SKAUDVILE

Kovno Guberniya, Russia (1827-1918)
Tavrig District, Lithuania (1918-1940)

Shkudvil, Lithuania, Circa 1918

Other Names

- Yiddish: *Shkudvil, Shkodvil*
- Lithuanian: *Skaudvile*
- Russian: *Skadvile*

Location

- Western Lithuania, 22km Northeast of Tavrig (Taurage) and the Russian Border of Kaliningrad

- View location via **MapQuest** (Then click your browser's "back" button to return here.)

Population of Skaudvile, Lithuania

- **1,590 Jews on June 22, 1941, Only 11 Escaped the Annihilation, 0 Jews in 1996**

Maps

- [Map of Lithuania, 1882](#)

Resources

- [1816 Shkudvil Reviskie Shazki](#)
- [1851 Shkudvil Reviskie Shazki](#)
- [1912 Shkudvil Draft Evasion List](#)
- [Luba and Freda Friedman's Escape](#)
- [How I survived the Holocaust by Nachum Levy](#)
- [Agudat 1913 and 1914 Contributors](#)
- [Aviva Abramovich Story](#)
- [Shoah Survivors of Shkudvil](#)
- [Shoah Victims of Shkudvil](#)
- [Shkudvilers: Lists Box Taxes, Etc](#)
- [Search for the Propp Family](#)

JewishGen Family Finder

JGFF

- Do you have roots in Shkudvil? Would you like to connect with others researching the same community? Click the button to search the JewishGen Family Finder database.

Compiled by [Henry Propp](#) Direct questions or comments to the author or the [ShtetLinks](#) project coordinators.

Shkudvil

The Propp Ancestral Shtetl in Lithuania

Researched and Edited by [Henry Propp](#)

In general there was a remarkable amount of religious freedom in Lithuania. Lithuania developed as a center for Jewish religion, education and scholarship, however there was also

religious intolerance and fierce anti-Semitism there too. During most of the last two hundred years Lithuania has been under Russian control, first under the Czars and then under communism. The Russian governments implemented many pogroms which persecuted the entire Jewish population of the Russian Empire, most of whom were living in the *Cherta,* the Pale of the Settlements.

In 1995 a large group of Russian documents were found in the state archives in both Kaunas and Vilnius, Lithuania. They are called reviskie shazki. These are lists of revision lists were published by Avotaynu Monograph of "Jewish Vital Records, Revision Lists, and other Jewish Holdings in the Lithuanian Archives. These are a series of ten early Russian censuses of the Jews living in the Pale of the Settlements. Czarist authorities in the late part of the 18th century began them. The lists start in 1795 in eastern Lithuania and were organized by family and listed by name and age. The Russians for conscription in the Russian army and taxing the Jewish subjects used these revision lists. The lists are not necessarily very accurate for the obvious reasons, but they are useful tools for researched for additional information about our family in Shkudvil. They list some of the Jewish population in many of the villages of what is now Lithuania. We have obtained three of these lists for 1816, 1851 and 1912. The list are actually two pages one page for male head of the household and any other males residing within the household and a second page listing all of the females of the same household. The lists are of limited use. This is because they only list changes made after the main census, thus the name reviskie, meaning in English: revision.

The Old Wooden Shule

Later used as the cheder

In the August 14, 1816, Reviskie Shazki, there is listed a "Shimel Hirschevich Probnovich" born 1765 listed with his sons: Efraim, Hirsh and Avram and on the female side with a wife, Rochel, and one daughter which can not be read from the original document. These members lived in one household. The information passed down from Louis Arne's grandparents that the first Propp in Shkudvil was Shimon Propp and he had three sons: Efraim, Hirsh and

Abe, along with four daughters. Louis also said he only had information on four of the seven children: Hirsch, Abe, Sara and Rivka. The 1816 Reviskie Shazki lists that Efraim departed Shkudvil in 1812 at the age of 24 years old. There is far too much information which agrees to be only coincidental. These reviskie shazki are a primary vital record confirming that Shimon or Shimel Propp did come to Shkudvil before 1811, the year of the previous census. The 1816 census indicates that Shimel was in Shkudvil during the previous census. Shimel is very common nickname for Shimon.

There was also the fear of conscription (1827 to 1867) in the Russian army for the young Jewish men (12 years old) and boys. The duty in the army could be very severe and could last up to twenty-five years or sometimes even more. Each Jewish community through the Kahal, was given quotas. Even boys of eight or nine years old were at times kidnapped by snatchers (khapers) who were employed by the Kahal for purpose of filling their quotas. The assignments were made to distant points in Russia and many of the young men never saw their families and loved ones again. During their time in the Russian service tremendous pressures were brought to bear on these young men to convert to the Russian Orthodox religion.

When Czar Alexander II came to power he relaxed the conscription laws and provided support to Jewish people of Russia. When his son, Czar Alexander III, came to the Russian throne in 1881, all of the anti-Semitism, pogroms, and mistreatment of the Jewish population greatly intensified and finally forced a large scale emigration from Lithuania. However, there remained in Lithuania a very large part of the Propp family, and 240,000 other Jewish people right up until World War II. During the latter periods of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century the Propp family was spread throughout Lithuania, Sweden, South Africa, Germany, and Russia rather than all living in the Shkudvil area as in previous times.

Shkudvil is 22 km northeast of Tavrig in western Lithuania. It is located on the road from Kaliningrad (Königsberg) to Saint Petersburg and is situated along the Ancia River. It has a population today of about 3,000 Lithuanians, and no Jewish people. The town of Shkudvil began as a site for some roadside inns. At the very end of the eighteenth century, younger Jewish settlers were attracted to the area, where they established a small village. Every new Jewish settler was called by the name of his original shtetl.

The Jewish community immediately began to develop and was fully organized by 1820. After several years, a small yeshiva (religious university) began to draw people from the settlements. Some families would come to the area to seek bridegrooms for their daughters from the yeshiva. A large Jewish community grew and flourished in Shkudvil in the following years. In 1847 the Jewish population of Shkudvil was 204, and in 1897 it was 1,012, or seventy-two percent of the total village population. Just before the Holocaust there were 1,017 Jews, or sixty percent of the population. The town burned down in 1922, 1931, and 1937 and it was rebuilt in 1938-39. Today it serves as a township seat, with three houses of worship: Jewish, Roman Catholic, and Evangelical Lutheran. There is a hospital and secondary school there. There were buildings in Shkudvil which predated the period of Jewish settlement, and were built in the very early part of the eighteenth century. The oldest

building is a Catholic Church which dates back to 1726. The shtetl is described in The Books of Rabbi S. I. Scheinfeld:

> "Shkudvil, like countless other shtetls, was a poor community with a few shops and the usual assortment of small trades people and artisans, and a large proportion of men who spent most of their days studying the Talmud or teaching, while their wives often scraped up the family income."

The village became known throughout Europe as a village of Torah scholars -- primarily of the *Musar* movement, which was popular in this part of Lithuania -- as well as of knowledgeable people of secular subjects, known as *maskilim*. The mood and attitude of the shtetl is further amplified in the forward written by [Rabbi Slapobersky](#) and the story concerning the life of Rabbi Slapobersky.

In 1857, under Czar Nicholas I, the Russian government announced that all the Jews who lived less than 50 versts (approximately 33 miles) from the Prussian border should leave the area. The Russian government also told them to go to an established area further inside Russia. They gave the Jewish people the opportunity to choose where they wanted to go. Nineteen small communities of Jews in the area met and decided they were not going to leave the area. The people of Shkudvil were among them. As it worked out the Russian Government under the Czar relented on the requirement for Jews to move only because it was not in their best interest. The Jewish people there were Rabbis, teachers, merchants, small store owners, tradesmen and a few farmers who raised corn, rice, grains, cows, horses, and chickens. One of the principal commodities was the small and sturdy Samogitian horse breed, well suited for work in the coal mines.

Tuesday was market day, and Shkudvil's was thought to be one of the largest markets in the Zhammut (northwestern) region of Lithuania. In 1871 there was a terrible famine, in which the Jewish people suffered much worse than the general population of Lithuania. On the Shavuoth holiday of 1932, a big fire consumed half the homes in Shkudvil. After that a purely Jewish firefighters' group was organized, not only to fight fires but also to protect the Jewish population from the Lithuanian gangs and hooligans. Later on, the firemen's group became the shtetl's *zelbst-shutz* (self-protection group). In 1936 a blood libel again broke out against the Jewish people in nearby Tavrig (Taurage).

Shkudvil is listed in **Where Once We Walked,** A guide to the Jewish communities destroyed in the holocaust, and **The Shtetl Finder** gazetteer. There is a plaque for Shkudvil in the Chamber of the Holocaust, Mount Zion, Jerusalem, Israel and a Memorial Window in the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, DC. It is also listed in *Yahadut Lita,* **(Lithuanian Jewry)**. The book, **Lithuanian Jewish Communities,** lists the Yizkor dates of the Nazi Massacres for Shkudvil as 26 Tamuz 5701 (July 21, 1941) and 23 Elul 5701 (September 15, 1941). The town is also mentioned in a document which is only known as "A Schkudviler", author unknown, at the central archives, Yad Vashem in Volume III in the Guide to Unpublished Materials.

The Nazi's developed a new type of unit just prior to its invasion of the Russian borders on

the eastern front. The units were called *Einsatzgruppen*, these were the first of the Nazi mobile killing units. In the German planning sessions for *Operation Barbarossa* in March, 1941, Hilter declared that the "Jewish-Bolshevik intelligentsia" would have to be eliminated, and that these tasks could not be entrusted to the army. Einsatzgruppen A was assigned to Army Group North. The Einsatzgruppen was then broken down into smaller operational units called Einsatzkommando. These units operated independently but under guidelines of the Einsatzgruppen mission, which was to murder all the Jewish people who lived in the overrun areas. The Einsatzkommando 3 were assigned to Lithuania, and were augmented in the field by indigenous groups of Lithuanians, Estonians, Latvians and Ukrainians in the form of auxiliary police. To reach as many villages and cities as fast as possible, the Einsatzgruppen moved closely on the heels of the advancing German armies, trapping the large Jewish population centers before the victims had a chance to discover their fate. It should be noted that the Lithuanians took such a willingness and displayed so much passion in the murdering of their fellow Jewish countrymen, that the Nazis used Lithuanians to help kill Jews in all the overrun areas of Russia.

In 1940 the Jews of Lithuania were listening very closely to their radios. They listened to the hate, the Jew-baiting, and how they were being blamed for everything that was wrong with Germany and the world. They were listening to what the Nazis were doing in other parts of Europe. The Jewish people of Shkudvil and Lithuania were terribly frightened and scared. In May of 1940, the Russians occupied Lithuania and reinforced the front lines between Lithuania and Germany. There were miles and miles of trucks with Russian soldiers, tanks, and big guns, which drove right through Shkudvil to the border. The Jews there were very impressed with the awesome power of the Russian government. They felt safer, and most were glad to see the Russians for that reason. The Jewish people in Lithuania at this time had many restrictions imposed by the Lithuanians. The Russians lifted some of the restrictions, and made many Jewish people government officials. The Lithuanians intensely resented these changes, and this may have contributed to the later brutalities committed by some Lithuanians, but there had been years of anti-Semitism and hate. The Jewish people had already lost most of their rights granted in 1920 when Lithuania was constituting its new government.

On Sunday morning, June 22, 1941, the German government implemented "Operation Barbarossa", the invasion of the Soviet Union along the Eastern front. The German Army Group, North crossed the borders of Lithuania at Tilsit, East Prussia and drove the 65 kilometers to Shkudvil, arriving in the afternoon of June 22. (According to one eyewitness the date was June 24.) The Russian army did not in any meaningful way oppose the Germans. Most just surrendered or quickly retreated. The people of Shkudvil and the occupying Germans lived in a relatively peaceful coexistence for the next two or three weeks. Then on July 16, the Lithuanian government, through some of its Lithuanian auxiliary police in conjunction with the occupying German army and Einsatzkommando, called all the people in Shkudvil together at the center of the town. This included both the Jewish and non-Jewish men, women, and children of the village. The Lithuanian paramilitary organization and the German Einsatzkommando then separated Jews and non-Jews. The non-Jews were all told to go home, leaving only the Jewish people of Shkudvil standing there in

the center of the village. While there the Jews were harassed and tortured by many of the Lithuanians. They ripped the beard from a Rabbi and then killed Reb Hillel Zilberg with shotgun. The famous Gaon Rabbi Abraham Yitzchak Pearlman was dragged out of his home that Friday, and after being tortured was brutally murdered. The Jewish men were then separated from the women and children. The Lithuanians had to use force to make this final separation and many of the people were kicked and beaten. Finally, when all of the Jewish men were separated from their wives and their mothers and their children, they were walked a few kilometers south into the Puzai Forest and shot until all were dead. Almost all of the Jewish men of Shkudvil were murdered that day, only a very few were able to escape. Later on July 21, some of the communal leaders, Gaon Reb Moshe Baruch Braude, Benyamin Stein, Shmuel Eli Brett and Yaakov Dorfman were taken to the cemetery of Upyna and brutally murdered together with Upyner Jews including their Rabbi Yitzchak Yoffe. These same procedures were used in 180 villages throughout Lithuania, and throughout the rest of the Pale for the mass annihilation of the Jewish population. In 1941, many of the Propp family who had remained in Europe, lived in village of Taurage (Tavrig) and cities of Kaunas (Kovno), Lithuania and Königsberg, Germany.

A few days after the men were taken to the Puzai Forest and murdered, a long row of empty wagons entered Shkudvil and stopped next to or in front of every Jewish home in the village. The older people, the women and the children, who were Jewish, were loaded on to the wagons along with what meager belongings they could bring. The long line of wagons took them to the train station in Batakiai (Batok). All during this period the Germans and Lithuanians were still hunting down the few Jewish men who had escaped and were in hiding. Most of the men were caught and taken to the village of Upyna and killed.

The elderly Jewish people, the women and children were kept prisoners for some time at Batok. The stronger ones were made to work for Lithuanian farmers in the area. They were guarded by the Lithuanian auxiliary police and were constantly being harassed by Lithuanian gangs. Feige Schertz, sister of Leon Brett, and Mrs. Braude gave birth while there without any medical assistance. In the middle part of September, some of the Lithuanian guards told the prisoners there, that they too were to be killed soon. Many of the woman tried to run and escape, but only a very few succeeded, most were either recaptured or shot. Some did manage to escape. One women is still living in Israel and one is living in Vilnius. On September 15, 1941, the remaining 800 Jews were taken to the Gryblaukis forest, twenty-two kilometers northeast of Tavrig, and murdered in a most hideous and cruel manner. In the darkness of that cold night in the forest one could hear the moaning and cries of "*Shema Yisroel*" from the throats of the dying and martyred woman and children.

There were less than ten survivors of those who were in Shkudvil, Lithuania when the German army entered the village. All the rest were massacred and are buried in the following listed mass graves.

At least two Propps were fortunate to either not be in Shkudvil at the time or escaped. First, Itzig Propp, who was about thirty years old and lived with his Uncle Naftali Propp, who owned a cloth store and had a large house on the square in Shkudvil, met Leon Brett outside

of Shkudvil on June 21 or 22, 1941. Leon Brett had a new English bicycle and was riding it towards Russia to escape the Germans. They traveled together for some time heading northeast toward Russia . One night as they approached the village of [Kelm], Lithuania they stopped and hid in what looked like an empty barn. The barn was full of Jewish people who were huddled together and were trying to hide from the Germans. The next day Itzig wanted to continue; Leon felt more secure in the barn with the others. After another day Leon Brett felt lonely and left the barn to catch up with Itzig. All the people in that barn were found by the Lithuanians and murdered. Itzig and Leon arrived in Siauliai, Lithuania which is about 75 kilometers north east of Shkudvil. Leon Brett stayed and after two years of being a prisoner in the Shavli (Siauliai) ghetto that was established there, finally escaped and joined the Jewish partisan forces in Lithuania. Itzig Propp went on to Russia and finally to Israel. Yankel Propp, who was an esteemed scholar and teacher was not in Shkudvil at this time but was able to flee into Russia. Yankel Propp was a very ardent Zionist and a leader in the movement before the war. He too went on to Israel and lived there. Yankel Propp lives in Apartment in Jerusalem. After the war Itzig lived with a Lithuanian family in Shkudvil and died in 1994 in Tavrig. The Propp family in Shkudvil prior to World War II was said to be a prominent and well known family in the area*.

*Included are first hand accounts by Mr. Leon Brett, A Shkudvilian and Holocaust survivor, who now lives in Johnstown, Pennsylvania.

A List of the Mass Burial Sites for the Jewish People of Shkudvil, Lithuania

1. The **Puzai Forest** four kilometers from Shkudvil. Three hundred men are buried here. They were murdered on July 15, 1941.
2. The **Gryblaukis Forest in Batakiai** , twenty-two kilometers north-east of Tavrig on the Tavrig-Shkudvil road. One thousand Eight Hundred women and children are buried here They were murdered September 21, 1941.
3. The **Town of Upyna** , Within the Jewish Cemetery, there are one hundred victims buried there. They were murdered in the latter part June in 1941.

The Shkudvil Jewish Cemetery

In Avraham Tory's book **Surviving the Holocaust, The Kovno Ghetto Diary,** it is mentioned that in August of 1942: "Two sisters had arrived in the Ghetto from Shkudvil. They were saved by a miracle. Until now they had been hiding in peasant houses." That was about one year after Shkudvil and those Jewish people left had been destroyed, by the Nazis. Very few Jews escaped the annihilation of Shkudvil or Lithuania. Only 6,000 to 7,000 survived out of the over 240,000 Jewish people who lived in Lithuania before the war.

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Prior to the war, eighty percent of the youth were affiliated with Zionist organizations. Many joined pioneer training and made Aliyah to Eretz Yisrael. Others immigrated to the United States, Sweden, Norway, South Africa, South America and many other countries.

Almost every member of the community belonged to a society for Torah study, such as *Mishnayot, Chayei Adam, Menorot Hamaor, Tiferot Bachurim,* or *Shas,* led by Leibchik, the clock maker, Yosef Yavetz and Benyamin Stein. Their was also a "*Daf*" (daily-page) for scholars, led by Hirsh Lifshitz, Moshe-Baruch Braude and Eliezer Fein. There was a Jewish Peoples Bank, which was administered by Meier Krom and there was a Beit Midrash, founded in 5626/1866 and a Synagogue. The charitable organizations included *Chevra Kadisha, Lechem Aniim*, and *Bikur Holim.*

Among the earliest rabbis in the village of Shkudvil were Rabbi Moshe Lurie, who served between 1820 and 1830. Rabbi Lurie died about 1835. He was the son of Rabbi Todres Ben Orvm Lurie. Rabbi Todres passed away in 1818. Later came Rabbi Moshe Ben Lazer who died in 1889. His son Rabbi Eliyahu-Yazber-Ber came to Shkudvil by 1913. Before this, he was in Yanashouk. Between the two World Wars, when Lithuania was an independent country, there were two small Yeshivas in Shkudvil. They were supervised by Rabbi Shmuel Sachs, Rabbi Eliyahu-Dovid Katz, and Rabbi Yaakov Levy. Later Rabbi Perlman also supervised the Yeshiva.

A few of the more well known natives of Shkudvil are:

- The Gaon Rabbi Michal Slapobersky - Rosh Yeshiva Tiferet Zvi in Jerusalem, and patriarch of a large Rabbinical family in Israel. Rabbi Michel passed away during Yom Kipper, 1995. Rabbi Slapobersky's mother was Hinda-Rivka Propp, daughter of Reb Shimon and Gitel Prop.
- Rabbi Yitzchak Katz - Head of a Kollel in Petach Tikva.
- Dr. Moshe Zilberg, who was born in 1900, became the Chief Judge of the High Court of Jerusalem. Dr. Zilberg was a lecturer at the Hebrew University and he was also an

author. He wrote in the Jerusalem press about the justice system.

- Simon Fishman was born in 1878. His maternal grandmother was Rivka Prop Davidzon, daughter of Shimel Probnovich. He came to the United States at the age of 13 in 1892 with his mother and father. He started from Tennessee as a peddler at a very young age and traveling in Oklahoma and Texas selling his wares such as pins and needles from a donkey's back. He later moved to Sidney, Nebraska and opened a mercantile store. He served as Mayor of Sidney. Simon Fishman then moved to Tribune, Kansas and became a world famous agriculturist, who introduced wheat farming to western Kansas. Mr. Fishman built the first grain elevator in Tribune, Kansas and in 1926 shipped one million tons of wheat from there, when ten years prior not one grain of wheat was shipped from western Kansas. In 1933 he became a State Senator for Kansas. He was important in establishing the AAA under the Franklin D. Roosevelt administration during the great depression of the 1930's and was good friends of Herbert Wallace and Will Rogers. Mr. Fishman passed away in Denver, Colorado in 1956.

- Rabbi Shard-Feul Shapiro was born in 1900. He attended and taught in a Yeshiva in Belgium. He also studied at Telz and other Yeshivas throughout Lithuania. Rabbi Shapiro was murdered in a Nazi concentration camp in 1940.

- Rabbi Chaim Meier Greenberg was a renowned Talmud scholar. He taught in Yeshivas throughout Lithuania. His father, Moshe-Zvi, said that he was the "Shkudvilen of the time" on Jewish matters.

- Rabbi Shule-Yitzchak (Solomon Isaac) Sheinfeld was born in 1860. In 1891 he immigrated to the United States. A few years later he became a Rabbi in Louisville, Kentucky. He then moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin and worked there for over 40 years. He was descended from a family that has contributed many scholars and spiritual leaders to the world. His father, Aaron Scheinfeld was a Talmudic scholar, maskil and the Governmental Rabbi of Shkudvil, in charge of recording births, weddings, deaths, and other legal documents. Another of Rabbi Sheinfeld's ancestors was the distinguished Rabbi of the seventeenth century, Zebi Hirshe Ashkenazi better known as Chacham Zevi. Rabbi Sheinfeld passed away in Milwaukee in 1943.

- Rabbi Abraham Yitzchak Perlman was born in 1913 in Telz, a small village in Lithuania. Later Rabbi Perlman became a very elite scholar and writer. He was thirteen, when he remarkably wrote a Torah in 1926 at the distinguished Slabodka Yeshiva located in a suburb of Kovno, (Kaunas), Lithuania.

- Telz Yeshiva was founded in 1881. It remained open until World War II, when the surviving faculty founded the Telzer Rabbinical College in Cleveland, Ohio. Rabbi Chaim Stein from Shkudvil became a Mashgiach there. Rabbi Stein still lives in Cleveland and in 1991 he visited Lithuania and Shkudvil. He told me that there are no Jewish people living in Shkudvil anymore, but that the mass grave sites of the Jewish people, who were murdered there, are being maintained by the Lithuanian Government.

The New Stone Shule

Sources

This information was compiled from various books, magazines and papers from Hebrew, Yiddish, English, and Lithuanian sources. Also from first hand spoken commentary:

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In Loving Memory Waldheim Cemetery, Chicago, Illinois (800) 222-4541