

Contents

History

Jewish life in the Pale

Territories of the Pale

1791

1794

1795

1805–1835

Final demographics

In popular culture

See also

References

External links

History

The territory that would become the Pale first began to enter Russian hands in 1772, with the First Partition of Poland. At the time, most Jews (and in fact most Russians) were restricted in their movements. The Pale came into being under the rule of Catherine the Great in 1791,^[3] initially as a measure to speed colonization of newly acquired territory on the Black Sea. Jews were allowed to expand the territory available to them, but in exchange Jewish merchants could no longer do business in non-Pale Russia.^[4]

The institution of the Pale became more significant following the Second Partition of Poland in 1793, since, until then, Russia's Jewish population had been rather limited.^[5] The dramatic westward expansion of the Russian Empire through the annexation of Polish-Lithuanian territory substantially increased the Jewish population.^[6] At its height, the Pale, including the new Polish and Lithuanian territories, had a Jewish population of over five million, and represented the largest component (40 percent) of the world Jewish population at that time. The freedom of movement of non-Jewish Russians was greatly increased, but the freedom of movement of Jews was greatly restricted and officially kept within the boundaries of the pale.^[4]

The name "Pale of settlement" first arose under the rule of Nicholas I. Under his rule (1825 to 1855), the Pale gradually shrank, and became more restrictive. In 1827, Jews living in Kiev were severely restricted. In 1835 the provinces of Astrakhan and the northern Caucasus were removed from the Pale. Nicholas tried to remove all Jews from within 50 miles of the Austrian border in 1843. In practice, this was very difficult to enforce, and the restrictions were lessened in 1858.^[4]

Alexander II, who ruled 1855 to 1881,^[7] expanded the rights of rich and educated Jews to leave and live beyond the Pale, which led many Jews to believe that the Pale might soon be abolished.^[4] These hopes vanished when Alexander II was assassinated in 1881.^[7] Rumors spread that he had been assassinated by Jews,^{[8][9]} and in the aftermath anti-Jewish sentiment skyrocketed. Anti-Jewish pogroms rocked the country from 1881 through 1884. The reactionary Temporary Laws, also called the May Laws, of 1881

prohibited any new Jewish settlement outside of the Pale. The laws also granted peasants the right to demand the expulsion of Jews in their towns. The laws were anything but temporary, and would be in full effect until at least 1903. In 1910, Jewish members of the State Duma proposed the abolition of the Pale, but the power dynamic of Duma meant that the bill never had a realistic chance to pass. Far-right political elements in the Duma responded by proposing that all Jews be expelled from Russia.^[4]

At times, Jews were forbidden to live in agricultural communities, or certain cities, (as in Kiev, Sevastopol and Yalta), and were forced to move to small provincial towns, thus fostering the rise of the *shtetls*. Jewish merchants of the First Guild (купцы первой гильдии, the wealthiest *sosloviye* of merchants in the Russian Empire), people with higher or special education, university students, artisans, army tailors, ennobled Jews, soldiers (drafted in accordance with the Recruit Charter of 1810), and their families had the right to live outside the Pale of Settlement.^[10] In some periods, special dispensations were given for Jews to live in the major imperial cities, but these were tenuous, and several thousand Jews were expelled to the Pale from Moscow as late as 1891. The extremely restrictive decrees and recurrent pogroms led to much emigration from the Pale, mainly to the United States and Western Europe. However, emigration could not keep up with birth rates and expulsion of Jews from other parts of Russia, and thus the Jewish population of the Pale continued to grow.^[4]

During World War I, the Pale lost its rigid hold on the Jewish population when large numbers of Jews fled into the Russian interior to escape the invading German army. By August 1915, the boundaries of the Pale were *de facto* unenforceable. The Pale formally came to an end soon after the abdication of Nicholas II, and as revolution gripped Russia. On March 20 (April 2 N.S.), 1917, the Pale was abolished by the Provisional Government decree, On the abolition of religious and national restrictions.^{[11][4]} The Second Polish Republic was reformed from much of the former territory of the Pale in the aftermath of World War I.^[12] Subsequently, most of the Jewish population of the area would perish in the Holocaust one generation later.^[4]

Jewish life in the Pale

Jewish life in the *shtetls* (Yiddish: שטעטלעך *shtetlekh* "little towns") of the Pale of Settlement was hard and poverty-stricken.^[13] Following the Jewish religious tradition of *tzedakah* (charity), a sophisticated system of volunteer Jewish social welfare organizations developed to meet the needs of the population. Various organizations supplied clothes to poor students, provided kosher food to Jewish soldiers conscripted into the Tsar's army, dispensed free medical treatment for the poor, offered dowries and household gifts to destitute brides, and arranged for technical education for orphans. According to historian Martin Gilbert's *Atlas of Jewish History*, no province in the Pale had less than 14% of Jews on relief; Lithuanian and Ukrainian Jews supported as much as 22% of their poor populations.^[14]



Geographic distribution of Jewish languages (such as Yiddish) in the Russian Empire according to 1897 census. The Pale of Settlement can be seen in the west, top left.

The concentration of Jews in the Pale, coupled with Tsar Alexander III's "fierce hatred of the Jews", and the rumors that Jews had been involved in the assassination of his father Tsar Alexander II, made them easy targets for pogroms and anti-Jewish riots by the majority population.^[15] These, along with the repressive May Laws, often devastated whole communities. Though attacks occurred throughout the

existence of the Pale, particularly devastating anti-Jewish pogroms occurred from 1881–83 and from 1903–1906,^[16] targeting hundreds of communities, assaulting thousands of Jews, and causing considerable property damage.

Most Jews could not engage in agriculture due to the nature of the Pale, and were thus predominantly merchants, artisans, and shopkeepers. This made poverty a serious issue among the Jews. However, a robust Jewish community welfare system arose; by the end of the 19th century nearly 1 in 3 Jews in the Pale were being supported by Jewish welfare organizations.^{[17][4]} This Jewish support system included, but was not limited to, providing free medicine to the poor, giving dowries to poor brides, Kosher food to Jewish soldiers, and education to orphans.^[3]

One outgrowth of the concentration of Jews in a circumscribed area was the development of the modern yeshiva system. Prior to the Pale, schools to study the Talmud were a luxury. This began to change when Rabbi Chaim of Volozhin began a sort of national level Yeshiva. In 1803 he founded the Volozhin yeshiva, and began to attract large number of students from around the Pale. The Tsarist authorities were not pleased with the school and sought to make it more secular, eventually closing it in 1879. The authorities reopened it in 1881, but required all teachers to have diplomas from Russian institutions and to teach Russian language and culture. This requirement was not only untenable to the Jews, but essentially impossible, and the school closed for the last time in 1892. Regardless, the school had great impact: its students went on to form many new yeshivas in the Pale, and reignited the study of the Talmud in Russia.^[3]

After 1886, the Jewish quota was applied to education, with the percentage of Jewish students limited to no more than 10% within the Pale, 5% outside the Pale and 3% in the capitals of Moscow, St. Petersburg, and Kiev. The quotas in the capitals, however, were increased slightly in 1908 and 1915.

Amidst the difficult conditions in which the Jewish population lived and worked, the courts of Hasidic dynasties flourished in the Pale. Thousands of followers of rebbes such as the Gerrer Rebbe Yehudah Aryeh Leib Alter (known as the *Sfas Emes*), the Chernobyler Rebbe, and the Vizhnitzer Rebbe flocked to their towns for the Jewish holidays and followed their rebbes' minhagim (Hebrew: מנהגים, Jewish practices) in their own homes.

The tribulations of Jewish life in the Pale of Settlement were immortalized in the writings of Yiddish authors such as humorist Sholom Aleichem, whose novel *Tevye der Milchiger* (Yiddish: טײַוה דער מילכיגער, *Tevye the Milkman*, in the form of the narration of Tevye from a fictional shtetl of Anatevka to the author) forms the basis of the theatrical (and subsequent film) production *Fiddler on the Roof*. Because of the harsh conditions of day-to-day life in the Pale, some two million Jews emigrated from there between 1881 and 1914, mainly to the United States.^[18]



A melamed (Jewish teacher) in 19th century Podolia

Territories of the Pale

The Pale of Settlement included the following areas.

1791

The ukase of Catherine the Great of December 23, 1791 limited the Pale to:

- Western Krai:
 - Mogilev Governorate
 - Polotsk Governorate (later reorganized into Vitebsk Governorate)
- Little Russia (Ukraine):
 - Kiev Governorate
 - Chernigov Governorate
 - Novgorod-Seversky Viceroyalty (later became Poltava Governorate)
- Novorossiya Governorate
 - Yekaterinoslav Viceroyalty
 - Taurida Oblast (Crimea)

1794

After the Second Partition of Poland, the ukase of June 23, 1794, the following areas were added:

- Minsk Governorate
- Mogilev Governorate
- Polotsk Governorate
- Kiev Governorate
- Volhynian Governorate
- Podolia Governorate

1795

After the Third Partition of Poland, the following areas were added:

- Vilna Governorate
- Grodno Governorate

1805–1835

After 1805 the Pale gradually shrank, and became limited to the following areas:

- Lithuanian governorates
- Southwestern Krai
- Belarus without rural areas
- Malorossiya (Little Russia or Ukraine) without rural areas
- Chernigov Governorate
- Novorossiya without Nikolaev and Sevastopol
- Kiev Governorate without Kiev
- Baltic governorates closed for arriving Jews

Congress Poland did not belong to the Pale of Settlement^[10]

Rural areas for 50 versts (53 km) from the western border were closed for new settlement of the Jews.

Final demographics

According to the 1897 census, the *guberniyas* had the following percentages of Jews:^[19]

- Northwestern Krai (whole Lithuania, Belarus):
 1. Vilna Governorate [12.86%]
 2. Kovno Governorate [13.77%]
 3. Grodno Governorate [17.49%]
 4. Minsk Governorate [16.06%]
 5. Mogilev Governorate [12.09%]
 6. Vitebsk Governorate (some parts of it are in Pskov and Smolensk Oblasts now) [11.79%]
- Southwestern Krai (part; now in Ukraine):
 1. Kiev Governorate [12.19%]
 2. Volhynian Governorate [13.24%]
 3. Podolia Governorate [12.28%]
- Polish governorates (lands of Congress Poland):
 1. Warsaw guberniya (Варшавская губерния (Мазовецкая губерния 1837–44)) [18.22%]
 2. Lublin guberniya (Люблинская губерния) [13.46%]
 3. Łuck guberniya (Плоцкая губерния) [9.29%]
 4. Kalisz guberniya (Калишская губерния) [8.52%]
 5. Piotrkow guberniya (Пётроковская губерния) [15.85%]
 6. Kielce guberniya (Келецкая губерния (Краковская губерния 1837–44)) [10.92%]
 7. Radom guberniya (Радомская губерния) [13.78%]
 8. Siedlce guberniya (Седлецкая губерния (Подлясская губерния 1837–44)) [15.69%]
 9. Augustów guberniya (Августовская губерния, 1837–67), split into:
 1. Suwałki guberniya (Сувалкская губерния) [10.16%]
 2. Łomża guberniya (Ломжинская губерния) [15.77%]

Others:

1. Chernigov Governorate (some parts of it are in Bryansk Oblast now) [4.98%]
2. Poltava Governorate [3.99%]
3. Taurida Governorate (Crimea) [Jewish 4.20% + Karaite 0.43%]
4. Kherson Governorate [12.43%]
5. Bessarabia Governorate [11.81%]
6. Yekaterinoslav Governorate [4.78%]

In 1882 it was forbidden for Jews to settle in rural areas.

The following cities within the Pale were excluded from it:

- Kiev (the ukase of December 2, 1827: eviction of Jews from Kiev)
- Nikolaev

- Sevastopol
- Yalta

In popular culture

- *Fiddler on the Roof* musical, later adapted into a film, located in the Pale of 1905 in the fictional town of Anatevka, Ukraine
- *Yentl* musical, later adapted into a film located in the Pale of 1873 Poland
- The novels of Isaac Bashevis Singer

See also

- The Pale (English Pale) around Dublin, Ireland
- Pale of Calais, English territory in France from 1360 to 1558
- Antisemitism in the Russian Empire
- Antisemitism in Ukraine
- History of the Jews in Belarus
- History of the Jews in Lithuania
- History of the Jews in Poland
- History of the Jews in Russia
- History of the Jews in Ukraine

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External links

- [The Pale of Settlement \(with a map\)](https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/pale.html) (<https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/History/pale.html>) at Jewish Virtual Library
- [The Pale of Settlement \(with map and additional documents\)](http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Pale_of_Settlement) (http://www.yivoencyclopedia.org/article.aspx/Pale_of_Settlement) at *The YIVO Encyclopedia of Jews in Eastern Europe*
- [Jewish Communities in the Pale of Settlement](http://yannayspitzer.net/2012/07/22/a-new-map-of-jewish-communities-in-the-russian-empire/) (<http://yannayspitzer.net/2012/07/22/a-new-map-of-jewish-communities-in-the-russian-empire/>) (with a map)
- [Life in the Pale of Settlement](http://www.friends-partners.org/partners/beyond-the-pale/english/30.html) (<http://www.friends-partners.org/partners/beyond-the-pale/english/30.html>) (with photos)
- [Map of the Pale in 1825](http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/fishstein/imagegallery.php?catname=SPECIAL%20IMPRINTS&catsub1=06) (<http://digital.library.mcgill.ca/fishstein/imagegallery.php?catname=SPECIAL%20IMPRINTS&catsub1=06>)

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