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HISTORICAL RESEARCH OF JELGAVA LOCAL MUNICIPALITY

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Jelgava Local Municipality is a municipality in the Zemgale region located on both sides of the Lielupe River. The county was formed in 2009 by uniting the Kalnciems city with the rural territory of Eleja, Gluda, Jaunsvirlauki, Lielplatone, Livberze, Platone, Sesava, Svete, Vilce, Vircava, and the Zalenieki parishes as well as the Valgunde County. The municipality administration is located in the city of Jelgava.

The land in Zemgale became suitable for human life approximately 8,000 years ago when the sea abated northward. After the end of the ice age in areas filled with swamps and forests the first people arrived taking up hunting and gathering food.

With the entering of the Zemgalians, one of the Baltic tribes, into the ancient Zemgale lands, a habitation of the fertile plains began. Populated areas, ancient palaces, cemetery fields, port sites appeared along with the development of farming culture. The most notable Zemgalian administrative centres and fortifications were in Tervete, Dobeles and Mezotne. Several Zemgalian palaces had once been located in the current Jelgava territory.

Latvian history in the 13th century was marked with independence battles of the heroic Zemgalians against the intruders- crusades against the Western feudalists who despite the military superiority, struggled to break the resistance of the Zemgale defenders. Only in the end of the 13th century did the battles for freedom in Zemgale end, as a result of which the land was under the rule of the Livonian Order.

The Livonian Order ceased to exist in 1561 when the last order master Gotthard Kettler surrendered to Lithuanian and Polish authority. Zemgale became part of the newly formed Courland and Semigallia dukedom.



In 1562 Gotthard Kettler became the first Duke of Courland and Semigallia. The Courland and Semigallia dukedom were autonomous in their economic life and most of the economic boom was achieved during the rule of Duke Gotthard Kettler (1642-1681).

Duke Gotthard Kettler



Duke Jacob of Courland and Semigallia



In the current Jelgava county we can find several testimonies from the times when the Duke owned manors, family estates, ancient manufactures, palaces, churches and burial places. In the 15th and 16th centuries the first manor homes appeared in Jelgava county – the Bramberge, Green, Vilce, Sesava, Blankenfelde, Lielvirca, Mazvirca, Oglaine, Virca, Livberze and others.

Bramberge Manor



Sesava Manor House

With the Duke of Courland and Semigallia and the care of local landlords in the 16th and 17th century several Lutheran churches were built in Salgale, Vircava, the Green Manor, Sesava and Livberze.



The Vircava Church

Manufacturing –
The Glass Kiln in Livberze



During the reign of Duke James of Courland and Semigallia (1642-1682) brick and tile kilns were installed and began their operation in the Jelgava county territory, as well as limekiln, alcohol, vinegar and soap making places, linen and sail weaving, wallpaper making and powder for hunting and fireworks.

The manufactured goods were consumed locally and brought to Riga, Lithuania and other places by boat through navigable rivers. Zemgale farmers also travelled to the colonies of Tobago and Gambia.

Zemgale was affected by all the wars in which the dukedoms' neighbours- the Poles, Lithuanians, Swedes, Russians and Prussians were involved in the 17th and 18th centuries. In 1705, the forces of the Russia's Czar Peter I invaded Jelgava, but the Swedes got lucky near Murmuiza where the Swedish and Vidzeme troops led by Count Lewenhaupt defeated the Russian troops led by Count Sheremetyev.



Monument in memory of Swedish Count Lewenhaupt

The Northern war in 1710 and the Great Plague in those years were the main reasons that dramatically altered the lifestyle tradition of living in 2-4 house villages that was known for centuries. The disintegration process of the peasant villages began and independent farms were developing.

The Biron family came to the throne of the Duchy of Courland and Semigallia in the 18th century; the Biron family's roots are in Kalnciems or Timza. The reigns of Ernst-Johann Biron and Peter Biron left the Semigallian region with a wonderful cultural and historical heritage; some of the most remarkable palaces and gardens from the period have survived. In 1795 the Duchy became a part of the Russian Empire. Jelgava became the capital of the governorate of Courland, though Semigallia retained administrative and economic unity.



Duke Ernest Johann von Biron



Duke Peter von Biron

The 19th century in Jelgava County began with a war in 1812 as French troops led by Napoleon invaded Russia. Prussians, who were allies of the French, entered Courland.

In the 19th century the Jelgava district territory became an economically developed county. Parish schools were built and the number of educated people rose. After the emancipation of the serfs, the Russian Tsar Alexander I came to Jelgava (1817) and announced further reforms. The manor peasants began to purchase their own homes. Peasants obtained last names, passports and the right to freedom of movement.

In the second part of 19th century parish municipalities were formed and the Jelgava district as a territorial unit. The building of roads from Jelgava to Riga, Tervete, Joniski, Dobele and the opening of railway lines between Riga-Jelgava (1868), Jelgava-Mazeiki (1873) and Krustpils-Jelgava-Ventspils (1902) encouraged economic development. During the first National Awakening choir and drama groups were formed in the parishes, which actively participated in the national song celebration and organised song festivals in the parishes.



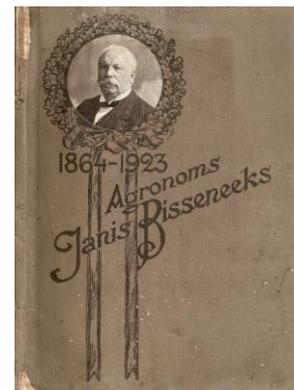
The Home Purchase Certificate

Agriculture, credit unions, sports, music, education and cultural organisations were established. The first Latvian song celebration took place in Kronvirca in 1868. The first known theatre production took place in Eleja in 1871, in Zalenieki (1872), Jaunsvirlauki (1873), Svete and Virca (1874) and in Livberze in 1878. The county choirs and musicians actively participated in the IV General Song Celebration in Jelgava in 1895. The county farmers actively participated in the Riga and Jelgava Latvian societies, founded various organisations and choirs.



The poster of the Uzina Society House opening

A law issued in 1866 for vocational and manufacturing freedom encouraged economic development in the region. The Latvian farmers were involved in the cooperative movement of Janis Bisenieks from Virca.



Janis Bisenieks

Until the war, the economic boom of the county's farms was evident. This was shown by the agriculture good processing cooperatives, the use of contemporary agricultural technology and successful trade.



Steam damp

The Revolution of 1905 had its effects in Semigallia. There were demonstrations and protests in churches, and repression when the rebellion was suppressed. The effects of the Revolution were not as extreme as in other parts of the Baltic provinces of the Empire as the revolutionaries did not burn down that many estates.

The First World War was also felt when the German forces invaded in 1915. There was much destruction and devastation. Many local people became refugees. Others were drafted into the army. The effects of the war, including famine, still remain in people's memory.

Soldiers and nurses in World War I



5. The Zemgale riflemen regiment soldiers in the Tirelpurvs

Family photos, overgrown war time retrenchments, soldiers' graves and monuments, museum expositions and literary works all attest to the war time events in Jelgava County.

The heroism of the Latvian civil guards (who were later to become the Riflemen) is demonstrated in the Lozmeteĵkalns (Machine Gun Hill) area- Tirelpurvs, during the Christmas battles.

Memorial at Lozmeteĵkalns (Machine Gun Hill)



Zemgale was occupied by the Germans for several years and remained in the battle zone after the end of WWI. Tough battles took place during Latvia's fight for independence against the Bermont army and German forces in Jelgava County, in 1919. The glory of this history is told by the family archives, memorial places and the Cemetery of the Brethren.

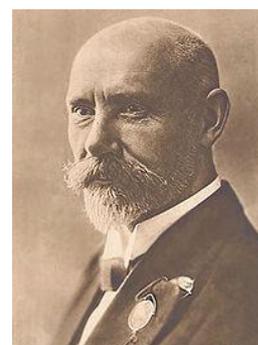


The monument in Varpa for lieutenant colonel A. Keller



The Demonstration of 1918

During the Latvia Republic's period of prosperity before the Soviet occupation and the Second World War, Zemgale was the state's 'bread basket,' since large farms were developing and modern technologies were employed and due to the suitable agricultural soil. Several well-known Latvian politicians, entrepreneurs and cultural workers come from Zemgale.



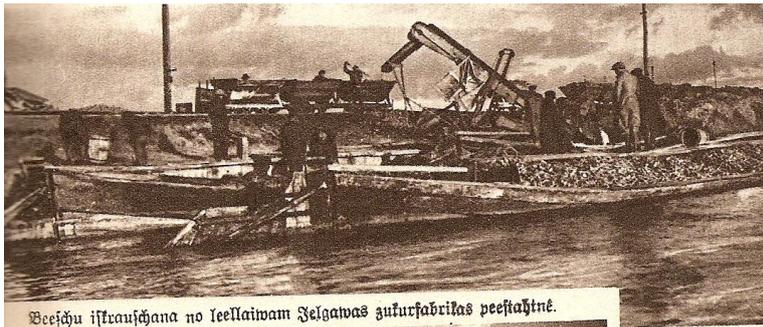
Janis Cakste – the first president of Latvia

In 1920, the Jelgava District Council and the councils of the civil parishes were established. As a result of the agrarian reform many farmers received land and established new farms. In 1935 in the Jelgava District territory there were 41 parishes with 351,960 hectares of land, including 82,227 hectares of forests, with 64,499 inhabitants. At this time 4,327 new farms were established and there were 3,958 already existing farms, altogether there were 10,884 farmsteads registered in the district.



The landscapes of rural life in the 1920s and 1930s

In 1921, in order to restore agricultural production, the agronomic department was established in the Jelgava district. The opening of the Jelgava sugar beet factory in 1926 encouraged the development of the sugar beet culture. The sugar beets were transported to the factory by rail and the river Lielupe.



Barges of sugar beets in the Lielupe River

Grain farming developed during the first period of Latvian independence and significant indicators were achieved in livestock farming. There were 74 active organisations overseeing livestock farming in the Jelgava district, taking care of the breeding and raising of animals and dairies were created. In 1936 there were 125 drainage organisations regulating Melnpe, Auce, Tervete, Iecava, Misa and other rivers. The length of the regulated rivers and the total length of drainage ditches in 1936 reached over 2,200 km.



The Putelis Dairy Farm

Brick manufacturing continued and the production of peat started as quarries were developed in the Kalnciems clay pits.

The Brick kiln in Kalnciems

During this time several community halls, parish houses, schools, dairies and railway stations were built.



The Sesava station



The overall network of roads with wider traffic significance in 1936 was 2,277 km. The first-rate or state roads were 634 km, but the district parishes had to maintain 605 km of second-rate roads and 1,038 km of third-rate roads. The local governments built 138 km of new roads within the borders of the district, for examples, Jelgava-Kalniciema highway, continuing work on the construction of roads Jelgava-Vircava-Bauska, Jelgava-Tukums. In 1932 the electrification of the Jelgava district rural areas began, installing essential high-voltage electrical lines from Jelgava-Tukums, Jelgava-Meitene, Jelgava-Tervete, Kronauce-Auce-Dobele.

In 1939 there were 170 agricultural organisations registered in the Jelgava district, 5 trade and industry, 4 vocational, 15 firemen, 82 cultural, 31 sports, 32 assistance organisations. The parish choirs took part in both the local Zemgale, Dobele, Jelgava song festivals as well as in the General Song festival in Riga, the peasants and farmers presented their produce in the Manufacturing, Farming exhibitions and tradesmen took part in the Arts and Crafts exhibits.



A poster of the Third Harvest Festival in Jelgava



At the Song Festival in Jelgava

The Second World War left a devastating effect on the Zemgale region, as the Zemgale farms suffered, homes and outhouses were destroyed, flocks were dispersed and the city of Jelgava was left in ruins. The nearby Dobele region was located in the territory of the Courland cauldron, where some of the heaviest battles took place during the war.



Legionaries in the Zalenieki Palace

During the mass deportations between 1941 and 1949 to the northern parts of the USSR more than 1,143 people were deported. During Soviet rule the socialist economic model was put into place—Machine Tractor Station (MTS), soviet farming and the establishment of collective farms. During the war with the armies and frontlines crossing the lands, houses were destroyed, farms cleared, men were conscripted into the German and Soviet armies. Repressions were felt from

all the occupying forces. The German occupation forces killed Jews, Gypsies and mental hospital patients. Not all the victims of the Soviet repression were able to return from deportation and imprisonment; they are buried all over the Siberian taiga and tundra. The Zemgale land was rigged with retrenchments and still today hides traces of the war and burial places of the soldiers fighting on both sides. There are many testimonies from the days of collective and state owned farming in the county.



The first tractor in the collective farm



Sugar-beet collection in the collective farm

On December 31, 1949, the Jelgava County was liquidated and as of January 1, 1950 the Jelgava District was formed with its executive committee, which with slight territorial reforms existed until November 1959. From November 1959 until April 1962 the Jelgava District was subject to the city's executive committee. From April 17, 1962 till December 18th once again the Jelgava District had its own executive committee. From 18th December, 1962 until January 10, 1967 part of Jelgava District territory was subject to the executive committee of the Dobele District, and another part was subject to the Bauska executive committee. Since January 10, 1967 the Jelgava District had its own management until 2009 when Latvia finally completed the administrative territorial reform and instead of the Jelgava District two municipalities were created – the Ozolnieki Local Municipality and the Jelgava Local Municipality. During Soviet times similar tendencies were observed in the Jelgava District farms to that which occurred all over Latvia – the manufacturing of goods mainly for the Eastern market, high immigrations, decrease in the Latvian population, the establishment of military bases, and total control by the communist party. There were collective farms in the Jelgava District territory, such as the collective farm Nakotne, which in the context of the overall Soviet manufacturing stagnation stood out with its productivity.

With the onset of the independence movement in Latvia, people in Jelgava District were also involved by participating in the elections, the *Latvijas Tautas fronte* movement, going to the barricades, regaining properties that belonged to their ancestors and starting activities in their properties that correspond to the market economy.



The Plenum of the Latvia Creative Union May 1990

The production of agriculture goods has remained the principal occupation in the Municipality. The restructuring of manufacturing, various state reforms and changes in workforce have led to a decrease in the numbers of residents and births in the rural areas. However, in spite of the changes, the Jelgava Local Municipality economic and cultural activity is notable all over Latvia.

The rich cultural heritage with more than a hundred state and locally recognised cultural monuments (archaeology, architecture, art and history) attest to the interesting and event filled history of Jelgava Local Municipality, its high material and spiritual culture. Many excellent socio-political, science, literature, art and cultural personalities have been born and have worked in Jelgava Local Municipality, adding to a vital part of Latvian cultural history. Jelgava Local Municipality has taken an important role in the economic and cultural life of our country.

