

Jews in Latvia in 1918-1940: a genealogical perspective

Mag. Theol. Valts Apinis (Riga)

Short introduction

First of all, I would like to express my appreciation to the *International Institute for Jewish Genealogy and Paul Jacobi Center* in Jerusalem and Dr. Neville Lamdan in particular for supporting the project under the same title. It is necessary to mention that I was chosen to present this ongoing genealogical research made by a number of Latvian scholars that work professionally in the field of archival resources. The project is currently at its research stage that includes the data collection of the sources of Latvian House Registers.

The project approach is academic in general. Data gathering and processing is based upon the research of primarily archival sources available at Latvian State Historical Archives (Riga). This may be an interesting fact that Latvian Archives were founded just one year after Latvia granted its independence in 1919. Latvian State Archives are considered the second largest in Europe after the Historical Archives of St.Petersburg. There are approximately 6 million archive files that cover a period from 1220 to 1944 stored in Latvian Archives.

Brief historical overview

In general, the project attempts to reconstruct an image of Jewish life in Latvia during the interwar period (1918-1940) in terms of genealogy. This is to be pointed out that historically the first period of the independency of democratic Republic of Latvia matches the above time gap. It was the first time in the history of the region for Latvian Jews to be granted equal civil rights when the first president of Latvia, Karlis Ulmanis, came to power. Indeed, Jews took an active part in the formation of the Republic. According to census data, there were 93, 479 9 (4,7 % of the total population) Jews in Latvia in 1935. In turn, 92, 46 % of Latvian Jews had the official citizenship status and respectively were loyal to the state. During the period of 1920 – 1940, the social environment changed substantially: more than 20,000 Jews moved from provinces to the capital Riga, while the social stratum of medium small traders and artisans decreased in size in comparison to the statistics gathered in 1914. In 1935, 48,8 % of employed Jews were engaged in commerce; 27,7% worked in industry; 5,9% were professionals of mainly intelligent labor; 3,4% worked in the field of medicine; 2,9% in transport; 0,9% in agriculture and 0,8% in administration. In 1935, 25,9% of Riga private employers were Jewish.

Genealogical approach

The activities related to genealogical research at the State Historical Archives had slowed down in the 1990's due to the property restitution carried out in Latvia. A lot of references that proved property rights and verified claimants' related links were issued at the Archives. Some of these references may be considered similar to a large scale genealogical research. The genuine genealogical activities had begun in 1997 when the land reform was completed and accordingly, the overflow of Archives stopped. Since then, more than 2000 archival references were prepared and issued; most of them were positive.

The main objective of the research project *Jews in Latvia in 1918-1940* is the systematic analysis of Riga House Registers (books) as a source of genealogical data to result accordingly with the identification of family links and kinship groups. The expected result of the project is to

develop a computerized data base that will contain brief information on approximately 20-21,000 Jews who lived in Riga in the interwar period of 1918—1940. The aspects of social and individual movements will be included into the database as they were experienced by Riga Jewish population.

It should be noted, that the preceding study was mainly focused on Holocaust related period and there were just few articles on Jewish life in pre-war Latvia published by individual local scholars.

Research on Riga House Registers as a medium for historical reconstruction

The identification of all the members of Latvian Jewish community of 1918—1940 has a significant potential in terms of genealogy: since the majority of Latvian Jews was principally resided in Riga, the study of preserved Riga House Registers becomes unique in this particular regard. This study represents a sort of micro-history on individual level and thus is valuable and helpful for the reconstruction of settlements and movements Jewish population in this time period.

The process of identification of Latvian pre-war Jewish population is enhanced significantly by the special study of Riga House Registers. There are more than 16 000 records on the time period of 1918—1944 booked in the registers retained by Latvian Historical Archive. These records are a highly valuable source of extensive and unique data on Riga inhabitants, regardless of their place of birth.

The Riga House Registers are the key for establishing family relationships and kinship ties. Upon Registers' data, the larger demographic scale may be studied as the social mobility of Jews increased. The post World War I period, the Rise of Latvian Nationalism, the establishment of an independent Latvian Republic and the later period of World War II are covered by preserved records. Riga House Registers provide an indirect indeed powerful tool for the study of Jewish community, especially considering the absence of vital records of the above period.

In some cases, data confirmation and records' connection may be necessary. This is most likely to involve an investigation of some business records: for Riga, they are detailed and numerous. Also, the process may involve the study of cross references between House Registers' data and inland passport and police registration data and the track backwards to an individual or family connection with the place of up-country origin. Ultimately, the research work in this particular area is comprehensive, durable and precise.

Features of Riga House Registers

Records listed at Riga House Registers include extremely particular information on each individual who was the occupier or a resident of a real estate, i.e.: given and last names, maiden names, places of birth, previous addresses of residence, dates of birth, internal passport cross reference numbers and police registration information. In some cases, the indication of a family's next place of residence or destination is listed at the records on departure registration.

Upon systematic extraction, analysis and reconciliation of Riga House Register data supplemented where appropriate with other archival material, genealogical techniques of family data recording and database storage are used in the project to achieve the following research goals:

- 1) to provide detailed personal information on each particular individual;
- 2) to ensure that all available family and kinship links for each individual are identified and confirmed and family lists are created wherever possible;
- 3) to identify most important events in the life of an individual and to track the changes of family structure over time;
- 4) to record and save the data in a way compatible for further search by individual or by specific dwelling unit (throughout the inter-war period, it may have been occupied by different families as people arrived and departed; indeed, there are cases of the unbroken history of occupation for over 20 years);
- 5) to ensure that the detailed information in regards to place of origin, previous addresses and, when available, future destination is retained and recorded in a way compatible for the facilitation of further demographic and social research contributed to population movements to and from Riga.

Riga House Registers can be divided by two types:

- 1) 1919—1927: the early Books. More detailed and completed information on individuals recorded.;
- 2) 1927—1941: the later Books.

There are Riga House Registers records until the period of approximately 1944 available at Riga department of Latvian State Historical Archives.

House Register of pre-war Riga is very similar to a modern address book. The names are arranged in an alphabetical order. The volume and size of earlier registers is smaller. There are maximum 500—600 pages at each of the Registers; the regular volume is 300—400 pages. In cases the birth date of an individual is missed, the necessary information may be traced by a place of registration.

The religious identity of each individual is listed at House Registers, too. For example, the mark *Jud(u)*, *Moz*. (“Jewish”, “Moses [believer]”) precisely indicates that one was Jewish; however, the later registers are less precise in this regard. (ref. Sample No.2).

The current progress of the project involves precise and durable research: all individuals’ data is written down from a house register (see attached sample at the end of the present article); then data collation is made to establish the possibility of family or kinship connection, including the processing of individual surnames, places of birth, maiden names, etc.

Upon the data of House Registers, the whole family story may be reconstructed through the listed chain of recorded events. The remarks “married”, “children”, etc make it possible to reconstruct even the further destinies of families or individuals.

In 1920-s, a significant number of Latvia residents left the country and thus it is complicated to find out an information about direction of their migration.

The records of Riga House Registers make it possible to trace information on Jewish families that returned to Riga after World War I, including the places they were evacuated to (i.e. Germany, etc).

In cases a passport with indicated address is available, it can be double-checked by the House Registers. The listed information includes the date of one’s registration together with the name, surname and maiden name (however, no father’s name in most registers), the place and date of birth, occupation, previous address as well as a documentary proof of registration: a

passport or certificate of identity in general. The date of the termination of the residence is also registered at the House Registers. I.e., the one might be moved to ghetto or deported, changed his residence within Riga or Latvia or dead. Consequently, the further fate of Latvian Jews may be evidenced directly upon the records of Riga House registers by tracing one's pertinent information, including the sign off for Riga ghetto. The last registered address in this case may serve as an important source for further genealogical search: upon the sign-off data, there is a possibility to acquire the information that leads back to the earlier time up till 1918 and even earlier. To mention, House Registers of Riga of the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century are kept at Latvian Archives, too. Indeed, the best preserved books belong to the time period of 1919—1940.

The examination of the House Registers will allow stating more detailed information and gathering the missing data to make the database as accurate as possible.

Data is attentively extracted and recorded in Excel files. Data records include the name of the individual, the address (street name, building and flat number) and other essential information (ref. Excel sample No 3 that contains an extract of recovered names and information).

Riga genealogical reconstruction samples

In order to get acquainted with the precise outlook of Riga House Registers of that time period, the demonstration of two samples of books of 1925 and of 1940 is presented below.

Sample No.1 – House-register from Riga, Dagdas Street 4 (1925)

House-register Riga, Dagdas Street 4

Vertēstojamais unā tūris	Ģimene	Uzskaites, uzskaites, seštas uzskaites un ģimenes (atļaušas (no) pabeigti, nepabeigti, atļaušas)	Stad un kur dzimis (dzimšanas)	Ģimene	Ģimene dzimšanas	Ģimene dzimšanas	Ģimene dzimšanas	Ģimene dzimšanas	Ģimene dzimšanas	Ģimene dzimšanas
9/1/1925	22	Laupeņa, Bronis Oviņa d. (nepiln)	Kraslava 15/12/1899	Mos.	Kraslava	Strogonin	Lat. (Danz. apr. 1916.)	Pas. dzimst. 1916/5/1916 no Kraslavas krievu valstī.	Stad un kur dzimis un kur dzimst.	Ģimene dzimšanas
4/1/1925	7	Lurja Borise, Borisa d.	Kraslava 18/2	Mos.	Kraslava	Zargma	Kraslavas piln.	Pas. dzimst. 1916/2/1916 Kraslavas piln. lat.	Stad un kur dzimis un kur dzimst.	Ģimene dzimšanas
4/1/1925	6	Lur, Kija, Kija m.	Kraslava 1911/2/1911	Juda	Kraslava	Kraslavas	Kraslavas piln.	Pas. dzimst. 1916/2/1916 no Kraslavas piln.	Stad un kur dzimis un kur dzimst.	Ģimene dzimšanas
15/1/1925	13	Lebedevs Anton, Jūlija d. (nepiln)	Kraslava 18/11/1895	Juda	Kraslava	Kraslavas	Kraslavas piln.	Pas. dzimst. 1916/2/1916 Kraslavas piln. lat.	Stad un kur dzimis un kur dzimst.	Ģimene dzimšanas

- Date of registration number
- Flat
- Surname, name, father's name, maiden name
- Date and place of birth
- Religion
- Previous address
- Occupation
- Place of origin or citizenship
- By whom and where the person's identity document issued
- When and where struck off

Person's register example: *Lemperts Israils Orila d. (nepr.)*

- 1. Date of registration: *January 9th, 1925*
- 2. Flat number: *32*
- 3. Surname, name, father's name: *Lempert Israil, son of Oril (unmarried)*
- 4. Date and place of birth: *Krāslava, July 15, 1893*
- 5. Religion: *Mosus*
- 6. Previous address: *Krāslava [in Latgalia]*
- 7. Occupation: *worker*
- 8. Place of origin or citizenship: *Latvia (Daugavpils district)*
- 9. By whom and where a person's identity document issued: *Passport No. 2720, issued on May 23, 1922 by Krāslava local board*
- 10. When and where signed off: *July 17, 1925 by Police office to Krāslava*

Sample No.2 – House-register from Riga, Marijas Street 57 (1940)

Dzīvokļa Nr.	Iestāšanās laiks			Uzvārds, vārds, gimenes uzvārds (precēts, neprecēts, atraitnis vai ikgirts) un bērni līdz 16 g., kuriem nav atsevišķa pase, jeb personas apliecinājums.	Kad un kur dzimis	Nodarbošanās	Agrāka dzīves vieta	Pasn. vai personas apliecināj. lta Nr. no kā un kad izdots un uz kādu laiku	Kad pietiekts policijā	Kad un uz kurieni aizgājis	Kad izrakstīts policijā
	Gads	Mēn.	Diena								
19	1940	junija	3	Vaiiss, Eida dzim. Tokers prec.	1909 Daugavpils	frizieris	Maskava 57. kv. 22	Latv. pas. P. 11. N. 019317 izd. 1921. pasifekcija 1938 12. maijā zem. 2414081	Pierakstīts 4 JUN 1940	2. jūl. 1941 apsūdzināts	izrakstīts 19 JUN 1940
17	"	"	7	Prass, Sere neprec.	1913 Rūjiena	pērtrogs	Jūrmala Ie. 21	Latv. pas. M. 16. N. 019321 izd. 1938. pasifekcija Rūjienas apri. 1939 16. 19. zem. 24532	Pierakstīts 7 JUN 1940	1940. 11. 5 Rīga	izrakstīts 19 JUN 1940
23	"	"	14	Balsans, Leupalds prec.	1909. 22. 11 Lepāle Kilohābe gul. kārņģis	griezējs	Lietuvas valstī 28. 4. 1910	Latv. Republikā apsūdzin. P. 10. N. 789. 11 24. 3. 39 izd. Pas. pasifekcija, iznija 1940. 16. 15.	Pierakstīts 14 JUN 1940	1940. 12. 5 Lepāle izrakstīts	izrakstīts 14 JUN 1940

Person's register example: *Vaiiss Eida dzim. Tokers (prec.)*

- 1. Date of registration: *June 3, 1940*
- 2. Surname, name, maiden's name, family status: *Vaiiss Eida born Tokers (married)*
- 3. Date and place of birth: *Daugavpils, 1909*
- 4. Occupation: *barber*

- **5. Previous address: *Marijas Street 57-23 [Riga]***
- **6. Passport or person's identity document, by whom and where issued: *Passport TT No.019317, issued on May 12, 1938 by Riga prosecutor's office under No.414081***
- **7. When registered to police: *June 4, 1940 in Riga prefecture No.3***
- **8. When and where signed off: *July 2, 1941, arrested***
- **9. When signed out in police: *July 19, 1941***

Brief Conclusions

- The academic project *Jews in Latvia in 1918-1940: a genealogical perspective* involves the research of Riga House Registers (books) dated 1918-1940 as a genealogical data source;
- on a larger scale, the research represents an attempt to identify family links and kinship groups in the context of the larger demographic scale and to reveal unexplored aspects of Jewish life in pre-war Latvia;
- Riga House Registers provide an indirect indeed powerful tool for the study of the Jewish community life considering the absence of vital records;
- Riga House Registers consist of two types of books: 1) the early registers of 1919—1927 that contain more detailed information on individuals, and 2) later books of 1927—1941. Both types are used for genealogical research;
- The result of the project is a creation of a computerized data base with compressed information on approximately 20—21 000 Jewish individuals who lived in Riga in the interwar period (1918-1940).