

Lithuania: Jewish Family History Research Guide

Brief History

In the 16th 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

Once you have identified the name of your ancestral town, you can locate it on a map using the following sources. It is also very helpful to identify the district and province in which the town was located at the time your relatives lived there, as well as the current district and province, using historical atlases and/or the web site listed below.

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

REF DS 135 .E81 L5813

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

The JewishGen website contains three databases that may assist you in finding your ancestor's town: the Communities Database, the Gazetteer, and the Radius Search.

<http://www.jewishgen.org/Communities>

Primary Records

Lithuanian Archives

The main source of vital records for the 18th and 19th centuries is the Lithuanian State Historical Archives. 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.

Lithuanian State Historical Archives

Address: Gerosios Vilties 10

Vilnius LT-2009, Lithuania

Tel.: (370 5) 213 7482

Fax: (370 5) 213 7612

E-mail: istorijos.archyvas@lvia.lt

Several other Lithuanian archives contain additional records. To contact these archives or get further information on Lithuania's archival access policies and services, see <http://www.archyvai.lt/en/about-us.html>.

Rhode, Harold, and Sallyann Sack. *Jewish Vital Records, Revision Lists and Other Jewish Holdings in the Lithuanian Archives*. Avotaynu, 1996. Consult this book for further information about the holdings of the Lithuanian State Historical Archives.

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 a number of Lithuanian records. To identify the relevant microfilms, do a "Place Search" in the Family History Library Online Catalog, <https://familysearch.org/#form=catalog>, first using the town name, and then using the province (gubernia) name.

LDS microfilms can be ordered online for viewing at any LDS Family History Center including the Ackman & Ziff Family Genealogy Institute. The ordering website is <http://www.familysearch.org/films>. Further information and instructions on ordering microfilms for viewing at the Genealogy Institute can be found at <http://www.cjh.org/p/34#microloans>. Many LDS microfilms of Jewish interest are available at the Genealogy Institute on long-term loan. A list of these microfilms can be found at <http://www.jgsny.org/microfilms-at-cjh>. For an index of Lithuanian Jewish LDS microfilms by town, see <http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/FHLC/VilnaMicrofilmsIndex.htm>

The Family History Library has been digitizing their collections and, therefore, many records are already available on their site either image only, index only, or both image and index. To browse the digitized collections by country, visit <https://familysearch.org/search/collection/list>

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.

<http://www.rtrfoundation.org>

The website of the Litvak SIG, a special interest group of researchers of Jewish families of Lithuanian descent, 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 State Historical Archives or other sources.

<http://www.litvaksig.org>

JewishGen KehilaLinks, formerly "ShtetLinks," features web pages which contain information, photos, lists of resources, and much more about places where Jews lived in. There are several web sites for towns in Lithuania.

<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/Lithuania.html>

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. The JewishGen Yizkor Book Project website has a growing number of English translations of Yizkor books, a Bibliographic Database where you can find all the Yizkor books published on a particular place and which libraries possess each book, a Necrology Index where you can search for names within the lists of Holocaust martyrs of the translated books, and a Master Name Index where you can search for names within other portions of the translated books.*

<http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/>

* To locate Yizkor books available at the Center for Jewish History, see "Sources at the Center for Jewish History" below.

Genealogy Indexer has been digitizing historical directories and making them searchable and browsable on their website. Currently, the Lithuanian directories include: 1930, 1935, & 1938 Lithuania Telephone Directories, 1933 & 1937 Vilnius Business Directories, and 1937 & 1939 Wilno and Woj. Wilenskie Directories.

<http://genealogyindexer.org>

The Family History Museum has a permanent online exhibition “The Synagogues of Europe: Past and Present” featuring pre- and post-World War II postcard photographs of hundreds of European synagogues, many of which are no longer standing or are in a state of disrepair. This exhibition is organized by country and, within each country, by town, listed according to their modern names.

<http://www.museumoffamilyhistory.com/s/mfh-syn-europe.htm>

Sources at the Center for Jewish History (CJH)

Search CJH’s online catalog at **<http://search.cjh.org>** for general histories, yizkor books, memoirs, diaries, photographs, and other materials on the Jews of Lithuania. Below is a selection of resources available at CJH.

1897 Census of the Jews of Lithuania (microfiche).

Genealogy Institute Avotaynu’s Microfiche Box

Briedis, Laimonas. *Vilnius: city of strangers*. CEU Press; Baltos Lankos, c2009.

YIVO 000127410

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

Genealogy Institute DS 135 .L5 G73

Gustaitis, Rolandas. *Jews of the Kaisiadorys region of Lithuania*. Avotaynu, 2010.

Genealogy Institute DS135 .L52 K374413 2010

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. 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*. Garland, 1991.

REF DS 135 R93 L556

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

YIVO 00089603

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: **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 then type the town name in one field and Yizkor OR "Memorial Book" in the second field.