Białystok developed within a strongly multicultural setting. The land surrounding the city was owned by Polish gentry and was worked by Polish and White Russian peasants. The city itself was settled to a large extent by German traders and Jews. From the late eighteenth century until World War I, it was part of the Russian Empire; between the wars, it was Polish. By the twentieth century, Białystok was distinguished as one of the few cities in Eastern Europe whose population was primarily Jewish. Many large cities had populations that were one-third Jewish; Białystok’s population was three-fifths Jewish.

Somewhat like Łódź, Białystok rose to prominence in the nineteenth century as a center of textile production. By the end of the century, Białystok was producing inexpensive cloth to meet the needs of the vast Russian Empire. Białystok was also a center of the tobacco industry. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, most of the textile mills and cigarette factories were in Jewish hands. Isaac Zabudowsky, a native son, was reputed to be the first Jewish millionaire in Russia. Białystok was also the birthplace of Ludwig Zamenhof, the creator of the “international” language Esperanto, and of Yitzhak Shamir, the Israeli prime minister. However, the overwhelming majority of Białystok Jews were neither rich nor famous; they were poor workers and small shopkeepers. Beginning in the 1880s, Białystok became a center of the Jewish labor movement; especially strong was the Jewish Socialist party known as the Bund.

In 1906, amidst the first Russian Revolution, Białystok was the site of a notorious pogrom. Violence on a vastly greater scale followed upon the German occupation of the city in June 1941. The Germans immediately burned down portions of the Jewish neighborhood, including the Great Synagogue, in which they had locked 1,500 Jews. In August, they established a ghetto. Two years later, the ghetto was liquidated and most of its 45,000 inmates were shipped to Treblinka. At that time, a revolt broke out that had been planned for months by the ghetto underground. Led by Mordechai Tenenbaum, it lasted only a few days, since the Germans, having just put down the Warsaw ghetto uprising, were better prepared to deal with resistance. A handful of Jews managed to reach the surrounding forests and link up with existing Jewish partisan units, most of which eventually joined the Soviet partisans.

**Location**

188 km NE of Warsaw
53° 08'/23° 10'
Voivodship: Białystok

**General Population, 1939**

100,000 (60% Jewish)

**General Population, 1994**

276,933

---

**SYNAGOGUES**

- **ul. Suviska 1**
  Site of Great Synagogue, built in 1909–1913. Memorial plaque to the 1,500 Jews burned alive on June 27, 1941; reconstruction of the wrecked Great Synagogue’s dome dedicated in August 1995.

- **ul. Branickiego 3**
  Shmuel Mogilew Synagogue, built in 1902, was demolished by Nazis in 1941. Plaque commemorates the site of the former synagogue. Current site use: sports hall on synagogue foundation.

- **ul. Piękna 3**

- **ul. Waryńskiego 24A**

---

Former Cytron Synagogue, ul. Waryńskiego 24A, 1994
JEWISH CEMETERIES

ul. Wschodnia
Only one of six cemeteries to survive. 5,000+ tombstones dating from 1890.

ul. Żabia
Former ghetto cemetery dating from 1941 (3,500 Jews died here).
Current use: park (with remains of the wall that surrounded the ghetto cemetery).

ul. Bema
Cemetery dating from 1840.
Completely destroyed.
Current use: market place.

ul. Kalinowskiego (near ul. Grochowa)
Cemetery founded in the 1760s.
Completely destroyed and now a park.

ul. Sosnowa
Cemetery completely destroyed.
Current use: park.

HOLOCAUST MEMORIALS

ul. Żabia (former ghetto cemetery)
Two monuments: one commemorates ghetto victims and the second honors Jewish partisans.

ul. Wschodnia (old Jewish cemetery)
Tall granite monument commemorates site of mass grave for 1906 pogrom victims.

Highway 19 (en route to Augustów)
Las Pietrasze, a forest at the northern edge of Białystok. About one-half mile into the forest is a cemetery park where 5,000 Jews were shot and buried in a mass grave on July 3 and 12, 1941. A memorial monument is located at the site.
OTHER JEWISH SITES AND MONUMENTS

ul. Warszawska 8
Plaque in Polish and Esperanto at site of school attended by Dr. Ludwik Zamenhof, creator of the Esperanto language, born in Białystok in 1859.

ul. Lipowa 41D
Former Jewish vocational school, Wysocki, founded by O.R.T.
Present use: trade school.

ul. Sienkiewicza 79 (north of ul. Jagienki)
Former Jewish school built in 1905 and attended by former Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir.
Current use: hospital.

ul. Warszawska 15
Former Jewish hospital, constructed in 1840. Oldest building now standing in Białystok.
Current use: hospital.

DEPORTATIONS

Treblinka, Biechów, Majdanek, Przužany, Theresienstadt, Auschwitz-Birkenau.
SELECTED READING


Kaplan, Pesach. “Eksterminacja Żydów w Białymstoku” (Extermination of Białystok Jews [Feb. 1943]). BZIH 60 (1966): 121. (P)


Klementynowski, David. Lebn un umkum in Byalistoker geto (Life and Death in the Białystok Ghetto). New York, 1946. (Y)

Excerpted from Jewish Roots in Poland (© 1997) and published here at JRI-Poland.org with permission from the publisher, Routes to Roots Foundation, Inc. All rights reserved by the publisher and Miriam Weiner.

Korzeć, Paweł. “Rzemiośla żydowskie w Białymstoku na przełomie wieku XIX i XX” (Jewish Handicraft in Białystok at the Turn of the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries). BŻIH 50 (1964): 23–35. (P)


Mark, Bernard. Der oyfshand in Byalistoker geto (The Uprising in the Białystok Ghetto). Warsaw: Jewish Historical Institute, 1950. (Y)

———. Megilat Byalistok; ha-mered ba-geto (The Białystok Scroll: Rebellion in the Ghetto). Tel Aviv, 1945. (H)

Nof, Noomi. Ha-emol be-ol (Yesterday in Ashes). Haifa, 1979. (H)


———. Di titeitkeyt fun der Byalistoker landsmanschaft in Amerika (The Activities of the Białystoker Landsmanshaft in America). New York, 1934. (Y)

Town hall and part of market square, today


FILM
