

RESEARCHING YOUR LITHUANIAN ROOTS

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Since its founding 20 years ago, LitvakSIG's translation activities have taken place through geographic-specific Research Groups whose primary purpose is to identify, collect and translate data from available records for Lithuania. A number of towns now in Belarus and Poland but with records in Lithuanian Archives also fall under our aegis.

Looking forward, LitvakSIG will be translating more records from the Lithuanian State Central Archives, including country-wide lists such as: Emigration to Eretz Israel; Evacuees to the USSR during World War II; Jewish Volunteers in the Lithuanian Army; JDC Lithuanian Survivors List.

LitvakSIG is an independent organization whose database and discussion group are hosted by JewishGen. Each organization has its own, separate administrative and fundraising structure.

How to find out what records exist for your towns

* In LitvakSIG, towns are organized into District Research Groups for the purpose of getting records translated. To find out what District your town is in, download and check the LitvakSIG Shtetl List. It will show you the current spelling of the town and what District the town is in.

<https://www.litvaksig.org/information-and-tools/shtetls/>

* On the website for Miriam Weiner's Routes to Roots Foundation, search the archival database for the town and also for the Uyezd (District) that the town is in. These searches will provide information on what records exist and what archives they are in. <http://www.rtrfoundation.org/search.php>

* Browse the Index of Records in the Kaunas Regional Archive and the Inventory of Jewish Vital Records in the Lithuanian State Historical Archives (LVIA), which are on the LitvakSIG Members Page.

* Make a note of the available records for your towns listed in these databases and write to the Coordinator of the Research Group that your town is in and ask him/her whether these records (1) have been translated; (2) are in the pipeline for translation, and (3) are already on the All Lithuania Database and publicly searchable. <https://www.litvaksig.org/research/district-research/>

* Joining your District Research Group gives you immediate access to Excel files of records as soon as they are translated -- at least 18 months before they are publicly searchable. Even when these records are publicly searchable, you will find that being able to browse and sort an Excel file of your town or district's records significantly enhances your research.

Searching the All Lithuania Database

You can search LitvakSIG's All Lithuania Database (ALD) by Surname, Given Name, Town, and/or Any Field. Only in searching the ALD can you search two or more of these fields at the same time as a standard option. There are currently two million record translations in the ALD.

<https://www.litvaksig.org/all-lithuania-database/search-ald/>

You can make a “Phonetically Like,” “Sounds Like”, “Starts With” or “Is Exactly” search of the ALD. You can search for a “Fuzzy,” “Fuzzier” or “Fuzziest” search to find significant spelling variants. Under “Region,” you can focus your search by uyezd (district) or gubernia.

If you undertake a “Sounds Like” search and put square brackets [] around the first letter of a surname, you will only receive search results that begin with that letter, giving you the breadth of a “Sounds Like” search but also a greater focus.

Search Results in the All Lithuania Database are grouped into several “templates” with general titles that include “Revision Lists,” “Directories,” and “Tax and Voters Lists.” It’s important to remember that these are just general categories and you will find that the lists covered by them are in a number of cases quite different than those general titles.

What sorts of records are in the ALD and what kind of information do they contain?

Revision lists and family lists were essentially a financial census; there were 10 official “revisions” – the first was in 1765 and the last in 1858. After 1858 there were Additional Revision Lists and Family Lists. These reflect the town in which a family is officially registered even if they may have moved to a nearby town. Historically, many Jewish families were NOT included in revision lists because they were afraid that if they were listed, their sons would be more likely to be conscripted, and because they wanted to avoid paying taxes.

The revision list includes the following information: Town, Uyezd and Gubernia of registration, Surname, Given Name and Father’s Name, Relationship Within Family, Age This Revision List, Age Last Revision List, Reason Individual Left and Year (if missing from family), Comments, which may refer to relationships, why person is missing, etc., Date, Page Number, Registration # and Former Registration #.

Translations of all vital records (birth, marriage, divorce, and death) are included in LitvakSIG Research Groups. These events are recorded in the town where the birth, marriage, death or divorce actually took place, even if a family may be officially registered in another town. If a family lived in a tiny village or dorf, they would most likely record the birth of a child, for example, in a nearby larger town.

Birth records may include the following information: Surname, given name of child, given name of father & paternal grandfather, given name of mother & maternal grandfather, maiden name of mother, date of birth, town in which event took place and town of registration (if different), uyezd, gubernia of residence, comments, place & year recorded, record #, microfilm # if filmed, Archive & Fond citation if not filmed. (The Vital Records Translation (VRT) project began by translating vital records that were microfilmed by the Latter Day Saints (LDS) and has been extended to include some vital records that were not microfilmed (such as later Rabbinate Records, although not all years for all towns).

Special Project: Lithuanian Internal Passports 1919-1940

After World War I, a Lithuanian Internal passport was required for all citizens aged 17 and older to avoid being sent back east to Russia. This was an ID, not a travel document. A person had to show he or she had resided in Lithuanian territory prior to World War I to prove the right to Lithuanian citizenship.

Internal Passports are very valuable in terms of genealogical research. Many have photos or copies of birth, marriage certificates, affidavits etc.

Areas that were part of Interwar Poland, such as Vilnius, also had Internal Passports.

Other Resources Available through LitvakSIG

Members-Only Website - LitvakSIG is a membership organization. Annual dues (\$50 US per calendar year) provide entry to the LitvakSIG Members-Only Website, which includes:

- inventories of holdings in various Lithuanian archives
- index to conscripts from Vilna Gubernia, 1900-1914, photos and translations available
- scholarly articles
- minutes of board meetings
- Annual Financial Reports presented during IAJGS Conferences
- discussion forums relevant to the Members Research Library, annual elections.

Discussion List & Archives - LitvakSIG volunteers, members and subscribers actively participate in posting useful information from the front lines of running LitvakSIG projects and answering questions posted by researchers. There are more than 2300 subscribers and it is the very best place to get an answer to questions about Litvak research. To subscribe, you must first be registered with JewishGen, www.jewishgen.org. Once registered go to <http://lyris.jewishgen.org/ListManager> to subscribe to the LitvakSIG Discussion List.

Old messages from the Digest, back to 1998, can be searched in the SIG Lists Message Archive by keyword. <http://data.jewishgen.org/wconnect/wc.dll?jg~jgsys~sigspop>

Other Links from the LitvakSIG Homepage

FAQs - Questions and answers about LitvakSIG, about records available, about travel to Lithuania, about understanding the data in the ALD and other records.

<https://www.litvaksig.org/information-and-tools/faq/>

Glossary - Terms of importance with which you may not be familiar

<https://www.litvaksig.org/information-and-tools/glossary>

Family Research – Steps for getting started

<https://www.litvaksig.org/research/family-research/>

Archives and Repositories – Links to information about the main archives relevant to Litvak research and contacting those archives.

<https://www.litvaksig.org/information-and-tools/archives-and-repositories/>

Audio / Video – suggested resources

<https://www.litvaksig.org/information-and-tools/audio-video/>

Books – A list of books of interest and assistance to your research.

<https://www.litvaksig.org/information-and-tools/books/>

Given Names Database - a searchable database of Jewish given names used in Lithuania during 1795-1925. Each name is cross referenced to new local vernacular names adopted in this same time period in nine foreign countries (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, Mexico, Palestine, South Africa, UK, US) to

which Lithuanian Jews immigrated. This includes the Hebrew, Yiddish, local and other-European-country secular names used in Lithuania, as well as new vernacular names used in foreign countries.

<https://www.litvaksig.org/information-and-tools/given-names-database/>

Image Library – photos from the shtetlach

<https://www.litvaksig.org/information-and-tools/image-library/>

Internet Links – Some of our favorite links to other genealogical websites.

<https://www.litvaksig.org/information-and-tools/internet-links/>

LitvakSIG Online Journal - articles that are of interest to Litvak researchers

<https://www.litvaksig.org/information-and-tools/online-journal/>

All features referenced and appearing in Bold, can be found as links from menus on the LitvakSIG website homepage at www.litvaksig.org, or as links from web pages within the website.

Finding out more about your ancestral town in Lithuania

The LitvakSIG Shtetl Map includes links to information and resources about your town

<https://www.litvaksig.org/research/map/>

The JewishGen Communities Page provides general information about your town, such as geographical coordinates, other Jewish communities within 30 miles, the current name and previous names of the town, and information on and links to resources that can help you learn more about your town.

<http://www.jewishgen.org/Communities/Search.asp>

The JewishGen Yizkor Book Project includes translations of Memorial Books and Memorial Collections for Lithuanian towns.

<http://www.jewishgen.org/Yizkor/translations.html>

JewishGen Kehilalinks include websites with resources for Jewish historical and cultural research for nearly 100 Lithuanian towns.

<http://kehilalinks.jewishgen.org/Lithuania.html>

Resources for Litvak Holocaust Research

Yad Vashem's Database of Shoah Victims names contain four million names of martyrs and survivors

<http://yvng.yadvashem.org/>

Yad Vashem's Shoah Related Lists database can be searched by town name and yields lists about your town from before and during the Shoah

<http://collections1.yadvashem.org/search.asp?lang=ENG&rsvr=17>