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Winter  
**PENNSYLVANIA  
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**SLOVAK AMERICANS**

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*(Inside front cover)*

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## COVER:

*Members of the Pittsburgh Slovaks perform a folk  
dance as part of the Jasličkáři or shepherd's play at the  
community vilija at Prince of Peace Parish Center in  
Pittsburgh in December, 1994. (Photograph by Nicholas  
Bocher)*

# FORTUNE'S STEPCHILDREN: Slovaks in Pennsylvania

by Susan Kalčík



*Suzanna and Adam Thur and their children on their farm above Marsteller, Pa., in the 1920s. (Courtesy of the Thur family)*

## THE THURS

Suzanna Pinčák Thur arrived in Barnesboro, Cambria County, Pennsylvania, on October 31, 1902, and her first impression of her new home was a terrifying one of strange masked figures; she had never heard of American Halloween. But even more frightening was the news that her husband, Adam Thur, who had immigrated to America the preceding year sponsored by a cousin, was out of work—the coal mines had laid men off.

Suzanna Pinčák had been born in 1883 in the town of Kojšov, the state of Spiš, Slovakia. Her mother, Anna's, family owned a sheep farm and Suzanna's father was her second husband. When Anna was widowed again, she married a third time but died in childbirth when Suzanna was five years old. Now an orphan, Suzanna went to live with a maternal aunt and was put to work almost immediately caring for infants, the ill, or the elderly left at home while the able-bodied worked in the fields. By the time she was sixteen, she was an accomplished cook with a number of good references in her passbook, something all workers had to carry when they traveled looking for jobs.

Suzanna Pinčák would have been happy to continue her career as a cook, but her aunt arranged a marriage for her with Adam Thur, a man from a land-owning family in the village. Thur was considered a great catch, since land ownership gave him a high status. He left for America

a few months after their wedding, and Suzanna lived with her mother-in-law and continued to work. It was the \$600 in savings from her job which enabled the couple to buy a two-room house and a small piece of land on the northern edge of Barnesboro, despite her husband's lack of work. Suzanna did not want to live again with her husband's relatives; she wanted to be in charge of her own home. From the house Adam could walk to the coal mine when there was work, Suzanna could walk to the homes of her friends or to stores in Barnesboro, and the family could walk along the railroad tracks to St. Mary's Byzantine Catholic Church (now St. Mary's Ukrainian Catholic Church), founded in 1912. Adam was one of a group of men who worked to build the parish, and Suzanna always complained about the cemetery site he and the others had chosen. Situated on one of the steep hillsides in that part of southwestern Pennsylvania, she said it meant that even in death she would not be able to lie down and rest.

And there was little enough time to rest in her life. In 1905 she bore the first of six children, Joseph, whom the family called Jim. A second son, Adam, was born in 1907; the oldest daughter, Susan (Sue), in 1910; Mary in 1913; Anna in 1917; and Sophie, called Sally, in 1920. Mary died when she was six months old, and Suzanna never again ate strawberries because there was a belief in her part of Slovakia that to do so was to take the berries from the mouth of her dead child.



*Some of Suzanna and Adam Thur's descendants at the family reunion, August, 1994. Seated in the center from left to right are Ann Thur Kalčík, Mary Chernitsky Thur, and Sue Thur Jonav. (Photograph by Nicholas Bocher)*

Besides caring for her growing family, Suzanna's work was important to the family economy and kept them going despite the intermittent nature of Adam's work in the coal mine. She produced much of the family's food on their one acre of land, and one day she bought an old cow from a woman who was taking it to the butcher. It was so old it had no teeth, so Suzanna cooked mash which she fed to the animal until it was fat enough to bring a good price when she sold it. With the money she began a small dairy herd and was able to sell milk, butter, and cheese. In the evenings she often sewed clothes for her neighbors; if a garment was needed quickly for a wedding or funeral, she might work all night to finish it.

It was the custom for a newborn's godmother to donate material for the infant's layette, and when Suzanna was godmother, the lucky child also got the benefit of her sewing skill. Walking through the town one day with a large bundle of material for her new godchild, Suzanna was spotted by a group of young, single Slovak men. Mistaking her bundle for that of a new immigrant and thinking she was an unmarried woman—a rarity in the early years of Slovak immigration—the men purchased a keg of beer and hurriedly planned a party to welcome her to their community and introduce themselves as likely marriage prospects. When they inquired about her, they were told that her husband might not approve of their courtship. They didn't waste the beer; they had the party anyway, but without the guest of honor.

With Adam and Suzanna's hard work, and with the help of friends, relatives, and a Jewish storekeeper who extended Suzanna credit whenever she needed it, the family thrived. But Adam was not as satisfied with town life as Suzanna was; he wanted to own his own farm. One day, on the way to visit a farm advertised for sale, the couple stopped at the home of John and Martha Anderson (Swedes) and asked for some water. When John learned of their mission, he offered to sell them his own farm which he had purchased a few years earlier from Germans, and which his sons were not interested in working. In March of 1918, the Thurs bought the approximately 320-acre farm for \$5,000. The family loaded their possessions onto a wagon and walked (Suzanna and Sue alternately carrying the baby, Anna) "over the hill" to their new home, just above the coal-mining town of Marsteller. The agreement was that they would pay a small amount down, and the rest of the money at the end of the year. No one really thought they would be able to earn the money; indeed, the soil on their new property was so poor that the farm produced only one wagon load of hay that summer. But they picked and sold wild blackberries and borrowed some money from a relative, and at the end of the year the farm was theirs.

The farm prospered modestly, meeting the family's needs for vegetables, meat, eggs, chickens, and milk products. The Thurs canned every kind of vegetable, as well as fruit, meat, and butter. Apples were dried in the hot

attic, and wild mushrooms were gathered from the woods and dried for later use, including in the soup served at the *vilia* or Christmas Eve supper. When the girls were still small, Suzanna got help with such chores from women in Marsteller (a steep hike down the hill from the farm), and her Italian neighbors taught her to cook tomatoes until they formed a very thick paste which was spread in a flat pan to dry so it could be cut up and saved. A block could then be dropped into any soup or sauce requiring tomatoes.

Suzanna was known for her good cooking and for her hospitality. The farm's cool, mossy, creekside glade became a popular place for picnics. On some Sundays, when friends or relatives came to visit, the family would carry chairs from the parlor to the grape arbor in the garden. On other Sundays Suzanna would hire a car and chauffeur and the family would be driven to Portage to visit friends from her Slovak village (*krajani* or countrymen) who had settled there.

But less prosperous times came too, especially during the Depression; then Suzanna found the making and marketing of moonshine one way to help the family get by. The children grew adept at each grabbing an assigned piece of the still and running into the woods with it when the warning was given that revenue officers were approaching. Suzanna would dump the mash into the pig slops, and once she hid the coils under the laundry in a washtub and scrubbed away while the officers poked around ineffectually, looking for evidence. The farm helped the family survive, and they always found enough to share with others less fortunate in the town below the hill.

Suzanna's children went to school in Marsteller and, as they grew they helped on the farm. The boys, Jim and Adam, also worked in the coal mines and elsewhere. Sue, the oldest girl, left home to work a series of jobs caring for children or the elderly or doing other domestic work. Still a child herself, on one of her first jobs she had to hide when the children of the town were on their way to school, in case someone saw her and wondered why she wasn't accompanying them. One of her jobs took her to Johnstown, where she worked on Orchard Street for Harry Trout, superintendent of transportation at Bethlehem Steel's Cambria Works. When she grew tired of a job or got homesick, she would return to the farm. On one such visit, she met the son of a man who had courted her mother in Slovakia; she eventually married him and moved to Cleveland. Sue had three children, two of whom died; the third taught school and married a non-Slovak; they raised three children who all still live in Cleveland.

Sue's younger sister, Anna, lived with her in Cleveland while she looked for work there. Anna married one of the sons of a Slovak widow (he worked for Jones and Laughlin Steel) who lived next door to Sue; they settled in Cleveland and raised six children. Most of Anna's children went to college and they all held white collar or professional jobs. All but one married (none to Slovaks); only two are still living in Cleveland.

Anna and Sue's youngest sister, Sally, also moved to

Cleveland; she married a non-Slovak and had one child. Joe Thur had been working in the coal mines in the Barnesboro area, but when a mine official's demand for a bribe to keep his job angered him, he too moved to Cleveland where he found work as a mechanic. He lived with his older sister and her family until he died in 1963.

The youngest son, Adam, worked a number of jobs, including in the mines, but when he married Mary Chernitsky the family farm became his. Mary had immigrated to America shortly before the couple were married in 1930. (When Mary was two years old her mother left her with her grandparents in Slovakia because she thought the journey to America to join her husband would be too difficult for such a young child. Arriving in Indiana County sixteen years later, Mary joined a family she hardly knew, for they had all been born here.) Adam and Mary raised four sons and a daughter and continued to farm; Suzanna stayed on to help them. Adam Senior, now severely crippled by arthritis, lived the rest of his life in a nursing home.

Since Mary did not speak English well and used Slovak in the home, Suzanna lost some of her English fluency. The women would speak to Adam and Mary's children in Slovak, and the children would answer in English; all of them went to Marsteller and Barnesboro elementary and high schools. The draft was in effect, so the boys all joined the army; afterward, two of them followed their older brother to Cleveland where they worked in the building trades and in white collar jobs; their sister joined them there and eventually worked for a department store and in real estate. One brother married a woman from Cleveland, and the other brothers married sisters from Carrolltown, Pennsylvania; the sister married a man she met in Cleveland; none were married to Slovaks. They all raised families and most of their children stayed in Cleveland, although some have moved from that city.

The youngest brother, Rudy, never married; he returned from the army to help his father run the farm. Although the coal mine in Marsteller which had once employed as many as eight hundred men closed in the 1950s, the farm continued to have a market for its produce. Using a truck, the Thurs reached a wider area with their dairy products, eggs, and potatoes. But with Mary growing tired of the work and Adam, too, aging and ill, the work of raising the produce and marketing it was too much for Rudy, so he and Adam decided they would specialize in raising Hereford breeding stock. They sold their dairy herd and in 1972 purchased their seed stock of four bred Hereford heifers. Since his father died and his mother became ill, Rudy has run the farm virtually by himself. He is proud of the fact that he has never taken government subsidies and hopes that he can continue working until the farm is one hundred years old and can claim century-farm status. His brothers and sister come to the farm frequently to help with some of the work, to hunt, and to visit and to help care for their mother. Several of them have purchased adjoining properties. Indeed, the farm has become some-





*Frank and Nellie Zahoranec and their children in Cambria City, Johnstown, Pa. Josephine is on the far left. (Courtesy of Josephine Zahornec)*

thing of an icon of family and ethnic identity for the extended family, and Rudy also gets visits from a great number of cousins, nieces and nephews, and their offspring.

### THE ZAHORNECS

Franz (in America, Francis or Frank) Zahoranec<sup>1</sup> immigrated from Spiš state in Slovakia in 1903 or 1904. He had served in the Hungarian cavalry and bore traces of his military carriage into old age. Unable to mistreat any animal, he himself had once been punished because he would not beat a recalcitrant horse. He came to Cambria City (one of several neighborhoods in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, that housed great numbers of immigrants at the turn of the century) where he lived with his cousin and his cousin's wife. There was a man in Cambria City that many immigrants paid in order to secure jobs, but Francis was able on his own to join some friends working in the local steel mill (the Cambria Iron Company; later, Bethlehem Steel).

About the same time, a young woman named Cornelia (later known as Aunt Nellie in Cambria City), from Gemer state in Slovakia, arrived to join several sisters in Johnstown. She spoke German and Hungarian as well as Slovak and had been a cook for the Hungarian upper classes. She soon took a job as a cook with a family in Johnstown and they treated her well, helping her adjust to life in America. One of the younger boys teased her, but told by the family to

do what she wanted to make him stop, she put cayenne pepper in his serving of *pirohi*; from then on he let her alone. Nellie's sister Mary was a widow who ran a boardinghouse. She knew many eligible young men and introduced Francis Zahoranec, who was looking for a bride, to her younger sister; the couple were wed in 1906 and went to live on Chestnut Street in Cambria City.

Frank was talented in math and worked with a micrometer to measure train car wheels. One day when he was under a car working, someone started riveting and the loud noise shattered his eardrums; he was deaf for the rest of his life. In another accident, one of his legs was crushed and almost completely severed, but the doctors were able to reattach it. Each morning before he left for work, he and Nellie stood before a picture of the Last Supper and prayed, obviously with good reason, that he would return home safely. When he was eligible to retire, the company begged him to stay on a few more years because they could not fill his position. He did, although he would have preferred not to. On his way home from work each day (at first he walked, but later was able to take a street car), he would stop in a neighborhood saloon, Joe's Place, for just one shot of whiskey and one beer; his daughter, Josephine, says she never saw him drunk. He would save her a piece of cake or fruit from his lunch pail and give it to her when he got home. Although it tasted like steel and was a bit the worse for wear, she always looked forward to this treat from her dad and the safe return it signaled.

Frank Zahoranec was the family gardener and filled the tiny backyard with vegetable and flower plants. And he was a general handyman around the house, doing carpentry and shoe repair, cutting hair, and even making tools and cooking utensils when they were needed. He did not socialize as much as his friends did at the many Slovak fraternal and clubs (the First Catholic Slovak Band Hall was, and still is, only a block away), because his deafness made it difficult to participate. He did like to have friends sit and visit in his backyard, but his social life centered around his family. When Josephine was growing up, various family members would gather at Frank and Nellie's home each week for Sunday dinner. The house was also a center of activity in the neighborhood because all the Zahoranec children played some musical instrument, and because of Nellie's hospitality and reputation as a cook. No one could be in her home more than a few minutes before they were eating some treat she had prepared. One of the few demands Frank made was that, no matter what the weather, each dinner must begin with soup, usually accompanied by Nellie's homemade noodles.

Nellie did not work outside the home after she married. In fact, it was so unusual for her to leave her home, that the one time her daughter, Josephine, came home and found her mother gone, she was sure something dreadful had happened; it turned out her mother had merely gone to confession at St. Stephen's Slovak Catholic Church a few blocks away. Nellie was a noted seamstress, and many people in Cambria City wore her handiwork produced on a White treadle machine; often she made the patterns herself. Neighbors would take apart empty flour and sugar sacks, bleach them in the sun, and Nellie would make sheets and aprons from them. Although she might have to work until three in the morning and catch only a few hours sleep to finish an order, she could not charge people poorer than herself much (or anything) for her services.

Charity was a way of life for the whole family. Frank sponsored a number of relatives and friends from his village in Slovakia so they could immigrate to America; the couple took care of his brother's children when the brother died; two cousins lived with the family for a time; and a relative crippled with arthritis was one of their charges—Josephine remembers carrying soup and other food to his nearby home.

Their unassuming generosity made them popular with almost everyone, but there was one difficult neighbor, angered by some incident with one of the Zahoranec children, who came into Nellie's home and cursed her, hissing like a snake. Nellie told Josephine that this woman brought a reputation as a witch with her from Slovakia. Nellie believed in supernatural happenings; as a young girl visiting her elderly grandmother in Slovakia she had been frightened by a kind of whirring sound that chased her. She ran in fright to her grandmother who said she knew she was dying and had sent a guardian angel to hurry Nellie. As a child in Johnstown, Josephine, home one day

because of an illness, had seen a mysterious woman dressed in black who came to the garden gate several times; when her mother would check, she saw no one. Later, a letter from Slovakia informed them that on the very same day Josephine had seen the woman, Nellie's mother had died.

Frank and Nellie had seven children. The first, Frank, died at birth, and another son, Eddie, died at the age of four. The oldest girl, Betty, married and had a daughter, Jo Ann, who is very active in a Slovak fraternal in Johnstown. She married a Slovak and had five sons, two of whom died young. The next child, Joe, had a daughter, Joel Ann, and a son, Richard, both of whom married Slovaks. The next daughter born to Nellie and Frank was named Anna Mary, but took the name Sister Thea when she joined the Sisters of St. Francis of Mary Immaculate. This order taught at St. Stephen's Catholic School, the school the family's children attended; its motherhouse was in Joliet, Illinois, and Sister Thea taught most of her life in a Slovak Catholic school in Streator, Illinois. The next son was Francis, who had a daughter, Francine, who married a non-Slovak; she currently teaches in West End Catholic School, in the building that was formerly St. Stephen's School.

The youngest child, born like her siblings in the house on Chestnut Street but the only one delivered by a doctor rather than a midwife, was Josephine. She spoke no English when she started at St. Stephen's School, but the sisters who taught there all spoke Slovak. She studied Slovak as well as the usual subjects, and the sisters informally passed on Slovak traditions and folklore; she remembers one day being taught a little Slovak song about a rooster. For Josephine, the worst thing about knowing Slovak occurred on the night of the 1936 flood, the second big flood to devastate Johnstown. She and other children from the neighborhood had been taken to the highest floor of a warehouse by their parents, who feared that even this haven was not high enough to escape the rising waters. In Slovak, the adults discussed what might happen and hoped the children would at least die together and all at once. Huddled with the other children, Josephine was the only one who knew what danger they were in. Next to that, being laughed at by some children for speaking Slovak seemed insignificant.

After attending Johnstown High School, Josephine went to Wisconsin to join the Sisters of St. Agnes. She was already teaching, although she had not yet taken her final vows, when she had to leave the convent to care for her mother, who was seriously crippled with arthritis, and then for her dying father. Although this changed the course of her life, she does not complain about her decision; she has the highest regard and respect for her parents and what they did for her and her siblings. She especially appreciates the hard life they lived as immigrants—the insults and indignities they had to put up with, and the many sacrifices they made for their children and others. Both her parents bore physical signs of their hardships: her father's injuries; her mother's arthritis, which began deforming her hands

when she was only thirty years old.

Josephine taught music in various area Catholic schools, directed the Head Start program in the county, and started a flower shop which was destroyed by the 1977 Johnstown flood; she currently manages the lunch program at West End Catholic Elementary School where one of her nieces teaches. She still lives in the house in which she was born, and still attends, as she always has, St. Stephen's Slovak Roman Catholic Church, a few blocks away. At one time it was the largest Slovak national church in the nation, with almost one thousand students in its school, and with more than a thousand members of the Rosary Society; records for the latter were kept for years in Slovak. Father Horvath from Nanticoke, Pennsylvania, was the first parish priest, but a priest from Slovakia, Father Martvon, who served the parish for fifty-four years, was the man most responsible for its growth. Josephine participated in the many religious, educational, and social events held by the parish such as Forty Hours Devotions, May Day crownings, pageants, plays in Slovak, and especially in its musical events. She directed several choirs and still gathers some of the old-timers to sing Slovak hymns for special occasions. In recent years she started a children's group that performs Slovak folk dances.

Josephine, the only child of Frank and Nellie Zahoranec still living, sees herself as an anomaly: old—and observant—enough to remember the details of life for Slovak immigrants and their children in Cambria City, and young enough to be able to pass the information on. She has appeared at several National Folk Festivals in Johnstown to share her stories; has helped write the centennial history of St. Stephen's Church; has been interviewed many times by the press and folklorists (an excerpt of one interview appears on a tape produced by the Southwestern Pennsylvania Heritage Preservation Commission); and is now writing down her memories so they will not be lost.<sup>2</sup>

### SLOVAKS IN EUROPE, AMERICA AND PENNSYLVANIA<sup>3</sup>

The Thurs and the Zahornecs both have a unique family history of course, yet their stories are similar to those of the many thousands of Slovaks who immigrated to the coal mining towns, farming areas, and urban neighborhoods of America. Emily Balch, who knew Slovaks from her work with immigrants in America and from her travels to Slovakia, described them as "one of the most attractive of the Slavic nationalities." But she also called them "fortune's stepchildren"<sup>4</sup> because of the hardships they endured in their beautiful but poor land, their centuries of domination by other groups, and their struggle to maintain a separate identity despite attempts to wipe out their language, religion, and traditions. In America they were labeled by immigration officials as Austrians and Hungarians because Slovakia was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the time. They were also lumped together and derided with other Slavic immigrants as "hunkies" or "huns," and in

later years they were confused with the Czechs with whom Slovaks in Europe formed Czechoslovakia. They were described, and even described themselves with some confusion, as "Slavish" or "Slavonic."

In fact, Slovaks are descendants of one of a number of Slavic tribes that migrated west to settle near the Tatra Range of the Carpathian Mountains around the fifth century. In the ninth century they united with neighboring Moravians to form the independent Great Moravian Empire. The next threat of domination came from Germanic culture, religion, and military power, and to defend against it the ruler of Greater Moravia, Rastislav, asked the Byzantine emperor, Michael III, to send his people missionaries who would bring Christianity and learning. In 863, two brothers (later saints), Constantine and Methodius, brought the eastern rite of Christianity to the Slovaks and developed an alphabet so that their language could be written. (The Cyrillic alphabet is named after Constantine's monastic name, Cyril.) The brothers won from the Pope the right to baptize the Slovak people and use their language in liturgies. In the tenth century, however, the Slovaks were dominated by Magyars (Hungarians) from the west, and around A.D. 1000 King Stephen of the Kingdom of Hungary imposed Western or Latin Christianity on his subjects. A few hundred years later, the Eastern rite was reintroduced by Rusins or Ruthenians who migrated west. This, plus the Reformation in the sixteenth century and the Catholic Church's counterreformation, left the Slovaks of the nineteenth century divided into four religious groups: approximately eighty percent were Roman Catholics, fifteen percent were Lutherans, and the rest were either Eastern Rite Catholics or Calvinists.

Tartar invasions in the thirteenth century weakened Hungarian domination a little, but the Magyars regained control, and in the middle of the nineteenth century the Slovaks were subjects of the Hungarian part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. In the 1840s, Hungary, affected by nationalist movements, began a program of Magyarization of its non-Hungarian subjects; Slovaks resented this, and resisted as best they could the attempts to make them give up their language and culture. One response by Slovak leaders—writings that developed into a body of literature written in a literary Slovak based on dialects of Central Slovakia—established Slovak as a language distinct from Czech. Schooling was conducted in the Hungarian language, and thus, for Slovaks, education became associated with Magyarization, although many priests and intellectuals fought the process and some emigrated to America because of it.

Even greater than these political and cultural forces were economic forces that began to drive Slovaks from their homes and homeland. The majority of Slovaks worked in agriculture, although there were some in the timber, mining, and tinwork industries as well. The Magyar rulers had supported a feudal system favorable to themselves, and even though serfdom was abolished during the Revolution

of 1848, much of the land was still owned by Hungarians. Figures for around 1900 show sixty-eight percent of Slovak workers in agriculture, with fifty-two percent of these on "dwarf holdings" of less than two hectares; a little more than forty-seven percent were landless peasants. Sixty-nine percent of the dwarf holdings in Slovakia were owned by Slovaks, but sixty percent of the estates of fifty hectares or more were owned by Magyars. In the state of Spiš, eighty percent of the holdings owned by Slovaks were smaller than five hectares. Farm workers were earning an average of twenty-four to thirty-six cents a day for men, and twenty-one to twenty-four cents a day for women.<sup>5</sup> In other words, most of the plots of land held by Slovaks, having been subdivided for generations, were too small to support families. The industrialization then happening in other places in Europe would have helped the economic situation of Slovaks, but it was resisted by the Magyar landowners.

These forces, along with a birthrate that had skyrocketed, especially in the eastern part of Slovakia, combined to produce a large working population without work; the need to survive forced them to become a migratory workforce, moving to farmlands as seasonal labor and to cities to work in industries both in Hungarian territories and in other countries. By the 1870s, Slovaks had added the rapidly industrializing United States of America to their list of places to seek work. By 1918, approximately 650,000 had traveled here and 500,000 eventually settled—the second largest Slavic ethnic group in the United States next to the Poles. Seventy-five percent of those who came before World War I came from Eastern Slovakia, from what were then the states of Spiš, Sáriš, Zemplín, and Abov. Half of these Slovaks came to Pennsylvania where the need for unskilled labor provided them jobs, especially in the coal mines and steel mills. (We are told that in 1907, slightly more than fifty-one percent of Slavs employed in the steel mill in Homestead, Pennsylvania, were Slovak.<sup>6</sup>) They often came in what is called "chain migration"; as Slovaks here sent for or helped their relatives and others from their home villages to migrate, whole villages and regions regrouped in immigrant neighborhoods or towns.

The early stages of Slovak migration consisted mainly of men—mostly poor, single, young, landless agricultural workers from Eastern Slovakia—who came to this country to work and save money to take home; money to improve their and their families' lives. Those who were married usually left their wives behind to maintain the family home and property, if there was any. The men worked hard, long hours; usually walked miles to and from the mines or mills; lived in crowded conditions, often in boardinghouses; and focused on their return to Slovakia and their lives there. Cousins Michael and Josef Bugos and their fathers, for example, commuted between the steel mills of Homestead and the family farmlands in Slovakia (sometimes every farming season) until World War I trapped Michael in this country and he eventually became Americanized.<sup>7</sup> Their

agenda made early Slovak immigrants willing to put up with low wages (high, of course, in contrast to what they found in Europe) and primitive living conditions (for example, sharing homes, rooms, and even beds) so they would be able to save as much money as possible. Some Americans, however, mistook their living arrangements for signs of the inherent inferiority of Slovaks. In particular, some critics were suspicious of the morals of the women who ran boardinghouses. Others more accurately saw that these conditions fostered diseases such as tuberculosis.

As they adapted to the new country and began to long for family life and the help of a wife to improve their economic situation, the men sent for or returned to Slovakia to find wives. In the later years of immigration, older, married, and more prosperous Slovak men, some from western and central Slovakia, came, bringing their families with them or sending for them when they were settled. And immigration of single women took place as well, many to perform domestic work or to labor in textile factories. So many single Slovak women went to work in textile mills in New Jersey that, in the later years of Slovak immigration, it was common for young men who wanted to marry to leave their jobs in Pennsylvania for a few weeks or months, go to Slovak settlements there and "hang around" the Slovak churches until they found girls to court.

The increasing adaptation and commitment to this country, the growth of families, and the enlargement of the Slovak population here, lessened the pull back to Slovakia and made Slovak immigrants more concerned about living and working conditions in the United States. They began to find ways to improve their situation here, building communities as well as a sense of ethnic identity with their fellow Slovaks. Their first concern was with work; for the men, as we have seen, this usually meant unskilled labor in coal mines and in industries such as steel. Such jobs brought Slovaks to the anthracite regions of western Pennsylvania; to the bituminous coal fields and coke ovens of southeastern Pennsylvania; to places like Wilkes Barre and Uniontown; to industrial centers such as Johnstown and Pittsburgh; and to myriad small and large coal patches like Jerome and Windber in Somerset County, Portage and Barnesboro and Marsteller in Cambria County, and Bitumen in Clinton County. Here they worked ten- or twelve-hour days, six days a week when work was available (or "good"), doing back-breaking, unskilled labor for low pay, in settings made even more dangerous for them by their lack of English and indifference to their health and safety.

In their early years in the steel mills, men would periodically have to work two twelve hour shifts back to back; in the coal mines, they had to provide their own tools and materials and were not paid at all for removing the rock that was mixed with the coal. Immigrants who lived in coal towns in company houses were often forced to buy at the company stores and intimidated from complaining about their working conditions or from joining

unions by the fear of losing their jobs and their homes. In addition, some coal companies employed their own "coal and iron police" (called "pussy foots") who controlled coal miners' activities, especially during strikes. Slovak men tended to work where they had friends or connections, and this resulted in some jobs being filled predominately by Slovaks. In Johnstown, for example, the majority of east-central Europeans in the blast furnace area were Slovaks. Slovaks, like other third-wave immigrants, were not promoted to skilled jobs as readily as Americans or earlier immigrants. Although the bulk of Slovak Americans were unskilled laborers, there were some who started small businesses such as saloons and grocery stores, and some who built those businesses into larger enterprises such as immigrant banks.

Slovaks and their institutions played significant roles on both sides of the labor issue. For example, a study of the four major ethnic groups in Windber, Pennsylvania, a company town built by the Berwind-White Coal Company, reveals a split in the ethnic communities. A small group of ethnic leaders—among them immigrant bankers and steamship agents; ethnic contractors; mine foremen and their assistants; and parish priests—maintained a comfortable middle-class status by aligning with the company to secure immigrant workers and keep them from unionizing. They also helped immigrants become citizens, and they signed them up to vote as Republicans to support politicians and laws favorable to the company; there was even a Slovak Republican Club in Windber. Immigrant institutions were controlled by the company, who leased land for them through these ethnic elites; fraternal societies, churches, and even the press were used to support company interests. However, other Slovak priests, fraternal officers, and ordinary workers took leadership roles in the labor movement in the area. In 1903, Slovak societies supported a progressive newspaper editor who sided with the United Mine Workers of America (UMWA). Slovak miner Paul Bills was cited by anti-labor forces as a "trouble maker" for the role he played in the 1906 strike; he was seriously wounded in the Windber massacre of April 16. Martin Smolko wrote to the Slovak newspaper, *Slovák v Amerike*, about the same strike, and Rev. Michael Balogh, a Byzantine Catholic priest, spoke at the UMWA rally and buried two of the massacre's victims. Slovak miners in the area remained strong in their support of unions during the sixteen-month-long strike of 1922 and afterward, into the 1930s. The Slovak National Hall Association was the first organization in Windber to allow the UMWA a meeting place during the organizational drive of 1933, and Slovak-speaking Joseph Zahurak became president of a Windber UMWA local in the 1930s.<sup>8</sup>

Women worked hard too, outside the home before marriage as servants, maids, cooks, or laundresses or in local factories or immigrant stores; and mainly in the home after marriage. Even if they did not run boardinghouses as so many did, their days were long and filled with

household chores made difficult or impossible by the lack of clean running water; by air polluted by railroads, coal mines, or steel mills; by the primitive housing provided in company towns or slum neighborhoods near the mills; and by the lack of labor-saving devices that their wealthier sisters were beginning to enjoy at the turn of the century. Many immigrant women baked their own bread, raised and preserved their own foods, and sewed their own clothes. Some, like Suzanna Thur, even wove their own rag rugs on a homemade loom (*brda* or *krasna*). The chore often identified as the most onerous was that of washing the extremely dirty work clothes by hand: water had to be hauled manually, heated on a wood or coal stove, and the clothes dried in air polluted with coal dust or factory smoke. All these chores were multiplied for women who had boarders or relatives staying in the house. In addition to the housework, women had the major task of raising and educating the children (academically and in their religious duties), since fathers might see them only on Sundays. The burden was especially hard on women who were widowed; running a boardinghouse or doing domestic work for others were almost their only choices.

Children also worked and contributed to the family economy by gathering coal along railroad tracks, by selling papers and vegetables from the family garden, by picking wild berries, and by helping with chores at home. Children might have to enter the labor force when they were barely in their teens because of the family's needs; in Johnstown boys under sixteen worked for the steel mill as messengers, mail boys, and couriers. In the coal mines they worked as "breaker boys," picking slate from coal, or as "trappers" or "gate tenders," opening and closing doors to let in and out men, mules, and air. Young girls as well left their homes early to work as domestics or in small stores.

Since at the turn of the century laborers were not paid a wage that could sustain them and their families, it was necessary for everyone in the family to participate in its support. In a time that offered the worker and his family no help if he could not work because of illness, accident, layoffs, or strikes, the work of women and children along with that of men and the careful management of housewives made the difference between success and failure. In many Slovak households, the men and children brought their wages to the wife and mother whose job it was to manage the money and the home; thus, women in many Slovak families were strong and respected figures.

One of the first places men gathered to talk about their work and its difficulties was the saloon. Especially for single men and those living in crowded homes or boardinghouses, the saloon provided a place for socializing, a fact that escaped many Americans who regarded their time spent in bars as a sign of their dissipation. From these gatherings of Slovak men grew organizations that sought to ameliorate some of their problems. A first concern was insurance against illness, accidents, and death. Fraternal societies based on American and European models devel-

oped and flourished, and some eventually grew into national organizations such as the Slovak Evangelical Union, the First Catholic Slovak Union (Jednota), and the Greek Catholic Union. Many developed a social agenda as well, buying or building clubhouses and offering a year-round schedule of meetings, picnics, dances, and so on. And fraternal organizations had other functions too, helping to maintain and pass on Slovak heritage and identity to the children born in America; helping newer immigrants adjust and become citizens; building leadership skills; and providing experience working in American-type organizations.

Some business and political careers were also launched from within fraternal organizations and clubs. In Johnstown, Slovak clubs and fraternal organizations included the First Catholic Slovak Band Hall, branches of Jednota, the Woodvale Slovak Citizens' Club (later modernized to Am-Slo Social Club), and the Slovak Educational Society. Although some clubs allowed women in as social (rather than active) members, most were for men only, so women developed their own clubs, or auxiliaries to the men's clubs, such as the First Catholic Slovak Ladies Association. Often their tasks were extensions of their household chores, especially cooking, which was vital to the many social and fundraising activities of clubs and churches.

Fraternal organizations, especially the national ones, also played a significant role in the growing Slovak immigrant press, both locally (Johnstown had a Slovak paper, *Krajan*) and nationally. The Slovak-language press was one place immigrants could learn news of Slovakia and follow the activities of Slovak intellectuals and patriots who worked from America to improve conditions in the homeland. In 1918, Czech and Slovak leaders signed the Pittsburgh Agreement in that city, pledging to support the allies against Austria-Hungary and introducing the concept of an independent Czecho-Slovak state. Slovak leaders wanted home rule for Slovakia because Czechs outnumbered Slovaks and would dominate the new nation otherwise. Their fears were realized when Czechoslovakia was formed in 1920, and promises to make Slovakia a republic were broken. In 1938, The Munich Pact finally established Slovakia as a republic, but American Slovaks had mixed feelings about it because of its status as a German protectorate. After World War II, Czechoslovakia was re-established and Slovaks were dominated by Czechs and Communists. Under Alexander Dubček, Slovakia finally became a republic within Czechoslovakia but continued to chafe under inequities until in 1992 Slovaks decided to separate peacefully and formed the Slovak Republic.<sup>9</sup>

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Another important concern of men and women in the early years of the immigrant communities was their longing for churches in which to worship as they had traditionally done in Slovakia, where the local parish had been the center of town and village life. In smaller American communities there might be no churches at all, and even where there were, they were dominated by earlier immi-



*A crowd gathers to watch the May Day procession at St. Stephen's Slovak Roman Catholic Church in Cambria City, Johnstown, Pa., when it was one of the largest Slovak parishes in the country. (Courtesy of Josephine Zahornec)*

grant groups. (Slovak Roman Catholics in Johnstown, for example, worshiped at churches built by Irish and German Catholics.) The informal gatherings of men in saloons and the more formal groups in fraternal organizations and clubs, often acted as catalysts to start a parish or congregation. They might begin by gathering those interested, finding a temporary meeting place, and then raising the money to build their own church and, later, to expand. Slovaks who built St. Stephen's in Johnstown first met in an 1889-flood-damaged church abandoned by German Catholics who built a new one. Later, they raised the money to build a modest wooden structure and after that, an imposing stone church.

The ornate interiors of churches such as St. Stephen's may have caused some observers to think that the clergy took money from the poor to build them, and it is indeed astonishing that people making such humble wages could afford to contribute to them. But most Slovaks wanted the comfort of worshiping in their own way, in their own language, in their own churches. For most, these were rare places of beauty and grandeur in their lives, and they were proud of them; their names at the bottoms of stained glass windows attest to the sacrifices they were willing to make



*Parishioners carry the coffin of Father Martvon, who served as pastor to St. Stephen's Slovak Roman Catholic Church for fifty-four years, through the streets of Cambria City. (Courtesy of Josephine Zahornec)*

to have them. Often the task of building such churches fell equally on the laity and the pioneer priests who were brought from Slovakia or from earlier Slovak settlements. Unlike the frequently transferred pastors of today, these priests might spend most of their careers in one church. (Fr. Martvon was pastor at St. Stephen's for fifty-four years, and Msgr. John Golias served there as assistant and, later, as pastor for a total of twenty-eight years.)

Churches also became centers of social life, developing numerous religious, educational, and social organizations such as sodalities, rosary societies, ladies' guilds and men's clubs, choirs, and dance groups. Roman Catholics were the most numerous among Slovaks, and they built the most and often the first churches. The Slovak stance toward the American Catholic bishops was a kind of respectful defiance; they joined the Germans and other ethnic Catholics who insisted stubbornly on their own version of Catholicism in America. Eventually they won out against the mainly Irish Catholics who wanted to form a new kind of American Catholicism. They were allowed to build nationality parishes which drew their membership from all Slovak Catholics, rather than from within specific territorial boundaries as regular Catholic churches did.

In response to similar pressure from Byzantine Catholics, Pope Pius X appointed Rev. Stephen Ortynsky the first American Byzantine (or Greek) Catholic Bishop in 1907. Byzantine Catholic Slovaks usually banded together with the more numerous Ruthenian members of their faith to build their parishes, and were affected by the split that took place when American bishops refused to accept married priests. Some Byzantine parishes realigned with orthodox churches rather than change their traditions. Slovak

Lutherans in America were centered in the Slovak Zion Synod of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of America and the Synod of Evangelical Lutheran Churches of the Missouri Synod. Calvinist Slovaks were too small in number to form their own churches and usually joined existing ones. Even in death, Slovaks of different denominations asserted the need for their own place, and on the outskirts of many small coal towns one can still see a row of cemeteries, each for a different ethnic and religious group.

Next on the agenda for Slovaks was the building that often went up next door to the church, especially if it was a Catholic one—a school. Slovaks in Europe had come to mistrust public schools, since that was one place their language and culture had been suppressed. Added to that was the fact that at the turn of the century public schools in the United States were largely Protestant institutions, and many actively sought to “Americanize” immigrant children. Both in the schools and in the churches, Slovaks wanted to hear their own language being taught by their own people, and they wanted to protect their identity, so long threatened. Just as they had sought Slovak clergy, they now sought Slovak teachers for their children being born in America. For Roman and Byzantine Catholics, that meant looking for Slovak women religious—teaching sisters.

This proved difficult at first, since Slovaks had to compete with other Catholic parishes for sisters because the Catholic school system was growing rapidly in America. But Slovaks brought sisters from Europe, and even created orders of sisters: Slovak women religious congregations included the School Sisters of St. Francis, the Sisters of St. Basil the Great, the Sisters of SS. Cyril and Methodius,



*A reunion of the Slovak Boy Scout troop from St. Stephen's. Eddie Mesaros, now deceased, is fourth from the left in the front row. (Courtesy of Josephine Zahornec)*

and the Vincentian Sisters of Charity.<sup>10</sup> And so many second-generation Slovak women (the first generation born in America) entered religious life that some orders became Slovak by their sheer numbers. The Sisters of Saint Francis of Mary Immaculate, for example, were a German order that taught at St. Stephen's in Johnstown, but the large number of Slovak young women joining the order changed its character. When they first entered, however, they suffered some discrimination since the meaner jobs were given to the Slovak novices. Many of these women came back to teach at St. Stephen's, while others went to Slovak parishes in other parts of the country. Over one hundred women, "daughters of the parish," went into the sisterhood from St. Stephen's parish alone, in this or in other orders. Some went because of family pressure; it was an honor (and in some cases a relief on strained budgets) to have a child enter the convent. Some went because it was one of the few options besides marriage open to working-class women, and it was an opportunity for a poor woman to get an education. But the majority became sisters out of a genuine devotion to their religion.

Through their work, and through their churches, schools, and clubs, Slovak immigrants and the second generation built a kind of parallel society to that of the "Americans" or "Johnny Bulls." Doubly isolated by their ethnic identity and their religion (predominately Catholic) from mainstream America, which seemed only interested in exploiting or changing them, they built their own institutions to

meet their needs for security, education, social life, and spiritual comfort. In so doing, they forged ties with other countrymen that went beyond family, village, and even regional connections: they began to identify themselves as Slovaks.

But there were also frictions within the local and national Slovak community, in its churches and in its fraternal organizations; for one thing, Slovaks never overcame their four-way religious division. Thus, it was not unusual to see a very small coal-mining town supporting two or more Slovak churches. Within blocks of St. Stephen's in Johnstown are a Byzantine Catholic church attended by Slovaks, and a Slovak Lutheran church. And occasionally church communities would split into two groups: St. Stephen's in Johnstown spawned St. Francis Slovak Church in Morrellville in 1922, partly because of disagreements and partly to serve members of the Slovak community who had moved from the first place of settlement. The Slovak fraternal world also suffered its share of competition and disharmony.

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Within their communities, whether urban neighborhood or a section of a coal patch, Slovaks built a life that revolved around work, church, club, and family; around a calendar dictated by the change of seasons (important in their rural and agricultural background); and around religious and life celebrations. In this yearly round they continued many of the traditions and ways of living they



had brought from Slovakia, although American ways began to dilute and change these too, almost from the beginning. Regional foods such as soups, *pirohi*, sauerkraut, and meats were prepared in the home, as were some dishes borrowed from the Hungarians such as *paprikash* and *palacinky*, but more meat was available and consumed in America, and meatless soups were replaced with beef and chicken soups often served with homemade noodles. Traditional regional dress was quickly abandoned and worn only for special occasions or for dramas and dance performances. Sayings and beliefs, however, continued to be invoked. Suzanna Thur taught her children never to sit on a table where bread was placed, because bread was so important to life, and because it was used in the Communion service. Nellie Zahoranec told her daughter that when a child sat swinging her legs, she was tolling the death bell for her parents. Slovaks thought it attracted bad luck to boast of one's (or one's children's) accomplishments or good fortune. And a person who left a house by a different door than they had entered it was sure to have bad luck, as was a family whose first visitor at New Year's was a woman or a baby returned to the breast or bottle once it had been weaned.

Also invoked by the first generation and passed on to the second was a system of values that placed emphasis on family, religion, and hard work. Slovaks especially valued such virtues as honesty, loyalty, cleanliness, thriftiness, respect for elders, and generosity. They also shared a love of beauty, nature, and music, as well as a kind of persistence (or stubbornness depending on your point of view). Slovaks tended to be rather pragmatic and fatalistic—if not a bit cynical—in their approach to life, and accepted its sufferings with a kind of stoicism. Manners were taught to Slovak children too: when a child met an adult, he or she was taught to greet them by saying "*Pochválený buď Ježiš Kristus*"; or, if so greeted, to respond, "*Naveky amen*" ("Praise be to Jesus Christ"; "Forever, amen"). And when anyone left the house, it was wished that they go with God, or briefly, "*s Bohom*."

Holidays and holy days brought color and excitement to the immigrants' lives. Christmas and Easter were the major holidays, and they were celebrated with a rich array of traditions that varied somewhat from family to family depending on the village and region from which they emigrated. For Roman Catholics, Christmas was preceded by Advent, and for Byzantine Catholics, by the Philip's Fast, so-named for the saint's day on which it began. St. Nicholas's feast day, on December 6, was also important to Byzantine Catholics, and in some homes and churches he visited the children to question their behavior during the past year and to leave small gifts. Christmas Eve (*Štedrý Večer*) was the high point of the season's celebration, with a meal which began when children spotted the first star in the sky. The family gathered at the table, on (or under) which straw might be scattered as a symbol of Christ's birth in the stable. A lighted candle symbolizing Christ, as well as pine boughs symbolizing the earth's renewal after winter, might also appear on the table which

was sometimes sprinkled with holy water. A vacant place was left for any missing family member or needy person, and Slovaks invited those who had no place to spend Christmas to join them, for no one should be alone on this holy night.

At the Christmas Eve celebration a feast of meatless foods was served (the number and kind depending on family tradition and the economy), and common were sauerkraut or mushroom soup, *pirohi*, fish, cooked dried peas, *pagač*, meatless *holubky*, a Christmas bread, and nut and poppyseed rolls. Also common was *bobalky* or *lokša*, bread dough formed into small balls, baked, then softened with hot water or milk and served with sauerkraut or a honey and poppyseed mixture. Slovak Lutherans followed a similar tradition, but meat such as *klobása* could be served. Before the meal began, the head of the family would recite a prayer, greeting, and blessing for the coming year, and the *oplatky* (communion wafer stamped with a Christmas scene) would be passed to each member to share. Some folks also passed honey to sweeten the new year and whole garlic cloves to remind themselves of life's bitterness. Each person or family might cut an apple crosswise or open walnuts to see what the future held: a star shape in the apple and healthy nut meats meant a good year, but a cross in the apple foretold a death in the family. Before or after dinner family members might wash in a bowl of water that also held silver coins, this to bring them wealth in the new year. Because animals were present at Christ's birth and helped to warm him, they were treated with extra care on Christmas Eve. Anna Thur remembers her mother put bread, salt, and rose hips into a white enamel bowl, and the children had to take this to the barn to feed the cattle and horses before their own meal could begin. After dinner the family might open gifts, sing carols, or perform other fortunetelling rituals.

The culmination of Christmas Eve was midnight mass, but the celebration continued to some degree in the period between Christmas and January 6 (Epiphany—the Feast of the Magi), although industrial workers did not have as much time for this as did agricultural workers in Slovakia. There was much visiting of family and friends, and children were expected to learn a Christmas greeting, usually rhymed (the *Vianočný Vinc*), to say to the adults they met. Troupes of young men dressed as shepherds or angels and carrying a manger scene went from house-to-house performing a drama about Christ's birth; these Bethlehem Strollers (*Betlehmcí* or *Jasličkáři*) were rewarded with drinks and food and might collect for the poor. Since Byzantine Catholics still followed the Julian calendar, their Christmas might come a few weeks later than December 25th, and this too helped stretch out the season. The end of the old, and the beginning of the new year was also marked by much fortunetelling, and there were a number of ways young women could tell if, and who, they would marry in the coming year. Roman and Byzantine Catholic priests came to bless their parishioners' homes at Epiphany, and they inscribed in chalk on the door frame a cross, the

initials of the Three Kings (Gaspar, Melchior and Balthazar), and the date of the year.

Easter, too, was preceded by a period of fasting and reflection, Lent, which itself was preceded by the last feasting or celebration for a while, *fašangy*. On the Tuesday before Ash Wednesday many families fried and served doughnuts; some filled them with *lekvar* (prune preserves). Byzantine Catholics eased into Lent with Meatfare and Cheese-fare Sundays which marked the giving up of those foods. In agricultural Slovakia this period coincided with a time when those products would have been scarce; and Easter, with a time when milk, eggs, veal, and lamb would be plentiful, so the Lenten fast was broken with these foods prepared in traditional ways. On Holy Saturday for Roman Catholics and Easter Sunday for Byzantine Catholics, a basket filled with these foods would be taken to church and blessed; the family ate this as their first non-Lenten meal. The basket usually contained a bread rich in eggs and butter and decorated with bread-dough crosses, braids, or birds (*the paska*); ham, veal, and sausage (*klobása*); eggs (*kraslice*) dyed or decorated with a wax-resistant technique or dyed with onion skins and etched with various designs; butter, sometimes molded into the shape of a lamb; horseradish mixed with grated beets; a type of homemade cheese (*sirek*) made of eggs and milk and sometimes sweetened; nut and poppyseed rolls (*kolače*); and wine. Each food symbolized some aspect of the renewal brought by Christ's resurrection. The basket was covered with a cloth, usually hand embroidered with symbols and announcements of the resurrection in Slovak or Church Slavonic (a liturgical language used in the Byzantine rite). Slovak Lutherans did not have the Easter basket tradition but observed Good Friday with a special singing of the Passion in Slovak.

Josephine Zahornec says young women were told that if they ran barefoot through the dew-covered grass on Easter Morning and washed their faces with the water thus collected it would make them beautiful. But if they did not get wet that way, they had a very good chance of a dousing on Easter Monday, for the boys were allowed to throw water on the girls on that day. On Easter Tuesdays the girls could get revenge by doing the same to them.

Another observance that Slovak Catholics loved was the Forty Hours Devotion to the Holy Eucharist that each parish held once a year. Processions, which Slovaks also love, opened and closed this honoring of the Eucharist, and the first communicants of that year in their white dresses and best outfits were among the marchers. Josephine remembers that her mother, Nellie, was sent by the neighbors to get the day-old flowers Glosser's Department Store gave away when they were no longer saleable, so the petals could be used in the baskets the children carried. Nellie's English was heavily accented and she asked for "flower scraps" which she pronounced "screps," but despite her difficulty with English, Nellie was never known to come home empty-handed, and, sure enough, on her trolley ride back to Cambria City she carried enough flowers for all the neighborhood children. Josephine Zahornec remembers

All Souls' Day, November 1st, as a time to visit, clean, and decorate family graves. Byzantine Catholics celebrated the feast of Pentecost by decorating their churches and homes with green branches.

Weddings and christenings were important life celebrations for Slovaks, as were the unfortunately too frequent funerals. Weddings had been celebrated for many days in Slovakia, but the workweek in America cut these celebrations short; nonetheless, some contemporaries of Slovak immigrants thought they celebrated too long and too hard. Wedding parties were often rather large, and there were young attendants as well as those who were peers of the bride and groom. Those following Slovak tradition might wear or carry rosemary for good fortune and fertility. During their ceremony, Byzantine Catholic and Orthodox Christian Slovak brides and grooms wore crowns of flowers or jewels joined by a white ribbon. A church wedding and a dance or party at home or in the church or fraternal hall were common. Helen Polink remembered her wedding in Uniontown and how her sisters went to the church hall the day before and cooked all the food themselves. Chicken soup with homemade noodles was served first, and stuffed cabbage was among the many courses. At the reception the bride's veil would be removed and replaced by an embroidered or beaded cap (*čepec*) or scarf (*ručník, babushka*) to indicate her married state. A bridal dance was then held during which guests would give the bride or maid of honor some money, take a drink offered by the best man, and then dance with the bride. This custom gave the new couple something to get started with in their new life.

Not all the activities—social or otherwise—of the Slovak community in America were determined by traditions brought from Europe. As the second generation began to grow up, they introduced the Slovak community to "American" traditions and customs. Santa Claus soon replaced St. Nicholas at Christmas, for example. And for the second generation, sports activities were of great importance. Msgr. John Golias recalled that as a boy growing up in Nanty Glo, a coal town in northern Cambria County, baseball was nearly an obsession for him and his friends; they would play so late into the night that no one knew how they could even see the ball anymore in the dark. Churches and fraternal organizations capitalized on this love, encouraging second-generation membership by sponsoring baseball, basketball, and football leagues and tournaments; in the 1950s, the fraternal organizations added bowling alleys to their clubs when that sport became popular. American popular music blended with the Slovak taste for waltzes, polkas, and *čardases*, making a new kind of ethnic dance music and musician like "Jolly Jack" Robel of Shenandoah, Pennsylvania, popular in the 1930s, '40s and '50s.<sup>11</sup>

And the Slovak-American community was not closed to other ethnic groups. Slovaks lived and worked and, as we have seen, shared churches with older immigrant groups such as the Irish and Germans, as well as with their fellow immigrants. Mill neighborhoods and coal patches were remarkably cosmopolitan, and though this sometimes



*Churches and fraternal organizations sponsored sports teams to encourage second-generation Slovak membership. This is the North Side Pittsburgh Jednota basketball team in 1935. (Courtesy of the Slovak Museum and Archives at the Jednota Estates, Middletown, Pa.)*

brought friction between groups, it also resulted in their experiencing a kind of multi-cultural democracy that “Americans” would still be wrestling with two generations later. (Suzanna Thur used the Jewish New Year to predict the first frost of autumn.) And Slovaks mixed freely with Hungarians in Pennsylvania, for as Balch pointed out, they understood the difference between Hungarian peasants much like themselves and the Hungarian nobility trying to Magyarize them in Europe. (Josephine Zahornec remembers attending Hungarian events at nearby St. Emerich’s church, especially the gypsy funerals, where violin music brought tears to her eyes.) Although the first-generation Slovaks who immigrated to America tended to marry within their own ethnic group and religion, and even to marry people from their own town or region in Slovakia, the second and third generations began to marry outside the Slovak ethnic group, although usually not outside the religion except in the case of Roman and Byzantine Catholics whose intermarriage was common, at least in Johnstown. Johnstown Slovaks also remember that they met non-Slovak men and women in high school, both public and Catholic, where many of these relationships began, although they were discouraged by their parents and considered “mixed” marriages.

Although their families were modest if not poor (they had few opportunities for higher education, and they generally followed their fathers into the mines and mills or their mothers as housewives), second-generation Slovak Americans generally remember the community they were raised in as a happy one, for they were surrounded by family, supported by their churches, schools, and clubs, and lived in secure neighborhoods where they followed a familiar round of traditions. They look back with pride as they think of the “old-fashioned” values and strict discipline their Slovak parents gave them. They made many of their own toys (such as the bat and wedge used in playing “tip cat”), and they made a lot of their own entertainment by singing with family members, playing in

bands, or putting on plays in church groups. There were many opportunities for popular entertainment open to them as well. In fact, older Slovaks in Patton, Pennsylvania, point out how much more there was going on when it was a booming mining town than there is today; the most popular big bands in the country traveled to a dance hall there, and there were several movie theaters in town.

Radio, movies, national dance bands, and popular magazines and newspapers brought America into Slovak homes and communities and countered the isolation that ethnic Americans faced and felt. One of the first casualties of this popular culture was the Slovak language, and stories the second generation tell about this often reveal the ambivalence they felt toward their Slovak identity—pride mixed with embarrassment and even shame. They loved their parents and their traditions, but as a child, being different also hurt, especially if there was teasing or discrimination as happened when Slovak children admitted to the Irish and German elementary schools in Johnstown (before they built their own) had to enter by the back door. Many of the second generation stopped speaking Slovak except when they had to at home. And, ironically, the teaching of Slovak in their schools may have hastened the process, since the standard Slovak taught in the schools was not the same as the various dialects the students’ parents spoke, so it was not reinforced and even caused confusion in the homes.<sup>12</sup> It was easier for everyone to learn English, which fathers needed on the job and mothers needed in their shopping. In church services Slovak was replaced by (or supplemented with) English to keep the young people attending.

The first of the two biggest catalysts for change in the Slovak community was World War II. It took young men out of these communities to join the military and put young women to work in the war effort. It raised the status and pay of those working in the vital steel, coal, and railroad industries and protected their right to unionize. American domestic propaganda turned from trying to “Americanize”



*The yearly mass and reunion at Immaculate Conception Shrine in Bitumen, Pa., this one in 1992.  
(Photograph by Jim Harris)*

ethnics to arguing that “we are all in this fight together.” Government efforts to conserve food during the war even capitalized on meatless ethnic recipes. The Servicemen’s Readjustment Act of 1944 (the GI Bill) enabled many working-class members to attend college or to get training, and their education and increased confidence took them to professional or white-collar jobs. Parents who had worked hard in mills and mines pushed their children to take advantage of educational opportunities in order to escape such jobs. The postwar boom in housing swept second- and third-generation Slovak Americans out of the old ethnic neighborhoods and away from the old nationality parishes into newly built suburbs, although some of those suburbs became new ethnic neighborhoods. As a result, Slovak Americans became much more a part of mainstream America.

The second catalyst, deindustrialization, touched ethnic neighborhoods in urban and small town settings in Pennsylvania. The coal industry continued its steady decline after World War II, and many young people left mining regions to find jobs. The steel industry continued to boom until the 1970s and financed the education of many third- and fourth-generation Slovak children. But eventually decline hit hard there too, and the outmigration continued. Some of the old Slovak neighborhoods in Pennsylvania’s cities still persist, but with a shrinking and aging population. Others were taken over by newer groups that migrated to these cities. In the 1950s, closing coal companies sold their homes to the people living in them, and for many older Slovaks these provided good places for retirement. But the old coal patches too are shrinking and aging.

Membership in Slovak fraternal and clubs declined

despite efforts to add television and other attractions for the younger generation. The clubs especially have lost much of their Slovak flavor, since Pennsylvania law prohibits them from holding meetings or keeping minutes in Slovak or forbidding membership to non-Slovaks. Many older Slovak parishes have also suffered declines, and large churches built to hold the once huge number of worshipers are sparsely populated except for holidays. Reorganization in dioceses such as Pittsburgh and Altoona-Johnstown have closed some of these churches or combined them with others.

#### **BITUMEN, PENNSYLVANIA**

Between 1895 and 1920, the town of Bitumen in western Clinton County, Pennsylvania, was inhabited almost entirely by Slovaks (there were a small number of Swedes as well) who came to work for the Kettle Creek Coal Company. The First Catholic Slovak Union (Jednota) formed in 1896 and built Immaculate Conception Roman Catholic Church in 1897; the church was moved several times as the mining operations expanded. Inside the wooden structure the altar is flanked by statues of SS. Cyril and Methodius, and a crucifix on a pole, used in religious processions, stands in its holder. Slovak-speaking Vincentian Sisters of Charity taught in the Catholic school, and there was a public school as well; Slovak was commonly spoken on the street.

Bitumen was a company town; people shopped in the company store and those who found a way to get lower prices by ordering from catalogs had to pick up their merchandise out of town, as the company would not allow delivery of such goods. The company doctor, Dr. Mervine, who helped deliver babies and treat miners hurt in acci-



*Reunion goes in the cemetery next to Immaculate Conception Shrine, formerly the Slovak Roman Catholic Church, in now all but deserted Bitumen, Pa. (Photograph by Jim Harris)*

dents, was sometimes paid with chickens or produce. Slovak families raised their food in gardens, and many also had a cow and some pigs to butcher in early winter and chickens to provide eggs as well as Sunday dinner. They made their own sauerkraut (*kvasena kapusta*) and their own beer (*pivo*), wine, and vodka; and they cooked and ate the foods they had eaten in Slovakia.

The town had several orchestras and its own band which played for national holidays and some holy days. Work was stopped on holy days and people went to church and held religious processions. Dances and baseball games provided entertainment, and drinking and singing were part of most celebrations. The town had two dance halls, a union hall where plays were performed, and a Slovak hall that housed the two fraternal societies.

After World War I, the coal company did what many large employers in the nation were doing; they cut wages. Bitumen's Slovaks refused to work for the pay offered, and the mine was closed until the union contract ran out. During the ensuing strike, strike breakers were brought in, miners and their families were evicted from company housing, and the coal and iron police patrolled the streets in their black uniforms. When the strike was broken, most miners still refused to work for the low wages, and people left to find jobs elsewhere. Some families pooled their resources, rented railroad boxcars that they filled with their possessions, and left for places like Trenton, New Jersey,

where there was work.

The entire town closed down. The Catholic school closed and the sisters departed. The church had so few parishioners that it became a mission for St. Joseph's in nearby Renovo. When attendance was too poor to warrant even that, it was proposed that the church be torn down. But in 1969 a group of former residents, along with a handful of current residents, gathered to preserve the building. The Altoona-Johnstown Diocese agreed to keep the church as a shrine, and the Bitumen Shrine Corporation was formed to maintain the building and its cemetery, in which Roman and Byzantine Catholics are buried. John Machak, who grew up in Bitumen and who still lives there, is president of the Corporation, and he and his wife, Ella, act as caretakers for the shrine. The church was renovated and is now sustained by contributions from this group of former residents and their children and grandchildren. A sixty-three-year-old Renovo man, donating his time, spent a summer restoring the large crucifix in the churchyard. Every Fourth of July weekend there is a reunion in Bitumen, and former residents (some of whom had left as children) and their offspring return to attend mass in the church and to gather afterwards at the Machaks' home. One of the Machak sons-in-law has been videotaping these reunions for several years, and a number of journalists, historians, photographers, and folklorists have found their way to the town to do research.<sup>13</sup>



#### RUDY AND SUE ONDREJCO

In 1969, when he was seventeen, Rudy Ondrejco immigrated to America from Slovakia to live with an uncle who ran a small saloon on the South Side of Pittsburgh and who had no children of his own to help him. Rudy took English lessons with other immigrants in South High School; worked successively at Montefiore Hospital, Bethlehem Steel, and in the body shop of a car dealership; and joined the Pittsburgh Slovaks performance troupe where he met the woman who would become his wife. Sue Laco is Hungarian on her father's side; her mother's parents immigrated from eastern Slovakia at the turn of the century, and her grandfather worked in a screw and bolt factory on Pittsburgh's north side after first working in the coal mines. (He refused to learn English, and had his children translate from English radio shows and newspapers.) On Sundays, after the family attends mass at St. Gabriel's Slovak Church (now a "worship site" because of diocesan restructuring), they go to Sue's mother's house, where lunch is chicken soup and dinner features one of her Slovak specialties such as *halubki*.

Rudy and Sue co-direct the Pittsburgh Slovaks, a group which performs music, dance, and plays; and Sue recently began the Pittsburgh Junior Slovaks, which includes their four children. The couple has hosted the *Western Pennsylvania Slovak Radio Hour* since 1979, Sue speaking in English and Rudy in Slovak. The program is a mix of Slovak music, ranging from traditional folksongs to country-western; announcements of Slovak news and happenings in the region; and information about Slovak

*Ondrejana and Danitza Zatek offer the traditional Slovak greeting of Bread and Salt to Dr. Anton Gajdos, First Secretary for Cultural Affairs of the Slovak Republic Embassy in the United States at Prince of Peace Parish Center in Pittsburgh, Pa., December, 1994. Behind them a closed circuit television allows those in the back of the hall to see the ceremony. (Photograph by Nicholas Bocher)*

customs. (Many area Slovak Americans have revived Christmas and Easter customs after learning about them from this radio program.) Rudy also serves as an officer in the First Catholic Union, and Sue, in the First Catholic Slovak Ladies Association; they are involved in other fraternal groups as well. Rudy serves on the Diocese of Pittsburgh's cultural diversity committee, and has taught Slovak classes for the Community College of Allegheny County; the family has also hosted and sponsored programs for musical groups from the Slovak Republic.<sup>14</sup>

#### PENNSYLVANIA SLOVAK AMERICANS TODAY AND TOMORROW

There are some unconscious elements of ethnic identity which affect Slovak Americans, although this aspect of ethnic identity has not been much studied. For one, the values that older Slovak generations acted on in their lives are passed on to succeeding generations and may affect attitudes, tendencies, and personality traits, as well as behavior. Dr. Corinne Azen Krause's 1978 study of three generations of Italian, Jewish, and Slovak women found some basic differences between them, and she concluded that "ethnicity plays a role in the development of identity of women."<sup>15</sup> During a trip to then-Czechoslovakia in the 1980s with her husband and sister to discover the land of their roots, Sonya Jason wondered "do we retain a primal knowledge of our geographical roots in the collective unconscious?" She also wondered whether we have "a primal affinity for a particular topography because the area [of Slovakia] was much like my beloved Pennsylvania hills."<sup>16</sup>



*The Pittsburgh Slovaks, under the direction of Rudy and Sue Ondrejco, perform the shepherd's play (Jasličkári) for a community vilija or Christmas Eve Supper at Prince of Peace Parish Center in Pittsburgh, Pa., December, 1994. (Photograph by Nicholas Bocher)*

The Slovak love of beauty and nature, for example, may be expressed in new or modified ways for contemporary Slovak Americans. Illig and Rogers in their interviews with Slovaks in Patton, Pennsylvania, found gardens to be a link to their Slovak heritage, although now the men tended to be the main gardeners, whereas for the first generation it had been the women. And Glenn Bugos found his relatives in Slovakia to be like those in Pittsburgh in their desire to show off their gardens. "As a kid, with my relatives" he says, "I learned that it's always a good idea to ask for a tour of the garden, because you'll get one anyway." Indeed, despite the miles and the years and especially the Communist period that separated Slovak communities in Europe and America, when Bugos and his parents traveled to Slovakia, they experienced a remarkable similarity in the two cultures. They especially marveled at how the region they visited reminded them of Mount Macrina's retreat camp outside Uniontown, Pennsylvania.<sup>17</sup>

But the one thing that most characterizes the difference between the immigrant and succeeding generations among Slovaks in America is expanding *choices*. As we saw above, the second and third generations' options for jobs, places to live, and education began to multiply. Today, the majority of Americans number ethnicity as one of many choices they can make in identifying themselves. It has been said that each generation of Americans invents itself and this is true for ethnic Americans as well. Americans have a vast repertoire of interests and reference groups by which to identify themselves, and they can pick and choose

when to highlight what aspect. Someone once called Americans "situation ethnics" because they could choose to identify themselves as ethnic in particular situations—at a wedding, at a festival—and not in others—on the job, in the classroom. Ethnic identity in America today has shifted from a focus on the group to a focus on the individual and his or her choices. For many, Slovak identity is a private aspect of identity, expressed only within the family or close group. Other Slovak Americans, though, take such an interest in their heritage and in promoting it that they are sometimes referred to as "professional ethnics." Eddie Mesaros was active in Johnstown's First Catholic Slovak Band Hall, in St. Stephen's Slovak Roman Catholic Church, and in other Slovak organizations; he organized bus trips from Johnstown to Slovak Day at Kennywood Amusement Park in Pittsburgh; and he appeared at numerous festivals where he manned booths and cheerfully taught audiences a few words or phrases in Slovak or shared memories of life in the Slovak community and his work at Bethlehem Steel. His colleagues nicknamed him "Mr. Slovak."

Many (especially older) Slovak Pennsylvanians live their lives as they have always lived them, at least as much as possible. This is hardly surprising in a state with the highest percentage of people in the nation who have been in the same residence for thirty years or more.<sup>18</sup> These Slovaks, and many younger ones who have moved away from old ethnic neighborhoods as well, retain some Slovak traditions. The most common survivals involve foods and the

Easter and Christmas celebrations. Other identifiers such as the language have been consciously eliminated or allowed to die out. Some have been adapted to changing lifestyles; traditional foods served at Christmas may now be purchased rather than made at home, especially the time-consuming ones. Families may replace some traditional foods with ones their children will eat; fruit cocktail or fruited jello may be served in place of stewed fruit, for example, and fish sticks find their place on the Christmas Eve table as well. Some Slovak Americans have dropped the bridal dance from their wedding celebration, interpreting it as a sexist selling of the bride while others have modernized the tradition by letting guests choose to dance with the bride or groom. And some Slovak identity markers have merged with those of other, usually similar, groups. Slovaks routinely use the Polish *pierogi* and *kielbasa*, for instance, rather than *pirohi* and *klobása*.

But new ethnic markers such as Slovak Days have been created, and for some Slovaks a trip to Slovakia, perhaps to find distant family or just to see the village mother or grandmother grew up in, has become a new way of identifying with their Slovak heritage. Reunions, too, are increasingly important as ways to renew or intensify a sense of Slovak identity: clubs, neighborhoods, churches, families, and even whole towns hold reunions that draw people from all over the country.

And periodically some tradition or custom that has died out in a community may be revived by someone in the community or by someone from outside it, perhaps with some changes. Some third- or fourth-generation Slovaks wear a traditional costume in place of the white dress at their weddings. Slovaks from Prince of Peace Parish, formed in 1992 from seven former parishes of different ethnic groups on the South Side of Pittsburgh, held their first "Slovak Vilija and *Jaslickari* Program" in December of 1994, spearheaded by the Slovak Customs group of the parish. The event was attended by Dr. Anton Gajdos, First Secretary for Cultural Affairs of the Slovak Republic Embassy, and his wife and daughter, both named Dagmar. A traditional Christmas Eve meatless meal was served, followed by the singing of Slovak Christmas carols and a performance of the *Jasličkári*, the Bethlehem shepherd's play performed by the Pittsburgh Slovaks. They have been giving such performances in Pennsylvania and surrounding states since 1978.

Certain institutions and organizations act as centers to preserve, maintain, and promote Slovak heritage and identity. Churches are still important; they may hold liturgies or services in Slovak, foster Slovak choirs, or feature occasional hymns in Slovak. Mount St. Macrina remains an important center of Byzantine Catholicism and the ethnic identities tied to it, and thousands of people come there for the annual Labor Day weekend pilgrimage. And the importance of the ladies' groups that cook the traditional foods for picnics, for reunions, and for sale to others cannot be overestimated. Several of the non-Slovak Thursday daughters-in-law learned to make the foods that go into

the traditional Easter basket from lessons given at their church. St. Stephen's sponsored Slovak-language classes that were also weekly sessions in Slovak lore and belief because members of the first and second generation shared memories with those of succeeding generations trying to recapture what they felt had been lost. Some of the local and national Slovak fraternals, too, still function in both old and new ways. The oldest secular national fraternal, The National Slovak Society, is headquartered in Pittsburgh, and *Jednota's* printery is located in Middletown. (*Jednota* is the official paper of the First Catholic Slovak Union of the United States and Canada, still printed in both English and Slovak.)

Such publications are still important, but they have been joined by newsletters dedicated to Slovak heritage such as "Slovakia: A Slovak Heritage Newsletter" put out by the Slovak Heritage and Folklore Society; and "Slovak Heritage Live," a publication of the Slovak Heritage and Cultural Society of British Columbia. Also used to disseminate Slovak American music and information are radio shows like the *Ondrejcos'*, and the McKeesport *Slovak Hour* hosted for the last six years by Rev. Edward Bunchek. Slovak groups that perform music and dance in Pennsylvania include the Pittsburgh Slovaks, the PAS Slovak Ensemble (also from Pittsburgh), the Tatra Slovak Folk Group of Bethlehem, and numerous local groups like St. Stephen's Slovak children's dance troupe. Museums, archives, and libraries, including the Slovak American Collection of Western Pennsylvania which is part of the Historical Society of Western Pennsylvania in Pittsburgh, The Slovak Museum in Windber, *Jednota's* Slovak Museum and Archives in Middletown, and the Jankola Library and Slovak Archives in Danville, are resources that can be consulted when Slovaks search for their roots or want to continue or revive an aspect of their culture. Equally important resources, however, are individuals and families that maintain traditions or carry memories; they are living books to be consulted.

Folklorists are used to hearing dire predictions about how one tradition or another is dying out, and such predictions have been made for Slovak traditions in America. It is true that some have been lost and some have changed, and it is also true that Slovak Americans have not always valued themselves and their culture. But since the 1960s when ethnics began to reassert pride in their backgrounds,<sup>19</sup> and since the wave of interest in local history begun with the nation's bicentennial, Slovaks along with other ethnic groups have begun to examine and reclaim their heritage. New immigration from Asia, Latin America, and the Pacific Rim have made the third-wave immigrants less self-conscious. And since the Velvet Revolution and Czechoslovakia's split into two republics, Slovakia has come out from the shadow of the Czechs; more than just Slovak Americans now know that there is such a place as the Slovak Republic. In a recent review in *Newsweek*, the authors praise a book for including "not just the baroque and Biedermeier of Vienna but the babushkas of Slovakian



grannies."<sup>20</sup>

Like other ethnic groups, Slovaks have had their share of famous businessmen, scholars, and entertainers, but the real success stories of Slovak Americans in Pennsylvania are the stories of the "Slovakian grannies" and grandfathers; family stories such as those that opened this article. The heroes of those stories are ordinary people with extraordinary courage and determination; people who won by their hard work a piece of the American dream, if not for themselves, than for those who came after them; for all Slovak Americans—stepchildren no longer.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>In later years the family dropped the second "a" to make the name more closely conform to the way most people pronounced it.

<sup>2</sup>These family histories are taken from oral interviews conducted by Susan Kačik, and from informal conversations. Audio tapes of interviews of Josephine Zahorec by Susan Kalčík, Curtis Miner, and Ted Holland are available in the A.I.H.P. Folklife Collection, Collection 76 in the Special Collections and Archives, Stapleton Library, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA.

<sup>3</sup>For background on Slovaks in Europe and America see: Stolarik, M. Mark, "Slovaks," in *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, Stephen Thernstrom, Ann Orlov, Oscar Handlin, eds., Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980: 926-934; Stolarik, M. Mark, *The Slovak Americans*, in *The Peoples of North America Series*, New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1988; "The Unconquerable Slovaks," Lakewood, OH: Slovak Research Institute of America, 1989; Balch, Emily Greene, *Our Slavic Fellow Citizens*, New York: Arno Press, 1969 (c. 1910); Grisak, Michael J., "The Grisak Family," Volumes I and II, unpublished manuscript in Special Collections and Archives, Stapleton Library, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA; Linehan, Edward J. and James P. Blair, "Czechoslovakia the Dream and the Reality," *National Geographic*, Vol. 133, No. 2, Feb., 1968: 151-193; "Salt . . . the Bread of the Slovaks," videotape made in Slovakia with English dubbing, available from P. K. Sales/Services, Fort Meyer, FL; Sutherland, Anthony X., "The First Catholic Slovak Union: A Century of Fraternities," Chap. IX, *Jednota* June 18, 1994: 1 & 6; Liptak, Delores, R.S.M., *Immigrants and their Church*, New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1989 (esp. pages 131-141). For Slovaks in Pennsylvania see: Alexander, June Granati, *The Immigrant Church and Community: Pittsburgh's Slovak Catholics and Lutherans, 1880-1915*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987; Michrina, Joseph J., *Son of a Pennsylvania Coal Miner*, Lansing, MI: Heritage Press, 1983; Byington, Margaret, *Homestead: the Households of a Mill Town*, Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974 (c. 1910); A.A.U.W. Johnstown Branch, *Women of Cambria County*, Indiana, PA: A. G. Halldin Publishing Co., 1988 (see especially chapters on "Lifestyles of Women in Cambria County," pages 15-33); Bolchazy, Janine, M., "The Status of Slovak American Women in Pennsylvania, 1878-1914," Middletown, PA: Jednota Printing, c. 1984 (reprinted from *Jednota* annual FURDEK 1984, Joseph C. Krajsa, ed.); Sheppard, Murial Early, *Cloud by Day: The Story of Coal and Coke and People*, Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, c. 1947; Morawska, Ewa, *For Bread with Butter: Life-Worlds of East Central Europeans in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, 1890-1940*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985; "Going Under: The Legacy of Coal in Cambria County," Mary Yanni, ed., *Tribune-Democrat* Special Section, September 4, 1994; Greene, Victor, R., *The Slavic Community on Strike: Immigrant Labor in Pennsylvania Anthracite*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1968; Stolarik, M. Mark, *Growing Up on the South Side: Three Generations of Slovaks in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, 1880-1976*, Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1985; Illig, Barbara, "Life Narratives of the Slovak Community in Patton, PA," July 6, 1992, and Rodgers, Ramona, "Patton Centennial," June 30, 1992, unpublished student papers prepared for the Oral History Institute, 1992, in the Special Collections and Archives, Stapleton Library, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA; Bell, Thomas, *Out of this Furnace*, Pittsburgh: Univ. of Pittsburgh Press, 1991 (c. 1941); Michrina, Barry, *Pennsylvania Mining Families: The Search for Dignity in the Coalfields*, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993; *Out of the Dark 2: Mining Folk*, Barnesboro, PA: Northern Cambria High

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<sup>4</sup>Balch, p. 85.

<sup>5</sup>Morawska, pp. 26, 46, 313-4.

<sup>6</sup>Byington, p. 133. Miner 1989, p. 18, gives the figure of 53% of the Homestead works employees were Slovak. 800 Slovaks worked in Homestead in 1892 when the steel strike and battle took place there.

<sup>7</sup>Bugos, Glenn E., "Rodina," *Pittsburgh City Paper*, Vol. 4, Issue 24, June 15, 1994 thru June 21, 1994: 1, 8-9.

<sup>8</sup>Beik, Mildred, "The Competition for Ethnic Community Leadership in a Pennsylvania Bituminous Coal Town, 1890s-1930s," *Sozialgeschichte des Bergbaus im 19 und 20 Jahrhundert (Towards a Social History of Mining in the 19th and 20th Centuries)*, Klaus Tenfelde, ed., Munich, 1992: pp. 223-241.

<sup>9</sup>*Newsweek* Magazine, June 29, 1992: p. 33.

<sup>10</sup>See the Slovak Catholic Federation of America's annual, *Good Shepherd (Dobry Pastier)* for a current listing of Slovak Roman and Byzantine Catholic cardinals, bishops, religious congregations, institutions, parishes and priests.

<sup>11</sup>Greene, 1992: pp. 137-9. Robel is best known for his instrumental version of "Beer Barrel Polka," on the Decca label.

<sup>12</sup>Hammer, Louise B., "Language Death: The Slovak Language in America," *Good Shepherd*, 1993: pp. 87-94.

<sup>13</sup>Parucha, Leonard, "Bitumen, Pennsylvania Was a Social and Spiritual Mainstay for Slovaks," *Jednota* August 12, 1987 (reprinted from the *Clinton Times*; Parucha, Leonard, "Roots of GM Strike of 1937 Were Sprouted in Bitumen," *Clinton Times* October 21, 1987: 2; Stein, Fr. Timothy, "Bitumen Keeps the Faith at Ninety Year Old Shrine," *Catholic Register* July 21, 1986: 16; Susan Kalčík fieldnotes, July, 1992 in Special Collections and Archives, Stapleton Library, Indiana University of Pennsylvania, Indiana, PA.

<sup>14</sup>Batz, Bob, Jr., "Pittsburgh to Slovakia in one hour—by air," *The Gazette*, September 18, 1994: pp. 20-21.

<sup>15</sup>Bernardo, Stephanie, *The Ethnic Almanac*, Garden City, NY: Dolphin Books, Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1981: pp. 378-9.

<sup>16</sup>Jason, Sonya, "Czechoslovakia—Denizen of Democracy," in *Good Shepherd (Dobry Pastier)*, 1993: pp. 45-58. Ewa Morawska (pp. 106-7) observed that new immigrants chose to live in areas that resembled those they'd left. Slovaks who had immigrated from the high mountains of Spiš, tended to settle in the hills, in the Johnstown boroughs of Lower Yoder and Brownstown. See also "Immigration and Settlement Patterns and Spatial Distribution," in *The Harvard Encyclopedia of Ethnic Groups*, pp. 496-508 for a discussion of the relationship between geographical placement and ethnic group identity.

<sup>17</sup>Bugos, pp. 8-9.

<sup>18</sup>The national average is 13%; Cambria-Somerset Counties have the highest average in the nation, 23.5%. *Tribune-Democrat*, December 14, 1994: pp. A1-2.

<sup>19</sup>See Novak, Michael, *The Rise of the Unmeltable Ethnics*, New York: Macmillan, 1971.

<sup>20</sup>Oelbaum, Zeva, et al, "All I Want for Christmas . . ." *Newsweek*, December 5, 1994: p. 76.

# SLOVAK CHURCHES: Religious Diversity and Ethnic Communities

by June Granatir Alexander



*The First American Slovanic Presbyterian Church, Jessup, Pa.; later (post World War I), the First Presbyterian Church. (From the Golden Jubilee Book of The Slovak Calvinistic Union in America. Pittsburgh: Slavia Printing Co., 1951.)*

Between 1880 and 1924 an estimated five hundred thousand Slovaks migrated to the United States. They were part of the massive immigration movement that helped make the United States not only a more ethnically, but also a more religiously, diverse country: Slovaks organized over three hundred and fifty congregations and built hundreds of churches in America's cities and small industrial towns. Founding and supporting churches became an intrinsic part of the Slovak "immigrant experience," and it was a phenomenon that went on for nearly a half century. Because Slovaks professed both Catholic and Protestant faiths, they differed from most of the East European immigrants who were entering the United States at the turn of the century. And, since more than half of these Slovaks settled in Pennsylvania, this religious diversity was evident in the many churches they subsequently organized in the state.

This essay will argue that the development of Slovak churches did not stem from discrimination by other nationalities, nor did it reflect an alienation from American society. Instead, a fierce loyalty to their religion caused Slovaks to adapt to a foreign society by voluntarily forming separate ethnic congregations. Slovak churches, however, became more than houses of worship; they evolved into centers of social activity. In addition, for Slovaks, churches ultimately had a two-fold, and, seemingly contradictory,

effect. On one hand, belonging to an ethnic church encouraged Slovaks to view themselves as "Slovak." On the other hand, this emerging group consciousness was accompanied (and, indeed, nurtured) by an "Americanization" of Slovak churches. Moreover, by Americanizing their churches, Slovak immigrants laid the groundwork which kept their children loyal to these ethnic institutions for decades.

## **BACKGROUND: RELIGION, CHURCHES, AND ETHNICITY IN THE HOMELAND**

To understand the formation of ethnic churches, one must begin with the situation among Slovaks in their native land. Slovaks, one of Hungary's several national minorities, inhabited the country's northern region. Although all Slovaks spoke the same language, these denizens of northern Hungary did not have the sense that they comprised a distinct people. Instead, regionalism was rampant as Slovaks identified themselves and their fellow countrymen and countrywomen by local origin. Slovaks did, however, have strong religious identities. At the end of the nineteenth century, approximately seventy percent of Slovaks were Roman Catholic, while about seven percent followed the Greek Rite. Lutherans, who represented the largest Protestant denomination, claimed thirteen percent of the population. About five percent of Slovaks were Calvinists af-

filiated with the Hungarian Reformed Church, and, finally, Jews and "other" religious groups represented another five percent of the population.<sup>1</sup>

Slovak Catholics and Protestants were deeply religious. Their religions, however, were not founded on an understanding of theological dogmas; rather, they were blends of Christian liturgy and superstitions. On one plane, Slovaks participated in the sacraments and observed the mandated religious feasts, but in their daily lives religion was a system of beliefs rooted in peasant mystic traditions and affixed to the Christian calendar. For both Catholics and Protestants, religion involved communal worship on designated holy days and adhering to an informal system of rituals and superstitions. Important religious holy days were customarily observed with village processions, while other feasts were observed more simplistically. On some saints' feast days Slovak villagers came together as a community to pray for a favor legendarily associated with a saint. For example, on the feast of Saint Mark (April 25) they prayed for rain and good weather during the upcoming growing season.<sup>2</sup>

Communal worship constituted a routine and vital part of Slovak village life. Because not every village had churches for all the denominations professed by its inhabitants, some communities shared a church. Nevertheless, churches existed in towns and villages throughout the countryside of northern Hungary, and Slovaks who wanted to worship at a church or who needed a clergyman could find both. Most of these churches were centuries old by the time emigration got underway in the 1880s. And, for centuries the important milestones in family life took place in local churches. Villagers could find their ancestors' christenings, marriages, and funerals recorded in parish registers, and they could honor their forebears by visiting their grave sites in cemeteries located adjacent to church buildings. Churches thus represented continuity in Slovaks' lives, and were an integral part of their family histories.

Although religious worship was both communal and personal, Slovaks lived in a country where church and state were not separate. Hungary's Catholic and Protestant inhabitants paid church taxes to the state, and the Hungarian government financed the recognized religions. The state paid all clerical salaries and pensions, appointed church officials, and passed laws regarding church governance. In addition, church patrons (usually local gentry or noblemen) absorbed major maintenance costs for church buildings and rectories. In short, ordinary Slovaks contributed little voluntary money toward the upkeep of their village or town churches.<sup>3</sup>

When Slovaks migrated to the United States, they encountered a different situation. They found themselves one of a multitude of ethnic groups in a society that considered separation of church and state a fundamental principle. Many Slovak peasant traditions and beliefs became irrelevant in urban, industrial America, where communal prayers for bountiful harvests were no longer necessary.

Religion and communal worship so deeply entrenched in history, traditions, and daily life, however, were not readily abandoned. Instead, as immigrants adjusted, they adapted their faiths and traditions to conditions in America.

## FOUNDING AND MAINTAINING ETHNIC CHURCHES

The Slovak migration to the United States reflected the religious diversity of northern Hungary; it included Catholics, Lutherans, and Calvinists. In 1883, Slovak Lutherans established the first Slovak church in the United States, Ss. Peter and Paul Slovak Lutheran Church in Freeland, Pennsylvania. Over the next six decades, Slovak Lutherans organized more than eighty congregations in the United States. The first Slovak Catholic churches were also founded in 1883; one was located in Hazleton, Pennsylvania, the other in Streator, Illinois. (A running but friendly battle ensued over which of these two congregations was *the* first Slovak Catholic church in the United States.) During the next four decades, Slovak Catholics established nearly two hundred and fifty churches in the United States. Only a small number of Slovak Calvinists emigrated. A few of these Protestants affiliated with Reformed churches, but most became Presbyterians in the United States. The first Slovak Calvinist church was also organized in Pennsylvania, in a small mining town near Scranton. Slovak Calvinists founded fifteen churches in the United States; all were affiliated with the Presbyterian Church, and seven were located in Pennsylvania.<sup>4</sup>

A small number of Slovak Greek Catholics migrated to the United States, but their efforts to organize separate churches enjoyed little success. These Catholics established a few churches, but more often they cooperated with other Greek Catholics (especially Carpatho-Rusyns) to found ethnically mixed parishes. Byzantine rite Catholics professed the same creed as followers of the Roman rite, and both were under the Pope's authority; however, services in the Byzantine rite were conducted in Old Church Slavonic which used the Cyrillic alphabet. Marriage laws for priests also differed. The fact that Byzantine rite clergymen could marry while Roman rite priests could not, created problems for Greek Catholics in the United States. Some American bishops refused to accept wedded priests in their dioceses, and this refusal caused some Greek Catholic Slovaks to join an Orthodox church.<sup>5</sup>

Finally, a tiny number of Slovak immigrants converted to other Protestant religions, primarily to the Congregational Church. According to one survey in 1925, there were seven Slovak Congregational churches in the United States; four were in western Pennsylvania. In that same year, Methodists reported eight Slovak congregations in America.<sup>6</sup>

Establishing all these Slovak churches was a process that stretched over five decades. Slovaks founded a few churches in the 1880s and 1890s, but during the early years of the Slovak migration to the United States, church formation was inhibited by the fact that so many Slovaks



*St. Joachim Church in Pittsburgh, Pa. The first Slovak Catholic churches in the United States were founded in 1883; over the next four decades nearly 250 more were established.*

planned to return to their homeland. "Return migration" was a characteristic feature of the Slovak immigration movement, especially during its early stages. Overall, perhaps one-third of the Slovaks who entered the country before 1924 returned to their homeland.<sup>7</sup>

Given the high ratio of temporary migrants and the fact that Slovaks could attend non-Slovak churches, there was initially little impetus to organize congregations, and the first Slovak Catholics to settle in an area usually frequented the local Czech or Polish church.<sup>8</sup> While these churches served the immediate needs of temporary migrants, over time they were not suitable to Slovaks, especially to the growing number of Slovak families who planned to remain in a particular locale. Despite the use of Latin to celebrate the Catholic Mass, language and cultural differences meant that existing churches could not adequately serve Slovaks who wanted to go to confession regularly, who wanted to understand the Sunday sermon, or who simply needed to talk to a priest. Because services were conducted in the vernacular, existing Protestant churches were particularly inadequate for Slovak Lutherans and Calvinists. Moreover, many Slovak Catholics and Protestants wished to continue observing special premigration devotions and feast days. Creating an ethnic church would provide the means to perpetuate these practices. And, the existence of other national parishes in the United States set a forceful example for Slovaks and helped spur them to action.

Fraternal societies were the propelling forces behind the creation of Slovak churches. Following the example of other immigrants in the United States, Slovaks organized mutual-aid societies to provide financial assistance and mitigate the potentially devastating effects of sickness,

disability, or death. The three major Slovak religious groups formed separate national organizations: the First Catholic Slovak Union (1890); the Slovak Evangelical [Lutheran] Union (1893); and the Slovak Calvinistic Presbyterian Union (1901). The local lodges affiliated with these national religious organizations reflected the regionalisms that permeated Slovak society in Hungary. Slovaks from different villages often formed separate lodges and, as a result, some areas boasted several branches of the same national religious organization. Through fraternal newspapers, local lodges learned about and developed contacts with one another, becoming part of a larger Slovak network which extended beyond their immediate neighborhoods.<sup>9</sup>

This network proved crucial to founding Catholic churches. After having decided that it was time to establish a Slovak church, local lodges called general meetings, formed area-wide organizing committees, took up collections, chose church sites, and, finally, approached their bishop to request permission to found a church.<sup>10</sup> Rarely did Slovak Catholics encounter problems or opposition from diocesan officials. Occasionally, determined Slovaks were forced to pressure bishops to acquiesce in their demands, but rarely did these immigrants resort to establishing independent churches as Polish Catholics did. Two of these rare occasions occurred in Pennsylvania. In 1907, Slovaks in Masontown became miffed when the bishop decided that they could not build a church until a recently built Irish church was free of debt. Some Slovaks openly defied the bishop and organized an independent church that never affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church. In 1909, Homestead Slovaks, unhappy with their pastor and with the location of their church, formed an independent parish



*Slovak Presbyterian Church, Braddock, Pa. (Golden Jubilee Book)*

when the bishop refused to grant them permission to build a new church. The parish and the bishop finally settled their differences, and in 1915 parishioners were accepted back into the Catholic fold. As a result, Homestead boasted two Slovak Catholic churches.<sup>11</sup>

The formation of Slovak Lutheran churches followed a course similar to that of the Roman Catholics, but it was a course marked by turmoil. Local fraternalists were again the driving forces behind lay efforts to organize a church. With the notable exception that Lutherans did not need hierarchical approval, they followed the same procedures for founding churches as their Catholic countrymen and countrywomen. Lutherans did not require approval because there was no established church hierarchy that had authority over Slovak Lutherans in the United States. Once Slovak Lutherans began migrating, several of America's Lutheran Synods did establish home missionary programs to seek their allegiance. Initially, however, Slovak Lutherans remained independent and, in 1902, even formed their own Slovak Synod. Conflicts developed when the Slovak Synod decided to affiliate with the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference of America in 1908. Some Slovak Lutheran clergy and laypersons refused to adopt liturgical changes demanded by the Conference, and, as a result, serious divisions developed among Slovak Lutherans. Continued

disagreements over liturgical and theological principles led to the formation of the Slovak Zion Synod in 1919. It finally affiliated with the United Lutheran Church in America in 1962. Ultimately, most Slovak Lutheran congregations associated either with the Lutheran Church in America or the Evangelical Lutheran Synodical Conference.<sup>12</sup>

Catholic and Lutheran churches were not alone in trying to attract the foreign born, or in their willingness to encourage ethnic churches: American Protestant denominations also accommodated immigrants by welcoming ethnic congregations into their midst. Besides preserving the faith of Protestant immigrants, American Protestant denominations hoped to promote "Americanization" among immigrants and their children. Some home missionaries advanced the notion that Protestantism was equated not only with "true Christianity," but also with being "American."<sup>13</sup> However, even some Protestants who advanced such views encouraged the development of a Slovak ethnic consciousness in order to attract immigrants or keep them loyal to their Protestant faiths. Slovak Calvinists became primary targets of these Protestant missionary efforts.

The earliest attempts by Slovak Calvinists to organize churches were usually cooperative efforts. In some instances Slovak Calvinists and Lutherans created mixed congregations. Occasionally these two Slovak Protestant groups even cooperated with Hungarians to establish a Slovak-Magyar Church. For example, in 1890, Slovak Calvinists and Lutherans in Pittsburgh worked with Hungarians to organize a church. The problems generated by this unusually ecumenical and ethnically diverse undertaking were evident in the church's name. In Slovak it was called "The First Slovak and Magyar Lutheran and Calvinist Church of Saint Paul"; in Magyar [Hungarian] the name translated "The First Magyar and Slovak Lutheran and Reformed Church of Saint Paul." This cooperative undertaking quickly failed. By 1891 the church was simply called the Hungarian Reformed Church, and, while some Slovak Calvinists did remain members of the church, the Lutherans left. Successfully combining two religions and two nationality groups demanded a more ecumenical spirit than these immigrants could muster. Similar attempts elsewhere to combine two religions and two ethnic groups also often failed.<sup>14</sup>

Slovak Calvinists, then, had two choices: they could join Hungarian churches or form their own separate congregations. Those who decided to organize ethnic churches chose to affiliate with the Presbyterian Church in the United States. Although there was no Presbyterian Church in Hungary, almost from the outset of their movement into the United States, Slovak Calvinists identified with the Presbyterian Church. And, in turn, despite some liturgical and doctrinal differences between American Presbyterianism and Slovak Calvinism, Presbyterians viewed these Protestants as coreligionists.<sup>15</sup> Presbyterian home missionaries, therefore, worked to convince Slovak Calvinists to affiliate with the Presbyterian Church. But, in order to attract Slovak Calvinists, it was necessary for the Presbyterian



*St. Gabriel's Church in Pittsburgh, Pa., 1936; it was demolished and replaced with a new structure in 1972. Vibrant Slovak Catholic churches still exist in areas where large numbers of Slovak immigrants settled and where their descendants remain.*

Church to make these members of Hungarian Reformed churches think of themselves as "Slovaks" instead of "Hungarians." Before World War I, the Presbyterian Church succeeded in organizing six Slovak Presbyterian churches; four were located in Pennsylvania.<sup>16</sup>

The outbreak of World War I gave added life to Presbyterian efforts to attract Slovak Calvinists to the fold. Animosity toward Hungary, together with the nationalism engendered by efforts to create an independent Slovak homeland, prompted Slovak members of Hungarian Reformed churches to break away and organize their own ethnic churches. These newly created congregations often asserted both their Slovak and Calvinist identities. In Pittsburgh, for example, by 1921 a young minister had convinced fifty-six Slovaks to abandon the city's Hungarian Reformed Church and affiliate with the Presbyterian Church. The congregation wanted the new church's title to include "Calvinist," a term rejected by the Pittsburgh Presbytery. The congregation remained adamant but compromised. It accepted the English name assigned by the Presbytery—The First Slovak Presbyterian Church—but the members decided that under the church's English title the Slovak version would be bracketed and read: "Prvý Slovenský Kalvínský Cirkev" [The First Slovak Calvinistic Church]. Church members clearly thought it important to

identify themselves as "Slovaks" and as "Calvinists," not merely as "Presbyterians." Other Slovak Calvinist congregations did the same.<sup>17</sup>

For Calvinists, then, loyalty to their religion had initially kept them tied to a Hungarian church and inhibited the emergence of a separate group identity. Ultimately it was, however, their religious faith that became a means for asserting a discernible ethnic identity. The decision finally to organize separate Presbyterian ethnic churches often took Slovaks who had once been part of heterogeneous congregations and transformed them into members of narrowly defined ethnic churches.

Most Slovak immigrants remained loyal to their pre-migration faiths, but there were exceptions. Four Slovak Congregational churches in western Pennsylvania represented stark examples of conversion to a different religion. They grew out of missionary efforts under the auspices of the Slavic Department of Oberlin College, the proselytizing arm of the Congregational Church in the United States.<sup>18</sup> The origins of western Pennsylvania's four Slovak Congregational churches lay in Braddock. Responding to an appeal by a local church member, in 1891 the Home Mission Board of the Congregational Church began missionary work among the town's Slavic immigrants. At the time, there were no Slovak churches in Braddock. By 1896, the Reverend John Jelinek, a Czech immigrant and a recent graduate of Oberlin College's Slavic Department, had succeeded in establishing a Slovak Congregational Church in the town. The Braddock congregation laid the groundwork for the creation of three additional churches; by 1900 it had three branches: Charleroi (1900); Duquesne (1901); and Pittsburgh (1901). All three branches eventually became congregations, independent of their "mother church" in Braddock.<sup>19</sup>

Slovak Congregationalists were not practicing the faith that they had professed in their homeland. Regardless of their religious backgrounds, the religion that these Slovaks adopted in the United States differed from what they would have practiced in Hungary. Moreover, Slovak Congregationalists adhered to strict religious beliefs which rejected important cultural traditions typically identified with Slovaks. For example, they denounced drinking, dancing, and playing cards. Because they adopted a more austere way of life than many of their fellow countrymen and countrywomen, these Slovak Protestants separated themselves from the large number of Slovaks who lived in their neighborhoods or towns. On Sundays, Slovak Congregationalists worshiped at regular morning services, and in the evening participated in "Christian Endeavors," consisting of Bible readings followed by discussions or, perhaps, by a consideration of current religious or social debates on subjects such as temperance. On Wednesday evenings, congregations regularly assembled for a prayer meeting. Sunday and Wednesday services usually included only members of the individual Slovak Congregational Church, but other religious gatherings involved Congregationalists from the three other Slovak churches in western Pennsyl-



*St. Paul's Slovak Presbyterian Church, Jersey City, N.J. Only a small number of Slovak Calvinists emigrated, and most of them became Presbyterians in the United States. (Golden Jubilee Book)*

vania. Every three months, one of these Congregational churches sponsored a rally, and members of the remaining three congregations traveled to the host church to participate. The rally included religious speakers, singing, the awarding of testimonials and, finally, a dinner. These quarterly events helped Slovak Congregationalists from the four churches to maintain close contact.<sup>20</sup> In effect, this interaction brought Slovak Congregationalists together and made them distinct from Congregationalists of other nationalities. Non-Slovak Congregationalists did not attend the Slovak rallies. Western Pennsylvania's four churches were probably the most vibrant and long-lived Slovak Congregational churches in the United States. Their vitality was due in large measure to their proximity, and to the constant interaction of their church members.

Slovak Congregationalists, Lutherans, Presbyterians, and Catholics, then, came to form separate ethnic bodies within their respective American denominations, and this separation was furthered by the interdependence of Slovak congregations. Not only did Slovaks from one church participate in the dedication ceremonies of other Slovak churches, they also relied on each other's pastors for assistance. Slovak clergymen routinely helped one another celebrate important religious ceremonies, and when pastors or ministers went on vacation, left town, or became ill, clergymen from other Slovak churches substituted during their absence. This interdependence made Slovak Catholic churches an identifiable ethnic subsystem within a diocese.

In the case of Protestants, it made Slovak churches separate systems within the denomination. The establishment of churches thus encouraged Slovaks to remain part of a general church body, while simultaneously separating them from coreligionists of other nationalities.<sup>21</sup>

#### AMERICANIZING AND REMAINING ETHNIC

Unlike the situation in Europe, America's Slovak congregations had to devise ways to raise money to meet their mortgage payments, pay their pastors, and operate their churches. Still, some Slovak congregations needed to be more self-reliant than others. Slovak Catholic parishes received no financial assistance from their dioceses, and therefore had to be completely self-sufficient; to raise funds, Catholic parishes assessed monthly fees. Slovak Lutherans, who faced the same situation as their Catholic countrymen and countrywomen, also instituted mandatory contribution systems. Monthly assessments, however, proved insufficient, and parishes had to devise other measures to raise money. The Lutheran clergy frowned on social fundraisers for the church but Catholics did not, and Catholic parishes and fraternal societies regularly held fund-raising events.<sup>22</sup> Because their home mission boards supplied some financial help, Slovak Congregationalists and Presbyterians fared better than Catholics and Lutherans. Into at least the 1930s, Slovak Presbyterian churches benefited from loans and grants from their respective presbyteries, but this support was not sufficient to operate a church, so members also took independent measures to secure funds, instituting an assessment system and sponsoring church picnics to raise needed monies. The Home Mission Board of the Congregational Church assisted its Slovak brethren by providing some financial aid and by helping to pay ministers. Because they did not institute a regular assessment system, Slovak Congregationalists relied extensively on fund-raising activities to generate additional monies. These activities, of course, had to comply with the strict beliefs of the Congregational Church. To earn money, the women in each church formed a Ladies Aid Society which crocheted or embroidered articles and prepared baked goods to sell. The congregations held bazaars where homemade products were sold. It was customary for individuals from all the Slovak Congregational churches in western Pennsylvania to participate in these one-day social events.<sup>23</sup>

Although the purpose was to raise funds for the churches, these various activities acted as more than money-making ventures. The maintenance of Slovak Catholic and Protestant churches became the nucleus for extensive social activity in the individual congregations. Church socials were often family affairs where adults and children spent leisure time together. Youth groups even sponsored fund-raising events. Social gatherings provided a means for unmarried men and women to meet and court—more than one young couple would later reminisce about how their courtship had revolved around church activities. The need for self-sufficiency and lay support thus made Slovak

churches in the United States what they had not been in Hungary: centers of social life. In this way, they more closely resembled "American" churches. For Slovaks, their tradition of communal worship in a church expanded to include an array of social activities for the church. And, the fund-raising social, which played a vital role in the financial solvency of a church, became an intrinsic part of Slovak community and church life.

The need for congregations to be self-supporting had two seemingly contradictory effects. On one hand, Slovaks were forced to Americanize their churches by adopting what was for them the "American" system of church support. On the other hand, these new lay responsibilities caused Slovak congregations to take on a life of their own which separated them from other nationalities and heightened Slovak ethnic consciousness. Americanization, then, did not mean that these churches shed their ethnic character; rather, it meant that they adapted to the reality of separation of church and state and fit into the structure of their respective denominations in the United States. As Slovaks sought ways to maintain their churches, they altered the role that these institutions had traditionally played in their lives. In the United States, congregations were transformed from being groups of people who participated in communal worship to being groups of people who had a shared commitment to the survival of the church. And in the process, socializing became a communal church activity.

Even as Slovaks were remaining aloof from their coreligionists of other nationalities, they were becoming part of larger denominations. Catholics, for instance, recognized the bishop's religious and administrative authority over churches in their respective dioceses. They observed American religious holy days as well as their own traditional feasts. Parishioners usually accepted the pastors appointed by the bishop, adhered to diocesan statutes regarding the selection of church officers, and contributed to the special collections mandated by the diocese.<sup>24</sup>

The financial aid that the Slovak Presbyterian and Congregational churches accepted also inextricably tied them to larger church bodies. Moreover, both complied with the precepts of their denominations. Presbyterians, for example, conducted their own administrative affairs but accepted supervision by the presbytery. The nature of the Congregational Church in the United States required that the administration of individual churches rest solely with the congregation. Consequently, Slovak Congregationalists selected their ministers and elected their church officers as well as their deacons. Despite their autonomy, Slovak Congregationalists adopted practices that clearly reflected their tie to the Congregational Church. For example, the Christian Endeavor idea had been developed by a Maine Congregational Minister in 1881 as part of an interdenominational movement. The concept enjoyed the support of America's Congregational Church and became an essential part of church life for western Pennsylvania's Slovak churches.<sup>25</sup>

In common with other immigrants who came to the United States, Slovaks felt the sting of xenophobia and encountered the hostility and discrimination that anti-foreign sentiment engendered. Yet, it was the more tolerant—not the hostile—aspects of American society that led to the formation of ethnic churches and actually helped promote group consciousness. Separation of church and state and freedom of religion permitted Slovaks to practice their faiths and, more important, to maintain ethnic churches. Slovaks benefited from the competition generated by America's religious diversity; this rivalry actually forced the country's church bodies to tolerate ethnic differences. Competing for immigrant followers, Catholic and Protestant denominations encouraged cultural pluralism within their ranks as late as the 1920s. The pluralism of America's religious system thus abetted the development of a Slovak ethnic identity and, concomitantly, encouraged the Americanization of Slovak churches by welcoming them into a broader denominational structure.

Americanizing churches entailed more than maintaining churches and conforming to denominational precepts or practices. For Slovaks as well as for other immigrants, it involved establishing measures to insure their children's continued fidelity to their religion and hence to their ethnic church. As the founders well knew, the survival of ethnic churches depended on the second generation. To keep their children loyal, many Catholic churches built schools where their children received a Catholic, although not always a "Slovak," education. Most Slovak Protestants did not follow suit. Their numbers were too small to support schools, and, moreover, Protestant hierarchies discouraged immigrants from establishing nationality schools.<sup>26</sup> Slovak Protestant churches, however, held regular Sunday Schools for children, and were also able to take one additional, important step to keep them from abandoning their parents' church: they held some religious services in English. By the 1930s, Slovak Protestant churches were introducing English into their services to accommodate children and young adults who, having been raised in the United States, preferred to worship in English. The introduction of English did not mean that these churches abandoned Slovak; rather, they became bilingual. Congregations adopted different systems to accommodate the language demands of members. Some chose to hold two separate Sunday services with one in English and the other in Slovak; some made their regular services bilingual or partially bilingual; and others alternated English and Slovak services. Regardless of which system congregations chose, most Slovak Protestant churches remained bilingual into the 1950s.<sup>27</sup> Since the liturgical language of the Mass was Latin, Slovak Catholics, of course, continued to use Latin until the vernacular was permitted in the 1960s. Decades earlier, however, many Catholic churches had also instituted a bilingual system for sermons. Parishes opted for either bilingual sermons or for holding separate Masses with English or Slovak-language sermons.



## ETHNIC CHURCHES AND GENERATIONS

Efforts to accommodate the language preferences of the second generation, together with the attachments nurtured by the numerous church-sponsored activities, reaped benefits. While introducing changes, Slovak churches still survived for decades as ethnic institutions. Indeed, well into the 1950s Slovak churches endured the dwindling of the first generation. They could not, however, withstand changing demographics. The migration of members from industrial, ethnic neighborhoods to the suburbs, as well as the urban renewal programs of the 1950s and 1960s, adversely affected ethnic churches.<sup>28</sup> Some Slovak churches dissolved; others became ethnically diluted as new immigrant groups moved into old neighborhoods; and others were taken over by new immigrant groups. Nevertheless, some churches remained vibrant Slovak institutions.

The status of Slovak ethnic churches in the 1990s is far from clear. Since the decennial United States Census is not permitted to include questions about religion, it is virtually impossible to make generalizations about Slovak churches or religious identities among Americans of Slovak descent. Identifiably Slovak Congregational, Presbyterian, and Methodist churches have disappeared. Their small numbers, together with the mobility of second- and third-generation Slovaks, made their disappearance almost inevitable. For Slovak Lutheran and Catholic churches, however, the situation is more complex—some of these churches have enjoyed far more longevity. For example, not until August 21, 1994, did the Slovak Lutheran church in Bloomington, Minnesota, abandon its Slovak services, thus ending a 106-year tradition.<sup>29</sup> Numerous Catholic churches still maintain “Slovak” in their title, although it is possible that the memberships of some of these parishes are now ethnically mixed. On the other hand, some Slovak Catholic churches still have at least one Slovak Mass per week or month. Although the founders of ethnic churches have largely passed away, their legacies have not. They helped reinforce the principle of religious freedom in the United States. And, in cities and small towns where large numbers of Slovak immigrants settled and where their descendants remain—especially in Pennsylvania, Ohio, New York, and New Jersey—vibrant Slovak Lutheran and Catholic churches still exist.

### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>June Granatir Alexander, *The Immigrant Church and Community: Pittsburgh's Slovak Catholics and Lutherans, 1880-1915* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987), p. 4; Peter Brock, *The Slovak National Awakening: An Essay in the Intellectual History of East Central Europe* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1976), pp. 53-54; R.W. Seton-Watson [Scotus Viator], *Racial Problems in Hungary* (London: Archibald Constable, 1908), p. 434; Emily Green Balch, *Our Slavic Fellow Citizens* (New York: New York Charities, 1910), pp. 90-93.

<sup>2</sup>Alexander, *Immigrant Church and Community*, pp. 4-6, 48; Balch, *Our Slavic Fellow Citizens*, pp. 88, 90.

<sup>3</sup>C.A. Macartney, *The Habsburg Empire, 1790-1918* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1968), pp. 121, 502 (nn. 3, 4), 503 (n. 1), 530, 698-99, 723-24; *The Catholic Encyclopedia, 1913*; s.v. “Hungary,” by A. Aldasy; Alexander, *Immigrant Church and Community*, pp. 49-51.

<sup>4</sup>June Granatir Alexander, “The Immigrant Church and Community:

The Formation of Pittsburgh's Slovak Religious Institutions, 1880-1914” (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1980); George Dolak, *A History of the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church in the United States of America* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1955); Slovak Calvinistic Presbyterian Union in America [SCPU], *Golden Jubilee Book* (Pittsburgh: Slavia Printing Press, 1951), pp. 167-228; U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, *Religious Bodies, Pt. I, Summary and General Tables*, pp. 78-82.

<sup>5</sup>Walter C. Warzeski, *Byzantine Rite Rusins in Carpatho-Ruthenia and America* (Pittsburgh: Byzantine Seminary Press, 1971); Myron B. Kuropas, *The Ukrainian Americans: Roots and Aspirations, 1884-1954* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp. 45-48ff.

<sup>6</sup>Kenneth D. Miller, *Peasant Pioneers: An Interpretation of the Slavic Peoples in the United States* (New York: Council of Women for Home Missions and Missionary Education Movement, 1925), p. 198; Alexander, “The Immigrant Church and Community,” p. 553.

<sup>7</sup>June Granatir Alexander, “Moving Into and Out of Pittsburgh: Ongoing Chain Migration” in Rudolph J. Vecoli and Suzanne M. Sinke, eds., *A Century of European Migrations, 1830-1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1991), pp. 200-20.

<sup>8</sup>Jozef A. Kushner, *Slováci Katolíci Pittsburghského Biskupstva* [Slovak Catholics of the Pittsburgh Diocese] (Passaic, NJ: Slovak Catholic Sokol, 1946).

<sup>9</sup>Alexander, *Immigrant Church and Community*, pp. 15-27; *idem*, “Staying Together: Chain Migration and Patterns of Slovak Settlement in Pittsburgh Prior to World War I,” *Journal of American Ethnic History* 1 (Fall, 1981): 56-83.

<sup>10</sup>Alexander, *Immigrant Church and Community*, pp. 28-46.

<sup>11</sup>Kushner, *Slováci Katolíci*, pp. 32, 61. June Granatir Alexander, “The Laity in the Church: Slovaks and the Catholic Church in Pre-World War I Pittsburgh,” *Church History* 53 (September 1984): 363-78.

<sup>12</sup>Dolak, *A History of the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church*; Lutheran Church in America, *A History of the Slovak Zion Synod, LCA* (N.p.: Lutheran Church in America, 1977), pp. 104-200; Alexander, *Immigrant Church and Community*, pp. 67-83.

<sup>13</sup>Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1975), pp. 858-60; John Higham, *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism 1860-1925* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1955), pp. 28-63; Charles Eugene Edwards, *The Coming of the Slav* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1921), pp. 73-90; Kenneth D. Miller, *The Czecho-Slovaks in America* (New York: George H. Doran, 1922).

<sup>14</sup>Alexander, “Immigrant Church and Community,” pp. 532-35; Louis A. Kalassay, “The Educational and Religious History of the Hungarian Reformed Church in the United States (Ph.D. diss., University of Pittsburgh, 1939); Dolak, *A History of the Slovak Evangelical Lutheran Church*, p. 24.

<sup>15</sup>Kalassay, “The Educational and Religious History,” pp. 65-70; Miller, *The Czecho-Slovaks in America*; Edwards, *The Coming of the Slav*, pp. 73-83; Alexander, “Immigrant Church and Community,” pp. 527-28.

<sup>16</sup>SCPU, *Golden Jubilee Book*, pp. 167-97.

<sup>17</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 167-228; Alexander, “Immigrant Church and Community,” pp. 541-45.

<sup>18</sup>Lawrence B. Davis, *Immigrants, Baptists, and the Protestant Mind in America* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1973), pp. 109-30; Miller, *Czecho-Slovaks in America*, p. 178.

<sup>19</sup>*Pamatník Českých Evanjelických Církvi ve Spojených Státech* [Memorial Album of the Czech Protestant Churches in the United States] (Chicago: Krestanský Posel, 1900), pp. 224, 226. Although this book ostensibly contains brief histories of Czech churches, it includes Slovak congregations as well.

<sup>20</sup>Alexander, “Immigrant Church and Community,” pp. 560-64.

<sup>21</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 423-26, 463, 509-11.

<sup>22</sup>Alexander, *Immigrant Church and Community*, pp. 70, 74-75.

<sup>23</sup>Alexander, “Immigrant Church and Community,” pp. 549-50, 562.

<sup>24</sup>Alexander, “The Laity in the Church.”

<sup>25</sup>Ahlstrom, *A Religious History*, p. 858.

<sup>26</sup>Miller, *Peasant Pioneers*, pp. 134-35; *idem*, *Czecho-Slovaks in America*, pp. 89-92.

<sup>27</sup>SCPU, *Golden Jubilee Book*, 167-228; June Granatir Alexander, “Religion and Ethnic Identity in a Slavic Community: Pittsburgh's Slovak Catholics and Protestants” *Studi Etudes Emigrazione Migrations* 28 (September 1991): 438.

<sup>28</sup>Alexander, “Religion and Ethnic Identity in a Slavic Community,” pp. 438-39.

<sup>29</sup>*Star Tribune* (Minneapolis), 28 August 1994.

# SLOVAK FRATERNAL - BENEFIT SOCIETIES IN PENNSYLVANIA

by M. Mark Stolarik



Founded in 1890, the National Slovak Society's goal was to unite Slovaks of all religious persuasions; this is the cover of the Society's 1944 calendar. (All photographs are of materials in the Slovak Museum and Archives in Middletown, Pa.)



Calendar published by the Živena Slovak National Women's Benefit Society, which copied the National Slovak Society.



*Slovak Evangelical Union (Lutheran) calendar; religious and other differences kept Slovaks from uniting into one national fraternal.*



*Calendar published by the Pennsylvania Slovak Catholic Union, founded in Wilkes-Barre, Pa., in 1893.*



*First Catholic Slovak Society Calendar. Slovak men established the first fraternal only for themselves.*

When one analyzes the workings of Slovak-American communities, one quickly realizes that they consisted of three very important components: parish churches, newspapers, and fraternal-benefit societies.<sup>1</sup> The last-named, in fact, appeared first among American Slovaks and often took the lead in establishing the parishes and newspapers. Since almost half of the 619,866 Slovaks who lived in the United States in 1920 resided in Pennsylvania,<sup>2</sup> it is not surprising that more than half of their national fraternal societies also appeared in this state. This article will outline the origins, growth, functions, rituals, and eventual decline of Slovak fraternal-benefit societies in Pennsylvania.

When Slovaks started to immigrate to the United States in large numbers in search of work in the 1880s, they found this country singularly devoid of social services. If an immigrant fell ill, had an accident, or died, no one gave him or his family any support or compensation. Therefore, the pioneers quickly concluded that they had to help themselves, if they were to survive in America's capitalist society.<sup>3</sup>

Whether they remembered fraternal-benefit societies or craft guilds that had existed in Hungary, or copied societies that arose among other immigrants in America, Slovaks in the United States established fifty local fraternal-benefit societies in the 1880s, twenty-five of them in Pennsylvania.<sup>4</sup> By 1890 these local fraternal societies began to federate into national bodies, and about half were headquartered in Pennsylvania.

Between 1890 and 1918, five large and three small national fraternal societies appeared among Slovaks in Pennsylvania. The first, and most important, was the National Slovak Society, with its headquarters in Pittsburgh. Founded on February 15, 1890, its goal was to unite Slovaks of all religious persuasions into a national fraternal that would provide them with accident, illness, and burial insurance, while at the same time championing the right of Slovaks in their homeland, the Kingdom of Hungary, to home-rule or independence. By 1920 it had 39,473 members.<sup>5</sup>

Religious, and other, differences, however, kept the Slovaks from uniting into one national fraternal. On September 4, 1890, Roman Catholic Slovaks in Cleveland established the First Catholic Slovak Union,<sup>6</sup> and a little later Slovaks of other religious persuasions followed suit. Thus, in 1893 Slovak Lutherans created the Slovak Evangelical Union in Freeland, Pennsylvania, and in 1901 Slovak Calvinists (Reformed) set up the Slovak Calvin Presbyterian Union in Mount Carmel, Pennsylvania. By 1920 the former had 7,821 members and the latter almost one thousand.<sup>7</sup>

Since Slovak men established the first fraternal societies only for themselves, their wives soon created parallel organizations. Thus, in 1891, a group of Slovak women established the 'Živena' Slovak National Women's Benefit Society in New York City; it copied the National Slovak Society.<sup>8</sup> In 1892, Slovak Catholic women in Cleveland created the First Catholic Slovak Ladies' Union, and in



Michael Petrakovič's certificate of membership in the First Slovak Catholic Union (November, 1907).

1898, Slovak Lutheran women set up the Slovak Evangelical Women's Union in Pittsburgh. By 1920 the latter had 3,328 members.<sup>9</sup>

Indeed, even regional fraternal societies split along gender lines. Thus, after a group of men had established the Pennsylvania Slovak Catholic Union in Wilkes-Barre in 1893, a group of women in 1898 created the Ladies Pennsylvania Slovak Catholic Union in Hazleton. In 1920 the men had 21,612, and the women 12,771 members.<sup>10</sup>

Finally, personal rivalries and jealousies led to the establishment of two small fraternal societies in Pennsylvania before World War I. One was the Independent National Slovak Society, headquartered in Pittsburgh, and the other was the Slovak Catholic Brotherhood, with its home base in Braddock. Since neither of these fraternal societies could attract more than two thousand members, they were later absorbed by the much larger fraternal societies mentioned earlier.<sup>11</sup>

As mentioned above, the main purpose of fraternal-benefit societies was to provide accident, illness, or burial insurance to their members. In the early years of their existence, the fraternal societies generally charged fifty cents a month in dues, and paid accident, illness, or death claims, depending upon their resources. Later, they came to be regulated by the states in which they were located, and the dues paid and the compensation provided was standardized according to state rules and regulations.

Besides providing insurance for their members, local lodges also served many community functions. Almost all

Slovak parishes, of all religious denominations, were founded by fraternal-benefit societies. Furthermore, these fraternal societies controlled their members' behavior by fining them for such spiritual transgressions as drunkenness, swearing in public, or missing certain religious services. In this way they helped to "Americanize" their members.<sup>12</sup>

At their monthly meetings the local fraternal societies promoted American democracy as practiced through their by-laws. The president opened the meeting with a prayer (or a salute in secular societies), the secretary read the minutes of the previous meeting and the names of the members in good standing, while the treasurer collected the dues. After this the lodge dealt with payments made to ill or maimed members, or to families of the deceased. It also initiated new members, made loans to those who were deserving, and contributed to other lodges or churches which merited their support. The treasurer and financial secretary would report on the lodge's finances, as would the overseers. After dealing with any other business, the meeting would close with a prayer (or another salute).<sup>13</sup>

In the early years the lodges had their own distinctive uniforms, banners, and badges. The uniforms were worn on festive occasions (such as the blessing of a church), or else to funerals. Indeed, every lodge member was expected to attend the funeral of a "brother" (or "sister"). The lodge president might even own a horse, which he would ride during a special procession. Often, the lodges also had bands, which would play music appropriate to the occasion.



*The Slovak Calvinist Presbyterian Union was established in Swedeland, Pa., in 1901. Members had their own distinctive badges, as did members of other early lodges.*



*Members of a Lutheran fraternal, the Slovak Evangelical Union in Freeland, Pa.; 1893.*



Members of the Pennsylvania Slovak Roman and Greek Catholic Union, c. late 1930s.

The colorful (red, white, and blue) side of these lodge badges was displayed for festive occasions such as parades and communions, and the obverse (black and silver), for funerals.

Lodge badges usually had two sides. The standard side would be in some bright color, and would be worn on regular occasions. The obverse would be black, and would be worn during funeral processions. The badges of the officers, starting with the president, would be larger than the badges of regular members. The lodge banner usually consisted of the Slovak tricolor (horizontal bars of white, blue and red), with the name of the lodge sewn across it.<sup>14</sup>

The larger lodges often built "Slovak Halls," either alone, or in concert with another lodge. Here they would hold their monthly meetings, stage plays, hold gymnastic events, open a bar and, perhaps, a bowling alley, and generally provide an agreeable place for community social activities.<sup>15</sup> Almost every center of Slovak community life in the United States had such a "Slovak Hall," and many still have them today.

At the national level, many Slovak fraternal societies also published their own newspapers, usually weeklies. Among the Pennsylvania-based fraternal societies, the National Slovak Society published the *Národné noviny* (*National News*, 1911--), the Pennsylvania Slovak Catholic Union the *Bratstvo* (*Brotherhood*, 1899–1990), the Ladies' Pennsylvania Slovak Catholic Union the *Zornička* (*Morning Star*, 1941--), the Slovak Evangelical Union the *Slovenský hlásnik* (*Slovak Herald*, 1900–1962; since then *United Lutheran*), and the Slovak Calvin Presbyterian Union the *Slovenský Kalvín* (*Slovak Calvinist*, 1907–1962; since then simply *The Calvin*). While some of these newspapers have since folded, or have become monthlies, they served their members well by providing essential information about the

activities of their lodges, their members, and the Slovak community at large.<sup>16</sup>

Even though Slovak fraternal-benefit societies provided essential services to their communities in the early years of their existence, they began to decline in the second half of the 20th century because they began to lose their *raison d'être*. The Great Depression of the 1930s made it difficult for unemployed Slovaks to keep paying their lodge dues, and many fraternal societies lost members as a result. Furthermore, the social-welfare legislation passed by the United States government as a part of its "New Deal" made many lodge self-help functions redundant. Then, too, the advent of television and spectator sports in the 1950s and 1960s made lodge social functions and entertainment less attractive. As a result, only the National Slovak Society, and the Ladies' Pennsylvania Slovak Catholic Union, among the Pennsylvania-based fraternal societies, are still in existence, and their membership has declined precipitously. The other fraternal societies have merged into larger bodies and have either lost their Slovak identity, or their corporate existence. Thus, the Slovak Calvin Presbyterian Union is now the Presbyterian Beneficial Union, and the two Slovak Lutheran fraternal societies, which merged into one body in 1960, call themselves simply the United Lutheran Society.<sup>17</sup>

All Slovak fraternal societies, whether Pennsylvania-based or not, face a struggle for survival. If they are to survive, they will have to find new reasons for their existence. Meanwhile, they have left us an interesting and colorful legacy of one ethnic group's attempts to deal with American society through collective action.



The orphanage at Jednota Estates, Middletown, Pa., run by the Sisters of SS. Cyril and Methodius; c. 1930s.

Statue of the Reverend Father Štefan Furdek, founder of the First Catholic Slovak Union and the orphanage (The Immaculate Conception Home) opened in 1914 at the Jednota Estates in Middletown, Pa.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>For more details on these three elements see my *Immigration and Urbanization: The Slovak Experience, 1870–1918* (New York: AMS Press, 1989), pp. 69–109.

<sup>2</sup>*Fourteenth Census of the United States, 1920, Population* (Washington: United States Printing Office, 1922), 2:973.

<sup>3</sup>Margaret Byington, *Homestead: The Households of a Mill Town* (Pittsburgh: The Russell Sage Foundation, 1910. Reprinted by the University of Pittsburgh Press, 1974), p. 161.

<sup>4</sup>Štefan Veselý, “Prvé slovenské spolky v Spojených štátoch Amerických,” *Slováci v zahraničí*, 4–5 (Martin: Matica slovenská, 1979), 9–57.

<sup>5</sup>P.V. Rovnianek, *Zápisky za živa pochovaného. Z môjho 25 ročného verejného účinkovania na národa roli dedičnej* (Pittsburgh: National Slovak Society, 1924), pp. 127–30; Juraj J. Nižnanský and Vendelín Plátek, compilers, *Dejiny a Pamätnica Národného Slovenského Spolku 1890–1950* (Pittsburgh: National Slovak Society, 1950), p. 214.

<sup>6</sup>Štefan Furdek, “Katolícka Slovenská Jednota v Spojených Štátoch Amerických,” *Kalendár Jednota, 1896* (Cleveland), 26–7.

<sup>7</sup>Štefan Zeman, “Pät’desiat’ rokov šľachetnej práce slov. evanjelikov v Amerike,” in Martin Brožek, ed., *Zlatá kniha Slovenskej Evanjelickej Jednoty 1893–1943* (Pittsburgh: Slovenský hlásnik, 1943), pp. 33–6; Frank Uherka, “Krátky prehľad S.K.P.J Jednoty,” *Kalendár pre slovenských Kalvínov, 1927* (Pittsburgh), 37–8; Thomas Capek, Jr., *The Slovaks in America* (Czechoslovak Section of America’s Making, Inc., New York, 1921), p. 88.

<sup>8</sup>Helen Prikazky, “Krátke dejiny 1. odboru v New York, N.Y.,” in Pavel Blažek, ed., *Pamätnica k Zlatému Jubileu Živeny, 1891–1941* (Pittsburgh: Slavia Printing Co., 1941), p. 211.

<sup>9</sup>Kenneth Baka, “The First Catholic Slovak Ladies Association,” in Joseph C. Krajsa, et al., *Slovaks in America: A Bicentennial Study* (Middletown, PA: Slovak League of America, 1976), p. 172; Alvin J.

Schmidt, *Fraternal Organizations* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980), 343; and Čapek, Jr., *The Slovaks*, p. 89.

<sup>10</sup>Pennsylvania Slovak Catholic Union,” Krajsa et al., *Slovaks in America*, p. 197; “The Ladies Pennsylvania Slovak Catholic Union, 1898–1976,” *Ibid.*, 201; and Čapek, *The Slovaks*, p. 89.

<sup>11</sup>Čapek, *The Slovaks*, p. 89; and Philip A. Hrobak, ed., *Slovak Catholic Parishes and Institutions in the United States and Canada* (Cleveland: First Catholic Slovak Union, 1955), p. 183.

<sup>12</sup>Stolarik, *Immigration and Urbanization*, pp. 73–4; and M. Mark Stolarik, “A Place for Everyone: Slovak Fraternal-Benefit Societies,” in Scott Cummings, ed., *Self-Help in Urban America: Patterns of Minority Business Enterprise* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1980), pp. 137–8. See also June Granatir Alexander, *The Immigrant Church and Community: Pittsburgh’s Slovak Catholics and Lutherans, 1880–1915* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987), pp. 15–27.

<sup>13</sup>M. Mark Stolarik, *Growing Up on the South Side: Three Generations of Slovaks in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, 1880–1976* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1985), p. 40.

<sup>14</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 83, 87–8. Examples of Slovak lodge regalia can be found at the head office of the National Slovak Society in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, at the Slovak Museum and Archives in Middletown, Pennsylvania, and at the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

<sup>15</sup>Stolarik, *Growing Up*, pp. 39–40; Michael J. Kopanic, Jr., “The Slovak National Home in Cleveland, *Národný kalendár, 1990* (Pittsburgh), 46–52.

<sup>16</sup>For a discussion of the Slovak-American press, see my “The Slovak-American Press,” in Sally M. Miller, ed., *The Ethnic Press in the United States: A Historical Analysis and Handbook* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1987), pp. 354–68. For the individual titles mentioned in this book see Konštantín Čulen, *Slovenské časopisy v Amerike* (Cleveland: First Catholic Slovak Union, 1970), where the titles are organized and described in alphabetical order.

<sup>17</sup>Stolarik, *Growing Up*, pp. 88–90; telephone interview with Mr. David Blažek, President, National Slovak Society, October 14, 1994.

# EARLY FRAKTUR REFERRING TO BIRTH AND BAPTISM IN PENNSYLVANIA: A *Taufpatenbrief* from Berks County for a Child Born in 1751

by Corinne Earnest and Klaus Stopp

In 1964, John Joseph Stoudt pictured a *fraktur* in a book on Pennsylvania German folk art.<sup>1</sup> Stoudt recognized the early date of 1751 on this *fraktur* suggested it represents an important precursor to American *fraktur* birth and baptism certificates, which became so popular in southeast Pennsylvania in the last half of the 18th century and throughout the 19th century. Stoudt called this *fraktur* “the key” that links European and Pennsylvania *fraktur* dealing with birth and baptism. If that is true—that this *fraktur* is “key”—it deserves more detailed evaluation.

American *fraktur* birth and baptism certificates have their roots in a special type of 17th and 18th century European *Taufpatenbrief*, *Taufpatenbriefe*, or *Taufzettel*, *Patenbriefe*, or *Göttelbriefe*, as they are sometimes called, were common in parts of today’s Germany, Switzerland, and eastern France. These early manuscripts referred to a baptized child, the German word *Tauf* meaning “baptism,” *Paten* meaning “godparents” or “sponsors,” and *Brief* meaning here, “document.”

One essential part of the *Taufpatenbrief* was the *Taufwunsch*. The *Taufwunsch* was a religious verse or “baptism wish,” which was meant to accompany the baptized child throughout life. The *Taufwunsch* text was surrounded by illuminated religious scenes or ornamentation to make it more decorative and solemn. Early *Taufwünsche* were illustrated by hand, while later examples were printed. *Taufpatenbriefe* were signed by the sponsors, and the date (usually the date of baptism) was noted. Then the *Taufpatenbriefe* was folded to cover an obligatory *Taufdukaten*, which was a coin or specially minted baptism medal in silver or gold, made to commemorate the baptism. Often, this folded *Taufpatenbrief* was sealed. Every sponsor, usually two to four persons, gave their own *Taufpatenbrief*, so children received more than one.

The *Taufpatenbrief* was regionally common among evangelical people in German-speaking Europe. Specifically, areas where *Taufpatenbriefe* were common include Alsace in today’s France, Saxony, Thuringia, Lusatia, northern Bohemia (Egerland and Sudeten), and the Canton of Bern in Switzerland. A great variety of *Taufpatenbriefe* existed, often within a single region such as Alsace. Each had characteristics specific to a small locality, even a single village. Thus, from their appearance alone, it is possible to determine origin even though, typically, no location is mentioned.

One type of *Taufpatenbrief* is most closely related to the Pennsylvania German birth and baptism certificate (*Geburts- und Taufschein*). Early hand-done *Taufpatenbriefe* from an area south and southwest of Strasbourg, in the Alsatian region located within the borders of present-day France, most closely resemble America’s Pennsylvania German birth and baptism certificates. These early European manuscripts (circa 1600–1800) include not only the text of the *Taufwunsch*, but also the names of the sponsors and the baptism date.

It is a fine point, but an important one, to differentiate between ordinary *Taufpatenbriefe* which mention only the sponsors and the baptism date, and locally specific *Taufpatenbriefe* that also give the names of the child and his or her parents. This latter type, rare in Europe, most closely resembles American *Taufscheine* where the focus is on the birth and baptism text rather than on the *Taufwunsch* or other religious verses. This shift in focus is significant, and there was another important change from European *Taufpatenbriefe* to American *Taufscheine*. The European *Taufpatenbrief* was given as a gift by the sponsor to the child, whereas the American *Taufschein* was given by the parents to the child.

Of known European examples that record the additional information concerning the names of the child and his parents, only seven date before 1830. Four of these are from Illkirch, just south of Strasbourg in Alsace.

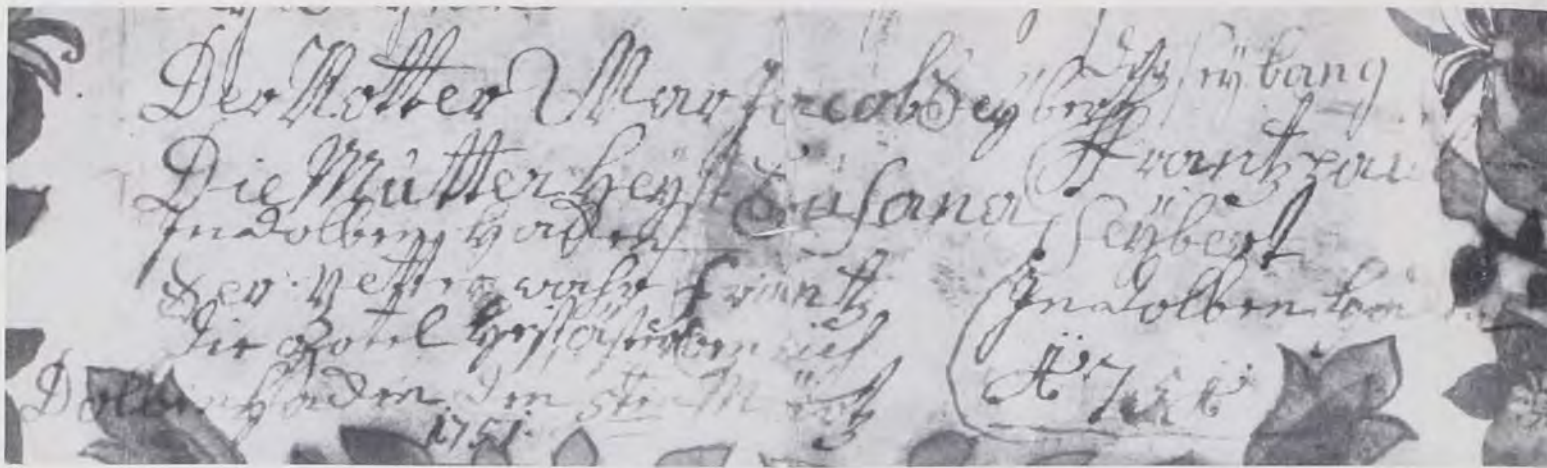
Outside Alsace, only one hand-done *Taufpatenbrief* is known up to now which records the name of the sponsor and the names of the baptized child and the child’s parents. This example was made in Switzerland (Frutigen) in 1812, more than fifty years after the first birth and baptism certificates appeared in Pennsylvania.<sup>2</sup>

Overall, the number of surviving examples of early Alsatian *Taufpatenbriefe*, which are the most important forerunners of Pennsylvania *Taufscheine*, is appallingly low. Two sources list the following Alsatian *Taufpatenbriefe* dating before 1800:<sup>3</sup> 1593 Saverne, one known example (a hand-written manuscript with no decoration) in the Archives de la Ville de Saverne; 1673 Climach, one known example (the first known hand-done manuscript with decoration) in the Archives Départementales du Bas-Rhin; 1691 Hoenheim-Bischheim, one known example (a hand-done manuscript) in a private collection, Niederbronn; 1696 Hoenheim-Bischheim, one known example (a hand-done





The 1751 Tulpehocken Taufpatenbrief



The Taufwunsch, written in red ink, takes up most of the text area on the 1751 Tulpehocken Taufpatenbrief. Squeezed below, in black ink, is a brief genealogy text: “The father was Jacob Seybert. The mother is called Susana. In Tulpehocken. The cousin was Frantz Wenrich. The godmother is called Äster. Tulpehocken, the 5th of March 1751. Frantz Paul Seybert. In Tulpehocken 1751.”

manuscript) in a private collection, Niederbronn; 1696 Strasbourg, one known example (printed) in Musée Alsacien de Strasbourg; 1697 Strasbourg, one known example (a hand-done manuscript), location unknown; 1698 Bischwiller, one known example (a hand-done manuscript) in the Musée Alsacien de Strasbourg; 1700–1709, one known example; 1710–1719, one known example; 1720–1729, two known examples; 1730–1739, five known examples; 1740–1749, sixteen known examples; 1750–1759, twenty-two known examples; 1760–1769, forty-four known examples; 1770–1779, thirty-nine known examples; 1780–1789, forty-four known examples; 1790–1799, 59 known examples.

Immigrants from Alsace had known, of course, the custom of the *Taufpatenbrief*, and it is no surprise that some attempted to continue this tradition in their new homeland. Yet the custom never took hold in America. When the Pennsylvania German birth and baptism certificate was introduced in the mid-18th century, it almost completely replaced the *Taufpatenbrief*. Thus, as expected, few examples of *Taufpatenbriefe* have surfaced in this country. The early example illustrated by Stoudt has been recently “rediscovered” and its significance more fully appreciated. This *Taufpatenbrief*, made for Frantz Paul Seybert of Tulpehocken in Berks County, Pennsylvania, records Seybert’s birth date of March 5, 1751. Since *Taufpatenbriefe* were to be given to the child on the occasion of baptism, this early fraktur manuscript may have been made when Seybert was baptized in April of 1751, possibly making it the earliest surviving American fraktur relating to birth and baptism.

When Stoudt published a picture of the 1751 Tulpehocken *Taufpatenbrief*, he recognized that this form was of American origin, and he knew it differed from later Pennsylvania German birth and baptism certificates. He misinterpreted

its origin, believing it to have come from Schoharie in New York, despite the fact that it mentions Tulpehocken three times.

Re-examination of the original manuscript reveals that the paper is probably not of American origin. The paper has a watermark, but previous restoration to the fraktur makes the watermark difficult to see clearly. However, similar appearing watermarks, not listed by Thomas Gravel and George Miller in their catalogue of watermarks, are known from England.<sup>4</sup> British paper suggests an American origin for the fraktur, for it is more likely a Pennsylvania German residing in the Tulpehocken area of Berks County would have easier access to British paper (probably purchasing it in nearby Reading) than a villager in Alsace.

Although this type of fraktur manuscript suggests Alsatian influence, too few examples of *Taufpatenbriefe* have survived on either side of the Atlantic to make a thorough comparison of decoration and text. The special decoration on the Tulpehocken example bears some resemblance to known Alsatian examples of the same period. A few motifs appearing on the 1751 Tulpehocken *Taufpatenbrief*, such as pomegranates, carnations, and flying angels, are common on *Taufpatenbriefe* in Alsace. These same motifs became widespread on early American fraktur.

Moreover, Dominique Lerch compiled known religious verses or *Taufwünsche* used on *Taufpatenbriefe* in Alsace.<sup>5</sup> The verse on the 1751 Tulpehocken example is unlike any on Lerch’s list. The text on the 1751 Tulpehocken example reads in its original German:

Ich wünsch dem Kind  
die Zucht und alle Tuchent  
Damit Es Zieren wird seine schöne  
Jugent. Es gebe gott dass aus Dir werd ein

frommes Kind ein rechter christ der seinen  
ältern ein wolust ist und bleibt im bund der  
Heiligen Tauf dein gantzes lebenslauff  
dass wolle dir der treue gott geben  
und nach diesen dass ewige Leben.  
Ich wünsch Dir Von Hertzengrund der allmächtige  
Gott spare [bware?] dich gesund. Er halte dich  
bey deynen ältern Lang und helfe wans dir sey bang.

Transcribed into modern German, the text reads:

Ich wünsch' dem Kind die Zucht und alle Tugend,  
damit es zieren wird seine schöne Jugend.  
Es gebe Gott, dass aus dir werde ein frommes Kind,  
ein rechter Christ,  
der seinen Eltern eine Wollust ist;  
und bleibt im Bund der Heiligen Tauf'  
seinen ganzen Lebenslauf;  
das wolle dir der treue Gott geben  
und nach diesem das ewige Leben.  
Ich wünsche dir von Herzengrund,  
der allmächtige Gott bewahre dich gesund.  
Erhalte dich bei deinen Eltern lang  
und helfe, wenn es dir sei bang.

And translated into English, the text reads:

I wish that the child's blossoming youth  
shall be decorated in discipline and virtue.  
Grant God that thou shall become ever pious, ever  
Christian,  
a joy and pleasure for thy parents  
remaining in holy baptism's union through all time.  
Thy Lord shall grant thee eternal life in return.  
I beg for you from the depth of my heart  
that the Almighty God shall accompany thee in times  
of darkness  
and keep thee in health and with thy devoted parents  
for long!

Study of the genealogy text and the handwriting on the 1751 Tulpehocken *Taufpatenbrief* is revealing. At first glance, it appears two people wrote the text. The *Taufwunsch* was written in red ink and occupies most of the text area. Squeezed below the *Taufwunsch* in black ink is a brief genealogy text. A literal translation into English of this lower text reads, "The father was Jacob Seybert. The mother is called Susana. In Tulpehocken. The cousin was Frantz Wenrich. The godmother is called Äster. Tulpehocken, the 5th of March 1751. Frantz Paul Seybert. In Tulpehocken 1751."

It is noteworthy that the date on the *Taufpatenbrief* is the date of birth rather than the date of baptism which was customary in Europe. Perhaps already making the transition from the *Taufpatenbrief* to the *Taufschein*, this document gives additional genealogy information lacking on Euro-

pean examples. It gives, for example, the child's name, the parents' names, and the location, information often missing on European *Taufpatenbriefe*.

The genealogy text on the *Taufpatenbrief* is so crowded into the limited space below the *Taufwunsch* that the author drew a wavy vertical line between columns to separate words which all but run together. A closer examination of the handwriting of the *Taufwunsch* and the genealogy portion, however, strongly suggests they were written by the same person in two colors of ink. Thus, in all likelihood, the *Taufwunsch* was not written in Europe and then imported, to be completed in this country once the occasion arose when it could be given as a gift to a baptized child.

The question remains, however, what led Stoudt to conclude that the *Taufpatenbrief* originated in New York. Stoudt may have assumed a New York origin because some of the people mentioned on the *Taufpatenbrief* came to Pennsylvania through New York with the so-called 1709'ers.

As the *Taufpatenbrief* indicates, Frantz Paul Seybert was the son of Jacob and Susana Seybert. Frantz's birth is recorded in the church records of Christ Lutheran Church at Stouchsburg in Berks County, Pennsylvania. The church records indicate he was born March 5, 1751—the date on the *Taufpatenbrief*—and was baptized one month later on April 8, 1751.<sup>6</sup>

Jacob Seybert, Frantz's father, probably immigrated through the Port of Philadelphia in the fall of 1738, perhaps from the Duchy of Zweibrücken.<sup>7</sup> He settled in the Tulpehocken area of Berks County, and was married on June 7, 1741 to Susanna Schütz.<sup>8</sup> Susanna Schütz was probably the daughter of Johann Adam Schütz, who immigrated through New York with the 1709'ers. About 1725, Johann Adam Schütz relocated in Tulpehocken, where he appears on tax lists.<sup>9</sup>

Frantz and Esther Wenrich, mentioned as sponsors on the *Taufpatenbrief*, are listed several times in the Christ Lutheran Church records from Stouchsburg where they served as sponsors at baptisms from 1744 to June 1752.<sup>10</sup> The word "cousin" referring to Frantz Wenrich should not be taken too literally. Frantz Wenrich and his wife, Esther, were sponsors at Frantz Paul Seybert's baptism, and although sponsors were often related to the child, they were not necessarily so.

Frantz Paul Wenrich may have originally come from Morschheim in the Rhenish Palatinate, north of Kirchheimbolanden. According to Henry Z. Jones, Jr., well-known researcher on the 1709'ers, he may have been the son of Benedict Wennerich.<sup>11</sup> If so, Wenrich was a five-year-old boy when his parents immigrated to New York and perhaps still a boy when he came to Tulpehocken. For certain, he was in the Tulpehocken area in 1743, but by about 1753, he relocated to Reading, where he appears on tax lists from 1759 to 1779. His occupation is listed as "gentleman."<sup>12</sup>

The decorative border of the 1751 Tulpehocken *Taufpatenbrief* was not necessarily made by Frantz Wenrich, but it is possible he wrote the text. Assuming Wenrich

followed European tradition, he would have given this fraktur to Frantz Seybert in April, 1751, at Seybert's baptism. The question is how he came upon the idea. Since Wenrich immigrated as a boy, we must assume he saw examples of *Taufpatenbriefe* which existed in the Tulpehocken area in the mid-18th century. Undoubtedly, immigrants flooding into southeast Pennsylvania from the Rhineland at the time brought with them European traditions. Thus, in all likelihood, this was not an isolated example of an early American *Taufpatenbrief*. Probably contemporary examples existed, but few survived.

Besides this example, other American *Taufpatenbriefe* are known. Among them are about a dozen made by the so-called Sussel-Washington Artist. This anonymous artist worked about the time of the Revolution in today's Berks, Dauphin, and Lebanon Counties, Pennsylvania.<sup>13</sup> Like European examples, and like the 1751 Tulpehocken *Taufpatenbrief*, the *Taufwünsche* on Sussel-Washington Artist examples occupy a place of prominence in the main text area, while a brief genealogy record is crowded below and in the margins. The opposite is true of American *Taufscheine*, where the central text is the genealogy text and religious verses are relegated to smaller, surrounding blocks.

In addition to hand-done American *Taufpatenbriefe*, a *Taufpatenbrief* was printed in 1821 by Peter Montelius in Reamstown near Ephrata, Pennsylvania. This specimen is the only American-printed example known,<sup>14</sup> and even this was never used. Thus, it appears the introduction of the *Taufpatenbrief* into Pennsylvania met with limited success, whereas the birth and baptism certificate gained great popularity in America, numerically dominating American fraktur from the middle of the 18th century throughout the entire 19th century.

The importance of the 1751 Tulpehocken *Taufpatenbrief* and what it teaches us is significant. It represents a rare American example of a European tradition which proved unsuccessful in this country. It also represents a transition from a European to an American form. This transition resulted in two major changes in the character of these personal documents. Whereas the European *Taufpatenbrief* focused on the *Taufwunsch*, the genealogy texts became central to American *Taufscheine*. And whereas sponsors gave *Taufpatenbriefe* to children, parents gave *Taufscheine* to their baptized children.

The 1751 Tulpehocken *Taufpatenbrief* represents one of the most important examples of American fraktur because of its transitional character and its early date. Since *Taufpatenbriefe* were given at the baptism event, this fraktur possibly represents the earliest surviving example of American fraktur referring to birth and baptism.<sup>15</sup>

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Stoudt, John Joseph, *Early Pennsylvania Arts and Crafts*, (A.S. Barnes and Company, Inc., Bonanza Books Edition, New York) 1964, Figure 331. At the time Stoudt published, the fraktur was in the collection of antiquarian Titus C. Geesey of Wilmington, Delaware. In poor condition at that time, it has since been crudely repaired. It was then sold August 7, 1993, at Horst's Auctions in Ephrata, Pennsylvania to Russ

Earnest, and is now in the collection of Professor Dr. Klaus Stopp in Mainz, Germany, where it has more recently undergone professional restoration.

<sup>2</sup>This piece is pictured in Konrad Weber, *Berner Taufzettel, Funktionen und Formen vom 17. bis 19. Jahrhundert*, (Benteli Verlag, Wabern-Bern, Switzerland) 1991, p. 23.

<sup>3</sup>Lerch, Dominique, *Imagerie Populaire et Piété Populaire en Alsace*, (Thèse de Doctorat d'État de l'Université Sorbonne, Paris) 1987, 1168 pages. Also, Lotz, François: *Nouveautés en Matière de Souhais de Baptême*, (Publications de Musée de l'Imagerie peinte et populaire Alsacienne de Pfaffenhofen, Pfaffenhofen) 1987, Number 24.

<sup>4</sup>Gravell, Thomas and George Miller, *A Catalogue of Foreign Watermarks Found on Paper Used in America, 1700-1835* (Garland Publishing, Inc., New York), 1983.

<sup>5</sup>Lerch, *op. cit.*

<sup>6</sup>*Records of Pastoral Acts at Christ Lutheran Church, Stouchsburg, Berks County, Pennsylvania, Part I, Baptisms, 1743-1819*, translated and edited by Frederick S. Weiser (The Pennsylvania German Society, Birdsboro, Pennsylvania) 1989, p. 8.

<sup>7</sup>Strassburger, Ralph Beaver and William John Hinke, *Pennsylvania German Pioneers*, (Reprint: Genealogy Publishing Company, Inc., Baltimore, Maryland) 1975. Two Jacob Seiberts appear on ship lists arriving at the Port of Philadelphia in the fall of 1738. One arrived September 9 on the Ship *Glasgow*. The other arrived on October 25 on the Ship *Davy*. Likewise, two Johann Jacob Seiberts appear in the Tulpehocken area of Berks County about the same time. Reverend John Casper Stoever recorded marriages of two Jacob Seiberts. One was John Jacob Seibert in Tulpehocken who married Maria Elizabetha Teiss on February 26, 1739. The other was John Jacob Saubert, who married Susanna Schütz in Tulpehocken on June 7, 1741. It is this Jacob Seibert and his wife Susanna, who are mentioned on the 1751 Tulpehocken *Taufpatenbrief*. See also Friedrich Krebs, "Emigrants to America from the Duchy of Zweibrücken," *Pennsylvania Folklife*, Summer 1972, Vol. XXI No. 4, p. 48; and Dr. Raymond M. Bell, "Pennsylvania Dutch Families - Seibert (Tulpehocken)," *Pennsylvania Folklife*, Vol. I No. 2, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup>*Early Lutheran Baptisms and Marriages in Southeastern Pennsylvania: The Records of Rev. John Casper Stoever from 1730 to 1779*, (Reprint: Genealogy Publishing Company, Inc., Baltimore, Maryland) 1984, pp. 56 and 58.

<sup>9</sup>Jones, Henry Z., Jr., *The Palatine Families of New York: A Study of the German Immigrants Who Arrived in Colonial New York in 1710*, (Universal City, California) 1985, p. 947.

<sup>10</sup>*Christ Lutheran Church, Stouchsburg*, pp. 1, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, and 11.

<sup>11</sup>Jones, *Palatine Families of New York*, pp. 1086-1087.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup>Earnest, Corinne and Russell D., *Papers for Birth Dayes: Guide to the Fraktur Artists and Scriveners*, (Russell D. Earnest Associates, Albuquerque, New Mexico [currently, Damascus, Maryland]) 1989, pp. 407-409.

<sup>14</sup>Currently in the collection of Professor Dr. Klaus Stopp, Mainz, Germany.

<sup>15</sup>Certainly, American fraktur contemporary with the 1751 Tulpehocken *Taufpatenbrief* exist. Fraktur from Ephrata Cloister and Mennonite fraktur from Bucks, Montgomery, and Lancaster Counties, for example, show early dates. But these fraktur do not concern themselves with baptism. Other American fraktur recording early and mid-18th century baptisms also exist, but these were usually made later than the date shown. For example, schoolmaster and fraktur artist Johann Carl Scheibeler records a baptism in 1749, but Carl Scheibeler's dates for making fraktur range from about 1769 to 1798. The anonymous Ehre Vater Artist recorded a birth in 1756 in South Carolina, but this fraktur was probably made about 1782. The Reverend Daniel Schumacher recorded a birth in Europe in 1746, but he dated the fraktur as having been made in 1781. Numerous other examples can be cited as well. One of the most solid pieces of evidence of an early baptism certificate comes from Reverend Daniel Schumacher's register of children he baptized from 1754 through 1773. Schumacher says he baptized Johann Jürg Müller, son of Johan Jürg and Margaretha Müller in August 1754. He noted he made a *Taufschein* for that child, but this certificate may not have survived. See *Daniel Schumacher's Baptismal Register*, translated and edited by Frederick S. Weiser (The Pennsylvania German Society, Allentown, Pennsylvania [currently, Birdsboro, Pennsylvania]) 1968, p. 215. An early Schumacher certificate known to have survived records a 1755 baptism. This certificate was made for Johann Martin, son of Frantz and Christina Bely. Johann Martin Bely was baptized May 25, 1755. See *Daniel Schumacher's Baptismal Register*, p. 221 and Earnest, *Papers for Birth Dayes*, p. 362.

# THE SOLITARY SISTERS OF SARON

by Jobie E. Riley



*The few buildings remaining at the Ephrata Cloister have been restored by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and are a popular tourist attraction. (Photograph by the author)*

At its peak, about twenty years after its founding, the Ephrata Cloister had some three hundred members composed of celibate women and men, plus some supportive married householders living on nearby farms. Founded in 1732 in the wilderness of what is now Ephrata, Pennsylvania (Lancaster County), by Johann Conrad Beissel, the society stressed sexual abstinence, hard work, spiritual devotion, and an austere lifestyle.

Beissel came to Pennsylvania from Eberbach, Germany, in 1720. He became a minister in the German Baptist Brethren sect, but left the group due to doctrinal differences, especially his belief in celibacy and his interest in worshipping on the Sabbath (Saturday). He retired to a small cabin along a stream, but he was not alone very long. Men and women of varied ages and differing degrees of intellect joined him. Separate quarters were built for men and for women, including Saron, the house for the celibate sisters. The few remaining buildings have been restored by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission and are a popular tourist attraction, especially the dramatic musical program *Vorspiel . . . (Prelude to the New World)*.

The sources for Beissel's beliefs involved Pietism, Rosicrucianism, Jacob Boehme and radical Pietism, the German Baptist Brethren (now the Church of the Brethren), and Inspirationism, among others. Beissel's central beliefs were that Jesus was androgynous, having his own masculine nature supplemented by Sophia, ancient goddess of wisdom and, he believed, part of the nature of the original Adam. In practice, this meant, then, that both male and female residents at the Ephrata Community considered themselves to be partners in divine matrimony with Jesus. This will be discussed in detail later. At any rate, although some references may appear to suggest homosexuality, such an interpretation would probably be a misreading of the material.

Asceticism was also a compelling part of Beissel's make-up. Great sacrifices were made by all members of the group, especially the women. A discussion of institutional methods used to handle these burdens will follow a brief review of these hardships.

Major themes in this self-imposed spiritual exile included celibacy, isolation, and severe privation. Forms and

procedures employed by Beissel included extensive measures to ensure separation of the sexes, distinctive clothing, long periods of silence, exhausting hours of choir practice, enforced attendance at lengthy religious services, and tedious manuscript writing.

The solitary of Ephrata were expected to die to mortal pleasures in order to live in eternal marital bliss in spiritual matrimony with Jesus/Sophia. Taking the required vow of celibacy was more difficult for some of the solitary females than for others. In several cases, the sister left a husband and children to follow the rigidly controlled life of a follower of the *Vorsteher* (superintendent) in divine marriage to Jesus Christ. Beissel spoke and wrote only in German. The name by which he identified himself ("Friedsam Gottrecht") was the German equivalent of "Father Peaceable, Godright."

To control unwholesome desires in the hearts and minds of his celibates, Beissel instituted several regulations pertaining to clothing styles, separation of the sexes, lectures and sermons, hymns, and the dual theme of earthly virginity and heavenly betrothal. Clothing, for example, was both functional and symbolic at Ephrata. All celibates wore long, loose-fitting, hooded robes, similar to those worn by Capuchin monks. Beissel deliberately set out to muffle the human form so as to reduce carnal urges. All celibates wore white to symbolize the purity of their lives, eschewing physical relationships and devoting themselves to Jesus/Sophia: "Wear white clothing and nothing crimson on you, other than that which clothes you for the cross: Christ's scarlet robe."<sup>1</sup>

In addition, plain, simple clothing emphasized the separation of the virgins from the world:

You are my most lovely clothes,  
 my finery and my jewels,  
 You adorn me with justice so fine,  
 as if I were clothed in silk, O Lord!  
 Let me avoid the nasty glitter,  
 In which the worldlings find their glory.<sup>2</sup>

Men and women were kept separate and out of sight of one another as much as possible, including during worship services: "The two galleries [in the chapel] were screened with lattice work like German synagogues of that day and were occupied by the women, the north side being reserved for the Spiritual Virgins [as opposed to the visitors who often came to worship]. The female entrance was a narrow door in the northeast corner of the hall opening to a narrow stairway which leads to a corridor along the eastern side of the *Saal*. Opening into the galleries is a narrow door, twenty by sixty inches, allowing the women to come and go unseen by the male members. Each gallery had three windows while the east side had four."<sup>3</sup>

Beissel lectured and sermonized incessantly, extolling the virtues of a virginal existence for both men and women. He stressed the theme in many of the hymns which he composed and required to be sung. He encouraged the



*Sketch of an Ephrata Cloister nun.*

sisters to perpetuate the theme of earthly virginity and heavenly betrothal.

The hardships which were endured by the celibates at the Ephrata Community included rigid schedules, sleep deprivation, meager diets, hard physical work, music lessons, long periods of worship and meditation, and difficult writing assignments.

Scheduling of time was of great significance in the maintenance of discipline at the Cloister. Because of Beissel's interest in Jewish law, he followed Old Testament ideas in this regard. The celibates observed the Jewish Sabbath and worked on Sunday. The day was divided into two twelve-hour blocks, beginning at 6:00 p.m. Following is a typical schedule:

<u>Evening to Morning</u>	<u>Morning to Evening</u>
Main meal of the day: 6 p.m. to 7	Waking and prayer: 5 a.m. to 6
School and lessons: 7-9	Employment: 6 to 9 Prayer, food if needed: 9 to 10
Sleep: 9 to 12 midnight	Labor: 10 to noon Mid-day mass: noon to 1 p.m.
Prayer and song: midnight to 2 a.m.	Labor: 1 p.m. to 5 Contemplation: 5 to 6
Sleep: 2 to 5	



Wall hanging at the Ephrata Cloister (Print courtesy of the Ephrata Cloister, P.H.M.C.; transcribed and translated by Walton Z. Moyer.)

So lebet dann die reine Schaar  
 Im innern Tempel hir beysammen  
 Entrissen aller Welt Gefahr  
 In heiss verlibten Libes-Flammen  
 Und lebet dann in hoffnung hin  
 Nach der beglückten Freiheit die dort oben  
 Da sie nach dem Verlibten Sinn  
 Ihn ohne Zeit und End wird loben.

The pure fellowship lives together then in the inner temple here  
 Separated from the world and its attendant fear  
 In fervent, amorous flames of love  
 it dwells in the hope of life above  
 In blessed freedom their hearts will raise  
 to the Lord their everlasting praise.

It will be noted that two three-hour periods were allocated for sleep. Even these periods, however, were not inviolate. For example, the midnight prayer service oftentimes extended beyond the two hours in the schedule. They were warned of the dangers of too much sleep, with the following enigmatic pronouncement: "Do not love sleep by which you will become poor, for a sleeper must carry torn clothing."<sup>4</sup>

Visitors often remarked that the solitary sisters and brothers appeared to be emaciated. They ate very little. Only one meal was scheduled, at 6:00 p.m., but individuals were permitted a small portion of food at midmorning if they were unable to do their work without more nourishment.

The demands of physical work were heavy. The Cloister was as nearly self-sustaining as possible. The residents grew their own food; made their own clothing, baskets, and matches; built and maintained their own buildings; designed and constructed their own furniture; and so forth. Since it was against their beliefs to dominate animals, the celibates pulled their own plows.

In addition to operating the colony, the members did much other work. Theirs was one of three major printing and publishing firms in the colonies (the others being the shops of Benjamin Franklin and Christopher Sauer in Philadelphia), and they published papers and books for outsiders as well as for themselves. They were very creative, being the originators of fraktur on this continent. "Fraktur illumination not only appeared in America first at the Ephrata Cloister . . . but also reached its greatest perfection there."<sup>5</sup> Beissel designed the outlines of the letters, but all of those working on the manuscript chose their own shading and coloring. No one could borrow a design or color combination from anyone else.<sup>6</sup>

(This style of embellished writing was originated by monastics in what is now Germany, as an easier, straight line or separated method of making letters. It is called *fraktur-schriften* (broken writing) or, more often, simply "fraktur." As may be seen in the appended examples, it became very ornate and complex. The term is now generally used to identify particular wall hangings and other printed items, rather than the generic style of printing.)

Choral singing was also a major part of the activity of the Cloister. The singing of the celibates was not only unusual in composition and used as a significant part of worship, it also served as an extension of the harsh, regular discipline endured by all. Beissel composed most of the songs and directed the choir. He was a "hard taskmaster," criticizing every fault. Seldom did a practice session pass without tears by the sisters and anger by the brothers. He would often scold the choir for two hours straight.<sup>7</sup>

Silence and quietness, too, were highly valued at the Cloister. Although no vow of silence was extracted, the solitary were urged to speak as little as possible, and only when useful: "Do not repeat that which has no substance nor permanence in it. You should be neither against God nor men, rather learn to speak well and to keep silence well, so then you will be worthwhile and pleasing to both God and men."<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, silence was considered to be a significant part of worship: "Among the rules for the daily life of the cenobites are such as these, 'Be withdrawn (*Eingekehrt*) and still—for out of the stillness of Zion goes forth the beautiful glory of God.' The poets of the community frequently enjoin inner quietude so as to be able to hear the voice of God."<sup>9</sup> In addition to these rules of conduct, a portion of hymn 94 reminded the members of the value of being quiet: "All sound must cease since otherwise one

# Ein Lob-Lied,

Dem in Gott gekehrten Vatter Friedsam zum Andenken  
abgesungen,

Als die ehrwürdige Jungfrau und Schwester ATHANASIA  
seinen Hingang aus der Zeit mit einem Liebes-mahl beehrte.  
Geschehen den 29sten August 1768.

**D**U lebt vergnüget, weil ein Feld  
gesieget, der dem Lamm so viele Leut  
hat durch seinen Fleiß erbeut.

<sup>2.</sup>  
D der treuen Pflege! der nicht müd  
noch träge ward bey so viel Gegenstand.  
D du theures Gottes-Pfand.

<sup>3.</sup>  
Sterben und Verwesen führt ihn zum  
Genesen: nun ist er zurecht gebracht, weil  
er ist zu Staub gemacht.

<sup>4.</sup>  
Zaget nicht ihr Kleinen, dann, nach vie-  
lem Weinen, ward der Kleinst von Gott  
erhöht, sein Gewächs nicht mehr vergeht.

<sup>5.</sup>  
ALL sein Guts gesüet, macht, daß man  
bestehet, wann die Sichtung kommt her-  
an, wie. der Vorgang hat gethan.

<sup>6.</sup>  
Josephs Traum-Gesichte bracht ihn ins  
Gerichte: doch sein keusch-verlobter Sinn  
half ihm durch mit viel Gewinn.

<sup>7.</sup>

D der Wunder-Zeiten! wer kan die-  
ses deuten, daß nun vor ihm allzumal  
bücket sich der Stämme Zahl.

<sup>8.</sup>  
Drum soll niemand zagen, wann er  
wird geschlagen: keiner dort die Krohn  
erlangt, der nicht hier mit Dornen prangt.

<sup>9.</sup>  
Schwestern, diß Bewegen bringt des  
Vatters Segen reichlich über euer Hauß.  
D was wird noch werden drauß!

<sup>10.</sup>  
Auch mit schönen Krohnen muß Gott  
dort belohnen, DJE, so dieses zuge-  
richt, daß uns jetzt so wohl geschicht.

\* \* \* \* \*

<sup>11.</sup>  
D du reine Taube! Gott geb, daß dein  
Glaube Schrancken-mäßig halte aus, bis  
zu in der Mutter Hauß:

<sup>12.</sup>  
Wirst mit vielen Freuden deinen  
Mann erbeuten der dich, seine werige  
Braut, hat aus seiner Seith erbaut.



*This eulogy had been listed in various sources, but no copies had been known to exist until this Broadside was discovered in 1972, inserted between the pages of a book in the Rare Books Section of the Pennsylvania State Library, Harrisburg.*



# A Hymn of Praise

Sung in memory of the God-honored Father Friedsam,  
As the worthy Virgin and Sister Athanasia  
honored his passing from this time with a love-feast.

This took place on August 29, 1768.

ZION be thou joyous, for the one victorious,  
Who through diligence and pain many souls for the  
Lamb has gained.

2.

Oh his faithful caring never was despairing;  
Despite pestilence and sword, he has won God's rich  
reward.

3.

His death and his decay lead to a better way.  
Because he's been changed to dust; therefore he's  
restored as just.

4.

You servants do not fear, for after suffering here,  
The least one by God was raised, and his fruit may  
last always.

5.

ALL his life was given; this assures him heaven,  
When the judgment shall bestow reward for his  
deeds below.

6.

Joseph's dream and vision brought him in derision;  
But his life was without stain, this transformed his  
loss to gain.

7.

Oh miraculous ages; who can grasp these pages,  
That tell of tribes who bow down low, unto him their  
homage show.

8.

None should give up worship, when he faces  
hardship.

On those heads the crown is worn, which on earth  
endured the thorns.

9.

Sisters, life with testing brings the Father's blessing;  
Richly on your house descends; none can tell where  
it may end!

10.

Then, with crowns of beauty God blesses as His  
duty,

THOSE who this have all prepared, that with us it  
could be shared.

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11.

Oh dove so clean and pure! God grant your faith  
endure,

Till you dwell with all the bless'd, in the Mother  
House of rest.

12.

There where joy will not end, you'll gain the  
righteous man,

Who raised you from out his side, to become his  
worthy bride.



*This translation was done for the present study by Walton  
Z. Moyer. By careful translation, Mr. Moyer was able to  
duplicate the basic rhyme scheme of the original.*



Der Christen  
 A B C  
 Ist Leiden, Dulden, Hoffen,  
 Wer dieses hat gelernt,  
 der hat sein Ziel getroffen.  
 Ephrata 1750

The Christian  
 A B C  
 is a suffering,  
 enduring, and hoping soul.  
 Whoever has learned this  
 has reached the blessed goal.  
 Ephrata 1750

*Page for the letter "C" from the ABC alphabet book. (Print courtesy of the Ephrata Cloister, P.H.M.C.; transcribed and translated by Walton Z. Moyer.)*

cannot hear the loving call of the voice which softly comes through the air."<sup>10</sup>

This paper will now cite examples of Beissel's directives and the sisters' replies. Beissel's instructions are often quite blunt and unyielding, leaving no room for deviation. His detractors often accused him of having a messianic complex, and some of his writings give strong evidence to that effect. The compensatory language of the sisters is often graphic, lurid, even steamy. Both Beissel and the sisters are marvelously creative and laudatory when they assign names to Jesus/Sophia.

Beissel wrote hundreds of poems and epigrams, instructing and encouraging the virgins. Regarding their lonely existence, for example, he rationalized its purpose as follows: "A solitary life, separated from the work and creatures, should be what you love best. For one can frivolously throw away one's happiness in this world. Whoever merely does, as he is or as he has come into the world, is already

where he should be. That is why man should learn to appreciate himself and his creator, and what the grace of the new covenant is, and recognize the same according to the will of God to sanctification."<sup>11</sup>

Explaining the need for and the value of suffering, he wrote: "Happy are those who suffer for the sake of righteousness; they die a happy death, for the death of the saints is regarded as precious."<sup>12</sup>

He often accompanied his description of earthly pain and privation with a promise of better things to come: "When you have cried enough, things will suddenly change, your many and long sufferings will suddenly disappear. The sweet fruit of suffering will surely enrich you yet; often the long-waged war appears the sign of victory. The cross must remain standing as long as you live on earth; whoever wants to go into God, must be raised up upon it."<sup>13</sup>

At times, he seems to be reacting to unrest in the ranks, as he chides his charges and then encourages them: "Go



The letter "C" from the ABC alphabet book. (Print courtesy of the Ephrata Cloister, P.H.M.C.)

and carry and put up with your burdens; nothing could be more suitable for the foreign sojourner. What are you croaking so much about, as if God had burdened you: it is your own doing, and all the injury of sin. Give yourself up, for then the burdens will fall, and you can rest in God's grace and love."<sup>14</sup>

Although there is no consensus among scholars regarding Beissel's poetic ability, he does at times soar: "In everything you do, behave as one who is poor and a possessor of nothing on this earth, and as one who can be transposed at any given hour, through divine destiny, into an utter abandonment towards God, angels and man. O what a happy prize when a heart is emptied of the comfort of all creatures, and O how that makes for joy and comfort on the day of blessed eternity, both in God and in his mercy."<sup>15</sup>

The following quotation reflects Beissel's basic argument for virginity: "The pure virginity which God himself has chosen, is from heaven, not inherent to Eve. Whoever

directs the pleasure of his will into God, is chosen for that, and goes into the chamber, where the betrothal of the purest souls flourishes, as they marry themselves eternally to the chaste Lamb."<sup>16</sup> Then, he broadens the appeal: "Whoever handles their widowhood and the ignominy of virginity with forbearance and patience and in quiet, will in the end be joyful, when the wonderful power of the highest will look with favor upon his seed. Isaiah 54:1. Rejoice with glory and exult you who are not pregnant, for the solitary one has more children than the one who has a husband."<sup>17</sup>

Hymn 28, from *Prelude to the New World*, probably by Beissel, emotionally describes divine matrimony:

I am in love, I can't deny it,  
 O pure, chaste heavenly bride;  
 I will tell of thy love which gave itself to me  
 in the Spirit;  
 For thy faithfulness has moved me  
 to give my all to thee.  
 Thou hast fully drawn me into thyself and  
 overwhelmed my senses.<sup>18</sup>

\* \* \*

The life of privation and hardship for the solitary sisters of Ephrata has been described. However, there is another side of the picture: "For the *Rose* or: *Very Fragrant Flower of Saron* it was a full and rich life—with far more culture and beauty and joy than fell to the lot of their married sisters in William Penn's colony—even though conjugal love was denied them, for were they not brides wedded in eternal virginity to a heavenly bridegroom?"<sup>19</sup>

The sisters did indeed make the choice voluntarily. Life was hard for pioneer women. Maybe the trade-off was worth it—current security within the sheltering walls of Saron and the assurance of an eternity of divine wedlock later, in return for a disciplined, hard life shared with others of similar dedication.

Beissel and the other occupants of the Ephrata Cloister were fond of hyperbole, both in titles and in description. The full title of what is known as the Ephrata Codex is a good example: *The Bitter Sweet or: The Song of the Lonely Turtledove, the Christian Church here on Earth, Which, from Parched Branches and Twigs in This Vale of Tears, still Laments Its Widowhood, and at the Same Time Sings in Hope of a Second and Repeated Betrothal. Ephrata, in the Year 1746.*<sup>20</sup>

One of Beissel's books of hymns (*Weyrauchs-Hügel*) has the following title: *Fragrant Hill of Zion, or Mountain of Myrrh, embracing many varieties of incense prepared according to the art of the apothecary, consisting of various love-inspired works of God—redeemed souls, expressed in many varied spiritual and delightful hymns in which, among others, the last call to the supper of the Great God is*

*excellently and variously presented for use of the awakened western church at the time of the setting of the sun, preparing her for the midnight advent of her Bridegroom.* Printed by Christopher Saur, 1739, Germantown.

\* \* \*

In referring to herself, a sister might use words such as lily, rose, bride, virgin, spring, true believer, dove, handmaiden, and so forth. Jesus Christ was also given many names, including "The giver, the gift, the Heavenly Rose, the morning-star, the Fountain from which refreshing waters flow, the Fountain of Nectar, the Heavenly Bread, the White Stone, the Tree of Life, the dove's Beloved, the Vine, the Palm Tree, the Pure Love, the Flower of Refreshment, the Castle, the Shepherd of the Soul, the Guiding Star, the Garden full of flowers, the Heart, the Morning-red, the Evening Star, the Evening Rain, the Rose-garden, the Golden Sea, the Lily-valley, the Philadelphia Fire, the Herb-Garden, the Grapes of the Vine, the unspotted Mirror of the Wisdom of God, the Flower of virginal virtue, the Healer, the one and all, the shepherd, a friend, and the bride-groom."<sup>21</sup>

Such naming was apparently limited only by the imagination and degree of fervor on the part of His admirers, although many of the names may be traced to such Old Testament sources as the Song of Songs. Incidentally, there is one other interesting note regarding names; the fact that all members of the Cloister were given a new name upon their acceptance into the society.

Specific items of Fraktur were done for a variety of reasons, in addition to the ever-present need to "crucify the flesh" with hard work. They were hung up as reminders, as inspirational devices, and as decorations; they were given away as gifts;<sup>22</sup> and they were used as tributes to deceased members: "When a Sister died they, in addition to the other customary German folk-rites, hung a personal prayer in Fraktur on the wall of her Kammer cell, over the head end of her bench-couch. After the funeral, the Kammer was shut up for a time with the prayer on the wall as a memorial, because of its magic influence on her soul in its flight into eternity."<sup>23</sup> (See also the appended copy of the hymn written by a sister on the occasion of Beissel's death.)

Although many sisters created Fraktur, there were, of course, some more skilled than others. It appears that Sisters Anastasia, Rahel, and Iphigenia were especially expert.<sup>24</sup> In the following examples of the work of some of the sisters, the first is a motto on the wall of the sanctuary which reads:

Thus lives the group so chaste  
In the inner temple here together,  
Snatched from the dangers of the world  
With fervently loving flames of affection.  
It lives on in the hope  
Of the blessed freedom over yonder,  
Where according to its loving inclination  
It will praise him without time or end.<sup>25</sup>

Scriptural references such as the following were often used:  
Arise, Zion, Arise! Arise!  
Virgins, do not delay!  
Thy Bridegroom comes  
To embrace thee with friendliness!<sup>26</sup>

Sometimes the format was poetic prose:

My Shepherd! Pasture me in a green meadow,  
and when I'm thirsty place me beside fresh water.  
Turn my soul around. Should I want to view what  
is vain, then correct my errant will.

My Healer! When I am wounded, when my strength  
is gone, let me be healed by Thy love-tincture,  
Thy precious-spent blood. Let the life-renewing  
of the spirit cheer and refresh me, strengthen my  
heart and will.

My Friend! Trust better in my heart, and let me  
more sure of Thy faithfulness be, that I may at  
all times rest the grief of my soul in the hollow  
of Thy heart. My Bridegroom! Love me and place  
upon my breast the seal of pure love, the Spirit.  
Let me know Thy greeting and Thy kiss. Be my  
mirror, in whom I view myself with a joyful heart.

My One and All! Let me here be one with Thee,  
then will all I have be nothing, but Thou will  
be my all. And when Thy kindness takes me from  
this earth, I'll go in peace into thy joy.<sup>27</sup>

At other times the rhythm is very clear:

O Jesus, Thou Flower of Virginal virtue,  
Thou Sweetness greater than the love of youth;  
I can do nothing else, I must give Thee my life,  
My praise, honour, Kingdom, possessions and fame.

Analogies to the senses abound:

Am I called a flower,  
To God's praise and fame;  
But am I so arranged  
That my smell pleases him?<sup>29</sup>

Significant imagery is used in the following hymn  
as well:

Thou shalt sing, my Dove:  
Come to my gaping wounds.  
So that no enemy looks at you:  
Here there is certain fragrance.  
Lay Thyself at my breast,  
And partake of sweet vitality.

Here, ye flowers in the meadows!  
Hear, ye birds up in the air!  
I want to betroth myself in love  
To my Jesus, who calls to me.  
I am His and He is mine,  
For ever shall his love endure.<sup>30</sup>

Some poetry is appealing in its wistful, sweet innocence:

The lambkin's not alone, the dovelet has a mate,  
And I no playmate have, nor shepherd who will wait.  
How long now must my heart in pass'nate longing burn  
Till my dear precious Friend myself his own will term?  
I know within my heart my love will ne'er grown cold,  
Yet premature this pow'r is wont to waxen old.  
I ever shall embrace the wisdom of my heart,  
Which raises me in it, and remedies my smart.  
But still it's not enough, to comprehend all this.  
I want the most beloved, our heav'nly mate to kiss;  
And since his look of love within my heart does lie,  
Such that he'll stay my boon, and other loves deny,  
And since 'twill surely be: he'll take me at the last,  
So will I choose him now and ever forth hold fast.<sup>31</sup>

Others made graphic references, in poetic prose, to the crucifixion wounds of Jesus:

So rests my strength in Jesus's blood and wounds,  
there goes and blows a gentle wind of love. With mind and heart to him I'm bound: I see before me sweetness pure. And thus I love to sit within the fissures of his side. There I'm at peace when all the storms are breaking, and gently rest in this cave of love.<sup>32</sup>

Still others combined Old Testament and New Testament references, with graphic imagery:

When the zeal of Moses threatens to oppress me,  
when the lightening strike of the law causes woe,  
when punishment and hell do threaten, I climb on high in faith and flee into Thy wounded side. In that dear place no ray of curse shall strike me . . .  
If Thou leadest me into the crucifying wastelands,  
I'll follow and put my trust in Thee . . .  
Death may seem to others dreadful, but not to me: my soul and heart and strength rest in Thee, Thou who deserteth no one, o most blessed Life!<sup>33</sup>

\* \* \*

There are indications that the Sophia tradition was at one time widely held, and its origins have been traced to a century before the Christian era.<sup>34</sup> But, "the Sophia tradition of early Christianity suffered a fate similar to the fate of the Sophiology of Gnosticism."<sup>35</sup> One of the major ideas of the Sophia movement, that of the "discipleship

of equals," was perhaps destroyed by the apostle Paul, controversial author of possibly forty percent of the New Testament: "Paul insisted that unmarried persons were more suitable for missionary work than married ones, and that married men were more able than married women, implicitly limiting their activities to the home. With this, Paul began a process that culminated in the theological defamation and marginalization of women within Christianity, and the concomitant conceptualization of the divine as male in the second and third centuries of the Christian era."<sup>36</sup>

This line of research would suggest that Beissel's beliefs were not nearly so far out of the mainstream of Christianity as many of his critics maintain. Also, even though the sisters underwent all the difficulties chronicled above, at least they were treated as "equal disciples" in the Ephrata Cloister. Perhaps the living martyrdom of the solitary sisters of Saron was worthwhile, worth all the privation, hard work, and discipline.

#### ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Georg [AKA Johann Conrad] Beissel, *Rules of the Solitary Life*, trans. Michelle S. Long, ed. Nadine A. Steinmetz (Ephrata, Pa.: Ephrata Cloister Associates, 1991), p. 2.

<sup>2</sup>Guy Tilghman Hollyday "The Ephrata Codex: Relationships between Text and Illustrations," *Pennsylvania Folklife*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (Autumn, 1970), p. 42.

<sup>3</sup>James E. Ernst, *Ephrata: A History* (Allentown, Pa.: Pennsylvania German Folklore Society, 1954), p. 191.

<sup>4</sup>Beissel, p. 39.

<sup>5</sup>Donald A. Shelley, *The Fraktur-Writings or Illuminated Manuscripts of the Pennsylvania Germans* (Allentown, Pa.: Pennsylvania German Folklore Society, 1961), p. 101.

<sup>6</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>7</sup>*Chronicon Ephratense: A History of the Community of Seventh Day Baptists at Ephrata, Lancaster County, Pennsylvania*, by "Lamech and Agrippa," trans. J. Max Hark, D.D. (Lancaster, Pa.: S. H. Zahm & Co., 1889), p. 162 ff.

<sup>8</sup>Beissel, p. 2.

<sup>9</sup>Ernest E. Stoeffler, *Mysticism in the German Devotional Literature of Colonial Pennsylvania* (Allentown, Pa.: Pennsylvania German Folklore Society, 1949), p. 54.

<sup>10</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup>Beissel, p. 11, rule 50. (Steinmetz numbered each entry in her collection of Beissel's *Rules*.)

<sup>12</sup>Beissel, p. 36. <sup>13</sup>Beissel, p. 26, rule 128

<sup>14</sup>Beissel, p. 4, rule 11. <sup>15</sup>Beissel, p. 2, rule 2.

<sup>16</sup>Beissel, p. 13, rule 62. <sup>17</sup>Beissel, p. 13, rule 63.

<sup>18</sup>Stoeffler, p. 54. <sup>19</sup>Ernst, p. 263.

<sup>20</sup>Hollyday, "The Ephrata Codex," p. 30.

<sup>21</sup>John Joseph Stoudt, *Pennsylvania German Folk Art: An Interpretation* (Allentown, Pa.: Pennsylvania German Folklore Society, 1966), p. 75.

<sup>22</sup>Shelley, p. 113f.

<sup>23</sup>Hilda Adam Kring, "Religious Symbols in a Symbol-Less Society," *Pennsylvania Folklife*, 33.2 (Winter, 1983-84), pp. 57-60.

<sup>24</sup>Shelley, p. 105. <sup>25</sup>Stoeffler, p. 61f. <sup>26</sup>Stoudt, p. 85.

<sup>27</sup>Hollyday, "The Ephrata Codex," p. 40.

<sup>28</sup>Stoudt, p. 88. <sup>29</sup>*Ibid.* p. 86. <sup>30</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup>Guy Tilghman Hollyday, "The Ephrata Wallcharts and Their Inscriptions," *Pennsylvania Folklife*, Vol. 19, No. 3 (Spring, 1970), p. 46.

<sup>32</sup>Hollyday, "The Ephrata Codex," p. 37. <sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup>Rose Horman Arthur, "The Wisdom Goddess and the Masculinization of Western Religion," *Women in the World's Religions, Past and Present* (New York: Paragon House, 1987).

<sup>35</sup>Wendy Everham, "The Recovery of the Feminine in an Early American Pietist Community: The Interpretative Challenge of the Theology of Conrad Beissel," *Pennsylvania Folklife*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Winter, 1989-90), p. 56.

<sup>36</sup>Elisabeth Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Reconstruction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad, 1983), pp. 170, 177, 189, 235.

46<sup>th</sup> Annual

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