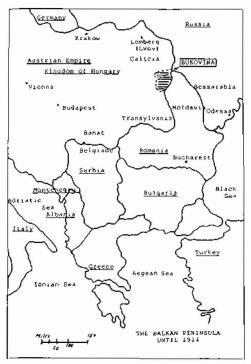
# THE GERMAN BOHEMIAN CULTURE AND LINGUISTIC HERITAGE OF THE CATHOLIC BUCOVINIANS IN ELLIS, KANSAS

## by Gabriele Lunte

Beginning in the 1880s a number of German speaking immigrants from the Austrian settlements in Bucovina began settling in west central Kansas. There they settled in Ellis, Trego, and Rooks counties with the town of Ellis as the center. The town of Ellis lies on the Union Pacific Railway line and used to be a stop where locomotives were repaired.

Bucovina which in English means the land of beech trees is located on the eastern rim of the Carpathians and owes its name to the extensive forests of beech trees in the hilly country of northeast Bucovina. This region has been a part of several different countries. Today the northern part of Bucovina with the former capital Czernowitz belongs to the Ukraine, whereas the southern section is part of Romania.



Balkan Peninsula until 1914

In the 1870s this region was one of the most densely populated areas in that part of Europe. There were also a number of economic hardships, such as the closing down of the glass and timber industries. In addition there was a scarcity of land, caused by the rule of primogeniture, by which the first-born inherited property. This combination of factors forced many Germans in Bucovina to consider emigrating.

Land agents from the United States distributed flyers promoting the opportunities for those who would come to America. Some Germans in Bucovina also had friends or relatives who had emigrated many years before. Lured by the flyers, word from friends and relatives, and the possibility for employment by the Kansas Pacific Railroad, they decided to leave Bucovina and seek a new life on the Great Plains.

The first substantial emigration wave from Bucovina to the American Great Plains (Nebraska, Colorado, Kansas) occurred in the 1880s, followed by a second wave some twenty years later in the middle of the first decade of the twentieth century (1905).

The immigrants to west central Kansas call themselves either Swabian or Bohemian Germans. They came from Bucovina, but did not originate there. The Swabians came from southwest Germany, whereas the German Bohemians came from western Bohemia. They were commonly referred to as Austrians in their new country, as well as in their old country, Bucovina, because they had settled in Bucovina under the Austro-Hungarian Empire (i.e., the Hapsburg Empire, 1775-1918) beginning in the late eighteenth century. The Swabians, who were Lutherans, came from villages such as Illischestije, Tereblestie, and Alt-Fratautz in Bucovina, while the Catholic German Bohemians, who were fewer in number, came from Karlsberg, Fürstenthal, and Buchenhain (i.e., Poiana Micului) to Kansas.

Although both groups must have had close ties since they were referred to as Austrians in Bucovina and traveled together when emigrating to America from Bucovina via Germany, they went different ways in the new country. Most of them initially engaged in farming. Single people, who did not have land, worked for the Kansas Pacific Railroad Company to get money to buy crops and/or land via the Homestead Act.

The Lutheran Swabians, who settled north of the city of Ellis, usually stayed on their land. The church was the center of their social life. The Catholic German Bohemians, on the other hand, who settled south of Ellis, integrated quickly into the ethnically diverse Catholic community in Ellis. For the first thirty years of settlement in Ellis there was no transportation and hardly any interaction between the different ethnic German communities. For most people it was a big chore to go the 12 miles to Hays to conduct business. They were mostly tolerant of each other. But nevertheless, only recently have intermarriages taken place. There were incidents of sports rivalries and fights at dances, even up to the 1960s.

Like the Volga German settlers in eastern Ellis County, the Catholic German Bohemians and the Lutheran Swabians persisted in keeping their customs and speaking German. But because of World War I the effort to retain their identity through their language began to weaken. The German language was banned from schools, people got rid of German books, and department stores, where often one of the requirements for hiring someone was the active knowledge of German, hung up signs prohibiting the use of German. Speaking German in public was discouraged. Because of the anti-German sentiment parents stopped teaching their children their dialect. This trend worsened during and after World War II. In 1946 the church ended German services. However, fluency in both dialects prevailed among some second generation Bucovina Germans in Kansas, because a parent or both parents could not speak English and the children had to use their dialect. These people preserved their dialect mainly by visiting one another, especially at church functions, weddings, baptisms and funerals. The younger generation retains hardly any dialect knowledge; some understand it, but cannot speak it.

Even with the gradual cultural, as well as linguistic acculturation to the English-speaking environment some Catholic and Lutheran Bucovinians still hold onto their identity by maintaining customs ranging from family functions to farming. In addition to the traditional wedding march, it is still a custom with some to sing a wedding song in German to praise God and the bride. However, the remembrance of other traditions, such as singing of wedding songs by a group of men at a wedding, the baptism by Christian names, the blessing of baskets full of eggs in church at Easter, and even toasts for drinking, has vanished.<sup>2</sup>

Vivid memories linger on, especially those of Christmas customs. Some people remember a special room in the house being set aside for Christmas and that no one was allowed to use it until then. Parents threatened their children with *Belzenickel* on Christmas if children had not been obedient throughout the year. *Belzenickel* was a mean person and accompanied the *Christkindl* (Christ child) as he delivered gifts to the children.

Bertha Honas Flax, a Catholic Bohemian, reminisces about a childhood incident. One morning she compared her sister's long fingernails with those of the devil. Her father overheard the conversation and threatened her with Belzenickel. When Christmas came she thought he had forgotten all about it, but he had not. So she received her punishment from Belzenickel.<sup>3</sup>

Since farming is an important part of their lives some people still bless their crops by sprinkling them with holy water. According to Bertha Honas Flax, holy water and candles are used to pray in bad weather. She puts some holy water into her hand and sprinkles it all around her while praying. She also remembers her mother saying a prayer called Ansprechen (prayer of request) in bad weather, during which her children were not supposed to disturb her.<sup>4</sup>

Songs for all occasions have been handed down through the generations and are remembered by some people. In addition to songs like the wedding song or

the song of the holy three kings at the beginning of a new year, there are some that praise the homeland and their heritage. Oren Windholz in his book *The Erberts* shows such lyrics in songs about the village Poiana Micului and the Bohemian Forest.<sup>5</sup>

#### Altes Hochzeitslied

Sing mit fröhlichem Gemüte Bräutigam mit deiner Braut Die dir heute Gottes Güte Zur Gehilfin anvertraut

Daß sie dich in Angst und Plagen Trösten soll in dieser Welt Und die Bürde mit dir tragen Welche dir beschwerlich fällt.

Tretet fröhlich zum Altare Betet Gott mit Ehrfurcht an, Dessen Güte viele Jahre Euch gesund erhalten kann.

Bittet Jesum um den Segen Ladet Ihn zur Hochzeit ein Denn daran ist es gelegen Wenn ihr wollet glücklich sein.

Reicht einander Hand und Herzen Redlich ohne Heuchelei, Trachtet daß in Freud' und Schmerzen, Eure Treue standhaft sei.

Immer soll die Liebe brennen, Nach dem göttlichen Gebot Niemand soll die Ehe trennen, Niemand als allein der Tod.

### Wedding Song

Sing with joyful exultation Happy bridegroom with your bride. Whom today God's loving kindness Placed as helpinate at your side.

That in all your trials and struggles, She may ever your comfort be And in patience share your burden Which along you could not bear.

Prayfully approach the Altar, Rev'rently adore your God; Whose kind providence and goodness Can give health for many years.

Beg your Savior for His blessings, Him as wedding guest invite, For good luck and future progress, Ever on it do rely.

Join together hand and heart, Live faithfully without deceit, Strive that through joy and sorrow, You may always loyal be.

Forever may your love be true, Like unto Divine command. May nothing ever separate you, No one except death along.<sup>6</sup>

#### Buchenland-Heimatlied

Traute Welt der gold'nen Ähren, Wälder, Fluren wunderbar, Über Wipfeln schneebedeekt, Wacht des Himmels Sternenschar Das ist am Karpartenrand Gottes grünes Buchenland.

In den Bergen, in den Hütten, Bunter Stämme Liebe webt Und der Deutsche schlicht inmitten

Als ein wahrer Bruder lebt. Deutscher Geist durch deutsches Wort

Ist der beste Friedenshort.

Dräuet Sturm und Ungewitter Wankt der Damm in finst'rer Nacht, Hält im grünen Land der Buchen Deutsche Treu die Feuerwacht Wo der Pflug die Scholle sucht, Folgen heilig Recht und Zucht.

#### The Bucovina Homeland

Familiar area of golden corn, Wonderful forests and meadows, Over snowcovered treetops, Heaven's band of stars are watching This is on the edge of the Carpathians God's green land of beech trees.

In the mountains, in the little houses, The love of different tribes is weaving And the German lives simply among them

As a true brother.

The German spirit through a German word

Is the best refuge for peace.

When storms and bad weather rise, When the dam sways deep at night, In the green land of beech trees German loyalty is on guard for fire Where the plow is looking for the soil, Holy rule and order follow.<sup>7</sup>

One aspect of Bucovinian culture that has been well preserved is food and cooking. Famous foods include *Hemetschwengers* (apple-filled pastry) and *Halushkis* (pigs in a blanket).<sup>8</sup>

## Hemetschwengers

1 cup heavy whipping cream

1 cup (2 sticks) butter softened

2 1/2 cups flour

4 to 5 tart apples (peeled and finely chopped)

Mix cream and butter by hand until blended. Add flour and mix until ball forms. This dough is similar to pie dough, so do not overwork it. Roll dough out 1/2 ball at a time on floured surface. Cut into squares. Put small amount of chopped apple in the center, and sprinkle on a little sugar. Bring four sides together in center and pinch shut. The *Hemetschwengers* may be frozen at this point. Bake at 350° for 25 to 30 minutes. While warm, roll in mixture of sugar and cinnamon. If they have been frozen, do not thaw them before baking.

Linguistically we have to differentiate the two groups of Bucovina Germans, the Lutheran Swabians, who speak a Palatinate type of dialect from southwest Germany, and the Catholic German Bohemians, whose dialect derives from the area of the Bohemian Forest in the western part of the former Austro-Hungarian Empire. This dialect mainly shows features of Central Bavarian with an interference of North Bavarian characteristics and borrowings from Czech.

There is a great concern that the Catholic German Bohemian dialect is dying out with the older generation because the dialect is not entrenched among the young people at all, and language loyalty is rapidly vanishing among Bucovina German-Americans. For this reason, and to show its unique characteristics a number of examples of sentences, words, and free speech are included. The following examples are based on interviews with informants whose parents were born in Poiana Micului and who evidence a certain degree of fluency in their dialect. Both informants have knowledge of Standard German. The Standard German and English equivalents are also included. The orthography is based on the recommendation for orthographic renderings of dialect texts in the Palatinate dialect by Rudolf Post in his book Pfälzisch: Einführung in eine Sprachlandschaft?

The first four of the five sentences that serve as examples are taken from the Wenker test sentences for German dialect research. The forty original Wenker sentences developed by Georg Wenker in 1876 were used as the basis for the Deutscher Sprachatlas, which is a collection of data on the German dialects at the University of Marburg.

# 1) Wenker sentence No. 5

English: He died four or six weeks ago.

Standard German: Er ist vor vier oder sechs Wochen gestorben.
German Bohemian: Er is g'storhm vier or sechs Woche zuruck.

The sentence structure is influenced by English while Standard German uses a prepositional phrase. The plural -n- for Woche (=week) has disappeared. The unstressed vowel -e- of the -ge- prefix in the participle g'storbm (=died) adapts to the following sound and is reduced to a -g-. This is a typical feature in Bavarian, whereas the sound is kept in Standard German.

# 2) Wenker sentence No. 6

English: The fire was too strong. The cakes are burnt black on

the bottom.

Standard German: Das Feuer war zu stark. Die Kuchen sind unten ganz

schwarz gebrannt.

German Bohemian: S' Feier is zu stork. Dr Kaik is schworz brennt inter se.

The singular is used for the plural form of Kuchen (=cake). The word is a loan word from English. The participle brennt shows leveling and the -ge- prefix is

omitted completely. This is typical for Bavarian as well as the pronunciation of a- as -o- like in stork (=strong) and schworz (=black), and the use of -ei- for -eu-as in Feier for Feuer (=fire). The phrase inter se is a Bavarian rendition of the Standard German unten (=on the bottom).

3) Wenker sentence No. 7

English: He always eats eggs without salt and pepper. Standard German: Er illt die Eier immer ohne Salz und Pfeffer.

German Bohemian; Er toat die Ojer essu mitaus/mitoane Solz und Pfeffer.

German Bohemian uses the verb toan (=to do) as an auxiliary with the verb essn (=to eat). The Middle High German -ei- in Standard German Eier (=eggs) is realized as -o- in the beginning of the word Ojer. The preposition mitaus is a loan translation from the English without whereas the preposition mitoane is a blending of the English preposition with and the German preposition ohne. The sound combinations of -oa- (as in mitoane), as well as -ua-, -ia-, and -ea- parallel the Bavarian diphthongization of those vowels which leads to a stretching of the vowels.

4) Wenker sentence No. 27

English: Could you all wait a moment for us?

Then we will go with you.

Standard German: Könnt ihr nicht noch einen Augenblick auf uns warten?

Dann gehen wir mit euch.

German Bohemian: Kennts ole woarten a Weil? Aft geh mir mit enk.

The subjunctive form kennts shows an unrounding of the umlaut realized in the Standard German könnt, as well as the contracted form for the second person plural with the -s- marker, typical for Bavarian, whereas Standard German uses the verb form and the personal pronoun, as in könnt ihr (=could you). The expression a Weil is a Bavarian expression and also shows apocope, a typical Bavarian feature which means the final unstressed -e- as in Standard German Weile has disappeared. The personal pronoun euch (=you, 2nd person plural) is realized as enk in German Bohemian. It is an old dual form used as plural and is common in Bavarian usage. The adverb aft, which is distantly related to the English word after, is genuinely Bavarian while Standard German uses nach or dann.

5)

English: I wish I would leave.

Standard German: Ich wünschte, ich würde fortgehen/ginge fort.

German Bohemian: I volt, I tet fuatgeh.

For the auxiliary würden (=would) in the conditional (=general subjunctive) German Bohemian uses a form of toan (=to do) as a subjunctive marker which is also a typical periphrastic form in Bavarian.

The Conjugation of two of the most common verbs:

Standard German haben	English to have	German Bohemian ham
ich habe du hast er/sie hat wir haben ihr habt sie haben	I have you have he/she has we have you have they have	i hon du host er/sie hot mir ham des zwei hats sie/die hamant
seln	to be	sã (~= nasalized)
ich bin du bist er/sie ist wir sind ihr seid sie sind	I am you are he/she is we are you are they are	i bin du bist er/sie is mir hama des zwei hats sie/die ham

In the verb ham (=to have) the first person singular has a zero-ending, the final vowel -e- is missing (=apocope). The first person plural is identical with the infinitive, whereas the third person plural is not, but rather keeps the Middle High German ending -nt-. (sie/die hamant). The second person plural des zwei hats with its final -s- parallels the Bavarian, as a reflex of the old dual ös/enk preserved only in Bavarian.

The verb sa(= to be) with its irregular verb stem as in Standard German exhibits unique forms in the plural. The plural forms hama, hats, hant (we, you, they have) parallel the equivalent forms in northeastern Bavarian, where older forms of the verb to be have been replaced by forms of to have in the plural. The suffix ma in the first person plural is tagged on to the conjugated verb as a reduplication of the pronoun wir which is assimilated to mir/ma when following the labial -m- in ham. The third person plural shows a Middle High German ending -nt- (sie/die hant).

German Bohemian uses a compound form in order to describe past events. This would correspond to the preterite and perfect form in Standard German. The forms are:

	Standard German	English	German Bohemlan
	haben	to have	ham
Simple Past:	ich hatte	I had	i hon khat
Present Perfect:	ich habe gehabt	I have had	
	sein	to be	sä
Simple Past:	ich war	I was	i bin g'ween
Present Perfect:	ich bin gewesen	I have been	J

The Austro-Bavarian origin of the German Bohemian dialect is apparent in the dialect vocabulary. The examples are grouped into semantic categories.

## 1) Cardinal Numbers

English	Standard German	German Bohemlan
one	eins	oans
two	zwei	zwoa
three	drei	drei
four	vier	viare
five	fünf	finfe
six	sechs	sechse
seven	sieben	sieme

The first three cardinal numbers do not have the appearance of the final unstressed vowel -e-, whereas the other numbers show it. The numbers from four onwards end in an unstressed vowel and have a softer sounding pronunciation. The numbers are inflected according to the gender; this feature can also be seen in Bavarian.

# 2) Kin

English	Standard German	German Bohemian
boy	Junge	bua
Grandmother	Großmutter	nadl, groasmuater
Grandfather	Großvater	nedl, groasfoter
Godfather	Pate	daftet
Godmother	Patin	daftot

aunt Tante basl uncle Onkel feter

cousin Kusin/Kusine geschwisterkind

The words show Central Bavarian origin.

## 3) Days of the Week

English	Standard German	German Bohemian
Monday	Montag	monta
Tuesday	Dienstag	irta/erta
Wednesday	Mittwoch	miatwoch
Thursday	Donnerstag	pfinsta
Friday	Freitag	freita
Saturday	Samstag	somsta
Sunday	Sonntag	sunta

The final -g- in the unstressed syllable is not pronounced in German Bohemian, which parallels the Bavarian usage, as do the days *Tuesday* and *Thursday* that are based on Greek. The word for *Tuesday* (=irta/erta) is taken from the Greek god *Ares* whereas the word for *Thursday* (=pfinsta) is derived from the Greek *pempte hemera*, i.e., the fifth day of the week.

## 4) Food

English	Standard German	German Bohemian
potato	Kartoffel	treapfl
cucumber	Gurke	umurkn
corn	Mais	kukruts
horseradish	Meerrettich	kre, kren
sweet cream	Sahne	schmettn

Loan words from Slavic are not uncommon in German Bohemian in names for food due to the interaction with Czech-speaking residents of Bohemia prior to the settlement in Bucovina.

# 5) Parts of the Body

English	Standard German	German Bohemian
eyelid	Augenlid	augndeckl
neck	Genick	gnack
ankle	Knöchel	knechl
molar	Backenzahn	stockzont

This selection of words is of Austrian-Bavarian origin.

## 6) Illnesses and Blemishes

English	Standard German	German Bohemian
stomachache corn on the toe	Bauchweh Hühnerauge	mognweh henneraug
витр	Beule	binkl

These words parallel Bavarian usage. The same can be noticed for the animals category. In addition, the diminutive ending -l- of the German Bohemian word for gosling (=gansl) is also the diminutive marker in Bavarian. The -er suffix on words like gonserer and anterer seems to be the marker for the masculine gender of a certain noun class.

## Animals

English	Standard German	German Bohemian
Gander	Gänserich	gonserer
gosling	Gänschen	gansl
rooster	Hahn	hona
drake	Enterich	anterer

## 8) Verbs and phrases (idioms)

English	Standard German	German Bohemian
Hurry up!	Beeil' dich!	dummel di!
to catch a cold	sich erkälten	verkiehln, s' kolte kriagn
to yawn	gähnen	s' mal afspreizn
to cackle	gackern	kefn, kraan
to pinch	kneifen	zwicken
to pull weeds	Unkraut jäten	gros ausreißn
to cry	weinen	flennen

All the verbs in this selection are also of Austro-Bavarian origin with dummel di (Austrian: tummeln) and verkiehln (Austrian: sich verkühlen) commonly being Austrian. The expressions sich verkühlen and flennen are also common colloquial German usage.

The following two examples, an anecdote and a recipe, show free speech of the German Bohemian dialect.

## Anecdote (by Martin Flax)

Haman zwei junge g'heirat in Bucovina. Und er hot gern weich'kochte ojer 'gessn. Unt she hot se immer hercht 'kocht 'khat, immer hercht 'kocht. Unt aft woar mol von disch, hat sie's wieder 'kocht 'khat, wieder hercht 'kocht. Hot er g'sacht: No olte, i hon g'sacht i tat die ojer gern weich 'kocht ham. Etst hast es wieder hercht." Und sie hot g'sacht: "Na olter, i weiß net, woas loas is mit de ojer. I hon's zwo stund 'kocht unt hon's net weich 'kriakt."

Two young people got married in Bucovina. The husband loved to eat soft-boiled eggs. And she always boiled hard ones for him. And once they were sitting at the table, she had boiled them hard again. Then he said, "Woman, did I not tell you I would like soft-boiled eggs? You boiled them hard again." She answered, "Man, I do not know what is wrong with the eggs. I boiled them for two hours and could not get them soft."

## Halushki (pigs in a blanket) (by Bertha Honas Flax)

I nimm von hamburger unt aft der schweinesleisch aa. Unt dann der reis; der reis nit kochen. Unt zwiesel, solz unt pfeffer. Unt aa zwei knosele, so pouder tua i eine aa; unt no die krautheipeln. Miß ma bladeln owaschnei, unt die miß ma aft dann warm machen, daß sie net hirch wern, weil sie völ brechen. Unt damit halushkis eiwickeln. Unt dann taan mir's kochen. Sie missen langsam kochen. Das sind about zwo stundn, owa net länger, wenn se langsam kochen, daß sie net verkochen kinnen. Wenn mir se kochen, tuan ma essich ein ins wosser, daß sie net zu sauer wern, ower wenn koa essich drin is, han sie owa au net guat.

I take hamburger and ground pork. Then I take rice that should not be boiled. And onions, salt, and pepper. And also two garlic cloves—I also use garlic salt—And then the cabbage heads—you have to cut off the leaves. They have to be warmed up, but not heated, because they often split. And then wrap the meat inside the cabbage leaves. And then they are cooked. They have to cook slowly, for about two hours, but no longer, so that they are not overcooked. While cooking them you put vinegar in the water, but so that they do not get too sour, but, if you do not add vinegar, they are not good either.

These examples indicate that the German Bohemian dialect shows features, that can sometimes generally be attributed to all Bavarian dialects. However, the features are mainly associated with Central Bavarian, but also show reflexes of the Central/North Bavarian interference zone. It has borrowings from Slavic in names for food which was probably due to the geographical proximity to the Czech-speaking area of Bohemia prior to settlement in Bucovina. Interferences

with English have been an inevitable factor for the German Bohemians in Ellis County, partly because of the topographical and climatic differences between the New World and Bucovina where their parents had emigrated from. It looks, though that the mixed dialects that the emigrants used in Bucovina accompanied them to their new settlement in Ellis, Kansas, and lingered for several generations.<sup>11</sup>

### Acknowledgement

I would like to express my appreciation to the Bukovina Society of the Americas in Ellis, Kansas, and especially to Bertha Honas Flax, Martin Flax, Ethel Haneke, Ralph Burns, and Oren Windholz, without whose contributions this article could have never been written.



Memorial honoring Bucovina settlers in Ellis, Kansas.

#### NOTES

- 1. While many people who write about Bucovina use the spelling of the -k- in the word Bukovina, I decided to follow the English spelling with a -c-. The historical background presented here is based on an interview with Bertha Honas Flax, Martin Flax, Ethel Haneke, Ralph Burns, and Oren Windholz in Ellis, Kansas in September 1993.
- 2. Martin Flax, a Catholic Bohemian, can tell much about the toasts. The person with a glass of Schnaps in his or her hand says: "So ist's Leben" (such is life), and the person who is being toasted says: "Trink g'sund" (Drink healthily).
- 3. Bertha Honas Flax could not remember the punishment.
- 4. Interview with Bertha Flax, Ellis, Kansas, September 2, 1993.
- 5. Oren Windholz. "The Erberts: A German Catholie Family in Austria, from Bohemia, through Bukovina, to America." (Hays, KS, n.d.), 25, 54.
- 6. Courtesy of the Bukovina Society of the Americas, Ellis, Kansas.
- 7. Lyrics by Heinrich Kipper who was a well-known author from the Bucovina. Courtesy of the Bukovina Society of the Americas, Ellis, Kansas. Translated by Gabriele Lunte.
- 8. Courtesy of the Bukovina Society of the Americas. From the BULLetin, a month newsletter published by the Society, Newsletter No. 7, Winter 1992.
- Rudolf Post, Pfälzisch: Einführung in eine Sprachlandschaft (Pfälzische Verlagsanstalt, 1990).
- 10. Each example includes the English translation, the same in Standard German, and finally the German Bohemia version recorded in interviews in Ellis, Kansas.
- 11. In 1988 the Catholic German Bohemians and the Lutheran Swabians formed the Bukovina Society of the Americas to promote recognition of the Bucovina German people and preserve their heritage. In memory of the Bucovina people that came to Kansas the society created a memorial to the Bucovina settlers in the city park at Ellis. The memorial slows the slopes of the Carpathian Mountains and its inscription includes a tribute to the settlers. The memorial was dedicated at the Fifth Bukovinafest in July 1993.
- 12. The Bukovina Society Headquarters in Ellis, Kansas. Courtesy of *The Bukovina Society of the Americas*.