

# Documenting the Vilna Ghetto Library

Judy Baston  
[JRBaston@aol.com](mailto:JRBaston@aol.com)

Vilna – known as the Jerusalem of Lithuania – had a strong cultural tradition before the Shoah that endured and flourished even after the Vilna Ghetto was established in 1941. Many historians believe the most important cultural institution in the Ghetto was the Vilna Ghetto Library, which became the center for Jewish secular cultural life in the ghetto.

In many ways, The Vilna Ghetto was unique – it was the only ghetto with a central, officially sanctioned library that functioned during the Shoah. The only possible exception might be Thereisenstadt, which in some ways was more a camp than a ghetto.

Documentation from the Vilna Ghetto Library has survived and includes lists of readers in the Library, lists of workers in the Library and even a list of readers who did not return books to the Library.

Most of these lists are in the Lithuanian State Central Archive (LCVA) in Vilnius and are also available in the Yad Vashem Archives in Jerusalem. and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington, DC, as part of RG-26.015M at <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/irn502384> which covers the Vilna Ghetto.

Through LitvakSIG, I ordered from the LCVA the scans of the “List of Readers with a Subscription to the Vilna Ghetto Library, Arranged in Alphabetical Order,” which contains the names of 4,401 Vilna Ghetto residents who took books out of the Vilna Ghetto Library. It includes the first and last names of the individuals, their addresses in the Ghetto, in many cases, the date they first registered with the Library, and the fee they paid to register.

I have donated the information from this valuable list to LitvakSIG, and thanks to data entry by volunteer Susan Goldsmith, this list was databased and is publicly searchable in LitvakSIG’s All Lithuania Database (<https://www.litvaksig.org/all-lithuania-database/>) One can search by surname for a family’s listings, or, by choosing “town” as a field and entering “Vilnius,” and choosing “any field” and entering “library”, you will get the entire list of 4,516 records – in 91 pages of 50 listings each.

In addition, the Excel file of the full translated list is available on the password-protected site of LitvakSIG’s Vilnius District Research Group (DRG), which is linked to the LitvakSIG website at [www.litvaksig.org](http://www.litvaksig.org) and accessible to qualifying contributors to the Vilnius DRG.

## **Suggested Reading About the Vilna Ghetto and the Vilna Ghetto Library**

Abramowicz, Dina, *Guardians of a Tragic Heritage: Reminiscences and Observations of an Eyewitness*, a lecture delivered at the Assn. of Jewish Libraries, Philadelphia, PA June 23, 1998, reprinted by the National Foundation for Jewish Culture

Abramowicz, Dina, *The Library in the Vilna Ghetto*, pp 165-170, *The Holocaust and the Book*, ed. Jonathan Rose. Amherst, MA, University of Massachusetts Press, 2001.

Arad, Yitzhak, *Ghetto in Flames*: Jerusalem, Yad Vashem , 1981

Balberyszski, Mendel, *Stronger than Iron: The Destruction of Vilna Jewry 1941-1945: an Eyewitness Account*, Jerusalem, New York, Gefen Publishing House, 2010.

Fishman, David, *The Book Smugglers*, Lebanon, N. H., University Press of New England, 2017.

Kruk, Herman, *The Last Days of the Jerusalem of Lithuania: Chronicles from the Vilna Ghetto and the Camps, 1939-44*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press, 2002.

Kruk, Herman, *Library and Reading Room in the Vilna Ghetto, Strashun Street 6*, pp 171-200, *The Holocaust and the Book*, ed. Jonathan Rose, Amherst, MA, University of Massachusetts Press, 2001. (Contains translation of report on the Vilna Ghetto Library presented at the celebration of the circulation of the 100,000<sup>th</sup> book.)

Ran, Leyzor, *Yerusholayim de-Lite, Vol. 2*, New York, Vilner Album Komitet, 1974.

Rudashevski, Yitzhak, *The Diary of the Vilna Ghetto*, Israel, Beit Lohamei Haghetaot/Ghetto Fighters House, 1979

Rudavsky, Joseph, *To Live with Hope, To Die with Dignity: Spiritual Resistance in the Ghettos and Camps*, Northvale, N.J., Jerusalem, Jason Aaronson Inc., 1997

Shavit, David, *Hunger for the Printed Word: Books and Libraries in the Jewish Ghettos of Nazi-Occupied Europe*, Jefferson, N.C. and London, McFarland & Co., 1997. Chapter 1, Jewish Libraries on the Eve of Destruction: Chapter 6, Vilna Ghetto, Chapter 8, Books and Readers,

Shavit, David, *Jewish Libraries in the Polish Ghettos During the Nazi Era*, Library Quarterly, Vol. 52, Chicago, IL, University of Chicago, Press, April 1982. pp. 112-118.

Sukys, Julia, "And I Burned with Shame," *the testimony of Ona Simaite, Righteous Among the Nations*," Jerusalem, Yad Vashem, 2007.

Sukys, Julia, *Epistophilia: writing the life of Ona Simaite*, Lincoln, NE and London, University of Nebraska Press.