

Pale of Settlement and Kingdom of Poland/Congress Poland << YIVO

[this is from page 3 below: *The Pale did not include the provinces of the Russian-controlled **Kingdom of Poland** (variously known as **Congress Poland** or the **Vistula provinces**)*] See the text "**Poland from 1795 to 1939**" and the maps included there.

The territories of the Russian Empire in which Jews were permitted permanent settlement. Although large in size (approximately 472,590 square miles or 1,224,008 sq km), and containing areas of dynamic economic growth, the Pale (known in Russian as cherta postoiannogo zhitel'stva evreev; the English word pale was borrowed from the term applied to the area of English settlement in Northern Ireland, where the lands of the "wild Irish" were considered "beyond the pale") was considered the greatest legal restriction imposed on the Jews of the empire.

The Pale of Settlement (yellow) Kingdom of Poland/Congress Poland (orange)

Both the city of Suwalki (Regina Reinherz) and Miedzyrzecz (Issac Fischleiber) were in Kingdom/Congress Poland. See the next map 2020.02 the map shows Suwalki outside of the Kingdom. It may indicate the situation ca. 1855, or part of Suwalki---la bosse---may be inside Poland (can not tell from this map).



Map of the Kingdom of Poland / Congress Poland

Suwalki (Regina Reinherz) is near the top
Miedzyrzecz (Issac Fischleiber) is east of Warsaw and is indicated by the red ellipse.



Origins of the Pale

The principles underpinning the Pale emerged in 1790 when members of the merchant class in Moscow protested to the municipal government against an influx of Jewish merchants from the provinces of Belorussia, which had been annexed from Poland in 1772. The Jews' "well-known fraud and lies" made competition with them impossible, the Moscow merchants complained. More concerned with protecting vested interests than with accepting charges of Jewish dishonesty, the government of Empress Catherine II (r. 1762-1796) banished the Jewish merchants, at the same time reiterating the legal principle that Jews in the empire enjoyed only those rights specifically allotted to them. These did not include residence in the interior.

Statutes of 1804 and 1835 delineated the provinces in which Jews were specifically allowed to reside: the Lithuanian provinces of Vilna, Kovno, and Grodno; the Belorussian provinces of Minsk, Vitebsk, and Mogilev; the Ukrainian provinces of Volhynia, Podolia, Kiev, Chernigov, Poltava, Kherson, and Ekaterinoslav; the Crimean province of Taurida; and the Moldavian province of Bessarabia. Established Jewish communities—but not new settlements—were tolerated in Courland (Kurland) province, and in Riga and Shlok in Lifland province. There were long-established Jewish communities in Central Asia ("Bukharan" Jews) and in the Caucasus (the Georgian and "Mountain" Jews) whose areas of tolerated residence were not considered part of the Pale and were not governed by its provisions.

There were further restrictions even within the boundaries of the Pale. For the first half of the nineteenth century, Jews were banned from the cities of Kiev, Nikolaev, and Sevastopol. Jews were not allowed to live in peasant villages in Mogilev or Vitebsk provinces, or in villages inhabited by Cossacks or state peasants in Chernigov and Poltava provinces. As a measure against smuggling, Jews were barred from new settlement in villages within a 50-verst zone (about 33 mi. or 53 km) from the empire's western frontiers. On the other hand, Jews of all social estates were allowed free movement within the Pale, a right not enjoyed by non-Jewish members of the largest class of urban dwellers, the meshchanstvo (burghers).

The Pale did not include the provinces of the Russian-controlled Kingdom of Poland (variously known as Congress Poland or the Vistula provinces), where substantially different rules and regulations governed Jews. Indeed, Jews could move freely between the Pale and the kingdom. However, Jews from the kingdom were also barred from the Russian interior. Despite official recognition of the legal anomalies thus produced, Russian officialdom never succeeded in devising a common set of regulations for Jewish residence in these two areas.

Modifications of the Pale

As definitively constituted in 1835, regulations permitted only short, temporary sojourns outside the Pale. During the reign of Emperor Alexander II (1855–1881), the restrictions of the Pale were relaxed for categories of Jews deemed economically productive, or fulfilling the official agenda of Jewish acculturation into Russian society. These privileged groups included merchants of the First Guild (1859), holders of academic degrees (1861), and some military veterans (1862). The most significant alteration came in 1865, when the regime permitted Jewish master craft workers to leave the Pale, a provision that potentially applied to one-fifth of the Jewish population therein. The burdensome bureaucratic regulations that accompanied this enactment ensured that the number of Jews who could take advantage of it was relatively low.

On the other hand, tens of thousands of Jews resided illegally outside the Pale without the necessary *pravozhitel'stvo* (residence permit). Others lived on the margins of legality, enrolled as servants or crafts workers, but pursuing other occupations. The authorities of the closed city of Kiev conducted periodic *oblavy* (hunts) for illegal resident Jews, who were dispatched back to the Pale in chains, under military escort. The two capitals, Saint Petersburg and Moscow, also conducted occasional crackdowns on illegal resident Jews. The most notorious of these actions was the expulsion of “illegals” from Moscow in 1891, an event that drew international criticism.

In response to the chaos caused by a series of such expulsions in 1880, the Minister of Internal Affairs, Lev Makov, issued a ministerial circular dated 3–15 April 1880, permitting Jews who had settled illegally before that date to remain in place. The residence rights accorded to these “Makov Circular Jews” always rested on a shaky legal foundation, and the Ministry of Internal Affairs withdrew the circular in 1893.

A major revision of the Pale occurred in the wake of anti-Jewish pogroms of 1881–1882. The violence was depicted by Nikolai Ignatiev, the minister of internal affairs, as a protest by masses of peasants against “Jewish exploitation.” Ignatiev implemented temporary legislation, known as the May Laws, to prohibit new Jewish settlement in peasant villages within the Pale. It should be noted that the May Laws did not apply to the Kingdom of Poland, or to Jews living in towns. Nonetheless, capricious interpretation of these laws by local authorities caused a good deal of suffering and inconvenience for rural Jews.

Impact of the Pale

The Pale in general, and the May Laws in particular, have generally been considered chief contributors to the impoverishment of Russian Jewry at the end of the nineteenth century. Yet given the size of the Pale (more than twice the size

of contemporary France), and the economic opportunities within its borders, additional causes should also be sought. One of the most important was a demographic explosion: *the Jewish population of the empire increased fivefold between 1800 and 1900*. Another factor was the overconcentration of Jews in a narrow range of occupations, including petty trade and semiskilled artisan fields such as tailoring—activities that were further undermined by the economic development of the region in such areas as textile production. This situation was recognized by contemporaries, including the elite Jewish secular leadership in Saint Petersburg, which founded ORT (the Society for the Spread of Productive Work among the Jews of Russia) with the double goal of giving Jews new skills and qualifying them for residence outside the Pale. Jewish impoverishment in the Pale is best explained as a product of the uneven and unsteady economic development of the empire as a whole.

Public Debate on the Pale

With the rise of the Russian periodical press in the second half of the nineteenth century, and a growing public debate on the “Jewish Question,” the status of the Pale attracted widespread attention. This debate failed to follow precise ideological divisions. Russian liberals were generally opposed to exceptional legislation and favored a degree of Jewish emancipation. Yet the foremost liberal newspaper, *Golos* (The Voice), steadfastly opposed abolition of the Pale. Given the low cultural level of Russian peasantry, the paper opined, they would be “eaten alive” by the literate and crafty Jews if the latter were allowed free entry into the interior. The leading judeophobe newspaper in the Pale, *Kievlianin* (The Kievan), in contrast, consistently favored abolition of the Pale. If the Jews were such a burden, the paper editorialized, why should the provinces of the Pale be required to suffer Jewish exploitation and malfeasance alone? Better to let the Jews disappear into the interior, where they would harmlessly disperse like a drop of poison in the ocean. Given such rhetoric, there was no widespread public clamor for abolition of the Pale in the nineteenth century.

This situation persisted even after parliamentary democracy was introduced into Russia after 1905 and the tsar promised that legal strictures on ethnic and religious minorities would be relaxed. Conservatives and reactionaries were adamantly opposed to any improvement in the legal position of Jews, and progressives and liberals saw the question as one best postponed to a later date. Only the outbreak of World War I changed the situation. The Russian military was deeply suspicious of Jewish communities that resided in the war zone, and the Russian high command initiated the forced expulsion of entire Jewish communities from the front to the Russian interior, a situation the civilian government was forced to accept. The legal status of the refugees was uncertain, but by allowing refugee settlement in the interior, the government placed the regulations of the Pale in abeyance. These actions effectively dismantled the Pale. The Pale of Settlement, and all other exceptional legislation applicable to Russian Jewry, was formally abolished by the Russian Provisional Government; its disbanding occurred on 20 March (new style, 2 April) 1917.

Suggested Reading

John D. Klier, *Russia Gathers Her Jews: The Origins of the "Jewish Question" in Russia, 1772–1825* (DeKalb, Ill., 1986); John D. Klier, *Imperial Russia's Jewish Question, 1885–1881* (Cambridge and New York, 1995); John D. Klier, "What Exactly Was a Shtetl?" in *The Shtetl: Image and Reality*, ed. Gennady Estraiikh and Mikhail Krutikov, pp. 23–35 (Oxford, 2000); Benjamin Nathans, *Beyond the Pale: The Jewish Encounter with Late Imperial Russia* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 2002); Richard Pipes, "Catherine II and the Jews: The Origins of the Pale of Settlement," *Soviet Jewish Affairs* 5.2 (1975): 3–20; Hans Rogger, *Jewish Policies and Right-Wing Politics in Imperial Russia* (Berkeley, 1986).

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