

Latvia: Jewish Family History Research Guide

Brief Historical Overview

Jews have resided in the provinces of Livonia and Courland since the 15th century. In the 18th century, these provinces were incorporated into the Russian Empire. The provinces were not included in the Pale of Settlement, so only Jews who had resided there before incorporation into Russia were permitted to live there. However, the Jewish population increased because various classes of Jews, such as university graduates, received special dispensation to move there. Modern-day Latvia also includes 3 districts from the province of Vitebsk (including the large town of Daugavpils/Dvinsk), which joined Courland and Livonia in 1918 to form the independent Latvian Republic. By 1925, the Jewish population of the Latvian Republic was 95,675. In 1934, Latvia became a totalitarian state, and many Jews emigrated in the 1920's and 30's. The Germans occupied Latvia in July 1941. Only about 1,000 Latvian Jews survived the Holocaust. After WWII, Latvia became the Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic, part of the U.S.S.R. It regained independence in 1991. Most Latvian Jews have emigrated, and many Jews who now live in Latvia are immigrants from other former republics of the Soviet Union.

Finding Your Ancestral Town

Once you have identified the name of your ancestral town, you can locate it on a map using the following sources. It is also very helpful to identify the district and province in which the town was located when your relatives lived there, as well as the current district and province, using historical atlases and/or the web sites listed below.

Mokotoff, Gary and Sallyann Amdur Sack with Alexander Sharon *Where Once We Walked: A Guide to the Jewish Communities Destroyed in the Holocaust—Revised Edition* (Avotaynu, 2002). This gazetteer, available in the Genealogy Institute, lists towns according to variant spellings and provides the present-day country and map coordinates of the town, as well as an estimate of the pre-WWII Jewish population.

CGI DS 135 .E83 M65 2002

ShtetlSeeker Database (www.jewishgen.org/ShtetlSeeker). This database allows you to search for towns using either the exact spelling or the Daitch-Mokotoff Soundex. Soundex searches find similar sounding names with variant spellings. Links connect each town name to online mapping web sites.

Primary Records

Latvian Archives

Jewish communities in Latvia began to keep vital records around 1854. Some earlier records exist as well. Availability of vital records varies depending on locale and time period. Vital records before 1906 and revision lists (registers of individuals for taxation and military service) can be obtained from the Latvian State Historical Archives. A \$50 non-refundable deposit is required for each inquiry.

Latvia State Historical Archives <http://www.arhivi.lv/index.php?&110> E-mail: histarch@com.latnet.lv
16 Slokas Street
LV-1007, Riga, Latvia Tel: 371 7 614008 Fax: 371 7 612406

A listing of the holdings is available at www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/riga/riga_archive_holdingslatest.htm.

Vital records from 1906 can be obtained from the Latvian Archives of the Registry of the Ministry of Justice:

Archives of the Registry Department
Kalku Street 24
LV-1050, Riga, Latvia

Beare, Arlene. *A Guide to Jewish Genealogy in Latvia and Estonia* (Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain, 2001) Has further details about the holdings, policies and procedures of archives and libraries in Latvia.
Genealogy Institute DS 135 .L3 B43

For towns that were part of Vitebsk Guberniya (province), such as Daugavpils/Dvinsk, Kraslava, Dagda, Rezekne/Rezhitze, Ludza, and Preili, records may also be found in the National Historical Archives of Belarus:

National Historical Archives of Belarus www.archives.gov.by/EArh/E_naz_ist.htm
55, Kropotkina St.
Minsk, 220002, Republic of Belarus
Tel: (+375-17) 268-65-22, 268-65-23 Fax: 268-65-20 E-mail: niab@solo.by, niab@belsonet.net

Please see our Belarus fact sheet for further information.

Family History Library

The Church of Latter-day Saints has microfilmed vital and other records from around the world and placed the microfilms in its Family History Library (FHL) in Salt Lake City. These microfilms can be accessed through any Family History Center (found in most American cities), or at the Center for Jewish History through a loan program with the FHL. To identify records and obtain the microfilm number, search the FHL catalog at <https://familysearch.org/>. Few Jewish records from Latvia have been filmed, but records of the German embassy in Riga, 1926-1941, including registration lists of German Jews living in Latvia, are available.

Internet Resources

Latvia Special Interest Group www.Jewishgen.org/latvia/

This forum for researchers of Jewish families of Latvian descent includes several helpful features for locating vital records. The "All Latvia Database" incorporates data from various sources, including voter lists, family lists, and enlistment registers. Among those of special interest are: Riga Tax Administration List, with 12,000 entries from 1858-1917 referring to 23,000 individuals; Jewish Inhabitants of Riga 1885/1886, with 2,650 entries referring to 4,000 individuals; Dvinsk/Daugavpils Family List, with 8,200 entries referring to 14,000 individuals.

Courland Special Interest Group www.jewishgen.org/Courland

Web sites for several towns can be found at www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/latvia.html.

Center for Jewish History

Search CJH's online catalog at <http://search.cjh.org> for general histories, yizkor books, memoirs, diaries, photographs, and other materials on the Jews of Latvia. Below is a selection of resources available from YIVO.

Bobe, Mendel, ed. *The Jews in Latvia*. Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews in Israel, 1971.

Yizkor Book Collection

Ezergailis, Andrew. *The Holocaust in Latvia, 1941-1944*. Historical Institute of Latvia, 1996. /88972

Gordon, Frank. *Latvians and Jews between Germany and Russia*. Rev. ed. Memento, 2001. /105271

Pinkas Ha-Kehillot: Encyclopaedia of Jewish Communities. Latvia and Estonia volume. Yad Vashem, 1988.
REF DS 135 .E81 I38 1988

Schneider, Gertrude, ed. *The Unfinished Road: Jewish Survivors of Latvia Look Back*. Praeger, 1991. /84158