

SVEKSNA: Our Town

This article is dedicated to the memory of my Grandfather Zacharia Marcus, who came from Sveksna; and to my cousins: Jack Marcus, Daniel Marcus, Marcia Partridge, Mark Marcus, to their children and of course to my Daughters and their children: with hope that we will all always remember our common background with honor and love.

To Allison, Marcia's daughter, the biggest wedding present that I can give you, is to share my love for our Family Heritage with you.

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INTRODUCTION

During the past few years I have written articles about the places in Eastern Europe that my Grandparents came from.¹ Now the time has come for me to try to write about Sveksna, the town in Lithuania that my Maternal Grandfather **ZACHARIA MARCUS**, who I loved so much, came from. I hope to succeed here in honoring the memory of the Jews of this town; and thereby the memory of my Grandfather.

The obtaining of information about Sveksna has not been very easy, and I do not think that I have found enough. Even so, I want try to write down what I have found.

Since Sveksna, is a small town in Lithuania, I feel it appropriate to also relate information about the Jewish Community of Lithuania as a whole.

There are maps in the APPENDICES, which can be referred to in order to see the location of various places in connection with Sveksna.

I remember hearing about Sveksna when I was a little girl, and since then it has been a place that interested me. Therefore I thought I knew much about this town. When visiting Yad VeShem², I did look up Sveksna, and read what information that there was about it. Yet, I realize that if I am about to write an article I must base it on facts.

After deciding to write this article, I started to seriously go about finding material on **SVEKSKNA**. I visited the Library of Yad VeShem, the National and University Library³, the Lithuanian Archives⁴, the Zionist Archives⁵, and found in these places not only information, but people wiling to help.

Of course, I want to thank everyone who has helped in seeking reference and in the preparation of this article.

¹ Here is a list of the articles. Some are available on the internet. [Rezekne: The City of My Roots](#), [The Connection Between Rezekne and EinZaitim](#), in honor of my Paternal Grandmother Esther Anne (Chia Esther) Pass Herschman; [Research on Cherkassy](#), in honor of my Maternal Grandmother Edith Golding Marcus; [Vilna: At the Time of The Gaon](#), in honor of my Paternal Grandfather Zvi H(G)erschman who was a descendant of the Vilna Gaon. He came from Vitebsk; however Vitebsk has a very good Memorial Book, which gives all of information.

² The Israeli Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem, Israel

³ The Hebrew University, Givat Rom Campus, Jerusalem, Israel

⁴ Tel-Aviv, Israel

⁵ Jerusalem, Israel

By way of the JewishGen⁶ website, I was able to make contact with other people who are also interested in Sveksna. Many of them sent me whatever information^{7[7]} they had, and I have used this information in this article. I thank them all for their willingness to help, and am happy because of these nice contacts that I have made. I used this information mainly in footnotes, in connection with historical events. I seriously tried to locate the people from Sveksna who gave Testimonies about the Holocaust; and am quite sorry that I did not succeed in doing so. Perhaps they are no longer alive? I did succeed in locating Zalman Yavenlovitz, who was together with them in the Work-Camps and Concentration-Camps. Contact with him was very thrilling for me, and also gave me more information. After actually finishing this article I was lucky enough to locate Rivka Ladon, the daughter of Meir Ladon (ZL). She shared her memories with me, told me about her trip to see Sveksna and the area, and showed me her video of the trip. It was wonderful to meet her. I believe the feeling I then had was of a “Lanzman”.

I was seriously surprised by how much I enjoyed working on this article!!

⁶ See **BIBLIOGRAPHY**, Internet, p. 61

⁷ Ibid, Emails, p. 61

THE JEWS OF LITHUANIA

HISTORY⁸

Lithuania is the southernmost country, of the Baltic area in Northeastern Europe. In Lithuanian it is called **Lietuva**, in Polish- **Litwa**, in Russian- **Litva**, in Hebrew- **Lita**, and in Yiddish- **Lite**

The Jews first settled in Lithuania, in the beginning of the fourteenth century, upon the invitation of Count Gdimin. In 1388/9, the Jews of Brisk and Grudno received a Bill of Rights, which protected them and their property, and gave them freedom in trade, in crafts, and in religion. The richer of them worked for the duke. In 1399, Vituts, brought Jews to Troki. In the fifteenth century there were also Jewish communities in Ludsk and Ludmir. However, in 1495, the Jews were expelled, and their property confiscated, by Alexander Hegiloni. In 1503, after he was chosen as the king of Poland, he allowed the Jews to return. Many of those who previously lived in the south of Lithuania didn't return. In the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries, the Jews were estate owners or worked in agriculture. Michael Yozofomitz and his sons were granted the status of "nobility" by Zigmunt. In the period of Zigmunt II, the Jews weren't allowed to appear publicly in expensive clothing, and had to wear a special badge, by which they could be recognized as Jews. With the uniting of Lithuania and Poland, the conditions of the burghers, the farmers and the Jews worsened. Even so, during this period of Kings Zigmunt I, Zigmunt II, and Stephen Btori, the Jewish population in Lithuania grew. This was mainly caused by an influx from the west, chiefly from Bohemia. The new communities that were founded were in Kovrin, Klezk, Novegrodek, Tikoizin, Slonim, and Ostrha. In 1527, the burghers received a "Bill of Rights". This also forbade the Jews from settling in Vilna. In 1591, this was modified and a few merchants gained permission to settle there. This was the beginning of the Vilna community, which afterwards was officially recognized.

In the sixteenth century, the "Lithuanian Council" was organized. The important communities, which then were Brisk, Grodno, and Pinsk, and a bit

⁸ EH, V. 21, pps. 765-76; EJ, v. 11, pps. 361-90; HO, V. 3, pps. 636-9

later on Vilna and Slutzk, were represented by Community Administrators and Rabbis. The Council was responsible for taxes, and other common problems. The Kariates⁹ also paid taxes through the council.

In 1561 and 1566, blood-libels took place; and Jews were found guilty of murdering Christian children. The Council succeeded in obtaining a Bill from Zigmunt III, stating that trials would take place in the presence of the Siem and the king himself. The king also defended the Jews with problems dealing with the burghers, since the nobility used the Jews to weaken the burghers. In 1663, the Siem issued a bill of free trade. The Jews received a "Bill of Rights" from King Vladislav IV, and from local authorities. The situation continued to be difficult between the Jews and the burghers, and in the middle of the seventeenth century the Jews became known as the aids of the nobility.

The Chmielenski massacres¹⁰ of 1648-9 were seriously felt by The Jews of Lithuania, though not to the extent that they reached in the Ukraine. The Russian army continued to attack Jewish communities in 1654, 1659-60. Then the Swedish army, which also attacked Lithuania, taxed the Jews. At this time, the leadership of Lithuanian Jewry started to come from Vilna. The Jews, who were still continuously threatened by the burghers, took refuge on the estates and in towns.

The kings and the nobility helped the Jews in renewing their communities. Simultaneously, they tried to help the Jews with their financial burden, and collect taxes from them. Then the Catholic Church reaction grew stronger, and there were again blood-libels. Two leaders of the Jewish community of Rozenoi, were found guilty and killed.

In the beginning of the eighteenth century the armies of Russia and Sweden again attacked Lithuania. This caused famine, plagues, and taxes for the Jews. The period of King Stanslav Ponitivski, brought Edicts which made life a bit easier on the Jews.

In 1764, the Committee of Lithuania stopped functioning, and the entire Jewish population was taxed, aside from babies less than a year old. The

⁹ A Jewish sect, which came into being in the eighth century. Its doctrine is primarily characterized by the denial of Talmudical- Rabbinical tradition. Some lived in Lithuania from the seventeenth through the twentieth centuries. EJ, V. 10, p. 761

¹⁰ These were uprisings against Polish rule in the Ukraine, which resulted in the destruction or hundreds of Jewish communities. They took place in 1548-9. Chmielnicki was the leader. Ibid, V. 5, pps.480-3

census that was then taken stated that 157,250 people had to pay this tax, of one gold coin for each person. The Siem then decided to cancel the debts of Jewish Communities, which were quite high; but the administrators were ordered to report how much of an income each Jewish community received. Luckily, the supervision on this was not too good. This did cause the “selling” of official positions in the community, which in turn caused social distress, and difficulty in dealing with internal and external problems. This matter was brought to the King’s court. In 1792, the Siem decided on a special Jewish court to help with the community debts.

In 1792, the Russian army again attacked Lithuania. The Jewish community sided with the Lithuanians. According to the third partition of Poland, in 1795, Jews were only allowed to live where they had resided earlier, or in the south, were taxed a double tax (two times more than the burghers), and were allowed to be elected to the city council; but here there was opposition from the burghers).

According to the Bill of 1804, Jews were allowed to attend public schools, work in industry and agriculture, declared under city rule, and could only be tried in city courts. Jews, who lived in towns, villages, or ran inns or taverns were ordered to come reasonably often to the cities. They were thought guilty, because of the hard situation of the farmers, for they were the ones who served them the wine. This bill was soon canceled.

The Czar Nikolai wanted to bring the Jews closer to the peasants, and to convert them. The Bill of 1827 stated that a percentage of young men and children had to be drafted into the army for a period of twenty-five years. This was also used as a punishment for those who didn’t pay their taxes. This was the responsibility of the community, and therefore mainly felt by the poor, which caused hatred of the administration. The Bill of 1835 forbade Jews to marry young, and stated that all official documents had to be in Russian or in the language of the country. Dr. Max Lilienthal was sent to Lithuania as a representative of the czar, in the aim of spreading modern education and canceling the community organization. When he realized what the real aim of

this was, he left Russia. In the meantime, the Enlightened Jews¹¹ used this to spread their dogma.

In 1844 the “Community Organization” was officially banished, and the sexton of the synagogue was in charge of religious matters, and charity. The draft¹² continued to be controlled by the Jewish clerks who had previously been given this task. Sir Moses Montefiore went to St. Petersburg to speak with the czar to try to aid the Jews in this matter, but to no avail.

The Jews of Lithuania were still subject to various taxes. These taxes¹³ were quite burdensome on the poor. Jewish box tax farmers (government representatives) were responsible for the collection. These Jews got the position by the bidding of the highest sum, promised to be collected, at an auction. The box tax¹⁴ was a tax on every pound of kosher meat¹⁵ purchased by a Jew. It was paid by all, with the exception of some higher professionals. The “candle tax” was a tax on all candles used for Jewish rituals. It was paid by all of the Jewish population, including merchants. Its purpose was to support the government project of state schools for the Jews.

In 1847, a Rabbinical and Teachers’ Seminary, was opened in Vilna, and its students weren’t subject to the draft. With the aid of the enlightened Jews, the government, subject the Jews to a new law concerning their way of dressing.

In the beginning of the reign of Czar Alexander II things got a bit easier: The special draft was cancelled, Jews with higher education, and tradesmen were allowed to settle where they wanted to, and permission was granted to open additional Hebrew Publishing Houses.

¹¹ See THE JEWS OF LITHUANIA, ENLIGHTENMENT, p. 19

¹² Sometimes youth “sold themselves” to become army conscripts, in order to help pay off the debt of the community or of their family.

¹³ The checking of the records of these taxes is also a way of finding out about the history of the area. The problem here is that these records do not always coincide with real life. They do however include such information as: population, well-to-do families, incomes, community expenses, debts, economic conditions, disasters, health, public buildings and other related material. BX, p. 3; SH, pps.1-2. There are records of the “Candle Tax” taxes in various communities in the years 1845- and 1846; and records of both taxes for the years 1904, 1908 and 1912. Some of these records also contain names. JCL, pps.1-5. These documents can be found in the Russian State Historical Archives. BX, p. 1

¹⁴ Originally this tax was used to pay the debts of the Jewish community to the Catholic Clergy; and was on items of primary necessity. This tax was first paid in Lithuania, in order to help the Jews of Southern Russia; EJ, V. 5, p. 119. The first recorded documentation of it, was in 1647. After the liquidation of the “Community Organization” it was issued on meat (December 19, 1844 through 1917). If money was left over, the Jewish community could ask to use it. There was an immense amount of bureaucracy involved. Ibid, pps. 1-3

¹⁵ The exact kind of meat, and its weight is listed; Ibid, pps. 5-6

In the years of 1867-9 there was a bad famine, and a cholera plague broke out. Special Jewish schools were closed, but Jews were then allowed to study in public schools; so many did so. The Rabbinical Seminary that was founded by the government didn't produce a generation of Reform Rabbis, but served as an institute for higher general education. There were still Rabbis (in charge of official business) and Yeshiva principals that were chosen by the government. In 1873 the Rabbinical Seminary was closed, but the Teachers' Seminary still existed. Many enlightened Jews and the first members of the Jewish Socialist Party studied here.

Then the reign of Alexander II, began to signify the beginning of persecution. There were great fires. The Bill of 1887 lowered the percentage of Jewish students who were allowed to study in high schools and schools of higher education, and forbade tradesmen to travel around freely. After the uprising in Russia in 1880-2 many Jews also left Lithuania. Most immigrated to the USA or South Africa. Lithuanian Jews were among the first to ask to come to the land of Israel. The Bill of 1892 forbade Jews to participate in urban elections.

The Jewish workers began to organize themselves, in order to improve their conditions, and in 1897 the "Bund" (Jewish social democrats) was founded.¹⁶

After the Russian-Japanese War of 1904-5, the Jews feared uprisings against them, and therefore a "Defense Committee" was organized.¹⁷

In March 1915, the Russian army entered Prussian territory and occupied Klaipeda (Memel) and Tilze. These places were active centers of patriotic Lithuanians. Russia deported many local inhabitants to the heart of Russia, where they were kept throughout the war. Simultaneously, the Germans advanced further into Russia, and several battles were fought.

On April 17, 1915 the Germans occupied Kaunas (Kovno). On April 30, 1915, the German army entered Siauliai, an important railroad and manufacturing center. On September 18, 1915, the Germans reached Vilna.¹⁸

¹⁶ See **THE JEWS OF LITHUANIA, SOCIALISM**: p. 24

¹⁷ PL, pps .675-6

¹⁸ LY, p. 146

The German Occupation Government introduced new laws. Transportation to larger cities was cancelled. Men were often forced to work at the warfronts or in Germany. Food was taken, for the German army, without consideration of the basic needs of the local population. Severe punishments were given to those who violated these new rules. There was nowhere to complain about actions of the Occupation.^{19[19]}

During World War I, the Jews were particularly oppressed. There were anti-Jewish riots. In the spring of 1915 the Jews were expelled, from the provinces of southeastern Lithuania, to the Russian interior. With the withdrawal of the Russian army, the local rioting against the Jews increased. Under German occupation, the Jews suffered from lack of food and unemployment. Some of the Jewish refugees began to return and most settled in cities or towns. A bit of aid came from Jews in the USA and Germany; and the Jews organized to help themselves

After the war, the Jews of Lithuania were divided among Lithuania, Soviet Byelorussia and Poland. With the foundation of independent Lithuania(1923-39), the Jews there had autonomy. The communities chose a "National Committee", in which the Zionists were the majority. One Jew was a member of the government, and in charge of the Jews. . A network of Jewish and Hebrew schools was opened. The Jewish school system was so good that it was called the "second Eretz Yisroel".

The agrarian reforms of 1922 affected the few Jews that were farmers. These reforms caused conflict with the established Jewish economy in the towns and villages, since they also caused urbanization of the peasants. At this time Jews worked mainly as merchants, craftsmen, transporters, credit bankers and professionals; and there were still many Jews who did work in government positions.

In 1924 the autonomy was cancelled, but the Jews still had their own school system. Since the government had an anti-Semitic policy, which interfered with the jobs of the Jews, many Jews left the country. Almost half of them came to Israel.

¹⁹Ibid, p. 149

The National Committees were officially dissolved, but still responsible for the Jewish People's Bank and the Hebrew-Yiddish school system. Two bodies were formed: Ezra for social aid, and Adas for religious needs. Jewish property was confiscated. However many Jews continued to work in government positions. Again, many Jews immigrated.

The Soviet government annexed Lithuania in 1940 and turned it into a Soviet Republic²⁰. Supplies were barely received, but prices were raised. This mainly affected the middle class, which was made up mainly of Jews. All the factories and large stores, which belonged mostly to Jews, became government property. All organized Jewish life was stopped. This included schools, Zionist organizations, and youth movements.

The Jewish population grew because of the annexing of the Vilna province and the influx of refugees. The new Communist regime needed capable and experienced workers, so Jews were given prominent positions. The new economy was to be equal for all, but Jews were affected badly. Many Jews, from various sectors of the entire Jewish community, were deported to Siberia and other parts of Soviet Asia.

World War II broke out on September 1, 1939. The Germans occupied Poland and then Lithuania came under Soviet rule. It was annexed by the Soviet Union, in the end of the summer of 1940.²¹

The Nazis occupied Lithuania within one week and the local National forces were responsible for murders, arrests, and explosions. These National forces were made up of the army, intellectuals, and those who previously belonged to the underground and had connections with the Nazi Intelligence. They joined up with the "Partisans" after the invasion. In June 1941, the government sent 5,000²² Jews to Work Camps inside Russia. Only a few thousand²³ Jews succeeded in escaping into Russia. Most of the Jews were stuck inside of Lithuania. The local population, started straight away with uprisings against them. Houses were burnt, synagogues were destroyed, and men, women, and children were tortured and murdered. Therefore on June 5, 1941, when the regiment, which was to destroy the Jewish life in the Baltic

²⁰ PL, pps. 675-6

²¹ DM, p. 1

²² They sent 7000. HO, V. 5, p. 1284

²³ The number of Jews that managed to do so was between 14,000 –15,000.Ibid, p.1284

countries, reached Lithuania, all they had to do was to join up with these “Partisans”, and turn them into a part of their force. One regiment remained in Lithuania, made its base in Kovno, on July 2, 1941, and was headed by Yagger²⁴, who was also the head of the Security Police. Many Jews joined up, with forces against the Nazis. The Lithuanians that were in the Soviet army made up over 50% of the gunners division; a large percentage of them had been partisans.

Then murdering of Jews became quite easy and went according to schedule for the Nazis. The Lithuanians were the ones who usually carried this out. Yager organized a “Field Unit” to take care of the out of the way communities. Many communities were completely destroyed by a single sudden attack. There were many social, and economic prohibitions. About eight hundred Jews from the west were sent to the work camp in Heidekrug, near Memel, and the ones that survived there were sent to Aushwitz in 1943²⁵. There are official reports of the extermination carried out by the action units.

Ghettos were formed in Kovno, Shavli, Vilna, Svencionis and other places. The Jews there were forced to wear two yellow star badges²⁶. They were allowed autonomy within the ghettos, which was subject to the supervision of the regional commissioner. They were guarded by the auxiliary police, which was recruited from the local population.

By October 15, 1941, over 80,000 Lithuanian Jews were murdered. According to Yager’s report, of December 1, 1941, there were still Jews in Shvalli (4,500), in Kovno (20,000) and Vilna (15,000). It seems therefore, that there were then about 40,000 Jews, mostly in these three ghettos.

The “National Committee” realized that hard physical work could postpone murder, and this caused the Committee to find/create as many possible jobs for Jews to do inside of the ghetto. The decline of “actions”, aside from the sending of Jews to the Riga ghetto, and to Work–Camps (from

²⁴ The Nazi Karl Yagger was born in Switzerland in 1888. He was caught in 1959, in Germany, where he was disguised as a farmer. He committed suicide in jail. He served in Holland, Germany, Northern USSR, then Lithuania. Everything he was responsible for was written in his reports: the murdering of 136,421 Jews, 1,064 communists, 653 insane people and 134 others. Ibid, V. 3, p. 541

²⁵ See **SVEKSNA, THE HOLOCAUST**, pps.38-46

²⁶ This is a yellow Jewish star, with a black dot in its middle. JL, V. 4, p. 364

1942 until the middle of 1943) caused these ghettos to gain some strength, a bit of a revival of social and cultural life and an underground.

On April 5, 1943, 5,000 Jews from the vicinity of Vilna were taken to Ponar and shot to death. They did show resistance! Close to the end of 1943, Jews that could still work, from these three ghettos, were sent to Concentration Camps. About 2,000 Jews remained in the Work-Camp near Vilna. The ghettos of Kovne and Shalvi were turned into Concentration Camps. The Jews in these ghettos showed resistance. There were attempts to flee and an active underground. Close to the end of the Vilna Ghetto, the resistance managed an armored escape to the Rodnicki forest and formed four units of Partisans. Only a few dozen of the Jews from the Shavli Ghetto succeeded in escaping. Then there were about 1000 Partisans in Lithuania.

Lithuania was liberated in the summer of 1944, by the Russian army. Then, only a few hundred Jews were found there. Of the Jews that were sent to Concentration Camps from the three big ghettos, about 4,000-5,000 were still alive. The number of Lithuanian Jews who were murdered during the Holocaust is between 140,00-143,000.²⁷ Only about 12% of Lithuanian Jewry remained alive after the war. This number includes the Jews who returned from Russia and the Jews who were in the "Lithuanian Division" of the Red Army.

The War Crimes Trials declared the Lithuanians guilty, together with the Nazi criminals. Many war criminals succeeded in avoiding trial. There were a few individuals who did help the Jews, despite the danger. Some Jews hid in monasteries or houses of these kind people.

Right after the war, the Lithuanians made an effort to find the places of mass-murder and concentration, the reasons for these murders and to identify the victims. They set up a committee and looked for witnesses. Many memorials were set up, with the inscriptions in Russian and/or Lithuanian. Usually the victims were listed as Soviet citizens. After much pleading and paying, it was allowed to add Yiddish and even Hebrew inscriptions in a few places.

²⁷ HO, V. 5, p. 1284

According to the Soviet census²⁸ of 1959, there were 24,672 Jews in Lithuania. This was 0.9% of the general population. Over 30% of the 175,000 Jews of Lithuania and Byelorussia declared Yiddish as their national language. This was then the only way that they could show their affiliation with Judaism. There was pressure to revive Jewish culture. The Soviet authorities finally gave permission for the establishing of a Yiddish theater group. In 1960/1 there were 413 Jewish students in institutes of higher learning. According to this census, there were 24,000 Jew in Lithuania in 1970. This was 0.8% of the general population.

²⁸ EJ, v. 14, p. 483

CULTURAL LIFE²⁹

The term “Lithuanian” (or “Litvak” in Yiddish) is frequently found in speech, folklore, literature and history. Until the end of the sixteenth century, Lithuanian Jewry wasn’t considered an important part of European Jewry. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the community was quite influenced by Polish Jewry in community organization, educational methods, ways of Torah study and great Rabbis who came from Poland.³⁰ At the time of the rule of the Czars³¹, the Jews of the western provinces of Kovno, Vilna, Grodno and Northern Sovalk were influenced by the Polish–Lithuanian Jewry; and the Jews of the provinces of Vitebsk, Minsk and Mohilev were influenced by the Byelorussia Jewry.

The Jews of Lithuania differed from Jews of other areas in Eastern Europe by certain characteristics: the superiority of intellect over emotion, cleverness, sharpness, learning ability and coldness. This caused the idea that they were weak in their fear of G-D. Hasidism didn’t actually take root in Lithuania, with the exception of the section close to Byelorussia where Habad did have an influence. Over 12% of the Lithuanian Jews lived in cities or towns. There were over 300 communities that had over 1000 members and 12 communities (Vilna, Minsk, Dvinsk, Brisk, Grodno, Mohilev, Pinsk, Boboroisk and Homel) that had over 2000 members. There was also full Jewish life in smaller communities, which sometimes consisted of only a few dozen Jewish families.

Geographic and historic factors caused the togetherness of Lithuanian Jewry. The country was poor, and the population mainly belonged to the poor strata. The national culture wasn’t developed. Therefore the Jews, who had contact with the Lithuanians as shopkeepers, innkeepers, craftsman, merchants and contractors, felt themselves superior to the local population. Because of the persecution,³² they realized that they couldn’t and wouldn’t actually intermingle with the local population. They developed a feeling of

²⁹ EH, V. 21, p. 772-6; EJ, V.11, pps. 362-9; HO, pps 636-7

³⁰ Rabbi Mordechai Yaffe, Rabbi Joel Sirkes and Rabbi Solomon Luria, were born in Lithuania, got their education and experience outside of Lithuania. EH, v. 21, p. 773; EJ, V. 21. p. 362

³¹ This was from the end of the eighteenth century to WWI. Ibid, V. 11, p.361

³² See **THE JEWS OF LITHUANIA, HISTORY**, pps. 5-13

security, which caused them not to even want to associate with the local population. They had their own way of life, which was based on Jewish law. They loved and honored the Torah and studied it in exactness. They spoke in a particular style of Yiddish. This was mainly noticed in the pronunciation of ““**u**” (sh) like “**o**” (s).³³ They also pronounced “oui” more like “ow”³⁴. The term “Litvak” (Lithuanian) is found in Jewish literature and folklore. Most Jews did know Lithuanian and the professionals used Russian. In the beginning of the seventeenth century, Lithuania began to be recognized as a center of Jewish learning. In the middle of the seventeenth century, Lithuania also began to produce great Rabbis, who lived and practiced there. Among the outstanding Rabbis of this period were Rabbi Solomon Luria,³⁵ Rabbi Shabbetai Mier Ha-Kohen³⁶, Rabbi Moses Rivkas³⁷, Rabbi Yechiel Halperin and Rabbi Hirsh Koidonover³⁸. The Yeshiva in Brisk had many students from Poland and other places in Eastern Europe. Grordno also became such a center, especially after Rabbi Mordechai Yaffe³⁹ settled there. Vilna also became such a center.

The most important of Lithuanian Rabbis, was the Gaon of Vilna^{40[40]}, Rabbi Elijah Ben Shlomo Zalman (1720-97). He was the symbol of Torah study in Lithuania. He established his own method of Torah study. It was characterized by close examination of the Talmudic text and accuracy in its interpretation, a comprehensive knowledge of all the Torah sources,

³³ EH, v. 21. p. 773

³⁴ My Father (z'l) used this as away of knowing what vicinity a Jew came from, without asking him. He believed the Lithuanian Jew to be superior intellectually; but stated that there were different levels among Lithuanian Jews also. He felt the presence of this difference when Margolis, and Raisin (see **Sveksna: JEWISH HISTORY**, p.) conversed, and my Grandfather was present, but couldn't actually take part in the conversation, ZM

³⁵ Rabbi Luria lived from about 1510 to 1574. He was also known as Rashal or Mahaarshal. He was a famed commentator and judge. He was born in Lithuania, but taught also in Poland. EJ, V. 11, p.262, pps. 580-2

³⁶ Rabbi Ha-Kohen died in 1621-62. He was a commentator on the **Shulchan Aruch (Book of Jewish Law)**, a judge in the Jewish court in Vilna, and a historian of his period. Ibid, V. 14, pps. 1217-1219

³⁷ Rabbi Rivkas died in 1671-2. His, clarifications, additions and corrections to the **Shulchan Aruch**, became an integral part of it and appeared in all editions. He favored tolerance of non-Jews. This was something out of the ordinary in his time. He was an ancestor of the Vilna Gaon, who, in turn, which was supported by a legacy left by him. Ibid, pps.197-8

³⁸ Rabbi Koidonover died in 1712. His book **Kav HaYashar** (The Straight Line) is a book of Jewish ethics. Here he related to the suffering and persecution, communal and economic problems of the period; and the despair brought on by the Shabbatean disillusionment. Ibid, V.10, p. 1154

³⁹ See **THE JEWS OF LITHUANIA, HISTORY**, p. 12 ft. 30. He lived from 1820 to 1891. He studied in the Volozhin Yeshiva. He was Rabbi of Ruzhany, near Grudno for over 30 years. He opposed the ideas of religious reform; was an ardent Zionist, and aided those who came on Aliyah. He came on Aliyah in 1888, and settled in Yahud, near Petach-Tikva. His son published some of his works after his death. Ibid, V.9, p.1265

⁴⁰ I feel it important to add here, that the family of my Father (the late Oscar Herschman) was descendant of the Vilna Gaon.

abstinence from casuistic methods, and the study of grammar and sciences to aid in understanding the Torah. He was the founder of the Mitnagdim Movement, which was in a constant pulmus with the Hassidim. His followers founded Yeshivot, the first and most famous being the Yeshiva of Volozhin⁴¹
42

At this time, the idea of the Enlightenment came in from the west and the influence of the Hassidim from the south.

In the nineteenth century the Great Yeshivot of Mir⁴³, Telz⁴⁴, Slobodka⁴⁵, Panevezys⁴⁶, Radun⁴⁷ and Lida⁴⁸, were founded. These Lithuanian Yeshivot had students from all over Russia, and produced many rabbis and scholars who in turn went to spread the Torah in the entire world.

The Musar (Ethical) Movement was founded in the middle of the nineteenth century by Rabbi Israel Salanter. The goal here was to combine between traditional Judaism and the influence of that period by fostering the study of ethics. After the settling of problems with the Yeshivot of Slobodka, and Novordk⁴⁹, this became the accepted way of learning in these Yeshivot.

⁴¹ EJ, V. 6, pps. 651-8

⁴² Bialik and Berdyczewski also were educated there. EH, V. 21. p. 773; EJ, V. 11, p.368

⁴³ This yeshiva was located in the town of Mir, in the Grodno area. It was founded in 1815 by Rabbi Samuel Tiktinski and afterwards headed by Rabbis Yom Tov Lipman, Elijah Teomim and Abraham Kamai. Now it is in Jerusalem. Ibid, V. 12, ,pps. 70-1

⁴⁴ This yeshiva was located in the city of Telz (Telsai), in northwestern Lithuania. The Yeshiva existed from 1875 to 1941. The new methods adopted here were the division of pupils into classes according to their knowledge, periodic tests and compulsory attendance. The study of Musar was introduced, and there was concentration on the development of skill and acuity in profound logical analysis. The yeshiva was headed by Rabbis Eliezer Gordon, Joseph Bloch, Simeon Shkop, Isaac Hotzberg, Isaac Bloch and Azriel Rabinowitz. The Yeshiva was re-established in Cleveland. Ibid, V.15, pps. 938-9

⁴⁵ This yeshiva was founded in 1849 in Slobodka, near Kovno, by Rabbi Israel Lipkin (Salanter, 1810-1883). It was dedicated to the ideals of the " Musar" (education of the individual toward strict ethical behavior in the spirit of Jewish law). A branch was opened up in Hebron, in the Land of Israel, in 1924, and after the Arab Massacre was relocated in Jerusalem and known as the Hebron Yeshiva. EM, pps. 365-6, Ibid, V. 11 pps. 534-8; V.14, pps.1667-8

⁴⁶ This yeshiva was located in the city of Panevezys in Northern Lithuania. It was founded by Liebe Miriam Gavronsky, the daughter of K. Z. Wissotzky, in memory of her husband in 1911. The first Rabbi there was Isaac Jacob Rabinowitz. After WWI, it was re-established by Rabbi Kahaneman. After WWII, he re-established it in Bnei Brak, Israel. Ibid, V. 13, pps. 55-6, JL. V. 1, pps.205, 224, 395-6

⁴⁷ This yeshiva was located in the village of Radun, near Grodno in eastern Lithuania. It was founded by Rabbi Israel Meir Hacohen, also known as the "Hafetz Haim", in 1869. He taught his students to be just and to speak nicely of everyone and was a living example of such behavior. EH, V. 21. p. 773; EJ, V.11, p. 367; EM, p. 381, V. 13, p. 1505

⁴⁸ This yeshiva was located in Lida, in the province of Vilna. This yeshiva was established by Rabbi I. J. Reines, a founder of the Mizrachi movement, in 1905. Here secular subjects and modern Hebrew literature were also taught. EJ, v. 11, p. 368; EM, pps. 381, 388

⁴⁹ This Yeshiva was founded in 1896, by Rabbi Joseph Hurwitz. He was one of the leaders of the Musar Movement and one of the prominent disciples of Rabbi Israel Salanter. Here there was a maximalist trend. The student was taught to discipline himself. A deeper psychological approach was used. JL, V. 12, pps. 1236-9

The opponents to this movement felt that this would cause neglect of Torah study.

The Lithuanian Yeshivot trained Rabbis and religious communal workers which served in Jewish communities all over the world. Among the Lithuanian Rabbis, who became world famous during the past one hundred years are Rabbi Isaac Elchanan Spector⁵⁰, Rabbi Dov Soloveichik⁵¹, Rabbi Meir Simcha Cohen⁵², Rabbi Joseph Rosen of Dvinsk⁵³, Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzniski⁵⁴ of Vilna, Rabbi Iser Zalman Meltzer⁵⁵ and Rabbi Abraham Isaiah Karelitz⁵⁶.

Hebrew printing took root in Lithuania in the eighteenth century. Printing Houses were opened in Schklov in 1783, and in Grodno in 1788. In the nineteenth century Vilna became known as one of the centers for the printing of Jewish books. The most famous printing house there was the Romm Printing House⁵⁷. In addition to traditional books, books of the Enlightenment and Yiddish and Hebrew literature were also printed. Lithuania was also a center for the Karaites⁵⁸.

⁵⁰ In 1817, Rabbi Spector established a Yeshiva in Kovno for the training of outstanding Rabbis. In 1896, he succeeded in obtaining the withdrawal of the government decree prohibiting Jewish instruction in the Cheder. He influenced Rabbi S.R. Hirsch to write about the relationship of the Talmud and Judaism. He participated at meetings that submitted pleas to the Russian government for aiding Jewish life. He was a prominent Zionist and also aided Jewish life throughout the new world. EJ, V.15, pps.259-261

⁵¹ Soloveichik is the name of a Lithuanian rabbinical family. It was first heard of in Slobodka. Joseph was Parnas (coordinator) with the government. His sons Moses and Abraham built the great Synagogue of Williamopol-Slobodka in 1772. Moses was its rabbi. Joseph became the son-in-law of Rabbi Chaim of Volozin and rabbi of Kovno. His son Isaac was official rabbi of Kovno. Some members of the family immigrated to the USA and others to the Land of Israel. All were/are known for religious/community work. Ibid, pps. 127-33

⁵² Rabbi S.M. Cohen lived from 1843 to 1926. He was a renowned Talmudic scholar and commentator. He served as Rabbi of Dvinsk for 40 years. He declined the offer to come to Jerusalem, for he wanted to stay with his congregation and they wanted him. He was a member of the Central Committee of Rabbis, the representative body of Jewsthat had connections with the government. Ibid, V. 11, pps. 1260-1

⁵³ Rabbi Rosen lived from 1858 to 1936. He was Rabbi of the Chasidic community of Dvinsk. He knew the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds well. He saw a subject as a whole and was able to analyze well, in order to get to the core of the law. He traced new scientific ideas and the philosophy of Maimonides to the Talmud. This was revealed in his commentary on the Bible, and in conversations with great scientists. Ibid, V. 14, pps. 360-1

⁵⁴ Rabbi Grodzniski lived from 1863 to 1940. He was a great Talmudic scholar and leader of Lithuanian Orthodox Jewry. He was a leading judge in the Vilna Rabbinical Court (1887) and worked for the support of Yeshivot and Torah education. He was a vehement opponent of Zionism. Ibid, V. 7, pps.928-9

⁵⁵ Rabbi Meltzer lived from 1870 to 1953. He was one of the principals of the Slobodka Yeshiva. In 1894 he became the head of the Slutsk Yeshiva (1897) and then the Rabbi there. He suffered at the hands of the Bolsheviks, and was then imprisoned for teaching Torah there. In 1925, he became head of the Ez Hayim Yeshiva in Jerusalem, as he was a fervent Zionist. He had a moderating influence in Agudah. EJ, V. 11, pps.1295-6

⁵⁶ Rabbi Karelitz lived from 1878 to 1953. He was also known as the "Hazon-Ish" (man with a revelation), Ibid, p. 368. He knew sciences, for he felt that this knowledge was necessary for a full understanding of Jewish law. He gave guidance to people from all walks of life and was known throughout the world as an authority in all matters relating to Jewish law and life. He was a lover of Zion, though not affiliated with any organization and settled in the Land of Israel in 1933. Ibid, V. 10, pps. 787-8

⁵⁷ The Romm Printing House was opened in Vilna in 1799 and shut in 1940. It published both Jewish traditional literature and modern Jewish Literature. It is famous for the printing of the Talmud. Ibid, V. 14, pps. 255-6

⁵⁸ See **THE JEWS OF LITHUANIA; HISTORY**, p. 6, ft. 9

ENLIGHTENMENT⁵⁹

The Enlightenment reached Lithuania by way of Prussia, first to the border towns, to the cities of Vilna and Minsk, and then spread to other localities. It took on a special character since there was no assimilation. The enlightened Jews formed circles and groups. The Hebrew language and literature began to flourish and spread the its' ideas. It encompassed every aspect of life. Noted people in this sphere were the poets AD'M HaCohen (Lebinsohn) and J. L. Gordon, the novelists Abraham Mapu, Perez Smoleskin and Bialik⁶⁰, the publicists and critics A.U. Kovner, A.J. Paperna, M.L. Lilienblum and J.M. Pines, the scholars of Jewish studies J. Steinberg and E. Zweifel, the authors of popular works on general history and geography M.A. Guenzberg and K. Solomon, the authors on natural sciences H.S. Slonimski, Zev Rabinowitz and S. J. Abramowicz (Mendele Mocher Seforim⁶¹). The founders of Russian Jewish literature, and the new Yiddish literature; which consisted of newspapers and books were M. Dick, Y. Katik, D. Einhorn, M. Kolbeck, A. Kkariv and S.J. Abramowicz They wrote Yiddish fiction that depicted Jewish life in Lithuania. Hebrew authors, who were influenced by the enlightenment and who depicted Jewish life in Lithuania are Ben Avigdor, Y.H. Brenner, G. Shufman, Y. Katznelson, D. Brown, Y. Ancki, and others. Authors who did so in Hebrew and Yiddish were Z. Shneur, Y Cohen, D. Shimoni, H. Landki, P Hirshbein, A. Gordon, D. Tsharni, and others. Authors who did so in Yiddish were D. Einhorn, M. Kolbach, S. Mimon, A. Lisishki, I.D Berkowitz. M. Villkinskiand, Y. Katik, Y. Kapalev others.

The enlightened assisted the Russian government in the spreading of Russian culture among the Jews. They took part in the establishment of a network of government schools for the Jews. The most well known was the Rabbinical Seminary in Vilna ⁶². The first Hebrew Teachers' Seminary was opened in Grodno, in 1908. They were also the founders of the Zionist and socialist groups.

The Research Institute of the Jews of Lithuania was opened in Minsk, but was shut in the 1930's. Hebrew schools, under the auspices of the "Tarbut⁶³" chain, were opened, mainly in Eastern Lithuania. Yiddish schools were also opened. The Institute for Jewish Research (YIVO⁶⁴) was opened in

⁵⁹ EH, V. 21 p. 774; EJ, V. 11, pps. 369-70

⁶⁰ He was not from Lithuania but did study there and did write about Lithuanian Jewish life. See THE JEWS OF LITHUANIA, CULTURAL LIFE, p.16, ft. 42

⁶¹ He was also known as "Medele Mokher Sofarim" (Mendele the seller of books); see below. EJ, v. 11, p. 370

⁶² See THE JEWS OF LITHUANIA: HISTORY: p. 8

⁶³ This was a Hebrew educational and cultural organization that maintained schools in most Eastern European countries between the wars. The education was Zionist oriented. The organization also published textbooks, curricula and periodicals. EJ, V. 15, p. 807. This organization operated kindergartens, elementary schools, high schools, gymnasiums, teaching seminaries, theater groups, evening classes, and libraries. Za-3241/a

⁶⁴^[64] The original goals of this institute were that Jews participate in scholarly research in their own language and that the results of world scholarship be made available to those Jews who were only familiar with the Yiddish language. The guiding basic principles were:

- (1) The Jews as a people, all over the world;
- (2) The enrichment of Jewish life by means of Jewish scholarship;
- (3) The application of the most modern methods of social science in understanding Jewish identity and Jewish group phenomena.

Nazis destroyed the Vilna headquarters but took much of the library with them to Germany. After the war it was taken to New York. Throughout the world there are branches of this organization.

Vilna in 1925. A Yiddish Theatre was also opened. All of this stopped when Lithuania became part of Russia in 1939-40.

Today the YIVO Center is in New York. A compromise was made as to the use of the English language.
EJ, V. 16, pps. 837-9

ZIONISM⁶⁵

Zionism had a strong base in Lithuania. Its background was dated back to the Aliyot of the Chassidim, in the eighteenth century, and of the pupils of the Vilna Gaon, in the end of the eighteenth century. The people who were concerned and connected with the settlement of Jews in the land of Israel, in the 1870's were A. D. Gordon, P. Smolenskin, Y. M. Pines, and E. Ben-Yehuda (the father of the rebirth of the Hebrew language). They then wrote about Jewish nationalism and the settlement of the Land of Israel.

The Hibbat Zion movement spread quickly in Lithuania, to cities, towns and townlets (shtetls). Lithuanian Jews, who helped spread this ideology throughout Eastern Europe were S.P. Rabinowitz, Hermann Schapira D. Gordon in the periodical Ha-Magid, P. Smolesnskin in the periodical Ha-Schachar, the Hebrew authors and poets Z. Shneour, Y. Cahan, I.D. Berkowitz, and of course Bialik⁶⁶ and others.

In 1902, the second convention of Russian Zionists took place in Minsk. This was the only Zionist convention to be held openly and attended by the public in the czarist period. Vilna was the center the Russian Zionists from 1905 to 1914. The Zionists were responsible for the revival of the knowledge of the Hebrew language and the establishing of Modern Hebrew schools⁶⁷. Lithuanian Jewry had an important role in the settlement of the land of Israel. From the beginning of the twentieth century, Zionist organizations for adults and youth began to take root, throughout Lithuania.

The Jews of Lithuania were very interested in what was happening in the land of Israel. There was a steady correspondence with the Central Zionist Committee in London, and the Zionist Movement in Kovne, and sometimes Vilna. This correspondence was mostly in Hebrew, but sometimes in German or English.⁶⁸ Most of this correspondence has to do with money. Money was needed to help the settlement in the Land of Israel⁶⁹, money was needed by the National Committee for its expenses⁷⁰, money was needed in order to spread the Zionist Movement in Lithuania⁷¹. There were also receipts for contributions from all these places.⁷² The Lithuanian Zionists wanted to know exactly what their contributions were used for.⁷³ Once a check for one hundred dollars was sent by way of the USA to London.⁷⁴ Contributions were received from all of the various Zionist Organizations, such as Mizrachi, Zeiri Zion and others.⁷⁵

There were requests for educational material from the National Committee.⁷⁶ There were also requests to receive reports about the Zionist

⁶⁵ EH, V. 21, p.774; EJ, V. 11, pps. 370-1

⁶⁶ See THE JEWS OF LITHUANIA, ENLIGHTENMENT, p.19, ft. 60

⁶⁷ See THE JEWS OF LITHUANIA, ENLIGHTENMENT: p. 19

⁶⁸ ZA-3241/a. This is visible in all the material in the files of Lithuania in the Zionist Archives

⁶⁹ ZA- 2157/b

⁷⁰ Ibid, 914, 2157

⁷¹ Ibid

⁷² Ibid, 914

⁷³ Ibid, 2157/b

⁷⁴ Ibid

⁷⁵ Ibid

⁷⁶ Ibid, ZA—3241/a

Congresses.⁷⁷ There was also a request that when names of the Lithuanian contributors were listed, they should be listed in Hebrew, and not in English.⁷⁸ Lithuanian Jews were interested in the situation in the Land of Israel. They were interested in the security situation⁷⁹ and the political situation and sent a telegram to Lloyd George⁸⁰ to this effect, in connection with the peace conditions with Turkey.⁸¹ They were interested in the agricultural development⁸², employment⁸³, and the economic development, and had many ideas to this effect.⁸⁴ They were interested in the use of electricity⁸⁵, in the land of Israel. They were especially interested in the Balfour declaration.⁸⁶ Sometimes they sent letters about the good situation of the Zionist Movement in Lithuania, and about the developing of Zionist culture there.⁸⁷ Activities were planned for Zionist leaders to come to give lectures⁸⁸. Pamphlets and journals, which were printed.⁸⁹ There were also problems of internal problems, between various factions of the Zionist organization.⁹⁰ Information was sent to London, pertaining to Zionist schooling.⁹¹ Help given to the Zionist organization of Latvia. There was "Palestine-Office" in Kovne, which was connected to the Immigration Department in Jerusalem.⁹² Lithuanian Rabbis were asked to pray for the Jews in the land of Israel, at the time of the riots.⁹³

⁷⁷ ZA-3241/a

⁷⁸ Ibid

⁷⁹ Ibid, 2157/a

⁸⁰ He lived from 1863 to 1922. While he was British Prime Minister, in 1917 the Balfour Declaration was approved. EJ, V. 11, pps. 413-4

⁸¹ ZA-914

⁸² ZA-3241/b

⁸³ ZA-3241/a

⁸⁴ ZA-914

⁸⁵ ZA-2157/b

⁸⁶ ZA-3241/a

⁸⁷ Ibid

⁸⁸^[88] ZA-3241/b

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ There was a controversy between the "Chalutz" the "General Zionists". ZA-3241/b

⁹¹ ZA- 3241/a. This was information about Tarbut schools, which included information about the students and their parents. See ft. 63

⁹² ZA-3241/b

⁹³ ZA-3241/a/b

SOCIALISM⁹⁴

Lithuania was the birthplace of the Jewish Socialist Movement. Socialist literature developed here, and was first written in Hebrew, by A Lieberman and his colleagues. Afterwards it was written in Yiddish. This was the way that an independent secular culture began to develop in Yiddish. This was because the many thousands of poor Jewish workers and craftsmen didn't know any other language. The "Bund" was formed in order to organize the Jewish workers in revolutionary activities. The main influence of the "Bund" was in Lithuania. This organization played a detrimental part in the decline of tradition, and was against Zionism and Hebrew culture; but created a feeling of self-confidence among the Jewish workers. This new culture spread in Eastern Europe and with the Lithuanian Jews who emigrated from the country.

⁹⁴[⁹⁴] EH, V. 21, p.774; EJ, V. 11, p. 371

INFLUENCE⁹⁵

The influence of Lithuanian Jewry on world Jewry gained strength in the middle of the nineteenth century, because of the famous Yeshivot, books, Rabbis and educators. This was spread by word of mouth of Rabbis, teachers, students, families, merchants and letters and with the immigration of Lithuanian Jewry, etc. There was a strong correspondence between Lithuanian Rabbis and Rabbis from all parts of the Jewish world dealing with various problems that had then arisen. There was a constant immigration due to the poverty of the country.

Today this influence is still felt as Jews continue to study the works of Lithuanian Jewry and research it.

⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 373

SVEKSNA

GEOGRAPHY

Sveksna is also known by the names Sveksnos, Szweksnie, Sveksna, Schvetnau, Shveksni, Suveksniai, Shvekshe (Yiddish)⁹⁶ and Shvekshe. It is located in the Taurage district⁹⁷ of western of Lithuania near the German border⁹⁸. The latitude is 55.5197, the longitude 21.6208 and the altitude 164 feet. The time zone is MT+2. The nearby cities and towns are Jomantai in the west, Alseikos and Jonikai in the north, Uzlauskis and Siauliai in the east and Nikelai and Vilku Kampas in the south. It is 38 kilometers southeast of Klaipeda⁹⁹, which is on the Baltic Sea, 60 kilometers from Taurage and 18 kilometers from Zemaiciu-Naumiestis¹⁰⁰. The nearest airports are Palanga and Lipaja. The nearest train station is Korkoritein¹⁰¹. Today the roads to Sveksna are good.¹⁰² Before WWII there were dirt roads connecting Sveksna with Verzan and Zemaiciu-Naumiestis and a better road connecting Sveksna with Memel and Silute (Heidekrug)¹⁰³. There is a stream/river in the town.¹⁰⁴

In the eighteenth century the Plaiteriai counts established a park¹⁰⁵ here with linden paths, palaces, pools and sculptures. The villa of Genovite was at the path's end. This villa was built by the count in 1880. The palace of

⁹⁶ JL, p.1226

⁹⁷ See **APPENDIX 1, MAP OF LITHUANIA**, p. 52; **APPENDIX 2, MAP OF SVEKSNA AREA**, p. 53. Taurage is also the main city of the district. PL. p. 673. The Jews of Sveksna went to this city to buy things that their town didn't have and to do business. It took about 2-3 hours to get there by horse. KS. JL, p. 1268

⁹⁸ This became so after the annexation of Memel. .LJ, V. 4, p. 364

⁹⁹ Memel is the only port town in (western) Lithuania. Jews lived there from the sixteenth century and lived there freely from the emancipation of the Prussian Jews in 1812. The Jewish community consisted of German, Prussian and Eastern European Jews. The German Jews ran the community. The port was the source of income for many Jews. EJ, V. 11, pps. 1297-8. The Jews suffered there, because of the geo-political problem. Memel was annexed by Germany in 1939. Most of the Jews managed to escape before the Germans entered the city. The fate of those that remained was that of all Lithuanian Jewry. HO, p. 737. Today this is the medical center of the area. KL, p.1 There are pictures of the Memel Synagogue on the internet. JE, p.3, LDL, p. 3

¹⁰⁰ See **SVEKSNA, THE HOLOCAUST**, pps. 73-8; MMZM, p. 2;. There was a small Jewish community here from the end of the eighteenth century. In 1939, when the German army annexed the Memel strip, the Jews fled in to Lithuania. Their fate was that of the communities that they had joined. The Germans set up work camps in and around Heidekrug. There were about 500 Jews here. Only thirty-two of them remained alive at the end of the war. PL, pp. 213-4

¹⁰¹ JL, V. 3, p. 1268

¹⁰² BC

¹⁰³ MMZM, p. 2

¹⁰⁴ Today there is a restaurant in a renovated mill situated across the road. It is run by a retired Lithuanian-American priest. AR. My Grandfather told me of a small river there where he went swimming as a boy. He also mentioned that they swam there with less body movements. ZM

¹⁰⁵ This is beautifully kept. RL

the counts is at the other end of the town behind the old cemetery.¹⁰⁶ The church, which is the highest in the area¹⁰⁷, can be reached by crossing a bridge.¹⁰⁸ The church was in the village square.¹⁰⁹ A lane led from here to a smaller square where the Jewish houses of worship were situated. Some Germans, who were probably traders or craftsmen, lived on the outskirts of the town. On the other side of the there were shops and inns whose costumers were mainly Lithuanian peasants. The village was almost entirely Jewish.^{110[109]} The Kaukiskiai estate, which was located three kilometers from the town, was owned by the Jew Shajeviv.¹¹¹

¹⁰⁶ KV

¹⁰⁷ It is 75 meters high and has two towers. It was built in 1905. KV

¹⁰⁸ Ibid

¹⁰⁹ The bridges, Church and houses in this area have been renovated. There are ducks in the water. RL

¹¹⁰ KL

¹¹¹ MMZM, p. 4

HISTORY¹¹²

The area of Sveksna has been inhabited for over two thousand years. This is proven by the barrow graves and fortress hills that are found there. The fortress hills form an entire defense system, occurring at intervals of five kilometers, along the banks of the Asva and Veiviras rivers. Ornaments, beads, weapons and Roman coins were found there. Some of these are now on exhibition in the Vilna Museum.

In the middle of the thirteenth century Teutonic knights began raiding the area and fought there for over a hundred years. They usually marched from the Memel castle through the Sveksna countryside. Sveksna is mentioned in historical documents of the fourteenth century.¹¹³ The road descriptions from 1384 and 1388 mention the Sveksna creek.¹¹⁴ There were a few small settlements and a large forest in the area. In 1509 a church was built on an estate there.

The first landlords were the magnates of the Kesgaila family. The entire township was virtually their holding. Various noblemen owned the estate and village from 1598 through 1766. There were five hundred inhabitants there in 1644. Count Wilhelm Broel-Platter, a nobleman of German origin, acquired the estate in 1766. His descendants owned this property until 1940.

In the seventeenth century Sveksna had a wool-carding shop, gunpowder and glass factories, a brickyard, a sawmill and the only paper factory^{115[114]} of the area. Jurgis Plateris (1810-36) built a large library on the estate and invited Simonas Stanavicius¹¹⁶ (1799-1848) to be the librarian. He lived on the Plater estate and served as the librarian from 1829 until his death. Adomas Plateris (1836-1909) aided book-smugglers in carrying Lithuanian publications across the Prussian border.¹¹⁷ Juozapas Rugis practiced medicine in Sveksna from 1886 to 1918 and was an important figure in the National Reawakening Movement.

¹¹² MP, PL, pps.673-6

¹¹³ *ibid*, p. 673

¹¹⁴ See **SVEKSNA: GEOGRAPHY**, p. 29. This is probably a reference to the same thing.

¹¹⁵ This factory produced 750,000 pages a year. PL, p. 674

¹¹⁶ He studied at the University of Vilna, was active in the national revival and was also a writer of fables and poetry. ST

¹¹⁷ PL, p. 674

During the period of Russian rule¹¹⁸, the town was part of the district of Vilna until 1843 and afterwards part of the district of Kovne. In the nineteenth century market¹¹⁹ days and large fairs took place.¹²⁰ Then there were about thirty shops¹²¹ and pubs¹²². The shops sold various products. There were craftsmen of various skills working in them.

In 1858 and 1863 there were serious fires in which one hundred and thirty houses were burnt, and only twenty-three were left. There was another serious fire in 1903 in which almost all of the buildings were damaged.¹²³

Sveksna was the district center from the middle of the nineteenth century and during the period of national independence. The town developed under the Lithuanian Autonomy. Then the town had Roman-Catholic and Protestant Churches, a Synagogue, a high school, a hospital¹²⁴, a nursing home, three mills, two wool-carding shops, a dairy production and other economic and cultural institutions.

There was another serious fire in 1925¹²⁵. The government then forbade buildings of wood there; therefore the new buildings that were constructed in the center of the town were of stone. The town as a whole was redone. Streets were paved. There was a public park,¹²⁶ and there were public gardens. Sveksna was then considered one of the nicest kept places in the Taurage area.¹²⁷

After the annexing of Memel, Sveksna became part of the twenty-five kilometer strip between Lithuania and Germany. An order was issued by the German army to liquidate all the Jews and the Communists¹²⁸.

The Germans captured Sveksna on June 22, 1941, the first day of the war.

¹¹⁸ This was from 1795 to 1915. Ibid, p. 644

¹¹⁹ Few Jews sold at the market. KS

¹²⁰ Sometimes the noblemen's fruit produce was taken to the market in Memel or Koenigsburg. KL

¹²¹ Milk was sold here. Ibid

¹²² The farmers spent their earnings here. KS They enjoyed cheap vodka. KL. The richer people didn't like the drunks. Jews drank their own homemade wine. KS

¹²³ See **SVEKSNA, JEWISH HISTORY**, p. 31, ft. 141

¹²⁴ Jews also went to the hospital in Memel for treatment. This was expensive. KS

¹²⁵ It was in 1924. The entire city was burned. MMZM, p. 2

¹²⁶ This park was on the estate of the Nobleman Platen. See **SVEKSNA, GEOGRAPHY**, p. 27

¹²⁷ MMZM, p. 3

¹²⁸ DM, p. 1

JEWISH HISTORY¹²⁹

Jews first settled in Sveksna in the seventeenth century. One Jew lived on the estate¹³⁰ there in 1644. Among the founders of the community were also refugees from the Chmielenski massacres. In the beginning of the nineteenth century a synagogue was established. The Jews paid taxes to the government. During the period of Russian rule, the Jewish community grew. Every family had a vegetable garden and poultry next to their house. Some also had a cow.¹³¹ The Jews worked mainly in trade and crafts. Some worked¹³² for the noblemen in the area and also lived on their estates¹³³. In the neighboring village of Kaukiskiai, which was about three kilometers from Sveksna, there was an estate owned by the Jewish family Sibutz.

Some had large families and were very poor.¹³⁴ Yet it is known that the Jews of the community did give much charity. They were among the contributors to the Jews of Lithuania who suffered from the famine of 1872. There was a severe famine in Persia;¹³⁵ and it was known that the Jews were really suffering and getting minimum, if any, aid from the Persian government. All the Jews of Lithuania who knew famine, and this includes the Jews of Sveksna, were among the donors.¹³⁶ They also contributed to the Jewish settlement in the land of Israel in 1898, 1899 and 1903.¹³⁷

They were also among the taxpayers of the various taxes that the Jews had to pay¹³⁸. In 1843 Jewish communities were combined for the chief

¹²⁹ JL, p. 1268-9; LJ#3, p. 365; PL, pps. 673-6

¹³⁰ See SVEKSNA, GEOGRAPHY, pps. 21-2

¹³¹ The town was also surrounded by farms. KS

¹³² The official tailor of the "graf" (duke or nobleman) was the Great Great Grandfather of Stephen Marcus. D&S

¹³³ One estate belonged to a Polish Nobleman Germinsitz and called by this name. KL

¹³⁴ D&S

¹³⁵ The Persian Famine donation lists provide a resource of names, including over 5,000 Jewish Lithuanian families. News of the famine was at first reported in the London Jewish Chronicle, on August 4, 1871; and afterwards in the Hebrew newspaper HaMagid, on November 17, 1871. Donations were requested, and lists of the donors were printed, regardless of the amount. DMP. Among the contributors were B.Z. Kranitz (the Rabbi of the community) and Azriel Rubes. PL, p.674

¹³⁶ There are 62 families on the list of contributors from Sveksna. Ibid. The list that appeared in the HaMelitz newspaper were regardless of the amount of the contribution. DHP. The name Eitzkovitz appears. This seems to be one of the relatives of David Newman who is also descended from a family that had roots in Sveksna. DL; and of Stephen Marcus. D&S. The name Bloch appears, this may also be a relative of Stephen Marcus. D&S. The name Markus appears. This may be a relative of Stephen Marcus and of ours, as my Grandfather's family name was Marcus.

¹³⁷ The agent was Moshe Yanowsky. PL, p. 674

¹³⁸ See THE JEWS OF LITHUANIA: HISTORY, p. 8, BX, p. 6. A Zevelovich appears on this list. This may be a relative of Judy Lynn. JL

purpose of the collection of taxes¹³⁹. This was the case with Sveksna and Vieverzenai for paying the Box Tax¹⁴⁰. In 1887 five Jews were listed as payers of this tax. In 1892 and 1914 four Jews were listed¹⁴¹ as paying taxes in the Postal Savings Records. These seem to be the tax collectors.¹⁴²

My Grandfather told a story about the paying for “Shabbos candles”. He also told a story of the draft to the army. He said that he was listed as younger than he was for this reason. Therefore his age wasn’t certain. There was a discrepancy between what was on official documents as to how old he thought he was.¹⁴³

Anti-Semitism¹⁴⁴ as well as poverty¹⁴⁵ was felt by the community. In the 1880’s many immigrated^{146, 147} mainly to the USA.¹⁴⁸ Some also went to South Africa.¹⁴⁹ Some went to Denmark.¹⁵⁰

The Jews suffered from the devastating fires of June 1858 and June 1861. This caused more poverty in the community^{151, 152}.

¹³⁹ JCL, p1. This caused disputes between the communities, for they didn’t want to pay debts that weren’t actually theirs. BX, p.6

¹⁴⁰ See **THE JEWS OF LITHUANIA: HISTORY**, p. 8

¹⁴¹ One of these is Gershon, son of Nachum, Markus. SH, p.1. I find this very interesting for, as I have already written, my Grandfather was Zacharia Marcus (z’l). One of his sons (my Uncle Norman) was called Nachum (z’l). Perhaps there is a family relationship here. This may also be a relative of Stephen Marcus.

There is also an Itzikovich on this list. This seems to be a relation to David Newman who also is descended from a family that has roots in Sveksna. DN

¹⁴² SH, p. 1.

¹⁴³ ZM. See **LITHUANIA, JEWISH HISTORY**, Bill of 1827, p.7

¹⁴⁴ My Grandfather always felt persecuted by the clergy. Once, when the windows of his house were broken by children playing ball, he decided that the best way to complain was to go to the principal of their school. He felt himself very brave, going to the principal of a Catholic school, a priest. He came back and stated that it was as he had expected. The priest asked him if he was Jewish. He said then that all of his life he had felt anti-Semitism. ZM

¹⁴⁵ When we children complained about food, we were told that he was happy when he was young when he and his sisters were given herring and potatoes to eat, “the food of the poor in Sveksna”. ZM

¹⁴⁶ I believe that my Grandfather’s family left Sveksna in about 1900. They went to Manchester, England. They had relatives who went straight to Chicago, USA. Afterwards they all tried to get to the USA. Because of economic reasons they didn’t go together. My Great-grandmother died in England before her turn came. My Grandfather went to New York for my Grandmother had family there, and a relative offered him work. ZM

¹⁴⁷ The Port of Hamburg office has a list of all those who immigrated through this port between the years of 1850-1935. It is possible to check passenger manifests. D&S

¹⁴⁸ Burt Ofsaifof writes that his Great-grandfather, Great-grandmother, Paternal Grandmother and her three brothers left Sveksna in about 1888, and traveled through Hamburg to England and then to the USA. They settled in Chicago in 1889. BO

¹⁴⁹ Keith Loon writes that is Great Uncle went there. He did well, as he was a professor of mathematics at Natal University, S.A., and at Rhodes and Cambridge, U.K. KL

¹⁵⁰ This was easier financially for it was in the area. Stephen Marcus’ Grandfather went there and, among a variety of jobs, also worked on whaling ship. D&S

¹⁵¹ This was explained by the tax-collector Faitel Izkovich and the five representatives. SH, p. 3

¹⁵² If this has something to do with anti-Semitism, it may explain the reason why Philip Stein was not allowed to go out of the house. He lived at one end of a row of cottages, which were occupied by peasants. KL

The synagogue and study-hall were also burnt in the serious fire¹⁵³ of 1903. The family of Count Platter, whose estate had in the meanwhile been divided between four inheritors, contributed logs for the rebuilding of a few houses, the synagogue¹⁵⁴ and the study-hall. The condition was that the name of the contributor would appear on a plaque on the wall of each building. The local rabbi, Rabbi Ben-Zion Zev Kranitz,¹⁵⁵ placed an advertisement in the “HaMelitz” newspaper on July 28, 1903. Here he told of the urgent need for help for the people¹⁵⁶ who had lost all their possessions in the fire. The people whose houses weren’t burnt contributed nicely to their brethren, and the Rabbi himself contributed his salary for four weeks.

The Jews of Sveksna suffered during WWI, as did the general population of Lithuania and particularly the Jews.¹⁵⁷ The Germans occupied the town and confiscated what they needed.¹⁵⁸

As far as Jewish education¹⁵⁹ and religious practice goes, the community had two Hadarim^{160, 161} a Talmud-Torah and a Yeshiva¹⁶². Of course there was a Synagogue¹⁶³, but the “Shtebel” / Bet-Midrash (study-hall) was used constantly. This was the place of worship of the artisan class. The seats were oriented so that they faced Jerusalem (to the east). Seats near the front were very honorable and expensive. They were rented or sold. They were inherited. There were free seats near the back door.¹⁶⁴

The Yeshiva was founded and headed by Rabbi Kranitz. He gathered a group of quite brilliant Torah students and started a Yeshiva for them in

¹⁵³ See **SVEKSNE: HISTORY**: p. 29

¹⁵⁴ There is a picture of the synagogue on the internet JE, p. 4; LDL, p.4

¹⁵⁵ Rabbi Ben-Zion Zev Kranitz was born in 1858. He served in three communities: Beznac, Prirsale and Prienai before being asked to become the Rabbi of Sveksna. OS, pps. 202-3. He also previously worked in the Yeshivot of Kelm and Telz. LJ. V.1, pps. 228, 234, 241

¹⁵⁶ Stephen Marcus writes that his Great Great-grandparents and family left Sveksna for Hamburg in the early 1902 to immigrate to the USA. His Great Grandfather was refused passage because of trachoma (an eye infection). Therefore he returned to Sveksna by himself. D&S. Could the fire have been the cause for this difficult decision?

¹⁵⁷ See **THE JEWS OF LITHUANIA: HISTORY**, p. 9-10

¹⁵⁸ They put their horses in the ground floor of homes. The Grandmother of Ken Solomon remembered horses heads sticking out of the windows. KS

¹⁵⁹ My Grandfather had much criticism for the American and American Jewish school systems. He claimed that learning was more serious and more respected when he was young. ZM

¹⁶⁰ Cheder literally means room, but the actual meaning is primarily classes for small children, where they are taught Jewish subjects. DM, p. 1

¹⁶¹ The Grandfather of Keith Loon remembered attending Cheder. KL

¹⁶² DM, p. 91

¹⁶³ This was used mainly on Shabbatot and Holidays. It was not heated. It was a scary place for little children, particularly at night. KL.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid

Sveksna. These students came from Sveksna, the surrounding area, Memel, Telz and from Perieai¹⁶⁵. He organized a program of studies, which included the study of ethics for a half hour each day. He was very particular about the behavior of the students. The Jewish families of Sveksna provided the Yeshiva students with meals. This deed of charity came to about 600 rubles a year.¹⁶⁶ This Yeshiva existed between the two world wars. It is on the list of important Lithuanian Yeshivot¹⁶⁷ and was also well known among Polish Rabbis¹⁶⁸.

According to law of the Lithuanian autonomy, the Jews had a “Community Committee”, from 1919 to 1925. This committee did much in all fields of Jewish life. In the municipal elections, after World War I, two of the twenty-one council members were Jews. The Jews of Sveksna participated in the national elections for the first Lithuanian Siem in 1922. Then the Social Zionists established a school for girls. This existed until the establishment of the “Tarbut¹⁶⁹” school. There was also a “cheder”. After finishing elementary school, some already began to work. Many of the students, whose families were well off¹⁷⁰, continued their high school education in the local gymnasium, despite the fact that there was a bad anti-Semitic atmosphere there. Some went on to the Yeshiva, and others went to the Hebrew high schools of Kovne.

The Yeshiva students that left Sveksna for other Yeshivot were in a class by themselves. If they were particularly bright they went on to one of the renowned Yeshivot such as Volosin or Slobodka. If not, they left the village anyway and went to another Yeshiva. They didn’t have to worry about paying for their keep, as they “ate days” (every day ate with a different family¹⁷¹).

During the beginning of the period of Lithuanian independence the Jewish population, as well as the general population, diminished^{172[171]}. Many Jews emigrated from Sveksna, as from Lithuania and Eastern Europe in

¹⁶⁵ This is the town where he had formerly served as a Rabbi. It is situated about 30 kilometers south of Kovno. OP, p. 203

¹⁶⁶ This was the accepted way of Yeshiva students eating in the Yeshivot of Eastern Europe. See THE JEWS OF LITHUANIA, CULTURE, p. 16

¹⁶⁷ JL. V. 1

¹⁶⁸ OS. p. 203

¹⁶⁹ See THE JEWS OF LITHUANIA, ENLIGHTENMENT, p. 19, ft. 63

¹⁷⁰ MMZM, p. 4

¹⁷¹ KL; See SVEKSNA, JEWISH HISTORY, p 32, ft..164

¹⁷² See APPENDIX 4-THE POPULATION/JEWISH POPULATION OF SVEKSNA, p. 55

general. This wasn't easy for older people and sometimes also caused a problem for religious people.¹⁷³

In the spring of 1922, the Lithuanian Nationalists tried to blame a blood-libel on the Jews. The mobs attacked the home of Rabbi Reuben Srulovitz. The Jews then went through four days of rioting against them. This was stopped by the members of the "Maccabi" youth movement. If not for them, lives would have been lost.

In 1925¹⁷⁴ there was another serious fire and almost all of the town's buildings were burnt. The rebuilding began a year later, with the aid of friends and relatives from abroad, mainly from the USA. The Jews were very diligent and stubborn about the building of their houses.¹⁷⁵ The new Synagogue was completed in 1927.¹⁷⁶ The library of the Social Zionists was also burnt down; it was rebuilt with the help of the surrounding Jewish communities.

The Jews were proud of their town, because of all the renovations done the town became very attractive.¹⁷⁷ The youth spent much time in the park. Families went for walks there on Shabbat the afternoon meal (cholent). Activities were organized there for the children and youth. Everyone enjoyed the fresh air and the trees and flowers.

There was only one place in Sveksna where Jews didn't feel comfortable, and for generations had not gone there. This was Verzan Street. It was written in the city charter that Jews were not allowed to live or build on this street. A note there stated that a long time before Jews used to use this street as a route to carry their dead to the Jewish cemetery. On one such occasion, the Christians threw stones on a Jewish funeral procession and many Jews were wounded. Then the rabbi forbade the Jews to use this street, and the families that then lived there had to move. This custom continued until the Holocaust.¹⁷⁸

The president of Lithuania visited the town in 1926, and the Jews went out to welcome him.^{179[178]}

¹⁷³ KS

¹⁷⁴ See SVEKSNA, HISTORY, p. 27, ft. 114

¹⁷⁵ MMZM, pps. 2-3

¹⁷⁶ The previous Synagogue was built of wood. RL

¹⁷⁷ See SVEKSNA, HISTORY, p. 28

¹⁷⁸ MMZM, p. 3

¹⁷⁹ There is a good photograph of the celebration in JL, p. 1269.

The connections with the Lithuanians, the local population, had always been bad. They felt that the Jews were their economic and social rivals and believed the stories of the blood-libels.¹⁸⁰

The 1930's were characterized by anti-Semitic vandalism.

There was a blood-libel, in the early 1930s. This occurred before Passover, and Rabbi Reuben Srolovitz¹⁸¹ was again involved. He was accused of murdering a Christian boy in order to use his blood for the baking of matzot. There was a mass demonstration at his house and his property was robbed and ruined. After the boy was found, and was in good health, the town's people said the Jews were frightened and therefore returned him. The Jews spent that Passover with fear and locked in their houses.¹⁸²

In the winter of 1931, the Lithuanian gymnasium students attacked one Jew and wounded him badly. The local priest returned from a trip to the USA. He collected a sum of money for the gymnasium. He said that large contributions were from Jews.

According to a survey taken by the Lithuanian government in 1931, there were then sixteen shops; ten of them belonged to Jews.¹⁸³ The Jews also owned a sawmill, a flourmill^{184[183]} and two leather factories. In 1937 fifteen craftsmen worked in the town. There were seven butchers, three tailors, a baker, a hat maker, a welder, a shoemaker and a watchmaker. In 1939 there were twenty-five telephones, six of which belonged to Jews. Four large clothing stores belonged to Jews¹⁸⁵.

Most of the Jews worked in trade or crafts. A small number worked in agriculture. Most Jewish families had a vegetable garden, a few fruit trees next to their houses, and raised cows and chickens. Therefore they lived as if villagers. They carried on intensive business with Memel. They sold agricultural products, meat and horses there.¹⁸⁶

In December 1936, sixty-five tombstones in the Jewish graveyard were desecrated by Lithuanians.

¹⁸⁰ It was as if this was a subject learned in high school. MMZM, p. 4

¹⁸¹ See **SVEKSNA, JEWISH HISTORY**, p. 33

¹⁸² MMZM, p. 4

¹⁸³ See **APPENDIX 5: SHOPS IN SVEKSNA**, p. 56

¹⁸⁴ This was owned by Hillel and Mendel Jabner. MMZM, p. 3

¹⁸⁵ The owners were Moshe Ziv, Moshe Joselevic, Chaim Riyppkin and Bajle Markus (She was possibly a relative of Stephen Marcus and/or of ours?). MMZM, p. 3

¹⁸⁶ **IBID**, p. 3

There was a boycott of Jewish businesses. The deterioration of the economic situation was caused mainly by propaganda from the Organization of Lithuanian Merchants “Verslas”, by the rise of the Nazi party in Germany and the annexation of Memel¹⁸⁷. These caused a cease in the connections with the port there and with the city of Telz. Sometimes shop signs were smeared with tar.

When Memel became a part of the “Third Reich”, in 1939, six Jewish families came to Sveksna as refugees.

The community was ultra-Orthodox¹⁸⁸. The Jewish religious life centered in the synagogue¹⁸⁹, the “Bet Midrash” (study hall) / “Kloiz” (a room for study and prayer). Many were Zionists. They voted for the Zionist Congresses of 1933, 1935, and 1939. Their votes were distributed between the Social Zionist, Young Zionist, General Zionist, Political Zionist Revisionists and Mizrachi parties. Most of the youth were Zionists and prepared themselves for Aliyah. The Zionist youth groups in Sveksna were “Zeiri –Zion” (Young-Zionists), “HaShomer Hazair” (Young Guards), “Tifferet Bachurim”(Glorious Boys), “Maccabi” (a sports organization) and Brit Hakanaim” (Fanatical Brotherhood) that ran a training farm in the area. This youth spent their spare time in the activities of the Zionist organizations. In the period of Free Lithuania,¹⁹⁰ a few of the youth belonged to the illegal communist youth movement.¹⁹¹

Famous Rabbis of Sveksna were Rabbi Menachem Mendel Horowitz^{192[191]}, Rabbi I.B. Gevrunski¹⁹³, Rabbi M.I. Segal¹⁹⁴, Rabbi H.Z.

¹⁸⁷ See **SVEKSNA, GEOGRAPHY**, p. 22, ft. 89; **HISTORY**, p. 28

¹⁸⁸ This is described in connection with Purim, the marriage broker and the purity of women. KS. It is also described in connection the “Brit” ceremony, the “evil-eye”, charity and the reciting of psalms. KL At the Passover seder, my Grandfather tried to teach us to barely spill any wine, while reciting the “ten plagues”. He also taught us to play with nuts. ZM

¹⁸⁹ There were parties and dancing there for young people. KS

¹⁹⁰ This was under the rule of Smetamses, MMZM, p. 4

¹⁹¹ Ibid

¹⁹² Rabbi Horowitz was the Rabbi of the area from 1648. LJ, V.1, pps. 117, 200, 396; Ibid, V. 3, p.365;PL, p. 675

¹⁹³ Rabbi Gevrunski lived from 1851 to 1905. He was a Jewish representative in Moscow. He wrote a book about the Hebrew language in the Bible and the Talmud. He was the son of Rabbi B.B. Gevrunski, and brother of Rabbi S. Rabinowitz. (See below) LJ. V. 1, pps. 205, 224, 238, 396; Ibid, V. 3, p.365; PL, p. 675

¹⁹⁴ Rabbi Segal was born in 1812. LJ, V. 3, p.365; PL, p. 675

Broide¹⁹⁵, Rabbi S.A. Feivelson¹⁹⁶, Rabbi E.L. Kumai¹⁹⁷, Rabbi B. Kranitz¹⁹⁸, Rabbi I. Portman¹⁹⁹ and Rabbi S.I. Levitan²⁰⁰.

Famous people born in Sveksna were Rabbi B.B. Gevrunski²⁰¹, Rabbi S. Rabinowitz²⁰², Rabbi M. Sominov²⁰³, Rabbi M. Uri, Rabbi Bashavlan²⁰⁴, Shlomo Steinberg²⁰⁵, Doctor Margolis²⁰⁶ and Professor J. Raisin²⁰⁷.

¹⁹⁵ Rabbi Broide lived in the middle of the nineteenth century and published many books about the laws of interest, Megilat Esther and the "Song of Songs", LJ, V. 1, p. 365; PL, p. 675

¹⁹⁶ Rabbi Feivelson died in 1901. As well as being a scholar he took care of the needy, the study-hall and Yeshivot. LJ, V. 3, p. 365; PL, p. 675

¹⁹⁷ Rabbi Kumai was Rabbi in Sveksna from 1885 to 1888. He served twenty years as head of the Mir Yeshiva. LJ, V. 1, pps. 498, 509-10, 513-4, 527-8; PL, p. 675

¹⁹⁸ See SVEKSNA, JEWISH HISTORY, p. 30, ft. 143

¹⁹⁹ Rabbi Portman was the son-in-law of Rabbi Kranitz. See above. He was murdered in Zezmer in 1941. PL, p.675

²⁰⁰ See HOLOCAUST: pps. 37-47. Rabbi Levitan was the last Rabbi of the community. He had served previously as a Rabbi in Norway and in the Lithuanian communities of Varna, Mishad and Baslau. In 1934 he was honored to become Rabbi of Sveksna. He was murdered in the Holocaust. He wrote many books of commentaries on the Talmud, Jewish Law and Legend. LG, p. 123; LJ, V.3, p.365; PL, p. 675.

²⁰¹ Rabbi Gevrunski was the brother of Rabbi Horowitz. LJ, V. 3, p. 365

²⁰² Rabbi Rabinowitz was among the Rabbis that signed the petition for the resettling of the Land of Israel and for the founding of the "Mevasseret Zion" (Announcers of Zion) Movement, in 1889. LJ, V. 3, p. 365; PL, p. 675. He was well liked in the entire Zionist Movement and sided with the settlement of the land of Israel faction. LJ, V. 1, pps. 498, 509-10

²⁰³ Rabbi Sominiv was an interceder and a communal worker. He also wrote books on new aspects in the study of Jewish law and lore. LJ, V. 3, p. 365; PL, p. 675

²⁰⁴ Rabbi Bshalvan was an interceder and a businessman. He wrote many books about Jewish Law. LJ, V. 3, p. 365

²⁰⁵ Mr. Steinberg lived from 1891 to 1938. He lived in the USA from 1903 and wrote many Yiddish plays, which appeared in the Yiddish theatre there. PL, p.675

²⁰⁶ Dr. Margolis practiced in New York City. He was an acquaintance of my Grandfather. ZM

²⁰⁷ Professor Raisin wrote about the Enlightenment, and Jewish customs. LM, p. 5. He lived in the USA and was an acquaintance of my Grandfather. Ibid

THE HOLOCAUST²⁰⁸

The Jews began to suffer at the hands of the Germans even before the war because of the physical closeness to the Memel area.²⁰⁹ This was felt mainly economically. At night, tar was spread on the signs outside stores owned by Jews. Circulars were distributed, which called for the Christian population not to buy from Jews. Many of the Jews received economic aid from relatives who lived abroad.

After the Soviets captured Lithuania in 1940, the Anti-Semites tried to become close to the Jews. The general situation of the poorer Jewish strata became better, but the Jewish merchants found themselves in a situation that was constantly declining.

On the Sabbath of June 21, 1941, there was a feeling of nervousness among the officials and the Soviet citizens who were then present in Sveksna. Soviet army officers had moved into the Platter estate. The next day, at 4 AM, there was a German artillery attack on the estate. The frightened Jews left the town for the surrounding villages by foot or by wagons.

This was the day that the Germans captured Sveksna, June 22, 1941, the first day of the war.

The farmers, in the villages where the Jews had hidden, told the Jews to leave their property immediately. Some of them even threatened to shoot the Jews and shouted "You have had enough good days. You will no longer sing Russian songs". Moshe Shapiro, who had served as head of the Communist party in Sveksna for one year and had been in charge of the collection of grain from the farmers for the government, escaped from Sveksna; but the farmers of the village Kurmai caught him. He fought against them, fired his gun and wounded one of them. Yet they succeeded in wounding him, then torturing him to death, cutting open his stomach and filling it with grain. The Partisans arrested Jechiel and Leizer Lacon and three girls who were members of the communist Youth: Zeldia Lurie, Bluma Ickowic and Aida Lacon. They murdered the girls on Saturday, June 28, in the public park.

²⁰⁸ DM, pps.1-2; JL, pps. 1268-9; LJ, V. 3, p. 365; LJ, V. 4, pps. 364-5; MMZM, pps 4-10; PL, p. 676

²⁰⁹ See SVEKSNE: HISTORY, p. 35

It was rumored that they were shot when they were naked. The two boys were kept in jail and on the Friday run to the Synagogue, as were all the Jewish men. From there, on Saturday, they were sent to the Work-Camp near Heidekrug with the other men. Israel Gesel, who served as secretary of the communist Party in Sveksna, escaped to a village near Silale. The Germans, however, got there before him; and he had to return to Sveksna. Then he met Jews who were already returning to Sveksna. They advised him not to return. The Partisans caught him and immediately shot him to death, near Kveserna. He was buried in Sveksna on Thursday, June 26.

Upon returning to their houses the Jews found that the Lithuanians had taken cows, horses, wagons and some of the belongings from inside their houses. German soldiers marched in the streets. The local Lithuanian population appeared in the streets wearing white armbands, armed and quite happy.

Many Lithuanians who had served as government officials during the period of independent Lithuania, but not under the Soviets, returned armed and became the local authorities. The mayor was Penkauskas, from the village Inkakliai. Losargis from Sveksna was an official. Lomsargis from the village Vilkenai was in charge of the police. Penkauskas from Sveksna became head of the Partisans, who helped the Germans exterminate Jews. The task that Penkauskas saved for himself was "To solve the Jewish problem in Sveksna".

Immediately after the German occupation of Sveksna, orders were issued against the Jews. They had to wear the yellow band²¹⁰, to hand over their radios, bicycles, silver and metal utensils, jewelry and anything else of value to the Partisans, who were located in what had been The Communist Center. This building belonged to the Jew Shaje Aserovic. They were forbidden to walk on the sidewalks, had curfews, and had to hang a sign on their doors saying "Zyda Namas" (the home of Jews). The men were dispatched to forced labor, the young people to hard work, and the old people to the streets. The women were sent to scrub the floors in German and Lithuanian institutions and to clean public out-houses. They were allowed to

²¹⁰ See THE JEWIS OF LITHUANIA, HISTORY, p. 12, ft.26

return home to eat in the afternoon and then had to return to their work again until evening. Armed Partisans watched over them. They were beaten if they tried to speak to each other.

By Friday, June 27, all the Jews that had hoped for refuge in the villages had returned to Sveksna. On this Friday, June 27, 1941, the S.S. and S.D. forces, under the leadership of Dr. Scheu (Shau)²¹¹ of Heidenberg arrived. He had two goals, which were to begin to carry out the process of exterminating the Jews of this strip²¹², and to select Jews who would be fit for slave labor in Germany. The Germans, together with the Lithuanian auxiliary forces and Partisans went from house to house and commanded every Jewish male, from ten²¹³ years old, to go outside into the street. They were allowed to take a package of clothing with them, and ordered by the Lithuanians to take a tin spoon and dish. About two hundred Jews were rounded up.

The Lithuanians took them to the Synagogue²¹⁴ yard and ordered them to stand in line, where they were held under guard. One group at a time, the Jews were allowed to enter the corridor. The SS men sat at long tables, others stood holding heavy braided ropes. The Jews were hit with these ropes. The Jews who were still in the yard were certain that they were hearing the screaming of the Jews that were being hung. The Jews were to hand over their money at the first table and their watches, wedding rings and other valuables at the second table. At every possibility, such as if they didn't approach a table like a soldier, or didn't stand at attention while waiting, or other such reasons, they were beaten with sticks and the ropes until they bled. Meir Shmulevic was covered with blood, and Isaac Markosevic had a wisdom tooth pulled. The Jews were to hand over their certificates and answer questions at the third table. They were all registered. Then the Lithuanian Doctor Bilunas, from Sveksna, examined them all to see if they

²¹¹ The name of Dr. Scheu of Heidenburg also appears in the Testimony of Meir Ladon. ML; and the Video Testimony of Zalman Yavnelovitz. Mr. Yavnelovitz was from Taurage (Vaintusas). ZY Dr. Scheu is not listed in the computer of Yad VeShem or in [The Encyclopedia of the Holocaust](#). Dr. Scheu also gathered the Jews from all the towns in the area in the same manner and sent them to the Work-Camps in Heidekrug. TZ

²¹² See [SVEKSNA, HISTORY](#): p. 35

²¹³ The youngest were 13-14 years old. MMZM, p. 7

²¹⁴ This was the Study-Hall yard. Ibid

were fit for work. He understood that the ones that weren't wouldn't live: So he declared them all healthy and fit.

There was a smaller corridor behind the large one, which led to the women's section upstairs. The Lithuanian barber Ivanauskas, who was noted as a hater of the Jews and a Partisan sat here. He cut everyone's hair with a haircutting machine, making the sign of a cross in the middle of every head. He also tore off the beards of the religious Jews.

Then the men were ordered to go upstairs to the women's section. The SS soldiers who stood on both sides of the stairs beat everyone cruelly with sticks. The older people, who weren't able to ascend very quickly, got the worst beatings.

Some of the men were ordered to collect all the Torah scrolls and holy books into a pile and to burn them. Some were sent to collect the holy books from the Rabbi's house and other houses and to take them to the Jewish cemetery and burn them there.

Once in the women's section, the men were ordered to stand in line and do exercises. This was in order to insure that they wouldn't rebel and to tire them out. While doing these exercises they were beaten. Naphtali Ziv was chosen, because of his sportsman's appearance, as the leader. He was ordered to do complicated exercises and everyone was forced to follow after him. Whoever didn't succeed in doing the exercise, or had no strength to continue, was beaten until he lost his senses. Then cold water was poured on him, and the exercise was started again. This went on for three hours. The old and the weak were forced to continue to participate.

In the early evening the Germans began another game. They took groups down to the yard, had them stand in the middle and shot above their heads. Afterwards they said they did this in order to strengthen "The Jewish fear". They were especially cruel to the old Jewish Rabbi, Shalom-Isaac Levitan.

It was hot outside, and inside it was stifling. The Jews were thirsty. The SS soldiers brought in a bowl of water and played with their hands in it. They didn't give any of the Jews permission to drink.

At about six PM, the wives were told that they could bring dinner to their husbands. The Partisans received the food from the women. They kept the best of it for themselves.

Through the night, the Germans thought up similar games. They almost always chose the old rabbi as the scapegoat. At two AM, one German called upon the Rabbi to lecture about acting wisely and obeying. The wounded and sore Rabbi mumbled something about being "G-d fearing".

Later that night, the men were allowed to lie on the floor and go to sleep. The SS soldiers that were guarding them spoke loudly of what tortures were planned for these Jews for the next day. Different men were woken up at different times during the night and then ordered to "hand over their weapons" and were beaten.

The next morning the SS soldiers woke up Rabbi Levitan and ordered him and a few others to collect all the hairs and to burn them. He explained to them that he wouldn't fulfill the order because for he wanted to keep the Sabbath. The SS soldiers hit him with their browning pistols and once shot over his head. Then he was ordered to stand with the palms of his hands facing downwards. They placed the hairs on top of his hands and ordered Moshe Mant to collect the hairs from the floor. They then lit a piece of paper and lit the hairs with this. Moshe was forced to continue holding the hairs in his hands. Moshe was then ordered to mix the burnt remains with the burnt remains of the Torah scrolls, which were still quite hot. While doing so, he showed Rabbi Levitan a piece of a Torah scroll, which was not burnt. What was written on it was "Remember what Amalek did to you". Afterwards they beat the Rabbi and Moshe and led them to the yard. The SS soldiers fired a few shots in the air, and this caused the other men still upstairs to believe that the Rabbi and Moshe had been murdered. Afterwards they were rushed upstairs, the Rabbi was bleeding.

Two trucks arrived in the yard with planks hanging from the sides. The SS soldiers sent all the young and the healthy men from upstairs to the trucks. While running (or flying) down stairs, they were to jump into the trucks without touching the planks. Two German soldiers stood on either side of every step with heavy sticks in their hands and hit the Jews as they descended. Whoever had the bad luck of their feet touching a step got hit two additional times. The

young ones went down first and tried to jump all the stairs at once, so that they wouldn't get hit. Only a few managed to do so. Rabbi Levitan got hit many times, many others were bleeding. The two trucks were high and whoever did touch the planks was beaten. These two transports²¹⁵. each with thirty men went to the Work-Camp Varsmininkin²¹⁶, near the town of Heidekrug. They were sent into the barracks, which previously housed war prisoners from France and Belgium. The remaining men²¹⁷ were taken to other Work-Camps. A total of 120 men²¹⁸ were sent that day from Sveksna.

These men were examined by a doctor and given injections. After all of the official business was taken care of some were sent to Pikaten work camp, and some were sent to Silwen work camp, which were nearby.²¹⁹ The Jews were treated as merchandise and were traded.²²⁰ Dr. Shau was in charge and under him were a few other SS officers, one of which was his brother.²²¹

That Friday, the women and children were kept locked in their homes, under the supervision of Lithuanian armed guards. These Lithuanian Activists guarded in the streets and shot at anyone who tried to go out. On that Friday, four women and one man were murdered. They were brought to in the Jewish cemetery²²² and buried in a common-grave.

According to the testimony of Meir Ladon²²³, one of Sveksna's survivors, other Jews, mostly from Maclitnian and Luicova, were brought to Heidekrug in the beginning of July.²²⁴ The Jews worked mostly in agriculture, in the brick factory²²⁵, in the yard, for neighboring farmers and in other tasks. Then there were about one thousand people in these camps. There were also Polish people here. They received many beatings when they didn't work well.²²⁶ Dr. Scheu was in charge of the camp.

²¹⁵ An account of this second truck appears in JL, V. 4, and MMZM, p.9

²¹⁶ There was an agricultural development farm located here. JL, p. 364

²¹⁷ This transport also only included the young and healthy. The old and the weak were not taken to camps. MMZM, p. 9

²¹⁸ There were 50, according to JL, 100 according to DM, and 120, according to PL

²¹⁹ Meir Ladon also relates this in his testimony. ML

²²⁰ ZY

²²¹ Ibid

²²² This information also appears in the information of town and district municipalities. LS. pps 1-2

²²³ ML

²²⁴ Mr. Yavenlovitz was taken to the Heidekrug camp with his father and all the male adults from Taurage, when he was fourteen and a half years old. ZY

²²⁵ The Nazis in charge here treated the Jews well for they worked well. Ibid

²²⁶ Ibid

The prisoners worked from the morning until the evening. The work was hard but bearable. The Jews grew accustomed to the conditions in the camp. There was enough food. They were brought warm clothing in the winter. There was a cold shower. They did know a bit about the war. Sometimes they saw German newspapers. The guards told them about the murdering of Jews and about mass murders.

Those that worked in agriculture slept in rooms where they worked. There were also eight women and some Poles who worked there. The Poles, who were Jew-haters, showed it. Guards weren't present when they slept. Valter²²⁷ was a commander there. He treated them reasonably well. Sometimes the supervision became more serious, and the SS soldiers treated some Jews badly. Then even bribing couldn't help. Sometimes when they were sent to work at another job in the camp, or if there was a new SS officer, they were beaten.²²⁸

In the middle of August²²⁹, the first "selection" took place. The older ones or those who complained of being sick were chosen. They were told that they were being sent back to Sveksna. Meir's father was among those taken away. The next day the SS soldiers returned and brought sacks full of clothing with them. These were to be distributed among the workers. Meir and his friends worked as cooks and were given first choice. Meir found his own leather jacket, which one day earlier he had given to his father, among these clothes. It was clear that everyone that was taken was murdered. It is possible that they were all murdered at a killing site in the village of Saudvicai, which is near Niishtut-Tarvig, and buried there²³⁰.

The Jews tried to work as well as they could so that they wouldn't be chosen for the "selection". They heard from the guards that there was to be another one. They tried not to show if they were sick and to continue working.²³¹ Naphtali Ziv was on a pile of dead people, but a Nazi guard saw he was moving a bit and moved him away.²³² There were two more

²²⁷ In the Trial proceedings (See **AFTER THE HOLOCAUST**, pps. 48-51); many witnesses stated that Valter treated them well. Ibid

²²⁸ Ibid

²²⁹ This was on July 17, according to Meir Ladon. ML

²³⁰ DM, p. 1. They were taken to a near by place and killed there. The shots were heard in the camp.

ZY.

²³¹ Ibid

²³² TZ1

“selections” in October and November 1941. Then they were also told that those that were taken would be returned to Sveksna. Nothing was known about what happened to these people. After a while, it became known that they were also taken to the village of Saudvicai.²³³ They were also murdered and buried there.

In a place where some worked, which was near Heidekrug, Jews from these camps sometimes met with Lithuanians from Sveksna, who knew about the fate of the Jews who remained there. This way, they heard about what was the fate of their families. The Jews had been gathered together and sent confined to one street, “Zydu Gatve” (The Street of the Jews), which then became the local ghetto. This population of the Jews that remained was made up of women and children, a few males²³⁴ who had succeeded in hiding in June or weren’t then present in the town. They were subject to starvation and abuse. The men were selected as the administrators (firzarger) of the ghetto. The women were sent to do forced labor. No more details are known.

On the first day of Rosh HaShanna (5702), September 22, 1941²³⁵, they were taken from the ghetto to the forests near the villages Inkakliai and Raudishkiai. They were murdered on the left side of the road by Lithuanian Partisans and buried there. In the Lithuanian Small Encyclopedia, it is written that the German fascists murdered hundreds of people in this area during the war. According to the testimony of Benjamin Yankelowitz²³⁶, they were buried in a common grave. The local population took the gold teeth from the bodies. The grave was discovered after the war. Afterwards this was covered with concrete and a monument was set up.

There was another “selection” in Heidekrug, in August 1942.²³⁷

Then there was a rumor that the Russians wanted to free them. Then they were watched over very well. They had been in this work camp for two

²³³ See above. This appears to be the same place. Shalom Yehuda Davidowitz was murdered there. I do not know which time. I got this information from a cousin of his. TC

²³⁴ The weak and old, who weren’t sent to the camps, were also there. MMZM, p. 10

²³⁵ This happened on September 20, 28 of Elul, according to MMZM, p. 10

²³⁶ I tried to contact Mr. Benjamin Yankelowitz but was told by the people who now live in his apartment in Ramat Eliyahu, Israel, that he and his wife died a few years ago. They had no information about surviving relatives.

²³⁷ ML

years and one month.²³⁸ There were almost one hundred who survived the Heidekrug (Silute) work camp. An order was given to transfer them to another place. They were taken from there in the end of July 1943. They heard that they were being taken to Auschwitz, but didn't actually know what Auschwitz was. The trip was by foot and by train and took a long time, almost two weeks.

They arrived in Auschwitz on August 2, 1943. Among them, there were about twenty from Sveksna. Immediately after their arrival, there was a "selection". They were taken to an open lot at the entrance to the camp. The ones that were sent to the right were sent to the camp. The ones that were sent to the left were sent to busses, which went to the crematorium. They then didn't actually know but sensed what was happening.²³⁹ About one hundred of them were murdered. They went to work in Birkenau, which was a few kilometers away. They worked fixing the train tracks. They were given enough food, for their guards understood that this was very difficult work. Therefore they were able to give some food to older men. They got used to seeing the crematorium.²⁴⁰

About a month later, together with other prisoners from Auschwitz, they were taken to Warsaw, in order to remove the ruins of the ghetto. The ghetto was quite filthy. They also cleaned the rooms of the Nazi soldiers. The Nazi soldiers took them to bathe a few times. They were taken there naked. It was quite cold and the water was cold. They thought that they were being taken to be killed. There were quite a few Ukrainians there, who were very cruel; and the Jews were quite scared of them. They got used to seeing wagons piled with dead; but there was always hope. There were still a few Jewish families that were in hiding in the bunkers, and they occasionally came out to look for food, for they were starving.^{241[240]} In his Testimony, Meir Ladon²⁴² wrote that

²³⁸ Zalman Yavnelovitz states in his testimony that some were there for two years and four months. He and the men from Sveksna arrived there however for less time, for they arrived there in the end of June.

ZY

²³⁹ Ibid

²⁴⁰ ML, p. 3; ZY

²⁴¹ Ibid

²⁴² I tried to locate Mr. Meir Ladon, but even after I received his address from his testimony in Yad Veshem, I couldn't find anyone in Israel with that name, or a similar name.

they worked there in 1943-4.²⁴³ Because of the bad sanitary conditions there, many died in a typhus plague.

In the summer of 1944, after they had been there about a year, the ones who remained were taken from Warsaw. They heard that the Russians were approaching and that there were Partisans nearby. They were being taken, by a round about route to the Dachau Concentration Camp. The brother of Meri Ladon was sent back to Auschwitz.²⁴⁴ The others walked for a few days, perhaps a week. They reached a place called Vizel, in Poland. They dug to look for water. They reached Katowitz. Then they were taken by train in the direction of Dachau. On the train, they were given water to drink, from a hose. They finally reached Dachau. Some were thrown with the dead. They were there for about a month, in July-August 1944.²⁴⁵ They were taken from there to a camp called Valdblager There, the houses were underground. Then they were taken to a camp called Muhldorf near Munich. Here, they felt hunger for the first time. They were being starved. The camp was bombed a few times. There they worked a few months, building an underground airport.²⁴⁶ In April 1945, about six thousand men were taken from this camp.²⁴⁷

Then they reached Feldamfing, near Munich. There was a change in the attitude of the Nazi soldiers towards them, for they knew that the end was near. One day, about a week before the end of the war, they were taken on a train, as if to kill them by the thousands. The train conductor decided he wouldn't kill them and just took them back and forth. The Nazi soldiers stayed with them until the end.²⁴⁸ Towards the end the Nazi soldiers burned their official certificates, changed their clothing and said that the war was over. Some tried to escape and ran in the direction of the forest near the camp. Then they rounded up all the prisoners, which were then about two thousand men.²⁴⁹ The Americans arrived and captured the camp. Then, the eighteen

²⁴³ ML, pps. 4-5

²⁴⁴ Ibid, p. 5

²⁴⁵ TZ1. They were there about two weeks, according to Meir Ladon. ML, p. 5

²⁴⁶ ZY

²⁴⁷ ML, p. 5

²⁴⁸ ZY

²⁴⁹ ML, p. 5

that remained from Heidkrug,²⁵⁰ from Sveksna and the area, were freed in the spring of 1945.²⁵¹

²⁵⁰ ML, p. 6

²⁵¹ JL, V. 3, p. 365

AFTER THE HOLOCAUST

After the War, Monuments were put up in the two places of the murders, on the Common Graves, of the Holocaust victims from Sveksna.²⁵² These Monuments are where the Jews were murdered. One Common Grave is near the village of Saudvicai, which is near Niishtut-Tarvig. The other is near the villages Inkakliai and Raudishkiai, about six kilometers from Sveksna, on the left side of the road. There are pictures of them, taken on the visit of Benjamin Yankelowitz, one of the survivors of the Holocaust who visited there²⁵³. The Testimony of Meir Ladon contains pictures of the Memorial Service at the "Common Grave" Site and the building of the fence around it.²⁵⁴

In April 1960, there was an announcement on the media asking for people who had known of Dr. Scheu. Meir Ladon went to the Police Station in Rechovot, Israel, and gave witness against him. Dr. Scheu was then arrested in West Germany.²⁵⁵

There was a trial of four Nazi Criminals that took part in the murdering of Jews in the Heidekrug area, on April 27, 1964, in Aurich (near Hamburg), Germany. The Nazis were Dr. W. Scheu, F. Jagst, Walter Allistsat²⁵⁶ and Otto Bastian. Jews, who were survivors of Heidekrug, from all over the world were invited to participate as witnesses. All expenses were paid for the trip, personal expenses on account of the journey, expenses while there and loss of earnings. They were asked to list the reasons that hindered them to appear in the proceedings.²⁵⁷ Zalman Yavenlovitz, Naphtali Ziv²⁵⁸ and Yitchak Markosevic²⁵⁹ went to this trial as witnesses. The trial took three weeks. Two Nazi soldiers came as witnesses for Dr. Scheu. When they saw Zalman

²⁵² PL, p. 668

²⁵³ This is written on the back of the pictures. LA They are not very clear pictures, so I cannot present them here.

²⁵⁴ These pictures (A-1869/545-55) were submitted to Yad VeShem by Mordechai Kaplan. ML

²⁵⁵ ML, p. 6

²⁵⁶ See **THE HOLOCAUST**, p. 43. At the trial the officials found it hard to believe that witnesses were saying good things about him. ZY

²⁵⁷ There are fifteen copies of these invitations in Yad VeShem. There are three English translations. FC. I find the wording to not be kind enough for an invitation for these witnesses.

²⁵⁸ Naphtali Ziv went to live in Australia. He is no longer alive. TZ

²⁵⁸ Ibid

²⁵⁹ He stayed in Germany and married a German woman. He barely came to visit in Israel. She came more often. When she visited she telephoned Zalman Yavenlovitz to give regards. He hasn't heard from them for a while so it is possible that they are no longer alive. TZ1

Yavenlovitz there they were shocked, for they recognized him and couldn't believe that he was still alive. Zalman Yavenlovitz also recognized them and gave testimony against them. Therefore they also got a sentence, even though they weren't, at first, on trial.²⁶⁰ The Nazi Criminals stated as their defense that they were SS soldiers and were carrying out their orders. The lawyer at the proceedings told the Jews how to manage to say what was important. Each one of these Nazi Criminals received a ten-year sentence.²⁶¹ There is a file in Yad VeShem that has the verdicts of such trials.²⁶² As far as Walter goes, the Jews said good things about him and explained how he helped them, and this surprised everyone.²⁶³

There are two testimonies of witnesses in the Library-Archives of Yad VeShem. I found the Testimony of Meir Ladon²⁶⁴, and the combined Testimony of Moshe Ment²⁶⁵, Yitchak Markosevic²⁶⁶, Naphtali Ziv²⁶⁷ and Meir Smulovic²⁶⁸. The testimonies of Benjamin Yankelowitz and of Meir Ladon are used as reference in Jewish Lithuania. Unfortunately the actual testimony of Benjamin Yankelowitz could not be found. The Video Testimony of Zalman Yavenlovitz appears in Yad VeShem. He came from Taurage, near Sveksna, and went through the war together with the men from Sveksna. The testimony of Ment, Markovitz, Ziv and Smulovic includes a list of names of all the Lithuanians who helped the Nazis in Sveksna.²⁶⁹

In the Sveksna file in the Lithuanian Archives there are a few letters and postcards, dated 1944-7. They were sent by a survivor, L. Ziv,²⁷⁰ who

²⁶⁰ ZY

²⁶¹ They were told to give their testimony and remain inside the courtroom while the Nazi criminal on trial was asked questions; and then to interfere with a comment. Therefore they were asked questions in relation to what the Nazi criminal stated and were able to tell what had happened. Ibid

²⁶² TR This is a special file. I was able to look at it after I signed that I would not list any names or facts that could aid to the identity of a particular person, facts which could bother someone or the results of the trial. These files were all in German.

²⁶³ TZ1

²⁶⁴ Mr. Ladon was born in Sveksna in 1924. .ML

²⁶⁵ Mr. Ment was born in Sveksna on December 15, 1904. Before the war, he worked as a seller of horses and in agriculture MMZM, pps. 1-2. He was 37 years old in 1941.

²⁶⁶ Mr. Markwitz was born in Sveksna on June 6, 1924. He finished elementary school. Before the war, he worked as a butcher. MMZM, pp. 1-2. He was 17 years old in 1941.

²⁶⁷ Mr. Ziv was born in Sveksna on October 25, 1924. Before the war, he finished four years at the Lithuanian high school. MMZM, pps 1-2. He was 17 years old in 1941.

²⁶⁸ Mr. Smulovic was born in Sveksna on February 26, 1910. He finished elementary school. Before the war, he worked as a butcher. MMZM, pps.1-2. He was 31 years old in 1941.

²⁶⁹ MMZM, pps. 9-10

²⁷⁰ See **SVEKSNA: HOLOCAUST**, p. 34. Is there any relationship between this person and Naphtali Ziv, or perhaps it is the same person? It seems to be, for Naphtali Ziv is one of the four witnesses in one of the testimonies found in Yad VeShem. MMZM

was then in Vilna to a Gita Zilberman²⁷¹ in Tel Aviv. They are written in Yiddish and in bad condition, so it is almost impossible to read them.²⁷² The relevant information was that the writer only knew of a few people of Sveksna who were alive after the war.²⁷³

There is a (partial) list of holocaust victims in the Taurage areathat also includes some names from Sveksna. It is written Lithuanian. This list was put out by the Russian Government.²⁷⁴

A shop, which was once owned by a Jewish man, was used as a residence for an old Jewish lady in 1999. It seems that she was the one Jew who lived in the town, but she died recently.²⁷⁵ The house where Meir Ladon and his family once lived is now a laboratory.²⁷⁶

The Synagogue in Sveksna still exists. It wasn't destroyed. Now it is empty.

Today the town has a neurological hospital²⁷⁷, a high school, a mill, a lumber mill and other industrial and business enterprises. Since 1950 it has been the district center.

There are quite a few exotic birds in Sveksna. People who are very devout "birdwatchers" go there to see them.²⁷⁸ They enjoy their stay in the Vikenu Maluanas Hotel²⁷⁹ while they are there.

There is a local branch of the Silute Museum in Sveksna.²⁸⁰ The museum is located in one of the park buildings.²⁸¹ The director of the Museum in Silute had the local schoolchildren in Sveksna do a project about the Jewish History in this region.²⁸² The subject was Jewish schoolchildren.²⁸³ These local schoolchildren had an exhibition on this in the Synagogue

²⁷¹ I have tried to locate her but with no success. These letters were given to the Lithuanian Archives by Israel Kaplan. Perhaps there is a connection between him and Mordechai Kaplan. I tried to locate them but with no success.

²⁷² The workers in the Archives, Yiddish experts, and others have not been able to decipher them.

²⁷³ LA

²⁷⁴ NC

²⁷⁵ DN

²⁷⁶ This is quite near the center of Sveksna. RL

²⁷⁷ This hospital is under control of the county doctor service of the Klaipeda district, which is part of the National Health Program. KL, p. 1

²⁷⁸ Bt, CB, YL.

²⁷⁹ The hotel staff doesn't know much English, but by way of a tourist book, necessary conversation can be made with them. Ibid

²⁸⁰ RL1

²⁸¹ KV

²⁸² RL1

²⁸³ RL

building in the summer of 2002. The section of the Lithuanian Government that is in charge of “educational change”, and that includes lectures about the Holocaust financed this. There is a special foundation there for this type of program.²⁸⁴

As of now, Sveksna does not yet have a JewishGen website; however Ken Solomon wanted to create one.²⁸⁵

²⁸⁴ RL1
²⁸⁵ KS1

APPENDICES

APPENDIX-1 MAP OF LITHUANIA²⁸⁶



<http://maps.takas.lt/>

0  30 km



APPENDIX 2- MAP OF SVEKSNA AREA ²⁸⁷



²⁸⁷ Ibid

APPENDIX 3- THE JEWISH POPULATION IN LITHUANIA²⁸⁸

<u>YEAR</u>	<u>POPULATION /-% of total population</u>
1764	157,250
1772	157,300
1900	170,000 /- region 1,500,000
1923	153,743 /- 7.5%
1940	133,000
1941	168,00 ^{289[287]} , 145,000 ^{290[288]} , 40,000 ^{291[289]}
1959	24,672 / -0.9%
1970	24,000 /-0.8%

²⁸⁸ AJP, maps and charts 2, 7, 15, 23,46, 49, 50, 58, 59, 67, 70,93, 95, 98, 101, 111, 112, 113, 119, 136,139, 145; EH,V. 21, pps. 765-76; EJ, V.11, 361-90

²⁸⁹ This was before the Holocaust. HO, V. 5, p. 1284

²⁹⁰ This was when the Germans captured Lithuania . It does not include the 3,000 refugees from Germany, Austria, Bohemia and Moravia. Ibid

²⁹¹This was at the end of the year. Ibid, V. 3, p .638

APPENDIX 4- THE POPULATION/ JEWISH POPULATION OF SVEKSNA

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<u>YEAR</u>	<u>POPULATION</u>	<u>JEWS</u>	<u>PERCENTAGE</u>
1776		423 ²⁹³	
1784		185 ²⁹⁴	
1816		133	
1847		420 ²⁹⁵ /534 ²⁹⁶	
1897	1,819	974, (about 800) ²⁹⁷	53%
1914	2,000		
1921		200 families	
1923	1,340	519	39%
1939	2000	@100 ²⁹⁸	
1940	@2000	@ 500, 519 ²⁹⁹ , 110-5 families ³⁰⁰	25%
1959	1905		
1972	2250		

²⁹² JL, p.1268; LJ, V. 3, p. 265; MP, PL, p. 673

²⁹³ According to the head-tax there were 211 men and 212 women. Ibid

²⁹⁴ There were 68 men and 65 women. Ibid

²⁹⁵ LJ, V. 3, p. 265; MP

²⁹⁶ PL, p. 673

²⁹⁷ DM p.1

²⁹⁸ Ibid

²⁹⁹ This is considered to be the population. WW, p. 519. This number was however taken from the government census of 1920-30. Ibid, p. 365

³⁰⁰ MMZM, p. 3

APPENDIX 5- SHOPS IN SVEKSNA³⁰¹

<u>TYPE</u>	<u>ALL</u>	<u>JEWISH</u>
Butcher	2	2
Restaurants and Taverns	4	1
Clothing, Fur, Textile	4	3
Leather and Shoes	1	1
Medicine and Cosmetics	1	0
Electrical Appliances, Sewing Machines	1	1
Tools	1	1
Heating and Animal Feed	1	1
General	1	0

³⁰¹ This is according to the government census of 1930. PL. p.674

CONCLUSION

Sveksna was a small place in the Jewish world that was in Lithuania. It seems to me that, in relation to its population, many important Rabbis and people did come from there. The Jews of Sveksna were a part of world Jewry not only in the giving of knowledge but also in the giving and receiving of help. The feeling of anti-Semitism was unfortunately found here, as in every other Jewish community.

Even though this world does not any longer exist, we can still be influenced by it. This can be done by the spreading of the influence of Lithuanian Jewry, through learning from the books written there, the teachings of famous scholars, studying the history and researching it.

I realize that I have collected much information about the Jewish history of Sveksna and Lithuania as a whole. I also realize that there is much information that I do not have and that is missing to make this article complete. I am not sure exactly how many Jews from Sveksna did survive the Holocaust, though I do know that only a very few did. I do understand this; but find I it very hard to digest.

I have succeeded in finding the testimonies of the survivors: Mier Ladon, Benjamin Yankelowitz, Moshe Ment, Meir Smulevic, Naftali Ziv and Isaac Markosevic. I have also used the Video Testimony of Zalman Yavenlovitz for the period of the Camps, for according to his Testimony, he was then with the men from Sveksna. I have not been able to locate any of the survivors from Sveksna or someone from their families; but I am very happy that I succeeded in speaking to Zalman Yavenlovitz. It gave me a good feeling to read what the men from Sveksna wrote about the Sveksna that was before the Holocaust. They were proud of their town, as my Grandfather was proud of his Sveksna – the Sveksna that was. This makes me proud to be a descendant of Sveksna.

My reason for writing this article was to find as much information that I could about Sveksna, for my family, all who are interested and above all for myself.

I hope that I have helped in spreading the influence of Lithuanian Jewry by doing this research. All the people who read it are also taking part in doing so. More so, I hope that I have succeeded in paying tribute to the memories of all the Jews of Sveksna who lost their lives in the Holocaust.

I understand that Sveksna was a small part of Lithuanian Jewry; but it has given me a great deal.

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