

Finding Your Ancestral Town

If you know the name of the town your ancestors came from, you can locate the town on a map, identify the country and region, province, county, district or other administrative unit it is in currently, and obtain the corresponding information for the time period when your ancestors lived there. With some research, it is possible to obtain this information even when you do not have the “correct” or present-day spelling of the town name.

Identifying the Town Name

To learn how to identify the name of the town where your ancestors lived, please see our fact sheets on **Starting Your Family History Research**, **Immigration Records**, and **Naturalization Records**. Other suggestions are available at www.jewishgen.org/infofiles/faq.html#Towns. Besides the name, try to obtain additional identifying information about the town. What type of industry or trade took place there? What languages were spoken? Was it near any rivers, forests, or borders? What larger city was it near? Interviewing relatives is the best way to find out this information.

General Resources

Once you have a town name, there are many printed gazetteers and online databases that include variant spellings. Many of these provide the map coordinates of the town, as well as the name of the district, state, region, and/or province:

Mokotoff, Gary and Sallyann Amdur Sack with Alexander Sharon. *Where Once We Walked: A Guide to the Jewish Communities Destroyed in the Holocaust—Revised Edition* (Avotaynu, 2002). This gazetteer lists towns according to variant spellings. Present-day Kirovgrad, Ukraine, for example, can be found by looking up Elizabetgrad, Jelissawetgrad, Kirowo, Kirowograd, and a number of other alternate names. This book, available in the Center for Jewish History Genealogy Institute, also provides the map coordinates of the town, as well as an estimate of the pre-WWII Jewish population.

Genealogy Institute DS 135 .E83 M65 2002

ShtetlSeeker Database (<http://www.jewishgen.org/communities/LocTown.asp>) You can search for towns using either the exact spelling or the Daitch-Mokotoff Soundex. Soundex searches find similar sounding names with variant spellings. The Daitch-Mokotoff Soundex is especially suited to Eastern European names (e.g., “v” and “w” are considered the same). You can also limit your search to particular countries. Links on the results screen connect you to online map sites.

Columbia Gazetteer of the World. Online database.

Genealogy Institute

GEOnet Names Server (GNS) Web site provides access to the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency's (NGA) and the US Board on Geographic Names' (US BGN) database of foreign geographic feature names, the official repository of foreign place-name decisions approved by the US BGN. About 20,000 of the database's features are updated monthly.

<http://earth-info.nga.mil/gns/html/index.html>

Barnavi, Eli, ed. *Historical Atlas of the Jewish People – Patriarchs to Present*. Schocken Books, 1992.

Genealogy Institute DS 117 .J8513

Cohen, Chester. *Shtetl Finder Gazetteer*. Heritage Books, 1989.

Genealogy Institute DS 135 .R9 C58

Cohn-Sherbok, Dan. *Atlas of Jewish History*. Routledge, 1994.

Genealogy Institute G 1030 .C559

Digital Topographic Map Sets – U. California at Berkeley Library

www.lib.berkeley.edu/EART/topo.html

Gilbert, Martin. *Jewish History Atlas, Revised Edition*. MacMillan, 1976.

Genealogy Institute G 1030 .G5

Magocsi, Paul Robert. *Historical Atlas of E. Central Europe Vol. 1*. U. Washington Pr., 1998.

Genealogy Institute G 2081 .S1 M3

Perry-Castañeda Library Map Collection, U. Texas at Austin.

www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/

Room, Adrian. *Place-Name Changes Since 1900: A World Gazetteer*. Routledge, 1980.

Genealogy Institute G 103.5 .R66

Third Military Mapping Survey of Austria-Hungary, circa 1910. Includes wide areas of Central and Eastern Europe.

<http://lazarus.elte.hu/hun/digkonyv/topo/3felmeres.htm>

U.S. Board on Geographic Names. Printed country-by-country gazetteers; for updates see *GEOnet Names Server*.

Reading Room and Genealogy Institute

Country-Specific Resources

Belarus

Routes to Routes Foundation

<http://www.rtrfoundation.org/maps4.shtml>

Belarus Special Interest Group *Shtetls of Belarus* database

www.jewishgen.org/Belarus/Shtetls/Belarus.htm

Czech Republic

Staré mapy Českých zemí. Historical Czech maps.

<http://amapy.centrum.cz/>

France

Meyrat, J. *Dictionnaire national des communes de France et d'Algerie, colonies francaises, pays de protectorat*. A. Michel, 1950.

Genealogy Institute DC 14 .M57 1950

Galicia

Wynne, Suzan F. *Finding Your Jewish Roots in Galicia: A Resource Guide*. Avotaynu, 1998. Galicia, also known as Austrian Poland, is now divided between Poland and Ukraine. This book lists towns with their district and province.

Genealogy Institute CS 878 .G35 W96

Germany

Ravenstein, Ludwig. *Atlas des Deutschen Reichs*, 1883. Also covers portions of surrounding countries.

www.library.wisc.edu/etext/ravenstein/#Introduction

Hungary

Auslander, Jordan. *Genealogical Gazetteer for the Kingdom of Hungary*. Avotaynu, 2004. Covers all territories under the Hungarian crown before World War I, including those that are now incorporated into surrounding countries.

Genealogy Institute DB 904 .G387 2004

Lelkes, György. *Magyar Helysegnev-Azonosító Szótár*. Kosa Pal, 1998. Covers all territories under the Hungarian crown before World War I, including those that are now incorporated into surrounding countries.

Genealogy Institute DB 904 .L44

Osztrák-Magyar Monarchia vármegyéi. Austro-Hungarian counties in 1910.
<http://lazarus.elte.hu/hun/maps/1910/vmlista.htm>

Hungarian Place Locator (1995 edition)
www.bogardi.com/gen/g056.htm

Lithuania

Routes to Routes Foundation
<http://rtrfoundation.org/maps5.shtml>

Litvak Special Interest Group *Shtetls of Lithuania* database
www.jewishgen.org/Litvak/Shtetls/Lithuania.htm

Interactive map of Lithuania
www.maps.lt

Moldova

Routes to Routes Foundation
<http://rtrfoundation.org/maps3.shtml>

Poland

Słownik geograficzny Królestwa Polskiego i innych krajów słowiańskich. Comprehensive multi-volume gazetteer of Poland originally published 1880-1905.
Ref DK403 .S53

Routes to Routes Foundation
<http://rtrfoundation.org/maps1.shtml>

Pogonowski, Iwo Cyprian. *Poland: A Historical Atlas*. Dorset Pr., 1988.
Genealogy Institute G 1951 .S1 P34

JRI-Poland Town Index. Includes gubernia, province, and map coordinates.
www.jewishgen.org/JRI-PL/town/index.htm

Slovakia

Majtan, Milan. *Nazvy Obci Slovenskej Republiky*. VEDA, 1996.
Genealogy Institute DB 2708 .M34 1998

Gazetteer of Slovakia
www.iarelated.com/gazateer.htm

Interactive Slovak map
<http://mapy.atlas.sk/>

Slovak maps and town guides
<http://mesto.sk/>

Ukraine

Routes to Routes Foundation
www.rtrfoundation.org/maps2.shtml

Blackie & Sons Atlas (Edinburgh, 1882) A historical map of Ukraine identifying the provinces.

<http://www.feefhs.org/maplibrary/russian/re-ukrai.html>

Magocsi, Paul Robert. *Ukraine – A Historical Atlas*. U. Toronto Pr., 1987.

Genealogy Institute G 2151 .S1 M34

Ukraine 1:100,000 topographic maps – U. California at Berkeley Library

www.lib.berkeley.edu/EART/x-ussr/ukraine.html

Locating Records

For guidance on locating records from your town, please consult our country-by-country fact sheets.

Town History

There are many sources of information on the history of your town's Jewish community.

Yizkor Books

Memorial books commemorating Eastern European Jewish communities.

Guzik, Estelle. *Genealogical Resources in New York*. JGS, Inc., 2003. Appendix B has an extensive bibliography of Yizkor Books, indicating which NYC libraries have copies.

Genealogy Institute Z 5313 .U6 N524 2003

JewishGen Yizkor Book Project. Database includes many translations and is searchable by town, indicating which US libraries have copies.

www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/database.html.

New York Public Library Yizkor Books Online

www.nypl.org/research/chss/jws/yizkorbooks_intro.cfm

Encyclopedias

Pinkas-Ha Kehillot. A multi-volume encyclopedia of towns published by Yad Vashem, provides brief town histories and demographic information (in Hebrew).

Reading Room

Encyclopedia of Jewish Life Before and During the Holocaust (3 volumes). Abridged English version of *Pinkas-Ha Kehillot*. Yad Vashem and NYU Pr., 2001.

Genealogy Institute and Reading Room DS 135 .E8 E45 2001

Encyclopedia Judaica

Reading Room

Jewish Encyclopedia

Reading Room.

Other: Memoirs, biographies, oral histories, and general histories sometimes provide background descriptions of towns. Consult the catalogs at the Center for Jewish History and other research libraries.