Latvians in Southwest Michigan: A Transnational Perspective

Andrew K. Dove

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LATVIANS IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN: A TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

by

Andrew K. Dove

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Submitted to the
Faculty of The Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the
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Andrew K. Dove
LATVIANS IN SOUTHWEST MICHIGAN:
A TRANSNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Andrew K. Dove, M.A.
Western Michigan University, 1997

The focus of this study was to look at the Latvian population in Southwest Michigan utilizing the transnational theoretical framework. Transnationalism examines the three-way relationship between the migrant, home community (Latvia), and host community (United States). First and second generation Latvian-Americans were interviewed to assess the nature of their transnational activities with regard to economics, politics, family ties, communication, and organizational membership.

The data were collected through the use of in-depth interviewing. Both an interview protocol and demographic survey were utilized. A total of 16 adult Latvian-Americans ($N = 16$) were interviewed. Eight were first generation Latvian-Americans ($N = 8$), and 8 were second generation Latvian-Americans ($N = 8$).

The findings of this study indicate that both first and second generation Latvian-Americans engage in transnational activities, though the second generation Latvian-Americans to a lesser degree. Both groups remit economic assistance to relatives and organizations in Latvia. Politics have played an important role in keeping the Latvian community united. Latvian culture, particularly the language, is passed down from generation to generation. Technological advances have increased communication with friends and relatives in Latvia. Second generation Latvian-Americans with business ties in Latvia may be the new transnationals utilizing their education and cultural heritage for economic gain.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Statement of the Problem

The purpose of this study is to look at a Latvian community in Southwest Michigan with regards to economics, politics, communication, family, and organizations. This is intended to be a multidisciplinary study integrating both sociological and anthropological concepts. The theoretical framework for this study will be transnationalism. While the study of immigration is well documented, the transnational theory of immigration is different in that chooses to look at the relationship between migrant, home community, and host community. The transnational perspective is defined as:

the process by which immigrants build social fields that link together their country of origin and their country of settlement. Immigrants live their lives across national borders and maintain their ties to home, and develop multiple relations—economic, formal, and social, even when their countries of origin are geographically distant. (Schiller, Basch, & Blanc-Szanton, 1992, p. 1)

Transnationalism is viewed as a “situation where networks, activities and patterns of life encompass both the host and home societies” (Jones, 1992, p. 219).

I became interested in the Latvian community primarily because I was curious why they chose to settle in Southwest Michigan. Also, I found my interest piqued at the possibility of learning more about migrants from a former Soviet Republic. In addition, I have firsthand knowledge of the transnational activities of both my father (who is English) and my wife's family (who are from India). Transnationalism is a
powerful concept accounting for the behaviors and institutional practices of immigrant groups. As such, I conducted my study on a Latvian community in Southwest Michigan using a transnational theoretical framework to guide me.

What makes the case of the Latvians of particular interest is the fact that the majority of the original Latvians came to the United States as refugees via Germany after World War II when the Soviet Union occupied Latvia. The transnational literature primarily focuses on migrants leaving the home community/country for the purposes of economic gain. For the Latvians, survival was the major reason for leaving Latvia originally. It was the second migration which was fueled by economics.

Purpose of the Study

This study will focus on the transnational activities of the Latvians (both first and second generation) when the prospect of returning home is small, and further, how these transnational activities may have changed since the restructuring of the Soviet Union, which resulted in Latvian independence. To get a broad picture of the Latvian community, both Latvian immigrants and Latvian-Americans were interviewed. As both groups refer to themselves as “Latvian” and “Latvian-American,” to avoid confusion, I will refer to the elder Latvian immigrant population as “first generation Latvian-Americans,” and the younger Latvian-American population as “second generation Latvian-Americans.” The term “Latvian(s)” will be used when speaking of the Latvian community as a whole.
CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Latvia

In order to better understand the local Latvian community and the individuals within that community, it is necessary to look at their country of origin, as this will provide insight into their transnational activities. Both Latvia and its peoples have a long and rich history.

Pre-20th Century

Archaeological evidence indicates that the first human settlements in what is known today as Latvia date back to 9000 BC. The first wanderers in the region were known as “proto-baltis” (Plakans, 1995, p. 2). Latvians or Letts belong to the ethnic group of Balts who settled on the southern and southeastern shores of the Baltic Sea some 4,000 years ago (Sinka, 1988, p. 5). At the beginning of the 12th century, the Latvians were divided into four main tribal kingdoms: Zemgale, Kurzeme, Latgale, Talava. The Latvians’ principal occupation was farming, with crops of wheat, rye, barley, and oats grown as the main cereal crops. In addition to farming, the Latvians were also proficient folk singers. Hundreds of thousands of folk songs passed on by word of mouth from one generation to another give a vivid description of the social, cultural, and religious life of the ancient Latvians. Many songs speak of dedication to work, love of nature, and a love of singing (Sinka, 1988, p. 8).
Latvia and its people have long been the target of foreign conquest. In 1290, it was the Germans who captured the Latvian kingdom, and for the next 300 years it was known as Livonia. Following the Germans in succession were the Russians, Poles, and Swedes, who all occupied various regions of Latvia at one time or another. Following the Swedes were the Russians again, in 1710 capturing the whole Latvian territory. The 19th century saw the Russians in control of the country, with German nobility retaining positions of authority at the local level and overseeing land management, the judiciary, education, and the church (Sinka, 1988, p. 11).

20th Century

The end of World War I and the defeat of the Russians gave Latvia its freedom. On November 18, 1918, Latvia became a parliamentary republic. Its sovereignty and independence ended with the USSR’s June 17, 1940 occupation. At this time the Soviet Union illegally annexed Latvia into one of its many republics making up the USSR. Following a brief period of occupation by Nazi Germany (1941–1945), Latvia was again reoccupied by the Soviet Union. This last occupation continued for 46 years, from 1945 through 1991. During this period, Latvia was known as the “Latvian Soviet Socialist Republic.” With the break-up of the Soviet Union, Latvia became an independent nation.

Today, Latvia is a republic with both a Chief of State (President Guntis Ulmanis) and a Head of Government (Prime Minister Maris Gailis) (Central Intelligence Agency, 1996). Geographically, Latvia is a small country (slightly larger than West Virginia), bordered by Estonia on the north and Lithuania on the south. Also bordering Latvia, but to a smaller extent, are Belarus and Russia (Central Intelligence Agency, 1996). According to the Latvian Department of Citizenship and
Migration (located in Riga, Latvia), the estimated population as of June 1996, was 2,633,800 persons. Of the total population, 1,494,800 (57%) are ethnic Latvians; those of Russian origin numbered 792,000 (30%); and those of Belo-Russian origin numbered 112,200 (4%). The remaining 9% of the population is made up of a combination of Ukrainians, Polish, Lithuanians, Jews, Gypsies, Germans, Tatarians, Estonians, Armenians, Moldavians, Azerbaijanis, Chuvash, Georgians, and various other groups (Latvian Department of Citizenship and Migration, 1996). Latvia also experiences an out-migration rate of 3.76 migrants per 1,000 population, or about 9,000–10,000 people a year (Central Intelligence Agency, 1996).

The major religions in Latvia are Lutheran, Roman Catholic, Russian Orthodox, and Baptist. Latvia enjoys several daily newspapers (in Russian), and a weekly English language newspaper (the Baltic Times). There are also two State-run television stations and several independent television stations. In addition, cable television subscriptions are available, as is satellite television (Republic of Latvia Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 1996).

Latvia’s economy includes both industry and agriculture. Its industry produces vans, buses, railroad cars, agricultural machinery, radios, processed food, and textiles. Its agricultural production consists mostly of dairy farming and livestock feeding and includes meat, milk, grains, sugar, fishing, and fish packing (Central Intelligence Agency, 1996).

Soviet Occupation and Out-Migration.

Latvian sovereignty was disregarded on August 23, 1939, when Estonia and Latvia were illegally placed under Soviet control in the secret protocols of the Nazi-Soviet Non-Aggression Pact. Within one year they were occupied by the Red Army
and forcibly annexed to the USSR without overt military opposition (Dreifelds, 1996, p. 5).

To facilitate the annexation of their newly acquired territories, the Russians deliberately uprooted great masses of people in Poland and the Baltic States. First in Poland and later in Latvia, the Soviet Union sent important segments of the Polish population deep into the Soviet interior, far away from the formerly independent Poland. Families were split apart and many hundreds of thousands were dispatched to remote settlements and camps for “corrective labor” in Siberia and elsewhere (Marrus, 1985, p. 196). It is estimated that in the first year of Russian occupation “34,250 Latvians vanished without a trace—more than 2 percent of the population” (Marrus, 1985, p. 197). The deportations of the first year of Soviet occupation culminated in the mass round-up of some 15,000 Latvians on the night of June 13–14, 1941. Of the 34,250 deported, 32,895 were deported to Siberia and other forced settlement areas, and 1,355 were murdered (Sinka, 1988, p. 28). This led to a great exodus of Latvian intelligentsia (numbering between 120,000–150,000 individuals) and the best educated citizens (and their families) (Dreifelds, 1996, p. 41). This mass exodus was precipitated by executions of Latvian government officials, Latvian intelligentsia, and army officers (Dreifelds, 1996, p. 34).

Millions of Western and Eastern Europeans were displaced during and immediately after World War II. The Soviet occupation of eastern Poland in the winter of 1939–1940 led to one of a series of collective deportations and population transfers carried out by Stalin as roughly 1.5 million Poles and Jewish refugees were sent to the Soviet interior. This was followed in 1940 with the forced movement of up to 0.5 million Finns, and in 1941–1942 with the deportation of about 61,000
Latvians, Lithuanians, and Estonians into Soviet Asia and Siberia after the 1941 fall of the Baltic States (Collinson, 1994, p. 38).

In Latvia, deportation during the first years of the Soviet regime involved about 205,000 people, or 10%-11% of the total population, while repatriation and forced emigration (fleeing the Soviet occupation) to Germany involved approximately 100,000 people, in addition to another 100,000 who emigrated to Western countries (Ardittis, 1994, p. 69).

The communist regime for many decades tried to counter the political influence of Latvian refugees who left in 1944 and 1945. Initially, the refugees were depicted as “fascists” or “fascist collaborators” who had fled Latvia out of fear of justice for their deeds. As contacts between relatives broadened, this all-inclusive label became more conditional until it was allowed that many had been merely duped by the Nazi regime to leave (Dreifelds, 1996, p. 40).

Those refugees from Latvia who fled the Soviet Union joined upwards of 10 million people in Western Europe whom the war had displaced. Camps were set up by the allies to temporarily house and feed the refugees, and it was expected that all displaced persons would be repatriated within 6 months after the end of World War II, providing Soviet cooperation (Marrus, 1985, p. 309). Lucky for the Latvians that when the United States forcibly repatriated Soviet nationals (often against their wishes), as per Stalin’s request, the United States did not recognize any refugees as “Soviet citizens” unless they were Soviet nationals at the outbreak of the war in 1939 (Marrus, 1985, p. 315).

Between the late 1940s and the mid-1980s, the Baltic republics were largely isolated from the outside world. Sealed off from virtually all contact with the West during the Stalinist era, they remained closed to Western journalists until the 1960s
and to Western television for much longer. Tourists were confined mainly to the major cities of Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius, and much of the countryside and coastline remained off-limits to all outsiders, especially journalists. Postal correspondence was subject to censorship, and information about dissent could be smuggled out only with great difficulty and considerable personal risk (Hiden & Salmon, 1991, p. 134).

The 120,000–150,000 Latvian refugees living in the West have become important and are still an important ingredient in Latvian politics and culture (Dreifelds, 1996, p. 40). Thousands of Latvians living abroad have come back to offer their contributions in many fields. Their claims to nationalized land and enterprises have been seen by some resident Latvians as a potential boom to the economy but by others as the reassertion of a new class of property-owners with only minimal ties to the daily realities of Latvia (Dreifelds, 1996, p. 41).

Today, under the current democratic system of government, the Latvian media are privately owned by different sources and cover a broad spectrum of opinion and support a wide range of philosophies. Reporters are often iconoclastic and vigorous in their pursuit of the truth and are not intimidated by government officials. In addition, Latvians enjoy more freedom of speech, group association, freedom of religion, opportunities to travel abroad and immigrate if desired, and the freedom to belong to one of numerous political parties (Dreifelds, 1996, p. 176).

The Latvian Community in Southwest Michigan

Prior to 1948, Kalamazoo had almost no Latvian population at all with the possible exception of one or two families. The originator of the first Latvians to Kalamazoo was the minister of the East Main Methodist Church, Reverend Carlis Laupmanis. Reverend Laupmanis was Latvian-born and before World War II
migrated to the United States where he served as a minister in various localities in the Midwest. During the years following the war, he became interested in the plight of displaced persons in Europe, in particular his fellow Latvians. When the Displaced Persons Act was passed in 1948, he recruited sponsors for the Latvian displaced persons from among his parishioners and from various other church groups in Kalamazoo (Halla, 1959, p. 6).

Under the Displaced Persons Act, the prospective immigrant had to qualify for the special visa in the same way as any norm quota immigrant. The only differences were that (a) there were no quota limitations, and (b) a sponsor was required (a resident United States citizen who guaranteed to provide the prospective immigrant with housing and employment upon arrival at his destination). Under this program, the Latvians began to arrive in the Kalamazoo area by 1949 and continued to arrive for a period of about two years (Halla, 1959, p. 6).

Halla’s 1959 Masters thesis (Western Michigan University Department of Sociology) on the exiled Latvian population in Kalamazoo indicates a number of Latvian organizations, none of which originated in the United States. These groups include the Latvian Association, Latvian Veterans Welfare Society, Latvian Choral Society, Latvian Youth Organization, Latvian Boy Scouts, Latvian Girl Scouts, and Latvian Saturday School (Halla, 1959, p. 7).

It should be noted that the Latvian community in Southwest Michigan is much smaller now than at the time Halla wrote his thesis. His estimated the Latvian population to be around 1,100 individuals (Halla, 1959, p. 6). The estimates given to me by individuals in the community, are around 400. The number may actually be larger, as the estimate is based on those Latvians known by the subjects to be active in the community.
Latvia Today

What do the Latvians have to look forward to if they return home? The ethnic composition of Latvia has changed dramatically since many of the immigrants left in the late 1940s. In 1935, 77% of the Latvian population were Latvian-born. By 1989, that proportion had dropped to 52%. As of 1993, there was a slight increase to 54% (Norgaard, 1996, p. 172).

One of the major problems immigrants in general face when deciding whether to return home is how ill prepared they may actually be. They do not realize how much they or their communities have changed during their absence. Relatives and friends may no longer share the same interests and may seem narrow, overly provincial, or, in some cases, even backward. In addition, some returnees may encounter envy and suspicion among their less prosperous neighbors. Believing that all migrants are wealthy, locals sometimes try to take advantage of migrants byExpecting higher payment for services and overcharging for goods. Additionally, many returnees are unhappy with the "way things are done at home." A typical complaint concerns the lack of efficiency and punctuality. It seems to take forever to get things done. Clerks and cashiers move "at a snail’s pace," and plumbers, electricians and other trades-people fail to arrive at the appointed time or do not come at all. Finally, a meddling, insensitive, and inefficient government bureaucracy is a source of considerable frustration for some (Gmelch, 1980, p. 143).

Transnationalism

Transnationalism has six premises central to its conceptualization:

1. Transnationalism is grounded in the daily lives, activities, and social relationships of migrants.
2. Transnational migrants live a complex existence that forces them to confront, draw upon, and rework different identity constructs—national, racial, ethnic.

3. The fluid and complex existence of transnational migrants compels us to re-conceptualize the categories of nationalism, ethnicity, and race.

4. Transmigrants deal with and confront a number of hegemonic contexts, both global and national, but at the same time transmigrants shape these contexts by their interaction and resistance.

5. The development of the transnational migrant is linked to the changing conditions of global capitalism.

6. Bounded social science concepts such as tribe, ethnic group, nation, society, or culture can limit the ability of researchers to first perceive and then analyze the phenomenon of transnational migration.

(Schiller et al., 1992, p. 5)

From a transnational perspective, axial ages are periods when peoples, ideas, and cultural traditions from widely different regions come together in a great flowering of human creativity. They have been a recurring phenomenon in the human experience. Transnationalism is a modern term for an axial age, a response to current state-centered national boundaries (Boulding, 1991, p. 789). As stated in the beginning, the basic premise of the transnational framework is that immigrants live their lives across national borders and maintain their ties to home even when their countries of origin are geographically distant. Of these categories, economics plays the most important role in the literature, yet through the wonders of mass media and communications, it is also possible to be transnational at the social, familial, and religious levels.

**Economics**

At the most basic level, transnational migrants leave their countries of origin to improve their economic situation. Whether it serves their individual needs or
increases the wealth and prestige of their family back home, the individuals come for the money (and as it happens, most of them end up staying for the same reason). It is the lure of quick and easy money that will let the immigrant return to his or her country of origin and retire with power and prestige. In his research on Gujerat Indians, Helweg (1987, p. 173) found that in response to the question of why people emigrate, the overwhelming response was "for the money."

Transnationalism has spawned a new sort of capitalist investor. Lessinger (1992) found that recent Indian immigrants now settled in the West are returning as capitalist investors to the land of their birth. These investors are attracted to the possible profits when combining a cheap, skilled labor force, and a growing middle class. Already the presence of these expatriates has had political repercussions and has fed an ongoing debate about national identity and the role of the state in government (Lessinger, 1992, p. 53).

Most transnational migrants have a dream. It is the dream of economic success and an early retirement. Margolis (1995), for example, found that the Brazilian immigrants in New York City considered themselves to be "sojourners," not residents of the United States. The Brazilian transnationals interviewed by Margolis (1995, p. 30) see working in the United States as a way to "save money and time." Explaining why Indians leave India to work, Helweg (1984) writes, "They leave with the same dreams that have plagued Indian immigrants for hundreds of years, to get rich quick and return to live a life of wealth, ease, and prestige" (p. 47).

An important aspect of the economic component of transnationalism is the subject of remittances. Simply put, a remittance is a payment, either in the form of money or goods, which is earned in the host community and sent to the home community. The primary function of a remittance is to fulfill one's familial obligations
and enhance the family name (Helweg, 1982, p. 32). Gonzales (1987) states that “most immigrants saved money to send home for the support of relatives and to increase their wealth in the village. Thus, many houses were built to which they could retire at some future date” (p. 155). According to Helweg (1984), “It is the uneducated and unskilled worker of rural origins who sends earnings back to India while the educated professionals and business people invest where they can obtain the best return” (p. 48).

Many countries have a long history of out-migration. In those countries, an interesting phenomenon is that those who remit larger sums of money, or the latest technologies, are seen as contributing more to the home society in general. The average unskilled worker will probably not be able to remit at the magnitude of a skilled worker. When discussing remittances by Caribbean immigrants, Chaney (1987) states:

The major issues related to remittances concern their magnitude, and whether they are put to productive uses to further development in the home islands. The questions related to returnees revolve around the degree to which they contribute, through new skills and innovative approaches, to change in the administrative and occupational structures, and the degree to which they invest their savings in a productive way. (p. 12)

The transnational labor force is not limited to only unskilled laborers, but includes both highly skilled and unskilled immigrants (Holston & Appadurai, 1996, p. 198). This has meant that people with different national and racial identifications, and often occupying different social class positions, have come to interact much more than they did during the postwar boon (Rouse, 1995, p. 373). To that end, an interesting fact surfaced from one project in that schooling is often used to enhance the future transmigrant’s opportunities abroad. Helweg (1982, p. 35), for example, found that young students plan their whole careers with the view of going abroad and
eventually becoming “foreign returned.” Gonzales (1987, p. 153) found that the Garifuna who could afford to, sent their children to Belize to be educated, as learning English was seen as a positive factor for gaining better employment abroad in the future.

With regards to the economics of return migration, in his study on Mexican migrants in Southern California, Chavez (1988) found “not only would migrants returning to Mexico find it more difficult to subsist in their place of origin, but the economic climate inhibits investment of whatever savings they may have gathered during their sojourn into the United States” (p. 95). Gmelch (1980) shares a similar response with an added twist:

The very successful are often not interested in returning because it would mean giving up secure, well salaried positions which cannot be equaled in the homeland. Returning may also mean costly obligations to share one’s wealth with less well off kinsmen at home. (p. 142)

Remittance to the home society at times causes problems for those residing in the home society. Those individuals who leave their communities in search of economic prosperity elsewhere contribute and/or perpetuate the economic hardship of those who have stayed behind. These hardships (usually it is the male who is the migrant, leaving a wife and family behind with no means of support) in turn lead to a dependence on remittances for survival. As remittances are not usually sent home on a regular basis, but rather episodically, this intensifies the problems between the home and the migrant (Sider, 1992, p. 238).

A final note on economics is that for many immigrants the thought of returning home remains only a dream. Many that have returned home find it to be disappointing and more expensive than they thought (either because of inflation or because they no longer understand how business is done at home). In some societies,
the fact that the transmigrant has lived and worked abroad holds less power and
prestige than it did at one time. In Helweg's 1987 case study of two Indian couples
contemplating going home, he states:

... they intend to return to India, but the effort and costs are so high, that
they do not exercise the option. The transportation facilities are present, but
the difficulty of leaving, and finding suitable employment in India, makes them
decide to remain on their present course abroad. Thus the ties to India are
maintained by frequent trips home. (p 171)

Politics

Transnationalism is interested in how political events in both the home
community and the host community affect the migrant, and how the migrant in turn
may try to influence the politics of both the host and home society. As Appadurai
(1993) writes, with regard to transnational politics, "Transnationals comprise de­
localized entities that retain specific ideological links to a putative place of origin, but
which are otherwise thoroughly diasporic collectivities" (p. 424). As will be
discussed, the Latvians are a politically proactive community. Rios (1992) states that
today’s immigrants "are holding on to their native cultures and traditional networks
in unprecedented ways. This indicates that when immigrants cross national
boundaries, they also bring together two societies into a single arena for social and
political interaction" (p. 226).

Wiltshire (1992) makes an interesting point when addressing where the
loyalties of those individuals, raised and socialized into several cultures, will fall when
the going gets tough. She writes, "For those socialized into multiple loyalties, those
for whom migration is possible, the young and well educated of the societies would
tend to see migration as a first option when a national crisis or instability looms"
(p. 178). This sentiment held true for the Latvians as it was the Latvian intelligentsia and their families who were mostly able to flee Latvia after the Soviet occupation.

Transnationalism, according to Appadurai (1990), is able to deterritorialize the politics of a single nation or state, as it is bringing the laboring populations of the world together. Deterritorialization can have several effects on the transnational community, the first being that the community may intensify its criticism of the political arena in the home community. The second effect is that it may result in a higher level of attachment to the politics of the home state (Appadurai, 1990, p. 11). Transnationalism also seeks to find out how migrant kinship ties and organization are affected by their bi-national existence. Specifically, they focus on migrant identity and ask, “What type of racial and ethnic constructions emerge due to a bi-national political existence?” (Schiller et al., 1992, p. xi, preface). This is not a new notion, as Graves and Graves noted in 1974 that circular migration involves the establishment of more or less permanent ties between two economic systems, one rural and one urban (p. 119).

Family

Among other things, the transnational perspective seeks to find differences and similarities between past and present migrants. Therefore, it is necessary to look at the migrant group as a whole (Schiller et al., 1992, p. x, preface). Much of Helweg’s (1988) chapter in the book *Sikh History and Religion in the Twentieth Century* deals with how the original transmigrants differed from subsequent waves of immigrants, and how the arrival of family members changed the behavior of the original migrants who were predominately male.
With regard to seeking the similarities and differences between generations of migrants, transnationalism is also interested in how the children of the migrants are affected and to what degree they help maintain the ties to the home community. Soto (1987) found that Caribbean children (the younger generation) are regarded as “not only agents of cultural change but as critical actors in maintaining cultural links between home and host societies” (p. 132).

Perhaps the biggest way ties to the family in the home community are kept is through language. The traditional immigration pattern of transition from foreign language to English happens over the course of three generations, with grandparents and grandchildren being virtually monolingual in one or the other language (Flores, Attinasi, & Pedraza, 1987, p. 226).

Helweg (1984, p. 49) states that geographic distance does not limit family obligation. Gonzales (1987, p. 150) points out that transmigration by males had been going on so long (for more than 100 years among the Garifuna) that there is now a tradition of men leaving their families and villages and returning after they have worked abroad. Margolis (1995, p. 32) correlates remittance not only with familial and kinship ties, but with the home society as a whole. The larger the remittance, the stronger the bond between home and migrant.

The idea of collective identity plays a role in that the transmigrant is not the sole unit of analysis; the family is. Collective identity is part of a cultural system where one’s self-esteem is not determined solely by individual prowess, but by how one’s kin group is evaluated by society (Helweg, 1982, p. 31). Indeed, the collective identity of being Latvian may bring pride to those immigrants in the host community. Immigration is a viable means of bringing prestige to the family. It is a socially sought means of circumventing the economic and social restrictions of
Indian society. This cultural system provides a values system which guides the relationships of professional immigrants with their sending community (Helweg, 1982, p. 32).

The transmigrant is placed in an interesting if not adversarial social situation. While working in the host community and keeping ties with the home community, is it possible to really belong to only one group? While still existing in the home community, while in the host community, is it possible for the transmigrant to truly return to the home community for good? The literature suggests that it is difficult to return home. Gold (1991) studied Jewish transnationals in the United States and found that while these migrants built communities and networks to deal with the social and cultural dimensions of ties to two places and enjoyed economic benefits from the migration, most were not quite comfortable with this status. In the words of one of the migrants, “Israel is my mother and America is my wife, so you can imagine the way I must feel” (Gold, 1991, p. 12). In Gonzalez’s (1987) study of the Garifuna, she found that “today many have become United States citizens, yet they think of themselves as members of two (or more) societies” (p. 154). Gonzalez described migrants from Belize as forming “part societies within several countries” (p. 154).

Maintaining ties to both migrants and kin may also influence the rate of return migration. Gmelch (1980, p. 139) found several urban studies which indicate it is not economic factors which drive return migration. What does drive return migration in large part are strong family ties and the desire to be in the company of one’s own kin and longtime friends. Indeed, the desire to return often surfaces during vacation trips home.
Communication

A variety of technological and communication advances in recent years (multilanguage newspapers, satellites, the Internet, cable television, fax, e-mail) have made it much easier for transnational migrants to keep in touch with their families and friends in the community and country of origin. Schiller et al. (1992) state, “Important to transnationalism are the recent advances in communications technology because they facilitate the maintenance of ties that bridge national borders” (p. xii, preface). Because communication is so readily accessible, it helps ties become much stronger, as now the three-way relationship among the migrant, the home community, and the host community are but a phone call or a fax away. Margolis (1995), for example, found that almost two thirds of the Brazilians she studied said they regularly keep track of what is happening in Brazil through reading Brazilian newspapers (p. 34). In addition, the Brazilian population in New York can enjoy a favorite Brazilian soap opera that is aired regularly on New York cable television. Many Brazilians also make video tapes and send them “home” to be watched on a VCR, usually purchased by the transmigrant and also sent home (Margolis, 1995, p. 35). Bamyeh (1993) writes:

The crucial aspect of this model (transnational) consists in the assertion that with the improvement of means of communication, communities that had been isolated from each other come to exchange elements within the reservoir of their cultural symbols that tend to be most common with them. Ultimately, those symbols of commonality become the foundation of a unifying national culture. (p. 54)

Organizations

Religious organizations have long been able to transcend national boundaries. As Boulding (1991) noted, “Communities of faith had never been bound by state
borders, and had always had transnational congresses to manage their affairs. Now the practice has spread to the secular" (p. 792). In Helweg’s (1990) study of the Gravesindians, the Gurdwara (place of worship for Sikhs) became a pseudo governmental office for the Gravesindians, which provided legislative, judicial, and welfare functions to the community. Though the Gurdwara was initially a place of worship, it soon evolved to become the major center of activity for Gravesindians (Helweg, 1990, p. 50).

Both religious and secular organizations (including governments) can play a major role not only in strengthening ties with home, but also in shaping the transmigrants’ identity in the host community. An example of how a government responds in actively seeking the rewards of its migrants is illustrated by Schiller et al. (1992). They note that the late President Marcos of the Philippines created the balikbayan box. A balikbayan box may be shipped from the host society to the Philippines with limited taxes and may contain appliances, electronic equipment and the like—anything as long as it fits the weight and size specifications. Marcos developed economic and legal means to facilitate the return of Filipino migrants and allowed each of them to bring yearly two balikbayan boxes duty-free (Schiller et al., 1992, p. 4). Other examples from Schiller et al. include a Grenadian Minister who spent time in New York City to elicit support from Grenadians living there to help convince their relatives (in Grenada) of the importance of agricultural work. These individuals were given power far above their social standings in the United States to try to influence their host country’s peoples. In addition, in New York City in 1988 there were 20 Haitian “home town” organizations that operated expressly to help both individuals in their home towns as well as the communities as a whole (Schiller et al., 1992, p. 3).
CHAPTER III

METHODS

Theory to Action

The transnational theory provided a framework to guide my research. I looked for relationships among and within the transmigrants, the host community, and the home community. I also argue that the relationships are primarily, but not solely, confined to economic in nature, but also include familial and kinship ties, as well as social and religious/secular relationships. The theory further implies that there are organizations within the Latvian communities (both home and host) which enhance and/or promote ties between the home community and the host community.

I took a historical perspective when considering the similarities and differences of past and present transmigrants (to include occupation in both home and host communities) from similar regions. This would indicate that one must look not only at conditions in the home community at the time of migration (what facilitated the migration), but also at the job opportunities available in the host country (if known).

As the cost of recurrent migration is expensive, I found a number of individuals who meant to repatriate but could not afford to go home. I looked at the rate and type of remittances sent to Latvia to find out what the money is used for. In
keeping with remittances, I found that some form of nonmonetary remittance was sent home.

Subjects

The subjects for this study were approximately 15–20 adult Latvians living in and around Southwest Michigan (including both Kalamazoo and Three Rivers and points in between). The sample relied on the snowball effect to find interviews.

As transnationalism looks at not only the present generation of immigrants but also those in the past, the intention was to interview several “waves” of Latvian migrants to assess the differences in the nature of their transnational activities. Unfortunately, Latvian migration prior to the late 1940s took place during a short period after the turn of the 20th century. Therefore, this original immigrant population was no longer available for study. Consequently, the subjects available for study were limited to Latvian nationals who had immigrated during the late 1940s and their adult children. Several of the subjects knew of Latvians in the area who would have been appropriate, but they had already returned home. As the majority of the Latvians interviewed had not sponsored any Latvians to come to the United States, I believe that population is quite small in this area.

Methodology

This research was conducted through in-depth interviews, conducted with subjects from the Latvian community in Southwest Michigan. Each subject also filled out a brief questionnaire. Copies of both the interview protocol and the survey instrument are provided in Appendix A and Appendix B, respectively.
As noted earlier, the subjects were found using the “snowball” approach. I initially contacted the Latvian Garazers center in Three Rivers, Michigan, in late 1996. I explained the nature of my thesis topic to individuals working at the center, and they agreed to help me find the initial interview and others if needed. I was given a name and a telephone number of a Latvian national living in the Three Rivers area. My initial contact with this individual was in December 1996. I explained my proposed research and a request was made that I write a short summary of the project and send it to him/her. Upon review he/she would contact me and let me know if he/she would agree to be interviewed and, additionally, help me find potential subjects.

As agreed, I sent the individual a short summary of the research plan and some tentative topics to be covered. The individual agreed to be interviewed. During this time, I finalized my interview protocol and the survey instrument. Once I received the Western Michigan University’s Human Subjects Review Committee approval (Appendix C), I set up the initial interview. At the conclusion of the interview, the subject gave me the name and telephone number of another individual. I contacted this individual, who also agreed to an interview. Sixteen interviews were completed in this manner. As the sample was not random, the information gathered, while not generalizable to the Latvian community in the United States or even the state of Michigan, can only reflect the social processes in the local Latvian community.

All of the interviews were conducted in Kalamazoo, Portage, or Three Rivers, Michigan. Eleven of the interviews were conducted in the subject’s home. Of the five remaining interviews, four were conducted at the subjects’ place of work, and the remaining interview was conducted at my apartment.
Once I arrived at the subjects' choice of interview venue, I introduced myself and again told them this research study was for my Masters thesis. I then explained the informed consent letter to them, asked them to read and sign it, and gave them a copy to keep (Appendix D). At this point, I requested they fill out the survey, which all subjects did. I found that as they read through and answered the questions, they would often answer many of the questions I had planned to ask during the interview. After this happened several times, I began to ask permission to tape the interview before they filled out the survey to facilitate hearing everything they had to say, and possibly to cut some time off the interview or eliminate what may have been seen as repetitive questions. If they said something of particular interest, I would make a note of it and would come back to it later in the interview.

No two interviews were alike. With some subjects, I would ask a single question, and over the course of answering the question, they would in fact answer multiple questions. I tried to keep the interview flowing smoothly and did my best to bring the subjects back on track if they went too far out on a tangent. As one subject said to me, “We all want our own books.” Indeed, most of their stories were interesting, if not fascinating, and perhaps worthy of a book. This was usually not a problem as there was a general structured interview protocol that was still effective, even if it was not followed precisely.

The data collection period lasted from the end of April to the middle of July, 1997. The bulk of the interviews took place in May and June, as only one interview was completed in April, and two in July. The length of each interview varied. The average time was about 1½ hours, with 40 minutes being the shortest and 3 hours the longest.
Subject Profile

I did encounter a problem with finding women to participate in the study. It was only at the conclusion of one interview that the subject’s wife suggested several women to talk to. To that point no women had been interviewed.

First Generation Latvian-Americans

A total of 16 first and second generation Latvian-Americans were interviewed. All first generation Latvian-Americans interviewed \( (N = 8) \) were male, 3 were between the ages of 55 and 64, and 5 were 65 years or older. All listed their religious denomination as Lutheran. The average age when they came to the United States was 21, and the average age at which they learned English was 16. On average they have been in the United States for approximately 47 years (since 1950), but the average length of time in Southwest Michigan was much less at 20 years (note this number is skewed as several had been here 40 years or longer, and several had been here 5 years or less). All subjects had at least “some college,” with 75% having a 4-year degree or higher. On average these individuals had been back to Latvia six times, with almost all trips tourist in nature, most coming after Latvian independence in 1990.

Second Generation Latvian-Americans

A second generation Latvian-American may be defined as someone born in the United States of Latvian parents (first generation), and raised in the United States. The second generation Latvian-Americans interviewed numbered 8 as well. However, this group includes one individual who was born in Germany and came to
the United States as a small child (he is a Latvian citizen). The gender breakdown was 5 males and 3 females. The ages varied from 25–34 (N = 4), 35–44 (N = 3), and 45–54 (N = 1). Like the first generation Latvian-Americans, this group is well educated with 75% having a college degree. All 8 were raised speaking Latvian as a first language. English was the second language for all but one, who was raised speaking both English and Latvian at home. The average age at which these individuals learned English was 4 years old. Five of the 8 are Lutheran, and 3 list their religious denomination as Catholic. An interesting finding is that the average number of times these individuals have returned to Latvia is 8, with the majority coming after Latvian independence. This average is higher than that of the first generation Latvian-Americans, but may be explained by the nature of the trips to Latvia. While the first generation Latvian-Americans return to Latvia primarily as tourists, the second generation Latvian-Americans were just as likely to be traveling to Latvia for business purposes.
CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS

First Generation Latvian-Americans

In this chapter I will discuss the findings from both the in-depth interviews and the survey protocol responses and how they relate to transnationalism. I will first discuss the first generation Latvian-Americans, and then the second generation Latvian-Americans. This section will deal with transnationalism through economics, politics, migrants and kin, communication, and organizations. It is important to note that there are relationships among the various topics, and all serve to connect the migrants to both the home and host communities.

Economics

The discussion of economic issues will first deal with the various types of remittances that the subjects either directly or indirectly contributed to Latvian individuals or organizations. Following that discussion I will look at both land and business ownership as they are linked to the relationship between the migrant and the home community. Lastly, I will examine the potential economic benefits of supporting both the Latvian Saturday School and the Latvian Summer High School.

A major distinction between other migrants and the first generation Latvian-Americans who arrived in the United States during the late 1940s is that the first generation Latvian-Americans were refugees whose primary reason for leaving Latvia.
was personal survival as opposed to economic gain. Their initial goal was to survive the process of leaving the country. It was not until they had to choose a country to which they could emigrate (from the Displaced Persons camps in Germany) that their journey became one driven primarily by economics. Nevertheless, from the interviews, the idea of succeeding or failing on one’s own merit was quite appealing to them. However, after several years in the United States, many first generation Latvian-Americans gave up the hope of being able to return to a free Latvia during their lifetime. A few maintained the goal of returning well into the 1960s, but for most, the realization that the Soviet occupation would probably outlive them was fast becoming a reality. During the 1970s and 1980s, with their careers in full swing, families being raised, and the Soviets still in power, the number of individuals contemplating returning to Latvia grew smaller. For the majority, their exodus from the German Displaced Persons camps to the United States started with working as an indentured servant. In exchange for passage, work, and a place to stay in the United States, the Latvians had to work for a period of two years for whomever sponsored them. For most, it meant working in the fields, tending crops. Those who came with their parents and/or siblings went to school during the week and helped their parents out on weekends. At the end of the two years, each moved on with or without his or her families or friends and found both schooling and occupations in various regions of the United States. Over and over, I heard phrases such as “hard work pays off,” and “succeed on your own merits.” It would seem that hard work has indeed paid off for those interviewed. They came to this country with nothing and through hard work managed to “make it” in the United States. All appear to enjoy middle to upper-middle class lifestyles. They chose professions such as medical doctors, administrators, scientists, architects, or engineers. It should also be noted that while
economics or the chance to develop their fullest potential may have been the primary reason for choosing the United States, it was not the only reason. According to the interviews, other reasons for choosing the United States include freedom and democracy, and in a more lighthearted vein, the weather. It seems that the weather in various parts of the United States is just like that in Latvia. I heard this comment several times.

Remittances

Remittances represent a link between the immigrant and the home society through the support of relatives and/or organizations with funds or goods obtained while working in the host society. According to the literature, remittances are directly linked to family and kin as they are usually a form of obligation to help relatives and friends, or a response to a request from relatives and friends for assistance. While no one interviewed said they felt a cultural obligation to help their relatives, most felt they had a personal obligation to help their relatives and friends who had not made it out of Latvia. I got the impression that this personal obligation stemmed from feeling “guilty” about getting out of Latvia while their relatives remained. Without exception, each has in the past and continues to send some sort of remittance to the home society.

The form and frequency of remittance has changed in the years following Latvian independence; however, I was told that during the Soviet occupation, remittances were possible only if you had enough money. During the Stalin era, for example, one interviewee sent packages to his sister in Latvia. The price of shipping a single 20 lb. box was upwards of $400. There were alternative channels available through which an individual could ship a package or letter to relatives, but these were
not always dependable. In the early years, remittances were possible, but not common.

Shortly after independence, remittances were usually in the form of money, since at that time the personal survival of relatives took priority over luxuries. While specific dollar amounts were not mentioned, the money sent was used primarily to buy food, to pay rent and heating bills, and to buy the necessities for survival on a daily basis. In recent years, remittances to large families, the very young, and the very old have essentially remained constant. These are the individuals who continue to need basic necessities. For large families with many children, funds are usually in short supply, and as food is so expensive, there is little left over for clothing and medical care. The elderly no longer have communism to support them, and the pensions they receive from the Latvian government are not sufficient. These individuals receive the bulk of the remittances at the direct individual level, though they are also supported to a lesser extent indirectly. An indirect remittance is a donation, either financial or otherwise, made to various organizations in the United States, that send the money or goods to Latvia.

Those receiving less are individuals able to work and support themselves. It is often these individuals who believe the streets of America to be “paved with gold.” The remittances to these individuals take a different form. As one subject stated, “I don’t want to support someone capable of caring for himself; instead I prefer to help them help themselves.” A remittance in this case is often used to help someone buy or start a business, or to buy new equipment for an existing business. From several interviewees I heard the phrase, “helping them to help themselves.” I was told this is a Latvian tradition that entails helping others get ahead, not through handouts but through their own hard work. Essentially, it is giving someone the tools to get ahead,
but it is up to the individual to make use of what is given to him or her. As told by one interviewee:

The “Summit on Volunteerism” going on right now in Philadelphia is something Latvians have been doing a long time. A strong Latvian tradition is “helping people help themselves.” In the village everybody knows everybody else and we help each other out. In this spirit we cleared a park and built a pavilion. Everyone volunteered their services free of charge. Many are skilled people such as stone masons, electricians, metal workers, and wood workers. This sort of volunteerism is a tradition in Latvia.

Remittances to organizations in Latvia are given both directly and indirectly. Indirect remittances are donations to a second party which in turn directs the donations to Latvia. While direct donations are not uncommon, indirect remittances are more the standard. An indirect remittance involves making a donation to an American-based Latvian organization, which then sends a lump sum to its sister organization in Latvia. An example of a common indirect remittance within the community would be a remittance to the Latvian Welfare Association (Daugavas Vanagi). Originally set up in the Displaced Persons camps to care for disabled Latvian war veterans and their families in the West, today they have expanded into Latvia itself. In addition, this group has “pledged to uphold their national heritage and to do their utmost to facilitate the ultimate aim of Latvian liberation and restoration of its status as an independent and sovereign European state” (Sinka, 1988, p. 53). This organization does not wholly support anyone, but it helps to pay the rent or bills on an occasional basis. There are 23 regional branches of this organization throughout the United States. Once a year at the national meeting, the various delegates of all the local chapters pool all donations gathered at the local level. The money is then sent to the central board, which decides who will receive financial help.
Another example is the local Latvian church, which has a sister church in Latvia to which they send donations. The funds are used to support the church and its various endeavors in the community. Other Latvian organizations benefiting from indirect donations from Latvians in this community are the Latvian National Opera Guild and several academic fraternities. It was interesting to note that no one mentioned financially supporting political groups in Latvia, even though the Latvians interviewed indicated that they were politically proactive.

Direct remittances to organizations are less common but do occur. One subject stated:

I personally send back birth control pills, aspirin, and Tylenol, and both prescription and nonprescription drugs. I usually send these to regional hospitals in Latvia. Many of the old are invalids or infirmed, alcoholism is very high, cancer of the throat and lungs are very high, and heart disease is very high in Latvia. The health system does not work, though some of the doctors are very good. The medicine is also expensive to the average Latvian, that along with being in short supply is why I send it (medicine) over.

One first generation Latvian-American currently remits money to help his brothers, both of whom are retired. In his own words:

I help out my brothers who are both retired. The pension system is in shambles and they are just not provided enough to live on. The government does not have a good enough tax collection system in place yet. Most Latvians believe those in the United States all have "big bucks." I strongly believe that most Latvians abroad would agree that it is useless to try and teach any Latvians over the age of 40 how to work and how to think. It is a lost cause as they are so used to have others think for them. They are just not capable of making decisions on their own.

One finding with regards to economics that goes against the transnational literature is that having relatives in the United States brought little power or prestige to those remaining in Latvia. I was told that during the Soviet occupation, having relatives in the United States was a detriment, as that fact alone put you under much closer surveillance by the Soviet government. In addition, having relatives in the
United States did little to enhance the reputations of hard-core, card-carrying communists. Sometimes it was better not to mention that you had relatives in the United States.

**Land Ownership**

Land ownership implies a tie to the community for the Latvian living in the United States. Several of the Latvian subjects (or their spouses) owned land in Latvia (usually a farm) or were in the process of trying to repossess the land that they once owned or the land that had been owned by their parents. Those who managed to regain ownership of the land routinely encountered bureaucratic problems and problems with the land itself. For example, during the Soviet occupation it was not uncommon for the Soviets to remove buildings from a piece of land and move them elsewhere. I was told that many farms were not used and the soil has been exploited. Trying to improve the repatriated land is a difficult experience. The construction of new buildings in particular is quite costly, and due to infrequent visits back, there is no guarantee that the contracted work will be done, or if done, completed satisfactorily.

**Business Ventures**

While it is not uncommon for first generation Latvian-Americans in the United States to own land, it is somewhat less likely for immigrants own a business or a building in Latvia. Immediately following Latvian independence, the economy was still too volatile to start a business. Currently, only one of the interviewees had a business venture in Latvia, which is a collaborative effort to help Latvians recover land from the government. Indeed, the majority of the clients are United States-based
Latvians. I believe this to be a prime example of providing a service to a niche market. On a lighter note, one subject said:

I wouldn’t mind helping out one boy with a hot-dog joint. Americanism is coming to Latvia . . . they have pizza now, Italian food, Chinese food, and most other foods. They have three McDonalds now in Riga. I don’t know if you call that progress but they are there.

Several other Latvians were considering business ventures but had yet to make any concrete plans. Setting up a business in Latvia is a risky proposition. If you manage it from the United States, you have very little say in how it actually operates.

**Schooling**

The Latvian community is very supportive of education. In Southwest Michigan alone there is a Latvian Saturday School, and a Latvian Summer High School. A point made by several subjects is that there is a dual purpose to these schools. The major function is the transmission of Latvian culture through the teaching of language, history, and culture. This allows young Latvians to keep their heritage and to associate with others of Latvian descent. Interestingly, the school also serves as a “matchmaker” for young Latvians. The point made to me, regarding the potential economics of Latvian schooling, was that those young Latvians with a working knowledge of the language, culture, and traditions of Latvia would have a golden opportunity to use their United States education and bilingual skills to economically prosper in a free Latvia. While economics may be a secondary function of the school, it is something many second generation Latvian-Americans have used to their advantage in the business world.
The first generation Latvian-Americans in this community were active before Latvia's independence and continue to be active politically after independence. The general feeling is that while an individual can make a difference, there is "strength in numbers," and the efforts of many Latvians devoted to a single cause will have more of an impact. Before independence a "free Latvia" was a rallying point, not only for the Latvians in Southwest Michigan, but for Latvians throughout the United States and in other parts of the world. A free Latvia meant that they would have the opportunity to go home if they so choose. The Latvians interviewed all took part in letter-writing campaigns to senators, congressmen, and various presidents of the United States with the sole purpose of bringing about pressure on the Soviet Union to grant Latvia its freedom. It was one of their main purposes while in the United States, and it was something they took extremely seriously.

After Latvian independence did not produce the often discussed great Latvian exodus back to Latvia, those who maintained their residence in the United States did not end their proactive political activities. Now the political rallying point was to help Latvia with the transition to a free market economy. This, however, soon became a friction point between Latvians in the United States and Latvians who resided in Latvia during the Soviet occupation. I am told that many Latvians in Latvia expected the economy to change overnight and when this did not happen (coupled with empty refrigerators and soaring inflation), the Latvians in the Latvia were less receptive to Western ideas, and the prestige which first generation Latvian-Americans in the United States may have had after Latvian independence was compromised.
In addition, first generation Latvian-Americans in this area are currently active in trying to generate support for Latvia to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) in the next round of countries to receive membership. With Poland being the first former Soviet nation to become a member of NATO, the first generation Latvian-Americans interviewed feel the future looks good for Latvia.

Although some individuals are more politically active than others, one impression was that those who were committed to helping Latvia politically are very active. One gentleman gave me several letters that he had personally written to both *Life* magazine and President Clinton. The letter to the president asked the president to take heed when dealing with the Russians and to not make deals at the expense of the Baltic states. The letter to *Life* magazine expressed his disdain at a 1992 edition of the magazine which had published an article about the Latvians and Germans in World War II. This same individual said to me, “Of course I am always trying to influence politics; they need help.” This reference to “help” refers to the Latvian government in its pursuit of democracy and a free market economy.

Most of the first generation Latvian-Americans interviewed stated that a true democratic society and a free market economy would not be possible until the current generation in power had died out (some went as far to say that democracy and a free market economy would not be possible until everyone currently 40 and older dies). While the current Latvian government is headed by the Latvian Farmers Union Party (which, coincidentally, has a fair amount of support in Three Rivers), there are too many parties to have a clear majority. Consequently, legislation is developed slowly within the government. However, the visit by the Latvian president to Southwest Michigan brought a lot of pride to Latvians in this area. I was told that the president encourages Latvians living in the United States to offer help with the transition to a
free market economy. It also appears that the president has an open-door policy for Latvians from the West when they visit Latvia. Several Latvians intimated that while in Riga they had paid a visit to the presidential palace and had been seen by the president, often on short notice. This open door policy and the fact that the president came to visit (even though the visit was primarily for medical purposes) helps keep those first generation Latvian-Americans abroad feeling like they still have an important role to play in the development of the Latvian economy, and that their Latvian kin still need their help. As one subject stated, “Even if nothing is done with our views, at least we are given the opportunity to feel like we are contributing.”

One individual in the “village” sees both the American Latvian Association in the United States and journalists and writers in Latvia as having the clout to affect political change. As he put it:

The American Latvian Association can influence politics. They can change the public opinion in Latvia. I have urged the American Latvian Association to explain the process of democracy to Latvian citizens in Latvia. Latvia will not progress unless good people are elected. I have also spoken to writers and journalists in Latvia. They can especially influence peoples’ thinking. I tell them how we (Latvians in the United States) see democracy and justice, and what reforms I believe are necessary for Latvian democracy and justice to be successfully implemented.

Also of interest are several comments made by one individual when speaking of his concern for Latvian politics:

Latvian politics depress me. I basically live the Latvian problem everyday. I am always looking for some way to help out, politically, economically, but not culturally. Latvians know how to sing and dance but they do not know how to run a country anymore. I have a problem... I am a dual citizen... it gives me flexibility... and I do not need a visa to go back and forth... I personally am against it (dual citizenship) because you can only serve one country. I have one vote here... and then rush over and vote there... there are obligations in each country... I get a guilty conscience... you should concentrate on one, either Latvia or the United States, but now I am working for two... being a dual citizen is nice but there is more to it than just being a citizen; there is an obligation.
Another subject states:

No, no, you can’t influence politics at the individual level, but definitely at the organizational level. An organization can have a very strong voice. You know Latvians have watch dogs in Congress, and an embassy in DC. Our community has invited Senator Upton to come and speak, and we write congressmen. Actually we call and write congressmen as often as possible with the Latvian Welfare Association. Currently we are trying to push Congress to include the Balkans in NATO as soon as possible. The Baltic States really need protecting. For 50 years we wrote letters urging the United States to help Latvia gain its independence; now we want to help them to have better lives. However, the political parties in Latvia resent suggestions from Latvians in the United States. They don’t want to accept the suggestions as they have the attitude of “don’t tell me what to do; you don’t know what goes on here anymore.”

Family Ties

Contact and commonalities with other migrants and kin also strengthen the ties between the migrant, the host society, and the home society. The first generation Latvian-Americans interviewed all suggested the strength of culture in unifying the local Latvian community and how it helps bridge the gap to their kin in Latvia. The transmission of culture also helps bond the Latvians to Latvia. By passing along the cultural activities and traditions to the younger generations, the elder, first generation Latvian-Americans are bridging the gap between Latvia and the United States. While the two countries may be geographically distant, the transmission of culture will give both groups a common cultural identity. The goal of United States-based Latvians to help bring about freedom for Latvia ensured that the Latvian cultural identity would remain strong.

In this section I will look at the Latvian traditions carried on in the United States and the reasons for doing so. When talking of culture and traditions, one subject made an interesting point: “We in this community are hard core Latvians as we are more Latvian than those in Latvia as they have been ‘Russianized.’” This
sentiment of their kin being "Russianized," I believe, has played a major role in the degree to which Latvian culture is expressed. The whole time the Soviet occupation was going on, Latvians in the United States perceived that the Latvian culture they knew was being destroyed by the Russian influences on the culture. Both out of fear of cultural extermination and pride in their culture, the Latvians in the United States rallied around their Latvian identity, which served the dual purpose of cultural transmission to younger generations of Latvians and to help support Latvia in its fight for independence.

First and foremost in the transmission of Latvian culture is the use of the Latvian language. Being able to communicate in Latvian means being able to talk with friends and relatives not only in Latvia, but in the United States as well. It means being able to read the Latvian newspapers and understanding Latvian television. All of the first generation Latvian-Americans interviewed stated that they spoke Latvian as their primary language with other Latvians. Additionally, Latvian was the primary language they taught their children. Even when the spouse was not of Latvian descent, it was common for the children to be taught Latvian along with English from birth. Most of the subjects' children had married Latvians and they too had taught their children Latvian. In many households there can be up to three generations capable of communicating in Latvian. Thus, the transmission of the Latvian language would seem to indicate a common tie between young and old, as well as a tie that binds them all to one another and to Latvia. One subject stated:

I remember that while growing up we always attended a Latvian-speaking church, and this is something I did with my children as well. Speaking of language, I would have to say that language was the big tradition we held on to, as it was the language that was spoken at home while growing up, and it was the language my wife and I, who is also Latvian, passed on to our children. All four of them grew up speaking Latvian as their native language;
English was second. Two of my sons married Latvians and they in turn taught their children Latvian first.

In addition to language, the first generation Latvian-Americans in the area have kept alive a number of specific Latvian traditions. The most prominent cultural events are the “John’s Midsummer Solstice Festival,” “Latvian Independence Day,” “Names Day,” the “June 14th Day of Deportation remembrance,” and the Latvian “Song and Dance Festival.” The Song and Dance Festival happens every two years and attracts tens of thousands of Latvians from throughout the United States and Canada. Each of these events is special to Latvia, and each helps strengthen the bond between migrant and host and home society. In particular, it strengthens the bond between Latvians in the United States with those in the home society.

In Latvia, the John’s Festival or Midsummer Solstice is a chance for Latvians to gather to celebrate both the bounty of summer and the crops they have labored over for months. It is a rural festival that has its roots in Latvia. The festival takes its name from the Latvian calendar which associates several first names to each day of the year. John, or “Janis,” happens to fall on June 21st, which is the day the festival is actually celebrated in Latvia. I attended this year’s festival at Long Lake. The festival draws hundreds of Latvians from across the United States to celebrate with Latvian song and dance, food and beer. While the purists may argue that the festival has lost much of what it was originally intended to symbolize, the American incarnation is still a big draw for young and old alike. This year’s celebration had song and dance troupes from Toronto and Chicago to provide the entertainment. I am told in that in Latvia the celebration is based more on participation by the crowd (with regard to impromptu singing and dancing), than the more choreographed, planned event held in this area. However, one cannot doubt the hard work put into the festival by the
organizers. The songs and dance tell stories of Latvian history, and the costumes worn by the performers are from different regions and eras in Latvia.

Both November 18th and June 14th are also special days in the Latvian community. November 18 marks the Latvian Independence of 1918, and June 14 marks the date that tens of thousands of Latvians were deported to Siberia in a single day. Both dates are days of reflection. Rather than celebrate the two occurrences of freedom from the Soviet Union, in the 20th century, Latvians prefer to celebrate both days of independence (November 18, 1918, and August 21, 1991) on November 18. Both Independence Day and the Day of Deportation offer a chance for Latvians to reflect back on their origins and the struggles endured in the fight for freedom.

One subject noted:

The Latvians in this community who appear successful have maintained the Latvian culture and become better educated. They know two languages off the bat, the success of the group gives the community a “small town” feel, and there is positive reinforcement to become successful. There are probably a group of people in this area that are not successful; you look in the paper and see an obituary for a Latvian you never heard of. This sort of small community mentality may weed out people who are different or who do not have the same desires.

With regard to culture another subject states:

I think the culture is so strong because those that originally came over were from the middle and upper classes who brought with them literature and culture. Latvia affected every aspect of life. I got my first job with a Latvian carpentry outfit. I learned to swear in Latvian, and how to really drink beer with those guys. I was having the same experiences as many of my American friends, but I was having them with Latvians.

Additionally, this subject added:

There is a paradox I will tell you about. There are a lot of people in this community that call themselves Latvian, and I suppose they are Latvian in the sense that they may attend the Latvian church, but in their everyday lives they are American. Latvian is but a small strand in most people’s lives and they can survive quite nicely with or without it.
As the Long Lake Camp is a primary meeting place for Latvians in Southwest Michigan, and is host to many of the Latvian activities in the area, I inquired as to its history. One subject shared with me the events leading to the acquisition of the Long Lake Camp and the creation of the Latvian subdivision nicknamed “the village.”

While in Detroit I knew of Kalamazoo and the heavy commitment to the Latvian community. Many Latvians wanted a Latvian Middle School but we needed land and buildings. We heard that a Girl Scouts camp was for sale in Three Rivers, Michigan. I went with several others to look at it and eventually with the help of other Latvian investors we were able to purchase the land and buildings that now house the Latvian High School and Summer Camp. It is an ideal location as it is centrally located to Chicago, Detroit, Indianapolis, and Kalamazoo. The Latvian community here in Three Rivers originated when one person bought up all this land and then started selling it to Latvians, thus creating what now appears to be a little retirement community. This is how the subdivision was born.

From a very young age a Latvian in this community could learn the Latvian language and traditions at home, then have them reinforced at Latvian Day Care and Saturday School, and further enforced at the Summer Camp and High School, and then continue through various memberships in Latvian organizations and associations both locally and nationally.

Communication

Communication is essential to the transnational relationship as it bridges the distance between the migrant, the home society, and the host community. In keeping with transnationalism, I found that technology has greatly improved the frequency and type of communication between the migrant and their relatives, as well as the migrants and Latvia in general. I will examine two forms of communication. The first refers to ways the first generation Latvian-Americans remain in contact with their family and friends in Latvia, and the second refers to ways they keep current on news and politics in their home land.
Communication With Family and Friends

The majority of the Latvians interviewed kept in touch with their family and friends in Latvia primarily through letter writing and telephone calls. The frequency of contact varies from individual to individual and from time to time, however. Some are in contact on a weekly basis while for others it is less frequent. As one might expect, communication increases when plans are being made to visit Latvia, or for birthdays and holidays. Letter writing is still the most common form of communication since the high price of phone service makes frequent phone calls very costly. However, both the fax machine and e-mail are utilized to a lesser degree than letters and telephone calls. This is understandable, as the use of these technologies also requires someone on the receiving end having, or having access to, a computer or a fax machine.

The content of communication with friends and relatives is primarily personal in nature, though those with business connections in Latvia will speak of business. Interestingly, none of the subjects stated they spoke of politics or technologies. More frequently, they indicated that when communicating with someone who has visited Latvia, they may talk of what is happening to individuals common to both parties, or the goings-on in their respective communities.

Communication of Politics and News

The communication resources available to the Latvian community with regard to keeping current on what is happening in Latvia far outnumber the more conventional communication resources of keeping in touch with family, friends, and colleagues. The resources available locally are telephone, letters, e-mail, Internet, fax,
shortwave radio, television, and newspapers. However, with the exception of newspapers and television, it appears that the Latvians prefer to stick with letters, phone calls, and word of mouth to keep current on what is happening in Latvia (in contrast the younger second generation Latvian-Americans, who utilize current technology to a far greater degree).

The Brooklyn, New York-based Latvian newspaper LAIKS ("The Times") was read by the majority of those Latvians interviewed. LAIKS is a weekly Latvian language newspaper which provides information on what is taking place with regard to politics, news and sports in Latvia, but also keeps Latvians in the United States up-to-date on what Latvians in the United States are doing. Another newspaper available to Latvians in Southwest Michigan is Diena ("The Day"), which is a Latvian daily newspaper printed in Latvia. This paper, like most dailies, reports on news, politics, sports, etc. While the news coverage is supposed to be quite good, the paper usually arrives two weeks late. While some subjects said that this delay, along with the expensive price tag, stops them from purchasing it, one interviewee reported that the fact the paper arrives so late keeps things fresh in the mind. Just as you are forgetting what is happening, the newspaper shows up and it is on the front page. Also, it is common for several individuals to purchase a subscription together, thus reducing the price of receiving the paper.

A point touched on by several of the Latvians is that all gain knowledge or insight through word-of-mouth communication. When individuals have spent any amount of time in Latvia, upon their return, they tell their friends and family what is going on, what they have experienced, and describe any noticeable changes. This word-of-mouth communication clearly serves to strengthen the ties between the immigrants and their home community.
Some in the Latvian community have access to a daily Latvian news program offered through the cable television channel SCOLA. While all were familiar with the television program, and all had watched it, few actually received it through their cable company. For reasons unknown to the first generation Latvian-Americans I interviewed, this program, like the newspaper Diena, is delivered to them days after the fact. The program has essentially the same format as news programs in the United States. It features local, national, and international news, as well as sports, entertainment, and weather. Those individuals who do not receive the program through their cable company need not fear as there are those in the community who videotape each day’s show and will distribute the video to anyone who wants to watch it. When asked whether he watched the Latvian television programming, one subject stated:

No, not very often. Some people watch it religiously; they watch it every day and we do not phone them between 4:00 and 4:30. I do not find the show interesting so I will have some put on a videotape and watch them once a month. It is all 14 days late and the usefulness is that you get to see people who are in government and otherwise, so you can see them and put a name to a face, so that is it.

Organizations

The Latvian community has strong ties to both church and secular organizations. As noted earlier, the church was at the genesis of Latvian immigration to this area in the late 1940s and early 1950s. While the membership roster may be smaller than in the 1950s and 1960s, today the church still serves the function of bringing Latvians from Kalamazoo, Three Rivers, and Portage together in Kalamazoo for Sunday worship and/or Sunday School.
Latvian organizations abound in the Southwest Michigan area. Although the Latvian population has experienced a decline in size, the number of Latvian organizations has not been affected to a great degree. The Latvians in this area have a church, the Latvian Heritage Center, a Latvian Credit Union, Latvian Day Care, the Latvian Welfare Association, Long Lake Camp, and many more. This does not include the many Latvian organizations that one can belong to at the national level, such as the American Latvian Association, or various professional associations and academic fraternities. For young adults, there is the Latvian High School and the Latvian Heritage Center. At the national level they may belong to the American Latvian Youth Association, which is under the auspices of the American Latvian Association. For the youth and children there is Summer Camp at Long Lake and Latvian Boy and Girl Scout troops they may join. In addition, there are numerous choirs associated with the many organizations.

Each organization serves a purpose, whether it be social or political, with regards to strengthening not only the local or national Latvian community, but also keeping strong ties to Latvia. Most of the local organizations are social in nature but all stress the continuance of Latvian culture to some degree. For example, the Latvian Day Care is the only one of its kind in the country and stresses learning the Latvian alphabet, Latvian language, traditions, morals, respect, and attitude. It is interesting to note that several non-Latvian families also send their children there. I am told the Day Care also serves the function of drawing young Latvians into the community from outside the local area.

At the national level, the American Latvian Association is the major organization, serving as the umbrella organization for many of the smaller Latvian groups. This includes the Long Lake Camp and High School. The American Latvian
Association provides educational material to the High School. Several of the Latvians interviewed had at one time or another served on the board of directors of this organization. The American Latvian Association coordinated mass letter writing campaigns to help Latvia gain independence. This sort of activity was also conducted by the Latvian Welfare Association, though I was told the American Latvian Association has the real political clout and power to influence politics. After independence, the American Latvian Association shifted gears to help influence the change from communism to democracy through offering its help to the Latvian parliament.

It appears that there are more than enough American-based Latvian organizations at both the local and national level for all individuals to get involved with their heritage. In virtually all instances, it appears that these organizations promote Latvian culture and seek to improve the lives of those in Latvia.

Second Generation Latvian-Americans

With the first generation Latvian-Americans, who came to the United States in the late 1940s and early 1950s, firmly entrenched in transnational activities (economics, politics, family ties, communication, and organizational membership), I will now proceed to look at second generation Latvian-Americans who grew up living the transnational experiences of their parents' generation. To what extent are the transnational experiences of their parents manifested in their own actions with regards to economics, politics, family ties, communication, and organizational membership? The following is a summary of the results acquired from interviewing representatives from the second generation Latvian-Americans.
Economics

Economics seems to be at the heart of transnationalism. Indeed we have seen that the Latvians do provide a variety of economic support to Latvia. The question is, to what extent do second generation Latvian-Americans participate in economic remittances to the land of their ancestors? My interviews with the second generation Latvian-Americans indicate that most make the same kinds of economic remittances to Latvia as their parents, although to a lesser degree. As in the case of their Latvian parents, these remittances are monetary and nonmonetary in nature and can be either remittances or indirect in nature.

Remittances

While a few of the second generation Latvian-Americans interviewed send no support or remittances of any kind to Latvia, the majority do contribute financial or other aid to their relatives in Latvia. However, among this group, monetary assistance was higher immediately after Latvian independence. It has become much less prevalent in recent years. Among those who continue to provide economic support, it is more common for them to first evaluate requests by relatives for money. Those that do not remit money seem to do so for several reasons. The first is the fact that they may have little or no communication with their relatives in Latvia, so no requests are made. The second is that they do not want to be a welfare agency for someone, who, if taught, could learn to work. This latter opinion was voiced several times and was framed in the context of communism taking away people’s ability to know how to work. The second generation Latvian-Americans repeatedly asserted that until the able bodied in Latvia learn how to work, they will keep looking to
others to support them. When discussing economic remittances, the phrase "America is paved with gold" surfaced several times. One second generation Latvian-American took it a step further, saying he is often asked for money by "gold-digging" relatives. Most blame this attitude on 50 years of communist rule by the Soviet Union.

A more common form of remittance from second generation Latvian-Americans would be care packages sent to relatives in Latvia. Care packages include clothing and books for children, toys, personal hygiene items and, in some cases, lingerie. The items are mostly for children, but specialty items such as tools may also be sent. Second generation Latvian-Americans are more likely to send packages several times a year for birthdays and holidays.

As the United States is the second generation Latvian-Americans' country of origin (with the exception of an individual born in Germany) it is interesting to note that more of them travel to Latvia for business than do the first generation Latvian-Americans interviewed. While moving to Latvia may not be appealing to many second generation Latvian-Americans (or to the Latvian immigrants, for that matter), several are able to use their Latvian heritage and language skills for economic gain by engaging in employment that allows them to travel to Latvia on a regular basis. These individuals who return frequently are usually consultants for United States-based groups that have business interests in Latvia. Another individual returns for months at a time to lecture at a major university in Riga. From the comments made by these individuals, it is evident that those who travel as tourists and those who spend more time in Latvia have different views on Latvia. The individuals who spend more time there are less likely to give economic remittances. As one individual stated:

I do not want to be a welfare society; people in Latvia need to be taught how to work. . . . Those that go back often are more in tune to what is going on
and can get over how much better things look. . . . We can look past the superficial.

Like first generation Latvian-Americans, the second generation Latvian-Americans also provide indirect financial support to Latvia through membership fees and donations made to various Latvian organizations in the United States. Second generation Latvian-Americans belong to many of the same organizations as do their parents. These include memberships in the American Latvian Association, the Latvian Welfare Association, various academic and professional societies, and, locally, the Long Lake Camp, Latvian Heritage Center and Latvian Lutheran Church.

**Land Ownership**

None of the second generation Latvian-Americans interviewed owned any land in Latvia, even though many of their parents do. It is more common for the Latvian-Americans to own an apartment in Latvia, which is either leased out or used when they return for business.

**Business Ventures**

As stated earlier, several of the second generation Latvian-Americans I interviewed return to Latvia on a regular basis to conduct business or engage in professional activities. I asked one subject who had resided in Latvia for over a year with his family, only to move back to the United States, why he had not stayed in Latvia. He responded by saying that it was not economically possible to survive in Latvia on a university professor's salary without having to find "other" sources of income. This individual is using his United States-based income to return to Latvia for a different reason. He and his wife moved back after Latvian independence
because “they wanted to be connected with what was happening in the country.” He wanted to experience the change “while it was happening.” Of all the interviews, this individual was the only one who mentioned wanting to leave the United States and help Latvians for the sake of helping Latvians. Most prefer to do it from the United States, through either direct or indirect remittances.

**Politics**

Among the second generation Latvian-Americans interviewed, there appears to be some apathy with regards to either following or being concerned with Latvian politics. A common sentiment echoed by some is that “Latvian politics have no effect on me personally, but I have a passing interest because it affects my relatives.” Those who return to Latvia on a regular basis are more likely to be current on what is happening, but Latvian politics still play a minor role in their lives. One individual is a member of the Latvian Farmers Union political party, which is currently in power in Latvia. This is the same party that was in power before the Soviet Union imposed its government in Latvia. This may reflect a high degree of nostalgia, relying on the old to usher in the new as was mentioned by one subject. Also of interest is the report by several who return on a regular basis that people in Latvia have an “us and them” mentality, referring to those Latvians coming from the United States always trying to tell Latvians how things should be done. As one subject stated:

For the most part I am treated very well, but there is definitely an “us and them” mentality between the Latvians and Latvian-Americans. In professional circles in Latvia, the term “Latvian-American” has negative connotations. After independence, Latvians from America had a very “know it all” attitude as they made it seem like they had all the answers. The fact is that democracy has really not worked out, and everything moves much slower with regards to business than in the United States.
Overall, it appears that second generation Latvian-Americans feel less able to influence politics at the individual level, but agree that through such organizations as the American Latvian Association, it is possible to influence United States foreign policy with regard to Latvia. However, as many of the second generation Latvian-Americans are more or less apolitical with regard to Latvia, this finding is not as surprising as one would expect. As one respondent stated:

What happens there concerns me a great deal, and I think about the political situation quite a bit, but in all honesty it does not affect the way I do my job or live my life to a great extent, if at all.

Another subject noted:

Prior to 1991 we were a united community. We needed to hang together to fight for the Latvian freedom. We had the mentality “if we don’t care they will be forgotten.” It was very easy to mobilize the community as they all wanted the same thing, to help Latvia regain its freedom and to return home to Latvia. I suppose you have noticed there was no mass exodus once independence was achieved. People have been accustomed to their lives in the United States and the change is not something they want to experience. Many will be redefining what it means to be Latvian and why they are hanging on to tradition. What does it mean to now be Latvian in the United States?

Family Ties

While the tie to migrants and kin for some second generation Latvian-Americans may be waning through lack of personal contact or lack of remittances, the ties to their Latvian heritage remains through involvement in the local Latvian community. The second generation Latvian-Americans interviewed all grew up immersed in Latvian culture. All were exposed to Latvian language, activities, customs, cultures and organizations.

The use of the Latvian language in the home and within the Latvian community is common to all interviewed. With the exception of one, all second generation Latvian-Americans interviewed were taught Latvian as a first language.
They learned English primarily through school and friends. This tradition of teaching children Latvian first has carried over with this generation. In several of the subjects homes, I noticed Latvian being spoken between adults and children alike, and each subject indicated they teach Latvian to their children before teaching them English.

It is important to note that the spouses of the second generation Latvian-Americans interviewed were also of Latvian descent. Several times I heard comments relating to how much easier it was to carry on the tradition of language when both parents speak the same languages. As several of the respondents tell it, the Latvian High School served a secondary courtship function, as they had met their spouses there.

I do not know if the Latvian language is passed on in those families of mixed parentage. I was told that this makes it much harder for Latvian to be passed on, but not impossible. One subject stated, "People with an interest in keeping the community together are dying. Assimilation is taking over, and more and more young people are involved with mixed marriages. It is very hard to raise kids Latvian in a mixed household."

While Latvian is learned in both the home and school environment, and language skills are clearly reinforced within the Latvian community, one interviewee made an interesting point that the Latvian being taught is not the same Latvian spoken by those in Latvia. In Latvia, they speak a form of Russian-Latvian, and in the United States they speak a more American-English form of Latvian. This same subject was of the opinion that for each generation of Latvians in the United States there is also a somewhat different form of Latvian spoken—that the various generations do not communicate on a regular enough basis to have a Latvian language common to all. The older generations are more likely to use a purer form of
Latvian, while the younger generations are more likely to use English interspersed with their Latvian. However, this same individual sees the Long Lake Camp and the Latvian High School as institutions that will be able to bridge the gap between Latvians in Latvia and Latvians in the United States. He explains that as more Latvians from Latvia attend the Summer Camp and High School, the friendships which blossom will encourage trips to Latvia and to the United States (the subject also feels that Long Lake will be the last Latvian organization standing).

In addition to language, all interviewees grew up participating in various Latvian activities, schools, holidays, festivals, and organizations. Many of the subjects participated in Latvian Boy and Girl Scouts, which are identical to those in the United States but conducted in Latvian. All grew up attending the Latvian Saturday School where they learned language, history, culture, and geography. These subjects are reinforced during Latvian High School (held during the summer at Long Lake). To graduate from the High School one must pass four oral exams, the same as in Latvia. The camp also serves to bring together Latvian youth from all over the United States, although primarily the Midwest. Along this same vein I was told that while it was definitely not “cool” to be a choir member and folk dancer while a teen, it was fun, and a great place to meet members of the opposite sex.

The major holidays and festivals celebrated by second generation Latvian-Americans are the same as those celebrated by the elder first generation Latvian-Americans. The John’s Day Festival (Summer Solstice) is an event attended by most of the Latvians, young and old. The mood was indeed festive when I went to the event this summer. I had been warned that it was a night to party and have a good time. Although I was not able to stay all night (as I was told many did), I did have a good time while being regaled with song and dance, a few beers, and a sip of
“Latvian Lemonade,” which is a concoction I believe to be made from vodka and lemonade. The festival boasted many young adults and teenagers who all seemed to be enjoying themselves. I was told that growing up Latvian allows youth to partake in experiences that their American friends often are not allowed. Drinking and staying out past curfew are prime examples. One individual, who labeled himself a “purist,” usually boycotted the St. John’s Festival as it had become too “American” and lost much of its original meaning. He feels the whole affair is nothing more than “an excuse to get drunk.” In a slightly different vein, one subject noted:

The celebration entails lots of Latvian singing and dancing, folk dancing, and eating and drinking a lot of beer. Now that we have the kids it is not quite the same as we do not participate in the all night party.

When asked why they felt it was important to carry on Latvian traditions, some suggested it was for the sake of tradition. This meant they had various cultural experiences and it was seen as a “natural progression” to carry on the same traditions with their children. The majority of responses also seemed to indicate that it is important not to forget where you come from, not forgetting the past, and to be proud of your Latvian heritage.

**Communication**

Second generation Latvian-Americans utilize a number of different ways to communicate with friends and family and to keep abreast of what is going on in Latvia. When communicating with friends and relatives, second generation Latvian-Americans utilize e-mail, phone, and letters more than other types of communication. Six of eight interviewees responded that they used e-mail, while the same number also wrote letters and used the telephone. Those with business and professional contacts in Latvia also communicate more often than those without those contacts.
Business aside, the majority indicated that their communications with Latvia are mostly social in nature. Talk is often of persons both parties know in common. It is also not unusual for second generation Latvian-Americans to have friends of Latvian descent who have moved from the United States to Latvia for the purpose of working. I am told these moves are usually temporary.

In order to keep abreast of what is happening in Latvia, half of the second generation Latvian-Americans interviewed stated they use e-mail, the Internet, newspapers, and phone calls. To a lesser degree they get their news from the SCOLA television channel or have it faxed to them from a relative or friend, or receive it through word of mouth. None indicated the use of shortwave radio. The use of the Internet is interesting, however, in that Latvians have numerous Internet sites available to them on the World Wide Web. I am told that Reuters News Service provides up-to-the-minute information on what is taking place in Latvia on a daily basis. In addition, the Latvian government and its various ministries post web pages with the day’s happenings in government and vital statistics and such. The Long Lake Camp in Three Rivers has its own Internet site which enables the camp to be known worldwide. In addition, through the e-mail feature, Latvians worldwide may directly ask questions about the camp and its various activities. Currently, the site is only in Latvian, but an English version is in the works. The Internet certainly expands the variety of information available to Latvians, not only in the United States but around the world.

Here, two subjects elaborate on how they communicate with friends and relatives or keep current on politics and what is happening in Latvia. The first individual, who returns to Latvia on a regular basis, states:
I communicate with my colleagues mostly through e-mail, and my relatives I usually call on the phone. The phone has limits as it is very expensive. I usually do not write letters as the postal service is very unreliable and slow. My wife is a much better communicator than I am, even though I have better than weekly contact with people in Latvia. She is the type of person who, along with her morning coffee, will write a letter or e-mail almost everyday.

The second subject returns as a tourist on occasion:

I read the newspaper LAIKS. It's a New York weekly publication that gives news on Latvia and those Latvians in the United States. I also have a friend in Latvia who used to live in Michigan but moved back there to work. He is about the only one I call and we usually talk about what is happening with the friends we have in common, and the happenings in the "village," and Latvian society in general. I actually get most of my information through my mother who regularly talks with our relatives in Latvia. You also get a lot of news by "word of mouth," just by talking with others in the Latvian community.

Organizations

Second generation Latvian-Americans are active in many Latvian organizations, and the majority belong to several organizations. The most common national-level organizations are the American Latvian Association and, to a lesser degree, the Latvian Welfare Association. At the local level, the Kalamazoo Heritage Center, Garezers (Long Lake Camp), the Latvian Lutheran Church, and the Kalamazoo Latvian Association are most prevalent. Individuals also belonged to a variety of Latvian academic fraternities and various professional associations. An interesting observation is that as many of the Latvian organizations have gotten older, so have both their population and leadership. In particular, there appears to be very little turnover with regard to leadership within these organizations. I was told several times that the majority of Latvian organizational leadership positions have been held by the same people "as long as anyone can remember." As such, some second generation Latvian-Americans feel the organizations have lost touch with their younger members. At the same time (with the exception of several second generation
Latvian-Americans interviewed), there doesn’t appear to be a great rush by the younger members of the Latvian community to take over positions of leadership. This was a sore point among those younger members who are involved and who have managed to acquire leadership positions. As quoted by a second generation Latvian-American involved in multiple Latvian organizations:

I feel the Latvian community in Michigan is dwindling. People with an interest in keeping the community together are dying. Assimilation is taking over, and more and more young people are involved with mixed marriages. It is very hard to raise kids to be Latvian in a mixed household. The membership in local Latvian organizations is mostly the older Latvians, but that does not mean the younger Latvians are abandoning the community. I would estimate 90% of my friends are Latvian. My generation is more socially bound than our parents and grandparents, and no one is really stepping forward to take over the leadership in local Latvian organizations. I have many friends who are Latvians who married Latvians, who do not participate in Latvian organizations. However, the Long Lake Camp is the exception. The camp brings us together and is the central meeting location for all Latvians in Southwest Michigan. All of my friends growing up went to the camp and all still support it in one fashion or another. I believe that within 20 years many of the local Latvian organizations will have folded due to the elderly dying off, and a lack of support and interest by the younger generation. But I think the camp has the best chance of surviving because the young people do support it and have a lot of good memories of it.
The analysis consists of two major parts. The first will compare and contrast the transnational activities of the two Latvian groups interviewed. The second section will deal with several specific issues related to the populations studied and transnationalism that became apparent during this study. I will discuss (a) how technology appears to render borders meaningless, (b) where a transnational relationship ends, and (c) the apparent classism between first and second generation Latvian-Americans and those in Latvia.

First Generation Latvian-Americans

The first generation Latvian-Americans interviewed are transnational. The fact that they lived most of their lives believing they would not be able to return home on a permanent basis, even if they so desired, seems to have strengthened their transnational activities. They do indeed live their lives across national borders and maintain ties to their homeland. Furthermore, as the literature has suggested, the first generation Latvian-Americans have developed multiple relations, both formal and informal, with regards to economics and the transmission of culture, even though their country of origin is geographically distant. Also, concurrent with the literature is the fact that when the opportunity to return home developed, the predicted mass exodus of Latvians returning to Latvia did not come to fruition. The majority now travel to the home community as tourists. Those who go more often are likely to
have the opinion that all is not as well as it seems, and that most of the changes that
have taken place in Latvia are on the surface. Therefore, returning to Latvia after
many decades in the United States would be a most difficult transition. The Latvia
they left is no longer there; the people and the way of life were changed by
communism. As one interviewee stated, “Latvia is like the Wild West; if you don’t
have the street smarts you will not survive.” Indeed, most first generation Latvian-
Americans maintained that their lives were now here in the United States, and to
leave it all would mean a drop in their quality of life. They would have to leave family
and friends and encounter a culture that has changed drastically since they left.
Moreover, the first generation Latvian-Americans realize that they themselves may
have changed during their stay in the United States. The general sentiment of many in
this group is summed up nicely by this subject who states:

I have the desire to return permanently to Latvia, but during the communist
regime I could not return home as I was considered an outlaw for fleeing the
country with my family. Once you leave a system like that, going back is not
easy. You face a lot of adversity and possible imprisonment or worse. To
answer your question, I truly have the desire to return to my homeland, I
currently would go back if possible, but the reality is my children were born in
the United States, my grandchildren were born in the United States, and I
enjoy the comforts of the United States. To return to Latvia now, the
adjustment to the lower standard of living would be quite harsh.

As the literature would have predicted, the first generation Latvian-Americans
who were interviewed did make remittances (directly and indirectly) to the home
society in the nature of both money and packages. The nature of the remittances,
however, is not consistent with the transnational literature. As opposed to sending
remittances for cultural or familial obligation, and/or to increase their standing (or
their relatives’ standing) in the home community, they remitted out of a personal
obligation they felt they had to those who had not escaped. After independence,
money and goods were remitted primarily for the purpose of improving the chances for survival of their relatives.

They left their homes in Latvia not for economic gain, but for fear of death, or deportation to Siberia, by the Soviet occupation government, or as conscripted members of the German Army in World War II. It was not until they chose the United States as the country to which to immigrate that economics overrode survival. Once established in the United States, they began the long fight of helping Latvia gain independence. While in the United States, politics seemed to be as important, if not more important, than economics, as the goal of helping Latvia regain its freedom united an entire community, young and old alike. Their refugee status did not hurt them, but perhaps helped keep them focused in both their professional lives, as well as in uniting the community. Multiple organizations were formed for the purpose of keeping Latvians together and preserving the Latvian culture. The politics at home certainly influenced those Latvians who escaped to the United States. Those that had to stay in Latvia were placed under communist rule. During the fight for freedom, the members of the community rallied to help their fellow Latvians. After independence, the United States-based Latvians believe they still have a role to play with helping Latvia establish its free market economy.

Second Generation Latvian-Americans

The second generation Latvian-Americans who were interviewed offer a different view of transnationalism than what is portrayed in the literature. Though they are not immigrants, they certainly carry out many of the same transnational activities of their parents' generation. They grew up with the Latvian community as their reference group. They were raised as Latvian, speaking Latvian and
participating in Latvian activities. They spent their Saturdays in Latvian School and their summers at Latvian Camp or High School. Several have dual citizenship. For these kinds of reasons, it would be more than relevant to use transnational theory to examine their relationships with Latvia.

Like their parents' generation, the second generation Latvian-Americans have also remitted both money and packages, though they are perhaps a little more skeptical about doing so. For those who return on business, however, it is not uncommon for them to keep an apartment in Latvia. Unlike their parents, second generation Latvian-Americans are more likely to travel to Latvia for business purposes. Opportunities to work as consultants in various fields have paid off economically for many second generation Latvian-Americans. Indeed, it appears that a new type of transnational seems to be emerging. As the business opportunities in Latvia have increased, there are more opportunities for Latvians to go to Latvia to work. The younger generation of Latvians have a common heritage, the language skills, and considerable knowledge of customs and traditions. The Latvian educational institutions established by their parents' generation (e.g., Saturday Schools and Latvian High School) have given the younger Latvians the language and cultural skills necessary to facilitate a move to Latvia for the purpose of finding employment. Employment aside, the schooling they received and the cultural immersion they experienced would seem to make them well suited for extended trips back to the homeland.

While both groups use the telephone and write letters to keep in touch with friends and relatives in Latvia, second generation Latvian-Americans are more likely to use current technology such as e-mail, the Internet, and fax machines. With regard to keeping current on what is happening in Latvia, both groups rely on newspapers,
telephone calls, letters, and word-of-mouth communication (from those who have been to Latvia recently) to varying degrees.

Second generation Latvian-Americans, while somewhat interested in the politics internal to Latvia, are less likely to be personally affected by them. What does concern them about Latvian politics is the impact that politics have on their relatives and friends.

Second generation Latvian-Americans often belong to the same Latvian organizations as their parents. A major difference between the two generations, however, is that while Latvian-Americans often belong to such organizations, they seldom hold positions of leadership (although there are exceptions—several young Latvians had taken leadership positions in the community). The consensus among them seemed to be that it was difficult to get younger people involved at the leadership level. To that end, there was the fear that many of the organizations would cease to exist after the original first generation Latvian-Americans are gone (such as the Latvian Studies Center did when the American Latvian Association cut its funding). It is ironic that one of the Latvian organizations which may prove most beneficial in years to come is the now defunct Latvian Studies Center. Contacts made between second generation Latvian-Americans and those Latvians who came to the United States to study appear intact. It is these contacts, and those made through the Summer Camp and High School, that will facilitate future transnationalism between the United States and Latvia.

In deference to Halla’s (1959) findings that those Latvian immigrants who became assimilated into Western culture would be more apt to succeed (e.g., economically), my findings are the opposite. It seems that the ties to Latvia and the strong sense of tradition among the Latvians have created a sense of community and
purpose that fosters success among its members. The first generation of Latvian-Americans has left its mark as to the benefits of hard work and dedication to a cause.

The continuation of Latvian heritage through organizations like the Long Lake Camp and the Latvian Heritage Center and Day Care Center will undoubtedly go a long way in the future toward continuing the transmission of Latvian culture to coming generations of Latvians in this area. These organizations, perhaps more than any others, will continue to help close the gap between Latvians in the United States and those in Latvia.

Technology and Borders

Through this study, and throughout the transnational literature, it becomes evident that national borders become less relevant as the technology of communications increases. Mass media, through television, radio, and newspapers, allow the Latvian-American to be current on what is happening not only in Latvia, but with Latvians in the United States. The Internet, faxes, and e-mail ensure that those who desire can have up-to-the-minute information about virtually anything pertaining to Latvia. All forms of communication serve to link the Latvian to Latvia, and vice versa. Most of the problems encountered by Latvians in the United States with communicating to relatives during the Soviet occupation are no longer there. No longer does the Latvian in the Southwest Michigan have to return in person to his/her home community to be able to actively participate and effect change in that community.
Transnational Relationships

The first generation Latvian-Americans are one of the last generations to remember what Latvia was like before communism. They are an older population, as are their counterparts in Latvia. As the Latvian generations continue in both Latvia and the United States, the commonalties between the two populations will diminish. The history that future generations of Latvians in the United States share will be different from that of those in Latvia. As was stated in the interviews, with mixed marriages and an apathy of the second generation Latvians with regards to actively participating in the decision making of Latvian organizations, who will carry on the transnational activities? It has been postulated by those in the Latvian community that the Summer Camp and Latvian High School will ensure the relationship between the two nations survives. But what happens when the present generation that runs these organizations is gone? It may be these same second generation Latvian-Americans, who, during the course of their business ventures in Latvia, help to keep the ties between the Latvia and the United States intact. It is these individuals who state they are able to look past the superficial change and know what is really going on. These individuals are more likely to establish meaningful relationships with individuals in Latvia, as they will have more in common than just heritage; they will have a commonness that is tangible and based in the present, not the past.

Classism

Transnationalism provides an opportunity to see how actions by the transmigrant have real implications in both the home and host communities. There appears to be an interesting phenomena taking place with regard to how the past and
current political activities of the first generation Latvian-Americans are affecting their relationship with both their home and host communities. During their time in the United States, the Latvians fought hard to help Latvia gain their independence. They actively participated in trying to help place political pressure, through lobbying the United States government, on the Soviet Union to grant Latvia its freedom. Once this was accomplished, they chose not to return home but instead remain in the United States. These Latvians have done very well for themselves and, indeed, their lives are now in the United States. Their good fortunes, coupled with the bad fortunes of those in Latvia, may have served to drive a wedge between the two populations. The Latvians in this community seem genuinely concerned that those in Latvia have a better life, one they may have had, had the Soviet Union not occupied their country. As the switch to a free market economy, nor the democratic process, has not gone as smoothly as hoped, there is resentment on the part of those in Latvia, directed towards their counterparts in the United States. As mentioned by several interview subjects, there appears to have developed an “us and them” mentality. A type of classism has formed between those who left before the Soviet occupation, and those who remained. Many in Latvia are struggling for survival on a daily basis. They are not interested in what those in the West have to say. On the home front, now that Latvia has achieved independence, what is there to bring the Latvian community together? The very fact that they achieved their goal in helping free Latvia may be the Latvian community’s undoing. They are currently trying to influence politics in both Latvia and the United States, and they still help out immensely with remittances, but, for the most part, they are bystanders in the change being affected in their home land.
Summary

The first generation Latvian-Americans are transnational. They have kept the ties to the home community alive through economic remittances, political activism, communication, culture and traditions, and the establishment of organizations within the United States community to help the Latvian community and preserve Latvian heritage. The dream of returning home ended early for many (indeed many do not want to return home permanently), but that did not stop them from working for a better future for Latvians everywhere. Likewise, the second generation Latvian-Americans interviewed exhibited many of the same transnational tendencies, though to varying degrees. This younger generation has the ability to become the new transnationals, and, to some degree, it is happening already in the form of temporary trips to Latvia for employment and business purposes.

Besides the discussions about the respective Latvian-American populations interviewed, it is interesting to note that it is the second generation of Latvian-Americans who have the potential to become the new group of transnational migrants. This is somewhat ironic, as this generation is more likely to be apathetic when it comes to keeping the ties to Latvia alive outside of the home environment.

The second generation Latvian-Americans will be an interesting group to follow in years to come, to see if and how they maintain the ties to Latvia, and the degree to which they use their heritage to take advantage of economic opportunities in Latvia.
Appendix A

Interview Protocol
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. General Questions:
   • Why did you come to the United States?
   • Why did you leave Latvia?
   • Under what conditions did you leave Latvia (political reasons, economic, etc.)?
   • What did you hope for when coming to the United States (expectations)?
   • How did you come to the United States (plane, boat, via other countries)?
   • Did you receive help when you arrived in the United States? Who gave you help? What sort of help did they give you?
   • In what ways do you help new Latvian arrivals to Southwest Michigan?
   • Do you plan on returning to Latvia?
     • If they planned on returning but did not, what were the circumstances that they stayed?

2. Social/Cultural:
   • What Latvian traditions have you kept while in the United States? Why?
   • What sort of interaction do you have with other Latvians in Southwest Michigan? Where does this interaction take place?
   • Is there a Latvian organization in Southwest Michigan where you can turn if you need help? What services are provided?
   • What American traditions have you incorporated into your life? When you return to Latvia do you share these American traditions? Which ones?

3. Communication:
   • How do you keep current on what is happening in Latvia; with your family members in Latvia; your home community?
   • Do you subscribe to Latvian newspapers? Which ones? How often does it come?
   • Are you able to receive Latvian television programs (SCOLA-Satellite Communication for Learning channel?) How often are they broadcast? Which ones do you watch?
   • Do you keep in contact through the telephone? Who they call (or who calls them?) How often? Roughly how much money do you spend monthly on phone call to Latvia?
   • Do you keep in contact through writing letters? How often? To whom?
   • Do you use email to communicate with relatives, friends, others in Latvia?
   • Do you use the computer to access information on Latvia? Which sites?
   • What do you do with the information you receive?
   • Do you communicate activities happening in the United States to your friends and relatives in Latvia? Do you know what they do with the information?
4. Economics:
- Do you own land in Latvia? Is business conducted on the land? What business? Who takes care of the property while you are away?
- Do you own a home or apartment in Latvia? What happens to it while you are away?
- Do you own a business in Latvia? What sort of business is it? Who manages the business?
- Why do you keep property, homes or a business in Latvia?
- Do you send money home to support friends, relatives, or others? Do you know what they use the money for?
- Do you provide financial support for any organizations in Latvia? What groups? Roughly how much money do you send? What are the purposes of the group(s)?
- Did you used to support groups in Latvia? What groups? What are the purposes of the group(s)?

5. Political:
- How do you stay abreast of politics in Latvia?
- How does what happens in Latvia affect how you live your life in the United States?
- Are you able to influence politics in Latvia from the United States? How? What topics? Why do you do this?
- What are your thoughts on the Latvian president visiting SW Michigan?
- Why are you concerned with Latvian politics?

6. Familial:
- What sort of family obligations do you have to your relatives in Latvia?
- How do you fulfill these obligations while in the UNITED STATES?
- Why do you feel it is necessary to fulfill your family obligations?
- What does your family gain from you being in the United States?
- What does your family's community gain?
- Is there pressure within the Latvian community to fulfill one's family obligations?

7. Organizational/Religion:
- Do you belong to any Latvian organizations in the Untied States? Which ones? Purpose of groups? Why do you belong?
- Do these groups provide services for individuals or groups in Latvia? What do they do?
- Is there a central meeting location for the Latvians in Southwest Michigan? Where? What takes place there? Why do people go there?

8. Closure:
- Is there anything I haven't asked you which you feel will aid this project?
- Do you know of anyone else who might like to share their story with me?

Thank you very much for your participation!
Appendix B

Demographic Questionnaire
**DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION**

*Answer only those questions you feel comfortable answering*

1. Gender  
   - Male  
   - Female

2. Age  
   - 18–24  
   - 25–34  
   - 35–44  
   - 45–54  
   - 55–64  
   - 65+

3. Birthplace: City/Village________________________ Country_____________________

4. Native language______________________________

5. Age when first learned English__________

6. Age when first came to the United States____

7. Years lived in the United States_____  

8. Years lived in Southwest Michigan_______

9. Marital Status__________________________

10. Highest level of education completed:  
    - Elementary (1st – 6th grade)_________  
    - Middle School (7th – 8th grade)______  
    - High School (9th – 12th grade)_____  
    - Trade school_________________________  
    - Some college_________________________  
    - 2-year college degree___________  
    - 4-year college degree___________  
    - Masters degree___________  
    - Doctoral degree___________

11. Religion__________________________________________

12. Last occupation in Latvia______________________________

13. Current or last occupation in the United States________________________

14. Other occupations held while in the United States________________________

15. How many times have you returned to Latvia since first coming to the United States_____
16. Please list those items which you take to Latvia for friends and relatives:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

17. Please list the items you bring back to the United States from Latvia:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

18. Do you have any relatives who have immigrated to the United States? If “Yes,” what is their relation to you? and where did they immigrate?

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

19. How do you keep in contact with your friends and family in Latvia?
   a. Telephone ______
   b. E-mail ______
   c. Fax ______
   d. Letters ______
   e. Other (please list) ____________________________

20. How do you keep track of what is going on in Latvia?
   a. Telephone ______
   b. E-mail ______
   c. Fax ______
   d. Letters ______
   e. Internet ______
   f. Short-wave radio ______
   g. Television ______
   h. Other ____________________________

21. On average how much money do you spend monthly on telephone calls to Latvia?
   a. Less than 15 dollars ______
   b. 16 – 30 dollars ______
   c. 31 – 45 dollars ______
   d. 46 – 60 dollars ______
   e. 61 – 75 dollars ______
   f. 76 dollars or more ______

22. Please list any Latvian organizations in the United States you belong to:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Thank You!
Appendix C

Human Subjects Institutional Review Board Approval
Date: 10 April 1997

To: Doug Davidson, Principal Investigator
   Andrew Dove, Student Investigator

From: Richard Wright, Chair

Re: HSIRB Project Number 97 04 01

This letter will serve as confirmation that your research project entitled "The Latvian Community in Southwestern Michigan: A Case Study in Translationalism" has been approved under the expedited category of review by the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board. The conditions and duration of this approval are specified in the Policies of Western Michigan University. You may now begin to implement the research as described in the application. Please note that you may only conduct this research with English-speaking subjects unless a Latvian translated consent document, demographic information survey, and interview protocol are submitted for HSIRB review.

Please note that you may only conduct this research exactly in the form it was approved. You must seek specific board approval for any changes in this project. You must also seek reapproval if the project extends beyond the termination date noted below. In addition if there are any unanticipated adverse reactions or unanticipated events associated with the conduct of this research, you should immediately suspend the project and contact the Chair of the HSIRB for consultation.

The Board wishes you success in the pursuit of your research goals.

Approval Termination: 7 April 1998
Appendix D

Informed Consent
I have been invited to participate in a research project entitled “The Latvian Community in Southwest Michigan: A Case Study in Transnationalism.” I understand that this research is intended to study how, and to what extent Latvian immigrants living in Southwest Michigan remain in contact with their home community in Latvia. I further understand that this project is Andrew Dove’s thesis project.

My consent to participate in this project indicates that I will be asked to attend one, one hour private session with the researcher. I will be asked to meet Andrew Dove for this session at a place that is both convenient and comfortable for me. The session will involve an interview during which I will be asked questions regarding how I have maintained contact with Latvia (to include questions about economics, technology, family, social/culture, politics, religion, and organizations I may belong to) during my time in Southwest Michigan. During this session I will also complete a survey to provide general information about myself such as age, level of education, and employment status.

As in all research, there may be unforeseen risks to the participant. If an accidental injury occurs, appropriate emergency measures will be taken, however, no compensation or treatment will be made available to me except as otherwise specified in this consent form.

One way in which I may benefit from this activity is having a chance to talk about my experiences to someone interested in what I have to say. I also understand that others who are migrants or immigrants may benefit from the knowledge that is gained from this research.

I understand that all the information collected from me is confidential. That means that my name will not appear on any papers on which this information is recorded. The forms will all be coded, and Andrew Dove will keep a separate master list with the names of participants and the corresponding code numbers. Once the data are collected and analyzed, the master list will be destroyed. All other forms will be retained in a locked file in the principal investigator’s office for no less than three years.

I understand that I may refuse to participate or quit at any time during the study without prejudice or penalty. If I have any questions or concerns about this study, I may contact either Dr. Doug Davidson at (616)387-5285, or Andrew Dove at (616)381-4172. I may also contact the Chair of Human Subjects Institutional Review Board at (616)387-8293 or the Vice President of Research at (616)387-8298 with any concerns that I have. My signature below indicates that I understand the purpose and requirements of the study and that I agree to participate.

Signature

Date
BIBLIOGRAPHY


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