



Edgars Chernevskis and family.

Photo courtesy of Andris Pešelis.

Chernevskis, Edgars (1926–1998)

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Edgars Chernevskis was a devout pastor who ministered and coached new pastors in the difficult context of the Soviet regime and collected data about early Adventist church history in Latvia.

Early Years

Edgars Černeviskis (Čerņevskis) was born on December 11, 1926, in the city of Riga, Latvia. His grandmother had become an Adventist in 1912. In 1931, his mother, Lina, joined the Adventist Church during a Bible lecture series and a year later his father, Geronims, also joined. At about the same time, his parents bought a small farm in Jaunsaule, south of Riga near the border of Lithuania.¹ A small group of Adventists belonging to the Bauska church regularly met on this farm as a small group. In 1940, Černeviskis was baptized into the Adventist church in the city of Riga. During the summer he lived on the farm, but returned to the city for school in the autumn.

In 1944, war came to Bauska, which the family survived. However, Černeviskis was drafted into the Soviet Red Army and sent to a military training camp in Russia. There, he remained faithful to the Bible and the Sabbath and was, consequently, sent to a filtration camp for re-education. Fortunately, he succeeded in keeping his Bible during those trials, although there were many situations when he could have lost it. Because Černeviskis refused to deny his faith, he was regularly punished by the administration and moved to several camps until his health failed and he was hospitalized. Černeviskis recognized God's providence in his life when in the hospital he met an injured soldier from his first military training camp. This soldier was the only one who survived from their original military unit during the battle for Königsberg. Černeviskis believed God spared one soldier's life to tell him that he would have died if he had compromised his faith.

Marriage and Later Years

After his return home from the army in 1954, Černeviskis was called to ministry as a pastor in the Adventist Church. In 1956, he married Velta Laudurga. They had a daughter and a son, Guna and Atis. During his ministry, Černeviskis served many churches in Latvia. Because of his faithfulness to the Bible, and especially the emphasis on Sabbath, the Soviet administration suspended his pastoral license several times. Interestingly, they always restored it in a bid to make Černeviskis turn away from Christianity; however, he maintained his Christian standards.²

As a result of his example, other Adventist church members stopped sending their children to school on the Sabbath day and attended church instead. This was a transgression in the eyes of the Soviet administration since schools were open on Saturdays. Moreover, the Soviets wanted to keep children and youth away from religion and did everything possible to remove religion from Soviet Union territory. To their disbelief, the dying Adventist church membership started to grow under the leadership of Černeviskis.³ Two churches he pastored late in his career are an example. At the time, the Soviet administration of religions and cults issued pastoral credentials and licenses for every denomination in the Soviet Union.⁴ The Soviet administration assigned Černeviskis to two dying churches—Liezere and Salace—in the expectation that they would soon close due to loss of membership. However, the Soviets were disappointed. As soon as Černeviskis arrived, the churches started

to grow.⁵

Chernevskis understood that these churches, located in the remote part of the province, could die because of small and mostly elderly membership. Consequently, he, together with Leonards Sharipovs, planned a courageous project to raise a new church building in the town of Salacgriva near the Salaca church. In 1971, they began to build though the purpose of the building project was kept secret. From the outside, it looked like they were building a residential building. With this camouflage, members could help.⁶

When the building was finished in 1977, they did not know how to get authorization from the Soviet administration to open the new church building and hold meetings. In that same year, the president of the General Conference, Robert Pierson, visited Riga and met with the Soviet administration. Nearly simultaneously, Chernevskis asked the Soviet administration for permission to open this new church building. Since the Soviet administration wanted to show the American guest that there was religious freedom in the Soviet Region, they gave the authorization for the opening. Thus, in 1979 the new building was dedicated. Chernevskis's enthusiasm moved people to reformation and revival in their spiritual lives. Even those, who despised him, respected his steadfastness and faithfulness. Edgars Chernevskis died in 1998 in Inchukalns, Latvia.⁷

Contribution

Edgars Chernevskis's courage and faith motivated others to be faithful in difficult times. He demonstrated that even small and hopeless churches may grow in a difficult setting. His most important contributions were his unofficial coaching of new pastors and enthusiasm for collecting historical information about Adventist churches and pastors. His research helped reconstruct historical events and development of the Adventist Church in Latvia in later years. He helped to lay the foundation for the Seventh-day Adventist archive in Latvia currently in the possession of his daughter, Guna Rimane.⁸

SOURCES

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NOTES

1. Edgars Černeviskis, *Autobiography*, unpublished manuscript in the private collection of the author.
2. Černeviskis, *Autobiography*; A. and L. Šaripovi, "Velta un Edgars Černeviski," *Kopējā ceļā*, February 1996.
3. Černeviskis, *Autobiography*; Andris Peselis, *Septiņās dienas adventistu Latvijas draudžu mēcēji*, 2013, unpublished manuscript in the private collection of the author.
4. E. Černeviskis, *Adventes kustība Latvijā* (Rīga: Patmos, 1998).
5. Černeviskis, *Autobiography*; Peselis, *Septiņās dienas adventistu Latvijas draudžu mēcēji*.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.

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