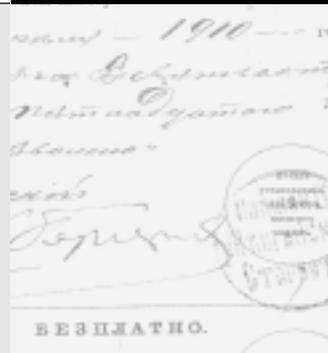


**FOLLOWING THE PAPER TRAIL
GENEALOGICAL RESOURCES
IN THE UKRAINIAN AND MOLDOVAN ARCHIVES**

by **Professor ChaeRan Y. Freeze**



The collapse of the Soviet Union in late 1991 unleashed an archival revolution that inaugurated an unprecedented phase in Jewish genealogical research. Prior to its collapse, Communist rule meant that documents pertaining to national minorities such as the Jews were virtually inaccessible and, indeed, segregated in special storage (*spetskhran*) to avert use by nationalists and “ethnic conflicts.” Moreover, access to archival materials was almost exclusively restricted to participants in official exchanges, chiefly from the United States and Great Britain. Private citizens, whether Soviet or foreign, had virtually no right to use archival materials, even for private matters like family history.

Independence brought profound changes to the republics of the former Soviet Union, including the declassification of hitherto secret collections. That process encompassed not only classified repositories (such as the Ukrainian Communist Party Archive) but also materials pertaining to Jews, which were gradually transferred from special storage to the main collections. Moreover, many archivists who had once denigrated genealogical research as a “decadent bourgeois pursuit” now take an active interest in assisting individuals to locate family records. This shift in access and attitude has been extended not only to citizens but also to foreigners, including those without formal academic credentials and support. Although conditions and access vary kaleidoscopically (among archives and from time to time), what was once unthinkable is now truly feasible.

To be sure, researchers still face important challenges, especially in Ukraine. The hardships caused by Ukraine’s transition to a market economy have taken a significant toll on the archives and their capacity to service researchers. As Patricia Grimsted warns:

“[With the] shortages of staff, lack of technical facilities, storage space limitations, and deteriorating physical condition of many archival repositories...worries abound regarding the adequate preservation of the Ukrainian archival heritage for future generations.”¹ At a rudimentary practical level, the state’s fiscal crisis has meant drastic reductions in archival staff, working hours and duplication facilities—even the occasional unpredictable suspension of operations altogether. If political repression was the main obstacle to research in the past, the severe economic crisis poses the primary threat today.

Although Ukrainian archives are officially open to the public, researchers should anticipate various problems and take a few preparatory measures *prior* to a trip to Ukraine. First, it is essential to obtain an updated schedule of closings and holidays, especially for those taking short trips. For example, Ukrainian archives often reduce hours or close for staff vacations in the summer; in addition, reading rooms are closed at least once a month for *sanitarnyi den’* (cleaning day). More recently, some archives have limited their hours in response to budget cuts and inability to pay staff salaries. Ideally, a local contact should call the pertinent archive for details; in some cases, a fax, e-mail or telephone call might be available to clarify these matters.

Second, it is recommended that one obtain an official letter of introduction, preferably from a Ukrainian institution or at least a sponsoring organization in the United States. Genealogists have found that letters from their mayor or congressman (with an official stamp or seal) usually satisfy archival directors. Such letters, which should describe your background and the purpose of your visit, should be translated into Ukrainian (as required by the Central



Entrance to the State Archive of Chernovtsy Oblast (formerly a church), 1993

8

State Historical Archive in Kiev), or at least into Russian. It is also customary for archive officials to register a researcher's passport and to ask the researcher to fill out an *anketa* (information sheet). Third, if one cannot read Russian or has only limited time to spend in the archive, it may be most productive to request the archive to conduct a genealogical search *prior* to your visit. Cooperation, costs and results will vary according to the archive. It is also wise to have a firm agreement (in writing) regarding the price of photocopies and labor to avoid any misunderstandings. For those who plan to conduct their own research, it is helpful to consult published finding-aids (*putevoditeli*) for references to collections (*fondy*) to make a short visit more productive.

In Moldova, historical documents are located in the Moldovan National Archives in Kishinev. The archivists here are very receptive to visiting researchers. While it is also helpful to notify the archives prior to arrival so that some books could be prepared for the visitor's arrival, it is not mandatory and the staff is ready to assist anyone who wishes to work there.

Finally, oblast (provincial or district) archives often lack the facilities to photocopy or microfilm documents. In that event, be prepared to improvise by using a 35-mm camera or hiring a local photographer (with the permission of the archive, of course). If the archive does have its own equipment, expect high and even exorbitant rates, sometimes as much as several dollars per page. (For bankrupt and underfunded institutions, foreign researchers represent a unique opportunity to raise funds.)

SIX COMMON TYPES OF REGISTRATION RECORDS

The Ukrainian and Moldovan archives hold six major types of registration records that constitute an excellent starting place for genealogical research. While this article will focus on documents from Ukraine, similar materials can be found in Moldova. These include: (1) *kahal* records; (2) poll-tax records; (3) metrical books; (4) social estate registration records; (5) family registers; and (6) recruitment lists. While the adage "God is in the heavens and the Tsar is far away" may have held true in Jewish daily life, it hardly corresponded to the intrusiveness of the state when it concerned registration. Behind this energetic interest was the state's overriding concern to ensure the regular collection of taxes and, after 1827, the military conscription of Jews.

Archival records reveal that enforcement of these laws was very vigorous in the Ukrainian provinces; authorities there were exceptionally vigilant in their prosecution of Jews (especially men) who failed to register. Ironically, what Ukrainian Jews of the nineteenth century viewed as "a bad plague" (especially those without registration papers) has proven highly advantageous for descendants searching for their roots.

L.p.	Nazwisko i imię ożenika.	Zawód.	Miejsce zamieszkania /adres/	Wymierzyć się mająca składka opłacona na r. 1935 zł. gr.	U w a g a . ?	
z przenieżenia					zł. 998.--	
129.	Weisinger Mejlech	Kupiec	Skała	" 6.--		
130.	Weidberg Markus	"	"	" 6.--		
131.	" Moses	"	"	" 6.--		
132.	Weisinger Keckel	"	"	" 6.--		
133.	Seidenfeld David Alo	"	"	" 5.--		
134.	Weiser Moses	"	Josinca	" 12.--		
135.	" Matan	"	"	" 8.--		
136.	Zimmerman Zisla	"	Skała	" 5.--		
Razem				zł. 1052.--		

Na ogólna liczbę osób wyznania mojżeszowego /bez różnicy pćci, wieku i zatrudnienia 1.710 przynależnych do Gminy wyznaniowej żydowskiej w Skale nad Zbruczem /t.j. zamieszkujących w siedzibie gminy wyznaniowej oraz w miejscowościach pod zarządem wyznaniowym do okręgu gminy wyznaniowej /początkowo do opłaty składki osób 136 n. ogólna suma zł. 1.052.-- a mianowicie:

71 osób po zł. 5.--	zł. 355.--
21 " " " 6.--	" 126.--
16 " " " 8.--	" 128.--
9 " " " 10.--	" 90.--
11 " " " 12.--	" 132.--
4 " " " 15.--	" 60.--
1 " " " 16.--	" 16.--
1 " " " 20.--	" 20.--
1 " " " 25.--	" 25.--
1 " " " 100.--	" 100.--
136 osób n. sumę	zł. 1.052.--

Skała n/Zbr.dnia 18 listopada 1935 r.
Przewodniczący Zarządu:

Niniejsza lista składek stosownie do art. 13 przepisów o organizacji gmin wyznaniowych żyd. była wyłożona do wglądu dla członków Gminy w kancelarii gminy przez 8 dni t.j. od 19 listopada do 27 listopada 1935 r. włącznie. Wyłożenie listy składek podane było do publicznej wiadomości przez obwieszczenie plakatami w obrębie Gminy wyznaniowej. Skała n/Zbr.dnia 28 listopada 1935 r.

Członkowie Zarządu:
Złeszk Weintraub
Przewodniczący Zarządu: [Signature]



Kahal records: list of contributors to the Jewish Community Chest in Skala Podolskaya, including #133, Dawid Elo Seidenfeld, 1935

Kahal Records

Following the partitions of Poland, Empress Catherine II was confronted with the daunting task of extracting taxes from her new subjects. Rather than assign this complicated task to Russian bureaucrats, she elected to utilize the existing Jewish regional council (*kahal*), which had performed similar functions under Polish-Lithuanian rule. She, therefore, ordered that Jews enroll in their local *kahal* and that these records be used to assess and collect the poll tax. The *kahal* was also responsible for issuing passports for internal travel and thus regulating the geographic mobility of the Jewish population.

Kahal records that can be found in Ukrainian archives (dating back to the late eighteenth century) reveal several important details about family members. Whenever Jews were expelled or left a town, they not only had to apply for a passport but also for registration in another *kahal*. For example, a thick file about the expulsion of Jews from Kiev in 1828 included individual requests for inclusion in the Vasilkov *kahal*; however, the latter agreed to accept only those who could afford to pay the poll tax or who volunteered their sons for the conscription quota. Given the parental fears about forced conversion in the army and the

25-year term of military service, it is hardly surprising to find bitter complaints about these harsh prerequisites. Although these documents do not always indicate if an individual was accepted into a given *kahal*, they offer valuable clues for tracking down relatives who migrated to other towns.

In addition to registration lists, Ukrainian archives contain more substantive petitions to the Kiev general-governor about unfair treatment at the hands of the *kahal*. One common complaint concerned “dead souls”: that is, the refusal of the *kahal* to remove a deceased relative from the poll-tax registers, thereby forcing the family to pay taxes on them. To be sure, the *kahal* was merely following Russian law (which fixed taxes according to the revision lists compiled every two decades) and refused in the interim to complicate the task by deleting the dead or adding newborns; however, this did not lessen the burden for families visited by untimely disease and death. More tragic were the denunciations from impoverished Jews that the *kahal* had hired *khappers* to abduct their young sons (often under the age of 13) as military recruits in the place of wealthy co-religionists. Many complaints came from Jewish women who protested that their sons had been brutally snatched from their arms and who often signed their own petitions in Yiddish.

Poll-Tax Census (Reviziya)

The second type of registration was the poll-tax census (*reviziya*), based on documents called the *revizskie skazki*. Tsar Peter the Great first ordered a systemic head count of the male population in 1718; his purpose was to establish a direct capitation tax and put his government on a more secure, predictable financial footing. This system divided Russian society into two basic categories: the great mass of unprivileged “poll-tax population” (which later came to include the Jews) and the “non-poll-tax population,” exempt from the capitation tax. Inclusion in the

poll-tax category also entailed various other disabilities—conscription, liability to corporal punishment, restrictions on geographic mobility and travel, and exposure to other forms of discrimination. Thus, in contrast to the privileged groups (clergy, nobility, and civil and military servitors) exempt from this onerous duty, the poll-tax population had to bear this “stigma, conferred by birth” until it was finally abolished in 1883. Although the poll tax receded in relative importance as the state came to rely more on indirect taxes, it nevertheless remained a heavy burden. That was especially true for impoverished Jews who struggled to pay the double poll tax (imposed on Jews and various other groups). Significantly, the government used this tax to induce desired behavior—for example, by granting a tax exemption to persuade Jews to join agricultural colonies and serve as state rabbis.

Of the 10 poll-tax revisions, the fifth revision census (1794–1796) was the first to include the territories of partitioned Poland, and hence of interest to Jewish genealogists (subsequent revision lists were compiled in 1811, 1816, 1834, 1850 and 1858). The poll-tax record followed a standard form, with the male members of the household listed on the left-hand side and females on the right-hand side of the two-page census (see page 18). The left-hand section inquired about the ages of male family members at the last revision census and their current age, the absence of any individual from his primary residence and sometimes the current occupations. Female subjects also provided names, current ages and any “temporary absences” from their residence. Since dates of birth were not recorded, the reported ages must be treated with caution, particularly for records prior to 1835, when the Russian government began to enforce the registration of births more stringently. Until then, oral declarations served as the primary verification of age.

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.
№ по порядку	ФАМИЛИЯ, ИМЯ И ОТЧЕСТВО.	Где приписанъ?	По какому документу, откуда выданному, проживаеъ?	По возрасту или ищанскому свидѣтельству въ паспорту.	По наружному виду	Имѣеъ ли свидѣтельство объ исполненіи воинской повинности и какое: временное или безсрочное?	
292	Полисаръ Аронъ Янкелевичъ	изъ Бандеры	Полномочному Бандерскому Сиротскому Сиротскому с. Арсенія Іероніма 1875. с. 4415.	112			
293	—	—	—			114	
294	—	—	—			7	
295	Полисаръ Мордко Янкелевичъ	изъ Бандеры	Полномочному Бандерскому Сиротскому Сиротскому с. Арсенія Іероніма 1875. с. 4418.	111			

List of inhabitants in Krivoye Ozero in 1875, including documents #292–#294, listing Aron Polisar (born 1833, son of Yankel) and his sons Maiorko (born 1861) and Leizer (born 1874). Document #295 lists Mordko Polisar (born 1848, son of Yankel). All of the Polisars were official residents of Bendery, Moldova, but they were registered in Krivoye Ozero, Ukraine.

However, knowledge of one's age was at best an approximation; as one townsman confessed, "I have lived many years [but] how many years, I do not know."²

The revision record was compiled in two copies: one for the district treasury office, the other for the Provincial Office of the Treasury (*Gubernskaia kazennaia palata*), which, in turn, sent a summary of the data to the Senate and the Ministry of Finance in St. Petersburg. In most cases, the best-preserved and most easily accessible copy is found in the fond of the Provincial Office of the Treasury. For example, the revision censuses of the Zhitomir Jewish community are located in this collection (State Archive of Zhitomir Oblast, fond 118). For the towns and villages in Kiev Province, numerous records are also found in the State Archive of Kiev Oblast (fond 280). Some *revizskie skazki* include not only Jewish families but also co-residents from groups such as townspeople and peasants. As a result, one must often search general revision files to locate Jews included with other social groups. To be sure, some files contain only Jewish families—for example, the revision censuses of the Jewish communities of Vasilkov, Belaya Tserkov and Berdichev in Kiev Province. Such records are easier to locate because they included "evreiskii" ("Jewish") in the title of the file. Revision records are also found under the rubric of *podatnye spiski* (poll-tax lists), organized by towns; the State Archive of Kiev Oblast, for example, contains 10 census files for the town of Fastov (fond 344).

In general, the revision censuses are valuable not only because they provide data on the structure of the household (e.g., the number of children and, sometimes, the occupation of individuals), but also because they indicate if an individual left the town. Hence, these files can also provide critical clues to help locate those who left their permanent place of residence. Finally, one must keep in mind that not all revision census records are entirely accurate and may include Jewish males from other families. As archival records indicate, it was not uncommon for the *kahal* to recruit a poor boy as a substitute for a wealthier family; thus the former's name would appear with a different family, not with his own.

Metrical Books (Metricheskie Knigi)

In 1826, the Russian state extended the system of metrical books (the communal records of births, deaths, marriages, and divorces) to the Jews and made the state rabbi (better known as the *rabbiner*, in Yiddish) responsible for record-keeping. The state or crown rabbis were not regarded by their communities as authentic rabbis but as mere official registrars. As Sholom Aleichem once wrote, "To old-country Jews I don't have to explain what a rabbi of the crown is. They know the breed.... He fills out birth certificates, officiates at circumcisions.... To take it for granted that among our people a rabbiner is well-loved—let's not say any more."³ The testimony of Yitzhak Baer Levinson is also telling: "Some of the small towns have elected, quite cleverly, people who can just about write and sign their names in Russian and are ostensibly called rabbis, while the real rabbi, an expert solely of the Torah, remains in his place—the two of them [being]

Marriage record of Berko Odnopozov, widower, age 26, and Brocha Avroskin (divorcée), daughter of Avrum, age 26, married in Priluki, Ukraine, in 1891

grafted together like the lame and the blind."⁴ Given the dearth of qualified Jewish "rabbis" for the task of recordkeeping in the early nineteenth century and the disincentives to register (taxation and conscription), it is hardly surprising that the early records were incomplete and unreliable. Such evasion and error, predictably, caught the attention of the government and impelled it to adopt a new strategy to ensure registration.

The government took the first step in 1835 when it issued published bound volumes with individual entry numbers to standardize recordkeeping and prevent *ex post facto* tampering. The new standard format made it all but impossible to "doctor" the records by ripping out (numbered!) pages or inserting retroactive entries. Moreover, each year the rabbi was required to deposit one copy of the metrical book with the provincial board (*gubernskaia uprava*), thereby making it possible to detect retroactive alterations and prevent future additions. To be sure, the inefficient and venal Russian administration admitted some errors. Thus, some Jews still neglected—or dared to ignore—the legal obligation to register; eventually, some requested their state rabbi to insert the information under a later date. Although most state rabbis were reluctant to accommodate such requests (the harsh penalties included fines, imprisonment and conscription), some—either out of compassion or greed—acquiesced. For example, five years after his daughter was born, a certain Gurvich in Odessa realized that he must register her birth. His local rabbi declined

to amend the oversight but advised him to visit a so-called Rabbi Kagan, who had a reputation for “fixing” such problems. Much to the father’s surprise, the state rabbi recorded the birth in the metrical books of Varvarova (Kherson Province) without any hesitation. For genealogists, the lesson is clear: Given such opportunities, especially in the new areas of settlement like Odessa, Kherson and Ekaterinoslav, relatives (in particular, females) may have registered in a different town under a wrong date—if they bothered to register at all.

To ensure the accurate identification of subjects, the tsarist state insisted on the consistent spelling and transliteration of names. Inconsistencies and errors such as the omission of letters were cause for punishment. That included a strict ban—an extension of the general policy to prevent fraud and deception—on “any corrections in Jewish metrical books, with the exception of errors made by the clerk [the state rabbi].”⁵ But the burden of demonstrating that “exception” rested on the victim, and the resolution of such cases was subject to the caprice of local officials. For example, when the provincial board of Kiev fined Sheina Beila Zatulovskaya 300 rubles in 1912 because her son failed to report for military service, she could hardly have been more astonished: her son had died almost 10 years earlier. A brief inquiry revealed the cause of the misunderstanding; the state rabbi had recorded the death of “Moise Khazan” instead of “Moishe Khazan.” And once made, the mistake proved impossible to rectify. Despite the

mother’s repeated attempts to confirm his death (e.g., pictures of his tombstone and family poll-tax records), the provincial board stubbornly refused to rescind the fine, evidently convinced that Moishe was not dead or, at least, determined to punish his kin and community for failing to keep proper records.

As this case indicates, the government used the metrical books to compile essential information for taxation and recruitment. For researchers, however, this impulse meant that the data invited verification and included valuable personal data. As Peter Czap, Jr., once observed about analogous records for the Russian Orthodox Church, they “reflect identifiable individuals whose lives can be traced from beginning to end.”⁶ The standard form for the registration of birth, for example, included details about the child’s sex, the *mohel* who performed the circumcision, the date and place of birth, and the names and social status of the parents and the infant. Marital registers recorded the ages and names of the bride and groom, the name of the rabbi who performed the ceremony, the date of marriage, obligations of the marital contract (usually the amount of the *ketubah*) and the signatures of two witnesses. The entries for divorce included the names and ages of the spouses, the name of the rabbi who supervised the divorce or *halitsah* (levirate divorce), the “reason” for the dissolution of the marriage and the date of the final divorce. The form for deaths provided the name and age of the deceased, burial site (e.g., the town and sometimes the cemetery), and the date and presumed cause of death. For genealogists, details about the place of burial can be very valuable, especially if the cemetery is still intact.

Most state rabbis provided only the required information and, often, resorted to stereotypical phrases. Perhaps the best examples are descriptions such as “mutual hatred” or “mutual agreement” as grounds for divorce, or “illness” as the cause of death in every single record. There were exceptions, however. For example, in the 1870s, the state rabbi of Kharkov conscientiously recorded more specific causes for marital dissolution (e.g., infidelity, childlessness, conversion or “extreme poverty”). He even noted when the wife received the *get* (bill of divorce) through an official courier, not the husband.

How reliable are these sources? For the earlier period at least, the “forgeable” forms and disincentives unquestionably encouraged distortion and evasion. Those who married off their children prior to the minimum age (set by the state in 1830 as 16 for girls and 18 for boys) entered an older age to avoid punishment. To all this must be added the sheer cost of registration (one to five rubles). Increasingly, however, Jews had strong incentives to comply and file accurate data, precisely because the metrical books could prove social origins, marital status and the identity of legal heirs. For example, Russian gymnasiums (high schools) required students to present a copy of a birth certificate (e.g., a copy from the metrical book) in order to receive a diploma, state courts demanded written documentation of death before executing a will and the military required a marriage certificate for Jewish widows to claim the army pensions of their deceased husbands. In one

ЧАСТЬ I. О РОДИВШИХСЯ					
№	Кто совершил	Число и место рождения и обращения	Где родился	Состояние отца, имена отца и матери	Кто родился и какое ему, или ей, дано имя
Место рождения	Кто совершил	Христианский отец	Еврейский	ровался	
1899 14 июля 1899 г.	Sender Rozenberg	15 июля 1890 г. Одесса	Одесса	Sender Rozenberg Khaya Sura	Leya Rozenberg
1904					
1905					
1906		23	17		
1909		23	17		
1912					

Birth record of Leya Rozenberg, born July 15, 1890, in Odessa, daughter of Sender Rozenberg (son of Yudko) and Khaya Sura 12

poignant case involving Lipa Froima Goldberg, a widow, the state denied her application for a military pension on the grounds that the couple had failed to register their marriage in a metrical book.

Various recently published guides provide a list of metrical books in the archives of the former Soviet Union. To be sure, they do not always include the phrase *metricheskie knigi* (metrical books) in the descriptions. In Dmitrii A. Elyashevich's guide, for example, archival collections include metrical books when they refer to: (1) the name of a Jewish *ravvinat* (rabbinate), such as the *Korostyshevskii ravvinat* in the Central State Historical Archive of Ukraine, Kiev (fond 663 with 203 files dating from 1840 to 1916); (2) a Jewish *obshchestvo* (society or community); and (3) an *obshchina* (commune). Some fondy described as synagogue or *kahal* records may also include metrical books.

For researchers whose families lived in very small shtetlach, records were usually kept by the state rabbi of the closest town. Throughout the nineteenth century, there were bitter debates among Jews in small towns whether to maintain their own state rabbi, whose salary was paid from the tax on kosher meat (known as the *korobochnyi sbor*), or to unite into a single rabbinical district (*ravvinskii uchastok*) with a neighboring town, thereby sharing the cost of supporting the unpopular registrar. But the latter option could be highly inconvenient. The Jews of Bukov (Kiev Province), for instance, requested permission to elect their own official because it was very difficult to persuade the state rabbi—who lived more than 20 miles away—to perform the duties of registration. Hence, archive guides sometimes overlook small towns; that is especially likely if the town was combined with another for registration. Thus, it is sometimes worthwhile to locate the closest town with extant metrical books.

Social Estate Registration Records

According to the Statute of 1804, the Jews were to register under one of four social categories: (1) "agriculturalists" (*zemledeltsy*); (2) manufacturers and artisans; (3) merchants (*kupty*); and (4) petty townspeople (*meshchane*). The latter was a catch-all term to encompass those outside the three more specific status categories. After 1832, Jews (like other subjects) who had rendered exceptional service could be inscribed in the privileged status group of "honorary citizen" (*pochetnyi grazhdanin*), who enjoyed a host of special rights, including exemption from the poll tax and conscription.

Registration served both to identify taxpayers and to assign them to a specific town and administrative jurisdiction. Given the critical importance of registration, the state imposed severe consequences for evasion or deception. In the words of the law: "Jews who cannot present a written document in standard legal form, certifying their membership in a class, will be regarded as vagrants and will be treated according to the full severity of the law."⁷ In the case of a Jewish woman, the law automatically assigned her to the social status of her father and, after marriage, to that of her husband. In the event of divorce, she retained the status of her former husband. When

a Jew planned to move to another town, his local town council had to confirm that he had paid all outstanding taxes and dues. Only then was the district police administration able to authorize his departure and make the necessary insertions into his internal passport.

Although the law did not specify precisely how one was to register in a social estate, such registration was based in principle on the poll-tax revisions. More difficult was the problem of those who had changed their status. For example, one case in the Kiev State-City Archive, which dragged on for two years (1875–1877), involved a certain "A. Berenshtain" who sought to register as a new "honorary citizen" in Kiev, but he encountered long delays as state bureaucrats sought to verify his new status and wealth. It is also worthwhile to look at files in the *meshchanskaiya uprava* (townsmen's administrative board) collections, which have lists of registered townspeople. For instance, the State Archive of Kiev Oblast holds 46 such fondy, which cover many of the major towns in Kiev Province, such as Belaya Tserkov (fond 948) and Fastov (fond 344).

№ по порядку списков Регистрации.	Имя, отчество и фамилия хозяина и неотдвоенных членов его семьи мужского пола, достигших 18 лет полного возраста и подлежащих по этому обложению.	По раскладкѣ, составленной согласно утвержденной сметѣ, облаязь уплатить общественного сбора		ВЪ ТО ЧИСЛО УПЛАЧЕНО.							
		Неодимки прежнихъ лѣтъ.		Отмѣтка времени внесения денегъ.	Въ счетъ недоимки.		Въ счетъ оплаты да 1911 года.				
		Руб.	К.		Руб.	К.	Руб.	Коп.	Руб.	Коп.	
1	Фортунувъ Говшей	"	4	"	15 Мая	"	"	4	"		
1	Фортунувъ Ицко	"	2	"	15 Мая	"	"	2	"		
1	Фортунувъ Мордко	"	2	"	15 Мая	"	"	2	"		
1	Фортунувъ Ушеръ	"	2	"	15 Мая	"	"	2	"		

List of taxpayers in Samgorodok, Ukraine, in 1911, including four members of the Fortunov family: Govshei, Itsko, Mordko and Usher

Family Registers (Posemeinyi Spisok)

The fifth category of registration documents was the family register (*posemeinyi spisok*). State laws required that the male head of each household enter the same name that he used in the poll-tax census for the family register and supplementary “alphabetical register.” Each record included the individual’s social status (*e.g.*, merchant or townsperson), name, age, poll-tax registration number, place of permanent residence, primary occupation, current locus of residence, and finally a notation about his military draft status. This registration did not include females (*e.g.*, records of Radomysl, district of Kiev), but that is not surprising, given the tax and military function of such documentation. These records were to be deposited with the city *duma* and updated every two years or whenever an individual changed his social status or residence.

Recruitment Lists

The final type of registration record was the recruitment list for each town. Like the family register, this record usually excluded women (although there were a few exceptions) and drew upon the previous poll-tax census. From left to right, the standard form included: (1) the registration numbers of each household for the current list, the last poll-tax census and previous recruitment list; (2) the names of male members of the household, including sons and brothers; and, finally, (3) the ages at the last poll-tax census, as well as the current ages.

CREATIVE SOURCES FOR JEWISH GENEALOGY

Unlike registration records, which provide minimal biographical data, invaluable information can be gleaned from archival materials such as court, educational and administrative records, which offer rich detail about the daily lives of family members and their communities. However, this type of advanced research requires intensive preliminary study of family recollections and oral histories. Thus, prior to my research trip to Ukraine in 1994, Professor Marvin Fox of blessed memory asked me to be alert for materials about his family in Korostyshev. Without his “map” of family stories, the search would have been fruitless. He had told me, for instance, about the election of the state rabbi (a dentist by the name of Aron Ratner) in his parents’ hometown. My search led to a file on the “election of the

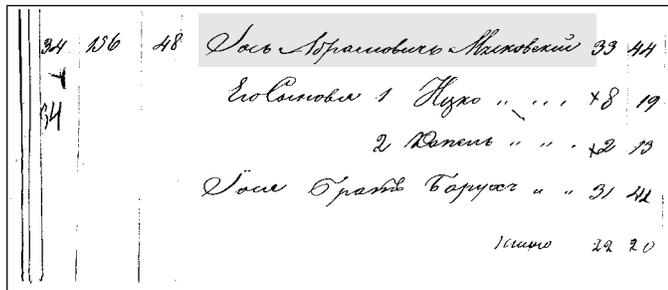
Korostyshev state rabbi” (located in the State Archive of Kiev Oblast), which included signatures of his grandfather and uncle, who had participated in this contentious election, as well as the names of other members of their *bet midrash* (house of study). Extraordinary material about his family emerged from these files—from their role in town politics to their position on the kosher-meat tax that paid the state rabbi’s salary.

Court Records

Court records are an important, if difficult, source for learning about Jewish life in Ukraine and finding relatives who failed to register. Following the judicial reforms of 1864, Jews turned increasingly to the secular state courts rather than the traditional *beit din* (rabbinical court) to resolve their disputes, especially over financial matters. The latter gradually lost the capacity to enforce its rulings, forcing litigants to appeal to state courts for justice. As a result, state authorities came to prevail, even on private, family matters: traditional use of the *herem* (excommunication) or flogging to force Jews to comply with rabbinical injunctions gave way to fines, imprisonment or military conscription. In the end, the rabbis had but one means at their disposal—namely, “persuasion and exhortation.” The erosion of the *beit din*’s authority also stemmed from the decline in popular veneration of rabbinic authority and the fear of communal ostracism among some Jews. Moreover, the judicial reforms of 1864 made state courts not only accessible but affordable even for ordinary Jews. To be sure, the penchant for litigation did not guarantee justice. Indeed, as the courts complained, the profusion of litigation encouraged widespread corruption; despite attempts to combat this, bribery was still rampant and successful.

What types of issues brought Jews into the state courts? First, in some matters, only state courts had jurisdiction. That was most notable in the difficult question of registration. Some Jews—despite all the government’s injunctions on registration—nevertheless sought to procrastinate or to evade this obligation altogether. That noncompliance was particularly true of Jewish girls, whose parents had little incentive to pay for the registration of births, especially in view of the high rates of infant and child mortality. However, parents soon discovered that the state treated unregistered offspring as “illegitimate children”—a status fraught with severe restrictions and discrimination. In response, some parents attempted to undo the damage caused by their negligence, whether intentional or accidental. The problem was that the state rabbi could not amend the metrical books from previous years, since the originals were preserved by local civil authorities. Nor was “adoption” an easy alternative: legal adoption required the personal consent of the tsar himself. A Senate ruling in 1900 sought to facilitate the correction of records by permitting Jews to file suit in district court to alter their status, but this procedure was neither cheap nor guaranteed.

The profusion of Jewish names (*e.g.*, Finkelshtein, Zilberman, Groisman, Shpilberg) in the archival registers demonstrates how widespread the problem had become. In the State Archive of Zhitomir Oblast, a typical petition to



Recruitment list, 1846, from Balta Uezd (district), including #34 entry for Ios Myaskovsky (born 1802, son of Abram); Ios’ sons Itsko (born 1827) and Danel (born 1833); and Ios’ brother Borukh (born 1803). Note: The year of birth was calculated from the age at time of the census.



Passport issued in 1910 to Zanvel Mednik (son of Moische-Itsko), of the village of Kalyus in Novaya Ushitsa District, age 32, a tailor, married. Mednik completed his military service in 1897 and, with this passport, could travel anywhere where Jews were permitted to live.

16

clothing. Conflicts between competitors also ended up in court. For instance, Hersh Mermilshtein, a tailor, lodged a complaint against Khaya Laiman, a seamstress, on the grounds that she had opened her own store without first obtaining permission from the state artisan board.

Minor civil cases involving Jewish traders and small business owners revolved around such matters as fraudulent promissory notes, unpaid debts, improper sales, and property claims (e.g., the case of Tykman vs. Gersheingorn over the use of a forest under lesseeship). The oblast archives hold thousands upon thousands of such cases, especially in towns with a large Jewish population, such as Zhitomir and Odessa. These records—although serendipitous and difficult to search—can contain a gold mine of documents and data.

Finally, the criminal courts prosecuted Jews for a variety of offenses ranging from petty crime (e.g., theft, false scales and the production and sale of moonshine) to more serious crimes like homicide and rape. Some of these “crimes” would hardly fit in any modern classification but were specific to the Russian Empire—such as vagrancy or lack of valid documents, an offense regarded as important and treated severely by the tsarist government. Another offense was alleged self-mutilation (*chlenovreditelstvo*), prosecuted by the state as an attempt to avoid military conscription. This desperate act was not uncommon among religious Jews, who lived in dread of forced conversion in the tsarist military. If the long list of files in the Zhitomir criminal court is any indicator, such cases were anything but rare. In 1880, for example, the state brought a case against Iosi Gershkovich Bronshtein from the village of Kodin (Volynhia Province), alleging that he had willfully injured his eye to escape

the draft. His neighbors sought to rebut that accusation and testified that, in fact, his eye had been deformed since birth. One witness, Moshko Dubov, claimed that as long as he remembered, the accused did not have a healthy right eye. Notwithstanding such depositions, Iosi Bronshtein was found guilty and sentenced to prison.

Educational Records

During the reign of Tsar Nicholas I, the government and *maskilim* (enlightened Jews) sought to propagate secular education among the Jewish population. Initially, these plans met with strong resistance. As one observer put it, “The greatest indignation against the proposed reforms of the schools was unanimously manifested. The leading members of the *beit ha-midrash* threatened with banishment and excommunication anyone who dared support such a frivolous scheme...”⁸ Gradually, however, the state schools gained “acceptance” both among poor families (seeking to shield their sons from conscription) and enlightened families (desiring to broaden economic and

social opportunities for their children). The Universal Military Conscription Act (1874) provided a significant additional incentive by reducing the term of military service in direct proportion to one’s education. Institutions for women’s secondary education also expanded dramatically beginning in the second half of the nineteenth century; by 1914, the women’s gymnasiums had approximately 40,805 Jewish students. Moreover, trade and artisan schools for both men and women gained popularity among the Jews and showed a similar pattern of geometric growth.

The records of educational institutions preserve valuable information about family members who attended a state or private school. The richness of such files is evident from the records of Jewish students in the Moscow and Odessa women’s gymnasiums: (1) applications from prospective students, providing basic biographical data—name, place and date of birth, and names and social status of parents; (2) a short essay of the student’s intentions and plans; and (3) a small photograph (not present in all files). Most archival collections also include the by-laws of the school and information about the curriculum, which can shed light on the goals of the instructors. If the school records are well-preserved, the collection may also contain student grades, disciplinary files, and the service records of faculty (including Jewish teachers). A sample report card of Leya Fuksman from Korostyshev lists the courses she took (such as history, science, calligraphy, drawing and other classes) as well as her final marks.

Where can one find these records? First see Chapter 12 of this book. Also, some of the private Jewish schools are listed

in Dmitrii Elyashevich’s guide (see p. 561), but by no means is his list complete. One must also look in the collection of each educational district or the Chancellery of the Administrator of . . . School District (*Kantseliariya popechiteliiia... uchebnogo okruga*). In principle, one should search for educational records in the oblast archive closest to the town where the family members resided.

Administrative Records

Administrative records relevant to Jewish genealogical research consist—first and foremost—of documents filed by Jews at various government offices. These consist of petitions to the general-governor about matters that could not be satisfactorily resolved by a local institution and records of the state rabbinat elections.

The general-governor received letters from Jews petitioning for a revision of metrical books. These letters address mistakes made by the state rabbi in the spelling of names, birth dates and the omission of entries. Unfortunately, such Jewish files are scattered throughout various administrative fondy and may take time to find; still, they can be valuable for locating “missing relatives.” For instance,

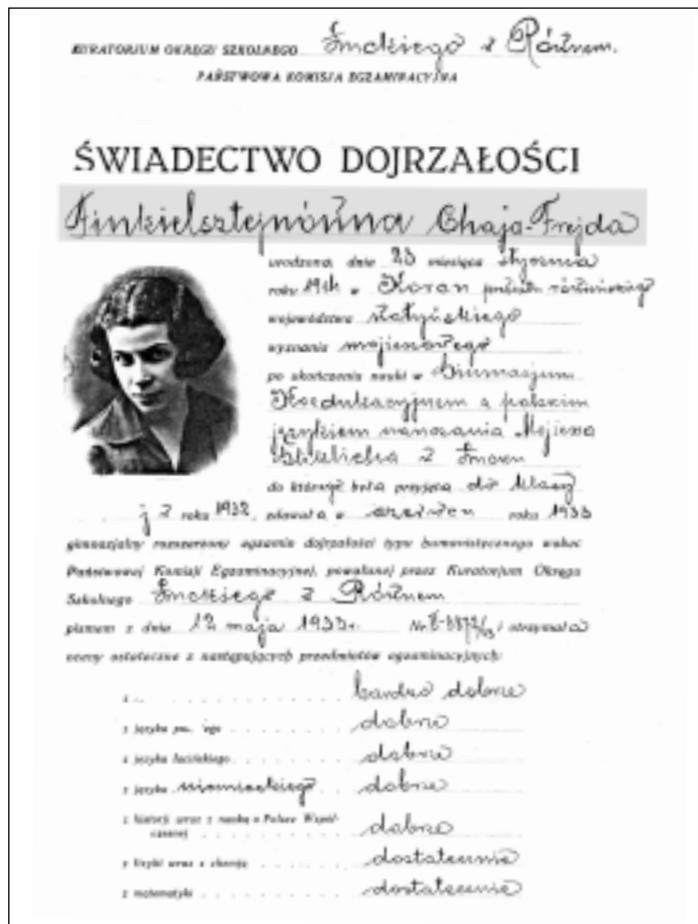
the State Archive of Kiev Oblast holds numerous revision letters, including a 72-page file about the mistakes made by the state rabbi of Kiev in 1899, along with petitions from Jews demanding corrections in their registrations.

The archival collections of the general-governor also contain important files on personal matters that the *beit din*, state courts, or police authorities had been unable to resolve. An example from the State Archive of Kiev Oblast concerns Vera Portugalov of Poltava Province, who appealed to the general-governor of Kiev for assistance in locating her husband: “Four months ago, my husband, Avraham Portugalov, deserted me and my children in the town of Lubny, and we have not received any word of his location or money to support myself and my children.” She had heard rumors that her husband was living on a street in Kiev called Malaya Vasilkovskaya, without a passport, and asked that the police assist in locating him and bring him to accountability. Other Jewish women petitioned the general-governor of Kiev for assistance and intercession in a broad variety of cases involving kidnapped sons in the tsarist army, innocent husbands incarcerated in prison, abuse by police and a plethora of other personal matters.

Finally, the records of the state rabbinat also provide useful information about religious organizations and politics in Ukrainian towns. As a rule, the male members of each prayer house and synagogue (the franchise normally being restricted to males over age 25) elected 10 delegates, who in turn cast votes to choose the state rabbi. Sholom Aleichem, who once served as the state rabbi of Kiev, described the procedures as follows: “Every three years, a proclamation is sent to us: ‘*Na osnovanii predpisaniya...*’ [‘On the basis of the order...’]. Or, as we would say: Your Lord, the Governor, orders you to come together in the synagogue, poor little Jews, and pick out a rabbiner for yourself.... Then the campaign begins. Candidates, hot discussions, brandy, maybe even a bribe or two.... That was life!”⁹

Researchers who are fortunate enough to find their relatives on these lists will not only learn what prayer house they belonged to (*i.e.*, prayer houses of the butchers, tailors, shoemakers or the Hasidic *kloiz* of a certain rebbe), but also the names of other families with whom they may have been closely associated. Moreover, these records indicate the prices for registration reached after extensive negotiations between the new state rabbi and town residents.

As this overview of archival materials suggests, the opportunities for genealogical research in Ukraine are immense and exciting. Numerous registration records, even for small towns, have remained intact despite the destructive legacy of war on Ukrainian soil. In addition, researchers should not overlook the rich store of materials in collections bequeathed by the state courts, schools and various administrative institutions. The latter files, moreover, are not mere lists of names but contain a wealth of detail that can greatly complement family memories and help reconstruct life and relations in the Ukrainian shtetl.



Diploma from a school in Rovno, dated 1933, issued to Chaja-Frejda Finkielstejn, born in 1914

Key Russian Terms for Genealogical Research

archival notations:

- fond, fondy** or **fonds** (collection, collections; record group[s])
opis, opisi (inventory, inventories, subdivisions of the collection)
delo, dela (file, files)
list, listy (folio, folios)

administrative or geographic divisions in Imperial Russia:

- guberniya** (province); **uezd** (district); **volost** (township) or **gorod** (town)

administrative or geographic divisions in the Soviet Union and in Russia:

- oblast** (province or district); **raion** (region); **gorod** (town)

duma (a representative council in Russia; Russian legislature)

Evrei (Jew)

evreiskaya sinagoga (Jewish synagogue)

gubernskaya kazennaya palata (provincial or guberniya Office of the Treasury)

metricheskie knigi (metrical books/registers of births, deaths, marriages and divorces)

molitvennaya doma (prayer house)

podatnye spiski (poll-tax lists)

posemeinyi spisok (family register)

putevoditeli (published archival guides to fonds and collections)

revizskie skazki (poll-tax census)

soslovie (social estate)

meshchanstvo (petty townspeople)

kupechnestvo (merchant)

remeslennik (artisan, often included with the **meshchanstvo**)

pochetnoe grazhanstvo (honorary citizen)

zemledelets (agriculturalist)

ZAGS Archive or Department of ZAGS (Otdel Zapisi Aktov Grazhdanskogo

Sostoyaniya): where vital records are registered, usually located in the local town hall or mayor's office

Notes

¹Patricia Kennedy Grimsted, "Archives in Ukraine," on the Arceo Bibliobase Web site: <<http://www.sabre.org/huri/abbukr/>>. See also Patricia K. Grimsted, *Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the USSR* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1988).

²Jacob Goldberg, "Die Ehe bei den Juden Polens im 18 Jahrhundert," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, 31 (1983): pp. 483–515.

³Sholom Aleichem, "Tit for Tat," in *The Old Country*, trans. by Julius and Frances Butwin (New York: Crown Publishers, 1946), p. 200.

⁴Azriel Shochat, *Mosad 'ha rabanut mi-ta'am' be-Rusyah* (Haifa: University of Haifa, 1975), p. 9.

⁵L.M. Aizenberg, "Ob ispravlenii dopushchennykh v evreiskikh metricheskikh knigakh oshibok," *Evreiskii mir* 14–15 (1911): pp. 42–43.

⁶Peter Czap, Jr., "Marriage and the Peasant Joint Family in the Era of Serfdom," in David Ransel, ed., *The Family in Imperial Russia: New Lines of Historical Research* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1978), p. 121.

⁷Paul R. Mendes-Flohr and Jehuda Reinharz, *The Jew in the Modern World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), p. 304.

⁸Michael Stanislawski, *Tsar Nicholas and the Jews. The Transformation of Jewish Society in Russia* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1983), p. 74.

⁹Sholom Aleichem, "Tit for Tat," in *The Old Country*, p. 200.

ChaeRan Y. Freeze is an assistant professor of East European Jewish History at Brandeis University and an associate at the International Research Institute on Jewish Women. Since 1993, she has worked in the central, provincial and city archives in Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kiev, Kharkov, Odessa, Zhitomir, Lvov, Vilnius and Kaunas. Professor Freeze is currently preparing for publication a book on the history of Jewish marriages and divorces in Tsarist Russia.

Editor's Note: This article is revised and adapted from an article that appeared in *Avotaynu*, vol. 13, no. 1 (Spring 1997): pp. 6–11.



Remains of devastated Jewish cemetery in Zborov, 1998

18

Editor's Note: The following words appear on the subscription form of the *Kyiv Post*: "Those interested may well ask: how do you spell the name of this city? Kiev or Kyiv? The issue of how to spell the name of this city is not fully resolved, with linguists, historians, traditionalists, Ukrainian nationalists, Russophiles, the Ukrainian Diaspora, legalists and many other parties weighing in. At present in Ukraine, both spellings are in use; however, the national government has stated, in legislation, its preference for *Kyiv*."