

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 Unterstutzungs Verein (New York) (**I-127**). AJHS also has a Workmen's Circle collection (**I-304**).

Landsmanshaft Records at Other Locations

- American Jewish Archives <http://americanjewisharchives.org/catalog/>
3101 Clifton Avenue, Cincinnati, OH 45220
Tel: (513) 221-1875 Fax: (513) 221-7812 aja@huc.edu
- American Jewish Historical Society (Boston area collections) www.ajhs.org
A160 Herrick Road, Newton Centre, MA 02459
Tel: (617) 559-8880 Fax: (617) 559-8881 reference@ajhs.org

- Philadelphia Jewish Archives <http://www.jewisharchives.net/>
18 South Seventh Street, Philadelphia, PA 19106-2314
Tel: (215) 925-8090 Fax: (215) 925-4413 info@jewisharchives.net
- Local historical societies: see <http://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**

Kliger, Hannah, ed. *Jewish Hometown Associations and Family Circles in New York* (Bloomington: Indiana U. Press, 1992). An analysis of the WPA study. **AJHS F 128.9 .J5 J574; YIVO /84702**

Rontch, Isaac, ed. *Di idishe landsmanshaftn fun Nyu York [The Jewish Landsmanschaften of New York]* (NY: I.L. Peretz Yiddish Writers' Union, 1938) A survey of immigrant societies in NY prepared by the Yiddish Writers' Group of the Federal Writers' Project, WPA. Includes essays on landsmanshaft history and activities as well as survey results [in Yiddish]; also contains Table of Contents and Directory of Organizations [in English]. **Ref HS 2229 .M4 1938**

Sorkin, Sidney. *Bridges to an American City: A Guide to Chicago's Landsmanschaften, 1870 to 1990* (New York: Peter Lang, 1993). **AJHS F 548 .J5 J5 S67; YIVO /85988**

Soyer, Daniel. *Jewish Immigrant Associations and American Identity in New York, 1880-1939* (Harvard U. Press, 1997). **AJHS F 128.9 .J5 S69 1997; YIVO /90209**

Weisser, Michael. *A Brotherhood of Memory: Jewish Landsmanschaftn in the New World*. (New York: Basic Books, 1985). An examination of landsmanshaftn in the lives of immigrant Jews. **AJHS F 128.9 .J5 W45; YIVO /80464**

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.