

# Baltic Conference

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The Baltic Conference was a church unit that comprised the provinces of the Baltic countries and the surrounding area in the Russian Empire from 1908 until c. 1920.

## Territory and Statistics

Period: 1908–1920?

Territory: The Governorates of Courland (1913–20?), Estonia (1908–1912), Livonia (1908–1911; only Lettonian-speaking part, excepting Riga and its suburbs, 1911–13), Kovno (1912–20?), Pskov (1908–1913), St. Petersburg (1908–1911), Suwałki (1914–20?), and Vitebsk (1912–13)

Membership: 859 (before World War I)

Churches: 7 (before World War I)<sup>1</sup>

## Organizational History

The territory of the Baltic Conference belonged previously to the Middle and North Russian Missions. For the origin of Adventist work in the territory, see articles on those church units and their predecessors.

By 1907, the growing work in Russia called for the formation of a separate Russian Union. This required a reorganization of the church units within Russian territory. It was in this context that the North Russian Mission was dissolved and the Baltic Conference was organized at a meeting in Riga on October 25, 1907.<sup>2</sup> The Baltic Conference comprised the Baltic Governorates of Esthonia, Livonia, and Courland (from the dissolved North Russian Mission) and the St. Petersburg and Pskov Governorates (cut off from the Middle Russian Mission).<sup>3</sup> Membership at the time was 393. Initial officers were President J. T. Böttcher, Secretary J. Schneider, Treasurer E. Fenner, and executive committee members J. Sprohge, J. Teesneek, J. Hahn, and J. Bitsch.<sup>4</sup> The church unit began operation at the beginning of 1908.<sup>5</sup>

At the start of 1911, Riga “and its suburbs” was excluded from the Baltic Conference when the city became the territory for the Russian Union District.<sup>6</sup>

At the meeting of the Baltic Conference in St. Petersburg, January 25–27, 1912, it was decided to divide the church unit into the Baltic Conference and Neva Conference.<sup>7</sup> The one that retained the old name comprised the Governorates of Courland, Pskov, and the Lettonian part<sup>8</sup> of Livonia (excluding Riga), as well as the Governorates of Kovno (from the West Russian Mission) and Vitebsk (from the Middle Russian Mission)<sup>9</sup> It lost the Governorates of Estonia and St. Petersburg, as well as the Estonian-speaking part of Livonia to Neva Conference.<sup>10</sup>

By 1913, it had become untenable to administrate the work in the immense Russian Empire as one union. At the European Division Council at Budapest, beginning October 30, it was decided to divide the Russian Union into the East and West Russian Unions.<sup>11</sup> The Baltic Conference became part of the West Russian Union when the union began operation at the start of 1914.<sup>12</sup>

Another twofold division of the Baltic Conference took effect in 1914 when the Baltic and Duena Conferences started operating. The Baltic Conference comprised the Governorates of Courland, Kovno, and Suwałki (the last one annexed from the Polish Mission).<sup>13</sup> It lost the Governorates of Pskov and Vitebsk, as well as its part of Livonia over to the Duena Conference.<sup>14</sup>

With World War I, the believers in the Baltics found themselves on the Eastern Front, and subsequently in the midst of the Baltic Independence Wars. General meetings ceased for several years, in Estonia from 1917, and in Latvia even earlier.<sup>15</sup> The conditions of war echo through even the dry statistics of the *Yearbook*. In 1915, the conference is first listed with an address in the *Yearbook*, Post Box 982 in Riga.<sup>16</sup> The address then continued to change, moving inland away from the front: In 1916, it was Post Box 14, Minsk,<sup>17</sup> and in 1917 it was Post Box 2, Post Office Birsha, "Excelsior," Saratov.<sup>18</sup> From 1918 to 1921, there are no reports from Russia in the *Yearbook*.

As the Baltic countries became independent, the church organization of the area adopted accordingly. The Estonian and Latvian Conferences and the Lithuanian Mission were organized in 1920 and became part of the Scandinavian Union.<sup>19</sup> The Suwałki Governorate apparently became part of a Russian church unit.

## List of Presidents

J. T. Böttcher, 1908<sup>20</sup>–10; J. Sprohge, 1911–12; J. T. Böttcher, 1913; J. Schneider, 1914–17; church unit not listed from 1918.

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### SOURCES

*Annual Statistical Report*. Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1915.

Brandt, P. "Ausschuß-Sitzung der Baltischen Vereinigung." *Zions-Wächter*, March 18, 1912.

Christian, Louis H. "The Baltic Provinces," *ARH*, March 3, 1921.

Conradi, Ludwig R. "European Division Council in Budapest." *ARH*, December 18, 1913.

Conradi, Ludwig R. "New Developments in Eastern Europe." *ARH*, July 4, 1912.

Conradi, Ludwig R. "Reise-Erfahrungen." *Zions-Wächter*, December 2, 1907.

*Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook*. Various years. <https://www.adventistyearbook.org/>.

Sprohge, Joh. "Die erste Versammlung der Baltischen Vereinigung." *Zions-Wächter*, December 2, 1907.

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## NOTES

1. For period and territory, see the present article. For other statistics, see *Annual Statistical Report* (Washington, D.C.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1915), 6.
2. On the meeting, see Ludwig R. Conradi, "Reise-Erfahrungen," *Zions-Wächter*, December 2, 1907, 394; Joh. Sprohge, "Die erste Versammlung der Baltischen Vereinigung," *Zions-Wächter*, December 2, 1907, 400–401.
3. Joh. Sprohge, "Die erste Versammlung der Baltischen Vereinigung," *Zions-Wächter*, December 2, 1907, 400–401; "Baltic Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1908), 111; "Middle Russian Mission" and "North Russian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1907), 83.
4. For initial members and officers, see Joh. Sprohge, "Die erste Versammlung der Baltischen Vereinigung," *Zions-Wächter*, December 2, 1907, 401.
5. Joh. Sprohge, "Die erste Versammlung der Baltischen Vereinigung," *Zions-Wächter*, December 2, 1907, 401.
6. "Russian Union District," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1911), 106.
7. P. Brandt, "Ausschuß-Sitzung der Baltischen Vereinigung," *Zions-Wächter*, March 18, 1912, 129; Ludwig R. Conradi, "New Developments in Eastern Europe," *ARH*, July 4, 1912, 11–12.
8. Before the division of the Baltic Conference into two conferences, the territory was described as "the Baltic Provinces (Estonia, Livonia, Courland)." "Baltic Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1908), 111. After the division into the Baltic and Neva Conferences, "letton. Livonia" belonged to the former and "Estonian-speaking Livonia" to the latter. "Baltic Conference" and "Neva Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1913), 110–11. The Baltic description then changed to "Letton, Livonia" in 1914. "Baltic Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1914), 111.
9. "Baltic Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1913), 110; "Middle Russian Mission" and "West Russian Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1912), 117.

10. "Neva Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1913), 110–11.
11. Ludwig R. Conradi, "European Division Council in Budapest," *ARH*, December 18, 1913, 12.
12. "Baltic Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1914), 111.
13. "Baltic Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1915), 120; "Polish Mission," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1914), 112.
14. The description of Livonia in the Baltic Conference was somewhat unclear, as has been mentioned in a previous footnote. The Livonian territory of the Duena Conference is described as the "Districts of Riga, Wenden, Walk, Wolmar." It is unclear whether that equates or overlaps partially with the formerly described "Letton, Livonia" or "letton. Livonia." "Duena Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1915), 121.
15. Louis H. Christian, "The Baltic Provinces," *ARH*, March 3, 1921, 12.
16. "Baltic Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1915), 120.
17. "Baltic Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1916), 122.
18. "Baltic Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1917), 130.
19. Louis H. Christian, "The Baltic Provinces," *ARH*, March 3, 1921, 12–13. The Estonian Conference appears in the *Yearbook* in 1921, the Latvian Conference in 1922, and the Lithuanian Mission Field in 1921 (then in the East German Union, the year after in the Scandinavian Union). "Esthonian Conference" and "Lithuanian Mission Field," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1921), 96, 90; "Lettonian Conference," *Seventh-day Adventist Yearbook* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald, 1922), 99.
20. Joh. Sprohge, "Die erste Versammlung der Baltischen Vereinigung," *Zions-Wächter*, December 2, 1907, 400–401.

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