

THE PALE OF JEWISH SETTLEMENT

by
Hal Bookbinder



The Pale of Jewish Settlement was the western area of the Russian Empire in which Jews were allowed to live. It began with the first partition of Poland in 1772 and survived until the beginning of World War I in 1917. This area is of special interest to Jews, as the vast majority of their ancestors lived there. This timeline provides a chronology of significant

events related to the Pale. For further background, the reader may wish to refer to the *Encyclopedia Judaica* (New York: Macmillan, 1971–1972), Simon Dubnow’s *History of the Jews in Russia and Poland from the Earliest Times Until the Present Day* (New York: Ktav, 1975), and Salo Baron’s *The Russian Jew Under Tsars and Soviets*, 2nd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1976).

TIMELINE OF THE PALE OF JEWISH SETTLEMENT (1770–1820)

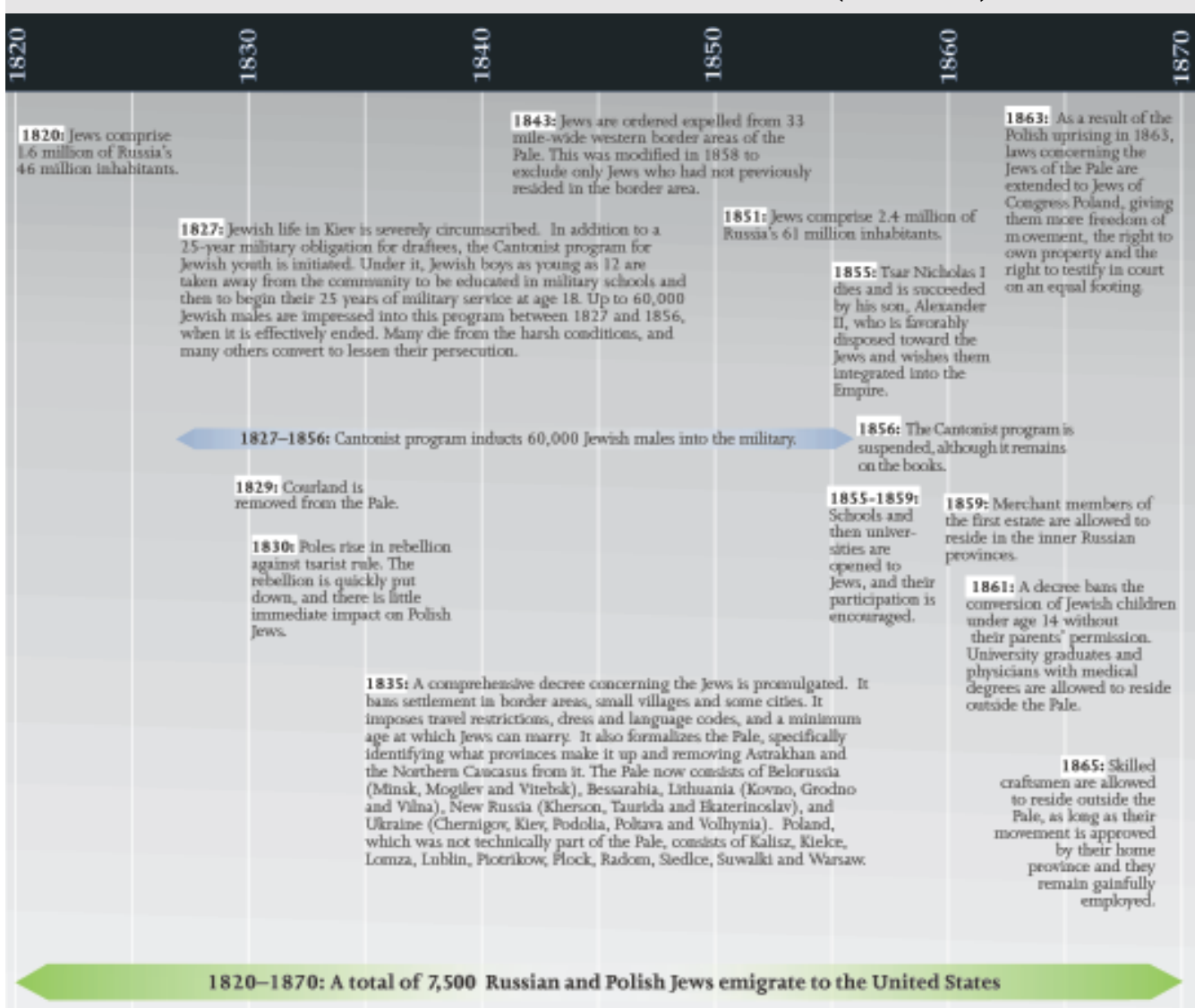
1770	1780	1790	1800	1810	1820
<p>1772: First partition of Poland. 27,000 Jews in Vitebsk (then Polotsk) and Mogilev are incorporated into Russia.</p>	<p>1774: The formerly Turkish areas of New Russia are added to the Empire. This area contains few Jews, mostly Karaites.</p>	<p>1786: A decree is issued limiting to one-third the number of town councilors in any town who can be Jewish. In practice, few Jews become councilors at all.</p>	<p>1791: Free movement is allowed only in Vitebsk, Mogilev, Yekaterinoslav, Kheerson and Taurida (these last three provinces make up New Russia, and the government is interested in their colonization). Jewish merchants are no longer allowed to travel to Smolensk and Moscow.</p>	<p>1795: Third partition. Grodno, Kovno and Vilna are added to the Pale. Russia now contains about one million Jews. Decrees are issued endeavoring to move Jews from villages to towns to restrict their movement.</p>	<p>1796: Tsar Catherine II (the Great) dies and Paul I becomes tsar. Paul initiates studies on how to deal with the Jews.</p>
			<p>1799: Famine ravages portions of the Pale. Jewish innkeepers are blamed, and many are dispossessed. Courland is added to the Pale.</p>	<p>1801: Paul I is killed; Alexander I becomes tsar.</p>	<p>1804: The study initiated by Paul is completed, and a decree is issued aiming to better integrate Jews into general society by causing them to use civil languages and dress. It also calls for the uprooting of all Jews from small villages to towns by 1807. Astrakhan and the Northern Caucasus are added to the Pale.</p>
				<p>1807: Uprooting is begun but then abandoned due to its economic impact and concerns about Napoleon. Napoleon creates the Grand Duchy of Warsaw and gives Russia the Bialystok area, which is incorporated into Grodno.</p>	<p>1809: The Grand Duchy is expanded to include Western Galicia.</p>
				<p>1812: Bessarabia is taken in an agreement with Napoleon on spheres of influence and added to the Pale.</p>	<p>1815: The Grand Duchy of Warsaw is dissolved, with most of its territory incorporated into the Russian Empire as Congress Poland, comprised of 10 provinces. Technically, Poland and the Pale are separate entities whose Jews live under different rules.</p>
				<p>1817: Alexander I issues a decree forbidding the unfounded spreading of blood libels. But such accusations continue to be made and pursued. Government efforts are initiated to get Jews to convert. Converts are promised land in New Russia. The effort fails and is abandoned in 1823.</p>	



A distraught father tends to family members killed during a pogrom in Russia, c. 1917

24

TIMELINE OF THE PALE OF JEWISH SETTLEMENT (1820–1870)

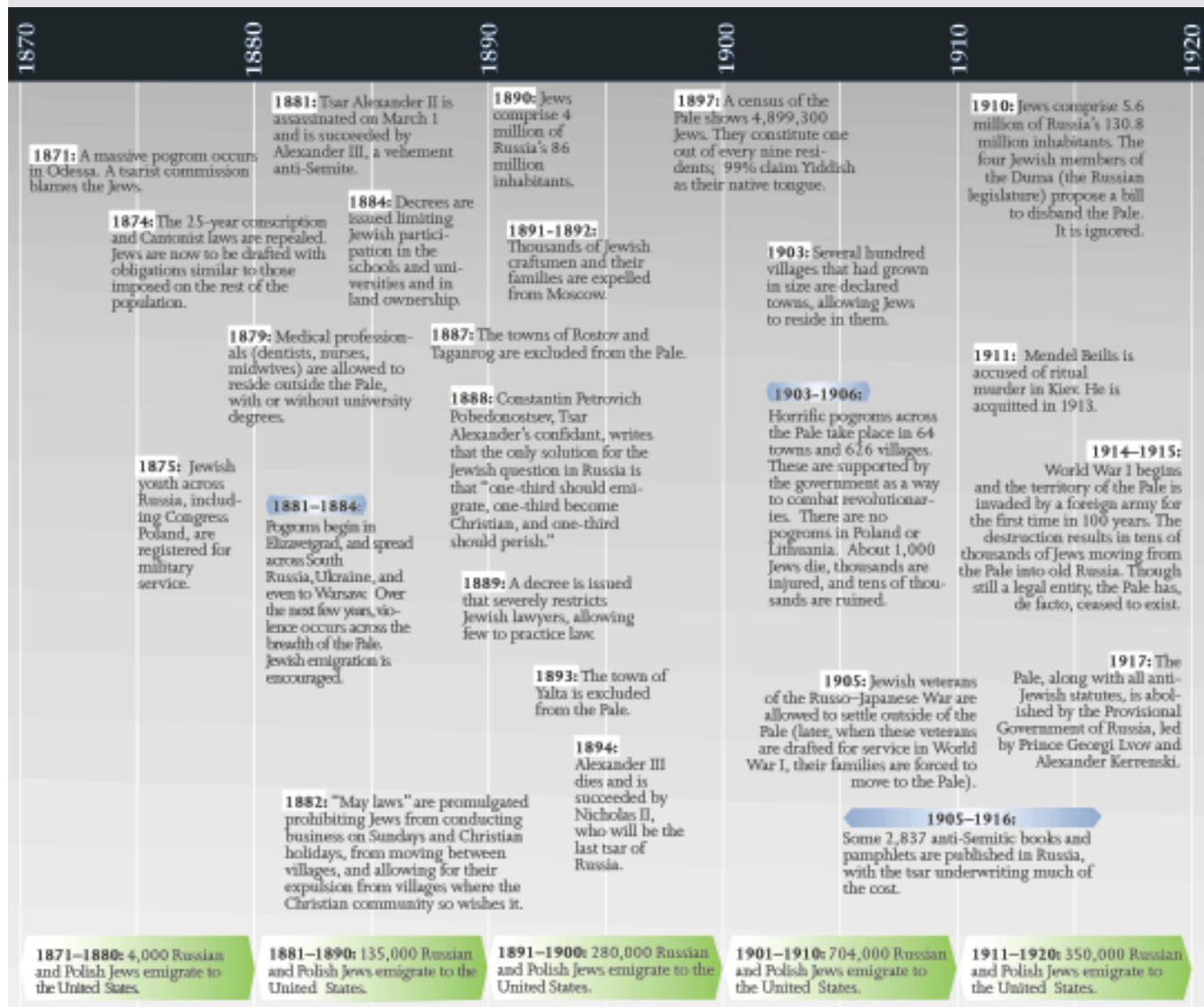


Hal Bookbinder has been writing and lecturing on genealogical and Jewish historical topics for over a decade. He has served as chair of an annual Seminar on Jewish Genealogy (Los Angeles, 1990), president of the Jewish Genealogical Society of Los Angeles (1991–1993), and treasurer and then vice-president of the International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies (1994 to present). He has extensively researched his own family, tracing several lines into the early nineteenth and late eighteenth centuries, when they lived in the area known as The Pale of Jewish Settlement. Mr. Bookbinder was raised in the Catskills of New York State, absorbing its unique “Borscht Belt” experience. After obtaining degrees in mathematics and operations research from New York University and in business from the University of Northern

Colorado, he and his wife, Marci, settled in the Los Angeles area. Their four adult children live in or around Los Angeles. Mr. Bookbinder manages computing and telecommunications for UCLA Healthcare and is an instructor of mathematics and statistics at the University of Phoenix.

Editor’s Note: The foregoing article was adapted from an article that originally appeared in *Roots-Key*, vol. 15, no. 3 (Fall 1995): pp. 11–13.

TIMELINE OF THE PALE OF JEWISH SETTLEMENT (1870–1917)



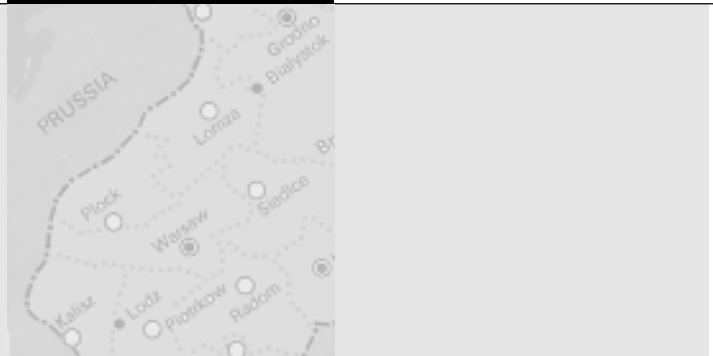


The Pale of Jewish Settlement at the End of the Nineteenth Century

Map 4

**THE RUSSIAN GUBERNIYA
AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY**

by
Hal Bookbinder



Understanding the geographic history of an ancestral town can provide us with clues as to where to search for records, how they might be organized and in what languages they may have been written. It may also shed light on the environment in which our ancestors lived.

Consider Volhynia. The oldest records of Jews in Volhynia date to the twelfth century, when the *Volhynian Chronicles* note that resident Jews mourned the death of a prince of Volhynia. At that time, Volhynia was an independent principality. In 1452, Volhynia was absorbed by the Grand Duchy of Lithuania. In 1569, it was transferred to the Kingdom of Poland. In 1793, the eastern portion of Volhynia was incorporated into the Russian Empire; in 1795, Russia took the rest. In 1917, Volhynia became part of an independent Ukraine. By 1921, Poland had taken the western two-thirds of Volhynia. The 1939 partition of Poland between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union resulted in all of Volhynia being incorporated into the Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic (SSR). Finally, with the 1991 breakup of the Soviet Union, Volhynia became a part of independent Ukraine.

The borders of Volhynia have not been static either; they have tended to shift to the east over the centuries. In the thirteenth century, the principality of Volhynia included lands that are currently in eastern Poland. The eastern portion of Volhynia, including the city of Zhitomir, was joined to it only in the 1790s, after the partition of Poland. Prior to the partition, Lutsk was the traditional capital of Polish Volhynia. Under Russia, Zhitomir became the capital. From 1921 to 1939, Lutsk was the capital of Polish Volhynia (Wolyn), while Zhitomir was the capital of Soviet Volhynia.

When Polish Volhynia was incorporated into the Ukrainian SSR in 1939, it was divided into two oblasts. The western portion was designated Volhynia Oblast, and the eastern portion became Rovno Oblast. They, with Zhitomir Oblast,

which had been a part of the Ukraine since 1917, comprise most of historic Volhynia. These three oblasts remain today, with their respective capitals of Lutsk, Rovno and Zhitomir. Some smaller portions of Volhynia were included in other oblasts. For example, the town of Kremenets went to Tarnopol Oblast, and the town of Shepetovka went to Khmel'nitskiy Oblast (formerly Proskurov).

My ancestral town of Dubno is currently in Rovno Oblast, Ukraine. So it might be logical to look for records in Rovno or in Kiev, the Ukrainian capital. However, recognizing that Dubno was in Russian Volhynia from 1795 to 1917, I should not overlook Zhitomir and Moscow. And, since Dubno was in Polish Volhynia from 1569 to 1795 and from 1921 to 1939, I probably should not overlook Lutsk and Warsaw either.

The information that follows provides an overview of the political geography of the Pale of Jewish Settlement in the 1890s, when most of our ancestors were living there.

The Pale of Jewish Settlement consisted of the vice-regencies of Belorussia, Bessarabia, Lithuania, New Russia and Ukraine (Poland was a separate legal entity). Each vice-regency was composed of one or more guberniyas (provinces). Each guberniya was made up of a number of uedzy (districts). Normally, the name of a uezd was the same as its chief town. When the town had a different name, it is shown as “uezd/town” (see facing page). The population figures are from the 1897 Russian census, as shown in the *Atlas of Modern Jewish History* by Evyatar Friesel (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990). The list of uedzy by guberniya is from the *Great Soviet Encyclopedia*, A. M. Prokhorov, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1973–1983). The contemporary names shown in parentheses are from *Where Once We Walked*, by Gary Mokotoff and Sallyann Amdur Sack (Teaneck, NJ: Avotaynu, Inc., 1991).

РЕВНЗСКАЯ СКАЗКА.				РЕВНЗСКАЯ СКАЗКА.			
1850 г. Октября 30 дня, Бухбинский Шломо Шлоимович				1850 г. Октября 30 дня, Бухбинский Шломо Шлоимович			
Дубно				Дубно			
№	Имя	Возраст	Состояние	№	Имя	Возраст	Состояние
1	Эфраим	48	Холост	1	Эфраим	48	Холост
2	Берко Бухбиндер	11	Сын	2	Берко Бухбиндер	11	Сын
3	Берко Шлоимович Бухбиндер	1 1/2	Сын	3	Берко Шлоимович Бухбиндер	1 1/2	Сын

List of inhabitants for the town of Dubno, 1850. Entry #3 is for Berko Buhbinder (1786–1848), son of Shlomo. Also shown are Berko’s son Abram Itsko (born 1823), married to Khava-Serla (born 1826), and their daughter, Ester (born 1848); and Berko’s second son, Shimon (1832–1837).

THE PALE OF JEWISH SETTLEMENT

with 1897 Population Data

Vice-Regency; Jewish Population; Jews as Percentage of Total Population	Guberniya (Year Formed); Jewish Population	Uezd (Contemporary Name); * = Guberniya Capital
Belorussia 724,500 13.6%	Minsk (1793–1795, 1796) 345,000	Bobruisk, Borisov, Igumen (Cherven), *Minsk, Mozyr, Novogrudok, Pinsk, Rechitsa, Slutsk
	Mogilev (1773–1778, 1802) 203,900	Bykhov, Chausy, Cherikov, Gomel, Gorki, Klimovichi, *Mogilev, Mstislavl, Orsha, Rogachev, Senno
	Vitebsk (1802) 175,600	Drissa (Verkhnedvinsk), Dvinsk (Daugavpils), Gorodok, Lepel, Liutsin (Ludza), Nevel, Polotsk, Rezhitsa (Rezekne), Sebezh (Sebeza), Velizh, *Vitebsk
Bessarabia 228,500 11.8%	Bessarabia (1873)	Akkerman (Belgorod Dnestrovskiy), Beltsy, Bendery, Izmail, Khotin, *Kishinev, Orgeyev, Soroki
Lithuania 697,400 14.7%	Grodno (1801) 280,000	Bialystok, Bielsk, Brest Litovsk (Brest), *Grodno, Kobrin, Pruzhany, Slonim, Sokolka, Volkovysk
	Kovno (1842) 212,700	*Kovno (Kaunas), Novoaleksandrovsk (Zarasai), Panevezys, Raseiniai, Siauliai, Telsiai, Vilkomir (Ukmerge)
	Vilna (1795–1797, 1802) 204,700	Disna, Lida, Oshmyany, Svencionys, Trakai, Vileika (Nanjoji Vilnia), *Vilna (Vilnius)
New Russia 501,800 8.0%	Ekaterinoslav (1802) 101,100	Aleksandrovka, Bakhmut (Artemosvk), *Ekaterinoslav (Dnepropetrovsk), Mariupol (Zhdanov), Novomoskovsk, Pavlograd, Slaviansoserbsk/Lugansk (Voroshilovgrad), Verkhnedneprovsk
	Kherson (1803) 339,000	Aleksandriya, Ananyev, Elizavetgrad (Kirovograd), *Kherson, Odessa, Tiraspol
	Taurida (1802) 60,800	Berdiansk, Dnepr/Aleshki (Tsyurupinsk), Feodosiya, Melitopol, Perekop, *Simferopol, Yalta, Yevpatoriya
Ukraine 1,425,500 9.7%	Chernigov (1796) 114,500	Borzna, *Chernigov, Glukhov, Gorodnya, Konotop, Kozelets, Krolevets, Mglin, Nezhin, Novgorod Severskiy, Novozybkov, Oster, Sosnitsa, Starodub, Surazh
	Kiev (1708–1781, 1796) 433,700	Berdichev, Cherkassy, Chigirin, Kanev, *Kiev (Kyiv), Lipovets, Radomyshl, Skvira, Tarashcha, Uman, Vasilkov, Zvenigorodka
	Podolia (1796) 370,600	Balta, Bratslav, Gaysin, *Kamenets Podolskiy, Letichev, Litin, Mogilev Podolskiy, Novaya Ushitsa, Olgopol, Proskurov (Khmelnitskiy), Vinnitsa, Yampol
	Poltava (1802) 110,900	Gadyach, Khorol, Konstantinograd (Krasnograd), Kovelyaki, Kremenchug, Lokhvitsa, Lubny, Mirgorod, Pereyaslav (Pereyaslav Khmelnitskiy), Piryatin, *Poltava, Priluki, Romny, Zenkov, Zolotonosha
	Volhynia (1796) 395,800	Dubno, Izyaslav, Kovel, Kremenets, Lutsk, Novograd Volynskiy, Ostrog, Ovruch, Rovno, Starokonstantinov, Vladimir Volynskiy, *Zhitomir

Editor's Note: The foregoing article was adapted from an article that originally appeared in *Roots-Key*, vol. 16, no. 2 (Summer 1996): pp. 11–12.