

FROM POWER & WEALTH TO VIRTUAL OBLITERATION

The Disappearing Evidence of Baltic Germans in Latvia

These pages were written for my Canadian-born children and grandchildren. Based on several years' personal experience and observations during regular visits to the Baltic States, and having lived in Riga in our own apartment during the winter of 2014/15, combined with an extensive study of the subject matter, I have arrived at the following observations:

I was born in Riga in the year 1930, at a time when, following the end of WWI and hundreds of years' of foreign dominance and Baltic German administration, Latvian nationalism had finally found successful expression via the creation of its own internationally recognized, Western European oriented republic. Our family, including our Canadian-born children and grandchildren, very much enjoy visiting this lovely and strangely familiar land of our forefathers and to witness and learn about the historical evidence of their activities and accomplishments during a period of some 740 years. And we intend to continue these visits in future years.

However, it seems that each time we have been there, official reference with respect to this evidence of the presence and of the cultural, educational/religious, economic, military and administrative/political contributions of the former Baltic German ruling elite – also a major military factor in the independence and creation of the present Baltic States – is gradually disappearing. In fact, official government publications regarding the history of Latvia including Wikipedia, which receives its information from official Latvia, make little or no reference to the former Baltic German presence. However, there is reference to “German dominance in the region that was increasingly challenged by other powers” and “under Russian control Latvia was in the vanguard of industrialization and the abolition of serfdom, so that by the end of the 19th century it had become one of the most developed parts of the Russian Empire”. Furthermore, it mentions “increasing social problems and rising discontent” and “a rising sense of Latvian nationalism from the 1850's onwards”.

We had an interesting experience with the Latvian Ministry of Immigration. The Latvian Government amended its citizenship legislation in October 2013

to permit “Dual Citizenship” for Livs i.e. former residents of the territory, now referred to as Latvia, whose parents and/or ancestors were born and resided there between 1871 and June 1940. Dual citizenship would be of interest, since it gives Latvian citizens and their descendants access to residency throughout the entire EU including access to universities etc. Following an exchange of correspondence with the Latvian Embassy in Ottawa, we were encouraged to apply direct to the Ministry of Immigration in Riga, since I was born in Riga and my parents as well as my wife's and our grandparents seemed to meet the qualification criteria. However, when we visited the Latvian ministry, we were advised – following their scrutiny of our documentation package – “Your group (i.e. the Baltic Germans) doesn't qualify, unless you learn to speak Latvian, so you can be interviewed, and surrender your Canadian passport.” It would appear that the Latvian civil servants have a selective interpretation of the legislation passed by their own politicians.

The otherwise excellent “Museum of the History of Riga and Navigation” has on permanent display many portrait paintings of Baltic German mayors, city councilors, architects and other people important in trade, business and education, but their names were hardly recognizable as they have been “Latvianized”. There are books with German language covers including a first Latvian dictionary and a first Latvian bible, both printed and published by German printing houses and translated into Latvian by Baltic German pastors, but there is no mention of these contributions nor of others in the fields of architecture, construction and financing of the many churches, interesting buildings, museums, theatres, schools etc. in Riga or of the manor houses, castles, palaces and fortresses throughout the countryside. There is also little mention of the Baltic German trades people and of the merchants, members of the “Hanseatic League”, that greatly contributed to the wealth and growth of the Cities of Riga, Tallinn (Reval) and Tartu (Dorpat). Even the destruction of German graves, and the removal of German names from gravestones was noticed.

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This trend is both sad and deplorable, especially from the point of view of a Baltic German born in Latvia and being a descendant of a well-known aristocratic family with erstwhile estates in both Estonia (Saaremaa/Ösel) and Latvia (Courland). However, there seem to be historical causes for the seemingly deliberate current policy of official Latvia that point to the areas of Land owner/peasant/serf relationships and socio-economic and class differences, language, education and religious differences, rising nationalism, property rights, influence of the foreign rulers incl. Russification, revolutions and WW1 and WW2. In consequence, I have attempted to find a historical rationale for these problem areas, developments and ongoing sentiments.

Introduction - History

Following a crusade initiated by the Pope Innocent III of Rome in the late 1190's - supported by Knights of the Teutonic/Livonian Order - for the purpose of Christianizing the natives of the Baltic lands in the face of an expanding Islam and of the Russian Orthodox Church, it was the German bishop Albert von Buxhöveden of Bremen, accompanied by the Brothers of the Sword, who is officially credited with the founding of Riga in 1201 as a German city. The main

problem facing the Baltic German ruling elite in Livonia, Estonia including Ösel, and Courland, right from the beginning of their conquest and colonization, was the absence of German and Western European farmers.

The small ruling class (less than 5% of the total population) faced a largely illiterate and hostile class of peasants, farm workers and handymen, who were engaged by force to work as serfs on the large estate

farms of the knights and their aristocratic descendants and later on in the manufacturing facilities frequently owned by these same aristocrats or by other Baltic German industrialists and merchants. The estates - awarded by the Church to the knights and their descendants in return for an obligation of the knights to protect the Church - eventually amounted to about 80% of the total agricultural land in Latvia. In addition to owning their land, the aristocrats had access to Western European education and culture and to improved agricultural methods, to financing, to new industrial/architectural technologies and to markets and trade opportunities (Hanseatic League). The colonized native population initially and essentially owned nothing and remained largely illiterate until the abolition of serfdom in the 19th century i.e. some 600 years later, although attempts were made, particularly during Phase 2 (Imperial Swedish Rule), to improve the educational standards and living conditions of the native population. The landowners did provide security and stability for their serfs/peasants and the families.

The 740-year Baltic German historical presence and contributions within the Baltic lands in general and in today's Latvia in particular, are comprised of four (4) of the six (6) main historic phases, with each phase reflecting a further decline in authority and function. Following their loss of privileges in the late 1900's, their land expropriation in the early 1920's and their repatriation/deportation in November 1939 i.e. during Phase four (4), there were no Baltic Germans left in Latvia:

- Phase 1 (1200 - 1561 = 360 years):
State of Teutonic/Livonian Order/Sword Brothers
- Phase 2 (1561 - 1721 = 160 years):
Imperial Swedish Rule
- Phase 3 (1721 - 1920 = 200 years):
Imperial Russian Rule and WW1
- Phase 4 (1920 - 1940 = 20 years):
Independent Latvian Republic and WW2
- Phase 5 (1940 - 1990 = 50 years):
Soviet Occupation (Latvian SSR) and WW2
- Phase 6 (1990 - 2015 = 25 years):
Independent Latvian Republic and member of EU



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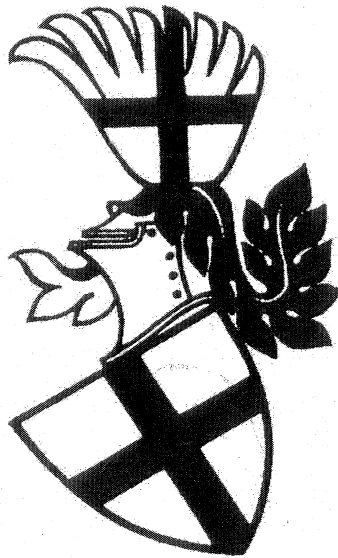
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Phase 1 (1200 - 1561 = 360 years):

State of the Teutonic/Livonian Order

Historical Phase 1 of the Baltic German presence in the Baltic lands (Livonia, Courland, Ösel and Estonia) including today's Latvia, witnessed the arrival of representatives of the Catholic Church and of the Knights of the Teutonic Order as part of a crusade initiated by Pope Innocent III in order to Christianize the native population and to create an "Order State" to counter the perceived and potential advances of Islam and of the Russian Orthodox Church. The Christianization and colonization efforts met strong resistance from the native population and from neighboring Imperial Russia that involved the knights in bloody battles. Some of these battles were lost (Battle against Russian forces on Lake Peipus in 1242) and some of the Order's fortresses were destroyed as a result of native uprisings.

But the various branches of the Order eventually merged, new immigrants arrived from Western Europe and order was restored. Due to the absence of German farmers, the newly created aristocratic landowner class engaged native peasants as serfs. A German constitution was introduced and German pastors and teachers spread the German language across the land. The privileges bestowed upon the aristocratic landowners by the Church - within the framework of the Order State - included: property rights, (German) language and education rights, religion and (German) administration of the Baltic lands. The major cities of Tallinn, Riga and Tartu also became members of the Hanseatic League, a joint venture of German merchants from major Western European port cities, that not only benefited the Baltic port cities, but the country as a whole.



Tensions developed between the wealthy cities that resented the dominance of the Livonian Order and of the Church. Also, there were confrontations between the Order and the Church. The events following the Lutheran Reformation (1517) in Western Europe would have a major impact upon the cohesion of the "Order State" and on the authority and administration of the Baltic German ruling elite.

During Phase 1 and within the framework of the "Order State", the Baltic German Elite enjoyed full participation with the Catholic Church in the Rule and Administration of the country. Little or no attention was paid to improving the living conditions and education of the largely illiterate rural Latvians (Livs) employed as serfs in the service of the aristocratic landowners. However, the landowners also provided security and stability to their employees and families, while strict class distinctions were being maintained, as was common practice in Europe at that time.

Phase 2 (1561 - 1721 = 160 years): Imperial Swedish Rule.

The decline of power of the Hanseatic League following the end of the 15th century and the spread of the Lutheran Reformation throughout the Baltic lands commencing in the early 1520's, eventually forced the Catholic Church to withdraw, following the Treaty of Augsburg (1555) that gave the rulers the right to determine the faith of their subjects. The Livonian Order acceded. Translations of the Bible and the Catechism from Latin into German were followed by translations into Estonian and Latvian. This development gave rise to church services by German pastors also being offered in Estonian and Latvian. As Reformation and Counter-Reformation raged in Europe, Sweden emerged as the major military power in Europe, while the Livonian Order had weakened due to internal conflicts and the effects of the Reformation. These developments did not escape the neighbor Russia, keenly interested in access to the harbors of Riga and Tallinn and concerned about the growing power of Sweden. The Russian army under Tsar Ivan IV (the Terrible) invaded Li-

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voniam and Estonia in 1558, unleashing the Livonian War (1558-1583) and causing enormous devastation and suffering for the people of Livonia. The army of the Knights of the Livonian Order was defeated at the battle of Ergene (1560) and its Grandmaster Philip Schall von Bell executed in Moscow.

The Russian armies were eventually defeated by Sweden and Poland/Lithuania and the Baltic lands were divided as follows: Protestant Sweden took the Duchy of Estonia (1561) and Ösel-Wiek (1645), whereas Catholic Poland/Lithuania took Livonia and Courland. The Livonian Order was secularized in 1561 by its new Grandmaster, Gotthard Kettler, who placed the Order under the protection of the King of Poland in order to protect Livonia from being annexed by Russia. Kettler himself became the Duke of Courland. In the meantime, Russian forces attacked Poland/Lithuania, but were driven from the Baltic lands and forced to accept peace with Poland/Lithuania in 1582 as well as with Sweden.

Sweden subsequently forced both Poland/Lithuania (Polish/Swedish war of 1600-1629) and Russia out of Estonia and Livonia and forced Denmark to surrender Ösel. As a result, most of the Baltic lands (except Courland) came under Swedish rule. Although the country and its inhabitants had suffered considerably due to the seemingly never ending wars, the period of Swedish rule is considered to have brought stability, order and peace to the area.

The Baltic German ruling class was once again able to secure by negotiation, the privileges it had enjoyed in Phase 1 of its existence, namely: property rights, the rights of (German) language, education and religion, and the right of administration under a German constitution. Sweden was most interested in the field of education, which also benefited the native population as compulsory education was introduced, books were translated into Latvian and Estonian and the first Baltic German university was founded in Tartu in 1632. The Swedes also tried to improve the living conditions of Estonians and Livonians working on the estates of the Baltic German and Swedish aristocrats. The rights of landowners to administer justice were curtailed, but the Swedes

were unsuccessful in freeing the serfs due to the opposition of the landowners. But new taxes were imposed and the landholdings reduced. While the Baltic German elite were able to continue the life style and enjoy the privileges and most of the authority it had previously enjoyed, what was missing was a full participation in the rule of the country.

During Phase 2 the Baltic German Elite, instead of continuing as Rulers of the Baltic lands, had become Administrators, receiving instructions from and reporting to the King of Sweden. The Swedes emphasized education and endorsed fair treatment of the serfs, which included a curtailment of authority in the administration of justice by the landowners, thus improving the living conditions of the serfs. However, the Swedes were unsuccessful in freeing the serfs due to strong opposition from the landowners.

Phase 3 (1721-1920 = 200 years): Imperial Russian Rule

Sweden had emerged as the dominant power in Northern Europe during the 17th century due to her well-trained army and excellent Royal leadership. However, the storm clouds were gathering, as several of the neighboring countries were keen on expanding their territorial interests. These included Denmark, Poland and Russia. In addition, there was resistance amongst the Baltic German landowners to the forced reduction of their estates and to the newly introduced heavy tax load. Peter the Great, Tsar of Imperial Russia, took advantage of the new European constellation and attacked the city of Narva (Estonia), held by Sweden. This action triggered another 21 year devastating war, the Nordic War of 1700 -1721 (Riga 1710), during which the populations of the Baltic provinces once again were considerably reduced as they suffered great hardship and illness including hunger, the Plague and deportation. Following a brief interim war between Sweden and Poland, with Sweden prevailing as the victor, the Swedish army inflicted initial defeats upon the Russian army at Narva. However, the Russians eventually emerged as the victors following the defeat of the Swedish army at Poltava (Ukraine) in

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1709, and Peter the Great built the city of St. Petersburg and made it the capital of the Russian Empire in 1712. The defeat of the Swedish army caused Estonia and Livonia to become Russian provinces and to thus provide Russia with access to the Baltic Sea, an objective that had been on the minds of Russian rulers for a long time.

Once again, the Baltic German elite, now administrators instead of erstwhile rulers, managed to successfully negotiate with their new Tsarist Imperial Russian masters, the granting of their traditional privileges including their German constitution, language, education and religion as well as property rights and the position of Governor General reporting to St. Petersburg. As the country gradually recovered economically and culturally, a period of peace, prosperity and wellbeing commenced, that was to last for about 150 years, even though there were signs to suggest that the world would not always remain so.

While agriculture and commerce flourished and the landowners built lovely manor houses and even palaces, the Latvian and Estonian peasants and farm workers remained serfs and were not given much of an opportunity to see their educational standards, language and Latvian identity needs, living conditions and legal status improved accordingly. There were, however, informal attempts by German pastors and by individual Baltic German landowners to improve conditions for those employed by the landowners. These attempts included the printing and distribution of a Latvian dictionary, a translation into Latvian of the bible and of the Lutheran catechism, the teaching of Latvian in schools and the tolerance of Latvian singing. But preference amongst the Baltic German elite seemed to remain for a continuation of the status quo and for strict adherence to the code of class distinctions. While intermarriage between aristocrats and families of Baltic German academics, medical professionals, wealthy financiers, industrialists and merchants were reluctantly accepted, marriages with members of Latvian families were, according to an unwritten law, not acceptable.

Courland, which had been under Polish/Lithuanian rule, rejoined the Baltic Provinces, now under Russian rule, in the year 1795 as a result of the "first partition" of Poland. The Baltic Provinces changed geographically as Northern Livonia from Lake Peipus west, including the cities of Tartu and Parnu, with a predominantly Estonian population, was added to Estonia including Ösel, whereas the remainder of Livonia (Capital: Riga) and Courland (Capital: Mitau/Jelgava) were combined as Latvian provinces. Many pastors moved from Germany to the Baltic Provinces. The university of Tartu was re-opened in 1802 and Baltic German academic life flourished as did the sciences and cultural life, and there was interchange with the Russian nobility in St. Petersburg. However, the slumbering unrest amongst the predominantly rural Latvian and Estonian populations began to stir and eventually to express itself in social unrest by 1820, even though by that time (1816 - 1619) serfdom had been officially abolished. But the peasants were no better off, since they now had to pay the landowners rent for the land they cultivated for their own consumption. It wasn't until 1849-1860, following the farmers' revolt of 1841, that Latvian and Estonian farmers were allowed to acquire farmland and to grow crops for sale. These measures had been encouraged by Tsar Alexander I, who aimed at reforming the status of farmers in all Russian territories.

The second half of the 19th century was to witness major changes in the administration and lives of the Baltic German minority and in its relationship vis-a-vis the emerging nationalism of the Latvian majority and the Russification efforts of the Russian rulers in St. Petersburg. On the one hand, there were greater advances in education and religious instruction for Latvians and Estonians including the appointment of Latvian teachers and the introduction of Latvian newspapers, books of poetry and, of course, singing, which played an important role in the emerging national movements in the Baltic provinces. On the other hand, a greater involvement by the Russian masters in the affairs of these Baltic Provinces was noticeable especially with respect to education, reli-

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gion and culture, although daily life on the estates and in the towns remained relatively unchanged.

The new church laws curtailed Lutheran church privileges throughout Russia, followed in the period between 1867 and 1890 by a full range of new measures designed to russify public and private life, such as: 1867 - replacement of German by Russian as the language of all government offices; 1877/82 - new Russian city regulations; 1887 - compulsory teaching in Russian throughout the school system including private schools; 1888 - Russian police; and finally by 1889 - a new Russian justice system and a Russian constitution; German was replaced by Russian on all official signs including street signs; even the Baltic German Governor General was replaced by a high-ranking Russian civil servant.

Thus, gone forever were the privileges, which the Baltic German administration had so carefully negotiated with Tsar Peter the Great, following the end of the Nordic War in the year 1721. A new era had commenced under Tsars Alexander I and II and Nicholas II, that sought improvement of education, personal development and living conditions for all citizens of the Baltic Provinces, however within a uniform Russian framework throughout the entire Russian Empire. It tolerated no exceptions such as had been the case in the Baltic German administered provinces, where German had been the official language in schools, churches and government offices within the framework of a German constitution and justice system. These Russification measures clashed with an ever escalating nationalism of both Latvians and Estonians, that included their pursuit of improvements not only of social, educational and economic conditions, but also of greater recognition as Latvian and Estonian majorities, and opportunities of participation in the governance of their own countries.

The smouldering, ever increasing unrest amongst the various parties concerned gave explosive expression during the first revolution of 1905, that saw hordes of Russian Bolsheviks roaming the countryside and burning, looting and destroying some 84

Baltic German owned estates and killing 82 owners and pastors, primarily in Livonia. These Russian revolutionaries were supported by Latvian Bolsheviks, by stirred-up Latvian farmers and factory workers, by members of the Latvian press and by nationalist intellectuals.

The supporters included Karlis Augusts Wilhelms Ulmanis, who was eventually captured and jailed by the Imperial Russian Government. However, following his release, he engaged in agricultural studies in Switzerland, Germany and the United States and returned to Latvia in 1913. Ulmanis was elected First Prime Minister of the independent Republic of Latvia (November 18, 1918), following the end of WWI.

During the late 1800's and early 1900's, the Baltic Germans proposed a number of reform measures to improve both the economic, educational and social status of the Latvians including the provision of opportunities for participation in the Provinces' administration, but these reform measures were rejected by the Imperial Russian government, which had a different vision for the Baltic Provinces. In consequence, the Baltic Germans focused more on their own language and culture and on the management of their estates, and less on the future aspirations of their employees. It appears that the Latvians at that time hated the German ruling class and particularly the landowners more than they feared the new Imperial Russian justice system, their military or a potential rule by a Bolshevik/Communist rule that was to follow within just a few years.

By 1914 World War I had broken out, an unfortunate sequence of events, triggered by the assassination of the Austrian Archduke in Serbia. Serbia had a military assistance agreement with Russia and Austria had a similar one with Germany. Thus both Russia and Germany were dragged into this war, and several other countries followed including England, France, Turkey, Italy etc. and eventually even a reluctant US. In the end (November, 1918), the new German Social-Democratic (Ebert) government accepted the conditions of the Versailles Peace Treaty (28.6.1919) that held Germany solely responsible for

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this war, and thus planted the seeds amongst a humiliated German people for the developments that eventually led to National Socialism in Germany and to the outbreak of WWII in 1939.

While the Allied forces celebrated a victory in the West, the German Army in the East had defeated the Russian Imperial Army, weakened by poor morale, equipment and supply problems and by the spread of Communism throughout its ranks and amongst the cities' factory workers, following the Bolshevik Revolution in October, 1917. The subsequent forced abdication of the Tsar, the take-over of the Russian parliament, the Duma, by the Bolsheviks and the murder of the entire Tsarist family, represented the end of Feudalism in Imperial Russia, where the traditional Baltic German way of life, even its continued existence, was now in grave danger. Many Baltic Germans left the Baltic States at that time. Whereas in 1881 there were 180,000 Baltic Germans in the Baltic Provinces, that number had shrunk to 162,000 by 1914.

While Phase 3 started positively for the Baltic Germans - as they continued to remain the administrators of the Baltic Provinces under their new Imperial Russian masters, with all previously granted privileges still intact - they eliminated serfdom and the onerous, unpopular land rental agreements, improved education and living conditions for their employees, but proved unable to offer the Latvian majority an improved social standing, greater authority and more meaningful participation in the good fortunes of their own country. Circumstances changed, however, particularly during the second half of the 19th century, when an ever strengthening Latvian nationalism and the Russification clashed, and the Baltic German minority was unable to have its belated reform proposals for the betterment of conditions for the Latvians accepted by the Imperial Russian government, and even lost most of their previously granted, 700 year old privileges and authority, except for their property rights.

Phase 4 (1920 - 1940 = 20 years): Independent Republic of Latvia and WWII

The relatively brief and eventually successful "War of Independence" (1918/19) to free the Baltic lands of invading Bolsheviks (Communists) resulted in the creation of the three internationally recognized, independent Baltic Republics of: Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. This war was successful, because of the efforts of the following combined forces: Remnants of the loyal Imperial Russian (white) army, volunteers of the German army (the "Iron Division"), "Latvian Riflemen", the Baltic German "Landeswehr" (Latvia), Estonian army units supported by volunteers from the Scandinavian countries, and the Baltic German Baltenregiment (Estonia), of which my father was a member. It also included ships of the British fleet, anchored in the ports of Riga, Reval (Tallinn) and Libau (Liepaja) under the leadership of Lord Harold Alexander, who also assumed command of the "Landeswehr". Lord Alexander eventually advanced to the position of Field Marshall in the British army during WWII and was Governor General of Canada (1946-1952).



As the Russian Bolshevik forces had already invaded and occupied most of the Baltic Provinces including the city of Riga, supported by Estonian and Latvian Bolsheviks, the combined "White" forces faced an uphill battle against the "Reds", who had imprisoned or expelled to Siberia many Baltic Germans, Latvians and Estonians. In spite of internal squabbles and even military confrontations (Estonian forces vs Latvian forces in Livonia), the combined "White" forces finally prevailed, Riga was recaptured by the "Landeswehr" on May 22, 1919, and the "Reds" were driven out of the Baltic Provinces. The "war of Independence" officially ended with the signing of the Peace Treaty of Tartu on February 2, 1920, and the various components of the "White" forces disbanded shortly thereafter.

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Following the end of WWI (Peace Treaty of "Brest-Litovsk" (5.November,1918) - when the Baltic Provinces were officially separated from the Russian Empire - the new provisional governments in Latvia (Karlis Ulmanis), Estonia and Lithuania quickly declared their (internationally supported) independence as Republics, and following the end of the "War of Independence" (1920), the borders between Latvia and Estonia were re-aligned along ethnic/language lines in Livonia i.e. the northern part of Livonia and the former Duchy of Estonia including Ösel became the Republic of Estonia, whereas southern Livonia and Courland became the Republic of Latvia.

There were considerable squabbles within the different interest groups within the newly formed republics as to future direction and political association. Some of the options included (a) an independent association of the Baltic States with Baltic German participation, (b) becoming an extended part of Germany, (c) joining Lenin's new Communist Russia and (d) remaining independent republics ("Latvia for Latvians"). The provisional (Ulmanis) government of Latvia - with overwhelming support from the majority Latvian population - chose independence.

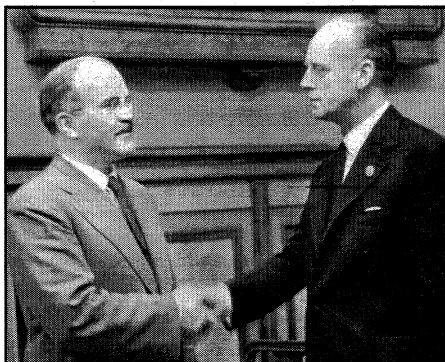
Even though the former Baltic German ruling elite had played an important role during the War of Independence by helping Latvia become an independent republic, it was cruelly rewarded. The new, anti-Baltic German, revenge oriented Latvian government, following the example of the Russian Bolsheviks in Russia, initiated a "Land Reform" Act on September 16, 1920, authorizing the confiscation of some 1,300 estates "without compensation", comprising 3.7 million hectares or ca. 90% of the agricultural land owned by the Baltic German "Barons" (approx. 80% of the total agricultural lands) as well as the large industrial and commercial enterprises, banks and financial institutions, cultural properties, schools and even churches.

In Estonia, the confiscated Baltic German owned land amounted to approx. 60% of the total. Thus, the

former ruling class had lost its entire economic base and political relevance, and at 4% of the population, was reduced to a small minority comparable to the Jewish minority and to about 1/3 of the Russian minority in Latvia. Furthermore, employment opportunities for Baltic Germans had now diminished as had education in the German schools. German street and community names were replaced by corresponding Latvian designations. The next 20 years proved to be a very trying time for those Baltic Germans, who chose to remain in Latvia, their home country for 700 years, with many living in poverty and with the somewhat unrealistic hope that circumstances would improve. Many left for Germany, Scandinavia and the Americas.

There is no doubt, that the national Latvian sentiments expressed and decisions taken during the 1920's and 30's were influenced not only by their own historical experiences and hard feelings toward - what they considered their 700 year-long Baltic German oppressors, who had enslaved them, taken their land and frustrated their educational, economic and social aspirations and their rightful participation in the economic and political administration and good fortunes of their country - but by events in Russia and in Western Europe, including the rise of National Socialism under Adolf Hitler in Germany and the expansion of Soviet Communism under Joseph Stalin in Russia.

The act of "confiscation without compensation" of the Baltic German properties represented the first step in the total elimination of the Baltic German presence in the Baltic States, the second step being the "repatriation" (deportation) in November, 1939



of the remaining group of Baltic Germans (ca. 80,000) to Germany and to the German occupied (Warthegau) region of Western Poland. The repatriation fol-

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lowed the signing of a secret agreement between representatives of Hitler and Stalin on August 23, 1939, that delineated the new Nazi German and Soviet Russian spheres of influence in Eastern Europe including the assigning of the 3 Baltic States to the Soviet sphere, which in turn placed the Baltic German minorities in grave danger in view of what had happened in Russia since the revolution and the emergence of Soviet Communism. It seems that Hitler was thus prepared to sacrifice the established German speaking minorities in the Baltic States, in Soviet Russia and in the territories within the proposed Soviet Russian sphere of influence in return for short term gains in Polish territory and for more time to prepare for an attack on the Soviet Union to yield even more land and to eliminate a competitor.

I believe that these acts of "confiscation of property" and the subsequent "repatriation" (deportation) of the Baltic German minorities" from Latvia, Estonia and Lithuania represented "acts of ethnic cleansing" that would likely be considered "crimes against humanity" within today's interpretations of the provisions of the Geneva Convention. It should be noted, however, had the "repatriation" of the willing not occurred, the Baltic German minority would have been exposed to the whims of a Soviet justice system that most likely would have condemned them to incarceration and/or asylum in Siberia. However, time moves on, and what happened then has now become part of our history that recorded a realignment of countries, the horrific destruction of Europe, the death of some 50 million people and the movement of tens of millions of refugees who lost home and country. Thus, the fate of our small Baltic German minority seems to be almost insignificant in perspective. The changed circumstances and the revised political constellations reaching back to that time and to that part of the world seem to have been accepted by the international community; and we are facing new challenges today.

Phase 4 represented the final phase of the Baltic German presence in Latvia, the land they had once ruled, then administered, enriched and defended during a time span of over 700 years. They brought

German culture, education and Christianity including the Reformation to the Baltic States, a place they proudly called "home". However, being a small ruling minority of only 5% holding 80% of the country's agricultural land, they were unable and reluctant - due to their ongoing need for Latvian farm workers, but also their insistence on class-distinction, as was then common in Europe, and their focus on their own self-preservation and way of life - to assist the initially rural indigenous population in their aspirations toward a higher level of education, social conduct and acceptance as the Latvian majority, with the view toward meaningful participation economically and politically in the administration and good fortunes of their own country.

Belated efforts by the Baltic German administration during the late 19th century toward such participation were rejected by the Imperial Russian government. In consequence, when the Latvian majority was finally given the opportunity, their newly elected Latvian government confiscated "without compensation" the estates of the Baltic German landowners and the Baltic German businesses, financial institutions and cultural assets. A similar situation unfolded in Estonia. The final exit from Latvia occurred following an agreement between the dictatorial governments of Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union to establish respective spheres of influence, which included the placement of the Baltic States within the Soviet sphere. The repatriation (deportation) of the remaining and willing 80,000 Baltic Germans to German territory in occupied Poland was arranged in short order, with the consent of the Soviet Union. Remaining in Latvia under Soviet rule was not an option.

Phase 5 (1940 - 1990 = 50 years): Soviet Occupation (Latvian SSR) and WWII

Once the Non-aggression Pact and the secret agreement between Ribbentrop (Germany) and Molotov (Soviet Union) had been signed, it didn't take long for German troops to march into Poland (September 1, 1939) and occupy it within a span of 3 weeks, and

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for the Soviet Union to annex the agreed Eastern part of Poland (September 17, 1939). Due to Poland's agreements with Britain and France, the German attack on Poland triggered the beginning of WWII. The Soviet Union then leaned on the Baltic States to accept her protection as part of the new era and promptly sent troops to underscore the seriousness of her intentions, following both Estonia's and Latvia's request to become member states of the Soviet Union. Thousands of Latvian people were jailed and 34,000 were sent to Siberia. This included also Karlis Ulmanis, Latvia's popular former president, who was arrested in 1940 and later died in a Soviet prison camp in 1942.

Following Germany's decision to attack the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, and subsequent to a successful war in France and the establishing of partnerships with Japan and with several European countries including Italy, Hungary, Romania etc., German troops quickly reached the Baltic States on their march toward St. Petersburg (Leningrad) and Moscow and were greeted as liberators by both Latvians and Estonians. However, the interlude lasted only a little over 3 years, when, following the German defeat at Stalingrad and a strengthening of the Soviet army, the German troops were forced to retreat toward Germany, with the Soviet Army in pursuit. Bitter battles ensued that saw Estonians and Latvians fighting alongside German army units against the Soviets. At that time thousands of Latvians and Estonians left their home countries to find new homes in Western Europe, North America and Australia.

In the meantime, in January, 1945 the remaining Baltic German community, now scattered all over German occupied Western Poland, was once again rudely awakened, this time by the approaching Red Army on its march toward Berlin and Germany. The order came in mid-January, 1945 for all German nationals to leave to leave immediately and head for Germany with whatever transportation was available. Those living on farms were to use horses and wagons, those in the cities were to be picked up by truck from designated locations. However, the

trucks never arrived, leaving women, children and seniors to fight for themselves. Literally millions of refugees moved toward Germany, by horse and wagon, by automobile, by train, by ship and on foot in minus 20 degree Celsius temperatures, only to face allied bombing attacks as they reached the refugee camps in the devastated cities and towns of Germany. As the Soviet Red Army approached Berlin, the refugees either moved further west again or decided to stay in Eastern Germany. It goes without saying that whatever personal belongings and assets the Baltic Germans didn't lose when they were first "repatriated" in November, 1939, and subsequently on their flight to Germany ahead of the Red Army in January, 1945, they certainly lost on their scramble to Western Germany a few weeks or months later.

By early 1945, the Soviet Union was once again in firm control of the Baltic States, where it remained until 1990, following a collapse from within during the Gorbachev/ Yeltsin era. The russification effort continued as part of the Soviet Union's policy of Transferring Russians from different parts of the Soviet Union into the Baltic States, so as to increase the number of Russians vis-à-vis the indigenous Latvians, Estonians and Lithuanians and thereby gradually achieve majority status. All expressions of Latvian nationalism were suppressed and tens of thousands of Latvian intellectuals were jailed and/or shipped to Siberia including children who never returned. As the small farms of the Ulmanis era were not producing enough, the concept of Russian co-operative farming was introduced.

Ugly high-rise apartments were built in the pristine countryside to accommodate farm workers and greater emphasis was placed on industrialization, requiring the construction of more ugly high-rise apartments in the cities to accommodate factory workers. Otherwise, restoration and renovation efforts commenced with respect to national monuments destroyed during WWII, such as the House of the Black Heads (Schwarzhäupterhaus), the Church of St. Peter (Petrikirche), the Opera House, the National Theatre etc. and many medieval structures and Art Nouveau apartment buildings, for which

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the centre of Riga today is considered a UNESCO heritage site.

The Russian language was emphasized particularly in the cities, as Latvia had become the Latvian SSR. The Soviet military occupied large tracts of land, particularly along the Baltic coast due to tensions of the Cold War with the West. Thus the dream of Latvian independence and mastery within their own country remained just that, until the late 1980's.

Phase 6 (1990 - Present = 25 years): Independent Latvian Republic and Member of the EU and NATO

The collapse of the Soviet Union from within during the Gorbachev/Yeltsin era in 1989/90 gave rise to the release of the 3 Baltic States from the grip of the Soviet Union and to their renewed pursuit of independence as democratic Republics. They were subsequently welcomed into the European Union and into NATO, and in January 2014 Latvia adopted the Euro as its currency in replacement of the Lat as had Estonia done in 2011. As previously mentioned, when the Baltic States were part of the Soviet Union, they had to pursue a policy of encouraging Russian nationals from other parts of the Soviet Union to move to the Baltic States, primarily to Latvia. In addition, when Latvia gained her independence in 1990, thousands of former Soviet army officers and personnel decided to stay in Latvia, with the result that the Russian population in Latvia at 700,000 today represents approximately 34 % of Latvia's total population and more than 2/3 of the population of Riga. In Estonia, the number of Russians was 160,000 or 12% of the total population. This situation has created enormous problems. Since the Russians didn't want to be integrated into Latvian society or to learn Latvian, they established their own Russian schools, therefore did not qualify for Latvian citizenship and could not participate in the political process i.e. in elections or representation. Furthermore, the Latvians thoroughly dislike the Russians, largely based on their experiences during what essentially amounted to 45 years of Soviet occupation, which included the presence of the KGB.

However, the restoration and renovation of historically interesting buildings is ongoing and Riga's citizens are taking great care in keeping the city clean and attractive for the many tourists who converge on Latvia, primarily during the summer season. Riga was named "European City of Culture" for the year 2014. And we certainly enjoyed many of the cultural offerings, including concerts, opera, ballet, museums, parks etc. Menus in the city's good restaurants are usually in three languages: Latvia, Russian and English, and most clerks in the stores speak Latvian and Russian, the younger ones also English.

One hears more Russian than Latvian on the streets of Riga as many restaurants, stores, hotels and apartments are owned by Russians. Russia is also a major trading partner and Russians are major investors, particularly in resort properties (Jurmala). The banking sector seems to be dominated by Scandinavian financial institutions. It is ironic that - whereas there is little or no German presence in evidence, except for some hotel ownership and summer tourist groups - the Latvian language does contain a very substantial percentage of Latvianized German words. Wages are low and good employment opportunities are scarce, with the result that particularly young Latvians and Russians are leaving the country for Germany, the UK, the Scandinavian countries or North America. There is peace in the land for now, but there are also clouds on the horizon, as the winds are blowing from both East and West, and the small and vulnerable Baltic States represent attractive strategic acquisition targets as they have for hundreds of years.

Synopsis, Conclusion and Outlook

When I not only observed, but actually encountered a seemingly deliberate policy by the Latvian authorities to eradicate all evidence of the 700 year presence of the former Baltic German ruling class, in which my family was also represented, I asked myself: "Why are they unwilling to present a more balanced picture of our joint history and achievements as well as the painful experiences that have ultimately resulted in the creation of an independent, beautiful,

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modern, yet historically interesting Western European country?" In response, I felt that I needed to undertake some research into the likely reasons for such Latvian policy and began to examine the pros and cons of the actions, policies and aspirations of the parties. I also examined the impact of the various foreign ruling bodies upon the changing authority, function and privileges of the erstwhile minority Baltic German ruling elite, essentially intent on maintaining the "status quo", and upon the subordinate Latvian majority working class with its aspirations for a better education, improved socio-economic conditions and eventual recognition as acceptable members of a national majority within the culture of its own country.

Phase 1 (1200 -1561) represented the first 360 years of Baltic German rule within the framework of the Teutonic Order State and in partnership with the Catholic Church. The initial thrust of the Order to Christianize and colonize a hostile indigenous, largely illiterate rural population, met with violent resistance, but arrived at an eventual arrangement that brought order to the region as both aristocratic rulers/landowners and Latvian serfs seemed to settle into their respective roles. Class distinction was strictly enforced; and while the landowner provided a measure of job security and stability for the families of the serfs, their socio-economic and educational conditions remained relatively unchanged. On the other hand, while the members of the ruling class were obliged to perform their administrative and military duties, they enjoyed a comfortable lifestyle enhanced by the benefits of their association with the Hanseatic League.

Phase 2 (1561-1721) represented the next 160 years of Baltic German administration, under the rule of the Kingdom of Sweden. Following the Lutheran Reformation and the acceptance of the Lutheran faith by the Teutonic Order, it separated from the Catholic Church and was subsequently dissolved. In the meantime, Sweden which had emerged as the dominant military power in Europe, had conquered most of the Baltic Provinces (except Courland) and the Baltic German elite successfully managed to negoti-

ate the assumption of the country's administration (not rule) and the granting of the traditional privileges including: the German Constitution and justice system, German language and education, Lutheran religion, property rights and the position of Governor General reporting to Stockholm. Initially, hunger, illness and the plague ravaged the country and decimated the population. However, the Swedes emphasized education, improved living conditions and the fair treatment of the serfs including curtailment of the authority of the landowners in administering justice. But they were unable to free the serfs due to strong opposition from the landowners, essentially interested in maintaining the status quo.

Phase 3 (1721 - 1920) represented the next 200 years of Baltic German administration, under the rule of the Tsarist Russian Empire. Following the devastating (for the Baltic provinces) 21-year Nordic War (1700-1721), Imperial Russia emerged as the victor, and once again the Baltic German ruling class was able to successfully negotiate the granting of its traditional privileges. Following economic recovery, the country enjoyed a relatively peaceful 150-year period, interrupted by Russia's forced acquisition from Poland/Lithuania of the Province of Courland, which re-joined the other Baltic provinces of Estonia/Ösel and Livonia. While there were initial attempts at improving both education and living conditions of the rural serfs, it wasn't until 1816 that the serfs were finally freed and subsequently relieved of their obligation to pay rent for land cultivated for their own consumption.

The 19th century witnessed two major developments, that not only clashed with each other, but ultimately combined to eliminate the presence of the former Baltic German minority ruling class: 1) the strong emergence of Latvian nationalism and 2) the removal from the Baltic German ruling class of the previously granted privileges (except property rights) as part of the introduction of a major Russification program that replaced German with Russian including constitution, education, language and religion (Russian Orthodox vs. Lutheran). The position of "Governor General", previously held by a Baltic

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German, (Paul von Lilienfeld in Courland until 1885) was handed to a Russian civil servant. Social unrest swept the Tsarist Russian Empire culminating in two revolutions instigated by Bolshevics/Communists, who roamed the countryside, looting, burning and killing, with aristocratic landowners as major targets. The first revolution took place in 1905, the second in 1917-20, following the end of WWI, at which time the Russian Tsar Nicholas 2 and his entire family were murdered. This act signaled the end of Feudalism in Imperial Russia including the Baltic Provinces. While socio-economic conditions and education improved amongst the Latvian majority, the belated Baltic German reform-proposals, that would have provided Latvians with more recognition, authority and participation in the administration of the country, were rejected by St. Petersburg as they conflicted with the Russification strategy in Latvia.

Phase 4 (1920 - 1940) represented the next 20 years of Baltic German presence, under the rule of the independent Republic of Latvia. Following the end of WWI and the successful Bolshevik Russian revolution that put an end to Feudalism, the Baltic Provinces were embroiled in a "War of Independence" to remove the Bolshevik/Communist revolutionaries, cooperated and were successful, with the military help of the Baltic German minorities in both Estonia and Latvia. Thus the Latvians gained independence and formed a Latvian government under the leadership of Karlis Ulmanis. One of the first acts of the new government was the introduction of a Land Reform that authorized the confiscation of all Baltic German estates, businesses and cultural assets without compensation, thus removing the economic base of the former Baltic German ruling class, its authority and its political relevance. The final act in the removal of the Baltic German presence from the Baltic States was not initiated by the Latvians but by the two super-powers, the Russian Soviet Union and Nazi Germany. Their secret agreement provided for the establishment of respective spheres of influence, placed the Baltic States in the Soviet sphere and provided for the repatriation/deportation of the remaining, willing Baltic Germans to German territory

by November 1939. Remaining in the Baltic States under Soviet Russian rule was not an option for the Baltic Germans.

Conclusion and Outlook

There seems to be a historical rationale for what appears to be today's official Latvian effort to obliterate the 740-year presence and achievements of the erstwhile Baltic German ruling class, while simultaneously usurping such contributions, even though the remains of that evidence are everywhere to be found i.e. in the architecture of the cities, the churches, the cultural and educational facilities, manor houses, fortresses, castles, palaces, and vandalized cemeteries; and even in the Latvian language which contains a large component of Latvianized German words.

Being part of the European Community, the Baltic Provinces were naturally influenced by the events and political developments taking place in other European countries. At the time of the Catholic Church/Teutonic Order crusade to the Baltic lands to Christianize and colonize the largely illiterate rural inhabitants, the accepted form of governmental rule was Feudalism and a socio-economic order based on class distinction. This form of government remained in place in the Baltic Provinces right until the Russian Bolshevik Revolution at the end of WWI (1918), even though the foreign rulers (mainly Sweden and Russia) changed and brought their own characteristics to bear upon the Baltic German administration and the indigenous people. Initial rejection by the Latvian peasants/serfs, followed by a gradual acceptance of the status quo, eventually gave way to a desire for better education, socio-economic conditions, status and a national Latvian identity.

Major influences surfaced as a result of the Lutheran Reformation and the translation of the Bible and Catechism into Latvian. Schools were built and education in Latvian by German and Latvian teachers was introduced, and their living conditions improved. But the serfs were not freed until 1816 and their land rental fees only removed in response to a

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farmers revolt. The winds of political and social change in Europe followed the US Declaration of Independence (1776), the French Revolution (1789) and various additional 19th century European revolutions that targeted an end to the willful rule of the aristocratic elites, unfair taxation and poor living and working conditions of the masses. The "Communist Manifesto" (1848) by Marx and Engels demanded a re-distribution of wealth via confiscation of the landowners' estates and a dictatorial rule by the "Proletariat". The French had asked for: "Liberty, Equality and Fraternity". These ideas that had permeated European society, also manifested in the Russian revolutions of 1905/06 and 1917/18. A Bolshevik Russian occupation of the Baltic Provinces was repelled by the combined military and volunteer forces from Latvia, Estonia, Germany, the Scandinavians in the presence of a fleet from Great Britain. This force included Baltic German regiments that re-captured the city of Riga on May 22, 1919.

However, one of the first acts of legislation by the new Latvian government under Karlis Ulmanis was to expropriate without compensation all Baltic German property. While this act was in line with what happened in the Soviet Union - but not with established property rights in Scandinavia, the UK and Germany - it removed the Baltic Germans' economic base and rendered them politically irrelevant.

Why does it seem that there is now a deliberate effort by official Latvia to obliterate the 740 year-old presence of the former Baltic German ruling class and to usurp and represent their achievements as that of the Latvians rather than represent them as a cooperative effort? The apparent animosity appears to have its origin in the propagated perception: that the Baltic German knights and the Church some 700 years ago invaded the country, enslaved the people, forced Christianity upon them, took away their land, suppressed their culture, prolonged their poor living conditions and discouraged their educational and socio-economic progress; while at the same time, focusing on class distinction, on personal enrichment and a lavish life style, on the continuation of the status quo and on collusion with the various for-

eign ruling entities to preserve their privileges. As to the impression of a deliberate effort by the Latvian authorities to obliterate evidence of the erstwhile Baltic German presence in today's Latvia and to usurp the accomplishments of the former ruling class, there may possibly be a sense of inferiority and a need to impress fellow members in the EU, major powers such as the US and Russia and the many tourists visiting this beautiful and interesting land.

However, be that as it may, the expatriate Baltic German community is presently engaged in a considerable number of private undertakings to financially assist in the restoration of historical sites in Latvia (amounting to well over 1 million Euros), and together with Latvian and Estonian academics, within series of seminars, to seek factual information and engage in meaningful dialogue about our common culture, history, accomplishments and future cooperation in both Latvia and Estonia.

It was encouraging to read in a report by Baron Freytag v. Loringhoven, President of the Öselsche Ritterschaft (October 18, 2014) that: "The connection between the Estonians and Baltic Germans of Ösel has deepened more and more as the years have gone by."

It can only be hoped that these examples will also influence official Latvia toward a more cooperative direction with respect to its own view of our common history and a more constructive stance pertaining to our mutual relationships and the historic and continuing Baltic German contributions for the benefit of the land we all called home.

By: Peter E. Baron v. Sass – March, 2015