

## **Old Countrymen, New Neighbors: Early Carpatho-Rusyn and Slovak Immigrant Relations in the United States**

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The Slovak and Carpatho-Rusyn communities in the United States today are for the most part distinct and separate. In the formative years of these communities, the lines between the two were not so firmly drawn, and these two Slavic peoples experienced times of cooperation and conflict that helped to firmly define their respective identities. Despite that, some of the immigrants' descendants today still struggle with the question "who are we?"

Historic "Upper Hungary," specifically the counties of Abaúj/Abov, Szepes/Spiš, Sáros/Šariš, Zemplén/Zemplín, and Ung/Už, experienced the highest rate of poverty and thus the highest rate of emigration to the United States starting in the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In these counties – for the most part present-day eastern Slovakia – Slovaks were the majority, and Rusyns were a substantial minority. At that time, Rusyns were the majority population in more than 300 villages of the region. (1) In a larger number of villages, the residents were considered to be Rusyns at various points in the earlier parts of the century, but through various socioeconomic and religious factors, they became Slovakized, even if their self-identity was undetermined or in flux. (2)

Religious affiliation is today one of the primary characteristics of the respective communities: the Carpatho-Rusyns are typically of Byzantine Catholic or Orthodox Christian faith, while the Slovaks are mainly Roman Catholic with a Protestant minority. Since the earliest days, these ecclesial communities and their hierarchies have presented themselves as ethnically monolithic even though their histories and communities have at times been intertwined.

At the time of this first and primary emigration, a firm sense of national identity was not yet in place among the Slavs in this region, particularly among the Rusyns:

In light of the lack of national institutions, publications, and schools in the Prešov Region, together with the attempts of the few local leaders to identify with Magyar or Russian culture, it is not surprising that the masses of the peasants did not have an opportunity to develop a national consciousness. If a person from the Prešov Region were asked his identity, he would respond that he was "from here," from a particular village or county, or that he was a Rusnak, the local term for a Rusyn. Rusnak proved to be a deceptively complex name, however, because historically it had come to designate all adherents of Greek Catholicism who, despite the ethnic origins of their ancestors, might by the nineteenth century be Slovak or Magyar as well as Rusyn. The situation was further confused when Rusnak/Rusyn came to be interpreted as an ethnolinguistic category, not a religious one. The realization of this semantic change came slowly among the masses, and when Hungarian census takers began to record the national composition of the region, it was not uncommon to find the inhabitants of the same village described as Slovak in one census and as Rusyn in the next. This identity problem was later to provoke bitter debate between Slovak and Rusyn polemicists. (3)

As to the national feeling among speakers of Eastern Slovak dialects, many of whom were Greek Catholics:

Ethnic Slovaks in this region spoke a series of dialects (*spišské, šarišské, zemplínske*) that were substantially different from the Slovak literary standard. Moreover, the Slovak national movement was never very strong in the area, and many local residents felt themselves to be distinct from Slovaks farther west. This feeling of separateness even reached a stage wherein some leaders proclaimed the existence of a separate Eastern Slovak or *Slovjak* nationality (*vichodoslovenski narod*). (4)

### **Early Settlement of Rusyns and Slovaks in the U.S.**

The first Slovak immigrants to the United States from Upper Hungary began to arrive in the late 1860s,(5) and Carpatho-Rusyn immigrants from Upper Hungary and Austrian Galicia began to arrive in the latter 1870s. The communities of both groups began to organize in the early 1880s.

In general, Slovaks (particularly those from eastern Slovakia) and Carpatho-Rusyns settled in the same towns and cities in the U.S.: New York City, Passaic, Jersey City, and Bayonne, New Jersey, Bridgeport, Connecticut, the anthracite coal mining region of northeastern Pennsylvania, Philadelphia and the Lehigh Valley of Pennsylvania., western Pennsylvania (esp. the Pittsburgh, Johnstown, and Uniontown areas), Cleveland, Chicago and northwestern Indiana, St. Louis, Minneapolis, and Detroit. (6) A review of the location of Slovak parishes and other organizations is fairly consistent with the location of Carpatho-Rusyn parishes (Byzantine/Greek Catholic and Orthodox) and fraternal lodges. The places where Slovaks were established that had no Carpatho-Rusyn presence were few; some of these were Schenectady, New York., Kansas City, Missouri., Milwaukee, Wisconsin., Haverstraw, New York, Tacoma, Washington, and some locales in Wisconsin. (7)

Specifically Slovak Roman Catholic parishes were founded in Hazleton, Pennsylvania and Streator, Illinois (1885), and a Lutheran parish was founded also in Streator (1884), (8) while the first Carpatho-Rusyn Greek Catholic parish was founded in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania in 1884. Their respective mutual-aid “burial societies,” or fraternal insurance lodges, were also founded at around the same time, the first such Slovak society being founded in New York City in 1883, while the first such Rusyn society was founded in Shenandoah, Pennsylvania in 1884. (9)

### **Earliest Fraternal Societies with Slovak and Rusyn Members**

Fraternal organizations were usually the first community institution established in the Rusyn and Slovak immigrant settlements. These were built on the model of similar organizations in the homeland, in part as a replacement for the American insurance that was not usually available to Slavic immigrant, and out of a need for an organization to rally the immigrants on an ethnic basis.

The first of these societies began to pop up in pioneer Slovak and Rusyn settlements through the 1890s. A chronological listing of Slovak societies (10) includes a partially Greek Catholic society as the 15<sup>th</sup> such lodge, the First Slovak Roman & Greek

Catholic Sick Benefit Uniformed Society of St. Stephen, King of Hungary founded in Bridgeport, Connecticut in 1888. Following in the list are several other “Roman and Greek Catholic,” “Rusyn-Slovak Greek Catholic,” or “Slovak Greek Catholic” societies: St. Nicholas, Kingston, Pennsylvania (f. 1887 or 1888), St. Vojtech, Streator, Illinois (f. 1889), McKeesport, Pennsylvania and Philipsburg, Pennsylvania, Allegheny/Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, and Passaic, New Jersey (f. 1890). It’s unclear who determined the Slovak-language appellation the author cited from Slovak newspapers of the time, as the legal, incorporated names of these organizations would have been in English.

Nevertheless, some or most of these organizations would likely have joined the national Slovak organizations founded around that time: the National Slavonic Society of the United States (renamed National Slovak Society of the United States of America in 1913; referred to here as NSS), or the First Catholic Slovak Union, FCSU/”Jednota,” both founded in 1890. Rusyns would not have their own comparable organization until 1892.

A detailed history of the NSS revealed a number of individuals who were Rusyns and lodges which had Rusyn membership. (11) For example:

- NSS #226: Greek Catholic Spolok of St. Nicholas, McAdoo, Pennsylvania (f. 1896)
- NSS #332: St. Vladimir, McKees Rocks, Pennsylvania (f. 1900)
- NSS #658: Uspenie Panny Marie, Ganister, Pennsylvania (f. 1911)

At the 5th NSS convention, held in Allegheny, Pennsylvania in 1895, Michal Smutko was the delegate from the Johnstown, Pennsylvania Lodge #38. Smutko, from Sečovce, Zemplín County, was a founder of St. Mary’s Greek Catholic Church in Johnstown in 1895 and joined the Greek Catholic Union.

Various other Rusyn members noted in NSS history: (12)

- NSS #3, North Side Pittsburgh: Petro Vorobljak, called “karpatorusky predak” (Carpatho-Rusyn leader)
- NSS #170, Philadelphia: Josyf and Aleksander Mochnáč from Palota, Zemplín County

The First Catholic Slovak Union – a specifically Catholic alternative to the secular NSS – had Rusyns among its membership as well. Some lodges were entirely Rusyn, such as the Ss. Peter & Paul Brotherhood of Mount Carmel, Pennsylvania, and St. Vladimir Society of Pleasant Hill (today McAdoo), Pennsylvania but they eventually transferred to other fraternal organizations. One of the founders of the lodge in Shamokin, Pennsylvania was Štefan Petrisko, from the Rusyn village Torysky, Spiš County, and other lodges had Rusyn members along with Slovak majorities, such as the St. John the Baptist lodge of Olyphant, Pennsylvania. (13)

While the FCSU’s Catholic nature made it a more logical affiliation for the generally devout Greek Catholic immigrants, it was not always a welcoming organization for those whose Rusyn identity was more resolute. For example, a mostly Galician, Lemko Rusyn lodge was founded in Ansonia, Connecticut, in 1892, the Brotherhood of St. Basil the Great, under the leadership of Osyf Varcholyk. Three months after its founding Varcholyk spent some time in the hospital. For three months no meetings were held, and upon returning home he found that many of the members had transferred to a lodge of the

FCSU, whose members by and large, as Varcholyk wrote, “didn’t want Rusyns to have their own organization.” (14)

Rusyns from Hungary and Galicia finally established their own national fraternal, the Greek Catholic Union of Russian Brotherhoods (“Sojedenenje”/GCU), in Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania in 1892. It published the newspaper *Amerikansky Russky Viestnik* (American Russian Messenger, later the Greek Catholic Union Messenger), which for several decades appeared in a Cyrillic-alphabet “Russian” edition and a Latin-alphabet “Slavonian” edition that was essentially written in the Eastern Slovak Zemplín dialect.

Dissatisfied with the influence the Greek Catholic clergy from Hungary held over the GCU, a number of lodges and members founded another fraternal society in Shamokin, Pennsylvania in 1894. The Ruskij Narodnýj Sojuz (RNS), or in English, Russian National Union, counted as members Rusyns from Hungary and Galicia who had a strong sense of national identity, whether “Rusyn,” “Russian,” or “Ruthenian.” (The “Ruthenian” segment would eventually lead the organization to a Ukrainian orientation and official change of name in 1914 to the Ukrainian National Association.)

The RNS, through its newspaper *Svoboda*, would soon be critical not only of those in the GCU who were insufficiently “Rusyn” in outlook, but especially those Rusyns who belonged to Slovak organizations such as FCSU/Jednota:

...The call for ethno-national unity was echoed again in a plea to all “patriotic Rusyns” to leave Jednota and join the RNS: “In Slovak newspapers we have discovered that many Rusyns in Pennsylvania belong to the Catholic Jednota. We call attention to all patriotic Rusyns to find these lost people and ask them to join Sojuz.” A week later, *Svoboda* printed an article titled “A Lack of Patriotism,” commenting that it was “very sad” to find Rusyns in Jednota because “it shows that such a Rusyn has lost his national consciousness.”(15)

An anti-clerical, anti-Hungarian, “patriotic Rusyn” offshoot of the GCU, the Russian Brotherhood Organization (RBO), was founded in 1900. Its membership included immigrants from Eastern Slovak-speaking villages who certainly did not consider themselves to be Slovaks. Consider this excerpt of the minutes of the first meeting of the Saints Peter & Paul Brotherhood of Mahanoy City, Pennsylvania on July 1, 1900, at which the RBO was also established:

*Na tej istej schodzi založeno i OBŠČESTVO RUSSKICH BRATSTV, jak organizacija, kotra ma služic dl'a pomočy ruskim bratam v Ameriki, na co sja budu prispevki placic pre posmertnu podporu. (16)*

[At this same gathering the Russian Brotherhood Organization was established, as an organization intended to provide help to Rusyn/Russian brethren in America, who will pay dues for death benefits.]

The RBO was generally of Russian orientation, though its first president, John Žinčák-Smith (who had also been founding president of the Greek Catholic Union), was from an Eastern Slovak-speaking village, Rakovec nad Ondavou, Zemplín County. And the above minutes were written in a language with both Eastern Slovak and Rusyn features.

## **The Pennsylvania Slovak Roman & Greek Catholic Union**

Dissatisfied members of the First Catholic Slovak Union living in the area of Hazleton – Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania founded a new organization in 1893 in the city of Pittston. This new fraternal was dubbed the Pennsylvania Slovak Roman & Greek Catholic Union (or for short, the Pennsylvanská Slovenská Jednota – PSJ). Two of the founding lodges were Greek Catholic, and mostly or entirely Rusyn, in membership: St. Vladimir Society of Pleasant Hill, Pennsylvania and St. John the Baptist Society of Hazleton. Andrij Škvir, a Rusyn from the Lemko Region of Galicia, a member of the St. Vladimir Society, became the PSJ's first Vice President.

At the first national convention in 1894, liturgies were held at the Slovak Roman Catholic St. Joseph Church in Hazleton and the day after at the Rusyn Greek Catholic St. John the Baptist Church in Hazleton. But its inclusionary policy toward Greek Catholics – and ostensibly Rusyns – would attract unwelcome attention from Greek Catholic clergy, competing fraternal, and Rusyn secular leaders.

A little over two weeks after the [1895, second] convention, the officers were forced to convene another extraordinary meeting to deal with important matters including conflicts in Branch 3 in Hazleton and Branch 4 in Pleasant Hill. It was reported that Greek Catholic priests in these towns had told their congregations that they should leave the Pennsylvania Slovak Catholic Union. [PSJ National President] Ujfalussy and some officers traveled to Pleasant Hill to be at Branch 4's monthly meeting in an attempt to resolve the situations and to urge the members to remain faithful to the PSJ. Their mission was unsuccessful as Branch 4 voted to leave the organization.

This was the first of several conflicts with Greek Catholic clergy. From the beginning the PSJ was envisioned as a society of both Slovaks and Rusyns of Roman and Greek or Byzantine Catholics, but evidently some Greek Catholic priests and leaders became alarmed at the number of Greek Catholics joining the PSJ viewed by some as mainly a Roman Catholic organization. The Pennsylvania Slovak Catholic Union or PSJ was also seen as competition to the Sojedinjenje or Greek Catholic Union... The battles would continue. (16)

At the same annual meeting [1906], Father Pavčo [or Paučo, a Slovak R.C. priest, national Chaplain of PSJ] said that some Greek Catholic priests in Pennsylvania considered the PSJ as “a thorn in their eyes.” Complaints were received claiming that there were some Greek Catholic priests who would not sign the membership card required by new members asking to be admitted into the society. In some cases, the new members were told they should join the Greek Catholic Union or have their membership cards torn up.

This was one of the first serious problems in the society's history. An angry Father Pavčo exclaimed, “We will continue forward with our most beautiful flag of the Pennsylvania Slovak Catholic Union for the Catholic faith and the Slovak nation. Our lodges have done much for the Catholic causes. They built churches, maintained schools and supported churches. The overwhelming

majority of our members are loyal and sacrificing Slovaks. No one has the right or reason to slander us and dishonor us by throwing mud at us!”

It was obvious that some Greek Catholic priests felt their church members should belong to the Greek Catholic Union or some other strictly Greek Catholic organization rather than the PSJ. It is unknown how widespread the opposition to the PSJ was, but it was resolved when the PSJ officers approved a new policy whereby new members did not need the signature of a priest to be admitted into the society provided they could find someone else to attest to their faith. (17)

In the decades that followed, as the PSJ remained strong in the anthracite region and expanded across Pennsylvania and even beyond, its Rusyn and Greek Catholic membership remained fairly significant, and the organization maintained a chaplain for Greek Catholic members, among whom were Father Nicholas Martyak and Father Nicholas Chohey, longtime pastor of St. Mary’s Greek Catholic Church in Wilkes-Barre. Chohey’s messages in the PSJ’s *Bratstvo* newspaper addressing the Greek Catholic PSJ members were in Rusyn (using the Latin alphabet). As late as the 1950 convention, Rusyns and Greek Catholic concerns were discussed. A liturgy was celebrated in a Rusyn G.C. church in Hazleton by Fathers Chohey and Nicholas Martyak, both former PSJ chaplains. A \$3,000 donation was made to the new Byzantine Catholic Seminary in Pittsburgh. And at the banquet, “the Slovak Lawyer, George Puhak [who was actually of Rusyn background], was the toastmaster. He stressed the importance of having the Slovaks and Rusyns in one organization, the Pennsylvania Slovak Catholic Union.” (18)

In a few Rusyn Greek Catholic parishes and communities, the local PSJ lodges played a significant role; see, for example the photos here from Wilkes-Barre, Pittston, and Exeter Borough in the area where the PSJ was born. And other Rusyns / Greek Catholics played significant roles in the organization, such as Edmund Lembick of Hazleton (evidently of Rusyn ethnicity though born in Germany) who served several years as the accountant, and Jozef Ridilla, a native of the Rusyn village Šambron, Šariš County, who was national Vice President from 1909-1919. However, in most written histories of the Byzantine Ruthenian Catholic Church in America, Rusyns in America, or individual parishes, the role played by the PSJ is little more than a footnote if it is even mentioned at all. In 1990 the PSJ merged with the First Catholic Slovak Union, its *Bratstvo* newspaper ceased publication, and its offices were closed.

**Figure 1. Carpatho-Rusyns and Greek Catholics in PSJ**

PSJ lodges specifically identified as Greek Catholic:

<b>Lodge #, Patron</b>	<b>Location</b>
#8 St. John the Baptist	Hazleton, Pennsylvania
#15 St. Michael the Archangel	Freeland, Pennsylvania
#45 Mother of God	Coleraine, Pennsylvania
#47 St. John the Baptist	McAdoo, Pennsylvania
#128 St. George	Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania
#214 St. Elias the Prophet	Conemaugh, Pennsylvania
#235 Holy Resurrection	Scranton, Pennsylvania

#317 Transfiguration of Christ	Youngstown, Ohio
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Lodges that seemed to be mostly Greek Catholic and/or met at a Greek Catholic church:

<b>Lodge #, Patron</b>	<b>Location</b>
#26 St. Paul	Taylor, Pennsylvania
#34 Ss. Peter & Paul	Pittston Junction, Pennsylvania
#43 Mother of God of Mariapocs	Tyre, Pennsylvania
#55 St. John the Baptist	Sykesville, Pennsylvania
#68 St. George the Great-Martyr	Windber, Pennsylvania
#122 St. Michael the Archangel	Sheffield, Pennsylvania
#152 St. John the Baptist	South Fork, Pennsylvania
#167 Ss. Peter & Paul	New Salem, Pennsylvania
#181 St. Anne	Punxsutawney, Pennsylvania
#229 St. Michael the Archangel	Chicago, Illinois
#251 St. Elias the Prophet	Kingston, Pennsylvania
#263 St. John the Baptist	Beaver Meadows, Pennsylvania
#313 St. John the Baptist	Scranton, Pennsylvania
#327 Ss. Peter & Paul	Nazareth, Pennsylvania
#345 Ss. Peter & Paul	Beaverdale, Pennsylvania

Source: Anthony X. Sutherland, *The Pennsylvania Slovak Catholic Union: A Century of Brotherhood. 1893-1993*, Wilkes-Barre, Pa.: PSCU, n.d., 147-163, and published listings in the *Bratstvo* newspaper.

### ***The Voyage of One Rusyn Lodge Through Multiple Ethnic Fraternal***

St. Vladimir Beneficial Society, made up of Rusyns from Hungary and Austrian Galicia, was an independent sick benefit lodge founded in the “coal patch” of Honey Brook, Pennsylvania, near Hazleton, in 1887. In 1891, the lodge moved its operations to the adjacent town of Pleasant Hill, and in 1892 became a member of the First Catholic Slovak Union. The next year it joined with other Greek and Roman Catholic brotherhoods in the anthracite region in the new PSJ as Branch 4 (mentioned previously).

The lodge president, Dymytrij/Mitro Kapitula, a Lemko Rusyn, was a delegate to the PSJ’s 1894 and 1895 national conventions. However, shortly thereafter, at the urging of the editor of the *Svoboda* newspaper (published by the Ruskij Narodnŷj Sojuz for Rusyn immigrants from Hungary and Galicia but in a Galician version of Ukrainian) Kapitula transferred the St. Vladimir Society from PSJ to the Ruskij Narodnŷj Sojuz (literally, Rusyn National Union or Association, but in English, “Russian National Union”). It would only stay in the RNS until 1898, however, when under the leadership of Rusyns mainly from Šariš and Zemplín Counties it switched affiliation to the Greek Catholic Union. There it would find its permanent home.

Meanwhile, Kapitula and the majority of the other Lemko members of the lodge decided to remain part of the Russian National Union, by then an organization focused on its large Galician/Lemko membership and calling itself the Little Russian National Union. They founded a local lodge of this organization in McAdoo, the Protection of the

Blessed Virgin Mary Society. The original Ruskij Narodnŷj Sojuz in 1914 had fully adopted a Ukrainian ethnonational orientation, most of its Rusyn- or Russian-oriented members having departed for other organizations, and changed its name to the Ukrainian National Association. Eventually the Protection of the BVM Society transferred to yet another organization, and a new McAdoo lodge of the now Ukrainian National Association was founded. (19)

### **Criticism of Rusyns Identifying as Slovaks**

The situation of Rusyn affiliation with Slovak organizations and some Rusyns expressing a Slovak identity led some, especially within the GCU leadership, to go on the offensive not only regarding this phenomenon in the U.S., but also the situation in the homeland where issues of national identity on the Rusyn/Slovak “border” were coming to a head. For example, consider this text from the 1902 GCU almanac:

... “Are there Greek Catholic Slovaks living in Hungary?”

We have shown, with historical data, that up to the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the mentioned counties were inhabited only by Rusyns. Later, for various reasons, there was an inflow of Slovak Roman Catholics and/or Protestants into those counties. Now it must be understood that the Rusyns were always oppressed, even persecuted, by various means... yet the poor wretches were pleased that they were able to sustain and preserve their beliefs. They gave no thought to converting their neighbors into the Rusyn religion, while agents of these other religions were imposing their dogmas on the Rusyn, that he abandon his religion for theirs. This was being done by the Latin clergy, who were quite successful in many villages forcing many Rusyns to accept the Roman Catholic faith and the Latin Rite. There was no adoption of the Greek Catholic faith by Slovaks, but the reverse, that Rusyns were pressured to accept the Roman Catholic faith. Thus Slovaks in Hungary from the 13<sup>th</sup> century to the present never adopted the Greek Catholic faith, and so in Hungary there have never been and are not Greek Catholic Slovaks, and so all of the Greek Catholics living in these counties are originally Rusyns and not Slovaks.

If this is so, can we say that there are Slovak Greek Catholics in America?

No, absolutely not! For these Greek Catholics coming from Hungary, from the counties Už, Zemplyn, Abov, Šaryš, and Spiš, in which the Greek Catholics are originally Rusyns and not Slovaks, thus there cannot be Slovak Greek Catholics in America, either. If some still call themselves that, that is the result of the efforts of outside forces which want to increase their ranks at the expense of our Rusyn Greek Catholic people and line their own pockets.

... We close this article with the basic judgment of these outside forces here in America, which our Greek Catholic Rusyn people coming from the counties of Zemplyn, Abov, Šaryš, and Spiš like to call themselves “Greek Catholic Slovaks” but we close also to these of ours who fell prey to these outside forces and notwithstanding all historical truth, to great scandal (*ad absurdum*) call themselves Greek Catholic Slovaks, which have never existed in the world and do not exist! (21)

While the above article ends on a thoroughly polemical note, it is reflective of the way some Carpatho-Rusyn immigrant secular community leaders felt about the claim by some Slovaks that many Greek Catholic Slavs of then-northeastern Hungary were not Rusyns, but Slovaks.

It is even more fitting that the article above was written in an Eastern Slovak dialect, used by the GCU in some of its early almanacs and the Latin-alphabet edition of its *Amerikansky Russky Viestnik* newspaper, an acknowledgement that many of their members could read and understand that language better than Rusyn written in Cyrillic.

Articles like the one above appeared in many Rusyn immigrant newspapers with numerous other polemics denouncing those Rusyns who were choosing to declare themselves Slovaks. Many of the fiery anti-Slovak writings came from the pen of *Amerikansky Russky Viestnik* editor Michael Hanchin (Hančin), a native of Stanča in an area of southern Zemplín County where the Slovak identity was taking root. Some exchanges crossed from the pages of one publication to another. One such article, which was published in the *Narodna Obrana* newspaper of the Rusyn organization American Russian National Defense, dated July 30, 1917 (published in the August 7 edition) described the controversy when GCU Lodge 96 of Bradenville, Pennsylvania participated in an all-Slavic celebration in Pittsburgh, where they marched under the banner “Slovak Gr. C. U. L. No. 96,” which ignited protests on the part of the editor of *Narodna Obrana*, the President of the GCU, and Hanchin. The letter-writer blamed the situation on the priest and cantor in the Bradenville parish for their lack of leadership and pro-Hungary political/cultural sympathies. Furthermore, the letter-writer claimed that something like this would never have happened a few years earlier when a known Rusyn patriot was their cantor. The Bradenville Greek Catholic parish had very few members from Slovak villages, but a significant portion were from villages that were undergoing assimilation into a Slovak identity: Lutina, Jakovany, Milpoš, Olejníkov, and Hanigovce in Šariš County, and Banské and Davidov in Zemplín County. The rest of the congregation were from thoroughly Rusyn-identified villages in Spiš, Šariš, Už, Bereg, Grybów, Gorlice, Sanok, and Lesko Counties (these last 4 in Galicia) – from basically all over the Carpatho-Rusyn homeland.

While there is no shortage of evidence that many Rusyn immigrants had a vague sense of identity, and may willingly have drifted between Rusyn, Russian, Rusnak, Carpatho-Russian, Uhro-Rusyn, Slovak, Czechoslovakian, “Greek,” “Greek Catholic,” or “Slavish” to describe themselves, some of the strongest Rusyn (or “Rusin”) patriotism was found among those who came from Eastern Slovak-speaking villages (that nevertheless were once identified as Rusyn in southern Zemplín County.) Some of the most prominent early community leaders in the GCU, the RBO, Russian Orthodox Catholic Mutual Aid Society, and United Societies of the Greek Catholic Religion, such as John Žinčák-Smith, Michael Yuhasz, Nicholas Pachuta, John Uhrin, Michael Hanchin, John Pivovarnik, Michael Jevčák/Yeosock, Michael Martahus, Andrew Kovaly, and many others, were from that very area.

### **Political Conflicts between Rusyn and Slovak Organizations**

“There is no ‘Slovak’ people” – so titled was an article in the *Amerikansky Russky Viestnik*, Aug. 29, 1918. The postwar years and the struggles over the formation of the

First Czechoslovak Republic would involve back-and-forth arguments between Rusyn American and Slovak American leaders, in print and, no doubt, in face-to-face meetings. But the root of the distrust undoubtedly was the early conflicts in these communities.

The National Slovak Society, for its part, both supported the Rusyn people and disagreed at times with the position of the Rusyn leaders:

“National Slovak Society members expressed their concern for the fate of their brother Slavs, the Rusyns, who were now [World War I] experiencing the brunt of persecution in wartime Europe. Not only were repressive measures being taken against Rusyns in Carpathian Hungary, but in neighboring Galicia, Magyar troops were perpetrating wholesale massacres. This did not mean that the N.S.S. was conceding to the claims of a Rusyn nationalism in Eastern Slovakia. Although support for the Slovak cause in the region had been growing – largely thanks to the financial support of the American Slovak community – certain elements considered the “Slovjaks” (i.e., Greek Catholics speaking the dialect of the eastern regions) as a separate nationality. The official N.S.S. policy was that the Slovjaks were Slovak, not Rusyn, Russian, or any other Slav people.”

“[In 1921] Gregory Zsatkovič, a Pittsburgh attorney of Carpatho-Rusyn birth, had returned home to assume the governorship of Podkarpatska Rus (Ruthenia) in the new state. Zsatkovič demanded that the Czechs institute autonomy; he also demanded the incorporation of several counties of Eastern Slovakia into his province. Since the Slovaks did not wish to undercut their position while combating Czech centralism, they took an uncompromising stand to Rusyn demands. The N.S.S. followed suit. Relations between the N.S.S. and Zsatkovič’s adherents had always been cordial, and they had been allied during World War I. The policy change, however, brought about a bitter estrangement, and affected relations between the Slovak and Carpatho-Rusyn communities in this area. (22)

## **Social Contacts between Rusyns and Slovaks in Established Communities**

### ***Intermarriage***

Would social contacts, shared neighborhoods, shared professions, linguistic closeness, and to some extent shared parishes encourage intermarriage between Rusyn and Slovak immigrants? In general, we would expect so, especially since there were no Catholic canonical impediments to a marriage of a Roman Catholic to a Greek Catholic (as there could be between a Catholic and a Protestant, or a Catholic and an Orthodox).

Looking at the number of marriage contracted between Rusyns and Slovaks (both Roman Catholics/Protestants and Eastern Slovak-speaking Greek Catholics), we may be surprised at what we find. Quantitatively speaking, we can analyze records of respective Rusyn and Slovak parishes to get a sense of intermarriage rates in the United States. Here I present the example of one Rusyn parish, a well-established parish in Scranton, Pennsylvania located in a neighborhood of substantial Rusyn and Slovak residents (the Slovak Roman Catholic parish was located in a nearby neighborhood).

During the years surveyed, the parish also served Greek Catholics living in Dunmore, Taylor, Dupont, and elsewhere. Entries involving persons living in those places are omitted from the count, as were marriages where either one or both spouses was a non-immigrant.

**Figure 2. Number of marriages celebrated at St. Mary Greek Catholic Church, Scranton, Pennsylvania between spouses of various ethnicities**  
(Between immigrants living in Scranton city only.)

Year	Spouse ethnicity			
	Both Rusyn	Rusyn w/ Slovak	Rusyn w/ Other	Both Non-Rusyn
1907	18	1	1	3
1908	11	1	1	1
1909	11	0	0	0
1910	14	0	2	1
1911	6	0	0	0
1912	7	0	0	1
1913	14	0	1	0

Source: Marriage register of St. Mary Byzantine Catholic Church, Scranton, Pa., also partly available on Family History Library film 1671292, Items 4-5 (Marriages 1889-1910 Deaths 1891-1910).

Another Greek Catholic parish in Scranton, specifically for people from Galicia, was founded in 1910, which substantially reduced the Lemko and Ukrainian element in St. Mary's parish. Yet the number of marriages of Rusyns to Slovaks did not increase after the Galicians' departure from the parish.

A less formal analysis of a Rusyn and Slovak community in Graceton, Pennsylvania reveals a similar lack of intermarriage between the groups. Graceton was one of the largest settlements of Rusyn immigrants from Jakubany, Spiš County, and was also home to a number of Slovaks (who by origin were generally Gorals) from Nová Ľubovňa, the village adjacent to Jakubany. This is no surprise, as the phenomenon of chain migration was as much geographic as it was ethnic/familial. But Graceton's Nová Ľubovňa Slovaks had their own church, and the Jakubany Rusyns had their own church (actually several). Surveying records of the churches of the Jakubany natives, the number of intermarriages between these two ethnic/religious groups seems to have been negligible. Similarly, the Nová Ľubovňa Slovaks did not join the Greek Catholic Union Lodge 459 based in Graceton, the primary fraternal affiliation of those from Jakubany and other local Rusyns.

### ***Immigrant Businesses Catering to Rusyns & Slovaks***

In many Rusyn and Slovak immigrant communities, there were many businessmen (and women): grocers, bankers, undertakers, saloonkeepers, hoteliers, etc. See the examples here for many varieties of businesses and how they identified

themselves and crafted their messaging to reach their target customers whether Slovak, Rusyn, or Slavs generally.

### ***Rusyn and Slovak Americans Share in Community Activities***

From the earliest days, Rusyn and Slovak lodges and bands could be found marching together in parades celebrating the dedication of new churches or lodge anniversaries. And as we can see, businesses may have styled themselves “Rusyn-Slovak” in an attempt to appeal to the largest audience. But for the most part, their social clubs were established strictly along ethnic lines.

The social/recreational/political “Slovak Clubs” (taverns with meeting/dance halls) were more numerous than comparable businesses established by Rusyns, but many of them were affiliated with parishes and served primarily that membership, largely an ethnically homogeneous one. It was at the “independent clubs” or “citizen’s clubs” with their own buildings owned by laypeople where the blurring of ethnic lines happened in several directions. Actually, the Rusyn-founded clubs were usually called some variation of “Russian Club” or “Ukrainian Club,” with only a handful of them named “Carpatho-Russian Club” or “Rusin Club.” Some of the clubs with names like “Slavonic Citizen’s Club,” though founded by Slovaks and/or Rusyns, attracted customers of many Slavic or even non-Slavic backgrounds. But if we investigate the founding membership among certain Slovak clubs, we find not only Greek Catholic (or Orthodox) members, but also ethnic Rusyns among the founders and charter members. (See illustrations.) The village of Snyderstown at Bradenville, Pennsylvania has not only a Slovak Club but also a “Greek Catholic Club” each with its own building, and both with Slovak and Rusyn Greek Catholic members – both still in existence today, in the shadow of the local Rusyn Greek Catholic church.

Studies of Philadelphia’s Slovak American communities by Robert Zelker (in which he included Rusyns without distinction) indicate a fair amount of social activities shared between the Rusyn and Slovak communities. Some examples:

“St. Agnes Sokols [from a Slovak R.C. parish], too, as well as Holy Ghost Greek Catholics and nondenominational Národnýs were included in the St. John’s [another Slovak R.C. parish] social network.” (23)

“In 1921 the construction of Slovak Hall further united the region’s various societies. With its extensive meeting rooms, dance floor, bar, and gym, the hall at Fifth and Fairmount was a dream come true for the dispersed community. ...Although Soedinenie [the GCU] was not a shareholder, its members were invited to the grand opening. In succeeding years, Greek Catholic men and women from Point Breeze fondly recalled ‘Fifth and Fairmount,’ where ‘certainly I went. Whatever they had.’” (24)

“While some Roman Catholics may have looked down on Greek Catholics, they nevertheless considered them part of the community. Shareholders thought the gala opening of the Slovak Hall would have been incomplete without Holy Ghost’s Soedinenie. The Slovak Club of Twenty-ninth and Porter, too, was a

community resource for Greek as well as Roman Catholics in Point Breeze...” (25)

“Greek Catholics in [GCU] Lodge 160 seem to have regarded themselves, at least in the century’s first three decades, as part of the Slovak community. Into the 1920s donations were made to Roman Catholic St. John’s, and members of that church were accepted into Soedinenie.” (26)

“...in early twentieth-century Philadelphia, Greek Catholic, Roman Catholic, and Lutheran immigrants from Upper Hungary were part of one social network. Jan Br. of Camden [New Jersey] Ghost parishioner and predseda and zápisník of his church’s Soedinenie lodge, simultaneously served as zápisník and učtovník of Camden’s NSS lodge... “When the GCU lodge sponsored balls at Southwark’s Washington Hall, invitations went out to ‘our brother and sister Greek and Roman Catholic Slovaks and all other fellow countrymen in our region.’” (27)

### **The Remnants and the Legacy**

Slovak and Carpatho-Rusyn immigrant communities in the U.S. set up similar and largely parallel religious and social institutions. Blurring of lines between language, religion, and identity helped to keep these groups, while largely separate on an official basis, somewhat intertwined. At the same time, polemics and political issues between them, particularly over the identity of Greek Catholics from Upper Hungary and the fate of that territory after World War I, served to drive a wedge between the nationally-conscious portions of each group. Never mind that the average member of either group was more concerned about achieving the “American dream” and caring for their family to worry about such lofty issues of “who are we.”

Today, remnants of the polemical attitudes that furthered the separation between the groups 100 years ago are rarely found, except in the anecdotes of “old-timers.” While officially the institutions of each group that survive do not frequently engage in inter-group joint projects or social affairs, some grassroots activity goes on with the goal of promoting knowledge and understanding about the Slovak Republic, its peoples, and their history in their shared ancestral lands. Deeper study and awareness of our mutual history in the United States will help to further this progress. And learning about the issues that created “Rusyn Americans” and “Slovak Americans” will help us individually come to a better understanding of the question “who are we.”

### **Notes**

1. Paul R. Magocsi, *The Rusyns of Slovakia: An Historical Survey*, Boulder: East European Monographs, 1993; Paul R. Magocsi, *Our People: Carpatho-Rusyns and Their Descendants in North America*, Wauconda, Ill: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers, 2005. About 325 villages in Austrian Galicia, the so-called Lemko Region, had a Carpatho-Rusyn majority; emigrants from these villages typically left Austria-Hungary about the same time as their ethnic compatriots in Hungary, and for the most part settled in the same places in the U.S. However, their interaction with Slovaks was much less, and so their activities will not be given much attention in this article.

2. Carpatho-Rusyn Research Center, and Paul Robert Magocsi. *Carpatho-Rusyn Settlement at the Outset of the 20th Century with Additional Data from 1881 and 1806: Map and Placename Index by Paul Robert Magocsi*. Toronto: Cartography Office, University of Toronto, 1998.
3. Magocsi, *The Rusyns of Slovakia*, p. 55.
4. Ibid., pp. 74-75.
5. Konštantín Čulen, *History of Slovaks in America*, St. Paul, Minn.: Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International, 2007, p. 69.
6. Magocsi, *Our People*.
7. First Catholic Slovak Union of America, *Slovak Catholic Parishes and Institutions in the United States and Canada*, Cleveland: The Union, 1955.
8. Čulen, pp. 78-81.
9. Ibid., p.146; Štefan Veselý, “Prvé slovenské spolky v Spojených štátoch amerických” in *Slováci v zahraničí 4-5*, Vols 4-5, Martin: Matica slovenská, 1979, pp. 9-57; Richard D. Custer, “The Influence of Clergy and Fraternal Organizations on the Development of Ethnonational Identity among Rusyn Immigrants to Pennsylvania,” in *Carpatho-Rusyns and Their Neighbors: Essays in Honor of Paul Robert Magocsi* edited by Bogdan Horbal, Patricia A. Krafcik, and Elaine Rusinko, Fairfax, VA: Eastern Christian Publications, 2006.
10. Veselý. It’s not entirely clear what his criteria of “Slovak” societies were, since the list omits the Rusyn-founded St. Nicholas Brotherhood of Shenandoah (1884), but includes some other Rusyn-founded societies.
11. National Slovak Society of the United States of America, Juraj J. Nižnanský, and V. S. Plátek, *Dejiny a pamaňnica Národného Slovenského Spolku, 1890-1950*, 1950.
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.; Custer; Jozef Paučo, *75 rokov Prvej katolíckej Slovenskej Jednoty: 1890-1965*, Cleveland, Ohio: Prvá Katolícka Slovenská Jednota, 1965.
14. Iosif Varcholik, “Bratstvo i prichod v Anzonija, Konn.” in *Pravoslavnyi russko-amerikanskii kalendar’ na 1902 g.*, Bridgeport: Svit, 1901, pp. 63-71.
15. Myron B. Kuropas, *Ukrainian-American Citadel: The first one hundred years of the Ukrainian National Association* (1996), 34; *Svoboda*, Oct. 3/Oct. 10, 1894, cited in

Kuropas, p. 93.

16. "Bratstvo svv. App. Petra y Pavla chyslo 1 O.R.B. Mahanoi Syty, Pa.," in J. H. Dzwonczyk, ed., *IUbileinyi Al'manakh 1900-1940 Obshchestva russkykh bratstv v S. Sh. A. / Jubilee Almanac of the Russian Brotherhood Organization of U.S.A. 1900-1940* (Philadelphia: Pravda Press, 1939): p. 50.

17. Anthony X. Sutherland, *The Pennsylvania Slovak Catholic Union: A Century of Brotherhood. 1893-1993*, Wilkes-Barre, Pa.: PSCU, p. 14.

18. Ibid., 23.

19. Ibid., 101-102.

20. "Hromada: McAdoo," in Luka Myshuha, ed., *Propamiatna knyha vydana z nahody soroklitn'oho iuvyleiu Ukraïns'koho Narodnoho Soiuzu/Jubilee Book of the Ukrainian National Association in Commemoration of the Fortieth Anniversary of Its Existence*, Jersey City, N.J.: Svoboda Publishing, 1936, p. 704.

21. *Amerikánsky Russko-Slovenský Kalendár na zvyčajný rok 1902*, Homestead, Pa.: Greek Catholic Union, 1901, 100-103. Translated by John E. Timo and Richard D. Custer. Original text and translation in Custer, "No Such Thing as Greek Catholic Slovaks: The GCU's Polemic," <http://rusynsofpa.blogspot.com/2014/12/no-such-thing-as-greek-catholic-slovaks.html>

22. R. Vladimir Baumgarten and Joseph Stefka, *The National Slovak Society: 100 Year History, 1890-1990*. [Pittsburgh, PA]: The Society, 1990.

23. Robert Zecker, *Streetcar Parishes: Slovak Immigrants Build Their Nonlocal Communities, 1890-1945*, Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 2010, p. 180.

24. Ibid., p. 183.

25. Ibid.

26. Ibid., p. 184.

27. Ibid.