

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 at the time your relatives lived there, as well as the current district and province, using historical atlases and/or the web site 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.

Genealogy Institute DS 135 .E83 M65 2002

The JewishGen website contains three databases that may assist you in finding your ancestor's town: the Communities Database, the Gazetteer, and the Radius Search.

<http://www.jewishgen.org/Communities>

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 1910 and revision lists (registers of individuals for taxation and military service) can be obtained from the Latvian State Historical Archives.

Latvia State Historical Archives

Address: 16 Slokas Street

LV-1007, Riga, Latvia

Tel: (371) 67612406; 67613118

Fax: (371) 67612406; 67615955

E-mail: vestures.arhivs@lvva.gov.lv; vestures.arhivs@arhivi.gov.lv

Web Site: <http://www.arhivi.lv/index.php?&110>

A listing of the holdings is available at http://kehilalinksjewishgen.org/riga/riga_archive_holdingslatest.htm.

The Latvia State Historical Archives has been digitizing some of their collections and making them browsable as images online. Currently, the Riga Rabbinat vital records, revision lists from the provinces of Livland and Courland, and 1897 Russian Empire Census documents from the provinces of Courland, Livland and Vitebsk are available in their original languages at <http://www.lvva-raduraksti.lv/en/menu.html> (Registration is required). In addition, English translations of many Riga Rabbinat vital records and 1897 Russian Empire Census documents are available at <http://www.premiumorange.com/rigavitalrecords>. Although it is not yet possible to search this database, you can search for a name within an individual record group (i.e. Town – Record Type—Year) by clicking on the link for that group and then typing Control F.

Vital records from 1910 on can be obtained from the Latvian Archives of the Registry of the Ministry of Justice:

Archives of the Registry Department

Address: Kalku Street 24

LV-1050, Riga, Latvia

Tel: (371) 67830682; 67830684

Fax: (371) 67830673

E-mail: dzimts.dep@tm.gov.lv

Beare, Arlene. *A Guide to Jewish Genealogy in Latvia and Estonia* (Jewish Genealogical Society of Great Britain, 2001). Consult this book for further information about the holdings, policies and procedures of archives and libraries in Latvia.

Genealogy Institute DS 135 .L3 B43

Family History Library (FHL) of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS)

The Family History Library of the Church of Latter-day Saints has microfilmed a number of Latvian records. To identify the relevant microfilms, do a “Place Search” in the Family History Library Online Catalog <https://familysearch.org/#form=catalog>, first using the town name, and then using the province (gubernia) name.

LDS microfilms can be ordered online for viewing at any LDS Family History Center including the Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute. The ordering website is <http://www.familysearch.org/films>. Further information and instructions on ordering microfilms for viewing at the Genealogy Institute can be found at <http://www.cjh.org/p/34#microloans>. Many LDS microfilms of Jewish interest are available at the Genealogy Institute on long-term loan. A list of these microfilms can be found at <http://www.jgsny.org/microfilms-at-cjh>

For a list of LDS Latvia microfilms that may contain Jewish records, see the following journal articles available at the Genealogy Institute:

“Records from Latvia in the LDS Collection Include Jewish Information.” *AVOTAYNU*. Vol. XIV, No. 1 (Spring 1998): p. 25-27.

“Additional Latvian Microfilms.” *AVOTAYNU*. Vol. XIV, No. 2 (Summer 1998): p. 24.

The Family History Library has been digitizing their collections and, therefore, many records are already available on their site either image only, index only, or both image and index. To browse the digitized collections by country, visit <https://familysearch.org/search/collection/list>.

Web Resources

The website of the Latvia SIG, a special interest group of researchers of Jewish families of Latvian descent, includes several helpful features for locating vital records. The *JewishGen 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 over 8,200 entries referring to 14,000 individuals. A search of this database can help you identify records to request from the Latvia State Historical Archives or other sources.

<http://www.jewishgen.org/Latvia/>

Courland Special Interest Group **<http://www.jewishgen.org/Courland>**

JewishGen KehilaLinks, formerly “ShtetLinks,” features web pages which contain information, photos, lists of resources, and much more about places where Jews lived in. There are several web sites for towns in Latvia.

<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/latvia.html>

Additional Latvian town web sites can be found at **http://jewishgen.org/Latvia/SIG_Shtetl_Focus.html**

Yizkor (memorial) books provide the history of Jewish communities destroyed or ravaged by the Holocaust. Most include photos and biographical articles, and many have name lists of those deported and killed. The JewishGen Yizkor Book Project website has a growing number of English translations of Yizkor books, a Bibliographic Database where you can find all the Yizkor books published on a particular place and which libraries possess each book, a Necrology Index where you can search for names within the lists of Holocaust martyrs of the translated books, and a Master Name Index where you can search for names within other portions of the translated books.*

<http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/>

* To locate Yizkor books available at the Center for Jewish History, see “Sources at the Center for Jewish History” below.

Genealogy Indexer has been digitizing historical directories and making them searchable and browsable on their website. Currently, the only Latvian directory available is the 1940 Latvia Telephone Directory.

<http://genealogyindexer.org>

The Family History Museum has a permanent online exhibition “The Synagogues of Europe: Past and Present” featuring pre- and post-World War II postcard photographs of hundreds of European synagogues, many of which are no longer standing or are in a state of disrepair. This exhibition is organized by country and, within each country, by town, listed according to their modern names.

<http://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/s/mfh-syn-europe.htm>

Sources at the Center for Jewish History (CJH)

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 at CJH.

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

YIVO 000129907

Dribins, L. *Ebreji Latvijā 2*, papildinātais izdevums. Elpa, 2002. [Latvian]

YIVO 00107615

Dribins, L. *Latvia's Jewish community: history, tragedy, revival*. Publishers of the Institute of the History of Latvia, 2001.

YIVO 00107495

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

YIVO 00088972

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

YIVO 00105271

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.

YIVO 00084158

Sīteimanis, Josifs. *History of Latvian Jews*. Rev. and edited. East European Monographs; Columbia University Press, 2002.

YIVO 00107112

Yizkor Books: **YIVO Library** has a large collection of Yizkor books, including some from towns in Latvia. Using the CJH online catalog's Advanced Search, select YIVO (Repository), and then type the town name in one field and Yizkor OR "Memorial Book" in the second field.

Forthcoming Resources

The Latvia Holocaust Jewish Names Project is compiling information on the identities and fates of Latvian Jews (as identified in the 1935 census). A searchable database will be available at <http://names.lu.lv/en.html>.

The Jewish Religious Community "Shamir" (Riga, Latvia) is compiling the Jewish Encyclopedia of Latvia, the first encyclopedia specifically devoted to the history of Latvian Jewry and biographies of distinguished members of this community. Currently, an index and sample pages are available in English at <http://www.shamir.lv/en/>.