

# The Bukovina Society of the Americas NEWSLETTER

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## BUKOVINA PEOPLE AND EVENTS

- The events of Bukovinafest 06 on September 15th and the Midwest Deutsche Oktoberfest, September 16-17th are just days away. We look forward to the renewal of old friendships and making of new ones. Enclosed is the program of events.
- M. Brian Michaelsen, Van Nuys, CA has become the 157th member of the Lifetime Club.

## WEBER FAMILY REUNION

by Janet Gagnon, née Weber (Fairfax, VA)

On July 1-2, 2006 the descendants of my parents, Agatha Gaschler (1899-1991) and Joseph H. Weber (1898-1948), gathered in Ellis/Hays, KS for a family reunion to visit and research their roots. The reunion was organized and coordinated by Tom Dechant, Lois Dreher, Janice Massier, and myself. Family members came from as far away as Connecticut, Virginia, Maryland and Arizona. In all there were ninety-eight attendees from twelve different states.

In the quest for their roots, some members of the group toured the old sod dugout north of Ellis, the birthplace of Agatha Gaschler. The only sign of the dugout today is an indentation in the side of the hill, but the tour, which included the farm where eight of Agatha and Joseph's children (Rose, Florence, Pauline, Ella, Ralph, John, Betty and I) were born, was truly inspiring. A special thanks to Ernie Pfeifer, Frank and Mary Schuster and to all the people who allowed us to visit these areas. When my parents lived on the farm, they had no electricity, running water, or indoor plumbing. Although these features have since been added, they did not detract from the original character of the house.

Agatha's parents (Barbara and Michael Gaschler) were born in Fürstenthal, Bukovina, where Michael worked as a lumberman and Barbara as a glassblower. She started work at age seven and was often summoned at 3:30 A.M. My grandparents married in Fürstenthal and in 1891 moved to Buhusi, Romania, where my grandfather was employed in a glass factory and later a cloth factory only to return to Fürstenthal four years later. In 1897 the couple immigrated to the United States with their four children (Philomena, Anton, Anna and John), arriving in Baltimore on June 24 and reaching Ellis on June 29. Until proper living quarters could be constructed, they settled in the dugout, which we visited.

My father, Joseph Weber, was born in Fürstenthal and in 1901 set sail for the United States on the steamship *Maria Teresia* with his parents (Katharina and Johann), his five sisters (Barbara, Elisabeth, Rosa, Theresia, and Catharina) and his brother, John. The family settled on a farm south of Ellis.

## DIE BUKOWINA

von Emil Laukhardt  
posthumously submitted  
by his daughter,  
Hildegard Laukhardt-Iglhaut  
(Middle Village, NY)

Es gibt ein Fleckchen Erde,  
So wunderbar, so schön;  
Wer einmal darin weilte,  
Möcht' stets es wieder seh'n.

Hier kann das Herz gesunden  
Von Schmerzen allerhand.  
Man nennt dies Fleckchen Erde  
Das schöne Buchenland.

Natur in stiller Größe  
Ist unaussprechlich schön  
Wohin das Aug' auch blicket,  
Es kann nicht satt sich seh'n.

Hier rauschen alte Buchen  
Aus ferner Kriegeszeit  
Und können viel erzählen  
Von Landes Glück und Leid.

Sie schauen stolz hernieder  
Von Wald und Bergesrand.  
Als müßten sie beschirmen  
Das schöne Buchenland.

Und wer von hier muß scheiden,  
Wo seine Wiege stand,  
Der denkt: Seh' ich dich wieder,  
Mein schönes Buchenland?

## BUKOVINA

by Emil Laukhardt  
trans. by Sophie A. Welisch

There is a spot on this fine earth  
So wondrous to behold;  
That once one thereon sets his foot  
Its magic works unfold.

There the downcast heart can find  
Surcease from woes and pains.  
Bukovina is the name  
That echoes fond refrains.

In its silent greatness  
Are nature's splendors seen,  
Where ere the eye doth settle  
Its fill it cannot glean.

Here rustle age-old beech trees  
Extant from days of old.  
They have so much to tell us,  
As joy and grief unfold.

So proudly they glance downward  
To woods and mountain bands;  
As if they must defend it,  
Their lovely Buchenland.

And who from here must wander  
From where his cradle lay,  
Must ask: "My Bukovina!  
Will I see you someday?"

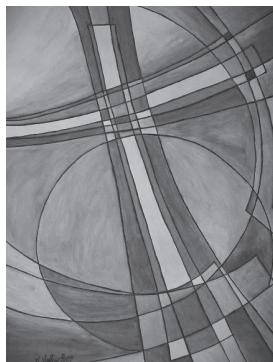
When my parents decided to relocate in Ellis, they purchased an old farmhouse with the stipulation that it had to be moved. With the help of family and friends, they dismantled the house piece by piece and used the materials to reconstruct the home at 405 North Madison. Everything from the old house was used, including doors, windows, and even some of the nails. This was recycling in its purest form, a trait not uncommon among Bukovinians.

The Bukovina Society Museum in Ellis and the local cemeteries proved to be great sources of information about our ancestors. Agatha and Joseph are buried at St. Mary's cemetery in Ellis, along with some of their children, parents, and grandparents. A special thanks to Oren Windholz for all his information and coordination as well as to Joe Erbert. As is so often the case in Ellis, all the people who were so helpful during the reunion are also related to the Weber family either through blood or marriage. Some reunion attendees were able to research their ancestors back six generations without ever leaving Ellis. It was indeed a memorable occasion.

## WALTER WELISCH: PAINTER, GRAPHIC ARTIST AND ART INSTRUCTOR

by Sophie A. Welisch (Congers, NY)

It is always a pleasure to write of prominent Bukovinians of our time and especially so when this happens to be a close relative. While I had been generally aware of the professional activities of my first cousin, Walter Welisch (Bad Griesbach, Germany) and in fact have several of his paintings and graphic productions, it was not until I asked him for specifics about his artistry that I was able to glean a fuller view of his life's work.



*Kreuzfahrten (Intersections)*



*Weltensegler  
(Glider of the Worlds)*

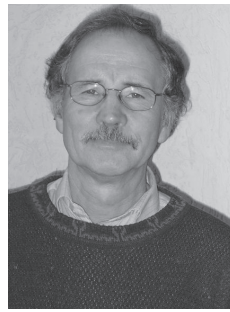
Walter's parents, Franz Welisch and Eva Hermann, both born in Bukovina in the first decade of the 20th century, were among the 96,000 Bukovina-Germans evacuated to Germany in 1940. It was in the summer of 1945, two months after the end of World War II, that Walter was born in Fürstzell, Bavaria. After studies in Munich and Augsburg, he taught art in schools in Königsbrunn and Bad Griesbach and between 1989-1995 served as Director of the City Gallery of Bad

Griesbach. His paintings have been purchased and are on display at a number of public institutions in Germany. In addition, Walter's artistic biography has been published in *Künstler im Rottal* (1993) by Dr. Petra Noll, in *Maler, Bildhauer, Designer im Landkreis Passau* (1994) by Robert Muthmann, and in *Buch der Stadt Bad Griesbach* (1995) by Dr. Petra Noll.



*Trope (Metaphor)*

Ranging from realism to the abstract, Walter's motifs originate either within his being or develop while a work is in progress, while background music provides the dynamic and movement for his sketches and drawings. His current emphasis lies in acrylic painting and in print graphics using linoleum blocks and woodcut blocks.



Walter Welisch

Anyone interested in further information about the works of Walter Welisch may consult his homepage on the Internet: <http://members.surfuu.de/Welisch.index.html>

## 56th ANNUAL MEETING OF THE REGIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BUKOVINA GERMANS

by Peter Grunikiewicz (Stuttgart-Büsnau, Germany)

On Saturday, June 24, a beautiful summer day the likes of which have been unparalleled in recent weeks, the *Landsmannschaft der Buchenlanddeutschen* began its two-day meeting, held this year in Unterechingen near Ulm. After opening the program and introducing the guests of honor, Alfred Wenzel, speaker for the *Landsmannschaft*, reflected on the period of the transfer and settlement in the East, flight, and resettlement in the West (1940-1947). He was followed by further observations on a similar theme by President Ewald Zachmann, who concluded by paying respects to our compatriots who died during the past year.

Joachim Wendt, representing the Association of Expellees (*Bund der Vertriebenen*) relayed greetings from Erika Steinbach, the Association's president. He further reported on activities relating to the construction in Berlin of a center dedicated to maintaining the records not only of the 1945-47 population expulsions, but to opposing any type of expulsion regardless of time or place. Although the subject of vigorous debate in Germany, preparations are currently underway for an exhibit entitled "On Forced Paths" (*Erzwungene Wege*).



*Dr. Ortfried Kotzian receiving the Landsmannschaft's golden honor pin from President Ewald Zachmann with Gertrud Romberger.*

Gertrud Romberger, the *Landsmannschaft's* cultural adviser, made a meaningful transition into cultural aspects of the Bukovinian tradition with readings from the homeland poets Georg Drosdowski, Johanna Brucker and Elisabeth Axman. This presentation was followed by the *Landsmannschaft's* dance group from Büsnau with folk dances from various European countries. The Unterechingen brass band and the Bukovina choral group from Salzgitter provided musical interludes in the context of this section of the program.

Then Dr. Ortfried Kozyan, the former director of the Bukovina Institute and now director of the “House of the German East” in Munich, discussed his new book, *The Resettlers (Die Umsiedler)*. In recognition of his services on behalf of Bukovinians the world over, Herr Zachmann presented him with the *Landmannschaft’s* golden honor pin.

A large number of participants then withdrew from the assembly hall to the television room to watch the soccer match between Germany and Sweden in the world championship competition currently underway. Germany’s victory undoubtedly added to their good spirits. After the game Anton Lang, mayor of Unterehlingen, formally greeted the group.

The “Genealogy Information Service” by Brigitte Haas and Michael Augustin proved to be a major attraction for many guests. A two-way exchange of information was for some participants the most important reason for their attendance at the meeting.

After dinner the approximately 160 guests enjoyed an evening of music and dancing provided by Helmut Jaschusch on his electronic organ.

Sunday’s program began with religious services followed by the closing ceremonies. The Unterehlingen brass band and choral group from Salzgitter performed throughout the day. After a group luncheon the guests were again treated to dance music by Herr Jaschusch, after which the successful annual event drew to its inevitable conclusion.

Farewell until next year!

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## A SLICE OF THE PAST

by Michael R. Halkiu (Cincinnati, OH)

Illischestie, Kimpolung, Augustendorf, Czernowitz. These were fabled cities to me as a child. At family gatherings, I would listen with wide-eyed fascination as the older relatives, especially *Tante Mina*, *Tante Lisa*, *Onkel Addy* – my father’s aunts and uncle – talked about the past. In my mind, I could picture an ox-drawn cart ambling up the dusty road behind us as we fished along the Siret River. I thought of my father, who would have been only eight or nine years of age at the time, walking among the reeds of the riverbank, cutting them down and fashioning crude panpipes for his musical amusement. At the farmhouse, which was a short distance away, I could smell the *Blutwurst* cooking - *Blutwurst* with *Mamaliga* (corn meal mush, a staple in the Bukovinian’s diet). The aroma was strong and inviting. I imagined *Tante Lisa*, blond hair neatly done, dressed in fine clothes like she always wore, traveling up the lane for a visit from Augustendorf.

In this particular instance, I was brought out of my reverie by *Tante Mina’s* nasally voice. “That was life on the farm, *Rafaelle*,”

she said with a sigh. She always called my father *Rafaelle*, a nickname left over from childhood. An uneasy silence ensued. *Ralph*, or “*Pops*” as I called him, hardly said a word. His facial expression was one of pained silence as he sat by the picnic table, a cigarette burning between the fingers of one hand and holding a beer in the other.

That was life on the farm. My mind drifted off again as I thought about all the clichés, which became synonymous with my ancestry: life on the farm, life on the other side, the old country, behind the Iron Curtain. What I heard was a time that was fun and hard, scary and mysterious. This seemed to sum up life in the Bukovina.

Bukovina, Land of the Beech Trees, as I later learned. As a first generation American, I had no experience of its existence. I had never visited there. I knew that it was in Europe, but where? Germany? Yugoslavia? Romania? Finland? Did it even exist or was it something imaginary, something that lay way out in Buxtehude. Its mystery and mystique were magical for me, a realm approaching that of J.R. Tolkein’s *Hobbiton* in its magnificence or – during World War II – *Mordor* in its misery.

I continued to listen as the conversation started up again. While many of my cousins and my younger brother congregated around the pool and discussed school, Rock and Roll and the latest toys, I sat silently on the brick wall of the back steps, just out of the adult circle, craning my neck to hear their conversation in English and in German. Some of it was comical, some sad, some even laced with bitterness and anger. Each party I attended, whether in *Onkel Addy’s* back yard in Rutherford, NJ, Uncle Steve’s basement in Allendale, NJ or the Soccer Club in Wayne, NJ brought out more stories, more background, and more emotions. And during each of these times, I was drawn further into their reality, living it as they lived it, enduring the same emotions as they had endured.

Looking back, I realize now that I was doing genealogical work at the age of eight. Those parties would shape my cultural personality and spark an interest that thirty-five years later is still just as strong. It was at those parties that I first learned about my ancestry.

But who were my ancestors? Where did they come from? What were the names of the principle players? And more importantly, what were their stories? What had occurred in their lives that made them unique to the family? I know that there are many questions that remain unanswered. Perhaps some will never be answered. One thing I do know: the stories that I heard while growing up have shaped my life. They have defined me for who I am. In the following paragraphs I will relate one such tale, based on what I know, what I have heard, and what I have experienced as the son of immigrants.

### Goat’s Milk

As I sat on those brick steps, slurping coke through a straw, I continued listening to their table talk. “*Pops*” smoked and drank, like most family members of his generation. The conversation switched from English to German and back to English again. In some instances, the speech would change to Romanian if sensitive issues of sex or familial black sheep crept into the dialogue.

*Onkel Franz*, my father’s brother, in one of his rare appearances with the relatives, looked over and asked if I were having a good time just sitting there. Before I could answer, some other voice – I

forgot who – scolded him slightly. “*Lass ihm doch*” (leave him alone), she said. “He’s fine. You’ve got nice boys there, Ralph. And just think, they almost wouldn’t be here if not for your mother.”

That elicited a smile from my father’s face. But I was puzzled. Though I knew where babies came from – sort of – I didn’t quite understand why the comment was made. They then switched the subject to something more mundane so nothing further was said that elicited my interest.

It would be years later before I understood the full implications of that statement. But the story came to me piecemeal through my mother, my aunt, and my great aunt. I will recite it here as best as I can remember. My thanks to *Tante* Lisa, my great aunt, for the vividness she brought to the narrative.

It was a cold, November evening in 1939 when my grandfather, Anton Halkiu, and the doctor arrived at the farm. The air was cold and gusty, blowing fiercely in anticipation of a storm dropping down from the Carpathians. A steady background noise rustled from tree branches jostling in the wind like knights in a tournament. The mud in the lane leading to the farm was almost hard, its moisture rung out by the dry atmosphere. Birds were absent as well as the drone of insects. In the distance, a cow could be heard in the barn, complaining about its confinement. Even further off could be heard the sound of a wolf.

The entire homestead was ready for another winter of bitter cold and snow. Anton trudged silently alongside the doctor, looking out over the field toward his home. He knew with confidence that there would be enough to eat for the long, cold season ahead. Frank, his second oldest son, had always been a tremendous help around the farm that fall.

But there were other concerns, which crowded out his thoughts. The German Army was less than 100 miles away in Poland. Rumor had it that they may come this way in the spring. There were whisperings of a change in government soon – or at least a change in allegiance.

These thoughts too, were cast aside, replaced by ones of little Rafaelle. The child, born in early September, had had much trouble keeping food in his stomach. He was quickly losing weight and would soon die if a remedy were not found. Out of six children, two had died early infancy. Anton was anxious to see that another child did not meet the same fate.

As they entered the peasant farmhouse, my grandmother, Marie, looked up pensively from the chair where she sat near the fireplace. She was a diminutive woman, standing just over 5 feet tall, with long dark hair and a dark complexion. Next to her stood their son, Gustl, a tall, thin boy of four years. In the kitchen could be heard the clanging of pots as their daughter Anna finished cleaning up after the evening meal. In Marie’s arms and wrapped in a small white blanket lay the infant boy, Rafaelle.

A forced smile appeared on the doctor’s face. He had been to the house twice before and tried to help the little tyke. But there was something wrong that he could not fix. The child simply could not digest food. It always came up on him. And he seemed to grow frailer. Nor did he consider an operation. On what would he operate?

The general practitioner strode across the small room to where Marie sat and took the crying infant from her arms. He poked and prodded the little boy gently, looking for any internal or external signs regarding an ailment. It was obvious that something was amiss, but the root cause could not be found. Time was running out.

The physician looked at the middle-aged woman with a grim countenance. “There is very little else that can be done for the child except to make him comfortable . . . and to pray. Pray that God heals him or takes him quickly. I have done all that I can. I am sorry, Marie.”

“Done all you can?” asked Marie incredulously. “Done all you can?” Tears began to stream down her cheeks as strains of despair permeated her voice. “I’ve already lost two children. I will not lose another! There has to be an answer.”

“I’m sorry Marie,” he said sadly. “I’m afraid there are no more answers.” The doctor gave Rafaelle back to his mother, a look of anguish crossing his face. There seemed to be nothing that could be done for the child.

Retrieving his coat and cane from the chair, the physician turned to my grandfather, who had already gone to the front door. “Anton, please make her understand. Medicine can only do so much.”

Addressing them both, he said “I’m truly sorry. If you need me or Father Anastasius Sonntag. . .” The rest of the sentence remained unfinished. Before the thought could sink in, he bade them both a good night and left.

As the door closed, Anton knelt next to his wife and squeezed her shoulder. Rafaelle was still whining in his mother’s arms. “Gustl, go and help your sister in the kitchen,” Anton said gently.

Without a word, the four-year-old year turned and did his father’s bidding. After a while, the farmhouse grew quiet, save for the crackling of the fire and Raefelle’s occasional whimpers of hunger. Both Anton and Maria said nothing for the longest time. Their eyes were affixed on the frail baby before them. Neither one wanted to think of the inevitability that stared them head on – the loss of another child.

Time seemed to drag on. In the end, it was Marie who spoke first. Her voice, soft and melodic, bespoke some of her Gypsy background. Anton looked at her in a different light. He noticed her black hair was tinged with a bit of silver. Her hands were calloused from working the farm. They were not always so. Life on the farm was hard and she was just beginning to show the physical effects of such an existence. Despite all this, he loved her more than he did on their first day.

“Maybe we should feed him something different,” she said. Her gaze remained on the small child in her arms. “Like what,” asked Anton in a slow voice? “We will give him goat’s milk – and only goat’s milk. My grandmother always said that goat’s milk was better for an upset stomach or stomach problems.”

“That’s an old wives’ tale,” exclaimed Anton. “That won’t . . .”

He was cut short by Maria's steely glance. If there were anything that stopped him cold, it was Marie's steadfast mind on certain subjects. Once she decided to do something, there was no turning back. Over time, he came to fear and respect that quality in her – more so than any officer under whom he had served in the Austro-Hungarian army.

They both looked at Rafaele, who seemed to have slipped into an exhausted sleep. Marie was exhausted as well, but she was stubborn. She refused to give in until the baby breathed his last. This child will live. And her husband will help her. God will help them all.

“Yes,” said Marie. We will try goat's milk – and only goat's milk. And we will pray as well. She gently stroked the child's head. “The doctor was right about one thing. The Lord will help little Rafaele one way or another. But I have faith that he will live.”

Of course, the outcome of the story is well known. My father lived and grew into adulthood. But he would always be plagued by digestive problems. I suspect that in today's age of medicine, he might have been diagnosed as having Krohn's disease. But this never stopped him from living a full life including work, marriage, and children.

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## SOME NOTES ON A RECENT TRIP TO BUKOVINA

by Frank Stempksi (San Jose, CA)

*Frumos* ! This is Romanian for “ beautiful.” It is how my wife Pat and I found Transylvania and Bukovina on our trip to Romania in September 2005.

We were sitting in the *Transylvania Restaurant* in Los Gatos, California, eating Dracula burgers and *Metetei* (Romanian meat rolls) when Pat said, “let's visit the ancestral home of your grandfather, Julius Tischinski.” This was Solca, Bukovina, Romania. Perhaps the following notes and highlights of our trip will be of some use to prospective travelers to this region of the world.

**The village of Solca.** Beautiful countryside, beautiful endearing inhabitants, with a carefree staunch attitude about the value of the agrarian life style. Solca is on the Solca River. The word Solca means “salt” and the folks are really the “salt of the earth” in the positive sense of the word.

**Lodgings.** In Suceava we recommend staying at the *Leaganul Bed and Breakfast* hosted by the delightful Breaban family. Juxtaposed next to the agrarian horse and wagon lifestyle is the creeping mercantilism evidenced by the Metro, which looks like a Wal-Mart or PriceClub, not like Target or K-Mart yet!

**Transportation.** Watch out for taxi drivers/tour guides who might rob you and leave you in a desolate location. With a little care and judge of character we found both older and experienced taxi drivers as well as young and agile taxi drivers who saved us money with good recommendations for accommodations and helped us negotiate for articles and souvenirs.

**Food and Eateries.** Having been converted from my early upbringing on rather bland German, Polish and Croatian

food to the spicy fare of Bangkok, Saigon, Bombay, Guadalajara, Houston, and New Orleans, I found the Romanian cuisine not that exciting but very interesting. I did indulge in the *Polenta* (corn meal mush), *Metetei* (Dracula hamburger rolls), and the scrambled cow brains and eggs on which my grandmother raised us. I stayed away for the most part from the *Pakinka*. And Jack Daniels was at the top and the highest priced on most restaurants' beverage menus: about \$18.00 US for a shot of Jack Daniels bourbon!

### Lasting memories:

- Almost everyone of all ages (at least over fifteen years) smokes cigarettes like mad.
- There are more churches in Romania than in Poland, and they are building or rebuilding almost 100 churches per month.
- And the most intriguing is the polyglot of nationalities with their mix of traditions and languages.
- The Romanian language derives from Latin, as do Italian, French, Portuguese and Spanish. Many people we encountered also spoke a good bit of English.

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## IMPRESSIONS OF BUKOVINA

by Pat Stempksi (San Jose, CA)

In this essay Pat Stempksi describes her trip to Bukovina undertaken with her husband, Frank whose grandparents had immigrated to the United States before World War I. It was to the land of the grandparents that the couple undertook a journey in September 2004, which took them to the south Bukovinian villages of Solca, Arbora and Suceava as well as to various historic sites along the way. (ed.)

The trip to Bukovina involved a lot of travel time: twenty hours by plane, including layovers each way and another ten hours by train twice to and from northern Romania. However, we did spend a day in Bucharest where we visited the National History Museum (with its concrete and marble replica of Trajan's Column), a day and a half in Solca, and a day in Transylvania in the Carpathian Mountains where we visited several castles. In Brasov we saw the remains of a Saxon walled city and a Gothic medieval cathedral.

The night train took us from Bucharest to Suceava (Su-châv-ah), the closest town to the village of Solca in Bukovina. Frank's maternal grandparents, Julius and Barbara Maier (Mayer) Tischinski, had come from Solca and nearby Arbora. They were distant cousins: both of their mothers were Kuffners. Barbara immigrated to the United States in 1909 and Julius in 1910. According to the family, Barbara's father owned a mill in Arbora while Julius was a cobbler by trade and the son of a small farmer in Solca. Julius was not considered a suitable match for the daughter of a mill owner, so although they were secret sweethearts; they could not marry until after they came to the United States.

Julius' father, Stefan, had moved to Solca from Hungary. This could have been as near as Transylvania which was then a part of Hungary. We only know that he came from Hungary, spoke German and had a Polish surname. At the time he moved to Solca, Bukovina was under Austrian administration and remained so until after World War I.

In Suceava we stayed with Gerta Eisenhauer, with whom we had made previous contacts. I was struck by the fact that Gerta looked and dressed exactly like Frank's grandmother in her later years as I

had seen her in photographs. Gerta's great grandfather had also tried to immigrate to the States in 1910, but he was turned back at Ellis Island for poor eyesight. I thought that Frank did quite well speaking German with Gerta.

We spent the day with Monica and Alex (Gerta's grandson and his wife), and after she got off work, with Mimi, Alex's mother. Monica was a pleasant young woman of thirty who spoke French and some English and lived in Suceava with her husband but came to Solca on the weekends to unwind. Monica told us she loved the slow pace of life in her native village and that two days in Solca seemed like a week in Suceava. She hoped one day to retire there. That week she had spent three days in Solca helping with the potato harvest, and we saw evidence that many other young people had returned from the cities to help out on the family farm at harvest time. The young adults in casual city wear were out digging potatoes and posing happily for Frank when he stopped to take their photos.

It was humorous to see people out in the potato fields talking on their cell phones because this is still a totally non-technological agricultural society in which all farming is done by hand and with horsepower. (Corn is another staple crop.) There were horse-drawn wagons everywhere in the fields and on the roads carrying timber, hay or potatoes. We saw one wagon in Solca pulling a glass-

covered hearse with the mourners following behind on foot, first through the town to the Orthodox Church and then from the church to the cemetery. The animals were all well cared for. Very few people had cars. Most got around by walking or riding in horse-drawn wagons or by hitching rides from passing cars or wagons.



*Orthodox Shrine on road to Solca.*

The website [www.solca.ro](http://www.solca.ro) seemed to indicate that Solca had been destroyed in the First World War so we were surprised to find many older buildings. We visited the Catholic Church in Solca built in 1850 and the Basilica in Arbora dating from 1904. The priest at the Basilica checked the available church records for Frank's family without result. Many records had been lost in a fire we were told. We also visited the Catholic cemetery in Solca. This is actually the rear of the Christian cemetery, which is largely Romanian Orthodox. Many of the grave markers had been removed, including those of Frank's great-grandparents, Stefan Tyszinski and Valeria Kuffner Tyszinski.

Romania is 85 percent Eastern Orthodox and there are at least as many Orthodox churches there as in the United States. Frank read an article in an English language newspaper in Bucharest, which stated that three new churches were being constructed each day. Everyone seems to be reclaiming his religious heritage since the fall of communism. We visited several of the famous painted Orthodox churches of the region.

The countryside was beautiful but most of the buildings were worn down and in need of repair. The people we met generally did not have much income. They lived in modest homes, many with outhouses. Most young adults were working in the cities or increasingly abroad in Italy or Germany. Our twenty-two-year-old taxi driver, who took us on a day tour to Transylvania, was making about \$65 dollars a day as a self-employed worker in the

tourist industry. He had previously worked in Italy for a year and managed to save enough money to buy a car in Germany in order to avoid paying a 19 percent sales tax at home.

Since the revolution of 1998, Romania has imposed a sales tax of 19 percent on all goods and the government is considering raising it to 22 percent. This is not a consumer-oriented society, which is just as well since most of the people we saw in the countryside could not afford to buy much anyway. Solca is famous for black pottery but we could not find anything for the grandchildren until our last day, which we spent in the Carpathian Mountains. This appears to be the most prosperous area of Bukovina, where the main industry is tourism: castles and medieval towns in the summer and skiing in the winter.

We found people throughout Romania to be friendly and honest and helpful to tourists. A visitor should know that (except perhaps in Transylvania) he should not expect Western standards in hotels and trains, and so on. We would highly recommend that train trips be booked well ahead of time. I would definitely want to make sure I had a sleeper for night train trips. (The day train, however, was air conditioned and quite comfortable in first class accommodations.) The hotels did not provide washcloths, but there was plenty of hot water. The hotel beds left a bit to be desired; however, all the places where we stayed had TVs in the rooms with a news and movie channel in English, although Frank had more fun watching *The Simpsons* in German and Romanian. The food, which included dishes like sausages, white tripe soup, country fried meats and *polenta* (corn meal mush) with cheese and sour cream was not our usual fare, but we did not starve, and the vegetables at harvest time were wonderful. Suceava even had a McDonalds. We were told that Bucharest had twelve! Basically we stayed at three-star older hotels of the kind more likely to be frequented by Europeans.

Romanian currency has little value and millions of lei are required to purchase almost anything. Fortunately, the country is scheduled to join the Economic Union (EU), and transactions with the Euro, while not at a favorable exchange rate for Americans, are infinitely simpler. Moneychangers would only give us Romanian currency for our US dollars. For Euros we had to go to a bank. A word of caution: Romanian banks and moneychangers will not take any wrinkled, nicked or, as they say "dirty" US currency. A German bank in Bucharest agreed to cash a "dirty" fifty dollar US bill for a 10 percent commission. We also had trouble using our bank and credit cards in cash machines. However, we were everywhere able to pay for our hotel rooms, and restaurants in Bucharest accepted our credit cards.

In Romania it is helpful to know a second language; however, people there are working hard at learning English and one can get by with English alone. Throw in a bit of a remembered high school French or Spanish and you will do very well indeed, since Romanian is a Romance language similarly derived from Latin.

The best thing about our trip was that it gave us a real sense of place. It was lovely to see the culture that had formed Julius and Barbara, Frank's grandparents, and indeed little seems to have changed in the Romanian countryside. Today, nearly one hundred years after they immigrated to the United States, it seemed to us that they could have returned to the old country and fit right in.