Discovering the Treasures of the Yizkor Books: Using Yizkor Books in Genealogy Family Research

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“Be your own historian!

- “Be your own historian! Don’t depend on others to tell your story. Record, make notes and collect [materials]” Shlomo Anski, 1915

- Kiev Editorial Committee for the Collection and Research Materials appealed after the Pogroms: “Brothers! We request people to tell.. We request that everything must be told and written down!”

- “Remember the days of yore, learn the lessons of the generation that came before you”- Deuteronomy 32:7
Who wrote the Yizkor books?

- Compiled through the **collective efforts** of former community residents.
  - Articles/chapters are authored by different townspeople and published with the help of an editor.
  - (i.e. The Killiya Yizkor Book, the Belti Yizkor book, Dorohoi, Jedwabne, Lublin)
- Authored by one **person**, usually a historian such as the *Jews of Kishinev by Itzchak Korn*, recently published by Jewish Gen and available in English.
- **Individual memoirs** such as the fine work by Haim Zaidman entitled the “Duty to Remember” about Harlau, a small town in Eastern Romania.
Language

- Most Yizkor books were written in Hebrew or Yiddish or in Yiddish with the Hebrew translation
- Documents in Romanian, Russian, Polish, Hungarian or other languages
Yizkor Books - Valuable sources of information about Jewish communities and its people

- The books are in general divided into four parts:
  - Town and people before the WWII – history of the locality
  - Town and people during the WWII
  - Fate of the town and its survivors after the war
  - Necrology
A family researcher may find:

- Names of relatives
- Pictures
- Maps
- Descriptions of common local professions
- Necrology
Illustrations from Yizkor books

- Bivolari, Romania
- Map of Edinetz, Bessarabia
- The Great Synagogue of Cluj
- A high school promotion picture, Cluj, Romania
- A theatre group in Khotyn, Ukraine
More than 1200 Yizkor Book titles

- Published in very small quantities and intended mainly for family and friends.

- Mostly published immediately after the war, in the ’50s, the ’60s, and the’70s

- Copies were sent to YAD VASHEM, YIVO, US-HMM
A Guide to Finding Yizkor Books

- Yizkor Book Database
  https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/database.html
- Libraries with Yizkor Book Holdings
  https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/database.html
- New York Public Library Yizkor Book Digital collection:
  &keywords=&sort=mainTitle_ns+asc#/?tab=about&scroll=6
- Yizkor Book Translations in Print
  http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/ybip.html
Yizkor Book Database

- Database Description
- Over 1,000 titles
- Contains the following information:
  - A description of Yizkor Books for that location.
  - Libraries with these books.
  - Links to any translations that may exist on the Yizkor Book Translation Project web site.
How to search the database – when you know the Town

- [https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/database.html](https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/database.html)
- Enter **Town** in the *Yizkor Book Bibliographic Database* and choose the **type of search**
- 3 Search methods:
  - Town – Daitch Mokotoff Soundex system
  - Town – exact spelling
  - Global Text Search (name of author/s, editors, publishers or contact person)
Library Holdings

- The libraries with Yizkor books are listed in: https://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/database.html under Libraries with Yizkor Books

- It includes call numbers from a number of large university, special and public libraries in the USA, Israel, Great Britain and Canada.
New York Public Library Collection

- The Yizkor book holdings of the Dorot Jewish Division

- Digitization by the New York Public Library in partnership with the National Yiddish Book Center (almost 700 titles)

- You can download to your computer to read.

- You can order a print from the library.
Yizkor Book Translations in Print

- A complete listing of all the books in print is available at: http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/ybip.html

- Since 1994 JewishGen volunteers and professionals have been translating Yizkor books and publishing them on the web.

- Over 75 titles have been published in hard cover and more than 6000 books sold.

- The list gives the book price and ordering information.
Yizkor Book Translations in Print
Yizkor Book Master Name Index (YBMNI)

- More than 90,000 entries, indexed from 132 different Yizkor Books
- [http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/yizkor/Names/](http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/yizkor/Names/)
- It directs researchers to the Yizkor book itself, where more information is available.
A Search result from the Master Name Index – when only the Name is known

- A search for: Leibenzon
- Lithuania (Country), Lithuania

Various spelling of the place name:
- Lietuva [Lith], Литва Litva [Rus], Litwa [Pol], Litauen [Ger], ליטא Lita [Heb], ליטא Lite [Yid], Lithuania [Eng].

Upon breakup of the Russian Empire, Lithuania became independent in 1918. It was annexed by the USSR in 1940, and became independent again in 1991.

Original Title:
- Yahadut Lita (vol. 1) English Title: Lithuanian Jewry Editor: N. Goren et al. Published: Tel Aviv 1959 Publisher: Am-Hasefer

- Pages: 648 Languages: H

Translation link:
- [http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/lithuania01/lithuania01.html](http://www.jewishgen.org/yizkor/lithuania01/lithuania01.html)

List of Libraries - See WorldCat site: [http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/668203064](http://www.worldcat.org/oclc/668203064)
- YIVO Institute for Jewish Research Library, New York, NY, United States,
  - Call No: +DS135 L5 Y3
- More libraries are listed
NAME LISTS FROM YIZKOR BOOKS

- https://www.ushmm.org/online/hsv/source_view.php?SourceId=45402 (US Holocaust Memorial Museum web site link to Jewish Gen Database)
- NAME LISTS FROM YIZKOR BOOKS (ID: 45402)
  - VIEW ALL NAMES IN THIS COLLECTION
  - SEARCH NAMES WITHIN THIS COLLECTION
- It directs to the index
- The index can be printed.
NAME LISTS FROM YIZKOR BOOKS – SAMPLE RECORD

- Borenfreund, Israel
  - **Sex:** Male
  - **Holocaust Fate:** Murdered
  - **Page Number:** 10
  - **Name Source:** Nowy Sacz Society in New York
  - **Other Notes:**
    - Book introduction and a book page containing the name are available on request.
Who uses Yizkor books?

- Family members who want to find material about ancestors or relatives and Yefim will share his experience.
- Historians, anthropologists and other researchers and students of Jewish life in Eastern Europe.
How to use Yizkor Books in family research?

Ideas/methods which may help you in your research

**Name:** Kogan (various spelling: Cogen) – a Kohen  
**First name:** Shabsa (grandmother’s father) – a Rabbi;  
**Shabsa’s father’s name:** Yerikhim  
**Place:** Kaushany, (Căușeni) Bessarabia
Results of search

- Shabsa’s children were born in Kaushany.
- In one child’s birth records I found that Shabsa was a Dubossary meschanin (Middle Class).
- Searched in the Dubossary Yizkor book, (Dubossary was in the Kherson gubernia (not Bessarabia))
  https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Dubossary/dub298.html
- Found the article “The Great Scholar and Rabbi Yerucham son of Rabbi Shabtai Hacohen”
Results of search

- According to the article Yerikhim’s father is Shabsa
- It is very likely that this Yerikhim is in fact my great greatgrandfather.
- Finally, there was a photo of Yerikhim in the Yizkor Book, and looking on photos of Yerikhim and Shabsa it is clear that they are related
Second story – looking for family in Kaushany

- Read the chapter “Kaushany” in Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities in Romania, Volume II
  https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/pinkas_romania/rom2_00394.html. No information about my family
- Consulted the Bendery Yizkor book (Bendery is 20km from Kaushany)
  https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Bender/ben145.html and I found a line about my mother’s uncle Berl, Boris Spivak.
Ideas for your research:

- You may find information about your relative(s) in a different Yizkor book, not necessarily for the town she or he used to live.
- You need to read the Yizkor books carefully with some criticism.
- There may be errors, because in many cases people who wrote them were not professional researchers, they wrote what they knew.
- Here is a simple mistake: from Bendery Yizkor Book: [https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Bender/ben181.html](https://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/Bender/ben181.html)
  - “David Abramovich Natanzon was born in Tiraspol [Podolia] in 1877.” Tiraspol was never part of Podolia gubernia, but Kherson gubernia.
Ala’s story

- Ala Gamulka (Tulchinskiy) – translator and educator

- Yizkor Books sometimes produce surprises!
  - In the *Rokitno* Yizkor book I found a list of Holocaust victims and I was able to confirm the surname of my mother-in-law’s sister.

- In the *Manievitch* Yizkor Book I found, by accident, a picture of my husband’s cousin who perished there. He remembered the teenaged cousin from his boyhood.
"We have the responsibility to remember: Once we remember, we need to embrace life and with the lessons learned from our collective memory, live life to the fullest."

- Felicia Carmelley: Across the Rivers of Memory"
Thank you for your participation

• I encourage all genealogists – professionals or amateurs to read as many Yizkor books as possible
• I call on all people who are here today to participate in the translation projects or support a translation publication in order to make these valuable books available for future generations!