THE ENCYCLOPEDIA OF

JEWISH LIFE

Before and During the Holocaust

Editor in Chief **Shmuel Spector**

Consulting Editor **Geoffrey Wigoder**
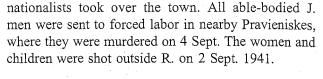
Foreword by **Elie Wiesel**

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RUMSISKES (Yid. Rumshishok) Kaunas dist., Lithuania. Jews first settled in the 19th cent. During WWI, the Russian army expelled the Jews. About half (50 families, or 42% of the total) returned. R. was a summer resort, mainly for yeshiva students and teachers. There was a Hebrew school, part of the Tarbut network, and the Zionist movement won widespread support. Relations with non-Jews were good until 1940 when the Soviet occupation brought out latent antisemitism. The J. pop. in 1938 consisted of 50 families. After the German invasion in June 1941, Lithuanian

nationalists took over the town. All able-bodied J. men were sent to forced labor in nearby Pravieniskes, where they were murdered on 4 Sept. The women and children were shot outside R. on 2 Sept. 1941.

KEDAINIAI (Yid. Keidan) Kedainiai dist., Lithuania. Jews first settled at the late 15th cent. They were expelled for a short time and then allowed to return. In the 17th cent. Prince Radziwill granted all citizens, including Jews, the right to vote while his son, Yanush, provided Jews with military training in case of emergency. Boguslav, the heir of Yanush, restricted the Jews to a ghetto, but leased his palace to a Jew, to whom he gave authority to judge and impose fines upon fellow Jews. The K. J. community was one of the original members of the J. self-governing Council of the Land of Lithuania (1623–1764). After the Council's demise, K. was the site of two more meetings of the Lithuanian J. communities. The Vilna Gaon (1720–97) was educated in K. and married a K. native. A large and beautiful synagogue was completed in 1807. A yeshiva was founded in the beginning of the 18th cent. which existed until the Holocaust. In 1884, with the help of K. natives in New York, the Ohel Moshe *talmud torah*, named for Moses Montefiore, was founded; in 1888 it became a modern school, teaching both secular and religious subjects. K. had many adherents of the Haskala movement. In the 1880s and 1890s, the economic situation and antisemitism led many to emigrate to England, the U.S., and South Africa. By 1898 there were seven synagogues. Even prior to the Hovevei Zion movement of the 1880s, some immigrated to Eretz Israel. In 1811, Shelomo Zalman Tzoref went to Palestine with other followers of the Vilna Gaon. He was the grandfather of Yoel Moshe Solomon, one of the founders of Petah Tikva. In the 1880s and 1890s, several Zionist organizations were established and many contributed to settlement funds for Eretz Israel. The J. pop. in 1897 was 3,733 (61% of the total). During WWI, the Russian army expelled the Jews to Russia; some went to Vilna. After the war most returned. Relations with the Lithuanians were good and Jews actively supported Lithuanian independence. Between the World Wars, a J. council ran the community's affairs. In 1926, two competing organizations took over its functions. Five of the 12 city councilors elected in 1931 were Jews. In the 1930s, relations with the Lithuanians worsened and J. businesses were boycotted. The community maintained

a Hebrew school, a Yiddish school, a *heder*, and a Hebrew junior high school. The Zionist movement won widespread support. Many of the youth emigrated to Palestine, the U.S., and South Africa. On the eve of the German invasion in 1941, the J. pop. was about 2,500. The Germans issued a variety of antisemitic decrees and Lithuanian nationalists introduced a regime of terror and mass arrests which led to the immediate murder of 125 J. men and women in the Babenai forest. In July, 200 Jews were killed in the Tevciunai forest. The remaining Jews were put in a ghetto, together with 1,000 Jews from surrounding towns. On 28 Aug. 1941, after 13 days without food, all were brought to Smilaga Creek, forced into pits, and shot.