

Leeleva Online Map

Kunoff

Kunev (Russian: КуНЕВ)
Ukrainian: (Кунів, КУНІВ)
Polish: Kuniów
Yiddish: (Koniv, וויניוק)

Kunoff is a village marked at the bottom left-hand corner of Jake Unruh's Leeleva map, east of the RS Highway and Vilna River, and south of Antonovka and Manziliska.¹ Actually the village of Kunoff is located to the northwest of Leeleva (Lesna), about 5 ½ miles by road or probably a little over an hour's walk. Jake's RS Highway (Ukrainian Highway P26 [Автошлях Р 26]) runs through the town, on the northwest side, and the Vilna River also passes to the northwest. The village of Antonovka is situated a mile or so to the east, and the clearing where the village of Manziliska stood lies immediately to the southeast.



Kunoff in 1921²

The Village of Kunoff was an important village in 19th Century Ostrog County, and after the Town of Ostrog was probably the main center for business for many Leeleva Villagers. It was the third most populous municipality in the county. Kunevskoy Parish or Township was centered around the village³ and one of three County police headquarters was located there.⁴

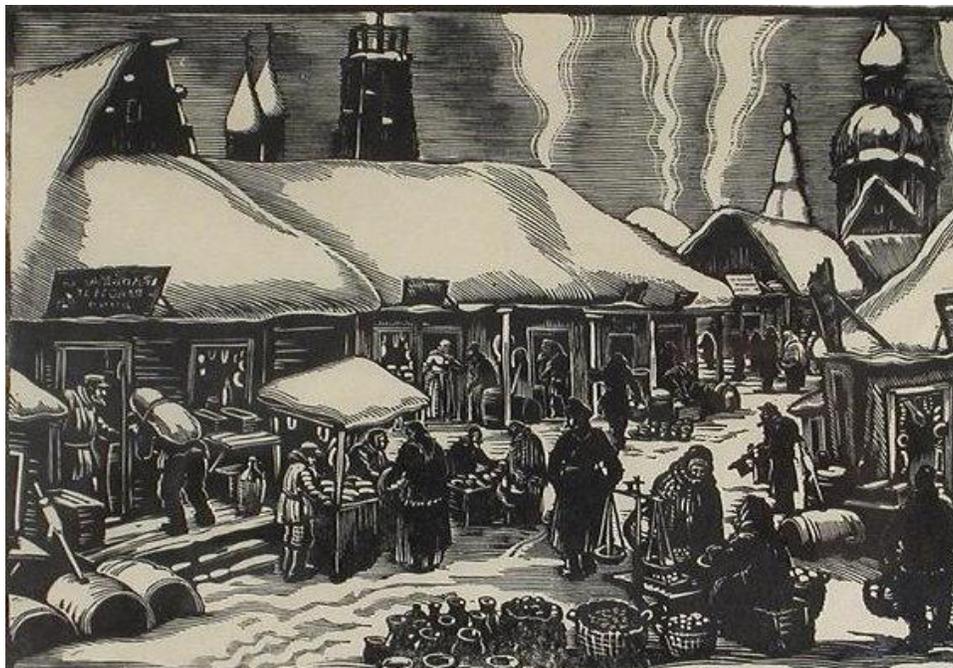
Kunoff was established as a municipality in the 15th Century and had been owned by the local Polish Families of Malin and Jablonovsky. Northeast of the village stood ruins of an old Jablonovsky palace with extensive gardens.⁵

By the 19th Century, Kunoff was predominantly Jewish; the Jewish population of the town by the turn of the century was 1661 residents out of 2845 total.⁶ The village also had a good number of Polish Catholic households and both a Jewish synagogue and a Polish Catholic Church were located there.⁷

In its capacity as a Parish Center, Kunoff was a local hub of business and commerce. It was to Kunoff where my great grandfather, Andreas Ratzlaff, reported upon his dismissal from the Russian forestry service. Great Grandpa Ratzlaff also purchased his passport from the Police Station in Kunoff. According to one report, a parish judge of some sort was also stationed in Kunoff,⁸ and later a post office and telegraph station were located here.⁹

At this time period in Ukraine, most types of retail or industry were owned by the Jewish population. Kunoff, with its large number of Jews had a market square that housed at least a dozen shops including a couple barbers.¹⁰ One source even indicates that fairs were held in the village, perhaps as many as 12 annually.¹¹ A brick factory was also located in the Kunoff as well as a Jewish school.¹²

The illustration below, a woodcut by Solomon Yudovin, shows a winter scene in a Russian Jewish village near the turn of the century. Several shops are shown in the background and in the foreground are several stalls selling various goods; perhaps the market square for the village. Kunoff may have looked somewhat similar to this without the taller towers rising over the roofs of the shops.



Jewish Shtetl Market, Woodcut by Solomon Yudovin¹³

The Germans living in the Mennonite villages may very well have traded some of their goods in Kunoff, especially if the village did in fact host fairs. My great grandpa Ratzlaff listed his vocation as a weaver of linen.¹⁴ A fair at Kunoff would have been an excellent and realistic opportunity for great grandpa to sell any linen made by the Ratzlaff Family to retailers. He may also have traded linen for any other goods the family needed.



Kunoff Area in 1913¹⁵

An important fact to remember is that during the 19th Century the territory of Ukraine was occupied by the Russian Empire, but few Russians actually lived there. The largest presence of ethnic Russians in the immediate Ostrog area was in Kunoff where the local Russian military garrison was stationed. This garrison made up the vast majority of Russians in the County; the Russian percentage of the overall population in Ostrog County was only about 2.5 %.¹⁶

Kunoff was described as a shabby little village located on a large, muddy plain south of the Vilna River. Forests surrounded most sides of the village and roads ran out from several different directions.¹⁷

After the Polish-Soviet War, Kunoff lost its status as a Parish Center and fell under the administrative authority of Pluzhnoe Parish in Zaslav County.¹⁸ Many of the Jews living in the village escaped the Soviet Union by swimming across the Vilna River into Poland during this time.¹⁹

The photograph below shows several Jewish men selling their goods in an open market in a village near Kraków, Poland, around the turn of the century. A Jewish market in Kunoff may have appeared similar.



Jewish Men Outside Kraków Selling Their Wares²⁰

Jewish Population in Turn-of-the-Century Volhynia

Kunoff, as well as the other larger towns and villages in the area such as Ostrog, Pluzhnoe, Zaslav and Slavuta, had a very large Jewish population around the turn of the 20th Century.²¹

Town	Ostrog	Zaslav	Slavuta	Kunoff
Jewish Percentage of Total Population	62%	48%	61%	58%

Much of western Ukraine, including Volhynia, eastern Poland and western Russia, lay within the area of the Russian Empire known as the Pale of Settlement. Russia established this area in 1791 to provide areas of inhabitation for the Empire’s Jewish population who were not desired in the major urban centers of Moscow, St. Petersburg, or Russia proper. This was done by the Russian government in an attempt to separate the Jewish people who were frequently more highly educated and culturally sophisticated than the native Russians. Russian Jews during this time period did not possess rights to freely live anywhere they chose as did some other ethnic groups.

Jewish people in Ukraine were permitted to leave the Pale only under certain circumstances but could not live in the City Sevastopol or in certain areas within the Pale where Cossacks resided (Sevastopol and the Cossacks both held crucial military importance to the Russian Empire and the Russians didn't want the Jews to compromise the integrity of the military). Jewish people were required to live in urban areas and were even periodically expelled from small towns and villages (these expulsions were called pogroms). Exceptions were made for well-established merchants and artisans as well as those individuals possessed of higher education or who were retired from the military. Russian Jewish population increased from 1.6 million in 1820 to 5.6 million in 1910.

At times, Jews in Russia paid higher taxes and were prohibited from leasing land, running taverns, or receiving higher education. After 1882, Jews were restricted to urban areas only, resulting in overcrowding and limited economic opportunities. As the cities in Volhynia lay within the Pale of Settlement, and Jews were largely prohibited from living on the land, the Jewish population in all Volhynian cities was very high.²²

For an interesting fictional account of Jewish village life in the early 20th Century Pale, one should consider watching Fiddler on the Roof.

Two waves of severe pogroms were perpetrated in the Russian Pale; one in the 1880s and one in the early 1900s. This is not to say, however, that pogroms didn't occur in other places and at other times, but these were the two most severe waves. In the spring of 1881, after fear and confusion swept the country on the heels of the assassination of Tsar Alexander II, severe pogroms broke out in south and eastern Ukraine. Jews were seen as scapegoats for some forms of revolutionary unrest and severe violence took place in the Ukrainian cities of Kiev and Odessa. Later, Warsaw also saw violence.

The Russian government officially opposed the violence which saw several hundred Jews killed, but the local governor-generals of the affected provinces seemed to do little to stop the movements. The violence subsided, but 1881 became a turning point for Russian Jews. After this year, Jews were further limited in their social and political options, and many Jews became sympathizers of other radical revolutionaries who were disillusioned with the Tsar's government.²³

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This photograph from east-central Poland shows an old Jewish man with a small boy near the turn of the century.



Jewish Man and Boy²⁴

The second wave of pogroms came as a result of revolutionary agitation associated with the Russian Revolution of 1905. Looking for a way to divert the general population's attention from the Tsar, the government gave various bodies free reign to persecute Jews. Riots broke out as early as 1903 and continued through 1906. Again, several hundred Jews were killed in areas throughout Ukraine and Russia. Affected towns and cities in Ukraine and Volhynia included Melitopol, Odessa, Ekaterinoslav, Kiev, Zhytomyr and Rovno. As a result, some Jews took to organizing their own self-defense units while other sought refuge abroad and emigrated out of Russia. At the time of the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917, Jews largely sided with the communists. As a result, Jews were held in contempt by many of the other cultural groups and were not to be trusted. The native Ukrainians attempted to gain independence after the revolution and the Jews who sided with the Bolsheviks were ostracized.²⁵ It seems whichever way the Jews turned they were making new enemies during this time period.

This photograph from early 20th Century shows three Jewish carriage drivers in Korets. Korets is a large Volhynian village about 35 miles northeast from Ostrog.



Jewish Drivers in Korets²⁶

Jews in Volhynia during the 19th Century were prevalent in the larger towns of the region. In Ostrog and Zaslav Counties, the large towns of Ostrog, Zaslav, and Slavuta, as well as the local volost (township) seats, Kunoff and Pluzhnoe, had large Jewish populations. Jews may have also occupied certain small villages, such as Pivneva Gora. These Jews spoke Yiddish and were largely involved in commerce. They lent money, owned and operated factories and stores in the towns, and traded manufactured goods for raw materials with the peasants of the countryside in markets and at fairs. Jews owned print shops in Zaslav and Ostrog, as well as warehouses, bakeries, mills and shops across the area. In time, Jews also became leaders in the region regarding trade unions, credit unions, and health care facilities. The Russian government, as well as other European governments at the time, officially suppressed Jews and generally treated them very poorly. Therefore the prevailing attitude toward them throughout the countryside was one of disdain. The Jews were tolerated, but not accepted. Add to this the fact that they were involved in commerce and were commonly seen as swindlers and cheats and the resulting public perception was a very poor one.²⁷

The German villagers of Leeleva probably also had a poor opinion of their Jewish neighbors. In memoirs and remembrances, many unkind statements have been made regarding Jews. The German villagers would have sold goods they produced, such as grain or linen, to Jewish retailers. Also if they needed to buy anything the purchase would likely have been made from a Jewish retailer or peddler. It's easy to distrust someone with whom you're buying or selling produce and these Germans, who had very little money, probably felt frequently cheated by the Jews.

Several ancestors including my great grandfather Andreas Ratzlaff, had at least a working knowledge of the Yiddish language so that they could deal with Jewish retailers or traders. My Ratzlaff ancestors also hired Jewish smugglers to take their possessions out of Russia when they made their way out of the country in 1907.



Sources:

44° 50' OSTROG, Maßstab 1:200000 d.N. oder 1 cm=2 km. K.u.k. Militärgeographisches Institut. Teilweise berichtigt bis 1913.

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P48 S43 (alt. A48 B43) Zaslów (1:100 000 WIG - Mapa Taktyczna Polski), Wojskowy Instytut Geograficzny, Warszawa, 1931.

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¹ Unruh, Jacob, "From Village Life to Kansas Plains", 1978.

² P48 S43 (alt. A48 B43) Zasław.

³ Kunev Township (Kunevskoy) in 1906 included the northeastern area of the cluster of Mennonite villages lying southwest of Ostrog. The Mennonite villages included in Kunevskoy were Karolswalde (Sloboda Galendry), Antonovka, and Mezheliski (Manziliska). Ostrog County was comprised of 14 parishes (or volosts) in 1906: Annapolskaya, Bugrinskaya, Dolzhanskaya, Goschskaya, Khorovskaya, Krivinskaya, Kunevskoy, Lyakhovetsky, Pereroslovsk, Pluzhanskoy, Semenovskaya, Siyanetskaya, Unievskaya, and Zdolbitskaya. The German Villages of Leeleva, Jadwinin, Mykailivka, Stanislavka and Fuerstenthal were all in Pluzhanskoy; Gruenthal was in Siyanetskaya. In total, Kunevskoy included 45 settlements in 1906. Pluzhanskoy was centered around the village of Pluzhnoe, located 4 ½ miles southeast of Leeleva. (List of the Settlements in Volyn Gubernia, 1906.)

⁴ List of the Settlements in Volyn Gubernia, 1906.

⁵ Cynkalowsky, Prof. Alexander, Ancient Volyn and Volhynian Polissia.

⁶ "Towns in Volhynia Province in 1900", JewishGen, NY, New York, 2014, and List of the Settlements in Volyn Gubernia, 1906.

⁷ P48 S43 (alt. A48 B43) Zasław.

⁸ Cynkalowsky, Prof. Alexander, Ancient Volyn and Volhynian Polissia.

⁹ P48 S43 (alt. A48 B43) Zasław.

¹⁰ Unruh, Jacob, "From Village Life to Kansas Plains", 1978.

¹¹ Cynkalowsky, Prof. Alexander, Ancient Volyn and Volhynian Polissia.

Commercially, the fair system (a holdover from medieval times, in contrast to the mercantile system of Western Europe) was still prevalent in the 1800s in Ukraine. Fairs gave wholesalers opportunity to sell to retailers. Wholesalers traveled throughout the country trading with peasants. They would then take their goods to a fair to sell their goods to retailers. Many, many fairs were held in Ukraine in big cities as well as towns and villages. In Volyn, the town of Dubno (Дубно) was well-known for its large annual fair. In the larger Ukraine, Kiev, Berdichev (Бердичів) and Kharkiv (Харків) all held major fairs. Even international traders sometimes attended the larger fairs. Specific wool and grain fairs were held in areas where these items were exported.

The commerce of the wider world was only beginning to touch Ukraine in early 1900s by which time the area had begun to export wool, cattle, poultry, grains, and raw minerals. On the other hand, Ukraine imports included mainly manufactured goods.

(Anonymous, What is Ukraine?, published circa 1915.)

¹² Cynkalowsky, Prof. Alexander, Ancient Volyn and Volhynian Polissia.

¹³ "Russian Shtetl" Solomon Yudovin of Beshkovichi (1892-1954).

¹⁴ Many Germans supplemented their agricultural income by weaving linen. Jake mentions that the spinning wheel was a common fixture in the homes of the villagers and that Leeleva villagers traded rolls of linen in Kunoff. It's probably telling that Jake included Kunoff on his map and not Pluzhnoe, even though Leeleva was located in Pluzhnoe Township. The Leeleva villagers must have traded in Kunoff, or else Jake would have included Pluzhnoe on his map. The Germans probably also did trading in the larger markets in Ostrog and perhaps also in Krevin or even Zaslaw. Zaslaw was the capital of the adjacent county, Zaslaw County, and is about 18 miles southeast of Leeleva. (Paspornnaya Kniga (Passport) of Andreas Ratzlaf, 1906; Unruh, Jacob, "From Village Life to Kansas Plains", 1978; "A Family History for the Hoffmann, Lehmann, Spitzer, and Related Families in Old Volhynia", Bill Remus, 2011.)

¹⁵ 44° 50° OSTROG.

¹⁶ The First General Census of the Russian Empire of 1897; Breakdown of Population by Mother Tongue and Districts in 50 Governorates of European Russia; 1897.

¹⁷ Geographical Dictionary of the Polish Kingdom and Other Slavic Countries, Warsaw; (1880-1914).

¹⁸ Yesyunin, Sergey, "Administrative-Territorial Divisions of Zaslavschyn in the Late XVIII - early XXI Centuries".

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ "Photos of Manachem Kipnis", Riowang.blogspot.com, 2013.

²¹ The First General Census of the Russian Empire of 1897; Breakdown of Population by Mother Tongue and Districts in 50 Governorates of European Russia; 1897, and List of the Settlements in Volyn Gubernia, 1906. "Towns in Volhynia Province in 1900", JewishGen, NY, New York, 2014.

²² "Pale of Settlement", Jewish Encyclopedia, Vols I-VII, 1901-1906.

"Pale of Settlement", Jewish Virtual Library; Modern Jewish History, 2014.

²³ "Pale of Settlement", Jewish Virtual Library; Modern Jewish History, 2014.

²⁴ "Photos of Manachem Kipnis", Riowang.blogspot.com, 2013.

²⁵ "Pale of Settlement", Jewish Virtual Library; Modern Jewish History, 2014.

²⁶ "Observations of Jewish Community Life in Russia; Report of a Visit, September 7-24, 2008", Betsy Gidwitz, 2008.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ "Pale of Settlement", Jewish Virtual Library; Modern Jewish History, 2014.