



SLOVAK AMERICAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, DC

NEWSLETTER

October 2015

www.dcslovaks.org

Slovak Fraternal Organizations Celebrate 125th Anniversary

In the late 19th century, Slovak immigrants to North America formed fraternal organizations that provided insurance and support to their communities. Several of these organizations have survived the changes and upheavals of many decades and remain strong financially, while continuing to honor Slovak heritage. This year, 2015, finds two of these organizations celebrating their 125th anniversary with various events.

The First Catholic Slovak Union (FCSU), also known as the 'Jednota' (Union) was founded in 1890 by a group headed by Rev. Stephen Furdek in Cleveland, OH. The FCSU celebrated its 125th anniversary at the Renaissance Hotel in downtown Cleveland, on August 29. The evening opened with a Mass celebrated by the Right Reverend Gary Hoover, OSB, Abbott of St. Andrew Abbey, and several concelebrants, and honored the 100th anniversary of the passing of founder Fr. Furdek. The evening continued with a dinner attended by over 300 FCSU members and guests. Among the speakers at the dinner was former U.S. Ambassador Vincent Obsitnik, who spoke briefly and offered a toast, followed by an address by FCSU President Andrew M. Rajec. Slovak Ambassador Peter Kmec gave a keynote speech highlighting Slovakia's accomplishments since gaining independence. A wonderful, combined performance by two Slovak folklore ensembles, Veselica from Chicago and Lucina from Cleveland, entertained the attendees.

The FCSU's 125th anniversary celebration continued in Washington, DC, on September 12, with a pilgrimage to the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. The event featured a Mass celebrated by Cardinal Wuerl, followed by a blessing at the much-revered Slovak shrine of Our Mother of Sorrows. The more than 300 pilgrims from various localities then traveled to the Slovak Embassy for a cocktail reception. The following day the FCSU traveled to Middletown, PA, for the dedication of its newly renovated Jednota Memorial, at its Jednota Estates site.

Earlier this year, on March 7, the National Slovak Society (NSS) celebrated its 125th anniversary with a gala banquet in Canonsburg, PA, near Pittsburgh. Attendees included the Slovak Embassy's DCM, Peter Zelenak. The NSS was also founded in 1890, in Pittsburgh, by representatives of five Slovak societies, including its first President Peter V. Rovnianek. David Blazek currently serves as President and CEO, and Joseph Stefka, Jr. is Chairman of the Board. In 2008, the NSS relocated its headquarters to McMurray, PA, along with its Slovak Heritage Museum.

SASW extends its congratulations and best wishes for the future to these important organizations!

SASW News and Notes

SASW Scholarships and a Successful Café Night – This year the SASW Board of Directors was able to approve three \$750 scholarships for Slovak students at VSM/City University in Slovakia. The scholarships help deserving Slovak students to complete their studies and move on to bright careers. SASW extends its thanks to all who contributed to the scholarship fund and hopes that everyone will continue to support this program, which SASW has continued for many years, and is very proud to have done so. You can use the membership form to renew your membership and/or contribute to the scholarship fund.

In regard to the scholarship fund, our second 'Café Night' program was held at Bistro Bohem restaurant on July 13. Entertainment was provided by Orchester Praževica, and a nice gathering dined on the Bistro's delicious food, helping to raise a decent sum to give us a start on next year's scholarships. We would like to extend our thanks to Bistro Bohem for supporting the event, and encourage everyone to patronize the restaurant whenever you're in DC. Bistro Bohem is at 600 Florida Ave, NW, Washington, DC, (202) 735-5895, < www.bistrobohem.com >.

Talk on Slovak Political Prisoners – On September 19, the SASW Speakers' Series, in cooperation with Friends of Slovakia, sponsored a talk by Prof. Jana Kopelentová- ehák of the University of Maryland, on Slovak political prisoners during the communist-era. Her research largely derives from her dissertation work, which subsequently led to the publication of the book *Czech Political Prisoners*. For this talk, she focused on the topic from a Slovak perspective and pointed out several areas where the experience of Slovak prisoners differed from those of their Czech compatriots. For example, while Czech prisoners were typically kept in facilities within-country, many Slovak prisoners were sent to the Soviet Union and were often isolated from other Slovaks, in an apparent effort at 'ethnic fragmentation.' Her talk also dealt with the personal stories of survivors and their efforts to re-integrate into society. Their desire to obtain 'rehabilitation' and compensation was often not realized until the post-communist era. Those attending the talk gained a deeper perspective of this era of Slovak and Czech history. Prof. Kopelentová- ehák's book is available online.

Svätý Mikuláš Party to be Held December 6 – SASW plans to hold its annual Sv. Mikuláš Party at the Slovak Embassy on December 6. Please mark your calendar and plan to attend this popular event. It features excellent Slovak food, and a visit to the children by Sv. Mikuláš himself. It also helps to raise funds for SASW programs, such as the VSM/City University scholarships. Details will be forthcoming later this fall. We always appreciate volunteers who can donate a bit of time to help with the event. If you'd like to help, please contact Helen Fedor at < dcslovaks@yahoo.com >.

Cleveland Agreement Anniversary – The year 2015 is also the 100th anniversary of the signing of the Cleveland Agreement between Czechs and Slovaks, which was a key event leading to the independence and formation of Czechoslovakia. The Czechoslovak Society of Arts and Sciences will hold a Commemorative Banquet at the Bohemian National Hall in Cleveland, on October 24, at 6:30pm. Reservations are due by October 10. For information call Paul Burik at (440) 934-4420.

Slovak Folk Artist Honored – The esteemed Slovak straw artist and egg decorator, Sidonka Wadina was honored by the National Endowment for the Arts at a concert on Oct. 2 in Washington. She received the National Heritage Fellowship, the nation's highest honor in the folk and traditional arts.

Annual Czech & Slovak Folklife Festival in VA--- On Saturday, Oct. 17 from 11am-4pm, this festival will be held at the Prince George County Heritage Center, 6406 Courthouse Rd., Prince George, VA 23875. The location is south of Richmond, VA near Petersburg. See <www.virginiaczechslovak.org> for info.

ANNOUNCEMENT

General Membership Meeting and Talk

Saturday, October 31, 2015

at the Slovak Embassy

- **at 12:30 PM, SASW annual meeting (for SASW members)**

SASW will hold its annual general membership meeting, during which the Board will review the year's activities, answer questions, and conduct the election for three Board positions.

If you wish to place your name in nomination for the Board, please contact the Nominations Committee Chair, Kathryn Tatko, at (703) 751-1456, or Ken Bombara at (202) 512-7245. Please plan to provide a short written statement describing your background and interest in serving on the Board.

- **at 2 PM, Talk by Prof. Mark Stolarik (open to the public)**

“Slovak Immigration to the U.S. and Canada: Similarities and Differences”

How does Slovak immigration to the U.S. compare to Slovak immigration to Canada? Professor Mark Stolarik, who has been studying Slovak communities in North America for the past 50 years, will compare and contrast Slovak immigration to these two countries from the 1870s to the present. He will look at when the immigrants came to the two countries, why, where they settled, what institutions they created, what united and divided them, and what contributions they made to the Old Country and to the New World. Prof. Stolarik gave a stimulating and very well received talk for SASW in 2011.

Mark Stolarik is Professor of History and holder of the Chair in Slovak History and Culture at the University of Ottawa. From 1979 to 1991, he was president and CEO of the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies in Philadelphia, and director of its press. Prof. Stolarik is a specialist in the history of immigration and ethnic groups in North America, with emphasis on the Slovak experience. He has published nine books and over 60 articles in the field, including *Immigration and Urbanization: The Slovak Experience, 1870-1918* (1989) and *Where is My Home? Slovak Immigration to North America* (2012). He was a consultant and contributor to the *Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups* (1980) and to the *Encyclopedia of Canada's Peoples* (1999). He edits the scholarly annual *Slovakia* (since 1982), and also serves on the editorial boards of the *Journal of American Ethnic History* (Detroit) and *Historický asopis* (Bratislava). Over the course of his career, he has collected and helped to preserve Slovak library, archival, and museum materials, including the establishment of a Slovak Archives at the University of Ottawa.

Czech and Slovak Freedom Lecture to be held on October 20

This year's Czech and Slovak Freedom Lecture, held annually, at noon, at the Woodrow Wilson Center in the Ronald Reagan Building in Washington, will feature Msgr. Tomáš Halík. Halík is a prominent Czech public intellectual, a Roman Catholic priest, and a scholar who was awarded the Templeton Prize in 2014.

Msgr. Halík studied sociology and philosophy, and during Communist rule was banned from teaching, so he had to work in various occupations, e.g., as a psychotherapist for drug addicts and alcoholics. He studied theology clandestinely in Prague, and in 1978 he was secretly ordained as a Catholic priest in East Germany. Before 1989 he was active in the so-called "underground church," and in the 1980s he was a close associate of Cardinal František Tomášek.

Msgr. Halík often publicly discusses ethical issues, such as racism, political and religious intolerance, the process of secularization, as well as the process of European expansion and integration. As a visiting fellow, he held lectureships at both Oxford University and Cambridge University. He was one of the external advisors of former Czech President Václav Havel. Halík is also a member of numerous societies, including the Washington-based Czechoslovak Society for Arts and Sciences. In 2010, his book *Patience with God* (Vzdáleným nablízku: Váše a trp livost v setkání víry s nevírou) was named book of the month by the U.S. Catholic Book Club, and was awarded the prize for Europe's best theological book.

The prestigious annual Czech and Slovak Freedom Lecture is organized under the auspices of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, in Washington, DC < <https://www.wilsoncenter.org> >, together with the Czech and Slovak embassies, the American Friends of the Czech Republic, and Friends of Slovakia. The latter two organizations alternate each year in selecting the lecturer. Last year, the audience heard an inspiring presentation by Slovak foreign policy expert Pavol Demes.

A Short Review of the play “Out of This Furnace”

When, in mid-June this year, my husband and I were in Pittsburgh, we went to the Cathedral of Learning at the University of Pittsburgh, to see the play “Out of This Furnace,” based on Thomas Bell's (Belejcak) book of the same name. It was presented by the Unseam'd Shakespeare Company, which has been performing for 22 years. This past June was the third time the company staged this play, as the interest was high.

“Out of This Furnace,” is a story about immigrant Slovak families in Braddock, PA, and their struggles to make a new life working in the Pittsburgh steel mills of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The story celebrates family bonds and mourns family losses, yet the spirit is always revived and the people move on. We watched as the back-breaking work in the mills and the unfair labor practices led the men to band together, to fight to unionize. These unions had a profound effect on the families, offering the promise of making anguished and severely challenged steel mill families lives' more endurable.

The director chose a simple set with wooden chairs on several raised levels. This gave us the opportunity to visualize the interiors for ourselves, or to see them as we may remember them from our relatives' homes when we were growing up.

We enjoyed the performance so very much, and especially the talk-back with the actors after the play was over. We were thankful to have been fortunate enough to be in Pittsburgh when this very remarkable and memorable play was performed, and for the memories so many of us will share with one another, and forever embrace.

Kathryn Tatko and Jack Richards

Cyclist Peter Sagan Captures World Championship

For those who follow the world of competitive cycling, Peter Sagan is well-known as one of the world's great young sprinters. This summer, at the Tour de France, cycling's most prestigious race, Sagan, age 25, won his fourth consecutive title in the points classification, known as the 'green jersey.' This title is different than the overall best time competition known as the 'yellow jersey,' which tends to get the bulk of the publicity. Sagan also had very good showings in other recent races, such as the Tour of California and the Vuelta a España, where he won four stages.

Now Sagan has added a prestigious title by winning the UCI World Road Cycling Championship, here in nearby Richmond, VA. As a news report noted, "*Audacious as ever, Peter Sagan attacked over the top of the penultimate climb, slashed through the final corners and held off the peloton on Governor Street to win....*" Here is a link to the full story, which also has a photo of Sagan celebrating his victory with "Slovakia" prominently displayed on his jersey < http://velonews.competitor.com/2015/09/news/sagan-smashes-his-way-to-victory-at-worlds_386460 >. Sagan has become Slovakia's great ambassador to the world of cycling.

Famous Slovak Woodcarving Relocated

At the end of 2014, the Slovak Crafts Store in Grove City, PA, closed its doors. As those who have visited the store know, it housed an impressive animated wood carving depicting folk life in Slovakia. The owners, Anne and Dave Dayton, have transferred the woodcarving to the National Slovak Society Heritage Museum in McMurray, PA, where it was put on display on September 26, at the NSS SeptemberFest.

The basswood woodcarving was commissioned by the Daytons and completed by three Slovak master woodcarvers in the Presov area. It is believed to be the largest animated woodcarving in North America, at 17 feet long, 6 feet deep, and 8 feet high; it has 82 moving figures. The display consists of five self-contained sections, each representing a different part of Slovakia, including a replica of Bratislava Castle, along with displays featuring village life such as pottery-making, wine-making, and folk music, with a manger as the centerpiece.

The NSS Heritage Museum is located at 351 Valleybrook Rd., McMurray, PA, just outside of Pittsburgh. For further information check out the NSS website at < www.nsslife.org >.

REMINDER: It's not too early to renew your SASW membership for 2016!! Your support is essential for us to continue our activities in support of Slovak American heritage, culture, and community.

The **Slovak American Society of Washington** is a tax-exempt 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization. [Contributions and membership dues are tax-deductible.](#)

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SLOVAK AMERICAN SOCIETY OF
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**SLOVAK AMERICAN SOCIETY OF WASHINGTON, D.C.
MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION/RENEWAL/DONATION FORM**

New annual membership, and renewal of existing members for 2016, runs thru December 31, 2016.

Individual membership (\$25/year) \$ _____

Family membership (\$35/year) \$ _____

Optional tax-deductible donation:

VSM/City U. scholarship fund \$ _____

SASW General Fund \$ _____

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED \$ _____

**Make checks payable to:
Slovak American Society of
Washington, D.C.**

MAIL THIS FORM TO:

**SASW – Membership
2808 Albemarle Dr.
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____ Yes! Please contact me to help out with Society events