

THE BLECHER BOYS OF BESSARABIA BECOME BARBERS:

**From Soroki to Chicago
1909-1914**

By Marla Raucher Osborn

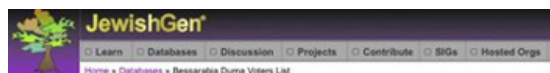


Blecher Boys – Marty, Joe and Sam, c. 1915

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One boy, per boat, per year, beginning in 1909.

From ports like Bremen, Glasgow, Hamburg, and Liverpool one Blecher boy each year would board a steamship bound for a major American port—Baltimore, Boston, New York—all with the same final destination: Chicago. One by one, beginning in 1909 and ending in mid-1914, all six Blecher boys would leave Soroki, Bessarabia, and make their way to Chicago. The later arrivals would join the earlier ones. They would share lodgings. They would each apply for American citizenship, sometimes together. They would bear witness for each other on marriage certificates and army enlistments.



Bessarabia Duma Voters List



Searching for Surname **blecher**
(D-M code 785900 or 784900)
Number of hits: 153
Run on Tuesday 4 May 2010 at 09:58:47

Item	Name	Patronym	Qualification Reason	Town - Russian Name	Town - Modern Name	Uyezd	Country	Year
8-60	BLEKHER, Kisil	-	kn.	Orgeyev	Orhei	Orgieev	Mold.	1907
K5-26	BLEKHER, Anchel	-	d. 47	Romanovka	Basarabasca	Bendery	Mold.	1907
B-180	BLEKHER, Shmul	Zelmanov	v.	Bendery	Bender / Tighina	Bendery	Mold.	1907
K5-28	BLEKHER, Anchel	-	d. 50	Romanovka	Basarabasca	Bendery	Mold.	1906
4-50	BLEKHER, Yankel	Shaev	d. 67	Soroki	Soroca	Soroki	Mold.	1907

1907 Bessarabia Duma Voters List Showing Yankel Blecher in Soroki

By May 1914, the Blecher boys of Chicago would welcome the arrival of their parents and only sister, Mollie, my grandmother.

Mollie (known as Malke) was the youngest of seven children born to Jacob (Yankel) and Ida (Chaike) Blecher.

Her six older brothers were named: Meyer, (Meier), Sam (Simche), Sol (Shaike), [Joe](#) (Josel), Marty (Mottel), and [Arthur](#) (Alter).

All seven Blecher children were born in Soroki, Bessarabia (then, Russia; today Moldova), between 1887 and 1908.

By the 1940s, four of the six Blecher boys would own a very successful barber shop in Chicago. Of the other two brothers, one would become a tailor and the other would pursue an exemplary career in the military (both navy and army) from 1922 through WWII. One brother would return to Russia—for reasons unknown—and find himself in Slavuta in April 1926 applying for a [Russian passport](#) valid for one-year, before returning to Chicago. After graduating from Medill High School, [Mollie](#) would marry in 1930 and thereafter leave Chicago for Los Angeles, California. She would remain—until her death in 1968—the baby, the protected, the favorite of each of her six

Blecher brothers.

In my genealogical research for my Blecher family of Soroki, I have been both fortunate and unfortunate.

Fortunate, because Cook County (Chicago) has an excellent online resource. Because the Blechers landed, settled, and largely stayed in Chicago over multiple generations, I was able to find through this website dozens of birth, marriage, death, and [naturalization records](#). From these I could then turn my research attention toward obtaining passenger lists, census records, and even voter registration records (Los Angeles County), with great success.

Unfortunate, because Blecher seems to have had dozens of spelling variations—in addition to the usual (and expected) typographical and transliteration mistakes genealogists expect—making it quite the research challenge!

Here are some of the surname variations for Blecher not only in the transcribed databases but in the original records themselves: Blekher, Blakher, Blaker, Bleker, Bleecher, and Blyakher.

(And that's before explaining that every Blecher family member changed the family surname at some point to Heller, usually in connection with the naturalization process).



Jacob and Ida Blecher, c. 1910

Given names for the Blechers also produced great spelling variations. As was common, all the Blecher given names were “Americanized” once on American soil. Practically speaking, this meant that database searches and records might have original ethnic or diminutive given names, or their closest American counterpart.

Marty, for example, produced, in addition to Martin, the following variations: Mordechai, Mottel, Moudle, Motke.

Sol, in addition to Solomon and Saul, appeared as Shaiké, Shake, Chaiké, and even Chaie.

My personal favorite: the 1914 Boston passenger manifest for my grandmother Mollie and her parents listed her father's name as “Zeide Blaker”!

Even the Bessarbian town of Soroki produced huge variations in spelling, some quite amusing and unexpected: Soroka, Soroca, and Sowka, plus, my favorite: Sriculia.

The moral of this story for the researching genealogist: be sure to have a very, very open mind and experiment liberally with spelling when searching!



Blechers' Central Park Barbershop, Chicago, c. mid-1940s

In 1929, Jacob Blecher passed away in Chicago. He was around 80 years old, though looked older with his white hair and beard. The family buried Jacob at nearby Waldheim Cemetery. Meyer and Marty's sons recounted to me years later how Jacob always carried candy in the pockets of his long black coat for the children of their Chicago neighborhood. He loved children.

Less than a year after Jacob's death, his widow Ida was tragically hit by a truck and killed while crossing the street in front

of their brownstone apartment at 3804 W. 16th Street. Alerted by the commotion, several Blecher boys quickly arrived on the scene and severely beat the truck driver. Chicago police arrived. Ida died on the street of severe trauma and shock. Two days later she was buried beside Jacob at Waldheim. It was a muggy August afternoon.

Eighty years then passed and Ida's rose gold locket (seen in a [1915 photo](#) of her) passed down to another generation—the second American-born generation. My generation. That the family surname of Heller had once been Blecher was by then only a fading but persistent family rumor.

I felt compelled to prove that the rumor was true.

May 2013
Paris, France

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Research Notes and Hints

Marla found the Cook County Genealogy Online website to be an excellent resource for records regarding her Chicago-based family: <http://cookcountygenealogy.com/>

Marla also found references to her family by searching the family's surname on JewishGen's Romania Database for the Bessarabia area: <http://www.jewishgen.org/databases/Romania/>

The ship manifests can be found at: <http://www.ellisland.org/> and <http://www.ancestry.com/>

For more information regarding Bessarabia, go to JewishGen's Bessarabia Special Interest Group (SIG) at: <http://www.jewishgen.org/Bessarabia/>

A slightly different version of this story also appears on JewishGen's Bessarabia SIG page at: <http://www.jewishgen.org/Bessarabia/FamilyMemoirs.html>

You can read about Marla's 2011 visit to Soroki, Bessarabia, at: <http://www.jewishgen.org/Bessarabia/Travel.html>. Her photos of this trip can be seen at: http://www.pbase.com/nuthatch/111023_md_soroca

Marla's Blecher Family Tree can be found at: http://www.ckcckc.org/m/f/blecher/wc01/wc01_002.html

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