



BELARUS (SIG) NEWSLETTER

An online magazine for people with Jewish roots in Belarus

Issue No. 1- Contents - november 1998

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THE NEWSLETTER TEAM:	The Newsletter Objectives (page 2)
	Request for material (page 1)
	From the Editor (page 2)
LETTERS...	From the Belarus SIG Coordinator (page 3)
FEATURE ARTICLES:	A Journey to Senno (page 5)
	Our town Swir (page 7)
DATA AND SOURCES:	Existing Sources for Shtetls in Belarus (page 11)
HELP NEEDED!?	Photos with unidentified persons (page 17)
WHERE TO FIND ...	Descriptions of Polotsk and the life in Polotsk (page 18)

THE EDITORS' REQUEST FOR MATERIAL: We would be very pleased to receive material of various kinds from readers for consideration and possible inclusion in future issues of this newsletter. Your contributions should be related to one of the following categories:

Articles on the history and culture of Jewish life in the region.

Information about existing Jewish communities there.

Memoirs and interviews about the life in Belarus etc.

Maps, photographs, census information etc.

Family anecdotes passed down from Shtetl times.

Information about genealogical sources.

Results from individual research which may be of general interest.

Recent travel experiences in the region.

Other relevant material which may be of general interest.

Where information is derived from existing published sources (eg. archival or census material) these should be fully referenced. Please e-mail written material in plain text format and photographic images in gif- or jpg-format files to the editors.

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The Objectives of the Belarus SIG Newsletter

Our intention is that the Newsletter will serve our readers in three major areas:

1. To offer a variety of topics which we believe will be of interest to readers who have roots in Belarus or are otherwise interested in the Jewish community historically linked with the region. There will be articles, pictures, maps, trip reports, monographs, memoirs, stories etc. Readers are invited to offer their own suggestions about content, and, indeed, to contribute material of their own. Some of the copy will be extracted from postings to our discussion group.
2. To offer a service to those who are undertaking their own genealogical research associated with Belarus. There will be information on archival sources, records of births and deaths; historical, geographical and demographic data of various kinds; a forum for feedback to readers queries in this area and opportunities to establish family links.
3. To offer an opportunity to "publish" photos of unidentified persons in the hope that someone might either recognize one or more of the persons depicted, or - even better - might have an identical photo and know the story behind it!

Editorial:

HELLO AND WELCOME!

This is the first issue of a new, online magazine conceived especially for subscribers to the Belarus sig. In the short period our discussion forum has been in existence a wide spectrum of interest has steadily emerged concerning the Jewish community which flourished in White Russia during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries of the common era. Our subscribers across the world have shown a fascination with the fate of their ancestors in the region, the circumstances in which they lived, their work, their demographic features, their patterns of migration. There is a current eagerness to trace roots, to establish connections, to find lost family branches and, if possible, to make contact with the living survivors of these branches. We intend and hope that our newsletter will assist in the structuring, and maybe occasionally the focusing, of the ongoing discussion and exchange of information within the forum.

Our Jewish, White Russian ancestors were characterised (as indeed were their coreligionists in other lands) by a spirit of pioneering and resilience in their land of adoption. We know they contributed greatly and in many ways to the culture and commerce of the region, in spite of their having to endure, very

often, deprivations and humiliations on account of their "exotic" origins, appearance and customs.

Then, in our own century, came the final deprivation and humiliation and the end of a complete way of life. Today we stand on the threshold of a new millennium of this common era we have shared with oft capricious neighbours. We now have a land which proudly bears our name; our culture, religion and customs have been completely reestablished. We are now respected and fully enfranchised among the nations in whose lands we choose to live. We also have, at our service, a new means of communication and dissemination. Perhaps the old pioneering spirit has just begun to resurface in this new, electronic diaspora, but, instead of sublimating itself in a ceaseless search for, and establishment of, a hospitable place of abode, it now devotes itself to repairing broken links in the chain of our history, to helping us to rediscover who we are and who we were. Hello and welcome.

Bryan Richard Polikoff , Editor
November 6, 1998

Letter from the Belarus SIG Coordinator

David M. Fox – e-mail: fox@erols.com

The Belarus SIG has come a long way in a very short period of time thanks to the hard work of many volunteers. It is difficult for me to believe that from an informal exploratory meeting of approximately twenty people at the Summer Seminar in Los Angeles on July 14, 1998, we have grown to 363 members with an active Belarus Discussion Group, Belarus SIG web site, on-going research projects, and now our first issue of the Belarus SIG On-line Newsletter. All of this in less than four months!

The Belarus SIG

A New Model For Special Interest Groups

In setting up the structure of the Belarus SIG, we have forged a new model for Jewish genealogical special interest groups with the help of JewishGen, Inc. We have no fixed dues structure and only ask that our members contribute time and or funds to support research projects related to Belarus. For US taxpayers financial donations are tax deductible. Through JewishGen-erosity, Susan King has provided us with ability to collect and disburse funds for our research projects without the need to have a SIG treasurer and separate SIG bank account. JewishGen has also provided the technical support and listserv for our discussion group, web site and now our newsletter. We are indeed grateful to Susan King, Carol Skydell, Warren Blatt, Michael Tobias, Bernie Kouchel, Joyce Field, and the rest of the JewishGen support team.

Our Newsletter

Most of the other SIGs produce printed newsletters which require the expense of printing and mailing. To eliminate these administrative expenses as well as the volunteer effort to distribute hard copy newsletters, the Belarus SIG has embarked on a new course - an on-line newsletter. We are indeed fortunate to have Bryan Polikoff from the United Kingdom and

Elsebeth Paikin from Denmark heading up our newsletter. They have been working closely with Risa Heywood, our Belarus SIG webmaster, to make this first on-line newsletter one that will set the standard for others to emulate.

Thanks To All The Volunteers

We have had many members of the SIG come forward to volunteer in various capacities. I have already mentioned Bryan, Elsebeth and Risa as well as the JewishGen support team, but there are many others who are working behind the scenes to make this SIG a successful venture that will help us all in our mutual interest in researching our family roots in Belarus.

I am reluctant to list all the volunteers for fear of omitting someone. If I do so please forgive me. Sandra Grabosky has been reviewing the JewishGen Family Finder and some of the other discussion groups recruiting new members. Joel Spector has been working on a database of shtetls, uzeds, gubernii, and references to source publications with articles about the shtetls. Roberta Solit who has visited the Library of Congress and made copies of the Vsiia Rosiia for the translation group. Vitaly Charny has provided a surname database of the Minsk vital records. We are waiting to get this file on the web site in a searchable database.

And lest I forget, a special thanks to all the people below who are working on various projects.

Status of Projects

1903 Vsiia Rosiia (Russian Business Directory)

Tom Gartman and his team of volunteer translators (Ira Leibowitz, Mark Grekin, Mike Mogilevsky, Adrienne Narrows, Jane Rollins, and Bert Lazerow) have completed work on the Minsk Gubernia pages. Tom is trying to obtain some data that was unreadable on the hard copies because of the poor quality of the microfilm. Once this is complete, the database

will be submitted to Michael Tobias who will convert it to a searchable database on the web site. Tom and his team have started work on transliterating the Mogilev gubernia pages from the Russian Business Directory.

Minsk Uzed (District) Economic History Survey

This project is estimated to cost \$500 and donations for this project are close to the target. Thanks to those of you who have made a financial commitment to this project. I have authorized Oleg Perzashkevich to begin work.

Minsk Yizkor Book Translation

I have found a volunteer without any connections to Belarus to translate/transliterate the table of contents and the name indices of both volumes. She has started work on this task. Once completed, the results of this effort will be made available on the SIG web site.

Translation of the Mogilev Vital Records

We are looking for someone to take on the job of coordinating and organizing this project. It will require assembling a team of people who can make hard copies of the LDS microfilms, translate the records and enter the data into an Excel spreadsheet. We have a number of members who have volunteered to help with the translations. If you are willing to take on the challenge, please contact me by private e-mail: fox@erols.com

Mogilev Birth Index

Bella Nayer has translated an index of male birth records that was found on one of the LDS microfilms. We are indeed grateful for Bella's effort. There are some limitations with the index. First, female births are not included. Second, it lists the name (first, surname, and sometime the patronymic) of father, not the child. Third, the index does not include all the years for which microfilm birth records are available. I am waiting to convert Bella's word-processing file into an Excel spreadsheet. When completed, this index will be placed on the web site.

Translation of the 1834 Borisov Revision List

Mike Levine is the project leader of this effort. Work is progressing.

Translation of Senno 1861-64 Birth Records

Bernard Dickman has provided hard copy from the microfilm. We need a volunteer to take charge of this project.

Translation and Indexing of Minsk Gubernia Revision Lists

Vitaly Charny has started work on this project with the 1811 Revision (census) List.

The Future

The Belarus SIG is up and running, but we have a long way to go. The future success of this SIG is dependent on the continued participation of our members. If you think something needs doing, volunteer to head up a team to do it or it will never get done.

Hopefully some of you have taken the web page construction course being offered on JewishGen. The skills gained in the course should enable you to develop ShtetLink pages and perhaps offer assistance to our webmaster, Risa Heywood. When you attend your local Jewish Genealogy Society meeting, it would be beneficial for you to talk up the SIG and solicit new members. Speaking of members, some people in your societies may not have e-mail or web access and may have research interests in Belarus. If you know of these people, encourage them to get "on-line". Until they do so, offer to share the information you gain from the discussion group, web page, and newsletter. You may even want to print out copies of this newsletter to share with them. In closing I would again like to thank all of you who have contributed to the SIG.

Dave M. Fox

REACQUAINTANCE - A journey to Senno, Belarus

by *Elliot Lepler*

Previously posted in the Belarus SIG Discussion Group 19. September 1998.

This spring the Leplers in America rediscovered family in Eastern Europe who had been lost to us for the past 60 years. For 10 days in May, Marcia and I journeyed with our new-found cousins back to Belarus and Saint Petersburg, Russia, a trip which became one of the most emotional experiences of my life.



My Russian cousins, my wife, Marcia, and I at the Senno entry

My Grandfather left Senno in Belarus in 1912 to avoid serving in the Tsarist armed forces. He kissed his family goodbye and traveled eventually to America, never to see his parents again.

My Russian cousins, my wife Marcia and I at the Senno entry

He corresponded with his family in the "old country" until Stalin made it unhealthy to receive mail from America. In World War II the Nazis overran all of Belarus.

As a young person I asked about life in Europe and about my family there. Like many other immigrants my grandparents did not like to talk much about the difficult lives they had escaped from. I was told that all of my relatives had been wiped out in the Holocaust. Off and on over the years I wondered if there

were any of my kin still alive, and even thought of trying to find them, but my interest was not as strong as that of one of my cousins.

She listed our name on a Jewish Genealogy Website. This spring we were very surprised when she received an email from a Vladimir Lepler. He and a number of his family emigrated from St. Petersburg to Denver in 1996. They seemed to be related as they knew much that corroborated what we knew about the Lepler ancestors. Then they sent us a scanned photo of my great-grandfather. The photo was an exact duplicate of the picture that has hung on my wall for the past 30 years! Vladimir is a grandson of my grandfather's brother, a second cousin.

We heard that Vladimir's wife and son, Svetlana and Alex, were going to be in St. Petersburg in May so we decided to go visit them. They were most anxious to get to know us and offered for us to stay with them in their apartment. We accepted, but we also wanted to visit Belarus to see Senno and Lepel, the city for which we are named. In the course of conversation with Svetlana we learned that we also have a cousin in Minsk who was also interested in meeting us.

So we began our trip flying into Minsk where our cousins met us at the airport. First introductions were a bit formal but the relationships warmed quickly. We were given a tour of Minsk for a few days and then set out on a pilgrimage through the Belarussian countryside. We went to Lepel first and found the old Jewish quarter. Nobody there knew of the Leplers. Our Russian cousins had told us that all the Jewish Leplers in the former Soviet Union are descended from an Abram Lepler who was born there about 1800. There were only a few Jews left in Lepel and we did not spend much time there.

We drove then an hour or so to Senno, a town of about 11,000 current population. We knew some

Leplers died there at the hands of the Nazis, but there seemed to be no record of them at City Hall. But one of the officials suggested we speak with a 90 year-old man, who was referred to as a "walking encyclopedia." Within 10 minutes his son arrived to take us to his house.



In the old man's house

My heart leapt as the old man answered in Russian "Absolutno!" to the question whether he remembered Leplers. He then mentioned an uncle and several cousins by name. He did not remember my grandfather, since he was 4 years old when he had left. His son then proceeded to lead us to the street the Leplers lived on. He did not know which house on this dirt path was theirs, but it did not matter since the Nazis had burned the village to the ground.



A view of Senno '

The son then took us to the site of the Senno ghetto and from there a short walk to a memorial at the burial place of the 800 who were exterminated on

New Year's Eve, 1941. Although the names were not engraved on the monument, I felt touched by the Holocaust at that moment to a depth I had never felt.



A walk in Senno

Not far from the mass grave was the old Jewish cemetery. It was not cared for and bushes and trees grew among the decaying stones. But Hebrew markings remained clear on some. My great-grandfather was lying there and I felt a deep sense of order coming back from America to retouch the past. We then left Senno and traveled to Vitebsk and on to St. Petersburg by overnight train for a week's stay. During that time we talked late into the night about life on both sides of the Iron Curtain. Leplers did well on both continents. Three Leplers went to jail in Europe, for political crimes. But they prospered in jail! The stories entertained me and filled in a void that I did not realize until then was so important to me.

Our relatives in Russia had never set foot in a synagogue. They have little understanding of Jewish culture. They are very careful to keep their Jewish identity quiet. We hope to share with them Jewish life in America. Maybe next year some will partake in our Seder. I feel as though a new avenue in my life has been opened.

I write this for you in hopes that some of you can have a similar wondrous experience. The former Soviet Union is much more open now. The Internet is a new tool you can use in place of tedious searches through old records. I know a number of Kol Emeth members have found relatives through the Internet and I would encourage all of you to do so.

Our Small Town - Swir

Extracts from a book from the Yivo Institute in New York written in Yiddish.

The extracts (ca. 8 pages on the description and history of the town Swir) were sent to Belarus SIG by **Arnold H. Wolfe**, who had them translated into English by a friend.



A charcoal drawing of Swir (ca. 1914)

The town of Swir, where we saw for the first time in our lives the rays of the sun: the town that first heard our childish delight; the town where our first tears dropped: the town in which we played and joked throughout our childhood; this was the town that became a part of ourselves like our own flesh and blood.

A long street with two squares and a few small alleys actually made up the whole of Swir, and despite the description it was, in our eyes, the children of Swir, nicer than any other town. Truthfully speaking there were no brick houses in Swir. It was only one side wall and all the other parts of the house were built of wood. The roofs were covered either with shingles, metal or plain straw. Throughout our lifetime many houses grew old. There were houses which were practically sunken in the earth up to the windows. Some homes did not even have wooden floors.

It was a rarity to have plumbing in the town of Swir. Most of the water was derived from a well quite far away, and yet it seemed a wonder that no one hated this place. On the contrary, everyone was tied to this town with their very lives.

Anywhere a person of Swir was to be found, be it in New York or Los Angeles, in Buenos Aires or in Cuba, in Paris or in Brazil, in London or Tel-Aviv, in that place the one same heart was beating. All of them are bound like brothers and sisters, their lives like one, and all this because of the forlorn little town in a section of Vilna.

The town was very friendly. Even the nature around us was a witness that our grandparents knew where to build their homes. From one side a stream, and from the other side a lake, and the stream actually flows out of the lake near the houses of the town. Around and around were forests, fields and small towns. The town was not dipped in milk and honey, rather in green fields and flowers and as far as the eye could see were various fruit trees. There were apple and pear trees, plum and cherry trees, and blueberries without end.

During the summer the town was surrounded by ears of corn and stalks of wheat. In the winter is was covered with a big white blanket of snow. The Jews of Swir, therefore, lived a very contented life. In the old huts there lived good people and devoted friends.

Everyone felt secure in their homes, like a bird in its nest, that is, until the wild barber came and the nest together with its birds was broken and destroyed. Woe! Woe unto the faithful and devoted birds of Swir! Woe! Woe unto their burned and destroyed nest.

Highlights of the History of Swir

Unfortunately, a lot of historical material and documentation is missing, thus making it difficult to relate the exact history of Swir. Not only was our whole city destroyed, but also our cultural and social life was uprooted. We were physically uprooted from our very origin, as well as geographically lost. The sources for further basic knowledge are lost to us today. Unfortunately, the generation that could have enriched us with its knowledge has perished. Yet we made an effort to relate the history of this town in a concise form.

It is clear that the town carries the name of the great Duke Swerski. His dynasty ruled for hundreds of years over all the surrounding areas. It is also said that on the peak of the mountain there stood a beautiful castle. In his honor not only was the town named after him, but also tens of families named themselves after the great Duke. It was extremely difficult for us to confirm with certainty if the families today named Swirski spread throughout the world originated from Swir.

According to all estimations the Jewish community was its existence for hundreds of years. The old cemetery can be a witness to this as most graves are sunken in the earth. The few monuments whose engraving was still legible dated back one hundred and fifty years. The ledger that had all the deaths recorded on it, and their place of burial was passed from one generation to the next, and was an important historical document.

Most Jews of the town wandered in from surrounding towns or close cities. It is difficult to know today whether they came of their own free will or because of the decree from the Czarist regime that Jews must leave the towns. Therefore, many families who were forced to leave carried the name of their town. The Fuzileher, Shpialer, Dubnikirer according to the origin of their town, for example, the Kurgatkes

originated from the town of Kureniaz, Miadler and Shuentzianer. The big fire that broke out at the end of the century practically wiped out the city. Therefore there are no old historical buildings or antiques left. The synagogue was rebuilt after the fire in a modern style.

The town endured many wars. Napoleon and his army reached there. There is a legend that the Swirer hills thinned out through him. Through the First World War the town practically remained unharmed because the fighting front was further away by several kilometers. Later however, by the Polish-Bolshevik War in 1920 there was a battle before the town was captured.

The stronghold of the Polish Army was on the hill of Swir, while the yet stronger Bolshevik Red Army was located at the other side of the river. During the fierce battle between the two armies which heavily destroyed many homes, the Jews escaped to the cemetery. The cemetery was in close proximity to the city. The day after the surrender of the Polish Army the Jews returned to their homes.

They later found out that it was a coincidence that they were saved because they all hid behind the trees of the cemetery. The Russian Army saw that there were large groups of people hiding there and mistook them for the Polish. They were prepared to fire with their artillery when they heard the cry of a child and the sound of animals. They realized then that they were only civilians. In that war an eleven year old boy was wounded. He was Velvel, the son of the Chassid.

The people who remained alive claimed that after the Second World War the greatest majority of the town was destroyed. The synagogue became level with the earth. The whole area was virtually uprooted. The Christian neighbors made the area into gardens. No vestige of Jewish life, as it was, remained. Most tragic of all, was that from approximately 200 families who lived there, remained only 100 survivors. These people were scattered all over the world, but the majority of them are in Israel.

Geographical and Economic Situation

Even from a distance of 5 to 6 kilometers the contours of the town are visible in the blue sky and extend long and narrow. Especially visible is the hill, the Swir Everest in the middle of the market place, and the Swirer skyscraper the Yedes wall.

The German occupation of the First World War extended the railroad to Constantine.

Swir is geographically located in west White Russia. The neighboring towns and distances are as follows:

- Kabilnik - 20 Kilometers
- Michlisbak - 21 Kilometers
- Sventzion - 37 Kilometers
- Kurenetz - 49 Kilometers
- Smargon - 42 Kilometers

Aside from the fact that the town was above sea level and the paths were cemented, it was still very muddy on rainy days.

In back of the town there were lots of mud puddles. The farmers used to go to town through the mud as a short cut. In a dry summer they picked up their pants to their knees and splashed through the mud. During the fall and Spring it was impossible to pass through the mud.

On the other side of town the ground was normal.

There were 1900 people in the town of Swir - 1100 Jews and 800 non Jews. Among the gentiles there were White Russians and Poles. It was difficult to differentiate who belonged to which nationality, because many rich people found it below their dignity to admit they belonged to the White Russian nationality. They broke their teeth in order to speak like Poles and claimed they belonged to the Polish nationality. They let these people have their way, in letting them think they were Polish.

The Jews lived in "The Street of the Third of May", which starts at the cloister and goes till the horse market, a length of about one kilometer. That marked the boundaries of the town. Many Jews also lived in smaller streets.

The people called Staravieren and tens of families built a village at the side of the river and called Sloboda.

Most of the Jewish people in Swir were merchants. In front of every house on the main street where goods were sold, there were many different types of stands. There were textile, dry goods, hardware, building materials, bakeries, butcher and other stands as well. For many people these stands were not their only means of sustenance. In many families it was the job of the wives and daughters to take care of these stands.

The men were the dealers, and dealt in many different trades. Some dealt with wheat in large scale production. They used to purchase the wheat at the market and exported large quantities to Vilna. Another dealt in the same manner with potatoes, with fruit, with poultry, with eggs, with leather skins, with pig hair and many others. There were many merchants who were occupied only during certain seasons of the year, like fruit gardeners. Besides this, there were many peddlers, and those who worked with their hands like shoemakers and tailors. The Jews of Swir received the main financial help from the bank and the town's Jewish Charity Organization. According to a report from Vilna, there were a total of 140 members who belonged to the Jewish Charity Organization.

The greatest majority of the Jewish congregation lived very modestly, and yet they were very satisfied and happy. Unfortunately, when the Second World War broke out this contented life was utterly destroyed.

General Appearance

Swir had a specific appearance, and was built different than the surrounding towns due to her topographical layout. It wasn't a very flat ground, rather there were valleys and hills which led to the wide flowing river. There was a mountain in the middle of the town which was the center of attraction for artists who portrayed this beautiful blessed nature upon their canvases.

Not far from the border of town where the river was flowing, there was the church and the priest's large fruit garden. All around there were the little houses that belonged to the gentiles. From the wheat market that was located nearby, there were little farmers' huts that were covered with straw and from there

started the street that divided the whole town up to the horse market.

Here was the Jewish trade center - the heart of the town. Between these little wooden huts that were covered with shingles and seemed as if they born of one mother, there sprouted one red two story brick house that belonged to Zelig Yedes.

From both sides there grew a stretch of poplar trees and in the middle there was an asphalt road made of big stones. Not far from these was the Phanizer street and from this street there was a row of other small roads which led to the synagogue. These streets were named after the important people, such as Yuda Velvel's street, Eli Netanya, Moshe the Muller etc. Here was the concentration of the synagogue's personnel, the ritual bath, and the Talmud Torah (Hebrew school for children), which was later used as a public school and as an organization for the Zionists.

From the horse market at the other end of town started the Duberlianer street with beautiful fruit gardens. That was where the people of town took their afternoon stroll.

The River

Our village was blessed with its specific rich nature. The big mountain gave the impression of a proud giant with its head looking down to the quiet river. The river was the third largest in the Vilna area and its surroundings. It was 14 kilometers long and 5 kilometers wide with its crystal clear waters. It also served as a means of transportation. On the other side of the river there were green pastures where cattle grazed. One and half kilometers from the village at the edge of the river surrounded by water was the Jewish cemetery.

The Bridge

The bridge marked the beginning and the end of the town. One side were green, lovely pastures which blended with the dense forest and together created a beautiful dark crown. On the opposite side were deep muds which brought many complaints and tears from hardworking horse and wagon owners. Their livelihood depended on passing this road to sell their wares, and were unable to avoid passing this mud.

INTERNET ADDRESSES FOR THE BELARUS SIG:

Belarus SIG Website:	http://www.jewishgen.org/Belarus/
Belarus SIG Online Newsletter:	http://www.jewishgen.org/Belarus/newsletter/bnl_index.htm
JewishGen Organization:	http://www.jewishgen.org/
The JewishGen Family Finder:	http://www.jewishgen.org/jgff/
The Family Tree of the Jewish People:	http://www.jewishgen.org/gedcom/
The JewishGen ShtetlSeeker:	http://www.jewishgen.org/ShtetlSeeker/
JewishGen Discussion Group:	http://www.jewishgen.org/JewishGen/DiscussionGroup.htm

Existing Records for Shtetls in Belarus

David M. Fox

Published in the Belarus SIG discussion group October 1, 1998.

There are a number of sources available to determine what records exist for towns and shtetls in Belarus. From my limited review of these sources, it appears that there is a lot more available records in existence than some of us may have thought.

Several months ago I purchased the CD with the Archives of all the AVOTAYNU (Publishers of Works on Jewish Genealogy) issues through 1996.

Today I did a search on Soshnikov (Vladislav). Mr. Soshnikov is a principal player in RAGAS and has written a number of articles for "Avotaynu" regarding the archives in the FSU which I reference below.

In addition, Project Judaica, a joint program of Jewish Studies and Research sponsored by the Jewish Theological Seminary of America (JTSA), YIVO Institute for Jewish Research and Russian State University for the Humanities (RSUH) has been gathering lists of archival collections found in the archives of the FSU including Belarus.

I will outline the sources available and in some instances give examples from the various sources. There is an overlap of what records are listed in each of these sources, but there are also some lists of records that are not found in other sources. Also, the level of detail varies.

1. Ted Gostin's Info File about Belarus Records filmed by the the LDS is certainly a good starting point because the records on the microfilms are available from any Family History Center (FHC) in the world. This file lists the town, type of records, years covered in the records, and the film number. This same info file has an addendum written by Warren Blatt and includes the names of towns and the years of Revision Lists (Poll Tax Lists) which are contained in 126 additional microfilms available from the FHCs.
2. During the LA Seminar, I spoke with Kahlile Mehr, who directs the FHC filming in Eastern Europe. He indicated that there were still "Jewish records" in the Minsk archive that had not yet been filmed. The following information first appeared in AVOTAYNU, the International Review of Jewish Genealogy, Vol. XII, Spring 1996. It is reprinted here with the express permission of Avotaynu, Inc.:
 - a: Recent News from the LDS (Mormon) Family History Library Belarussian Acquisitions:
 - b: Microfilms of Jewish records newly available at LDS (Mormon) Family History Library include many revision lists from the State Historical Archives of Belarus in Minsk as well as a few vital records from Beltsy, Moldova.

Use the catalogue numbers to order films through a local LDS family history center. Some films include material from more than one town; material from a single town often covers more than one reel of microfilm. Since most Jews did not have hereditary family names in 1795, it is probably wise to inspect later films first; family groupings listed in 1811 and 1816 may permit educated guesses about families listed in 1795, even when they do not have last names.

Recent News from the LDS (Mormon) FHL Belarussian Acquisitions

TOWN	YEAR	MICROFILM NUMBERS
Bobriusk	1795	1,925,366-378
Bobriusk	1806	2,008,324-326
Bobriusk	1816	2,008,268-270; 2,010,469
Borisov	1795	1,925,378-379
Borisov	1811	2,008,326-329; 2,010,468- 469; 2,010,473
Borisov	1816	2,008,263-268
Davidgorod	1795	1,925,405-407; 1,925,409-413; 1,925,399-401; 2,008,319-320
Dokshitsy	1795	1,925,366 and 1,925,367
Igumen	1795	1,925,380-396; 2,008,317-319
Igumen	1811	2,008,329-330; 2,010,467-468
Igumen	1816	1,925,180-181; 2,008,262-264
Igumen	1842	2,008,280-281
Koidanova	1811	2,008,322-324
Minsk	1795	1,921,924-930; 1,922,324-325; 1,922,327; 1,923,577-579; 2,008,305; 2,008,316-317
Minsk	1811	2,008,322-324
Minsk	1816	2,008,270-278
Minsk	1842	2,008,278-280
Mozyr	1795	1,925,403-405; 1,925,409; 1,925,396-399; 1,925,401; 2,008,306-308; 2,008,320
Mozyr	1811	1,925,413-415
Mozyr	1816	1,925,415-416
Nesvizh	1795	2,008,282-283
Novogrudok	1795	2,008,281-282
Novogrudok	1806	2,008,321
Novogrudok	1811	2,008,472-473
Novogrudok	1816	2,010,469-470; 2,008,471
Pinsk	1795	1,922,326
Pinsk	1811	2,008,471-473
Pinsk	1816	1,925,416 and 1,925,180
Postavy	1795	2,008,303-304
Rechitsa	1816	2,010,469
Slutsk	1795	2,008,2-303; 2,008,306-308; 2,008,320-321
Slutsk	1811	2,010,468-469
Slutsk	1816	2,008,471
Velejka	1795	1,923,579; 2,008,308; 2,008,315-316

3. Vladislav Soshnikov wrote an article titled "Belorussian Archives Revisted" which appeared in AVOTAYNU, Vol. X (Fall 1994). While this article mentions records that are included in the Mormon microfilms, it also mentions other records which obviously have not yet been filmed. Among the records mentioned by Soshnikov are:

In the Minsk Archives

- a. "Nearly complete Jewish vital record books for the city of Gomel 1882-1906
- b. City of Zhlobin 1867-1906
- c. City of Rogachev 1885-1896
- d. Mstislavl District births, 1883-94
- e. City of Mstislavl deaths, 1872
- f. Zembin kahal marriages, 1905
- g. **Vital record books for:**
 - 1. Mogilev synagogue, 1890-1917
 - 2. Vorotinsk-Zaverezhsk, 1872-1917
 - 3. Dashkovka, 1857-1916
 - 4. Knyazhitsy, 1871-1916
 - 5. Seletsk, 1871-1917
 - 6. Tishovsk, 1871-1917
 - 7. Goretsk, 1894-1917
 - 8. Romanovo, 1897-1917
 - 9. Mstislavl (births), 1916
 - 10. Lyady, 1893-1917
 - 11. Klimovichi (marriages), 1912

Central State Historical Archives in Grodno

(check out the article for a more detailed list)

- a. **Synagogue records for the Lida area:**
 - 1. Belitsa
 - 2. Boronovsk
 - 3. Oshmyany
 - 4. Ostrinsk
 - 5. Radun
 - 6. Rozhanka
 - 7. Shchuchin
 - 8. Vacilishkovsk
 - 9. Zheludok
- b. Grodno Census of Jews 1875
- c. Grodno Census of Jews 1875
- d. **Numerous censuses (see article for years) for:**
 - 1. Grodno city
 - 2. Bielsk District
 - 3. Bialystok District
 - 4. Brest District
 - 5. Grodno District
 - 6. Kobrin District
 - 7. Lida District
 - 8. Pruzhany District
 - 10. Slonim District
 - 11. Sokol District
 - 12. Volkovisk District
- e. Lists of real estate property by district for 1908-1915
- f. Draft list for the Czar's army by district

4. Vladislav Soshnikov wrote an article titled "Sources for Genealogy In the Archives of the Former Soviet Union" which appeared in AVOTAYNU, Vol. XI (Summer 1995). This article discusses various classes of records that might be useful for genealogy research: Revision List (Reviskie skazki); Vital Statistics Records; Military Records, Law Courts; Administrative and Economic Offices of City and Town Governments; Offices of the Governor, Police, and Prison Inspectors; Educational Establishments; and City and Business Directories.
5. Vladislav Soshnikov wrote an article titled "The Current State of Archival Research in the CIS" which appeared in AVOTAYNU, Vol. XII (Spring 1996). This article gives a picture of conditions of various archives in the CIS, including Minsk and Grodno. Of interest to Belarus researchers is a list of records from the Lida district (once part of Lithuania) along with the record group number in the Grodno Archives:

Records from the Lida district

- a. Belitsy Synagogue (m: 1887-1900; v:1898; d:1897-89)
 - b. Orlyany Synagogue (m:1889-1900; v:1887-1900; d:1897-1900)
 - c. Ostryno" (marriage, divorce, death, 1887-1900)
 - d. Radum" (m:1900; v & d; 1898-1900)
 - e. Rozhanka" (m:1897-98; v:1897-1900; d:1897-1900)
 - f. Schuchin" (v: 1897-99)
 - g. Vasilishki" (v:1897-99; d:1897-99)
 - h. Voronovo" (marriage,divorce,death, 1897-1900)
 - i. Zheludok" (marriage, divorce, death, 1897-1900)
 - j. Lida District - Revision Lists 1834, 1863, 1884
 - k. Lida District - Lists of creditors to the State Treasury (1904-1915)
 - l. Lida District - Lists of depositors to the savings bank (1914-1916)
 - m. Lida Town - lists of payers of town residents' tax, 1915
6. In 1996, the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) of America published a softcover book titled "Jewish Documentary Sources in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus: A Preliminary List", edited by Dorit Sallis and Marek Web. I obtained this book directly from the JTS for \$15 US plus postage.
- This book is a preliminary report of the work done by Project Judaica. From its title, I can only assume that there will be a more complete inventory forthcoming. There are about 25 pages devoted to records in different Belarus archives. The inventory gives the name of the archive, collection reference number, the Russian title of the record group, the English title, years covered, and number of items. I obviously can't list everything found in the 25 pages, but I will list some of the more significant ones.
- To order a copy of the book, contact:

Rebecca Schwartz Publications Office
 Jewish Theological Seminary 3080
 Broadway New York
 NY 10027
 USA

From "Jewish Documentary Sources in Russia, Ukraine and Belarus: A Preliminary List"

a. State Archives of Brest Region:

1. Brest - Jewish People's Bank Records, 1938-1939
2. Pinsk - Yudel Piekacz Jewish Vocation School records, 1921-1939
3. Drohiczyn District - Society of Jewish Craftsmen records 1938-1939
4. Pinsk - Municipal Jewish Hospital records, 1919-1939
5. Bereza Kartuska - Jewish religious community records, 1936-1937
6. Brest - Jewish religious community records, 1928-1937
7. Wysokie Litewskie - Jewish religious records, 1928
8. Kobrzyn - Jewish religious community records, 1936-1938
9. Pinsk - Jewish religious community records, 1934-1939

b. State Archives of Gomel Province:

1. Gomel - Jewish National Chamber of the People's Court records, 1926-1930
2. Gomel - National Jewish Court records, 1931-1934
3. Rechitsa District - Plenipotentiary of the Jewish Public Committee to Aid
4. Victims of Pogroms, 1923

c. Belarus Stat Historical Archives, Grodno:

1. Belitsy, Lida Dist. - Synagogue records, 1897-1900
2. Belostok - Jewish Hospital records, 1832-1913
3. Belostok - Jewish Religious Congregation
4. Bel'sk - Jewish Religious Congregation records, 1835-1846
5. Brest - Jewish Hospital records, 1913
6. Brest - Jewish Community records, 1874-1897
7. Disna District - Rabbinate Records, 1893 - 1901
8. Brest - Synagogue Jewish Religious Congregation records, 1852-1910
9. Grodno - Municipal Jewish Community Records, 1838-1912
10. Kobrin - Jewish Community Records, 1838-1912
11. Olita - Jewish Religious Community Records, 1852
12. Orlia - Synagogue Records, 1897-1900
13. Orlia - Jewish Religious Community Records, 1836-1846
14. Ostrino- Synagogue Records, 1897-1900
15. Ostrolenka - Jewish Community Records, 1838-1867
16. Prenska - Jewish Religious Community Records, 1895-1902
17. Pruzhany - Jewish Religious Community Records, 1859-1869
18. Radum - Synagogue Records, 1897-1900
19. Rozhanka - Synagogue records, 1897-1900
20. Shaki - Jewish Religious Community Records, 1842-1911
21. Szczuczyn - Synagogue Records, 1897-1900
22. Suwalki - Jewish Hospital Records, 1863-1869
23. Vasilishki - Synagogue Records, 1897-1900
24. Wolkowysk - Jewish Religious Community Records, 1865
25. Voronovo - Synagogue Records, 1897-1900
26. Zheludok - Synagogue Records, 1897-1900

d. State Archives of Grodno Province:

1. Grodno - Jewish Community Records, 1899-1939
2. Lida - Moses Dvorzecki Jewish High School Records, 1918-1939
3. Grodno - Jewish Religious Community Records, 1929-1936
4. Szczuczyn - Jewish Community Records, 1915-1939
5. Wolkowysk - Herzliya Coeducational High School Records, 1921-1939

e. National Archives of the Republic of Belarus:

1. Belitsy - Jewish Community Records, 1856-1862
2. Borisov - Rabbinate records, 1905
3. Cherikov District - Jewish School Commission Records, 1853
4. Cherikov - Jewish State School Records, 1880
5. Dashkovka - Jewish Community Records, 1857-1914
6. Dobromysl - Jewish Community Records, 1854
7. Dubrova - Jewish Civic Association Records, 1862
8. Es'mony - Jewish Community Records, 1914
9. Gomel- Jewish Community Records, 1853-1876
10. Gorsk - Jewish Community Records, 1911
11. Gorodok - Rabbinate Records, 1872-1917
12. Karpilov - Jewish Community Records, 1890-1906
13. Kazimir-Sloboda - Jewish Community Records, 1862
14. Khotimsk - Jewish Community Records, 1880
15. Klomovichi - Jewish Community Records, 1854-1915
16. Lepel' - Synagogue Records, 1841
17. Lepel' - Jewish Community Records, 1833-1844
18. Liady - Jewish Community Records, 1899
19. Minsk - Jewish Community Records, 1817-1843
20. Minsk - Rabbinate Records, 1839-1917
21. Minsk - Jewish Community Records, 1869-1914
22. Minsk - Jewish Burial Association Records, 1909-1918
23. Mogilev - Synagogue Records, 1837-1886
24. Mogilev - Jewish Community Records, 1830-1915
25. Mogilev - Jewish Burial Society Records, 1889
26. Mstislavl' - Jewish Elementary School Records, 1862-1864
27. Nosovichi - Jewish Community Records, 1855-1917
28. Novogrudok - Jewish Community Records, 1800-1850
29. Orsha - Jewish Community Records, 1840-1915
30. Pinsk - Communal Rabbinate Records, 1911
31. Polotsk - Jewish Community Records, 1826-1840
32. Rakov - Jewish Community Records, 1877-1916
33. Rogachev - Jewish Elementary School Records, 1857-1875
34. Rogachev - Jewish Community Records, 1859
35. Senno - Synagogue Records, 1861-1864
36. Shumiachi - Jewish Community Records, 1858-1862
37. Staryi-Tolochin - Jewish Community Records, 1861
38. Streshin - Jewish Community Records, 1861-1877

39. Surazh _ Jewish State School Records, 1855-1877
40. Uvarovich - Jewish Community Records, 1883
41. Vitebsk - Jewish Community Records, 1827-1895
42. Vitebsk - Children's Orphanages Records, 1911-1918
43. Vitebsk - State Jewish School Records, 1849-1867
44. Zabychansk-Neginsk - Jewish Community Records, 1858-1903
45. Zakharino - Jewish Community Records, 1875
46. Zhlobin - Jewish Community Records, 1867-1913
47. Zhuravichi - Jewish Community Records, 1860-1875

There are other records and archives that are found in the book, but are not included above. The book also gives the fond (collection) number.

If anyone hires a researcher to find records in one of the archives mentioned in the book, you could save the researcher time and yourself money if you provide them with the fond.

Request for help!

I have heard of small miracles: Some have had the luck of finding exactly the same photo belonging to another - unknown - family, which eventually led to long lost relatives. Others have been less fortunate, they have only gotten into contact with someone who knew and could identify one or more persons on such a photo. That too have either led them on the right track in their search for ancestors of relatives, or in some rare cases directly to them.

Now, in an old photo album belonging to my husband's late aunt, we found three photos of persons unknown to us all. No names, no dates, no places - nothing is written to tell the tale.

However, we presume that the persons in the photo must be some kind of relatives. My husband's family is said to have come originally from the Polotsk region, but later someone in the family moved to Latvia (i.a. Rezekne, Dagda).

I hope that someone will be able to recognize the photo or some of the people in the photo, and thus help me to get on the right track. Maybe it will even lead to some shared ancestors. All and any information - even wild guesses - will be greatly appreciated.

Please write to: Elsebeth Paikin, Kildevaenget 37, DK-2100 Copenhagen O, Denmark



Photo No. 1:



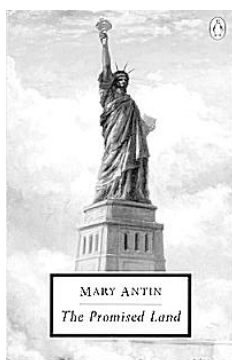
Photo No. 2:



Photo No. 3:
Only information "From USA"

Where to find: Descriptions of Polotsk, Vitebsk gubernia

Genealogy should be more than the mere gathering of dates and names. If that is all - we will not be much wiser. The skeleton of dates and names should - as far as it is possible - be depicted on a backdrop of knowledge of our ancestor's life, the place where they lived, the social structure of the society, and much, much more. Only then will we feel akin to our forebears.



Mary Antin: "The Promised Land"

Mary Antin was born in Polotsk in 1881 and in her book "*The Promised Land*" (first published in 1912, latest edition 1997 by Penguin Books Inc.) (ISBN 0-14-018985-8), she vividly describes her life in Polotsk until she and her family emigrated.

After reading it, you almost feel as if you have been there. So much so, that the black-and-white photographs from Polotsk seem to be redundant. You seem to know the people, and lingering in your consciousness is the fragrance of the deep-red Dahlias in her grandfather's garden, of:

"...the wild flowers that grew on the grassy slopes of the Vall..." and "the small daisy, popularly called "blind flowers" because it was supposed to cause blindness in rash children who picked it..." (p. 68).

The last part of the book is dedicated to the tale of emigration and the struggle to find a new life in the promised land, America. That too is an interesting story - Mary Antin shares with us the hopes and dreams that make the immigrant's life endurable.

Only a few examples can be quoted here, but the book has - fortunately - been reprinted and is therefore still available.

"Among the medieval customs which were preserved in the Pale when the rest of the world had long forgotten them, was the use of popular sobriquets in place of surnames proper." (p. 36).

With these words Mary Antin takes us for a journey through the Pale, through the years, and she introduces us to her family and invites us to her parents' wedding and lets us witness their struggle of daily life: "Let me spread out my family tree, raise aloft my coat-of-arms, and see what heroes have left a mark by which I may be distinguished. Let me hunt for my name in the chronicles of the Pale". (p. 36)

"Ours was a quiet neighbourhood. Across the narrow street was the orderly front of th Korpus, or military academy, with straight rows of unshuttered windoes. It was an imposing edifice in the eyes of us all, because it was built of brick, and was several stories high." (p. 66) ... *"In the summer-time I lived outdoors considerably. I found many occasions to visit my mother in the store, which gave me a long walk. If my errand was not pressing - or perhaps even if it was - I made a long stop on the Platz, The Platz was a rectangular space in the centre of a roomy square, with a shady promenade around its level lawn. The Korpus faced on the Platz, which was its drill ground. Around the square were grouped the fine residences of the officers of the Korpus, with a great white church occupying one side."* (p. 68) ... *"It was not far from the limits of Polotzk to the fields and woods. My father was fond of taking us children for a long walk on a Sabbath afternoon.... The first landmark on the sunny, dusty road is the house of a peasant acquaintance where we stopped for rest and a drink. I remember a cool gray interior, ..."* (p. 69-70).

After this short appetizer I wish you some pleasant hours in company with Mary Antin.

Elsebeth Paikin