



The Bukovina Society of the Americas NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 81, Ellis, KS 67637 USA

Vol. 19, No. 2 June 2009

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Membership Dues:
Lifetime \$150.00
Annual \$15.00



Bukovinafest 2009 September 17-20

Marking The 20th Anniversary BUKOVINA SOCIETY HISTORY

by O. M. Windholz and Werner Zoglauer

The origins of the Bukovina Society of the Americas in Ellis, Kansas began over the course of several days, September 26-29, 1988, when three people interested in the heritage of the ethnic German people from Bukovina, Austria met for the first time. Paul Polansky, whose Schneller grandfather was among the colony of Bukovina Germans who settled in Yuma County, Colorado, had collected information about his ancestors and knew of Schnellers in Kansas. He was interested in meeting descendants of the Bukovina Germans of the Ellis area. Irmgard Hein Ellingson invited Polansky, an Iowa native, to travel to Ellis from his home in Spain. She planned the event so well there was even a choir who greeted him by singing *Amigos de Christos* (We're Friends of the Lord). It was the first assembly of the Bukovina Germans of the Ellis area since emigration over a hundred years ago and most had only limited oral history of their heritage. Polansky found the Bukovina ancestry of Oren Windholz in a family tree filed with the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia and was also writing to him at the time. From a very brief news article, a large crowd greeted Paul at the St. Mary's School Auditorium where they were fascinated to see slides of his travels to Bukovina, a risky adventure during the Communist era. After his presentation, many people were able to view their family tree on his laptop containing thousands of Bukovina German names. The desire to accommodate the many people who wanted more information brought about a follow up

session the next day where they lined up for hours to see the wonders of his computer.

While a Bukovina organization had been around for 40 years in Germany (*Landsmannschaft der Buchenlanddeutschen*), very little was known of our heritage in the New World. The Ellingson book on the Swabian Lutherans of Kansas and several publications by Dr. Sophie Welisch were the only resources printed in the English language. Polansky, Ellingson and the Windholzes agreed to attend the *Landsmannschaft* 40th annual meeting in Augsburg. At this convention were hundreds of descendants of Bukovina Germans who had stayed behind in Bukovina and during the Second World War were relocated to German lands. They were in awe of seeing us, many their distant cousins and constantly asked about their families in America. Not comprehending the vast geography here versus Germany, some asked us if they knew their families in Canada. One group of Bukovina Germans living around Simbach/Inn belonged to a local club of those whose ancestry was Bohemian German. Some 10 years later as they disbanded due to an aging population, they chose to give their banner, featuring the Bukovina emblem, to the Bukovina Society where it is displayed.



The organizing committee, from left to right Darrell Seibel, Joe Erbert and Ernie Honas, back row, Bernie Zerfas, Oren Windholz and Irmgard Ellingson.

After the exhilarating days of sharing Bukovina matters, Polansky encouraged



Irmgard Ellingson and Oren Windholz working on the agenda for the organizational meeting of the Bukovina Society.

Ellingson and Windholz to consider establishment of a Bukovina German organization in Ellis. Plans were also made by the three to conduct a heritage festival the following year after their return from Augsburg. On the morning of December 10th of 1988, Ellingson and Windholz met to outline an agenda and plans for an association and formed an organizing

committee of Bernie Zerfas, Darrell Seibel, Joe Erbert and Ernie Honas who met in the afternoon to finalize plans. An announcement in the newspapers brought another large crowd to a public meeting where by-laws were adopted for the new association designated the Bukovina Society of the Americas. The organizing committee was expanded into a board of directors with added members Dr. Sophie Welisch, Paul Polansky, Bob Schoenthaler and Raymond Haneke. The new board elected as officers, Oren Windholz, President, Darrell Seibel, Vice President, Joe Erbert, Secretary and Bernie Zerfas, Treasurer.

In March of 1989 the Bukovina Society association met to adopt By-laws and finalize plans for the heritage festival conducted July 19-22. From Wednesday evening through Saturday, the Ellis High School Auditorium was filled with Bukovinians enjoying presentations of their culture, language and music. Greetings were brought to Ellis by Irma Bornemann, Stuttgart, Germany on behalf of similar German organizations. On Saturday an ecumenical service was conducted with prayers and songs in German. The final evening featured a German dinner and grand march honoring the 25th wedding anniversary of Reinhold and Margaret Boschowitzki. Music and dancing was a part of each day's activities. The festival was intended to be a one time celebration, but the tremendous attendance and requests for more conventions led the board to schedule a festival in 1990 and annually thereafter through 1998. Since that time, festivals have been scheduled every three years with September of 2008 being a celebration of the 20th anniversary of the Society. The Society is thankful for the long list of prominent speakers and presenters, a number from foreign lands, who have traveled at their own expense to provide quality programs. The ties that were first formed by Irma Bornemann have been taken up by Michael Augustin of Stuttgart who is a frequent visitor to Ellis and has traveled widely in his personal Bukovina interest and those of

the Society.

The Society has sponsored or participated in Bukovina related conventions beyond the Ellis headquarters. Van and Mary Massirer hosted Society members in Waco, Texas, for a conference with German interest groups. Two conventions were conducted in Regina, Canada through the efforts of Laura Hanowski and Irmgard Ellingson, one with the Federation of Eastern European Societies. The descendants of a colony of Bukovina Germans in Brazil have an organization formed and led by Prof. Ayrton Gonçalves Celestino. Their annual meeting is called the Haluschkifest. A group representing the Society joined in one of the festivals in Rio Negro/Mafra and met cousins of descendants of the Bohemian German from Bukovina who settled in Ellis. The Society joined with the Sunflower Chapter of the American Historical Society of Germans from Russia to present a German Christmas Customs special at the headquarters. Paul and Dorothy Massier and Irmgard Ellingson represented the Society at a celebration of Bukovina Germans in Oregon. In September of 1996, 28 Society members from Canada and the States participated in a tour of the former Bukovina homeland sponsored by the Bukovina Institute of Augsburg. Prof. Kurt Rein organized the tour which was led by Dr. Ortfried Kotzian, both visitors and participants in Society conventions in Ellis.

The Bukovina association became a Kansas non profit corporation in October of 1994 and gained IRS designation on September 11th of 1997 as a 501 (c) (3) tax exempt non profit, making charitable donations to the Society tax deductible. A corporate board is elected by the membership to conduct the business of the Society and to reflect the broad representation of the Society, an advisory International Board was established.

The emblem of the Bukovina Society and other Bukovina organizations worldwide is the coat of arms of our ancestral homeland. Awarded in 1862 by Emperor Francis Joseph I to the crown land of Bukovina, it depicts and aurochs, and extinct wild European ox, presumably the ancestor of today's cattle. During the Bukovina tour of 1996, it was learned that an effort is being made to breed back stock to resemble the original aurochs.

Founding President Oren Windholz began a bulletin which became the *Newsletter* of the Bukovina Society and is now published quarterly in its 19th year. The *Newsletter* is available in print and electronic format to members. The Society has published seven books and cooperates with other authors in the marketing of 15 books of Bukovina interest and has numerous memorabilia available

with the imprint of the coat of arms. The University of Kansas and three universities, among other institutions, have sent many scholars and students to Ellis to work with the Society in recording our history and German dialects.

Society charter member Larry Jensen of Ithaca, New York, was an early expert on what was then known as the World Wide Web and brought this and his many other talents to the Society. He created a Bukovina website in 1996 on his own account which brought about greater awareness, visibility and membership gains. He continued this pioneering effort on his own until the Society took over the role in the spring of 2002. Werner Zoglauer and Rebecca Hageman developed a new Internet website at www.bukovinasociety.org to replace the Society's original web pages. With the goal of becoming the premier Internet location for information about the Bukovina Germans, the new website was then a very ambitious undertaking. On May 1, 2002, the website went public with 61 pages, including our [Bukovina Society Store](#) page where visitors can buy Bukovina related books and souvenir items. Since then the website has grown to over 300 pages plus a "members only" genealogy section. Today, an average of 1,500 to 1,700 visitors per day are attracted to our website. Although most of the articles are in written in English, the website also contains many articles in the German language and some in Portuguese. Thousands of hours have been spent by our volunteers and content contributors to build and maintain the website for our members and visitors. We have been very fortunate to have scholars and authors from the United States, Germany and Brazil, who have played an active role in providing the website with rich content about the history and culture of our Bukovina ancestors.

Among those who actively support the website publishing, genealogy and correspondence activities, we recognize and thank our fellow Bukovina Society associates from the USA: Rebecca Hageman, Irmgard Hein Ellingson, Steve Parke, Doug Reckmann, Dr. Sophie Welisch, Oren Windholz and Werner Zoglauer; from Germany, Michael Augustin, Renate Geschwentner and Gertrud Siewi; and from Brazil, Dr. Ayrton Celestino. In addition, we also recognize the fine work performed by our volunteers in the Kansas headquarters who provide support for the website Store, Marcy McClelland

A private section of our website remains the most popular of our membership services and has attracted over 700 visitors to join the Bukovina Society in the past 4 years. Our database now contains the names of over 291,000 Bukovina ancestors and their descendents to the present

time. This large database is actually the sum collection of databases contributed by several of our active members and therefore does contain some duplicates.

Our members who have joined the Bukovina Society to research our databases live in over 25 countries and almost all have mentioned their ancestral ties to the former and very small Bukovina, once the easternmost crown land of the former Austrian Empire. We are very proud that our members have chosen the Bukovina Society website as the place to meet and as the place where they can learn more about the history and customs about their ancestors. Later this year the Society will be upgrading the software in our genealogy section to add more advanced search and report capabilities.

Bev Muntain, Sask. Canada, created and maintains a mailing list of persons whose email questions and comments are shared by hundreds of members. Genealogy beginners and veterans alike gain daily from this free service. To join or get more information, the location is www.Bukovina-gen@yahoo.com.

Bukovina was a multicultural country of which the Bukovina Germans were a minority. The main focus of the Society, its website and publications is the ethnic Germans and it was established by them for this purpose. The Society recognizes the rich history of the other minorities who shared this great land. Some of these Bukovinians are also members of the Society and we incorporate input from them into our functions. At a reunion of my class from St. Joseph's Military Academy in Hays, I passed out a collection of the newspaper accounts of travel to Bukovina. One classmate immediately recognized Bukovina and said "That's where my grandfather came from." He is of Polish descent and went on to tour Bukovina with his wife and they both submitted travel articles to the *Newsletter*.

The Bukovina Society headquarters and museum are located in the former First Congregational Church, the first recorded church in Ellis. An historic structure on the main (Washington) street in Ellis it is now operated by the Ellis Arts and Historical Society, and is home to numerous community organizations and functions. When the Society first looked at establishing a headquarters, St. John's Lutheran Church generously offered a building on their property. It proved to be too far from the main roads for attracting visitors. Oren Windholz and Ray Haneke worked with Ellis civic leader Jack Nicholson to secure the present site.

Continuous membership growth is being experienced in

large part due to our internet presence and now totals nearly 500 from all parts of the world. Thanks to the Board of Directors, the International Board and the many people, particularly the many not named in this historical account, who have contributed so much to the Bukovina Society story.



The Society Board of Directors elected after the first Bukovinafest in July 1989. Seated from the left: Robert Schoenthaler, Irmgard Ellingson, Sophie Welisch, Irma Bornemann, Ernie Honas and Wilfred Uhren. Standing from the left: Joe Erbert, Bernie Zerfas, Paul Polansky, Raymond Haneke, O.M. Windholz and Darrell Seibel.

PEOPLE AND EVENTS

- Celebration of the Society's 20th anniversary will begin with the early bird social and dinner Thursday, September 17th at 6:30 p.m. at the Ellis Country Club. On Friday programs will be conducted at the Society headquarters. On Saturday and Sunday, Society members will enjoy reserved seating at the annual Midwest Deutsche Oktoberfest in Ellis County.
- The annual meeting of the Bukovina Society of the Americas, a Kansas not for profit corporation will be held at the headquarters on Friday, September 18th, 2009 at 3:30 p.m. Election of board members for expired terms and regular business of the corporation conducted. Please note this is a change from the normal annual meeting time in July to accommodate more Society members.
- Bev Augustine informed us of the death of her husband Joe on January 28th 2009 at Maplewood, MN. They were a part of the Bukovina tour in 1996 and took many pictures, particularly of Joe's ancestral village of Fürstenthal. They were a hit with the kids in the former Bukovina German villages as they distributed many gifts.
- In an article entitled "Grüfte und Gräber auf dem Czernowitzer Friedhof in Gefahr" in *Der Südostdeutsche* (Augsburg), January 20, 2009, p. 6 Reinhold Czarny (Bochum, Germany) describes the deteriorating state of the cemeteries in Czernowitz (Ukraine). Although gravesites are nominally under state protection, the author saw monuments formerly with inscriptions in Latin letters now bearing Cyrillic texts as well as evidence of deliberate vandalism. In some cases desecration of a monument is considered abandonment by the family and can result in confiscation by the state. In order to reclaim ownership of a gravesite, a family must provide a deed of ownership or secure a "cemetery pass" from the States Archives. After prolonged discussions with the relevant authorities, Herr Czarny was able to regain possession of the gravesite of his grandfather, Emil Wimmer, and repair the damages to its 80-year old monument.
- Irmgard Ellingson published an article titled "The Swabians in Central and Southeastern Europe" in the Volume 16, 2008 *FEEFHS Journal*. The Federation of East European Family History Societies, founded in 1992 today includes 108 organizations including the Bukovina Society. Irmgard is a past president of FEEFHS.
- Many Bukovina Society members have had the privilege of meeting Dr. Ortfried and Marie-Luise Kotzian. He is presently the director of Haus des Deutschen Ostens in Munich, and is the former director of the Bukowina-Institut Augsburg. The following message was forwarded by Dr. Kotzian on behalf of their daughter and son-in-law, Ruth and Christian Geier: "Hello, dear friends. Although we are happy that Ruth is not suffering from any medical complications, we are deeply saddened to share the news of the death of our daughter, Blanca Maria, shortly after her birth on Friday, Feb. 13, 2009, at 8:56 a.m. in the Zentralklinikum Augsburg. We thank our parents and Ruth's sisters, who were Blanca's baptismal sponsors, as well as the many good souls in white (gynecologists, pediatricians, anesthesiologists), blue (nurses, midwives), and black (clergy), who made possible and facilitated the all-too-short half hour with our daughter."
- Welcome to our newest life member, number 181, Fred Sendek of Belle Vernon, MI.