Landsmanshaftn

Definition
Landsmanshaftn are societies formed by Jewish immigrants from the same villages, towns, and cities in Central and Eastern Europe. The landsmanshaft became a dominant form of Jewish social organization in the late 1800s. The many types of landsmanshaftn include religious and socialist organizations, as well as American-style fraternal orders. Landsmanshaftn provided immigrants with formal and informal social networks, and members helped one another with financial needs such as medical care and burial plots. In 1938, a Federal Works Progress Administration (WPA) project identified 2,468 landsmanshaftn in New York City (see references below). The number of landsmanshaftn began to decline in the 1950s, though some societies continue to exist today.

Landsmanshaft Records
Landsmanshaft records include minutes of meetings, membership records, burial records, and programs from special events such as annual banquets. Most landsmanshaft records are handwritten in Yiddish and English. Records also appear in Hungarian, German, Polish, Russian, and other languages. Older records are less likely to be in English.

Landsmanshaft Records as a Genealogical Resource
The value of landsmanshaft records for family history research varies. With the necessary language skills or the help of a translator, one may find an ancestor’s membership application, filled with information about his or her life. However, one may also find only minutes of meetings at which one’s ancestor was not present. Some societies’ records are preserved intact and complete, while others are fragmentary.

Landsmanshaft Records at the Center for Jewish History
You may search CJH’s online catalogs at http://search.cjh.org by either the organization name or the town name.

YIVO Archives
Records from over 1,000 societies, arranged in over 500 record groups (collections), range in date from 1859 to 1984. YIVO also has an extensive collection of records of the Workmen’s Circle (Arbeter Ring), whose branches were often organized according to the town or region where their members originated. For additional details, see Rosaline Schwartz and Susan Milamed, A Guide to YIVO’s Landsmanshaftn Archive (New York: YIVO, 1986), available in the Genealogy Institute and in the Lillian Goldman Reading Room.

American Jewish Historical Society (AJHS)
AJHS’s Landsmanshaftn Collection (I-332) contains over 100 folders of material on dozens of societies. A few organizations are cataloged separately, such as the German Hebrew Benevolent Society of the City of NY (I-46), Independent Slonimer Benevolent Society (I-126), Radomer Culture Center (I-125), and Slonimer Ladies’ Bikur Cholim Untersutzungs Verein (New York) (I-127). AJHS also has a Workmen’s Circle collection (I-304).

Landsmanshaft Records at Other Locations

- American Jewish Archives
  3101 Clifton Avenue, Cincinnati, OH 45220
  Tel: (513) 221-1875  Fax: (513) 221-7812  aja@huc.edu

- American Jewish Historical Society (Boston area collections)
  A160 Herrick Road, Newton Centre, MA 02459
  Tel: (617) 559-8880  Fax: (617) 559-8881  reference@ajhs.org
References

Books

*The Jewish Communal Register of New York City, 1917-1918* (New York: Kehillah of New York City, 1918). Includes a listing of landsmanshaftn. *Genealogy Institute; Ref HV 3192 .N5*


Web Sites

www.jewishgen.org/infofiles/landshaf.txt
Landsmanschaft Immigrant Benevolent Organizations, by Glenda Rubin, 1996. A basic description of landsmanshaftn; includes a list of organizations in Israel, with contact information.

www.jgsny.org/searchcity.htm
Burial Societies in the New York Metro Area. An online database created by the Jewish Genealogical Society, Inc. (New York), listing burial plots of landsmanshaftn, synagogues, family circles, fraternal organizations and labor unions. Contains more than 10,000 entries from almost 100 cemeteries located in New York City, Long Island, Putnam County, Westchester County, and northern New Jersey.