

# The Bukovina Society of the Americas NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 81, Ellis, KS 67637-0081 USA

Vol. 30, No. 2 June 2020

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Membership Dues:  
Lifetime \$150.00  
Annual \$25.00

## SOCIETY NEWS & EVENTS

- We hope that all people of Bukovina interest are safe during this time. The Society board has not met recently in accordance with group guidelines. We submitted our last series of reports by email.
- We are very encouraged by the increased support of our Society and website, particularly for those who chose to become life members.  
Mary Larson, Amanda VanderVeen, Gary Hetzer, Franz Binder, Dr. Gernot Peter
- Thanks also to all new and renewing annual members.
- **BOOK SPECIAL:** *German Emigration from Bukovina to the Americas*, a definitive work on the emigration from Bukovina to the New World is available now for a special price. It is listed on the website for \$10.00 plus postage. The Max Kade Center at the University of Kansas donated a supply of the books to the Society for distribution, allowing us to offer the price of \$10.00 with postage and handling included. The 300 pp. book was published in 1996, edited by Drs. William Keel and Kurt Rein. This is for US postal delivery only. For International orders, please email the Society for the additional cost.
- The Society website has a new new link for Sister Organizations. *Bukowinafreunde* at: [www.bukowinafreunde.de](http://www.bukowinafreunde.de) although it is in the German, many browsers have translation features such as Chrome.
- German-Bohemian descendants, Buchenhainer u. Dumbraver, were scheduled for a periodic reunion in May of this year. Irmtraut and Adolf Shaper sent notice that due to the Virus situation, it has been postponed until May 15, 2021. The next gathering will take place on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Maria Wald Chapel.
- Luzian Geier informed the Society of the death of Mary Scheinost on March 18th, 2020 in Zurich. She was a long-time supporter of the Bukovina saga. Born in Minneapolis, she was a medical specialist whose work located her in Switzerland. Mr. Geier relates, Mary was a

cosmopolitan and enterprising person who has traveled half the world. She was in Bukovina several times in the footsteps of her ancestors with the Bukowina Institut”.

## WHERE TO, MATE? TO THE END!

By Kath (Plach) Garofali

(From the memoirs of my father, Carol Plach)

### Part Three: My Turn to Shout

With the loss of her husband and her eldest son missing in action, my grandmother was desperate to avoid my father's inevitable enlistment when he was reunited with his family in the Lennep camp towards the end of January, 1945. The only way to circumvent this was to delay his registration on arrival in the camp. Being unregistered meant that my father received no rations, so the family shared their meagre food allowance with him in the hope of not drawing attention to his existence.

Bombing alerts became constant, and being in a factory, the family were particularly vulnerable. During one mealtime a bomb landed on a Russian POW camp next door. The force of the explosion caused the floorboards in the factory dining hall to lift. The diners were left in the dark and complete chaos erupted when people felt warm liquid on their faces; everyone assuming it to be blood. There was a collective sigh of relief when they discovered they had been doused with the soup they had been about to eat.

Travel, even for a short distance had become difficult with the constant air alarms and bombing. On one trip between their quarters and the factory, my father thoughtlessly greeted a man with, “Guten Tag”. He immediately began to question my father, “Why not Heil Hitler? Why are you not yet in the

army? Get yourself to the nearest office in Wuppertal.” My father knew that he could check up on him so he had no choice but to report for call up. To not register was a serious offence and equated with deserting.

The Sergeant at the desk asked how long my father had been in Lennep. My father mumbled, “Four weeks”. He continued with his questions, “How did you get to Lennep?” As he fired questions at my father, the Sergeant stood up and hobbled over to the counter on an artificial leg. My father noticed the many war decorations on his jacket and knew that with all of his sacrifices he would have no mercy on him. With a sinking heart, my father began to lay out his identification papers on the counter. The Sergeant asked my father if he had joined the Arbeitsdienst (pre-military service) yet. My father could honestly reply that he had not. To my father’s surprise, the Sergeant told him he needed to join the Arbeitsdienst first before being enlisted and promptly dismissed him. It took my stunned father a while to realise that the Sergeant had used an old excuse to let him off; even fifteen-year olds were being directly inducted to fight at the end of the war.

The first carpet bombing of Lennep occurred shortly after my father’s reprieve and caused great damage. Only about one in five houses were left standing. Fires burned everywhere, there were live electrical wires on the ground and gas explosions. People clawed at the rubble to excavate those who had been buried. The constant bombing led to little time working in the factory and many long hours spent sheltering in the building’s cellar. The last few months of the war, from February through to April felt more like years. The air attacks grew to such an extent that people gave up listening to the radio announcements and air raid sirens and watched the sky for approaching planes instead.

Towards the end of April there was an increase in strafing, followed by a military barrage. Once this stopped, all that could be heard over the following days was some machine gun fire and shooting with small arms. Soon after, very hesitant and ready to shoot, American soldiers arrived at the entrance to the basement laundry where my father and his family were sheltering with some other factory workers. My father heard the urgent question, “Are there any men here? Soldaten?” His sister replied, “Only my little brother”.

That was the end of the war for the family; liberated from the oppressive round the clock bombings. They could now move about in the open air. The first offerings by the American soldiers of chewing gum, chocolate and cigarettes planted the seeds of hope of a discernible future.

The euphoria of having survived the war soon gave way to the pangs of hunger. The allies were occupied with ending the Nazi regime which meant that there was no civil order or food supply for some weeks. The plants and food that became edible increased in direct proportion to the hunger that people experienced. The survivors of the neighbouring

Russian camp slaughtered a horse and my grandmother managed to get some scraps of meat from the head to make a watery soup. One day my father was fortunate to score a G.I. 100-gram ration tin of spam. He was so starved that he ate the contents that same night secretly under his blanket. My father still feels ashamed to this day that he didn’t share it with his mother and sisters. Weeks later when the English troops took over the administration of the North-West region of Germany, they could not keep up the generosity of the American soldiers who had kept many civilians alive by sharing their tight supplies.

A loose order was gradually restored and my father and the family were accepted into a temporary camp for displaced Polish people. He hadn’t spoken Polish with his family for five years and it took my father some time to become fluent again. Before the winter of 1945/46 the family were moved to Solingen. The occupation authorities evicted German inhabitants from a comparatively undamaged part of town and moved in the many displaced people of all nationalities. With the re-opening of German schools, my father was keen to pursue his education and was relieved to be accepted in to the Humboldt Gymnasium on probation.

My father became obsessed with learning. When he started at the school, he was eighteen years old and placed in a classroom of thirteen-year olds. This reinforced just how much he had missed out on his schooling during the war and this made him all the more determined to catch up. In Germany after the war, cigarettes and coffee were the main currency. As my father didn’t smoke, he paid for extra private tuition with cigarettes and studied before school and late into the night in the cramped conditions of the camp.

Whilst concentrating on his schoolwork, my father had been unaware of his mother’s mental and spiritual deterioration. She felt she had no future. One of my grandmother’s sisters who was compensated for her lost home in the annexed Russian part of Poland, urged her to come to live there. The family did not want to return to a communist regime despite how bleak the conditions still were in the west. They were completely opposed to the move until my grandmother once again attempted to take her own life and nearly succeeded. My father’s oldest sister Jadwiga, volunteered to move to Poland with her five-year-old daughter and my grandmother. In the summer of 1947, they departed on a cargo boat from Lübeck, over 400 kilometres away. Army trucks took them to the port on the Baltic sea. My father was allowed to accompany them to the port but as the army trucks also had to make the long return journey, there was little time for farewells. He said his brief goodbyes with a feeling of adieu forever and a deep sadness at the further disintegration of his family.

The UNRA rations had now ceased and the new Deutschmarks replaced the bartering system. My father’s schooling was now being paid for by his sister Toni, who had remained with him in Germany. They were allotted

two rooms in a nice neighbourhood and it was around this time that Toni met her future husband. Although my father continued to jump ahead with his school years, he was not allowed to take one last short cut and jump to his final year. He couldn't expect his sister to support him for another few years as she was getting married. The director of the school refused to make any more concessions for fear of setting a precedent. My father had no choice but to discontinue his studies due to a lack of finances. Jobs were difficult to come by but he was very fortunate to find a job thanks to his French tutor's connections.

During this time, my father and his newly married sister had been applying to emigrate. There were few opportunities for them in post war Germany and they had no home to return to. They filled out various applications to go to Canada, Argentina and Brazil. Their 'How to Speak Spanish and Portuguese language books' were quickly discarded when the Australian Commission was set up offering more generous terms. The vetting and screening of the thousands of prospective migrants was a long process. Documents needed to be examined, medical tests completed and interviews attended. From their initial application in March, it took five months to arrive at the last camp in Germany. The news of their acceptance to immigrate to unknown Australia filled them with hope for a better future.

My father, Toni and her husband were eventually accommodated in Italian Army Barracks in Bagnoli, just outside of Naples. Each day they eagerly perused the list of names posted for the next departing vessel. Funds were becoming low and they began to sell off some of their prized possessions. Finally, their names appeared on the lists for the S.S. Fairstar, departing on the 18th September, 1949.

The ship was a converted American aircraft carrier with an Italian captain and crew. It sailed through the straits of Messina, towards Cairo for the passage through the Suez Canal. My father was very fortunate to be singled out by the Australian Migration Officer on board to give English lessons despite his scant English. It was a great bonus when he received a cheque from the Australian government weeks later as payment for his work. On board, my father forged a close friendship with Vasile, who was around the same age as my father's older brother and the only other Romanian on the ship. It was wonderful for my father to be able to speak in Romanian after a nine-year interval and they forged a strong friendship that continued in Australia.

On the last evening of the journey, the ship's captain made a farewell speech. He told his passengers about their new land, "Australia is a good country, with great opportunities. Forget your nationalities and start anew united." The spirit of eagerness to leave war ravaged Europe behind was a great unifying force despite the diverse nationalities on board. Australia welcomed them with a perfect spring day when their ship docked in Port Melbourne on the 19th October, 1949.

The only disappointment was seeing their carefully saved fruit from on board disposed of by customs officials. Unaware of the custom regulations, in the eyes of the new migrants who had experienced prolonged hunger first hand, they were stunned to see such waste.

Trains took the passengers from the port to the Bonegilla Migrant camp which was over 300 kilometres away. They eagerly watched the sunburnt countryside that was such a great contrast to the greenness of Europe. On arrival in the camp, they queued up with their documents and various European identity cards. Everyone was issued with a 'Certificate of Authority to Remain in Australia.' The Australian debriefing officers struggled with the foreign names and my father was amazed that they were so good humoured as they worked, smiling and laughing. He was even more impressed when they were told, "You can put away all your papers, you do not have to carry your identity papers with you. You are free."

It was a surprise to find such a plentiful supply of fresh food in the Migrant camp compared to what they had experienced before leaving Europe. Within two weeks of their arrival, my father, Vasile and a few others were assigned work in the Government Stores in the city of Melbourne. They were provided with initial accommodation in a migrant hostel. To say that my father was delighted was an understatement. Many highly skilled migrants were less fortunate; my father's accountant brother-in-law being one of them. He was assigned to do manual labour in a brickworks quarry.

They arrived in the city in the early afternoon and unpacked their meagre possessions. With work awaiting them the following morning, despite the trauma of being in a foreign place, the spirit of adventure led my father and Vasile to catch a bus into the unknown. As they boarded the bus the driver asked, "Where to, Mate?" My father gave the only answer he could with his limited English, "To the end!". Fortunately for them the last stop was not too far away and they found themselves near a cinema. Using broken English, they managed to buy tickets and watch a film. During the interval they followed the other patrons outside, trying hard not to do anything to attract undue attention. Vasile lit up a cigarette and his whole pack of matches exploded in his hand. So much for not standing out.

On receipt of his first pay packet, my father enrolled in a private coaching college to improve his English in order to do the adult matriculation examination at the university. Some months later he was delighted when he passed English literature, History and received top marks in his French and German subjects. However, a failure in English Expression meant his admission to University was denied. This reminded my father of his academic setback in Germany and reduced him to tears of frustration and put a large dent in his educational aspirations for some time.

With his two-year work contract over, my father was free to seek other employment. He continued to work in Melbourne for a few months before he had the opportunity to travel with a mate, working his way around Australia. This gave him the chance to experience life in other Australian states and to work on his 'Aussie' accent. On his return in 1952, Sydney became 'home' when my father accepted a permanent position with good prospects for the future. Three years later, his sister Toni and her three-year-old daughter travelled the 800 kilometres from Melbourne to Sydney to live with my father after the death of her husband. My father purchased a house that same year and became more of a father than an uncle to his young niece. In 1958, my father married and over the next few years, along came my sister and I, followed by the birth of my brother ten years later. It was fortunate that Toni and her daughter managed to visit the family in Poland in 1960 with my father's financial assistance. Toni sadly passed away in 1966 and her thirteen-year-old daughter was now permanently under my parents' care. From the time my father first started work in Australia, he had been sending money to Poland to support his mother, oldest sister and her daughter. With a mortgage to service and a few extra mouths to feed in Australia, it was little wonder that twenty years passed before my father had the financial means to visit his mother, eldest sister and niece in Poland.

Before my father's tail feathers were clipped by these responsibilities, his travels around Australia in 1951 were a memorable adventure. He found himself in Crocodile Dundee territory in Darwin, thousands of kilometres and many unsealed corrugated roads later. My father was entranced with the tropical beauty and towns along the relatively untouched coastline as they headed north. In Darwin he experienced their annual show day where big, live crocodiles were on display. The hunters complained that they only had caught 'babies' that year and sadly displayed crocs that were three feet long. Two days after the show the hunters redeemed themselves after catching a 'beauty'. They paraded it through the streets to much fanfare on the back of a five-ton truck with its tail dragging along the road.

My father found casual work in Darwin and the workers always gathered at the local 'watering hole' for a few beers after work. A round of drinks was bought and then came the familiar, "Your turn to shout, mate." My father's initial thought when he had first heard this expression shortly after arriving in Australia was, 'Shout out what?' A fellow worker had saved him after seeing the utter look of confusion on his face and nodded at the bar, "Your turn to buy the beers, mate".

After three months spent working in Darwin, my father received a telegram from Melbourne in 1952, announcing the wonderful news of the birth of Toni's daughter. It was time for my father to make the long journey south to meet the first family member to be born in Australia and on to Sydney for the next chapter in his journey. Looking back on his life and

the great opportunities that this new country gave to him, my father says he has so much to be thankful for and now, "It's my turn to shout about it. With joy".

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## REENACTING AGRICULTURAL HERITAGE

(Van Massirer, BSA board and lifetime member sent this email to friends. His great-grandfather, Franz, was the original owner of the land which Van inherited from his father. Franz acquired the land in 1896, four years after his arrival in Texas.)

Late last fall, I planted some oats with binding and threshing in mind. Now it's almost ready for the binder. It's a beautiful field of grain, no excess fertilizer and all standing up straight. I have swathed part of the field for baling, but about five acres remain for the binder and thresher.

Since 1985, we've done several of these demonstrations, and it seems that it's about time to do another one. If you'd like to lend a hand with the binding, especially the shocking, I'd be most appreciative. Be forewarned, however, that I am rather picky about how the shocking is done. It's an aesthetic thing with me, and at age 83, I'm too danged old to change! If you'd like to just come and sit under the pecan trees and observe, that's okay too. The oats will probably be ready for binding within the next two weeks, and another message pinpointing the date will be sent later.

Threshing will occur two or three weeks after the binding and will be an all-day event, including lunch served from the old original cook shack. As with the binding, some extra help will be needed. If you'd like to bring an old tractor, along with a trailer and a trusty pitchfork, we'll try to find something for you to do. If you'd like to bring an old tractor or equipment just for display, that will be great too. All of this will be under and/or near some large pecan trees providing plenty of shade. And, if you want to bring a couple old plugs (mules) to pull your wagon, there is a stream nearby for watering them at noon, just like the old days! The idea is to re-create a 1940s-1950s era threshing.

Obviously, it's not going to take all day (I hope!) to thresh five acres of oats, so we'll take some time for storytelling and reminiscing.

All of the binding and threshing equipment we will be using are items that I inherited from my dad, and there are lots of stories that came with it. I'm sure some of you have stories too.

I hope you can join us. Specific date/time info will be sent later.

Van



## MAMALIGA

A revisit of a recipe from prior Newsletter

When the settlers arrived in Bukovina, they quickly adopted a food that was common in Romania and other Eastern lands. Mamaliga (Polenta), a staple due to the prominence of corn, was an alternative to bread. Emigrants to the New World brought the traditional dish tradition along, but the plentiful wheat fields changed dietary tastes. Dr. Sophie Welisch recalled her mother and other Bukovinians in New York making Mamaliga, as well as the colonies in other areas. The taste was not widely liked by youngsters. Dr. Valentin Reitmajer published a Bohemian German cookbook with over 60 recipes in Germany which was translated by Dr. Welisch for the Society and has sold out numerous printings. Any number of other items, berries, cream, eggs and friend meat can be eaten alongside, or dunking the Mamaliga in grease. Among the recipe variations:

1 cup cornmeal

1 tsp salt

3 cups water

Place cornmeal and salt in saucepan and gradually add the water, stirring to prevent lumps

Place pan on heat, stirring until it boils

Reduce heat to low, stirring until it thickens, about 10 minutes

Place mixture in oval bowl smooth surface and let stand 5 minutes

Invert the Mamaliga onto a platter and slice. The slices can also be fried.

An anecdote from early Ellis, KS ethnic Germans, upon seeing a mess made by children:

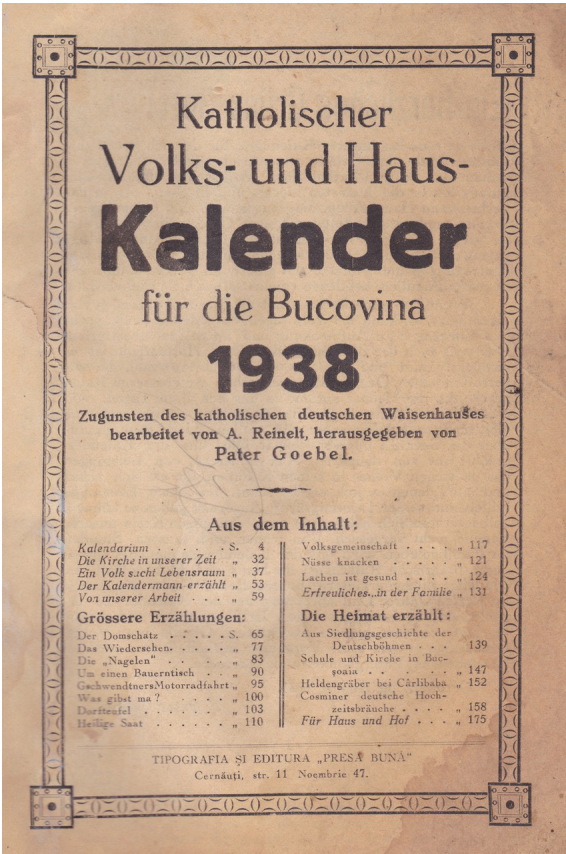
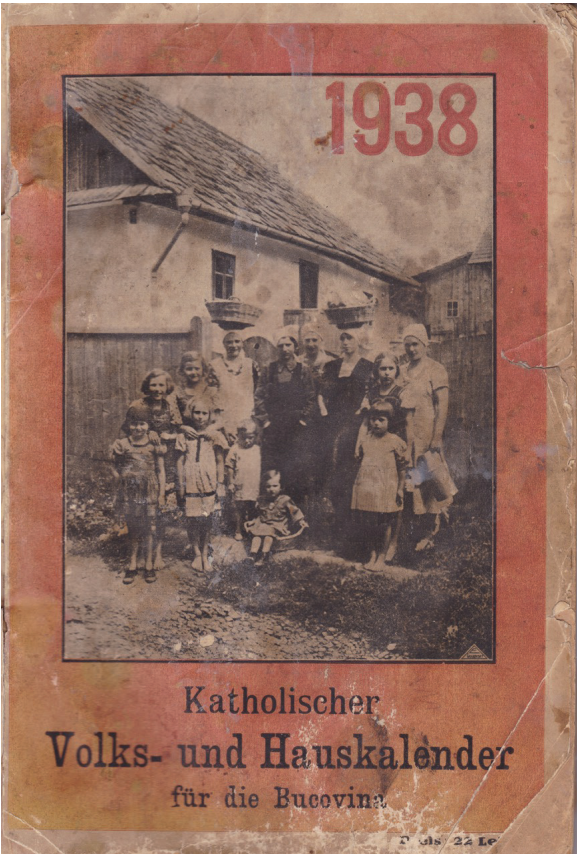
Mamaliga Mamalei, Bukovina Schweinerei



Postcard sent to Doug Reckmann's Great-Grandfather in 1916 from his sister.



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Courtesy of Luzian Geier.