Romania: Jewish Family History Research Guide

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. These resources at the Center for Jewish History contain further historical details:

*Encyclopedia of Eastern Europe*
Modern reference work gives a balanced history of disputed territories, such as Transylvania. Romanian topics are covered on pages 666-698.
**REF DJK 6.E53 2000**

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

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

**REF DS 135 R7 A6 1991**

**LBI DS 135 R7 C35**

*Emigration Collection: Emigration 1881-1914.* Documents on Romania include newspaper clippings from 1902 and relevant proceedings of the Alliance Israelite Universelle, Paris. Materials in German and French.
**LBI AR 2023**

**YIVO 9/83842, /107486**

**YIVO 3/36339**
Geller, Jacob. *Ha-Yehudim ha-Sefaradim be-Romanyah.* Tel Aviv: U. at Tel Aviv, 1983.

**YIVO /90751**


**Genealogy Institute**


**REF DS 135 R7 A62 1993**


**YIVO /112904**


**YIVO /88224**


**YIVO /92175**


**REF – YIVO Publications**


**YIVO REF DS 135 .R7 K5**


**YIVO /31139**


**YIVO /107396**


**YIVO 15/10166**


**LBI DS 135 R7 R86**


**LBI DS 135 R7 S37**


**Genealogy Institute and REF DS 101 AJ 1901-02**


**YIVO /108405**

LBI DS 125 R7 V4

The following sources have information about specific regions or towns within Romania:


YIVO /87866


AJHS BM 522.3 .E7


AJHS DS 135 .R93 Z273


YIVO /93680


Genealogy Institute


YIVO /99690


YIVO /83204


YIVO /32075


YIVO /112901


YIVO /105262


LBI Library st 1209


YIVO /92204


YIVO /88076
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 (județ) in which it is located. If your town was in (Austria-) Hungary before 1920 (i.e., if the town is located in Banat, Bihor, Maramureș, 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:

Nomenclatura Postala a Localitatilor (Orase, Comune, Sate, Catune, Ferma, Manastiri, etc.) din Romania. Bucharest: "Eminescu" S.A., Institut de Arte Grafice si Editura, 1925.

REF DR 204.3 .N6

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, occasional family photos, documents, and recipes, scholarly articles, and excerpts from Yizkor books and other publications (census lists, business directories, etc.).

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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, Săcueni, 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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Weiner’s Routes to Roots Foundation web site updates the information contained in her book.

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:


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:


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 landsmanshaftn representing Romanian Jews, including former residents of towns such as Bacau, Baran, Birlad, Botosani, Bucharest, Burdujeni, Radauti, and Satu Mare, and regions like Bereg, Bukovina and Maramures. Other collections contain the records of Romanian-American religious congregations, such as:

Roumanian-American Congregation (Philadelphia, PA). Minutes, financial records, tickets for High Holy Days services, meeting notices, scrapbooks.

YIVO Archives RG 1101

To find out if YIVO has a collection for your town, consult the Center for Jewish History’s online catalog at http://catalog.cjh.org or one of the following sources:


http://home.att.net/%7Elandsmanshaft/yivo.htm
Web site prepared/edited by Ada Green, listing organizations represented in YIVO's Landsmanshaftn Collection.
Personal Papers of Individuals and Families
LBI AR 9194

Jacob Sinnreich Family. Typescript of excerpts from 1898 diary, school papers, and family tree. German language materials from Bukovina.
LBI AR 5061

YIVO Territorial and Photographic Collections -- Romania
Territorial Collection – Rumania. Assorted materials relating to Jewish history and life in Romania: 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 Archives RG 116 -- Rumania

Territorial Photographic Collection – Rumania. Over 450 photographs can be found in the “People of a Thousand Towns” online catalog, which may be accessed from www.yivo.org/library/index.php.

Subjects include fusgeyers, farmers, blacksmiths, a tinsmith, a furrier, lumberyard & winery workers, shepherds, butchers, grocers, peddlers, rabbis, medical equipment and personnel, traditional and vocational schools, agricultural colonists (1920s settlements in Bessarabia), synagogues, summer camps, pogroms (1903-5 and post WWI), refugees, portraits, street scenes, and non-Jewish villagers and peasants.

There are numerous photographs of Carpathia and Maramures. Towns include Bacau, Bender, Bilhorod-Dnistrovskyy, Birlad, Bolhrad, Borsa Maramures, Botosani, Briceny, Bucharest, Chernivtsi, Chiperceni, Chisinau, Cluj-Napoca, Craiova, Dej, Edinet, Gerta, Iasi, Iclod, Izbeste, Khotin, Leova, Lipcani, Marghita, Moinesti, Moisei, Novoselitsa, Ocnita, Orhei, Piatra-Neamt, Reghin, Ruscova, Ribnita, Sacueni, Sadgora, Sapinta, Satu-Mare, Sebes, Sighetu Marmatiei, Soroka, Stefanesti, Sucavea, Telenesti, Tirgu Neamt, Tirgu Ocna, and Viseul de Sus.
YIVO Archives RG 120 -- Rumania

American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC) Photographs
YIVO Archives RG 335.9

American ORT Foundation (vocational training programs)
YIVO Archives RG 380

Roman Vishniac Collection (1930's)
YIVO Archives RG 1223

Yiddish Theater Photographs
YIVO Archives 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-Nasaud, Bivolari, Borsa Maramures, Bronka, Cluj-Napoca, Copalnic Manastur, Darabani, Dej, Dolgoye, Dorohoi, Edinet, Gertsa, Gherla, Gura Humorului, Halmeu, Hirlau, Huedin, Ileanda, Kapreshty, Kushnitsa, Maramures, Marculesti, Marghita, Mihaileni, Oradea, Radauti, Rakhov, Reteag, Romania, Ruscova, Sadgora, Salaj, Saveni, Snyatyn, Somcuta Mare, Stefanesti, Strimitura, Tasnad, Tirgu Lapus, Tirgu Mures, Transylvania, Turt, Tyachev, Vatra-Dornei, Vinogradov, and Zadneye.

Other reference books useful for Holocaust research include:


**YIVO 9/83843**


**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**


**YIVO /88667**


**YIVO /109959**


**YIVO /99691**


**YIVO /93454** [Romanian version, 2001: /108541]


**YIVO /95231**
YIVO 89369

YIVO 98710

YIVO 9/83843


Web Sites
www.jewishgen.org/romsig/
ROM-SIG, Special Interest Group for Romanian Jewish Genealogy

www.feehfs.org/ro/frg-ro.html
Romanian home page of the Federation of East European Family History Societies

www.rootsweb.com/~romwgw/index.html
Romania World GenWeb

www.bh.org.il/V-Exh/Romania/
The Jews of Romania—a Virtual Exhibition from Beth Hatefutsoth

www.romanianjewish.org
Romanian Jewish Community

www.shtetlinks.jewishgen.org/kishinev/pogromvictims1903.htm
Kishinev Pogrom victims

Romanian Home Page

www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/romania.html
Romania maps (Perry-Castaneda Library, University of Texas at Austin)

www.ushmm.org/research/center/presentations/features/details/2005-03-10
Romania Facing the Past (U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum)