

Girsh Rivkin

(1904, Chislavichi -1992, Kaluga)



Girsh-Nochem Rivkin was born in Chislavichi on 29.11.1904, the ninth of ten children. His father, Yakov-Isaac, was a tailor and had to work hard to earn a living for the family. In the early 1920s, Girsh graduated from the local intermediate school and went to study at the Civil Engineering Technical College in nearby Smolensk. However, in the second year of his studies, the college moved to Tver, and Girsh was offered the position of principal at the Jewish school in Chislavichi, which he willingly accepted. Under his management, the school was among the best Jewish schools in the Smolensk region, and Girsh was sent to Moscow to participate in an All-Union conference of the principals of Jewish schools. Eventually, he began studies at the Department of Jewish Philology at Moscow Junior University, from which he graduated in 1928. After graduation, he worked as the principal of the Jewish school in Smolensk. In 1936 he was arrested under the false accusation of “counterrevolutionary Trotskyist activity” and sentenced to 5 years imprisonment in labor camps. He was sent to the Vorkuta region and subjected to hard work, frost, and starvation, which he miraculously survived. He was not released till 1946 and forbidden to leave Vorkuta, where he lived and worked till 1966. Girsh Rivkin passed away on 25.12.1992 in Kaluga. [The memoirs that he wrote in the 1970s](#), disregarding the pressure and threats of the KGB, contain colorful descriptions of Jewish life in Chislavichi at the beginning of the 20th century and depict the horrific experiences of its Jewish inhabitants during the Holocaust. They describe his odyssey through the GULAG archipelago and recount the names of 389 contemporaries –former residents of his native shtetl.

[Index-Chislavichers mentioned in his book \(in English\)](#)

[HOME](#)