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The Story of the Zekants Family



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What we know:

The son of Žanis Zekants, John, requested this family history research of his father's Latvian family history as well as shedding light on his father's WWII military service. John provided the following information:

- Žanis Zekants was known as John in Australia
- Žanis Zekants was orphaned as a baby and raised by his aunt Olga
- Žanis's birthdate known as 26-Feb-1916
- Žanis grew up in Riga in a 'tenement' house near a chocolate factory
- Žanis was born on the frozen Gulf of Finland near Helsinki
- Žanis had an uncle who was pulled out of his house and shot by the Russians
- Žanis had another uncle who came to Australia to work in pearling before WWI
- Žanis fought in WWII against the Russians at the Siege of Leningrad
- Žanis surrendered to the Americans and was a POW in Germany
- Client provided several diaries and photographs

Focus of Research

- Information about John's paternal lines (grandfather's name unknown)
- Identifying the two uncles above, as well as the aunt who raised Žanis
- Other historical information relating to ancestors and places of residence for Zekants
- Details of Žanis's military activities and experience in WWII

Materials Included with this Report:

- Family tree charts
- Pedigree report
- Research report
- Scanned copies of records relating to direct ancestors
- List of record sources
- Interactive farm map

Records Consulted:

- Talsi, Spāres, Nurmuižas, Stende, Ugales, Puze, Valtaiki Lutheran Churches
- St. Martin's Lutheran Church, Riga (plus other Riga churches)
- Riga internal passport list
- Farm Revision Lists – Spāres, Talsi
- 1897 All Russia Census - Nurmuižas
- 1941 Census: Daugavpils, Valtaiki
- 1935 Census: Riga
- Latvian Military records
- House books - Riga
- Ciltskoki digital database (full search)
- Arolsen Archives
- Australian National Archives
- WWI military documents in Russian online archives
- Riga Address Books: 1904-1930
- Riga War Museum records
- Žanis/John's war diaries
- Norwegian, Latvian, British maritime records

Main websites used in this research:

- **Raduraksti:** raduraksti.arhivi.lv
- **Ciltskoki:** ciltskoki.lv
- **Arolsen Archives**: https://arolsen-archives.org/
- **Historical Latvian Maps:** https://vesture.dodies.lv/
- **National Archives of Australia:** https://www.naa.gov.au/
- **Latvian National Library-Photo Site:** https://www.zudusilatvija.lv/
- **Latvian Riflemen list:** https://latviesustrelniekusaraksts.lv/
- **GWAR Russian Military Archives:** gwar.mil.ru
- **Latvian National Library-Periodika:** https://periodika.lndb.lv/#
- **National Library of Australia -Trove:** https://trove.nla.gov.au/
- **Baltic Maps:** https://balticmaps.eu/
- **MyHeritage:** www.myheritage.com
- **GENI:** www.geni.com
- **FamilySearch:** https://www.familysearch.org/en/australia/
- **The Internet Archive:** https://archive.org/
- **Cemety:** https://www.cemety.lv/

A Note on Church Records

Despite the devastation of two world wars, 50 years of Soviet occupation and the general ravages of time, an amazing number of records are still available in Latvia. A huge segment of available records has been scanned and are accessible online. Such a high rate of scanned images is available because so many Latvians fled the country due to WWI and WWII. For such a small country, these large overseas diaspora communities are very important to the preservation of the language, culture and history of Latvia and its people. Having these records available to these overseas communities has been a priority for the Latvian government as well as volunteer organizations.

(note that record availability can vary based on being ethnic Latvian vs. Baltic German but I will only be listing Latvian record availability here)

Lutheran church records for **Talsi** exist for the years 1754-1914 online, but only baptisms from 1836 to 1905 are indexed.

Lutheran church records for **Spāres** exist for the years 1747-1943 (none of these are indexed).

Lutheran church records for **Nurmuižas** exist for the years 1711-1914 online, but only baptisms from 1834 to 1909 are indexed for Latvians (earlier for Baltic Germans).

Lutheran church records for **Riga St. Martins** exist for the years 1852-1920 online, but only baptisms and marriages are indexed and some records are missing.

Language of Records

Until the early 1890s all records were written in German (with some rare exceptions in the early 1800s that may have been written in Latvian). In the early 1890s, Tsar Nicholas II decreed that all church records in the Baltics were to be written in Russian. Not all churches obeyed this order at the same time and many churches in Riga never changed over at all. Generally, records start to be written in Russian in Kurzeme between 1890 and 1892.

Dates in Records

It is important to be aware that prior to 1918, all records in Russian Imperial territory used the old Julian calendar (referred to as Old Style) while the rest of Europe was using the newer Gregorian calendar (referred to as New Style). This means that dates seen in records do not exactly correspond with dates today.

18th Century (1700–1799): The difference was 11 days from March 1, 1700.

(March 1st in Old Style = March 12th in new Style)

19th Century (1800–1899): The difference widened to 12 days on March 1, 1800.

(March 1st in Old Style = March 13th in New Style)

20th Century (1900–1999): The difference became 13 days on March 1, 1900.

(March 1st in Old Style = March 14th in New Style)

After 1918, Latvia started using the same calendar we use today.

For the sake of simplicity, dates as written in the records will be used in this report. If you want to know how a pre-1918 date corresponds to today's calendar you can use the above information to make that calculation.

A Note on Civil Records

The main civil records (non-church records) available for the 18th and 19th centuries are Farm Revision Lists (also called Soul Lists). These lists were done every several years starting in the late 1700s and document who was living on which farms. These lists are organized by individual manor, not by city or town. Each farm will include all residents living there at the time and organize them in family groups. Each family (surname) is given a number and everyone with that surname will be identified by that number. These numbers are only applicable within a manor.

Information included in these records are: farm name, managing family, marital status, spouse and children's names, ages for each person at the time of the list, and often the name of an adult male's father. This is very helpful when trying to extend back another generation in time. These records also state where the individual was living in the previous Revision List and what their age was then (unfortunately, this only applies to males). If someone has moved away, died or been conscripted since the last Revision List this will also be listed. Many Revision Lists also include a list of incoming/outgoing registers for the years between revision lists.

Revision Lists were not connected with a person's religion. This is helpful in that all residents are recorded. A person's religion is not recorded in the records however. Neither is occupation, nationality or social status.

In general, these lists were made in the following years across Latvia:

1797, 1811, 1816, 1826, 1834, 1850, 1858

It varies widely as to which of these years still exist for which location. Here is a list of existing lists for the records used in this research:

Talsu draudze (Talsen, Kirchspiel) : 1797

Spāres (Spahren) privātmuiža : 1797, 1858

Nurmuiža (Nurmhusen) : 1797

Serfdom and Surnames

The Russian Empire existed as a feudal society long after the rest of Europe. This meant that land was owned either by the Crown, the Church or by Baltic German nobility (who were holdovers from the Teutonic Knights that came to Christianise the Baltic tribes in the 1200s).



Late 18th/early 19th century drawing by the artist and ethnographer Johann Christoph Brotze, showing Latvian peasants working the land (Wikimedia Commons)

In the 17th and 18th centuries the western part of Latvia was known as the Duchy of Courland, an 'independent' vassal of the Poland-Lithuanian Empire. In 1795 however, under the rule of Catherine the Great, all of what we today call 'Latvia' came under Russian control.

Ethnic Latvians (also referred to as Letts), were relegated to little more than slaves, known as serfs. They were tied to the land by law. Wherever someone was born, they were bound to the owner of that land and could not leave, marry or make any decisions without the consent of their master. These peasants existed in society without having surnames. People were identified by their first name, father's name, farm name or occupation. There were so many Jahns for instance and so there could be 'Jahn of Adam', 'Jahn of Ratteneek farm' or 'Jahn the blacksmith'.

In 1819, Tsar Alexander I approved a new law to abolish serfdom in Latvia. This was an experiment that Alexander agreed to under pressure from Enlightenment thinkers in western Europe. It took years to adjust to this system. One major change was the issuing of surnames. This happened in Kurzeme (western Latvia) in the 1830s.

Sometimes a family would be able to choose their own surname or often local church officials chose the names. Names could sometimes be of German origin, as the Lutheran clergy were all German, or the names could come from a person's farm or a geographical feature.

The head of household, and all of his unmarried children and married sons usually took on the same surname. A surname was only allocated to one family per manor and already existing Baltic German surnames were of course off limits. There doesn't seem to be any evidence that the surname 'Sekant' was given to any other family in any other manor. It appears to be unique.

Here is a list of the surnames in this report with their meanings:

'**Sekant'** = German for being on the edge of a body of water (modern Latvian spelling: **Zekants**)

'**Lattinis'** = most likely derived from the 'Lattweet' farm in Ladzere where Indriks (the first to take this surname) grew up (modern Latvian spelling: **Latīnis**)

'**Abolins'** = derived from the Latvian word for 'clover' or 'trefoil' (modern Latvian spelling: **Āboliņš**)

The spelling of surnames (as well as first names) varied quite a bit in the records over time. For example, '**Karl'** with a K is the Latvian spelling and '**Carl'** with a 'C' is the German spelling. The modern female first name '**Lise'** can be found as '**Lise'**, '**Lihse'**, '**Lize'** or '**Liesche'**. Almost every name can have some kind of spelling variation. This is very important to remember for any future research you might undertake.

Variations of '**Zekants'**: Sekant, Sehkant, Seekant, Siekant, Seekand, Seekante, Sehkante

Variations of '**Latīnis'**: Lattihinis, Latihnis, Latihn, Lattin, Latein, Lahtin

It is also good to be aware that during the Inter-war period (1918-1940) records were written in Latvian and surnames have a male and a female version. This linguistic convention was usually dropped by diaspora communities but still exists in Latvia today:

Here are the female versions of the above relevant surnames:

Zekante, Latīne, Āboliņa

A Brief History of Talsen/Spāre/Nurmuiža

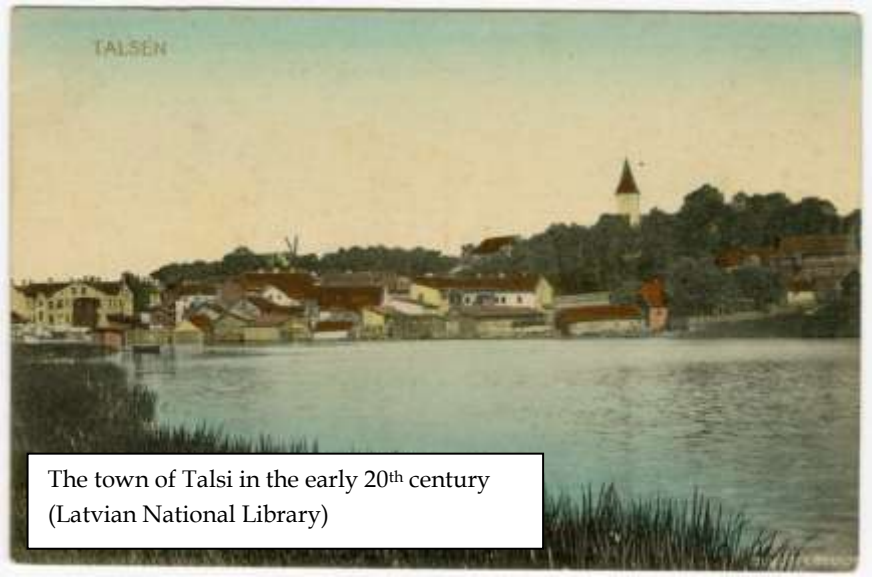


The Zekants and Latīnis families had long connections with these places. The Zekants ancestors originated from Spāre to the west of Talsi city and the Latīnis in the Nurmuiža area to the east of Talsi city. Each parish had its own Lutheran church and there are family records in all three.

There is evidence of a hillfort in Talsi from the 10th century which would have been built by indigenous Curonian tribes. The first mention of Talsi in historical records was in 1231, after the arrival of the Teutonic knights during the Northern Crusades. As the city is located in a strategic area, set among several hills and lakes, the knights then built a castle here. Over the next few centuries, the population steadily increased with more German-speaking traders and artisans settling in the area.

In 1567, the first Lutheran church was erected in Talsi. There have been many additions and changes to the church building over the centuries but the original structure is still there, making it the oldest masonry structure in the area. In the early 1800s, the pastor Karl Ferdinand Amenda was a close personal friend to Beethoven and Mozart.

During the time of the Duchy of Courland, in the 1600s and 1700s, Talsi was the location of several important industries including iron smelting. At the time of Courland's incorporation into the Russian Empire in 1795, the population was 60% Baltic German with



The town of Talsi in the early 20th century (Latvian National Library)

an increasing Jewish presence. There were several manors in the area, many owned by the powerful von Fircks family and other ruling Baltic German families. Spāre and Nurmuiža were two of these neighbouring manors.

In the mid to late 19th century, Latvia experienced was is known today as the 'Latvian National Awakening'. This was a movement to embrace Latvian culture, language, lifeways and identity. One of the great leaders of this movement was Krišjānis Valdemārs who was born just north of Talsi city. Many in the Latvian population of the Talsi area were open to these new ideas and by the time of the 1905 Revolution it had become a 'hotbed' of nationalist pride, socialist thought and hatred for the Baltic German nobility and the Tsarist regime that had held them down for generations.

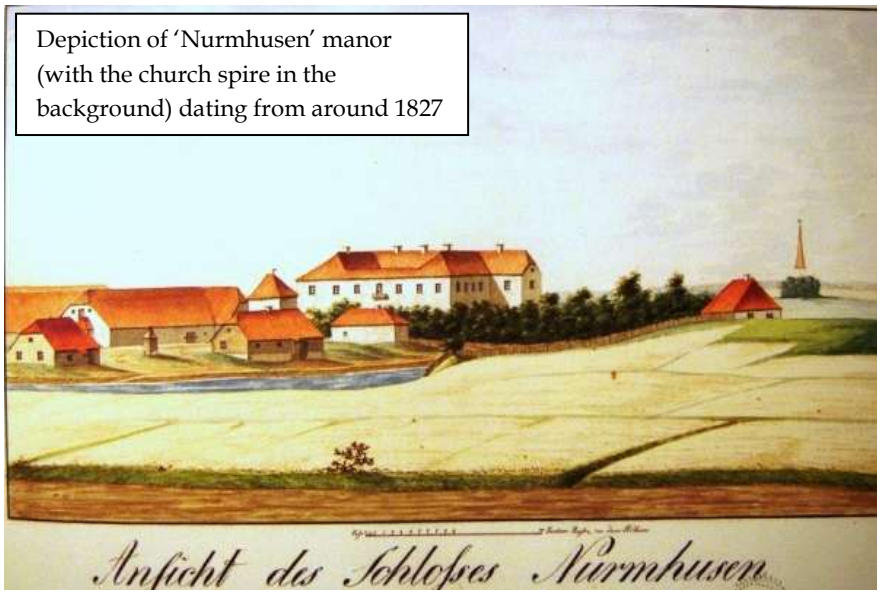
Not long after the devastation caused by the 1905 Revolution, came WWI. The area was evacuated and burnt, leaving just over a thousand residents. Peace was restored with the coming of Latvian independence in 1920 and people started to return. There were over 4000 people by 1935. In the interwar period (1920-1940) the population was 82% ethnic Latvians.


Spāres lake circa 1950s (Latvian National Library)

The small parish of Spāre, just west of Talsi, was built around the original 16th century manor house owned by several different Baltic German families over the centuries. The original manor house was destroyed during the 1905 Revolution. The town is located among several lakes including

Spāres lake and the much larger Usma Lake. It was on a small farm jutting out into this lake (Usmenieki farm) that two brothers, Indriks and Jannis, took the surname 'Sekant', meaning 'on the edge of water'. It certainly seems like the origin of the name came from the geography of the farm they were living on at the time.

About 10 km east of the town of Talsi in northwest Latvia is the small historical village of Nurmuiža (located today in Lauciene parish). Before the 20th century, this place was known by its German name 'Nurmhusen'. The well-preserved manor house, the impressive Lutheran church and the crumbling rectory are three of the oldest pieces of local history still in evidence today. The extensive manor house complex is the largest and oldest manor house preserved in Latvia to the present day. It is said that the name comes from the old Livonian word for 'field'. The manor was created as the home of a vassal of the Livonian Order of Knights. In the 1500s, after the Livonian Order was dissolved, Georg von Fircks and his wife Anna acquired the property and started expanding it. The von Fircks family were one of the wealthiest and most powerful Baltic German landowners in Courland for centuries.



Depiction of 'Nurmhusen' manor (with the church spire in the background) dating from around 1827

In 1594, Georg and Anna von Fircks, funded the construction of a new Lutheran church. Georg von Fircks died in 1600 and he was placed in a tomb under the apse of the church. A large stone relief sculpture of he and his wife was placed in front of the altar. The building we see today dates from the late 1600s.

The Zekants Family

Žanis Zekants (born 6 August 1892) was the father of Žanis (John) Zekants. *(for the sake of clarity, I will refer to the elder man as 'Žanis' and the younger as 'Žanis/John')*. Žanis was born on Spahren-Dange farm. His parents were Jekob Seekant, born 7 February 1848, and Magreete Latīnis, born 5 August 1853. Jekob Seekant was the son of Fritz Karl Seekant and Lavize (no surname). Fritz Karl Seekant (born 20 March 1822) was the eldest of seven children born to Indriks and Lihse. It was Indriks who first took the 'Zekants/Seekant' surname.



Teeſas fludbinaſchanas.

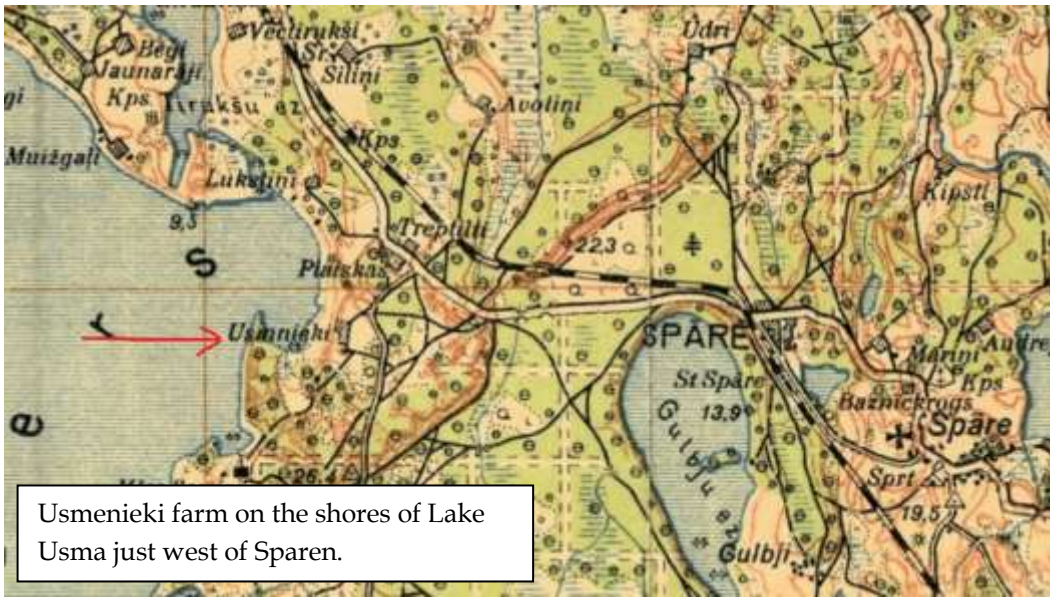
Us pawehleſchanu taho Reiſerifkas Majeſteetes, ta Patwaldineeka wiſſas Kreewu Walſts ꝛc. ꝛc. ꝛc., tohp no Spahrenes pagaſta teeſas wiſſi tee, kam kahdas taiſnas parradu praſſiſchanas woi meklеſchanas pee ta libdſſchinniga Spahrenes ſaimneeka Uſmeneeku Jndrika Seekanta buhtu, pahr kurra mantu inwentariuma, truhkuma, un zittu parradu labbad konkurſe ſpreeſta, uſaizinati, pee ſaudeſchanas ſawas teeſas libdſ 20tu Meij ſ. g., kas par to weenigu iſſlehdſamu terminu nolikts, pee ſchihs pagaſta teeſas woi paſchi woi zaur weetneekeem, kur tahdi wehleti, jeb kur waijadſigs ar klahtſtahwetajeem un wehrmindereem peteikteeS un ſagaidiht ko teeſa ſpreedihs, ar to pamahziſchanu, ka tee kas libdſ pee minnetai deenai ne buhs peteikuſcheeS jeb to paſchu kas peenahkahs ne buhs wehrā likkuſchi, pehzak wairs ne tapš klauſiti, bet winneem muhſchiga kluſſuzeeſchana uslikta. — Tāpat arri tee, kas wirſpeeminnetam ſaimneekam Uſmeneeku Jndrikim Seekantam ko parradā buhtu, tohp uſaizinati, ſawus parradus aiſmakſaht. Kas ne peteikſees un kluſſu zeetihs, tam buhs dubbulti ſawi parradi jaatlihdſina.

Spahrenes pagaſta teeſa, 20tā Merz 1837. 3
(L. S.) †††Jahne Freiberg, pagaſta wezzakais.
(Nr. 20.) C. Roſenthal, pagaſta teeſas ſtrihweris.

First written record with the name 'Seekant'.

In 1837, a record appeared in several newspapers regarding 'Indrika Seekanta' of Spahren-Usmenieki farm. This is the first known written record of this surname. This official imperial decree states that Indriks has fallen into bankruptcy. As a Latvian peasant at this time, Indriks would not have owned the land of the farm so this announcement is concerning the 'movable' wealth of the farm that perhaps Indriks did own outright. This would have included tools, farm equipment, livestock and other personal assets. After this date Indriks no longer lives at Usmenieki farm but is moving from farm to farm until his death at Kruije farm in 1853. There is still a farm called 'Usmenieki' today.

Indriks had a brother named Jannis who also took the 'Seekant' surname. Jannis only had one surviving child, a daughter, who married and of course did not carry on the name. Jannis also lived on Usmenieki farm in the mid-1830s. He died at Ugales-Attmatta farm in 1854. Indriks and Jannis had a sister named Lavize who married in 1840 and took her husband's surname of Rosentein. Lavize died in 1848.



Usmenieki farm on the shores of Lake Usma just west of Sparen.

All of Indriks Seekant's children were born after the abolition of serfdom in 1817. The decades of the 1820s-1840s saw quite a few changes in the law regarding ethnic Latvian peasants. Officially they were no longer tied to their landlords. They were given surnames in order to simplify record keeping. Technically they had the legal right to move around. These changes came slowly however, when compared to everyday existence, and Indriks and his family probably felt little change to their daily lives.

It wouldn't be until the 1860s that peasants were finally given the opportunity to buy their own land. Most could not do this however, because it required wealth. But little by little more and more peasants were able to save money and purchase their own farms. There was a push in the later decades of the 19th century to homestead on free land in Siberia and Inner Russia. Siberia was also being used as a place of exile for criminals, many accused of very minor crimes. In 1883, a man with the name 'Jekob Sekant' was born in the Siberian village of Lejas Bulana. This village had been established in the 1850s as a central location for Latvian speaking exiles and homesteaders in Siberia. This Jekob Sekant's father



Traditional house in the Siberian village of Lejas Bulana

was named Fritz Seekant from Kurland. The only Fritz that seems to be a possibility was the son of Indriks's second eldest son, Karl. Fritz was born in 1856, and then there seems to be no more trace of him in any church records. Was he arrested for some crime and punished with exile? Or did he heed the call for free land to seek a better life? Whatever the reason he ended up over 5400km away in Siberia and established a line of Zekants descendants there. Jekob Zekants of Lejas Bulana would end up being shot in 1938 during Stalin's infamous purges.

At least three of Indriks's daughters married, but more research would be needed to research these lines.

Indriks's eldest son, Fritz Karl and his wife Lavize were married in 1844 and had at least six children. Fritz Karl was Žanis/John's great-grandfather. Fritz Karl and Lavize were farm workers who would move from farm to farm in the area, often on a yearly basis. The traditional date for moving to a new farm was St. George's Day (Jurģi or Ūsiņš Day) at the end of April/start of May. The family were living at a different farm for each child's birth: Masgruschneeka, Dange, Leekneek, Kruije, Louisenhof and Krusin, all in Spahren. Karl's son, Jekob, was the second child and eldest son (Jekob is Žanis/John's grandfather). Young Jekob would have moved around with the family, from farm to farm, helping with the farm work. It is unlikely that Jekob would have attended any kind of organized school. Education available to Latvian peasants wouldn't be available until the next generation.

Jekob's brother, Karl, and Karl's descendants settled in Ugales (a bit further west of Spares). Research has been done on these families and living relatives contacted. Jekob's four sisters all married but more research would be needed to track those lines.

The Latīnis Family

At the age of 27, Jekob was working as a farmhand at Suktur farm in Nurmhusen. 22-year-old Magreete Latīnis was also working at Suktur farm. Magreete's father, Indriks, had been the long-time manager of Annuse farm just east of Talsi city (in the region known as Wolfshof).

At this time in the 19th century, every farm was attached to a local manor house. Each manor was the administrative hub and main residence for the Baltic German family that had, most likely, been associated with that manor for generations. To 'manage' a farm during the 1700s and 1800s meant that the managing family had been entrusted with the daily management and running of a single farmstead. Very small farms might only consist of that family, while larger farms could house several families of farmworkers and unmarried farmhands as well as the managing family.

The management of a farm would often pass down from the head of the household, usually to the eldest son. Subsequent sons would often move to their own farms as they came of age and got married themselves. If the farm was large, these sons may stay on their ancestral farm, but moving was far more common. Farms where there were no surviving sons would need to find someone else to manage them, so job openings like that were not uncommon. New husbands might also be able to become the manager of their wife's family farm. And some families never became 'managing' families at all and moved around year by year working as farm workers.

Magreete's father, Indriks Lattihnis, was the manager of Annuse farm from at least the time of his marriage to Dore Abolins in 1844 to the birth of his final child, Minna, in 1866. Indriks's second eldest child, Annlihse, married in 1868. Her husband, Indriks



Annuse (Anuži) farm today

Kalwing, must have been given the managership of Annuse farm as in 1870, when Indriks Lattihnis died, his only surviving son (Andrejs) was only 10 years old. By 1879, Annlihse and Indriks Kalwing are no longer the managers of Annuse farm and it seemingly passes to a new family. It is unknown who actually owned the farm during any of this time. Anuži farm still exists today but the original buildings are long gone.

Indriks Lattihnis married Dore Abolins in Talsi Lutheran church in 1847. Indriks was born around 1810 on Lattweet farm in Ladzere, just north of Talsi city. Dore, interestingly, was born in Riga around 1828. This is a very early date for mobility of ethnic Latvians. However, Riga had different laws and a different social history to the Courland countryside. Dore's father was named Mattis. Searching in churches in Riga has failed to find a baptism record for any 'Dore Abolins with father Mattis'. Her father's name and birthplace is listed in the 1897 All-Russia Census. Her death record from 1905 also states she was born in Riga. How she came to be moving from Riga to Talsi in the early 19th century would require further research.


Johann Heinrich Tiling

Indriks and Dore were the managers of Annuse farm for the births of all seven of their children: Anndarte (1849), Annlihse (1850), Magreete (1853), Kriss (1856), Andrejs (1860), Angrieta (1863) and Minna (1866). Magreete and her siblings were baptized in Talsi Lutheran church by Pastor Johann Heinrich Tiling who was pastor from 1837-1870. Pastor Tiling had married the daughter of the previous pastor, Karl Ferdinand Amenda, who had been a close personal friend of Beethoven and a teacher to the children of Mozart.

Their son, Kriss died at the age of 9 which left Andrejs as the only surviving son. As of the 1897 Census, Andrejs was already 40 years old and had never married. There is no evidence of this surname (Latīnis) today. The eldest child, Anndarte, and the youngest, Minna, also had no children. Angrieta only had one son, Andrejs, whose father, Jannis Kristapsons-Blesurs,

died in a tragic accident when his son was only 1. AnnLihse had at least 3 children, all daughters, but more research would be needed to track these lines. That leaves Magreete, who would become grandmother to Žanis/John.

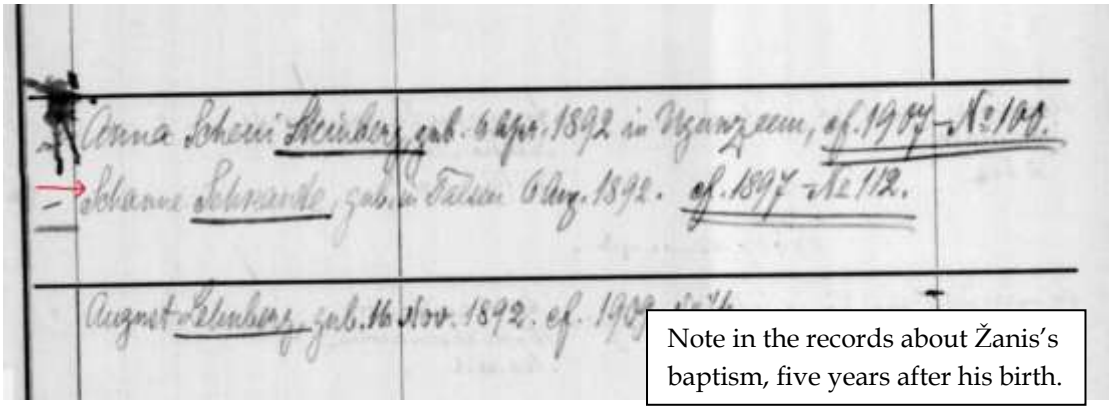
On the 12th of October 1875, Jekob Seekant and Magreete Latihnis were married in Talsi Lutheran church by Pastor Theodor Karl Alexander Wiebeck, who was pastor for 40 years, from 1870 until 1910. Jekob and Magreete's first child, Lizette, was born at Annuse farm, where the family was still living at this time. This close connection with the Latīnis side of the family, rather than the Zekants side, would continue through the decades.

Jekob & Magreete and Family

Jekob and Magreete Zekants had six children, Lisette (1876), Andrejs (1879), Karl (1881) and Fricis (1884), Teodors (1887) and Žanis (1892). The youngest, Žanis, was the father of Žanis/John. The first four children were baptized in Talsi Lutheran church. After the death of their son, Fricis, in 1886, the family decided to convert to the increasingly popular Baptist faith.

The introduction of the Baptist faith came to the Russian Empire via Germany. This new sect had some radical ideas compared with more established mainstream religious groups. Baptists believed in a more direct route to God, bypassing church hierarchies like pastors, ministers and priests. They had no need for fancy church buildings, vestments or ceremony. And most radical of all, they did not believe in the immediate baptism of children. Baptists thought a person needed to be old enough to understand their own mind and consent to their own baptism. This meant that their last two children, Teodors and Žanis were not baptized as babies in the Lutheran church and so their records are not there.

The reason why their baptism records could not be found was a puzzle for a while. There is a small, faded notation at the end of the records for 1892 in Nurmuiža Lutheran church. This notation states that 'Schanne Sehkante', born in Talsen 6th of August 1892, was baptized in 1897 record #112. Indeed, there he is, along with this older brother Teodors (born in 1887). They are both getting baptized Lutheran. That either means they themselves decided to be part of the Lutheran church but their parents remained Baptist, or the family as a whole decided to go back to Lutheranism. The 1897 Census lists Magreete and her



Note in the records about Žanis's baptism, five years after his birth.

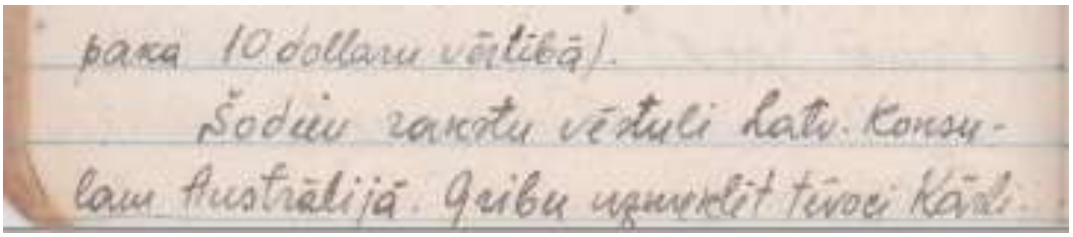
children as being Lutheran (Jekob is not listed in this census for some reason). There is no record of Jekob in the Lutheran church until his death in 1914.

(additional information deleted for sample report)

Uncle Karl Zekants



According to family stories from John Zekants, Žanis/John had an uncle who had gone off to far-off Broome, Australia to work in the pearling industry, most likely in the years before WWI. The best candidate for this particular uncle was Karl Zekants, born 17-Dec-1881, the third child of Jekob and Magreete Zekants. This was confirmed while translating Žanis/John's diaries from the late 1940s. While in Germany, he writes that he needs to contact the Latvian consulate in Australia to try to track down his 'Uncle Karl'.


para 10 dollaru vērtībā).
Šodien rakstu vēstuli Latv. Konsu-
lam Austrālijā. Gribu uzrakstīt tēvoci Kārli.

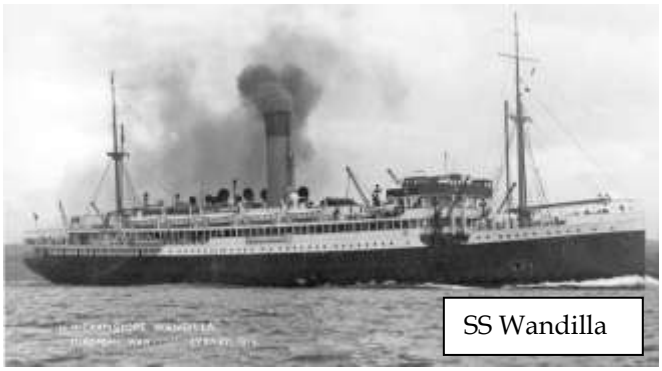
Entry in Žanis/John's diary dated 6-Apr-1947:
'I will write a letter to the Latvian Consulate in Australia. I want to look up my Uncle Kārl.'

The only evidence found of Karl in Australia is on a passenger list for the steamer ship *Wandilla* on 23-Oct-1920. The name 'Sekant' is listed as one of the passengers. This was the German spelling of the surname, which is what Karl would have been using since the spelling did not change to 'Zekants' until after WWI.

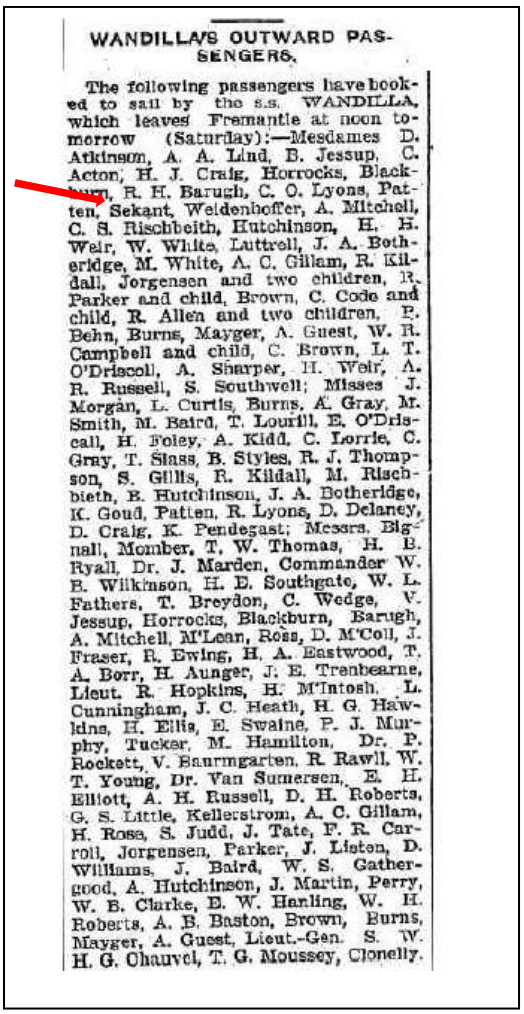
The *Wandilla* was leaving Freemantle with some passengers on board that had come from Broome. The ship was on its way to Adelaide, Melbourne and Sydney. Unfortunately, the passenger list for this particular voyage no longer exists. The disembarkation lists for

Sydney and Melbourne have been checked and Karl is not on them which means he most likely got off in Adelaide, which was known for its Latvian diaspora. No trace of Uncle Karl can be found after this date.

It is most likely that Karl came to Australia as crew on the Norwegian sailing ship 'Pax' in 1914. We have evidence that Karl's close cousin, Andrejs Blesurs (the son of Magreete's sister Angrieta), was crew on that ship which spent a year sailing from Europe through South America to Geraldton, Western Australia and then back to Europe. It seems very possible that Karl was also crew on this ship and did not return with it, instead making his way up the coast to Broome where he would then find himself pretty much stuck as WWI broke out only weeks later.



SS Wandilla



WANDILLA'S OUTWARD PASSENGERS.

The following passengers have booked to sail by the s.s. WANDILLA, which leaves Fremantle at noon tomorrow (Saturday):—Mesdames D. Atkinson, A. A. Lind, B. Jessup, C. Acton, H. J. Craig, Horrocks, Blackburn, R. H. Barugh, C. O. Lyons, Patten, Sekant, Weidenhoffer, A. Mitchell, C. S. Rischbeith, Hutchinson, H. H. Weir, W. White, Luttrell, J. A. Botheridge, M. White, A. C. Gillam, R. Kildall, Jorgensen and two children, R. Parker and child, Brown, C. Code and child, R. Allen and two children, P. Behn, Burns, Mayger, A. Guest, W. R. Campbell and child, C. Brown, L. T. O'Driscoll, A. Sharper, H. Weir, A. R. Russell, S. Southwell; Misses J. Morgan, L. Curtis, Burns, A. Gray, M. Smith, M. Baird, T. Lourill, E. O'Driscall, H. Foley, A. Kidd, C. Lorrie, C. Gray, T. Slass, B. Styles, R. J. Thompson, S. Gillis, R. Kildall, M. Rischbieth, B. Hutchinson, J. A. Botheridge, K. Goud, Patten, R. Lyons, D. Delaney, D. Craig, K. Pendegast; Messrs. Bignall, Momber, T. W. Thomas, H. B. Ryall, Dr. J. Marden, Commander W. B. Wilkinson, H. E. Southgate, W. L. Fathers, T. Breydon, C. Wedge, V. Jessup, Horrocks, Blackburn, Barugh, A. Mitchell, M'Lean, Ross, D. M'Coll, J. Fraser, R. Ewing, H. A. Eastwood, T. A. Borr, H. Aunger, J. E. Trenbearne, Lieut. R. Hopkins, H. M'Intosh, L. Cunningham, J. C. Heath, H. G. Hawkins, H. Ellis, E. Swaine, P. J. Murphy, Tucker, M. Hamilton, Dr. P. Rockett, V. Baumgarten, R. Rawll, W. T. Young, Dr. Van Sumersen, E. H. Elliott, A. H. Russell, D. H. Roberts, G. S. Little, Kellerstrom, A. C. Gillam, H. Rosa, S. Judd, J. Tate, F. R. Carroll, Jorgensen, Parker, J. Listen, D. Williams, J. Baird, W. S. Gathergood, A. Hutchinson, J. Martin, Perry, W. B. Clarke, E. W. Hanling, W. H. Roberts, A. B. Baston, Brown, Burns, Mayger, A. Guest, Lieut.-Gen. S. W. H. G. Chauvel, T. G. Moussey, Clonelly.

Uncle Teodors Zekants



Another family story was that Žanis/John had an uncle who was pulled out of his house one day and shot by Russians. The above photograph is in the procession of John Zekants but remained unidentified at the beginning of this research. The photograph is signed on the back with the name 'Teodors Z'.

This is Teodors Zekants, born 25-Sept-1887, the fifth child of Jekob and Magreete Zekants. Teodors became a sailor like his brothers before him and spent time in the Tsar's Navy. He was trapped in Sevastopol, Crimea during WWI and the Russian Civil War which made him part of the White anti-Bolshevik forces who had to flee at the last minute in November 1920 with the Fleet of General Petyr Wrangle.

Teodors returned to Latvia with his new wife and two young children probably in the middle of 1921. He settled in the Daugavpils area of western Latvia and ended up taking a position as a prison warden at Daugavpils prison. This is the uniform he is wearing in this photograph. He and his wife, Liene, had a total of 8 children all of whom survived to adulthood.

Contact with the descendants of most of Teodors's children has been made in the nations of Latvia, Ukraine and Germany. At least two of Teodors's surviving descendants also had this family story about Teodors being pulled out of his house and shot by Russians/bandits. The most likely time-frame for this event would be during the 'Year of

Terror' between June 1940 and July 1941. This was the time of the first Soviet occupation and people in a position of power such as politicians, military officers and police officers were targets for exile or execution. Being both a prison warden and an ex-White Army participant would have made Teodors an obvious target.

Teodors's second wife, Helene, and several of his youngest children were living at Vilcani farm in Rubenes in by the spring and early summer of 1941. We know this from the 1941 census that was taken at the beginning of September by the newly occupying German forces. Teodors is not in the census and his wife and children are scattered at farms across the area and their previous residence is listed as Vilcani farm.

There is a military memorial gravesite in Akniste which supposedly houses the remains of dozens of soldiers who fell while fighting for the Soviet 'Fatherland'. This states that Teodors died in 1941. His son, Edward, is also listed at this memorial having died in 1949. It is very puzzling as to why the family stories claim Teodors was killed by Russians yet he ends up in a military grave for Soviet patriots. There are several possible reasons for this, but in the end all lines of inquiry have led nowhere and we may never know how this came to be.



Teodors and his son Edward are both buried in this Fraternal Military memorial grave in Akniste, Latvia (monument No. 805).

Aunt Olga Rozentals/Rozenvalds



When John asked for this research to begin the only person in his father's old Latvian photos that he could identify by name was 'Aunt Olga'. John understood that his father, Žanis/John, had been orphaned at a very young age and was raised by this aunt. Soon after looking in detail through John's photos and documents Olga was able to be identified as Olga Rozentals, sister to Žanis/John's deceased mother, Emilija.

Olga was born 5-Jan-1895 in Zalenieki/Jekabnieki (although all of her documents throughout her life list Riga as her birthplace). She was baptized 'Lavize Olga' but always went by 'Olga'. She was the third child of Kristaps Rozenvalds and Anna Smiltnieks. Her elder sister, Emilija, was the mother of Žanis/John. Her elder sister, Lavize, died as a toddler and her younger sister was Anna Zelma (who as far as we know did not have any children).

Around the turn of the 20th century, the family moved to Riga as many people were doing at that time, attracted by factory jobs and increasing industrialization of the big city. Olga worked as a textile worker/seamstress for most of her life.

During WWI, Olga spent time as a refugee in the Caucasus. She returned to Riga in August, 1921. She was probably part of the final White Army stand in the Crimea and may have been part of Wrangle's Fleet. In 1922, Olga and her parents and sister moved into a

flat in the building at 9 Karlines street just north of the Old City, Riga. This would be the family's residence for the next two decades.

Olga married Andrejs Blezurs (Kristapsons) in November 1927. Andrejs was the first cousin of Olga's sister's husband, Žanis Zekants. They had a son, Valdis, in March 1929. Sadly, Olga's husband, Andrejs, died of a sudden heart attack 6 months after the birth of their son. Olga continued to raise both her son and her nephew, Žanis/John.



Olga (second from the right) with her family in the flat at 9 Karlines street circa 1928.

Just as the Soviets were about to take over Latvia in June 1940, Olga married for a second time. Her husband was Willi Droune. Willi was a boarder in their flat and was of Baltic German descent. By marrying him, Olga was eligible to repatriate to Germany. She must have thought this was the safest option, rather than staying and living under Soviet occupation. Olga and Valdis left for Germany, after giving up their Latvian citizenship for good, on the 10th of July 1940. This is listed in her Riga passport document as well as the Riga House books for her address. Willi would follow her in March 1941, leaving Žanis/John the sole remaining family member living at 9 Karlines apartment 20.

(additional information deleted for sample report)

WWII & The Latvian Legion

Žanis/John entered mandatory military service in the Latvian Army in 1937. After completing his mandatory service, he immediately signed up as a volunteer and was stationed in the border town of Valka as a radiographer. When the Soviets took over in the summer of 1940, many officers of the Latvian Army were executed. This did not include Žanis/John as he was not a commissioned officer. According to the story he wrote for IRO (International Refugee Organization) in Germany after the war, he was absorbed into the Red Army for a while and then was discharged for 'mistrust'.

According to family stories, after the Germans took over in 1941, Žanis/John became afraid that he would be a target by any future Soviet occupation due to the murder of his uncle (*see Teodors Zekants above*). For this reason, he signed up most likely for one of the Latvian Police Battalions that were eventually sent to participate in the Siege of Leningrad. According to a letter that he wrote to his cousin Elza in Seattle many years later, he was on 'the frontlines' on his birthday (Feb 26) in 1943. So, he was already at the front before the Latvian Legion was even formed.

In March of 1943, Hitler approved this new military force dubbed The Latvian Legion. This would be a group of 'volunteers' who would fight for Germany against the Soviets. Whatever battalion Žanis/John was serving in would have been absorbed into the 19th Division of the Latvian Legion in August 1943.



Evacuation of the Latvian 15th SS Division to Pomerania. (Picture: Latvian War Museum, Riga. Reference LKM 5-59573/2966-FT)

At the start of September 1944, Žanis/John was shipped out on the military ship 'Moltkefels' and arrived in Pomerania (German-occupied Poland) on the 9th. The original reason for this transfer of men to

Pomerania (German-occupied Poland) was for intense training. The plan was to then send them back to help the 19th Division continue to try to push back the Soviets in Latvia.

This did not end up happening because the Soviets could not be stopped. The Reds took Riga in October, leaving only the 'Courland Pocket' which would be held by the remaining 19th division of the Latvian Legion until they were virtually annihilated. The men of the 15th remained in Pomerania and engaged in several horrendous battles and encirclements before regrouping in March 1945. Žanis/John missed many of the deadly battles between January and March 1945 as he had been transferred to a translation school in Oranienburg north of Berlin.

(additional information deleted for sample report)

WWII Service of Žanis/John Zekants

27-Aug-1943: mobilized as a corporal in staff company of the 2nd Infantry Regiment of the Latvian Legion – 19th Division

16-Dec-1944: transferred to translator school in Oranienburg, north of Berlin

27-Mar-1945: left Oranienburg and arrived in Neu-Brandenburg to join the remaining 15th Division. Assigned to the 33rd Regiment under Col. Vilis Janums as a signalman

20-Apr-1945 to 26-Apr-1945: fled the Russians and the Nazis with Janums Battlegroup

27-Apr-1945: surrendered to the Americans at Calbe on the west bank of the Elbe River

30-Apr-1945 to 24-Aug-1945: POW at a series of camps in northern Germany

24-Aug-1945: transferred to Displaced Person status at the Fliegerhorst foreigners' camp

Analysis of Genealogical Goals

- At the outset of this research, during the initial meeting, John Zekants requested searches to be done to identify two uncles and an aunt of his father. All three of these people have been identified, put on the family tree and a reasonably detailed picture of their lives discovered.
- Prior to starting this project, John was not aware of his paternal grandparents' first or last names, dates of birth/death or causes of death. All of this has been discovered was well as identifying various family members in John's existing small collection of his father's Latvian photos.
- John also wanted to know in general about the Zekants family tree. This tree, which had not been mapped out previously has included four generations back from Žanis/John on the Zekants side. This includes detailed information about Žanis/John's paternal grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins.
- Based on documents found including Latvian military records, refugee documents from Germany, Australian archive documents and existing material such as photos and diaries, Žanis/John's WWII military and refugee experience has been written up in great chronological detail from 1937 to 1950.
- John was also interested in places associated with his father and Zekants ancestors. Several important locations (farms, towns, houses) have been located and placed on the interactive farm map provided with this report

Recommendations for Further Research

- Deep research into the maternal Rozentals line of Žanis/John's mother
- Lateral tracking of the lines of other children of Indriks Sekant
- Deeper on-location research armed with the information from this report to try to locate living relatives
- Research on the Australian migrant experience
- Completion of translation of diaries 1947-1950
- Further research to try to find out the fate of Uncle Karl Zekants
- Further mapping of Žanis/John's movements during WWII based on diaries

Recommended Sources for Historical Context

- Books by Vincent Hunt: **Road of Slaughter** and **Escape from Berlin** in addition to future publications
- **Latvian Legion** by Arthur Silgailis
- **The Latvians: A Short History** by Andrejs Plakans
- **In the Shadow of Freedom** by Egils Kalme
- **Roots Saknes Latvian history site:** http://www.roots-saknes.lv/

Genealogical Proof Standard

The information in these reports is accurate to the best of my knowledge and ability based on the information given and found. Future research may change or contradict the information in this report. I subscribe to the five guidelines of the Genealogical Proof Standard:

- reasonably exhaustive research
- complete and accurate source citations
- analysis and correlation of the collected information
- resolution of any conflicting evidence
- a soundly reasoned, coherently written conclusion