

“Raguva” - Encyclopedia of Jewish Communities in Lithuania (Lithuania)

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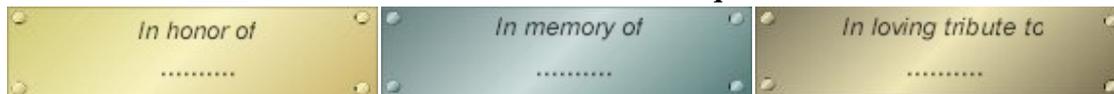
Translation of the “Raguva” chapter from
[Pinkas Hakehillot Lita](#)

Written by Josef Rosin

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Raguva

Written by Josef Rosin

Translated by **Shaul Yannai**

In Yiddish, Ragueva; in Russian, Ragovo

Small town in the Panevezys district.

Year	Total Population	Jews	Jews as Percentage of Total Population
1766		1,187*	
1847		852	
1859	465		
1897	1,763	1,223	69
1923	1,015	593	58
1940		About 500	

* Head-tax payers

Raguva is located on the bank of the Nevezis River, on the Panevezys-Vilkomir road, 28 kilometers southeast of the district city of Panevezys. An estate and district by the name of Raguva are noted in old documents starting in 1501. In 1610, Raguva is already mentioned as a town. In the 17th century, the town belonged to the Uginsky noble family. Between 1795-1915 Raguva was under Russian rule, first within the region of Vilnius, and from 1843 in the Kaunas region. The town developed in the 19th century and became the center of the district. In January 1919, Soviet rule was organized in the city that lasted for 4 months. During independent Lithuania (1918-1940) Raguva was a district center. For many years there was no road or railway line that connected the town to neighboring cities. There was also no electricity. In winter, Raguva was almost completely isolated from the world. In the 30's a bus line was opened during the summer to Panevezys.

The Jewish Settlements Till After World War I

Apparently Jews began to settle in Raguva during the 17th century. This is evident from the old headstones in the old cemetery there. Among them were also headstones of the Jews of

Panevezys, who did not have their own cemetery and who buried their dead in Raguva. It is known that in the 17th century a number of Karaite families also lived in the town.

The economic situation of the Jews of Raguva was fairly good until WWI. They traded with the estate owners in the area and made a decent living. Raguva also had a leather factory and one for bristles and brushes. Both belonged to Jews and employed about 100 people. In addition, there were artisans and peddlers in Raguva, most of them staying throughout the week in the villages, returning home only for the Sabbath. The great number of Jewish workers in a town whose Jews were orthodox left its imprint on the public life there. This was especially felt after 1915, when revolutionary activities began in Russia. One Sabbath in 1905, a member of the “Bund” stood on the pulpit in the synagogue, pulled out a revolver, and gave a fiery speech against the Czar. But with the advent of Zionism public opinion in town leaned towards Zionism. Jews from Raguva arrived in Eretz-Yisrael prior to “Chibat Zion”. In Mount of Zion in Jerusalem there are at least two headstones of Raguva descendents that died in 1864 and 1881.

The centers of Jewish life in Raguva were the old wooden synagogue, with a beautifully carved Holy Ark, built in the 18th century, and the big Beit Midrash built at the end of the 19th century as a majestic Beit Khoma. Among the rabbis who served in Raguva during this period were: Rabbi Binyamin Rabinovitz (served between 1859-1861), known for his dispute with the Maskilim, especially against M.L. Lilinblum; Rabbi Shneur-Zalman Hirshovitz (died in 1904), student and friend of Rabbi Israel Salanter; Rabbi Mordechai Rabinovitz (served between 1864-1885).

The names of several Raguva Jews are mentioned in the list of donators for those struck by hunger in Lithuania in 1872. Yehuda Gan was in charge of donations.

At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century two big fires broke out in the town, each time burning half of the town's homes. In the 1905 fire, 100 houses were burned.

In the beginning of WWI, on May 1915, the Russian military authorities exiled the Jews of Raguva into the interior of Russia. Only half of the Jews who lived in Raguva prior to the war returned to the town after the war.

The Period of Independent Lithuania

In 1919, with the declaration of autonomy for the Jews, a ruling committee of 9 members was elected in Raguva. The committee was active in most areas of Jewish life in the town until 1925.

During this period, the Jews of Raguva made their living through commerce, peddling and crafts. There were also several families in the agriculture business. The weekly market days in the town, and the fairs held 3 times a year, were a very important source of livelihood for them.

According to the 1931 census, conducted by the Lithuanian government, there were 12 shops and businesses in Raguva, 11 of them (92%) owned by Jews. The business branches were divided as shown in the table below:

Branch or Type of Business	Total	Owned by Jews
Eggs	2	2
Restaurants and taverns	1	0
Clothing, furs and textiles	5	5
Footwear, leather and shoemaking	2	2
Sewing machines and electrical equipment	1	1
Medicine and cosmetics	1	1

According to the same census there were 2 flourmills owned by Jews in Raguva.

In 1937, there were in Raguva 18 Jewish artisans: 6 shoemakers, 3 barbers, 2 glass cutters, 2 blacksmiths, 2 tinsmiths, an oven maker, a tailor and a shoe stitcher.

The "Folksbank", established in Raguva 1924, played an important role in the economic life of the Jews of the town. In 1927 it listed 98 members. In 1939 there were 56 telephones in Raguva, only 2 belonged to Jews (a merchant and a doctor).

From the middle of the 30's the number of Jews in the town decreased gradually. The economic crisis that beset Lithuania and the open propaganda of the Lithuanian Union of Merchants (Verslas) against buying from Jews hurt the Jewish merchants badly. Some Jews were also physically wounded. In 1927 and 1939 there were pogroms in Raguva: the mob attacked the Jews in the streets and homes. Firefighter guards, who were all Jews, prevented bloodshed. The youth sought a way out and many of them went to Eretz-Yisrael or immigrated to the United States and South Africa.

During this period, there was a Hebrew elementary school in Raguva as part of the "Tarbut" network. It was established in 1925 and about 100 children studied there. Until the beginning of the 30's there were two libraries in Raguva: one initiated by the Z" S (Zionist Socialist) party, the other by the Yiddisher "Liebhaber fun Wissen" (Seekers of Knowledge). Due to various reasons, the latter was closed down and only the Z" S library remained which had about 600 books in Hebrew and Yiddish. From time to time there were also lectures, "public trials" and an amateur theater.

The old synagogue and the Beit Midrash were the center of the religious life in the town during this period as well. The synagogue attracted tourists, Jews and non-Jews, who came to admire the artistic carving in it. During the same period a number of organizations, "Ein Yakov" and others, were teaching Mishna and Talmud. Raguva had many who were "Bnei Torah" (Versed in Judaism) and Talmidei Hakhamim (scholars). Among the Rabbis who served in Raguva during this period were: Rabbi Moshe-Mishel-Shemuel Shapira, who published many books (served in Raguva from 1887 till his death in Raguva in 1933); Rabbi Israel Mel, who was Raguva's last Rabbi and was murdered by the Lithuanians during the Holocaust.

A number of welfare institutions were active in Raguva: "Ezra" (Help), the "Gemilut Hesed" (Charity) Fund and "Linat Zedek" (Hospice for the Poor). Many of Raguva's Jews belonged to the Zionist camp. The number of Jews who bought the "Shekel" ("a quasi membership card of the Zionist society") increased with the years. The Z" S party was the most active in Raguva and initiated most of the cultural activities in the town. The "Mizrahi", the General

Zionists and others also had branches. During the 20's and 30's the distribution of the votes to the Zionist Congresses in Raguva was as shown in the table below:

Congress Nr.	Year	Total Shekalim	Total Voters	Labor Party		Revisionists	General Zionists		Grosmanists	Mizrachi
				Z'S	Z'Z		A	B		
15	1927	44	41	9	23		2			7
16	1929	107	62	20	34		1			7
17	1931	47	42	16	18		1			7
18	1933		85	83			2			
19	1935	160	160	107				1	12	40

Among the Zionist Youth Organizations that were active in Raguva were: "Gordonia" with 40 members, "Dror" with 50 members, "Hashomer Hatzair", "Nezach" and "Hechalutz Hatzair".

Distinguished Jews born in Raguva were: Yehoshua Plovitz (1875-1937), author of, among others, "The Oath", which became the anthem of Poalei Zion. He immigrated to the United States in 1906 and published poetry and essays; Michael Higger (1898-1952), a scholar in Jewish studies, published a critical edition of Talmudic Literature; Yecheskel Yafe (1858-1910), one of the most important communal workers in Kaunas; A. Lazaroff, a communal worker, one of the organizers of the national banks in Lithuania; Hanach Stein (born in 1910), from 1929 in Baltimore, published essays, stories and poetry in Yiddish.

During World War II and Afterwards

In 1940 Lithuania was annexed by the Soviet Union, becoming a Soviet Republic. The flourmills belonging to Jews and most of the shops were nationalized. All Zionist parties and youth organizations were disbanded. The Hebrew educational institutions were closed. The supply of goods decreased and prices rose sharply as a result. The middle class, composed mostly of Jews, suffered a severe setback and its standard of living dropped gradually.

The war between Germany and the Soviet Union broke out on June 22, 1941. A few days later, on June 26, the German military entered Raguva. At that time there was already an organization of Lithuanians that placed itself at the service of the occupying rule. This unit specialized in murdering Jews.

The first to be arrested and murdered were young Jews and those that were in some way linked to the Soviet rule.

In the middle of August, the entire community, men, women, elderly and small children, were transferred to the district city of Panevezys, where they were placed in a ghetto. On August 24-25 (1-2 Elul, 5701) the Raguva Jews together with the Panevezys Jews were taken to the Pajuoste forest, 8 kilometers east of the city, and were murdered there. After the war the Soviet government uncovered a mass grave at that place. Inside were almost 8000 victims.

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