



# The Bukovina Society of the Americas NEWSLETTER

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

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Membership Dues:  
Lifetime \$150.00  
Annual \$25.00

## SOCIETY NEWS & EVENTS

- New life members: #272 Stephen D. Hart, 273 Bonnie-Lynn Hart, 274 Isaac Dan, 275 Giovanna Dan, 276 Lothar Bauerle, 277 Dwight Rumpel, 278 Romuald Tomashek, 279 Matthew & Holly Quinn, 280 Gene & Helga Lukacsy, 281 Joseph Eklund. 281 Joseph Eklund & John Wlad 282 Cathy Mejia, 283 Lil Vogl, 283 Kai Malgay
- We are happy to note that four members of the Zita Watzlawik family are all now life members. Family members are touring the States in 2022, known as TANGO ARGENTINO: GDTango & FABRIZIO MOCATA QUARTET. We were pleased to learn that one of the stars of the group plans to attend Bukovinafest 22. See: <https://www.camimusic.com/tango-argentina> for info and videos.
- New Life member has a website of interest to cooks: <https://www.penzeys.com/cook/themes/one-for-the-road-to-november-25th-2021/cathy-mejia/> An article on her ancestors is in this Newsletter. We are happy to receive these family stories and photos.
- Bukovinafest 2022 reservations: No-cost, no-obligation advance reservations can be made by email to: [bukofest-2022@bukovinasociety.org](mailto:bukofest-2022@bukovinasociety.org) Information on the Society website.
- Doug Reckmann chaired a special committee with Guy Windholz to increase membership and promote interest in Bukovinafest 22. He sorted through all emails ever associated with the BSA into three categories and sent them an email. The response has been very good. It is nice to see some familiar names again as part of the Society.
- Helmut Schmeller, 89, of Manhattan, Kansas, passed away on November 10, 2021. Born in Bärnau, Germany, and growing up during the Second World War had a profound impact on his life and career as a German Historian. After teaching for several years at the Amberg American Elementary School for US Forces in Erlangen, Germany he emigrated to the United States. He received his Ph.D. from Kansas State University and had a long career at Fort Hays State University. He was a frequent contributor of time and talent to the Bukovina Society.

## DEAR GERMAN-BOHEMIAN DESCENDANTS

We hope that you have made it through 2021 healthy so far and that you will continue to be on the safe side of life with your family despite the still rampant corona pandemic.

We wish you and your families a peaceful rest of Advent, a merry Christmas and good luck, success, satisfaction and above all health for the year 2022.

For known reasons, we had to postpone the meeting of the descendants from Bukovina twice. Now we hope that the fight against the corona pandemic will bear fruit and that the willingness to vaccinate will continue to increase so that the number of infections will decrease significantly. We wish that we can meet you on May 28, 2022 in Julbach in front of the Maria-Wald-Kapelle and afterwards in the Inntalhof in Kirchdorf am Inn. Further interested German-Bohemian descendants are very welcome. So we really hope that the meeting can take place next year! As soon as the course of the pandemic becomes foreseeable, we will send you all a detailed invitation.

In the meantime it has been more than 80 years since our ancestors from Bukovina answered the call "home in the empire" during World War II. By settling in Poland in Eastern Upper Silesia and in the Warthegau, they hoped for a new, better life. About two and a half years later they had to flee from their assigned Polish farms before the Soviet front. They came as refugees to central, western and southern Germany and Austria under the most difficult of conditions. Only then, after initial adversity, could they build their new home in Austria, the FRG and the GDR and help ensure that we can now live in peace for over 77 years.

The cohesion of the refugee German-Bohemian population has not been broken to this day. Hopefully we can come together for the 34th meeting in Lower Bavaria in May 2022 and use this opportunity to remember the inauguration of the Maria



Support continues for the renovation project of the BSA headquarters/museum and community center. The entry way was completed thanks to donated equipment and new floor tiles with installation donated by museum volunteer Guy Windholz. Bids have been received for restoring the pressed metal ceiling and walls in the main room. In addition to the generous donations from members, grants are being submitted for additional funding.

Wald Chapel in 1991.

To this day, we are repeatedly contacted by descendants of the former resettlers from Bukovina. Questions about the German-Bohemian roots and family histories keep coming up. Hence our advice to everyone: ask the living witnesses for as long as possible and write down what you hear. That's how we started and today we are happy that we were able to record the story (s) of our ancestors in books and brochures. We thank all contemporary witnesses who gave us their time and shared their memories with us. We look forward to seeing you again or getting to know each other: hopefully.

Best regards, Irmtraut and Adolf Schaper

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## MRS. GASCHLER'S LIFE FROM 1934 TO 1951

Translated from video interview

By: Becky Hageman and Anni and Klaus Häusler

Installment #1 - Leaving Fürstenthal

I was born in 1934 in Fürstenthal in Bukovina in Romania. My ancestors were glassblowers and they all come from Bohemia. In the past they belonged to Austria-Hungary. In 1802 the whole glassworks in Bohemia was dissolved. Unfortunately, I do not remember the name of this village in Bohemia. The Empress Maria Theresa of Austria assigned land to our ancestors in Bukovina, on which they were allowed to settle.

I grew up in a home where people were poor but still had the necessities of life.

There was also a glassworks, but it was discontinued because it

was no longer viable. People then found work in the sawmill or in the forests. They often stayed there for a week to cut wood. I remember that the landscape was very beautiful, with green slopes and forest-covered mountains, the foothills of the Carpathians. We had a beautiful childhood.

I went there twice many, many years ago. When I got to the yard, I immediately noticed the hand pump, which brought tears to my eyes. People used to have all summer kitchens in Romania or in Fürstenthal. They cooked food outside in the annex in the summer. In large cauldrons, for example, plum jam was boiled down.

What I still remember: the winters. We went sledding. For me, these mountains were giant mountains, but they weren't mountains at all, they were small hills.

Today I am still afraid when I see wolves. My father also used to say that when he went out in the winter evenings, the wolves would come right up to the village, looking for food. It was very, very cold. I can still hear this howling of wolves today. I was so afraid and then always crawled into bed with my father. If I see another wolf in Germany today, I panic. This is terrible for me.

I must have been a very lively child and played ring-around-the-rosy with other children in the street, always sang and took care of other small children. Why? No one knows. But it was like that.

I can still remember our beautiful garden, which was huge and ended at the bottom of a small stream. On the other side lived my Aunt Luck - Kathi. Whenever I wanted to visit them, I had to cross a small footbridge. I can't remember how many times I stumbled down there. I like to remember my grandpa Julius, who came from a farm. We often stayed with him as children.

Fürstenthal is about 80 km away from Czernowitz, our capital. I remember that etiquette was very important for the people of Fürstenthal. Even though they were poor, French was held in very high regard. The tables were beautifully set. There was little, but always hospitality was always very important. Everyone who came to our house -everyone- no matter who it was was received as if he was a king.

When I was in Romania again years ago, I had a realization. I was walking along the village street and all of a sudden I saw the stream coming directly from the Carpathians and the footbridge, which was repeatedly swept away by high water. On a hill stood a white building. This was the church I went to with my grandmother every Sunday. I walked in there and had this feeling: you know this. It was really so familiar. That's right, I think about it so often that it seemed very, very familiar to me.

In 1938/39 a student - I know it from stories - came from Munich, who chose the village Fürstenthal to write his doctoral thesis about the village. But, when then already the war came closer and closer, he went back to Germany.



Then an administrator came from the Reich, went from farm to farm, and all at once began to record all the estates and property. Indeed, we were told that we were to be resettled in the German Reich as a result of the war. Hitler wanted to bring all the Germans, whether they were from Ukraine, Russia, Romania or Bessarabia, back to Germany. He wanted to settle Poland. The Poles were driven out and the Germans should now be settled there. He had conquered it all.

People were free to stay there. But the German language was suddenly no longer desired. The German schools were closed. In Radautz, a small town maybe 10 km away from us, there lived, I think, 12 to 13 different denominations, all of which got along well, and suddenly it was over. Among other things, my father was friends with several Jewish families. I can remember standing in the kitchen when a man, a friend of my father's whose name I can't remember, came in. He said: "Josef Steffi, I want to say goodbye to you, the war is coming closer. We are no longer wanted. I'm going home, to Palestine." Only today do I know what that meant. Many then left. My father still said: "Stay here," "No," he said. "I'm leaving."

Then my parents and the entire population were given the choice of staying or leaving. My father did not want to stay there at first, but there were several more families who wanted to stay. My mother just said, "None of my family wants to stay here. Everyone wants to go home to the kingdom, to the promised land." That's why my father decided to leave, too.

Everything was recorded. All the assets were written down and a thick folder was given to them, and that was the end of the matter. After that, all the transports were organized by train. We were on the last transport because my father still could not decide to leave home. We went by train for hours through the forest and there I saw a wolf. I have not forgotten that to this day. I hated these beasts like anything else and then there was one. I was still so horrified and just thought that this isn't real.

When we arrived in Neu-Ulm we were welcomed with music. People were standing on the platform. Doors and windows were opened and people cheered us. I was the first to get German money and a teddy bear from the whole team. Then we were taken to the camp in Neu Ulm. We were given a

room where bunk beds were set up. That was our place to stay for the next few weeks. I don't remember how long we were boarded there. My father looked for work at the Mutschler furniture store in Neu Ulm. I remember events in the camp. We were quite pampered, my mother told me. In 1942 my brother Erich was born there. Then we were told that we could stay there.

Many of our relatives stayed in Allgäu. But because my mother's whole family went to Poland, she didn't want to stay there (Neu Ulm). So we came to Poland.

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## TRIFFO EMIGRATION TO AMERICA

By: Traci Parker

"They wanted to move to America for a chance at a better life." That's what Cathy Mejia of Kalamazoo, Michigan, knows about her great-grandparents' decision to leave Austria. So in 1910, following two of their sons who made the trip a few years earlier, Magdalena and Anton Triffo sold all of their possessions, with the exception of their house, and set sail for Ellis Island. That was just the beginning of what turned into a two-year journey for Cathy's grandmother, Johanna, who was just 10 years old at the time. She recalls the stories her grandmother told about their trip.

"The trip across the Atlantic seemed very long to her, and they all slept and ate together in one big room. Three days into the trip they were all confined to the room as they traveled through the edge of a hurricane." Upon their arrival at Ellis Island, their hopes for a new life in America were quickly dashed after confusion arose surrounding their sponsorship.

"Ellis Island officials sent a telegram to Grandma's brothers, who were living in the Chicago area, asking if they sponsored the family. Apparently they didn't understand they both had to sign the telegram, so only one of them did."

Immigration officials accused Johanna's father of lying about having sponsorship. Language barriers made it difficult for the family to explain their situation, but eventually they were able to make an appeal to President Howard Taft. As they waited for a reply to their appeal, the Triffo family spent a tense week living on Ellis Island. "The family was separated, and they were called by nationality to the sleeping quarters every night, where they had to fight for a bed to sleep in," says Cathy. Their request was ultimately denied, and they were deported to Austria. Luckily, the only possession they hadn't sold was their house.

"It took two more years for the brothers to save money for passage," says Cathy. "On July 9, 1912, they boarded the Vulturina in Rotterdam and sailed to Halifax, Canada. My grandma remembers this ship having much better quarters and food. They went by train to Montreal and on to Chicago where her brother Joe met them at Union Station."

The family continued on to Naperville, Illinois, where Joe and

Jake were boarding with a family that came from their same village in Austria.

Cathy still enjoys listening to audio tapes her grandmother recorded over the years. “Grandma said on the tape that there was a huge meal on the table waiting for them when they got to the house in Naperville. She said, ‘I can still see all the food—we kids thought white bread was cake. What a celebration we had!’ “My grandma was 12 when she started working for a family keeping house, cleaning and cooking,” says Cathy. “She has a plate, that I now have, that the lady gave her in appreciation of her hard work—one of her first, and prized, possessions.” In 1916 the family relocated to Detroit in hopes of finding better work opportunities. “That’s where my grandma met my grandpa—he had emigrated with his family from the Alsace-Lorraine province in France.

Cathy says her own mom was amazed when she and her husband Paul got married and ended up in Naperville. “It was the first city where my grandmother lived. It’s like we were coming full circle.” Cathy has fond childhood memories of spending time with her Grandma Jo. “My brother and I would spend a week during the summer with Grandma Jo and Grandpa Al. I loved these weeks because we played lots of games and I helped her with meal preparation as well as clean up.”

Cathy says her grandmother was a fantastic cook. “For her, a great meal was all about family gathering to share good food,

good conversation and laughter.” Cathy’s grandmother had written down some of her recipes, “which was amazing since she taught herself to read and write English.

“I’ll always remember her nut bread—scrumptious! And her cabbage rolls are legend,” says Cathy. “She served them with plain vinegar or with a tomato sauce. My 87-year-old uncle still makes these today. Two years ago, my husband and I made the trip to Toledo with my niece so we could make cabbage rolls with my aunt, uncle and cousin.”

Cathy says after cutting back on cooking a bit while she worked full time, she is back to cooking from scratch a lot more often. “I have raided my grandma’s recipe box! One recipe, meatloaf, was not written down but was taught to me by Mom who learned it from my grandma.”

Cathy says she has modified it a bit to accommodate her husband’s low sodium diet. She reaches for salt-free seasonings and has swapped out the ground beef for ground turkey—making it appropriate to share in honor of Thanksgiving. “I like to think my grandma and my mom would approve,” says Cathy.

“I have wonderful memories of holidays spent at my grandma’s table,” says Cathy. “I am so grateful for the journey my grandmother made and how she valued family, faith, friends and how food was a connection to all of them.”