Guide to Romanian-Jewish Genealogy

Historical Background

Like most European countries, Romania’s borders have changed considerably over time. Starting in the late 15th century, the Ottoman Empire ruled the Romanian provinces of Moldavia, Walachia, and Dobruja, while Austria and Hungary controlled Banat, Bihor, Maramures, Satu Mare, and Transylvania. Austria took over Bukovina (northwestern Moldavia) in 1774, and Russia obtained Bessarabia (eastern Moldavia) in 1812. An unsuccessful Balkan revolt against the Turks ultimately led to Russian occupation of Walachia and Moldavia from 1829-34. The two principalities merged in 1859 to form Romania (also spelled Rumania or Roumania at various times), which remained subservient to the Ottomans until full independence was achieved in 1878. The province of Dobruja was also added at that time.

After World War I Romania regained control over the territories of Banat, Bessarabia, Bihor, Bukovina, Maramures, Satu Mare, and Transylvania at the expense of Austria-Hungary and Russia. During the Holocaust period, Romania temporarily gave up northern Transylvania (including northern Bihor, Maramures, and Satu Mare) to Hungary, and permanently lost northern Bukovina and Bessarabia (now the Republic of Moldova) to the Soviet Union.

Jews were present in the region under the Roman Empire, but subsequent invasions and wars severely disrupted their existence. The Jewish population increased significantly after 1800, primarily due to immigration. The following sources are recommended for further historical details:

*Encyclopedia of Eastern Europe*
Up-to-date reference work gives a balanced history of disputed territories, such as Transylvania.
YIVO Ref DJ K6 .E53 2000

*Encyclopedia Judaica*
Comprehensive source of articles on major towns and regions.
YIVO Ref DS 102.8 .E496

*Jewish Encyclopedia*
Published in New York beginning in 1901; presents an early 20th-century view of international Jewish problems.
YIVO Ref DS 102.8 .J7

YIVO DS 135 R7 A6 1991

LBI DS 135 R7 C35

YIVO DS 135 R7 A62 1993

YIVO /92175


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Finding Your Ancestral Town

To make the best use of this guide, you should first follow the general guidelines in our fact sheet on starting your family history research, and if necessary use our fact sheets on immigration, naturalization, census, and vital records to identify your ancestral town. If you determine that your town is within modern-day Romania, you will also need to find out the name of the county (judet) in which it is located. If your town was in (Austria-) Hungary before 1920 (i.e., if the town is located in Banat, Bihor, Maramures, Satu Mare, or Transylvania), you should also consult our fact sheet on Hungary. Besides the encyclopedias listed above, the following resources can be extremely helpful in this process:

ROM-SIG News
Formerly published by the Special Interest Group for Romanian Jewish Genealogy (see www.jewishgen.org/romsig), this newsletter contains anecdotes, short memoirs, members' personal experiences with travel to Romania and working with various archives and professional researchers, and occasional family photos, documents, and recipes. Scholarly articles appear also, as well as excerpts from Yizkor books and other publications (census lists, business directories, etc.).

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www.rootsweb.com/%7Eromwgw/districthotmap.html
This map shows county boundaries with links to individual county maps indicating most major towns.

Finding Records

Although religious authorities were required to maintain registers of births, marriages, and deaths starting around 1790 in Austria-Hungary and around 1830 in Walachia and Moldavia, records before 1850 are scarce. Civil (government) registration of vital events began throughout Romania in 1865, but not until 1895 in Austria-Hungary. Various kinds of censuses were conducted from the 18th century onward, and many of these records have been preserved. A census could be limited to a particular county or city; it might count only the Jews, or only property owners, or the entire population; and it was most often conducted for taxation purposes.
The two main sources for records are the Family History Library (FHL) of the Church of Latter-Day Saints (LDS) and archives in Romania. The FHL has not been allowed to microfilm records in Romania. Jewish vital records are only available for Apatiu, Cahul, Causani-Nou, Chisinau, Sacueni, Salard, Salonta, Sintimreu, and Tighina. Some films of census records are available for areas that were previously under Hungarian rule (see our fact sheet on Hungary). However, most genealogical research must be done on site in Romania. These articles explain how and where:


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[www.rootsweb.com/~romwgw/transylrecords.html](http://www.rootsweb.com/~romwgw/transylrecords.html)

Provides addresses and telephone numbers for archives in the Banat, Bihor, Maramures, Satu Mare, and Transylvania.


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[www.rtrfoundation.org/](http://www.rtrfoundation.org/)

Miriam Weiner’s Routes to Roots Foundation web site updates the information contained in her books.

[www.jewishgen.org/databases/Romania/](http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Romania/)

The JewishGen All-Romania database (including Moldova) is an index of tens of thousands of records.

Certain records were created specific to the "Sudits," or foreigners living in Romania during the 19th century. These individuals, under the diplomatic and legal protection of a foreign government, were granted special economic privileges through treaties with the Sultan of the Ottoman Empire. One-third or more of the Sudits were Jewish. For details, see:


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Depending on the region and time period, records may be in one of several languages: Romanian, Hungarian, German, Russian, Hebrew, and/or Latin. The same can be said of naming patterns. Although Sephardic Jews adopted surnames as early as the 15th century, prior to 1800 most Ashkenazi Jews used Hebrew or Yiddish patronymics (e.g., Moshe ben Avraham). Laws mandating surname adoption took decades to implement. Although surnames at the time of adoption were in the official language of the locality, a name (or they way a name was spelled) could be changed for various reasons. Specifically, Jews living under Hungarian rule increasingly abandoned Hebrew or German names for Magyarized versions as the 19th century progressed. For a more detailed discussion, see:


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**Landsmanshaft Records**

*Landsmanshaftn* are societies formed by Jewish immigrants from the same villages, towns, and cities in Central and Eastern Europe. These became a dominant form of Jewish social organization in the late 19th century, and include religious, cultural, and social organizations as well as American-style fraternal societies. *Landsmanshaftn* provided immigrants with social networks and financial assistance with health and accident insurance, cemetery plots and funeral expenses. YIVO has an extensive collection of archival materials from Romanian-American religious congregations (e.g., Chadash Agudas Achim, Philadelphia) and *landsmanshaftn* representing Romanian Jews, including former residents of towns such as Berlad, Bacau, Bucharest, Burdujeni, Botosani, Baran, Radauti, and Satu Mare, and regions like Bereg, Bukovina and Maramures. To find out if YIVO has a collection for your town, consult the following sources:


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**YIVO Territorial and Photographic Collections -- Romania**

The **YIVO Territorial Collection** has assorted materials relating to Jewish history and life in countries around the world. The "Rumania" file includes the register of the free loan society in Bacau, 1836; handwritten copies of registers of various other 19th-century societies; leaflets, posters, and programs published by *Fusgeyer* emigrant groups around 1900; material on the situation of the Jews before and during World War II; reports on the concentration camps in Transnistria; and albums of photographs, documents, charts & maps on the Romanian Holocaust. YIVO also has several collections of photographs that document Jewish life in Romania.

Territorial Collection -- Rumania

**YIVO Archive RG 116 -- Rumania**

Territorial Photographic Collection -- Rumania

**YIVO Archive RG 120 -- Rumania**

American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) Photographs

**YIVO Archive RG 35.95**

American ORT Foundation (vocational training programs)

**YIVO Archive RG 380**

Roman Vishniac Collection (1930's)

**YIVO Archive RG 1223**

Yiddish Theater Photographs

**YIVO Archive RG 119**

**Holocaust Resources**

Yizkor (memorial) books provide the history of Jewish communities destroyed or ravaged by the Holocaust. Most include photos and biographical articles, and many have name lists of those deported and killed.
**YIVO** has a large collection of Yizkor books, including those covering Bacau, Baia Mare, Baia Sprie, Beclean, Bessarabia, Bistrita, Bivolari, Borsa Maramures, Bronka (Ukraine), Cluj, Copalnic Manastur, Darabani, Dej, Dolgoye (Ukraine), Dorohoi, Gertsa (Ukraine), Gherla, Gura Humorului, Halmu, Hirlau, Huedin, Hungary (country), Iclod, Ileanda, Kapreshty (Moldova), Kushnitsa (Ukraine), Maramures (region), Marghita, Mihaileni, Oradea, Radauti, Rakhov (Ukraine), Reteg, Romania (country), Ruscova, Sadgora (Ukraine), Salaj (region), Saveni, Snyatyn (Ukraine), Somcuta Mare, Stefanesti, Strimtura, Tasnad, Tirgu Lapus, Tirgu Mures, Transylvania (region), Turt, Tyachev (Ukraine), Vinogradov (Ukraine), and Zadneye (Ukraine).

Other reference books useful for Holocaust research include:


LBI DS 135 RY D7


YIVO /92176


YIVO /87631

Provides the historical background of anti-Semitism in Romania as well as an account of the Holocaust period.

YIVO DS 135 .R7 B78

Based on documents which became available after the fall of Communism and the opening of previously sealed archives, this book details on a local level the role of the Romanian national government in the starvation, torture and killing of hundreds of thousands of Jews.

YIVO /95231

### Web Sites

[www.jewishgen.org/romsig/](http://www.jewishgen.org/romsig/)
ROM-SIG, Special Interest Group for Romanian Jewish Genealogy

[www.feehfs.org/ro/frag-ro.html](http://www.feehfs.org/ro/frag-ro.html)
Romanian home page of the Federation of East European Family History Societies

Romania World GenWeb

[www.bh.org.il/V-Exh/Romania/](http://www.bh.org.il/V-Exh/Romania/)
The Jews of Romania—a Virtual Exhibition from Beth Hatefutsoth

[www.romanianjewish.org](http://www.romanianjewish.org)
Romanian Jewish Community

[www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/kishinev/pogromvictims1903.htm](http://www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/kishinev/pogromvictims1903.htm)
Kishinev Pogrom victims