

Introduction

Recently I had the luck that a cousin of my father's wrote me the name of the city in Latvia, that my paternal grandmother came from [\[1\]](#). As I know very little about Latvian Jewry, I decided to do some research on its' history, and in particular the history of the Jews in this city.

Upon thinking more deeply about why this was so important to me, I realized what an impact my grandmother had on me, and my development. I never knew my grandmother, since she died when my father was a young man of eighteen years old. However, I was brought up to love her memory, and am blessed to be named after her. The little I know about her and her background are from a tidbits which my father mentioned while I was growing up.

While gathering the information for this paper, I began feeling very close to her and her family, for I was discovering their past as part of the actual history of the Jewish people. I would like to share this information with whoever will perhaps read it.

I wish to thank all the interesting, friendly and helpful people who I have come in contact with while gathering the material for this article; such as the librarians in Yad VeShem, The Hebrew University and National Library, the reference librarian in the Zionist Archives, the reference librarian in the Diaspora Museum, the Director of the Organization of past Latvian and Estonian Jews, Professor Dov Levin of the Hebrew University, and my friend Dr. Jonah Katz of Yad VeShem; and to Dr. Drey who unintentionally caused me to write this paper. Please excuse me, if I have left someone out, and know that it was unintentional.

Historical Background of Jews in Rezekne

The city is located in the central eastern part of Latvia, in the section of the country known as Latgale, near the intersection of the Lenigrad-Warsaw, Moscow Wentapelis railway junction. The city changed hands a few times: in 1561; the local government

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was then under the rule of Poland-Lithuania. With the first division of Poland, it became part of Russia. It became the capital of the district of Vitebsk, in 1802 [\[2\]](#).

The Latvian name of the city is Rezekne, the old German name is Rositten, and the old Russian name is Rezhitsa [\[3\]](#), the Jewish name is Rezhitse [\[4\]](#), other used names are Rezehne, Rezhitza, Rezitza, Rjeshiza, Rjetschiza, and Rzezyca [\[5\]](#).

Rezekne was considered one of the important Jewish communities in Latvia [\[6\]](#). Jews in Latvia were culturally influenced by German Jewish culture, Lithuanian and Belo Russian Jewry, but assimilation didn't develop here as in Western Europe [\[7\]](#). The languages that the Jews spoke were Yiddish and Russian [\[8\]](#).

The Jewish community in Rezneke was founded in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. The Jews were then expelled from the neighboring village of Makashani (a distance of about 18 kilometer away). They took the "Holy Ark" with them, and placed it in the "Brick Study-Hall", which they built and organized}. A "Study-Group for learning Mishao" was began in 1786 [\[9\]](#). At this time the Jewish population of the city was about five hundred, which was about seventy-five percent of the total population [\[10\]](#).

Before the Jewish Cemetery was consecrated [\[11\]](#), and for a short period afterwards some people asked to be buried in the old cemetery in Makashani, for in addition to this being the burial place of their families, there were many rabbis and holy people buried here. This practice ended in the 1880's. However, this old cemetery was looked after up to the late 1930's [\[12\]](#).

From its' beginning, this Jewish community, became an important segment part of the city. The Jewish population was constantly changing. In 1815 the Jewish population was 1,072, which was 90% of the total population [\[13\]](#). In 1847 there were 542 Jews in the city [\[14\]](#).

Jewish Life in Rezekne at the End of the Nineteenth Century

Most of the Jews worked as either merchants, of cloth and agricultural produce, such as grains, or artisans, such as tailors [15]. Many merchants sold their goods also in the neighboring area of the district of Vitebsk [16]. There was an active Jewish community life in the city consisting of schools, synagogues, and various organizations and institutions [17]. There were charity organizations, a free "soup-kitchen" for the needy, an organization for helping the sick and an old-age home. There were eleven synagogues and 'study-halls' the largest of them (the "Gumiatur") was built in about the year 1882, and was constructed of bricks. Children studied in "chedarim", in modern "chedarim" consisting of five grades (also considered as a Jewish elementary school), where there were also secular studies, and in "Talmud-Torah [18]". A library was founded, as the community knew the importance of books, and collections of books [19]. The Chief Rabbi of the city, up to 1858, was Jona Mann [20]. In 1858, he and his family came to live in Jerusalem [21]. His son Jacob was a judge in the Jewish court and gave lessons to youngsters [22]. The next chief Rabbi was Rabbi Azriel Jephet, who was descended from a long line of Rabbis and scholars [23].

The Chief Rabbi of the city from 1861 to 1900 was Isaac Zioni, known as "Reb Itchala", the son of the Rabbi Naphtali Zioni of Ludza. He was the author of "The Ascending of Isaac" [24]. Religious observation was very important in community life [25].

Only in 1851 were Jewish merchants permitted to live in the new part of the city, except for the vicinity of the Russian Orthodox Church, which was located on the main street. At this time most of the Jews lived on the outskirts of the city [26]. In this period the Jewish population grew steadily [27]; in 1863 there were 1,731 Jews, in 1883 there were 7,216 Jews [28], and in 1897 there were 6,478 Jews in the city. This was 60% of the total population [29]. In 1897, the Jewish population was 6, 478. At this time many Jews immigrated to the U.S.A. or South Africa [30].

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Elijah Shapira, contributed and organized a fire department, in 1875. It was run on a volunteer basis, by Boris Chirpas. He also helped finance a drama club [31].

The Jewish community suffered from economic problems in the 1880's. Because of the large number of needy people the community wasn't able to give proper help [32]. The poorer members of the community were complaining about the high prices. A few of the richer members of the community started selling bread and flour at a rate subsidized by money from the community charity [33]. However, this didn't last for very long. Because of this economic problem, there was quarrelling between state licensed teachers and teachers not licensed, according to the law. The police entered the scene, and fired all of the teachers who didn't have licenses and were teaching in "chedarim". These teachers were now also without work [34] and so needed charity. These teachers also claimed that the licensed teachers had reported them to the police. They begged of the heads of the Jewish community to arrange something with the authority for them [35]. In 1888, the Jewish civil workers and notaries were suddenly fired [36]. At approximately the same time, a body of a Jewish boy was found. He was killed for the reason that the horse that he was riding wasn't galloping fast enough. The police were associated with this murder [37].

The conditions of the community institutions improved in the 1890's. The "Talmud-Torah" then had 100 students. It moved to a larger building of three stories, which was donated by Chaim Ribash, an honorable member and philanthropist of the community [38]. It was operated by government funds, and with the hope that this would help raise the education level, and the problem of conscription to the army; but the latter didn't improve [39]. The local prince came to visit this school, and was happy with what he saw. He suggested the founding of a division for the study of trades [40]. A trade school for boys was founded, but didn't last for too long. In its place a government run boys school was opened, which offered a four year education program, and was also open to Jewish boys from the surrounding area [41]. The Russian teacher Savko founded a private girls' gymnasium. Most of the students here were Jews [42]. There were also problems with the youth who didn't want to study and made friends with the Christians. They spent time with them in the cleaner [43], southern part of the city, on the other side

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of the brook, which separated the Jews from the Christians. They were known as "American children" [44]. The school children didn't always act with respect to the school property, and some seemed to be only interested in nice clothing.

Social aid, organized by the community began at this period [45]. Medical aid that was given to the poorer element; and medicines were sold at low prices. This was financed by "Bikur-Cholim" (the care for the sick organization). The two Jewish doctors that then lived in the city were the ones who actually did this work [46]. The "communal loan organization" widened its' work [47]. There was an attempt to teach people, such as tradesmen, who never had the opportunity to learn anything [48]. The social-aid wasn't preceding on the level that it had been intended to [49]; however there were quite a few good deeds that had been done [50]. The Richer community members were reminded of the needier community members and the fact that "charity begins at home" [51]. There were often calls to remind the community members of the importance of charity [52]. A "righteous" Jew arrived in the city with an accomplice. He was collecting charity for a very needy cause. After receiving money from the community fund and leaving Rezekne, it was discovered that he was a fraud [53].

An attempt at organizing Zionist activities was made by Rabbi Chaim Joseph Jaffa. He preached about the importance of settling in the land of Israel, and of giving cultural and financial backing to this cause. He began collecting books that praised the land of Israel, and stated that sometimes these books were more important than meetings. The organization was discontinued when he left Rezekne to come to live in the land of Israel [54].

Zionist Activities officially began in 1891, when the "Chovevei-Zion" (lovers' of Zion) Organization acquired land in the Land of Israel and were among the founders of the agricultural settlement of "Ein-Zaitim", which is located in the vicinity of Sefed [55]. The original plan for this settlement was made by the "Dorshei-Zion" organization [56] and "Organization of the Thousand" [57] of Minsk [58], who in turn sold land to members [59] of the Jewish community of Rezekne, in 1891. The "Partners in Ein Zaitim Committee" was elected, at a community meeting, which agreed to the economic

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and practical conditions [60]. The goal was to start an independent moshava [61]. Two members of the Jewish community who had bought land here went on Aliyah, and were to organize and supervise the development of the settlement and care of the land until the others arrived. They didn't actually know too much about managing the settlement. The two previous settlers, who lived there with their families, and Arab workers planted Olive groves and fruit orchards here. These were the ones who actually worked the land and understood what they were doing. These two settlers accepted the offer of the manager to become members of the organization. After enquiries, the committee sent a new manager. The two settlers, with the help of the crooked Rabbi and judge Ridba'z of Safed tried to outsmart the manager, in matters of finance and property. This was a hard thing to do for he previously was a schoolteacher, and an old-time Zionist who believed that the land of Israel could only be acquired by suffering. The problem was presented to the committee in Rezekne, the religious courts of Safed and of Jerusalem, under Rabbi Joel Moshe Solomon; and the British counsel in Beirut. At this stage the problem became ethical, for legally Ein Zaitim was the property of the landowners from Rezekne [62]. It was obvious that very few of them had come [63] or would actually come and settle here in the future due to age, capability, or financial problems, and the fact that they weren't faithful to the payments. The people who knew how to work the land were the settlers. The solution was that these two settlers were officially accepted as members of Ein Zaitim. After four years, it was decided that the first stage in the development of Ein Zaitim was not successful. The fact that the land was not suitable for this type of agriculture was an addition on the social and economic problems. The Baron took the land under his control. It was hard for the heads of "Dorshei-Zion", and the sub organizations to realize that they hadn't succeeded, and they hoped to succeed in another place, or in this place at a future time. A few attempts to resettle Ein Zaitim were made, but none of them have been successful [64]. It is interesting that my husband used to do his army reserve service at the army base that is now located here.

The song "במהרשתי" ("WITH MY PLOW") [65] which explains the joy of working the land of Israel, and signifies the beginning of the settlement of the land of Israel, was sung by the youth at this period. It was written by Eliakim Zunzer (Vilna, 1835- New

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York, 1913), at the time of the First Aliyah [66]. One of the few things that my father did tell me of his mother was that she used to sing this song, and that she learned it together with other young people in her hometown.

Jewish Life in Rezekne at the Beginning of the Twentieth Century

From the beginning of the twentieth century, there were two Chief Rabbis. The Rabbi of the poor segment of the population was Rabbi Dushovich, known as "the Chadrinker", and the Rabbi of the wealthier was Rabbi Chaim Lubocki, known as the Kablinker. He was in this post from 1913 [67]. He was a Zionist, a member of the "Mizachi" organization, and an enlightened person. He wrote "Chaim's (Life's) Additions", a Torah composition [68]. He was a cousin of the previous Chief Rabbi - Rabbi Isaac Zioni. The former's honorable place was inherited by the Rabbi Aaron Judah Shulman and after him, the Rabbi Lieb Perl, who was known as "the Judge of Rezeke" [69], Rabbi Moshe Shakrota and Rabbi Yafin [70]. The "government authorized" [71] Rabbi was Rabbi Jacob Pollak [72].

Most of the workshops in the city were owned and run by Jews [73]. There was a Jewish loan society, known as "The Organization for Loans and Savings", which was founded by Rabbi Dushovitz and was called "The Rebbe's Bank" by the people. In 1912, it had 197 members [74]. There were Jewish doctors, nurses, teachers and lawyers. There were a few Jewish clerks in the municipality. Four Jews, who were representatives in the city council in 1917. They managed to cancel the decree that General Assemblies were to take place on Friday nights and Sabbaths

Now most of the children began to study in the public elementary school for boys, in the government run school for boys, which had four grades and in the government run gymnasium. In the latter number of Jewish students was limited at five percent. Afterwards a public elementary school for girls was opened up [75]. A rich Jewish woman, who had previously left the city, funded this school [76].

The language of instruction in the Jewish elementary school was changed from Russian to Yiddish. A second school was opened and a quarrel developed between the

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Yiddishists and the Hebraists on the language of instruction there. The education minister decided in favor of Hebrew. The Latvian Dictatorate (1934-1940) decided to combine these two schools. Then there were corresponding classes with instruction in Yiddish or Hebrew. A government run Jewish high school, was founded in 1922. A Yeshiva called "The House of Joseph" was opened between 1921 and 1934. In the same period a Yeshiva was opened, which was called "Torah and Musar" (moral ethics). Students from other communities also attended. There was also a traditional school called "Torah and Derech Eretz"(politeness).

At the beginning of the century, the Zionist Organization "Chovevei-Zion" was replaced by "Kadimah" [77] and "Mizrachi" which opened up branches [78]. "Kadimah" then had 130 members. Hebrew lessons were given in its' meeting hall. "Mizrachi" had forty members [79]. In the 1920's "Zeiray-Zion" (Young Zionists), was the strongest Zionist Organization, and in the 1930's "the Zionist Revision Organization was the strongest. The Zionist Organizations had a strong influence on the youth. The branch of "Hanoar Halomed" (Zionists Students) called itself " Hachaver" (The Friend), and in the 1920's started a branch of "Hachalutz" (The Pioneer). A branch of "Hatchiah" (Rejuvenation) was operated for a short period. The branch of "Bar-Cochba"(scouts), developed into "HaShomer Hazair". In the 1930's branches of "Betar", "Borochav Youth" and "Herzliah" were started. At this time dozens of the youth came to live in Israel. There were two sport organizations: "Hapoel" and "Hakoach". Hebrew lessons were still given at the "Kadimah" Zionist Organization and there was an active chorus there.

Jewish cultural life centered around the Yiddishist ("Bund") "Shalom Aleichem Club" and the Zionist "Bialik Club" [80]. The "Bund" which had about 100 members, had a dramatic club which attracted many and put on plays in Yiddish which were open to all [81]. It housed a rich library". This was an Anti-Zionist organisation , but had the majority of members. The Yiddish poet Nachman Dimenstein who was one of the heads of the "folks' party" was born here and lived here. He published poetry in various Latvian publications. He and his family [82] perished in the Holocaust [83]. The first volume of his works was lost in the Holocaust[84].

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The "Bund" and other youth were responsible for the defense of the community . The "well-to-do" members of the community financed this. There were revolutionary units, which were connected to the underground. Among these revolutionaries were Shafir, Pliner, and Chiat [\[85\]](#).

There was a social uprising in the year 1905, and members of the "Bund" (these Yiddishists) were among the leaders of the strike. In October of the same year there were anti Jewish uprisings in the city [\[86\]](#), and the Jewish youth organized themselves to protect the community. Six of them were killed [\[87\]](#).

Before World War One there were eleven synagogues in the city: the "Gumiatur", that was near the market place and considered the largest, and the oldest after the burning of the "White Study House", built in 1882, its lists were the continuation of the first lists ("Mishnah study group"-1786) of the community, and its' rabbi was Rabbi Skruta; the " Zemdlediker" was next in size, was founded in 1876, by a group of businessmen, including Chaim Mantifal, Shraga Fibush Yaffa and Moshe Emnitov; the "Greener" Study Hall, that was previously known as the "New Study Hall"; the "Revitur Study Hall, which had a "Mishnah study group' list dating from 1848, and its' rabbi was Rabbi Lubocki; Hillels' Study Hall was the oldest, founded by Hillel Emnitov, in about 1840; the "Merchants" synagogue which was founded in 1860, the "Planaver" Study Hall which was built in about 1875 from a contribution by Chaim Mantipal, and was the only prayer house in the new part of the city which was called "Plan"; the "Large Minyan of Chasidim", which was followed by four more minyanim of Chasidim: one of them belonged to Lubavitch, and was founded in 1865, by Shmuel Ribush; another one was founded by Uri Ribush; the third one was also founded by the millionaire Chaim Ribush, in about 1835, and was called "Chaim's Minyan" this burnt down and was rebuilt in 1919, by Jacob Kaminsky, and called "Kaminsky's Minyan"[\[88\]](#).

The Jewish population was 11,000, just before the First World War, which was fifty percent of the total population [\[89\]](#).

Rezekne and World War One

Many Jews, including most of the communal leaders escaped, into Russia, during the summer of 1915 after the outbreak of World War One. In the autumn Jews who had been expelled from Courland [\[90\]](#) and Lithuania began arriving in the city. The first group to arrive numbered about 800. The community's charity organizations weren't working properly since many of the pillars of the community had left. A government representative of The Central Committee from Petrograd was in charge of giving aid to these refugees, with the help of a few members of the community and some of the youth. Financial help was given to needy members of the community who asked to continue running their businesses, in addition to these refugees, by this committee.

The Russian army suffered a few defeats in this area. The Jews were suspected as guilty of treason. In 1916, the entire community almost got expelled from the city. The Russian general Nazomov, stated as guilty the Jewish tavern owners, because of the drunkenness in the units of Russian soldiers. Rabbi Lubocki went to speak to an army official and succeeded in getting the decree cancelled.

After the revolution of February 1917 there were democratic municipal elections and two Zionists were elected to the city council. With its' help Jewish community life was re-established. Two other Zionists were elected on other lists: the local creditors and the socialist block [\[91\]](#). These four Jews succeeded in the decision of not having general meetings on Friday evenings. Members of the "bund" voted against this. The head of the local police was a Jew named Tager. The community was allowed to send five representatives to the General Jewish Meeting of Latvia which took place in 1917. Rabbi Aaron Judah Shulman was in charge of picking the representatives.

The city was under Bolshevik rule from November 1917 until February 1918. The Jewish Commissioner Finkleman, put out a warrant to put an embargo on the synagogues. Again, Rabbi Lubocki was able to save the community when he made an appeal to the commissioner. He was also able to acquire wheat for baking matzoth. At this time the Jewish elementary school was headed by two teachers, the Tarifskin sisters,

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who were active in the revolutionary movement. In February 1918, the Bolsheviks withdrew their forces from the city, under pressure from the German army, which was moving in on the southwestern front. The farmers of the nearby villages took advantage of these few hours when there wasn't any government and began looting any property that they were able to. A committee, made up of the important community members went out to meet the pilot force of the advancing Germans, and to request of them to speed up their entry into the city. The Germans entered the city and the looting stopped. The period of the Germans in the city continued until December 1918. The army officials planned to convert a few of the synagogues into army hospitals. Rabbi Lubocki intervened and was again able to save Jewish property.

In the end of 1918, the Bolsheviks again took over the city. There were a few Jewish soldiers who were from the community among the Latvian soldiers who entered the city. A short while afterwards groups of soldiers began pilfering Jewish stores. Young Jews stopped this uprising. In June 1920 there were three Anti-Semitic uprisings, due to lack of food and black-marketing. In one of them twenty-seven Jewish stores in the center of the city were broken into. The Jews were able to stop these uprisings. From autumn 1920 and for a few years, the city served as a station for Jews that were being sent from Soviet Russia.

According to a census taken by the "Joint", in 1920, there were 291 artisans. The percentage of Jewish artisans in the city remained so, during this period. Making a living was easier this way, than being a merchant because of the Latvian competition, which had more of a chance at selling to government institutions. The Jewish bank wasn't capable of giving credit to Jewish merchants, according to their needs. Some Jewish merchants received credit from the "Latvian Bank for Industry and Credit", but had to pay interest at a rate of up to 48%. This bank had a local Jew as a board member. The complaints of the Jews reached the Latvian Siem, but to no avail. Even so, a majority of the shops remained in Jewish hands.

Rezekne after World War I

In 1922, the Jewish population reached 5,500, but most of these Jews were refugees. They received aid from the Committee for Helping Latvian Jewish Refugees, which worked together with the Joint. The latter sent a special committee to organize the situation. The Temporary Committee for Helping Local Jews also received help from the Joint. In 1922, a committee to help orphans was founded with money received from the “Joint”. About a year after the First World War the Jewish population of the city was 4,148, for the city became the center for Jews migrating back from Russia [\[92\]](#).

Quite a few of the Jews who returned to Rezekne, after the war decided not to stay there, and immigrated to other countries where they had relatives. Because of this, the Jews became, for the first time since they settled in the city, the minority of the total population. A feeling of pessimism enveloped in the community. However there were also some positive developments: the “Joint” gave financial aid to the community, and to needy families; and American landsmen sent one thousand dollars to help reorganize the community. The credit plan, which was funded by the “Joint”, began operating in 1923; by then the community was capable of also being able to give credit. A few years later the Bank of Latvia also gave loans to this credit plan. Its' official name became “The First Jewish Credit and Savings Fund” [\[93\]](#).

During the period of Latvia's democratic regime (1918-34) the communal life in the city once again began to flourish. Then there was Jewish cultural autonomy [\[94\]](#). This centered around religious activities, and social aid institutions, such as charity for the needy, help for the sick, and help an old-age home. Real-estate properties that belonged to the community since the nineteenth hundreds' were listed as property of the community charity. The head of this charity organization was Dr. Pollak, the son of the rabbi, and he was helped by Azriel Jephet, a descendent of Rabbi Jephet. The organization helped merchants and artisans, gave scholarships to students, and gave to needy families (secretly). In the elections for the city-council, in 1922, there were thirteen Jews, from the various Jewish lists, out of the thirty members. This number went down to nine, in 1926, for soldiers in the army base located in the city received permission to vote. The

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reason behind this was to increase the number of Latvians, serving on the council, that were then the minority in the city. Up to the beginning of the 1930's, the job of vice-mayor was held by Jews (Isaac Kelmonowich or his rival- Kolman) [95].

Only once were there elections for the Jewish Community Council, and this was in November 1920. More than seventy percent of those who were able to vote, did so. There were twenty-five council members, and the distribution was as follows: “Bund” and Independent Socialists- six members,”Folks Party [96] - five members, “Young Zionists’-three members, and the remainder was distributed between members that were not affiliated with parties such as the wealthy and synagogue representatives.

In the 1920's a group organized, known as “Independent Socialists”, which also had Jews among their members. Some of the Jewish youth belonged to the “Bund” and some to the “ Communist Youth Organization”. In 1922, thirteen of the thirty members of the “city-council” were Jews. Afterwards the number went down.

The Jewish population was 3,342 in 1935. This was 25.4% of the total population [97]. The percentage of the Jewish population went down from more than 40% in the end of the 1920's, to 25% in 1935. This was due to Aliyah to the land of Israel, immigrating to America, or young people moving to the capitol city, usually to find jobs. The government influenced Latvians to settle in the city, and a new neighborhood was built for them on the north side of the city. Jews were not allowed to have government jobs [98].

After the First World War the government in this area changed hands quite often from the Russians to the Germans, and once again the Soviets. Rezekne was the capitol of “Red Latvia” from May 22, 1919, to January 21,1920. The city was part of (free) Latvia from 1920 to 1940, and from then was called “Rezekne”.

The Latvian Dictatorate stopped the opportunity of Jews working as municipal clerks, in 1934. Latvian merchants were favored, upon Jewish ones. In the year 1935 most of the shops (75%), in the center of the city were owned and run by Jews (see Chart 1). The number of Jewish workshops diminished. Jews owned only fourteen of the

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thirty-six workshops. Even so, the majority of the Jews continued to work in trade or as artisans. There had been a joint aid fund for artisans, but the Jews began to get aid only from their own aid fund. Six of the eighteen doctors, and two of the ten lawyers were Jews..Quite a few of the Jews were able to support themselves nicely [\[99\]](#).

After the National revolution of Olmanius, in 1934, all the social aid in the community, for helping the needy, was handled by the municipally run government institution known as “The Society for Jewish Aid in Rezekne”. Its' first head was Michael Bobrov, and after him came Michael Metapl. The community rabbis succeeded in getting financial aid for this institution from the well-to-do members of the community. Every Jewish community member was listed as a potential “giver”. Therefore there was much cooperation between the government run organization and the community aid. Kosher meals were given out to the needy and to the children of the unemployed, this formed the Jewish section of the public kitchen which was once again known as “the Jewish uncle”. Because of the bad financial situation which developed in the community in the years of 1938-9, the help was extended to the distribution of clothing, shoes, and wood for heating; and a “childrens' kitchen' run by a women's committee (which gave out 14,770 meals). The community charity organization found new sources for financial aid. A new building for the old-age home was dedicated in 1938, and dedicated to Chaim Ribash. The local branch of the AZA Jewish Health Organisation, that was founded in 1927, now did good work. From the beginning of the 1920's the baby care unit gave care and medicines for free. Now, there was dental care and a day-camp (run with the help of the women's committee)[\[100\]](#).

The community marked the twenty-five years of devoted rabbinical service of Rabbi Lubocki, in 1938 [\[101\]](#).

Rezekne and the Holocaust

With the outbreak of World-War Two, and the agreement between Germany and The Soviet Union, the Soviet army entered Latvia, and in the summer of 1940 the Soviet

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Regime began here. A few Jews were part of this new government and some of them in key positions. The Jewish community institutions were cancelled and gradually a new method of education was applied. In the middle of June 1941, Jewish property owners, active Zionists, members of Non-Communist organizations were exiled to Siberia [102], or sent to work-camps “ where they were trialed, and sent to jail; many of them died there. Some of the members of their families who were sent to various areas in Russia succeeded in remaining alive. Among them were the businessmen Simon Mantipel, members of the Loyal Latvian organization (“Eizsargas”) such as Dr. Pollack, and the organizations' Jewish musicians. After the declaration of war between Germany and Russia [103] the city became a center for those who were escaping into Russia [104]. Many Soviet officials, that were exiled from their positions in Lithuania and Latvia past through the city on their way to Velkiye Luki. Also Jewish refugees from Lithuania, Dugavghpils, and other places past through the city, and received help from the local Jewry. Many Jews left the city together with the local officials, and some were then officially exiled. Some went south to cross the border at Zilufe, and some went north to cross the border at Karsabah or Abrene; however the borders were not as yet officially open and only members of the communist party or officials were allowed to do so. The other Jews had to wait until July 4; however some did succeed earlier because of the andromosity at the time of the bombings. Jews that couldn't take the waiting returned to the city [105]. Hundreds of Rezneke's Jews succeeded in crossing the border. Many of them became Russian soldiers. Small groups of refugees (many were “Betar” members) tried to escape by way of the southern Russian borders and come to the Land of Israel. They were all caught by the Soviets and put in jail for long periods.

The Germans began to bomb the city and especially the area of the local railroad station on June 25 or June 26. The official deportations began on June 26 and June 27. It seems that some asked the local Rabbis what to do, and that Rabbis Lubocki and Rabbis Yafin replied that they were remaining in the city, but everyone should follow their own conscious [106].

The Nazis occupied Rezekne on July 3, 1941. At this time members of the Red army, members of the communist party and other Pro-Soviets still wandered around in

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the neighboring forests. Fires broke out in the city, and the corpses of 60 anti-Soviet Latvians were found there. The Jews were declared guilty of this incident. A local police auxiliary was organized from previous members of the Latvian police and members of the patriotic Latvian organizations (“Eizasargis” and “Prekunkrust”). By the middle of July their number already reached 150, and they then received a reinforcement from Riga.

One day after the occupation, all the Jewish males between the ages of eighteen to sixty were ordered to gather in the market place. The number counted was 1,400. Armed members of the auxiliary police surrounded them. Some young people were murdered then and there. One Jew committed suicide by taking poison, and another tried to escape by swimming in the lake, but was shot. The rest of the men were taken to the local jail, looted of their money and worthy belongings and were beaten. Some were shot and killed there.. The ones left alive their had to bury their dead and some were shot afterwards. The artisans were taken to various work camps [\[107\]](#).

On July 10, a regiment of the German security forces came to the city for a weeks' stay. Then over 140 Jewish males were murdered. This took place in two separate actzias; and was executed by he auxiliary police, under the supervision of the commanders of the German security police. They defined their doing as a reaction to the murder of the 60 Latvians, and the fires. This was the beginning of the planned murders of the Jews of the city. First the men were killed and then the women and the children. At first these killings took place in the Jewish cemetery and a few other places [\[108\]](#).

At the end of the month, Rabbi Lubocki was invited to the Gestapo headquarters. Then he was sent to the Jewish cemetery (or nearby forest [\[109\]](#)) where there was a call-up of all the Jews who were to be killed. The Rabbi spoke to them very sympathetically before they were shot to death. It is told that he led his congregation to the pit where they were murdered, wrapped in his tallith [\[110\]](#). Rabbi Yafin also was killed in the Holocaust together with the members of his congregation [\[111\]](#). One young Jew succeeded in killing three Latvians before being shot. According to one report, after this

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“actzia” the remaining Jews were taken to the Ghetto of Daugavpils, where most of them were killed.

During the month of August the number of murders continued to rise. Quite often 200 Jews were taken from the jail, in over crowded trucks to the rifle range. They were told to get undressed in the hut and then sent to the pit. German certificates testify that the auxiliary police under the supervision of the German security police did the killings, on August 1 and August 5. The “actzia” of August 1, included political prisoners, who weren't Jewish, while the “actzia” of August 5, was of only Jews. The women who remained in their houses were subject to robbery, beatings and rape. On about August 2, after most of the men had already been murdered, the women and the children were sent from their houses to the jail. They were taken in groups, to the Jewish cemetery or the rifle range, to be murdered. A group of women were raped the day before they were taken to be murdered. On August 23, the last groups were taken in thirty-three trucks to the rifle-range [\[112\]](#). This was the last “actzia” and the end of the Jewish community of Rezekne.

In the autumn of 1943, this ghetto was finished with, and the remaining Jews were taken to the Kaiserwald Concentration Camp, near Riga. According to another report, the murders continued to take place in the Jewish cemetery; and when this was filled in the old rifle practice range of the “Eizasargis” in the Anchupani Mountains, a distance of five kilometer from the city [\[113\]](#).

The head of the police auxiliary issued a command to look for Jews who had gotten converted to Christianity. In October 1941, the police discovered twelve converted Jews, who had been converted by the priest of the Russian Orthodox Church, in order to save their lives. The Jews were killed and the priest was fired.

The Jews who worked for the Germans continued to do so, until they were sent to their deaths in 1943. In the summer of 1944, before the German withdrawal, the Germans brought a group of thirty Jews from the Riga ghetto to Rezneke, and ordered

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them to take the bodies out of the pits where they had been buried and burn them. After their task was completed, they were murdered [114].

In the city of Rezneke, the Jews who remained alive were two adults [115] and a few children, who were found in a hiding place. They had been helped by local residents. The Russian army freed the city on July 7, 1944.

Rezekne after World War Two

Some of the Jews who had escaped to Russia returned to Rezekne, and were joined by Jews from other communities [116]. Young people from this community were active in the aiding of Jews who wished to escape to the land of Israel. Among them were the Shomer HaZair members Eilka Goldberg and Vlasik Shlumovich [117]. In 1950, the Jewish population was a few hundred. A Jew by the name of Chiat was head of the Construction Ministry. And a Jew by the name of Israelite was head of the Planing Ministry. The government allowed [118] minimal religious services for these Jews. The Jewish cemetery, which was slightly damaged during the war was rerenovated. In the 1960's, a fence was built around it. The synagogue "The Greener Study Hall" was re-opened, and there was a ritual slaughterer. After his death, the Jews asked for this ritual services from the Rabbi of Lodza [119]. His service continued until 1956 [120].

A monument was constructed in the center of Jewish cemetery in memory of those who died in the Holocaust, with the inscription in Hebrew.

In 1960 there was one synagogue in the city, but mazzah baking was prohibited. In 1970 the Jewish

population of the city was 250. Most of them left Rezekne afterwards for Riga and the services for the Jews weren't continued [121]. In the 1970's there were only a few Jewish families in the city.

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In 1965, the members of the Latvian auxiliary police, who took an active part in the murder of Jews of the

Rezekne area, during World War Two, were put to trial in Riga. One of them got sentenced to 15 years, and the others received the death penalty. The chief of police, Bulislav Mikovskis, escaped previously to Russia and therefore wasn't present at the trial [\[122\]](#).

According to German sources, 3,219 Jews were murdered in Rezekne and the surrounding area; and in the general area 5,128 Jews were murdered. Of the 95,000 Latvian Jews, only 15,000 managed to escape into Russia. Only 10% of Latvian Jewry remained as survivors of Concentration Camps. This is the lowest percentage of Holocaust survivors [\[123\]](#).

Conclusion

Writing this paper has enlightened me both education wise and as far as family roots. I always felt part of the Jewish people, and now I feel even more so. As I have written in the introduction, my goal in writing this was to do “something” in memory of my father and his mother. Now, feel that I have also done a little “something” in the memory of all the Jews of Rezekne.

My original goal was to research the city of Rezneke at the time that my grandmother was there. After reading about the history of the city I understood that I had to be fair to all the Jews of the city and include the period of the Holocaust. Now I feel that I am doing the minimum to honor their memory.

I realize that the city of Rezekne was not a very special place, as far as important historical facts go; but now I know that it was important as a part of Jewish history.

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Pre-Holocaust Jewish Participation in the Local Economy

Type of shop	Total number	Owned by Jews: number	Percentage
Grocery	100	10	10
Bakery	14	11	79
Restaurants, taverns, candy stores	38	10	26
Mills	3	3	100
Butchers	38	28	74
Beverages	8	3	38
Fruits and vegetables	6	5	83
Clothes, cloths, hats	63	58	92
Shoes and leather goods	25	24	96
Furniture	5	4	80
Books and writing materials	13	6	46
Metal products	13	13	100
Tools	7	5	71
Chemicals and medicines	20	20	100
Watches and jewelry	7	6	86
Cigarettes and tobacco	2	2	100
Barbers	19	14	74
Others	10	3	30
Total	391	228	58

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Bibliography

1) Source	2) Abbreviation
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5) Encyclopedia Judiaca , Keter, Jerusalem, Israel, 1972, volumes: 5, 6,10,14	6) Judaica
7) Encyclopedia Hebraica , Encyclopedia Publishing Company, Tel Aviv, Israel, 1969, volume 21	8) E.H.
9) Card Catalog, Eastern European Archives, Hebrew University, Israel Archive	10) E.E.
11) File-REZEKNE, Organization of past Latvians and Estonians, Shefayim Regional Council, Israel	12) O.L.E.
13) File: A, J, Sirkin, Central Zionist Archives,Jerusalem, Israel	14) C.Z.A.
15) Database-REZHITZA, Diaspora Museum, Ramat Aviv, Israel	16) D.M.
17) Letters, Oscar Bechman, Vivian Omerberg, saved in my house	18)
19) The Book (Pincas) of the Latvia and Estonia , Yad VeShem, Jerusalem, Israel, 1988	20) Pin
21) Encyclopedia of Israeli And General Literature , Mitzpe, Tel Aviv, Israel, 1943	22) E.L.
23) Conversation, Nachumi HarZion, researcher of Hebrew songs	24) N.HZ.
25) Ben Hillel, Mordechai, Olami (My World), Mitzpe, Jerusalem, Israel, 1936, book 4	26) O.M.W.
27) Dimenstein, Zalman, Illustrated Almanac-1939-40 , Rezekne, 1939	28) I.AI.
29) Drewaner, Alter, Articles about “Chibat-Zion” and the Settlement of the Land of Israel	30) A.Ch.
31) Tel Aviv University, Ramat Aviv, Israel, 1988, volumes : 4, 5	32)
33) Eliav, Mordecai, editor, Book of the Fist Aliyah , Yad ben-Zvi, Jerusalem, Israel, 1982, volume 1	34) B.o.A.

Footnotes

[1] Letter, Oscar Blechman, 03/01/01.

[2] D.M.

[3] Judiaca v. 10, pps. 1462-63.

[4] Pin, p. 233.

[5] Archives E.E., card catalog.

[6] E.H. v. 21, p. 621.

[7] Judiaca v. 10, pps. 1462-3.

[8] E.H. v. 21, p. 621.

[9] D.M.

[10] Pin, p. 233.

[11] Ibid., p.234.

[12] Ibid.

[13] D.M.

[14] Judiaca v. 14, p.140.

[15] D.M.

[16] Pin, p. 234.

[17] Judiaca v. 10, pps.1462-3.

[18] D.M.

[19] Hameletz newspaper, 1884. File O.L.E..

[20] Here he was known as Reb Yona Rezikner. File O.L.E..

[21] Pin, p. 234.

[22] In the land of Israel, he began a factory for the making of bricks and shingles, in Jaffa. This is how Jews got into the building trade here. He accepted Yeminite workers in

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Jerusalem. They liked him so much, that they called him “aba”. He helped in the building of “Mishkanot Israel” (one of the first Jewish neighborhoods, outside of the old-city) together with Joseph Rivlin, the Lemel school, and the Sha'arei Zedek hospital. File O.L.E..

[23] Pin, p. 234.

[24] D.M.

[25] Articles about the importance of the holiday of Succot, and the obtaining of an *etrog* and the necessity for a proper fence around the Jewish cemetery . Hamelitz newspaper, 1892. File O.L.E..

[26] Pin, p. 234.

[27] Judiaca V. 14, p.140.

[28] Pin, p. 234.

[29] Judiaca v. 14, p.140.

[30] D.M.. Here, I feel the roots of my family; letters: Oscar Blechman-03/01/01, Vivian Omerberg-11/01/01.

[31] D.M.

[32] Pin, p.234.

[33] Hamelitz newspaper, 1880. O.L.E.

[34] Pin, p. 234. Forty “teachers” were now without work, and were frightened of what might happen to them. Hamelitz newspaper, 1886. O.L.E..

[35] Pin, p.234. There was much jealousy and unfounded hatred in this episode, Hameletz newspaper, 1885.

[36] Pin, p. 234.

[37] Hamelitz newspaper, 1897. O.L.E..

[38] Pin, p.234.

[39] Hamelitz newspaper, 1892. O.L.E..

[40] Ibid., 1893. O.L.E..

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[41] Pin, p.234.

[42] Ibid.

[43] File-O.L.E..

[44] Hamelitz newspaper. 1892. O.L.E..

[45] Various kinds of charity was organized: for helping the sick, the hospitalized and needy school children, and a women's organization; Ibid, 1894, file; O.L.E..

[46] One of the Jewish doctors was so well liked by everyone; so that when he died many Christians came to his funeral. Ibid,1890. O.L.E..

[47] Pin, p.234.

[48] Hameletz newspaper, 1884. File O.L.E..

[49] Two years after it officially began, it was reported that barely anything was being done. Ibid,, 27/11/89. O.L.E..

[50] Ibid., 1888. O.L.E..

[51] Ibid.

[52] Ibid., 1897. O.L.E..

[53] Ibid., 1886. O. L. E..

[54] Ibid., 28/8/92. O.L.E.

[55] D.M.

[56] Joshua Sirkin was head of the organization. He had made a written agreement with Baron Rothchild about the legal, financial and practical sides of the organization and the plan for settlement A.Ch, v. 4. p.335, f.1. The Hebrew protocol of the agreement made by "Dorshei-Zion" Minsk to buy and settle land in Ein Zaitim, near Safed, by Sirkin -1891 is in the C.Z. A. It is eight pages long. C.Z.A., file: Sirkin, Letters in connection with "Dorshei-Zion".

[57] The organization was so called because its' goal was to settle a thousand people here. E.A., v. 6, p 535. When the people would come on Aliyah after ten years, they would find ready housing and farms for them. B.o.A. pps. 62-64; E.A., v. 6, pps. 535-7; A.Ch. v.5, p. 362, f.2,3,4.

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[58] The activities in Minsk 1890-1, appear in file A54/8 in the C.Z.A. The activities in the area appear in file J 33/105 in the C.Z.A.

[59] The idea was to sell the land to people of means. B.o.A., v.1, p. 57.

[60] O.M.W., p. 137.

[61] Rehovot was also organized this way and was successful. A.Ch., v. 5, p. 362, f.3.

[62] O.M.W., pps. 137-143.

[63] It is important to add here that Aliyah was temporarily forbidden in July 1891. A. Ch. V. 4, p. 335, f. 1. This was due to the large number of people emigrating from the country, and a temporary rise in the living conditions of the Jews. B.o.A., v. 1. p. 156.

[64] O.M.W., p241. B.oA. V. 1, pps.64, 201. The place does have a rich history of Jewish settlement up to the modern period. Judiaca, pps. 540-1. Now there is an army base located here. E. A. p.236

[65] The Hebrew words to this song are in Appendix 2.

[66] Zunzer was an entertainer and Yiddish and Hebrew songwriter. He influenced many with the Zionist spirit, and the enlightenment. The song was written in Yiddish and translated into Hebrew by Noah Shapira, at the time of the first Aliyah. E.L., N.H.Z..

[67] D.M.

[68] The second part was published in Riga in 1939. Pin, p. 237.

[69] Pin, p. 234.

[70] Ibid., p. 238.

[71] A decree issued by the Russian government in 1844 to establish schools whose teachers would be both Jews and Christians. The secret instructions which accompanied the decree declared that the ' purpose of the education of the Jews is to bring them nearer to the Christians and to uproot their harmful beliefs which are influenced by the Talmud'. The government also recognized a limited communal organization whose function was to watch over the conscription of the Jewish youth to the Russian army, the collection of the 'candle-tax' (which financed this new school system), and the election of the rabbi (whose function was to register births, marriages, deaths, and to deliver sermons on holidays extolling the government). Judiaca v. 5, p. 1006.

[72] D.M.

[73] Ibid.

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[74] Pin, p. 234.

[75] Ibid.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Ibid., p. 235.

[78] D.M.

[79] Pin, p. 235

[80] D.M.

[81] Pin, p.235.

[82] His father was the meat slaughterer Chaim Dimenstein, and his brother was the Yiddish newspaper writer Zalman Dimenstein. Pin, p. 238. The latter was the editor of The Illustrated Almanac of 1939-40. This contains a short but thorough history of the Jews in the city. It is written in Yiddish, and illustrated by A. Naislosa. Ibid p. 242; I.A.I. I have a copy of this almanac which I copied from the original which can be found in the O.L.E..

[83] D.M.

[84] Pin, p. 238

[85] Ibid., p. 235.

[86] O.L.E..

[87] D.M.

[88] Pin, p. 238.

[89] Ibid., p. 234.

[90] The region of southwestern Latvia, bordering on the Baltic Sea. Judiaca v. 5, p. 1006.

[91] The head of this organization was Dr. Chiam Grudneski. Pin, p.239.

[92] D.M.

[93] Pin, p. 235.

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[\[94\]](#) D.M.

[\[95\]](#) Pin, p. 236.

[\[96\]](#) The “Jewish autonomy”; the city had the largest branch in all of Latvia. Ibid., p. 238.

[\[97\]](#) D.M.

[\[98\]](#) Pin, p.236

[\[99\]](#) D.M.

[\[100\]](#) Pin, p. 237.

[\[101\]](#) Ibid.

[\[102\]](#) D.M.

[\[103\]](#) Pin, p. 240.

[\[104\]](#) D.M.

[\[105\]](#) Pin, p. 240.

[\[106\]](#) Ibid.

[\[107\]](#) Ibid.

[\[108\]](#) Ibid., pps. 240-1.

[\[109\]](#) E.H. v. 21, pps. 621-622.

[\[110\]](#) Pin, p. 237.

[\[111\]](#) Ibid., p. 238.

[\[112\]](#) Ibid., p. 241.

[\[113\]](#) Ibid., p. 241.

[\[114\]](#) Pin, p. 241.

[\[115\]](#) Only one Jew by the name of Israelite, remained alive. His nephew was with him. They found a hiding place with a Polish friend. Ibid.

[\[116\]](#) Ibid.

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[\[117\]](#) Ibid.

[\[118\]](#) According to D. M., sponsored.

[\[119\]](#) Pin, P. 241

[\[120\]](#) Ibid.

[\[121\]](#) Judiaca v. 14, p. 140.

[\[122\]](#) Pin, pps. 241-242.

[\[123\]](#) E.H. v. 21, pps. 621-622.

[\[124\]](#) E.L., p. 117.