

June 6, 1997  
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## HISTORY AND GENEALOGY OF THREE SLOVAK FAMILIES IN AMERICA

The Hovanec, Vrabel and Rerko families of Southwestern Pennsylvania  
(Fayette, Allegheny, Westmoreland and Greene Counties)

To assist in referencing a given individual, a number has been assigned to all descendants. This number reflects the parents and children of each individual. With 1 being Jan Vrabel and Anna Kozar, 1.1 being their child Martin and 1.1.1 being a child of Martin's, and so forth. The number 2 is assigned to Jan's brother Andrej, and 3 to Jan's brother George.

### I. INTRODUCTION

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In the late 1800's and early 1900's the Austrian-Hungarian Empire was approaching collapse. The Slovak region of the Empire was under the repressive administrative control of Hungary and the economy of the region provided for only a subsistence existence. These conditions had existed for many years but had not produced any substantial migration of peoples. However these two factors, when combined with the industrial revolution that was occurring in America in the late 1800's; with its promise of money to be made and a corresponding higher standard of living, produced an irresistible force that motivated literally millions from around the world to immigrate to America. As part of this great migration to America, a substantial number came from present day Slovakia and of the people known as the Slovaks. Our ancestors were part of this migration of Slovak people to America.

### II. BRIEF HISTORY OF SLOVAKIA

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Slovakia is located in a region bounded on the west by Czech and Austria, on the south by Hungary, on the north by Poland, and on the east by the Ukraine. The region is mountainous with many rivers and streams. From the very beginning of their settlement in this area in the 6th and 7th century, Slovak's have lived in small villages that in most cases are home to no more than a few hundred inhabitants. This mountainous region has always supported an agrarian society consisting of logging, farming and tending sheep. In the 1000 years prior to World War I, there had been little or no industrialization of the region. Since 907 A.D. Slovakia has been under almost constant Hungarian/ Austro-Hungarian control with only a few brief interruptions. The following is a chronology of the rulers of Slovakia.

DATES	RULER
6th Century	Avars conquered and ruled the region
9th Century	Slovakia was made part of the Moravian Kingdom
907-1526	Magyars conquered Slovakia and established the Kingdom of Hungary
1526-1867	Austro-Hungarian (Hapsburgs) rule with Hungarians ruling Slovakia
1867-1918	new Dual Monarchy for the Austro-Hungarian Empire, with the Hungarians ruling Slovakia

With the creation of the Dual Monarchy of the Austro-Hungarian Empire in 1867, a deal was reached between Austria and Hungary which enabled Austria to rule the Czechs and the Hungarians to rule Slovakia. However, Hungarian rule for the Slovaks was harsh. Because the Slovaks were primarily serfs, they were not considered to be part of the political nation by the Hungarians and therefore had no influence on politics in their own land. The Slovak peasant was considered to be only useful for working for a landlord, paying taxes and providing recruits for military service. The Nationalities Act of 1868 established Hungarian as the exclusive official language. Slovak was relegated to private use and was regarded as a peasant dialect. Franchise laws restricted the right to vote to large land holders (the Slovaks were the serfs who worked the land for the land holders) which effectively eliminated the Slovaks from having the right to vote. In 1875 the Hungarian government dissolved the Matica slovenska (a private Slovak cultural foundation which fostered education and encouraged literature and the arts) and confiscated its assets. In 1874 all three Slovak secondary schools were closed by the government and in 1879 a law made Hungarian mandatory even in church-sponsored village schools. In effect, the Hungarian government was attempting to eliminate the Slovak people as a nationality. Under this harsh Hungarian rule, most Slovaks continued to live as peasants in an agrarian society and in extreme poverty up to World War I.

The following information is taken from "The Carpath-Rusyn Americans". Although serfdom was abolished in the Hungarian Empire in 1848, land ownership remained concentrated in the hands of Hungarian and Austrian aristocrats. Even in the best of times, the peasants found it difficult to survive on their small plots of unproductive mountainous land. By the last decades of the 19th century (1880-1900) the situation had become grave. The population continued to grow, and its basic needs could not be provided for on landholdings, often minuscule to begin with, that each family divided among its sons into even smaller parcels of land. There was no industry in the region or in other parts of the under-developed Hungarian kingdom and the Austrian province of Galicia, so the factory and manufacturing jobs available to peasants in the areas of Europe that had been transformed by the Industrial Revolution were nonexistent. As a result, the peoples of this region sank deeper into poverty, with no hope of improving their situation except by emigrating abroad.

It is estimated that by the start of World War I, that 20 percent of the Slovak population had emigrated to other countries. With a very large percentage going to America. It is estimated that about 500,000 Slovaks came to the USA during this migration. In 1996, the total population of Slovakia was reported to be only 5.5 million people. If you consider the off-springs of all those that immigrated to the USA, it would appear that there are currently more Slovak's in the USA then there are in Slovakia. Up to the 1950's, there was very little inter-marriage of Slovaks with other nationalities in the USA. This would indicate that there was indeed a very large group of Slovak's in this country.

### III. IMMIGRATION TO AMERICA

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The Vrabel, Rerko and Hunchuck families all come from the Spis region of current day Slovakia. This region is located in the foothills to the east of the Tatras mountains. In the region is located valleys with rivers providing water and transportation. An old castle is located in the region and at one time probably provided protection to the population of the surrounding area. The castle was also used by the land owners which governed the region for the Hungarians. All three families appear to have worked as farmers or shepherds. The following is what is known about the location and occupation of each of the three families in Slovakia.

FAMILY NAME	NAME OF VILLAGE	OCCUPATION
Vrabel	Domanovice, Spis	shepherds
Rerko	Odorin, Spis	farmers
Hunchuck	Smizaney, Spis	probably shepherds

All members of the three families came to America between 1889 and 1912. They probably traveled from their home villages in Slovakia by train to Bremen, Germany. (The Hunchuck family came through Hamburg, Germany.) Then by steamships of the North German Lloyd Steamship Company (they probably had the cheapest rates) to New York, N.Y. and then by train to southwestern Pennsylvania. The following is a list of the family members with the know vessel and date of arrival in New York, N.Y..

NAME	ARRIVED	VESSEL	FROM
Martin Vrabel Mary Lesnak	Nov 17, 1899	SS SAALE unknown	Bremen
Michael Vrabel Mary Karabin	Dec 23, 1899 Feb 13, 1906	SS RHEIN	Bremen Bremen
Paul Vrabel Anna Rerko	Feb 09, 1903 Sep 05, 1906	SS ZIETEN SS FRIEDER GROSSE	Bremen Bremen

NAME	ARRIVED	VESSEL	FROM
Joseph Hunchuck	Jan 22, 1905	SS PENNSYLVANIA	Hamburg
Mary Mikolaj	Jan 22, 1905	SS PENNSYLVANIA	Hamburg
John Rerko	May 02, 1907	SS KAISER WILHELM DER GROSSE	Bremen
Veronica Hunchuck	Jan 22, 1905	SS PENNSYLVANIA	Hamburg
Steve Rerko	Jan 16, 1910	SS PRINZ FRIEDRICH WILHELM	Bremen
Mary Yohman	Feb 16, 1912	poss SS NECKAR	Bremen

When traveling across the Atlantic, all appeared to come as "steerage" passenger, with any where from \$1. to \$10. in their possessions. These truly being "the poor huddled masses yearning to be free". As steerage passenger, they were provided a minimum amount of space, with no privacy or sleeping accommodations. There were scant sanitation facilities or medical services available for their use. They all came to the Connellsville Coal and Coke Region of Southwestern Pennsylvania to work in the coal and coke industry. The normal pattern of immigration to America was for the eldest child of the family to immigrate to America and to stay with a relative or friend. They were then followed by other members of the family. Even when individual family members appeared to travel alone, it was often possible to identify other individuals which appeared to be cousins, uncles or friends, who were traveling with them. However, the Hunchuck family came to the USA as a family group; with Joseph, his wife Mary and two children (Veronica and Matthews). The following is a list of all family members that make-up the original group of immigrants. It appears as though the original three brothers (John [Jan], Andrew, and George) all came to the USA in about 1889. They were then followed by the next generation in 1899-early 1900's. The Rerko's also match this same pattern.

NAME	YEAR BORN	YEAR IMM.	YEAR DIED	YEAR STAYED WITH
John Vrabel	1841	abt 1889	1889	friends
Anna Kozar	1857	-----		did not come to USA.
George Vrabel	1857	abt 1889	1898	unknown
Anna Bacsuf				unknown
Andrej Vrabel	1849			
Sofia Tomecko				
Andrew Rerko	1855	abt 1884	abt 1917	returned to Slovakia in late 1880's
Anna Krivjansky	1856	abt 1884	abt 1924	returned to Slovakia in late 1880's

NAME	YEAR BORN	YEAR IMM.	YEAR DIED	STAYED WITH
Martin Vrabel	1879	1899	1970	unknown
Mary Lesnak	1881	1901		unknown
Michael Vrabel	1882	1899	1963	brother Martin Vrabel
Mary Karabin	1888	1906	1952	unknown
Paul Vrabel	1885	1903	1928	brother Michael Vrabel
Anna Rerko	1885	1906	1939	cousin Andrea Baluch
Joseph Hunchuck	1880	1905		unknown
Mary Mikolej	1880	1905	1924	
Andrew Rerko	1855	abt 1883		unknown
Anna Krivjansky	1856	abt 1883		unknown
John Rerko	1889	1907	1960	cousin Andrea Baluch
Veronica Hunchuk	1889	1905	1940	unknown
Steve Rerko	1891	1910	1965	brother John Rerko
Mary Yohman	1893	1912	1965	unknown

As you will note from the above, the people came to America over many years with each family coming at a different time. Interestingly the Rerko family originally came to the USA in the mid 1880's and then returned to Slovakia. The children then came to the USA in the early 1900's. Also John Vrabel and his brother George (and also probably Andrej) came in the late 1880's and in the case of John, after his death in 1889 his children also came to the USA in the 1900's.

#### IV. MIGRATION IN AMERICA

In appearance, southwestern Pennsylvania, with its mountains and rivers is very similar to the region that the immigrants left in Slovakia. The migration pattern of these families indicates that they all came to southern Westmoreland County or northern Fayette County. Then moved south with the movement of the coal and coke industries as earlier mines were depleted. The placenames that are seen reflect this migration pattern and include the following: (the dates are from records which indicate that the family was actually living in the town/coal patch at the time)

LOCATION	NEAR	FAMILY	YEAR(S)
Morewood	Scottdale, Westmoreland County	Andrew Rerko	1885
Tarrs	Scottdale, Westmoreland County	John Vrabel	abt 1889
Central	Scottdale, Westmoreland County	George Vrabel	1898
Tarrs	Scottdale, Westmoreland County	Anna Rerko	1906
Tarrs	Scottdale, Westmoreland County	John Rerko	1907
Elm Grove	Connellsville, Fayette County	Paul Vrabel	1903-1907
Elm Grove	Connellsville, Fayette County	Martin Vrabel	1902-1906
Elm Grove	Connellsville, Fayette County	Michael Vrabel	1903
Edenborn	Connellsville, Fayette County	Michael Vrabel	1906
Elm Grove	Connellsville, Fayette County	John Rerko	1910
Brownfield	Uniontown, Fayette County	Joseph Hunchuck	1906
Edenborn	Connellsville, Fayette County	Joseph Hunchuck	1909
Shoaf	Smithfield, Fayette County	Martin Vrabel	1911-1920
Shoaf	Smithfield, Fayette County	Michael Vrabel	1909-1911
Shoaf	Smithfield, Fayette County	Michael Vrabel	1919-1921
Wynn	Fairchance, Fayette County	Paul Vrabel	1911-1920
Wynn	Fairchance, Fayette County	Steve Rerko	1913-1917
Oliphant	Fairchance, Fayette County	John Rerko	1914-1920
Oliphant	Fairchance, Fayette County	Joseph Hunchuck	1915
Collier	Fairchance, Fayette County	John Rerko	1943-1964
Brier Hill	Uniontown, Fayette County	Steve Rerko	1926-1931
Martin	Masontown, Fayette County	Michael Vrabel	1914-1917
Shoaf	Fairchance, Fayette County	Michael Vrabel	1919-1921
Martin	Masontown, Fayette County	Michael Vrabel	1923-1960
Mather	Waynseburg, Greene County	Paul Vrabel	1921-1928
McKees Rocks	Allegheny County	Martin Vrabel	1927-1975
Greenville	Mercer County	Steve Rerko	abt 1933-1964
Uniontown	Fayette County	Anna Vrabel	1928-1939

As can be seen from the above, this pattern of migration continued until the late 1920's when the families started to disperse randomly.

The "Connellsville coal and coke region" covered 137 square miles, in a narrow band of 3-4 miles wide and a length of 30 miles. The band ran from Latrobe (Westmoreland county), southwest through Scottdale, Connellsville, Uniontown to the Fairchance-Smithfield area. As the coal in the Connellsville coal and coke region was being depleted, a new region called the "Klondike coal and coke region" was being opened up between 1900-1910. This new region was located in western Fayette County in the Masontown

area and extended into eastern Greene County. As you will note, this closely matches the migration pattern shown for the three families.

This coal region had been mined in small operations from the early 1800's up to about 1880. Starting in about 1880 the tempo changed and coal mining became big business, with money flowing into the area from other parts of the country to develop the coal industry. With this change to large scale mining operations, a large number of workers where required. This need for a large number of workers was partially filled by the influx of immigrant workers from Europe.

In the first four sections of this paper, I have attempted to provide the reasons and an explanation of why and how our ancestors decided to immigrate to America. In essence, it can be summed up as being a combination of three events which came together at the same time in history:

the high level of poverty that the Slovak people lived in;  
the harsh rule of the Hungarians over the Slovak people;  
the need for workers in the Connellsville coal region;

that caused the migration of our forebears from Slovakia to the coal fields of southwestern Pennsylvania.

## V. WORK AND UNIONS

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### WORK - MEN

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#### COAL MINING

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Of the original group of males that immigrated to America, all were involved in the coal industry, with only the type of work being different from man-to-man. The following are the types of jobs which are known to have been done by this first group of immigrants:

- miners/diggers
- drivers/teamsters
- laborer (probably means that he worked for a fixed daily wage, vice being paid by the wagon loaded or hauled)

### FARM WORK

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Even though coal mining was the principle work engaged by these immigrants, they also would work on farms in the area during periods when the mines were closed down.

## UNIONS AND STRIKES

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At various times in the history of the three families, unions have played a major role. With the wrenching strikes of 1922 in Mather, Pa. when Paul Vrobel (1.5), his wife and five children lived for eight months in a tent. All because Paul would not be a scab (a derogatory term for someone who works when others are on strike), as an example.

Paul Vrobel was involved in the strike at the Mather coal mine in 1922. The following is an extract from "Patch/Work Voices" on how the family lived during the strike (Narrated by Paul Vrobel, son of Paul Vrobel). Please bear in mind that the following narrative is through the eyes of a nine year old boy, who we can assume was sheltered from some of the harsher realities of life:

"It was 1922 when the coal miners decided that they would strike to try to get a better way of life and wages and other conditions. And naturally, living in a coal camp or coal town, whichever way you want it, why they would ask the men to work and if they refused to work, why you couldn't live in the town. You would come home; and they'd drive up with a horse and wagon ... and they would load all your furniture up on this wagon and haul it out to a country road some place, and take it and throw it off the wagon and leave it there. And then the union officials would get another horse and wagon from a farmer, and they would come out and load your furniture up on this wagon and take it out to a central area, a camp, and they used the old army tents--W.W. I surplus--and one family could fit in there. But it was very crowded because in our tent--we lived in one there for about eight months; all during one winter up until spring and summer of the following year--we lived in Mather, Pennsylvania--our whole family lived in that one tent. We had two beds, a kitchen stove, a cupboard, and trunks. In other words, all the family's worldly possessions were in this one tent. We got thrown out of the patch because our father refused to work--he called it scabbing."

"Another thing, at night when you were in this camp, why the company would have a great big search light up on top of the tippie, and they would direct one of these big search lights on the camp and leave it there all night so that they could see what was going on. They had armed guards around their towns. They even had police, some called them yellow dogs, some, Coal and Iron Police. They rode on horseback, and they would guard the company property. They would ride around at night to make sure none of the strikers would come and do some damage to the coal mines with explosives and stuff like that.... There were some pretty good fights down around the train depot outside the company property. The union officials would go down to



pick up the mail for the camp of strikers and the company would send their guards to pick up supplies, and every once in a while, it would become violent and fists would fly and people would be beaten. The whole strike lasted a year and a half."

All of the immigrant families were supporters of the union. With the creation of the United Mine Workers (UMW) in the 1920's, the coal mine workers finally had a say in their wages and working conditions. Please bear in mind that prior to the UMW, workers had no recourse to disagreements with the mine owners. If you didn't like the working conditions or wages, then you would be fired and would have no income with which to feed your family. The unions provided at least some benefits to the members: freedom from fear of being fired without cause, a safer work environment, the right to express concerns about working conditions and hours worked, a retirement plan, health benefits for workers and their families, death benefits and a decent working wage.

In a family story related by Evelyn Hovanec (1.5.1.2) (daughter of Anna Vrabel and Andrew Hovanec) about how her parents met is of interest here. In 1933-1934, the woman at the Michael Burkowitz shirt factory in Uniontown, Pa. were trying to organize a union. They were picketing the owners of the factory and a group of men from the UMW joined the picket line to show support. Anna Vrabel who worked at the shirt factory and was on the picket line at the time met her future husband, Andrew Hovanec (1.3.4), who was one of the UMW members to join the picket line. So you can say, the union was responsible for their marriage.

#### LEAVING COAL MINING

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Even though all male immigrants of the three families initially worked as coal miners, it is also apparent that; that was not always the final goal. Andrew Rerko worked in the coal industry in Morewood, Pa. in 1885. He then returned to Europe with his wife and daughter. Upon returning to Europe, he returned to farming. In all probability, the money that he had earned in America enabled him to buy a farm in Slovakia. When his daughter and two sons came to America in 1906-1910, they were apparently planning on doing the same as their father. When John Rerko arrived in New York, N.Y., he listed his occupation as farm laborer, but when he arrived in Tarr, Pa., he also went into the coal mines. In about 1943, John Rerko quite coal mining and took up farming in the Collier, Pa. area. John's brother Steve Rerko, quite coal mining in the 1930's and moved to Mercer County, Pa. where he took-up farming. This was the only family group to actually leave coal mining within the original group of immigrants.

Martin Vrabel also left coal mining in about 1920, when he could not find work. He went to McKees Rocks, Pa. and took a job in the steel mills of Lockhart Iron and Steel Company, where he worked until he retired.

## ACCIDENTS

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Coal mining in the late 1800's and early 1900's was very dangerous work. The four immigrant families all had their share of sorrow from the mines. The first to die was John Vrabel in about 1889 in Tarrs, Pa.. John had only been in America a few short months, when he was killed in a mine accident. His widow, who had never left Slovakia, was left with three small boys to raise by herself. All three of these boys subsequently immigrated to America between 1899-1903 and went to work in the coal mines of Fayette County. One of these boys, Paul Vrabel in turn was killed in a mine accident at the Mather coal mine on May 19, 1928 in Mather (near Waynesburg) Greene County, Pa.. In this one accident, a mine explosion, 195 men died.

## SONS OF IMMIGRANTS

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An examination of the work being done by the sons of the original immigrants indicates that for the most part, they also went into the coal mining industry. The following pattern of work emerges from a study of various records, with the industry and number of sons of immigrants working in that industry.

miners - 3  
other work - 2

## WORK - WOMEN

### HOUSEWIVES

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The women of the first group of immigrants were responsible for the running of the household and the care and feeding of her husband and the children. She would:

- child bearing and nursing;
- take care of the garden;
- preserve food by canning;
- feed chickens;
- slaughter chickens and gather the eggs;
- haul water;
- haul coal into the house for heating and cooking;
- remove ashes from the stove;
- wash clothes and hang them outside to dry;
- mend clothes;
- make clothes;
- clean house;
- tutor the children;
- bath the children;
- prepare all meals;

wash dishes;  
make sheets for the bed;  
make rugs for the floor;  
nurse the sick;  
help neighbors who needed help.

A women's work load would be built around the routine of house work and making do with whatever was available. All house work was done without the benefit of modern appliances. Obviously, older children were expected to take on some of these duties when they became old enough to do the job. It appears as though the principle job of the wife was to "make-do" with what ever she had to work with, in order to care and feed her family. With large families of 5-11 children to take care of, it is obvious that raising a large family was a full time job.

#### BOARDERS

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In at least some of the immigrant families, where information is available, boarders were also kept. Normally one-to-two boarders would live with a family. The income from the boarders would help to off-set the expenses of the family. But with the boarder came the additional work for the women caring for the family.

#### DAUGHTERS OF IMMIGRANTS

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By the 1920's, the daughters of the immigrants started to enter the work force. Basically the jobs were low paying and repetitive in nature.

### VI. GOD AND COUNTRY

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#### RELIGION

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All three families were Roman Catholic and attended services regularly. The members of this generation all received the Holy Sacraments: with all children being baptized; all marriages were in the Catholic church and all that died received the Last Rights. The church attended was normally the closest to where the family was living. If there was a choice of two or more Catholic churches available, then the one for Slovaks or Polocks was used.

#### PETITION FOR NATURALIZATION

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In reviewing the family it is apparent that a number of the men, and by extension their families were naturalized as citizens of the country. Of the eight males who immigrated, at least five became naturalized citizens of this country.

NAME	NATURALIZED
John Rerko	May 5, 1941
Steve Rerko	February 12, 1931
Paul Vrabel	no (died in 1928)
Michael Vrabel	May 6, 1941
Martin Vrabel	December 26, 1924
John Vrabel	no (died within months of immigrating to America)
NAME	NATURALIZED
George Vrabel	no
Joseph Hunchuck	January 12, 1939

While researching immigration records on the various family members, it was observed that on John Rerko's immigration record that a notation was made beside his name. The notation consisted of two numbers as follows:

6-63663  
4-6-38

It was subsequently noted that on John Rerko's ; Declaration of intention to become a citizen of the United States of America, "U.S. Department of Labor", "Immigration and Naturalization service" form 2202-L-A that he submitted his papers on 3 June 1938 and that a "certification No. 6 63663 from the commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization showing the lawful entry of the declarant for permanent residence on the date stated above has been received by me." Signed by John J. Brady, clerk of common pleas court, Uniontown, Pa..

With the approach of World War II in the summer of 1938, it is apparent that the U.S. Commissioner of Immigration and Naturalization had implemented a policy of requiring proof of lawful entry into the United States, and the original immigration records from 1907 were used to verify John Rerko's date of entry into the United States.

#### MILITARY SERVICE

In the second generation (the sons of the immigrants) a number of individuals served in the U.S. military. These men were:

NAME	SON OF	SERVICE	REMARKS
Paul Vrabel	Paul Vrabel	Army	Served in 3rd Army in Europe during WW II.
Steve Vrabel	Paul Vrabel	Navy	During WW II.

## VII. EDUCATION

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Not much is known about the education of the early immigrants. However it is possible to ascertain from census records those which could read, write and speak English. The following information lists what I have found. Husbands and wives have been grouped together.

NAME	READ	WRITE	SPEAK	CENSUS YEAR
Mike Vrabel		YES		1920
Mary Vrabel		YES		1920
Martin Vrabel		YES		1920
Mary Vrabel	NO		YES	1920
John Rerko		YES		1920
Veronica Rerko	NO	NO	YES	1920

## VIII. MORTALITY

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Several interesting items have been noted in studying the question of mortality among the early immigrants. The first item concerns the rate of death among the children. This information was derived from various records.

FAMILY	NUMBER OF CHILDREN BORN	NUMBER OF CHILDREN SURVIVED
Paul Vrabel & Anna Rerko	8	5
Michael Vrabel & Mary Karabin	10	10
Martin Vrabel & Mary Lesnak	8	5

However, a review of ages at time of death for the early immigrants indicates that if you were a male and did not die in a mine accident, then you could expect to live to a relatively old age. This however was not true for the wives of the immigrants. The men appeared to live into their mid 70's while the women only lived to their 50's. The following table lists the men and women with their year of birth/year of death and age at time of death.

NAME	YEARS	AGE	REMARKS
George Vrabel	1856-1898	42	
John Vrabel	1841-abt 1889	49	MINE ACCIDENT
Martin Vrabel	1878-1970	92	
Michael Vrabel	1882-1963	81	
Paul Vrabel	1885-1928	43	MINE ACCIDENT
John Rerko	1889-1960	71	
Steve Rerko	1891-1965	74	
Joseph Hunchuck	1880-		

NAME	WIFE OF	YEARS	AGE
Ann Kozar	John Vrabel	1857-abt 1924	67
Mary Lesnak	Martin Vrabel	1881-	
Mary Karabin	Michael Vrabel	1888-1952	
Anna Rerko	Paul Vrabel	1885-1939	54
Veronica Hunchuck	John Rerko	1901-1940	39
Mary Yohman	Steve Rerko	1893-1965	72
Mary Mikolaj	Joseph Hunchuck	1880-1924	44

#### IX. NAME CHANGES

A major difficulty that was uncovered in this research were the changes in the spelling of names. Most records searched are filed alphabetically or by some index system which is based on how the name sounds. Unfortunately these systems do not lend themselves well to non-English sounding names. This can really present a problem when you are looking for "Steve" or "Stephen" and the Slovak name turns out to be "Istvan". The following are a list of given and family names, along with their current day spelling which I have come across in researching the four families.

Original	Current day spelling
Alzbeta	Elizabeth
Andrea	Andrew
Andreas	Andrew
Anna	Anne
Borbala	Barbara
Erzebet	Elizabeth
Gynro	George
Istvan	Steve
Jan	John

Original	Current day spelling
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Janos	John
Joanne	John
Josef	Joseph
Jozef	Joseph
Juraj	George
Katarina	Catheran
Maria	Mary
Martini	Martin
Matej	Mathew
Michal	Michael
Pal	Paul
Pavel	Paul
Pavol	Paul
Stefan	Steve
Stephen	Steve
Zofiou	Sofia
Zuzana	Susanna

#### Family Names

Original	Current spelling
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Hanczak	Hunchuck
Johman	Yohman
Kazsimir	Kazimir
Lesnyak	Lesnak
Mihalyik	Mihalik
Rerko	Rerko
Vrabely	Vrabel

## X. CELEBRATIONS AND HOLIDAYS

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There is no official documentation on how the four families celebrated major events, such as christening, weddings, wakes and holidays (Christmas and Easter). However, I have experienced some and have heard stories of how the four families celebrated from my parents and other relatives. The following information is derived from these stories.

The Roman Catholic church played a dominate roll in the lives of my ancestors and was the focal point around which the family celebrations revolved. Because life was hard, the families took every opportunity to celebrate life. Most celebrations were built around the church, family, friends, food, drink, music and dance. These celebrations provided a break from the hardships of life and permitted the coming together of family and friends.

When a birth occurred, it was viewed as a continuation of life and the chastening was the time used to celebrate with family, friends, food and drink.

Marriage were often celebrated for several days; with one story told to me about how the bride was pushed around the coal patch in a wheel barrel. Beer was drunk from a keg which was kept at the bride's house and food was provided by the neighbors. The entrance to the house was decorated by an arch of flowers by friends of the bride. In another story, the wedding banquet was held on Sunday, as was the Slovak custom. With a band playing ethnic music. At which time the groom was arrested by the Connellsville, Pa. Police for violating the "Pennsylvania Sunday Blue Laws", which restricted drinking and dancing on Sunday.

Death was viewed as a time of sorrow and a time to reflect on the deceased one's life. To talk about the good times and the bad times. Normally in the early years, the deceased would be layed-out in his/her own house for 2-3 days prior to burial in the Church Cemetery after Mass was said for the deceased. Again, neighbors would bring food to the house of the deceased for the mourners.

Christmas and Christmas eve was a time of celebration with song, food and drink. Just prior to Christmas, the children would go house-to-house singing Christmas carols in English or Slovak for the people of the coal patch. The Christmas meals reflected the continuation of traditions, passed down from one generation to the next. This is embodied in the special foods prepared for these meals and include the following:

#### Christmas Eve

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- unleavened bread - blessed by the priest and served at the beginning of the meal to reflect the sacrifice of Christ to come into this world to save man. The bread was served with honey.
  - fish - was the meat of choice for this meal.
  - vegetables - assorted
  - bobalky - baked dough with sauted cabbage

#### Christmas Day

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- ham - as the meat of choice
  - vegetables -assorted
  - koluchki - nut rolls (walnut)/poppy seed rolls
  - Christmas bread - a sweet bread
  - pagach - baked dough filled with potato or cheese
  - pirohy - boiled dough with potato filling
  - machanka - mushroom soup



Easter was again a time of tradition, from the blessing of the palms prior to Easter, to the blessing of the "Easter basket" of food by the priest at church or in the home of a neighbor (the priest made house calls). This basket of food was then consumed on Easter Sunday.

#### Easter meal

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- ham - meat of choice
  - kishka - summer sausage
  - kielbosi - smoked sausage
  - smoked bacon
  - eggs - hard boiled and decorated by the children
  - sidac - a cheese made from milk and eggs
  - pushka - a pie made of cottage cheese
  - sweet bread
  - horseradish - made hot, but could be cut with ground beets if needed.

#### XI. CONCLUSIONS

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The obvious question which I have tried to answer is "who are these Slovak immigrants that came to America and why did they come". Hopefully you have reached the same conclusions that I have: They were a strong people who believed in God and the right of man to be free of oppression and poverty. I have attempted to place my ancestors into the context of what was happening in the world around them. They represent only a small part of the Slovak immigrant experience, but they are probably quite representative of what most Slovak immigrants experienced who traveled to the coal fields of southwestern Pennsylvania in the late 1800's and early 1900's (1882-1910). There are many conclusions which can be drawn from this story of "Three Slovak Families in America". The families all came at a time of great hardship in Slovakia.; They risked everything, including their lives to find a better way of life for themselves and their families. They fought for what they believed in and adopted, without reservation, the country which had accepted them. However, the only really important conclusion that matters is that the four families came, multiplied and prospere. Which was far more than they could expect in a Slovakia under Hungarian rule. What else could our immigrant ancestors have asked for?