

Botoșani county records, accomplishments and analysis

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(revised Mar 2022 to include new acquisitions)

Botoșani county – a short historical and demographic background

Modern day Botoșani County (județ) lies at the North-Eastern edge of Romania in the region of Moldova. The city of Botoșani is the county seat. In the 19th century and up to WWII, the Northern part of the county was organized as a separate county, Dorohoi, also named after its county seat.



Figure 1: Botosani county position in Romania

In 1899 Botosani County was the home of more than 29000 Jews, 11% of the Jews living in the kingdom of Romania. About 17000 Jews lived in the city of Botosani, 2700 in Harlau. The market - towns (târg) of Stefanesti, Sulitza, Burdujeni Bucecea and the small location of Frumusica were the homes of most of the other Jews in the county. In these locations the Jews were the majority of the population. The rest (5%) lived in villages, where they were a very small minority.

In 1899 Dorohoi county was the home of about 19000 Jews, 7% of the Romanian Jewish population. About 7000 Jews lived in the city of Dorohoi. The rest of the Jewish population lived in the cities and towns of Mihaileni, Hertza, Darabani, Saveni, and Radautz-Prut. With the exception of Darabani, the Jews were the majority of the population in these locations. About

12% of the Jewish population lived in villages, and as in Botosani County, they were a small minority.



Figure 2: Botosani County map

Botosani county's modern borders differ slightly from the borders of the historical counties. The city of Hertza and its neighborhood were claimed by U.S.S.R in 1940, and belong now to Ukraine. The city of Harlau is now a part of Iasi county. The town of Burdujeni, which was on the border between Romania and the Austro-Hungarian Empire until 1918, was incorporated in the 1920s into the neighboring city of Suceava, and today is its largest neighborhood.

The city of Botosani was probably founded in the 14th century, though it was first mentioned in documents in the 15th century. It was one of the major cities in the principality of Moldova. In 1859 immediately after the union of the Romanian principalities it was the 3rd largest city in the country after Bucharest and Iasi. The population in 1870 was almost 40 thousands people, making it the 4th largest city in the country. The establishment of Bucharest as the capital of the United Principalities reduced Botosani to the status of a far-away from center, provincial town. Shifts in commerce trends and new opportunities attracted population from all North Moldova to the south of Romania and the united capital. The population of Botosani decreased. It took about one hundred years for the city population to surpass the 1870 figure.

Jews were living in Botosani in the 16th century. There are references about the existence of a tomb dated 1540 in the old Jewish cemetery. The population grew slowly during the centuries. Immigration waves in the beginning of the 19th century increased the Jewish

population considerably. In 1859 thirteen thousands Jews lived in Botosani, making it the 2nd largest community in the United Principalities after Iasi. At that time, the Jewish community in Botosani was larger than the one in Bucharest. The number of Jews shrank as the result of internal migration to the south of Romania, and immigration from Romania starting in the 1880s. At the beginning of WWII about 15 thousands Jews lived in the city. When Romania entered WWII alongside Nazi Germany, the authorities expelled a few thousand Jews living in the small towns and villages in the historical Botosani County to the city. Most of the Jewish population living in Botosani survived the war. After the founding of the State of Israel in 1948 the vast majority of the Jewish population left Botosani in the 1950s and 1960s and immigrated to Israel. Today, there are less than 100 Jews in Botosani.

The Jews of Dorohoi County had a tragic fate. In 1940 the Dorohoi pogrom claimed the lives of 53 – 150 Jews. In 1941 most of the Jews of Dorohoi county (and also of Burdujeni, incorporated in Suceava) were expelled to Transnistria – a region in Ukraine, beyond the Dniester river. Many of them were murdered, others died from cold, hunger and diseases. One third of Dorohoi county Jews perished. Most of the rest, as with all Romanian Jews, immigrated to Israel.

Today, in Botosani County Jews live only in Botosani and in Dorohoi.

Botosani records project

In May 2008 the authors visited the Botosani county branch of the Romanian National Archives. We coordinated the visit and met at the archives. We knew ahead of the visit that the archives' rules were changed, and allowance was made to take photos using a digital camera for a small daily tax.

We have photographed the existing books of indexes to the records of Botosani. Those indexes were prepared by the local authorities over the years. Some were quite old, some new. We decided that the best way to continue the research was to transcribe the indexes into a digital format (Excel spreadsheet) and find a local contact person that would be ready to take photos of the desired records for a fee.

We recruited a few people that were interested in Botosani genealogy and established a team of six people.

Two, born in Botosani itself:

- Luc Radu (previously Goldschlager), living in USA.
- Sorin Goldenberg, living in Israel.

Two, born in other parts of Romania, with Botosani roots.

- Rony Shaham z.l. (1950-2012). Previously Schwartz. Born in Craiova, his father was born in Botosani. Lived in Israel.
- Bruno Segal, born in Bucharest of Botosani born parents. Living in USA.

Two born in USA.

- Robert Zavos, living in USA, with roots in Bucecea, Botosani County.
- Edward Hardiman, living in USA, with roots in Botosani and Vaslui.

The books of indexes for the city of Botosani are partial and lacking vital information. There is no index for the death records 1865-1900. The birth indexes were partial and information about the identity of the parents is available only for one decade. Marriage indexes only contained entries with the first name of the grooms starting with the letters "A" through "I". For example grooms with names like Leib or Moishe are not included. They contain no information about the parents.

It took a few months to complete the transcription, and we were able to find a resident of Botosani who was willing to work for us and take photos of specific records. We've sent him lists of suspected records, and he sent us back photos of the records he could find. Some records gave hints that enabled us to find new records, so we've had a few iterations. At the end of this process, it was clear, that the indexes lack crucial information. Most of us did not have the luck of ancestors with surnames. Searching for an unknown sibling of such ancestor, when only his father's name was given by the indexes was not practical. In addition, we have learned from the records we've acquired, that witnesses to the records might reveal additional relatives. Witnesses' names do not appear in the book of indexes.

Thus, we decided to change the strategy and acquire the records themselves to compile an index more suitable for genealogical research, and continue the research using the index and the records. In June 2009 we've started to acquire the registers of marriages for the city of Botosani, 1866-1905. It took us two years to complete the acquisition of all Botosani BMD registers (up to 1905). The indexing of the records took a few additional months.

We continued with the acquisition and indexing of records from some other small towns in the county where we had personal interest like Bucecea and Saveni. As money became available, we've decided to complete the task, acquire and index all "Jewish locations" in Botosani County. We have completed the task. The records of the city of Harlau (1865-1908) were acquired by ROM-SIG.

In principle, records are considered confidential for one hundred years. After this period, they should be transferred to the National archives where they are open to the public. In practice, for many locations the registers are not yet available up to 1914.

A summary of our holdings follows:

Location		B	M	D	Comments
Botosani	1865 - 1910	27773	3438	21211	
Bucecea	1865 - 1912	1616	701	971	Indexed up to 1907
Burdujeni	1865 - 1914	2873	501	1635	Deaths indexed up to 1906 only
Darabani	1865 - 1914	3571	642	2477	Some registers were lost
Dorohoi	1865 - 1910	10329	916	6520	Deaths Oct 1895 - Dec 1898 are lost
Hertza	1865 - 1931	3208	639	2537	Many losses. Only indexed by the team
Hertza Villages	1865 - 1931	644	99	298	Many losses. Only indexed by the team
Frumusica	1877 - 1912	888	120	352	Years 1865 – 1876 and 1881,1882,1898 are missing. Some additional deaths and marriages registers are also missing Indexed up to 1907
Mihaileni	1865 - 1910	3970	363	3014	A few registers are lost
Radautz Prut	1865 - 1906	1498	261	926	
Saveni	1865 - 1914	3004	567	1903	Some records are lost
Stefanesti	1865 - 1907	3280	606	245	Most of the death registers and year 1904 is lost

Sulitza	1865 - 1910	3161	546	1976	
Zvoristea	1865 - 1910				
Total		66206	9399	44065	119670

From Botosani county we have acquired many other interesting records – as Condica Suditzilor 1824, Catagrafia 1845 (Botosani), List of Austrian subjects 1834 (Botosani), metrical records, passports, army draft registers and personal requests, Census of Dorohoi county Jewish heads of families (1872), Botosani Jewish schools (late 1890s – 1947), and many others.

We have acquired also the civil state records of the following locations outside Botosani county:

Falciu county: Husi.

Iasi county: Bivolari, Podu Iloaei, Sculeni, Targu Frumos.

Neamtz county: Bozieni, Buhusi, Piatra, Targu Neamtz.

Putna county: Adjud, Focsani, Odobesti, Panciu.

Roman county: Bacesti, Bara, Roman.

Suceava county: Baia, Falticeni, Lespezi, Pascani.

Tutova county: Barlad, Puiesti

Vaslui county: Codaesti, Negresti, Pungesti, Vaslui.

For Husi, Piatra Neamtz, Roman, Targu Neamtz, Vaslui some of the pre 1865 Mitrice survived.

The civil state records collection count has exceeded 200 thousand records.

We decided to build the indexes by transcribing the few details crucial to identification of potentially relevant records.

For births: date of registration, name of child, name of the father, paternal grandfather, surname, name of the mother, maternal grandmother, mother's maiden name. Declarent's name, father's name, surname, and relationship. Same for the two witnesses.

For deaths: date of registration, name of deceased, his surname, profession, age, name of the father, paternal grandfather, parents' surname (if different than that of the deceased),

name of the mother, maternal grandmother, mother's maiden name, spouse name, his father's name. The two witnesses' name, father's name, surname, and relationship.

For marriages: groom's name, name of the father, paternal grandfather, surname, mother, maternal grandmother, mother's maiden name, place of birth and place of residence. Same details for the bride.

We've taken care to arrange the columns of the index at compilation time to follow the order the records register them in order to save time.

The records contain more data. Ages, profession, address, etc. But given that we have the digital copies of the records, and we can inspect any potential record, read it and analyze it, we've decided to skip those details. We wanted to make the indexes ready as quick as possible and available for research.

As we gathered more data, we decided to share it with a larger group of Botosani area researchers. We've opened "Botosani-Gen" group on Yahoo. Later, we've moved it to Facebook. The Yahoo group had 250 members. As we expanded our acquisitions we renamed our group "Jewish Genealogy in Romanian Moldova". The facebook group has now more than 2000 members.

We also perform research for a fee for those who are interested. The combination of digital indexes and digital records create a powerful tool. Given that many of the local Jews didn't have surnames, our tools enable us to find relationships that other researchers using the resources available at the archives could not find. In addition, we can easily check people's movements between locations in the county, while those at the archives need to browse through several sets of registers, a time-consuming task, rarely done.

The revenues from the research fees are invested in funding our project. It is our major funding means, along small donation from individuals.

Analysis of Romanian civil state records

The most important source for genealogical information is the civil state records collection. Civil state registration was introduced in Romania by the Russian occupation authorities in the 1830s. The registration was handled by the churches or for the Jewish population by the Jewish community in each town. In 1864, the new Romanian civil code transferred the registration to the city halls. It started in December 1865. From that point in time, the registrations books included the entire population, without regard to their religion. There are no Jewish specific records books. The records before December 1865 are called metrical records, or in Romanian – Mitrice. Very few if any (depending of the location) of the registers containing those records survived. Registration was partial, and very little information was recorded. For example, a Botosani birth record before 1863 would not record the mother's name. Thus our focus would be on the city hall registration.

Graphical format

In the period 1865-1909 the Romanian records are registered on a blank page. The records are in Romanian using cursive handwriting. Romanian language was written in Cyrillic Romanian alphabet for centuries. Romania officially switched to Latin alphabet in 1860. In practice some clerks continued to write in Cyrillic. In Harlau, most of the records up to 1875 are in the Cyrillic alphabet. Some records from Dorohoi are also Cyrillic. The penmanship of many of the clerks in the first years of registration was quite poor.

Birth or death records cover one page; marriages cover 2 – 4 pages.

A new format was introduced in 1910. Blank pages were replaced by formatted text having blank spaces to fill in the required information.

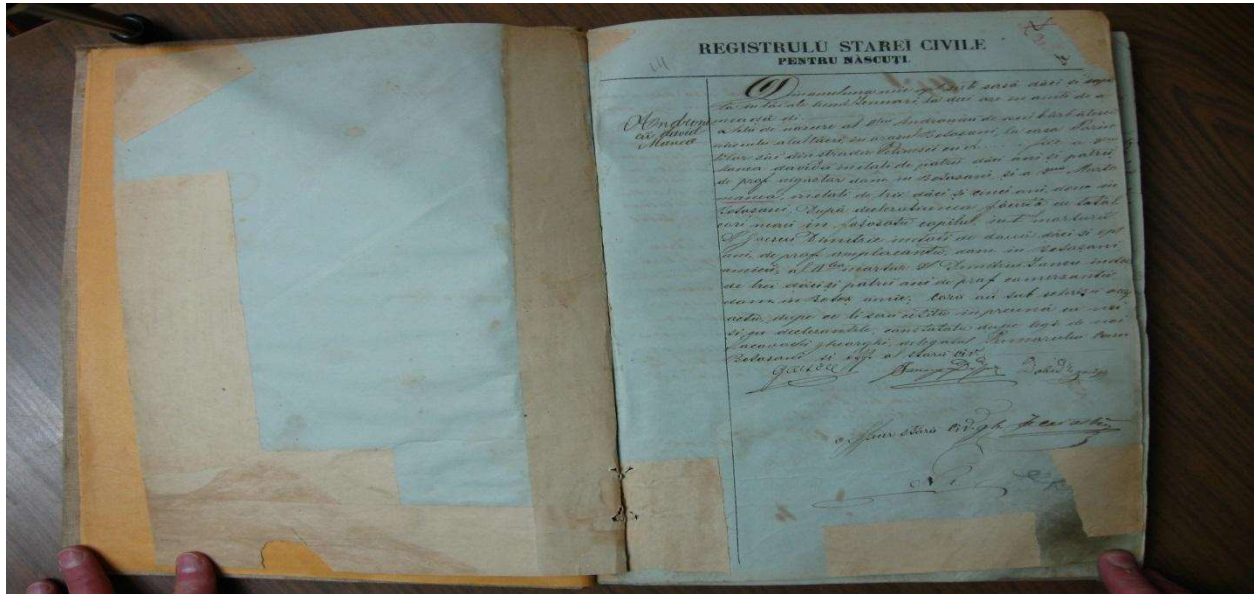


Figure 3: Birth record from 1867

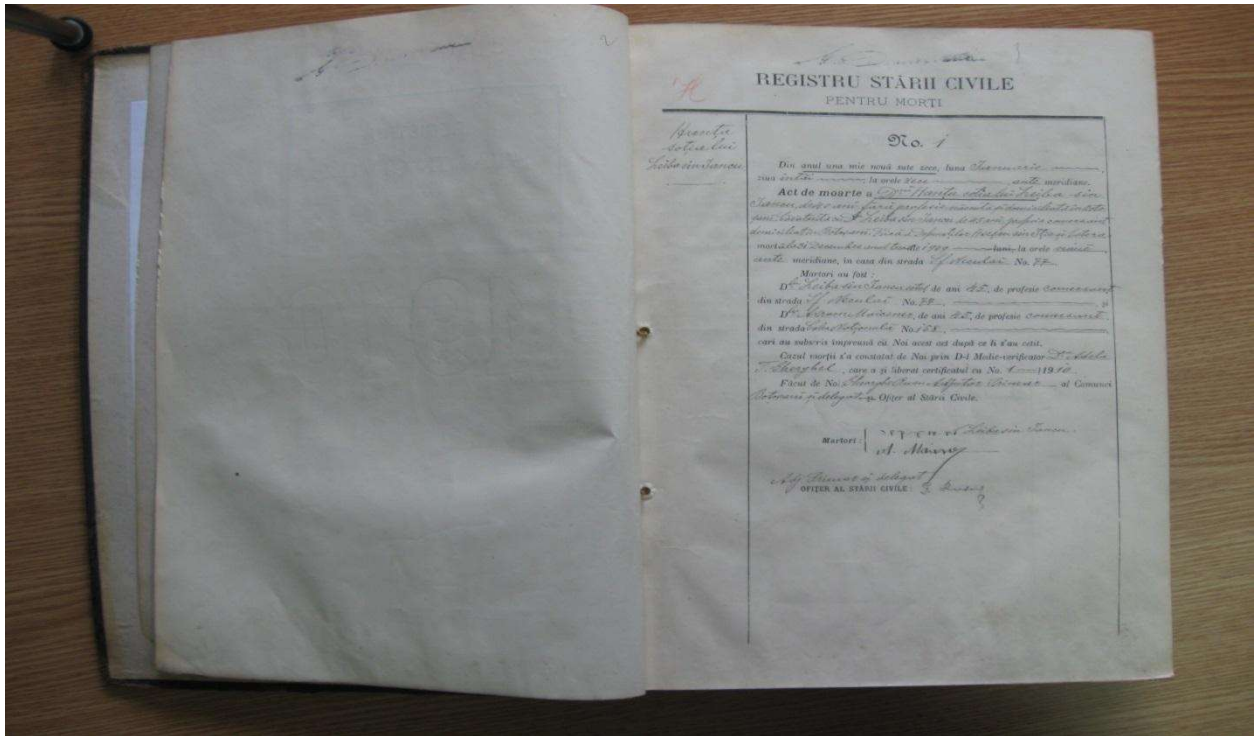


Figure 4: Death record from 1910

In Falticeni, a format quite similar to the 1910 format was adopted in 1894. This format requires 3 pages for a marriage record (as opposed of two in the regular 1910 format).

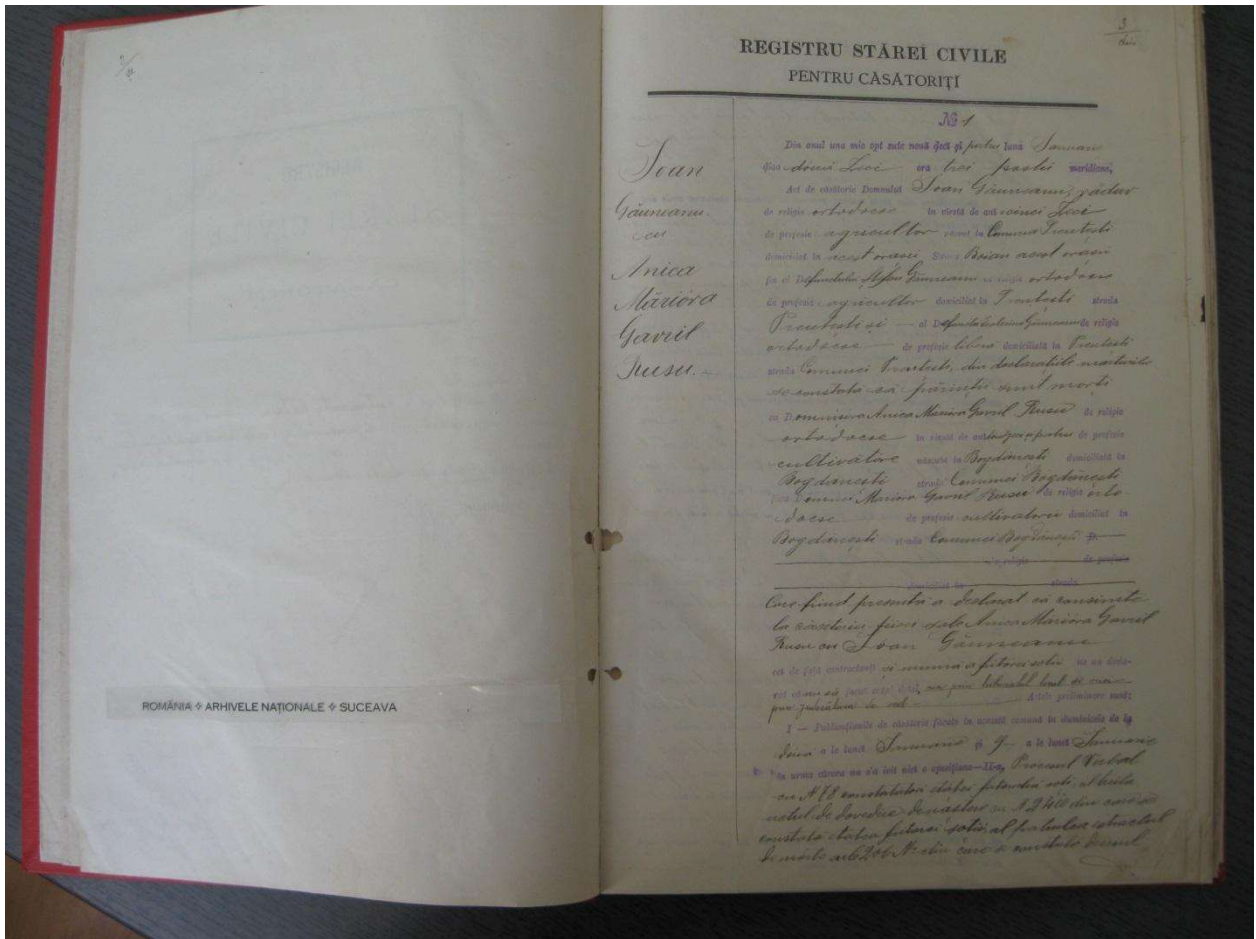


Figure 5: 1894 Falticeni marriage record

Formal Requirements

The Romanian civil code specifies the information that the different types of records should contain. The important details are:

General requirements

- Civil state records should include the year, month, day when they were registered, given name, family, age and profession and residence of all parties.
- Witnesses should be at least 21 years old.
- Civil state records should be registered in every commune (local administrative unit) in two copies.
- Witnesses should sign the documents, or should register the reason that prevented them from signing
- All numbers should be registered as words, not digits.

Birth records

- Declaration of the birth should be performed within three days after birth. The child should be presented. If anything prevents the child from being presented, the civil state officer should visit the residence to attest the birth.
- The declaration should be made by the father or in his absence by the physician, midwife, or anyone who was present to the birth. Two witnesses are required.
- Birth registration should note the date, the hour, birth place, gender, given name, family name, profession and residence, the profession and residence of the father, mother and of the witnesses.

Marriage records:

The record should register the following details:

- Given name, surname, profession, age, birthplace and residence of the couple.
- Given name, surname, profession, and residence of the couple's parents.
- Given name, surname, profession, age and residence of the witnesses and whether they are related to the couple; if related, the relationship.

Death records:

The record should register the following details:

- Given name, surname, profession, age and residence of the deceased.
- The name of the spouse.
- Whether the deceased was single or widowed.
- Given name, surname, profession, age and residence of the witnesses, whether related to the deceased, and the relationship.
- If known, the name, surname, profession and residence of the parents, as well as the deceased's birth place.

Practice

In practice the information contained by the records is not as prescribed by the law. Exact details differ among locations, even though all locations in the county (and even Falticeni) are less than 50 km distance from Botosani.

Birth records

- In the first two decades 1865-1885 (maybe even later), many infants were not registered at birth. The percentage of girls that were not registered was higher than the boys.
- There are locations where the father was almost always the declarant, locations where a high percentage of the declarations are done by "professional" witnesses and those where a mixture of both types can be found.

- Early records did not specify the hour of birth.
- In the smaller places, the house number was omitted. In Darabani, the address was omitted.

There are places where the clerk would record whether the birth occurred at the parents' house or someone else's. In Botosani, this information usually was omitted. Addresses varied a lot. The names of the streets have sometimes changed, while the house number remained the same.

- Age of parents/witnesses is almost never consistent.
- Starting in the 1890s - mother's maiden name – or her father's name was also registered. The exact start year varies with location. In Botosani it happened only in the 20th century. The 1910 format doesn't have a field for this info, so it was omitted.
- Illegitimate births. Starting around 1885, the children of a couple who didn't have a civil marriage were considered as illegitimate, and registered only the mothers. Many times the declarant was the father. In some locations the place of birth was registered as a house that belonged to the father. For most locations, it was mentioned as "the birth occurred at his mother's house...". There are many cases where the father managed to register children as his own, even though there wasn't a civil marriage. We've observed also some few cases where children were registered as illegitimate, though the parents had civil marriage.
- Witnesses: In all location some of the witnesses were "professional". They are registered as witnesses to tens and hundreds of births and deaths, over many years. Of the professional witnesses many were sextons, some were midwives. Sometimes, people used the services of non-Jewish Romanian witnesses. There are locations where the usage of professional witnesses was dominant. In others, either relatives or casual neighbors would be the witnesses. In most locations witnesses were usually males. In Dorohoi, many of the witnesses were women. Registration of the relationship of witnesses varies between locations. In some locations, the record would say if a witness was a relative, and the exact relationship. In others, like Dorohoi or Darabani a birth record would not record a relationship even if clear (for example grandfather). In Harlau, many of the relatives are registered as "moş", an elder relative. One has to take into consideration that relationship might be in the wide sense, i.e – a witness who's registered as father's cousin, might really be his wife's. All locations would register witnesses' name, age and profession. In most of the locations same details would be registered for the declarant (unless he was the father). In Dorohoi and Mihaileni, only his identity would be registered, without any details. Exact address of the witnesses was registered only starting with 1910. Before that, only the city of residence.
- Signatures: In many of the early records one person would sign in Hebrew/Yiddish for all. In Botosani this continued for a few years, in others for decades. Later records would indicate the declarant/witnesses did not know how to write. However there are cases where a person signs one record while a later one might say he

“doesn't know to write”.

Only Latin/Cyrillic alphabet signatures are probably authentic.

- In many of the small places (not in Botosani and Dorohoi) starting in the late 1880s someone has checked the status of the male infants, and registered their death act as a side note. In Falticeni, this practice started earlier, and the checking was performed on all of the children. As a result, it can be seen that the mortality rate was about 30-40%.
- Starting in 1930, every important status change - as marriage, divorce, death, name change, immigration etc... was registered as a side note. Such side notes help us trace the person in his later life. Marriages that occurred in a short period starting 1912 were also registered as side notes. Legitimization, as a result of the parents having a late civil marriage was also registered as a side note.

Death records

- At least half of the death records are those of children.
- The most important information in the case of an adult death, especially an elderly one, should be the information about his parents and his place of birth. Unfortunately, most death records from the area do not register this information. In Botosani this information started to be registered only in the 20th century, and only partially. Dorohoi records usually registered the information about the identity of the parents of an adult, but no info about the place of birth. Other locations started registering information about the parents in the 1890s. This information should be treated with caution, as many times it was erroneous. Only in Botosani one might find information about the place of birth of a young child.
- The witnesses were of the same type as those who testified at birth, excluding perhaps midwives. However, there are places where 1st degree relatives were witnesses to the death and other places where such relatives were never witnesses. In case of related witnesses, death records might have registered the relationship (in places where birth records didn't) though many times it would only say “relative”, and not the specific relationship.
- Details about the parents of a small child vary. Their age or father's profession wasn't always registered.
- Cause of death can be found usually in the death records of the cities. Small towns that started to register this detail did it only in the 20th century. Botosani and Dorohoi records registered the death cause starting 1884, Harlau starting 1895.

Marriage records

Marriage records are truly the most important of the civil state records. They are essential to genealogical research and the ability to connect a person to a larger family.

Romanian marriage records are registration of civil marriages only. The Romanian authorities introduced civil marriage requirement as part of the 1864 civil code reforms. It was understood that the couple should first have a civil marriage and afterwards have the religious one.

The civil marriage ceremony was the culmination of a long bureaucratic process. It required the following phases and documents:

- Registration of the intent to marry.
- Publish the intention to marry twice in a period of 8 days at the entrance to the city hall or church (synagogue).
- Age evidence act for both groom and bride.
- Consent of the parents of the couple. In case of death of one or more of the parents, a document of evidence should have been supplied.
- If both father and mother of either groom or bride were dead, the consent of the grandparents was required. In case all were dead, death evidences were required. A family relative should have consented to the marriage.
- All the evidence documents required authentication by the local court.
- Romanian law prohibited the marriage of close relatives such as cousins, uncle/niece or sister of deceased wife. Such marriages were allowed by the Jewish religion and practiced among Jews. The Romanian constitution allowed the King to give dispensation to the marriage.

In addition, four witnesses were required to attend the marriage.

Since most of the population didn't know Romanian, filling the forms and getting the evidence documents required mid-men and has cost money. Most of the Jewish population at that time was traditional and considered the religious marriage the only binding procedure. Thus, many of them preferred to skip the civil marriage, and have only a religious one. For those people, there are no marriage registrations. Some couples have chosen to have a civil marriage some years and in cases decades after they had the religious one. In such cases they usually legitimized their children that were alive at that time.

At the beginning of the 20th century the Romanian government understood that the marriage process was too complex, relaxed many of the requirements and the only evidence required was the age evidence. The change was introduced in 1906. As a result, the marriage registrations based on the new rules, contain less information, and are less valuable.

The important details that might be found in a marriage registration:

- Name, surname, age, occupation of the groom and bride. Birth place (usually), residence. First marriage, or different.
- Name, surname and residence of the couple's parents. Age and occupation of the parents are not always registered (depending on the period and location).
- A list of the required evidence documents. In case that births or deaths (of parents, spouses) were actually registered at the time of the happening, the exact record number/year of the registration.
- Additional evidences like permission of the army unit the groom belonged to.
- Four witnesses were required. Their ages, occupation, and residence (city not address). Many times, the witnesses are unrelated to the couple, but even in case they were related, the relationship was usually not recorded.

In addition to the marriage registration books, there are also the books that contain the registration of the marriage intentions. The information found in these books is important when the groom (usually) or the bride married in another place. Very few locations preserved the book of intentions.

Authenticity of the information

Every record is prone to errors. Many times, the witnesses that informed of the happening were not close relatives of the family and might have passed wrong information to the clerk. Even though the Romanian law specified (and the body of every record repeats it) that the record was read to the witnesses, we do not know if the practice strictly abode this rule, or whether sometimes the clerk gathered the information and wrote down the record later. We need to remember that the vast majority of the Ashkenazi Jewish population in the 19th century did not learn in Romanian schools and their mother tongue was Yiddish.

The following records present examples of such errors, probably caused by lack of communication:

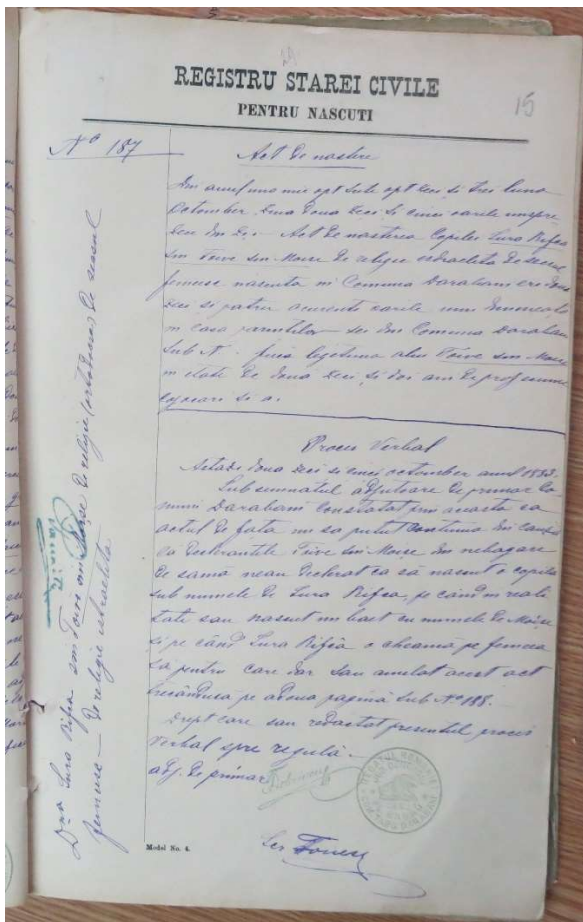


Figure 6: Birth record in error

Record 183/1883 from Darabani starts with the usual wording - ... birth record of Sura Rifca... daughter of Toivi sin Moise, 22, coat maker, and. The record stops at the word and, and we find a protocol written below claiming that the declarant was confused and actually a boy was born by the name of Moise and Sura Rifca was actually the wife. It might be that the clerk knew that Jews do not name children after their parents so he spotted that something is wrong. There are many other records where such errors or alike were not spotted.

Another example. While researching the death record in Figure 6, I was quite sure that there is an error and the deceased was not Moise sin Aron, as recorded but Moise Aron sin Itzic. The photo of the tomb was available. It is clear that the death record is not correct. I would also like to point to the fact that one of the witnesses was the deceased son, who certainly knew the correct information. Somehow, it didn't pass correctly to the record.

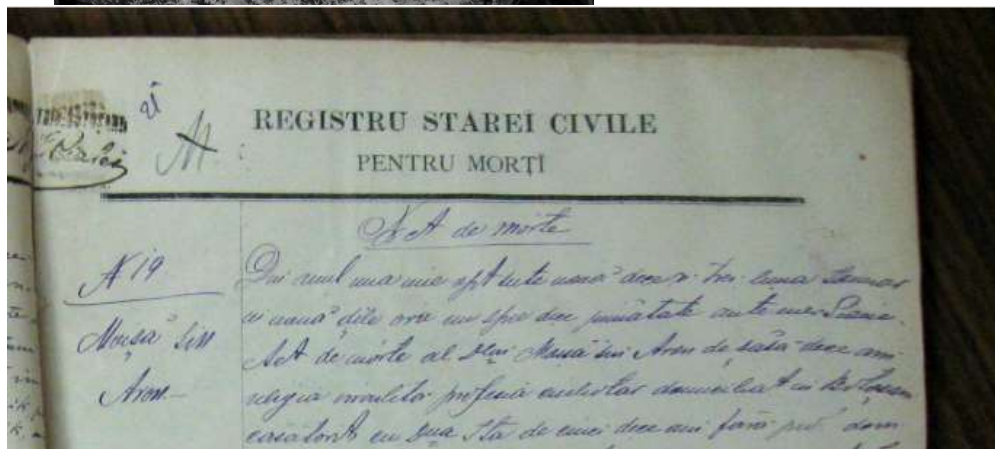


Figure 7: Death record vs. tomb

Birth records

- Later side notes or analysis of records show that sometimes the name of the baby or the name of the parents was wrong.
- In Botosani (city) in the 1870s and 1880s many boys were registered as Zeida and Alter, even though it was not their real name. We suspect that it was a way to circumvent the requirement to register the given name prior to the Birth.
- Ages of parents or witnesses are usually not accurate.

Death records

- Ages of deceased, spouse, witnesses are usually not accurate.
- Birth place could be wrong.
- Name of parents could be wrong.

Marriage records

As ordered registration started only in 1865, evidence about the age of the couple was based on the testimony of five witnesses. The facts would be those convenient to the subject of the testimony, and not always truthful.

It is well known that many Jews immigrated to Romania from the neighboring areas, during the 1st half of the 19th century. However, very few marriage records in the area would point to an origin outside of Romania if the groom or the bride lived in Romania. As an exception, quite a few Falticeni marriages show out of Romania origins. For example, a groom that was born in Constantinople, and another in Hague, Netherlands.

The true identity of the parents and their real status is sometimes doubtful. It seems that sometimes the people that presented themselves as parents of the couple weren't always the true one. It also seems that the Romanian authorities were aware of that since from one point and onward, the records carry the text of witnesses testifying that the people that accompany the couple are truly their parents.

Some examples:

In case one of the parents died and the other remarried, the new spouse might have posed as the true parent. The record would register either his name as the parent, or the name of the true parent.

We've found a record where the parents of the brother-in-law of the bride posed as her parents. Their names were registered as the bride's' parents' names.

In cases where the groom was not from Botosani, and without family, witnesses might have testified his parents were dead.

In cases where the groom and bride were of kinship that prohibited marriage, many times the couple did not ask for dispensation from the king. The written statement of the witnesses "the groom and bride are not of forbidden kinship" was not always true.

Challenges in genealogical research in Botosani county

Our project developed a very powerful tool for genealogical research. Locating and obtaining records is the main obstacle to research in Romania (as well as most of Eastern Europe) and this is no longer a problem. We can perform a thorough research of all available records, and not only of the known family. We can also locate family members that moved to other, unknown places in the county. Even taking all of these into consideration, many challenges still lie ahead of us.

There is one feature that singles out Romanian Jewish genealogical research from that of the neighboring areas - the lack of surnames. Romania is the only country in Europe that had a significant Jewish population and didn't require the Jewish population to acquire a fixed surname. As a result, surname adoption was voluntary. Given the provinciality of Botosani, the process took longer to be completed.

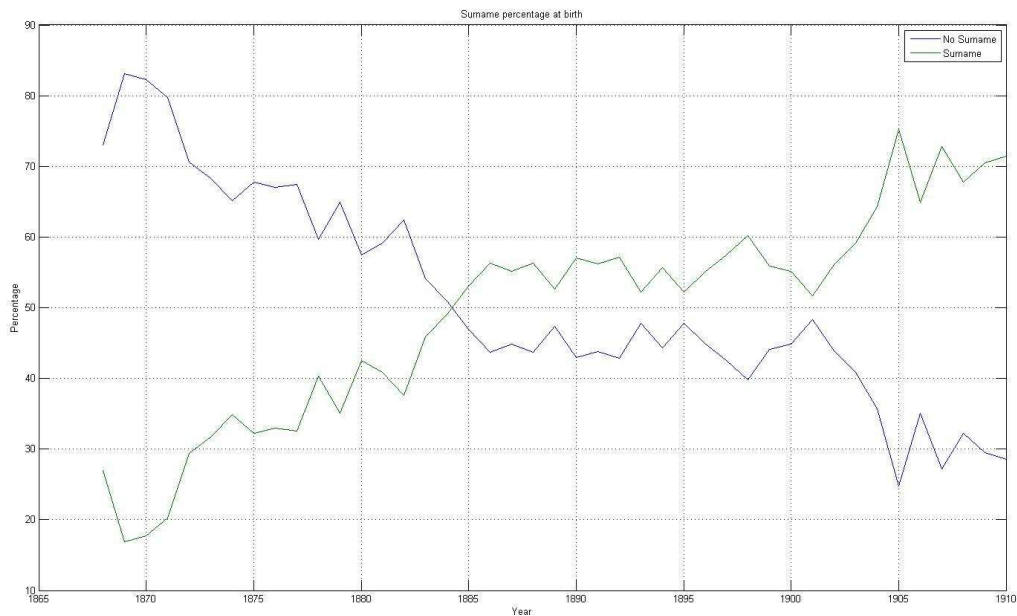


Figure 8: Percentage of babies having a surname at birth in the city of Botosani

The first challenge is to identify beyond any doubt the family of the ancestor. As a rule of thumb, ancestors who left Romania earlier, and with fewer family members, will have a more difficult identification. Even though ordered registration started in December 1865, it is quite clear that many were not registered at birth even after that date. It seems also that birth dates supplied by the emigrants in the new country were at best approximations. Most of the cases the birth date was not exact, nor close to the real one. As a result, the very simple method of finding the birth record of your ancestor at a given birth date is usually worthless if your ancestor was born in the 19th century.

Preliminary research in the new country is necessary. The names of the parents, if found in documents, even if adapted to the new country add information. Hebrew inscriptions on tombstones provide the Hebrew names of the ancestor and his father. The Hebrew names usually correspond to the Romanian Jewish names used in Botosani County. Finding the name of the mother is one major obstacle. Religious documents usually don't mention it, so only family lore, or civil documents can help.

Many times surnames were changed in the new country. But for Romanian Jews, even if their surname in the new country was a typical Jewish Ashkenazi surname, they might have been the first generation to use it. The family that remained in Romania either adopted the same surname later, or adopted a totally different surname.

Place of origin, known to the descendants, or found in the new country records, is not necessarily accurate. Many times, Botosani or Dorohoi were given as the place of origin, even though the real place of origin was in smaller places the respective counties, and not in the cities. Other times, the place of origin found in Ellis Island manifest might have been the last location the person lived while in Romania, but not necessarily the one he lived most of his life.

Another issue is existence of records for a certain family. There are families with many records, especially births of children, while others had very few. It is hard to find information about the parents or families of a couple who didn't have a civil marriage, or had it outside of Botosani county. Death records might tell a part of the story, but deaths that occurred after 1915 are yet considered confidential.

In addition, there is no equivalent to the detailed censuses like in U.S.A or U.K. Even though a few such censuses were held in Romania, the raw data was not considered important and was destroyed. There is no record that lists together all members of the family - parents and children, all together. The result, is we cannot "sample" a family's life every decade or so, and we need to rely on events that occur randomly in a person's life.

It is not simple to find relationships between people who married before civil marriage started. It is even harder to find relationships between siblings or relatives that lived in different locations.

Finding the place of origin for families that immigrated to Romania in the 1st half of the 19th century is almost impossible.

Another challenge that we present is the positive identification of a person. While in a small location a person named either Avram sin Moishe or Avram Cohn for example, and having a specific profession, and of a certain age range are usually unique in a certain period, that might not be true for Botosani or Dorohoi.

For example, in Botosani lived two Zeilig sin Iosub, shoemakers, about the same age, or two Rahmil sin Leib, carters, again of the same age. When such people were registered as witnesses, it is hard to know which one was mentioned.

An example of a family: A few siblings born in the 1880s and 1890s left Romania in the early years of the 20th century. We have been able to determine that their parents were Iancu sin Leib, a tailor, and Sara. We have found the marriage record of a couple by that name that

married in 1870. He was a tailor and 26 years old at the time of the marriage, she was 17. There are a few birth records that seem to belong to this couple in the 1870s. There are no death records or any evidence that those kids died during childhood, but the potential descendants of the couple are not familiar with those kids. In terms of same names, same profession, suitable age, there is nothing to imply that the couple who married in 1870, and had the kids in the 1870s is not the parents of those born in the 1880s. But there is a death record where a lancu sin Leib, tailor, of suitable age was witness to the death record of his father in law. However, name of the deceased was Shmerl and not Mochi who was the father of the bride in the marriage record. There are no additional hints to enable absolute decision.

Couples change addresses frequently. Records register the address of the event (birth or death) but not the address of a witness. In some locations the record would register who was the owner of the home the event happened, but not in Botosani.

It seems that most of the people didn't know to write. They didn't sign their own signature. Sometimes one hand would sign for all in the record. Latter, this habit stopped.

There are some few common professions that many of the men used to have: tailor, shoemaker, fur hat and coat maker, carter, water carrier, sieve maker. Many people were registered as having no profession, or free profession. Some professions required training, so usually one would profess it all his life. Untrained people, would change their profession, depending on the circumstances, or as they got older. As a person got older, probably his health prevented him for working, so he will be registered as having no profession.

Epilogue

Records only tell very few details about our ancestors. They are imperfect; they lack additional valuable information that we yearn to have. But sometimes those records are the only written testimony of their lives, the only source of information of their existence.

For more than fifteen years our group has invested lots of efforts in acquiring records from Botosani city, then the county and afterwards in the Romanian region of Moldova. We had great success in tracing our families as well as others. We've succeeded in uniting branches of families that didn't have contact for decades, second third and fourth cousins.

The most important, we've uncovered the names of our ancestors. We preserved their memory as well as the memory of the Jewish communities that once existed in Botosani county and in Romania.