

The First Women in Justice of the Republic of Latvia (1918–1940)

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Abstract:

Until the founding of the Republic of Latvia, women were practically excluded from law studies and work in the justice system. The territory of Latvia was part of the Russian Empire and thus subject to the 1864 judicial reform and its laws, which required a law degree and experience to be eligible for working in the justice system and prohibited women from these positions. Following the founding of the Republic of Latvia in 1918 and, more specifically, the establishment of the University of Latvia which had a stronger focus on gender equality in 1919, Latvian women finally had the opportunity to earn the necessary degrees and pursue careers in the judiciary. However, to gain the required experience and be admitted to practice in the court, Bar association, or notaria, women initially needed someone to employ them. In this regard, specific well-known men with liberal worldviews played a significant role.

Keywords: women rights; Justice in Latvia; judge; sworn notary; sworn advocate (sworn attorney)

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Introduction

Until the founding of the Republic of Latvia in 1918, its territories were part of the Russian Empire. The areas inhabited by Latvians were divided into numerous governorates. A portion of the Latvian population, along with the Estonian population, were consolidated within the Baltic Governorate, while others were incorporated into the Vitebsk Governorate. This division also resulted in different judicial regimes.¹ The legal capacity of women

¹ VĒBERS, J. Ģimenes tiesības Latvijā. No neatkarīgas Latvijas valsts nodibināšanas 1918. gadā līdz neatkarības atjaunošanai 1991. gadā [Family law in Latvia. From the founding of the independent state of

was restricted in all of the governorates, with the level of restriction varying. The Baltic Governorate imposed more restrictions compared to the Vitebsk Governorate.² In private life, a woman was initially under her father's authority, later transitioning to being under her husband's control, while in public life, she had to be "in her husband's shadow". Although a woman could be employed with her husband's permission, access to public offices or managerial positions in the private sector, except those within female educational facilities, were typically denied to her.

From the second half of the 19th century in Europe, it became possible for women to obtain education up to a high school level. Some of the most intellectually gifted among them even attained university degrees,³ however, it was only possible in fields already traditionally considered feminine, such as education or medicine. Why is author proclaiming that education and medicine were female fields of venture? In a patriarchal society, such pursuits were considered to coincide with the nurturing and caregiving aspects often associated with femininity. Women, whether as mothers within families or as nuns in monasteries, were commonly engaged in the realms of education and healing. Thus, the first Latvian women to acquire a university degree were doctors and pedagogues.⁴ The situation was different in traditionally manly fields, especially those related to state power or giving advice for the exercise of this power, such as law.

Until the founding of the Republic of Latvia in 1918 there were practically no women employed in the field of law.⁵ The Judicial Reform Laws of the Russian Empire of 1864, which were enforced in the Baltic Governorate in 1889⁶, set forth criteria demanding higher education and professional experience for roles within the judiciary and excluded women from judicial career.⁷ The statutory requirements for a judicial candidate did not expressly prohibit female candidacy. However, the absence of such prohibition indicates that the legislator did not even contemplate the possibility of female candidates. Upon

Latvia in 1918 to the restoration of independence in 1991]. In: *Latvijas Republikas Civillikumu komentāri. Ģimenes tiesības*. Rīga: Mans Īpašums, 2000, p. 112.

² ELJAŠEVŠ, D. Sievietes zvērīnātā advokatūrā [Women in the sworn Bar association]. *Tieslietu Ministrijas Vēstnesis*, 01.03.1933, Nr. 3, p. 52.

³ Although from the latter half of XIX C. some universities allowed women to study, not all universities allowed them to take the final examination and/or gave diplomas for the mastered education. See, SESKA, J. Tautas izglītība un audzināšanas principi Anglijā [Public education and principles of upbringing in England]. *Izglītības Ministrijas Mēnešraksts*, 01.11.1921, Nr. 11, p. 1133.

⁴ From 1920 in the Constitutinal Assembly of Latvia elected 6 women three had university degrees, i.e. two had medical degrees and one was an elementary school inspector, and another was concurrently studying medicine. See, *Latvijas Satversmes Sapulces deputātu saraksts* [List of members of the Latvian Constituent Assembly]. In: *Latvijas Satversmes Sapulces stenogrammu izvilks (1920–1922)*. Rīga: Tiesu namu aģentūra, 2006, pp. 1102–1107.

⁵ With a single exemption, that will be further researched in a follow up study.

⁶ KALNIŅŠ, V. *Latvijas PSR valsts un tiesību vēsture. 1. daļa* [History of the State and law of the Latvian SSR. Part 1]. Rīga: Zinātne, 1972, p. 293.

⁷ Including as lawyers. *Svod pravovykh polozheniy o prisyazhnoy i chastnoy advokature s razysneniyami resheniy Pravitelstvennogo Senata, s vypiskami iz zakonodatelnykh materialov i proyektom novoy redaktsii Sudebnykh uchrezhdeniy i s primeneniyem programm ispytaniy na zvaniye chastnogo advokata v magistrature i obshchiye sudebnyye postanovleniya* [A set of legal provisions on the sworn and private bar with explanations of the decisions of the Government Senate, with extracts from legislative materials and the draft new edition of the Judicial Institutions and with the application of test programs for the title of Private Attorney in magistrates and general judicial rulings]. Petrograd: Zakonovedeniye, 1916, p. 7.

closer examination of the provisions, it becomes evident that only males were considered eligible. This conclusion is apparent, for instance, in the requirement to examine the “property of the wife” during the candidate evaluation process.⁸

However, after a hundred years, at the beginning of the XXI century, the majority of judges, sworn bailiffs and sworn notaries in the Republic of Latvia are women, and women are also well represented in the bar and prosecutor’s office.⁹ In the study, author will outline how the foundations for women’s rights to work in judicial professions were established, focusing on the roles of judges, lawyers, and notaries. Author will also mention the pioneering women who were among the first to achieve these rights.

I Women and University Education

Despite limited legal capacity and therefore unequal possibilities to shape their professional and private life as well as restricted chances to take part in civil society activities¹⁰, Latvian women have been involved in all of the important processes for the Latvian nation and later also for the state – the Republic of Latvia. Experienced social-democrat Klāra Kalniņa (1874–1964), who had obtained a dentists’ degree from the University of Tartu, took part already in the founding act of the Republic of Latvia on the 18th November, 1918.¹¹ In the Constitutional Assembly, which between 1920 and 1922 drafted the basic law of the new country and adopted new laws in all the most important areas of life, including the decision on agrarian reform and marriage rights, out of 164 deputies, 6 were women.¹² In author’s opinion, for a new country that had just abandoned the patriarchal society model and proclaimed gender equality regarding the political rights in its constitution, this in no way was a small feat. A similar situation revealed itself in the other Baltic states. In Estonia the female percentile in the Constitutional Assembly was a bit higher, namely, 7 women out of 120 members.¹³ In Lithuania, 5 from 150 mandates were obtained by women.¹⁴

⁸ § 19.3. “... if, moreover, they themselves, or their parents, or wives own, even in different places: or the space of land is twice as large as that determined for direct participation in the election of vowels in district zemstvo assemblies (schedule attached to paragraph. and Article 23 of the regulations on zemstvo institutions, approved by the highest on January 1, 1864), or other real estate with a price not lower than fifteen thousand rubles, and in cities – real estate assessed for tax collection: in capitals not less than six thousand, in other cities no less than three thousand rubles ...”. *Uchrezhdeniye sudebnykh ustanovleniy 20 noyabrya 1864 goda* [Establishment of judicial institutions on November 20, 1864]. [online]. [seen 2023-12-21]. Available: <http://constitution.garant.ru/history/act1600-1918/3450/>.

⁹ In 2015. In the Republic of Latvia female judge proportion was the following: in the first instance and courts of appeal 81%, Supreme Court 63%, the Constitutional Court 43%, the office of the prosecutor 61%, 49% of all sworn advocates, 87,5% of sworn notaries, 71% of sworn bailiffs. See, Sievišķīgā Latvijas tieslietu sistēma [The feminine judicial system of Latvia]. *Jurista Vārds*, 17.03.2015, Nr. 11 (863), p. 18.

¹⁰ LAZDIŅŠ, J. Consolidation of the Principle of Democratic Elections in the Law of the Latvian People. *Journal of the University of Latvia. Law*, 2023, Nr. 16, p. 165.

¹¹ CIELĒNA, I. Feministe Klāra Kalniņa [Feminist Klara Kalniņa]. *Jaunā Gaita*, 09.2006, Nr. 246, pp. 17, 18.

¹² Latvijas Satversmes Sapulces deputātu saraksts [List of members of the Latvian Constituent Assembly]. In: *Latvijas Satversmes Sapulces stenogrammu izvilks (1920–1922)*. Rīga: Tiesu namu aģentūra. pp. 1102–1107.

¹³ Constituent Assembly. Parliament of Estonia. [online]. [seen 2023-12-25]. Available: <https://www.riigikogu.ee/en/introduction-and-history/history-riigikogu/constituent-assembly/>.

¹⁴ Steigiamasis Seimas [The Constituent Seimas]. In: *Visuotinė lietuvių enciklopedija*. [online]. [seen 2023-12-25]. Available: <https://www.vle.lt/straipsnis/steigiamasis-seimas/>.

However, to work in the judiciary, intelligence, enthusiasm, and a desire to participate were not enough, as relevant education and previous experience were required. Before the founding of their own state, it was not possible to study law in the territory of Latvia. Since there was no opportunity to study law on the territory of Latvia until the founding of their country, Latvians went to study in Tartu, Moscow, Saint Petersburg and other university cities. This was also the path taken by the first women who wanted to become lawyers. Otilija Ķempele (1893–1990) began studying law at Moscow University in 1912, after graduating from the Jelgava girls' gymnasium. She successfully passed the bar exam in 1916.¹⁵ Olga Dzelzīte (1897–1985) arrived in Saint Petersburg in 1917 as a refugee. There she graduated from the Zjablova's Private Gymnasium with a gold medal¹⁶ and began her studies at the Law Faculty of Saint Petersburg University.¹⁷ Nevertheless it must be remembered that women in the Russian Empire had very limited opportunities to study, including law. First of all, the empire routed all female higher education from universities to the Higher Women's Courses (rus. *Высшие женские курсы*), after the graduating of which the women could take the final exams at the university. Furthermore, depending on the university, both externship and free-listener study places were available to women, however no full-fledged studies on the same terms as men.¹⁸ Even if the university was liberal, like the University of Tartu, and allowed women to study law, in order to pass the final exams and obtain a state-recognized diploma, it was necessary to follow imperial regulations that limited women's rights. However, Otilija Ķempele overcame these obstacles.

Latvian women could freely access law studies only after the founding of the University of Latvia in the fall of 1919.¹⁹ Already at the first meeting, the founding commission of the University of Latvia decided on who will have the right to enter the newly founded university. Professor Pauls Valdēns (1863–1957) argued that the key to the success of a university is adequately prepared students, as well as "equal placement of young men

¹⁵ JĒKABSONS, Ē. – ŠČERBINSKIS, V. (eds.). *Latvijas advokatūra. Zvērināti advokāti un zvērīnātu advokātu palīgi biogrāfijās 1919–1945. Biogrāfiskā vārdnīca* [Latvian Bar Association. Sworn attorneys and sworn attorney assistants in biographies 1919–1945. Biographical dictionary]. Rīga: Latvijas vēstures arhīvs, 2007, p. 306.

¹⁶ KUNDZIŅA, I. Olga Dzelzīte mūžībā [Olga Dzelzīte in eternity]. *Laiks*, 23.11.1985, Nr. 94, p. 7.

¹⁷ LAPIŅŠ, L. (ed.). *Latvijas Universitātes Tautsaimniecības un tiesību zinātņu fakultātes absolventu dzīves un darba gaitas (1919–1944)* [The history of the life and work of graduates of the Faculty of Economics and Law of the University of Latvia (1919–1944)]. Rīga: Senatora Augusta Lēbera fonds, 1999, p. 96.

¹⁸ AGAMOVA, N. S. – ALLAKHVERDYAN, A. G. *Russkiye zhenshchiny v nauke I vysshey shkole: istoriko – nauchnije I nauchovedcheskiye aspekty (k 150-letiyu so dnya rozhdeniya S. V. Kovalevskoy)* [Russian Women in Science and High School: Historical, Scientific and Scientific Aspects (to the 150th Anniversary of the Birth of S. V. Kovalevskaya)]. [online]. [seen 2023-12-19]. Available: <http://ihst.ru/projects/sohist/papers/ag-al01v.htm>.

¹⁹ In the High school of Latvia established in 1919. 8th of February by Pēteris Stučka, ruled a kind of gender equality, in admitting students. Nevertheless, the Highschool of Latvia functioned only for a few months and so did not provide women with the possibility of reaching a higher education. See, Latvijas Sociālistiskās valdības 1919. gada 8. februāra dekrēts "Par Latvijas augstskolas dibināšanu" [Decree of the Socialist Government of Latvia of February 8, 1919 "On the establishment of the Latvian university"]. *Cīņa*, 08.02.1919, p. 1, LSPR Izglītības komisariāta 1919, gada 8, februāra noteikumi par Latvijas Augstskolu [Regulations of the Commissariat of Education of the Latvian Socialist Soviet Republic of February 8, 1919, regarding the Latvian University]. *Cīņa*, 08.02.1919, p. 1.

and women”.²⁰ It was the founding of the University of Latvia and the gender equality established from the very beginning in relation to students that ensured the opportunity for women to apply for those judicial positions, which required higher education.²¹ During the interwar period of the 20th century, many young women, mostly Latvians and Jews, graduated from the University of Latvia with a law degree.²² The fervor of Jewish youth to study law can certainly be attributed to various factors, one of which is the restrictive policies imposed on Jews in the Russian Empire since the late 19th century. These policies included limitations on the rights of Jews to study law and hold public positions, including the prohibition to work in notaries.²³

After the establishment of the Republic of Latvia, the laws of the Russian Empire of 1864 on the judicial system, which established a French-style judicial system and court-related positions in the empire, including the bar, the Latin-style notary, bailiffs and the prosecutor’s office, were kept in force.²⁴ Imperial laws, as already noted, placed restrictions on women working in these positions. However, leaving the laws of the empire in force in the Republic of Latvia, it was stipulated by law that they are applicable to the extent “they do not contradict the Latvian state system and the platform of the People’s Council”.²⁵ The People’s Council platform had established the foundations of gender equality.²⁶ So, formally, there were no longer any obstacles for women to become judges, lawyers, notaries or hold other positions, as long as they had the appropriate education and work experience.

II The First Female Judges, Lawyers, and Notaries in Latvia

With the operation of the University of Latvia education became available. However, in order to gain experience in the industry, it was necessary to find a suitable job. This often-times turned out to be quite complicated as lawyers are rather conservative and often the employer was influenced by the candidate’s gender. Analysis of historical facts shows that

²⁰ Rīgas Politehniskā institūta reorganizācijas komisijas 1919. gada 8. augusta sēdes protokols Nr. 1.LVVA 1632-2 – 603, p. 1.

²¹ Ever since the 1864 Russian empires Judicial Reform an action was brought forth to require a degree of highest education firstly from the judges and lawyers. The laws put into effect during the reform were applied in Republic of Latvia in XX C. during the interwar period. See: LĒBERS, A. (ed.). *Latvijas tiesību vēsture (1914–2000)* [Legal history of Latvia (1914–2000)]. Rīga: Fonds Latvijas Vēsture, 2000, p. 218.

²² More on the female Jura students in University of Latvia read in: LAPIŅŠ, L. (ed.). *Latvijas Universitātes Tautsaimniecības un tiesību zinātņu fakultātes absolventu dzīves un darba gaitas (1919–1944)* [History of life and work of graduates of the Faculty of Economics and Law of the University of Latvia (1919–1944)]. Rīga: Senatora Augusta Lēbera fonds, 1999.

²³ DHIVELEGOV, A. – BELOV, V. – MUROMTSEV, S. *Grazhdanskoye i torgovoye pravo (Enciklopedicheskiy slovar' Brokgauza i Yefrona) v 10 tomah, tom 5* [Civil and commercial law (encyclopedia dictionary of Brockhaus and Efron) in 10 volumes. Volume 5]. Moskva: Litres, 2022, p. 284.

²⁴ *Uchrezhdeniye sudebnykh ustanovleniy 20 noyabrya 1864 goda* [Establishment of judicial institutions on November 20, 1864]. [online]. [seen 2023-12-30]. Available: <http://constitution.garant.ru/history/act1600-1918/3450/>.

²⁵ Latvijas Republikas Tautas Padomes 1919. gada 5. decembra likums Par agrāko Krievijas likumu spēkā atstāšanu Latvijā [Law of the People’s Council of the Republic of Latvia of December 5, 1919 On leaving the previous Russian laws in force in Latvia]. *Likumu un valdības rīkojuma krājums*. 31.12.1919, Nr. 13, p. 170.

²⁶ Latvijas Republikas Tautas padomes 1918. gada 17. novembra Politiskā platforma [Political platform of the People’s Council of the Republic of Latvia of November 17, 1918]. *Latvijas Tautas padomes sēdes*. 18.11.1918., Nr. 1., 1918, p. 6.

it was far from easy for a woman to start a career as an assistant to a notary, lawyer or judge. They had to break the societal perceptions on gender roles and gender-appropriate behavior and occupation. Even though a number of women had acquired legal education and court experience working as court secretaries and even had passed the test which allowed them to assume the duties of a judge, only one became a substitute judge, namely, a judge who replaces another judge during his vacation or illness.²⁷ In 1925, there were five women at the bar; following that, the number slowly began to increase, in 1930 reaching the maximum of 13 women, yet in 1936 there once again were only five women, constituting 2.1% of the overall number of lawyers. In total, from 1922, when the first woman obtained the right to be an assistant lawyer, until 1940, when the Republic of Latvia was occupied, 57 women worked at the bar, including 42 Latvians, 12 Jews, 2 Russians and one German.²⁸ Many of them did not continue working in the profession after marriage. Therefore, in order to find out the key to success that opened the previously closed doors for women to the positions of judge, notary and a sworn lawyer, let's take a closer look at the first women in these professions.

II a) The First Female Judge

Let's start with the woman who was the first not only to obtain the rights of a judge, but also to implement them in her life, judging the court. In 1923, at the age of 19, after graduating from Riga First State High School, Rozālija Bandere started law studies at the University of Latvia. Since the family was not wealthy, Rozālija worked as a teacher to earn the tuition fees. On top of that, during the summer holidays, for three years in a row, she supplemented her knowledge by studying at Riga teacher courses, supplementing her knowledge in pedagogic methodology. At the end of her life, Rozālija admitted in an interview that "the work of a teacher has also given me tact in court sessions with witnesses and lawyers".²⁹ It characterizes Rozālija as a purposeful, hardworking and empathetic person.

Rozālija passed the state exams in 1929, but in order to qualify as a lawyer, she still had to write and defend a thesis. In 1932, she defended her diploma thesis *Pignus in manus traditum* developed under the supervision of Professor Vasīlijs Sinaiskis.³⁰ In the same year Rozālija married her peer Kornēlijs Purgals (1905–1986). The husband, who came from a family of lawyers, built a successful career: at first he was the deputy prosecutor of the Latgale District court, then the magistrate of the 12th District of Riga.³¹ Her father-in-law Jānis Purgals (1869–1934) was a remarkable man: a member of the Latvian Association, head of the Riga Landlords Association and the Riga Lawyers Association, member of the Constitutional Assembly, notary, chairman of the Council of the Notaries Association.³² These are not all the works and public duties that he performed. In an interview Rozālija

²⁷ GAILĪTE, D. Rozālija Purgaile (Bandere): pirmā sievietē tiesnese Latvijā [Rozālija Purgaile (Bandere): the first female judge in Latvia]. *Jurista Vārds*, 17.03.2015, Nr. 11 (863), pp. 11–13.

²⁸ *Latvijas advokatūra. Zvērināti advokāti un zvērinātu advokātu palīgi biogrāfijās 1919–1945*, p. 22.

²⁹ OZOLIŅŠ, K. Rozālija Purgale, dzim. Bandere [Rozālija Purgale, born Bandere]. *Latviešu Juristu Raksti*, 1973, Nr. 12, p. 29.

³⁰ *Latvijas Universitātes Tautsaimniecības un tiesību zinātņu fakultātes absolventu dzīves un darba gaitas (1919–1944)*, p. 37.

³¹ *Ibidem*, p. 339.

³² LITVINS, G. – LITVINA, B. Jānis Purgals: Satversmes tēvs notariātā [Janis Purgals: Father of Latvian Constitution in Notariat]. *Jurista Vārds*, 26.11.2019, Nr. 47 (1105), p. 8.

said that her father-in-law's "opinions about a woman in all possible jobs were liberal. In his office, where around 20 employees worked, both notary assistant positions were occupied by women – Anna Ozoliņa and Olga Jurkovska."³³ Jānis Purgals wanted to transfer his notary practice to his daughter-in-law, but he died before he could realize his intent.³⁴ Rozālija's father – a clerk, also worked in the court in the early 1930s. For Latvia, this family was a model of a still developing civil society. A magazine "Yellow Press" in 1932, in the section "Aristocrats' life", announcing the engagement of Rozālija and Kornēlijs, mentioned that "The elder sister of the bride is married to the richest sworn advocate of Daugavpils – Miķelsons".³⁵ Namely, with the wedding of Rozālija and Kornēlijs, for the scope of Latvia an entire branched out lineage of lawyers was created. When Rosalia wrote an application in 1930 to be accepted as a judge candidate in the Latgale District Court, her husband Kornēlijs went there to work as a candidate for the position of a regional court judge as well.³⁶ His career developed faster than his wife's. In the Latgale District Court, Rozālija initially worked in the I Civil department on security cases, primarily drafting decisions in inheritance cases. She also served in the I Criminal department as a court secretary, responsible for recording court proceedings. After passing the exam for the senior candidate for judicial positions, the General Assembly of the Latgale District Court granted her the right to judge, a decision approved by the Chamber of Justice. Subsequently, she worked as a substitute for magistrates in Rēzekne and Daugavpils for two summers. While some of the judges she replaced were supportive, such as Andrejs Pļaviņš and Nikolajs Korits, judge Jānis Jasse expressed skepticism about a woman serving as a judge, doubting her ability to fully replace his work.³⁷ However, Rozālija especially warmly mentioned Kārlis Avens as her judicial mentor: "I liked his way of judging and his motives. Later, when working independently, I tried to keep the same style of judging as observed in his work."³⁸ Rozālija and Kornēlijs raised two sons: Jānis and Pēteris.³⁹ Rozālija Purgale's career as a judge ended with the Soviet occupation in 1940, but in 1944 fled to the United States, where she spent the second half of her life.⁴⁰

II b) The First Female Notaries

During this period, 7 female notaries worked in the notary as well. The first of them, Ludmila Jakuboviča, took over her husband's notary's office in 1917 while still in Russia. In 1917, during the Provisional Government after the tsar's abdication, laws were rapidly liberalized, including loosening restrictions on women.⁴¹

³³ OZOLIŅŠ, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

³⁴ GAILĒ, *op. cit.*, pp. 11–13.

³⁵ Aristokrātu dzīve [Life of the aristocrats]. *Aizkulises*, 19.02.1932, Nr. 8, p. 5.

³⁶ *Latvijas Universitātes Tautsaimniecības un tiesību zinātņu fakultātes absolventu dzīves un darba gaitas (1919–1944)*, p. 319.

³⁷ OZOLIŅŠ, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

³⁸ *Ibidem*.

³⁹ *Latvijas Universitātes Tautsaimniecības un tiesību zinātņu fakultātes absolventu dzīves un darba gaitas (1919–1944)*, p. 37.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*.

⁴¹ JĒKABSONS, Ē. – ŠČERBINSKIS, V. (eds.). *Latvijas notariāts 1889–1945. Biogrāfiskā vārdnīca* [Notariate in Latvia 1889–1945. Biographical dictionary]. Rīga: Zvērinātu notāru padome, 2013, p. 53.

Also in the notary office, similar to the court, many women were not allowed to work despite having passed all the requirements to take up the duties of the office. Erna Māliņa, upon joining the “Latvijas zemnieku savienība” [The Latvian agricultural society], indicated in her questionnaire that although she has passed the notary’s exam, “the position is not given to me because I am a woman”.⁴² A year later Māliņa got a notary practice.⁴³

Olga Jurkovska (1901 – after 1944) must be singled out among the first women notaries. Born and raised in Riga, she hailed from a family with a civil servant father. After completing high school in 1920, she enrolled at the University of Latvia, initially pursuing studies in economics before transitioning to law.⁴⁴ Already during her studies, she started working in the notary office of Jānis Purgalis, and was also a shorthand teacher.⁴⁵ As previously mentioned, obtaining a law degree required financial resources, and many students from less affluent families had to work to pay for their studies. Consequently, the duration of studies often extended. Olga faced challenges for nearly 10 years before earning her law degree in 1930. Despite the prolonged journey, she graduated with honors and was selected by the university to pursue research activities under the mentorship of Professor Vladimirs Bukovskis (1867–1937) to specialize in notary law. While further research is needed, it appears that Olga was among the pioneering women offered research opportunities in law, given the absence of female law professors during that era. Olga published the results of her research by giving lectures⁴⁶, publishing articles in the press,⁴⁷ and participating in the working group that developed the draft of the new Law on Notaries together with her scientific supervisor V. Bukovskis.⁴⁸ Until the new Law on Notaries was developed, the 1866 law of the Russian Empire on notary was in force in Latvia, which was translated from Russian in 1933 by O. Jurkovska, but edited by prof. V. Bukovskis.⁴⁹

Olga Jurkovska played an active role in organizing the 1st Latvian Lawyers’ Congress in 1932, where she also delivered a speech analyzing potential improvements in the Latvian notary public system. In 1935, she was appointed as a notary public. Unfortunately, she lost her position during the Soviet occupation. During the German occupation, she carried out notarial duties in Jēkabpils. However, since September 1944, there is no information available about her life.⁵⁰

⁴² LVVA [Latvian State Archive], 3282.f.,1. apr., 130. l., p. 165.

⁴³ *Latvijas notariāts 1889–1945*, p. 186.

⁴⁴ *Latvijas Universitātes Tautsaimniecības un tiesību zinātņu fakultātes absolventu dzīves un darba gaitas (1919–1944)*, p. 173.

⁴⁵ *Latvijas notariāts 1889–1945. Biogrāfiskā vārdnīca*, p. 150.

⁴⁶ JURKOVSKA, O. Notāru izglītības un amata stāvoklis. (Nolasīts I. Latviešu juristu kongresā 1932. g. janvārī) [Education and professional status of notaries (Read at the 1st Congress of Latvian Lawyers, January 1932)]. *Tieslietu Ministrijas Vēstnesis*, 01.01.1933, Nr. 1/2, pp. 1–21.

⁴⁷ E.g. JURKOVSKA, O. Daži jautājumi sakarā ar vienkāršiem vekseliem un to protest [Some issues related to promissory notes and their protest]. *Pašvaldības Darbs*, 01.06.1934, pp. 123–127.

⁴⁸ Izstrādās jaunu notariāta nolikumu [New notarial law to be drafted]. *Zemgales Balss*, 11.03.1937, Nr. 57, p. 2.

⁴⁹ JURKOVSKA, O. – BUKOVSKIS, V. (eds.). *Notariāta nolikums: tulkojums ar pārgrozījumiem, papildinājumiem, paskaidrojumiem un pielikumiem* [Notarial law: translation with alterations, additions, explanations and annexes]. Rīga: Sastādītāju izdevums, 1933.

⁵⁰ 1944. gada rudenī Olgu Jurkovsku un viņas māti jau meklēja kā pazudušas personas. Skat. Meklē tuviniekus. Tautas Palīdzības izziņu birojā reģistrētie meklējamie. *Tēvija*, Nr. 227, 25.09.1944, p. 3.

II c) The First Female Sworn Lawyers

In the Russian Empire, the issue of women's right to work at the bar first came up in 1908, when the legislature and the bar authorities debated it. In 1912/1913, a bill was introduced that would allow women to work as a sworn lawyer, but at the end of 1913, the State Council rejected this bill⁵¹ Only the Provisional Government of Russia, creating a liberal state, from June 1, 1917, granted women the right to be sworn attorneys' assistants and private attorneys, but not full-fledged attorneys. This law entered into force and was also applied in the territory of Latvia. After the founding of the Republic of Latvia, women were granted the right to work at the bar, enjoying equality with men.⁵² The first Latvian lawyer, Otilija Ķempele, obtained her law degree in the Russian Empire, graduating from Moscow University in 1916. Following her studies, she served as a legal consultant in Kiev until her return to Latvia in 1921. Upon her return, she immediately contributed to the development of Latvia as a legal state. Initially, she worked in the Commission for the Revision of Penal Laws at the Ministry of Justice. Subsequently, in 1922, she was admitted to the Council of Sworn Advocates of Latvia as an assistant to the sworn advocate Jānis Bērziņš. Serving as a sworn attorney's assistant for a minimum of five years was a statutory requirement for later advancement to the position of a sworn attorney.⁵³ Otilija Ķempele was admitted to the number of sworn lawyers in 1929 and her specialization, similarly to other female lawyers, was divorce and alimony claims⁵⁴ Otilija Ķempele was also actively engaged in social and political spheres. She was a member of the "Democratic Center" party and contested municipal and parliamentary elections, albeit without success. In 1918, she married Francis Ķempelis, a teacher and civil servant; the marriage remained childless. During World War II, both the Soviet and Nazi occupation authorities permitted her to continue practicing law. However, in 1944, she fled to the United States.⁵⁵

In authors opinion, one of the most remarkable Latvian lawyers of that era was Olga Dzelzīte. She commenced her studies at St. Petersburg University in 1917 but returned to Latvia in 1918. Subsequently, in 1919, she enrolled at the University of Latvia, where she completed her studies in 1926. In 1919, Olga married Kārlis Dzelzītis (1892–1982), a sworn lawyer. Following her marriage, she began working as a secretary in her husband's office. Upon obtaining her lawyer's qualification in 1926, she was appointed as an assistant to the sworn lawyer Jūlijs Šmidts. It is worth noting that one of her endorsers was the distinguished lawyer and politician Pauls Mincs.⁵⁶ In 1936, Olga Dzelzīte acquired the status of a sworn lawyer.⁵⁷ Her specialization was debt collection, damages, labor disputes.⁵⁸ Contemporaries remember that, while already being a sworn lawyer, she studied French

⁵¹ ELJAŠEVŠ, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

⁵² KALNIŅA, V. Otilija Ķempele un Olga Dzelzīte: Latvijas pirmās advokātes [Otilija Ķempele and Olga Dzelzīte: Latvia's first female advocates]. *Jurista Vārds*, 24.03.2020, Nr. 12 (1122), p. 28.

⁵³ *Uchrezhdeniye sudebnykh ustanovleniy 20 noyabrya 1864 goda* [Establishment of judicial institutions on November 20, 1864]. [online]. [seen 2023-12-21]. Available: <http://constitution.garant.ru/history/act1600-1918/3450/>.

⁵⁴ KALNIŅA, *op. cit.*, p. 30.

⁵⁵ *Latvijas advokatūra. Zvērināti advokāti un zvērīnātu advokātu palīgi biogrāfijās 1919–1945*, pp. 306, 307.

⁵⁶ KALNIŅA, *op. cit.*, p. 31.

⁵⁷ Latvijas zvērīnātu advokātu padomes 11.03.1936 lēmums Nr. 946 [Decision No 946 of the Latvian Council of Advocates of 11.03.1936]. *Valdības Vēstnesis*, 26.03.1936, Nr. 71, p. 5.

⁵⁸ *Ibidem*.

and graduated from the Riga French Language Institute. Olga Dzelzīte actively participated in public life, was interested in art, literature, traveled a lot. “Her intellect was combined with a warm responsiveness to people and a lot of personal charm.”⁵⁹ She is remembered by many as our first Queen of the first Press Ball of 1926.⁶⁰ One son was born in the marriage. In 1944, he fled and settled in the USA.⁶¹

Author would like to spotlight another tale of Latvian women in the legal profession. As previously mentioned, a significant portion of law students at the University of Latvia were Jewish. Gitele Hilmane (1886–1961), born in Kuldīga and a graduate of the Liepāja gymnasium, is a notable example. In 1910, she completed her studies at the Faculty of Law of the Higher Women’s Course in St. Petersburg. Despite her qualifications, she faced dual discrimination as both a Jew and a woman, preventing her from obtaining the status of a lawyer. In 1920, her family returned to Latvia, where Gitele began working as a sworn assistant attorney to her husband, Marks Mendelis Hilmans. In 1928 she was granted permission to handle cases.⁶² In 1930, she was admitted to the number of sworn lawyers, becoming the second female lawyer in Latvia.⁶³ There were two children in the family. In 1937, son Jūlijs obtained a lawyer’s qualification at the University of Latvia⁶⁴ and worked at the bar. In 1941, Gitele and her husband and son were deported to Krasnoyarsk by the Soviet authorities. In 1957, the family returned to Latvia.⁶⁵

In summary

1. Until the founding of the Republic of Latvia, women were practically denied the opportunity to work in the judiciary. The territory of Latvia was a part of the Russian Empire where the 1864 Russian Empire Judicial Reform Laws required legal education and experience to work in the judicial system and did not allow women to work in the judiciary. On the other hand, the opportunity to obtain a legal education in the empire was practically denied to women. Even if the women managed to study the university program, they were not allowed to take the final exams. However, some, including the Latvian Otilija Ķempele, overcame the restrictions and obtained the qualification of a lawyer. This depended largely on Moscow University’s liberal approach to women’s education, rather than the common position of the empire.
2. After the founding of Latvia in 1918, the 1864 court reform laws of the Russian Empire remained in force. However, the new state had normatively strengthened gender equality in its constitution, making the norms that prohibited working in the judiciary null and

⁵⁹ KUNDZIŅA, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁶⁰ Preses balles karaliene [Queen of the Press Ball]. *Atpūta*, 05.03.1926, Nr. 70, p. 9.

⁶¹ *Latvijas Universitātes Tautsaimniecības un tiesību zinātņu fakultātes absolventu dzīves un darba gaitas (1919–1944)*, p. 96.

⁶² Valdības iestāžu paziņojumi. Saraksts par privātdavokātiem, kuri pielaisti pie svešu lietu vešanas Rīgas apgabaltiesas rajonā 1928. g. II pusē [Government notices. List of private advocates admitted to conduct extraneous cases in the Riga Regional Court district in the second half of 1928]. *Valdības Vēstnesis*, 14.09.1928, Nr. 208, p. 1.

⁶³ Mūsu sievietes tieslietu zinību darbā [Our women in the field of law]. *Sievietes Pasaule*, 01.08.1934, Nr. 8, p. 9.

⁶⁴ Universitātes dzīve [Life at the University]. *Universitas*, 15.05.1937, Nr. 8, p. 212.

⁶⁵ *Latvijas advokātūra. Zvērināti advokāti un zvērinātu advokātu palīgi biogrāfijās 1919–1945*, p. 235.

void. At the same time, the requirement for education and work experience remained in force.

3. With the establishment of the University of Latvia in 1919, which advocated gender equality for students, Latvian women gained the opportunity to acquire the necessary education for careers in justice. On the other hand, in order to gain the necessary experience and be allowed to practice in court, at the bar, at the notary, these women needed someone who gives permission to work, that is, hires them. Certain socially recognizable men, whose liberal views were the basis for a woman to start a career in justice, were of a great importance. Notary Jānis Purgalis, professor Vladimirs Bukovskis, judge Kārlis Avens should be highlighted as they supported smart and diligent young people without distinguishing them by gender.
4. The life stories of the first successful women in the judiciary suggest that their success often relied on family connections. Their fathers, husbands, fathers-in-law, or sisters' husbands were often involved in the justice system and recommended or employed them. Nevertheless, it is crucial to emphasize that these women were exceptional: goal-oriented, hard-working, intellectually gifted, socially and politically active individuals who relentlessly pursued their dream of working in the judiciary.
5. The successful careers of all the women analyzed in the study were interrupted by the Soviet occupation. The most successful fled and spent the rest of their lives in the "free world". Less successful ones like Gitele Hilmane endured Soviet repression – not only a ban on working in the profession, but also exile. Others disappeared without a trace at the end of the war, like Olga Jurkovska at the age of 43. For each one of them, the life they had previously built with determination and diligent perseverance was irretrievably destroyed.