

**A Selected Overview of Documents in the  
Lithuanian State Historical Archives  
Pertaining to Jewish Institutions/Organizations**

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The Lithuanian State Historical Archives is the most important repository for the study of archive sources of the history and culture in Lithuania as well as the people who resided on its territory from time immemorial to the restoration of Lithuanian independence in 1918.

Not all documents relevant for research by historians and Jewish scientific organizations were preserved in the archives. Documents of different public institutions, as well as separate documents of those organizations and Jewish communities (the activities of which interested the authorities) were submitted to the state archives for storage. Small groups of documents set aside in the process of the operation of Jewish institutions and organizations that were under the authority of state bodies are stored in the archives, including:

- **Fond No. 570**

**“Jewish Teachers’ Institute of Vilnius”**

(134 storage units dated 1871–1922)

Consists of circulars of the administrator of the school district of Vilnius, personal files (regarding the work of teachers, etc.), lists of students, files

regarding the opening of courses and classes, reports, examination lists, school graduation certificates and other certificates.

- **Fond No. 576**

**“P. I. Kagan’s Private Jewish School for Men of Vilnius”**

(10 storage units dated 1915)

Students’ written examinations on different courses.

- **Fond No. 577**

**“Rabbinical School of Vilnius, City of Vilnius”**

(86 storage units dated 1847–1901)

Consists of files relating to the following: the appointment of teachers, granting allowances to them and awarding them, dismissing them from work, circulars, official lists, inspection of the public school, reports of the rabbinical school, opening of the Jewish primary school and preparatory classes, certificates and certificates of students upon departure from the schools.



View of Vilnius, 2000 (photo credit: Miriam Weiner)

- **Fond No. 620**  
**“Jewish Kahal of Vilnius”**  
 (57 storage units dated 1764–1921)  
 Consists of registration books, certificates issued by the Kahal in order to obtain passports, registries of incoming and outgoing correspondence, file copies of outgoing correspondence, registration books and files regarding income and expenditure of monies, registration books of box dues, books on registration of Jews of Vilnius district, financial and court materials. The fond includes a sealed book of the Kahal (in Yiddish), dated 1806, Talmud and its interpretation).
- **Fond No. 747**  
**“Joint-Stock Company Hygienic Low-Cost Apartments for Jewish Residents”**  
 (2 storage units dated 1905–1906)  
 A report on the activities of the company and the Minutes of the company’s general meeting
- **Fond No. 1215**  
**“Board of the Jewish Community of Vilnius”**  
 (102 storage units dated 1912–1917)  
 Consists of reports on the income and expenditure of monies from different Jewish schools. The schedule has a reference-index with a list of schools and synagogues, the names of which are found in the files of the fond.
- **Fond No. 1344**  
**“The Maggids”**  
 Pinhas ben Juda Leib (1747–1823) a Rabbi and Preacher, (Shteinshneider); Gilel Noah (1829–1903), a genealogist and bibliographer; David ben Gilel (1862 –c. 1941), a writer and artist.  
 (2 storage units dated 1808–1941)  
 Consists of personal materials of the Maggid family; family list of Maggid Gilel ben Shloma.
- **Fond No. 1506**  
**“Vilnius Committee of Resettlement of Jews”**  
 (9 storage units dated 1808)  
 The documents of the fond were discovered in the course of the improvement of one of the schedules of Fond No. 447 “United Chamber of Criminal and Civil Court of Vilnius,” powers of attorney issued by Jewish communities to different persons regarding the collaboration with the above Committee. On December 9, 1804, an order was issued regarding the settlement of Jews which stated that all Jews were to be evicted from villages, coaching inns and taverns to be resettled in towns of provinces and districts and public towns by 1808. Due to the war, the resettlement was suspended, and on October 19, 1807, an order was issued ordering the establishment of committees (under the leadership of civil governors) in each province to speed up the resettlement. In 1808, attorneys

were elected in all Jewish communities to collaborate with the committee.

- Fonds consisting of vital records (birth, marriage, divorce and death) of different Jewish communities and towns:

**Fond No. 728** “Jewish Rabbinate of Vilnius, City of Vilnius”

**Fond No. 1226** “Rabbinate of Kaunas Province”

**Fond No. 1236** “Roman Catholic Diocese of Sejny, town of Sejny” (the fond includes vital record books of Jews from different towns in Suwalki Province)

**Fond No. 1108** “Jewish Communities in Suwalki Province”

**Fond No. 1014** “Gmina Boards of Administration in Augustow Province, from 1807; Suwalki Province” (it also includes Jewish birth registers from Suwalki Province).



Old synagogue in Wilno/Vilnius, early twentieth century  
 (credit: Polska Akademia Nauk Instytut Sztuki, Warsaw, Poland)

## ARCHIVE DOCUMENTS USED IN RESEARCHING JEWISH GENEALOGY

Documents stored in the Lithuanian State Historical Archives are an inexhaustible source for the history of Lithuanian Jewry. Researchers from throughout the world work in the Reading Room of the Archives. Recently, documents providing genealogical data became of great importance to many researchers as the interest in the past, the roots and the history of one's family grew enormously. Approximately forty percent (40%) of inquiries sent to the Archives worldwide are inquiries relating to Jewish genealogy.

In 1991, employees of the Archives began responding to inquiries related to genealogy. The number of genealogy-related inquiries is growing each year. In 1992, the Archives received 68 inquiries among which there were not only inquiries related to Jewish genealogy, but also inquiries related to other religious denominations, primarily catholic-related inquiries. In 1995, the Archives fulfilled 324 inquiries related to Jewish genealogy alone, and, subsequently in 1998, 387 inquiries. In 2000, 343 inquiries were fulfilled; the last of them was registered in June. On January 1, 2001 approximately 50 inquiries submitted in 2000 remained unfulfilled. During the past ten years, extensive practical experience was acquired as the system developed for fulfilling research inquiries. Unfortunately, because of time constraints of the employees, not all the documents valuable from the genealogical point of view stored in the Archives can be used in responding to research requests.

The following documentary sources are used by the Archives in fulfilling genealogical inquiries.

### 1. VITAL RECORD BOOKS

According to the Regulations on Jews dated April 13, 1835, rabbis were responsible for recording vital records in the Russian Empire. However, books of vital records were started several years later (the oldest of them relating to Vilnius dating from 1837). Books of vital records (the keeping and form of which was regulated by law) are the main and the most reliable primary source for researching genealogical data. Prior to January 1, 2000, vital record books in the archives for Jewish communities in Lithuania mostly dated from the second half of the nineteenth century to 1915, including books of vital records of separate Jewish communities residing on the territory which is now Belarus and at that time part of Vilnius Province. Jewish vital record books are held in five archive fonds which indicate the administrative separation of Lithuania into three provinces (Kaunas, Suwalki and Vilnius) that existed from the end of the eighteenth to the early twentieth century.

Vital record books registering births, marriages, divorces and deaths occurring in the former provinces of Vilnius and Kaunas were kept in synagogues following the form provided by the authorities, and they usually had entries in two languages, i.e., Hebrew and Russian. In Suwalki Province, vital record books were kept by the authorities in gmina boards of administration and registration was based upon the verbal information provided by a family member in the presence of witnesses, usually after the registration of a birth, marriage or death made earlier in a synagogue following the religious rites. Entries in these books were made in Polish and later (from the second half of the nineteenth century) in Russian. These

entries provide more information because they include the age of the parents, occupation of the head of the family and detailed information on the witnesses. Unfortunately, these documents for some of the Jewish communities for the time period mentioned above are incomplete. For example, only marriage registries dated 1873–1874 for the Jewish community of Radviliskis survived, as well as birth, marriage and death registries dated 1844–1845 for the Jewish community of Raseiniai; many such examples may be provided. Books of vital records of Jewish communities of entire regions (e.g., Novoalexandrovsk district and many towns of Suwalki Province) were not submitted to the archives for storage, and their destiny is not known. Most probably, these books were lost during wars, evacuations and re-evacuations.

In recent years, the collection of vital record books in Archives increased. The Archives received birth registries dated 1851–1864 for the Jewish community of



“New” synagogue on Zawalna Street, Wilna/Vilnius, c. 1893  
(credit: Polska Akademia Nauk Instytut Sztuki, Warsaw, Poland)

Jonava that had been stored in the regional Archives of Kaunas. Also, vital record books were received from the Departments of Vital Records of many towns of Lithuania. As a result, the collection of vital record books of Kaunas increased (the missing birth registries dated 1904 and 1915, marriage registries dated 1895–1914 and some of the other duplicates of books of vital records were received) as well vital record books for the town of Krakes (birth registries dated 1896–1912 and some other books).

Some of the vital record books prior to 1915 (e.g., books of vital records for the towns of Zeimelis and Linkuva dated 1881) were stored in the Lithuanian State Archives of Vital Records which did not deal with genealogy-related inquiries. This was a huge inconvenience not only for employees fulfilling inquiries relating to incomplete collections of our Archives, but it also prevented us from being able to create a more complete picture for the inquirer about his family members. From January 1, 2000, due a reorganization of the archival system, the Lithuanian State Archives of Vital Records became one of the departments of the Historical Archives, and the books of vital records prior to 1940 from different religious groups (including Jewish community documents) were transferred to our Archives. Now, we are able to research these books in response to genealogy-related inquiries. This new part of our collections includes books prior to 1915 as well as many vital records after 1915.

Some of the vital record books of Jewish communities for different Lithuanian towns (Lazdijai, Seirijai, Veisiejai, Alytus, Sakiai) of the former Suwalki Province are stored in the state archives of Suwalki, Poland. Citizens of the Lithuanian Republic faced difficulties if they wished to obtain certificates of a social-legislative nature based on vital record books. Several years ago, pursuant to an agreement concluded with the Board of Archives of the Republic of Poland, the Lithuania Historical Archives received microfilms of the foregoing vital record books. However, we do not use these microfilms for genealogical research. Usually, we inform the inquirers about the location of the original copies of documents and ask them to submit their inquiries to the archives in Suwalki. However, the researchers may use these microfilms in the Readers' Hall of our Archives. In addition, some files include extracts of vital records, i.e., some towns of Suwalki gubernia (Lazdijai, Marijampole, Seirijai, Sejny, Vilkaviskis, Zapyskis) and some towns of Kovno gubernia (Babtai, Kaunas, Raseiniai, Vandziogala, Vilijampole). Some files include the birth, marriage or death record for one person and sometimes we can find records about many people.

In addition to birth, marriage, divorce or death records, we may find information about the Jewish community that another family member belonged to and, consequently, the name of the town of origin. This is a very important factor for further search work. Jews were not characterized by a settled way of life; very often they migrated with their whole families, or family members got married and moved to another location and stayed there for many years belonging to a different

community. Therefore, we may expand our research to documents from a second Jewish community indicated by entries in the vital record books. Some entries in the vital record books provide us with information about the occupation of the head of the family. In earlier years, not all entries made in the vital record books of Jews residing in towns stated surnames. Consequently, search for the requested information is more difficult. It should be noted that Jews received surnames later and very often they were related to the place of their origin (Vilenskij, Keidanskij, Strashun), sometimes to the nature of their occupation (Muler, Shkolnik, Kantor, Sapozhnik, Portnoj) or to their patronymic (Joselevich, Shmuelevich, Orelevich).

The accuracy and completeness of the data entered into the vital record books depended first upon the rabbi who kept them. Therefore, in earlier books of Vilnius vital records, as well as some other towns of the provinces of Kaunas and Vilnius, the class of the parents (town-dweller, merchant) is not always stated, however the occupation of the head of the family (tailor, retired soldier, shoe-maker, bread trader, rabbi, etc.) is stated. It should be noted that often entries in the vital record books were forged. This was done in order to escape



■ Monument to the Vilna Gaon in Vilnius, 2000 (photo: Miriam Weiner)

recruit conscription, *e.g.*, in the course of the search for information about the Gershuni family of Vilnius Jews, it was discovered that one family member while registering the birth of his second son, recorded himself not as a town-dweller of Vilnius, but as a town-dweller of Vishnevo and stated his surname as Epshtein and not as Gershuni, while leaving his first name and patronymic as well as the first name and patronymic of his spouse the same.

In the course of research, often we have to face different variants of transcription of the first names and surnames of the same persons who are members of one and the same family, *e.g.*, the surname of Shapiro may be written as Shapira, Shapir, Sapira, etc. The name of Roza may be written as Reiza, Rouza; the name of Rochel, as Rochka, Rocha, Roche; Shimel, as Shimen, Shimon, Simon, Semion, and others. In birth registries, children of the same parents may be entered under different surnames, *e.g.*, Shanc and Shancer. Very often children received two names at birth, *i.e.*, Yenta-Reiza, Chaim-Josel. Later they had their own families, and here we may find interesting facts while studying the entries related to their marriage or the birth of their children. In the vital record books, only one of the names is used and very often without any sequence. Especially, many questions arise when this variation is used in the transcription of the patronymic of the parents while registering the birth of their children, *e.g.*, the baby's mother Chaja-Riva who is the daughter of Chaim-Abram may be recorded as Chaja Abramovna or Chaja bat Abram or Chaja Chaimovna or Chaja bat Chaim or Riva Abramovna or Riva bat Abram in the birth entries of her many children. However, in spite of the foregoing obstacles, it should be stressed again that the vital record books are still the most reliable source for genealogical search.

## II. POPULATION REGISTRATION DOCUMENTS, FAMILY LISTS AND FIRST GENERAL CENSUS OF THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

Population registration documents, family lists and census documents are also searched by the Archives in response to genealogy-related inquiries. Population registration documents called Revision lists (*Revizskije skazki*) is the census of the population including family lists. During the eighteenth-nineteenth centuries, regular registrations of the population were made in Russia. A total of ten principal Revisions were made in Russia. In 1795, Lithuania became part of the Russian Empire. During the period of 1795-1858, only six principal Revisions were made in Lithuania. In between principal Revisions as well as after the final principal Revision of 1858, supplemental registrations of the population were made. Principal Revision lists that registered all residents belonging to the class of taxpayers (and they formed the majority in towns) are the most complete and informative. Supplemental Revision lists provide information about families or family members who for some reason were not included in the principal Revisions (were absent or on the run, were deliberately or accidentally omitted by the registrar). As a rule, the Revision lists were made according to the status (merchants and town-dwellers). In the earlier Revision lists, families were registered according to trades/occupations: shoemakers, tailors, goldsmiths (jewelers), joiners, glaziers and furriers. In addition to relationship and age of the family members listed in the Revision lists, sometimes we can find additional information, *viz.* where the family arrived from, recruiting/army service; the removal of persons from the Jewish communities who



■ Holocaust memorial in the Ponary Forest, outside of Vilnius, 2000 (photo: Miriam Weiner)

adopted Christianity; the transfer to another Jewish community or to another class (e.g., to the class of farmers or merchants); the renumeration of Jews from other communities (the so-called transferring population registration documents); those who emigrated abroad; the removal from Revision lists in order to obtain an education: a Bachelor's Degree, a Degree of Assistant Pharmacist, etc. (most often such entries are found in rich merchant families).

The Revision lists are incomplete, as described above, since they registered only the families belonging to the class of taxpayers. Knowing the consequences of any registration (first of all, the conscription to the Tsarist army for the period of 25 years), the Jews did their best in order to avoid it or provided false information about their family members, viz. they registered one son instead of two by providing him with a double name (Chaim-Josel instead of Chaim and Josel), stated false ages, etc. The concealment of persons eligible for registration was a widespread phenomenon in Russia.



Holocaust memorial in the Ponary Forest, outside of Vilnius, 2000  
(photo: Miriam Weiner)

Revision lists of Jewish communities that existed in districts of the former provinces of Vilnius and Kaunas are stored in the Archives. The most complete is the collection of Revision lists of Vilnius Province, which also included lands within the current borders of Belarus. These lists included Jewish communities in the districts of Vilnius, Disna, Lida, Oshmiany and Svencionys. The collection of Revision lists of the former province of Kaunas is rather small and basically consists of supplemental Revision lists. A small number of principal Revision lists of this region survived including Revision lists of Vilkomir district (1858); Revision lists of Jewish communities in Siauliai district (1858) which, however, does not include the Jewish community of the city of Siauliai; Revision lists of Jewish communities of Raseiniai district (1858), including the Jewish community of the city of Raseiniai; Revision lists of some of the districts of the earlier periods. Revision lists of Kaunas Province are widely used in fulfilling genealogy-related inquiries since the vital record books for towns in many regions (Raseiniai, Novoalexandrovsk, Vilkomir and other districts) of Kaunas Province either survived in small numbers or were not submitted to the Archives at all.

From a chronological point of view, the Revision lists of earlier periods supplement vital record books of Jewish communities which are stored in the Archives. It should be noted that the earlier Revision lists do not include surnames, therefore the search for information among such documents depends upon the existence of sufficient information about the family and its members collected from other archive documents from a later period. These books without surnames include first names and patronymics, family relationship and at least the approximate age of the family members.

During the search for information among Revision lists, it should be noted that often the place of residence and the registration (registration to this or that Jewish community) of the family do not coincide. Revision lists provide information about families according to their registration and not according to their place of residence. For example, the Vaisbrod family resided in the city of Kaunas from the end of the 1850's. According to the vital record books for the Jewish community of Kaunas, we succeeded in finding many entries of birth, marriage and death for the members of this family; these entries show that the Vaisbrods were town-dwellers of Vilkomir (Ukmerge), i.e. they were registered to the Jewish community of Vilkomir. Understanding the principle of the construction of Revision lists, we continued the search not in Revision lists of the Jewish community of Kaunas, but in Revision lists of the Jewish community of Vilkomir, and, of course, the search was successful.

Also stored in the Archives are Family Lists of residents of some cities and towns, viz. town-dwellers and merchants of Vilnius and its suburbs of Snipiskes and Naujamiestis dated 1874–1875; Jewish town-dwellers of the towns of Birzai (1887); Joniskis of Vilnius District (1877); Panevezys (1908) and Eisiskes (1904). Family lists were compiled by town councils. Information taken from Revision lists formed the

basis of the lists and according to their form and contents, they were the continuation of these registration documents. Family lists were compiled first of all in order to register recruits for military service and its completion. Therefore, the lists include a separate column for information about male members of the family of conscription age. These lists provide much information in addition to principle information about family members, their family relationship and age on the year the lists were compiled. Additional information includes data on changes of the family composition (death of some members, marriage and birth of new children) that was added to the lists subsequent to when they were originally compiled.

In 1897, the first general census of the population of the Russian Empire was made during which registration lists were compiled. The distinguishing feature of this census was the fact that the entire population of the state was registered according to the place of residence or the location where they were at the moment of the registration, regardless of the place of their registration. Fond "Committee on General Census of Population of Vilnius and Kaunas Provinces" is stored in the Archives. It includes the population registration lists (regardless of their religion) from some towns and villages of Novoalexandrovsk, Vilkomir, Raseiniai, Kaunas and Panevezys districts of Kaunas Province as well as of Vilnius, Oshmiany and Svencionys districts of Vilnius Province. Documents from this fond have been thoroughly analyzed; information about Jewish families has been extracted and is utilized in responding to genealogy-related inquiries. No information about Jewish families was found in registration lists of Kaunas, Oshmiany and Svencionys districts. Only a small number of documents regarding the residents of small villages of these districts survived; however, generally, Jews lived in towns and cities. In the registration lists, we can find the address (the name of the street) where the family lived; surnames, first names and patronymics of the family members as well as gender and age, relationship of the head of the household, marital status, occupation or status, religion, native language, literacy, place of birth, place of registration and place of residence. Unfortunately, the archive collection of registration lists is just a small part of the documents that survived. Pursuant to a resolution of the Tsarist government, these registration lists were destroyed after the calculation was completed and the conclusions were drawn and it was only an accident that some of them survived. It should be noted that some Revision Lists were published at <http://www.jewishgen.org> (based upon material submitted by both private researchers and material obtained officially from the Archives, for 1895/1897).

Prior to 1905, the results of the first general census (following the established format and provided in tables) were published in separate notebooks in the provinces of the former Russian Empire. Generally, information about the described province is provided in the preface to each edition, including location, geographical characteristics, climatic conditions, short description of education and administrative structure. Next, statistical information follows including the number and

composition of residents based on the results of the 1897 census according to cities and districts; density of population in comparison with other provinces; number of emigrants; comparative numbers regarding the division of the population by gender, age, class and nationality; religion; size of private or leased lands; statistical data on foreign nationals, literacy of the population, occupation, auxiliary trades and the division by households. Notebooks with the census results provide statistical and demographic data, information about social and professional composition of the population. As a result, we can form a picture of the Jewish people residing in different regions of Tsarist Russia.

While working with genealogy-related inquiries, the Archives basically limits its work to the above mentioned documents. We understand that the genealogical search should include all sources stored in the Archives, including recruit/conscription lists; police records of registration; passport documents; lists of persons under surveillance; foreign nationals; lists of persons evicted from frontier territories and other documents. However, the Archives do not have the resources or staff for such extensive research relating to genealogy-related inquiries. For example, the Archives holds



■ In the old town in Vilnius, 2000 (photo: Miriam Weiner)

some recruit/conscription lists for Jews of the city of Vilna from the end of the nineteenth/beginning of the twentieth centuries. These lists include information about the conscripts (surname, first name, patronymic, age or date of birth) and these files also contain information about the members of their families stating their age and relationship.

Since the earlier Revision Lists do not include surnames, it is generally not worthwhile to search these lists. The only exception are those cases when research in the vital record books and registration lists of later periods provide such complete information about the family and its family members that there is a possibility to find its traces in documents that do not feature surnames. For example, during the research process for information about the Griliches family of town-dwellers and merchants of Vilnius, we researched vital record books for 1837–1915 and Revision Lists (1800;1816; 1818;1834;1850) for the Jewish community of Vilnius. As a result, many documents were discovered providing extensive information about the family and it was then possible and productive to search the 1795 Revision Lists (no surnames).

Recently, many researchers/genealogists focus their attention on the analysis of the census taken during the period of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania, kahals of different locations in Lithuania during the second half of the eighteenth century (1765, 1784) that are stored in the collection of the Archives titled “Collection Early Records Books.” We think that these early census documents are very important for studying statistics and demography. However, it is difficult to say to what extent they may supplement the genealogical data on

individual families, as they state neither surnames, age nor occupation of the registered persons. They can only provide us with information about the first names, patronymics and family relationship.

The Archives is a public institution and the staff and activities are restricted by certain limits. In addition to responding to genealogical inquiries, the employees also perform their archive-related duties. These include the preservation of documents, registration and modernization of scientific and informational apparatus, fulfillment of inquiries of social-legislative nature and other archive-related work. As a result of the increasing number of requests for genealogical research that we receive from all of the world, we have had to limit our research to the archival sources listed above (primarily vital record books and Revision Lists/Family Lists).

The length of time necessary to fulfill a genealogical research request is between six and nine months from the time the inquiry is received at the Archives. The result of the search depends upon the accuracy of the information provided by the inquirer (most important: locations where the family resided or were registered) and, of course, upon the availability of the archive documents.

### III. DOCUMENTS RELATED TO JEWISH GENEALOGY IN FONDS OF PUBLIC INSTITUTIONS OF SUWALKI PROVINCE

In the Archive fonds, there are large quantities of documents relating to various aspects of history for Jewish institutions, organizations and societies, as well as private individuals,



Local view in Wilna/Vilnius, c. 1920 (source: Miriam Weiner Archives)

including documents of a genealogical nature. Representatives of the Jewish population, various Jewish organizations, societies and communities, as part of the state and obeying its laws, inevitably had to face public institutions when they addressed the authorities regarding any issue. The researcher who is familiar with the history of public institutions and functions of different organizations may more easily perform his task and find the required documentary materials in the fonds of various archives. Different issues pertaining to Jewish history, such as the beginning of printing of Jewish books in Lithuania, censorship of Jewish publications, history and construction of synagogues and Jewish religious trends that existed at that time were analyzed using the documents of our Archives.

I would like to devote special attention to the documents of the Lithuanian territory that comprised part of the province of Suwalki. Recently, significant time has been expended by archivists in analyzing this material. As a result of genealogy research, many documents were discovered that included priceless information related to genealogy. Similar documents may also be found in fonds of the former public institutions of the provinces of Vilnius and Kaunas.

The province of Suwalki which was part of the Governorship-General of Warsaw (Poland) also included ethnic Lithuanian lands, the so-called Uznemune. The archival collection of vital

record books for towns in the former Suwalki Province is rather incomplete and this makes the search related to genealogical inquiries much more difficult. Parts of the fonds of public institutions of this region are stored in the Archives and here you may find genealogical information. Unfortunately, the Archives do not have any possibility (while working with individual inquiries) to study schedules and files of the fonds of public institutions of Suwalki Province and collect tiny bits of the necessary information which may have survived in the documents. The fulfilment of one such inquiry would require months and months of work. This is a monumental task and experience shows that the results may be nil.

In 1994, we began the methodical study of the fonds of Suwalki province with the aim to select documents related to Jewish genealogy and the history of the Jewish people. The results of genealogical studies are periodically published in the genealogy-related magazine "LANDSMEN" of the Suwalki-Lomza group (Washington D.C.). As an example of this work, I would like to briefly describe the search principles and types of the discovered documents.

In the course of the research, the titles of the files are reviewed and those files are noted which are thought to contain information of interest. Then, with the same goal in mind, all selected files are looked through, page by page. The difficulty

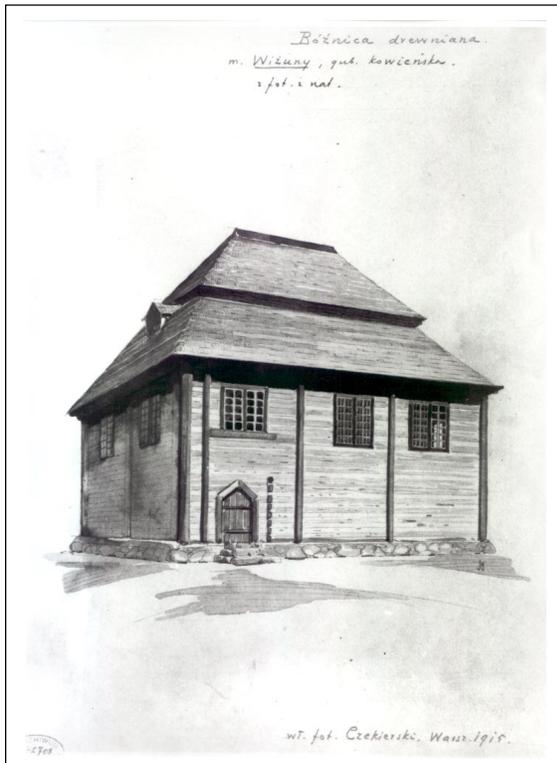


Old synagogue in Wilno/Vilnius, c. 1915 (credit: Miriam Weiner Archives)



Old synagogue in Wilno/Vilnius, early twentieth century (credit: Polska Akademia Nauk Instytut Sztuki, Warsaw, Poland)





Old synagogue in Wilno/Vilnius, early twentieth century  
(credit: Polska Akademia Nauk Instytut Sztuki, Warsaw, Poland)

- Files of inquiries of the residents of Suwalki Province from abroad or on the search of persons who left abroad and whose foreign passports expired. Such files contain documents entitled “Exposure of Unauthorized Absence” which include valuable genealogical information, including the first name, surname and nickname of the absentee, names of his parents and the maiden surname of his mother, class or occupation, whereabouts of the absentee abroad, the reason for absence (purpose of the trip), passport information (age and physical description);
- Lists of the residents of Suwalki Province replying to inquiries/requests abroad, containing surnames and first names of the person searched for, their ages, place of residence/registration, parents’ names;
- Lists of Jews who left their place of residence without any authorization (unauthorized absence from the place of registration) containing information about the age and place of residence of the listed persons;
- Lists of families of Jewish conscripts at the end of the nineteenth/early twentieth centuries from the districts of Suwalki Province; in addition to information about the conscripts (surname, first name, patronymic, age or date of birth) these files also contain information about the members of their families stating their age and relationship;
- Lists of Jewish families evicted from different regions of the frontier zone of Suwalki Province in 1915

due to the start of World War I; these files contain information about the evicted families stating their relationship and the location where the family is being resettled;

- Lists of Jewish farmers stating the age and the location of the owned lands;
- Abstracts from birth, marriage or death records may be found in different files, most often in files by private application of different individuals as well as in files of inquiries/requests from abroad;
- Lists of Jews from different religious districts who paid dues for the upkeep of the religious supervision (of a synagogue); also of persons registered as failing to pay religious dues. These files do not contain complete genealogical information. Generally, we can only find the first name and the surname (sometimes, the patronymic) of the person included into the lists. However, in the absence of other sources of genealogy of any region, this information is important;
- Lists of elected rabbis and members of synagogue leadership; separate files on the appointment of rabbis and synagogue employees from which we (upon finding the required surname) can determine the first name, the position (rabbi, scholar, synagogue-warden and treasurer), sometimes the patronymic as well as the location of the temple where the person performs service, and this also means the place of residence of the person which could be helpful in further research about the family.

**Editor’s Note:** The foregoing article is based upon a presentation at the 21st International Conference on Jewish Genealogy, held in London in July, 2001. The article has since been revised and updated for the Routes to Roots Foundation.



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