

The Changing Borders of Eastern Europe

Hal Bookbinder
hal.bookbinder@ucla.edu

The Bookbinders came from the town of Dubno, which is currently in Rivenska Oblast in the northwestern Ukraine. The town is first mentioned in writings in 1100. The oldest existing record of Jews in Dubno dates from 1532 and relates to the ownership of cattle. The oldest stone in its Jewish cemetery dated from 1581. This ancient town has passed between many masters, and innumerable battles have been fought through it. The nations that have controlled its area include:

1. Rus Principality of Volhynia (980's – 1199 & 1205 – 1238) – Rus princes conquered the area
2. Rus Principality of Galich-Volhynia (1199 – 1205 & 1238 – 1260)
3. Mongols of the Golden Horde (1260 – 1350's) – Mongols overran southern Rus principalities
4. Grand Duchy of Lithuania (1350's – 1569) – Lithuania expanded south to the Black Sea
5. Kingdom of Poland (1569 – 1795) – transferred by Lithuania to Poland under the Treaty of Lublin
6. Russian Empire (1795 – 1917) – absorbed by Russia with the 3rd Polish partition
7. Ukrainian State (1917 – 1921) – independent Ukraine emerged as the Russian Empire collapses
8. Polish Republic (1921 – 1939) – Poland conquered territories from the USSR and Ukraine
9. Soviet Union (1939 – 1941) – Nazi Germany and then the USSR invaded and occupied Poland
10. Nazi Germany (1941-1944) – Nazi Germany attacked the USSR and occupied Dubno
11. Soviet Union (1944 – 1991) – Soviet Union advanced on Nazi Germany and captured Dubno
12. Ukrainian Republic (1991 – present) – independent Ukraine emerged on breakup of the USSR

At many junctures between one regime and another, bloody battles were fought through Dubno, with its Jews often targeted. In 1648-1649, its Jewish population was virtually annihilated by Bogdan Khmelnytsky's Cossacks. Jews returned and created a vibrant center of learning and publishing. The community was ravaged in the fighting in the aftermath of the 1st World War as Polish, Ukrainian, White and Red Russian armies repeatedly took and then lost the town. 12,000 Jews lived in the town at the outbreak of World War II. Only 300 remained alive at the end of the War, including those who returned from the Soviet Union. A miniscule Jewish community continues to exist there.

Dubno is not unique. The shifting borders of Eastern Europe resulted in many of our ancestors moving from one province to another, or even one country to another, without ever leaving home. As the borders changed, the official languages and provincial capitals changed as well. Understanding the geographic history of a town can provide us with clues as to where to search for records, how they might be organized and in what languages they may have been written. It also may also shed light on the environment in which our ancestors lived. So, where might one look for vital records for Dubno?

- **Kingdom of Poland** (pre-1795) - Dubno was a powiat (township) in the wojewodztwa (province) of Wołyń in the kingdom of Poland. The capital of Wołyń was Lutsk; the capital of Poland was Warsaw.
- **Russian Empire** (1795-1917) - Dubno was a uyezd (township) in the guberniya (province) of Volhynia in the vice regency of Ukraine in the empire of Russia. The capital of Volhynia was Zhitomir; the capital of Ukraine was Kiev; the capital of Russia was St. Petersburg.
- **Polish Republic** (1921-1939) - Dubno was a powiat (township) in the voivodship (province) of Wołyń in the republic of Poland. The capital of Wołyń was Lutsk; the capital of Poland was Warsaw.

- **Soviet Union (1939-1941 & 1944-1991)** - Dubno was a city in the oblast (province) of Rovno in the soviet socialist republic of Ukraine in the USSR. The capital of Rovno Oblast was Rovno; the capital of Ukraine was Kiev; the capital of the USSR was Moscow (Rovno and Kiev reflect the Soviet rendering).
- **Independent Ukraine (1991 to present)** - Dubno is a city in the oblast (province) of Rivne in the republic of Ukraine. The capital of Rivenska Oblast is Rivne; the capital of Ukraine is Kyiv (Rivne and Kyiv reflect the Ukrainian rendering).

So, depending on the period being researched, one might want to look in archives in any of the following cities for documents concerning ancestors in Dubno: Dubno, Kyiv, Lutsk, Moscow, Rivne, St. Petersburg, Warsaw, or Zhitomir.

The Pale of Jewish Settlement

From the 1790s until World War I, Jews in the Russian Empire were for the most part restricted to Poland and the Pale of Jewish Settlement. The Pale consisted of the Vice regencies of Belorussia, Bessarabia, Lithuania, New Russia, and Ukraine. Poland was a separate entity which was merged into the Pale by the early 1870s. Each vice regency was composed of one or more guberniyas (provinces) which were further subdivided into districts.



Map source: Atlas of Modern Jewish History by Evyatar Friesel

Geography of the Pale

Vice regency #, % Jews, 1897	Guberniya (year formed) # Jews, 1897	District (contemporary name) * = Guberniya capital
Belorussia 724,000; 13.6%	Minsk (1793-95, 1796) 345,000	Bobruysk, Borisov, Igumen (Cherven), *Minsk, Mozyr, Novogrudok, Pinsk, Rechitsa, Slutsk
	Mogilev (1773-78, 1802) 203,900	Bykhov, Chausy, Cherikov, Gomel, Gorki, Klimovichi, *Mogilev, Mstislavl, Orsha, Rogachev, Senno
	Vitebsk (1802) 175,600	Drissa (Verkhnedvinsk), Dvinsk (Daugavpils), Gorodok, Lepel, Liutsin (Ludza), Nevel, Polotsk, Rezhitsa (Rezekne), Sebezh (Sebeza), Velizh, *Vitebsk
Bessarabia 228,500; 11.8%	Bessarabia (1873)	Akkerman (Belgorod Dbestrovskiy), Beltsy, Bendery, Izmail, Khotin, Kishinev, Orgeyev, Soroki
Lithuania 697,900; 14.7%	Grodno (1801) 280,000	Bialystok, Bielsk, Brest Litovsk (Brest), *Grodno, Kobrin, Pruzhany, Slonim, Sokolka, Volkovysk
	Kovno (1842) 212,700	*Kovno, Novoaleksandrovsk (Zarasai), Panevezys, Raseiniai, Siauliai, Telsiai, Vilkomir (Ukmerge)
	Vilna (1795-97, 1802) 204,700	Disna, Lida, Oshmyany, Svencionys, Trakai, Vileika (Naujoji Vilnia), *Vilna (Vilnius)
New Russia 501,800; 8.0%	Ekaterinoslav (1802) 101,100	Aleksandrovka, Bakhmut (Artemosvk), *Ekaterinoslav (Dnepropetrovsk), Mariupol (Zhdanov), Novomoskovsk, Pavlograd, Slaviansoserbsk/Lugansk (Voroshilovgrad), Verkhnedneprovsk
	Kherson (1803) 339,000	Aleksandriya, Ananyev, Elizavetgrad (Kirovograd), *Kherson, Odessa, Tirashpol
	Tavrida (1802) 60,800	Berdiansk, Dnepr/Aleshki (Tsyurupinsk), Feodosiya, Melitopol, Perekop, *Simferopol, Yalta, Yevpatoriya
Ukraine 1,425,500; 9.7%	Chernigov (1796) 114,500	Borzna, *Chernigov, Glukhov, Gorodnya, Konotop, Kozelets, Krolevets, Mglin, Nezhin, Novgorod Severskiy, Novozybkov, Oster, Sosnitsa, Starodub, Surazh
	Kiev (1708-81, 1796) 433,700	Berdichev, Cherkassy, Chigirin, Kanev, *Kiev (Kiyev), Lipovets, Radomyshl, Skvira, Tarashcha, Uman, Vasilkov, Zvenigorodka
	Podolia (1796) 370,600	Balta, Bratslav, Gaysin, *Kamenets Podolskiy, Letichev, Litin, Mogilev Podolskiy, Novaya Ushitsa, Olgopol, Proskurov (Khmelnitskiy), Vinnitsa, Yampol
	Poltava (1802) 110,900	Gadyach, Khorol, Konstantinograd (Krasnograd), Kovelyaki, Kremenchug, Lokhvitsa, Lubny, Mirgorod, Pereyaslav (Pereyaslav Khmelnitskiy), Piryatin, *Poltava, Priluki, Romny, Zenkov, Zolotonosha
	Volhynia (1796) 395,800	Dubno, Izyaslav, Kovel, Kremenets, Lutsk, Novograd Volynskiy, Ostrog, Ovruch, Rovno, Starokonstantinov, Vladimir Volynskiy, *Zhitomir

Geography of Poland

In 1815, the Kingdom of Poland was reconstituted at the Congress of Vienna, with the Russian Tsar as its King. The resultant entity was referred to as Congress Poland (“Kongresowka”). Congress Poland was divided into provinces referred to as palatinates or voivodships (“Wajewodztwa” in Polish). These voivodships included Cracow, Sandomier, Lublin, Podlachia, Kalisz, Plock, Warsaw, and Augustowo. The first four covered Polish lands that had been occupied by the Austrian Empire as Western Galicia. The latter four covered Polish lands that had been occupied by Prussia.

After two unsuccessful attempts at revolution, the army and legislature of Congress Poland were disbanded and it was consolidated into the Russian empire though it continued to be referred to as Congress Poland or the Kingdom of Poland. Its provinces were redrawn into ten guberniya, administered in the Russian fashion. Kielce was created out of Cracow. Radom was fashioned out of Sandomier. Podlachia was renamed Siedlce. Augustowo was divided into Suwalki in the north and Lomza in the south. Piotrkow was formed from portions of Cracow, Sandomier, Kalisz, and Warsaw. The other voivodships retained their names as they were converted to guberniya.

Guberniya # Jews, 1897	Major communities, 1900 (identified by their contemporary names)
Kalisz 71,700	Dzialoszyn, Kalisz, Kleczew, Kolo, Konin, Leczyca, Ozorkow, Sieradz, Slupca, Turek, Warta, Wielun, Wieruszow, Zdunska Wola
Warsaw 351,900	Aleksandrow Kujawski, Blonie, Gabin, Gora Kalwaria, Gostynin, Grochow, Grojec, Kowal, Kutno, Lowicz, Lubien Kujawski, Minsk Mazowiecki, Mszczonow, Nasielsk, Nowy Dwor Mazowiecki, Plonsk, Praga, Pultusk, Radziejow, Radzymin, Skierniewice, Warszawa, Wloclawek, Wolomin
Plock 51,500	Biezun, Chorzele, Ciechanow, Lipno, Mlawa, Osada Lubicz, Plock, Przasnysz, Rypin, Sierpc, Wyszogrod
Lomza 91,400	Grajewo, Kolno, Lomza, Makow Mazowiecki, Wysokie Mazowieckie, Myszyniec, Nur, Ostroleka, Ostrow Mazowiecka, Szczuczyn, Tykocin
Suwalki 59,200	Augustow, Kalvarija, Kudirkos Naumiestis, Marijampole, Prienai, Seirijai, Sejny, Suwalki, Szakiai, Vilkaviskis, Virbalis
Piotrkow 222,600	Bedzin, Brzeziny, Czestochowa, Koluszki, Lask, Lodz, Myszkow, Pabianice, Piotrkow Trybunalski, Radomsko, Rawa Mazowiecka, Tomaszow Mazowiecki, Warta, Wolborz, Zarki, Zgierz
Radom 112,300	Ilza, Konskie, Kozenice, Radom, Rakow, Opatow, Opoczno, Ostrowiec Swietokrzyski, Przedborz, Sandomierz, Solec, Staszow, Szydlowiec, Zwolen
Siedlce 121,100	Biala Podlaska, Garwolin, Janow Podlaski, Laskarzew, Losice, Maciejowice, Ostrow Lubelski, Parczew, Siedlce, Sokolow Podlaski, Stoczek, Wegrow, Zelechow
Kielce 83,200	Busko Zdroj, Checiny, Chmielnik, Dzialoszyce, Jedrzejow, Kielce, Nowy Korczyn, Lukow, Miechow, Olkusz, Pilica, Pinczow, Stopnica, Wloszczowa
Lublin 156,200	Bilgoraj, Biskupice Lubelskie, Bychawa, Chelm, Hrubieszow, Janow Lubelski, Kazimierz Dolny, Krasnik, Krasnystaw, Lubartow, Lublin, Pulawy, Szczepieszyn, Tarnograd, Tomaszow Lubelski, Uchanie, Zamosc

The population figures are from the 1897 Russian census as shown in the [Atlas of Modern Jewish History](#) by Evyatar Friesel. The list of districts by guberniya is from the [Great Soviet Encyclopedia](#). The contemporary names (in parenthesis) are from [Where Once We Walked](#) by Gary Mokotoff and Sallyann Sack.