

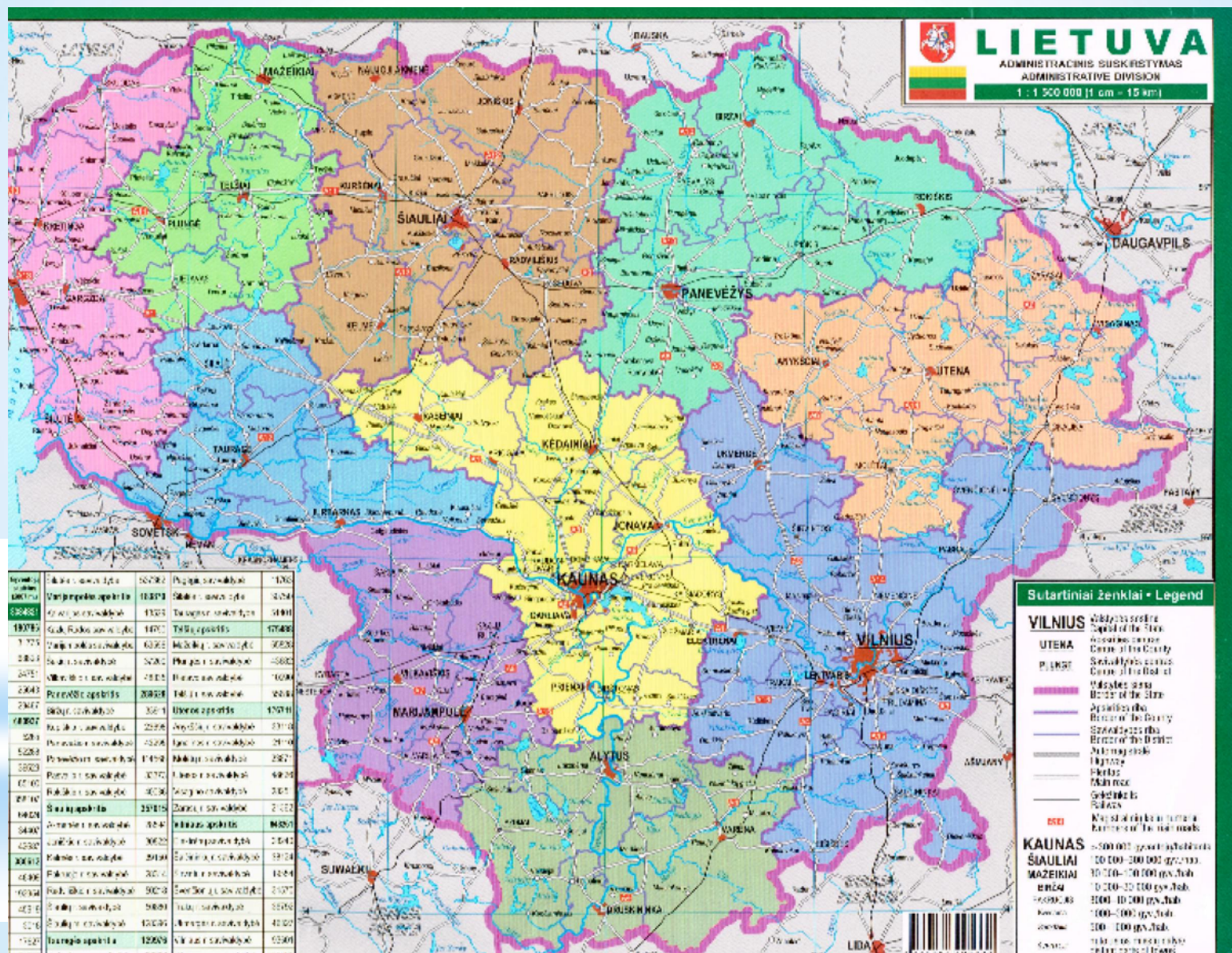
Lithuanian Heritage Trip

June 25-July 5, 2013

Pat & Ralph Fuller

Trip Organizers

- “ Sponsored by JewishGen.org
(<http://www.jewishgen.org>)
- “ Arranged by Lithuanian Holidays, Vilnius, Lithuania,
on behalf of Margol/Freedman Group, Atlanta,
Georgia (<http://www.litvaktrip.peggyspage.org/>)
- “ Funded by American Fund for Lithuanian-Latvian
Jews, Atlanta, Georgia
- “ Howard & Esther Margol started these trips 20 years
ago



June 25-30, Vilnius (Vilna)

- “ Capital of Lithuania & largest city
- “ Napoleon called it “Jerusalem of the North”
- “ Population over 520,000 (2000 Jews)
- “ Population of Lithuania declining, both from emigration & declining birth rate (“brain drain”)



Jewish Holocaust Museum

("The Green House")

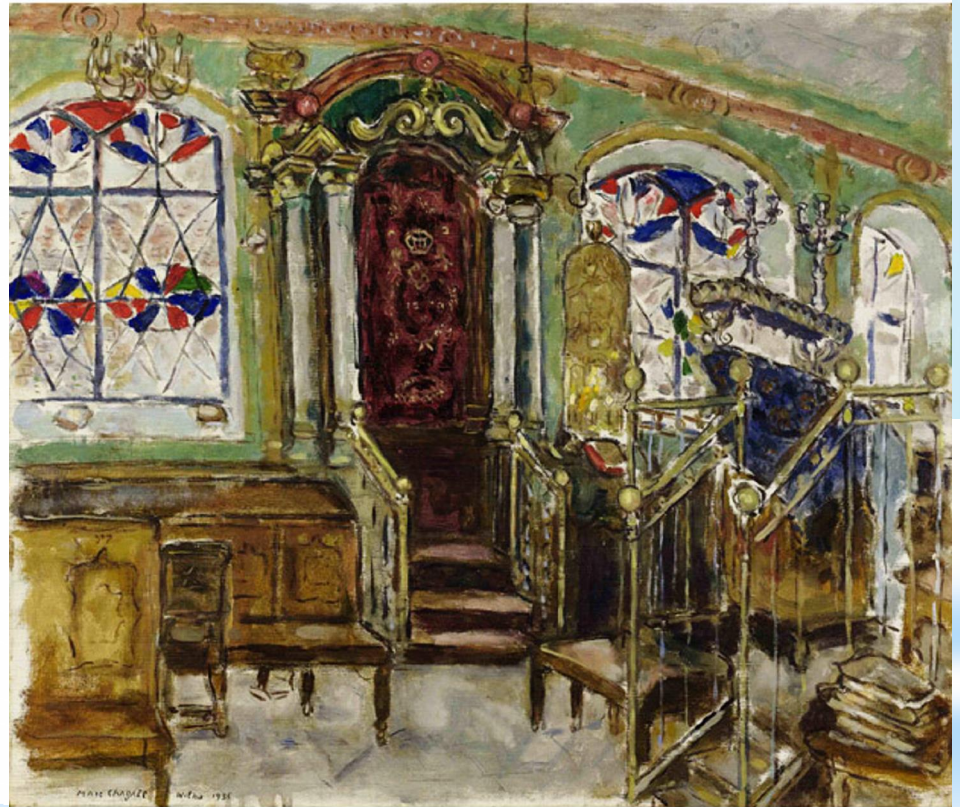
- " Out-of-the-way location
- " Not part of Museum of Genocide Survivors
- " Began as Soviet Museum of Revolution
- " Given to Jews in 1989
- " Founders were Holocaust survivors
- " 95% of Lithuanian Jews did not survive
- " <http://defendinghistory.com/the-green-house>



Tolerance Center

Of the Vilna Gaon State Jewish Museum

- “ Exhibitions focus on heritage of art & culture of Litvaks (Lithuanian Jews)
- “ Artists currently on display:
 - Cecile Reims
 - Miriam Meras
 - Gerardus Bagdonavicius
 - Samuel Bak
 - Marc Chagall 1935 painting of interior of Great Synagogue (destroyed)
- “ Testimonies from children who survived the Holocaust



Pits at Ponar (Paneriai)

- “ 6.2 miles from Vilnius
- “ Site of mass executions of 70,000 Jews (100,000 people) between 1941-1944
- “ Monument says, in Lithuanian, English & Russian: “Eternal memory of 70,000 Jews of Vilnius and its environs who were murdered and burnt here in Paneriai by Nazi executioners and their accomplices.”



Jewish Cemetery

- “ Saltonishkiu Cemetery, 3rd Jewish cemetery of Vilnius
- “ Only functioning Jewish cemetery in Vilnius today
- “ In custody of Jewish Community of Lithuania since 2000
- “ Remains of Vilna Gaon buried here, in large walk-in crypt
- “ In addition to Hebrew & Lithuanian, many stones are in Russian



Lithuanian State Historical Archives

- “ Main repository of records of Lithuanian history from 13th century to 1918
- “ Also contains civil registry & vital records up to present
- “ One of several state archives in Vilnius; this one contains the oldest documents
- “ Also 10 county archives throughout Lithuania



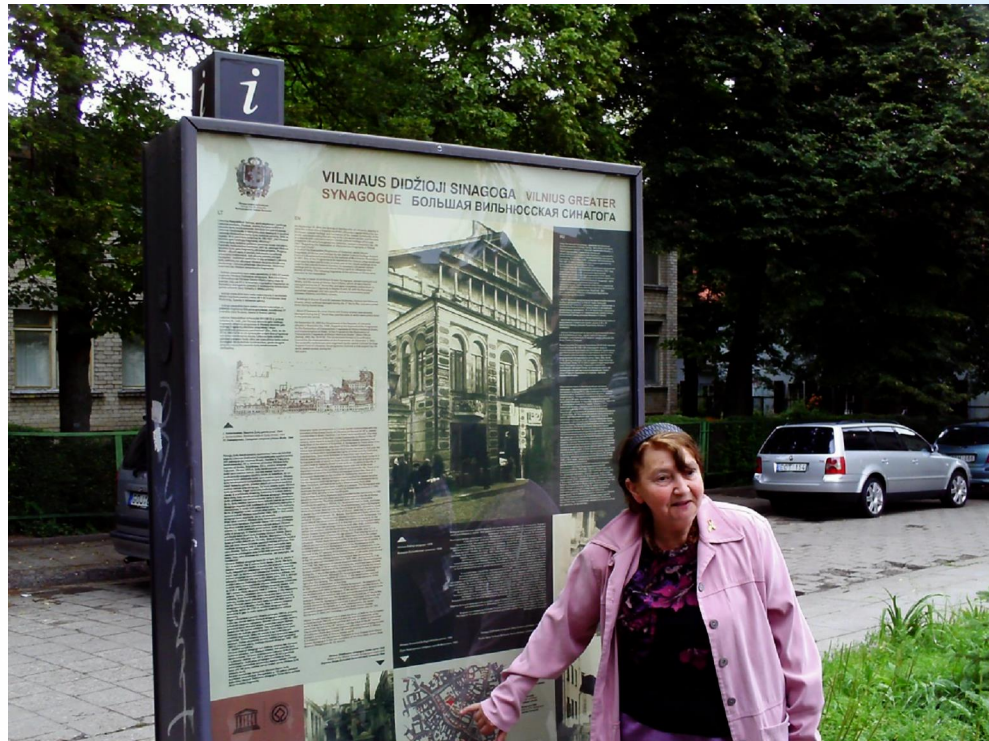
Afternoon with the Jewish Community of Vilnius

- “ Visited with Jewish senior citizens at “soup kitchen” or Senior Cafe
- “ Visited Jewish kindergarten
- “ Visited homes of Jewish families in 6 small groups



Walking Tour of Vilnius Ghetto

- “ Our guide was Roza Bieliauskiene, Professor of Jewish history & Yiddish
- “ 2 ghettos in Vilnius: big workers’ ghetto (30,000) & small one for those unable to work (10,000)
- “ Before War, 50% of population was Jewish; ghetto was in Jewish quarter
- “ Nazis bombed Jewish quarter & synagogue destroyed in 1944; many old buildings remain, however



Vilnius Ghetto Tour (cont'd)



Trakai

- “ Historic city & beautiful lake resort 28 km west of Vilnius
- “ Original capital of Lithuania
- “ Popular recreation area & tourist attraction
- “ Medieval castle dating from 14th century, reconstructed several times since then



Trakai (cont'd)

- “ Trakai home to small (65) wealthy community of Turkic Karaites for centuries
- “ Karaites believe in Old Testament only & don't view themselves as Jews
- “ Spared fate of most Lithuanian Jews during WWII
- “ We toured Karaite Museum & ate lunch at Karaite restaurant Kybyniar



Dinner at Jewish Community Center with Klezmer Band



July 1-2, “Roots Tour”

- “ Traveled with British couple, John Gross & Becky Wood
- “ Spent 2 days on the road touring John’s and Pat’s ancestral towns (shtetls)
- “ Our guide was Regina Kopilevich – “best tour guide in Lithuania” (<http://www.lithuaniatourguide.com/>)
- “ Towns visited included: Ukmerge, Pagiriai, Ramygala, Kupiskis, Siauliai, Plunge, Taurage



Ukmerge (Vilkomir)



Ukmerge (Vilkomir)



Alexey Bakaloras, Ukmerge



Pagiriai & Ramygala



Kupiskis



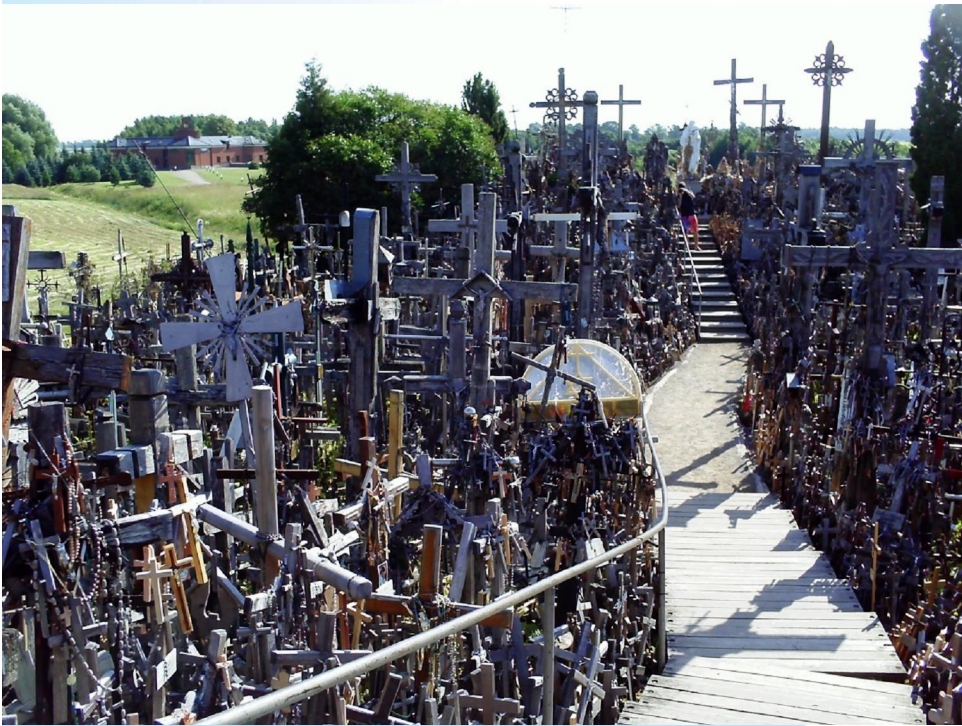
A Park in Kupiskis

(the only good picture I got of Regina, our guide)



The Hill of Crosses

(Plateliai, near Siauliai)



Plunge

- “ Jakob Bunka, famous wood carver & last Jew left in Plunge
- “ In Russian Army, wounded, & has chest full of medals
- “ Created small wooden sculptures of Jewish figures
- “ Restored Jewish cemetery of Plunge
- “ 9 of his giant tree sculptures decorate memorial site at Kausenai, depict real people he knew
- “ Some (but not all) of his family was killed there



Jakob Bunka (cont'd)



Jakob Bunka (cont'd)



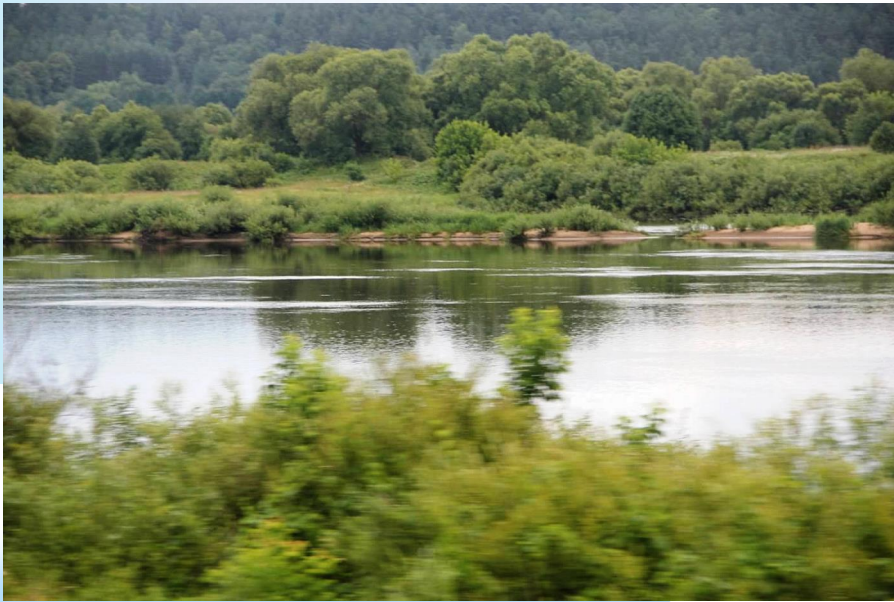
Taurage (Tavrig)



Taurage (Tavrig)



Road from Taurage to Kaunas



July 3-5, Kaunas (Kovno)

- “ Second largest city in Lithuania
- “ Population 415,000
- “ Provisional capital during interwar period when Vilnius was part of Poland
- “ Jews once 35% of population, now 500 Jews & one synagogue



Kaunas Regional Archives (KRA)

- “ One of 10 County Archives in Lithuania
- “ Building used to be a synagogue
- “ Many records destroyed by wars, floods & changing political conditions
- “ Archives consolidated in this building in 1965
- “ Archives contains mainly pre-1915 records for 7 districts of former Russian Empire; only county archive with pre-Soviet records



Tour of Kaunas Ghetto

- “ Former ghetto is in Aleksotas, a suburb of Kaunas across river, where Jews were allowed to live
- “ Killings more brutal and less organized than in Vilnius ghettos
- “ Nazis burned down ghetto in July 1944; people were hiding inside at the time
- “ A few escaped but froze to death in ghetto later; remaining survivors taken to Dachau



Tour of Ninth Fort

- “ “Ninth Fort” was part of Kaunas Fortress, constructed in late 19th century
- “ During Nazi occupation, used as place of execution for Jews, captured Soviets & others; 10,000 Jews transported from Kovno Ghetto & killed here
- “ On Christmas Day 1943, 64 prisoners escaped through tunnels
- “ During Soviet occupation, used as prison & way-station for prisoners being transported to labor camps
- “ Now houses a museum



Ninth Fort (cont'd)



Sugihara House (Kaunas)

- “ House where Chiune Sugihara lived while in Lithuania
- “ Now a museum dedicated to his memory
- “ Sugihara was Japanese Consul who issued transit visas that saved lives of 2,300 Jews
- “ Other “righteous gentiles” commemorated here as well, such as Consul Jan Zwartenkijk of Holland who provided visas for Curacao



Wooden Synagogue of Ziezmariiai

(One of last remaining wooden synagogues)



‘Karališka Senoji Kibinin ’ (The Royal Old Kybyn Inn)



Farewell Dinner, July 4

(Sarunas Hotel, Vilnius)



Quote from Dovid Katz, *Lithuanian Jewish Culture*

“ On the eve of World War II, there were, by the estimate of Yitzhak Arad, the eminent historian of the Holocaust in Lithuania, a million and a half Litvaks living in their historic territory . . . Over ninety percent of them were killed by the Nazis and their eager local collaborators for the one sin of ‘being Jewish,’ largely bringing to an unthinkable end a vibrant and variegated civilization. Still, its survivors and emigres and some of their descendants have managed to strike roots in different corners of the world, and small communities of survivors do their best to carry on in the original homelands. Modern democratic Lithuania has proved particularly conducive to the concentrated work of its small Jewish community and to the increasing number of visitors who have taken to seeking out their roots. Those scions of Lithuanian Jewish families in the west who are now looking into where it is their people come from are not seldom shocked by the magnitude of what they discover.”