

ZUZANA PALOVIC, GABRIELA BEREGHAZYOVA:
Slovak Settlers: The Emotional History of Immigration
Global Slovakia, Senica, 2023, 863 p.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/SN.2025.2.25> © Ústav etnológie a sociálnej antropológie SAV, v. v. i.
© 2025, Ben Sorensen. This is an open access licensed under the Creative Commons

Slovak Settlers is a book that has the potential to become an inadvertent academic treasury of oral history that, in the Americas, markets itself to an audience comprising of the very people that also wrote the 44 stories encased in the English edition. Though it is meant for a popular audience rather than being a monograph of academic importance, this particular book should find its way onto the shelf of those scholars whose interests lie in Slovak immigration and looking to document the metamorphosis of Slovak culture when anchored away from the native Slovak lands.

Slovak Settlers: The Emotional History of Immigration is a gargantuan volume, at least in English, consisting of 863 pages. 840 of these pages contain information about immigration, the last twenty-three give room for advertisements for past and future Global Slovakia publications and endeavours, sponsors, and short biographies of the two authors. I mention this more for the non-Slovak reader, as this practice has fallen out of favour in America and Canada, save for the biographies.

The book begins with a brief history of Slovak immigration, though their description of Slovak immigration takes up 124 pages. The history, of course, does not describe every aspect of Slovak immigration, yet it does make a good, comprehensive introduction to the topic. The personal oral histories of Slovak-American families and ancestors, and recipes then cover the stories that Palovic and Bereghazyova collected from descendants of Slovak settlers to the New World.

The first surprise for the scholar of immigration is in this beginning section. While it seems to be at first glance a perfunctory history of Slovak immigration to set the scene, one finds that there are a few footnotes that would lead laymen and beginning scholars to some valuable sources, though most of them should be known to every professional in this field. For the layman, though, this is a wonderful gateway for further self-education. Within this section, there are numbers and statistics for immigration; though the numbers of how many people in the 1990 US Census identified as Slovaks contradict from page 13 to page 14 (the correct number, according to the census, is 1,883,000, so page 13 is closer to the correct number) (1990 Census). Certainly, precise numbers (1.8 million on p. 13, but “some 2 million” on p. 14) are lacking for some statistics and present for others (“By 1920, as many as 619,866 people with Slovak roots resided in America” [p. 13]). Often, these facts and ideas are not properly attributed to the sources the authors drew them from. Yet the research is rather solid, if not always cited. These are, of course, small complaints that may well not be fair to a popular work; the seeming accessibility of the text conceals a real depth of understanding of Slovak immigration that, if properly revised, would make the first part of *Slovak Settlers* ready for an *Oxford Short Introduction* aimed at university students rather than a general reading public.

This first section contains another wonderful surprise: within the historiography of Slovak immigration, there is a dearth of narratives that focus on women. If they are

mentioned at all in family histories or more formal works, it is at best in passing. We would know that women were at home, and perhaps there would be a blurb about women at the Slovak Strike (formally the Westmoreland Strike of 1911). *Slovak Settlers*, on the other hand, does devote time to describe the plight of female immigrants from Slovakia to the United States. It has an entire section devoted to “The Emigration of Women” (pp. 33–38). This is perhaps the first section in all of the historiography of Slovak emigration abroad to focus on the lives of women making the journey. This five-page section precedes, by a year, the first monograph to record the life of perhaps the best-documented female immigrant from lands today known as Slovakia, Julia Warhola – Andy Warhol’s mother (Rusinko, 2024).

Even though this may be the first work to dedicate any ink to the plight of immigrant women as a focus, it has shortcomings. Firstly, this section, as much of the work, has footnotes that do not correspond to the main text. There are assertions that, while accurate, are not attributed to any supporting evidence. For example, “over twice as many men as women emigrated from Slovakia. In 1901 and 1902, nearly three times more men emigrated” (p. 33). This assertion can be backed up by evidence in the 1910 census, M. Mark Stolarik’s various works (especially Stolarik, 1974) and garnered from other sources. The authors also assert that “many women were pushed to perform tasks far beyond their knowledge or physical capacities” back in Slovakia with their husbands working abroad (p. 33). There are personal letters that attest to women overworking themselves alongside their young children, but perhaps a citation leading the reader to evidence would make their assertion that women did work “far beyond their knowledge” less suspect. What work on a farm would be beyond a woman’s knowledge that she could not learn? If this were true, would not these farms fail quickly? Again, without citations pointing the reader to evidence, this sentence seems to cater to the general public of Slovak immigrants in America rather than historical fact. In fact, throughout the first section of the work, the authors seem to prefer nostalgia over history.

The following paragraph explores the almost-taboo topic of illegitimate children. They assert that the illegitimate children, born of these deserted wives, would be “absorbed into the family and raised as their own son or daughter” (p. 33). Again, there is neither footnote nor any other reference that can lead the reader to evidence of this.

This section on women also describes company town housing as “shanty housing” (p. 36), which does not give these company houses their due credit: they were more than the improvised shelters of a true shanty town. While these houses were certainly not the quality of the company management’s mansions, these were not makeshift shanties that would be only marginally better than a “tent city.” As they later note, this company housing allowed women to use extra rooms for boarding tenants (p. 37). This means, then, that the housing was not in “shanties” in the strictest sense of the word, but certainly of a much lower standard than the abodes of the authors’ target audience, and perhaps in this case, “shanty” is a suitable word to use to drive home the nostalgia of this introductory narrative.

Slovak Settlers also has a section dedicated to the under-reported phenomenon of “Smugglers, Agents, and Fake Passports” (p. 39). The authors’ do a wonderful job of focusing in on this aspect of immigration, a phenomenon that Gunther Peck called the “padrones system” in his seminal work (Peck, 2000). But it is here in this section, another large fault with this work becomes apparent to the scholar: again, an interesting

assertion that agents lured uninformed Slovak immigrants to America with promises of “streets lined with golden coins, and an American Emperor (much like Austria-Hungary’s very own Franz Joseph) who needed their help to collect them” (p. 40). This sentence, thankfully, does have a citation to “Pollack, 2016.” Yet, when a scholar refers to the seemingly truncated bibliography, there is no work by Pollack listed. Tracking this particular assertion to the correct “Pollack” is difficult with no complete citation, especially when Martin Pollack published the original book, *Kaiser von Amerika*, in 2010, and the Czech and Slovak translations came available in 2016 as *Americký cisár / Americký cisár* (Pollack, 2010, 2016a, 2016b). As will be discussed below, *Slovak Settlers* has many problematic errors such as this that render the book difficult to utilize effectively for scholars.



Slovak Settlers also gives short excerpts discussing Slovaks in Canada and in Argentina. This is wonderful, as the settlers in these two nations do not get as much airtime as settlers in the United States, but also the excerpts are troubling in their brevity. The Canadian settlements and the Argentinian settlements are just as vibrant as the ones in the United States, and there are scholars focusing on these immigrant communities. In fact, the scholar who started the academic study of Slovak immigrants’ lives in Canada, and it is to his work that all subsequent students of Slovak immigration history are indebted.¹

The meat of the English edition of this work is the oral histories that the authors compiled. There are forty-four stories, separated by short bibliographies and recipes. They recruited accomplished authors, such as Helen Fedor, John Palka, and Lisa Alzo, and amateurs, who all gave vivid accounts of their family histories and personal experiences, full of data for the oral historian and the ethnologist. The stories and recipes are replete with many wonderful photographs. They encompass varying types of historical narratives as well as personal introspections that are seminal for ethnologists studying Slovak Americans at the present time. These stories are often enhanced through the authors’ own experience of traveling through their “ancestral homelands”, and when they have, they each communicate the invaluable knowledge they gained by meeting their relatives and

1 I am referencing M. Mark Stolarik, PhD, professor emeritus of the University of Ottawa, though he can also rightfully claim starting the field in the United States as he earned his PhD at the University of Minnesota with his dissertation that began it all for this field, *Immigration and Urbanization: The Slovak Experience, 1870-1918*.

seeing their Slovak heritage in the Old Country first hand. The photos throughout the book are comprehensively documented at the end of the book, giving the scholar ethnographic material to understand them in context. The scholar can only hope, though, that the stories were not so edited and collated that the narratives changed for commercial impact. If they were, then the value of these oral histories and introspections could lessen for the ethnologist and oral historian.

This brings up, of course, the shortcomings of this tome to Slovak immigration. The English version contains no table of contents. One must explore the gargantuan volume for stories and themes. The bibliography, as demonstrated above is incomplete, and there are orphaned footnotes throughout the first section. Some assertions in that first section that would do well to have citations to add correlating data lack evidence as they are not cited. Finally, and perhaps most frustratingly and importantly, there is no index for the English version of this book, making its use for a scholar cumbersome. But then, there is also the Slovak edition of this book, *Slovenskí vystahovalci: História slovenského vysťahovalectva*. This truncated version contains only 17 personal stories, and deletes the citations for the photos entirely, leaving the reader with much wonderful, but extremely out-of-context photo documentation of Slovak immigrants. This version is only 383 pages long, meaning that 480 pages of substantial ethnographic information are completely missing from the Slovak version.

Finally, one may wonder if Drs. Palovic and Bereghazyova can rightly call themselves co-authors rather than co-editors of this work, which would have more academic implications in a university press than a popular publication such as this one. In both versions of *Slovak Settlers*, the information contained after the first section is the work of many authors. It is for this reason that perhaps “editors” would be a more fitting title, though they can claim co-authorship to the wonderful, and comprehensive, first section. This is, though, a trifling matter; they do have every right to claim responsibility for this one-of-a-kind work.

No other volume has attempted what Drs. Palovic and Bereghazyova accomplished with this tome; they have gathered and collated either 17 (in the Slovak edition) or 44 (in the English edition) personal stories and included family recipes that would otherwise be lost in time. They wrote perhaps the most comprehensive short history of Slovak immigration as the first section to both versions. They masterfully chose artwork and collated photographs that are invaluable to all historians and ethnologists focusing on Slovak emigration. Therefore, despite the obvious shortcomings of this work and its popular target audience, *Slovak Settlers* is a wonderful collection of primary sources that belongs in the library of every person, layman or professional, interested in Slovak emigration.

BEN SORENSEN,
History Instructor, Cape Fear Community College,
Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra

REFERENCES

Palovic, Z., Bereghazyova, G. (2023). *Slovak Settlers: The Emotional History of Immigration*. Senica: Global Slovakia.

- Peck, G. (2000). *Reinventing Free Labor: Padrones and Immigrant Workers in the North American West, 1880-1930*. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.
- Pollack, M. (2010). *Kaiser von Amerika. Die große Flucht aus Galizien*. Wien: Zsolnay.
- Pollack, M. (2016a). *Americký císař*. Brno: Větrné mlýny. Translated by Tereza Semotamová.
- Pollack, M. (2016b). *Americký císař. Masový útek z Haliče*. Žilina: Absynt. Translated by Michal Hvorecký.
- Rusinko, E. (2024). *Andy Warhol's Mother: The Woman Behind the Artist*, Pittsburgh: The University of Pittsburgh Press.
- Stolarik, M. M. (1974). *Immigration and Urbanization: The Slovak Experience, 1870-1910*, PhD dissertation, University of Minnesota.



CHRISTOPH WULF (Ed.):
Handbook on Intangible Cultural Practices as Global Strategies for
the Future
Cham: Springer, 2025, 504 p.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.31577/SN.2025.2.26> © Ústav etnológie a sociálnej antropológie SAV, v. v. i.
© 2025, Paulína Blahová. This is an open access licensed under the Creative Commons

The *Handbook on Intangible Cultural Practices as Global Strategies for the Future* is part of a series of publications (Albert, Bernecker, Cave, Prodan, Ripp, Eds., 2022; Edmondson, Jordan, Prodan, Eds., 2020) that aim to critically reflect on both the theoretical and practical understanding of World Heritage, Intangible Cultural Heritage, and the Memory of the World. This voluminous edition invites scholars to look beyond UNESCO's established frameworks and legal structures and to conduct systematic scientific research that broadens the knowledge of the heritage field in contemporary times (Wulf, Ed., 2025). The publication of the Handbook on Intangible Cultural Practices comes out shortly after the 20th anniversary of the 2003 UNESCO Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage. It is the first to provide an extensive review of developments in the field since its ratification.

Compiled by Christopher Wulf, a renowned anthropologist and member of the German Commission for UNESCO, whose work focuses on embodied cultural practices and performativity, this handbook features contributions from 45 authors worldwide, spanning across more than 20 countries. The authorship originates from diverse professional backgrounds, including academia, government institutions, and community-based organisations, demonstrating that living heritage requires collaboration between both research and practical heritage management. The international contributions broaden the scope of the book, offering meaningful insights from heritage governance practices not only in the global North but also throughout Africa, the Americas, and Asia. As Wulf puts it, “result is a complex picture of living culture on all continents, where commonalities and differences are interwoven” (Wulf, 2025: 25).

The handbook aims to analyse the complexity of topics related to living heritage, including its similarities and differences with tangible heritage, the reasoning behind the 2003 Convention, the selection of intangible cultural practices, community and