

# Lithuania: Jewish Family History Research Guide

## Brief History

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Lithuania and Poland formed a commonwealth, with a joint sovereign and parliament, but separate administrations. Following the third partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth in 1795, the commonwealth lost lands in the west to Prussia and in the east to Russia. What remained became the Kingdom of Poland. During World War I, Lithuanian lands came under German occupation. After the armistice of 1918, the Soviet army occupied Lithuanian lands. By 1921, Lithuania had become an independent nation, with Vilna and other areas claimed by both Lithuania and Poland and under constant dispute. In World War II, Lithuania was first occupied by the Soviet Union, and then, in 1941, by Germany. By 1944 most of Lithuania had been reoccupied by the Soviet Union. Lithuania remained under the Soviet sphere until 1991, when it became an independent nation.

## Finding Your Ancestral Town

Dov Levin's *The Litvaks: A Short History of the Jews in Lithuania* (Yad Vashem, 2000) includes an appendix of Jewish communities and localities in inter-war Lithuania, listing the Lithuanian and Yiddish town names.

**REF DS 135 .E81 L5813**

Once you have identified the name of your ancestral town, you can locate it on the map with the following sources. It is also very helpful to identify the province in which your ancestral town is located, using historical atlases and/or websites.

Mokotoff, Gary and Sallyann Amdur Sack with Alexander Sharon. *Where Once We Walked—Revised Edition: A Guide to the Jewish Communities Destroyed in the Holocaust* (Avotaynu, 2002). This gazetteer lists towns according to variant spellings and provides the map coordinates of the town, as well as an estimate of the pre-WWII Jewish population.

**Genealogy Institute DS 135 .E83 M65 2002**

*ShtetlSeeker Database* ([www.jewishgen.org/ShtetlSeeker/](http://www.jewishgen.org/ShtetlSeeker/)). Allows you to search for towns using either the exact spelling or the Daitch-Mokotoff Soundex. Soundex searches find similar sounding names with variant spellings. Links on the database connect each town name to MapQuest.com, where the town location is identified with a red star on the map.

## Vital Records

### Web Resources

To identify what records from your town have survived, and where they are located, use the Routes to Roots Foundation database of genealogical records for towns in Belarus, Lithuania, Moldova, Poland, and Ukraine.

**[www.rtrfoundation.org](http://www.rtrfoundation.org)**

The website of the Litvak SIG, a special interest group of researchers with roots in Lithuania, includes several helpful features for locating vital records. The All Lithuania Database (ALD) incorporates data from many different sources and contains the largest number of Lithuanian Jewish records on the Internet. Records indexed include census lists, voter lists, and vital records. A search of this database can help you identify records to request from the Lithuanian archives or other sources. The Litvak SIG FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions) provide detailed advice about how to access records from Lithuanian Archives.

**[www.Jewishgen.org/Litvak](http://www.Jewishgen.org/Litvak)**

## Lithuanian Archives

The main source of vital records for the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries is the Lithuanian State Historical Archives, Gerosios Vilties 10, Vilnius LT-2009, Lithuania. Tel. (370-2) 23 74 84. Fax (370-2) 23 76 12. This repository contains pre-1915 vital records and some revision lists (census records). Research may be requested for a fee by writing, in English. The response will be in English. Several other Lithuanian archives contain further records—see the Litvak SIG FAQ's for addresses and instructions.

Rhode, Harold, and Sallyann Sack. *Jewish Vital Records, Revision Lists and Other Jewish Holdings in the Lithuanian Archives*. Avotaynu, 1996.

**Genealogy Institute CS 879.6 R48**

## **Family History Library (FHL) of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (LDS)**

The Family History Library of the Church of Latter-day Saints has microfilmed number of Lithuanian records. To identify the relevant microfilms, do a “Place Search” in the Family History Library Online Catalog <https://familysearch.org/>, first using the town name, and then using the province (gubernia) name. For a list of microfilms on long-term loan at the Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute, see [www.jgsny.org/microfiche.htm](http://www.jgsny.org/microfiche.htm). Additional films are available through our short-term loan program, or at any LDS Family History Center (FHC).

## **Sources at the Center for Jewish History**

The list below does not include all the relevant memoirs, historical works, and photographs available at CJH. To locate further resources, consult CJH’s online catalog at <http://search.cjh.org>.

*1897 Census of the Jews of Lithuania* (microfiche). **Genealogy Institute**

Greenbaum, Masha. *The Jews of Lithuania: A History of a Remarkable Community 1316-1945* Gefen, 1995.

**Genealogy Institute DS 135 .L5 G73**

*Lithuanian Jewish Communities*: Records 1844-1940, mostly 1919-1926. Records of communities outside Vilna. Miscellaneous communal records, including *pinkasim* (registers) of the communities, societies, and burial societies (mainly Kovno). Inventory in English and Yiddish.

**YIVO Archives RG 2**

*Rabbinical School and Teachers’ Seminary, Vilna*: Records, 1847-1914. School records, 1847-1873, include lists of students, teachers, and officials; diplomas of teachers and students; teachers examination lists. Teachers’ Seminary records include teachers’ record books, lists of students, graduation certificates. Inventory in English and Yiddish.

**YIVO Archives RG 24**

Rosin, Josef. *Preserving Our Litvak Heritage*. JewishGen, 2005.

**Genealogy Institute DS 135 .L5 R67 2005**

Schoenberg, Nancy. *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*. NY: Garland, 1991.

**REF DS 135 R93 L556.**

Spector, Shmuel and Bracha Freudlich, eds. *Lost Jewish Worlds: The Communities of Grodno, Lida, Olkienki*. Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1996.

**YIVO /89603**

*Vilna Jewish Community Council*: Records 1800-1940. Incomplete records of the Kehillah, including list of taxpayers (1800-1844); lists of taxpayers and materials from the Hevra Kadisha (1844-1919); and lists of candidates in Kehillah elections (1919-1940), vital records (birth, death, and marriage certificates) for 1909-1930, and lists of Jews in Vilna (1925, 1937). Inventory in English and Yiddish. These records are currently being recatalogued—permission from an archivist must be obtained before records can be accessed. Contact the YIVO Archives at (212) 246-6080.

**YIVO Archives RG 10**

Yizkor Books: Yizkor (memorial) books provide the history of Jewish communities destroyed or ravaged by the Holocaust. Most include photos and biographical articles, and many have name lists of those deported and killed. **YIVO Library** has a large collection of Yizkor books, including some from towns in Lithuania. Using the CJH online catalog’s Advanced Search, select YIVO (Repository) and Yizkor (Special Collection), and then type in the town name.