

FAMILY ORIGINS

The Khazanovich family, like other Ashkenazi Jewish families, probably lived in Western Europe at one time. By the early 900s, Jewish populations were well established in Northern Europe, and later followed the Norman Conquest into England in 1066, also settling in the Rhineland. The term Ashkenazi is thought to come from the Medieval Hebrew word for “Germany.”

The Khazanovich family has an additional clue as to its origins. DNA suggests that the earliest male ancestor of the line was, in fact, of Western European, rather than Jewish genetic origins, and further places the family in that region. (Read more under *Family DNA*.)

With the onset of the Crusades, and the expulsions from England (1290), France (1394), and parts of Germany (1400s), Jewish migration pushed eastward into Poland, Lithuania, and Russia. Jewish immigrants were welcomed, first as tax collectors.

The Khazanovich family probably settled in Lithuania, or possibly Poland, along with the other Jews migrating from the west, between 1300 and 1600.

In the 1300s, the Grand Principality of Lithuania was a large country, as shown in this map from 1360 (Lithuania is light green) and was united with its more powerful neighbor to the west, the Kingdom of Poland, forming the Commonwealth of Poland and Lithuania. The northwest part of the Grand Principality, where our ancestors were eventually located, was relatively desolate at this time. It was an area of deep forests, lakes, and swampland.



1360 Map of Europe

Lithuanian Jews flourished in the 1300s under the tolerant rule of King Gediminas, and migrants poured into the area, where they found prosperity. Towns began appearing in the 1550s, on the

lands belonging to local families or barons. Historical evidence shows synagogues appearing in towns by the 1600s and 1700s. Poland/Lithuania became the new cultural center for Ashkenazic Jewish life. The Jews at this time were largely middle class. By choice, they mostly lived in self-contained communities, seeking to protect themselves from outside influences, such as the intense attempts to convert Jews.

Many Jews lived in *shtetls*, small towns where the majority of the inhabitants were Jewish. They set up communities (kahals) like those in the Middle Ages, electing a board of trustees to collect taxes, set up education systems and deal with other necessities of Jewish life.

Through the 1600s their situation continued to be better than that of Jews in Poland, or in Western Europe. Jews were involved in money lending, which served as a primitive but badly needed banking system. They developed barter trade among peasants and serfs. In 1644 they were given rights to deal on the behalf of nobles in furs, clothes, linen, silver, gold, mead, flax, and spices. They could also sell meat, and could sell alcoholic beverages wholesale or in cities. "When working for Christians, they were restricted to specialized trades for which no guilds existed, e.g. jewelry, fur, and glass; for fellow Jews they could perform any type of work." At the same time, Jews were forbidden to rent or buy houses outside their defined area of residence. And while Western Europe was moving toward the modern era, medieval feudalism still flourished in Lithuania. Most land belonged to nobles or the Crown.

In the last half of the 1600s a Cossack invasion of Poland sent thousands of Jews into Lithuania, where they were welcomed and given aid. Then the Russian army invaded Lithuania too, and the Jews faced a wave of killing and destruction, followed by plagues and epidemics. By 1665 a rising Christian middle class was exerting efforts to put restrictions on Jews, such as excluding them from trade in certain items. At the same time the authority of the kahal was beginning to collapse. In the 1700s the Commonwealth itself began to fall apart. Reduced economic opportunities led to more anti-Jewish sentiment and restrictions increased. It was also a period when great fires destroyed Jewish areas.

Despite these troubles, the Jewish communities were growing. The first Lithuanian census was taken in 1765. At that time there were 76,500 Jews of whom 27,000 lived in Vilnius Province.

Finally, Russia, Prussia and Austria stepped in and partitioned the lands of the Commonwealth, taking control. The first partition was in 1772, and the final partition in 1795. In 1795 the region to the west of the Nemunas (or Nemans) River became part of New East Prussia. Regions to the east became part of Russia. The Khazanovich family probably lived to the east of the Nemunas River, in what became Russia, or in the area around Bialystok, which was later added to the Russian empire (see below).

After obtaining these lands, Catherine II of Russia restricted Jews to reside in these annexed territories, and in territories taken from the Turks to the South. These territories constituted the Pale of Settlement. Jews could travel and locate freely within the Pale, but only a limited number of categories of Jews were allowed to live outside the Pale, or to live in designated cities within the Pale.

On incorporation into Catherine II's Russia, all Jews were asked to declare themselves as burghers or merchants, which required payment of a fee to join a guild. Subsequent laws and expulsions from villages were attempts to get rid of the poorer Jews.

In 1804, for example, laws were aimed at Jews in villages, forbidding them to sell liquor (40% had made a living in liquor production and lease holding of agricultural lands), to lease inns or hostelries, and then finally requiring 100,000 families to relocate.

The laws were often initially unenforced, but their reissuance over the years caused migrations away from agricultural areas and into towns, and, along with the loss of traditional livelihoods,

poverty and overcrowding. “The density of the Jewish population in the Pale led to fierce economic competition. There were 3 times as many unskilled laborers, skilled workers, and cottage industrialists as were needed to meet the population’s needs. From 1808 onward, when records became available, some 45% of the Jewish labor force was idle and more than 35% of Jewish families in the Pale appealed to Jewish welfare institutions at least once.” (*The Jews of Lithuania*, by Masha Greenbaum.)

The borders of the Pale changed over time. In 1807 Napoleon had seized most of the country of New East Prussia and renamed it the Grand Duchy of Warsaw. Part of this seized land (the Bialystok Department) was ceded to Russia and added to the Pale of Settlement.

After Napoleon was defeated by Russia in the War of 1812, the Congress of Vienna Treaty made most of the remainder of the Duchy part of Poland. It was in turn absorbed into the Russian Empire as "Congress Poland" or "Russian Poland." (These appear as the Western provinces of Warsaw, Kalisz, Kielce, Lomza, Lublin, Piotrkow, Plock, Radom, Suwalki, and Siedlece, in the next map.) The region was not yet added to the Pale, however, and Jews couldn’t settle across the borders.

In the 1820s there were more expulsions from cities and villages, and a famine in Belorussia caused more Jews to move to Lithuanian towns that offered community assistance. A cousin of the family, Hirsh Khazanovich, was expelled from the village of Rusot or Rusoti, possibly at this time. (See the *Speculative Early Family Tree* for where Hirsh may have fit into the family.) He took his family to the nearby large town of Grodno (now Hrodna). It’s possible that ancestor Yudel Khazanovich came from this same area.

Conditions within the Pale of Settlement were to deteriorate in the 1830s through mid 1850s. The first Polish uprisings of 1830-1831 caused oppressive government decrees and expulsions for some Jews.

More migrations were caused in 1843 when a Russian edict demanded that no Jews live within 50 miles of the border of East Prussia. The rule of Nicholas I from 1825 to 1855 was particularly onerous. “The general thrust of Nicholas I’s Jewish legislation was to reduce their numbers in the Russian Empire, forcibly reeducate them so as to deprive them of their individuality, and thereby render them ‘harmless to Christians, both economically and morally.’ The first action of this kind, taken in 1827, was a ukase prescribing the conscription of all Jewish boys at the age of twelve for a period of 25 years.” The object was forced conversion. Each Jewish community was given a quota of “Nicholas soldiers” to provide, a quota that was much higher than for Christians. Jewish boys of 8 or 9 were sometimes kidnapped by professionals “khapers” to fill the quota.

In 1844 laws abolishing the kahal marked the end of Jewish autonomy. Conscription and taxation were handled by the government, using Jewish intermediaries. Large numbers of men fled across the border from Russia to Prussia and the west to avoid conscription. (See the section on Military Conscription.)

The first Khazanovich ancestors to appear in records are Moshe and Ester Khazanovich, who appear in the town of Nemunaitis between 1835 -1844 with their daughter Sheyne. The Yiddish name for the town was Nemoneitz. They lived with Moshe's uncle, Leybe, who had settled in Nemunaitis by 1818. A Khazanovich cousin, Elyash, had also settled there by 1818. See the *Speculative Early Family Tree* for the possible connections. Nemunaitis spanned the Nemunas River, so it was initially unclear whether the family lived on the west side, in what was Russian Poland, or on the east side, in Russia. The discovery of their names on Russian Revision Lists (census records) written in Russian, rather than Polish, suggested the family probably lived on the east side of the river.

The family appears on the 1850 Revision List (which refers to their presence during the prior 1845 census) and in the 1858 Revision List, but without Moshe and Ester’s sons appearing. Many

boys and men were hidden from the government officials, either by leaving town, living under a different identity, or possibly bribing officials to exclude their names from government census reports. The 1850 census report (Revision List) for Nemunaitis shows about 400 Jews, and appears to be missing about 50 males, including members of the Khazanovich family.

Moshe and Ester lived in Nemunaitis during what was a period of growth of the Jewish community (despite the tyrannical rule of Nicholas I). This period saw a significant increase in Jews on the opposite (west) bank of the Nemunas River in Russian Poland, outside the Pale. (These settlements became communities in Suwalki Province.)

It is unknown where Moshe and Ester had lived prior to their move to Nemunaitis. Because of restrictions on movement within the Pale, if they lived on the east side of Nemunaitis in 1845, Moshe and Ester would have had to move to there from somewhere else within the Pale (which at the time excluded Russian Poland).

It's possible that they came from the area of Hrodna (Grodno on the map below), about 43 miles to the south, which was the home of cousins. See *Family Ties to Josef Chazanowicz*.

A cholera epidemic hit the Pale in 1853, when the family lived in Nemunaitis. By this time all of Moshe's and Ester's known children had been born, and it's possible that other children were lost in the epidemic.

Nicholas I died in 1855, and the period from about 1855 through 1867 brought relief and was a time of relative economic growth and prosperity for the Jews in the area. The reign of Alexander II initiated reforms and new hopes. He issued changes to conscription that treated Jews and Christians the same, though the enlistment period was still long (16 years) and Khazanovich males are still missing from the 1858 census, apparently in hiding. In 1862 Russian Poland was added to the Pale, and Jews were allowed to travel to and settle in Russian Poland. The Pale then had the boundaries shown in the next map.



Pale of Settlement

What had, nonetheless, been a period of growth came to an end in 1868-69 when the last of the great Polish uprisings in the region was suppressed by the Russians, and a famine hit the area, which caused diseases such as "hunger typhoid." The newspaper HaMagid published in East Prussia formed a special relief committee to help the area. The famine undermined the economic and population growth of the prior 15 years. In 1871 Moshe's second wife died of a form of malnutrition. This was followed by another cholera epidemic in 1872, when 24 people in the Jewish community, age 2 weeks to 85 years, died in June and July. [The total Jewish population may have been about 500 at this time.]

In 1874 Alexander II instituted a general draft for all men aged 20, and the period of service was also reduced to 6 to 12 years (depending on the source of information.) More males appear on Russian government records from this period, apparently out of hiding, including several males in the Khazanovich family. Still, various schemes still went into effect to avoid conscription. The most popular departure route was to cross into Prussia from neighboring Suwalki or Kovno provinces.

Jews were still living in poverty, often multiple families to a room, eating "bread with radish, onion, garlic or pickled herring. Families of poor craftsmen eat nothing all day until father comes home." In 1874 and 1875 six children in the community died of smallpox.

From what we know of the Khazanovich family, they had humble occupations and lived in small towns or villages. They were probably poor, like most Jews forced to live in the Pale. And as was common in the shtetl, the children probably worked to help the family survive. Moshe himself was a Hebrew teacher. His daughter Sheyne's husband Khaym was a day laborer at one point. Both of these occupations were occupations of the very poor. Moshe's son Yehuda was involved in fur trading, and later owned cattle and a tannery, and though this might have indicated a slight improvement in his lot, tanning hides would not have been pleasant or envied work. Sheyne's son Mikhl worked for a landowner. Her stepson's in-laws (the Kushnerovich family) were shoemakers. (See *Notes on Life in the Shtetl, Occupations.*)



A typical Lithuanian town or shtetl

With the assassination of Alexander II in 1881, his son Alexander III initiated reactionary policies, including repressive laws (the May Laws) and government-supported pogroms.

In about 1886, and perhaps spurred by these events, Moshe's son Yehuda moved 6 miles across the Nemunas River into Suwalki Province in Russian Poland, and settled in the town of Miroslavas (in Polish, Miroslaw). Russian Poland was in general less restrictive than Russia.

The appearance of two family members on a ship manifest in 1898 suggests that when they moved to Russian Poland, they adopted the Polish spelling of the name with the "wicz" ending instead of the Russian "vich." It appeared as Chasanowicz.

In about the same time period Sheyne's (Jennie's) son Mikhl settled in Aleksotas. This town spanned the Nemunas River, with part in Suwalki Province and part in Russia. It is likely that Mikhl lived in the Russian part of the town in Kovno Province).

The complex political geography explains discrepancies in some family stories and records, which reference family members being from Suwalki, Kovno, or Vilnius, or from Russia, Poland, or Russian Poland. Despite these different references, the known towns of our ancestors and their spouses were clustered in what is now southern Lithuania.

In the 1880's through about 1905 many members of the Khazanovich family immigrated to America. Repressions and pogroms of the Russian government, and fear that the onerous conscription rules would be restored under Alexander III, inspired many to emigrate. The boom in trans-Atlantic steamships and the development of railways to the departure ports made this possible. In 1862 a rail line had been built between the city of Kovno and Germany, and this was probably the route used by our ancestors. The vast majority of Jews who emigrated were, like the Khazanovich family, poor working people.

Emigration gave the anti-Semitic newspapers in Poland and Russia ammunition to use against the remaining Jews. In addition to anger that the Jews had avoided military service, there was jealousy of the good life they imagined the emigrants to be living, away from the relative poverty of Eastern Europe. During WWI, public clamoring over Jewish loyalty caused the government to evict the Jews who lived near the border areas, including those in Suwalki Province. Yehuda's family, living in Miroslavas, in Suwalki Province, relocated in anticipation of eviction prior to the war.

At the end of WWI, Suwalki Province was divided, with part joining an independent Poland and part joining an independent Lithuania. The only known family remaining in the region at that point was Yehuda's in Miroslavas, and that region became part of Lithuania. The spelling of the family name changed again, this time adopting the Lithuanian ending of "vicius," so that the name was spelled Chazanovicius.

During the difficult period of the 1930's several more family members, Yehuda's grandchildren were able to emigrate. They moved to the U.S. and Uruguay. (Golda Chazanovicius Sneider was known to have taken the railway from Kovno through Germany, to the port of Rotterdam.) Lithuanian independence was short lived, and in 1940, after a secret pact with Nazi Germany on the divisions of lands in the area, the Soviet Union occupied Lithuania.

On June 22, 1941, Germany attacked the Soviet Union and several days later occupied the whole of Lithuania. Those family members known to have remained in Lithuania died in the Holocaust, killed by the German Shooting Squads. (See the section on Fayvl's Family in Lithuania.)

It's not clear how long the Khazanovich family lived in what is now Lithuania. When discussing stories that her grandfather Yehuda Khazanovich had shared, Golda Khazanovich (Singer) Sneider said that the family had lived in Lithuania for "at least 5 or 6 generations." That is almost certainly true, because we can account for 6 generations in records in the area. But it is unknown where prior generations lived.

The Khazanovich family is now spread across the United States, with family members also living in Montevideo, Uruguay, Europe, Asia, and Israel.

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