SOCIETY NEWS

The annual meeting of The Bukovina Society of the Americas, Inc. was held on Monday, July 14, 2003 at 6:00 p.m. in Ellis, Kansas. The main topic was the election of directors for terms expiring in 2003. Elected were Bernie Zerfas, Ralph Honas, Joe Erbert and Werner Zoglauer. The board of directors met following the annual meeting to elect officers for the ensuing year. Elected were Oren Windholz, President; Ray Haneke, Vice President; Joe Erbert, Secretary; and Bernie Zerfas, Treasurer.

BUKOVINA PEOPLE AND EVENTS

- Edward “Al” Lang has generously donated copies of his book, *Bukovina Families: 200 Years* to the Society for sale with the entire proceeds to be directed to the general fund. Previous copies were sold through the publisher, Almar Associates. This book is a genealogy of many of the Catholic German Bohemian families who emigrated to Bukowina between 1799-1842 and later to the United States, Germany, Brazil, and Canada. The 247-page volume, published in 1993, can be ordered for $25.00, which includes postage.

- July 5, 2003 witnessed the ordination in the Cathedral of Our Lady in Luxembourg of Denis W ellisch by Monsignor Fernand Franck, A rchbishop of the Grand Duchy. Born in Colmar, Alsace, France in 1966. Father W ellisch is the eldest of the two children of A dolf W ellisch and Gabrielle Krall. His father A dolf and paternal grandfather Rudolf W ellisch, both born in Gurahumora, were resettled in Alsace in the course of the transfer of the Bukovina Germans to the Reich in 1940. Father W ellisch celebrated his first mass in his hometown parish at the Church of St. Andre in Issenheim, Alsace on July 13, 2003.

- The Society for German American Studies has issued a call for papers for the 28th annual symposium April 22-25, 2004 at New Ulm, MN. Papers reflecting the following themes are suggested: Turners, Sons of Hermann, W W II POWs in New Ulm, Mission Societies, Dialects in Music and Folk Song, Missionaries to Indians. Other subject headings also welcome. Send one-page, double-spaced abstracts to L a V ern J. Rippley, St. Olaf College, Northfield, M N 55057, FAX 507.646.3732, email rippleyl@stolaf.edu (Note: 1 for LaV ern, not 1 “one”) Other details on the program and New Ulm attractions are available from: jeckstein@newulmtel.net

- On June 25, 2003 the Bukovina Institute, sponsored by the University of Augsburg and the Bavarian State Ministry of Sciences, Research and the Arts, unanimously elected a new Board of Directors as follows: three professors currently teaching at the University of Augsburg, Dr. R einhold W erners, Dr. H ans W ellmann and Dr. K onrad S chröder; the professors emeriti Dr. K urt R ein and Dr. T heo S tammen, both of whom had served on the previous Board; and Dr. G eorg S imnacher as political speaker. Dr. L inus F örster will continue as managing director. Among its first tasks was the election to membership in the Bukovina Institute of those individuals who had been active in the now defunct Raimund-Friedrich-Kaindl Gesellschaft. Founded in 1974 under the presidency of Dr. H erbert M ayer, the publications of the Kaindl
Gesellschaft over the years have contributed much to a better understanding of literary, historical, cultural and nealogical issues pertaining to Bukovina. Its name was derived from the historian, teacher and author, Raimund Friedrich Kaindl (1866-1930), whose research and publications about Bukovina represent seminal studies in the field.

On the second weekend of June, 2003 the Landsmannschaft der Buchenlanddeutschen (Association of Bukovina Germans) held its 53rd convention, this year in Brehna (near Bitterfeld), Sachsen-Anhalt, formerly in the German Democratic Republic. This year’s gathering included a number of “firsts”, e.g., the first time held in a former East German state since the reunification of Germany; and (2) the participation of a guest choral group of the Association of Bukovina Poles from Luban/Lauban, Poland. Attendance exceeded all expectations, indicating that more Bukovinians live in the former German Democratic Republic than had earlier been thought.

On August 2 about sixty people attended the 26th annual Fürstenthal gathering held this year in Oy-Mittelberg in Allgäu, Germany. Under the direction of Norbert Dombrowski, the program opened with an ecumenical church service. Thanks to Michael Augustin and Brigitte Haas the “computer and books corner” proved to be a popular attraction where the guests learned of Bukovinian research activities abroad, shared information, and initiated new contacts.

On the first weekend in August Steve Parke attended the 42nd annual convention of the Czech Festival in Wilber, Nebraska. The event was celebrated by ethnic foods, an assortment of accordion, brass and small combo bands, folk dancers, and other cultural events including the Miss Czechoslovak USA Pageant, the Czech Historical Pageant and various presentations at Sokol Hall. With family roots in Bohemia, Steve found this an exhilarating experience and plans to attend the festival again next year.

Thaddeus Jurkiewiez, 30 Whooping Hollow Rd., East Hampton, NY 11937 wrote to the Society indicating his interest in receiving mail from individuals with information on Seletin, Radautz, Jacobeni and Dorna Vatra in Bukovina.

BUKOVINAFEST 2003

The international meeting of members and guests of the Bukovina Society in Hays and Ellis, Kansas held from September 18-21 was jammed from start to finish with interesting historical presentations and cultural events. Seventy people attended the presentations and programs dedicated to both Bukovina and to the German-American heritage. A escorted bus trip on Thursday gave guests an opportunity to tour some of the outstanding Catholic Churches in Ellis County built a century ago by ethnic Germans, primarily from the Volga region of Russia. A final stop at historic Hays locations completed the afternoon. The popular early bird social that evening brought together many friends from prior conventions and Bukovina travels worldwide.

Friday’s program opened with a presentation by Becky Hageman (Wichita, KS) commemorating the bicentennial of the founding of the German Bohemian village of Fürstenthal in Bukovina. Doug Reckmann (Portland, OR) then detailed his tour and research of his ancestral village of Schwarzthal. After a lunch catered at headquarters, Society President Oren Windholz moderated a discussion centered on the Society’s plans for future developments. The afternoon’s program opened with a tripartite topic entitled, Umsiedlung, Flucht und V ertriebung (resettlement, flight and expulsion), i.e., an analysis of events leading to the 1940 resettlement of the Bukovina Germans and its consequences. This presentation by Michael Augustin (Leonberg, Germany), Sophie Welisch (Congers, NY) and Werner Zoglauer (Naperville, IL) included individual personal accounts, thus adding to the poignancy and relevance of the topic.

Friday evening featured a traditional mixer with a social and buffet. Dr. William Keel (Professor of German at The University of Kansas in Lawrence) presented “Halt the Hun: Anti-German Hysteria During World War I.” Following dinner Joe Erbert (Ellis, KS) and other volunteer musicians provided the guests with a grand march, polkas and other entertainment.

The Society joined with the Midwest Deutsche Oktoberfest on Saturday and Sunday. Programs sponsored during this time by the Society included opening speakers and entertainment, a genealogy room, an apple strudel demonstration by Irene Zerfas, Martha McClelland (Hays, KS), Martha Armbrister and Shirley Kroeger (Ellis, KS) and a fashion show featuring early attire in Kansas organized by Julia Honas (Ellis, KS), modeled by volunteers. In addition the Oktoberfest Committee provided continuous polka music, food, craft booths, other German cultural programs as well as a Polka Mass on Sunday.
In Search of My Roots
by Edith Hoffmann (Northridge, CA)

Finally my dream of visiting the places where some of my grandfather's family settled became reality. In July, 2003, my daughter Veronica and I went on a mission of discovery to Brazil. Our travel plans included the 13th Bucovina Fest in the twin cities of Rio Negro, Parana, and M afra, Santa Catarina. Both states, Parana and Santa Catarina, are home to many people of German and A ustrian ancestry who immigrated there during the 1800 and 1900's. Old traditions still flourish, and the culture reminds of old Europe.

Throughout the festivities, Professor A yrton Gonçalves Celestino was our guide and host, and the comfortable Blumenpark Hotel was our home. Prof. Celestino is the author of the book Os Bucovinos do Brasil (The Bukovinians of Brazil, 2002). He is known to all the participants and is so-to-speak the founding father of and driving force behind the Bucovina Fest.

The festivities started with choir presentations on Friday evening at the Igreja Matriz Bom Jesus da Coluna (church) in Rio Negro. Many groups from Rio Negro/M afra and surrounding area participated, starting with the very young and ending with adult choirs. It was good to see community interest and support of their cultural heritage. We were pleased to see that various other ethnic groups had been invited to participate in the presentations (Italian, Polish, U krainian). The church was filled with parents and family members who were visibly proud to see and hear their youths and peers perform. The emphasis was on enjoyment and participation and the atmosphere was relaxed and supportive.

Saturday was the big day, and M other N ature cooperated. It was sunny and warm as the parade of six big flat-bed trucks, filled with eager participants, dressed in traditional costumes, wound its way through Rio Negro/M afra with much fanfare, music and beeping. T he trucks are decorated by various families (descendants of Bucovina), who engage in friendly rivalries. At the dinner/dance in the evening, prizes are awarded for the best-decorated truck and the family with the most members represented at the festivities. The selection of a queen from a court of five princesses concludes the first part of the evening. This Year's winner was Josilaine A pacida Schelbauer.

The dinner/dance took place in the new beautiful, very big Bucovina Hall in Rio Negro. It was filled to the brim with enthusiastic participants and dancers. First we watched various groups perform traditional folk dances of Bucovina. After an ample and tasty buffet-style dinner, the dancing began. Enthusiastic couples poured onto the large floor and danced traditional Landlers, polkas, and waltzes. This brought back pleasant memories of my mother's favorite music. For Veronica, it was an eye-opener watching the many young people dance these "old-fashioned" dances with much gusto and passion. Occasionally the band played a few Brazilian folk tunes of the region, quite different from what we usually hear in the popular media. It was a very enjoyable evening, and the festivities continued into the wee hours of the morning.

Sunday morning commenced with a mass at the local church. From there we went to a brunch at the Restaurante do Parque, which is located right next to the new city hall. This concluded the festivities of the Bucovina Fest for us, while the men rounded out the Fest with traditional card games.

Prof. Celestino was instrumental in making this a wonderful experience for us, and we are grateful for his guidance and hospitality. I discovered to my surprise and delight that Prof. Celestino's ancestors also moved from the Bohemian Forest to Bucovina, just like mine. We will never forget the Bucovina Fest and the people who helped make it such a pleasant experience for us. The memories will remain in my heart as priceless treasures, bringing me closer to the past.

13th BUKOVINA FEST IN BRAZIL (JULY 4-6, 2003)

by Professor A yrton Gonçalves Celestino (Curitiba, Brazil)

July 4-6 marked the celebrations in Rio Negro (State of Parana and M afra (State of Santa Catarina) of the 116th anniversary of the 1887/1888 arrival of Bukovinians in Brazil. The residents of these two cities very much enjoyed the festivities sponsored by the Associação Alemã-Bucovina de Cultura—ABC (Bukovina-German Cultural Association), which was open to the public, irrespective of any links to Bucovina. Friday, July 4, featured a presentation of artistic melodies performed by various choral groups in the main church of Rio Negro. João Jacó Fuchs, the President of the Associação Alemanha-Bucovina de Cultura—ABC, opened the festivities with a brief speech about the ABC and its significance to the Bukovinian community. The function drew over 500 persons. The following day witnessed the great motor parade from Rio Negro to M afra in festively adorned trucks and cars. This parade, accompanied by fireworks and the imbibing of much beer (chopp), lasted for several hours.

On the evening of July 5 the A ssociation sponsored a dinner-dance with foods including haluski (stuffed cabbage/pigs in a blanket) and other typical Bukovinian dishes.

Sunday, July 6 began with a mass in memory of our deceased forebears offered at the church of Nossa Senhora Aparecida in Rio Negro. At this time Professor A yrton G. Celestino gave a brief summation of their adventures and exploits. M ass was followed by a luncheon in the old Seminary of Rio Negro. T he afternoon concluded with a traditional card game (Truco Dourado) with more than sixty contestants.

We were especially pleased with the visit and participation at our festivities of Mrs. Edith Hoffmann and her daughter Veronica Hoffman of California, USA. Edith Hoffmann is related to W enzel Hoffmann and other Hoffmanns who in 1888 emigrated from Bucovina to Rio Negro. T wo years later the family relocated to Johannesberg, a suburb of Lapa near Rio Negro. Initial contacts...
November 13, 1919 marks the date of my birth in Corlata, Bukovina, called Buchenland in German. My parents, Christian Fries and Luise (Glass) Fries owned a farm, where I grew up.

At age seven I began attending the Romanian school. Although I had some difficulty with the Romanian language, I successfully completed seven years of education with better than average marks and a good final report.

From an early age I had to do small tasks at home on the farm, for example helping with the feeding of the animals and cleaning the stable. When there were young calves or foals, I was responsible for them. Thus from an early age I had already learned how to handle and care for animals.

In 1934 I was scheduled for confirmation, which indeed also took place on Holy Thursday in the former school building, since we did not have a church. This wooden structure could no longer be used as a German school after the First World War (1914-1918). The pastor from another village came to conduct church services and confirmation. Receiving the blessed sacrament that day were seven children, all unaccompanied by their parents. I had gotten a new suit for the occasion. After a short address by the pastor, I was the first one called upon to recite the Apostles’ Creed, answer the other questions, etc. A short church service and a blessing everything was over.

We returned home and I had to change out of my new suit, then eat lunch, and in the afternoon we planted potatoes in the field. That was my confirmation celebration! But my other comrades shared the same fate. From that time on I was considered a full-fledged farm worker. There were no machines at that time; everything had to be done by horses or manually. I usually worked with the horses. Our farm prospered so that my father could buy additional properties and expand our holdings. In about 1938 we were able to sell enough potatoes to fill an entire rail car, keeping some potatoes only for our own use. This was quite an achievement without machines and without fertilizers and assisted only by day wage laborers.

During the summer I usually worked on the farm and in the winter I hauled wood for fuel and construction. Since we did not have our own source of wood, we had to travel far into the Carpathians across the Moldavia River, even when it was not frozen over in the winter. My workday averaged 12-14 hours, and thus the years passed. By 1939 we had enough wood to rebuild our house; at the same time my father bought another piece of property. Then everything abruptly changed.

Rumor had it that we Germans would be resettled in Germany. Hitler wanted all Germans outside the borders of the Reich to be brought back to Germany. We listened in amazement and skepticism. A German delegation confirmed that we would be able to emigrate. The 1940 transfer of the Bukovina Germans was voluntary; each person over 18 years of age had to present himself/herself before a joint Soviet-German or German-Romanian Commission and state his willingness to emigrate. About 4000 Germans chose to remain in Bukovina.

In Germany we would receive a much larger farm. We were informed as to what we could take and what we must leave behind. Cash money had to be surrendered to the German Commission. After a while a group of uniformed Germans returned so drunk that they could hardly walk. It was on a dark night that they measured our buildings—with what result? They followed the same procedure in measuring the land we owned.

The time for departure rapidly approached and it became a serious concern. We had to pack all our valuables in three large crates and deliver them to the railroad station. On them we had posted our return address, but destination? No one knew. The Commission was to decide when and where the train would go: it turned out to be “goodbye forever.”

My father turned 40,000 lei over to the German Commission and received a receipt but never again saw the money. The German government sold our properties to the Romanian government. And then we departed.

A trainride of two days and two nights we arrived in Judenburg, Austria and were assigned to barracks with ten bunk
beds side by side in every room. Married couples, whether young or old, had to sleep one under the other. Single people also slept in such barracks, separated according to sex.

Food was served in a common mess hall. I worked in a scythe factory without pay, as did the others. That did not sit well for long; the people began to protest, since they had been promised permanent resettlement and not camp life for months on end.

We were then naturalized, received our naturalization papers and had our blood type tattooed on our left forearm in case of the need for a blood donor. At last we were German citizens with all rights and also duties relating thereto. My brother, a dam Fries, was immediately inducted into the army and sent to the Eastern front. Finally in early 1942 we were settled in German-occupied Poland. For us the authorities joined two wretched farms lying adjacent to each other. The houses were covered with straw, and the equipment which was still there was incomplete with one part or another missing from each unit, rendering it unusable. We looked about in consternation at where we were being settled.

I was only there for four weeks before being called up for military service and told to report to the Cavalry Replacement Battalion, Trooper Platoon 5 in Mühlhausen. My parents remained on the farm along with a Pole who had lived there earlier. Since my father could speak Russian, he could communicate with the Pole.

The day arrived in early 1942 when I had to depart; two days later I arrived in Mühlhausen. After a few days I, along with some other men, were sent for basic training to Heilbronn on the Neckar. As we were marching through the streets, I saw some stores with the firm name of Fries. Was this a link to my family? At home our entire village used the Swabian dialect but with a different intonation. Upon completion of basic training, I got a few days’ furlough, enabling me briefly to return home. After the furlough I took leave of my parents in the hope that we would see one another again, since I knew what to expect.

Upon returning to the barracks a transport was assembled for the war front with exact destination unknown to us. After a few days en route, we arrived in Sarajevo, Yugoslavia, where civil war and partisan marauding are now taking place [1995]. That’s exactly what was happening during World War II. We became embroiled in a partisan conflict in which we sustained heavy casualties. I was there for almost two years before we had to withdraw because our losses were too great and we were no longer receiving reinforcements.

We were then sent to face the Russians in Balaton, Hungary. These were the hardest and also the last battles for me, since on February 12, 1945 I was wounded with a bullet through my left underarm. Perhaps this was also my luck since I could at least walk. Many who could not flee were shot by the Russians. The war was over for me, but I did not know where to go. A according to news reports the German troops had for some time been in full retreat; moreover, I did not know what had happened to my parents. In the army hospital I got a cast and a sling around my arm and then I aimlessly wandered about, since there were hardly any train connections. I determined to go to Austria in the hope that perhaps some of our people were still in the camp. And that proved to be the case. I in fact even met the wife of my stepbrother, Schumm, who was also in the camp and who confirmed that my parents were still alive and out of the Eastern sector. She also gave me their address. My happiness knew no bounds. My parents were presumably in the vicinity of Nuremberg. So I set out from Judenburg in Austria in the direction of Nuremberg. Generally I traveled by foot and along the way begged for food from the farmers.

For a few days I stayed in Stadl near Nuremberg with very nice people who understood my situation, since they also had a son who was a prisoner of war in Egypt. In anticipation that he might experience the same as I, they gave me one of his suits, enabling me to don my army uniform before the American troops reached this village on their way to Nuremberg. A few days later I had left, I again set out, since in the meantime I knew approximately how to get to Fesselsdorf, the village in which my parents supposedly were residing.

A few days later I reached Fesselsdorf and indeed found my parents; it was an overwhelming experience. They were living in one room about 12 square meters in size with no stove, one bed, one table, a hassock and a few paltry belongings. The landlords, the Weggel family, gave me a bed in another room, and I could join them for meals. In that my father was momentarily ill, I worked with our horses, with which my father had come from the East. The Weggels had insisted on taking in only people who had horses, and this was the case with my parents.

A few days later the mayor came and informed me that there were four men staying at the Weggels but that the farmstead of the Tiefel family across the way had only two women. They had had a Pole working with them, but he had now returned home. That was fine with me, since I saw no permanent existence here, and there I would be needed rather than just merely tolerated. The farm was run by a widow of about sixty years. She had a son, who was not yet back from the war and a daughter of about twenty years of age. AlII went well; I did my work and they seemed satisfied with me. The son returned from the war and we all had enough work, so all proceeded as heretofore. We were young people, so that a relationship developed between the daughter and myself, which after a time turned to talk of marriage. I rejected this because I had nothing and they were prosperous farmers who would hold my destitute status against me.

Her mother disputed this and said that I was able to work and needed nothing beyond that. We married but it did not take all that long before arguments began to erupt; we were expected to work on the farm with no pay and only for food as heretofore. I chose not to go along with this, since the farm belonged to her brother. I then took a job in a limestone quarry in Azendorf where I worked in shifts and helped out on the farm during my spare time.

My hourly wage in the quarry was 77 Pfennig net. I could not continue like this for long. My wife did not want to leave home although we were married, so we divorced. Her relatives had made recriminations that she had married a foreigner. She had three attorneys and under no circumstances wanted to be declared the guilty party in the divorce. The legal proceedings went from the District Court in Lichtenfels to the Upper Regional Court in Bamberg where the decision was finally rendered. We were both equally guilty and she had to pay the total costs, all just in order to rid herself of a foreigner. I then resigned from my job in Azendorf. For whom should I have to struggle so?
My father does not relate that his brother, Adam, who sustained injuries from the war, was also employed in the quarry and while at work there he collapsed and died. -WF

At last the argument and aggravation about the divorce ended, and I now had only my mother to whom to turn when in need. My sister, Relli (Aurelia) Christel in the Upper Palatinate was sick and in the hospital in Schwandorf. On May 27, 1952 my mother set out to visit her and on the way from the train station to the hospital she crossed the street at a blind curve, was struck by a truck and killed on the spot. She was nonetheless brought to the hospital, but there was no hope of resuscitation. My sick sister lay on the upper floor of the hospital and my mother lay dead on the lower floor. That struck me very, very hard given my current circumstances, in which I still needed her so desperately.

I then met my present wife, "your mother," Alma (Hahn) Fries, and worked in the Brückner barrel factory as a driver. In doing so, I qualified for a company apartment, which was important to us because we wanted to marry. And this we did in 1953. We both had nothing and could not make any recriminations against each other on this account. All went well; then you were born in 1955.

Several years passed after which my sister Ludwina May’s three children, who had remained in Glebowice (between Cracow and Auschwitz) and had been raised in an orphanage, were able to leave for the German Federal Republic. A search was made to find any relatives in Germany, and since my mother (their "grandmother") had already died, the Youth Welfare Office turned to us.

The children were separated: Erna went as a worker in a children's home in Rehberg, Wilfried went to the youth home in Rasen, and we kept Peter because he was still of school age. For the most part your mother handled these matters with Mr. Löblein, the director of the Youth Welfare Office, and I had to assume responsibility for them, which involved many details until matters were settled with Peter registered in school and Wilfried in an apprenticeship. They all had to take lessons in German, after which Wilfried got an apprenticeship with the firm of August Schneider Heating and Installation but only because your mother was a close acquaintance of Mrs. Schneider, who had attended our wedding. It is also important to acknowledge everything that your mother did for the family. I also did very much for her relatives.

I recall my 75th birthday and how surprised and overwhelmed I was not only because of the birthday celebration but also because my relatives came to the function you had arranged. That event occasioned me to reflect on the family's experiences after leaving Romania. As mentioned, we packed three crates with valuable materials, for example with homemade rolls of "hand woven" linen, which today can nowhere be bought. Although we deposited the crates as directed, we never saw them again. These crates after a long while were seen on a railroad siding in an open rail car in the Protectorate of Bohemia-Moravia by an inhabitant of our village. Our crates with return addresses had been opened, plundered, and the remaining contents had rotted. Here in Bavaria one repeatedly hears: "The foreigners came here and got [from the state]; who gives us something?"

We were resettlers from Romania via Austria to German-occupied Poland. For the sake of accuracy this must also be said of my siblings, none of whom are still living, only their grandchildren. And finally, we became refugees in Germany, at least those who were able to flee from the East.

My parents succeeded in escaping in the last minute. My other sister, Aurelia Christel, Werner’s mother from the Upper Palatinate, was not so lucky. She and her husband Eugen, trapped on the frontlines between the Germans and the Russians, had to get off the road and seek their escape across the fields. But they were unsuccessful in that the horses couldn’t manage. Eugen was wounded, one horse was shot, and they had to escape with the clothes on their back.

And my other sister, Ludwina May, the mother of Erna, did not get out of the East, where she, too, had been settled on a farm. Her husband, Friedrich May, was inducted into the army and my sister with three small children, without knowing a word of Polish, was left to tend the farm. Are there words to describe this? She was able to leave a few years later, but how she endured before this time one should not even ask.

And these are the foreigners who came here and got money. The question must be asked: who deceived whom?

*Ludwig Fries died in 2002; his memoirs, written in 1995, were posthumously transcribed and edited by his son, Wilhelm Fries (Mühlheim/Baden, Germany).*