, and ask where the Latvia SIG should go for the next few years.

Each SIG is unique; their achievements to date vary by their history of leadership, volunteer capacity, country size, historical Jewish population, and their SIG organizational model. Currently some SIGs are more active than others, some more diverse. Examples include the much larger Litvak SIG, which is now able to raise funds, or-
ganize into districts, and produce significant translation volume. The Ukrainian SIG is undergoing rejuvenation which includes new leadership and organizational changes, and is using Facebook to increase its membership. Starting a Facebook account certainly brought them new interested people along with a bit of protest from the old guard.

Recently, the Latvia SIG list-serve has sprung to life in response to a proposal for collaboration from Joyaa Antares in Australia, and a thought-provoking e-mail from Howard Margol. The e-mail exchange explored how to improve collaboration across continents.

Also, we are in the midst of a (almost) heated debate over whether to offer free access to newly acquired databases or require fees. As you know, the most tangible benefit of paid membership in the Latvia SIG is the quarterly newsletter. However, the dues paid cover more than the production and distribution costs of the newsletter. Part of the money collected is used for other expenses, like translating testimonies, subsidizing IAJGS conference speakers at Latvia SIG events, paying for database acquisition like the Dvinsk census records, and small donations to relevant organizations. We do receive some donations beyond the dues that go to the SIG directly and some that go to specific projects within JewishGen.

The alternative to not paying dues is to just solicit donations. To do that we need to identify specific projects, like the Litvak SIG does. If we do it through JewishGen, we need their approval for each project. Eliminating membership dues would result in immediate distribution of our newsletter by web posting to the Latvia SIG website. The link to the newsletter would be distributed via the Latvia SIG list-serve and also sent to interested parties like libraries, NGOs in Eastern Europe, other SIGs, and other websites of interest to genealogists.

Some Basic Questions

- Can we find enough qualified and consistently available volunteers to do translations or do we need to fund an organized program of paid volunteers focused on high priority translation projects?
- Are we using the newsletter to its best advantage? Should we change from a quarterly multi page format to an electronic monthly one to two-page ‘newsletter’ in the modern version of the word? Should we stop the production of the paper version since almost everyone can access a printer?
- Should we open the newsletter to all readers immediately on publication and eliminate our current policy, which is to limit distribution to dues-paying members and upload it to the website twelve months after publication?

Major Activities Proposed

- Translation of paper records
- Continue to look for paper records we can translate and find translators to do it.
- Identify and tell you, our interested members, about new Latvian databases coming on line.
- Education and Collaboration
- Find ways to expand participation by our list-serve ‘membership’.
- Foster communication and collaboration by amateur and professional researchers in the Diaspora with academic and volunteer communities in Latvia.
- Organize education group visits to the Baltic States to foster relationships and further knowledge acquisition.

Bring our Children into This Story

- Explore how social media like Facebook can help us spread the word to our children.
- Find ways to help individuals and families visit Latvia and other Eastern European cities to explore their genealogy.
Action Items

- Establish an executive group that includes a vice-president to manage the volunteer program, a treasurer to manage the finances, and an expert to launch our Facebook presence.
- Divide Latvia into efficient areas of land to identify, translate, and share data, and to develop a pool of volunteers to translate these paper records.
- Bring children into the narrative and enlist someone proficient in social media with specific expertise in Facebook.
- Foster widespread effective communications including effective use of our newsletter.
- Develop an educational program to encourage relationships between colleagues in the Diaspora and Latvia.

Question: Do you agree with my proposed plan? If not, what do you propose?

Question: Are you willing to get involved to help us?

I look forward to hearing from you via the Latvia SIG list-serve, by email, or call me at 781 248 4978.

Michael Eliastam
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Editor’s Comments

Since the last issue of the newsletter, which was published in May, much has happened concerning the Latvia SIG. Our new president, Michael Eliastam, summarized the salient issues in his report and we all hope that Michael can bring new life and direction to the SIG.

By the next issue of the newsletter I was the editor—Mike is a great salesman! And now, after 32 issues and almost 10 years, I am stepping down from that position.

In looking back, I can see the progress made over those years in both form and content and I am happy to have been a part of that transformation. Newsletters are now available in electronic form and can be downloaded from the SIG website going all the way back to January 1996, Volume 1, Issue 1. I am not sure what the next step in the evolutionary process will be, but I am confident that Michael Eliastam will do his best to produce a product that will enhance the status of the Latvia SIG for years to come.

Now back to the current issue. It seems that the IAJGS conference in Washington, DC just ended but registration for the upcoming conference in Paris is already a reality. From the initial information available the conference promises to be interesting and educational, with a star-studded list of academics, archivists, genealogists, and government officials participating. Coincidentally, the first abstract posted is one by Aleksandrs Feigmanis, a professional genealogist from Latvia who has helped many members of the Latvia SIG in their personal research and has also written articles for SIG newsletter. As Mi-
Michael mentioned, we hope to honor Christine Usdin at the conference for the incredible work she continues to do. The SIG invited Christine to the 2010 conference in Los Angeles, but she was not able to attend because of illness in her family.

Over the years I have been in contact with Yehudi Gaffen, a long-time SIG member and the driving force behind the effort to memorialize the Jewish population of Bauska that was essentially eliminated during the Holocaust. Yehudi and Jehuda Feitelson continue the fight and I have included the latest update with information gleaned from material received from Yehudi. In a recent e-mail from Yehudi, he implied that the non responsiveness of the officials in Bauska, despite the direct involvement of U.S. State Department officials, was quite worrisome.

Like the Bauska initiative, the SIG has been following the developments concerning the Green Synagogue in Rezekne. Dave Michaelson took early interest, beginning in 2003, in restoring the synagogue and was able to attract attention and support for the restoration, but no real progress was seen. However, a glimmer of hope appeared in 2007 when Gita Umanovska contacted me with the news that the Rezekne Art Secondary School together with the Latvian Jewish community defined a project called, Learning by doing — development of timber restoration in the Latgale region. The project was to be jointly financed by the European Union, the Norwegian government and Latvia via the Ministry of Culture. The completion date for the restoration was to be February 2010 and it was envisioned that the synagogue would be used for services on holidays and as a museum at other times.

Nothing more was heard about the project until May 2010 when Sigmund Hertzberg contacted us with the news that the project was still alive and, in fact, was to become a reality. Since then, Sigmund has kept us informed on the progress and now work on the restoration has actually begun and I am pleased to include another update in this issue.

For those of you who attended the Latvia SIG meeting this past July in Washington, you heard Henry Blumberg’s moving account of the events in Latvia surrounding the commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the beginning of the Holocaust in Latvia. I asked Henry to write something about his experience during those days and his article not only describes the events, but also relates his emotional attachment to Latvia, and especially to Liepaja, in a most personal way.

Mitchell Lieber presented excerpts of his documentary film, Rumbula’s Echo, at the SIG meeting and also at the general session of the IAJGS conference. And, as Henry described in his article, Mitch presented excerpts of the film at the ceremonies in Latvia. In the update Mitch talks about both venues and also gives us an idea of what is planned and what still needs to be done as Rumbula’s Echo moves ahead.

The testimony of Abram Kit in this issue provides a first-hand account of a survivor of the Holocaust who is personally connected to the ceremonies in Latvia described by Henry Blumberg and the film being produced by Mitch Lieber.

From the testimony, it is apparent that Abram Kit dedicated his life to remembering the events of the Holocaust and in honoring the memory of those Latvian Jews who were killed. In the testimony he does not spend much time discussing his personal life, but gives a general account of what happened to the Jews in Latvia. It is clear that Mr. Kit suffered a great deal, but tries to hide his personal suffering behind the larger picture of the annihilation of his people.

During the month of October the Latvia SIG listserve was inundated with questions, opinions, and suggestions concerning databases that have yet to be discovered and translated. Shamir, the Jewish religious community of Latvia, has recently provided the first stage of an index of files of Jewish materials stored in the Latvian State Historical Archives. These files do not appear on the Raduraksti website and to be useful to Latvia SIG members and other genealogists they need to be obtained and translated.

In the president’s report, Michael questioned how we can find qualified translators — either paid or volunteers — to work on high-priority projects. That question needs to be addressed, but equally
Important is to define the high priority projects. I believe that the index of files that Shamir has posted could lead to such projects. For that reason I have excerpted some of the index and included it in the newsletter and the complete index is now available on the SIG website as well as on the Shamir website. I would suggest, as a first step, contacting the archives to determine how one might get physical or on-line access to those files. Perhaps only the archivists can do that. If that is so, can the SIG define a project and provide the funding to the archives to do the translation of at least one file of particular interest?

Finally, I have included a couple of tidbits that I thought would be of interest. Some of you may have already read the beautiful book that Martha Lev-Zion wrote about bringing up her adopted daughter Tamar. It is now available as an E-book from Avotaynu and I have included information about how to buy the E-book. I’m sure that all of you know that Martha is a former president of the Latvia SIG and is very active in Israeli genealogy circles.

Logan Kleinwaks’ website is one that I highly recommend and now that he has included a 1940 Latvia telephone directory to his collection of online directories, you have even more reason to visit the site. Logan’s presentations at past IAJGS conferences have been interesting and educational.

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IAJGS 2012 Conference in Paris

The 32nd IAJGS International Conference on Jewish Genealogy will take place in Paris, France from July 15-18, 2012 and is hosted by the Cercle de Généalogie Juive in partnership with the Jewish Genealogical Societies of Belgium, Switzerland and Luxembourg.

The conference is attracting speakers from all over Europe and Israel, many of whom do not usually attend IAJGS conferences in the U.S. Attendees will be able to meet with eastern and western European archivists, visit historic Jewish sites in Paris, and visit historic Jewish sites in France and Europe after the conference, providing attendees the opportunity to continue their genealogical research while walking in the footsteps of their ancestors.

Registration for the conference is now open with discount prices for registering by February 29, 2012. Advanced registration is €185 for one person and €320 for couples. Please check conversion rates before registering. Proposals for lectures or workshops are now being accepted and can be submitted from the website. All that is required is a 10 to 20 line abstract and a short biography. The deadline for submitting proposals is April 30, 2012 and the committee will make its decision by May 30.

The conference will be held at the Marriott Paris Rive Gauche Hotel. The conference rate is €119 per night and applies for three days before the conference and three days after the conference. The rate includes a French continental breakfast. You can book your room from the conference website: http://www.paris2012.eu/

A number of lecturers have already been accepted, including the following:

Zsuzsanna Toronyi, Chief-Archivist of the Hungarian Jewish Archives

Ladislau Gyémánt, Professor of Jewish Studies at the Institute "Dr Moshe Carmilly", Babes-Bolyay University, Cluj, Romania

Jürgen Sielemann, Archivist, City of Hamburg, Germany

Philippe Landau, Head-Archivist of the Consistoire Central of France

Philippe Pierret, Curator at the Jewish Museum of Belgium, Brussels, and Associate Researcher of the French National Scientific Research Center (CNRS)

Henri Atlan, Emeritus Professor of Biophysics and Director of the Center for Research in Human
Biology, Hadassah University Hospital, Jerusalem

**Joel Zlotogora**, Department of Community Genetics, Ministry of Health, Israel

**Joshua Feingold**, Emeritus Research Director at INSERM (France)

**Marc Fellous**, Emeritus Professor of Genetics, Paris VII University, Chairman of the International Association for the Jewish Cemetery in Tunis

**Doron Behar**, Chief Medical Officer at the Department of Critical Care, Rambam Center, Haifa, board member of Family Tree DNA

**Frowald Gil Hüttenmeister**, Professor of Hebrew Literature, Tübingen University, Germany

Coincidentally, as of today, only **Aleksandrs Feigmanis**, the well-known Latvian professional genealogist, guide and contributor to this newsletter, is scheduled as a presenter. His presentation is scheduled for July 16 at 16:00 and is entitled *New Resources for Jewish Genealogy in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia*. Below is a slightly edited version of the abstract.

**Abstract**

During the last ten years new sources of genealogical information such as property files, student files, provincial administrative documents, files on political and criminal cases, KGB files, etc., were added to well-known genealogical resources (residence books, revision lists, censuses, vital BMD records and police files). In addition, important free web-based resources were created in Latvia and Estonia that allow genealogists to search large databases directly from a home computer. This report details the ways in which the new resources can be used and shows where such information is available.

**Bauska Update**

The Latvia SIG has published updates about the effort, led by Yehudi Gaffen and Jehuda Feitelson, to erect a memorial to the Jews killed in Bauska during the holocaust. Our last update, which appeared in the May 2011 newsletter (Vol. 15, Issue 3), was a reprint of an article that appeared in the San Diego Union Tribune early in 2011, summarizing the history and motivation for the effort. In the article, Yehudi expressed concerns that the memorial may not be realized because of the unwillingness of locals to admit and accept what happened to the Jews in Bauska.

Although the original plans for a static memorial have been abandoned, there have been some encouraging signs that a memorial in some form will be built. Yehudi Gaffen and Jehuda Feitelson have been leading this effort and it is a testament to their fortitude that the project is still alive.

Thanks to Eric Benjaminson, a long-time Latvia SIG member and now the U.S. Ambassador to Gabon, Yehudi has obtained the support of Judith Garber, the U.S. Ambassador to Latvia. In a letter to Ms. Garber in July, Yehudi explained that the Duma had officially rejected the design on the grounds that it is out of scale with the surroundings and felt too much like a cemetery. Although the Duma planned to set up a committee to oversee the design and construction of the memorial, Yehudi expressed concern about their real motives and agendas.

In mid-August Yehudi visited Latvia to get an on-the-ground status of what was happening and, of course, to emphasize by his presence that the project is still relevant and alive. According to Yehudi, his trip to Latvia, with visits to Riga and Bauska, was very productive. It was his sixth trip and, he thinks, maybe the lucky one. He met with the Memorial “working group” and also had meetings with Judith Garber and Benjamin Kajem – the representative of the Latvian Jewish Community. The meeting with the working group led to an apparent agreement to build an interim memorial that will ultimately become a multipurpose building to house a community library plus a permanent exhibit memorializing the contributions and ultimate murder of Bauska's Jews. The building will be a partial reconstruction of the destroyed synagogue that sat on the site.

On September 8, Yehudi followed up the meeting with a letter confirming his understanding of agreements reached, as summarized below:
the City of Bauska was committed to facilitate the design and construction of a memorial to the extinct Jewish Community of Bauska on the site of the destroyed synagogue.

- the original design of the memorial was problematic and would not be approved or accepted by the elected officials of the City of Bauska or its residents.

- the group supported an alternative concept of a building with a permanent exhibit to memorialize the lost Jewish Community along with a library/educational facility to serve the residents of Bauska.

- the façade could be modeled after the original synagogue that once stood on the site.

- an additional memorial on the site of the old Jewish Cemetery would be considered.

- Yehudi made an offer to lead and manage the fundraising efforts for the design and construction of the memorial and associated building.

- an interim memorial would be installed on the site, subject to a design review by the working group and the City of Bauska.

- a specific set of actions designed to move the newly defined project along were developed.

Since that letter was written there has been no response from the working group. Yehudi followed up with another correspondence about two weeks ago. After receiving a copy of the September 8 letter, Garber replied stating that she and her assistant met with the Bauska City Council subsequent to Yehudi’s meeting with the council, and the mayor’s understanding of the meeting tracked closely with the points outlined in Yehudi’s letter. The mayor asked that she and her staff discuss the project with the Jewish community, since their approval would be necessary because of ongoing concerns over the restitution of Jewish communal property. This was agreed to and the Embassy offered their good offices to facilitate moving the project forward.

Garber’s assistant, Heath Bailey, subsequently met with Ben Kajem of the Jewish Community in Latvia who expressed cautious optimism but reiterated that if the past was any indication, the Bauska City Council will further obfuscate and delay the project. As of this date, Yehudi has yet to hear from the Bauska City Council although he reminded the mayor five weeks ago that he is eagerly awaiting a response.

In the meantime, Yehudi met with Rabbi Hier and his staff at the Simon Wiesenthal Museum of Tolerance (MOT) in Los Angeles and Rabbi Hier agreed to assist by lending their name and helping with programming for the memorial. The details of the relationship with MOT are not yet finalized.

**Green Synagogue**

In the May 2010 issue of the newsletter (Vol.14, Issue 3), Dave Michaelson wrote that a Norwegian organization had taken an interest in restoring the Green Synagogue in Rezekne. The restoration plans and architectural designs that were the result of the project Dave initiated were shared with the Norwegians. Since the decision period for the Norwegian project had long passed, it was assumed that the project was cancelled. However, word was recently received from the Norwegians that the project is now funded and work is about to begin. Details of the restoration project were discussed by representatives of the Royal Norwegian Embassy, the Latvian Ministry of Culture and the Rezekne City Council in Riga on Monday, September 5, 2011.

On Wednesday, September 7, Sigmund Hertzberg from the Blakstad Vocational School in Norway met with representatives of the Rezekne city council. They discussed the organization plan, details of the restoration work and scheduling for conferences and seminars. The Rezekne City Council will have the management responsibilities for the project. Mr. Hertzberg will provide the SIG with detailed plans in the coming weeks. He stated that Sandra Jonikane, in Rezekne, Sandra.Jonikane@rezekne.lv, will be the point of contact.

The restoration project is a collaboration between the Rezekne municipality and Aust-Agder county...
in Norway. Participants include members of the Rezekne municipality, the Rezekne Jewish community, the Latvian Jewish Museum in Riga, two vocational schools in Rezekne and the Blakstad Vocational High School. Workshops for participants will be held to train craftsmen, teachers and students in the restoration of wooden buildings. Information gathered from this project will be disseminated to owners of similar wooden buildings in the Latgale region and other restoration opportunities will, hopefully, be forthcoming. The restored synagogue will become part of the cultural history museum in Rezekne.

According to an agreement, Norway will provide funding to EU countries and 73 million euros is allocated for Latvia for the period 2009 to 2014. Previous applications for the Norwegian funds for the synagogue project had been submitted, but no action resulted. However, a new application by Latvian Ministry of Culture was approved for the project and work is about to begin. The restoration is scheduled for completion by 2014.

The synagogue was built in 1845 and is the oldest existing wooden synagogue in Eastern Europe. It was last restored in 1939, and was in use until the early 1990's. The roof was replaced with funds from the government of Riga five years ago and the building is on the list of heritage buildings in the Latgale region.

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I have visited Latvia six times in the last seven years. What draws me to this small country on the shores of the Baltic? Latvia is far removed from my life’s experiences in South Africa, where I was born, and Canada, my beloved home.

This year marks the 450th anniversary of the arrival of Jews to Piltene and the 70th anniversary of the massacres in 1941. Many activities were planned to commemorate these events, and I hoped that by participating in them I would find the answer to my question.

My cousin Rita Bogdanova, the last Blumberg family member in Latvia, met me at the airport in Riga. Her late mother, Bella Blumberg, and Minna Reichert were the only Blumbergs I’ve met who survived the 1941 massacre in Liepaja. After the war Bella returned to Riga, while Minna immigrated to the U.S. and made a new life for herself.

The program in Latvia included a reunion in Liepaja from June 27 to 29 and a conference in Riga entitled Jews in the Changing World, organized by the Judaic Department of the University of Latvia. There was also an excursion to Kurzeme (Courland). Holocaust Memorial Day on July 4 was observed by participants from Israel, the U.S., Canada and South Africa.

**Reunion in Liepaja**

The next morning I joined other participants for our trip to Liepaja, where my family had lived before the Holocaust. Ilanna Ivanova, who had come from Liepaja to meet the group, had arranged the events for the reunion in Liepaja and the stay at the five-star Promenade Hotel, which was close to the wharf where transatlantic liners left for the New World with immigrants aboard.

From my window I could see the boats and wondered where my father, Julius (or Sundel, as he was known to his family), as a ten-year-old boarded the ship that took him to New York. I imagined his parents, brothers and a sister standing on the wharf waving to him. As a parent and grandparent, I cannot conceive the depth of their anguish as the boat sailed out of sight.

We met at the Liepaja Jewish Community Center that evening for the opening ceremony of the exhibition dedicated to the 70th anniversary of the Holocaust in Latvia. The photos and exhibits personalized the horrors that my family and other Jews of Liepaja faced.
Skede I said kaddish for the victims and remembered my previous visit when Bella Blumberg bent down and placed red roses on the site of the mass grave.

We then went to the Liepaja Holocaust Memorial Wall at the Jewish Cemetery. I was at its unveiling in June 2004. The names inscribed on the wall include those of 6,422 victims murdered by Hitler and Stalin, many of them my own family members—the Blumbergs, Hirschhorns, Yudelowitzs, Michelsohns. I recalled what Vaira Vike-Freiberga, the president of Latvia, wrote on that day of the unveiling: “What madness and hatred had seized people that caused them to destroy thousands of innocent fellow men?”

The names of brave Latvians who rescued Jews are also inscribed on this wall, such as Robert and Johanna Seduls of Liepaja, who hid eleven Jews for nearly two years in the basement of their apartment building. Among the people they hid were David and Hennie Zivcon, the parents of Ilana Ivanova. Tragically, Roberts Seduls was killed by an artillery shell in 1945, but his wife, helped by a few others, continued to care for the Jews until the end of the war. The rescuers saved a total of thirty-three Jews by hiding them or providing them with false papers, even though the penalty for hiding Jews was severe. The historian Margers Vestermanis reports that fifty-two Latvians paid with their lives for such acts of bravery.

I located the Sendsuls’ apartment, and I imagined the difficulties faced by the rescuers in hiding the Jews—finding space, keeping quiet, and buying food. Only six of the surviving Liepaja Jewish families remain today.

While we constantly reflected on the past, we also saw Liepaja as it is today. The mayor, Uldis Sesks, hosted a reception, and he and his staff described the multifaceted development that is taking place in Liepaja.

The Liepaja community arranged a festive dinner during which members of the Jewish community answered our questions. A few participants brought their children and grandchildren, and the importance of the visit to them was particularly profound.

We visited the museum at the Liepajas Metalurgs on the last day in Liepaja. This factory is the only metallurgical company in the Baltic states. We were treated to a magnificent lunch by Sergej and Alex Zaharjin, and the hospitality extended by the Zaharjin family was very much appreciated.

I met with Dr. Nick Evans, an authority on migration from the port of Libau (Liepaja). He and early mornings to sites important to Jewish emigration from Liepaja. The significance of the port as a departure point for emigration reminded me of the wretched conditions in steerage that my father had spoken of. led lengthy exploratory walks in the evenings.

I was very pleased that Rita Bogdanova joined us at the Liepaja reunion. On a previous visit, Rita’s mother, Bella, showed me places of interest in Liepaja, including the room she had shared with many other women in the Jewish ghetto. Rita was very generous in sharing her knowledge, assisting participants with travel arrangements and answering genealogical questions.

Ilana Ivanova has been a superb ambassador for Liepaja to all former Libauers and their descendants, providing us a warm welcome and ensuring that our time in Liepaja was unforgettable.

Connection with Grobina

In Liepaja I visited Vladimir Bans, who five years ago helped win approval for a memorial at the site of a mass grave in a forest outside the
town of Grobina. The memorial lists the names of eighty-seven Jews from Grobina, including members of my family, who were murdered at that site on October 27, 1941, along with the names of other Jews from Grobina who were murdered under different circumstances. A Latvian inscription on the memorial translates to, “…nobody is dead if his memory is kept,” which, according to Bans, does not convey the same importance as it does in Latvian.

Blumberg family members, including my grandfather, Jankel, murdered at the age of eighty-one, are listed on the memorial. This mass grave confirmed my father’s worst fears concerning the fate of his family.

I am honored to be one of the donors who, along with the municipality, contributed to the making of the memorial, and I believe it honors victims of the Holocaust as no other one does in Liepaja.

Genealogy Research

My presentation, Latvian Jewish Family Research: In and Outside Latvia, focused on the migration of my family from 1796 in Grobina to New York; Greenville, Miss.; South Africa; Israel; and Canada. I examined material from archives within Latvia as well as the ITS at Paderborn, Yad Vashem, the USHMM, the FHL in SLC, the South Africa Historical Archives, and internet resources and social networks. The process began with a few faded photographs and many unanswered questions and led to meaningful relationships with wonderful cousins who survived Bergen Belsen. It also helped me discover my extended family in Latvia, Israel, the U.S., France, Australia, Ireland and Canada.

Although Ed Anders did not attend the conference, his new book, Amidst Latvians During the Holocaust, about his and his mother’s survival, was presented and discussed. His family originated in Liepaja, and he and Juris Dubrovskis produced the memorial book Jews in Liepaja, Latvia 1941-1945. In the new book, Anders writes that his father devised a story claiming that his wife and son were not Jewish because his wife had been a German foundling raised by a Jewish couple, so Anders and his mother were saved. Sadly, his father and twenty-four relatives later perished. Anders became a professor of chemistry at the University of Chicago and is member of the U.S. National Academy of Sciences.

Rumbula’s Echo

Mitchell Lieber of Chicago presented scenes from his not-yet-completed documentary, Rumbula’s Echo, the first film that focuses on the Rumbula Forest murders of 27,800 people—more than a third of Latvia’s Jews and one of the two largest mass shootings of the Holocaust. It contains archival film, photos and narrations by many survi-
Lieber’s attention to detail, his discovery of the archival material and his interviews make this documentary vital for any student of the pivotal events of the Holocaust in Latvia. [The documentary was also shown during the Latvia SIG’s annual meeting at the IAJGS Conference this past July in Washington, D.C. – Ed.]

George Schwab and Sheila Robbins

George Schwab and his wife, Sheila Robbins, of New York brought a contingent of visitors to various events and memorial services. He was born in Liepaja, where his father was a gastroenterologist. The warehouse his grandfather owned was opposite the Promenade Hotel, where we stayed. Schwab arranged a visit to the American Embassy to meet Ambassador Garber. [See the reference to Ambassador Garber in the Bauska update. – Ed.]

Riga

We met a delegation from the Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews from Israel led by Elie Valk and his wife, Aviva, and Ella Barkan—an important supporter of the Memorial Wall in Liepaja.

In Riga, Gita Umanovska, executive director of the Jewish Community of Latvia, arranged many events, and Ruvin Ferber organized a conference with international speakers. Ilya Lensky, director of the museum Jews in Latvia, was also part of the team that facilitated the events.

Also in Riga, Arkady Suharenko, president of the Riga Jewish community, hosted a dinner for conference participants and members of the community.

We visited the mass grave site at Rumbula and other cemeteries of interest. Rita and I visited the cemetery where her parents were buried, the memorial to the Kaiserwald concentration camp where Bella was held, and the factory where Bella had been forced to work.

Riga is on the UNESCO World Heritage list and there is much to see and do there, but I found the Jewish Ghetto, the Museum of Jews in Latvia, the Occupation Museum and the Peitav Synagogue the most interesting. The very moving Holocaust memorial ceremony on the July 4 was held at the remains of the Choral Synagogue, where hundreds of Jews had been herded into the basement, after which the synagogue was burned to the ground.

Remains of the Choral Synagogue in Riga

It is difficult for me to summarize the importance of this trip. Meeting survivors and their descendants, exchanging genealogical information, attending the conferences and ceremonies, hearing eminent historians speak about Latvian Jewish history, and attending the reunion in Liepaja left me overwhelmed with emotion.

On the way back to Toronto, I wondered what drew me to Latvia again. It was certainly meaningful to reconnect with my past, but I think it was more important to answer my father’s question, “What happened there and what happened to our family?” I think I finally know the answer.
Rumbula's Echo Update
by Mitchell Lieber

As Henry Blumberg indicated in his article, Mitchell Lieber was in attendance and screened excerpts of Rumbula's Echo as part of the commemorations associated with the 70th anniversary of the beginning of the Holocaust in Latvia. Ed.

On June 30, a 29-minute set of excerpts from the initial rough cut was screened and on July 4, 71 minutes of the documentary's work in progress was shown.

The screenings were presented at the invitation of the World Reunion of Latvian Jewry and the biannual academic conference on Baltic Jewry, Jews in a Changing World. The audience included Latvians, Israelis, Americans, Canadians and people from other countries. A Finnish TV crew also sat in on the screening, once they promised not to use their camera.

The response was gratifying. Arkady Suharenko, chairman of Latvia's Jewish community, expressed his thanks after the screening. The executive director of the same organization said it was even better than she imagined it would be. Our friend, Professor Ruvin Ferber, chairman of the conference, repeatedly expressed his thanks. Henry Blumberg, the Canadian attorney of Latvian heritage who generously underwrote the conference, said, "I knew you were good, but I didn't know you were that good." A young Jewish woman from Riga, perhaps about 30, came up and said, "This was the best program here (in the large theatre at the Jewish Center), in several years."

The screening was discussed in advance on radio and was reported in Latvia's national newspaper, Latvijas Avize.

We are delighted that Beth Sternheimer has begun working on Rumbula's Echo, and has already made important contributions to our work. Ms. Sternheimer recently co-produced the four-part documentary series The Calling, seen on PBS in 2010. She was associate producer of Traces of the Trade: A Story from the Deep North, which aired on PBS' Point of View (POV) and was nominated for an Emmy Award. This documentary and two others on which she worked, were presented at the Sundance Film Festival. Ms. Sternheimer produced museum exhibit videos for the U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum (Hidden Children), the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York (Daring to Resist), and was a consulting producer on core exhibit videos of the Illinois Holocaust Museum and Education Center. She will be involved in overseeing many of the activities involved in completing Rumbula's Echo.

Rumbula's Echo Accomplishments

In late 2010, Rumbula's Echo met its initial production goals. During 2009 - 2010, it filmed 60 hours of footage including 30 interviews. By about that time, it had roughly 2,000 photos indexed in its archival database. It was clear that we had an important story and compelling footage. We decided that rather than rush the film to completion with insufficient resources to do it justice, we would take the time and obtain the resources to complete it in a way that brings the story to a large public around the world.

Editing is often more costly than filming. A production funder awarded the project an additional grant to begin the process and edit an initial rough cut. This was done during the first half of 2011. Initial rough cuts are typically twice as
long as finished documentaries. The completed documentary is targeted to be three one-hour TV programs, with a shorter version for screenings.

*Rumbula’s Echo* has also edited 71 minutes of the initial rough cut to a more advanced stage. This is the footage being shown at work-in-progress screenings in Europe and the U.S.

The documentary is now seeking funding for major editing, archival rights and supplementary photography. *Rumbula’s Echo* continues to move forward, thanks to the support of individuals, organizations, synagogues of supporters and family foundations. The documentary has a 29-minute program of work-in-progress excerpts to screen for individuals and select groups. If you can help with contacts, hosting a fund-raising party in your home or with a foundation contact, please get in touch with me at 312-602-3302.

Barry Shay, President of the Latvia SIG, invited me to present excerpts of *Rumbula’s Echo* at the Latvia SIG’s annual meeting at the International Jewish Genealogy Conference in Washington, DC on August 18, 2011. From all indications, the screening was enthusiastically received, with viewer comments such as, "Riveted all the time. Footage amazing...."

The latest news is that there was a work-in-progress screening in New York City, Sunday, November 13th, at noon. It was the featured program at the annual memorial service of the Jewish Survivors of Latvia - USA, at the Park East Synagogue, 163 East 67th Street.

**An Interview with Abram Kit**

*Recorded on June 15, 2000*  
*Conducted and edited by Ayna Aytane*  
*Center for Judaic Studies*  
*University of Latvia*  
*Translated into English by*  
*Sonia Kagna and Victor Popow*

A.K. My mother’s family comes from Silene. Let me show you where it is — right here, Silene, here it is [shows the location on the map of Latvia — Ed.]. And my father’s family comes from Kraslava. We moved to Riga in 1933. This is when our life in Riga began.

I was born in 1923. Until I was 10 years old, I lived in Silene. I started to study there-in secular school and I also studied religion. This is the genealogical tree of our family. Here all people and families who were killed in 1941 are marked in red ink. In green ink are marked names of those who survived the war and Holocaust. So, here [shows the table-Ed.] 33 people were killed; that family lost 13 of its members. To be precise, here are my grandparents-my grandfather and my grandmother. My grandfather’s name was Chaim, my grandmother’s name-Basya. They had-one, two, three, four, five, six and seven children. This family’s last name was Rat [his mother’s family-Ed.]; my father’s family’s last name was Kit. I don’t know the origin of my mother’s family name. About that last name — why was it Kit? That was because my father’s ancestors for generations were carpenters and glaziers; and, you know, when they install a new glass, from the other side they seal it with the “kit” [special luting cement used for working with the glass — Ed.]. That is where my last name comes from. So, these two families-they both were killed. This family was killed and that family was killed.

A.A. Excuse me, could you tell me their names?

A.K. Yes, you can write it down this way: the heads of the family were Chaim and Basya, my grandparents. Now there is already the third generation. They had the younger son — Benyamin. I remember his wife, Etta. Their family was completely exterminated in Silene. There were also Abram and Lesya. They had a daughter-Musya. This family was also exterminated during the Holocaust. There was the third family. I remember Ehon, who had a wife Chaya. They had a son-Gertz. They also were shot July 27 1941 in Silena. All these families were exterminated on July 27. You know, Ezergailis gave a lot of information regarding this extermination. I have his book, “The Holocaust in Latvia occupied by Germans,” there is a description of how 180 people were killed in Silena-the date it happened, who killed them, and how they were executed-everything is explained there.

Now about the other daughter of my grandfather—about my uncle and my aunt-her name was Bella,
and her husband, my uncle’s name was, his Shlomo-Solomon. They had four children and this family was also completely exterminated on July 27. Another of his [grandfather’s-Ed.] daughters was my aunt Taube. She had a husband, Ishiya. They had three children. All of them were killed.

Now I will tell you more about the other family. One of the youngest sons of my grandfather was Moesha. He had a wife — Tanya. They lived in Riga from 1930. They had five sons. Only one of their five sons survived — his name is Isaac. Now he lives in the United States. He and I survived the Holocaust together. He lives in New York City. He wrote a book but unfortunately I was unable to bring this book with me. The book was borrowed from me by the APN /[Russian abbreviation APN stays for Agenstvo Pechati Novosti — APN was the leading soviet information agency. Now Russian Information Agency Novosti — RIA Novosti — succeeds APN./] Erik Yansons, who works for APN, borrowed the book. Later I was sick and I was unable to go there and take the book back. If I need the book, I can call him and he will bring it to me. So, one of Moesha’s sons was killed in the war; his name was Mendel. Moesha’s other son, Isaac, survived and lives in New York City. Of the entire family, we are the only two people who survived. Moesha’s other three sons were exterminated with their mother in Rumbula.

So, now I will tell you about our family, about my mother Rahil and my father Moshe. They had six children. I am Abram, I am the only one who survived the Holocaust, everyone else was killed in Rumbula.

Regarding that family, my mother’s family that comes from Silene, this is all that I remember.

Now, about the family from Kraslava. This is Kit family. The oldest were — Samuel and Lyuba. They died around 1928. Their eldest son — Moshe — was my father. They also had another son, Irmiya, (Jeremiah) who was killed during the war. Jeremiah had one son, Leva. What was his last name? I don’t remember, but it will come to me later. (Probably their last name was Kit because usually the last name passes from the father’s side. So, Leva was the grandson of Samuel Kit. — Editor). Also my grandfather Samuel had a daughter, Basya. She died before the war. My grandfather Samuel had one more son, my uncle, the brother of my father, Hloyne. Hloyne had a wife Sonya and together they had two children. The whole family was killed in Kraslava during the Holocaust. Also grandfather Samuel had a son, Abram, who died before the war. Abram had three sons and only one son, Mikhail, survived. Mikhail was in the War and was evacuated with the military units. All other members of his family perished. In all, thirteen people were killed from my father’s side and thirty three people were killed from my mother’s side. This is it in its totality.

So now, you probably are familiar with this map [shows the map of Latvia - Ed.]. Jews used to live in all those towns [shows the marked towns on the map - Ed.]. Now Jews live only in Riga, I believe, there are approximately eight thousand of them, in Daugavpils - just a very few. Everywhere else now, it is like it was when the Germans put up their signs - “Juden frei”.

Next, the places where the Jews were exterminated around Riga are marked here on the map. Those places are - Jumprava, Rumbula, different ghettos, and Kaiserwald. And there is one more such place - Salaspils.

Now there are people who participated in those exterminations of Jews [shows the album - Ed.]. The main person, who did it, was Eichmann. This Eichmann, he did it all over Europe. Obergruppenführer (General) Jeckeln was working under Eichmann’s command, particularly in the Baltic region. Jeckeln was prosecuted here, in Riga, in 1946. He was hanged here at the Pobeda Square (Square of Victory). There was also Rosenberg. Rosenberg was an ideologue who came up with the final solution of “the Jewish question.” He was prosecuted in Munich, no, I am wrong, it had happened in Nuremberg. Rosenberg was sentenced to death. Under Rosenberg’s command was Lose, Heinrich Lose. Here he is, this picture was taken when he visited Latvia - it was in Dobele (Dobele is a town in the cultural region Zemgale in the central part of Latvia) [shows the copy of the photograph - Ed.].
Lose was giving commands, but he wasn’t personally involved in exterminating the Jews. The extermination was the work of the so-called “Arajs team.”

Cukurs was working with Arajs commando.

This picture [shows the photograph - Ed.] was made just before Cukurs was shot dead in Uruguay. There is a synagogue that was located on Gogol Street, this is how that synagogue used to look; now there is located that… [A memorable place - Ed.]. Here is a layout of Riga’s ghetto. Well... This is a school that is located on Lachplesha Street near Gogol Street. Now there is a Jewish school that has been working now for five years [from the moment the school has resumed its activity - Ed.]. On June 5th this school will celebrate its anniversary-160 years from the moment the school was built. I use to study in this school. Here is my class, this is my class too [shows the copy of the photographs - Ed.]. It was a miracle that had happened with those photographs: this person was at war and he saved those photographs. Out of all those people [on the photograph - Ed.] only two of us survived, everyone else was killed. There, as you can see, a clipping from the newspaper “Die Tages Zeitung”, there is a description [of the destiny of Riga’s Jews — Ed.]. So, these are the photographs of the ghetto. There is a house from where my family was taken to Rumbula… These are my family and Isaac’s family: Isaac is my relative who lives in New York City now. He has visited us here four times; and always when he comes to us, we are going to his house, where his family used to live. There is another house on the picture, the house in which we lived in the ghetto-it was located on Liksnas Street.

I have already told you about an extermination in Silene where 180 people were killed. This is their grave. On July 27th they were taken from Silene to the lake Smilgu, this is about 8 or 9 km away from Silene. This is where they were shot to death. This is their mass grave. In the past, when more of us, the people who survived, were living in Riga, every year we were going to this grave. We, the children and the relatives of those who were killed there, we collected money and erected the monument. Now there are only two left out of all of us. Only two of us, we are old and sick. We cannot go there anymore and nobody at all goes there now. Those photographs are from Andrievs Ezergailis’s book that we already have mentioned here. Those photographs were taken in Skede. Jews were shot to death in Rumbula and Jumprava and everywhere else; the same method of killing was used. Now about Rumbula. Only two women survived in Rumbula, one of them is Mikhailson and a second woman is Medale, who died six month ago in Riga at the age of eighty-six.

She (Medale) was able to speak about everything that she had witnessed in Rumbula. And she had survived, and when she tried to speak to Arajs and Cukurs they did not pay any attention to her; they answered that blood should be spilled there. Only after she went to Jeckeln did he save her life. There is, how to say it, a hole in a ground in Rumbula. When we returned to Riga after the war, at that time there (in Rumbula) was no order, there were no marked graves. There was only this hole. People were going there, they sieved the sand trying to find gold. At that time, you know, it was impossible to do something about it officially, because the Soviet government institutions were not giving permission. And only in 1959 or 1960 did they let us go there to at least put some things in order. And all this time we were going there. Every Sunday I went there taking a shovel and a bucket. We were going there to dig, and we put everything in order. There is [shows the photograph - Ed.] one of the monuments, this is the main monument in Rumbula.

At that time it was strictly prohibited to write in Hebrew. There was one architect, who took the responsibility to write. He said, if there would be any consequences, tell them, I did it, put it on me. And he wrote those three words on the monument in Hebrew anyway. Later-fifteen years ago-he moved to Israel. He died there not long ago. The memorial plaque dedicated to him was put next to the monument in Rumbula. It says that this person designed the monument and the dates of his birth and death. Here [shows the photograph - Ed.] you can see the work that we have done. I was going there for five straight years, in summer - almost every Sunday I spent in Rumbula. Here [on the photograph – Ed.] you can see me with the German delegation. They come here every
year. This year they will be here too, I think, June 30 - or will they come in May? - and then I will go with them again [in Rumbula – Ed.]. There is a diary [shows photographs from the exhibition dedicated to Anne Frank – Ed.].

Approximately forty to fifty thousand Jews from Germany, Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Austria were transported to Latvia. In Ezergailis’s book there is a list where everything is documented: when and how many people were transported, from where they were taken and where exactly the Nazis put them. All those trains with people were transported to Ikskile, no, in Shkirotava where those people were sorted; and here [on the photograph - Ed.] is this station, Shkirotava. Do you know when there was the Kristallnacht for us, for Latvian Jews? It was on July 4, when the majority of synagogues in Latvia were burnt down. This is [shows the photograph - Ed.] - the one from those burned synagogues; this one was in Jelgava.

Here is Bikernieki [shows the photograph - Ed.]. In Bikernieki the building of the monument has started, but everything there has stopped because of the lack of money. Now the Germans will do something there, they came to Bikernieki last year and they expressed big interest in continuing to build the memorial because the majority of the people killed in Bikernieki were German Jews. They say they will come this year and bring money and begin the work.

You know, in Jerusalem there is a place to study the Holocaust - Yad Vashem. They are preserving the names of people who were killed and exterminated. I sent to Yad Vashem the names of the members of my family; I have received the answer from there that they entered seven names in their database. Those seven names will be preserved in one cell. It will look this way [shows the photograph – Ed.]. I already told you about my cousin, who lives in New York City. The cell on the photograph has the names of the members of his family. In Yad Vashem the names are officially preserved in the Hall of Names. My family has their own cell as well. I never have been there. That is why I do not have a photograph of our cell. My relative lives there now. Probably I will ask him and he will take a picture for me.

Probably the majority of Latvians in some way supported the extermination of the Jews during the Holocaust. But there were still many people who were trying to save Jews during the war. Recently we celebrated the 100th anniversary of Lipke. Here - is Lipke [shows different photographs - Ed.]. There is a tree that he planted. A medal, which he received. There are two monuments, first is Lipke’s monument at Lesnove Cemetery, and the second is the monument in Smerli.

In 1943 the Nazis closed all the ghettos and sent people to the concentration camps. Here is [shows the photograph - Ed.] one of the first concentration camps in Latvia; this one is in Mezaparks - in Kaiserwald. I have been there too. I was sent to Mezaparks, to Kaiserwald. From there they sent me to Strazde I spent approximately a year and a half in Strazdu camp. From Strazde they moved me to Germany. Unfortunately…

A.A. Excuse me, is it Strazde on Yugla? (She is probably asking here about Yugla Lake in today’s Yugla parish near Ventspils).

A.K. Correct, that is correct. Unfortunately, when people, who want to see that place in Strazdu, ask me to come there and show them where was the concentration camp, I cannot do it. Unfortunately everything was burnt down there and later (in 1960s) multistoried residential buildings were developed on that place. It is impossible now even to find that exact place. There is only a small church left, usually I bring people to that church and there I show them it in this way: in a quarter of a mile there is a small church, almost a miniature church [speaks about Kaiserwald - Ed.]. If you stay with your back to the front of the church, you can see some residential buildings, there are five story buildings. There was the concentration camp. And there were Jews brought from Germany, Liepaja and Riga. And I have been there.

My cousin, who lives now in New York City [Isaac Rat - Ed.], has been there (in Strazde concentration camp) too. Let me first show you [shows the photograph - Ed.] something. You see, this is on Yugla, Stradze, here is where I have
been. You can see those towers there even now. On this picture you can see me with one of the German delegations, they sent me this photograph from Germany.

A.A. Excuse me, is it correct that on the place where the Stradze concentration camp was, now some sort of industrial plant is located?

A.K. That is correct, there was the sewing plant “Latvia” but that plant does not exist anymore. Now there is some kind of German business, I do not know what kind of business this is.

You see, in Stradze (also known as Strasdenhof), there was one woman from Lithuania, from Vilnius. Her name was Masha Rolnik. And she wrote a book about this concentration camp. I have this book, entitled “Ich muß erzählen” (“I Must Tell”). [The Diary of Masha Rolnik: I Must Tell - Gesher, 1967].

And she wrote…

“This is clothing that we had to wear in the concentration camp, our striped clothing. Here is Stradze. [shows the photograph - Ed.], here is the gate - to enter the camp - there is a small river.

I think you would be interested in the life of one person who published the book in the United States. This book was written in English. I have this book. I already told you that I have lent the book to Erik [from APN - Ed.]. Erik was working here during the (German) occupation. Near Daugava River there is “Lenta” (“Tape”) plant.

A.A. What is his name, name of this person (who wrote the book)?

A.K. I have already told about him, it is Isaac Rat.

A.A. You mean, this is your cousin, about whom you have already told us?

A.K. Yes, this is him. And he wrote the book. During German time [during the Nazi occupation - Ed.] there were some high skilled craftsmen - tailors, shoemakers, radio engineers, and electricians and there [on the “Lenta” plant - Ed.] all of them were working for the SS. And there the head of the ghetto was working. He has been there. When the Germans came, they needed some work to be done for them - to sew something, or to repair shoes - a lot of that kind of work. And the Germans put about 150 people in this place. In some strange way the five photo portraits of those workers were found and put on display in the museum [the interviewee means - “Jews in Latvia Museum” - Ed.]. You can imagine what happened, when he (Isaac Rat) visited Riga four years ago and went to the museum on Skolas Street. He entered the building and immediately noticed his photograph. And there was a
note under the photograph saying that all of those people have died. You can understand his feelings at that moment! He came close to crashing the museum display. He asked that a photographer be immediately brought there to take a picture of him. This is his destiny. I believe I can still give you his book to read because in his memories he goes to a more distant past. He tells about our grandfather from Riga, tells how the grandfather had lived. This should be of interest to you. When I get this book back I will give it to you to read.

A.A. Thank you!

A.K. Now there is something else. You see: here he is again [shows photographs in the album – Ed.]. He is visiting Israel. Those two people - they have been in Dundaga. In Dundaga was a concentration camp too, it was a terrible place, and a lot of people were killed there. One Latvian woman was hiding those two people. She had some hay in her attic. And they were hiding in the piles of hay. They survived until the Red Army came.

This person [shows the photograph - Ed.] - is already dead. He died two years ago, but he wrote a book. I have seen this book in our place on Skolas Street [in the Latvian Society of Jewish Culture - Ed.], in the library. The book is written in Yiddish, I have read this book; it was very interesting. He tells how they lived and how they survived.

Here are Lithuanian photographs (shows the album - Editor). You can see the fence and the warning signs that were there.

Near the entrance to the ghetto was the gate; through that gate the Jews went to work during the German time [during the Nazi Germany occupation - Ed.]. Jews were escorted to work in a column under the convoy. In the same way they were returned to the camp. Lithuanian guards were placed in that building and they worked with the Nazis. When people were brought to the camp after work those guards checked everything, even the prisoners’ pockets. And if they found something they beat them until they were bloody. Sometimes they even beat prisoners to death. It happened right here. This is all.

A.A. What were they looking for in people’s pockets? What was it that was forbidden?

A.K. It was forbidden to bring something inside the camp with us, especially food. People were trying to hide something, a golden ring for example, and then, during the work, they would trade it off for a loaf of bread. Guards were always trying to catch somebody with the loaf of bread, a piece of sausage or a piece of butter, or some other snack. I was caught when I was in Stradze, - I was working on “Rigas Audums” [a sewing plant – Ed.], - I was returning from work to the camp and I had five potatoes in my pocket. A commandant, his name was Hans, told me to show him what I had! When I pulled out those five potatoes, they started to beat me. After this beating, my friends could not recognize me for five days because I was so swollen.

This is my sad story.

A.A. I want to ask you about your middle name - Mordekhay. Was this name given to you in someone’s honor?

A.K. Names were given to us in honor of a relative that had passed away. This is one of my names. For example, Abram was the name that was given to me. But in my childhood I had been very sick. If somebody is very sick, the second name is given to this person. Why the second name is given? Because we believe that everybody’s destiny is already predetermined in heaven. And if my destiny were to die at the age of five, the second name would be given to me. And after that sometimes the destiny changes. This is the way in which the double names appear. This is the first explanation. There is a second explanation, you know, in our tradition it is customary to give names of the dead to the living. Names of the dead should be necessarily given to somebody presently living. In some families with many relatives sometimes there are not enough children to receive all the names of the ones who passed away. In those cases a child is given two names.
A.A. You mean, that the name of the dead person should not be lost; the memory of him should not be lost?

A.K. Yes, it should not be lost.

A.A. This is wonderful.

A.K. I will continue. I lost my family and I did not have any relatives. I had to work, I had to earn a living. Before the war there was a soap factory “Büngen”. After the war it was renamed “Sarkana Ausma.” I started to work there as a loader. During the evenings I was studying at the university. I have told you that before the university - no, I did not tell you. I was not eligible to be admitted to the university right after the war because I was missing one year of my high school education. That is why at first I went to the Latvian School — no, it was not the Latvian, - I went to the School for Working Youth #23 [Schools for Working Youth were created in the Soviet Union in 1943. Despite of their name, those kinds of schools were giving a possibility to people of different ages to get their education at the high school level or to finish their education without leaving their daytime job.] There I completed the 11th grade. Only after finishing the School for Working Youth did I go to the university. I passed the exams and I was admitted to the university.

A.A. What can you tell me about your relatives who have survived during the war?

A.K. Mikhail Kit [Abram Kit’s cousin from the father’s side - Ed.] has a daughter - Bella, Bella Kit. She now lives in Riga. She has a son. From my surviving relatives there is one who lives in New York City [cousin Isaac Rat — Ed.]. And more - my father had a sister Basya. Basya had a daughter Lyuba - Lyuba passed away recently. And there is Lyuba’s son - Marik. But she already had another last name. It was not Kit, it was Vyshkina. And her son’s name is Marik Vyshkin. And Marik already has a son, Arthur, too. That is all.

A.A. Could you tell me your current address?

A.K. Yes, it is 1A Yuglas Street, apartment #20. You know, this is on Yugla Street and when you go from the city on Brivibas Street - on the right side after the store in a form of a horseshoe - if you are passing by that store there are four nine-story residential buildings. I live in the third one of those buildings. And you know, when I moved to live with my current wife, our apartment was on the ninth floor. And in the window from the ninth floor I could see Stradze. And when I looked at Stradze, during my sleep I was having terrible nightmares and I was even screaming in my sleep. And when somebody moved out from the apartment on the fourth floor, we moved there and now we live on the fourth floor…

You understand, that from Stradze out of a total of 1,500 people - only me and, well, only five or six people are still alive.

**Jewish Materials Stored in the Latvian State Historical Archives**

In the past I have included material from the Shamir website about current Jewish activities in Latvia, memorials attended, foreign guests and celebrations. Now, Shamir reports that the first stage of the Guide to Jewish Materials Stored in the Latvian State Historical Archives has been completed. The result is a 103-page document that can be downloaded from the Shamir website. To make things easy for you, I have downloaded the document and taken the liberty of having it placed on the Latvia SIG website at: [http://www.jewishgen.org/Latvia/Archive_guide_LSHA.pdf](http://www.jewishgen.org/Latvia/Archive_guide_LSHA.pdf). Shamir says that there are still thousands of files yet to be inventoried. I assume that at some point an index to those files will be added to the Shamir website. The website has lots of information that is of interest to all of us, so please go to: [http://www.shamir.lv](http://www.shamir.lv) and peruse the site.

During the exchange of e-mails this past October concerning available databases, volunteerism, project coordinators, and to-pay or not-to-pay opinions it was pointed out that there are extant databases and other material that does not appear on the Raduraksti website. Most of the wonderful work that Christine continues to do in transliterating birth, marriage, and death records—some of which is now part of the JewishGen Latvia Database—is important to all of us as we try to dis-
It is also important in genealogical research to learn about the environment in which our ancestors lived to get some understanding of their every-day lives. Wouldn’t it be interesting to know what they were learning in school, what social clubs they belonged to, which organizations were important to them, who attended and who were the board members of various organizations, and what happened at meetings of these organizations? From looking at the list of holdings in the archives, I believe that the guide that Shamir released could be a crucial step in finding the answers to such questions. To give you some idea of the kind of information found in the guide, I have excerpted some of the material below.

Ebreju labklajibas biedrība ORT

Jewish charity association ORT (association of crafts and agriculture distribution amongst the Jews of Latvia)

Archival fund: 1822. 1921–1940. Files: 56.

Statutes, minutes of general meetings, lists of members, minutes of board meetings, lists of board members, cash-books, correspondence with the Ministry of Education, Jewish associations and private bodies on the professional education for Jewish youth, money assignments, correspondence with the prefecture on the permission of evening events and concerts with the participation of Herman Brown, Henrietta Safronova-Finkelstein, Raisa Tager, Lev Aronson, Ida Blumenfeld, Sara Rashina, Pavel Schubert; correspondence with association committees in Berlin and Paris on visits to Riga, association official magazine (1934), extracts from Jewish newspapers Frimorgn and Die Idische Schtimme, Statutes of “Metal” cooperative and the association of the Friends of the Jewish Scientific Institute in Latvia; materials related to the Liepaja and Daugavpils departments of the organization.

Ebreju emigrācijas biedrība HICEM

Jewish emigration association HICEM (previously HIAS) (Riga)


Minutes of the meetings, lists of the board members of Latvian department, activities’ reviews, minutes of the foreign committees meetings; the agreements with Latvian Ministry of Internal Affairs and Jewish United Emigration committee on the conditions of USSR Jews transfer via Latvia (1923), on the emigration of German refugees, emigration opportunities to USA, Palestine, South Africa, Australia, Philippines, Brazil, Argentina, Peru, Venezuela and Columbia; registration forms and cards of emigrants; applications on the search of relatives; correspondence with the association of assistance to Jews in London (Jew’s Temporary Shelter), Hias-Paris, Chicago, Philadelphia, San-Francisco, New-York, Vilnius, Kaunas, Shanghai on the assistance to the emigrants; correspondence with Jewish Colonization Association in Moscow on the search of relatives; correspondence with the shipping company White Star Line – Riga on the issues of transportation; activities brochures.

Biedrība Mahane Isroel

Association Mahane Isroel (Riga)

Archival fund: 5586. 1936–1940. Files: 15

The purpose of the association was the strengthening of religiosity amongst Jews and the expansion of education amongst Jews despite their social or economic status. The association cared for the preservation of Jewish religious heritage, which, being transferred by generations in centuries is capable to impact nowadays patriotic, religious and spiritual youth accomplishment. The association cared about the development of Jewish schools and compliance to Jewish traditions, such as regard to Saturdays’ rest off housing and other activities, kashrut and kosher compliance in Jewish families, etc. The association was involved in fund raising for Jews willing to immigrate to Palestine. In 1938, the subsidiaries of the association were registered in Livani, Jelgava, Krustpils, Aizpute, Rezekne, Karsava, Jaunjel-
gava, Liepaja, Daugavpils. The association was closed upon the decision of the Minister of public affairs on August 3rd, 1940.

Statutes, minutes of the central board meetings, alphabet index of the addresses of board members, lists of subsidiaries, slips of membership fees of Riga department, cash-books.

In perusing the index you can see that many, if not all, of the Jewish organizations and associations were closed during the summer of 1940 by the Ministry of Public Affairs. You may recall that the USSR occupied independent Latvia on June 17, 1940 and annexed it a few weeks later—and so began the annihilation of Jewish culture in Latvia. About one year later, in late June, 1941, Germany attacked the USSR and shortly thereafter occupied most of Latvia. What the Russians had begun, the Nazis completed by the end of 1941 as documented so movingly in this issue of the newsletter.

Barry Shay
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Tidbits

Taking Tamar Now an E-book

Avotaynu has published its first e-book, Taking Tamar and it is available on Amazon.com in Kindle format. Amazon has a Kindle app for the iPad/iPhone, Android and other devices.

Taking Tamar is a delightful, must-read story about Martha Lev-Zion’s experience adopting and bringing up a child with Down syndrome. Martha is founder and president of the Jewish Genealogical Society of the Negev, a past member of the Board of Directors of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies and a past president of the Latvia SIG.

In 1986, as a single woman in her 40s, Martha heard about an Israeli TV documentary regarding twenty-two children with severe birth defects who had been abandoned by their birth parents and were now in Israeli hospitals. Martha applied for one of those babies but was told that of the sixty-five applications, hers would be the last one considered. Martha took into her care the only remaining baby - a 14-month-old girl with Down syndrome. This book relates the amazing journey of Martha’s life raising her daughter Tamar. Interwoven with her experiences fighting Israeli governmental authorities, school systems (she wanted her child main-streamed), the birth family, and even the U.S. government, is her commitment to bring up her daughter as normally as possible and her daughter’s incredible accomplishments.

When she was fourteen months old, Tamar was tested and found to have an IQ between 45–60. Today she is a young woman who was living independently until she recently enlisted, and was accepted, into the Israeli Air Force! She still has some of the characteristics of a person with Down syndrome, but Martha’s commitment to maximize Tamar’s potential is something Martha feels any parent should do in rearing ANY child.

This must-read e-book is available for $9.99. Ordering information for the Kindle as well as the soft cover version can be found at: http://www.avotaynu.com/books/Tamar.htm.

1940 Latvia Telephone Directory Online

Logan Kleinwaks has added a 1940 Latvia telephone directory to his collection of online directories at his site: http://genealogyindexer.org.

To restrict searches to only this directory, change "Any Place" to "Latvia" in the drop-down list below the search box. Because the directory is organized by locality, if you are only interested in a few small places, you might prefer to manually search or browse those places' entries, rather than rely on the full-text search across the entire directory. The search is not 100% accurate due to OCR inaccuracies. To facilitate manual searches,
Kleinwaks has prepared a locality index at http://genealogyindexer.org/forum/viewtopic.php?t=1532 that links to the start of each locality's section.

**Membership Fees**

This is the first issue of the newsletter for the 2011/2012 membership year, which began on July 1, 2011, so if you have not done so already please renew your membership in the Latvia SIG. 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 from 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 onto 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.

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. Go to:


Donations to these accounts 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:

Latvia SIG
5450 Whitley Park Terrace, #901
Bethesda, MD 20814-2061

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.