

# The Orlean Family of Ribenishki, Latvia

**Version 2.0**



**Written by:** Omer Or

**Date:** February 2008

Appendices:

- Part of a testimony by Dominicovitch
- Family Trees
- Photo Albums
- Bibliography

## **Background for the second version**

The following document is an updated revision of the original paper, which was circulated in December 2003 during an extended-family meeting in Kibbutz Tirat Zvi. Additional material, which was accumulated prior to the family meeting, was not included in the original version in order to finalize and distribute the document in time for the meeting. Since the family meeting, additional material has been received, including photographs (as well as identification of existing ones), some additional details (dates), and more information regarding such topics as the relationship between the Orlean and Chodak families. Additionally, following another family research which I conducted on my mother's family, I decided to edit the material in a different manner (ordering the text by generations rather than family branches, as well as including more anecdotes from the family's life), and to include a bibliography and an organized list of sources. Finally, in order to complete the picture, I added a chapter describing the life of my grandfather Meir.

Since the publication of the first research, Nechama Kimmeldorf and Chaya Barzilay from Hadera have both passed away. Both ladies were the last remaining individuals from our family who were born and raised in Ribenishki. Their contribution to the research has been tremendous, and even lead directly to the connection of the Soloway branch to the family tree. In fact thanks to them we had the honor of meeting with Lavi Soloway, who came with his family especially for the family meeting in Israel. It was a great privilege to meet these two charming ladies (Chaya even honored the family meeting in Tirat Zvi with her presence), and I hope they felt satisfied by the young generation's interest in the family history.

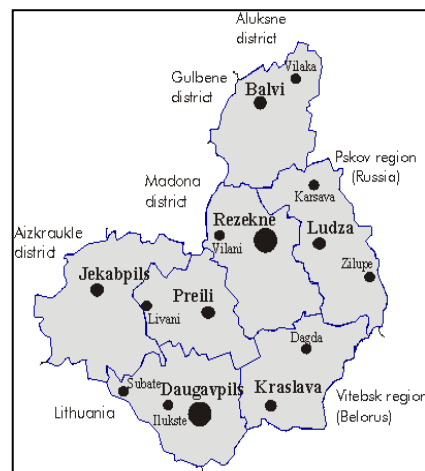
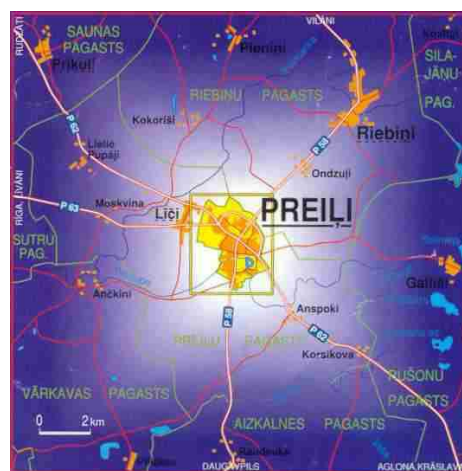
Since the publication of the first version, it has been briefly mentioned in Tirat Zvi's "Batira" magazine (January 2004), and in more details in the book "From Darkness to Dawn" which was produced among others by Atara Samuel – by reading this book I discovered by coincidence that Atara's husband, Amos Samuel, is also a direct family member from... my mother's side (through the German Wechsler family...) The research even won first prize in a research competition by the "Association of Latvian and Estonian Jews" in July 2004.

Finally, upon completing the first version, 30 pages of testimony have been composed and submitted to “Yad Vashem” with details of family members who perished in the Holocaust, to ensure that their memory will persist.

## Geography

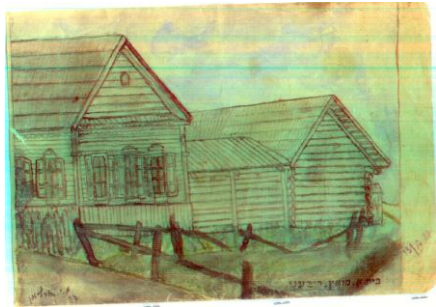
Ribenishki is also called Riebini or Silajani. It is located in the Southwest of Latvia, latitude 56.35 and longitude 26.8, 150m above sea level.

The town is located in the Latgale district, the easternmost district of the four districts of Latvia. Ribenishki belongs to the Preiļi region of modern Latvia, and is managed by a rural council (one of 19 rural councils in the Preiļi region). The nearby cities are Daugavpils (called “Dvinsk” by the Jews) and Rezekne (called “Rezhitse” by the Jews). At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Latvia was part of the Russian empire, and the entire Latgale district was part of the Russian Vitebsk district (Vitebsk Guberniya).



Our relative Lavi Soloway visited Riebini during a trip to Latvia in October 2003. The video he shot during the visit is fascinating – according to Chaya Barzilay who watched the video, the town has changed very little during the years. The wooden houses seem almost the same, with a horse and carriage traveling slowly along the deserted street. The only apparent difference is the emergence of a small number of depressing, soviet-style cement buildings. Another indication to this similarity can be found by comparing recent photos of the town, taken by Mr. Alexander Feigmanis (served as Lavi's translator during his visit in town) with drawings made by Meir Or in his youth.

**House in Ribenishki, Meir Or drawing**



**House in Riebini, today**



**River (Feimanka?), Meir Or drawing**



**Feimanka river, Today**



**The First Generation – Abraham Orlean (beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century?)**

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**Census of families in the Dvinsk area from 1875 – family of Kasriel son of Abraham Orlian**

The first member of the Orlean family we can trace is Abraham Orlean. Abraham’s name is mentioned in several official records related to his first born son, Katriel (census records from 1875 and 1883, and a death certificate from 1898). However, we lack additional information regarding Abraham’s parents, wife or year of birth. Since Abraham’s first born son, Katriel, was born in 1833-1834, we can assume Abraham was born in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. We do not have any accurate information about Abraham’s place of residence, but we can assume he resided in Dvinsk, since his son Katriel was a member of the Jewish community of Dvinsk in 1870, according to an 1875 census, and because this is where his son Selik was born.

As we shall see later on, in many cases there are several different versions of the year of birth in various official records. This is a result of estimating age based on physical appearance, as well as attempts by Jews to avoid military service in the Russian army, by declaring an older age (due of course to the high risk of death or injury during the military service). According to one anecdote which Myra Miller (a relative living in

Canada) heard from her father, one of the family members cut his own finger in order to disqualify for shooting a rifle and avoid the draft.

During this time period, we know of another person with strong connections to our family, Leibe Chodak/Chodok. Leibe is mentioned in at least one document as Yehuda Chodak (the full name may be Arye Yehuda – the Hebrew form of Leib). We do not know Leibe's year of birth either, but since his son Meir Yitzchak Chodak was born in 1831-1833, we can assume he was born around the same time as Abraham Orlean. Much later, Leibe's granddaughter, Rivka Beile, will marry the father of grandfather Meir – Reuven Leib Orlean.

From where did the first members of the Orlean family arrive in the Latgale area in general, and to the remote town of Ribenishki in particular?

There is a family tradition, which was mentioned by both Meir Or as well as his brother Avram, that many generations ago the family came from France (the town of Orleans) or even Spain. We couldn't find any documented evidence to support this tradition.

According to research of Jewish surnames conducted by "Bet Hatefuzoth" (House of the Diaspora institute in Israel), the name Orlean (or Orleans) evolved from the name Orlov, which is based on the Slovenian "Oryol" or the Polish "Orzel" (meaning "Eagle"). The German equivalent of this name is Adler, which originated in Frankfurt in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The eagle represented the renewal of the Jewish people (the eagle was seen as similar to the mythological phoenix). In priest (Cohanim) families named Orlov or Orleans, the name was selected because of the similarity between the eagle's wings and the priest raising his hands in blessing.

Other families with similar surnames can be traced to the villages of Orlik (meaning "small eagle") in the Ukraine, Orlicz ("son of the eagle") and Orlinec in Poland, and others. Since Jewish immigration to the Latgale district of Latvia (where Ribenishki is located) started in the 17<sup>th</sup> century by Jewish refugees of pogroms in the Ukraine, Byelorussia and Poland and in order to improve their economic conditions, it seems possible that the family is somehow related to those villages.

We can therefore raise an hypothesis that members of the Orlean family immigrated or fled to Latvia during the 17<sup>th</sup> or 18<sup>th</sup> century. It should be noted that earlier generations of

the family are difficult or even impossible to trace before the 19<sup>th</sup> century, among other reasons because the Jews started adopting family names on around this time period (before that they went by their father's name, e.g "Katriel son of Abraham").

### **Jewish settlement in the Latgale district**

The first Jews arrived to the Latgale district in the early 17<sup>th</sup> century. As mentioned above, they were mainly refugees of pogroms, first from Poland and later on also from Byelorussia and the Ukraine. Other Jews immigrated because of economic considerations, to take advantage of employment opportunities that became available because of wars in the region. While the Jews in other regions of Latvia, such as the Kurzeme district (the German duchy of Kurland), came from Germany as merchants and settled in the region, and were considered better educated, and well established both economically and culturally, the Jews of Latgale were poor refugees, spoke Yiddish and lived in closed Orthodox communities. If we also consider that the Latgale district was the most economically backwards district in Latvia because of its distance from the ocean, it is clear why the Jewish community had to struggle with harsh economic conditions from its very first days.

Until 1772, the region was dominated by Poland, but following the division of Poland in that year control of the region was passed to the Russian empire, where it remained until the collapse of the empire in World War I. Until World War II Latvia was an independent state with Riga as its capital. During World War II Latvia was occupied first by the Soviets, and later by Nazi Germany, and in the aftermath of the war it became one of the Soviet Socialist Republics, until its declaration of independence in 1993.

According to a research by Leo Dribins sponsored by the Latvian government, in 1776 there were 3000 Jews in the entire Latgale district. Since they were forbidden by law from purchasing land, most of them worked as craftsmen or petty merchants – the “wandering Jew” selling his merchandise among the villages and farms became a popular figure in Latvian literature. A small minority of the Jews were business owners – especially inns, pubs and beer breweries. Generally the Jews lived separately from their Christian neighbors and ran their lives autonomously.

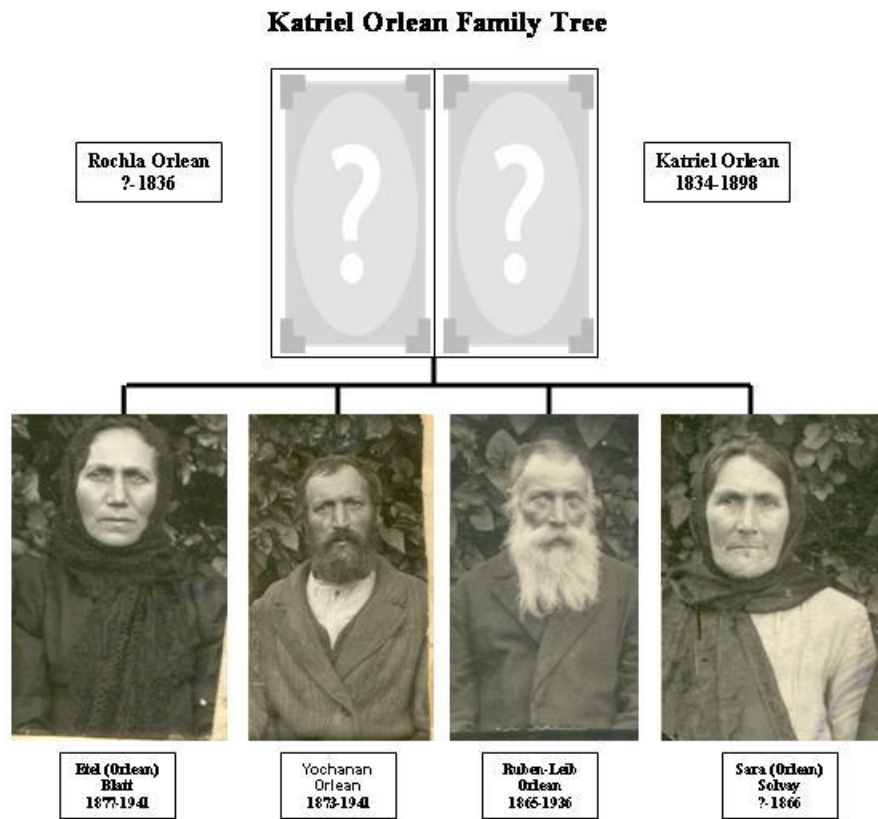


We have much evidence of anti-Semitism and severe limitations that were imposed on the Jewish community in the region. The Jews were objects of hatred, for both religious and economic reasons – some of the Jews made their living by leasing land from Polish noblemen in the area, and managed a workforce of serfs working the land, and were therefore perceived by the serfs as the ones responsible for their bad conditions. Additionally, as in other places, Jews were involved in making loans (which became a “Jewish” profession because Christians were forbidden to make loans in return for interest), and were traditionally seen as “greedy”. Several limitations and regulations were imposed on the Jews, including double taxation (as ransom to prevent their deportation by the authorities), even in cities that were mainly Jewish (such as Dvinsk that was 60% Jewish at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century). Violence towards Jews, including kidnapping for ransom, robbery and even murder, were relatively common. In some cases, members of the Jewish community were involved in acts of theft and kidnapping against other members of the community, as a result of the extreme poverty. To that we must add disputes between the Jewish community itself, especially between “Chassidim” and “Mitnagdim”. First hand memories and personal stories from the life of the Jewish community in Dvinsk during the 19<sup>th</sup> century can be found in the book “Childhood Memories” by Sarah Feiga Fonner from 1903.

### **The first days of the Ribenishki Jewish community**

The town of Riebini (Ribenishki) was established as a rural agricultural town at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Jewish life in this town began in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, with the settlement of several dozens of Jewish families. Most of the Jews resided on land that belonged to the local estate owner (for example, at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the estate belonged to a road engineer named Karbedzo). The Jews had to pay tenancy dues to the estate owner, and anyone who was unable to pay was forced to work on the estate as day laborers, in order to meet their obligations.

**The “second generation” – Katriel (1834-1898) Orlean and his wife Rochla (1836-?)**



Abraham had two sons. The first born was Katriel (pronounced Kasriel in Yiddish), born in 1834.

Katriel was married to Rochale (born 1836 – maiden name unknown). In 1870 Katriel and his family were registered as part of the Jewish community of Dvinsk, however in 1875 they are listed as living in Rezekne – it is possible the family moved between 1870 and 1875, or that the affiliation with Dvinsk was purely administrative. At some point in the 1890’s the family relocated to Ribenishki, where Katriel passed away in 1898 (we have a copy of his death certificate, which specifies the cause of death as “constipation”!) Katriel’s occupation according to official records was “petty bourgeois”.

Katriel’s descendants have spread across the globe – from North America to Israel. Those descendants who remained in Latvia, were all murdered during the Holocaust by the Germans and their Latvian assistants.

Abraham had another son named Selik Orlean, who was born in 1848-9. Selik was also registered in 1870 as a member of the Dvinsk Jewish community, but in 1875 lived in Rezekne. Selik married Chaya Doba (born 1856 in Ribenishki - maiden name unknown). Selik was a shoemaker, which as we shall see was the “family craft”.

The age difference between Katriel and Selik is unclear, and we have no information on additional siblings besides them.

During the same time period, the son of Leibe Chodak – Meir Yitzchak Chodak, resided in Preili. Meir Yitzchak was born in 1831-1833 (as mentioned above, the registered year of birth was often assumed based on external appearance during the census). Meir Yitzchak was born in Ribenishki (the record actually says “Gribenishki” but probably refers to the same town), and married Chana-Rocha daughter of Shlomo, also born in “Gribenishki” in 1836 (her maiden name is unknown). According to one record, it appears that Meir Yitzchak Chodak and his family moved at some point to a village named “Stikany” in the Preili district. Meir Yitzchak was a peddler, and the record mentioned he was literate as a result of home schooling, compared to his wife who was illiterate.

The history of the Chodak family was researched by Lavi Soloway. As we shall see, Lavi’s interest in this branch of the family is due to the fact that his great grand father, Solomon (Shlomo) Kodack (Chodak), was the son of Meir Yitzchak (and therefore also the brother of Beile Orlean). Solomon Kodack married Annie (Erleh?) Soloway, who was the daughter of Chaim-Zusmann Soloway and... Chaya-Sora Orlean, the daughter of Katriel Orlean mentioned above! Thus, Lavi’s family has a double connection to our family – through Katriel Orlean (the father of Lavi’s great grandmother and of our great grandfather), and through Meir Yitzchak Chodak (the father of our great grandmother, and of Lavi’s great grandfather...) The family tree of the Soloway and Chodak families as prepared by Lavi, is provided in the appendix.

As we shall see, marriages within the same families was common, essentially since the towns were small and the “selection” of Jewish men and women within the proper age was limited.

## The Ribenishki Jewish community in the Mid-19<sup>th</sup> century

During the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and at least until the 1920's Ribenishki was considered a remote town that was rarely visited by guests from the outside. Each family had a cabin made of wood, next to a plot of land, on which the family grew vegetables and crops (we have a drawing made by Meir Or showing the plot of land that belonged to his father, Reuven Leib, which includes several areas divided into a vegetable garden, flower garden, field of grain and "meadow").

As discussed above, most of the Jews made their living as petty merchants (selling the crops they grew or trading in other goods), and each Sunday they would travel to the surrounding villages by horse and cart, and return to Ribenishki on Friday at noon.

Ribenishki was mostly Jewish (91% in 1897, even though this number decreased at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century due to immigration of young Jews), and out of 17 shops in town, 16 were owned by Jews. Nevertheless, Christian Latvians owned the local flour mill and a wool processing factory. Additionally, the town had churches which served Christians from neighboring villages (the Catholic church was the only stone building in town). The Latgale district as a whole had a strong Jewish presence, and in 1847 the community in the district expanded to 11,000 Jews. The Jewish population in the big cities of the district such as Dvinsk and Rezekne, was over 50% for many years.

Religious life in town was developed. There were 2 synagogues (the "old" synagogue and the "new synagogue" – the gabai of the "new" synagogue was Abraham Muin), a communal bath, a kosher slaughter house (the shochet was I. Weissman, who served also as a teacher) and a rabbi – the community's first rabbi was Wolf Zioni, appointed in 1843. There was a "cheder" in the town (one of the melameds was called "mot'el der shamash").

1898 г. ЧАСТЬ IV. О УМЕРШИХЪ. 1898 г.							1898 г. ЧАСТЬ IV. О УМЕРШИХЪ. 1898 г.								
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**Kasriel Orlian death record 1898**

**“The Third Generation” – Reuven Leib (1865-1936) and Rivka-Beile Chodak (1877-1941)**



Katriel and Rochale had 5 children: Rivka, Sarah, Reuven Leib, Yochanan and Etel.

Selik and Chaya Doba had one son which we are aware of: Aysik Mordoch.

Generally speaking, it seems that most of the members of the Orlean family married other residents of Ribenishki, and by cross checking between several sources (the list of families in the village as of 1941, and the report of the “special committee for investigation of Nazi crimes on Soviet territories), we can identify a large portion of the extended family.

Besides Rivka Orlean, of whom we know very little, we generally have a good picture regarding the other family members and their descendants, who are living to this very day in Israel, Canada and the U.S.

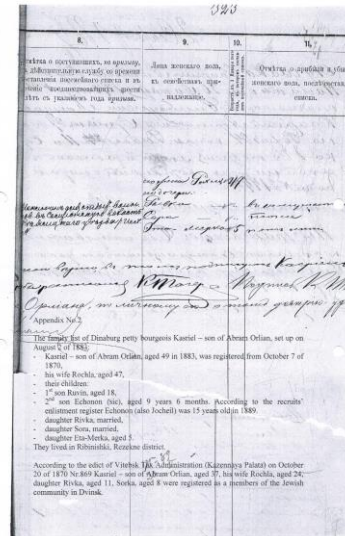
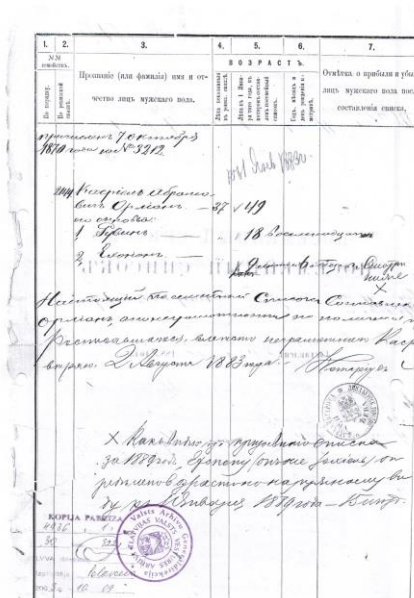
**Ribenishki in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century**

As discussed previously, until the 1920s Ribenishki was still a remote town, which rarely saw visitors from the outside.

Life was extremely poor, which caused many young people to leave town and seek their fortune in the larger cities (especially in Riga). There was a strong tradition of charity in Ribenishki, with funds collected every Thursday to buy food for the needy, and the traders would also contribute 10% of their proceeds to help the poor.

The village did not have a doctor, and had poor sanitary conditions. It didn't have even one paved road. The nearest railway station was in Krace, 22km away. In a photo of Reuven Leib and his family (including grandfather Meir) near their house (“The Orlean house”), dated around the end of the 1920s, we can see the wooden house with straw roof which was used by the family until their final moments in Latvia.

Due to the harsh economic condition, and as soon as the Jews received full citizenship in the independent Republic of Latvia, family members of the “third generation” started issuing passports and immigrating, especially to Israel, Britan and North America (Canada and the U.S).



**Family list Kasriel Orlian from 1883, residing in Ribenishki**

The family of Rivka Orlean

At this stage we have no further details regarding Rivka’s family. We know she was the oldest daughter (born 1859) and that she was married.

The family of Chaya-Sora (Orlean) Soloway

Most of the details provided below are the result of a research conducted by Lavi Soloway, a Canadian lawyer working in New York City, who is the son of Abraham Soloway (the grandson of Sarah Orlean Soloway), and is thus the great grandson of Sora (Sarah) Orlean and my third cousin... Lavi devoted considerable time to research the history of his family, collecting material from his family as well as from archival sources in Latvia.

Nevertheless, the fact that Sarah Soloway was born as Sarah Orlean, and therefore her connection to our family, was discovered only during an interview with Nechama

Kimmeldorf in the summer of 2003, who even remembered Sarah from her childhood (by then Sarah was an elderly widow). Since that discovery, this connection has been proven by additional documents and photos.

Sarah (Chaya-Sora) was Katriel Orlean's second daughter, and was born in 1866. Sarah married Chaim-Zussman (Zussie) Soloway, the son of Baruch-Tewel Soloway born in 1823 in Rezekne to Simon Soloway (unknown year of birth), and Sheine (probably Gutkin), born in 1830-1831 to Nissan Gutkin (unknown year of birth). Baruch-Tewel and Sheine Soloway had four other daughters besides Zussman, and we have some additional details about them.

Zussman and Sarah seem to have had 13 children, of which we are aware of 8:

- Anne (Eerleh) – Born circa 1880. Married Solomon Chodak/Kodack (born 1881 in Ribenishki, died 1947) and moved with him first to London, then to Toronto where they had 5 children, including the daughter Lili (Lea) who married her uncle – Benjamin (Baruch – see below). As mentioned above, the Chodaks had other ties to the Orlean family: we know that Beile Orlean, wife of Reuven Leib, was the daughter of Meir Yitzchak Chodak, and sister of Solomon Chodak.
- Ester (Soloway) Shogilev – Born in 1/6/1887 in Ribenishki. Married Yakov Shogilev and had 6 children.
- Hinda (?) – Born in 4/8/1890 in Ribenishki.
- Abraham – born in 23/4/1892 in the village of Varaklany. Worked as a shoemaker. married Blume nee Moger – and had 2 twin daughters in March 1933 (their names – Noima and Zelda).
- Bessie (Soloway) Zelkin – born in 1894. Married Wolf Zelkin, had 3 children. Died in Toronto in 1933. An interesting family anecdote – Bessie and her husband Wolf, who immigrated to Canada and had to work hard to make their living, managed to send a little money they saved to Bessie's parents (Sarah and Zussman), so they can send Abraham and his family to Canada. For an unknown reason, Zussman decided to send his youngest son, Benjamin (Baruch – Lavi Soloway's grandfather) instead, causing a big dispute for many years between Bessie and her children and Benjamin and his children...

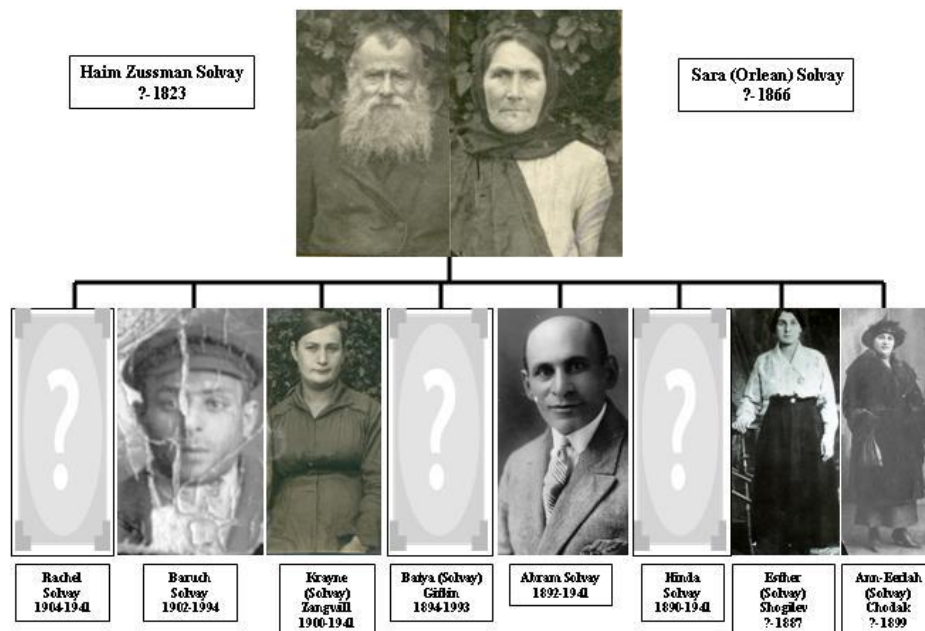
- Krayne (Soloway) Zangwill – born in 1900. Married Yechezkel Zangwill (born in 25/1/1900 in Ribenishki), had 3 children (Tuvia – 24/1/1927, Ester – 30/8/1930, Zussie – 26/2/1932, and Wolf – 24/8/1934). Comment: the Zangwill family was a big family in Ribenishki counting 41 members in 1941, and had several marriage ties with the Orlean family, as we shall see later.
- Benjamin (Baruch) – Born in 1902. In 1925 Benjamin married Lilly Kodack, daughter of – Solomon Kodack and Anne Soloway, which means he married his niece! They had one son – Abraham/Irving (born 1925 in Toronto), who was Lavi Soloway’s father. Benjamin died in 1994.
- Rachel – Born 1/4/1904 in Ribenishki.

Sarah and Zussman lived in Ribenishki. In a census from 1935 Sarah was already listed as a widow who lived at the house of her son Abraham (the house was apparently owned by the borther of Abraham’s wife – Leib David Moger, a hairdresser from Varaklany.

This was perhaps the reason for Zussman’s, or perhaps by then Sarah’s decision to send Benjamin to Canada in place of Abraham...) We do not know the exact year when Zussman died. It appears that by 1941, the year in which the Jewish community of Ribenishki was destroyed, Sarah had already passed away as well.

We know that Abraham and Krayne, with their families, perished in the Holocaust. Their siblings Benjamin, Ester, Anne and Bessie, had grandchildren and great grandchildren, who live mostly in Canada and the U.S.

### Sara (Orlean) Solvay Family Tree





### The family of Reuven Leib Orlean

Reuven Leib (according to his son Abraham, his full name was “Reuven Arie Leib”), who was the father of my grandfather Meir Or, was born in 1865. He married Rivka-Beile (Bilha), daughter of Meir Yitzchak Chodak (born in Preili in 1877). They had 7 children:

- Etel (Orlean) Zlatokrilov – Born in 10/3/1898. Married Eliezer Zlatokrilov. They did not have any children.
- Katriel – Born in 24/8/1899 (according to a passport he issued the date was 15/5/1892 – the date might have been modified to avoid the draft). Katriel was a shoemaker. On 20/10/1923 Katriel immigrated to the U.S and settled in Chicago, changing his name to “Karl”. Married Sarah, had two children – Ron and Linda. An interesting point – according to the Ellis Island immigration database, Katriel declared upon entry to the U.S that he will be supported financially by a man named Sam Saberman. It turns out that the name Saberman was previously Chodak, and was in fact the brother of Beile Orlean and Solomon Kodack mentioned above, who has arrived in Chicago earlier... The son of Sam Saberman, Meir, was Ron and Linda’s pediatrician... This story demonstrates the type of connections which persisted among the Jews of Ribenishki and the surroundings. Karl Orlean passed away on 10.6.1983.
- Nachum Peretz – Born in 1/12/1903. Worked as a shoemaker. Married Mera Zangwill (born 1905 to Menachem-Mena Zangwill and his wife Fride Lashe), and had 3 children – Fride Lashe (31/3/1927), Menachem-Mena (17/2/1930) and Israel Josef (15/2/1933).
- Abraham – Born in 1905. Made aliya to Eretz Israel in 1925, where he gave up his Latvian citizenship. Married Chava, had 2 daughters – Meira and Atara. It is interesting to note that Atara’s husband, Amos Samuel, has a family relationship to us through my mother’s father, grandfather Martin Wechsler (Eitan). Abraham passed away on 13.12.1986.
- Chaya (Orlean) Shklar – Born in 1904. Married Yehuda Shklar, also from Ribenishki, had 3 children: Mendel (circa 1931), Chaya Fride or Frinde (could also be Sora Fride, born circa 1934) and Reuven Leib (born circa 1938).

- Elchanan (Chone) – Born in 20/12/1909. Did not marry. We know that in 1941, the eve of Nazi occupation, he lived together with his mother. Elchanan was apparently also a shoemaker. In a page of testimony filled by his brother Meir he is listed as a “worker”.
- Meir Yitzchak – Born in 5/11/1911. In 1932 left Latvia and made aliya to Eretz Israel, after receiving an immigration certificate through a fictitious marriage in 9/9/1932 to Sara-Ginda Rubin, also from Ribenishki. Married Chana Zopovitch, had 5 children.

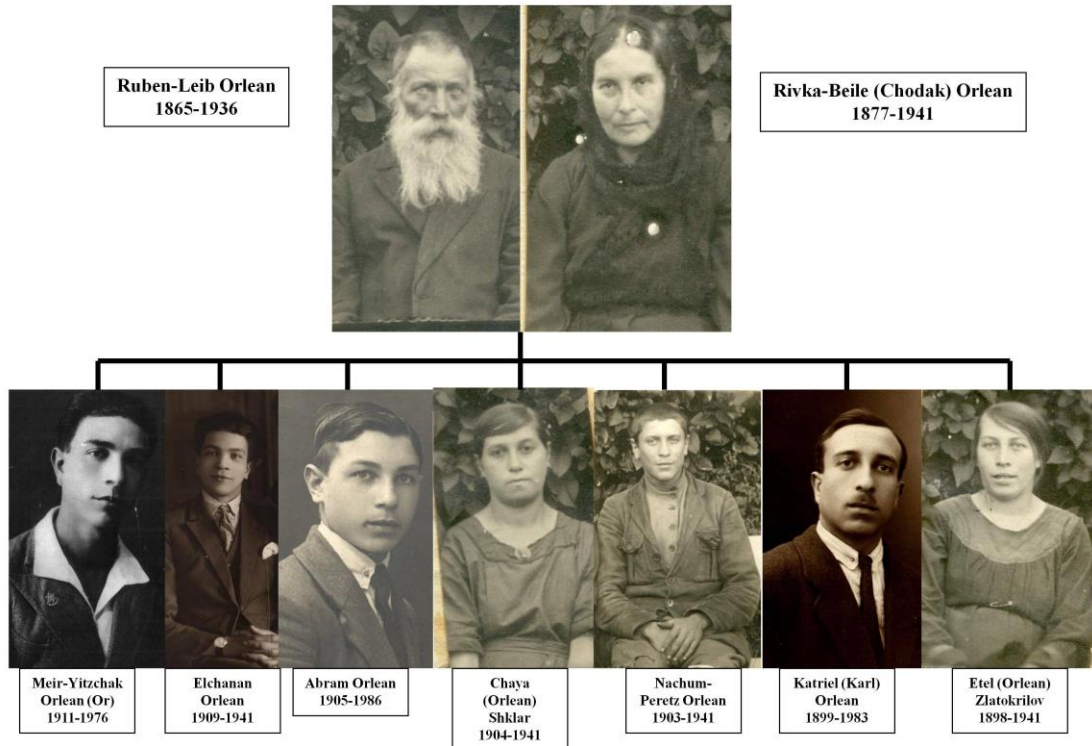
Reuven Leib, who is described by Nechama Kimmeldorf as a person radiating wisdom and dignity, passed away of old age on 9/3/1936 at 08:00. In a postcard written in Yiddish by Mera Orlean (the wife of Nachum-Peretz) to the three sons living overseas (Karl in Chicago, and Abraham and Meir in Israel), she updates them that Reuven Leib lay in one place for 3 weeks, and that “we didn’t save any funds or physicians, it is only that G-d didn’t want our father to live anymore”. She adds that “in practice he died from not having any lungs or kidneys left”. Because of the distance, the three sons did not learn about their father’s death in real time, and could not sit Shiva on time. As previously mentioned, three of the sons left Latvia during the 1920’s and 1930’s: Abraham Orlean immigrated to Eretz Israel in the 1920’s, built his home in Jerusalem where he married his wife Chava. Meir Yitzchak Orlean also immigrated to Eretz Israel, was one of the founders of Kibbutz Tirat Zvi, and married Chana Zopovitch. Meir later changed his name to “Or” (“Light” in Hebrew). Katriel Orlean immigrated to Chicago (where he used the name “Karl”), and married Sarah. All three had grandchildren and great grandchildren.

Beile Orlean, together with her four remaining children and their entire families, remained in Latvia and perished in the Holocaust.

A bit of information on the extended family: the Shklar family was from Ribenishki (we are aware of 20 members of that family who lived in Ribenishki in 1941, including the brother of Yehuda Shklar, Reuven, and his cousins David Leib and Chayim). The Zlatokrilov family was also from Ribenishki (34 family members in 1941). Nachum

Peretz's wife, Mera, was from the Zangwill family (see below for more information on the Zangwills).

### Ruben-Leib Orlean Family Tree



### The family of Yochanan Orlean

Some of the details mentioned below come from Myra Miller, a family member (my father's second cousin) who was first contacted as part of this research. Myra is an administrative worker in a Jewish hospital in Toronto, and in 2003 had 3 children and 9 grandchildren.

The rest of the material comes from archival material from Latvia (censuses and records), combined with the list of families in Ribenishki in 1941.

Yochanan was born in 1873, and married Miryam, daughter of Zalman Soloway (seems like she came from the same family as Zussman Soloway, although we are not aware of the exact connection). They had 4 sons:

- Katriel Zalman (after immigrating to Canada he changed his name to Sam Berlin) – Born in 11/6/1899. Married Golda Zangwill (died 1983), had 2 children. Katriel died in 1997.
- Rachmiel – Born in 1904. Married Dora Zangwill, had 3 children.
- Abraham – Born in 14/6/1910. Married a woman named Devorah (maiden name unknown) and had one son.
- Menachem Mendel – Born in 3/5/1922. Was not married, and in 1941 lived with his father Yochanan.

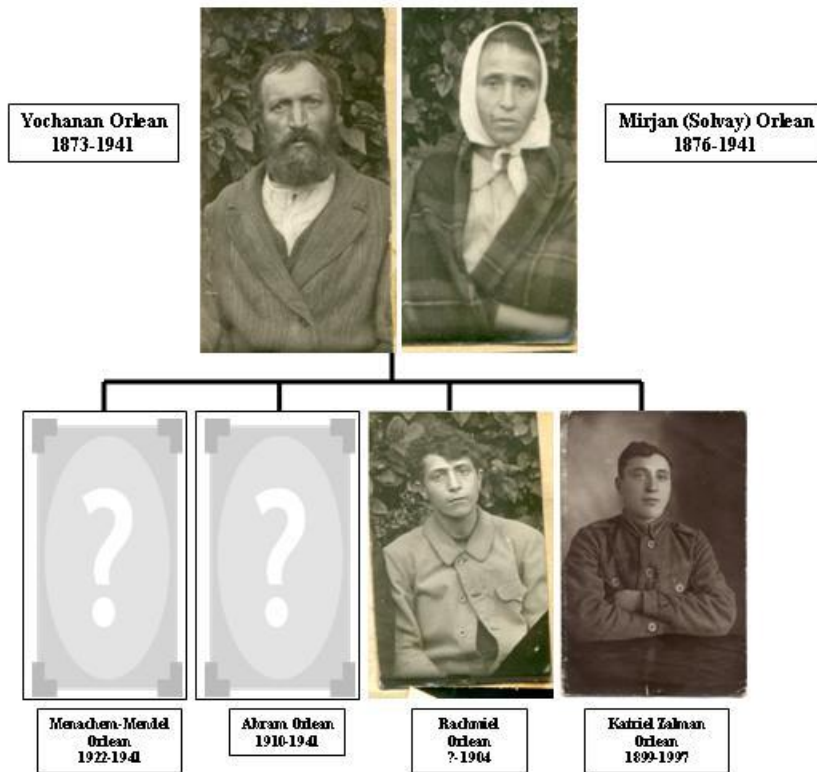
Katriel and Rachmiel immigrated to Montreal, Canada in the 1920's. They married two women from Ribenishki, who were also cousins: Golda and Dora (Doba) Zangwill. Dora Zangwill's mother was the sister of Shalom Blatt (see below).

Another interesting point is that Golda Zangwill visited Ribenishki in 1937 (2 years before the outbreak of World War II!). Myra has provided us with pictures from this visit. Katriel and Golda had 2 children: a son named Yossel (Joe) Orlean (Berlin) born 1924, and a daughter named Myra (Miller) born 1942. Rachmiel (also called "Ralph") and Dora had 3 children: Lilly (Avramson), Hyman (Chay) Orlean, and Meir (Marwin) Orlean. They are all living in Montreal and have grandchildren.

Yochanan and his two remaining sons, as well as his son's (Abraham's) family, remained in Ribenishki and perished during the Holocaust. Miryam, Yochanan's wife, is not mentioned in the list from 1941, which probably means she passed away earlier.

Myra Miller provided us an interesting photo which shows a family meeting between Katriel and Rachmiel Orlean and their wives, together with Karl (Katriel) Orlean, the son of Reuven Leib Orlean, who lived in Chicago. The photo shows the connections between the branches of the family in Canada and the U.S.

### Yochanan Orlean Family Tree



### The family of Etel Orlean (Blatt)

Most of the information below was received in 2 interviews with Nechama Kimmeldorf and her sister Chaya Barzilay, conducted in Nechama's apartment in Hadera in summer 2003. Lavi Soloway also participated in the second interview.

Etel Orlean was born in 1877. In 1898 she married Shalom Blatt (born 5/11/1874, the son of Berka Blatt), who was the uncle of Dora Zangwill (see above). Shalom Blatt was a merchant who traded farm produce with neighboring villages. Shalom died of Asthma in 1936. Shalom and Etel had 7 children:

- Katriel – born in 1901. Married Beile (maiden name Kodesh, the daughter of Chaya Kodesh. Was probably the sister of Ida Kodesh, the wife of Berl Blatt mentioned below). Had 4 children (Arie – 1927, Shabtai – 1929, Shulamit – 1935, Zvi – 1937). Lived in Livani. Katriel worked in the train company.

- Chaim – Born 1904. Married Chava (maiden name Lifschitz), had 4 children (Rachel – 1927, Mendel – 1930, David – 1932, Zlata – 1935). Lived in Preili. Chaim owned a grocery.
- Yitzchak – born in 1907. Married Sarah Bonye of the Zlatokrilov family (daughter of Yehuda Zlatokrilov and Rivka Shklar), had 1 daughter (Sheine Golda - 1938). Lived in Ribenishki. Yizchak worked as a farmer/merchant, and Sarah worked in a household goods store.
- Chasya (Blatt) Goldsmidt – Born circa 1910 in Ribenishki. Married Boris Goldschmidt. Had 2 children. Died in 1999 from a heart attack. An interesting anecdote: Chasya was the girlfriend of Rachmiel Orlean, and as he was supposed to take her to Canada with him, until he... fell in love with Dora Zangwill (Chasya's cousin) and took her to Canada instead... Chasya made aliya to Israel in the 1960's following a visit to Latvia by Nechama.
- Berl (Dov) – Born in 1915. Married Ida (maiden name – Kodesh). Had no children. Lived in Livani and owned a textile store.
- Chaya Rochale (Blatt) Barzilay – Born in 12/8/1919. Was married to Shmuel, had 3 children from previous marriages. Chasya made aliya to Israel in the 1960's following a visit to Latvia by Nechama.
- Nechama (Blatt) Kimmeldorf – Born in 28/7/1921, died 2007. During the war Nechama escaped to the Ural Mountains region, where she did temporary work, and married her husband to be - Yakov, with whom she made aliya in the 1950's. Nechama and Yakov had 2 children – Shalom and Tzipi, and had grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

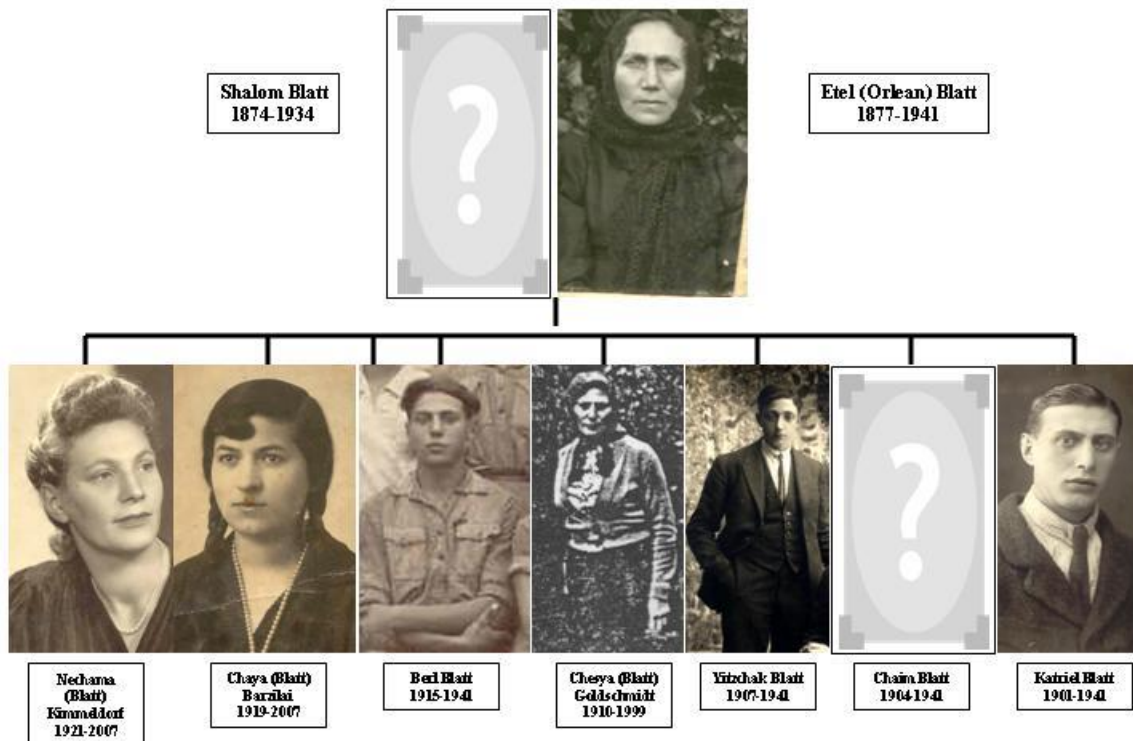
Etel Blatt and the four sons remained in Latvia during the Nazi occupation and perished together with their families:

- Yitzchak Blatt and his family, who lived in Ribenishki, were murdered during the events of 23-25 August, 1941, described below.
- Chaim Blatt and his family, who lived in Preili, were murdered together with the rest of the town's Jews, in two "Aktions" – the first in the Jewish cemetery on 28/6/1941, and the second about 500m from the cemetery in 8/8/1941.

- According to “Yad Vashem” pages of testimony filled by Nechama Kimmeldorf, Dov and Katriel Blatt who lived in Livani with their families, were sent to camps before being murdered. In the article about Livani in “Pinkas Hakehilot – Latvia”, the fate of the Jews of Livani is described in detail – they were murdered systematically by local Latvian forces starting from June 1941, in 3 separate sites – besides a few Jews who were sent to the Dvinsk ghetto and the Riga ghetto and murdered there later.

The three daughters lived in Riga during the Soviet occupation (1939-1941), and managed to escape to the Soviet Union, where they survived the war. After the war, Nechama immigrated to Eretz Israel, while her two sisters returned to Riga, and followed their sister to Israel in the 1960’s. All three sisters had grandchildren.

### Etel (Orlean) Blatt Family Tree



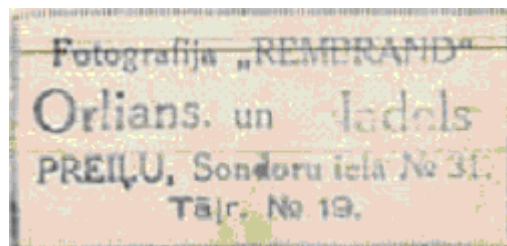
### The family of Aysik Mordoch Orlean

Aysik Mordoch was the son of Selik Orlean (brother of Katriel, son of Abraham). Aysik was born in 1875 in Ribenishki. He was married to Rocha Levin (born in 1877 at Ostrov, Russia). They had 5 children:

- Chana Eide – Born in 1900 in Ostrov, Russia. Worked as a seamstress, as of 1925 she was single and living in Riga in Lacplesa St. 114, apartment 7.
- Abraham – Born in 9.5.1902 (probably also in Ostrov), lived in Preili on Rezeknes St. 6, apartment 1, where he worked as a photographer. He was married to a woman name Masha (born 15.8.1909 in Neigauzen, her mother's name was Zvia-Rocha). Many of the family photos were taken or developed at Avram's photo studio in Preili (his partner in the studio was a man named Yankel Nadel, born 1870, married to a woman name Sarah, born 1872, the two had a daughter named Sheine-Sonia, born 1903) – see below a sample of the studio's stamp.
- Elka – Born 1912 in Rezekne.
- Chazkel (Yechezkel) – Born in 1914 in Ostrov. Chazkel was a soldier in the Red Army during World War II, and served as a sergeant in Battalion 32, Brigade 201. Chazkel was declared “missing in action” after the “Bestra Russia” battle in 1942.
- Selik – Born in 27.9.1919 (his name signifies that his grandfather Selik had already passed away by this time). Selik was also a soldier in the Red Army (sergeant in the Latvia brigade), and was killed in battle in the village of Tognovo (he was also buried there).

In 1897 the family lived in Rezekne, in Bulshaya Ludzas St. 34.

We know the family lived for some time in Ostrov, Russia (probably fled to Russia and lived with Rocha's parents during World War I), before returning to Rezekne (first to M. Ludzas St. 7, later moved to Kuldigas St. 70).





### Additional information

Many of the family members worked as shoemakers: Reuven Leib and his sons Katriel (who kept his profession in Chicago), Nachum Peretz and Elchanan, Yochanan and his sons Katriel, Rachmiel and Abraham (Katriel maintained his profession in Canada), and Selik. Shoemaking was the family craft, which was passed from father to son. Linda, the daughter of Karl Orlean from Chicago, tells us that until his last day, her father wore the same pair of shoes with which he came to the U.S, occasionally mending it and replacing the soles...

We know a little bit about the occupation of the other family members. Some were merchants who traded agricultural produce from their own or their neighbors' farms. Others were craftsmen (Abraham the grandson of Selik was a photographer, Leib David – the brother in law of Abraham, son of Sarah - was a barber, Merah Orlean - wife of Nachum Peretz - and Chana Eide - daughter of Aysik Mordoch - were seamstresses). The marriage ties between all of the families should be noted: since Ribenishki was a small village, there was a high probability of having families with several marriage ties among them.

Another phenomenon which should be noted is naming children after their late grandparents. This is the reason the names Katriel, Abraham, Reuven, etc. repeat so much, even among family members in Israel or North America.



**The Orlian family near their home in Ribenishki**

**The fourth generation – Meir Yitzchak (1911-1976) and Chanka Zupovich/Zupavicius (1914-1991)**



My grandfather, Meir Or, was one of Reuven Leib Orlean's 7 children, but only one out of 3 children who left Latvia before World War II and the Nazi occupation. His story reflects to a great extent the sharp transition between life in the "diaspora" and settlement in Eretz Israel.

Meir Or's life was researched thoroughly by my cousin – Meir Or of Tirat Zvi (Meir Or's grandson), as part of a "roots" project he carried out in school. We also have a letter written by Abraham Orlean, Meir's brother, which was written after Meir's death and marks the main milestones in Meir's life.

**Ribenishki between the World Wars**

Meir was born a few years before World War I. During the war, as the Russian Czarist army was defeated by German forces, a wave of anti-Semitism swept Russia, in which the Jews were blamed for assisting the German army, and 40,000 Latvian Jews were deported to internal regions in Russia, in trains marked by big signs: "SPIES". The Jews of the Latgale region were not deported, but the economic situation, which was quite bad already until that point, turned for the worse. During the years 1920-1922 the town received aid from the Jewish Joint Distribution Committee in the U.S – we have the final report written by the "Joint", which demonstrates clearly the terrible condition of the town. Despite the tough economic conditions, members of the community would host students from the region who studied in the local Yeshiva.

Until World War II, Latvia became an independent state with Riga as capital. As part of the cultural autonomy granted to Jews in the independent republic after World War I,

an elementary school was established in the village in 1921 which taught in Yiddish, and where Hebrew was also taught. It had 5 classes (Nechama Kimmeldorf remembered the name of one of the teachers – Tzila Feinstein), and for the 6<sup>th</sup> grade the Jews had to send their children to the neighboring town of Preili. Ribenishki also had a Yeshiva that attracted students from the village, as well as neighboring, smaller villages. The town rabbi from 1903-1922 was rabbi Yakov Shapira (son of the Rav Gaon Refael Shapira of Volozhin), from 1922-1925 rabbi Abraham Benjamin Tiz, and from 1925 rabbi Eliezer Ze'ev Schitz who was rabbi of the community until its destruction in 1941. Interestingly, there was no Mohel in the town: my cousin Meir from Tirat Zvi, describes in his “roots” project report that when Meir Yitzchak was born, the family had to invite a mohel from Dvinsk. Since the day of the Brit happened to be on Yom Kippur, and the Mohel wanted to avoid staying in Ribenishki on this day, he questioned Beile where she was before her labor started. When she replied she was picking potatoes in the field, he asked was she sure the sun had already set? When she replied there were clouds, the mohel decided that “Yom Kippur is not deferred by a doubt”, and scheduled the Brit for the next day...

According to a census which was conducted in independent Latvia, in 1935 there were 464 inhabitants in the town, out of which 317 (68%) were Jewish. Out of 88 households, only 11 belonged to Latvians (the rest of the houses were owned by Russians and Jews). The census even mentions that all houses use petrol lamps for lighting. There were 13 grocery stores listed in the town, as well as 2 butcher shops, a wine shop, a water mill with wool manufacturing facility, and a pharmacy.

Until his Bar Mitzva (1924), Meir lived with his family in Ribenishki, where he studied in the Yiddish speaking school. When he became 13, Meir went to study in the Yeshiva of rabbi Menachem Mendel Zak in Riga, following his brother Abraham who studied there before him (after being “scouted” in Ribenishki by another rabbi named Loft). Abraham became an enthusiastic follower of Zionism, and made aliya in 1925. A nice example of this enthusiasm can be seen in a postcard which Abraham sent his brother Karl in Chicago on 3/10/1929, about 40 days after the horrible 1929 “events” (murderous riots). At the end of the postcard Abraham writes: “No special news from Eretz Israel. Things are not completely quiet yet but are not difficult”. Abraham’s daughter, Atara, comments on this choice of words: “That was my father’s way to accept things as they

are, not to “cause panic” as he used to say. Especially, not to slander Eretz Israel to his brother in America.”

Abraham’s brother, Meir Yitzchak, followed his brother’s steps and in 1928 was one of the founders of the “Hamizrachi” youth movement in Riga. When it became known to the heads of the yeshiva, Meir was expelled. In order to survive, he offered to serve as a shepherd to a rich man, in return for bread, water and a place to sleep.

Atara Samuel, the daughter of Abraham Orlean, kept an original letter which Abraham planned to send Meir, in response to a previous letter sent to him by Meir. The letter is written as a mixture between Hebrew and Yiddish, and is a unique reflection to the mental and physical state in which Meir was at the time, and of course to the relationship between the two brothers. Abraham mentions in his letter that Meir had to walk for 25km by foot because he didn’t have money for “expenses”. Abraham is also enclosing (or planning to enclose) a small sum of money in the letter, and asks Meir “by any means” not to mention this at home, in order “not to add sorrow to their sorrows”. Abraham ends his letter with a personal issue, which he raises in Yiddish: “You’re a bit too much of an idealist, a bit too imaginative. Don’t be preoccupied, and don’t take anything to heart. And here you are talking like some Jewess, with all due respect... And what words are those: “if only I hadn’t been born... I would have no needs then...” How do you come about such silliness? I do not consider you a fool. Anyway you don’t be so gullible, and don’t be too concerned with your ideal...”

During one of his visits to Ribenishki, Meir was offered to marry one of the town girls, Sarah Rubin (later to become the aunt of general Yeshayahu Gavish), in return for funding his fare to Israel. At the time this was a common method to save immigration certificates. Meir arrived in Israel in 1933, after a long journey by train to Trieste, and from there by boat to Haifa.

Meir, Abraham, and their brother Karl in Chicago, are the only ones of their family to have survived World War II.

### **The Nazi occupation and the destruction of the community**

Following the Ribentrop-Molotov treaty of 1939, Latvia was handed over to the Soviets.

At this stage, 36 of the Jews of Ribenishki escaped to the U.S.S.R, of which 21 were

drafted to the Red Army and later fought in World War II (2 of them were killed in action, and the other 19 were badly wounded, including 4 members of the Zlatokrilov family and 2 members of the Shklar family).

The Nazi assault on the U.S.S.R began in 1941. Shortly afterwards the Nazis entered Latvia. In July 1941 they started to organize local Latvian groups as police or semi-police forces, which helped the Nazis in the extermination of “unwanted elements” including the Jews. In many cases, these forces initiated and lead such actions themselves.

One of the main players in this activity was an organization named “Aiszarghi”, a civilian rural guard that was converted to a regional security force after the Nazi occupation. This force controlled the regional police force, the “external” police (a rural police force), the jail facilities in the region, and “extermination squads” that were drafted as needed from among the Latvian population. These forces were divided to force “A” which included the “official” police, force “B” which was some sort of rural guard that was used to secure the train infrastructure in the region, and force “C” that was based on volunteers (unlike forces A and B that received regular salaries), and was drafted as needed to execute extermination operations.

The head of the “Aiszarghi” of the Rezekne region was Albert Eichelis (born 1912), who commanded directly and indirectly all of the murder operations that were carried out in the region. One of his subordinates was a man called Harald Puntulis (born 1909), a forest ranger who under the Nazi occupation became the head of Latvian police in district 4 of the Rezekne region, that included the village of Ribenishki, among others. Puntulis’s deputy was a Latvian named Drozdovskis. According to many testimonies, including some by Latvians who participated in the massacre, Puntulis commanded as well as participated in the extermination of the Jews of Ribenishki (it seems that Puntulis received a medal of honor from the S.S for his activities during this time period).

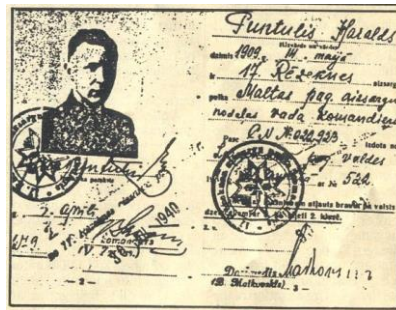
Immediately following the Nazi occupation, local Latvians engaged in sporadic acts of murder against the Jewish community in the region. These acts were accompanied by robbery and cruel cases of torture, as some of the Jews were killed after being badly tortured in the Preili jail.

On August 23-25, 1941, Puntulis gathered dozens of Latvian policemen, including about 30 policemen from the village of Malta who arrived on the scene on their bicycle, and

concentrated them about one kilometer outside of Ribenishki. There he briefed them about the operation which he defined as “the extermination of Ribenishki’s Jews”. Some of the policemen were ordered to surround the town in case the Jews try to escape. Others entered the homes of Jews, and at gun point lead them to a concentration point in one of the synagogues. From what we know about similar “acts of extermination” that were carried out in other places, the Latvians would act politely towards the Jews at this stage, so as not to arouse their suspicion.

The Jews were taken by trucks to the nearby Aizupe forest, which is located about 4 kilometers northwest of Ribenishki. There, about 100-150 meters from a wooden cabin, they had dug in advance a deep trench. The Jews were lead to the trench in groups of 10-15, and were shot dead from a range of 7-8 meters. Jews who remained alive after the first round of fire, were shot again. According to the testimonies, the evening after the massacre, the murderers held a feast in Ribenishki, inside the home of one of the murdered Jews (it is known that the local forces would receive shipments of vodka from Riga in large glass tanks, as a “bonus” for their part in the exterminations).

According to testimonies of local Latvians, when the Nazis retreated in 1944, the mass graves were opened and the bodies were burnt to eliminate the evidence.



**Puntulis' certificate from his service in the Aizsarghi**

According to the testimonies of Lemeshonok Frantz Dominicovitch, who participated in the massacre himself (see appendix C), and Vasankovitch Jazep Antonpovitch who claimed to have participated only in securing the perimeter, other participants in the massacre (besides Puntulis and his deputy Drozdovschis) were Ludwig Lischovschis and Ignas and Tarvids Shangles (brothers?)

We know of other participants in the murder, from Ribenishki and neighboring villages: Victor Tarvid (from Skutalsk), Vladimir Shpel (from Ribenishki), Stanislav Shpel (from Ribenishki), Anton and Boleslav Layzan (from Leykshiki), Ivan Meliushkan (from Reyniki), Donat Stabulink (from Randarchiki), Alexander and Anton Ungar (from Randarchiki), Anton Sander, and Pavel Saveliev.

All of the persons listed above escaped from Latvia at the time of the German defeat, besides maybe Pavel Saveliev.

In 1964 the Soviet authorities conducted a trial in Riga for Latvian war criminals who were active in the Rezekne region, including Ribenishki. Among the defendants were Albert Eichelis and Haraldis Puntulis. Puntulis was convicted of murdering 713 Jews, 28 gypsies and 9 communists. Both Puntulis and Eichelis were sentenced in their absence to execution by gun shot.

It turns out that Puntulis escaped to Canada in 1948, and following the trial in 1964, the Soviets demanded his extradition from Canadian authorities. The Canadians did not extradite him and did not even agree to investigate the accusations. He lived till the end of his days in Canada, making a living as a construction contractor. On July 4 1982 he died of old age, without having been punished for his crimes. Albert Eichelis lived in West Germany at the time of the trial, and I know that he stood trial there (I don't know if he was convicted). Puntulis even gave testimony in this trial (the testimony was taken in Canada), but making sure not to incriminate himself.

The archive of the Latvian Jewish Community holds a list of 274 Jews, residents of Ribenishki and neighboring villages (including a few who tried to take shelter at homes of Latvian families), who were murdered by the Nazis and their Latvian collaborators. According to the "Soviet commission for the investigation of fascist war crimes", the full number is 381. As we can see in appendix B, a large portion of those who were murdered were members of the Orlean family or "the extended family" (in-laws).

At the site of the slaughter in the forest, the survivors placed a memorial stone (shown in the picture below – the people shown in the picture are Chasya Blatt and her husband Boris Goldschmidt), with an inscription in Russian: "in eternal memory of the Jews of the village of Riebeni, who died tragically at the hands of the fascist German occupiers, August 23 1941. The relatives". We know of similar memorial stones that were erected to

individual Jews who were murdered. Once a year, the remaining Jews of Ribenishki used to conduct a memorial service at the site of the slaughter.

The relatives who resided in Preili (Chaim Blatt and his family, Abraham son of Selik Orlean and his family), were murdered together with the rest of the town's Jews, in two "Aktions" – the first in the Jewish cemetery on 28/6/1941, and the second about 500m from the cemetery in 8/8/1941.

The fate of those family members who resided in Livani is not entirely clear. According to "Yad Vashem" pages of testimony filled by Nechama Kimmeldorf in 1999, Dov and Katriel Blatt who lived in Livani with their families, were sent to camps before being murdered. In the article about Livani in "Pinkas Hakehilot – Latvia", the fate of the Jews of Livani is described in detail – they were murdered systematically by local Latvian forces starting from June 1941, in 3 separate sites – besides a few Jews who were sent to the Dvinsk ghetto and the Riga ghetto and murdered there later.

Until today, there is tremendous public objection to even mention the role played by Latvian nationals in the annihilation of the Jews, while consistently presenting Latvia as a victim of World War II, and the assistance to the Nazi occupation as legitimate resistance to the Soviet occupation.

### **Meir Yitzchak Orlean turns into Meir Or**



In Palestine, Meir joined the "Shachal" group in Rehovot, a group of religious pioneers who were preparing for communal settlement. He met his wife Chanka under circumstances described by his son (my uncle) Reuven: "while he was an activist in



“Hamizrachi” in Riga, he met a representative from Eretz Israel named Moshe. In a discussion he held with the young pioneers, Meir took an active part and even attacked Moshe on several issues. Moshe replied by accusing Meir of being the type of pioneer who know only how to talk, but do not follow through themselves... After Meir made aliya and joined Shachal, on one of his first vacations, he went touring around the country, and ended up in Pardes Chana, the residence of Moshe mentioned above, to prove to him he was not only a talker... There, he met a young girl who was presented by Moshe as his sister in law, who arrived in Eretz Israel this very week. Moshe’s wife was Chemda Skuratovsky (nee Zupovich), the mother of Yitzchak, Arie and Yossi Sharon (my father’s cousins), and her young sister who was still called Chana, was immediately referred to by Meir as “Chanka”, and was convinced by Meir to join the Shachal group.” Meir married Chanka in 1935. An interesting point – since the wedding ring, as any property purchased by the group, was considered communal property, an official document was required in which all group members forfeit their part in the ring... (the original document is kept by Reuven Or). Following this incident, a clause was added to the protocols of “Hakibbutz Hadati” (religious kibbutz movement) which stated that the money given by the treasurer to the bride’s groom for buying the ring, is the sole property of the groom!

In 30/6/1937 the group established Kibbutz Tirat Zvi in the Bet Shean valley. Meir even served as general secretary of the kibbutz in 1939-1941. Meir was also active in defense related activity in the kibbutz, went through a patrol officer (“noter”) course in the British police, and a region commander course in the Haganah. One of the first kibbutz members, Israel Yorav, wrote some memories from the first years in Tirat Zvi (written originally for the Tirat Zvi archive, today quoted in the Yorav family website):

“One day, while we were working on the road, we felt that throughout the entire day there was no movement of Arabs, and that was suspicious. The guards, among them Meir Or, decided when we returned from work, to walk in front of the vehicle and check the road. We had great luck: it turned out that that same morning, while we passed from the place where kibbutz Sde Eliyahu is located today towards Tirat Zvi, there was already a mine planted by Arabs across the road, but nothing happened. Only when Meir checked the road, he felt a wire which was stretched across the road, which didn’t belong to the

wires marking the sides of the road. The car was stopped, and we called in the “frontier force” which consisted of Arabs with a British commander, and they removed the mine.” Meir was active in the “Hapoel Hamizrachi” and “Hakibbutz Hadatai” establishments, and even served as a member of the “Hakibbutz Hadati” council between 1935-1971. Meir wrote many articles and even published several books about the life and folklore of the kibbutz, among them “Eve of Battle” (which was also translated to English), “The Religious Kibbutz and its Evolution”, and also some children’s books: “How we built a hen-house”, “The tale of a building”, and other stories which were published in the children section of “Hatsofe” newspaper, and dealt mainly with the life of children in the kibbutz (Tales of Esther the kindergarten teacher, Froyke, and more). Additionally, Meir published controversial articles about different issues in Jewish ritual, in which he confronted the accepted norms (uncovered hair for married women, turning on or at least turning off lights on Shabat and holidays, and more), which turned the rage of many religious authorities against him, and when they could not counter the claims, they turned to attack the person. Many of the kibbutz children, who had difficulties writing their Bar Mitzvah speech, had speeches written for them by Meir, and had only to recite the speech on their birthday...

Meir and Chanka had 5 children: Ruth (according to the first letter of Reuven Leib, Meir’s father, born 7/2/1938), Reuven (named after Reuven Leib, Meir’s father, born 6/9/1941), Shlomo (4/6/1947), Yochanan (10/1/1950), and Bili (named after Beile, Meir’s mother, born 27/8/1951).

Regarding the circumstances of changing the name from Orlean to Or, his son Reuven tells us the following story: “after the war of independence, Prime Minister Ben Gurion called the citizens of the state to change their names to Hebrew names, having changed previously his own name from Grin to Ben Gurion. In Tirat Zvi there was a great reaction and many members changed their names. Dad decided to change Orlean to Or, but mother refused. The winter of 1950-1951 was extremely cold, and it was snowing across the country including Tirat Zvi. Since there were no sidewalks, everybody walked in boots. Mother got new boots and wanted to write her name on them – there was not enough space to write Chana Orlean, so she wrote Chana Or. Meir claimed that by doing

so she agreed to changing the name... So all the children until Yochanan were born as Orlean, only Bili was born as Or.”

During the collection of material for this research, I found pages of testimony which Meir sent to Yad Vashem, to commemorate the members of his family who perished in the Holocaust. The pages show that Meir had clear and precise information about the circumstances of the death of his family members.

Meir died in 5/11/1975 from a kidney disease.

For the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Tirat Zvi, a book was published named “Or Hameir – a selection of Meir Or’s writings”.

## **Appendix - Part of a testimony by Dominicovitch**

From the interrogation report of the witness Lemeshonok Frantz Dominicovitch, January 25, 1960:

“Arrest of Jews living in Riebini was ordered by Puntulis, who arrived there together with senior policemen from the Silianski sector, Lisovschis Ludwig, although they said nothing to me. As soon as the SD group arrived in the village Puntulis and Lisovschis engaged with them in a conversation. Seglinish to whom I wanted to speak, refused to do so under the pretext that he had no time but conferred in secrecy with Puntulis and Lisovschis, probably about the impending arrests. Immediately afterwards the SD people went out in various directions for the arrest of the Jews... When I arrived on my bicycle at the synagogue in the evening, the Jews from Riebini were already crammed in there. Some of the Jewish population was still in the synagogue as the rest has been already dispatched to the execution. At the synagogue I was not long and then, with the truck who came to load the remaining Jews, I left for the execution site. On the truck there were 25-30 Jews.

We passed by the Dakari village (located at 1 kilometer from Riebini), and then 1 kilometer distance from the Riebini-Vilajani road turned right, in the direction of a certain shed.

When we reached the shed, the Jews were disembarked, part of them were chased into the shed and a group of some 10 people, the SD and local punishing forces, among them Shangles Ignat and Tarvids, were escorted to the execution place.

The execution place was some 100-150m from the shed. There was the ditch, freshly dug or an old one, I don't remember well now. Apart of that, I remember, there was a little bush.

This group of Jews they ranged in front of the ditch, which was already full with corpses. I participated also in the execution of this group of 10-15 people. I shot them with a rifle from approximately 7-8 meters. How many people I killed I could not say for certain, but all five bullets were fired. Among the executed were Jews I know and, as I remember, one of them turning to me said that for what I do my mother will curse me.

Together with me were executing that group of Jews members of the SD and of the local punishing forces, among them Lisovschis who used his revolver.

I don't remember how Lisovschis made his way to the execution place, maybe he came by car or bicycle. Until then, while I was busy with the dispatching of Jews to execution. After that I remained at the execution place to the end. In my presence were shot approximately 50 people. After the end of executions I together with local punishing forces and SD returned by car to Riebini. Here, in the house that belonged to one executed Jew, I don't know his name, was organized a drinking party at which participated Puntulis, Lisovschis , SD members, and I.”