

# Bagaslaviskis

## In Yiddish, Bagaslavishak

A town in the Vilkomir (Ukmerge) district.

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Year	General Population	Jews
1790	255	..
1847	305	..
1914	~100 families	~50 families
1923	161	..
1940	..	12 families
1959	228	

Bagaslaviskis is a small town along the road to Vilnius, 21 km south of Vilkomir, the district's city. In 1790 it was granted the rights of a town by King Stanislav August Poniatovski. As a result, the town started to develop, the number of market days increased, it had yearly fairs, and a few shops were opened. The town is surrounded by beautiful landscape with forested hills, fields and pastures. In 1880 and 1918, the town burned down.

Before WWI there were 50 Jewish families in Bagaslaviskis, but in the following years their number decreased. Jews lived also in the nearby villages of Vepriai and Jokubaiciai. During WWI, 500 Jewish families who were exiled from the Kaunas-Vilkomir region, from Jonava and Kaunas, came to Bagaslaviskis and to other towns in the area, but a few weeks later they were exiled from this area as well. The Jews of Bagaslaviskis feared that their fate would end in the same manner. It was only after lobbying with the authorities that they were they permitted to stay. The notables of the community became guarantors for the Jews' good behavior, with the death penalty looming over their heads if a Jew would be caught spying for the Germans.

Among the Jews, there were a number of grocers and peddlers, a plasterer, a tailor, 2 shoemakers, and a few that owned wagons. The yearly fair brought some life to the town. After the 1918 fire, the town received aid from "Yakapa" (the Vilnius council for helping Jews who were hurt in the war). A year later, in 1920, the aid increased to 6,200 marks, most of which was intended for purchasing foodstuff and some of it was used for cultural needs.

The economic situation of the Jews of Bagaslaviskis did not improve during the period of Independent Lithuania. The establishing of the Lithuanian cooperatives worsened the situation. Most of the Jews were petty traders, peddlers and coachmen. A few owned shops. There were also artisans: a miller, a tailor and a few shoemakers. In 1939 there wasn't even a single telephone in the town.

The community was too small and too poor to support a Rabbi or a doctor, not to mention a school. The local priest engaged in treating the sick (he used cupping glasses, leeches and hot bricks in order to cure pneumonia and stomach aches), and the "Melamed" (teacher) in the "Heder" also functioned as a butcher. The town would be visited by a travelling-Rabbi. His job was to register the births and the deaths, to request a Rabbi to officiate a marriage, and so on. One of the people who was born in the town was Rabbi Avraham-Haim Shas, the son of Shemuel, who served in the Rabbinate of some of Lithuania's communities in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and left behind him many handwritten new interpretations of the Torah. The last Rabbi of Bagaslaviskis was Rabbi Yerachmiel Yashpa.

A few of the town's Jews studied in the Hebrew Gimnasia in Vilkomir. After they returned to their town, they brought the spirit of the big city to it and they initiated evenings with lectures and dialogues on culture and society. The Jews of Bagaslaviskis had relations with the Jews of the nearby Gelvonai: the former used the library in Gelvonai and participated in the drama club of the bigger town. From time to time lecturers, messengers and delegates who collected donations would come to Bagaslaviskis. In 1925, as the meeting of the 14<sup>th</sup> Zionist Congress approached, some Shekalim (tokens of membership in the Zionist organization) were also sold in Bagaslaviskis. 47 people participated in the 1935 elections to the 19<sup>th</sup> Zionist Congress: 27 voted for the Eretz-Yisrael Haovedet party, 17 for the General Zionists (Grosmanists), 2 for the General Zionists A, and one for the "Mizrahi".

Due to the difficult economic situation and increasing poverty, Jews, especially the younger generation, started to leave the town. The elderly stayed behind and subsisted through the support of their children who went to other countries. This support was the sole means of livelihood for many of the Jews of the town. Quite many of them waited for the opportunity to join their children. Their hopes were foiled by WWII and the arrival of the Germans.

Very little is known of what eventuated in Bagaslaviskis during the Holocaust. When Germany occupied Lithuania in the summer of 1941, groups of Lithuanian Nationalists (The Activists) got together and brutally oppressed the Jews. Some of them also participated in transferring the Jews of Bagaslaviskis to Vilkomir and in massacring them there on Friday, 13 Elul, 5701 (September 5, 1941), together with the other Jews from the nearby towns and other places in the area. Very few of them survived.



