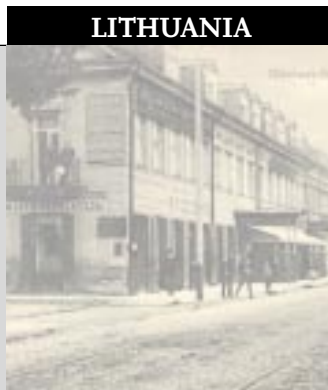


KAUNAS REGIONAL ARCHIVES

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The Archives in Kaunas was founded in 1921 to collect and preserve the records of the agencies of state and local administration which functioned on the territory of Lithuania in the nineteenth/beginning of the twentieth centuries. Today, the Kaunas Regional Archives is one of the largest in Lithuania and preserves more than 1,200,000 files (12,000 shelf-meters) organized into 2,320 fonds (record groups).

The holdings of the Kaunas Regional Archives consist of the records of three different periods:

1. Records of various administrative bodies of the former Kaunas gubernia (province) from 1843–1918 (records of Kaunas municipality and a few other institutions, from the beginning of the nineteenth century).

2. Records of local administration, schools, hospitals, private enterprises of Kaunas town and district from 1919–1944 .

3. Records of local institutions of the modern Kaunas region from 1945 until the present day.

The process of formation of the present archives' holdings was long and complicated: evacuation of the institutions of Kaunas gubernia with their records to various towns of Russia in 1915, lack of proper custody during WWI, the re-evacuation of the records in the 1920s and poor storage conditions during various periods caused much damage to the records. The archives of some institutions were destroyed completely, while for others, only fragmentary files remained.

In the holdings of the Kaunas Regional Archives, there are no birth, marriage and death registers, no records of the Jewish communities, Jewish religious, social and cultural organizations. Since 1995, when the archives began receiving requests for genealogical research, we have tried to determine how the life of the Jewish communities and individuals was reflected in the records of the administrative bodies we have, and thus find sources of genealogical information. Together, with the Jewish genealogical organization LitvakSIG, a "Catalog of the Jewish Holdings of the Kaunas Regional Archives" was prepared in 1998 (available online at <http://www.jewishgen.org/litvak/kaunasix.htm>) with detailed descriptions of the sources.

The holdings of the archives for different periods cover different territory.

The most important for genealogists are the records of the former Kaunas gubernia. It was

formed in 1843 from the northern and western districts (uezd) of Vilnius gubernia and consisted of seven districts named after their central towns – Kaunas, Panevezys, Raseiniai, Telsiai, Siauliai, Ukmerge and Zarasai (Novoaleksandrovsk). We have the records of a number of central (Kaunas Gubernia Administration, Chancellory of Kaunas Governor, Kaunas Gubernia Treasury) and local (municipalities, town dwellers administrations of various towns, police, postal savings banks), institutions which functioned on this territory. In the records of these institutions dealing with administration, taxation and conscription matters, the Jewish population is often treated as a separate group. In 1843, when Kaunas gubernia was formed, the Jews were administered by *kahals* (the term is used in the meaning of the administrative body of the Jewish community); in 1844, *kahals* were abolished and the administration of the Jewish population was entrusted to local municipalities, under the supervision of the gubernia administration; they were obliged to keep family lists, alphabetical lists of heads of households, lists of army recruitment districts, copies of revision lists and various records concerning taxation, including lists of taxpayers.

The main sources of genealogical information for this period in this archive are revision and family lists, where all the members of each family were listed and their age indicated.



Examples of documents awaiting restoration in the Kaunas Regional Archives, 2000
 (photo: Miriam Weiner)

The earliest record of this type we have is the revision list of Kaunas Jewish community of 1816, the latest, family lists of various communities of 1908; family lists for separate groups of population are found also for 1914–1915. The number of these lists in our holdings is rather few.

In some cases, other categories of records also contain information about all the member of households and their age and are made in the form of family lists, i.e., merchants lists, craftsmen lists, various military records, lists of army draftees, lists of men avoiding conscription, but the format of these records may be different.

The most numerous records containing genealogical information in our archives are taxpayers lists. Besides the taxes common to all the taxpaying population of Russia, the Jews paid two kinds of specifically Jewish taxes : 1) candle tax (*svechnoy sbor*), a tax on Sabbath candles for the needs of Jewish education; 2) box tax (*korobochnyj sbor*), a tax on kosher meat spent for various needs of the Jewish communities and local administrations. The lists of taxpayers can be found for almost every community, but only for specific years: 1846, 1877, 1885, 1892, 1904, 1908 and 1912. These lists do not provide much information, only names of the heads of households, given and father's names and sometimes: occupation, number of family members, financial status of the family and place of residence. The lists of members of the community unable to

pay the taxes give the reason for it: age, year of death or moving, status of health may be indicated. The general records on taxation: estimates of income and expenditures of each community, correspondence regarding permission to use box tax money for various needs, provide much information about the social and economic life of the Jewish communities.

Similar to taxpayers lists are lists of electors of so-called state rabbi (*kazennyj ravin*) of each community (he was in charge of keeping vital records) and various municipal elections. The lists include heads of households over the age of 25 with their age indicated.

Quite valuable genealogical data from the late nineteenth/early twentieth centuries is supplied by postal savings bank records. To deposit money, one had to complete a certain form indicating not only surname, given and father's names, but also age or date and place of birth, place of residence and occupation.

The fonds of local municipalities and town dwellers administrations contain some records on the issuance of internal passports, needed if one intended to leave the permanent place of residence for a certain time, but these records exist only for a few towns and separate years.

For the period of 1919–1944, the Kaunas Regional Archives hold only the records of the town of Kaunas and Kaunas district. They contain genealogical information only on the residents



■ Nikolaus-Strasse in Kowno, c. 1919 (source: Miriam Weiner Archives)



View of the city, 1940 (Source: International News Photos)

of Kaunas and in some cases, a very small part of Kaunas district.

The main source of genealogical data for this period are records on the issuance of internal passports. In independent Lithuania, each citizen had to be issued an internal passport at the age of 17 and it was the main document of personal identification. The records of the passport department of Kaunas municipality contain records on the issuance of internal passports to Kaunas residents, including passport cards with photographs, applications, copies of birth and marriage certificates, affidavits and other documents.

Other records for the period of 1919–1940 also provide genealogical data: records on the owners of real estate, payment of business and real estate taxes, lists of army draftees and voter lists in elections. These records serve not only genealogists, but also help to establish one's right to Lithuanian citizenship and nationalized by the Soviet private property.

For the period of 1940–1944, the Kaunas Regional Archives have only the records for Kaunas municipality, which contain no information on the Kaunas ghetto and the Holocaust. The records for the period after 1945 are not used in genealogical research.

The holdings of Kaunas Regional Archives are large and the analysis of the fonds of administrative bodies constantly reveal new sources of information; not all of them can be enumerated and included into the catalog or database. Yet we hope that the inclusion of the records from the Kaunas Regional Archives into the first general publication of all the Jewish genealogical resources of Lithuanian archives will prove useful to the researchers of history of the Lithuanian Jewish community and genealogy.



Vitalija Gircyte graduated from Vilnius University in 1983 with a degree in History. She worked at the Kaunas Archives and was later a university lecturer before returning to the archives in 1994. Since 1995, she has been engaged primarily in genealogical research, answering requests, locating and cataloging possible new sources of genealogical information.