Many times in genealogical research the most successful avenue of approach in gathering information about your ancestors is to contact as many known relatives as possible. If you don’t know any close living descendants, or have exhausted all the information they can provide, it is often helpful to search out more distant relations that have the same surname. This can be most easily accomplished by doing a telephone book search. To do this all one needs is the local branch of the public library; it usually stocks phone books from around the country, and often from the major cities around the world as well.

Fortunately, telephone book research does not take extraordinary effort; it is something that virtually anyone can undertake. In order to illustrate this clearly let me use as an example the situation that confronted me while investigating the paternal family of my wife, Sherry. At first, I felt that I had insurmountable problems to overcome. We had managed to trace back to Sherry’s grandfather, Juda Salamon Levie, who had been born in the 1860’s. On some old family documents I had also seen Juda’s name written sometimes as Juda Samuel Levie (it seemed that Salamon and Samuel were used pretty much interchangeably). In fact, the given name Samuel ran through several generations of Sherry’s relatives. The problem that prevented me from getting “beyond” this particular grandfather was that he had been born in a very remote country in South America. Just take a look at a map and you’ll easily find it tucked inconspicuously in the region between northern Brazil and Venezuela. Even though Surinam was located on the South American mainland, it has always been considered part of the old Dutch West Indies. But if you ask the average person today anything about Surinam, you’ll usually get only a blank stare. Most people, if pressed, would venture a guess that it’s in Asia somewhere near Vietnam!

How did a Jewish family ever get to such an out of the way place? The family myth is that they had come there from Canada. In fact a little historical research on my part had revealed that during the 18th and 19th centuries there had been a tremendous amount of trade (in codfish) between the eastern coast of Canada and the West Indies. The shipping lanes were highways of the 18th century and the richest part of the cargo sent to the West Indies was the prolific codfish, netted off the banks of Newfoundland. Cod could be easily caught, salted, dried, and packed, then sold cheaply and profitably. Plantations throughout the West Indies and the southern U.S. fed cod regularly to their slaves and sometimes the masters ate it too.

I had tried very hard to obtain records from Surinam, but without success. Information from the Burgerlijke Stand (Records Bureau) there is virtually impossible to obtain because the country’s present day political parties are drawn along racial lines. The government feels that the revelation of an ancestor of "the wrong flavour" in a politician’s past might be politically embarrassing. For this reason these records are kept under lock and key.

However, I had by luck come across a surviving remnant detailing ships’ sailings in and out of Surinam for the period between 1760 and 1790. One of the listings indicated that there was a man by the name of Asser Samuel Levie, who had journeyed from Amsterdam to Surinam with his wife and two children on the brigantine Vreedenburg in 1776 (a brigantine is an old three masted sailing ship). Then, in 1784, Asser Samuel Levie departed from Surinam for Halifax, Nova Scotia. The fact that he carried the name Samuel, plus the information that he...
had landed in Canada made me feel intuitively that he was most probably an ancestor of Sherry's. But how to prove it? I was not able to find any records concerning him in the various Canadian archives that I researched. However, I did finally find mention of him in Rabbi Malcom Stern's book, *First American Jewish Families, 600 Genealogies 1654-1977* (American Jewish Historical Society, 1978). In it was noted that two of Asser's daughters married men from Surinam, but a son named Samuel married Belle Meyers, who had been born in Quebec. So it seemed likely to me that there might be some living descendants still in Canada. This is when I begin my telephone book search.

By my example, it will become clear how anyone can be successful at researching almost any family name. Bear in mind that the task is considerably easier if you happen to have a name that is somewhat unusual. For example, Schwartz would be tough do deal with; the phone book listings would seem endless! So, if you are fortunate enough to have a somewhat odd surname, the number of false leads will be greatly reduced.

An impediment to my attempting to locate Sherry's relations before was that her last name was one I believed to be a very common one - Le vie. Of course, Levie is a variant of the Hebrew name Levy, used in the Old Testament to indicate the priestly caste of temple officials; the name derives from one of the original twelve tribes of Israel. In medieval Europe, when family names were often symbolized by animal totems, the name Levy and its linguistic variants, Lieb, Loeb, Levine, Levitt, etc., were indicated by a lion. However, it suddenly dawned on me

**CALENDAR OF EVENTS**

**Wednesday January 26:** Do You Know Who Your Parents were? Anna Cheszes, one of our members, will speak on the special genealogical problems of hidden children of the Holocaust. *Sharei Shomayim Synagogue, 8 p.m.*

**Wednesday February 23:** There will be a videopresentation on the history of Polish Jewry. A rarely seen documentary, one of the nine part PBS series entitled "The Struggles for Poland." It covers the long history of the Jewish settlement in Poland with particular emphasis on cultural and political life during the interwar period. *Adath Israel Synagogue, 8 p.m.*

**Wednesday March 30:** Topics to be announced.

**Saturday March 5 and Sunday March 6:** The Friends of Yiddish and Congregation Darchei Noam are jointly bringing to Toronto the Gilbert and Sullivan Light Opera Company in a production of *Der Yiddisher Mikado*. You don't have to speak Yiddish to understand this English/Yiddish adaptation of the original. All tickets are $18 at Ticketmaster 872-1111. For further information call 781-8331.

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The Jewish Genealogical Society of Canada was founded in 1985 and currently has about 150 members. Membership costs $30 per calendar year. Meetings are held September to June, usually on the last Wednesday of each month at 8.00 p.m. (doors open 7.30) at Sharei Shomayim Synagogue, 470 Glencairn Avenue, Toronto (unless announced otherwise). Guests are always welcome. Details are usually printed in the Canadian Jewish News.

The goals of the Society are to provide a forum for the exchange of knowledge and information through meetings, outings, workshops and guest lectures, and thereby to promote an awareness of genealogy within the Jewish community of Canada. The Society is affiliated with the Jewish Federation of Greater Toronto and is registered as a non-profit charitable organization.

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PATRICK GORDIS
HOWARD SHIDLOWSKY
DIANA SOMMERS
MIRIAM WEINER
that my wife's name is spelled Levig. Its particular "ie" ending made it a very special variant of the much more common Levy. With this revelation in mind, I sped down to the public library (we live in California now) to discover what long lost relatives awaited me hidden in the midst of the white pages. I was ready to go lion hunting in Canada.

When I arrived, the librarian informed me that they stocked phone books from cities all over the United States, plus a few from Canada. In less than a half hour, I had discovered 13 possible Canadian relatives of my wife! Next, Sherry and I set about composing a letter to send to all of the Levies, of whom I hoped at least some would turn out to be her long-lost relatives. In the letter we gave a brief history of the known details of Sherry's family, as I have outlined above.

Imagine how excited we were ultimately to receive four replies, responses which were varied, amusing, and informative. The first letter came from a Richard Levie, a Christian who reported a story that I felt was a pertinent one for the genealogical researcher. He wrote, "When I was a youngster in Quebec City, my father took me to St. Patrick's Church cemetery and showed me a tombstone with the name Richard Levie, aged 10, who died in 1710 of the plague. My wife and I [again] visited [there] during courtship, but when the children were old enough to see it, vandals had knocked down the fragile stones and the shards had been bulldozed into a nearby pile. The church records for the period had been lost in fires literally a hundred years earlier. In early Quebec history, the churches were the only recorders of births and deaths, so this trail went cold."

It was also evident to me that the entombed Richard Levie had lived too early to be a descendant from Sherry's presumed relation, Asser. I came to realize that in today's world many people named Levy (or its variants) are of diverse religious and national backgrounds, and, as previously mentioned, can trace their ancestors back to some early European translations of the symbol for lion.

But another Canadian Levie wrote that his ancestral tree could be traced back to the late 1700's to Jews in Nova Scotia. A third respondent notified me that he also knew of Jewish forbearers living in Nova Scotia, as well as in Newfoundland, who were slave runners in the early 1800's. So far, these three are my most likely links to Asser Samuel Levie. Up to now we have been unable to come up with any iron-clad proof, but you can rest assured that we are networking like crazy! And I feel confident that before too long by pooling our knowledge, we will have cracked the case.

The fourth fellow who replied to my letter was Dewey Levie, who is descended from a Mormon family. But Dewey felt quite sure that his family had originally been Jewish and he had been able to trace his ancestry back to one Frederick Levie, born around 1780, who had been married in Essex, Ontario, Canada.

For those of you who want further tips on how to stage an in-depth phone search, I've included the following pointers to help you get started:

1. Make a chart of all known relatives, listing as much information you have. Include birth, marriage, and death dates, and last known addresses. Many times this information is quite sparse, but don't be discouraged!
2. Try to remember any religious or community organizations to which a relative may have belonged. You can write to them for any information they might have on file which could help your search. Follow up on every clue.
3. If your family name is not outrageously common, go to the local library. Copy all those listings in the phone books having your surname. Go home and write a form letter to these people clearly explaining your purpose. It is best to include the matches, asking for the information you desire.
4. Contacting embassies can help in finding foreign relations. Consulates are a great source of all kinds of facts, and they are usually very willing to supply you with information.
5. Ask all of the relatives that you find for dates, facts, addresses or other information they might supply you with.
6. Record any anecdotes and remembrances you uncover both from your current family members as well as those you discover from the phone book search. Get them all down on paper for they are priceless reclaimed oral history of your family, and those precious words are worth their weight in gold!

So get down to that library, pull out those trusty-dusty telephone books and roll up your sleeves! I think you'll find telephone tag a sure fire way to catch up with those long lost relatives!

Ralph G. Bennett is a physician living in Hayward, California. His articles on medical subjects, history, genealogy, anthropology, art history and economics have appeared in many publications internationally.

December 1993 Shem Tov 3
INDEXING JEWISH CEMETERIES
Howard Shidlowsky

One of the many "Birds of a Feather" meetings at the Summer Seminar was a meeting of people involved with and interested in the various cemetery projects underway around the world. After introducing ourselves and briefly describing the state of our individual projects or interest, a general discussion of goals was chaired by Arline Sachs of the JGS of Greater Washington. We quickly learned that we all have a great deal in common.

The 2 hour session produced a general plan for coordinating the various projects. The plan has 3 phases:

1. Create a list of all cemeteries with Jewish burials.
2. Transcribe the tombstones in each of these cemeteries.
3. Create an index of all Jewish burials.

The first step is no small task. The list of cemeteries will show the name and location of each cemetery, the date it was established and closed (if applicable), number of burials and contact person and phone number. We hope to have a first version of this list prepared by December 1993. If you think this is a simple task, keep in mind that we are talking about cemeteries around the world, not just in the US and Canada. Hats off to Arline Sachs for volunteering to manage this task.

After this step was agreed upon, the group discussed what information should be recorded from a tombstone. Since some projects have already been running for a few years, there was a feeling that no individual project should have to radically change. The minimum amount of data that should be recorded is the full name of the deceased in English, date of death and birth (if given) and age (if given). Recording Hebrew names and dates presents a unique set of problems that we did not have time to discuss. Some groups do record the Hebrew names and dates while others don't in order to record more quickly. The issue should be settled locally. One group is calculating birth date based on the age given on the stone. Another group was even recording the measurements of the tombstones.

The last step is an enormous project. This will be a master index of all known Jewish burials (NOT the full data). We are a long way from making any decisions about this but the very idea is incredibly exciting (& certainly not something I ever considered when I volunteered to sit on the cemetery committee 3 years ago).

At some later date, all of this will have to be coordinated with Jewish Historical Societies, funeral homes, Synagogues and Landsmanschaften.

I was particularly pleased to meet others who are involved in similar projects. Swapping stories made me realize how much work has been done, how much lies ahead and how much I have learned while doing it.

VITAL STATISTICS RECORDS AT THE ARCHIVES OF ONTARIO

Microfilms of the computer-generated name indexes and full records of vital statistics records are now available at the Archives of Ontario. These records cover Births 1869-1896, Marriages 1869 - 1911 and Deaths 1869 - 1921. The indexes list the name, date and location of the event only. The indexes can be ordered by interlibrary loan although the full records may not. The latest materials, birth for 1897, marriages 1912 and deaths 1922, are not yet available.

For more information write to Public Service Section, Attn Vital Statistics Reference Archivist, Archives of Ontario, 77 Grenville Street, Toronto, Ontario M7A 2R9. Otherwise, you can call the Vital Statistics Hotline at (416) 327-1593 24 hours a day for updates.

Vital statistics records dated later than those indicated above are still held by the Registrar General. For information write to The Office of the Registrar General, P.O. Box 4600, Thunder Bay, Ontario P7B 6L8. The phone number is (416) 965-1687 in Toronto, 1-800-461-2156 elsewhere in Ontario and 1-807-343-7420 outside the province.

FIND YOUR JEWISH ROUTES

Visits to your shtetl in Poland, Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus or Russia

Where do you come from? Stop wondering and start knowing. I will search Russian archives for birth, marriage and death records of your ancestors; interview Jews in the towns they came from; take photos and videos of synagogues, Jewish cemeteries and local sites. I also organize personalized genealogical tours to Eastern Europe.

For information write or call Miriam Weiner, certified genealogist and co-author of the Encyclopedia of Jewish Genealogy (Jason Aronson Publisher) at Routes to Roots, 136 Sandpiper Key, Secaucus, NJ 07094. Phone 201/866-4075 or fax 201/864-9222.
Books

A History and Guide to Judaic Encyclopedias and Lexicons, by Shimeon Brisman

Reviewed by Patrick Gordis

A History and Guide to Judaic Encyclopedias and Lexicons (hereafter referred to as HGJEL), which was awarded the Harold Mason Judaica Reference Book Award for 1987, forms volume two of Shimeon Brismans valuable series on Jewish Research Literature. For at least two important reasons, Jewish research literature has always been the fons et origo of Jewish genealogical information: (1) Archival records pertaining to many Jewish populations are today of limited completeness or, to the degree that they do survive, often remain largely inaccessible to most researchers; (2) Jews have in their diaspora maintained a much higher level of literacy and interest in writing and reading relative to the gentile masses amongst whom they resided, which gave rise to a very lively literature and press, both religious and secular. In spite of the great potential importance offered by Judaic encyclopedias and lexicons to Jewish genealogy projects, many of these sources remain largely unexamined by researchers due to their obscurity, the languages in which they were composed, or their unavailability at many libraries. For the Jewish genealogist yearning for an English language, scholarly, largely reliable and comprehensive (up to 1986) overview of the enormous research possibilities offered by specialized Judaic encyclopedias and lexicons, Brisman's History and Guide to this subject matter is an absolutely indispensable companion. It is the considered opinion of the reviewer that if one were to enumerate all of the printed research sources described or mentioned in HGJEL and carefully examine each one for information about one's Jewish ancestors and ancestral towns, the amount of information one could glean would far exceed the combined potential information found in such popular Jewish genealogical reference works as Where Once We Walked (Woww), Encyclopedia of Jewish Genealogy, and the Gazetteer. Unfortunately, since HGJEL was not written by a Jewish genealogist or promoted as such, it has received very little, if any, attention in Jewish genealogical publications. The purpose of this detailed review of HGJEL, which will appear in two parts, is both to acquaint Jewish genealogists with the potential importance of this work to their own research and to suggest, in the second part, further valuable Judaic encyclopedias and lexicons omitted in HGJEL.

The present review will focus only on those chapters or portions of chapters of greatest relevance to Jewish genealogy: General Judaic Encyclopedias and Lexicons; Personalities of the Holy Land and the State of Israel; Biographical Encyclopedias & Lexicons; Encyclopedias & Lexicons of Jews in the Arts and Sciences; and Encyclopedias & Lexicons of Diaspora Communities. All but the last chapter commence with a detailed narrative portion which provides "bibliographical, biographical, historical and genealogical data" on the various encyclopedias and lexicons under consideration. This is followed by "elaborate chronological lists with summaries for instant information." The format of the chronological summaries varies somewhat, but usually includes the following elements: Basic bibliographical information (including transliterated titles for non-Latin alphabet works); a brief description of the contents, the purpose and the organization of the work; name(s) of the editor(s); indexes, added title pages and supplements (if any); and finally references to scholarly book reviews which were usually roughly contemporaneous with the original publication of the work. To better illustrate this scheme and to demonstrate its potential usefulness to Jewish genealogists, see the shaded box on this page. Other attractive and useful features of HGJEL include lists of abbreviations and major sources consulted, as well as "two detailed indexes, one to the narrative and the footnotes and one to the 'chronological lists.'" Before proceeding, two general points regarding HGJEL warrant special emphasis in the reviewer's opinion: (1) The reader should not gloss over the introductory narrative portion to each chapter—in favor of the chronological lists; (2) The reader should not gloss over the endnotes, which frequently contain not only vital information about the work in question, but also refer the reader to parallel sources which may be of equal or greater interest to a particular genealogical project.

At first glance, HGJEL would appear to be of greatest interest to novice Jewish genealogists, or to those Jewish genealogists who may have considerable experience in some aspects of Jewish genealogy, but remain essential novices in terms of Jewish research literature. In either case, a carefully examination of HGJEL would provide one with an excep-
tionally broad overview of many of the basic research tools for pursuing Jewish family history. It is worth noting that only about one quarter of the works described or mentioned in *HGJEL* are in English, the rest are in a dozen other languages—about half are in Hebrew or Yiddish. For those whose linguistic skills are limited to English or who have very limited linguistic skills in other languages (particularly Hebrew and Yiddish), *HGJEL* provides an English language key to a vast array of sources which might otherwise seem impenetrable. Furthermore, the novice or the researcher with limited linguistic capability relative to a particular source may be unaware that a particular work is considered unreliable or that it is largely derived from more detailed works which the researcher should locate.

Experienced Jewish genealogists will likely be familiar on one level with many of the basic works described in *HGJEL*. Nonetheless, even experienced genealogists, often approaching a particular source with very limited goals, lack the critical knowledge or sense to place a newly uncovered source in its proper context. By inclusion of references to scholarly reviews, supplements, various editions and translations, *HGJEL* provides the advanced researcher or author not only with crucial information about the source in question but also with a critical model of how to approach any printed source. Contemporary readers only acquainted with non-scholarly book reviews may not appreciate sufficiently the importance of seeking out book reviews which appeared in older scholarly Judaica publications. In contrast to most contemporary book reviews, which offer little more than a summary of a book's content with some general comments appended, scholarly book reviews of the past frequently included detailed additions and corrections which often constitute an indispensable companion to the original source. Moreover, it is probable that at least some of the sources described in *HGJEL* will have escaped the notice of even the most seasoned researchers. For example, those with Polish-Jewish ancestry may want to examine the *Lerer-Yizkor-Bukh* (New York, 1952-54) described in *HGJEL* (p. 347), which includes biographies of hundreds of Jewish teachers who perished in the Holocaust. Since this is not a yizkor book about a locality, it is not found in the bibliographies of yizkor books with which most advanced researchers are familiar.

The most basic deficiency of *HGJEL*, which leads in turn to many other problems and uncertainties, is the lack of clear definitions. *HGJEL* would have benefited greatly from clear definitions of what exactly constitutes a Judaic encyclopedia or lexicon in the mind of the author; exactly what criteria were employed to decide which sources were fully featured and described in the "chronological lists" as opposed to those relegated to the endnotes; and finally, what criteria were used to exclude numerous parallel works, most of which were probably known to the author. In addition to clear definitions to orient the reader as to the methodology of inclusion and treatment of different works, the author might also have considered attempting to enumerate in a bibliographical appendix all known Judaic encyclopedias and lexicons. By this means a nearly complete overview of Judaic encyclopedias and lexicons might have been available to the researcher or student.

Another significant inadequacy concerns the inordinate number of typographical errors and other relatively minor inaccuracies. Given that the author is a bibliographer and the academic publisher, it does not seem too much to expect many fewer blemishes. Those errors and inaccuracies noted at the conclusion of the first part of this review probably represent only a small fraction of the total number of misprints and mistakes. Although not taken account of in the corrections offered below, the indexes in particular seem full of errors and omissions.

In concluding the first part of this review, the reviewer would like to draw some basic lessons of Judaic research from *HGJEL* which may be of benefit to Jewish genealogists. First, with respect to general Judaic encyclopedias, an excessive emphasis has been placed in Jewish genealogical circles on the exclusive utility of the English language *Encyclopedia Judaica* (*EJ*). For example, both *WWW* and *Skillet Finder* only refer to *EJ* among all of the major Judaic encyclopedias. By contrast, an examination of *HGJEL* confirms that all major Judaic encyclopedias have been strongly influenced by the time and place in which they were created—not to mention ideological biases of the editors—and that more recent encyclopedias do not necessarily contain the same information as prior encyclopedias or in any sense supersede them. For example, while the *EJ* may be a far superior encyclopedia overall to the one volume *Magyar Zsidó Lexikon* (Budapest, 1929-1930) or the Spanish language *Enciclopedia judaica castellana* (Mexico City, 1948-1951), the Jewish genealogist investigating Hungary or Latin America respectively may find more pertinent information in the latter two sources. The bottom line for the Jewish genealogist is that he should not rely solely on one or two Judaic encyclopedias, but rather should endeavor to check as many Judaic encyclopedias as possible for localities, organizations and family names.

The other significant lesson the genealogist may draw from *HGJEL* is to be disabused of the notion that Judaic biographical lexicons only contain entries for world famous personalities. A few examples, by no means exhaustive will have to suffice here. Almost 20% of those featured in *The South African Jewish Year Book* (Johannesburg, 1929) were under the age of 30 and included many common folk, such as Abraham Nathaniel Porter, draper and outfitter, originally from Kovno, Russia. Regarding personalities of the Holy Land and the State of Israel, *Entziklopediyyah Lechaltute Hayishuv Ubenov* (Tel Aviv, 1947-1971) "covers personalities from all walks of life and all political groups ... including[ ] data on people not found in any other reference works."

**Corrections & Additional Information on Texts Cited in HGJEL:**

Page numbers in bold face refer to *HGJEL*. All items requiring correction are underlined. Commentary to corrections, when warranted, is supplied in square brackets []. Suggested additional information is entirely in square brackets. An "*" signifies that the reviewer did not personally examine the source in question.

**Note the following abbreviations:**

*BJGL* = Blätter für jüdische Geschichte und Literatur (supplement to *HZ*); *DLZ* = Deutsche Literaturzeitung; *EJ* = *Encyclopedia Judaica* (Berlin); *FJS* = Freie jüdische Lehrerstimme; *HZ* = Historia Judaica; *HJ* = *Hicks' jüdischer Volkskalender*; *JNM* = *Jüdische Monatsschrift* (supplement to the *Jüdische Presse*); *JBN* = Judaica Book News; *JBJ* = *Journal of Jewish Bibliography*; *JL* = Judaica Librarianship; *JLLG* = *Jahrbuch der jüdisch-literarischen Gesellschaft*; *JP* = *Jüdische Presse*; *JQR* = *Jewish Quarterly Review*, old series; *LB* = *Literarisches Zentralblatt*; *MGWJ* = *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums*; *MZS* = *Magyar Zsidó Stúdió*; *UL* = UCLA Library; *YB* = *YIVO Blätter*; *ZGID* = *Zeitschrift für die Geschichte der Juden in Deutschland*, new series; *ZHB* = *Zeitschrift für hebraische Bibliographie*.

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Cf. JL

which ALAILC represent with Judaism”).

the remainder of the supplement was published in another publication.

Note pagination error in original work following p. 368 of Hebrew section. The

by comparing H. Flesch, [Review: MSZ 22 (1952): 246-271; Chapter 8,

Tateh HaTzadik, foreword by Joshua Bloch.

biographical lists ... in other communities ... H. Flesch, [Review: MSZ 22 (1952):

Endnotes

printings-the introduction of the printing press came through Hebrew typography.


Chapter 1, pp. 23-29 (excluding “Junior Jewish Encyclopedia”); Chapter 5, pp.

December 1993 Shem Tov 7
TRAVELLING COMPANIONS TO JEWISH HERITAGE SITES
By Miriam Weiner

For the family historian, two recently published books are sure to become a necessity in planning visits to ancestral towns in Central and Eastern Europe.

Ruth Ellen Gruber, a freelance journalist for numerous American newspapers and former UPI chief correspondent in Vienna, Warsaw and Belgrade, shares her expert knowledge of the sights and sounds of historic Jewish culture in JEWISH HERITAGE TRAVEL: A Guide to Central & Eastern Europe (John Wiley &Sons; 1992, $14.95; paperback, toll-free orders: 800 982-2665 US only).

One of the most comprehensive guides ever published on the subject, JEWISH HERITAGE TRAVEL, conveys in brilliant detail the rich history of Jewish tradition as reflected through the fascinating treasures and ruins left behind in Central and Eastern Europe.

"When people think of the Holocaust and Eastern Europe, they think more about the places of horror where Jews died by the millions than those places where they lived in even greater millions," Gruber said.

Although her book tells how to look for signs of the lives that were taken away such as the scar which can be seen where mezuzahs were ripped from the front of doorways, Gruber also celebrates the lives Jewish ancestors led by looking at the homes of the commoners and rabbis, shops and magnificent synagogues that can still be seen today.

Her book not only conveys the popular sights tourists frequent, such as Prague and Budapest, but also the small hilltop village, the hidden graveyard and little known locations that offer a true picture of life in Jewish Europe as it once was.

In the book's introduction, Gruber, whose ancestors came from Romania, describes the strange emotions which accompanied her throughout her travels. "As I entered broken gates or climbed over broken walls into cemeteries where a Jew may not have set foot in years, I wanted to spread my arms and embrace them all, embrace all the gravestones, all the people buried there, all the memories. 'I'm here,' I told them mentally, 'someone' is here.'

For each country, there is a brief outline of the Jewish history and main sites of Jewish interest. After the main Jewish centres, there is an alphabetical listing of various other places of Jewish interest. There are dozens of intriguing facts and history for each location, along with sound advice for everything from conversing with locals and obtaining keys to locked synagogues, to finding elusive gas stations. Much of the writing is subjective, with personal anecdotes, photos and maps.

Both a practical travel guide and a historical guidebook, JEWISH HERITAGE TRAVEL, is a "must" for visitors to Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania, Yugoslavia and Bulgaria.

During my own travels throughout Poland, unfortunately prior to the publication of Gruber's book, a visit to Bialystok gave me the opportunity to meet Tomasz Wisniewski with whom I had been corresponding for some time. Wisniewski showed me his extensive research into the Jewish history of the Bialystok region including sketches which would eventually accompany the book he had dreamed of completing for so many years.

Tomasz Wisniewski is a Polish historian of Jewish life in Poland, author of three books and more than 100 articles about Jews in the Bialystok-Grodno region. He studied in Israel and became interested in Jewish history when he read a book about Jewish resistance in the Bialystok ghetto. Through his work he seeks to preserve the richness of Jewish culture and bring understanding to his fellow Poles.

As Wisniewski guided me through the remaining Jewish sites of Bialystok, he talked non-stop about the Jewish people who once lived there and the remaining half dozen old men living out their lives in a city once teeming with Jewish life.

Wisniewski's hard work came to an end, at least for this project, with the publication of SYNAGOGUES AND JEWISH COMMUNITIES IN THE BIALYSTOK REGION: Jewish Life in Eastern Europe Before 1939 (David Publishing House, Bialystok, 1992, Polish/English, paperback). The book contains a detailed history of each Jewish village in Bialystok region, descriptions of synagogues and Jewish prayer houses, more than 150 pictures and drawings of synagogues, maps, bibliography, indexes, tables and English summaries.

It is estimated that prior to the Holocaust, there were approximately 160 to 165 synagogues in the counties of Bialystok, Bielsk and Sokola. Of these, only 12 to 15 still remain and among them there is rapid deterioration due to lack of proper care. Until the Second World War, many magnificent wooden synagogues existed in the Bialystok region. The Holocaust brought destruction to all of them except those in Tykocin, Orla and Krinki.

This book will appeal to scholars as well as to families who want to know more about their origins. For ordering information write to Wisniewski at P.O. Box 351, 15-001 Bialystok Poland.

Miriam Weiner is a columnist and lecturer specializing in Jewish genealogy and Holocaust research. Weiner is also coordinator of "Roots to Roots" Genealogy tours to Poland and Ukraine. For information on how to research your family history, send a stamped self-addressed envelope to Weiner at 136 Sandpiper Key, Secaucus, NJ 07094.

8 Shem Tov December 1993
VIDEOS OFFER OPPORTUNITY FOR ARMCHAIR "ROOTS" TOUR
By Miriam Weiner

Many of us would like to take a walk in the footsteps of our ancestors during a visit to those far away places where they once lived. For the majority of Jews who are not able to travel to the "old country," a rapidly increasing number of documentary films available on video offer the viewer the opportunity to step back in time and for a few moments savor and explore the world that was.

Watching these films evokes a mixture of nostalgia for fading traditions and a historical perspective as it relates to one's own family. Some scenes bring to mind recent headlines such as the tragedy in Istanbul's synagogue and the desecration of Warsaw's Jewish cemetery.

A few years ago, Eric A. Goldman founded Ergo Home Video which offers a tantalizing variety of subject titles through its colorful and descriptive catalog. The category "Jewish Life Around the World" includes films about the Jewish communities in Argentina, Ethiopia, Italy, Morocco, Poland, Lithuania, Romania, U.S.S.R., the Dominican Republic and Arab Lands. According to Goldman, "we cherish the precious legacy of our past and attempt to bring you treasured classics and invaluable documentaries."

The Jewish community in Morocco dates back to the first exile. In the 1950's, Morocco had a thriving Jewish community of 306,000, but the numbers have dwindled to less than 10,000 primarily due to emigration. An intriguing exploration of remnants of Jewish life in Morocco is the documentary film, "Routes of Exile: A Moroccan Jewish Odyssey" (available in English and French). Shot on location, the film vividly portrays the ongoing odyssey of a 2,000 year-old community whose remarkable journey is still unfolding. The majority of Morocco's Jews live in Casablanca which is today a modern city in many ways, but through the camera's eye, we visit small pockets of Jews throughout Morocco who live their lives in much the same manner as generations of Sephardim before them.

For those with roots in Eastern Europe, the film entitled "The Jews of Poland: Five Cities / Bialystok, Lvov, Krakow, Vilna, Warsaw" (English and Yiddish) may cause some confusion due to the rapidly changing political and geographic structure in the U.S.S.R. While Poland can still claim Bialystok, Krakow and Warsaw, the city of Lvov (formerly Lemberg) is part of the Ukraine and Vilna (now Vilnius) is on the newly-drawn Lithuania map. However, this film was made in 1938-1939 when all five cities were part of Poland and what is especially painful about this film is seeing the route patterns of normal life for Eastern European Jewry during the pre-Holocaust days. Because we know what followed, it makes the scenes of Jewish sites and Jewish life jump out at you because the vast majority of these sites were damaged and destroyed. The faces in the film are haunting as they represent the faces of 6,000,000 Jews who perished. Filmmakers Yitzhak and Shaul Godkind visited six Jewish communities in Poland in an effort to record the vitality of Jewish life (the film about Lodz is lost). Little did they suspect their film would be one of the visual accounts of a once vibrant world.

Both videos are available from Ergo Media, Inc., P.O. Box 2037, Teaneck, NJ 07666 (800/695-3746 or 212/692-0404).

Today, Turkey's Jewish community is preparing to celebrate the commemoraton of 500 years of Jewish life in the former Ottoman empire. A glimpse into the traditions and rituals of the Sephardic community can be seen in "Turkey's Sephardim: 500 Years." Philadelphia photographer and filmmaker Laurence Salzmann and his wife, Ayse Salzmann, spent five years in Turkey where they met and photographed the Sephardic Jewish community. Out of their photographic journey evolved the documentary film which takes the viewer into the homes and lives of many descendants of those Jews who fled to Turkey from Spain in 1492.

The history of the Jews in Spain is well documented and even fictionalized accounts can introduce the reader to historical events such as David Raphael's book, THE ALHAMBRA DECREE. For a visual look, Raphael's film, "Song of the Sephardi," takes you to Spain as it recounts the amazing story of the Spanish Jews from the time of the Golden Age in Moorish Spain, through the fateful years of the inquisition, the expulsion in 1492 and the subsequent dispersion of the Sephardim, initially to Salonica, Istanbul and Amsterdam. The film was made with the participation of the Sephardic communities of Seattle and Jerusalem.

This unique feature-length documentary is an imaginative attempt to cinematically portray and interpret the lyrics of the traditional Ladino folk songs that have been the lifeblood and the musical soul of the Sephardi.

The preceding two tapes are available from the American Sephardi Federation (133 E. 58th St. #404, New York, NY 10022: tele: 212/308-3455) which offers a discounted price to members.

While the initial premise behind this article was to provide a source for you to "visit your ancestral town" in the comfort of your living room, do not be surprised if your immediate reaction at the conclusion of the film is to call your travel agent and book a flight.

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SEARCH ADS

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TORONTO SCENE

NEED HELP WITH GENEALOGY?

The Metropolitan Toronto Reference Library’s History Department is offering a new service to genealogists called Reference by Appointment.

The project began a ten-month trial run in September to determine the needs of genealogists who use the library’s collection. The service consists of a one-hour long in-house appointment. Unfortunately, the library cannot do in-depth research.

For further information, please contact Gwen Ing at the library, 789 Yonge Street, Toronto, Ontario M4W 2G8, (416) 393-7155. If you can’t attend, you may send your specific questions to the library at the address given above to the Attention of K. McClurg.

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Jewish Wedding Procession
from the prewar collection of the Berlin Jewish Community
Herewith, a list of family trees at Beth Hatefutsoth's Dorot Genealogy Center, Tel Aviv

For further information, contact:

Dorot Genealogy Center
Beth Hatefutsoth
P.O. Box 39359
Tel Aviv 61392 Israel
Attn: Ms. Diana Sommer, Director
Turkish Jews in Vienna (1800?)

Coloured engraving by G. E. Opitz

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