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## Jewish Families of Slonim, Grodno Region, Belarus

Hebrew: משפחות היהודים בסלונים, מחוז גרודנו, בלארוס

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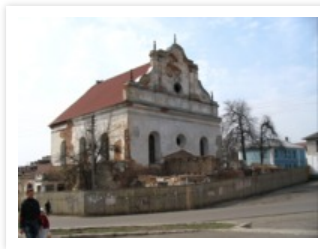
### About

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**Slonim** (Belarusian: Слoнiм, Russian: Сло́ним, Polish: Slonim, Yiddish: סלונים) is a city in Grodno Region, Belarus, capital of the Slonim district. It is located at the junction of the Shchara and Isa rivers, 143 km (89 mi) southeast of Grodno. The population in 2015 was 49,739.

Photo: The former Grand Baroque Synagogue of Slonim (set. 1942) now in disrepair.



[VMF org.](#) - [Slonim Synagogue](#)

### History

The earliest record is of a wooden fort on the left bank of the Shchara river in the 11th century, although there may have been earlier settlement.

The area was disputed between the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and Kievan Rus' in early history and it changed hands several times. In 1040, the Kievans won control of the area after a battle but lost Slonim to the Lithuanians in 1103. The Ruthenians retook the area early in the 13th century but were expelled by a Tartar invasion in 1241 and the town was pillaged. When, later in the year, the Tartars withdrew, Slonim became part of the Grand Duchy of Lithuania once again.

In 1569, Lithuania and Poland united and Slonim became an important regional centre within the newly established Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth. From 1631 to 1685 the city flourished as the seat of the Lithuanian diet.

The Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, later to be known as the Commonwealth of Poland, was dismantled in a series of three "partitions" in the second half of the 18th century and divided among its neighbours, Prussia, Habsburg Austria and Russian Empire which took the largest portion of the territory. Slonim was in the area annexed by Russia. The wars had damaged Slonim, but in the 18th century, a local Polish landowner, count Ogiński, encouraged the recovery of the area; a canal was dug to connect the Shchara with the Dnieper river, now known as the Ogiński Canal. Ogiński also built a greater complex, combining an opera theater, a school of music and a school of ballet, a printing house.

Russian control lasted until 1915, when the German army captured the town. After the First World War, the Slonim area was disputed between the Soviet Union and the newly recreated state of Poland. The town suffered badly in the Polish-Soviet war of 1920. It was ceded by the Bolsheviks to Poland in the 1921 Peace of Riga and became a part of Nowogródek Voivodeship (1919–39) of the Second Polish Republic.

Slonim was one of the many towns in Poland that had a significant Jewish population. The imposing Great Synagogue, built in 1642, survived the destruction and brutal Nazi liquidation of the Slonim Ghetto with 10,000 Jews massacred in 1942 alone. The 10 small synagogues around the Great Synagogue called Stiblach did not survive.

### Slonim Ghetto

#### Jews in Slonim - Historical background

The first mention of the Jews in Slonim originates from 1551. The community began to flourish in the first half of the 16th century. Jews specialized in the trade of lumber and grain; some, in the brewery business, others in numerous cottage industries. In 1635–42 the Baroque style Grand Synagogue was built in Slonim. In 1766 the local Qahal counted 1,154 members. Jewish cultural life thrived under the patronage of the Ogiński family from the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth. Following the military Partitions of Poland perpetrated by Russia, Prussia, and Austria, Slonim became part of the Russian Empire in 1795. It was the home of **Rabbi Avraham Weinberg, founder of the Slonim Hasidic dynasty**. There were seven synagogues in operation. In 1897 the total population of Slonim was 72.5% Jewish, but many young people emigrated. After the rebirth of sovereign Poland at the end of the First World War, and according to Polish census of 1921, there were 6,917 Jews in the city. Ten years later, the Jewish population grew again to 8,605 or 64% of the rapidly expanding population of 16,251 with 4,899 Catholics. There were 10 new Jewish schools in Slonim, including the Yiddish high school.

#### 1939 invasion of Poland

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[Esther Weinberg](#) (deceased)



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[Chaya Rachel Weinberg](#) (b. - 1942)



[R' Issachar Leib of Slonim](#) (1873 - 1928)  
Rabbi Yissachar Leib Weinberg of Slo...

During the Nazi-Soviet invasion of Poland in September 1939 Stonim was taken over by the Red Army. Within days, the new Soviet administration began the liquidation of the Jewish religious, cultural and political institutions. The Zionists were accused of being counterrevolutionaries and targeted first. The NKVD pronounced that Zionism was a fascist movement, and in April 1940 sent 1,000 Jews to Siberia in a wave of mass deportations of Polish nationals. The Zionists were accused of anti-Soviet activities, nevertheless, within months the Bund members were also arrested based on a prescribed list, and deported to the Gulag.

At the same time, Stonim turned into a major destination for Polish-Jewish refugees attempting to escape from the German-controlled territory of western Poland. Living conditions became very difficult. While the number of refugees in the fall of 1939 was around 2,000 by local count, their total had grown to 15,216 just one year later. The oppressive conditions of the Soviet system made the majority of newcomers unable to find work. Others collaborated; chiefly the young men with nothing to lose. By the time Nazi Germany launched Operation Barbarossa against the Soviet forces in eastern Poland, the number of Jews in Stonim had grown to 22,000 comprising around 70% of the total population.

### Stonim ghetto formation

The Germans rolled into the city on 24–26 June 1941 amid bombing and shelling. No Jewish relocations were ordered, but anti-Jewish measures were imposed right away to ensure isolation. Hundreds of men were rounded up and brought into the municipal stadium where they were beaten and killed during interrogations which lasted for one week. Soon thereafter, the German commandant of Stonim, ordered the Judenrat to collect a ransom of 2 million roubles in gold. He confiscated the ransom and executed the entire Jewish council. As of 12 July 1941 Stonim Jews were ordered to wear the Star of David on their outer garments. All Jews living around the city centre were evicted, their belongings confiscated, and they were moved across the bridge over the Szczara River to a brand new ghetto in the Na Wyspie (literally On Island) neighbourhood, surrounded by barbed wire and guards at both gates.

### Nazi atrocities

The first large-scale extermination of Jews in Stonim took place on 17 July 1941. Just prior to the massacre, burial pits were prepared on the outskirts of the village Pietrolewicze nearby. Some 2,000 Jews were rounded up in the square, were loaded into lorries never to return. The role of the collaborationist Belarusian Auxiliary Police (established on 7 July 1941) was crucial in the totality of procedures, as only they knew the identity of the Jews. In October 1941 a special ghetto zone was set up at the 'Na Wyspie' neighborhood. More Jews were brought in from neighbouring settlements. In March 1942 the makeshift ghettos in Iwacewicz, Dereczyn, Gołynka, Byeń, and Kosów in the vicinity were liquidated. All inmates were marched on foot to the Stonim ghetto to perish there.

The second mass murder of Stonim Jews by Einsatzgruppe B took place five months later, on 14 November 1941. In the so-called second sweep, the ghetto was cordoned off and 9,000 people were taken by lorries to the village of Czepielów, 7 km distance, where they were shot in the pits by rifle fire. The ghettoised Jews were fully aware of the progress of the massacre because a few prisoners escaped back. During the course of the operation, the Belarusian Schutzmannschaft-Einzeldienst forced the Jews out of their homes and convoyed them to Czepielów under armed escort. They also took part in the shooting by the SS, aided by the Latvian and Lithuanian auxiliaries. By 13 November 1941 only 7,000 skilled workers remained alive inside the ghetto, all bound into the forced labour process.

### The revolt

On the morning of 29 June 1942 the Jews staged a revolt to defend themselves from further deportations. All families descended into the secret bunkers. Tunnels were also dug leading outside. Members of the underground led by **David Epshtein** shot at the arriving troops using stockpiled firearms refurbished at the Beutelager. At least five Germans were killed and many others wounded. The Nazis set fire to the ghetto in retaliation. The Jewish hospital with patients inside was blown up by the SS. The extermination actions leading to subsequent ghetto complete eradication continued between 29 June and 15 July 1942. For two weeks, the fugitives were hunted down and trucked from Stonim to the killing fields near the village of Pietrolewicze by the SS, Orpo, and Belarusian police. The revolt was crushed with the help of arriving reinforcements which included Latvian, Lithuanian and Ukrainian Schutzmannschaft. Between 8,000 and up to 13,000 people were murdered in their homes or out in the streets and in the killing fields. Saved by the Polish nuns in a Catholic convent 62 miles from Stonim. One month later, on 31 July 1942, Generalkommissar for Weissruthenien Wilhelm Kube, reported that in the preceding ten weeks some 55,000 Jews were exterminated in the region.

The fourth and final ghetto extermination action took place on 20 August 1942, during which the last 700 men and 100 women performing various tasks were rounded up and murdered. The Stonim Ghetto was no more. Many Jews had fled into the woods; 30 people formed an autonomous Jewish fighting group called Schtors 51 (Shchors) in the vicinity of Kosovo, helped by Pavel Proniagin in defiance of Soviet orders. Others had remained in hiding on the Aryan side. According to Encyclopedia of the Holocaust, 22,000 Jews in and around Stonim had been murdered.

### Aftermath

Four months after the last ghetto massacre, during the night of 18 December 1942 Nazi forces raided the Catholic church and Monastery of the Sisters of the Poor, among other locations. The Nazis had obtained information, from the collaborationist Belarusian Central Council, regarding Poles harbouring Jewish fugitives who had managed to escape.

The next morning, several hundred Christian Poles were trucked to Pietrolewicze, on the outskirts of Stonim. There, they were executed for sheltering Jews. Their priest, **Adam Sztark** (pl), was among those killed.

Three of the victims were beatified by Pope John Paul II on 13 June 1999 in Warsaw, among the 108 Martyrs of World War II. Two of the beatified were Polish nuns from Stonim, executed at Górki Pantalowickie hill on 19 December 1942: **Ewa Noiszewska** (pl), and **Marta Wołowska** (pl). They had helped and sheltered Jews. Also beatified was the priest, **Adam Sztark**, who was killed along with them. In 2001, Sztark became the first Jesuit ever awarded the title of **Righteous Among the Nations** by the state of Israel. He had delivered food to the

ghetto, purchased with cash donations. He also issued false certificates, personally sheltered Jewish refugees, and called upon all his parishioners to help to save the ghetto residents.

The Red Army reached Slonim in mid-July 1944 during Operation Bagration. After World War II, Poland's borders were redrawn, according to the demands made by Josef Stalin at the Yalta Conference of 1945. Slonim (Cyrillic: Сло́ним) was then incorporated into the Byelorussian SSR of the Soviet Union. The Polish population was forcibly resettled within the new borders of Poland before the end of 1946. **The Jewish community was never restored.** Since 1991, Slonim has been one of the district centres of the Grodno Region in sovereign Belarus.

[Memorial Book of Slonim, Belarus](#)

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**Slonim Hasidic dynasty** originated in the town of Slonim, which is now in Belarus. Today, there are two Slonimer Rebbes, both in Israel: one resides in Jerusalem and the other in Bnei Brak. Colloquially, the Jerusalem side is called the "White" (Veissa) side and the Bnei Brak side is called the "Black" (Shvartza) side, a reference to their political leanings, white meaning more liberal and black meaning more conservative in Haredi parlance. These names are also attributed to the fact that when Slonim Hasidim split into separate factions, the leader of one, Rabbi Sholom Noach Berezovsky, had a white beard and the leader of the other, Rabbi Avraham Weinberg, had a black beard. The factions are distinguished by different Hebrew spellings, the Jerusalem group being known as סלונים and the Bnei Brak group being known as סלאנים. They are two distinct groups today and have many differences between them.

The first Rebbe of Slonim, Rabbi Avraham Weinberg (1804–1883), was the author of Yesod HaAvodah. In 1873 he sent a group of his grandchildren and other Hasidim to settle in Ottoman Palestine; they set up their community in Tiberias. Almost all of the Slonimer Hasidim in Europe perished at the hands of the Nazis in the Holocaust. The present-day Slonimer community was rebuilt from the Slonimer Hasidim who had settled in Israel.