

An Systematic Study of the Riga House Registers as a Source for Jewish Genealogy in Inter-war Latvia, 1918 -1940

Proposed by

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Research Plan and Research Goals

The primary objective of this research is a systematic analysis of the Riga House Registers as a source of genealogical data with a view to identifying family links and kinship groups. The secondary purpose is to create a database that reflects social and personal mobility into and out of the Capital City as it was experienced by its Jewish population.

Registration of household occupation commenced in Riga in 1918. From the 1920's, the owner of each building was required to ensure that a detailed record of occupiers was maintained. These inter-war House Registers, comprise approximately 16,000 data files held in the State Historical Archive, Riga, in Series 2942.

House Registers record highly specific personal information for each occupier of a property including given and surnames, maiden names, places of origin, previous addresses, dates of birth, internal passport cross reference numbers and police registration information. In some cases, there is an indication of the family's future destination when occupation was given up.

As a rule, children seldom had separate ID documents. Their existence is recorded in the House Registers, usually with the mother. Where deaths occur from natural causes, it is possible to track changes in family composition over significant periods of time. By the systematic extraction, analysis, reconciliation of House Register data, supplemented where appropriate with other archival material, the project will use genealogical techniques of family recording and databasing to achieve the following research goals:

- i) The creation of a database of between 20-21,000 Jews living in Riga in the period between the Wars
- ii) Provision of detailed personal information in respect of each individual
- iii) Ensuring that, wherever possible, the family and kinship links for each individual are identified and confirmed and, where possible, family lists are created
- iv) Identifying significant life events and tracking changes in family structure over time

- v) Preserving data in a way that is compatible with searching by individual or by specific dwelling unit. Throughout the inter-war period as one family ceases to occupy, a new family takes up residence. In a number of cases there is an unbroken history of occupation for over 20 years.
- vi) Ensuring that the detailed information relating to place of origin, previous addresses and when available future destination is retained and recorded in a way that will ensure it is retrievable, so as to facilitate further demographic and social research relating to population movements to and from the Riga

The projects Importance, Originality and Potential Contribution

The period concerned covers the post-World War I period, the rise of Latvian nationalism and the creation of a separate Latvian State, until the eve of World War II.

The project will be the first detailed examination of a major urban capital using genealogical techniques to establish not only information of specific interest to family historians but also to provide the data necessary to look at larger demographic and social trends in respect of the Jewish experience in the inter-war years. The House Registers are the key to establishing family relationships and kinship ties as well as understanding the larger demographic landscape as Jews were increasingly socially mobile.

The project further refines and develops genealogically based database techniques and seeks to present the results in a way that invites further academic research. Finally the project provides unique access to specific data relating to the Jewish population because the 100-year rule in relation to vital records means that it is not possible to do generalised research on individuals and populations unless requested by direct descendent for an approved purpose. The House Registers provide an indirect but powerful tool for the study of the Jewish community in the absence of vital records.

Source Data Entry

Data entry must be done to the highest standard. It is a time consuming process and requires fluency in Latvian, German and Russian. Each of the 16,000 data files will need to be logged and Jewish occupiers of property identified and the information about each extracted and recorded in Exl. Files.

From the outset, it is essential that data is extracted and recorded in Exl. Files in a way that permits recovery by named individual and also by street address, building and flat number. Already from preliminary feasibility study it is clear that although Jews were a definite minority in Latvia generally comprising only 5% of the overall population, by the 1930's they were the largest single ethnic group in respect of properties in central Riga with more than 20 tenants. In terms of population density the Jews of Riga comprised more than 45% of occupiers of these larger Riga dwellings. By way of comparison, the Baltic Germans occupied 24% of equivalent sized accommodation and ethnic Latvians a mere 20%.

Comparison and Supplementing Information from Other Archival Records

Data entry is not simply a mechanical task in this project. It requires a keen sense not only of the data that is provided but what is likely to be missing and where any individual gap can be filled. The database design must ensure that family relationships established from the House Register data must be recorded in a way that ensures that these links remain intact as the database grows. Were necessary, there is an ongoing need to be alert to the need to confirm data and connect records. It is anticipated that this is most likely to involve consultation of business records in Riga which are detailed and numerous, cross referring House Register data with linked internal passport data and police registration and finally to trace backwards to an individual [or family] connection with place of origin, if within Latvia. It is this process of checking and cross referencing that will give “added value” to the core data.

Identification of family units and kinship relationships

Data entry requires the data entry team to ensure that family relationships are identified as they arise and entered in a format that ensures that family units are “kept together” in database terms particularly in the case of collateral family and kinship groups. Pictures of family groups and kinship relationships will inevitably become more detailed and complex as the project progresses.
