

Pre-Communist History

Latvian history began around 9000 BC when Baltic people settled on the coastline of Latvia. Later came the medieval period, where Latvia more assimilated with European culture. German crusaders came to Latvia to convert the people to Catholicism. The Livonians ruled Latvia for most of its history until they collapsed and Latvia came under Lithuanian and Polish rule in the 16th century. During these times of change, Latvia adopted Lutheranism as its main religion. In 1772, Latvia was incorporated into Russia, and Latvian peasants and workers operated much the same as Russian ones did. The land of Latvia was devastated by battles in World War I. Soon after, the Russian Revolution of 1917 happened, overturning the government in control of Latvia. Latvia declared its independence in 1918, winning its war of independence against the Germans. In 1934 there was a peaceful coup that established a national dictatorship run by Karlis Ulmanis, which lasted until 1940. Once again in World War II Latvian land was used as a battleground for German and Soviet fighting. This time, Latvia was attempted to be taken over by both the Nazis and the Soviets during their non-aggression pact. In 1944, the USSR defeated the Germans in Latvia and conscripted the Latvian soldiers into their army. Soon after, the Soviets took over Latvia and the Russians began to reinstate the Soviet system. The pre-communist identity of Latvia was important to its resurgence after the fall of the Soviet Union.