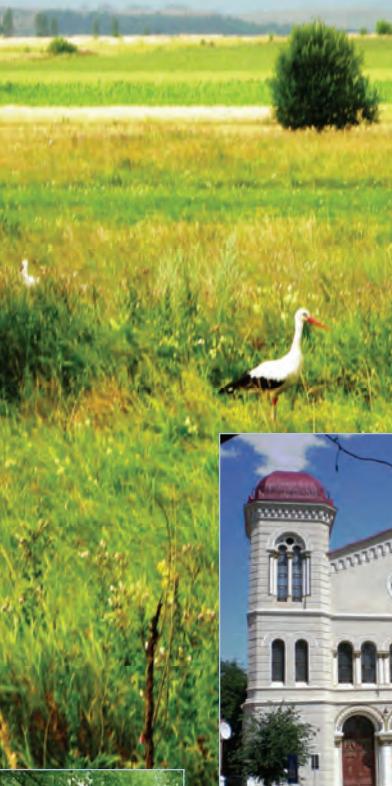




Merle Kastner
My Kastner and Nathanson
'Roots' Trip to
Bucovina and Moldavia in
July, 2012



My Kastner and Nathanson 'Roots' Trip to Bucovina and Moldavia, July, 2012:



Towns in Bucovina and Moldavia, referred to in this account and distances that we covered:

The first two days:

Suceava to Radauti is 36.1 km
Radauti to Frătăuții Vechi is 7.1 km
Frătăuții Vechi to Sucevița Monastery is 25.4 km
Sucevița Monastery to Marginea is 10.7 km
Marginea to Suceava is 41.6 km

The third day:

Suceava to Falticeni is 24.7 km
From Falticeni to Piatra Neamț is 77.6 km
From Piatra Neamț to Negulești is: 149.9 km
Negulești to Suceava is 211.6 km

The fourth and last day:

Suceava to Chernivtski/Czernowitz, Ukraine is 82.4km

What and where is Bucovina – a brief history:



Bucovina meaning 'the Land of the Beech Trees', (a little smaller than the state of Connecticut, USA) was formerly an independent crown land in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. There was a large and thriving Jewish population in Bucovina. Jews were heavily represented in the crafts, the learned professions and in government. Jews lived in many towns in Bucovina, ranging from a metropolis such as Czernowitz, to many tiny shtetls¹.

Already oppressed by the January 1938 decree reconsidering their citizenship, Bucovina's Jews became the direct target of persecution. Between June 28, 1940 and July 5, 1941, Northern Bukovina, including Czernowitz, was under Soviet rule, as a result of the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The deportation of the 3,500 people to Siberia was effected by the Soviets prior to the advancing Romanian/German occupation of Northern Bukovina. Jews in the rest of Bucovina were subjected to a set of discriminatory measures, particularly after General Ion Antonescu came to power in September 1940. 3,500 people were deported to Siberia in June 1941.

¹ A *shtetl* (Yiddish: שְׁטֵתֶל, diminutive form of Yiddish *shtot* עַשְׂתָּה, "town").

The reoccupation of northern Bucovina by Romanian and German armies after 22 June 1941 was accompanied by a series of massacres, resulting in approximately 15,000 deaths. In October of that year, the Romanian government ordered all Jews from Bucovina to be deported to Transnistria and the simultaneous establishment of a ghetto in Cernăuți. By the summer of 1942 almost 90,000 persons had been transported under terrible conditions to the ghettos and camps of Transnistria².

After World War II, northern Bukovina was annexed by the Soviet Union and ceased to exist. The northern portion became the Chernivetska oblast of the Ukraine and the southern portion became the Suceava Județe (county) of Romania. In 1971, there were still about 290 old Jewish Bucovinian families in Cernăuți and Jewish life was maintained to a limited degree.

First stop - The Paris Conference:

I arrived at the IAJGS Conference (International Association of Jewish Genealogical Societies) early Sunday morning, and at the conference hotel, the Marriott Rive Gauche at 11am.

In addition to the usual events that I attend annually, here are the highlights (for me):

At 2pm, the conference SIG/BOF (Special Interest Group, 'Birds of a Feather') Fair began and I, along with two others (John Diener from Ottawa and Hymie London from Montreal), parked ourselves at the Canadian table. I had brought handouts and we had two laptops for 'lookups' for those who came to our table. This ended at 4pm, when we had to vacate the room so that the caterer could prepare for the Presidents' Reception at 5pm. As designated representative of the Montreal group, I attended this lovely buffet dinner, where interesting exchanges took place with international friends, all with common interests. After 19 years of doing serious genealogy, many long distance relationships and mutual projects have developed, with numerous discussions throughout the year, continued at conferences.

That evening, several of us went to dinner at "R'Yves", the excellent restaurant in the hotel and then retired for the evening. As I had already eaten at the President's Reception, I was happy to sit with them and enjoy the conversation.



² Bukovina Jews were deported to Transnistria, acknowledged by Yad Vashem as an infamous concentration camp.

In advance of the conference, I had organized a Canadian 'BOF' ("Birds of a Feather") group as I do every year. Scheduled for Monday morning, this attracted 30 people - Canadians, Americans, Europeans, South Americans, Israelis - all of whom with an interest in researching Canadian roots or searching for relatives.

Later that day, I attended the lecture of my friend, Jeff Miller (JGS of Greater Washington), who spoke on "Following False Trails: Back to First Principles". This was the first time that Jeff had presented at a conference, so I wanted to encourage him. His talk was so impressive that I asked him to do it for our Montreal group next spring, using skype and possibly creating a 'webinar' as well.

In spite of the busy conference schedule, I did manage to get out of the conference hotel on a couple of occasions. Previous to the conference, I had signed up for a walking tour of "Le Marais" - old Jewish quarter of Paris, still very vibrant - which took place that afternoon. It turned out to be a 3-hour tour and a very rewarding one in spite of the hot sun and high temperatures of the day.

While at the conference, there were a great many sobering references to and commemorations of the 70th anniversary of the horrible 'Vel d'Hiv' (Velodrome d'Hiver) roundup by Paris police of some 13,000 Jews over a two day period - July 16-17, 1942 - before being bused to the infamous French camp at Drancy and then taken by train to Auschwitz death camp. On the tour, we passed the Holocaust Museum and saw many plaques on walls and in the surrounding streets, attesting to this horrible event.



That evening, 15 of us took the 'Metro' (subway) to have dinner at a kosher Asian restaurant, within walking distance of l'Arc de Triomphe. This was a delicious meal, a most interesting, diverse group of people and good conversation.

The next evening, the arranged 'Bukovinians' Dinner' took place in the hotel restaurant. I had sent out notices on the Czernowitz-Bukovina mailing list for some time before this - 15 people confirmed and attended. Sylvie Gsell arranged a beautiful dinner at an all-inclusive and very good price in the hotel restaurant. One couple, Dr. Cornel & Marsha Fleming, came by train through the 'Chunnel' from London, England, one friend, Mariette Gutherz, took the train from Montpelier, France to attend the dinner, one woman [who was attending



the conference] was from Israel, the rest, except for me, were from the Paris area. We began the evening at 7:30pm and at 11pm, people were still lingering, not wanting to leave - a great success!



The following day, the annual Bukovina BOF (Birds of a Feather meeting) took place as scheduled. 21 very enthusiastic people attended this session which I moderated, translated into French, sentence by sentence, by my good friend, Sylvie Gsell. I showed a slideshow that my cousin and dear friend, Bruce Reisch (originator, moderator of "Ehpes", the Czernowitz/Bukovina websites and mailing list) had prepared - demonstrating the research resources for the Bukovina area, some of them new. A most successful session!



At the annual Rom-SIG (Romania Special Interest Group) meeting, I again showed this same slideshow for Bukovina researchers. The number of attendees of this group was a large one and there was great interest in this. I had, of course, brought handouts to distribute.

This superb conference surpassed all our expectations. It was unusual in the wide variety of speakers and subjects covered - many of them not heard at previous conferences - 80 countries were represented and there were 850 people in all - a most stimulating international group - an aspect that I particularly enjoyed, and the interesting conversations and material that resulted from it.. I was immensely pleased and felt that it was a great success.

And then on to...Romania:

On Thursday afternoon, Sylvie and I boarded an Air France flight to Bucharest. As there were 2 hours between landing and our connection to Suceava, we had arranged in advance to meet with a good friend to those of us on the Czernowitz mailing list and one who has been incredibly helpful to me (and others) in so many ways - Edgar Hauster - from Romania but living in the Netherlands. Edgar was on a 3-week motorcycle trip across Europe. He met us in the airport restaurant for tea and some great

conversation and then we said our goodbyes.



Sylvie and I then flew to Suceava where we were met by Sebastien "Gigi" Traci, our congenial Suceava-based guide, driver, translator, who drove us to the superb 2-bedroom apartment where we were staying. Suceava is the capital of Judet Suceava in Romania.

Suceava:



After a quick breakfast in our apartment the next morning, Gigi arrived and we drove to see the last remaining synagogue in Suceava, then the Jewish cemetery. The synagogue, built in

1870, is rather small and was locked. In the photos above, notice the front and side views of the synagogue and the small house within the property, behind it (photo on the right). Bet HaKnesset G.H., "Gach" Synagogue on Str. Dimitrie Onciu 7, is richly decorated in the interior with symbolic representations of the Tribes of Israel and views of Jerusalem.



The unmarked Jewish cemetery is on Str. Armeneasca no. 3, was locked, but we were still able to see through the iron gates. It is rather overgrown with grass, but probably quite passable for a hardy researcher, properly attired. A black dog roamed over the tombstones. The Chevra Kadisha³ is rather large and surprisingly well maintained. As my family was primarily from Radautz, Fratautz and surrounding towns, I hadn't planned on searching this cemetery, due to lack of time.

We then went to meet with a friend of Sylvie's cousin, who lives in Suceava – Hany Schorr, an engineer, who still works part-time. We had a coffee together in a lovely outdoor restaurant and then went our respective ways.



Following this, we caught a quick glimpse of the nearby old fort, now being renovated. Suceava is not a pretty city in spite of its being the capital of Suceava Judet (county). Most of the old, attractive buildings were razed long ago to make way for ugly, concrete high rises, built after the WWII, such as one also sees in other cities in Romania. However, as Sylvie pointed out – this provided people with hot and cold running water, indoor plumbing and central heating in the cold winters, none of which they had had before in their houses. The climate in Bukovina and Moldavia is very similar to what we know in Montreal. This must have posed one less adjustment for our ancestors when they emigrated to Canada.

Radautz/ Rădăuți:

We then drove to Radautz, where my grandfather, David Kastner, was born in 1885 (although the year is questionable). We toured the pretty little city of Radautz – the third largest city in Suceava County, population of 22,145 inhabitants).

In 1807, Radautz records showed only 3 Jewish families paying taxes. In 1859, the Jews of Radautz formed their own community. In 1880, there were 3,452 Jews among the 11,162

³ A chevra kadisha (*Khevra kadishah*) (Aramaic: אַרְבָּה שִׁזְׁדָּק, *Hebh'ra Qaddisha* "holy society") is an organization of Jewish men and women who see to it that the bodies of Jews are prepared for burial according to Jewish tradition and are protected from desecration, willful or not, until burial. Jewish cemeteries usually have a building in which this can be done.

inhabitants of Radautz, with a Temple and six official shuls⁴. Before the Holocaust, more than 5,000 Jews lived in Radauti. Those who survived the deportation to Transnistria, immigrated to Israel and then some went on to North or South America. Only a few dozen Jews live in Radauti today.

The trade with the forty villages of the surrounding area, the wood industry and the richly supplied weekly market days brought prosperity to the population. Most members of our extended Kastner family owned lumberyards or were involved in the lumber industry in some way. My great-grandfather, Meyer Moishe Kastner, also owned a tavern and used to curse 'those drunken peasants' who frequented his establishment.

During our visit to Radautz, Sylvie, Gigi and I went to the Jewish cemetery. It is actually in pretty good condition, although needing some grass and weed cutting. Three goats roam the cemetery – these serve as very gentle, harmless live lawnmowers. Our guide Gigi (in advance of our visit) had alerted the caretaker, Mr. Popescu, who lives across the road from the cemetery, as to which burials we were looking for. As we had a comprehensive map of the cemetery and specific locations in it, this made it easy for him to help us, which he did. We gave Mr. Popescu 40 Lei (equivalent to \$10.72 US or Canadian), as he had cleared the graves we wanted to see and escorted us to them.

So, after close to twenty years of family research, I was able to put a stone⁵ on the graves of my great-grandparents- Sheindel Ostfeld Kastner and Mayer Moishe Kastner – my only great-grandparents who never came to Canada. I also wanted to put a stone on the grave of a friend to me and Bruce Reisch - Dorin Frankel. Dorin, the son of two Transnistria survivors, found me and Bruce on the Czernowitz mailing list. As we were searching for family in Radautz where he lived, he took it upon himself to go to the City Archives and photograph vital record after vital record, send the images to us, then put all the information into a concise database as well. This was like receiving manna from heaven! Professional researchers charge considerably for this, but Dorin refused to take any money. An accomplished pianist and piano teacher, his only request was a specific list of sheet music, which both Bruce and I gladly sent him on two separate occasions. As a result of his generous help, I had valuable information with which to plan this trip. I had been looking forward so much to meeting Dorin on this trip, but sadly he passed away suddenly in May, 2011 at the age of 68. Sylvie and I regretfully put stones on his grave together.



⁴ In modern Hebrew a synagogue is called either a בית כנסת *beyt kneset*, meaning "house of assembly"; or *beyt t'fila* (also written as *bet tefilla*), meaning "house of prayer", in Yiddish שול *shul*, from the German for "school," and in Ladino אסנוגה *asesnoga*.

⁵ "Why do we place pebbles on gravestones? An early Midrash *Lekah Tov* (also known as *Pesikta Zutra*) 35:20 relates that each of Jacob's sons took a stone and put it on Rachel's grave to make up Rachel's tomb. Here and elsewhere we learn that by placing stones on the grave one participates in building the tombstone."

http://www.templesanjose.org/JudaismInfo/time/Life_Cycle/pebbles.htm

We then went looking for Cousin Netty Kastner Moses' house. We eventually found it after several tries – just as she told me - on a small street with only 3 houses and no name, opposite the Orthodox Cathedral. Netty, who lives in Montreal, told me that she and her sister Dora shared the room with the big, windowed corner balcony. At the time, it was not painted the pinkish color that it is now. But she said that from the house, you could see the steeple of the church at the end of the street,. She was rather disheartened to see the dilapidated condition of the house. The sign on the side of the building says, "for sale or rent". Her family lived in this house from the time that Netty was three years old (1925), until their deportation to Transnistria in October, 1941.



It was disappointing to me that, after doing many searches in records and in those that I had received from Dorin Frankel, using other research techniques as well over a period of time, I was never able to find the address of the house where my great-grandparents had lived, nor of their business. I did have two other Kastner relatives' addresses, but in both cases, the streets are no longer in existence, having been replaced by large buildings or complexes. Even with the changed street names (first German names, then Romanian names, then Russian ones, then Romanian names again), it was clear that these streets no longer exists. In another case, even with a photograph of a large house and an address (1941), after careful inspection of the area, we agreed that the house is no longer there.

On our only evening spent in Radatz at the charming Hotel Maria, Sylvie and I went walking in the town center and came upon "Paul's Select Restaurant". We heard live music being played inside. The doors were open and we went in. A young waiter greeted us with 'Shalom'. We soon learned that he was the son of the owner, Paul Kiszuk, who came to our table later in the evening and said, "You are Jewish". Surprised, we answered 'yes'. He then told us that his grandfather had been Jewish and that Paul, who had played at many Jewish weddings, would play some Jewish music for us. So we were treated to a delightful medley of "Hava Nagila", "Mazel tov, Mazel tov" and other selections, so familiar to us. The dinner was delicious and we enjoyed the accompanying music - a lovely evening.



The next morning, we met with Mr. Igo Koffler, the president of the small Jewish community in Radautz, at the synagogue. He gave us a guided tour of the synagogue and of the brand new Jewish museum, which was to be inaugurated the following week, just after our departure. (above is a photo of the earlier Choral Synagogue, no longer in use)



During the visit of the Emperor Franz Josef I in Radautz in 1880, a delegation of Jews requested a proper plot of land to build a big synagogue due to the increased number of Jews in the town. The Emperor complied with a large plot of land in the center of the town. The synagogue was built in the style of the great synagogue of Czernowitz, but instead of a round dome, twin towers were built. The *bima*⁶ where the Torah is read is in the center of the synagogue, the women's section on the western gallery. The synagogue was inaugurated on the 18th of August 1883, the birthday of the Emperor. After I returned home, Netty was overjoyed to see photographs of the newly renovated Great Synagogue of Radautz. Her father had been gabbai.⁷

This synagogue was formally rededicated following its renovation (which cost 100,000 Euros, funded by outside interests (North & South American and Israeli), with a ceremony on July 25, 2012 that involved the Mayor of Radauti as well as national and local religious and Jewish communal leaders. The ceremony was followed by a symposium on Jewish life in Radauti and the formal opening of the small Jewish Museum.

Following our inspection of the synagogue and the museum, we walked up and down the street on which the synagogue was located. Sylvie's grandfather had had his furrier business not far away and we found the building, went inside and talked to the two men who were running a business there, but their conversation was rather guarded. They were most likely concerned that Sylvie was making attempts to reclaim this property, confiscated from her grandfather many years before. This reticence is very common in Eastern Europe. Several doors away from this house, we found the house that Netty's family had lived in during her early childhood.



Above, left to right: a view of the Strada 1 Mai, just down from the Great Synagogue of Radautz, Sylvie's grandfather, Reuven/Rubin Reicher's house and the house where Netty Kastner Moses was born.

⁶ A raised platform in a synagogue from which the Torah is read.

⁷ A Gabbai (Hebrew: 'גָבָי') (or sometimes: Shamash שָׁמָשׁ) is a person who assists in the running of a synagogue and ensures that the needs are met, for example the Jewish prayer services run smoothly.

Fratautz Vecchi/ Frătăuții Vechi:

Seven kilometers from Radautz was this most charming, spotlessly clean village. My great-grandmother, Shaindel Ostfeld Kastner was born here as well as several other Kastner and Ostfeld relatives. Netty's older sister Dora was also born in Fratautz. Lacking addresses to search for, we just enjoyed driving through the tiny village, looking at the houses and the lovely porticos over the gates leading to the gardens and houses, the inventive and quite beautiful coverings on the wells outside the houses.



Sucevita and Marginea:

We then drove the seventeen km from Fratautz and arrived in Sucevița, where we toured the magnificent painted monastery, one of several for which Romania is famous. This one, the last built in Bukovina - in 1581, was entirely covered inside and out with images painted using only plant-based colors, which have endured all this time.



Gypsies: We saw young gypsy boys panhandling outside the entrance to this monastery, young gypsy girls sticking their heads and hands through the open windows of the restaurant where we ate the evening before and in Piatra Neamț, a young woman carrying a baby and bottle approached me with a meaningful look. We also saw a few horse-drawn gypsy carts on the roads in various places. But they didn't bother or follow us.

It was lunchtime and Gigi drove us to a beautiful, rustic resort in the hills, where he informed us that Prince Charles had stayed for a week. We ate in a covered, outdoor area of the restaurant with flowers everywhere, choosing typical food for our lunches. Gigi recommended something special and typical of the area – Afinata – a homemade blueberry wine, in which the crushed blueberries sit at the bottom of the small glass. Delicious! The area abounds with berries of all kinds.



On the road back to Suceava, we drove through the small town of Marginea, where we saw potters preparing clay and making the black pottery for which this town is famous. This is all done by hand and with no color added to the naturally black clay. I wanted to bring one or two pieces home with me, but it would have been too difficult, due to their fragility.

Then, back to Suceava. That evening, Sylvie and I, after a walk around the area, had dinner in a restaurant in a nearby park – the Catalan – eating typical Romanian delights on the outdoor, covered terrace. Everything is so cheap in Romania. The bill for the two of us, including wine, came to 56 Lei which was equal to \$15.00 in Canadian or US currency.

Fălticeni:

The day began early – we had a lot of distance to cover. We merely drove through Fălticeni, 24.7 km from Suceava. Entering its outskirts, we saw typical small homes, but the city itself is lined with concrete high rises which are much less attractive. A few of my Natenson/Nathanson relatives came from Fălticeni , as did the husband of my grandfather's older sister Anna Ruth - Chaim Shulem (Harotnachaner) Hart.



Piatra Neamț, Moldavia, Romania:



One thing that Gigi pointed out is that the architecture in Moldavia is slightly different than that of Bukovina and we agreed. This is a beautiful, very large city in the Moldavian region of Romania, at the foot of the Carpathian Mountains and on the banks of the Bistrița River. Jewish settlement in Piatra Neamț dates back as far as the eighteenth century: a wooden synagogue was built in 1766; a burial society existed by 1771, and the cemetery includes tombstones from that period as well.

In 1803, there were 120 Jews living in Piatra Neamț, working mainly in crafts and trade. This increased to 1,760 in 1838; 8,489 in 1907 (approximately half the town's population) – Jewish merchants were active in industry, timber, cattle trading and also banking. In 1941, there were 19 synagogues in Piatra Neamț, one of them a rather modern temple. In 1947, approximately 8,000 Jews remained in Piatra Neamț, but their numbers decreased due to virulent anti-Semitism .

"One destination for Jews leaving Romania was Israel (then Ottoman Palestine) where Romanians founded two of the oldest villages - Rosh Pina and Zikhron Ya'akov. After that were London and Paris. But between 1871 and the outbreak of the First World War in 1914, almost 30 percent of Romanian Jews migrated to Canada and the United States." There was resistance to the huge influx of Romanian Jews at that time.⁸ My own Nathanson family arrived in Canada in June of 1901 and settled in Montreal.

⁸ "Finding Home, In the Footsteps of the Jewish Fusgeyers", Jill Culiner, Sumach Press ISBN 1-894549-40-6, Copyright © 2004 Jill Culiner.

Our first stop was at the synagogues, both situated on a pretty, winding, sloping street, Str. Dr. Dimitrie Ernici. The gate was locked but we were still able to have a good look. In 2003, just 153 Jews were living in the city and one functioning synagogue, The Temple Synagogue, existed. The wooden synagogue, the Ba'al Shem Tov, right next to it, was restored after an eight year effort, and was re-dedicated on Chanukah, December 14, 2009. It has been classified as a historical monument. We then ate our lunch at a very rustic, open-air restaurant in a recreational park in the high hills surrounding the city.



Wikipedia says, “because of its privileged location in the Eastern Carpathian Mountains, Piatra Neamț is considered one of the most picturesque cities in Romania.” The city is surrounded by lakes and mountains, the highest being Mount Pietricica. A cable car (telecabină), which we took, affords a magnificent view of the city and the surrounding lakes. We even saw a lone ski hill leading down from the mountain.

The old cemetery, closed in 1860, is quite hard to find - it is almost hidden behind the large hospital near the center of the city. To his credit, Gigi was determined to find it for us and did so – triumphantly. To get to it, you have to pay the parking attendant to enter the hospital parking area and then find a narrow laneway to go behind the hospital. There is an old, decorative concrete gate surrounding the cemetery.

My most important mission in Piatra Neamț was to see the address where my grandfather and his four siblings were born – at 83 Strada Cuza Voda. I had been informed by the Primaria/City Hall – by email that there have been no houses on this street for nearly 40 years and checking with Google Earth verified this – there are only high rise apartment buildings today. But still, I got out of the car and wanted to stand on the spot where my family had lived before their emigration to Canada in 1901 – and where my great-grandparents and grandfather, Henry (Zvi Hersh) Nathanson returned to visit his family in 1913 – these two pictures show (left) my grandfather and (right), my great-grandparents (S.L. and Basia Nathanson) in front of the house:



Below - three views of the street as it appears today:



Negulești:



We left the city and continued on to Negulești where my great-great-grandfather, Mordecai Menachem Mendel Natenson was born in 1837 as well as one of his first cousins, Sara Natenson, in 1886 – passing through many pretty small towns and villages, all very similar. Negulești was one of the smallest, so small that it is hard to find it on a map. It was like being in a 100-year time warp. Family lore (gleaned from cousins in Israel) says that Mordecai Menachem Mendel managed a vineyard before taking his family to live in Piatra Neamț. This is most likely, as Jews were not allowed to own land in very anti-semitic Romania, but often were employed as property managers for those who did. Later, in Piatra Neamț, the family was in the wine and spirits business and brought their expertise to Canada, allowing them to succeed very nicely here.

We then returned to Suceava. At our request, Gigi took us to the nearby Iulius Mall – a huge, western-style indoor shopping mall, filled with shops of all kinds and some international chain stores - but we were not there to shop. We ate our dinner - a typical, delicious Romanian meal, in the large food court. Interestingly, the plates on which we received our meal choices were white glass, not plastic. A bus took us back to our apartment – 2 stops away – at a cost of less than \$1.00 each.

Czernowitz/Chernivtsi, Ukraine:

People gravitated to Czernowitz - it was the largest, most beautiful city and the capital of Bukovina. The centre of culture - intellectuals, artists, music, theater and Jews comprised 30% of the population. It was known as "the Vienna of Bukovina". The imposing Chernivtsi National University (current name: Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University) has been included in the list of UNESCO World Heritage sites.

In the early 20th century, the 50,000 Jews comprised more than 30% of Czernowitz' population and the city was called "Jerusalem on the river Prut" and "The Vienna of Bukovina". Before WWII, Czernowitz was home to more than 70 synagogues. Today there are only two active synagogues in the city – one which was built in the early 20th century by Chasidics from Sadagora, a suburb of Chernivtsi.

Today 'Czernowitz' is 'Chernivtsi', a Ukrainian provincial capital of 263,000 people who remain proud of its cultured past, its sometimes astonishing architecture and beautiful city

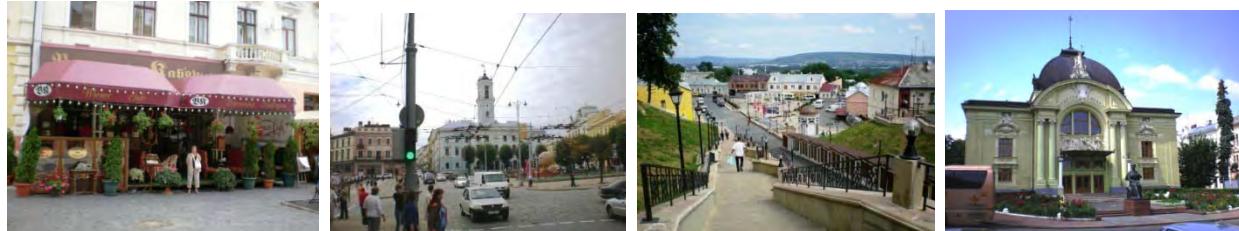
parks. After almost ten years of independence from the Soviet Union, much of it remains neglected, but there is some evidence of reconstruction. There was some renovation for the city's 600-year celebration in 2008, but having been done cheaply, paint and stucco are peeling from a number of buildings. Here and there, buildings are adorned with sculptured commemorative plaques. The Jewish plaques were all erected within the last ten years. They commemorate artists, musicians, poets and writers, of which there were many.

We left Suceava at 8am on the last day of this incredible trip, and drove straight to the Romanian/Ukrainian border. It is well known that crossing this border is a lengthy, irritating process, involving '*baksheesh*'⁹ (bribes) and annoying red tape. Leaving from Ukraine to Romania is even worse – most reports tell of two – five hours' wait to cross.

This morning, the lineup moved at a snail's pace, as we passed through four checkpoints. Finally, one and three-quarter hours later, we entered Ukraine. Gigi drove slowly at a speed of 60 kilometers per hour – apparently police cars hide and suddenly appear with trumped-up contraventions, involving more *baksheesh* and delays. Luckily this didn't happen to us.

We entered the legendary city of Czernowitz, parked the car and began walking down the cobblestone streets – yes, cobblestone streets! The sidewalks are, for the most part, constructed of either bricks or cut stones, laid together.

The first stop was the Herrengasse on which is situated the traditional Vienna Café, dear to the hearts of former Czernowitzers. We passed Turkish street, saw the former Jewish school, walked to the famous Ringplatz, the City Hall, the Hotel Bristol now a dormitory for medical students.



We walked past the former Great Synagogue, now sadly used as a theater and which locals often refer to as 'teatrusynagoga'. A little later, we went to find one of the two synagogues currently in use. Built in 1923, a plaque on the outside wall listed the times of services. The "New Synagogue" (as it is called) is found on Kobylytsia 53, a residential street in the south eastern part of the city centre.



A significant place that we did not have time to visit – for the first time in 70 years, a synagogue was opened in Czernowitz. The Sadovsky Street synagogue, closed by the Soviet Regime, was reopened in time for the High Holidays, 2011 - a Chabad-Lubavitch initiative.

⁹ Baksheesh (from Persian, is a term used to describe tipping, charitable giving, and certain forms of political corruption and bribery; "lavish remuneration and bribes, rudely demanded but ever so graciously accepted by the natives in return for little or no services rendered." <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Baksheesh>

So many beautiful buildings! We saw the famous Theater Square, the theater at one end of it. The recently established Bukovinian Jewish History and Culture Museum was a very important stop. Situated in the former Jewish National House, built in 1908, now Central Palace of Culture of Chernivtsi, the Jewish Museum is on the ground floor. Inside the museum, we were guided by Mykola Kushnir of the Jewish Community. He was very helpful, even with his limited knowledge of English. The museum is small, the exhibits brightly lit, allowing easy inspection - a monument to the Jewish community that was.



Finally, after lunch at the elegant Romanian restaurant 'Grig' that Gigi favors. We made our way back to the car and went to find the last operational synagogue, situated on a side street. After this, we drove along the former 'Judengasse' – an important street in the former Jewish community.

A visit to the Czernowitz Jewish cemetery was our last stop. The gate was open, so I was able to go inside and look around. All of us subscribed to the 'Czernowitz mailing list' know of the work that is currently being done to restore this cemetery, in many areas overgrown by grass, plants, fallen and broken tombstones and in some areas, almost inaccessible. This entire project is being led by Miriam Taylor, Wolfgang Schaechter and Alexandre Wolloch and is based in Miami, Florida, USA, funded by contributions from concerned individuals.



Some local cemetery workers were having a smoking break near the entrance, but seemed quite pleasant. I was disappointed to not see the group of young volunteers who had so kindly come to help with this monumental effort, led again this year by a dedicated non-Jewish friend to the Czernowitz list - Christian Hermann of Cologne, Germany. The area near the entrance gate seemed accessible enough, but I was able to see areas that badly needed extensive work.

Driving through the countryside, one passes untold numbers of corn fields and fields with sunflowers growing in abundance. It is a beautiful country – beautiful, rolling hills everywhere. We traveled on well-paved, two or three lane roads. We saw no super highways, but getting around was easy, except for the heavy traffic and road construction in Suceava. But once in Ukraine, there was a noticeable difference in the condition of the roads, which were in need of repaving.

We then left to return to Suceava. Miraculously, the border crossing took only 35 minutes, an unheard-of short time. We bade farewell to Gigi and then Sylvie and I walked around the area and again had dinner at Restaurant Catalan in the nearby park. We then prepared for the 4:45am lift to the airport the next morning.



What a wonderful experience - I loved every moment of it! Everything went so smoothly and I learned so much, saw such fascinating things. I had been a bit nervous before going, as this was not a guided trip and I had arranged everything myself - the guide, the accommodations, the itinerary - and I don't speak the language - but it worked out beautifully, even better than expected.

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