

Early Slovak Immigration

EARLY SLOVAK IMMIGRATION TO AMERICA AND ITS INFLUENCES ON THE 21st CENTURY.

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The Immigration of Slovaks' into the U.S. began in the middle 1800's, and became a widespread movement by the 1880's. Before 1899, the Slovaks were not distinguished from other nationalities of the Hungarian Empire in the immigration records, thus it was difficult to determine the extent of their migration into the U.S. In 1899 the Slovak population living in America consisted of 10,000 individuals. The economic hardships and political persecution in Slovakia were the chief reasons for the movement. Most immigrants came from Slovakia with economic backgrounds of agriculturists.

The immigration of Slovaks differed from many other nationalities. Instead of the entire family immigrating to America and settling there permanently, they looked at America as a place to gain financial wealth. After they felt they had accumulated a sufficient amount of wealth, Slovaks returned to their native homeland. At home, returning emigrants exercised an enormous influence. This is stated well in Racial Problems in Hungary: "During the past generation, many thousands of Slovaks have immigrated to the United States, carrying with them feelings of bitterness and resentment towards the authorities of their native land. They speedily learned to profit by the free institutions of their adopted country, and today the Slovaks possess a national culture and organization. Everywhere among the immigrants, leagues, societies and clubs flourish."

Slovaks are by nature very simple and lovable people. Their livelihood depends on the well being of their family. With a valiant heart a typical Slovak left alone, without his or her entire family. Many Slovak immigrants made the trip back and forth across the ocean several times within a ten-year period. Some even crossed the ocean as many as five times. The immigrants became inhabitants of large cities, and according to the national census, by 1910 the number of Slovaks grew to 426,666. They resided mainly in Pennsylvania, Ohio, New Jersey, New York, Chicago and Cleveland. Pennsylvania accounted for the largest population of Slovaks due to the steel and coal industries that employed them. The steel town of Youngstown, the rubber town

of Akron and the manufacturing town of Cleveland provided jobs for most Ohio Slovak immigrants. The factories and mills in northern New Jersey attracted many Slovaks seeking employment.

Unfortunately, Slovak immigrants endured working conditions Americans would not accept. These included: harder work, longer hours, and poor living and working conditions.

Nevertheless, Slovaks were considered diligent savers. It was not uncommon for a Slovak to accumulate a wealth of \$5000 in the early 1900s before returning to Slovakia. In Hazelton, Pennsylvania, a saving bank patronized mainly by Slovaks reported deposits of \$805,321.55 on December 3, 1917.

The typical Slovak immigrant of this period was mainly an industrial worker providing labor where rough, hard work needed to be accomplished. Their occupations were transitory, often moving from place to place. In many instances, Slovaks did not assimilate very well with American conditions and language, knowing they had loved ones on the other side of the ocean. However, after several trips to America, the migrants became acclimated with the U.S. culture. As a result, many Slovak immigrants returned to America with their entire family. Second generation Slovak boys continued in their fathers footsteps by working in the steel and mining industries.

As we approach the 21st century, a similar trend of immigration into the U.S. by Slovaks is evident. The recent fall of communism propelled Slovakia into the rough waters of capitalism. The readjustment and adoption of a new philosophy created economic uncertainty. The economic condition in Slovakia remains stifling. Many well-educated individuals are unemployed or receive meager incomes. Once again, as in the late 19th Century, Slovaks are immigrating to America to advance their economic position, with the intent that they will return to their native homeland. Many of these individuals are educated or skilled in a particular trade. Nonetheless, they come to the United States to improve their economic position. Employment in fields such as construction, care of the elderly, housekeeping and maintenance has allowed many Slovaks to save enough money to improve their living standard in Slovakia. The Slovaks of America have exercised great influence upon the conditions of their old country. Future generations must continue to influence and support their beautiful native homeland of Slovakia.

