



Roots and Branches

By MIRIAM WEINER

Albany, NY

Yad Vashem: prime source for history

Virtually everyone who visits Jerusalem comes to Yad Vashem, the world's foremost institution for Holocaust research and scholarship. There, they see and feel the horrors of the Holocaust through the exhibitions, memorials, documents and photos.

In addition to the museum and memorials, Yad Vashem encompasses other equally important departments including the library, archives, education and research center, and publishing division.

In tracing family history, eventually each of us wants to know what happened in our ancestral town during the Holocaust and the Yad Vashem publications represent a primary source for such information.

12 Volumes

In 1970, Yad Vashem published the first volume of *Pinkas Hakehillot (Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities)* and to date, 11 more have followed covering Poland, Germany, Hungary, Netherlands, Romania, Yugoslavia and Latvia/Estonia.

Each volume in this on-going series is awaited by historians and genealogists.

Communities Destroyed

These comprehensive volumes commemorate the Jewish communities destroyed during the Holocaust beginning with a history of the Jewish presence, accompanied by maps, photographs of synagogues and other well-known buildings along with pictures of communal leaders and rabbis. Statistical tables trace the Jewish population and the extensive bibliography leads the reader to other sources.

What makes this series so valuable is that many of the localities included are small and often, the entry represents the only available source of information. The series is published in Hebrew although most volumes include an English index.

Volume On Soviet Union

If your ancestors came from the Soviet Union and served in the military, you may find extensive biographical information in *Under Fire: The Stories of Jewish Heroes of the Soviet Union* compiled by Gershon Shapiro. The book is a collection of 150 biographies (with photo) and descriptions of the heroic deeds of Jews who were awarded the distinction of "Hero of the Soviet Union" during the war between Germany and the Soviet Union, 1941-1945.

If your family came from Romania, *Resisting the Storm: Romania, 1940-1947, Memoirs* is a "must." In addition to the name index, the place index enables you to immediately focus on the area where your family once lived.

The book includes photos and documents from the memoirs of Alexandre Safran, former chief rabbi of Romania during the tragic years of this community: the destruction of the Bessarabia and Bukovina Jews and the rescue of the Jews from old Romania and South Transylvania.

Book On Vilna

Famous for its vibrant Jewish cultural life, Vilna was known for generations as the "Jerusalem of Lithuania." For those with roots in Vilna, see *Ghetto in Flames: The Struggle and Destruction of the Jews in Vilna in the Holocaust* authored by Yitzhak Arad, chairperson of Yad Vashem Directorate. Anyone whose family came from Lithuania is likely to find references to their ancestral town in the place index.

Well-documented chapters are augmented with extensive photos, maps, statistical charts, and a detailed listing of archival material to provide a vivid description of the fate of the Jews of Vilna and a history of one of the largest ghettos.

A Volume A Year

Each year, Yad Vashem publishes another volume of *Yad Vashem Studies* containing a range of papers, documents and book reviews dealing with various aspects of the Holocaust written by outstanding scholars from Israel and abroad. Twenty volumes have been published to date.

One branch of my family came from Shepetovka in Volhynia district; therefore, a research paper by Shmuel Spector in Vol. XV was of particular interest to me: "The Jews of Vol-

hynia and Their Reaction to Extermination" which formed the basis for his subsequent book, *The Holocaust of Volhynian Jews: 1941-1944*.

A unique chronicle of the Nazi extermination of more than six million Jews and other "undesirables" can be found in *The Pictorial History of the Holocaust*, a joint publication of Yad Vashem and Macmillan, Inc. and edited by Yitzhak Arad. This over-sized book is an extraordinary compilation of photos, maps and explanatory text.

400 Plus Photos

The photographs from Yad Vashem's archives and private collections were shot when such photography was against the law in Germany and other occupied territories.

Quoting from the *Jerusalem Post*:

"This well-produced volume leads the reader on the terrifying journey...the reader will be pulled from page to page by the stark photographs...[Arad] seems to have hit just the right balance between too much and too little."

These publications may be found in many Judaic libraries or may be purchased at Yad Vashem's bookstore. To order by mail or to request a listing of titles, write to Yad Vashem, POB 3477, Jerusalem 91034 Israel. Specify Hebrew or English listings of publications.

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MIRIAM WEINER is co-editor of the recently published *Encyclopedia of Jewish Genealogy* and also is coordinator of "Routes to Roots" Genealogy Tours offered by ISRAM Travel in New York. Information on researching your family history may be obtained by sending a stamped self-addressed envelope to Weiner at 136 Sandpiper Key, Secaucus, NJ 07094.