



Avotaynu Monograph Series

**Jewish Vital Records,
Revision Lists
and
Other Jewish Holdings
in the
Lithuanian Archives**

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How to Use This Monograph

Lithuanian Jews—known as Litvaks—belonged to a highly sophisticated culture which was known throughout the Jewish and non-Jewish world for having produced some of the most brilliant scholars and works of learning. Some of these Jews and their descendants immigrated mostly to the U.S., South Africa, and to what was to become Israel. Approximately 95% of those who stayed behind were murdered during World War II, some by the Nazis but more by local henchmen. As a result, almost seven centuries of vibrant Lithuanian-Jewish culture effectively came to an end.

Most of what remains of that culture is its documentary legacy, much of which is kept in the Lithuanian archives. This monograph is an index to the late 18th-, 19th- and early 20th-century documents regarding those Litvaks who lived in Kovna, Vilna and Suvalki guberniyas (defined below). From the end of the 18th century until World War I, this territory belonged to the Russian Empire. Lithuania, as a country name, was not used during that time period.

Typed inventories of 19th century Jewish vital records (birth, marriage, divorce and death) held in the State Historical Archives of Lithuania in Vilnius were given to the Jewish Genealogy Society of Greater Washington by Laima Tautvaisaite, director of this institution, when she was guest of honor at the 14th Summer Seminar on Jewish Genealogy held in Washington, D.C., June 26–30, 1996.

We have organized and computerized these lists; they form the bulk of this monograph. To them have been added other databases compiled and donated by FAST Genealogical Service and by Yakov Shadevich. Most records are held in the Lithuanian State Historical Archives in Vilnius, but some are stored in a branch archives in Kaunas; a few are at the Academy of Science Library in Vilnius.

Data is presented geographically by town where the documents were created. Town names are rendered in the spelling currently used by Lithuanian archivists. Where known, alternative names are given in parentheses. *Fond*, *opis* and file (*delo*) numbers are given for all of the vital records and many other types of records. These terms are archival designations of the record storage system that enable an archivist to retrieve records, much as a librarian relies upon a cataloging system. A *fond* corresponds to a record group; an *opis* is an inventory of a subset of records within a specific fond and a *delo* is a file within an opis. Each file may consist of many pages or simply a single sheet of paper.

Boundaries

Country boundaries have changed frequently over the past two centuries in that part of the world. So also have administrative districts within countries. Provenance determines where records are to be kept. That is, international archival standards mandate that records be held in the archives of the country that today governs the land where they were created.

For example, some records created during the 19th century in what was then Kovno, Suvalki and Vilna guberniyas are today held in archives in Belarus or Poland. Revision lists from four *uyezds* (the term, *uyezd*, will be described below) that once were part of what was historically known as Lithuania (Disna, Lida, Oshmiany and Vileika) are now in a branch of the State Historical Archives of Belarus in Grodno. Other records, especially from former areas of Suvalki *guberniya* now in Poland, are held in the Polish Archives of Ancient Acts in Warsaw. (The address is 6 Długa St., Warsaw. Many have been microfilmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah, the acquisition arm of the LDS (Mormon) Family History Library and may be accessed through the LDS Family History Centers.) Nevertheless, some of the holdings of the Lithuanian State Historical Archives in Vilnius listed in this monograph were created in towns that today are part of Belarus, Latvia or Poland, yet are held by the Lithuanian State Historical Archives. During the last century, the Russian Czarist Empire ruled over all the countries listed here.

Wars, revolutions, fire, neglect and plain human error have taken their toll on the records from this area. Many have been lost. Others are not found where one expects them to be. Although revision lists from former Lithuanian *uyezds* are in archives in Belarus, some Jewish vital records from the same areas are held in the Vilnius archives and are listed in this monograph. Researchers in this area must discard any notion that record keeping is an exact science. Many a slip has occurred between an official plan for record storage and what actually can be found today.

Historical Geography

Some geographical terms used in this monograph must be defined. During the latter part of the 19th century, what is present-day Lithuania was divided administratively among three *guberniyas*, which were similar in size and function to provinces or states in Western countries. The three *guberniyas*—Kovno, Suvalki and Vilna—were named after the largest city in each of these *guberniyas*. Each *guberniya* was itself subdivided into *uyezds*, territorial units that corresponded roughly in size and function to what we in the West know as counties. Today they often are referred to in English-language writings as districts. The principle of naming an administrative unit after its largest population concentration held here as well. Hence, each *uyezd* was given the name of its largest community.

Sometimes records of interest may be found in a collection for an entire *uyezd* (as in the case of those for Vilnius County), rather than in records listed under the name of the town of interest. Be sure to check these county registers as well. For this reason, it is important to know not only the *uyezd* in which a town was located, but also the history of the boundary and name changes for that area. A typical example is that of the town of Braslav, today in Belarus. Prior to 1838, Braslav was the administrative center of an *uyezd* by that name. At that time, it belonged to the Lithuanian *guberniya*. After Kovno and Vilna were created as separate *guberniyas* in 1843, the new *uyezd* of Novo-Aleksandrovsk was created and Braslav became part of Novo-Aleksandrovsk *uyezd* of Kovno *guberniya*. Today, Novo-Aleksandrovsk is called *Zarasai*, as is the district in which it is located. A thorough researcher seeking 19th century records from Braslav must check both the town records of Braslav, and the *uyezd* records for Novo-Aleksandrovsk.

There were other, smaller, territorial units as well. One was *valscius* (*volost* in Polish) which was the smallest governmental unit of the 19th century Russian Empire. It corresponded roughly to a township in Western countries. Another was an *okrug*, a Russian word often used during the last century, which simply means an undefined region or neighborhood. A parish or religious community (*obshchestvo*) was composed of all individuals served by the same church or synagogue. The *Pale of Settlement*, the western area of the Russian Empire, was the only territory where most Jewish inhabitants were permitted to live during the last century. Much of this land was acquired during the three partitions of Poland in 1772, 1775 and 1795.

In 1981, the Soviet archival expert Patricia Kennedy Grimsted wrote:

By the late nineteenth century, the territories that now constitute the Soviet republics of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Belarussia, were divided among eleven different *guberniyas*, none of which coincide with present republic boundaries....Archival jurisdiction is determined along territorial lines by the provenance of the records involved. Thus, according to present Soviet archival regulations, earlier records generally fall under the jurisdiction of the state historical archive in the present-day republic occupying the territory where the records were created....In practice, given present Soviet archival regulations, many former *guberniya* records are now often divided between archives in several different locations. In the case of records from the *uyezd* level and from cities or smaller administrative levels, the present location of the *uyezd* center or of the city or district in question determined the present archival jurisdiction.¹

Grimsted notes that many changes of administrative-territorial divisions occurred over the last century. For a researcher, the question is not who rules a given town today, but rather, who ruled it during the 19th century.

Uyezds of the Three Lithuanian *Guberniyas* during the 19th Century (19th Century Russian Name/Modern Lithuanian, Polish or Belarussian Name)

Kovno (created in 1842/43 from Vilna *Guberniya*)

Kovno / Kaunas, Lithuania

Novo-Aleksandrovsk (Prior to 1839, this was called Braslav *uyezd*; today the town and its county

¹ *Grimsted, Patricia Kennedy, *Archives and Manuscript Repositories in the USSR: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania and Belorussia* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1981).

have been renamed Zarasai.)
Ponevezh (Upita) / Panevezys, Lithuania
Rossieny / Raseiniai, Lithuania
Shavli / Siauliai, Lithuania
Telshi / Telsiai, Lithuania
Vilkomir / Ukmerge, Lithuania

Suvalki (created in 1866/67 from Avgustov Guberniya)

Avgustov / Augustow, Poland
Kalvaria / Kalvarija, Lithuania
Mariampol / Marijampole, Lithuania
Seiny / Sejny, Poland
Suvalki / Suwalki, Poland
Vladislavov / Kudirkos Naumiestis, Lithuania
Volkovyshki / Vilkaviskis, Lithuania

Vilna (annexed from Poland in 1795; from 1796–1801 it was part of Lithuanian guberniya)

Disna / Dzisna, Belarus
Lida / Lida, Belarus
Oshmiany / Ashmyany, Belarus
Sventsiany / Svencionys, Lithuania
Troki / Trakai, Lithuania
Vileika / Vileyka, Belarus
Vilna / Vilnius, Lithuania

Records Defined

All genealogists know about the value of so-called "vital" records—the accounts of births, marriages, divorces and deaths. They and the *reviskie skazki* (fiscal censuses) are well known to most Jewish genealogists. Less well known, but often equally valuable are other categories of records, many of which are alien to Westerners not accustomed to totalitarian rule. A multitude of them were created in 19th century czarist Russia. Following are the categories of records listed in this monograph. Just because a particular record is not listed in the monograph does not necessarily mean that it does not exist; it may mean only that the records has not yet been located.

Vital Records

Vital Records are birth, marriage, divorce and death records. Only in 1826, did the czarist government issue a requirement that rabbis keep registration books of births, marriages, divorces and death. After that date, Jews were required to go to the synagogue to which they were assigned to register vital events. Once a year, the authorities went to the synagogues to copy these registers. The materials stored in archives today are all copies; original records, kept in synagogues, no longer exist. They were destroyed no later than 1942, primarily by the Germans.

Often a range of dates is given. Because we have not personally inspected every record listed, we cannot definitely say what is in them. It is known, however, that a range of dates does not necessarily mean that every date in between is represented in the collection, only that the earliest and latest date are know to be present. We assume, however, that several dates in between also exist. Any given file may include records for more than one year, and the records for a single year may be spread over a number of files.

Reviskie Skazki

Reviskie skazki (often called revision lists) were a series of ten censuses designed for taxation and conscription purposes begun by czarist authorities in the middle of the 18th century. The Imperial Czarist Empire of Russia had almost no Jewish inhabitants before the three partitions of Poland. Revision lists were first drawn up in the Lithuanian *guberniyas* only in 1795, the year that Jews first appeared in these lists. The *reviskie skazki* were organized by family and listed (by name and age) the

head of the household, spouse and children. Jewish revision lists were created separately from Christian lists. Because the lists were used for conscription, and army service was an especially onerous order for the Jews, every effort was made by these families to keep males from being recorded. This was especially true during the reign of Nicholas I (1825–55), during which Jewish boys as young as eight years of age were drafted for as long as 25 years. Revisions V (1795), VI (1811) and VII (1815) are known to be especially inaccurate, with many missing males (but only males were recorded in the sixth revision). (For excellent descriptions of the *reviskie skazki*, see, "Information for Jewish Genealogists in the State Archive of Zhitomir Oblast", *Avotaynu*, XII/1/14; "What May Be Learned from 19th Century Czarist Jewish Birth Records and Revision Lists," *Avotaynu*, X/3/05; and "Vital Statistics in Czarist Russia," *Avotaynu*, V/3/06). Because information about revision lists in this monograph was obtained from private researchers, the *fond*, *opis* and file information was not always available.

Finally, we believe that the *reviskie skazki* for the towns were usually kept in registers drawn up for entire uyezds. This means that researchers should examine the registers for the uyezd for the town in question, especially if revision lists do not appear in this monograph under then town entry in question.

Kupah Tax

Kupah Tax, called *korobochny* in Russian, has also been called the box tax in some English-language writings. According to Professor Dov Levin, author of the recently published *Pinkas Hakehillot Lithuania*, the box in question was most likely what is called a *pushke* in Yiddish; the blue and white Jewish National Fund boxes that once were found in almost every Jewish home is an example of *pushke*. Certain items, such as Sabbath candles and/or kosher salt were indispensable items for every Jewish household; it was on these items, therefore, that the tax to support the *kehillah* (Jewish community) was levied. Typically, the rabbi's wife had a monopoly on the sale of such items, and it was she who was responsible for collecting the tax. Banks were rare or nonexistent in Czarist Russia during most of the 19th century, so when a tax was collected, it was put into a special box, a *pushke* or (in Hebrew) *kupah*. Thus, a list of payers of a *kupah* tax is, for all intents and purposes, a census of the total Jewish community.

Other Records

Sprinkled throughout the monograph are notations of other categories of records listed only as financial, police, military, etc. As we went to press, the value of another, previously-unknown category of records came to light; these are records of postal savings accounts, popular in the Pale of Settlement at the end of the last century. Apparently, the authorities demanded extensive documentation of those with such accounts—including parents' names, birth places, etc. Without inspecting each file, the exact nature of these miscellaneous categories of records cannot be known precisely. What is known, however, is that some researchers of Jewish genealogy have found valuable information in them. Listed below are the abbreviations used to denote the various categories of records:

ai	alphabetical index	el	elections
al	alphabetical list	fin	financial
b	births	fl	family list
bdm	births, deaths, marriages	g	former residents of Griniskis
bdmv	births, deaths, marriages, divorces	hev	house estimated value
can	candle tax	hol	homeowner's list
cen	census	jcl	Jewish community list
cr	cemetery records—Jewish	jh	Jewish hospital
crl	city resident list	jkjc	joining Kovna Jewish community
ct	communal taxes	k	<i>kupah</i> tax
d	deaths	m	marriages
dc	draftee collecting & planning	m/r	merchants/residents
de	Duma elections	mer	merchants
dl	draftee list	misc	miscellaneous records
dl-j	draft list—Jews	ml	military list

ol	owners list	tcd	tax collection & distribution records
p	police	tpl	taxpayers list
pbr	postal bank records	tpl-a	apartment tax payers list
pib	passport issuance book	tpl-l	land tax payer tax
prb	passport registration book	tpl-r	real estate tax payers list
rc	real estate as collateral	txp	land tax planning
resl	resident's list	v	divorces
rs	<i>reviskie skazki</i>	var	various
ta	town administration	vl	voters list
		vl-j	voters list—Jews

How to Access Records

As we go to press, the Mormons are slowly microfilming at the State Historical Archives in Vilnius. No Jewish records have yet appeared in Salt Lake City, and none are expected in the near future. For now, therefore, researchers have only three options for accessing the records listed in this monograph:

1. Write directly to the Lithuanian State Historical Archives, Gerosios Vilties 10, Vilnius 2015, fax: 65-23-14, and inquire about the possibility of obtaining copies of files or records of interest. Be sure to ask about fees and estimated time for completion of the task.

2. Hire a private genealogical search service. This may be the only available option in the case of records for which no *fond*, *opis* and *delo* number is given. Two researchers with experience in Lithuania, and were contributors to this book are: Yakov Shadevich; 10412 Parthenon Court; Bethesda, MD 20817; fax, 301-365-5719; e-mail, yakov@inter.net. Boris Feldblyum; FAST Genealogy Service; 8510 Wild Olive Drive; Potomac, MD 20854; e-mail, bfeldbly@capaccess.org.

3. Research in person at the archives in Vilnius or Kaunas. This is likely to be the most unpredictable and/or unproductive course of action—unless the services of an on-site Lithuanian researcher with known experience searching Jewish records are engaged in advance.

Some records are noted as being physically located in Kaunas at the time of this writing. However, a plan has existed for several years to move some of the records to the archives in Vilnius. If you plan to go, be sure to inquire in advance if records of interest are still in Kaunas.

* Some *reviskie skazkie* are listed without *fond*, *opis* and file numbers. They were obtained from a private researcher and, at the time of writing could be accessed only through FAST Genealogy Service or through Yakov Shadevich. Although most are believed to be in the Vilnius archives, a few unidentified *reviskie skazki* records (including some from Kelme) are known to be held at the National Library.

Bibliographical Sources

In past years, *Avotaynu*, The International Review of Jewish Genealogy, has published articles relevant to Lithuanian archival research. Following is a list of the most important ones. Following the name of the article are the volume/issue/page numbers:

"Association of Lithuanian Jews in Israel," III/1/24.

"Missing YIVO Records May Be Found," V/2/26.

"Letter from Jewish Community of Kaunas," V/4/21.

"Book on Lithuanian Jewish Communities Delayed," VI/1/41.

"Vital Records of Lithuanian Jewry Found," VI/2/03.

"News of Marijampole Society," VI/3/39.

"Jewish Vital Statistic Records in Lithuanian Archives," VI/4/04.

"Book on Lithuanian Jewish Communities to be Published," VI/4/63.

"A Genealogical Trip to Lithuania: the Host's Perspective," VII/1/03.

Book Review, *Lithuanian Jewish Communities*, VII/3/36.

"Numerous Photographic Essays of Jewish Lithuania Planned," VIII/2/57.

"Explains 1795 Revision List," VIII/3/66.

"Lithuania Reluctant to Allow Microfilming of Jewish Documents," VIII/4/03.

"Dvinsk Genealogy and Post-Holocaust Questions," VIII/4/06.

1913-1914

prb

222

15

1

K

Account Applications, Bank

Kaimela (Kiduliai)

1815	b	1236	240	
1815	m	1236	241	3
1815	d	1236	242	3
1816	b	1236	240	3
1816	m	1236	241	3
1816	d	1236	242	3
1817	b	1236	243	3
1817	m	1236	244	3
1818	b	1236	245	3
1818	m	1236	246	3
1819	m	1236	247	3
1822	b	1236	248	3
1822	m	1236	249	3
1823	b	1236	250	3
1824	m	1236	251	3
1824	b	1236	252	3
1825	d	1236	253	3
1827	b	1236	254	3
1827	d	1236	693	3
1827	m	1236	693	3
1828	b	1236	693	3
1828	d	1236	694	3
1828	m	1236	694	3
1830	b	1236	694	3
1830	d	1236	695	3
1830	m	1236	695	3
1839	b	1236	695	3
1839	d	1236	696	3
1839	m	1236	696	3
1841	b	1236	696	3
1841	d	1236	697	3
1841	m	1236	697	3
1842	b	1236	697	3
1842	d	1236	698	3
1842	m	1236	698	3
1845	b	1236	698	3
1845	d	1236	699	3
1845	m	1236	699	3

only entry for kalvariija,

no entry for SULWAKI

homeowners list

Kalvariija

1908 hol

Kapciai

1871

rs

1875-1883

rs

1262 58

1

Kapciamiestis (Kopcheva)

1812	d	1236	1	
1813	d	1236	1	30
1818	d	1236	2	30
1823	b	1236	3	30

Fragments
Fragments
Fragments
Fragments**Kaunas (Kovno)**

1795-1816-1818

rs

1811

rs

I-61 65

1

K

1834

rs

61

1

K

1834

rs

I-61 308

1

K

1851

rs

I-61 1637

1

K

1858-1879

rs

I-196 1

1

K

1858-1898

rs

I-61 1612-1613

1

K

1858-1907

rs

I-61 1610-1611

1

K

1858-1908

rs

I-61 1609

1

K

1874

rs

I-61 1646

1

K

1875-1879

rs

I-196 2

1

K

1827-1918

fin

715

1836

crl

61

1837

prb

61 384

1

K

1

K

Kaunas Duma, Town of Labunava

crl

Alphabetic - Jews

Jews

Jews

Jews

Alphabetic - Jews

Property