

Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Latvia

von Ruvin Ferber

The Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Latvia was established in July 1998 by the decision of the University Senate. The initial financial assistance was provided by the *Memorial Foundation for Jewish Culture* (USA, New York). The University of Latvia had allocated the rooms for the Center in the representative part of the University Central Building in the very center of Riga.

The main goals of the Center are: preserving the legacy of Latvian Jews and perceiving their contribution to worldwide culture; performing research in history of Jews in Latvia and Baltic region, including the history of Holocaust; offering the students a wide range of courses and lectures in the field of Jewish history, tradition, philosophy and Hebrew language. The Center represents an important part of the Latvian Jewish community life by providing the academic component of Jewish education. The library of the Center includes sources in various fields of Judaica: Talmud and Torah related literature, Jewish history, philosophy and art, the State of Israel, Zionism, etc. Our priority is the History of Latvian Jews, including Holocaust survivors essays and lifestories. Special focus is put on the very peculiar history of the Kurland Jewry (Dr. T. Alekseeva, Ms. Constance Whippman, UK). Our daily visitors consist of teaching staff, scholars, students, as well as the wider audience interested in Jewish subjects. The Center is promoting lecture courses in Jewish subjects within the existings studying programmes at the faculties of history and philosophy, theology and others.

The Center is collaborating with a number of institutions such as the Latvian Academy of Sciences (Riga, Latvia), the Chais Center for Jewish Studies in Russian at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem (Jerusalem, Israel), the Moscow Center for University Teaching of Jewish Civilization "Sefer" (Moscow), the University of Ghent (Belgium), etc.

The Oral History project of the Center has been designed and organised by Ms. Aina Antane with support provided by Latvian SIG of World Jewish Genealogical Society (Ms. Arlene Beare, UK). A number of Jewish individuals who were born in Latvia are interviewed, the interviews being taped and documented accordingly with an idea to build up a series of oral histories that will give a picture of life in Latvia, in particular, during the interwar period (1920-1940). One of

the important priorities is the Latvia Holocaust Jewish Names Project aimed to recover the names and identities of the members of the Latvian Jewish Community who perished as a result of the Holocaust during the period from 1941-1945. The project is academic in its approach and primarily archive based. A close liaison is established with Riga Jewish Community, Yad Vashem, Claims Conference, International Task Force organisation, Embassy of Israel in Latvia, US Embassy in Latvia in working towards a recording the fate of the Latvian Jews.

Among the most recognized activities of the Center are once in two years International Conferences "Jews in a Changing World" which are devoted to history and culture of Jews in Latvia and Baltic Region. Four volumes of conference proceedings have been published covering the broad area of subjects in science and Torah, ethics and philosophy, Jewish history, Jewish identity, politics, culture and education.

Center for Judaic Studies at the University of Latvia, Prof. R. Ferber,
University of Latvia, 19 Rainis Boulevard, Room 210,
LV-1586 Riga, Latvia;
Fax: +371-7-225039, Phone: +371-7-034421; jsc@latnet.lv

http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/riga/LV_univ.htm

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