

Searching For My Slovak Roots

by, Pete Semanick



I have been researching my family history for four years and it has been a slow process. It requires a lot of time and much patience. Fortunately I was able to acquire 300 Semancik, Semanick, Semanik, Semanek, Semanchik names and addresses for which I am thankful to a couple of newly found cousins. Without their help I probably would have hit dead ends.

The first break-through was an unmarried female cousin in Pennsylvania. One of my 300 letters reached her and she was able to give me some real sound history information. Her father, along with six of his brothers and sisters, had immigrated from Olsov (Olyso) located in eastern Slovakia. Their immigration began in 1886 and ended in 1930.

With the help of this new cousin and her two sisters (ages 80-82-84), I was able to ascertain that my grandfather was the first to immigrate. He was the oldest in the family and he settled in the Hazelton area of Lucerne County Pennsylvania. The rest of the family also immigrated to the Wilkes-Barre area, which included Plymouth, Kingston, and Larksville.

Grandfather Carl John Semancik, later changed to Semanick, married and started a family in the late 1800's and early 1900's. They were devout Roman Catholics and were active in their church in the area. Grandfather was a coal miner and suffered many hardships according to the oldest of the three sisters. In the late 1800's he was involved in a coal mining strike and during a scuffle he hit one of the security guards and knocked him down. Not knowing whether the man was dead or merely knocked out the UMWA Union officials secretly sent him out of the state to Cascade, Montana where he again went to work in the mines.

At this time the families in Pennsylvania lost contact with him. Several years later an article appeared in the Slovak Newspaper, "Jednota", stating that several Slovak families were migrating to Tennessee as they had acquired farmland there. Some of the families contacted "Jednota" and were able to obtain an address. Contact was finally made and they again were re-united. Over the next few years several members of the families were able to visit one another. As the older folks died off several of the remaining clan again lost contact with one another.

Unfortunately I started my family research later in my life and not having any knowledge of my paternal family I started from scratch. Since finding the first cousin in Pennsylvania I have now found cousins from all brothers and sisters of my grandfather, with the exception of one great-aunt. She married after immigrating and no one knows her married name as she died at a young age.

In August of this year I made plans to go to eastern Slovakia in hopes of finding my roots. I was very fortunate in making contact with Helene Cincebeaux, who made arrangements for hotel reservations for me in Levoca. Once there, I made several trips throughout the local area and made contact with Vladimir Flak, a local genealogy guide. He took me to two archives and we were able to acquire information on the youngest brother and his wife, the last of the family to leave Slovakia in 1930. I was also able to find information on my great-grandfather and great-grandmother. All of the their children had been born and raised in Olsov.

The guide and I visited Olsov (population 400) and met with the mayor. I had several documents with me which were in the English and Slovak languages. He immediately looked at one of the documents (passport of my great-aunt) and stated that his grandfather was the brother of my great aunt. What a find! The thrill of visiting in the village and finding a relative was over-whelming. I was able to visit with several other relatives. I took pictures of the tombstones in the cemetery, which showed several of the inter-marriage relatives I had been told about by the newly found cousins in the states.

I met with one older man in the village and showed him five passport pictures from the 1930 era. He pointed to the picture of the youngest boy and said he remembered the day the family left for America. It seems that he and the youngest boy were playmates and each were sad that day knowing that they would never meet again.

After much research and consultation with members of the Semancik clan I have discovered that there were two Szemancsik (Semancik) brothers who had married women from different families either from Olsov or nearby villages. In August of 1873 both families had deaths occur. Joannes Szemancsik died leaving Dorothea Jun a widow and Maria Szlavkay died leaving Stephanus Szemancsik a widower. Both families had children by this time and in April 1875 Stephanus married Dorothea Jun. It seems that the custom of the land was that when there was a need by one of the women in the village that the surviving brother took the responsibility of taking over both families.

According to my research from church archive records from that area at least fourteen children were brought into this world by the two families. Children that survived all immigrated to America. They were Carl, John, Thomas, Anna, Stephen, John, Dorothy and Baithasar.

I have found cousins in San Jose, CA., San Diego, CA., Boise, ID., Cleveland, OH., Erie, PA., Plymouth, PA., Kingston, PA., Larksville, PA. & Hackettstown, NJ. All of these families and I are in contact and exchanging information on our respective families. It is great to be able to know where your roots originated. I am proud to be Slovak.

As a token of good will I intend to send money to the village mayor in Olsov for the sole purpose of providing playground equipment for the village children. During my short stay in Olsov I saw no playground equipment in the village and I saw no signs of anything for the children. I have made contact with 20 of my cousins asking for donations and hopefully by March 1999 I will have sufficient funds to provide swings, climb bars and a slide for the village children.

Stephanus Semancik & Dorothy Junova Semancik (Great Grandparents of Pete Semanick)

Taken Late 1800's in Olsov, Saris County, Slovakia

