
Fraternally Yours: Finding Clues about Your Ancestors in Fraternal Records

by Lisa A. Alzo, M.F.A.

“What are fraternal records?” “What information do they contain to help me with my genealogy?” “Where do I find them?” I am often asked these questions from students in the Slovak genealogy classes I teach online for MyFamily.com www.myfamily.com and the National Institute for Genealogical Studies www.genealogicalstudies.com

I have been acquainted with fraternal records for as long as I can remember, and still continue an association today. My parents belonged to several national Slovak fraternal organizations as members of local branches associated with Holy Trinity Church in West Mifflin, Pennsylvania. While growing up I remember how once a year, after Sunday mass, my mother and Aunt Betty would attend a special “meeting” in the church hall to pay lodge dues for the “Ladies’ Pennsylvania Slovak Catholic Union,” or the “Rimsko-Katolícky Osadný Podporujúci Spolok Panny Marie Ruzencovej” (Osadný Lodge). I never really paid attention to what exactly they were paying the dues for, why we were there or what the organization was about. I was told to sit quietly, usually with the promise of a Cerege (a type of Slovak donut) dusted with sweet powdered sugar.

In addition to these occasional church meetings, every other week, my father would receive the newspaper for the First Catholic Slovak Union, which I thought had a funny-sounding name Jednota. The newspaper was written in English, as well as Slovak (which, I unfortunately could not read), and had nice photographs and I remember how Dad always seemed to enjoy reading the articles.

It wasn’t until I became an adult – still attending the meetings with my mother that I understood a bit better what these organizations were all about.

The Purpose of Fraternal Organizations

When our immigrant ancestors arrived in the New World, they often settled in enclaves within cities and towns and tended to cluster in specific regions

in the United States. It was common for immigrants, particularly those who did not speak English, to travel together and put down roots among relatives, friends, or neighbors from their native land. These so-called “cluster communities” offered a place where the immigrants could transplant and preserve their culture, lifestyle and traditions as best they could in their new surroundings. Seeking to keep their culture as it existed in the homeland, immigrant groups frequently founded their own churches, schools, boarding houses, and other institutions, as well as forming their own academic, athletic, or charitable groups, and fraternal, occupational, and social organizations. Many also established their own ethnic presses that published newspapers and histories to highlight specific communities.

In the late 1800s, fraternal organizations became very popular. Employed largely in difficult and often dangerous industrial occupations, immigrants sought financial protection for themselves and their families. As a result, they established their own fraternal/benevolent organizations to provide mutual insurance and to foster camaraderie and social interaction, and some even as a way to keep ties to traditions or ways of the old country.

The Hidden Gems in Fraternal Records

At the turn of the twentieth century, almost five million men and women belonged to fraternal organizations. If your ancestors were living in North America at that time, chances are pretty good (about one in seven) that at least one of your ancestors belonged to a fraternal group.

Records of fraternal organizations contain personal information included in the membership application and death benefit claim forms. The membership applications generally include date and place of birth, names of parents and siblings, religion, profession, place of residence (at time of application), and medical information. But it is important to note that some of the membership application forms may be incomplete and contain little beyond the name and date of birth of the concerned individual. Death benefit claims provide the date of death, but also contain much other information about the individual. The records may also help you to track the dates your ancestor arrived or left a given area in order to create a migration timeline for your family. In addition, the records show the offices the member held and this may give insight into the character of your ancestor or his or her standing in the community, and if the individual was well-respected, may have been written about in local histories of the county or town.

PAST OFFICERS OF THE ROMAN CATHOLIC PAROCHIAL BENEFICIAL SOCIETY

(OSADNY LODGE)

ORIGINAL OFFICERS

Rev. John Kerchynak
Joseph Palus
Julius Palyo
L. Kristoff
Joseph M. Sabol
Andrew Velosky
George Tirpak
Elizabeth Pastirik
Mary Soffa

Anna Novotnak
Anna Turlik
John Alzo
Mary Liska
John G. Chonka
Ann Vesonder
Elizabeth Ambro Barnocky
Marie Kristoff

PAST OFFICERS

Michael Cvejkus Sr.
Matilda Foremsky Smith
Mary Charms
John Spirnak
John Palatis
Gertrude Polatas
Anna Mantich
Paul Thomas
George Vesonder
John Hoblak
Suzanna Ondechek
Sue Jackson
Mary Tomas
Julia Foremsky

Maria Foremsky
Stephen Kracinovsky
Andrew Lesko
Ludwick Dudek
Stephen Vamos
Elizabeth Alzo
John Turlik
Stephen Novotnak
Pearl Evanko
John Ragan
Pauline Huwalt
John Lancos
Maria Sargent

PRESENT OFFICERS

Michael J. Cvejkus
Mary R. Sabol
Mary G. Perun
Mary Elizabeth Polata
Diane Perun
Bess Cvejkus
Anna Mae Ondechek
Audrey Steiner
Rev. Edward P. Bunchek - Pastor

We apologize if we inadvertently omitted anyone. Please let us know so that we can add that person's name to our list.

Hidden gems among family papers may include documents or other correspondence that indicate an ancestor's involvement in a group or society. This list of past officers of the Roman Catholic Parochial Beneficial Society (Osadny Lodge) shows that the author's grandmother, Elizabeth Alzo, was a past officer.

Where to Look

Just as with any genealogical research quest, the first place to search for clues about an ancestor's association with a fraternal organization is at home.

Family Treasure Hunt

If your parents or grandparents are still alive, ask them whether or not they have or had an association with a

particular society, and if so, do they have any documentation associated with the membership. If you do not have any success with an immediate family member or if he/she is deceased, then check with your extended family (aunts, uncles, cousins) to see if they or their parents have any information or documents about membership in an organization.

NUMBER #389 AMOUNT \$500.00

Ukrainian Workingmen's Association

Український Робітничий Союз

DUES \$2.26 AGE 45

A FRATERNAL BENEFICIAL ASSOCIATION, ORGANIZED, INCORPORATED AND DOING BUSINESS UNDER THE LAWS OF THE STATE OF PENNSYLVANIA, HEREBY ISSUES THIS BENEFIT CERTIFICATE TO **MIKOLAY KOMARNICKY** a Member of this Association and of Assembly No. 42 at **MONTREAL** in the State of **QUEBEC, CANADA** and upon receipt of satisfactory proofs of the death of the Member and upon surrender of this Certificate, the same being in full force and effect, the Ukrainian Workingmen's Association will pay, subject to the stipulations, privileges, limitations and conditions hereafter, provided,

* **FIVE HUNDRED** * Dollars, to * **ANNA KOMARNICKA \$500.00** * represented by the Member to the Association to be related to the Member as * **WIFE** * or to such other beneficiary or beneficiaries as the Member finally may direct in accordance with the provisions of the By-Laws of the Association for changing beneficiaries, if such beneficiary or beneficiaries, whether named herein or later designated as aforesaid, be living at the death of the Member and within the classes designated in the By-Laws of the Association as permissible beneficiaries; otherwise as provided in the By-Laws of the Association.

OR if this Certificate is in full force and effect on the **30th** day of **JUNE**, 1966, the Association will pay to the Member, if then living, the sum of * **FIVE HUNDRED** * Dollars as an Old Age Benefit, subject to the surrender and return to the Association of this Certificate and subject further to all the stipulations, privileges, limitations and conditions hereinafter provided.

CONSIDERATION: This Certificate is issued in consideration of and on the basis of the application for membership, and the Member's signed statements to the medical examiner, received by the Association, which the Member represents to be true and correct in every respect, which representation has induced the Association to issue this Certificate, and in further consideration of the payment in advance of the monthly dues, monthly assessments, extra monthly assessments and other assessments and fines, which apply to the Member as the Association may from time to time establish the same, such monthly dues, monthly assessments, extra monthly assessments and other assessments and fines, if any, to be payable at such time, for the full period of **TWENTY-FIVE** years from the date hereof, or until the prior death of the Member.

If any monthly dues, monthly assessments, extra monthly assessments or other assessments or fines, levied against the Member are not paid on or before the date due, the Certificate will be in default; but a grace period of thirty (30) days will be allowed for any payment after the first, during which time this Certificate will continue in force. If death occurs within the period of grace, the overdue payments shall be deducted from the amount of death benefit payable hereunder. Should the Member fail to pay the amounts due on account of this Certificate at the expiration of the period of grace, he shall forthwith be expelled automatically and he and his beneficiaries shall forfeit entirely and conclusively all rights and claims and all money paid into the Association on account of this Certificate, except that the Member shall be entitled automatically to the extended benefit designated in paragraph 11 hereof and further entitled to reinstatement as provided in paragraph No. 17 on page two hereof.

The paragraphs entitled Privileges-Conditions-Limitations as set forth on page 2 hereof are hereby made a part of this Certificate as fully and entirely as though fully set forth at this point.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, THE UKRAINIAN WORKINGMEN'S ASSOCIATION has this **THIRTIETH** day of **JUNE**, 19 **41**, (which is the Certificate Issue Date), caused this Certificate to be signed by its duly authorized Supreme Officers and its corporate seal to be hereto affixed at its Home Office in the City of Scranton, State of Pennsylvania, but the same shall not be binding until delivered to the Member during his lifetime and sound health, nor until the first regular monthly assessment, and all other required initial payments, as set forth in the Constitution and General Laws and By-Laws of the Association, have been received and accepted by the said duly authorized Supreme Officers at the Home Office of the Association.

25 YEAR ENDOWMENT BENEFIT MATURING AT AGE **70**

ATTEST: *Thomas Tymoczko* SECRETARY *Peter Duchak* PRESIDENT

"Ukrainian Workingmen's Association benefit certificate im600102, Immigration History Research Center, University of Minnesota"

Key Items

Here are a few specific items which may lead you to an association with a particular fraternal organization or benevolent society.

Copies of Membership Applications/Policies and Certificates – perhaps you will find a copy of the member's original application or correspondence if a death claim benefit was filed upon the member's passing away. Certificates may be found in old family bibles, or perhaps in a frame stored away in a box in the attic or basement.

Dues Book – Members would typically pay yearly dues to belong to the organization and most groups gave their members a dues book with the date paid and the amount—to show that the membership was current.

Jewelry (pins, rings, medals, watch fobs, etc.) – While almost all of the fraternal groups were secret societies, members could still let others know about their membership. Some wore special jewelry (pins or rings) to show their affiliation. To assist in the identification of some of the insignias found on jewelry and other miscellaneous items, you can often locate old jewelry catalogs that typically had pages devoted to different fraternal groups and the specialized jewelry



Look for clues in family belongings such as duesbooks which indicated membership in a fraternal organization or benevolent society.

associated with each group. Some jewelry was also purchased through local merchants who ordered their goods from a catalog known as a "Blue Book." These catalogs may be difficult to find because they were used by traveling salesmen when they visited local jewelry stores. However, you may find one listed on an online auction site, or at a local antique dealer that sells old books and papers. In addition, the department store catalogs published at the turn of the twentieth century also have pages devoted to the rings and pins of fraternal organizations. Some of these catalogs have been digitized. One example is the 1902 catalog of the Sears, Roebuck & Company (Princeton Imaging) which is available on CD-ROM at: www.princetonimaging.com/cdrom/sears

Calling cards and Carte de Viste – In our ancestors' time, personal visits were a common method for keeping in touch. When folks would go visiting, they would often leave a calling card or carte de viste to either announce their visit, or to let the absent occupant of the home know they had missed a visitor. For those affiliated with a fraternal group, it was not uncommon to emboss the emblem of the group on the card. The carte de viste is usually a card with a photograph of an individual. For fraternal organization members, it was not uncommon for them to dress in partial or full regalia before having their picture taken for this special type of card. One problem in identifying an ancestor in a Carte de viste is that the key details are

often obliterated because of the quality of the photography and/or the smallness of the image. Another obstacle is that in some carte de vistas there may be more than one person in the photograph, or the individual is shown standing

Tombstone Inscriptions – Look for images or special inscriptions carved on an ancestor's grave stone. When visiting a cemetery, don't just photograph your ancestor's stone, but take pictures of the nearby markers as well. Family members often had plots in the same area of the cemetery in order to be buried next to one another. Also, some cemeteries may have designated entire sections for the burial of fraternal organization members.

Obituaries – Obituaries frequently mention membership in such organizations and often newspapers will place announcements specifically for the fraternal organization members. Also, be sure to check if the organization published its own newspaper—obituaries for members are frequently printed in the fraternal publication.

PAGE 18 JEDNOTA, WEDNESDAY, NOVEMBER 21, 2001

Brat Michal Alžo vo večnosti

Toronto, Ont. Kanada – Smutná správa preletelia rýchle našim veľkometom Torontom, že náš krajan, brat Michal Alžo nás náhle opustil. Snáď mu to bolo súdené našim otcom nebeským keď 3. októbra 2001 zomrel v spánku vedľa svojej milovanej manželky. Pochovaný bol z kostola sv. Cyrila a Metoda, kde svätú pohrebnú omšu vykonal Rev. Ján Kadlec, J.S. ako aj pohrebné obrady na cintorine v Glendale Memorial Garden v Mississauga, Ont.



Michal Alžo

Nebohý Michal sa narodil dňa 15. júna 1923 v dedinke Benkovce na Východnom Slovensku. Svoju vojenskú činnosť vykonával na Ruskom fronte a bol hrdý na to, že bojoval ako slovenský vojak proti bezbožnému ateizmu - komunizmu.

Odišiel do zahraničia kde v roku 1948 zakotvil v Kanade. Tu si našiel svoju životnú družku Paullete Ivančík, ktorá je slovenského pôvodu, narodená v Paríži vo Francii. Nebohý Michal bol dlhoročným členom Čísla 785 Prvej Katolíckej Slovenskej Jednoty a podporoval všetky naše slovenské podujatia. Bol prítomný všade, kdekoľvek sa niečo dialo v slovenskom živote v Toronte a jeho okolí.

Nebohý spolubrat Michal zanecháva zarmútenú manželku Paullete ako aj syna Alexandra a nevestu Sharon. Vnučky Alexis a Michelle si budú dlho spomínať na svojho starého otca, ktorý ich tak miloval. Vo Francii bude smútiť za ním švagrina Gisela Lichet a tu v Toronte naši krajanovia. Pozostalým v rodine vyslovujeme z hĺbky našich sŕdc, čo najúprimnejšiu sústrasť.

Drahý náš Michal, nech Ťi je zem kanadská ľahká a odpočívaj v pokoji Pánovom.

Bernard Kadnár

Many fraternal organizations published their own newspapers. Look for obituaries such as this one for the author's cousin, Michael Alzo, which appeared in the Jednota, newspaper of the First Catholic Slovak Union.

IN LOVING MEMORY

JOHN ALZO

John Alzo, 67, retired employee of the Duquesne Works, U. S. Steel Corp., died suddenly at 6:15 p. m. Saturday at his home, 633 Hill St., Duquesne.

He was a retired employee of the Duquesne Works, U. S. Steel Corp., and was a member of Holy Trinity Church, the Parochial Lodge of the church and the First Catholic Slovak Union, Branch 38 of Duquesne.

He leaves his widow, Mrs. Elizabeth Fenchak Alzo; three daughters, Sister M. Camilla of the Incarnate Word and Blessed Sacrament Congregation, Victoria, Tex.; Mrs. Elizabeth Berta at home, Mrs. Helen Braskovich of Swissvale; a son, John Alzo Jr., of Duquesne; a sister, Mrs. Mary Frena of Duquesne; two brothers and another sister in Europe; and four grandchildren.

Friends are being received at Shaughnessy's, Duquesne. A blessing at the funeral home at 8:15 a. m. Wednesday will be followed at 9 by requiem high mass in Holy Trinity Roman Catholic Church, Duquesne. The Rev. Michael J. Faidel will officiate and burial will be the parish cemetery.

You are not forgotten loved one
Nor will you ever be
As long as life and memory last
We will remember thee.

We miss you now, our hearts are sore
As time goes by, we miss you more,
Your loving smile, your gentle face
No one can fill your vacant place.

Died Sat., June 10, 1961

Newspaper obituaries often list the deceased's membership in fraternal organizations. This 1961 obituary for the author's grandfather, John Alzo, lists him as a member of the First Catholic Slovak Union, Branch 38.

Death Benefit Claims/Occupational Paperwork – Since a number of fraternal groups were created as a result of a person's occupation (railroad worker or steel worker, etc.) With some thorough investigation, you

MICHAEL CVEJKUS – PRESIDENT

RAYMOND SOLTIS – VICE PRESIDENT

MARY M. McKAY – FINANCIAL SECRETARY

ANTHONY H. YEVICK – TREASURER

JOSEPH MORAN – AUDITOR

Sacred Heart of Jesus Jednota Branch # 580

CONGRATULATIONS PARISHIONERS ON YOUR 75th JUBILEE

First Catholic Slovak Union
PITTSBURGH DISTRICT



Rt. Rev. Msgr. Cannon Joseph S. Altany, LL.D.	Chaplain
Joseph R. Vehec	President
Thomas Guidish	Vice President
Andrew Holovanisin	Vice President
Regis Brekosky	Financial Secretary
John Mato	Recording Secretary
Michael Hornak	Treasurer
Joseph Feledik	Chairman of Auditors
Mary Urish	Auditor
William Kovac	Auditor
Albert V. Belan	Sports Director
Anna L. Abaray	M. O. Sports Director
John Hrosik	Guard
Paul C. Kazimer	Public Relations
John Novotny	Membership

Church anniversary or jubilee booklets may contain advertisements for societies or organizations affiliated with the church. This one from Holy Trinity Catholic Church in West Mifflin, PA contains a full page ad for the Sacred Heart of Jesus First Catholic Union (Jednota) Branch #58, and lists the names of its local and district officers.

may find records showing date and place of birth or death, as well as pension information.

Church Bulletins/Notices and Anniversary Celebration Books – If the church your ancestor attended sponsored or held meetings for a local chapter of an organization, there may be announcements of meetings or special events in the weekly Sunday bulletin. Check with the priest or minister or secretary to see if they saved copies of old bulletins. Also look for special letters or other correspondence regarding special anniversaries or other events for the organization that may have been sent to members among your ancestors' belongings. When a church celebrated a milestone anniversary (25, 50, 100 years), the organizing committee would typically have a commemoration booklet printed for members to purchase. Look for a lodge or fraternal

organization's page—it may contain the name of the sponsors and patron-sponsored “well wishes,” or advertisements, photographs, and/or names of the current (or even the founding) officers.

Buildings – If you are conducting research in older communities or towns, keep an eye out for old buildings in which these groups once met that may have artwork with special insignia indicative of the group.

Property Records – If a mortgage was paid off by a widow shortly after her husband's death, this could be a big clue to an association with a fraternal group. Many organizations included some sort of insurance premium in their membership fees to provide for the widows and children of their members.

Miscellaneous Memorabilia – Check for treasures such as china, shaving mugs, a writing desk, stationery and envelopes which may be emblazoned with the motto and insignia of the fraternal organization to which the owner belonged.

Sources Outside of the Family

As far as historical records are concerned, they may be kept either at the local, state, or national organization. Typically, for most organizations, the records that are maintained at a national level are normally related to the charter or admission of chapters. Membership applications placed on file are usually kept at the local (or sometimes the state, or provincial) level.

The status of records generally varies with the society and its record keeping policies. Unfortunately, over the years, it may be that many records have been disposed of, unless copies were sent by local chapters to a state, provincial, or national headquarters. As society membership declined in North America during the twentieth century, local lodges, chapters and divisions closed and if the records of a defunct organization do exist, they could be located in any number of places.

Access to Records

Most of the organizations do not have policies regarding access to information in records. However, privacy laws in general prevent current information (anything from about 1900 on) from being easy to obtain. Few records are indexed. Therefore searching for a specific name can be difficult and time-consuming. Also, most of these organizations are not staffed for genealogical research tasks, so depending on the organization, so you may not have great success at the national or state level, unless your ancestor happened to be an officer at that level. However, many local chapters should be able to

provide basic information, such as name, address, occupation, and perhaps a birth date from an individual's application. The catch is you must know what chapter to contact.

If the organization is still in operation, contact the local chapter to see if they have kept any records. If not, then contact the state, provincial or national office.

Check the Encyclopedia of Associations (Gale Research) for organizations in the United States and worldwide. Libraries have access to an internet version at: www.galenet.gale.com

For Canada, consult the Directory of Associations in Canada/Repertoire des Associations du Canada (Micromedia Limited), and Associations Canada: an encyclopedic directory, published by Canadian Almanac & Directory Publishing Company Limited.

You can also contact libraries in the city or town where the local organization was based to see if there are any community records stored among their special collections section. This includes public, college and university libraries, as well as historical societies and religious institutions.

Use directories (city or county or a society's national or district) to identify the officers of the organization at the time it ceased to meet.

The National Union Catalog of Manuscript Collections (NUCMC) is a cooperative cataloging program operated by the U.S. Library of Congress. The catalogs from 1986/87 to the present are searchable online www.lcweb.loc.gov/coll/nucmc/; those from 1959-1985 are available in print form only. For example, using the online NUCMC search engine, you can find that Records of the National Slovak Society, District 6, Southwestern, PA (1919-1967) are at the Archives Service Center, University of Pittsburgh and even a URL link to a finding aid for the digital library at Pitt.

Main U.S. Repositories

There are two notable repositories in the United States that collect records of North American ethnic societies. The Immigration History Research Center (IHRC) at the University of Minnesota gathers, preserves, and makes available archival and published resources documenting immigration and ethnicity on a national scope. The materials are particularly rich for ethnic groups that originated in eastern, central, and southern Europe and the Near East. For example, the records of the First Catholic Slovak Union (membership applications) and the National Slovak Society (death benefit claims) are among several such IHRC collections. Among the

fraternal organizations represented at the IHRC are the National Slovak Society, the First Catholic Slovak Union, the Slovenian National Benefit Society, the Order of AHEPA (Greek), and the Order Sons of Italy in America. As there is often no name index available for these collections, researchers need to devote extended periods of time to locate the desired individual. The most efficient way is to visit the library in person. Staff research services \$20.00/hour for service beyond customary reference assistance. For further details about the records and services available check the research page IHRC web site at: www.ihrc.umn.edu/research/index.htm

The Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies of The Historical Society of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia www.hsp.org collects documentation (manuscripts and printed works) of American immigration, ethnic groups, and ethnic societies.

Other Items

Besides membership records, many of the 19th- and 20th-century ethnic societies published newspapers that may contain many details of value for genealogists. For example, The First Catholic Slovak Union's Jednota is an excellent resource.

Another example is the Ukrainian National Association's newspaper, Svoboda (IHRC holds an index to this paper): A select index to Svoboda: official publication of the Ukrainian National Association, Inc., a fraternal association, compiled by Walter Anastas and Maria Woroby.

Fraternal/benevolent societies have also published their own histories, jubilee-anniversary books and convention reports. Many of these contain information about individual lodges and their members, as well as photographs. They also provide the researcher with good background information on ethnic community life.

Some other repositories to check for any number of materials relating to fraternal organizations and benevolent societies, include:

Sister M. Martina Tybor Jankola Library – located at: 580 Railroad Street, Danville, PA 17821; Phone: (570) 275-5606. Research is by appointment ONLY. No Web site.

Slovak Institute www.slovakinstitute.com – located at: 10510 Buckeye Road, Cleveland, OH 44104; Phone: 216-721-5300 ext.294.

The National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library www.ncsml.org – located at: 30 - 16th Avenue SW, Cedar Rapids, Iowa 52404-5904; Phone: 319-362-8500

Also, be sure to check with libraries (public, private, and university) and historical societies in the city or town of your ancestor for holdings in their collections.

Just because there is no obvious record of society membership in your family, do not assume that they did not belong to one. Remember that during the 19th century, societies were very popular—functioning as one of the major social outlets of the time. To find out which societies were in operation during the time your ancestors lived in a specific location check: county or local histories, city or local directories. Some other places to consult, include:

The Family History Library Catalog www.familysearch.org - Search the Family History Library Catalog. Click on the Family History Library Catalog tab, then click on “Keyword Search” and type in “fraternal records” in the search box. You will see 171 matching entries. You can then view details about each entry.

Cyndi's List www.cyndislist.com/soc-frat.htm - Cyndi's List offers links to web sites for many ethnic, fraternal and other organizations. Check under the category “Societies & Groups” and “Fraternal Organizations.” To find organizations specific to Czechs and Slovaks, go to: www.cyndislist.com/czech.htm

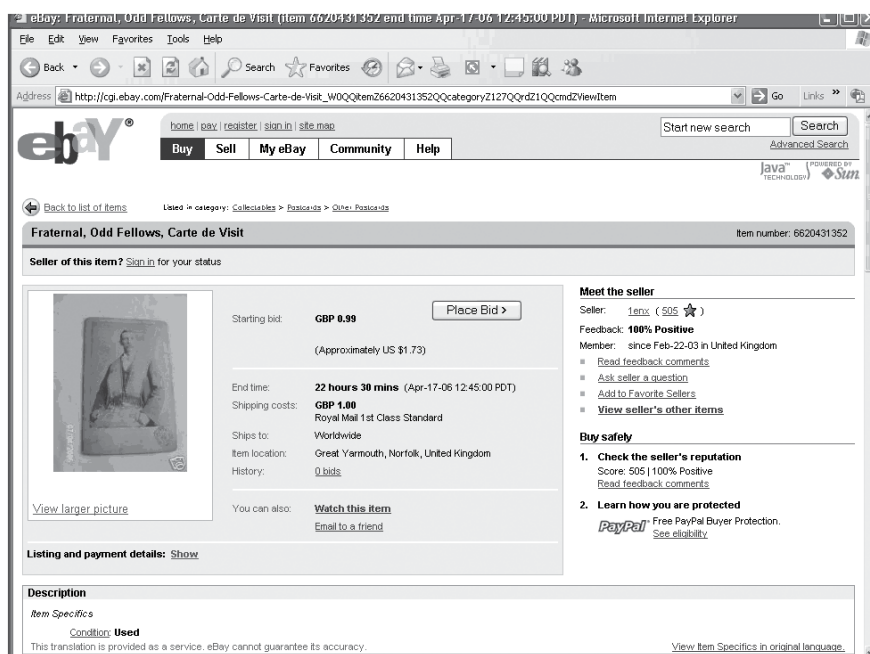
eBay - www.ebay.com - A visit to online auction sites such as eBay with the search term, “fraternal” will yield numerous listings for items or collections either being sold by individuals who do not recognize a connection to their family history, or those purchased by others at antique stores, auction houses, or estate sales. By browsing the postings on eBay, you may be able to identify something in your own family possessions or artifacts that will help with your research. For example, when conducting research for this article, the author found a listing on eBay for a “Vintage Slovak Fraternal Group Pin Ribbon Galetton PA,” at a starting bid of \$9.95.

Google www.google.com - General search engines such as Google are also helpful. A search on the term, “Fraternal organizations” produces 3,230,000 results. To narrow the search, you can click on “Advanced Search Preferences,” and follow the instructions on the advanced search screen.

Linkpendium www.linkpendium.com – Definitive directory of Genealogy links on the Web. Search under “Localities: USA” and then click on the state or county (for example, “Pennsylvania,” “Allegheny County.”)

Other Useful Resources

A list of the largest fraternal societies in the U.S., as



Fraternal memorabilia, such as this Carte de Viste, can often be found listed for sale on online auction sites such as eBay <www.ebay.com>.

shown in the 1896 World Almanac, may be found online in *Fraternalism in America (1860 - 1920)* by Bart P. Snarf www.phoenixmasonry.org/masonicmuseum/fraternalism/fraternalism_in_america.htm

The site includes photographs of decorations of honor and society emblems.

A good primer on secret and fraternal societies is the *International Encyclopedia of Secret Societies and Fraternal Orders*, by Alan Axelrod (Checkmark Books, 1997).

Another useful reference for many American societies is Alvin Schmidt's *Fraternal Societies* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1980).

Deciphering Acronyms

Many fraternal groups societies were commonly known or referred to by their acronyms. An excellent Web site that deals specifically with the various acronyms you might come across is: "Society Exonumia ("Secret Society, Fraternal Organizations abbreviations, slogans, mottos, a complete list," www.exonumia.com/art/society.htm (which includes common abbreviations for society names and also the acronyms to many of the mottos or slogans often engraved on jewelry or as part of an insignia on a tombstone).

Another useful tool in deciphering acronyms is: "Acronym Finder" at: www.acronymfinder.com Note

that this site is not limited to fraternal organizations.

Conclusion

If your ancestor belonged to a fraternal organization or other society, don't underestimate their value when performing family history research. Although it may be challenging to find the records for a particular society, taking the time to use the tools and strategies listed above could potentially lead you to those documents that hold a valuable link to important details about your ancestors. It may take a little extra digging, but you might just strike gold in a record you previously overlooked or did not even know existed!

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About the Author

Lisa A. Alzo currently serves on the CGSI Board of Directors. She is the author of *Three Slovak Women and Baba's Kitchen: Slovak & Rusyn Family Recipes and Traditions* (Gateway Press), *Finding Your Slovak Ancestors* (Heritage Productions), and the forthcoming *Pittsburgh's Immigrants* (Arcadia Publishing), as well as numerous articles for genealogy magazines. Lisa teaches online genealogy classes for MYFAMILY.COM, and the National Institute for Genealogical Studies, and is a frequent speaker at national conferences and genealogical and historical society. She can be reached at: www.lisaalzo.com