

The Bukovina Society of the Americas NEWSLETTER

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Bukovinafest September 17-21, 2009

PEOPLE AND EVENTS

- Welcome to our newest life members, number 182, Martin Zawilla, Los Llaos, Spain, and number 183, Joseph and Sherry Smith, Granisle, BC, Canada.
- Frank Augustine died May 1, 2009. He was a former board member of the Bukovina Society and helped with upkeep of our headquarters building. Anton Gaschler died August 2, 2009. Tony was a charter member of the Society and helped with recruitment of new members and attendance for the annual conventions.

A JOURNEY HOME TO BUKOVINA

by: Gail Tremblay

My grandpa, Alfred Schuster, who resides near Hays, Kansas, my parents, Steve and Barb (Schuster) Tremblay, and I all decided to take a trip to the region of Bukovina, which is in present day northern Romania, to try to locate where our ancestors came from. The adventure really started months



The Schuster family is pictured in the former Bukovina from left: Catharine Tremblay, Jared Tremblay, Steven Tremblay, Barbara (Schuster) Tremblay, Alfred Schuster and Curtis Schwieterman.

before we left when I came to Hays to visit grandpa and started my research at the Bukovina Society of Ellis County. I got a lot of help from Joe Erbert and Oren Windholz. Finally the day came and we departed on the 23rd of May, 2009.

On arrival we walked about the capital, Bucharest, which is still attempting to rid itself of nearly 50 years of Communist domain. The only resemblances of that time appear to be the 'Soviet-like' buildings still nestled all over the city. Upon closer inspection, Bucharest today appears the same as any other European city, with cafes crowded with locals enjoying themselves on a beautiful Sunday evening along the crowded side streets of the oldest district in town.

In the morning, it was back to traveling, as we flew north to Iasi, and collected our compact car for the next leg of the trip. We headed towards Suceava to pick up Curtis from the train station. He is a good friend working in the Peace Corps in the eastern Ukraine; and graciously took two, twelve hour train rides to meet up with us. But on the way to get him, we noticed rather quickly on the autostrada (highways), that we might not make it. It appears there are no speed limits and it is normal for people to pass with no space provided on the road and with constant oncoming traffic. We learned it was our responsibility to pull off the road if we couldn't keep up. This also proved difficult considering that goats, cows and horses are tied-up near the roads as a local substitute for lawn-mowers! We did in fact make it to Suceava, found Curtis and got some local assistance with directions to *Gura Humorului*.

Later in the evening, we were met by my brother Jared and his wife Catherine. Now our entourage was complete. We strolled through Gura, which it must be said, is a lovely town. I recommend to anyone visiting, use this as your base for travel. It was small enough that we didn't have to deal with too much traffic, and I believe we were close to everywhere we wanted to visit.

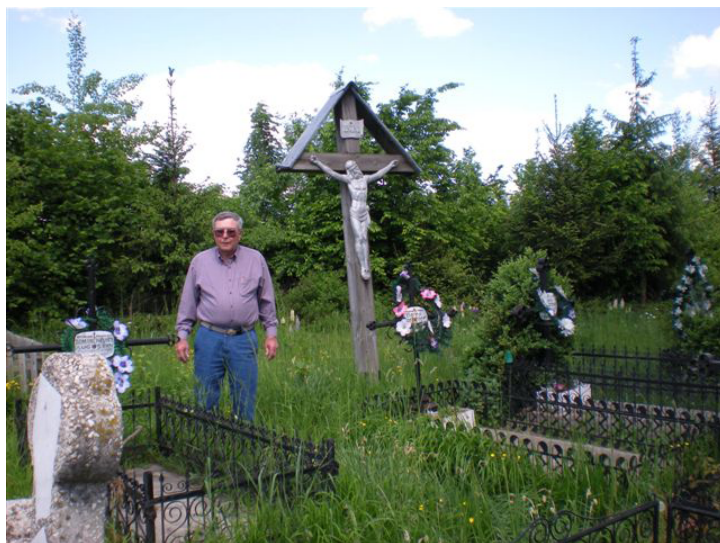
In the morning we were ready to find Furstenthal, or *Voievodeasa* as it is known today. After a couple of wrong turns and providing a lady a ride to the nearest town (hitch hiking is safe and used by everyone, including children), we ran into our destination.

With hopes high, we entered the small village of Furstenthal, which is nestled between some hills. This area is on the Eastern edge of the Carpathian Mountains, and is very hilly, and quite beautiful. Not locating the Church that I've seen in pictures before (thanks to The Bukovina Society), we stopped near a group of ladies standing around chatting. We used what seemed like every word we could come up with for church and mimicking the sign of the cross, before Catherine came up with Basilica. They all understood instantly that we must be Roman Catholic and not Greek Orthodox, and sent us across a gravel road with a creek of some sort running through it. We thanked them (*Mult'umesc*), and set out to cross the creek with our 'not so Hummer like' vehicles!!

Rather quickly, we found the Catholic Church and went inside. It was beautifully kept, with stained glass windows picturing the Holy family (*Sfanta Familie*), St. Michael the Archangel (*Sfantul Arhanghel Mihail*), The Holy Spirit appearing as flames above the apostles (*Coborarea Sfantului Duh*), and the Annunciation of Mary (Buna Vestire). There is even the Last Supper painted on the ceiling. The whole interior of the church is kept in excellent condition, as well as the yard outside. We decided to press on in hopes of finding the cemetery, which was not in immediate view of the church.

We proceeded down every road in the village, and made many turns winding us up through the hills. After almost two hours of hopeful exploration and many disappointments, we decided to look on the upper part of town once more. We found an alley between two houses, filled with waist high grass and trees pressing everything into shadows. At the end was a wood fence with a rickety gate. We walked down the alley, thinking it would be just a field on the outskirts of town. To our happiness, it was our cemetery. Today it has been taken over mainly by the Romanians living here, but we did find tombstones with names of our ancestors.

There were no first names of our ancestors as we were hoping to find, but names of descendants who had stayed after



Alfred Schuster in the cemetery of his ancestral village of Furstenthal.

our family left in 1901. Some of the names we found in relation to ourselves were Augustin and Gaschler. The last names of Baumgartner and Zimmer were also located in the cemetery. We noticed that on recent burial sites, there was a whole mound of wreaths that reached at least 3 feet in height and covered the whole area where the ground had been recovered.

Standing upon that hill, knowing our family had walked these same hills was very moving. I wish we could have spoken to the town's people to see if they remembered anything about the Germans who had lived here before them. Unfortunately, our language skills in Romanian were too limited. We sat and had a long dinner a few miles from Furstenthal and reflected how far our family had traveled for a better life.

The next day as we headed back to Bucharest once more, I thought of what we had found and how beautiful the area was. I wish we would have had time to learn more, but I believe the trip was still a success. More than a hundred years later, we were still able to find the location of our family's village with the Catholic Church and parts of the cemetery still intact. I think that is amazing, considering that the village was renamed and taken over by a different group of people who migrated to the area.

59th ANNUAL MEETING OF THE LANDSMANNSCHAFT DER BUCHEN- LANDDEUTSCHEN

by Michael Augustin (Leonberg, Germany)

Since very few members attended the October 2008 annual meeting in Czernowitz, the *Landsmannschaft der Buchenlanddeutschen* (Union of Bukovina German Fellow

Countrymen) scheduled this year's convention for June 13-14 in Germany. 2009 also marks the 60th anniversary of the founding of the *Landsmannschaft* in Munich. As in earlier years the gymnasium of the KSV (*Kraftsportverein*=strength event club) in Unterelchingen in the vicinity of Ulm hosted the festivities. The program did not deviate from that of earlier years: greetings by Chairman Ewald Zachmann as well as by representatives of the political sector, a moment of silence to commemorate the passing of deceased compatriots, a presentation by the cultural advisor Gertrud Romberger on the history of the Germans in Bukovina, a performance by the costumed dance group of the Bukovina Germans from Stuttgart-Büsnau, an ecumenical religious service, music, dancing and general festivities.

A new feature this year included the creation of a genealogy focus group, facilitated through the efforts of Professor Kurt Rein. With their laptops and their databases the genealogists were steadily barraged by members' inquiries about their forebears. Franz Prelicz of Pürgen, Bavaria was unanimously elected coordinator.

During the Sunday festivities the *Landsmannschaft* awarded its highest distinction, the golden pin with certificate, to two ladies for their work on behalf of the Bukovina Germans: Waltraut Sieglinde Nass, presiding officer of the Rhineland/Palatine/Saar branch as well as historian and author Dr. Sophie A. Welisch of Congers, NY.

All in all the meeting proved to be very successful, attracting a larger audience than in years past. With about 200 people the gymnasium in Unterelchingen was almost filled.

DR. SOPHIE A. WELISCH

By Irmgard Hein Ellingson

Dr. Sophie A. Welisch has been decorated with the *Goldene Ehrennadel*, or the Golden Honor Pin, of the *Landsmannschaft der Buchenlanddeutschen (Bukowina) e.V.* at their annual meeting on Sunday, June 14, 2009. Dr. Welisch was a charter board members of the Bukovina Society of the Americas.

Dr. Welisch is Professor Emeritus of History at Dominican College in Blauvelt, New York, and the American-born daughter of Bukovina emigrants Johann Welisch and his wife Susanna Klara Stephanie Loy. She has rendered outstanding services to the Bukovina movement through many years of hard work and service to Bukovina Germans worldwide. "Her dedication to translating so many of the German language articles about Bukovina to English has

forever opened the doors for so many English-speaking Bukovina-German descendents who would otherwise not be able to read for themselves about the richness of their heritage," wrote Werner Zoglauer, the Society's website webmaster. "Her presence is all over the Bukovina Society website and without her hard work, it would only contain a fraction of what it has become."

His remarks were reiterated by Irmgard Hein Ellingson, a Society co-founder and member of the Board of Directors. "It is due to Dr. Welisch's dedication and effort that the Bukovina story has been carefully researched, retained, and re-told on this continent. I will ever be deeply indebted to her for the many times in which she shared her scholarship, expertise, and enthusiasm for Bukovina."

In 1986 and 1987, Irmgard began to organize Bukovina research notes that she had made while she and her husband, the Rev. Wayne Ellingson, lived north of Ellis. Her friend, the late JoAnn Kuhr of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia (<ahsgr.org>) staff in Lincoln, Nebraska, located print resources for her as well as the address for Dr. Paula Tiefenthaler and the *Landsmannschaft der Buchenlanddeutschen (Bukowina) e.V.* Dr. Tiefenthaler provided additional information and introduced Irmgard to Dr. Welisch. Their support led to the publication of Irmgard's book *The Bukovina Germans in Kansas: A 200-Year History of the Lutheran Swabians* by Ft. Hays State University in December 1987.

Dr. Welisch is a prolific author and translator. Her Bukovina research career was introduced in her master's thesis *Drang nach Osten: The Germans in Bukovina*, was completed at Fairleigh Dickenson University (Teaneck, NJ: 1961). It continued with "The Bukovina Germans in the Interwar Period," which appeared in *East European Quarterly*.14 (Winter 1980: 423-37), "The Second World War Resettlement of the Bukovina-Germans," in *Immigrants & Minorities*.3 (1984: 49-68), and "The Bukovina-Germans during the Habsburg Period: Settlement, Ethnic Interaction, Contributions," in *Immigrants & Minorities*.5 (1986: 73-106). She collaborated with Maria Becker and Larry Jensen on the book *The Bori Story: Genealogies of the German Bohemian Families Who in 1835 Founded Bori in Bukovina (Today in Romania)* with History of the Village and Its People (Congers, NY: by the authors, 1996). She translated Josef Wild's book *Fürstenthal: A German-Bohemian Community in Bukovina* and Erwin Massier's book *Fratautz and the Fratautzers: The Rise and Fall of a German Village Community in Bukovina* into English for publication by the Saskatchewan Genealogical Society in 1992 and 1993. Other works by her have been published by AHSGR, the Federation of East European Family History Societies (<feefhs.org>), the *Landmannschaft*, and the Bukovina Society.

For a number of years, Dr. Welisch served as the editor of our Society's quarterly *Newsletter*. She submitted her resignation earlier this year with these words: "It has been an interesting experience, but as we know, even interesting experiences must someday come to an end. I extend my best wishes to the Society for continued success in disseminating knowledge about Bukovina and its people through its various endeavors."

The Bukovina Society of the Americas joins the *Landsmannschaft* in congratulating her upon this well-deserved honor. The directors and membership wish to express their gratitude to Dr. Welisch for her leadership in our organization throughout these past twenty years and in the course of her professional career. We will seek to uphold her example and her standards in our continuing work.

2009 NEMECHEK-ROURKE FAMILY REUNION

by: Steve Parke 31-Jul-09

Yes, it was that time of the year again, the annual Nemechek-Rourke family reunion in North Central Kansas. 2009 was the 22nd year for the Kirwin Reservoir July reunion but this group has been gathering at various campgrounds and large group facilities in Kansas since about 1970 and certainly before anyone thought about writing down exact dates and locations. Due to family obligations attendance was slightly down this year at 78. Most were from Kansas but people also drove from Iowa, Nebraska, Colorado and Texas.

As usual the meals from Friday dinner through Sunday lunch were plentiful. Casseroles, deserts and fruits and vegetables filled the cooler and eventually found their way to a meal line. For the last few years I've been bringing a sack of corn from the truck farms east of Pueblo on the Arkansas River. By noon Saturday it was gone. Next year I've been asked to bring a refrigeration truck with a more ample supply of not only corn but cantaloupe and watermelon as well. Cousins, dream on!

Of course there was plenty storytelling. "How's so and so doing?" and "What are they up to now?" We had a lengthy discussion about the 1985 picnic when we got caught near the tornado activity at a Salina, KS, campground. We were very lucky that year.

The annual softball games continue but with only two games this year. As I've noted before, this activity is a microcosm of this family's values. Everybody is eligible to play and many did from age 6 to 60. At one point I counted 21 players on the field with 4 in the area of second base. Once again, we forgot to keep score and worse yet, had

trouble keeping track of outs. Are we getting that old? To aid the older boys, a new rule was instituted: Those over 50 can have a pinch runner. Some of us aging warriors could use even more help as we were dodging line drives and had a high fly ball bounce off one head. We welcome the new crop of grade school age ball players.

Elders Eileen Nemechek, Lucille Nemechek and Sr. Margaret Rourke were in attendance. No family history records work was done at this year's reunion, so, Jennie, we hope to see you back again next year! Kathleen Kazmaier continues to update the family mailing list and make it available to everyone at the reunion or by email.

While we did little family history work at the reunion a major discovery was made earlier in the year that was shared in part at the reunion. This spring I was compiling a list of the German-Bohemian, Bukovina immigrants to Ellis, KS. Federal census records, the Ellis, St. Mary Parish Family Register, and BSA's, Bukovina Genealogy Database were used as well as some passenger ship records to complete the task.

What prompted the new discovery was Jennie Mills's copy of the 1901 Reitmeier passenger ship record. The Reitmeiers, lead by the mother, Philomena Rach-Reitmeier, were accompanied by friends, John and Regina Erbert-Landauer. We'd always assumed that the connection between these two immigrating families was the Reitmeier line through Franz and Rosalia Reitmeier-Ebert, who were among the earliest Bukovina settlers in Ellis in 1887 but there's a deeper connection.

The 1900 Federal Census lists Franz Rach living with Franz and Rosalia Reitmeier-Erbert as a laborer immigrating in 1887, having been in the USA for 13 years. In comparing notes with Oren Windholz, he was aware of Franz Rach's supporting role with Erbert Farms but we did not know that Franz was among the early 1887 immigrants. What was Franz Rach doing with the Erberts in 1887?

A search on BSA Genealogy Database provides the answer. Franz Rach's mother is Johanna Fuchs-Rach. Johanna is the sister of Josepha Fuchs-Erbert, wife of Ellis Bukovina patriarch, Joseph Erbert. Joseph and Josepha Erbert immigrated in 1889. The parents of the sisters, Johanna and Josepha Fuchs, were married in Aussergefild, Bohemia, and the Fuchs as well as the Erberts were part of the mid 1800's migration to Poiana Mikuli, Bukovina. Franz Rach was now living in America near his aunt, Josepha Fuchs-Erbert, and working for his cousin, Franz Erbert.

Let's get back to the passenger ship record. When Philomena Rach-Reitmeier's presence at Ellis Island was recorded in 1901, it notes that she was going to Ellis, Kansas, to see her brother Franz Rach and her aunt, Josepha Erbert. The

arrival of this Reitmeier family was a continuation of the arrival of Fuchs descendents which branched into both the Erbert and Reitmeier families. Or moving up one generation, this arrival was a continuation of the extended Erbert clan coming to Ellis.

Getting back to the Rourke-Nemechek Reunion, here's the relevancy. One of the immigrating Reitmeier children in 1901, Philomina, married Stephen F. Nemechek as his first wife. The Stephen F. Nemechek and Philomena Reitmeier family group are a continuation of the Fuchs family tree and through the Fuchs, are connected to the Erbert family tree. It is this group of Nemecheks, in part, that gathers for the annual Nemechek-Rourke Reunion. Yes, sooner or later we are all related! Watch what you say!

A process similar to that noted above could be done for almost all of the Ellis, German-Bohemian, Bukovina surnames, reducing the whole group of about 225 immigrants down to about eight large family groups in the 1800's, but that's for another article. At this time, let it be noted that this Nemechek-Rourke family reunion has some deep roots, back to Bukovina and earlier, the Bohemian Forest several hundred years ago.

a manner consistent with its original purpose. The church is now used by the Romanian Orthodox congregation and the school by the fifth through eighth grade classes of the community. Finally, at the recommendation of Hermine Schatte, we sought out Mrs. Zachmann, who is probably the last German in the village. The pictures that Mrs. Schatte had taken during her visit in the year 2006 and then sent to us were helpful. She had visitors from Germany, just as she had had in 2006. This time it was not her son Rudi but rather his twin brother Johann. The Zachmann brothers, born in 1956, left Romania in 1993 and now live in Kreis (county) Schwandorf, north of Regensburg in Bavaria, where they have established their independent lives.

In response to the question of why she had remained in Romania, Mrs. Zachmann answered that in 1940, she and practically all other Germans had left Bukovina with their families for resettlement in Silesia. During the flight [ahead of the advancing Soviet army] at the end of World War II, they reached Austria and were handed over by the American occupation troops to the Soviets. When the latter saw their birth places on their identity papers, the family was sent back to Romania. There they remained.

Noontime came and we left Illischesti in the direction of Gura Humorului. Just before we left town, we stopped to have coffee in a very respectable hotel restaurant. Our tour guide turned down an invitation for lunch. The time was too precious, since we still wanted to visit the monasteries. We drove through Solka to Marginea, to view some of the wonderful black ceramic vases. Aside from that we obtained beautifully painted Easter eggs.

After a short drive, we reached the Sucevita monastery, which was built between 1595 and 1606. Here a nun who spoke excellent German led us through the museum and finally to the monastery church, which has the most well-preserved paintings on its exterior walls. The nun ignored the summons to the next hour of prayer, telling us that she was in service.

The way to the Moldavita monastery, established in 1532, led through an exceptionally beautiful forested area in the Carpathian Mountains. In Moldavita we were received by Sister Tatjana who explained the exterior wall paintings to us and to a larger group from Germany. In the meantime, we became so chilled that we could not make it to the end of the tour but drove back to Campulung. Over dinner we said our farewells to Mrs. Gheorgiu and her colleague, giving them a donation for the work of the German Forum and some personal gifts.

On Monday morning, September 15, we left our group in Campulung to continue on our tour. We drove through

ON THE TRAIL OF MY ANCESTORS – A TRIP IN BUKOVINA AUF DEN SPUREN MEINER VOR- FAHREN – REISE IN DIE BUKOWINA

by Kurt Mayer (Vechelde)

Irmgard Hein Ellingson, translator

Der Suedostdeutsche, Nr. 4, 20 April 2009

We went on our way to Illischesti. The route passed through Dragoesti on a gravel road down through a valley to the scenic birthplace of my mother. We sought out the cemetery where we found a number of well-maintained graves of the leading members of the Kipper family who included the *Landtagsabgeordnete* (delegate to provincial parliament) and mayor. However, it was not certain that they were related to my mother. Finally we went to the former property of my maternal ancestors on the *Zwoelfergasse*, or "Street of the 12." I knew that none of the buildings belonging to my uncle Fridolin Kipper remained in existence. In spite of that we took a picture. Under a nut tree at the gas station diagonally across the road, we collected some sandstone and some walnuts that were tastier than any that I had ever had. Was it my imagination, or was it just because they were so fresh?

On the way back, we stopped at the former Evangelical Lutheran Church and the former old German school located next to it. Each structure continues to be used in

Roman, Bacau, and Galati and by evening, we reached Tulcea in the Danube delta. After a wonderful cruise in the Danube delta on Tuesday, we made our way to Bucharest on Wednesday. There we took a city tour and saw the Parliament Palace, a massive but terrifying structure, supposedly the second largest in the world, which had been built during the Ceausescu era. For me, Bucharest is the ugliest city that I have seen in Europe. By evening we were again deeper in the Carpathians, this time in Predeal. Here our guide recommended that we not leave the hotel because of the bears that live in the forests and approach the settlements at night.

We spent the next two days in Romania in *Siebenbuergen*, or Transylvania. Special high points of our sightseeing included the castle Pelesch by Sinaia, which had been built by Karl [Charles] I of Sigmaringen-Hohenzollern, who reigned from 1866 to 1914 as the first German king upon the Romanian throne. Another was Bran [Toerzburg], the Dracula castle. Aside from that we visited the old city of Brasov (Kronstadt) and Sighisoara (Schaessburg) where we dined in a restaurant located in the house in which Count Dracula had reportedly been born. We were very impressed by a worship service in the German school affiliated with *Margarethenkirche*, or St. Margaret's Church, the Evangelical Lutheran church in Medias (Mediasch), in which we were permitted to take a look, and finally by Sibiu (Hermannstadt), which was named the cultural capital of Europe in 2007. The central part of the city is outstanding structural condition, and a visit to the National Museum Brukenthal is well worth while. The influence of German culture spanning about 800 years is clearly visible.

After our last night in Hunedoara (Eisenmarkt), we left Romania on September 20 and reached our home after a two-day drive. In the course of crossing Hungary, we noted the great different in the economic development of the two countries. Romania's industrial development of the Ceausescu era is seen only in ruins but one sees many new industrial areas in Hungary. Will Romania ever attain a central European standard? It is understandable that a very large part of the *Siebenbuenger Sachsen*, or Transylvanian Saxons, left Romania after the changes in 1989 since the near future held no hope for improvement in conditions.

During our tour, I contacted the German teacher in Bistritz by telephone. She gave me the names and cell phone number of her parents in Lucacesti. With the help of Mrs. Gheorghiu from the German Forum in Suceava, I asked them for information, especially about the black smith shop once owned by my father. Mrs. Gheorghiu, with whom I have again spoken by telephone, told me that the old house on the property was until recently occupied by a store. The proprietors had supposedly given it up out of fear that the former occupants would be able to make a

claim upon it. They did not mean the owners prior to 1940 but rather the owners from the beginning of the Communist era, whose property had been expropriated. For more about this, see the report written by the Hermannstadt attorney Heinz Goetsch in *Der Suedostdeutschen*, Nr. 11/2008, about the Romanian law regarding return of a home in October 2001). In another telephone call to Mrs. Gheorghiu, I learned that the store closing probably had business or economic reasons. My family's ancestral home is now in the possession of the community.

I would like to use this report about my trip to Romania to remind readers about Mazanaesti, my birth place, as well as Lucacesti. I invite all readers who may come from this area or have information about it to contact me either by telephone at 05302/2107 or by e-mail at KurtMayer@gmx.net.

Editor's Note – Luzian Geier

The Romanian village of Lucacesti (Lukacestie in the Austrian administration), or Lukawec in Romanian, was formed across from Dragoiesti, along the old district highway between Berchischeshti and Suczawa. In 1900 the village had about 300 Romanian residents who for the most part occupied themselves with raising livestock. German artisans moved there later.

In administrative matters, the community belonged to the judicial district and to the district capital Gura Humor in 1905. It had 370 residents in that year, had its own school, and a post office in Dragoiesti. There was a savings and loan bank, four businesses (two little shops, a tobacconist, and a petroleum business) that were operated by Jews, and a black smith shop operated by Rudolf Novak. The village's liquor trade was licensed to Elias Wagner, also a Jew.

Mazanaesti was a typical Romanian village of average size. It lies at the source of the Somuzu stream along the district highway. Shortly before 1900, the village had 758 inhabitants and its own school. The post office, however, was located in Dragoiesti. It was also part of the Gura Humor administrative district. The only Germans in the village at that time were the families of black smith Franz Kramer and cartwright Josef Kristel.

In the time between the two world wars, both villages belonged to the Suceava administrative district (*Judet*) in Romania.

Today both villages belong to the Dragoiesti community in the Suceava *Judet* in southern Bukovina with the community center and with Berchiseshti and Korlata, two villages in which many Germans once lived. The total population is 5,353. The new coat of arms for the community (since the change in 1989) depicts four heads of wheat, an old plow in the center, and a field flower.