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The German American National Congress, also known as DANK (Deutsch Amerikanischer National Kongress), is the largest organization of Americans of German descent. It has some 30 chapters and over 100 associated member societies from coast to coast.

The non-profit organization seeks to bring together Americans of German descent in the pursuit of cultivating and presenting their heritage and interests on local, regional and national levels. These were the primary reasons why the German American National Congress was founded in 1959, and they are still among the organization's primary objectives today.

THE BUKOVINA SOCIETY OF THE AMERICAS

by Oren Windholz, President (Hays, KS)

The core of this article, originally published in Kaindl-Archiv 51/52 (Augsburg, 2002, pp. 44-49), has been updated to reflect recent changes and developments relating to the activities of the Bukovina Society of the Americas. My thanks to Werner Zoglauer (Naperville, IL) ,web master of the Society's web site at www.bukovinasociety.org for his helpful insights and elaborations on historic aspects of the life and times of the Bukovinians in their homeland and beyond as well as for his tireless efforts to expand the genealogies of Bukovina German families.

In 1987, President Reagan issued the first proclamation designating October 6th as German-American Day in celebration and recognition of the many fine contributions German immigrants and their descendants have made to America. German immigration to these shores began on October 6, 1683, when thirteen Mennonite families from Krefeld, formerly in Rhine Province, Prussia, responded to William Penn's invitation for religious dissenters to join his nascent Pennsylvania colony. Soon many other Germans followed, some directly from the many principalities and kingdoms later united under Chancellor Otto von Bismarck and reorganized as the German Empire. Other Germans came from the Austrian and Russian empires as well as from other Eastern European regions, where their ancestors had settled in earlier centuries. Among this latter group, we find the Bukovina Germans who with the Volga Germans, Black Sea Germans, Zipser Germans, Danubian Swabians (*Donauschwabern*), etc. represented

Auslandsdeutschtum (German communities abroad).

According to the 1990 census German Americans are the largest single ethnic group with 23.3 percent of the population. The success of the German immigrants' assimilation into the broader US culture and the politics of two world wars suppressed the public awareness and celebration of the rich heritage of these German immigrants. At about the same time as the signing of the first German-Day proclamation, many German-Americans were awakening to a yearning desire to learn more about the heritage brought to the New World by their parents, grandparents and more distant ancestors. Among this group were the descendants of the Bukovina Germans, whose forebears had been enticed with free homestead land in the 1880s, primarily to Ellis, Kansas; Yuma County, Colorado; Lewis County, Washington; Saskatchewan, Canada, as well as employment opportunities in urban areas including New York City and Naperville, Illinois. A second wave of immigration took place after World Wars I and II, when many of the Bukovina Germans joined their relatives in the USA and Canada.

Where is Bukovina? the reader may ask. Although the name is not found on any contemporary map, it remained from 1775 to 1918, the easternmost province of the Austrian Empire and was partitioned by Romania and Ukraine in the wake of World War II. As a multi-ethnic province, its

name has several spellings: *Bukowina* or *Buchenland* in German, *Bukowina* in Polish, *Bucovina* in Romanian, and *Bukovyna* in Ukrainian, all of which mean *Land of Beech Trees*.

Along with principalities of Walachia and Moldavia, Bukovina fell under the control of the Ottoman Turks during the 15th century. It remained in Turkish hands until the Russo-Turkish War of 1768-74 when the territory was first occupied by the Russians (1769) and then by the Austrians (1774). With the Treaty of Constantinople in 1775, control of Bukovina passed to the Austrian Empire. Administered as a district of the province of Galicia between 1786-1849, Bukovina gained the status of a separate crown land and duchy in 1849. When the Austrian Empire was reorganized into the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary by the Compromise of 1867, Bukovina, like Galicia, remained under Austrian administration, while the neighboring province of Transylvania came under Hungarian rule. During World War I, Bukovina became a battlefield between Austrian and Russian troops. Tsarist forces overran and occupied Bukovina early in the war and were not recalled until the fall of 1917 when Russia's new Communist rulers withdrew Russia from the war the pursued a separate peace with the Central Powers.

According to the Austrian census of 1775, Bukovina's population was only about 60,000. To encourage the development of this sparsely-settled land, the Austrian government subsidized immigration to Bukovina. In *Bukovina Villages/Towns/Cities and Their Germans*, (p. 1), Sophie A. Welisch notes: "Some were sponsored by private entrepreneurs as specialized craftsmen for a nascent glass industry or brought as miners to exploit the newly discovered veins of copper, iron, silver and manganese in Bukovina's mountains. Others came as farmers who received land from the state; some entered as government officials, teachers, architects and businessmen." Published by the Bukovina Society in 1990, this booklet traces the origins and evolution of twenty-two settlements either founded by Germans or places where they represented a sizable percentage of the population.

With the end of officially-sponsored immigration in the mid-19th century, colonists would continue

to arrive at their own expense. As a result, by the census of 1910, the population of Bukovina had risen to over 800,000. People of many different ethnicities participated in this immigration, including Armenians, Hungarians, Jews, Poles, Romanians and Ukrainians (at this time, called "Ruthenians"). German colonists came from three distinct areas: Swabians and Palatines, from what is now Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate in southwestern Germany; German Bohemians from the Bohemian Forest (*Böhmerwald*), now in the Czech Republic; and Zipsers, from the High Tatra Mountains in Spis county, now in Slovakia.

In time overpopulation caused the Bukovinians to look elsewhere for a livelihood. A population explosion, begun in the 1860s, limited the viability of farmsteads, which continued to diminish in size through their subdivision among the heirs. By the 1880s the mining industry had collapsed, reducing many mining families to destitution. And manufacturing, another sector of the economy, which traditionally provides employment, was virtually non-existent in Austria's easternmost crown land. It is therefore not surprising that among the millions drawn to the shores of the New World in the last decades of the 19th century we should find the immigrants from Bukovina, who ventured across the Atlantic to take up roots in a new land.

Seeking to populate their vast underdeveloped frontier lands, the United States, Canada and Brazil offered inducements to attract settlers. By the Homestead Act (1862), the United States government guaranteed each family 160 acres if they lived on and cultivated the land for five consecutive years. Brazil and Canada offered similar incentives. The transcontinental railroad companies, which had been granted wide strips of government land in the mid-West, were also eager to bring in a settled population to stimulate trade and commerce. Their representatives set up agencies abroad and combed the villages for potential recruits. Often a solitary villager ventured overseas, assessed the potential, and then put out the word for his family and fellow villagers.

Following a pattern of chain migration, most immigrants settled in communities among their compatriots where farmland was readily available.

Among the earliest Bukovinian immigrants were those who in the last decades of the nineteenth century homesteaded in the prairie states or sought a livelihood in America's urban centers. At about the same time (1887-88) about 400 Bukovinians set sail for Rio Negro (State of Parana) and Mafra (State of Santa Catarina) in Brazil where their descendants still live today.

The closing of the frontier and the lack of free land forced those immigrating to the United States after 1890 either to purchase farmland or look to the cities for a livelihood. Arriving at Ellis Island, many stayed on in New York City and its environs or moved on to other urban centers where they found work in the nation's expanding industrial sector.

World War I not only temporarily interrupted the flow of trans-Atlantic immigration but also triggered nativism and its concomitant negative attitude to the so-called "New Immigrants," i.e., those from eastern and southern Europe who were deemed inassimilable. Rejecting leadership in international politics, the United States returned to

time-honored isolationism and closed its doors to "the tired and the poor." In 1921 Congress voted to restrict immigration based on nationality, limiting admission of each national group to 3 percent of the foreign-born of that group in America based on the 1910 census. Romania, now the country in which Bukovinians found themselves after World War I, had a relatively low quota. The Reed-Johnson Act of 1924 further curtailed immigration from southern and eastern Europe, setting the annual quota at 2 percent of the number of foreign-born of that nationality resident in the United States according to the 1890 census. The Romanian quota, already low, was now reduced to 377 annually. Waiting lists of upward of twelve years were typical for Romanian nationals wishing to immigrate to the United States during this time. In the decade between 1931-1940 a mere 3,871 individuals from Romania gained legal admission to the United States. It can be assumed that only a small number of these immigrants came from Bukovina.

With immigration virtually closed to residents of Bukovina after 1924, some who wanted to leave



their homeland turned to Canada, which welcomed homesteaders for its central provinces. Given the porous nature of the American-Canadian border, a number of these immigrants readily found their way to the States. Others eked out an existence on the plains of Saskatchewan and Alberta.

The positive response of the Bukovina Germans en masse to accept resettlement in Germany in 1940 is indicative of the dire economic straits confronting the population in the interwar period. However, caught up in the exigencies of war, the transferees suffered enormous losses in life and material possessions. Responding to the human tragedy facing countless millions of refugees after World War II, the United States government ameliorated its immigration policy based on national quotas and passed the Refugee Relief Act (1953) followed by the McCarran-Walter Act (1957). This facilitated the immigration to the United States of displaced persons, the category in which the Bukovina Germans found now themselves. Many of those immigrating to the USA or Canada during this period already had family members here,

whom they then joined. With the upswing of the German economy (*Wirtschaftswunder*) in the mid-1950s, immigration of erstwhile Bukovinians to the New World effectively ceased.

The Civil Rights Movement of the 1970s accompanied by an emphasis on cultural diversity and a nostalgia to rediscover one's ethnic roots found a resonance among America's Bukovina German contingent. The founding of the Bukovina Society of the Americas was the Bukovina Germans' response to the current national focus on ethnic studies, culture and diversity. Motivated by pride in heritage and national origin, a group of interested individuals, appropriately located in Ellis County, Kansas, perhaps the most densely settled area in which descendants of Bukovinian immigrants reside, initiated contact with Bukovinians both in the New World and abroad and set in motion plans to establish a society. An article describing the first meeting of the Bukovina Society of the Americas (July 1989) appeared in *Der Südostdeutsche* (The Southeast German, September 15, 1989, p.1), written by Frau Irma



Bornemann, at that time President of the now defunct *Kaindl Gesellschaft (Kaindl Society)*.

Plans to establish the Society had begun to evolve in 1988, spearheaded by a committee of interested individuals. Several of the charter board members had had previous contacts with the *Landsmannschaft der Buchenlanddeutschen* (Bukovina German Regional Society), which that same year extended them an invitation to attend their 40th annual convention in Augsburg. Three members (Irmgard Ellingson, Paul Polansky-Schneller and Oren Windholz) indeed traveled to Germany to participate in this celebration and on behalf of the Society accepted the *Ehrenurkunde* (certificate of honor) and the *silberne Ehrennadel mit Goldkranz* (silver pin of honor with gold garland). Since that time the Society has maintained close collaboration with the *Landsmannschaft*, which in numerous ways has supported its endeavors.

In delineating its function, purpose and activities, the Board voted to accept the following by-laws:

1. to further historical knowledge of and preserve historical records relating to the Bukovina German heritage;
2. to promote respect for and recognition of the history and accomplishments of the immigrants from Bukovina including their heritage, traditions and records;
3. to encourage historical research relating to the emigration of our forebears from Germany and Austria to Bukovina and from Bukovina to the New World and to foster interest in colleges, universities, and educational institutions among students, faculty, and historians of studies and research relating to our ethnic heritage;
4. to establish and maintain an ethnic repository at the Center for Ethnic Studies, Fort Hays State University in Hays, Kansas for the collection of documents, photographs and artifacts relating to Bukovinians both at home and abroad;
5. to encourage research and compilation of personal family histories through genealogical forums;
6. to affiliate with other societies and institutions committed to similar goals and objectives;

7. to maintain a website with information relating to the Society's activities as well as to the history and culture of Bukovina and its people.

Registered in the State of Kansas, the Bukovina Society of the Americas is a non-profit corporation, which on September 11, 1997 received tax-exempt status from the United States Internal Revenue Service. Expenses are funded by membership dues, sale of books and memorabilia, and donations. Membership dues are \$150 US for lifetime or \$15 US annually. Donations and contributions to the Society can be directed to headquarters at PO Box 81, Ellis, Kansas 67637. The Society's contact person is its current president at the headquarters address or e-mail at owindholz@ruraltel.net>

Membership in the Society is open to anyone who is of Bukovinian heritage or has interest in its history and culture. Drawn from the United States, Canada, Brazil, Germany and several other foreign countries, we now have a committed membership of approximately 300 who support our endeavors. The Bukovina Society is directed and run entirely by volunteers. Speakers at all meetings and conventions, members of the Board of Directors and workers remodeling and operating the headquarters have all generously donated their time without compensation.

Due to the need for frequent transactions of a business and legal nature, the Society is currently operated by a twelve-member board of directors drawn from the Ellis, Kansas area. Given the expedience of modern communication, the sixteen-member international board, originally created to give the Society expanded input on programs and activities, will eventually merge with the Kansas group.

The emblem adopted by the Bukovina Society of the Americas and other Bukovina-related organizations is the coat-of-arms of our ancestral homeland, awarded in 1862 by Emperor Francis Joseph I to Austria's easternmost crown land. It depicts the head of an aurochs, an extinct European wild ox, the presumed ancestor of today's cattle, on a field of blue and red, flanked by three golden stars.

In May of 1991 the City Council of Ellis gave its unanimous consent to make the facilities of the First Congregational Church, which had effectively closed in 1971, available to the Society. Because of its continued use as a community center, the Council also agreed to pay for utilities and basic maintenance. Dedication of the Society's headquarters took place at the opening of its third annual convention in July of that same year. Its chapel serves as a site of occasional weddings while the lower level is used for meetings, meals and receptions.

The building also houses our museum, which is open every afternoon from Tuesday through Saturday and is accessible at other hours to any visitor who makes advance arrangements. A repository for artifacts including clothing, farm implements, mechanical tools, musical instruments, documents, photographs and books, the museum seeks to preserve the Bukovinian legacy for subsequent generations. A computer with access to Bukovina genealogy databases is available to members. Created by Werner Zoglauer, the project continues to expand as other researchers contribute their genealogical findings.

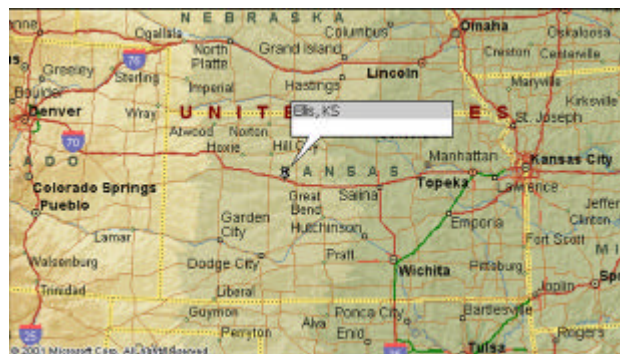
The Society's heritage festival in July of 1989 commemorating the centennial of the Ellis pioneers took on an international role through presenters from the United States, Germany and Spain. Each year the Society sponsors a convention, sometimes in conjunction with other associations in the United States or abroad. While most of these conventions have been held in Ellis, Kansas, we have on occasion accepted an invitation to join with other groups: in 1997 with the German Genealogy and Heritage Conference in Waco, Texas; in 2001 with the *Associação Alemã-Bucovina de Cultura* in Rio Negro, Brazil; and in 2002 with FEEFHS (Federation of East European Family History Societies) in Saskatchewan,

Canada.

Our annual conventions include formal presentations about Bukovina German history, culture and genealogy covering the time period from migration to Bukovina in the 18th and 19th centuries through post-World War II. In addition we have sponsored cooking/baking demonstrations of favorite Bukovina-German recipes and demonstrations of "wheat threshing" skills acquired by the Bukovina Germans in Kansas. It is always a pleasure occasionally to meet some of the Ellis "old timers" who still speak the "*Deutsch-Behmisch*" (German Bohemian) dialect, which the original Bukovina Germans brought from their ancestral homeland in the *Böhmerwald* (Bohemian Forest) to Bukovina and which their descendants then conveyed to the New World.

To keep its members informed, the Society publishes a quarterly *Newsletter*. In addition, it offers for sale numerous books on the Bukovina heritage as well as maps and a variety of Bukovina memorabilia. These items are available through Society headquarters at PO Box 1083, Ellis, Kansas 67637 or our web site: www.bukovinasociety.org > The Society affiliates with national and international organizations with an interest in Bukovinian, German or eastern European history, in particular with the *Landsmannschaft der Buchenlanddeutschen* (Augsburg, Germany) and the *Associação Alemã-Bucovina de Cultura* (Bukovina-German Cultural Society, Rio Negro, Brazil) with whom it exchanges periodical publications.

With the dispersion of Bukovinians throughout the world, the Internet has become a vital tool in allowing members of this small community to discover and maintain contact with one another. Often it is too late in life, after our antecedents have already departed, that we begin the inquiry into our roots and time-honored family traditions. Given the status of modern technology, more and more people are now turning to the Internet to provide these answers in the anticipation that someone may be able to answer our myriad questions. Aside from its publications and conventions, the Bukovina Society of the Americas has established a website, the principal purpose of which is to bring together like-minded professional and amateur researchers to explore the culture,



history, and traditions of the Bukovina Germans, wherever in the world they may be.

In the spring of 2002 Board members Werner Zoglauer and Rebecca Hageman developed a new Internet website at www.bukovinasociety.org to replace the Society's original website pioneered by Larry Jensen in 1996. With the goal of becoming the premier Internet location for information about the Bukovina Germans, the new website is a very ambitious undertaking. Contributors have included scholars and authors from Germany, the United States and Brazil, all of whom have played an active role in keeping information current. We are fortunate to have active on our board and on the website project Dr. Sophie A. Welisch, Professor Emeritus from Dominican College (Blauvelt, NY), who has authored many publications and articles about Bukovina and who has also translated numerous articles and books from German to English.

By the spring of 2004, our website had grown by more than 800 percent with over 220 pages of documents and maps related to Bukovina topics. Large amounts of data continue to be added with a few links still under construction. In this short period of time we have noted thousands of visits to the site from individuals in more than thirty countries around the globe. Our guest book frequently includes inquiries for further information, primarily of a genealogical nature, as families, torn asunder by immigration, war, and time, seek to reestablish contact or to learn of matters pertaining to the ethnic group in general. In addition, the Society and several of its active members maintain genealogy databases with the names of Bukovina ancestors dating back to the 18th century. Our online genealogy database contains more than 100,000 names of Bukovina Germans and their descendants. Whenever and wherever possible we will provide requested information to help our visitors discover their roots and re-connect with long lost friends and family.

Although most of the articles on our website are in English, we expect to increase the German-language content in the future. Among the projects under review is the inclusion of some of the back issues of *Der Südostdeutsche* (Augsburg, Germany), the monthly publication of the *Landmannschaft der Buchenlanddeutschen*. We

also have some postings in Portuguese, submitted to us by our sister organization, the *Associação Alemã-Bucovina de Cultura --ABC*, Brazil. The website has also become a primary resource and research location for our Bukovina cousins who live in Germany and with whom our genealogy is closely linked. This year about 35 percent of our guestbook comments have been in German in response to our increasing German language content at our website.

A rich source of history lies in the personal stories of the Bukovinians: those forced by economic reasons to emigrate overseas to the New World, those who were displaced in 1940 by the exigencies of war, and those who are several generations removed from these cataclysmic events but in their acculturation were torn between two sets of sometimes conflicting mores and traditions. We plan to add some of these stories to our website.

We invite you to visit us at www.bukovinasociety.org and hope you will find this an exciting place to learn about the Bukovinian legacy. Our website is so organized as to make it easy to navigate to the various sections and easily find materials of interest. Be assured we look forward to your visit and welcome your comments.

As it enters the sixteenth year of its founding, the Bukovina Society can point with pride to significant achievements, not the least of which is the networking it has facilitated among Bukovinians in the Old World and the New. Families long separated by emigration have touched base and through its publications and conferences, descendants of Bukovinians have been able to learn about their heritage. Given the current level of interest, the Society appears to be headed on a course of continued productive activity.

(Photographs by Rebecca Hageman, Wichita, KS. Oct. 2004)