

ARCHIVAL DOCUMENTS RELATING TO JEWISH ROOTS IN MOLDOVA (FORMER BESSARABIA)

Bonjour!

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Ladies and gentlemen!

If you're aiming at tracing your Jewish ancestors in Moldova (former Bessarabia), conducting at least a part of your research at the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova should be on your "must do" list. I am certain, many, if not all of you are familiar with Miriam Weiner's "*Jewish Roots in Ukraine and Moldova. Pages from the Past and Archival Inventories*", the book which has been a real guide for researchers, especially for those living outside Ukraine and Moldova. This book, first published in 1999 in English on the subject of history of Jews in Ukraine and Moldova, was presented by the author in collaboration with the Ukrainian and Moldovan archivists. Appendix at the end of the book with numerous references to the archival inventory will be of real help at the beginning of your genealogical quest. But I would like to tell you about various other archival documents that may have both direct and indirect value in genealogical research related to the Jewish roots in what is present-day Republic of Moldova and parts of Ukraine, the territories formerly known as Bessarabia. After more than 10 years, the Miriam Weiner's book can be supplemented by numerous newly discovered archival sources. It is difficult to list all the new inventories, but I can name a few previously unknown, that are directly related to Jewish history. Such as the following stored in the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova:

- Rabbinate metrical books with birth, marriage, divorce and death records for Orhei, Ackerman, Falesti, Briceni in 1843
- Early censuses of Jews in Chisinau, Rezina, Orhei, Falesti and others for 1849
- Rabbinate metrical books for Leovo, Hotin, Soroki, Dombroveny, Balti, Reni, Bender for 1851
- Jewish census of Bender for 1868
- Census of Jewish immigrants from Podolia, who were registered in Bessarabia in 1875
- Census of middle class Jews in Chisinau in 1910
- Cartographic material indicating home owners
- Lists of merchants, traders
- Personal files of many Jews who lived and owned property in Bessarabia at different time periods, etc.

Let's talk about the way we conduct genealogical research at the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova as well as about many newly discovered documents in more detail.

Every research begins with examining initial information provided by the customer. And the more detailed it is, the more chances there will be to find the data related to one's ancestry.

Namely, to start a research it is important to have the following information:

1. Locations in Bessarabia, where your ancestors were born, lived, married, gave birth, divorced, remarried.
2. Where they had owned a real estate: house, land, shop, mill, etc.
3. Where they came to Bessarabia from. For instance it could have been a province of Podolia or Kherson, etc.
4. First and last names. Children were often named after their grandfathers, great grandfathers, and could have had two or even three names. And it is important to spell the names in their original version: Abram, and not Abraham, Berel and not Bernie, Srul and not Israel or Rukhlia rather than Rachel, etc. Similarly, with family names - knowing the old spelling as well as all the possible changes the name have had overgone over time - may prove to be of significant importance.
5. Dates, exact or approximate of births, marriages, divorces, deaths of your ancestors with the necessary indication of name places where the events were registered.
6. School related records: name of the school and /or dates - exact or even approximate.
7. Occupation with maximum specificity: If, for example, your ancestors were merchants, you must specify what exactly they were trading.
8. Were your ancestors relocated, arrested, persecuted, deported, forced to one of the ghettos, and so on?
9. When did they emigrate from Bessarabia?

It will certainly help the researcher a great deal having copies of original documents from your family archive.

Given that the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova has no developed database of any kind, except for some fragmentary catalogs and name lists compiled at a time when genealogy was yet to become popular, and because even those available indexes are far from being sufficient, a researcher would more than often have no other choice rather than leafing through a multitude of inventories just to determine whether the real research would be at all possible.

The above mentioned inventories are as follows:

- I. Alphabetical rabbinic books consisting of vital records in case such exist for the particular location. Metrical books to first find out for which dates the records exist. Some of them were translated in English by Jewish Gen.
- II. Revision Lists of for various cities, towns and villages of Bessarabia, including the Jewish agricultural colonies for 1824. 1835-1836, 1848. In 1850. 1854, 1858-1859-60 years. And some of these materials were translated in English by Jewish Gen too.
- III. Lists of Jewish population of Bender as well as landowners lists from the 1868 census

IV. Jewish population of Bessarabia from the 1874-1875 census.

V. 19th century Jewish recruits lists.

- VI. Merchants lists for 1840s-1850s as well as multiple censuses with names of Jewish residents for various localities in Bessarabia (end of 19th century to 1917). And numerous voters lists.
- VII. Alphabetical books and lists of petty-bourgeois or Middle Class, residents of Kishinev (1910), Balti, Orhei, Soroki and others.
- VIII. Lists of Jews - Romanian-citizens, or those renounced citizenship for the period from 1918-1941. Voters lists for the period.
- IX. Personal files of the Jews, who were engaged in commercial activity from the court records and commerce records.
- X. Personal files from various school records.
- XI. Personal files and documents of various kinds from previously classified records of the Bessarabian Police, including records from all of the local police departments. Such as those in Chisinau, Balti, Cahul, Orhei, etc.
- XII. Records of nationalized properties owned by Jews.
- XIII. Property sale records starting from 1812
- XIV. Documents relating to the persecution of Jews at different periods of time.
- XV. Genealogical information from multiple old Bessarabian newspapers.

Based on more than 20 years experience in the field of professional genealogy, I would like to tell you about all the above mentioned documents in more detail. And I'll use copies of some of the records as examples.

- I. Alphabetical books kept at the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova are not many. Among the preserved are only those from Chisinau and Balti. However numerous metrical books consisting of vital records have been saved. Particularly well preserved are those from rabbinate of Chisinau, Beltsy, Bender. Others, such as from Causani, Romanovka, Cimislia are of lesser value. Many of you familiar with the records via JewishGen, whose vast database consists of indexed and transcribed vital records for most the localities. But I'm going to show you copies of the records. Typically, these are from 1860 to 1910 s. However many localities are not so well represented. Yet, I recently discovered and worked with the documents from 1842, 1843, 1851., Including registers for the rabbinate of Chisinau, Soroki, Ataki, Dombroveny, Briceni, Lipcani, Leovo, Hotin, Ackerman, Falesti. Tuzory, Orhei. Kilia, Bender. These early records are surprisingly well detailed and I would like to show you some of them.

Examples:

- 1) Alphabet Book of marriages for Beltsy rabbinate, 1879 (1)
- 2) From Metrical book of births for Hotin rabbinate, 1851 (2)
- 3) From metrical book of divorces for Kishinev rabbinate, 1842 (3)
- 4) From Metrical book of births for Kilia rabbinate, 1842 (4)
- 5) From metrical book of deaths for Soroki rabbinate, 1866 (5)

All entries were written in two languages - Russian and Hebrew,

including the date difference between the Eastern Orthodox and Jewish calendars.

II. Revision Lists or the earliest Jewish population censuses survived in many villages and towns, such as those conducted in the Jewish colonies in Chisinau, Baltzy, Orhei and many small places of former Bessarabia. Some of these early records were translated in English by Jewish Gen. As many of you know, those revisions consist of family lists where men and women are organized in separate groups: father and husband, sons, brothers, nephews were shown: 1) age at the previous census, and 2) the present age. Women, whether wife, daughter, sister, niece, were shown as a rule, only one of age, drawn up on the census year.

- 1) A copy from the census of all merchants for Kishinev, 1835. (6)
- 2) A copy of Jewish revision list (Revizskaya skazca) for Orgeev, 1848.(7)
- 3) From the Alphabetical and family Jewish record for Rezina, the Orgeev County, 1849 (8).

III. Probably, only few of you know about the revision list administered in 1868 in Bender (Tighina) with the attached city map showing certain neighborhoods inhabited by Jewish families.

Example: Map and a copy of this census (9)

Similar document was discovered by me for Oknica of the Khotyn County: a map of the town and a list of dwellers, including Jewish, who resided in the area (10).

The Archive holds a lot of maps stored in various inventories, such as maps of Ukraine, Bessarabia, Romania, with the attached architectural drawings of many construction projects, both residential and commercial, conducted by Jewish residents. Another interesting part of the archival holdings is census of Jewish agricultural colonies taken in 1863. Let's have as an example Dombroveny, Soroky County. Here, along with regular census data, the size of land belonging to Jewish owners is given(11)

IV. As for the Jewish censuses of 1874-1875, those can be found in several archival collections, including that of the Treasury Chamber of Bessarabia, Bessarabian Statistics Committee and the Bessarabian Regional Board. This is a census of the Jewish male population in alphabetical order with indication of age at the time of the compilation with a descriptions given by either the submitted document or appearance. Three such censuses taken in 1874-1875 at various localities of Khotin County are known. Those list place names before the migration.

For example, Jewish census in the city of Soroky in 1875 (12)

I would also like to dwell on the Podolia census of 1875 where you can find many Jewish residents, assigned to various towns and villages in Bessarabia, such as Soroki, Bender, Chisinau, Tiraspol, Baltzy, Rashkov and many others (13)

V. Yet another census type is the draft lists compiled at different time periods. I've worked with the 1850s lists where the age and place of enlistment of the recruits are indicated. (14)

VI. Speaking of the early merchant lists compiled in the 1840-1850 years, I would like to show a copy of this form for the city of Chisinau. (15) This is a detailed description of the entire family, starting with the head of household and his wife, as well as all other family members showing the age of each. I would also like to say a few words about 1897 census, the one that seems to be of interest to most genealogists. The National Archives of the Republic of Moldova has only general statistical data, without particular towns and villages of Bessarabia. Last year I was on a business trip to St. Petersburg Archives, but was unable to find any additional information related to the census. It's worth noticing that the Archive, that I had first visited in 1992 holds a vast collection of material related to Jewish history in Bessarabia. Although most of it is rather general in nature, one can find there valuable historic documents chronicling the history of Jewish settlements: Causeni Orhei, Cahul, Telenesti and others, Jewish hospitals, pogroms of 1882, 1903, conscription records from 1846 to 1856, the resettlement of Jews from the Russian provinces in Bessarabia in 1846, tax laws regarding Jews in Bessarabia in 1849, the various pieces of legislation in relation only to persons of Jewish origin, and many others. I personally have a list of about 100 individual cases of this nature and I'd be happy to share this information with anyone interested.

Besides the published by Jewish Gen 1906-1907 voters lists, there are many others elections records dated from the end of 19th century to 1917 and even later. Such as rabbi elections at different localities throughout the region with the attached lists and signatures of the electors. (16)

VII. When it comes to genealogical research in Chisinau. Beltsi, Soroki, Bender, often best source of information is the "Petite Bourgeois or Middle Class lists of Chisinev," for example, those of 1910, for Beltsi, Soroki, etc. (17). In these records, you can find important genealogical information: marriage data, relocation to another locality, date of death.

VIII. Among the records related to the 1918-1944 during which period Bessarabia was a part of the Kingdom of Romania, one can see some lists of Jewish residents of the region who became Romanian citizens as well as the lists of those who were refused in the citizenship. Among these documents are very commonly found voters' lists from many cities and villages of Bessarabia. (18,

19). In these documents, Romanian officials tend to indicate the date and place of birth or age, names of family members, ethnicity. You can find information about Jews who were engaged in political activities, including membership in Sfatul Tarii, etc. In such archival collections as those of Questura Police, Prefectures and Primaria well documented is Jewish active involvement in political life including participation in various political organizations.

- IX. In these same collections, as well as in many others associated with commerce and judicial tribunals we can find multiple personal files of Jews, who were engaged in commercial activities. Many of them owned restaurants, shops, warehouses, pharmacies, banks, cinema theaters, etc. There are registration of mills, construction of houses, synagogues, skating-ring, financing of the construction of many industrial, civil and religious facilities in towns and villages in Bessarabia during 19-20 centuries. (20.21)
- X. Not to be overlooked are various school records reflecting the period from 1900 to 1940. Typically in such documents, one can find information about the student's parents, religion, place and date of birth as well as scores and studied subjects. (22).
- XI. I would also want to say a few words about personal files and documents of various kinds, previously stored in secret stockpiles of the Bessarabian Police, including those from all the regional police headquarters, such as the files from Chisinau, Balti, Cahul, Orhei, Soroki, Cahul, etc. You can find personal files of those arrested after illegally crossing the border from the Soviet Union to Romania. Preserved mandatory questionnaires included such valuable genealogical information as place and date of birth of the person, his/her parents, relatives abroad, education, residence, etc. Often even photos of the person and/or family members can be found in these files. Fingerprints and specific type of questions in the files serve as the reminder that this was once classified information only relatively recently made available to public. Most of the files are dated from 1918 to 1930. (23)
- XII. In the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova there are a lot of documents related to the nationalization of properties in different cities and villages of Bessarabia owned in part by Jews. These documents can be divided into two types: 1) compiled by the Romanian authorities in 1941-1944 and 2) compiled by Soviet regime after 1945, when Bessarabia became part of the USSR.

In regards with the first type of document, the Romanian authorities described in detail the property previously owned by Jews: houses, land, factories, shops, pharmacies, banks, etc., Such descriptions included evaluation of the condition and value in Romanian currency and sometimes even name of new owner. Typically, these documents are dated 1941-1944. In such documents, which were called “inventory acts of evacuated citizens of Jewish origin”, you can find genealogical information, such as personal documents proving the ownership rights (24)

The second type of documents - decrees of the Soviet authorities from 1946 - to 1950, when decisions were made about the nationalization and denationalization of houses and other possessions of Jews who were evacuated and sent to ghettos or forced to flee in 1941. These records consist of ownership information with the street name, house number, size of the property, its condition as well as the name and fate of the former owner. There are similar decrees regarding nationalization and denationalization of shops, factories, restaurants, owners of which were many Jewish businessmen. (25)

XIII. The National Archives of the Republic of Moldova holds a bulk of sale records of houses, land, other real estate administered by various government agencies starting from 1812. For example, in archival collection of the Bessarabian court you can find a detailed history of the house where your ancestors lived, learn the seller's name, amount paid, and if lucky, find even the construction drawings approved by one of the famous Bessarabian architects. If you know the name of the notary, through whom your ancestors had made a deal, You may be able to find the file with personal information in one of the many archival collections. And if the deal had been made between 1918 and 1940, You can apply for a search in the archival collections of the Tribunals. This is where you can find information about selling or buying real estate, or even a will with names of many family members in it. Among the records related to the period of the Romanian administration, even earlier documents can be found, some of them going back to the first half of the 19th century. (26)

XIV. Persecution of the Jewish population at different periods of time is represented in various archival holdings. Beginning with the infamous pogroms in 1900 and ending with the destruction of the Jewish population in ghettos. Most documents on the subject can be found in the collections of the former so-called Bessarabian Gendarmes Headquarter and the Office of the Bessarabian Police Questura. (27. 28).

Last year, the Archives of State Security of the Republic of Moldova released about 5000 personal records of repression victims, many of whom were Jews. Those are to be stored at the National Archives. Today we can finally check the name and case number of the affected citizens, and provided a notarized letter confirming kinship, can study the documents, which until recently were classified "top secret".

XV. Similarly pogrom-related information can be found in the Bessarabian numerous newspapers - Bessarabskie Oblastnye i Gubernskie Vedomosti, Bessarabija, Bessarabskaja pochta, Bessarabskoe Slovo, Drug, published mainly by prominent Jewish people. You can also find there a lot of genealogical data, for example, the sale of real estate, tour of famous Jewish artists in Bessarabia, advertising by various Jewish shops, as well as birth, wedding and various other announcements and obituaries (29,30)

I presented a brief overview of records stored at the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova and those would have to be the basis for any genealogy research. Here I have to mention that such takes a lot of time, as one has to search through huge amount of archival material for order to identify and sort out information necessary for building a pedigree. On average, one such study can take from 3 months to 1 year, and sometimes even longer, depending on the condition of documents, objectives, scope of work, etc. I've been able to participate in even longer genealogy projects, some of which have lasted years and every time a new record had been found, it gave me a great joy to realize that it will shed a new bit of light on someone's family history. Along with the hope for new discoveries. Moments like this make an often time boring and frustrating search worthwhile.

On the other hand, some of the searches may stubbornly stay fruitless at times. It's when you do not find anything that would bear information specific to family relationship, or simply can not tie it all into a coherent whole because there are not enough preserved records. This is the most complex queries that require large expenditures of time and effort. Which, may lead to understandable dissatisfaction of customers (fortunately, very few), not to mention the fact that I, as a researcher feel very uncomfortable every time this happens and on many occasions would continue searching being guided by the "hunter instinct" alone.

That is why under the terms of our website www.bessarabia.ru where I've been an active member of the Genealogical Project: BESSARABIA, ROMANIA, UKRAINE AND TRANSNISTRIA " for 8 years, we usually do various genealogical researches.

Often, to find necessary information related to the genealogy of the Jewish family, one has to search grave sites in one of few of the still preserved cemeteries. Many of you are aware that, in Moldova and Ukraine, these monuments to Jewish history in a horrible, deplorable condition. This applies to such places as Hancesti, Lipcani, Baltsey, Wad Rashkov, etc., where among the old graves few that remain intact. Thus, the cemetery was completely destroyed in the former Jewish colony Dombroveny, Ungheni, and others. In more or less good condition are cemeteries in Chisinau, Bender, Edinets, In Chisinau the graves had been indexed and mapped. But regretfully, this book is written only in Russian. Similar work is being done in the Jewish community Bender. It is unfortunate that due to lack of funds, all cemeteries are being gradually destroyed, as with them gone, will disappear the very ability to find an important or at times, the only link to one's ancestors. It would be nice if the descendants living outside of Moldova, could help us to restore these important sites, that have always been special witnesses of the history of Jews in Bessarabia.

If you chose to pay the National Archives a visit, there is the Reading Room available, where many scholars, students, historians search alongside genealogists, both amateur and professional, some of whom are visitors from abroad. In order to join them, one has to acquire a permit that allows a thematic investigation for one calendar year with the option to be extended on request. To apply for the permit, you have to submit either official letter from organization you represent, or a personal application indicating subject(s) and/or object(s) of your research. This permit is free from any payment.

Also there are excellent specialists in the field of genealogy who will conduct the research on Your behalf and help to find your Jewish ancestors in Bessarabia. As a rule these researchers are some scientists with extensive experience in archival research and are members of the Genealogical, Heraldic societies or professional online genealogists. And you can send a request to search for archival documents by mail to the National Archives of the Republic of Moldova, where the staff will perform the search on your behalf based on established rates.

Regretfully, the National Archive of Moldova is yet to launch its own website. Archivists can't receive any inquiries and send their responses via Internet. Still, despite many difficulties, Moldovan scientists in collaboration with the National Archive have published two useful guide books designed to help the access to archival documents in the National Archive and other Archives of Moldova. Both are written in Romanian. One of the books, the "Accesul la Arhive on Republica Moldova" by Dr. Mihai Tashca and Alexandru Postica in 2011 is based on the legislation of Independent Moldova from the beginning of 1991. Under the law of the Republic of Moldova any of its citizens alike any foreigner upon submitting a formal request to have the right to access information stored in the National Archives. Another guide book "Ghidul arhivelor din Republica Moldova" by Dr. Mihai Tashca et al. contains data about all Archives of Moldova.

We hope that in the near future all Moldovan Archives will have well functioning websites and first-class specialists will begin digitizing our reach archival inventories for presenting them on-line so every person can trace family roots in Moldova.

In conclusion, I want to thank all the organizers of this important International Forum of Jewish Genealogical Conference, who invited me to join you.

I'll be glad to continue our cooperation in searching for new archival documents in the future! I hope that our genealogical project will also be able to collaborate with other archives and institutions in different countries, including Romania.

I sincerely wish all participants of the Forum a great success!

Thank you for listening!

Mersi beaucoup!