

YIVO Archives: Family History Research Guide

YIVO

Founded in 1925 in Vilna, Poland as the Yiddish Scientific Institute and headquartered in New York since 1940, YIVO is devoted to the history, society, and culture of Ashkenazic Jewry, and the influence of that culture as it has developed in the Americas. As the only pre-Holocaust scholarly institution to transfer its mission to the United States, YIVO is the preeminent center for the study of East European Jewry and Yiddish language, literature, and folklore.

The YIVO Archives

The YIVO Archives holds collections of manuscripts (private papers), organizational files, photographs, films, videotapes, sound recordings, sheet music, posters, art works, and other artifacts pertaining to Ashkenazic Jewry. The major languages of the records in the YIVO Archives are Yiddish, English, Hebrew, Russian, Polish, French, and German. You may search for relevant material in CJH's online catalog at <http://search.cjh.org>. Printed finding aids to specific collections, many of which are currently available only in Yiddish, may be obtained in the Reading Room. Some of the English-language finding aids are also available online at <http://www.cjh.org/p/93>.

Record Types

The list below is not comprehensive, but is an overview of the types of records held by the YIVO Archives that can be relevant to family history researchers. Note: The YIVO Archives does not have ship passenger lists or US census records, and has relatively few birth, marriage, and death records from a limited number of European towns.

Hometown Organizations (Landsmanshaftn)

More than 1000 collections contain records of societies formed by Jewish immigrants to the US who came from the same villages, towns, or regions in Central and Eastern Europe. Record types include minutes of meetings, membership records, burial records, and programs from special events. For example:

- First Przemysler Sick Benefit Society, **RG 932** Records from 1906-1965 include minutes, cemetery materials, membership and financial records, and a memorial book; founded in 1889 by immigrants from Przemysl, Poland.
- Soroker Young Friends Benevolent and Educational League, **RG 831** Records from 1921-1975 include minutes and financial records of this association of immigrants from Soroki, Moldova.

Immigration Assistance Organizations

Within **RG 245**, YIVO has created numerous sub-groups relating to the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), the Jewish organization formed to help immigrants, and HICEM, the organization formed in Europe through a merger of HIAS and other immigrant aid groups from 1927 to 1945. For example:

- HIAS Ellis Island Bureau, **RG 245.2** Records from 1905-1923 include individual case files
- HIAS Records of Arrival, **RG 245.4.41** Records from 1909 to the 1970s include index cards, arranged by surname within the year and port of arrival, containing vital information about HIAS-assisted immigrants.
- Holocaust records: Several sub-groups contain substantial documentation of efforts to aid refugees during and after the Holocaust, including case files. For example: HICEM Main Office in Europe, **RG 245.5** (1935-1953); HICEM and HIAS Office in Lisbon, **RG 245.6** (1940-1951); HIAS European Office in Paris, **RG 245.7** (1945-1958); and HICEM Office in Prague, **RG 245.10** (1934-1940s).

Records of other refugee assistance organizations include:

- German Jewish Children's Aid, **RG 249** Records include thousands of case files, 1933-1953.
- American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC), **RG 335** Records include 1,500 adoption records from the AJDC War Orphans Bureau, **RG 335.1**, 1919-1923, and individual case files from the AJDC Personal Services Department, **RG 335.6**, 1946-1954.

For additional resources, please see our fact sheet on Holocaust Research at <http://cjh.org/p/60> and CJH's online Holocaust Bibliography at <http://holocaustresources.cjh.org/>.

Political and Cultural Organizations

Eastern European Jews and their descendants in the United States formed countless political and cultural organizations, some of which have donated their archives to YIVO. These may be useful if a relative was an active member of a particular group. For example:

- Workmen's Circle, **RG 575** Records from 1893-1972 cover national administrative offices and some local branches, including membership cards.
- Yidisher Artistn Fareyn/Jewish Actors Union (Warsaw), **RG 26** Records from 1919-1939 include meeting minutes, correspondence, and about 600 files on individual performers.

Jewish Communities

The YIVO Territorial Collection contains miscellaneous materials relating to Jewish life around the world, such as:

- Germany, **RG 116—Germany 1** Records dating from the 18th-20th centuries include family papers, government documents, and incomplete Jewish community records from Altona, Berlin, Breslau (Wroclaw, Poland), Frankfurt am Main, and several other towns, including registers and minute books.

The YIVO Archives also has scattered records of Jewish communities in Eastern Europe:

- Lithuanian Jewish Communities, **RG 2** Records of more than 100 Jewish communities from 1919-1926 include vital statistics and community council minutes, with extensive files on Kedainiai, Marijampole, Panevezys, Siauliai, Ukmerge, Vilkaviskis, and 7 other towns. Records from 1844-1940 include communal, burial society, and charitable society registers, mainly from Kaunas (Kovno).
- Personenstandarchiv Koblenz, **RG 242** Photocopies of confiscated Jewish records (1677-1938) include vital and cemetery records, community registers, and tax lists from such places as Berlin, Dessau, and Frankfurt an der Oder.
- Vilna Jewish Community Council, **RG 10** Incomplete records from 1800-1940 include taxpayer lists; birth, death, and marriage certificates from 1909-1930; and lists of Jews in Vilna in 1925 and 1937.

Genealogies, Personal Papers, and Family Circles

Many individuals and some family circles have donated their personal papers to the YIVO Archives, such as:

- Israel Cantor Family Society, **RG 1257** Contains a family tree and other materials from 1926-1988.
- Genealogy and Family History Collection, **RG 126** Includes papers of individuals and families, including some genealogical charts. About 370 family names are indexed.

Contact Information

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