The Latvians in Kalamazoo:
Resolution of the Difficulties in Their Lives as Immigrants

by
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June 3, 1977
To my Mother who
died on June 8, 1974
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Preface

A grant is offered to Kalamazoo College students who are willing to spend a quarter researching and writing on an aspect of local history. Various projects were suggested to those of us considering taking advantage of this grant. Doing oral interviews of Latvian immigrants appealed to me immediately because of the personal dimension to this kind of research and because of the variety of places this work would bring me to carry out the research and interviews.

Mr. Alexis Praus, director of the Kalamazoo Public Museum, who suggested the topic, was interested in having tapes made to record the life stories of the immigrants for the library and museum. As the weeks progressed I started to pursue specific questions instead of simply gathering the life stories because I found that the personal histories were very similar to each other and this would not provide material for a paper. The interviewees, also, did not want to have the impromptu tapes available for public listening. I found that there had to be a period during which I became familiar with the Latvian community and this was best done by casual interviews so I continued to interview in this fashion without concern that the tapes would not be made public. Perhaps as
part of the continuation of this project, knowing better who to ask and what to ask for in formal interviews, I will make more prepared interviews for the public collection at the library.

I found only two papers that have been done on the Latvians in Kalamazoo. One was done by Mr. Carl Snow in 1975 for the records of the First United Methodist Church and includes three taped interviews. This paper, titled *Kalamazoo Methodists Help Refugees*, is a brief history of Latvians and a description of the church sponsorship project with a list of committee members and an incomplete list of families sponsored by the church. Mr. Snow's paper also has photographs of Latvian families, a displaced persons camp in Germany and Latvian families with their sponsors in Kalamazoo.

The other paper is a master's thesis done in the Sociology Department at Western Michigan University by Mr. Henry G. Halla. It is named *A Study of the Latvian Exile-Immigrant Group of Kalamazoo* and is dated July 1959. He observed that there were two groups among the Latvians in Kalamazoo, the immigrant-minded group and the exile-minded group. He surveyed twenty-seven Latvian families and distinguished statistical characteristics of the groups. The immigrant type of family has a "positive attitude toward assimilation and acculturation and is actively engaged in becoming Americanized," he concluded, while the exile type family, "retains it's contacts with the Latvian community and depends upon these contacts both socially and otherwise."¹

Halla predicted that the exile-minded family's resistance to assimilation was going to wane. To see if this prediction has been correct was one of the questions I first explored in my interviews.

Apparently the exile-immigrant distinction is still applicable, but those that I interviewed fit Halla's immigrant description. When I asked Latvians about it I did not hear of any that fit the exile description so I assumed that Halla's prediction had been correct, that exile-type families and individuals had assimilated since his observations eighteen years ago. From there I explored why it is that they have assimilated. In the last week of my research a young Latvian told me that there are, in fact, a handful of people who consider themselves exiles. Immigrants, I had found, were relatively happy with their lives in the United States, but the exiles, she said, are unhappy and strive to "annihilate all Americanism" in their lives. This was a surprise to me since no other had said this. She also said that my chances of happening across them were not good and that the individual(s) she was thinking of would probably not consent to be interviewed.

Whether there is an exile group remains to be explored, but at least it seems to be a small minority and not as obvious a group as it was when Halla conducted his random survey. This study, then, has focused on immigrant types, those who have either acculturated or assimilated, a distinction to be made later. To learn why the immigrants have become happily assimilated, even in the face of the hardships and difficulties they have known, became the design of this research.

My account of the immigrants' adjustment in Kalamazoo is objective
since I am neither Latvian or from Kalamazoo. This project has been enjoyable to me. I am thankful for the kindness of each Latvian that I interviewed, answered questions or gave me written information:

Mr. Mik selective Austrins, Miss Aina Kalniete, Mrs. Alise Osis, Mrs. Ilga Repins, Mr. Voldemars Rushevics,
\^ Mr. and Mrs. Sitka, Marite Skrupskeiis, Mr. Janis Sverns, Reverend Turks,

Mrs. Erika Zadins, especially Maruta Kajaks and Mrs. Mik selective Austrins.

Mr. Carl Snow and Mrs. Wietz of the First United Methodist Church went out of their way to assist me. I am grateful, also, to Mrs. Winif red Bowman for her recollections of the Latvians as they adjusted to Kalamazoo in their early years; Mrs. Gail Landy for giving me the use of a Public Library tape recorder and tapes; Dr. Kim Cummings for his advice.
Cultural Background

The language and folk songs are the two most outstanding aspects of Latvian heritage. The Lithuanian and Latvian languages are the only languages of the Baltic branch of the Indo-European Languages. The countries are surrounded by nations that speak slavic languages. The origin of the language is unknown. The ancient tongue is well preserved in modern Latvian and for this reason it is linguistically important.

In age, number and cultural significance the folk songs can be compared to the Hindu vedas. By 1965, 160,000 of the verses had been published and there were still 900,000 unpublished verses and variants recorded in the Institute of Latvian Folklore in Riga. The verses are four line units and are religious and social legends.

The invasions of other nations during the 10th century hindered the development of this oral tradition and some modern Latvian literature, thriving outside the country today, is an attempt to renew this connection. The modern Latvian choruses also renew this connection by singing these folksongs. In 1873, during the Latvian reawakening, the song festival was born when choruses from all over the country gathered to sing as one group. From then on these song festival have taken place periodically in cities in the United States, other

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cities in the world and in Riga.

Historical Background

Latvia is a small country in eastern Europe. It is boarded by Estonia in the north, Russia in the East, Lithuania in the south and the Baltic Sea in the west. Even in the 10th and 11th centuries Latvia was subject to invasion by other nations because of it's geographical location. From the east was Russian penetration to attempt to have a port on the Baltic Sea and from the west the Swedish pressed towards the rich lands near the Daugava River in Courland.* During the 12th century German missionaries arrived. The Germans soon annexed the Baltic region and lived there as nobility, forcing the rural people to pay taxes until the 16th century when the power of the Teutonic Order declined.

In 1561 the Latvian territory was divided between the Swedish and Polish crowns. Russia was a constant threat and Ivan III and Ivan IV tried to break through to the Baltic Sea in a number of wars. Peter the Great managed to do so during the Great Northern War and gradually, by 1795, all of Latvia was under Russian domination.

By 1819 serfs in Latvia had been granted personal freedom. With the growth of economic strength among the peasantry there came a revival of national feeling. The idea of political self-rule was conceived.

* see maps on page 7.
among the idealistic, but they knew their difficult position inbetween the German aristocracy and the Russian administration. Educational and other institutions were established to meet the increasing intellectual demands of the people. This is referred to as the period of the Latvian reawakening. In 1905, during the Russian Revolution, the idea of self-rule was openly put forth.

During World War I, and after the Russian Revolution of 1917, a conference met in Riga and asked for complete political freedom from Russia. On September 3rd, however, a German army took Riga. On November 18, 1918, after the collapse of Germany, the Latvian National Council, the same council that had met the year before, proclaimed the independence of Latvia. Latvia then had, until July 20, 1940, the only independent years that it has known in modern history.

When World War II started in September 1939 the fate of Latvia had already been decided by the secret German-Soviet treaty. On August 5, 1940 the country was incorporated into the U.S.S.R. Then, after the unsuccessful period of attack on the U.S.S.R. by Germany from July 1941 to October 1944, the Soviet regime was again restored and occupies Latvia to this day. With the retreat of the German army 65,000 Latvians fled to Germany and Sweden, among them the Latvians that eventually arrived in Kalamazoo.

What followed for the Latvians that chose to or had to remain in Latvia was and is difficult. In 1945 a mass deportation took place when 70,000 Latvians were forced to go to Siberia when collective farming was introduced. Only 55% of the population in Latvia are
Latvian since so many Russians have moved into the country. The Russian language has replaced Latvian in many quarters and Russians have the majority of the government and high ranking jobs. What followed for the people that fled the country was not easy either.

Just before the soviet army came into Latvia people were told that they could go to Germany. A few days later the ones that chose to packed what they could in one or two suitcases and left. They loaded themselves onto the ships provided for them. "It was estimated that West Germany had ten million refugees to care for at one time." The camps they lived in under the Germans were workers' camps provided by the churches. They were pressed into the war effort in various ways either for the Russians or the Germans depending on which zone they were in.

...Germans had brought so many people out from the East to work right in airfields bombed out, mostly taking care of bomb damage. These were the older men, the younger ones were called to fight in the army, usually by the Russians or Germans depending on the zone.

The living conditions under the Germans were bad. The war was still raging and Germany was loosing ground quickly. Supplies were short. Mrs. Zadins described how it was for her.

I had two girls and they were quite small, 3 and 5, so it was a struggle. Many babies died because there was not proper food. We didn't live under the Germans too long, about six months. I think we came in November and about April the Americans came in. We knew it was

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3 Carl Sno:, Kalamazoo Methodists Help Refugees, p. 1.
4 Mrs. Erika Zadins.
about the end of the war. It was very dangerous and many people perished either on boats getting out of the Russian zone or just being bombed out.

Hitler's Germany fell in May 1945. The first days afterwards were chaotic. The refugees were moved from the scattered work camps and centralized into larger displaced persons' camps for easy distribution of goods. There was a camp in Grosshabersdorf near Nuremberg called Valka for Latvians and Estonians and this was where most Kalamazoo Latvians stayed until four or five years later when they came to the United States.

Life in these camps was like barrack life in an army. All hoped that when World War II affairs were settled Latvia would regain independence. As it gradually became apparent that this would not happen the life of the displaced person was one of waiting for entrance into a new country. The Latvians could not stay in Germany because jobs were scarce and the jobs that could be found were war relief jobs funded by the allies. It was easier for single people to emigrate than families because they would not become economic burdens to the country. Families had children that needed educations and they needed larger living units.

Those who were able to work went to Australia, Canada, England or other places earlier, but they were single. Families with children no one really wanted, America didn't have the immigration law yet to change the quotas so we stayed quite a few years...because we simply didn't have a place to go with small children.

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5 Mrs. Erika Zadins
6 Mrs. Erika Zadins
The men found what jobs they could, yet many women and older men were left with a good deal of free time and not much of interest to occupy themselves with, so they organized their own cultural activities and schools for the children.

Supplies to Valka were provided by the Americans but it was mostly powdered products. It was difficult to get fresh vegetables, fruit and meat from the Germans because they were poor right after the war. Some chickens were raised, however, in the fields outside of Valka.

The barracks were cold and uncomfortable.

It was very cold in the winter. There was hardly any heat. Some tried to fix it but it was very dangerous to put stoves in the wooden barracks.

The majority of Latvians that finally came to Kalamazoo lived in Valka, including the chorus group, but not all of them did. Some lived in other camps and some people had the fortune to secure a job in a German town or city, or by other circumstances not live in the displaced persons' camps.

Mr. Salna spent three years in a displaced persons' camp and the last two years before he crossed the ocean as an officer in the International Refugee Organization in Nuremberg. Mrs. Alise Osis and her sister lived and worked on a farm in Bavaria.

Mr. Voldemars Rushevics and his family also did not live at Valka.

From October 1944 until January 1945 they lived in various camps and then the family moved to a small town named Blomberg where they remained.

7 Mrs. Erika Zadins
until April 1950 when they emigrated. Mr. Rushevics' story is different from others because of his particular skill. He is a professional musician and between 1946 and 1950 he performed in more than 400 concerts in Germany with the Latvian String Quartet. Even with this he and his family only had a one room apartment, but his life in Germany was probably a more satisfying and productive one than most Latvians had.

There was another Latvian musician active in Germany who played an important role in Kalamazoo history. That was Arnolds Kalnajas. An organist and composer, he had been trained at the Academy of Music of Latvia in Riga. In Germany he was in Valka where he organized musical events and activities to provide familiar entertainment and activity for his fellow Latvians. A chorus was organized with Mr. Kalnajas as the director and conductor. They called themselves Shield of Songs, a name derived from a folk legend, and during the following years gave approximately 30 concerts for Latvians and for the Americans stationed in Germany. They became well enough known to be invited to sing on German radio, in the Furth Opera House, and for the International Press. There were six Latvian folk singing festivals held in Germany that Shield of Songs participated in.

Finally in June 1948 the Displaced Persons Act was passed in the United States. Access to immigration visas became more easily available than previously when the quota for Latvian immigration had
been only 263 persons a year. A sponsor was now required at the place of destination in the U.S. The sponsor had to be a resident U.S. citizen who guaranteed to provide the immigrant with housing and a place of employment.

Mr. Janis Laupmanis was born in Latvia. He grew up in the country and as a teenager lived in Riga working by day and finishing high school in night courses. He was sent to England for more schooling and became an ordained Methodist minister. He came to the United States in 1940, worked as a farm hand, and then in a country church near South Haven, Michigan. He was transferred to Kalamazoo's Methodist Church just after the war ended.

This is where the story of the Latvian immigrants and the story of Kalamazoo meet, for Mr. Laupmanis had an old school mate in one of the refugee camps in Germany that he started to correspond with. Partly because of this he became "interested in the plight of the displaced persons in Europe, in particular with his fellow Latvian's situation in Germany." He found out about the chorus Shield of Songs. When the Displaced Persons Act was passed in 1948 this interest, along with the encouragement of the National Council of Churches for congregations to sponsor families, inspired Mr. Laupmanis and assistant pastor Paul Albery to organize a local sponsorship program. The goal was to sponsor the entire Shield of Songs chorus so that the group could remain together.

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9 Halla, p. 5.
10 ibid.
The Methodist committee created to facilitate the immigration of the chorus was headed by Mr. Howard Bozman. His congregation sponsored some people and neighboring congregations sponsored others. Mr. Laupmanis and his wife traveled among area churches asking them to sponsor members of the chorus. Many farm owners south of Kalamazoo sponsored Latvians. Generally the agreement was that the immigrants would work on the farm either until they found a job elsewhere, usually in Kalamazoo, or they had paid back their sponsor with labor. By the fall of 1949 most members of the chorus were in the U.S. They resumed their singing and traveled to area communities introducing Latvian music and finding sponsors for other refugees still in Germany. In this way many Latvians came to Kalamazoo that were not part of the original chorus.

The Latvians speak of how kindly they were treated when they arrived in Kalamazoo, of the extra efforts that were made for them. It does seem, in fact, that Kalamazoo was an especially congenial end point for them. It was easy to be that way though, because the Latvians proved themselves to be hard working, proud people that would not depend on benefactors for long.

The Methodist committee was a generous and responsible one. "Dr. Thomas Pryor, who was pastor of the Kalamazoo Methodist Church beginning in 1950, stated in a letter dated February 18, 1975..."

'I recall that the head of NCOR told me one time that he had no hesitancy in putting down '1st Kalamazoo Methodist' as the sponsor of any D.P.'s that arrived in New York..."
without sponsors. Sometimes he forgot to tell us about the family until they were on the train bound for Kalamazoo. He was sorry about that, but knew that our committee would take care of the family.

The members of the committee were aware of the individual situations and problems with each family and throughout the first few years were flexible in aiding the immigrants. Mrs. Bowman spoke of her husband's concern over a woman who refused to learn English. The Van Dykes, also committee members, unexpectedly took into their house Latvian families. These are examples of the care and attention given to the immigrants.

Mr. Laupmanis, seeing his goal fulfilled, extended himself. "He awaited the hundreds of immigrants at the Kalamazoo railroad station with the same care and help that one would give to one's father, brother or child. Uncounted numbers were housed and fed in his home."

Not all of the Latvians that eventually came to Kalamazoo were originally sponsored in southwestern Michigan. A small number of them were sponsored in southern states where they worked on farms. When they earned enough money they moved to Kalamazoo because there was already a large Latvian population to provide involvement in Latvian organizations and events. Mrs. Aina Kalniete was sponsored

11 Snow, p.5.
by a family in Iowa. She stayed there for a year. After hearing about Kalamazoo and that jobs were available, she decided to move here.

Some Latvians came to Kalamazoo because they had relatives here. It was because of this that Mr. Rushevics and his family came to Kalamazoo.

After my family and I arrived in Boston a representative of the Lutheran World Federation, who sponsored my family, asked me if I had some relative in America. My answer was 'yes', I had my sister-in-law in Kalamazoo. The representative didn't ask me any more questions. They gave me four tickets for the railroad and here I was in Kalamazoo. It was a self-perpetuating immigration to Kalamazoo. Mr. Laupmanis and the Methodist committee had set off a chain reaction.

The first months were awkward. Shelter and jobs were waiting for the immigrants, but the cultural adjustment was difficult. Language was the first barrier to overcome. Mr. Rushevics continues his story,

The first month or so I lived with my sister-in-law.

I had arrived in Kalamazoo in 1950, the second of April...At the Methodist Church on June 4th, 1950, the committee under the chairmanship of Mr. Howard Bowman had organized my first formal recital in the beautiful First Methodist Church...14

Mrs. Minifred Bowman, wife of the deceased Howard Bowman remembers the day well:

13 Mr. Voldemar Rushevics
14 ibid.
Now, you know Mr. Rushevics, I took him to his first public engagement in Kalamazoo and he didn't know a word of English and I didn't know a word of Latvian. The traffic is pretty heavy there on Sunday mornings and I had to shove him out of the car and someone was there to meet him. He was to play an accompaniment on his violin to the organ for the offeratory... (I had to push him out of the car) because he didn't know he was supposed to get out where I stopped to let him out and I had to gesture and try to hang onto the car and get him out and he was bewildered, of course, and I certainly felt awfully dumb but when you haven't a means of communication it's really tough and they overcame it. Mrs. Rushevics said, 'Oh, my husband remembers that first time just as if it were yesterday!' 15

The Methodist committee arranged evening language classes for the Latvians taught in the basement of the Methodist Church. Most of them were well educated in Latvia and all ready knew German and Russian, but found English, nevertheless, difficult.

The language was learned in a less formal way also. The sponsoring families helped the immigrants. Mrs. Zadins said that she had learned "English" in Latvia, but "American" was so different that, when we got on the farm the lady talked and I just couldn't understand, the pronunciation was so much different. We used to sit around the table and she wrote the question, I wrote the answer and little by little we learned... 16

15 Mrs. Winifred Bowman.
16 Mrs. Erika Zadins
Most were eager to learn the language to make the adjustment easier for themselves.

The language problem was one of the main reasons that professionally trained Latvians were not able to have jobs in the same field that had employed them in Latvia. Architects, doctors, lawyers, teachers, etcetera, took jobs as store clerks, dishwashers, farm hands, factory workers and other skilled and unskilled employments.

Mr. Vitands had been an architect in Latvia and found work with a construction company in Kalamazoo.

The main trouble was with the language. In school I picked up German, Russian and French and, of course, Latvian, but never learned English, so I had to start from zero and it was very hard. Being an architect I had another problem. We had used the meters and kilograms of the metric system and now these pounds and inches, and especially working in architecture...to pick up that and the language made it a little difficult from the very beginning. 17

The Methodist committee tried to help people find the same job or a similar kind of job that the person had in Latvia, but usually, because of language and lack of proper United States professional certification this was impossible. It was only by learning English proficiently and then gradually working up, gaining proper certification, that a person could resume the same kind of trained job that s/he had been originally trained to do. Mrs. Sitka started with an unskilled job and worked her way back to where she had been professionally in Latvia.

17 Mr. Vitands
I was graduated in Latvia from the University in Political Science and Business Administration. Of course when I came here I knew nothing in English. After several months on the farm we moved to Kalamazoo and we (she and her brother) worked at LaPols, the fur shop. I didn't know anything about sewing fur coats, but I learned something and there I worked for five years or so. I was more familiar with English and then I went to Parson's Business School for a half a year and after that I knew all the terms...I worked at the American National Bank with the bookkeeping. 18

Many of the original immigrants that had been professionals in Latvia still have or retired with, the blue-collar jobs that they started with when they began working in Kalamazoo. It was disappointing, for Mrs. Kalniete, for example, to be an attorney in Riga and then a cleaning lady and a bank clerk in America. As with many others she did not have the time and money to be retrained in the United States. Her spirit, though, and the prevailing spirit among the Latvians is shown by Mrs. Kalniete's statement, "No job is humiliating. You just have to do it well." 19

It was not as if speaking Latvian was always a disadvantage in terms of job adjustment. Latvians became consumers, after all, in Kalamazoo and in Mrs. Zadins' case her employers found her language skills commodious.

I found a job in Mohoney's Clothing Store and I didn't know enough English so I started for a

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18 Mrs. Sitka
19 Mrs. Kalniete
few months as a stock girl to pick up more language. They noticed how many people from our country and Germans came in and I could converse in other languages so they made me saleslady and put me in front because it was really attracting customers. 20

At the time of Mr. Hálla's study in 1959 there were approximately 1,100 Latvians in Kalamazoo, about 340 families. 21 By that time the Displaced Person$ Act had expired and the community had stabilized. As many Latvians were in Chicago and Grand Rapids. These cities have their own organizations and clubs but Kalamazoo has tended to be a center of Latvian activity.

Within the first five years in Kalamazoo three main organizations were established. The chorus already existed, of course, but was officially incorporated in 1955. The Latvian Association was created to handle community events and the two churches were established. Reverend Piebalgs was the original minister of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Parish; Reverend Turks of St. John's Lutheran Latvian Church on Cherry Hill drive. Both of these men still lead their congregations.

The story of the Latvians in Kalamazoo is different from that of other immigrant groups in the United States for three reasons. First, the Latvians did not leave their homeland seeking a better life in America as was the motivation for other earlier immigrant groups. They came because their country was invaded. Second, they did not settle into one neighborhood as earlier immigrants did. 22

20 Mrs. Erika Zadins.
21 Hálla, p. 6.
but were dispersed throughout the area because of the housing shortage at that time. Third, they came later than other immigrant groups in America. They came under a sponsorship program and were an anachronism in the settled community of Kalamazoo.

\[22^A\text{ibid. p. 9.}\]
The Latvians in Kalamazoo:
Resolution of the Difficulties in their Lives as Immigrants

THE DIFFICULTIES

Two aspects of immigration have threatened the happiness of the Latvians that settled in Kalamazoo. First is the concern that with adjustment in the United States the Latvian heritage will be lost. Second, there was a drastic change in socio-economic class for the Latvians to face when they came here.

Retaining the Heritage

Retaining all of the unique aspects of their cultural heritage is a firm value and obsessive concern of the exile group of Halla's study. "The exile...is a person who consciously or unconsciously is reluctant to abandon his former values and attitudes and resists acquisition and assimilation of new ones."\(^{22}\) The immigrant is more "willing and anxious to abandon the old and accept the new values and attitudes."\(^{23}\) They want to lead happily adjusted lives. An individual does not fit one or the other category so simply and Halla has an

\(^{22}\) Halla, p. 10.
\(^{23}\) ibid.
"intermediate" group. There are degrees to which an immigrant can choose to assimilate and there can be aspects of his/her life that retain the heritage and other aspects that abandon the traditions. There is a tension as an immigrant chooses to assimilate or not to assimilate, and in what parts of life, that threatens his/her peace of mind or happiness.

It is because of necessity or interest in being involved with American culture that an immigrant chooses to become more identified in behavior with American culture. The immigrant group, itself, can be subdivided into those that assimilate and those that acculturate, depending on the degree of identification with either culture.

Acculturation has occurred when the individual has made changes in behavior due to the contact with the foreign culture. Certain outward and superficial elements of the culture have been appropriated and slowly adapted. Assimilation has occurred when the individual has become identified in interest and outlook with the once foreign culture. Possession is taken of the new culture by internalization of its values and interests.

The distinction is useful for understanding how the Latvian culture is waning in Kalamazoo, but it is preferable to discuss assimilated and acculturated behavior instead of classifying a whole person as one or the other, allowing for variety within the individual. The distinction can be clarified by examining five aspects of it.

The first way to clarify this distinction is by examining the question of where "home" is. Marite, a young Latvian, said that...
there is a difference in respect to this among the Latvians.

Some people have made the United States their home and some will never be able to. It's just a place to live...they'll never call it home.  

She described the people who will never call the United States their home as simply biding their time. She associated happiness with the people who have made the U.S. their home, but asked,

...like anyone who has to leave their home, how happy can you be?  

The biding time attitude, or the characteristics of the acculturated as opposed to those of the assimilated are more common in the older generation of Latvians who were adults when they left Latvia.

(The biding time attitude is)...more for the older generation, because, well, I was born here in the United States, so I don't have that discrepancy, because...home is here. I am a natural citizen so I don't have that split, I have no real ties...I don't have their kind of ties.

The people that remember little of Latvia or were born in Germany or the United States tend to be more assimilated than acculturated because they identify with the culture that they know.

Related to this is the question of whether the Latvian would return to Latvia if it regained independence. Many said that at first they thought they would and that they often talked about returning and dreamed about it for the future. Gradually, as they became more

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25 Marite Skrupskelis  
26 ibid.  
27 ibid.
adjusted and Latvia more communist (only 55% of the population in Latvia today is Latvian and many have been converted to communism) and their children were involved in activities in school, they started to have the frame of mind of remaining here.* Mrs. Zadins said that at first she thought about returning but now asked if she would return her answer is,

No...my children probably would not want to go back because they have grown children that are so grown into this culture and they are happy and we want to stay where they are because our family (in Latvia) has died out by now, my parents and aunts and so on. I want to stay where they (children) are.28

Zadins are mainly acculturated people but their grandchildren are assimilated and that has a bearing on where their "home" is. Theirs is an attitude of biding time while they live out their lives but they allow themselves some degree of cultural assimilation since they would not return to Latvia. This is acculturation.

The third issue that helps to clarify this is the question of where Latvian heritage is. Does the immigrant feel a responsibility to continue the traditions of the culture so it will stay alive in the United States or is Latvian heritage kept alive by Latvians in the mother country with immigrants carrying no responsibility? Mrs. Austrins, a first generation immigrant, has tried to encourage young people

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* A few actually did return. One young woman returned to marry her boy friend in Latvia, giving up her freedom to live outside of the U.S.S.R. Another elderly woman returned to live out her life there. Obviously these would have fit Halla's exile definition.

28 Mrs. Erika Zadins
to participate in the chorus. She even initiated a young persons' chorus but her attempts and those of others have failed. Retaining the chorus is a value to the first generation immigrants but they have come to be saddened with the lack of interest in their grandchildren. They concede that young people have their own lives to live and that the value of Latvian heritage cannot be forced onto them. The acculturated feel responsibility which has brought them sadness. The assimilated feel no responsibility to keep the heritage alive.

Two young people in this study illustrate that this distinction cannot be automatically and simply drawn along the dividing line of generations. Marite has the same resigned attitude of some of the first generation immigrants.

All we can do is bide our time and if there is something we can do to help we will do it, but as far as continuing our alive and growing culture goes, it's not going to happen here. 29

Marite said also that there are young Latvians that "couldn't care less" about their Latvian heritage. These are the young assimilated. At the other extreme is Maruta. She is a high school senior who took the presidency of the Latvian Youth Association because,

I did not want to see it be liquidated. There was a question of liquidation because of non-participation. I didn't want to see that. 30

Maruta has a firm tie to Latvian heritage and a strong will to keep it alive among her peers. She is afraid the heritage is going to die in

29 Marite Skrupskelis
30 Maruta Kajaks
America. She is like a first generation immigrant who has not resigned hope. In another way, though, Maruta has characteristics of the assimilated. Asked if she would return to Latvia if it became independent, she said,

They wouldn't want me there. I've grown up in America...I've grown up with these ideas. I am an American Latvian. Someone asks me what I am, I say Latvian. Well, I'm American by where I live.31

Maruta is assimilated in this way but acculturated, if even that, in her firm ties to Latvian heritage. She is eight years younger than Marite. She is exasperated with the lack of interest and participation in Latvian activities and the Latvian identity among her peers in Kalamazoo. Perhaps her enthusiasm will begin a new cycle of young Latvian activity or it is possible that she, too, will grow to resign to the passing of a strong Latvian culture in Kalamazoo.

The fourth issue that helps illustrate the distinction between the acculturated and the assimilated is that of which language is spoken. An assimilated person and family would use English more than Latvian. The first generation immigrants in this study all speak Latvian in their homes, and with their Latvian friends. Many of their children have intermarried, however, and the language has not been retained in those families. Assimilated and acculturated behavior is more easily divided by generation in this aspect of the distinction.

Fifth, is the question of who the immigrant's friends are. An acculturated person would have mainly Latvian friends; an assimilated person more or as many American as Latvian friends. Most young people

31 Maruta Kajaks
up to age thirty five or forty are this way, especially the ones that have intermarried. All of the first generation immigrants in this study said they have more Latvian friends. The line is more easily drawn by generation here, too.

Recognizing the division of the acculturated behavior and the assimilated behavior in the immigrant, it is possible to go on and examine how the young choose to assimilate and how this affects the older generation, making them, too, surrender a bit more. The high value placed on education is significant in this process.

Education has a special value to Latvians. "Education is most important because this is something no one can take away from you,"

unlike the friends and material things that had to be left behind when the country was invaded. At least among the Kalamazoo Latvians, though, it is apparent that education was valued even before the war experience because so many of them were professionally trained in Latvia. The value of education may be inherent in the Latvian people or it may have its roots in the reawakening when institutions of higher learning were demanded and provided. Mrs. Kalniete says it dates back before the war, though, when the value on education was at least strengthened.

Those that had the time and money in Kalamazoo were reeducated. After Mrs. Zadins picked up English while working as a stock person and clerk at a store, she was trained in typing and shorthand at Central High School. Then she got an office job at Western Michigan

\[32\] Mrs. Aina Kalniete
University so that she could attend a class at lunch hour. After Stalin died the rules were changed and her two years credit in Riga was transferred and from there it took her five years to get a bachelor's degree. After that she got a master's degree. Most people did not have the time or money for their own education so they saved for their children's educations.

The Latvian school children valued learning, whether it was instilled in them by their parents or inherent. Marite described what Latvian students were like in Kalamazoo primary and secondary school.

...somehow the Europeans were better students... they always seemed to be the best students, most interested in learning and kind-of singled out in that way. Kids kind-of picked them out, like, 'What's wrong with you?, Why are you studying?, Why do you want to learn instead of messing around?';

The children went to college after secondary school and there are many master's and doctorate degrees among them. Mrs. Zadina's family is an example. Both children received scholarships, one to Kalamazoo College, the other to Western Michigan University. Both graduated and have master's degrees and doctorates now. This is a common story. Many young Latvians attended Kalamazoo College and professors remember what bright and highly motivated students they were.

What did college lead to? It led to two significant things for the history of Latvian heritage in Kalamazoo, intermarriages:

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32 Marite Skrupskelis
and career positions outside of Kalamazoo. There are comparatively few Latvians between the ages of twenty and forty in this area for these reasons.

Reverend Turks spoke about the children attaining good educations and then scattering for job opportunities.

Our younger generation went to Western Michigan University, Ann Arbor, we have about six doctors who finished Ann Arbor, (etcetera. My children...) all finished. My middle daughter finished Kalamazoo College, my oldest daughter, Ann Arbor University, and my son finished Kalamazoo College. They are working in many places. We have teachers, lawyers and professors in every city. 33

When a young Latvian moves does s/he continue to identify with Latvian heritage? The chances are small that a given city or town will have a Latvian community and it is questionable that if there was the Latvian would become part of that community rather than identifying with people in the same profession or neighborhood, and thus, assimilate to a larger degree.

In intermarriages it is doubtful that the Latvian language would be spoken in the home. Children would probably not learn the language. Intermarrying also often means moving with the spouse's job. Mrs. Zadins described this in her family, speaking of her daughter's family who moved to Amherst, Massachusetts.

...there are no other families in that community and even if she tried to teach the children they don't feel it's a real language if you don't converse

33 Reverend Turks
* University of Michigan
in it and she doesn't force them anymore. When they come to visit us they want to know very much what the words mean and to learn a few songs, but it's not enough, a couple of weeks and then they go again.  

With the second and third generation the identification with Latvian heritage decreases. Mrs. Zadins' daughter, with giving up on teaching her children the language by force has the attitude of the resigned acculturated. Mrs. Zadins does too. The identification with American heritage was made in the case of a second generation Latvian who, with her American husband, bought a house on the list of bicentennial homes in Kalamazoo.

The local organizations are affected by young people intermarrying and moving away. According to Mr. Sverns, recent president of the Latvian Association, the people that intermarry account for the drop off in the active participants in the group, although the individuals personal identity may still be Latvian. The person may value the Latvian identity in his or her own life but in regard to value placed on retaining the heritage throughout the generations in America, participation in the organizations is a good indication of the importance that Latvian heritage does and will have to the second and third generation Latvians.

When the chorus, Shield of Songs, was established it was stated in the laws of the group that Arnolds Kalnejas was the conductor and director. Mr. Kalnejas died two years ago, but the group has remained together to publish his works. The last performance of the
group was on May 21, 1977. The concert was in commemoration of Kalnejas. Mrs. Austrins, a spokesperson for the group, said that the group will not exist under the name Shield of Songs in the future but will reconvene in the fall of 1977 to examine the progress of the publishing and consider forming another chorus.

The death of Kalnejas handicapped the group. No strong director or conductor has emerged to take his place. It is hoped that a recent graduate of Western Michigan University's music school and competent director who has been doing some of the directing these past two years will stay in Kalamazoo to be permanent director, but Mrs. Austrins said that the future is uncertain.

The group was very active. It made over 320 stage appearances and over 150 full program concerts. Between 1945 and the late 60's there were seventy to ninety members. Shield of Songs participated in the song festivals held every five years in the major American cities. It also participated in Canadian song festivals and twice in the late 50's and early 60's won a prize for being most active Latvian chorus of the continent.

What has been the plight of the chorus in recent years? Mrs. Austrins estimated that only one third of the members of the chorus are age fifty-five or younger. People cannot participate as actively as they once did. Mrs. Austrins said it is not the same as it used to be, that in Germany and the early years in Kalamazoo the chorus was popular among the young people. Now they "prefer sports to singing." Troubled by this, many adults have encouraged

35 Mrs. Mikelis Austrins
their children to join the chorus through various individual and organized efforts. Choral singing is not popular among American youth and never has been to the same extent that sports are. Assimilation can be seen in the Latvian youth since they now prefer sports to singing. Even the audience at the May 21st performance was composed almost exclusively of first generation immigrants.

Like singing, folk dancing is not popular among American youth and now is not among Latvian youth either. Folk dancing festivals are also held in the United States, but Kalamazoo has not had a participating group for over five years. Marite remembers when it was popular with the group contemporary with her older sister. Marite's sister was a pre-teen when her family arrived in Kalamazoo. Now those people have largely married and moved away with their families. Speaking of the folk dancing group, Marite said,

For a lot of years there were twenty or thirty people and then it started slacking off and slacking off... 36

It seemed more important for the age group that faced the new culture in adolescence to keep together as a group. It is different for those like Marite and younger, born in the United States, that have grown up here. Marite is hopeful, though, that dancing will blossom again among the young Latvians in Kalamazoo.

Perhaps for the same reason, activity and interest in the Latvian Youth Association has lessened. Again, ten or fifteen years ago it was an active club, but now Maruta's biggest problem is

36 Marite Skrupskelis
creating interest among her peers who seem apathetic.

(A) problem is the activity, the participation, trying to get everyone to participate. How do you get people to participate? break their arm? You can't force someone, you just have to create interest. 37

Maruta and Marite are both enthusiastic and have ideas about how to create interest and initiate younger people. Maruta hopes to show other young Latvians that they will get a "personal pride" profit out of participating in their ethnic youth club. If "personal pride" means identifying oneself with Latvian heritage, it remains to be seen if Maruta and Marite will be able to instill this interest in young Latvians born and growing up in American culture.

The churches provide the same worship function of any other churches. For the immigrant they also provides the opportunity to gather weekly with other Latvians. Saint John's Lutheran Church met in another church building for ten years and then the congregation bought a plot of land outside of the city and built the building they now have. It took two years for the congregation to complete the church, working on it evenings and weekends.

Reverend Turks and Reverend Piebalgs are the original ministers. Rev. Turks estimated that the congregation of his church is 500. Mrs. Kalniete, secretary to Rev. Piebalgs of the Latvian Evangelical Lutheran Church said that the number in that congregation is 375, including children. She said that young families have moved away and there are not as many children as there were twenty-five years ago.

37 Maruta Kajaks
The Latvian Association is the principle unifying Latvian organization in Kalamazoo. (It is also united with other Latvian Associations in a national organization.) All area families and individuals belong to it. It was established within five years after the Latvians arrived. It organizes three or four yearly events such as performances by visiting singers and musicians. The organization aided in the adjustment to American culture.

It was a problem and probably still is to adjust to a new culture. A purpose of the Latvian Association is to deal with it in mass where you have an opportunity to go someplace and exchange ideas and if there is some kind of a problem just the contact helps the people function in a job and know all the systems. 38 This is less of a need than it was twenty-five or thirty years ago.

The organization attempts to retain the value of the heritage in the United States and the local community by donating money to Garezers, a Latvian summer school and camp and by providing funds for local young people to attend Garezers.

The original immigrants that are considered in this study still participate in the local Latvian events organized by the Latvian Association. Mr. Sverns estimated that two thirds of the active members are older than forty. He said that there are a number of inactive Latvians under forty and a number that have moved away. Asked if he thought the Latvian Association will become less active he said,

38 Mr. Janis Sverns
In general the signs are that it would drop off to some extent in the future, but there is the Latvian Youth Association that functions separately.

That age group is participating by itself. 39

Mr. Sverns places hope for the future of the Latvian Association in the young. Considering, however, what Maruta said about participation in the youth group, the future of the Latvian Association looks questionable.

The assimilation of the young due to intermarriage and moving is apparent in the lack of participation in the chorus, the churches, the Latvian Association and the Latvian Youth Association. As Mr. Sverns said, the participation of an individual is not necessarily a sign of whether his or her own personal identity is Latvian, but it is a sign of the value placed on continuing the outward aspects of the Latvian heritage in his or her life and in the society.

It is not without distress that the acculturated first generation Latvians see the young intermarry and move away.

Our young men are marrying the American girls, then they are American, no more Latvian. That is for us very, very sad. It is that we are proud of being Latvian. 40

But, with regret they concede that their children have their own lives to live. Their children live American lives and in a way Americanism becomes a little less bad in their eyes. They may even assimilate a bit more themselves and with their children's happiness their hearts may take a bit more root in America. However, regardless

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39 Mr. Janis Sverns
40 Mrs. Alise Osis
of whether the assimilation of the children has an effect on the
assimilation of the first generation immigrants, the entire issue
of assimilation is stressful to the original immigrants. On one hand
the loyalty to Latvian heritage is the most defended area of their
lives in the United States. They know the meaning of the songs, the
language, the dances, the stories and values. On the other hand,
their children have been successful in America. They are well
educated, have good jobs and are happy. On their tables and bureaus
in their livingrooms are the color photographs of their beaming,
healthy American grandchildren next to the worn, brown and white
photographs of relatives, friends and places left behind in Latvia.

The education and assimilation trend is not automatically
applicable to each second generation Latvian, nor is every Latvian
organization growing old and unpopular. There are exceptions but
the same blockades still seem to have their effect.

Three individuals interviewed for this study go against the trend.
This is not surprising since the interviewees were suggested as
people who are active and would know about Latvian activity in
Kalamazoo. Each of them are exceptions to the trend and that is
exactly why they were suggested. Chances of interviewing an inactive
Latvian, uninterested in the heritage, were small. Mr. Sverns,
Marite and Maruta are, for example, among the only in their age groups
that sang with Shield of Songs.

Mr. Sverns was fourteen when he came to Kalamazoo with his family.
He married a Latvian woman and remained in the city. He was president
of the Latvian Association for a few years. Language preference is
a sign of the attitude toward the heritage and in Mr. Sverns' home the family speaks only Latvian. The oldest child is just now becoming acquainted with English in kindergarten. Mr. Sverns wants his children to know Latvian and has confidence that they will pick up English easily without speaking it at home since he did. Only the future will tell if his children will value their Latvian heritage like their father does.

In Marite's teenage years she identified herself as being Latvian.

I don't know, maybe I was just a strange kid growing up, but I never really felt a need or want to become Americanized because I always felt that being Latvian made me something special. That was a time of everyone trying to find their own identity and being something unique and stuff. Well, I didn't have to look very far. I didn't have to become a hippy or try to stand out in any fake way because intrinsically I was very different. I spoke a different language...

She thinks of herself as a Latvian before she does as American and her closest friends are Latvian. When she is with her family she speaks Latvian.

Marite's situation is different from that of many people in her age group. She is twenty-six and single. Her old friends have married and moved away. She does not have the pull to assimilate of an American marriage and she has remained in her home town with a Latvian community she has known her whole life. She does not feel the same ties, however, that the older generation feels because she was not born in Latvia. She watches a lot of television and said that

41 Marite Skrupskelis
others would probably consider her more American than Latvian.

Maruta is a young Latvian, enthusiastic about her heritage. As mentioned above, she is president of the Latvian Youth Association. She attended Garezers, the Latvian summer high school for youth from the whole nation. She takes pride in her Latvian identity. Her closest friends are Latvian. Both she and Mr. Sverns place their hope for the future of the Latvian community in the youth group, but Maruta, herself, said that she took the presidency because she was afraid the group would disband if she did not. Maruta said her goal and the goal of the Latvian Youth Association is to see the Latvian community grow together as a whole. Judging from the attempts of Mrs. Austrins to have a youth chorus and the very reason that Maruta took the presidency, this seems idealistic.

Maruta has not been to college yet. She is entering Kalamazoo College in the fall of 1977. Maruta thinks of herself as Latvian-American rather than simply Latvian which concedes a degree of assimilation. Although Maruta identifies more with Latvian heritage than many of her peers, it seems that there are blockades that may prevent her from fulfilling her ideal of continuing interest in Latvian heritage in the community.

There are two existing organizations for the very young in Kalamazoo, the scouts and the Saturday school, that are not suffering, although not as many young people participate as earlier. The Saturday school was established when the immigrants arrived. It is for elementary school aged children and meets during morning and half of the afternoon every Saturday. The Latvian language is spoken
and Latvian history is taught. Teachers are college graduates and the school is funded by parents. The boy and girl scout troops cooperate with the American organizations but have separate meetings in St. John's Latvian Lutheran Church.

There are also three thriving adult Latvian organizations but are national organizations instead of local level groups and, so, do not indicate the participation and value felt in retaining the heritage in the local community.

College aged students come from the United States and Canada to take Latvian history, literature and language courses in the Latvian summer school at Western Michigan University. College credit is given for these courses. Second, the nationally organized song festivals are still thriving in the United States. Third, is Garezers, near Three Rivers, Michigan, a large plot of wooded land on Long Lake (Garezers in Latvian). There is a summer camp for elementary school aged people, a summer high school, a shooting range for sports clubs, and a camping area for families. The organization is supported by churches and Latvian associations throughout the nation and has been growing ever since it was established in 1965. There has since been established two other schools like Garezers elsewhere in the country. Organizations and events like these draw out the second and third generation people like Marite, Maruta and Mr. Sverns who find it more and more difficult to find people their own age participating in the local Latvian activities.
Change in Socio-Economic Class

Many Latvian immigrants had to face a change in socio-economic class and this is the second thing that clouded the likelihood of happiness came in their lives. Earlier immigrants to the United States to improve their economic condition, but this was not the case with the Latvians who left Latvia to escape the soviet regime. The kind of jobs they took in America were often drastically different from the jobs they had in Latvia. Of the immigrant group and intermediate group considered in Halla's study, 51% were professionals in Latvia, 45% were skilled workers or farmers and 4% checked "other". Half of the immigrants, then, took manual or skilled jobs which were very different from the jobs they held in Latvia, at least at first.

There are two reasons that lower socio-economic jobs had to be taken. First, the Latvians did not know the language and could not be placed in a job that required very much communication. Second, once they knew the language there were specialized terms in the field to learn. That presented a barrier. Mainly, though, in the specialized field there usually had to be education in the United States before certification for practice was available. 65% of the immigrants and intermediates in Halla's study felt they had to face lower occupational prospects. Not many were as lucky as Mr. Rushevics. Musical ability does not need to be certified and the specialized terms are symbolic and universal in his field. Immediately he could perform and when he learned English he was hired as a music professor at Kalamazoo College.
Mrs. Kalniète was an attorney in Riga. She had done her thesis on the laws concerning the rights of women and minors in Latvia. Since she is multi-lingual she worked for the Latvian government, reading on this subject in other countries and then made suggestions for legislation in Latvia. (Incidentally, Latvia was far ahead of other western nations in this area.) She was sponsored to a town in Iowa where she worked as a maid. In Kalamazoo she became a bank teller and has kept that job to this day. This is an example of the kind of change in career many immigrants had to make.

Marite's mother was a teacher in Latvia; a maid in the United States. Her father was a government worker in Latvia; a grounds caretaker at Nazareth College and then a factory worker. Marite described the problem.

...they were educated and when they got here it didn't mean beans. That was the whole transition for them, just doing manual labor. They knew that would happen, but still, it gets you down.42

Her uncle was a certified electrician in Latvia and when he came here he had neither time or money with a family to support to be retrained in the American system of electronics. He worked as a painter and handiman.

Mrs. Bowman remembers a married couple. Both were veterinarians in Latvia. A job was found for them in their field but it was merely cleaning out the kennels for an American veterinarian. She remembers this family especially well because the woman refused to learn English for months after they arrived. Perhaps this was a sign of her

42 Marite Skrupskelis
unhappiness with the transition.

RESOLUTIONS

When asked if she has been content with her life in America, Mrs. Osis said,

We are very thankful and happy that we are here. Very. We never thought that we'd live so happily as we live here. 43

Mr. Rushevics, also, gave an overwhelmingly positive response as an evaluation of his life as an immigrant:

...every single day was a happy one. I am never sorry that I accidently came to Kalamazoo. 44

Even with the difficulties of facing the loss of their old lifestyle in American culture and the difficulty for some of the immigrants of changing to less interesting or mentally demanding jobs, they are content, even happy here. They are not outwardly bitter or unhappy that they had to flee Latvia, face war camps, and continue their lives far from where they would rather be. It is the spirit of the immigrant, as opposed to that of the exile, to be happy. It has been the purpose of this research to not only examine the difficulties that the immigrants have faced, but to see what it is that inspite of these difficulties have made them happy. Certain aspects of their circumstances

43 Mrs. Alise Osis
44 Mr. Volkmars Rushevics
and their character account for their happiness.

Circumstances

Some aspects of the circumstances the Latvians faced in the United States were positive. Although most people could not work in the same field they were trained in, jobs in stores and factories were, at least, available. Mrs. Zadins described how easily her husband found his job.

My husband went to apply at Gibson's. He just walked down the street and looked and was told to come to work the next morning.  

It was nice to have a paycheck and normalize life again after living, usually jobless, in the barrack camps in Germany. The availability of jobs was partly due to the Korean War. Jobs were left open by the young men that served.

There was no discrimination against the Latvians. The stigma of earlier years, attached to being an immigrant, was gone and people were helpful to the new community members in their working situations. Many said that their bosses and fellow workers were especially nice to them.

For those who did not have time, money or interest in being retrained and certified in their original profession, at least there was the chance to work up the hierarchy at the stores and factories.

Mrs. Erika Zadins
where they were employed. They could strive for something and if they did not like the job they had the freedom to quit and look elsewhere, although Reverend Turks said that this did not happen much.

Part of the happiness of the Latvians is attributed to the plain thankfulness that they escaped the soviet regime in Latvia, regardless of where they finally settled. The United States' system of government is appealing, though. Mr. Rushevics said that the United States is the best free country in the world. Independent Latvia had been a democracy.

The Latvians were accustomed to a high standard of living in Latvia and found that here. The Christian religion prevailed in both countries with its moral values, including the work ethic. Education was valued in both countries. The climate is similar in North America to that in Latvia and American food is not drastically unlike Latvian food.

There are things about Kalamazoo in particular that the immigrants like. The size of the city is not as overpowering to a newcomer as a larger city is. Even though the Latvians could not settle in one neighborhood, Kalamazoo was small enough that close contact could be kept among the families.

The city is small enough that everyone knew about the Methodist sponsorship program. Kalamazoo is provincial enough that this created a personal interest that would probably not occur in a large cosmopolitan city.

Culturally, Kalamazoo benefits from being right on the route between Chicago and Detroit. Periodically musicians and symphonies
will come to Kalamazoo that usually only a larger city would attract. Along with Kalamazoo's own symphony and other cultural attractions, and partly because of the University, the Latvians could enjoy the same, or at least similar, cultural events as the those in Riga. Great music lovers, the Latvians in this study said that they have attended the Kalamazoo Symphony regularly. Kalamazoo was not so provincial that it did not appreciate Shield of Songs.

Finally, with Kalamazoo College and Western Michigan University, Kalamazoo is a good place for education. Some adults received degrees, especially at Western, and the majority of their children, at least among those considered in this study, went to Kalamazoo College. After receiving a local undergraduate degree they went elsewhere for graduate school or jobs, but they had been able to remain near their families and the Latvian community in Kalamazoo for their college years.

The Latvian Character

Along with these positive aspects of their circumstances, particular aspects of the Latvian character can account for the contentment of the immigrants in Kalamazoo. First, all of the Latvians interviewed or described by others in this study, except for the woman who did not want to learn English, had a desire to get along with Americans, cooperate and make the adjustment into American society as easily as possible. Mrs. Bowman remembers them as,
...just thrilled to be here and eager to do
anything that you suggested to them that might
be helpful and they worked hard. 46

When Lawrence Strong, a professor at Kalamazoo College, and his family
let Mrs. Bowman's friend, Erika, and her family live in their house for
the summer, the Latvians were most careful to not abuse the favor.
Mrs. Bowman said that the Strongs meant for the family to make themselves
at home.

...they just turned their house over as it was,
children's dolls, doll buggies, and everything, and
said for them to make themselves at home. We found
that they were having their daughters walk around the
carpets to save the carpets. They thought that they
were doing the right thing by not wearing out the
carpets. 47

It was an attitude of respectful compliance with the wishes of
the Americans for the purpose of making a good and happy adjustment.
It was not a subservient attitude, it did not call for loss of
pride, infact the attitude seems related to the Latvian pride in being
good, hard working people, for that is how they describe themselves.
The attitude of the immigrant was to forge good relationships with
Americans to ensure the smoothest adjustment.

The second facet of Latvian character that helped facilitate
their happiness was their willingness to work hard. Latvians were
liked on the job because they were interested, intelligent and applied
themselves.

Erika's husband was a mechanical engineer. They
liked him. He worked hard. He was interested in what

46 Mrs. Winifred Bowman
47 Mrs. Winifred Bowman
he was doing and he applied himself. He was told
he could stay there as long as he wanted and not
to worry about having to retire when he was 62.

It was satisfying to be liked and to be successful at their jobs.
According to Rev. Turks and Mrs. Zadins, few, if any, are on welfare.

Mrs. Kalnieite sums up the third aspect of Latvian character that
has helped to overcome the difficulties. She said that she does not
pity herself. She was an attorney in Riga and a maid and bank teller
in Kalamazoo. This strength of character, of accepting whatever
comes her way, making the best of it, and being happy with it, is
typical in the Latvian immigrants. Perhaps it is rooted in their
religious convictions. Above the altar at St. John's church is a
painting of Jesus, in spirit, leading the Jews out of Egypt.
The painting was done in Valka and symbolizes to the immigrants their
flee from the invasion of communism in their country. Their will
to overcome hardship and be happy with their lives could root in
their religious faith and identification with the story portrayed in
the painting.

There are external circumstances and internal immigrant attitudes
that account for the happiness that the Latvians in Kalamazoo know
even though there is hardship and homesickness. The adjustment for
the immigrant group has meant acculturation and assimilation, while
at the same time the attitudes that have helped them adjust seem related
to the fact that as Latvians they are different in American society,
and their proud will to not fail.

48 Mrs. Winifred Bowman
Conclusion

As the pride and resultant strength of being consciously and "intrinsically different" slips, as the second and third generation Latvians assimilate, the heritage and Latvian identity will be lost in the United States. They were late immigrants in America and we watch what happened to other immigrant groups fifty years ago happen again. They are not the first and all tried to keep it. Even with this resignation and the other difficulties the immigrants are happy, at least content. Kalamazoo was a welcoming and comfortable place to settle, but mainly it is the will to make the best of the predicament, and beyond that, be happy, that accounts for the overwhelmingly positive responses given when the Latvians were asked about their lives as immigrants in Kalamazoo.
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