

# Naše rodina

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“Our Family”

Quarterly of the Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International

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The following article is excerpted from the September 2018 issue of *Naše rodina*.

***Naše rodina*** (Our Family) [ISSN 1045-8190] is published quarterly by CGSI. *Naše rodina* promotes genealogical research of the ethnic groups that comprised Czechoslovakia at the time of its founding in 1918.

## Content

Each issue contains multiple articles written by a wide variety of authors covering topics relating to genealogy, history, and culture. You can review a list of over 30 years of articles and their authors in the [Naše rodina & Ročenka Index](#).

## Availability

Every issue of CGSI's quarterly journal publication *Naše rodina* (Our Family) is available to CGSI members. CGSI members receive the latest edition as soon as it is published and have [access to a digital copy of every issue since 1989](#).

## Contributing

CGSI welcomes [submissions of potential articles](#), from members and non-members, about history and culture that have substantial genealogical significance.

All articles selected for publication are subject to editing. To submit an article for a future issue, please [view the Naše rodina Submission Guidelines for Authors](#) or [email the Editor](#) with any questions about the submission process.

CGSI also encourages suggestions for future themes of *Naše rodina*. Themes for issues are chosen one year in advance to provide time to solicit and review appropriate articles. [View the list of upcoming issues of Naše rodina](#).

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# Slovak (Prairie County), Arkansas

By Jamie Mettrailer (reprinted with permission)

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Slovak (originally called Slovactown or Slovaktown), an agricultural community founded in 1894, still endures and is home to the Church of Saints Cyril and Methodius, who are also known as the Apostles of the Slavs. Slovak is the result of the promotional efforts aimed at encouraging immigrant settlement in Arkansas in the 1890s.

Various Slovak fraternal and nationalistic organizations, such as the National Slovak Society, translated advertisements promoting the favorable agricultural areas of Arkansas into the Slovak language at presses in Pennsylvania, Ohio, and Illinois. Following such advertisements, the Slovak Colonization Company was organized in 1894 in Pittsburgh by Peter V. Rovnianek. The company bought 3,000 acres of Arkansas land for settlement in the southern portion of Prairie County. This site was planned for an agricultural community on untouched grassland and included 160 acres in the



*The sign outside town pointing the way to the Catholic Church in Slovak, Arkansas. Photo courtesy of Dan Hooks.*

center of the tract for a township and lots for farms, the church, and a school.

In the fall of 1894, twenty-five families arrived at



*Sts. Cyril and Methodius Catholic Cemetery in Slovak, Arkansas. Photo courtesy of Dan Hooks.*

the Slovactown site. Farmers and coal miners who had struggled in the northeastern United States headed many of these families. This first group of immigrants arrived at DeValls Bluff (Prairie County) by rail and then proceeded to their new homes by wagon. The newly arrived settlers erected a community house where the pastor of Stuttgart (Arkansas County), twelve miles south of Slovactown, provided religious services. By 1895, letters to the Bishop Edward Fitzgerald requested a priest devoted solely to Slovactown. The growing Slovak congregation, under the guidance of another Stuttgart priest, built its first church in 1900.

By 1909, about fifty families had settled in Slovactown. Most of these families were Slovak, but a few were Bohemian and Russian. This community built another church, the Church of Saints Cyril and Methodius, around 1914, and yet the congregation still did not have a parish priest. In the absence of a priest, men of the Miklik, Matoske, Konecny, and Dolny families conducted services. By 1910, the Slovaks stopped cutting prairie hay and began farming rice as the region experienced the economic boom associated with the introduction of rice. By 1916, rice was the mainstay crop of the community.

The congregation of Saints Cyril and Methodius finally received its first resident pastor when Father Louis Glinski arrived in 1917. Dr. G. H. Keller replaced Father Glinski as the parish priest in 1923. Keller organized the youth of the community into the Slovak Catholic Club, blessed a new community house in 1924, and was also responsible for the installation of a water system and electric light plant in Slovactown. Slovactown was a parish of sixty farm families in 1925.

Several farmers in the Slovak area were forced to sell their land to make room for the 4,000-acre Pecker-



*Slovaktown and Sts. Cyril and Methodius Catholic Church sign in Slovak, Arkansas. Photo courtesy of Dan Hooks.*

wood Lake, which Edgar Monsanto Queeny, a St. Louis, Missouri, industrialist, created by adding a levee to LaGrue Bayou in 1942. By 1948, the population was made up of about ninety families. In the early 1950s, an estimated 500 citizens of Slovak descent lived on farms in or around Slovak. During this time, businesses also came to include crop dusting, seeding, and private flying businesses. During the 1950s, Father Frank Janesko acted as clergy for the community; Janesko was raised in Slovak and came from a family of the original settlers to the area. The Slovak community continues to be largely defined by farming, kinship, and religion. The Church of Saints Cyril and Methodius is currently attended through Stuttgart via Monsignor John Janesko and con-

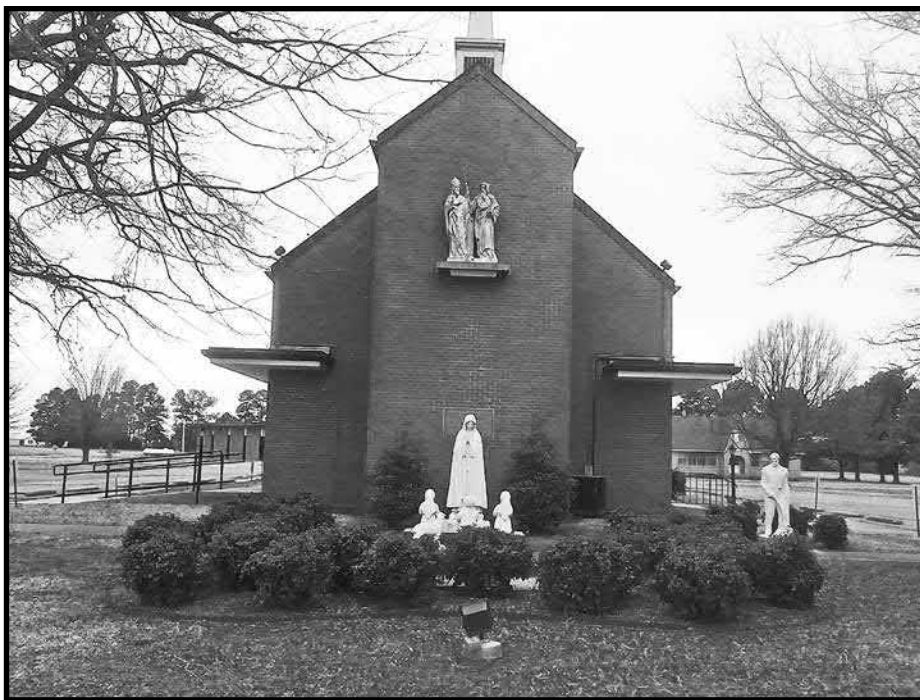
tinues to serve as the religious, social, and cultural locus for the community. The Knights of Columbus Oyster Supper is held at Slovak during the first part of the year.

### **For additional information:**

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*Front of the Sts. Cyril and Methodius Catholic Church in Slovak, Arkansas. Photo courtesy of Dan Hooks.*