

YIVO Library: 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 Library

The YIVO Library contains over 350,000 volumes, including works in Yiddish, Hebrew, Russian, English, French, German, and other languages. The library's collection encompasses the history and culture of East European Jewry before World War II, American Jewish history with a focus on immigration and acculturation, and the Holocaust. For family historians, the YIVO library possesses rich resources for learning about towns and individuals. You may search the Center for Jewish History's online catalog by author, title, or subject (such as a town name) at <http://search.cjh.org>.

For additional resources on tracing families during the Holocaust era, please see our Holocaust Research Guide at www.cjh.org/pdfs/Holocaust.pdf.

Towns

Yizkor Books

Yizkor books are memorial books that commemorate Eastern European Jewish communities. Most were created by *landsmanshaftn* (societies of immigrants from the same town) after the Holocaust, and are written in Hebrew or Yiddish. They often list families and individuals, and contain vivid descriptions of the town and its Jewish community. You may consult a current list of the many Yizkor books in YIVO's collection in the Reading Room or Genealogy Institute, or use one of these other references:

Bibliography of Eastern European Yizkor (Memorial) Books with Call Numbers for Five Judaica Libraries in New York. Appendix B of *Genealogical Resources in New York*, edited by Estelle M. Guzik (Jewish Genealogical Society, 2003)
CGI Z 5313 .U6 N524 2003

JewishGenYizkor Book Project. Web site with a database of Yizkor books, showing the libraries that possess each book.
www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor.

Other Sources

- YIVO's reference collection includes gazetteers for many Eastern European countries, and historical atlases that explain the many border changes that have occurred in Eastern Europe.
- *Pinkas Ha-Kehillot*, a historical encyclopedia about Jewish communities published in Hebrew by Yad Vashem.
REF DS 135 .E81
- To find other books about a particular town, you may search CJH's online catalog at <http://catalog.cjh.org>. If you read Yiddish or Hebrew, check the "Yiddish author/title" card catalog and/or the "Hebrew author/title" card catalog under the town name.

Individuals

In addition to the biographical dictionaries and books by and about rabbis listed below, the YIVO Library has many memoirs, autobiographies, biographies, and family histories. Until the transition to online cataloging is complete, you should also check the "Roman alphabet author/title" card catalog and the "Library of Congress subject" card catalog under

the surname of the individual or family in which you are interested. If you read Yiddish or Hebrew, check the “Yiddish author/title” catalog and/or the “Hebrew author/title” catalog under the surname.

Rabbis

YIVO has a large collection of rabbinical manuscripts in Hebrew, some of which date back to the 16th century. These manuscripts are usually responsas and religious texts rather than genealogies, but some do contain genealogical information. To find a rabbinical manuscript, check the “Rabbinics” card catalog under the author or title. For additional resources, please see our fact sheet on Rabbis.

Biographical Dictionaries

The following books contain biographical information about individuals who were prominent in political movements, occupations, and culture.

Herts, Jacob Sholem (ed.). *Doyres Bundistn*. Nyu York: Unzer Tsayt Farlag, 1956-1968. Profiles of activists involved in the Jewish Labor Bund.

3/47591

Jeshurin, Ephim H. (ed.). *Arbeter Ring boyer un tuer*. Nyu York: Arbeter Ring boyer un tuer komitet, 1962. Profiles of founders and leading activists in the Workmen’s Circle.

REF HD 7126 .W7

Kagan, Berl. *Leksikon fun yidish-shraybers*. New York: Rayah Ilman, 1986. A dictionary of Yiddish writers.

REF PJ 5121 .K3

Niger, Sh. and Shatzky, Jacob (eds.) *Leksikon fun der nayer Yidisher literatur*. Nyu-York: Alveltlekher Yidishn Kultur Kongres, 1956-1981. A dictionary of Yiddish writers.

REF PJ 5121 .L4

Reisen, Z. *Leksikon fun Yidisher literatur, prese, un filologye*. Vilne: B. Kletskin, 1926-30. A dictionary of Yiddish writers and scholars.

REF PJ 5121 .R38

Shvaytser, Shelomoh (compiled and ed.). *Shures Poyle-Tsi'en: portretn*. Tel-Aviv: Y. L. Perets, 1981. Biographical descriptions of Socialist-Zionist activists

REF DS 150 .L4 S39

Zylbercwaig, Zalman. *Leksikon fun yidishn teater*. New York: Hebrew Actors Union of America, 1931-1969. A dictionary of people who worked in Yiddish theater.

REF PN 3035 .Z9

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