

Posing for the camera in a shtetl

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The shtetl Michaleshik (pronounced Mikháleshik) was in the heart of the province of Vilna in the czarist period. In 1885, there were officially 843 inhabitants in the village, of whom around 90% were Jewish. It is a picturesque little village set in a sharp bend of the Viliya River which envelops it on two sides. For generations access from across the river was via a ferry on drag ropes. After the First World War, a bridge was built.

These photographs are from the period between the start of the First World War and the time just before the outbreak of World War II. In the interwar years Michaleshik was part of Poland. Today (known as Michalishki) it is in Belarus, not far from the border with modern Lithuania.

The village blacksmith, *Chaim der
shmid* ("Chaim the Smith"). His full
name was Chaim Weinstein. With his
wife Basye (born Gubersky).

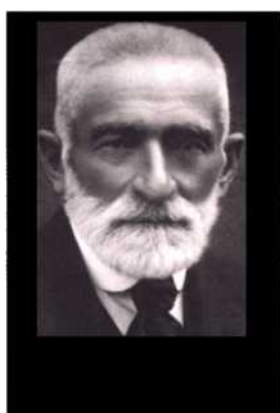


Genuine “natural photos” of shtetl Jews are hard to come by. The shtetl was poor and when a traveling photographer came to town, it was a kind of holiday. People ran for their best clothing. They were moreover in awe of the magical camera device, and often froze up in a fixed expression. The photographer frequently brought his own props, such as fancy clothing, an elaborate chair, a bicycle or tricycle, cardboard painted backgrounds and other odds and ends. The rowboat is for real, however. Rowing and swimming were beloved sports on the Viliya River, which flows into Vilna (Vilnius), and then joins the Nieman at Kovna (Kaunas). On the Lithuanian side of the border the river is now known as the Neris.

Most of these photographs were collected by Michaleshik native Esther Livingston, now of Los Angeles, California, with the assistance of her son, Professor Edward H. Livingston (UCLA), as part of an internet project to preserve the memory of the Jewish life of her native town.



Rowing on the Viliya River



Menke Katz Collection

Aaron-Velvel Gubersky, one of the leading timber merchants in town before the First World War. Like many, he was left impoverished after the war. Trees from the deep forests nearby would be cut down, and their logs rolled into the Viliya, knocked together into rafts during the spring thaw, and floated (with a sort of captain in a little booth built on to the rafts), to Vilna, Kovna, and the Baltic Sea, where they were usually loaded onto ships for faraway timber markets. Aaron-Velvel died in the mid 1920s. He had ten children.



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Frumke, the last of Aaron-Velvel Gubersky's ten children, perished in the Holocaust with her young family.



Menke Katz Collection

Another grandchild, Menke Katz, who went on to become "the poet of Michaleshik" in America where his family migrated in 1920 (see p. 267). He died in 1991.



Aaron-Velvel's grandson, Eltshik Chait. The picture was for his bride, Dveirke Ozhinsky, but he died at the age of seventeen, before the wedding. Dveirke perished in the Holocaust in 1941, but her niece, Tsila Bikson Guterman survived, and was the last Jew in Svintsyánke (Švenčionėliai) until her death in 2007.

Unnamed residents of the
village of Michaleshik...
*from the Esther and Edward
Livingstone Collection in Los
Angeles, California*



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Aaron-Velvel Gubersky's
granddaughter Blumke Rogovsky
(later Laxer). Her mandolin is for
real. Mandolin playing (using a
local system of numbers for notes)
was very widespread. She
emigrated as a young woman to
Israel and lived to the mid 1990s.



Unnamed residents of the
village of Michaleshik...
*from the Esther and Edward
Livingstone Collection in Los
Angeles, California*



Unnamed residents of the
village of Michaleshik...
*from the Esther and Edward
Livingstone Collection in Los
Angeles, California*



Unnamed residents of
The village of Michaleshik...
*From the Abrashke Rogovsky
Collection (Tel Aviv)*



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Lithuanian Jewish Culture

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עם החפלות עפי' נוסח אשכנז הנהוג בארצנו

עם הבאורים

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Lithuanian Jewish Culture
by Dovid Katz

BALTOS LANKOS of Vilnius is proud to publish Dovid Katz's monumental Lithuanian Jewish Culture. It is the most comprehensive work ever to appear in English on the cultural, linguistic and spiritual worlds of the Litvaks.

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This 400 page volume contains 325 rare photographic images collected by the author, many appearing in print for the first time. There are also 26 maps and charts, all of which are newly produced specially for this volume by Dr. Giedrė Beconytė of Vilnius University's Center for Cartography.



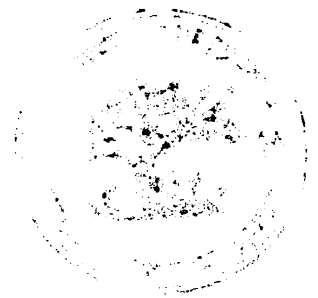
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