

## Latvian Jewish Encyclopedia

Article 4

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May 25, 2009

### Dimantshtein family

The Dimantshtein family originated in Polotsk, Belarus and moved to various towns in Latvia: Rekekne (Rezhitza), Daugavpils (Dinaburg/Dvinsk), Riga, Karsava (Korsovka), Ludza (Lutzin). The family were Leviim.

The family were Chabad Chassidim in Latvia. They were quite prosperous trading in flax, timber and fish. One branch of the family set up a fishery in Aberdeen, Scotland. Some changed the name to Diamond.

The earliest generation which has been traced in archival records was **Zev Wulf Halevy Dimantshtein**, born about 1770 In Polotsk and died before 1839. His children were **Greinen, Eliyahu and Moshe**.

**Eliyahu** was born about 1800 and died before 1885. His children were **David, Avraham, Shmuel and Zev-Wulf**.

Documents in Latvian archives including the 1889 list of Jews who lived in the rural areas of Lutzin district, **David Dimantshtein**, born in 1823 in Polotsk, moved to Korsovka in 1872 from Rezhitza. He must have moved at an earlier date from Polotsk to Rezhitza. He is described in this list as a merchant. According to family tradition he and his wife operated an inn on the outskirts of Korsovka. The circumstances which led to his burial in Lutzin rather than Korsovka are not known. The birthdates and birthplaces of his children are estimated. Information about some of his family taken from a family drawn up in England in 1948 by Norman Nygate.



Tombstone of David, son of Eliyahu Halevy Dimantshtein, Ludza 1901.  
(Photographed by Aleksanders Feigmanis, Riga).

**Vulf**, (son of Elyash) was born in 1839 Polotsk, and moved to Korsovka in 1878.  
Vulf's children: **Abram, Elye, Treina, Dveira, Liba, Itka, Musya**. All born between 1869-1885.

**David's** wife was **Keila-Tsirel**. Her parentage is not known but Genetic testing revealed matches with several families such that she may have been related to families in the Vitebsk region such as Popkovitch, Leviyan (Gamerov), and others. Keila Tsirel was a short woman who had very definite views about bringing up her family. She wanted her daughter Rivka to know how to milk a cow so she had the maid Marfa teach Rivka. David and Keila-Tsirel were wealthy farmers and publicans, operating an inn on the outskirts of Korsovka. Once an inspector paid a visit to the inn and while sampling the food found an insect in a bun. Anxious to save her parents from prosecution, Rivka ate the bun quickly claiming that the insect was only a raisin.

The family developed widespread trading enterprises supplying the markets in the capital Riga with timber and flax for which trade they held a license. They also marketed herring on a large scale caught in the lakes near Lutzin. These business enterprises took several sons to live in Riga, in particular Tsvi-Hersh and from there expanded the trade to England in the late 1870's which led to several members of the family settling there from 1880.

David and Keila-Tsirel's children were:

- 1) **Zissa** (c.1844-1932) married **Pesakh** Gordin and lived in Berzpils.
- 2) **Yehudah Leib** c.1848 - 1917 Korsovka.
- 3) **Tsvi Hersh** 1850 -1930 Riga.
- 4) **Rivka (Rashka/Rebecca)** 1851 or 1856-1834 married **Mordekhai Zev Vulf (Max) Bull** 1853-1931 London see separate article)
- 5) **Reuven** c.1852, died 1934 London.
- 6) **Zev Vulf** 1856-1920 Korsovka.
- 7) **Getzel** c.1857-1890 Korsovka.
- 8) **Moshe (Marks)** 1860 - 1942 London.
- 9) **Yeshaya** c.1860 - 1933 London.
- 10) **Zalman (Solomon)** 1865 -1937 New York.
- 11) **Meir**, b.1865 never married, Riga.
- 12) **Barukh** . Identity unclear. According to Patricia Levitsky's history of the family, Barukh was a brother of her grandmother Rivka Bull. But Llyoyd Nygate's family tree does not include Barukh. He may have been a brother-in-law to Rivka's husband Max Bull, the husband of his sister.

1) **Zissa and Pesakh Gordin** lived in Berzpils lost many of their family in the Holocaust. Their son **Yaakov-Zev-Wulf** settled in Korsovka where he was killed by the Nazis together with his children Raisa, Zalman and Mikhail. The surviving children Liuba Kalinkov, Gitta Tsiplevitch and Pesakh-Eliyahu settled in Israel. Zissa's sons Mendel and Dan also perished in Berzpils. Mendel's son **Aba Gordin** survived and lived in Korsovka. He possessed a Sefer Torah and took upon himself to organize religious services for the small community that survived the Holocaust

2) **Yehudah-Leib's** son **Moshe-Eliyahu** operated the family trade from Riga, settling in Lodon in the 1920's where he opened a wooden barrel factory importing timber from Riga. He married his cousin Sonya, daughter of his uncle Getzel Dimantshtein.

3) **Tzvi- Hersh** left his hometown Korsovka and moved to Riga to engage in business. Became wealthy. Started the Dimantshtein export business to England of herring, timber and flax. With the expansion of this business a number of his relatives immigrated to England. Tzvi' son **Bernard** Travelled to Aberdeen, Scotland to conduct his father's business. Opened a fish processing plant and a factory to produce barrels from the timber his father exported from Riga. The barrels were sent back to Riga, filled with herring, and exported back to Scotland. Bernard changed his surname to Diamond.

4) **Rivka** – see separate article “**Mordekhai-Zev (Max) Bull**”.



Mordekhai-Zev and Rivka Bull, 50<sup>th</sup> Wedding Anniversary, Lonson 1922.

### 5) **Reuven**

According to Maurice Bull's memoirs Reuven was very tall,, over six feet, and had a large spade beard. He was a very excitable man who once reacted violently to an anti-semitic remark made in the street. He was a furrier and settled in England in 1897.

Reuven's son **Yehudah-Leib** was killed in the Arab riots of 1929 while working in the Diskin orphanage in Jerusalem.



Details of his death appear in “Yizkor Am Yisrael et Kedeshei Tarpot” (Berzin and Weiss, Jerusalem 1930).

Literal translation from Hebrew:

“Yehudah-Leib Dimantshtein of blessed memory was born in 1880 in Russia to his father Reb Reuven Halevy. Yehudah-Leib was educated on the knees of Torah and Chabad Chassidism. However, when he was still young, at the age of seventeen, and desirous of expanding and completing his knowledge of religious learning, his studies were stopped. Because of his bad material situation his father was obliged to emigrate with his family to London. Here Yehudah-Leib bore the yoke together with his father of supporting the family. He worked initially at simple physical labour, afterwards learnt a trade and lived by it for many years. At the same time he ‘stroved in the dust at the feet of the wise’, learnt with the Gaon Moshe-Avigdor Chaikin. In his spare time he also laboured for the community, involved in the needs of various societies and institutions. All those years since arriving in London his mind was occupied with his aspiration to settle in Eretz Yisrael. But the obstacles he encountered were too great for him.

At last Yehudah-Leib overcame all the obstacles and emigrated to Eretz Yisrael in 1922. Upon arriving in the country Yehudah-Leib managed to find work in Jerusalem. He was one of the happy of the world, the sparks of his soul reached a single perfection. He lived by the labour of his hands in Jerusalem, approaching starvation from his meager bread, praying daily with the community of Chabad, set aside hours for Torah.

But his work did not leave him much time. Long periods of want arrived. In the years of depression in the country, 1926-1927, economic deprivation reached the house of Yehudah-Leib, reached its limits. Lacking everything, his father in his letters demanded that he return to London and they would make a living together. “Your son should not go down together with you [to the grave]” was Yehudah-Leib’s answer. In the end he went to work at the Diskin Orphanage. He carried out his work faithfully and diligently. While he was attending the orphans of the institution he was obliged to add to them his son, aged four, who was orphaned from his mother who died at the beginning of 5689 [1929] in a car accident.

On Friday 17<sup>th</sup> of Av, during an attack by Arabs on the Rabbi Diskin Orphanage in the suburb Givat Shaul, Yehudah-Leib was severely wounded. Four days he lay struggling with the suffering of death. He passed away on Monday 20<sup>th</sup> Av.”

Yehudah-Leib’s first wife died in London and he remarried in Jerusalem Minna Moseieff of an old Hebron family related to the Lubavitcher Rebbe. Their only son Avraham was born in 1925. In 1977 attempts were made to trace this son and an elderly official of the Diskin Orphanage. He related that there was tension between Yehudah-Leib and Minna and she demanded a divorce which Yehudah-Leib refused. During a visit to Jerusalem by the Lubavitcher Rebbe Yosef-Yitskhak Shneerson, attempts were made to persuade Yehudah-Leib to give the divorce. The Rebbe summoned him to the Amdursky Hotel and commended him to grant the divorce. But Yehudah-Leib refused. The situation reached a tragic end with the death of Minna in a car accident on the 17th of Shevat 5689 [1929]. Both Minna and Yehudah-Leib are buried in the Chabad section of the cemetery on the Mount of Olives. The orphan son grew up and lived with his family in Beersheva under the Hebrew form of his surname “Yahalomi”.

**6) Zev Wulf (also known as Velvel), born 1856, died 1920 in Korsovka.**

Operated a farm on the outskirts of Korsovka, perhaps the property which belonged to his father David. This was located near the Jewish cemetery near “Naudas Kalns” the infamous site of the massacre of the Jews in 1941.

Children:

Eda's

Shmuel (1882-1943 Siberia),

Getzel, perished in the Holocaust),

Avraham (killed in Korsovka in 1941)

Eliyahu (died in Kokand in 1942),

Pessia,

David , Haifa

Yekhezkel or Khatzkel, Kfar Blum.

Gershon and Seeka who apparently were killed as soldiers.

### **Zev Wulf's son Shmuel**

Escaped with his wife across the Latvian/Russian border when the Germans invaded Latvia. Perished from the rigours of life in exile in Siberia.



Family of Shmuel Dimantshetin, Korsovka c. 1934

**Shmuel's son Eizik** survived the Riga Ghetto and was deported to Stuthoff concentration camp.



Eizik Dimantshtein, Israel 1987.

The few survivors were evacuated to Sweden and liberated en route when the war ended May 8, 1945. Eizik lived for several years in Sweden and then immigrated to Israel where he worked as an engineer. He provided considerable material about his family. The

following are excerpts (translated from Hebrew and Yiddish) of an interview in 1987 by Chaim Freedman, published in "The Pen and The Blade".

“My grandfather Velvel was married first to Gitta and then to Minna by whom he had four sons. We are Leviim and Chassidim. In our township there were two or three synagogues for the Chassidim and two or three for the Misnagdim. My grandfather and grandmother lived not far from the cemetery and all the time one had to pass their house. In our township on Simkhat Torah the Chassidim would open the large oven and take out the Tsimmes and walk from house to house. It was a jolly time. That was the way with the Chassidim. The Misnagdim did not act that way. In our town was a secondary school where you could matriculate. Then I served for two and a half years in the Latvian army. Due to the anti-boutgeios feeling in Korsovka after the Soviet takeover in 1940 I went to Riga to work. There my sisters and brother were studying at the university. On the first day of the occupation Zhenia and Gitta were rounded up with large numbers of women, herded to the central prison and killed. Volinka was taken with men to the forest and killed. I was saved since the place I was living was not included in the roundup.

I was actually in Riga when the war started as were two uncles Getzel and Eliyahu, sisters Zhenia, Gitta and brother Volinka (Zev-Wulf). In Korsovka remained my father Shmuel and Avraham. My father was engaged in the forest trade, timber, produce and flax. He would buy from the peasants and ship to Riga. They called it a “Handler In Vald”. Flax was a rich and honorable trade in Latvia. One needed a government license.

My parents lived in Korsovka with my sister Rivka and they fled as soon as the war started. Those who remained in Korsovka were rounded up and killed. I think Avraham was one of those killed. My father died in Kokand in 1943 of typhus. My mother with Rivka returned to Riga after the war.

I worked in the Riga Ghetto in a factory. When I asked a gentile Latvian from Korsovka about the fate of the Jews there he told me “All the Jews in Korsovka were shot like dogs.” I heard afterwards that they rounded them up in a side street, took all of them, once they had prepared pits in the forest, it was not far from where grandfather had lived, called Naudas Kalns, the “Hill of Silver” and killed them all.

In Riga there were 40,000 Jews, In the Ghetto there were 30,000 until they killed 25,000. 5,000 remained in the “Small Ghetto” and I was amongst them. We worked in the railway freight station. Wagons would arrive. I was supposed to be specialist as I was one of the 600 Jews who were called craftsmen and so they looked after us. We worked there until the Russians approached Riga and then the Germans evacuated us. They came at night and put us in a store and told everyone to undress. In the middle sat one at table and they called us by the numbers which everyone bore and he had to present himself, that is to say run naked with hands in the air and to turn around. Then he would say right or left. They wanted to take the healthiest men who had no blemish on their bodies. That was why we had to turn around. To the right was life; to the left was the world to come.

So they evacuated us to Stutthof near Danzig. They acted relatively better to us because we were specialists and went to work where the railway passed by. Then I saw the crematorium. A German walked with a piece of white chalk in his pocket. In the summer there was no work. They walked around the yards, the German looking around. Whoever

didn't walk well he drew an "X" with chalk on their back. These were sent to the crematorium. We worked for about a half or three quarters of a year. Then the Russians once again approached and they evacuated us. Then I saw the destruction that they had wrought. Mountains and mountains of bodies. That was then the evacuation. Again the Russians approached Danzig and bombed Stutthof and the Germans didn't want to leave us. I was sick with typhus. That was on the 25<sup>th</sup> of April. We felt that at any moment the whole business would be over. As is known the war ended May 8<sup>th</sup>. I had a temperature of 41°. I was in the clinic. There was an epidemic. To my good fortune and that of another Jew (his name was Shmuel and he settled in Australia) we were the first to catch typhus. To my good fortune, what do I mean? They took us to the clinic. Later the Goyim also got sick and then they didn't take Jews any more to the clinic. All the Jews who had typhus were put in a barrack and it was burned down. I remember that I was on the third floor. Some officers wanted to run away. One said "We are leaving them here." We thought "Thank G-d". I had no more strength. But in the morning came an announcement: they are taking us with them.

We were a few kilometers from the Baltic Sea. There was no port and ships could not approach. People who were sick and could not manage the four kilometers were told: "Don't worry – stay here and we will take you." I, after four years in concentration camps, knew about their favours. I went down with difficulty and walked. Those who remained were all shot. Between 27-29<sup>th</sup> April we embarked on a motor less ship which was towed. What is meant by "embarked" ?. The ship was 100-150 metres from the shore. They placed a narrow bridge of boards. Sick people had to make it. They fell and they killed them. I succeeded; I had been as strong as an ox. I got inside. There we sailed until May 8<sup>th</sup>. They wanted to take us because if we weren't with them they would be sent to the front. They wanted to take us to a Baltic port, but everywhere were either the English or the Americans. Until May 8<sup>th</sup> we sailed on the sea and then the war ended. It is possible to write thousands of pages on the Hell which was there. If there is a Hell then it is a Paradise compared to the Hell which was there. They put in four times the number of people for whom there was space. One on top of the other. Whoever had strength lay on those who hadn't. At night shouts of Hell were heard from the people who were dying. In the morning the SS came and lowered a rope from above for those who had died to be tied and hauled up top. They slit their stomachs with a knife so that the bodies wouldn't be washed up, and threw them overboard. On May 8<sup>th</sup> the German team shouted: "the war is over and you can come out" and they fled.

On the 12<sup>th</sup> of May we reached port in Sweden. There were journalists who photographed us. The wounds will never heal. Twenty to twenty five years came the dreams at night. One cannot forget."

**Zev's son Eliyahu's daughter Luba Teitelbaum** (Netanya, Israel) described the Nazi invasion of Riga in July 1941. When the Germans invaded the Russians left quickly. Her husband had worked for them and so was given a pass for his family. The Germans occupied half of Riga while the other side of the river Dvina was still held by the Russians so that those who had influence could escape. Liuba and her family travelled by Gorky and then to Kokand in Uzkeistan. Her parents also got passes and joined them. Her younger brother Shmuel was in hospital in the Herman part of the city and he was killed. Her sister Zelda's little boy was in kindergarten in the occupied zone. He was trapped and killed there. In Korsovka relations with the Latvians had been reasonable.



But as soon as the Germans invaded the Latvians started a pogrom. The daughter of the rabbi had escaped on foot, but having forgotten something returned and was killed in the street. One German resident Pankiewitz had married a Jewish girl. He saved his wife and her family in a secret chamber he had built in his house. He hid other Jews there including, it is thought, Marita the daughter of **Getzel Dimantshtein**. But she left and was presumed to be killed. Liuba's father **Eliyahu** died of illness and deprivation in Kokand in 1942. Her mother and sisters returned to Riga after the war where her mother died in 1947. Liuba and Zelda settled in Israel. Her uncle **Getzel** died of disease in the Russian exile together with his son **Pavel**. Her uncle **Avraham** before the war travelled to London but returned to Korsovka where he was killed. Likewise her half-uncle Gershon was killed. Her half-uncle **Seeka** was killed serving in the Latvian army.

Liuba also recalled stories of the period before the Revolution. There were three incidents in Korsovka. On one occasion Russian soldiers from one of the warring sides burst into her uncle Shmuel Dimantshtein's house. Liuba and Eizik were terrified and sneaked through the crowd in the living room to the kitchen where they escaped to Christian neighbours. Shmuel's house was looted and many valuables stolen. On another occasion her father Eliyahu and family took shelter with Christian neighbours who disguised them in peasant clothes. Russian marauders came and demanded to be told which shops in town had liquor and tobacco. They didn't recognize Eliyahu as a Jew and asked him "Are there any Zhids?" He replied that there weren't. Liuba recalls seeing a Jew shot in the street. In 1920 Eliyahu and Getzel and their families moved to Riga. After the Second World War Liuba returned to Korsovka for a visit. She found most Jewish houses destroyed except for those of her father and her uncle Shmuel. Also the Jewish cemetery was intact.

**The Jewish cemetery of Korsovka** was photographed for Chaim Freedman by researcher Aleksandrs Feigmanis of Riga. About 300 photographs are held by Chaim Freedman.



Likewise the **Lutzin cemetery** was photographed and the data can be seen on the Ludza/Karsava Internet site <http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/Ludza/>





Ludza cemetery photograph by Zeeva Levy (Israel)

7) **Getzel 's son Shmuel (Sam Diamond)** settled in London where he was in business. He married his cousin Devorah (Dora) daughter of his uncle Reuven Dimantshtein.

**8) Moshe (Marks)**

Held a government contract to supply black bearskin hats to the British army during the Boer War. Wealthy furrier who lived in large house in Hackney Downs. According to the 1891 London Census, he immigrated to London about 1880, thereby being the first of the Dimantshtein family to leave Latvia.

**9) Shaya**

Arrived in England about 1900. made a living as a tallyman (draper). Was a member of the Jewish Socialist Bund in Russia and an ardent Zionist in England. Wrote a ballad in memory of the victims of the Kishinev pogrom in 1903. Was an active Shadkhan (matchmaker) in London. On one occasion he believed that his grandniece Betty Sagon was possessed of a Dybuk (evil spirit) so he carried out a Kabbalistic ceremony of exorcism. Had a tenor voice and acted as a Khazan on the festivals. He played the violin at family celebrations. At one family wedding (possibly Dora Bull's) he danced the Russian Kazatchka and died of a heart attack at the age of seventy three. After his death his widow went to South Africa to join their only daughter.

Other Dimantshteins included the Shokhet **Khaim Dimantshtein** and his son **Nakhum** who perished in the Holocaust in Rezekne. **Shneur-Zalman Dimantshtein** was a butcher in Korsovka, Several of his children survived the Holocaust by fleeing to Rostov. A grandson David settled in Israel in 1972. The Soviet Komissar Shimon Dimantshtein was born in Sebezh but it is not known if he was related.



Dimantshteins in London 1905; possibly Reuven and Shaya.