

From Homeland to Heartland ...and Beyond

Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International 20th Genealogical/Cultural Conference

**Greater Kansas City Area
October 28–November 1, 2025**



Sugar Creek Ethnic Dance Group and Kolo Kids



CGSI

Program and Registration Booklet

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KANSAS CITY HOTEL & ON-SITE ACTIVITIES

WHAT DOES THE CONFERENCE FEE INCLUDE?

The full 3-day Early Bird member fee of \$269 or non-member fee of \$319 entitles registrants access to:

- n The Whova pre- and post-conference virtual networking computer or phone app
- n Attendance at Wednesday evening's performance of *The Accidental Hero*, one-man WWII era play
- n Thursday's Welcome Reception and Exhibitor Fair
- n Participation in Thursday evening's Czech and Slovak singalong with Petr Husták and Bob Rychlík
- n Any of the 16 75-minute lectures scheduled for Thursday, Friday, and Saturday
- n Thursday, Friday, and Saturday lunches
- n Coffee on Thursday, Friday, and Saturday
- n Choice of two koláče on Friday morning
- n Friday morning's Keynote Address by Dr. Tamara Scheer
- n Friday evening's Parade of Kroje (fashion show with folk dress)
- n Admission to the CGSI Research Center, space permitting, with a ticket
- n Access to the vendor area
- n A 120-plus-page conference syllabus containing speaker material, and a welcome bag.

The Early Bird period ends August 1, after which the price for both a member and non-member increases by \$50.

Tuesday and Wednesday's tours are optional educational events and require registration and fees.

The four Czech folk-art workshops by Daniela Mahoney are limited to the first 25 persons and require a **separate \$20 registration fee**. These workshops are on the online registration form.

The Friday and Saturday dinners, and Saturday's ethnic entertainment are optional events and require separate payment on the registration form.

ACCOMMODATIONS/RESERVATIONS

Host hotel is **DoubleTree by Hilton, 10100 College Boulevard, Overland Park, KS 66210**, with 356 guest rooms including 171 rooms with King beds and 185 rooms with two queen beds. It is conveniently located off US Highway 69 and College Blvd. Trofi's restaurant offers an amazing selection of craft cocktails, beer, and pub-style food. Their coffee shop proudly serves Starbucks coffee. This is a pet-friendly hotel with a \$75 non-refundable fee, for animals not exceeding 75 pounds.

A block of rooms has been reserved for Conference guests from Sunday, October 26, till Sunday November 2. The CGSI group room rate is \$142 per night for a



standard room (2 queens or a king) with single or double occupancy, plus applicable taxes. There will be a charge of \$10 per adult added for triple or quad occupancy. The group rate includes a daily continental style breakfast for up to two occupants per room served in Trofi's restaurant.

The DoubleTree Hotel has offered free overnight parking for CGSI guests. Daytime parking is free for all hotel visitors.

To receive the published group rate, you must make reservations by 5 p.m. Central Time on Friday **September 26, 2025**. Reservations received after that date and time may be available at the DoubleTree's prevailing room rates.

The best and easiest method to make reservations is access the special CGSI guest block on our website, **www.cgsi.org**. Click on 2025 Conference at the top right of the menu, select Hotel Info, and click on the "Direct Booking Link for 2025 CGSI Conference." A short video created by CGSI will help you complete the reservation process. The reservation application's default dates begin with a Wednesday, October 29, arrival and Sunday, November 2, departure. If you plan to take either the Tuesday or Wednesday CGSI tours or do individual research or activities, please check to ensure you have included all applicable hotel nights in your online reservation.

You may also call DoubleTree's in-house Reservations agent, Liz Kates at (913) 323-1947, Monday through Friday 8 a.m.–4 p.m. After hours, please call the hotel at (913) 451-6100 and ask for reservations and ask for the CGSI Conference group rate of \$142 for room nights falling within the CGSI room block dates of Sunday October 26 through Sunday November 2.

Check-in time is 3 p.m., but you can request early check-in by calling the front desk on the day of arrival; however, early check-in cannot be guaranteed. **Check-out time is noon** on the day of departure.

All guests at check-in will receive DoubleTree's signature warm chocolate chip cookie.

All guest rooms and hotel spaces offer free high-speed wireless internet. The hotel is totally non-smoking. The DoubleTree Hotel does not offer shuttles, however, Classic Car Service, a private business with an office in the

DoubleTree Hotel, does private shuttles to and from the airport or to such places as the Midwest Genealogy Center. Reservations are highly recommended. Classic Car Service's phone number is (913) 221-8592.

Many, but not all, guest rooms come with a refrigerator, while all rooms contain a workstation with data port, 50-inch flat screen TV, and an in-room safe. The DoubleTree also has an indoor pool and exercise room.

Reserve early since room types are assigned on a first-come, first-served basis. Plan your travel schedule to include time for our Tuesday and Wednesday tours and for independent sightseeing and research. The CGSI has a map and list on our Conference page with local attractions and dining options. Here is a link to the 20 Best Things to Do in Overland Park, Kansas:

<https://www.travellens.co/best-things-to-do-in-overland-park-ks/>

TRAVELING TO THE CONFERENCE

By Car

From the Kansas City International Airport take I-29 south to I-635 south. Continue driving on I-635/35 south and merge into I-69. As you drive on I-69 you will pass I-435. Exit at College Boulevard, then turn left onto College Blvd. From College Blvd drive just beyond the DoubleTree Hotel and turn left onto Mastin Street. Immediately after, turn left into the DoubleTree parking lot.

From the south of Overland Park take I-69 north and exit at College Boulevard. Turn right after about one block and immediately take a left turn on Mastin Street. From Mastin Street turn left into the DoubleTree parking lot.

We advise you to use map software like Google Maps, Waze maps, or your vehicle's navigation system for the best route based on your point of origin.

By Air

Most air travelers will fly into Kansas City International Airport, 601 Brasilia Avenue, Kansas City, MO 64153. The DoubleTree Hotel is 33 miles south of the airport. During non-peak hours it takes about 34 minutes to drive. The DoubleTree Hotel does not provide shuttle service.

There are several ways to reach the hotel. Classic Car Service provides private shuttles to and from the airport, and reservations are highly recommended. Their phone number is (913) 221-8592.

You may hire an Uber or Lyft driver to take you to the hotel. You might arrange to share a ride with other conference attendees by using the CGSI's rideshare bulletin board item on the "Whova" networking platform. Whova will be accessible one month prior to the Conference.

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VIRTUAL PRECONFERENCE NETWORKING

If you attended the CGSI's 2021 or 2023 conference you are probably familiar with the networking platform **Whova**, which allows attendees to meet via personal text messages, videochat "meetup sessions," or by attaching pins to a virtual world map to display where your ancestors lived in the homeland and beyond. By reviewing the map, you can identify others using the platform who have shared ancestral villages or districts. You can even schedule regional networking round-table discussions. These options enable attendees to share information about common interests or geographic areas. CGSI leadership will schedule orientation sessions to help users navigate the site.

Note: The Whova online platform is also available for \$25 for those unable to attend the conference. See the registration form on the CGSI website to register.

REGISTRATION/CHECK-IN

Conference check-in is 2–5:30 p.m. Wednesday, October 29. People attending the Wednesday tour can register upon their return. Check-in will also be available all day Thursday and Friday and on Saturday mornings and as needed. Day-of-conference registration for walk-ins will be available; however, lunches and speaker handout material may not be available depending on the number of walk-ins.

People on tours will receive temporary name tags, and will receive their conference badge with a lanyard, meal tickets, syllabus, and welcome bag after the tour.

EXHIBITOR ROOM

You can find a wide selection of genealogical books, supplies, t-shirts, ethnic products, maps, folk art, imported Czech and Slovak items, translation services, and travel and professional research information. CGSI will have a full complement of items, including *History of Slovaks in America*, *History of Czechs in America*, genealogy how-to books, auto atlases, tourist maps, cookbooks, etc. Some speakers, sponsors, and for-profit and non-profit businesses will also be selling. The exhibitor area is open to the public.

NETWORKING AREA

You can use the Networking area to share information with fellow researchers, meet with a professional genealogist, participate in small group discussions, post your villages and surnames on the mapping software, or locate a fellow registrant who may share a common surname or village. This area is not staffed.

CGSI RESEARCH CENTER

CGSI will offer Genealogical Research Assistance sessions as part of the 2025 Kansas City conference. This opportunity, formerly known as the Traveling Library, will help you broaden your genealogical research, attempting to solve unanswered questions and chip away at your brick walls. If you're unsuccessful in deciphering the handwriting from an early parish record, or if you're trying to locate your ancestor's village in the old country or master the digital Archive resources, research volunteers will work with you and share the knowledge they've learned in their own genealogical research. To expedite each session, please provide in advance your question and any pertinent information or documentation you've collected related to your query to library@cgsi.org. Providing this information in advance will allow our research assistants to collectively analyze your query and assign it to the most appropriate team member. Look for more information at the Conference Registration desk to book your 20-minute Genealogical Research Assistance session.

TOUR INFORMATION— THINGS YOU'LL SEE

TOUR NUMBER 1—TUESDAY, OCTOBER 28— HARRY TRUMAN PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND ARABIA STEAMBOAT MUSEUM'

Departure: DoubleTree Hotel—7:50 a.m. Return: DoubleTree Hotel—5:30 p.m.

\$75 per person, includes a Windstar deluxe motor coach, guide fees, lunch, driver tip and admissions.

This tour, via deluxe 56-passenger coach bus, will have a morning stop at the Harry S. Truman Presidential Library and Museum in Independence, Missouri. The group will be led by CGSI member, Linda O'Brien. As of May 1, 2025, a Real ID or a Passport will be required to enter the Truman Library, with no exceptions.

A panel discussion, "Czechoslovakia and the Truman Years," will begin the tour. The discussion will be moderated by Dr. Cecilia Rokusek, CEO of the National Czech & Slovak Museum & Library. Panelists include Dr. Sam Rushay, supervisory archivist and leading Truman scholar at the library; John Palka of Minneapolis, Minnesota, a two-time refugee from his Slovak homeland, and Michal Razus, of Prešov, Slovakia, a professional genealogical researcher and tour guide.

Following the panel discussion, Terry Smitka, honorary consul of the Slovak Republic, based in Kansas City, will speak



The Arabia—before it sank.

about Slovaks who settled in his native community of Sugar Creek, Missouri, and the Sugar Creek Historical Museum.

The group will have two hours to tour the library and museum, and a boxed lunch will be served there. Each tour member will receive a locally made koláč.

In the afternoon participants will take a 90-minute guided tour of the Arabia Steamboat Museum in Kansas City, MO. The Arabia sank near KC on September 5, 1856 but was not discovered until 1988. The ship carried 200 tons of mystery cargo. The change in the Missouri River's banks led to the ship's discovery, buried in a farmer's field. Artifacts on display include clothing, fine china, carpentry tools, guns, children's toys and the world's oldest pickles.



The Harry Truman Presidential Library

TOUR NUMBER 2 – WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 29—KANSAS CITY GENEALOGICAL AND CULTURAL TOUR

Departure: The DoubleTree Hotel—7:30 a.m. Return: The DoubleTree Hotel—5 p.m.

\$80 per person, includes Windstar deluxe motor coach, guide fees, lunch, driver tip, and admissions.

This tour, via deluxe 56-passenger coach bus, includes three stops beginning with the Midwest Genealogy Center (MGC), Independence, MO, one of the preeminent resources for family history in the US, providing access to almost three-quarters of a million on-site materials. The tour will be led by Czech Honorary Consul Sharon Valasek. The MGC stop will include a one-hour orientation of the facility and its collections and another 75 minutes to browse individual books or materials in the facility's collection. You may also view kroje from the Baine/Cincebeaux Collection of Czech and Slovak Folk Dress.

Second stop will be at the Strawberry Hill Museum in Kansas City, KS. The museum, the former Cruise-Scroggs mansion and later an orphanage, has second-floor rooms with cultural artifacts and clothing worn by the ethnic groups that settled Kansas City, including Slovaks, Ukrainians, Poles, Croatians, and Slovenians. The Museum is accessible on level ground from the neighboring parking lot of St. John's Catholic Club and includes a stair glide for those with difficulty navigating stairs from first to second floor.

A Slavic catered lunch will be served at the museum, including a salad and a cabbage roll, polish sausage and sauerkraut, German potato salad, green beans, and a roll. Dessert is a slice of povitica (Croatian fruit or nut bread).

Final stop will be at St. John the Baptist Catholic church (Croatian), near the Strawberry Hill Museum. The church opened in 1905 to serve the rapidly growing Croatian community. The church's altars were made in Austria and its 14 full-length stained-glass



Strawberry Hill Museum—Kansas City, KS

windows were manufactured at the Benedikt Škarda glassworks. Some documents about the church say the windows were made in Berne, Switzerland in 1904, but they were probably made in Brno (Brünn), Moravia, Austria.

WEDNESDAY OCTOBER 29—THE ACCIDENTAL HERO—WWII MULTIMEDIA ONE-MAN SHOW BY PATRICK DEWANE

7–8:30 p.m.

This program portrays the WWII experiences of Patrick Dewane's grandfather Matt Konop, a US Army officer, and his role in liberating Czechoslovakia. Matt was born in Two Rivers, Wisconsin, to Czech immigrants and learned the Chodsko Czech dialect.

Because he knew the Czech language Matt was invaluable in his service to the army. Matt and his jeep driver entered his mother's village of Klenci and stumbled upon a meeting of the local resistance. This is the first time these people had ever seen an American. A few days later, when the German surrender was announced, Matt became known as "The Accidental Hero."

Patrick has been presenting this show since 2007 and has brought it to the Czech Republic every year since 2012. Patrick created a 52-minute documentary shown this year on the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II in Europe.



WELCOME RECEPTION AND EXHIBITOR FAIR—THURSDAY, OCTOBER 30, 6–8 P.M.

Networking and information-sharing are important to integrating newcomers into CGSI, and first-time attendees are especially invited to attend this reception. They will have a special ribbon attached to their badges.

The reception will include various food stations in the Exhibition area, offering light hors d'oeuvres. Cash bars and water will also be available.

This event will give you a chance to visit the conference exhibitors without pressure to get to another presentation.



CZECH AND SLOVAK SING-ALONG THURSDAY, OCTOBER 30, 8–9 P.M.

Join Petr Husták of Úžice, Czech Republic on guitar and Bohuslav "Bob" Rychlík, on his fujara (Slovak folk instrument) as they lead in the singing of various Czech and Slovak folk songs. The musicians will provide the words for some or all the songs they play. Drop in for as long as you wish to hear some favorite tunes.

PRESENTATIONS—OCTOBER 30–NOVEMBER 1

From Hometown to Heartland ...and Beyond

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 30

7:30 A.M.–4:45 P.M.

On-Site Registration and Check-In

8 A.M.–8 P.M.

**Exhibitor Room—Seattle II Ballroom
and Prefunction Space**

Free admittance to general public *

*Except 6–8 p.m. during the Welcoming Reception

8:30–8:40 A.M.

Conference Orientation

BREAKOUT 1—9–10:15 A.M.

**T1 Rus(Yn) Over, Don't Be Slo(Vak),
and Czech Out the Records
at NARA—St. Louis**
Lori Berdak Miller

The NARA (National Archives and Records Administration)-St. Louis is home to the NPRC (National Personnel Record Center) and the NARA Archival research room. Come and learn about NARA and what's available there, as we discuss steps for visiting the building to make the best use of your time. One might think that they will only be looking at official military personnel files. But NARA—St. Louis has a variety of resources to check out, not only military service records, but also flight records, lighthouse-keeper records, and court martials, to name a few, so be ready to be amazed.

T2 Czech Genealogy for Beginners
Blanka Lednická

This lecture offers practical tips for identifying your ancestors' places of origin and navigating Czech maps. It introduces the Czech archival system and explains the historical church, political, and estate administration that shaped archival divisions. Discover key resources like parish books, records, maps, and common Czech names and surnames. The presentation also addresses challenges such as handling the Czech language and choosing the right archives and parishes to search, providing a solid foundation for uncovering your Czech ancestry.

**T3 Finding New Czech, Slovak,
and German Records
in the MyHeritage Search Engine**
Daniel Horowitz

With billions of records at your disposal, where do you begin? The MyHeritage Search Engine is a state-of-the-art tool that can help you search for information about your relatives online. In a matter of seconds, it can search across billions of Czech, Slovak, and German historical records to pinpoint the most relevant items. Its advanced algorithms identify spelling and phonetic variations, understand nicknames, and handle synonyms and ethnic variations. Daniel will show you how to use the MyHeritage search engine to quickly and efficiently find information about your relatives..

**T4 Getting to Know Your Ancestral
Hometown: Deciphering Clues
from Parish Records**
Diana J. Bigelow

When brick walls block your path, the key to unlocking the lives and actions of your ancestors may be found in a demographic analysis of their home communities. As an information-rich resource, parish vital records offer an important tool for defining the societal norms of any ancestral community and thus, a better understanding of the life choices of the individuals who reside there. This talk will cover such topics as ancillary resources, demographic strategies, recognizing diversity, and simple statistical considerations, transcending the many historical stereotypes that can lead genealogical research astray.

**Workshop 1—Egg Decorating—
Drop Pull Technique:
The Wax and Candle Method**
Daniela Sipkova-Mahoney
(Limit—25 participants; \$20 supplies
fee; check on registration form)



Participants will learn to decorate eggs using a pin and hot wax to create tear drop designs on the surface of the eggs. Each participant will complete two eggs.

MORNING BREAK—10:15–10:45 A.M.

BREAKOUT 2—10:45 A.M.–NOON

**T5 Find It Yourself—Genealogical
Resources Available Online**
Jan Dus

This lecture will give amateur genealogists information and tools to perform as much of their own genealogical research as possible. What basic facts do researchers need to know to start their own genealogical research in the Czech Republic and/or Slovakia? How can you identify the website for the Regional Archive that covers your ancestor's birthplace? What resources are available online? How do you use the 1824-1843 cadastral maps website for the Czech Republic? How do you find current information about towns? When should you hire a professional genealogist.

T6 Beginning Slovak Genealogy
Lisa Alzo

Curious about your Slovak roots but don't know where to begin? This session will provide an overview of how to jumpstart the research process using traditional and online sources. Learn how to identify your ancestral village, how to locate and interpret vital records by using databases and websites, and how to keep track of search results. Get tips for contacting possible relatives and Slovak archives, and learn key strategies for overcoming the most common pitfalls and problems specific to researching Slovak ancestors.

**T7 The War To End ALL Wars—
Researching World War I Heroes**
Mary Dempsey

This presentation focuses on resources available for researching your ancestor who served in World War I, also known as The Great War. The presenter will talk about resources for researching those who served and where they can be found. The focus will be on resources available for World War I research in the United States, but it will also include resources for research in other countries that were involved in the Great War.

T8 Tracing a Czech Family before, during, and after the Holocaust
Joanne Sher

What was life like for a Jewish Czech family before World War II? What happened to the family members and their neighbors during the Holocaust? What happened to them and other Jewish Czech survivors? This presentation will follow a Jewish Czech family's life before WWII, their experiences during the war, and what happened to them after the war. Research methodology and resources will be presented. Information will be included on how to access records regarding those who perished in the Holocaust as well as Holocaust survivors.

NOON–1:30 P.M.
LUNCH (INCLUDED IN CONFERENCE FEE)

BREAKOUT 3—1:30–2:45 P.M.

T9 Finding the Farm and Interpreting Land Records
Gary W. Clark

This presentation interprets cryptic land descriptions in homestead documents, deed records, and plat maps to reveal the exact location of ancestral homesteads, farms, and homes. It also offers guidance to finding and obtaining these records, their genealogy uses, and how they add context to family stories. This interactive presentation will demonstrate online access to typical land records and share copies of original documents for the audience to inspect. This session will also demonstrate digital tools used to translate these land descriptions to GPS and driving directions.

T10 'Kde domov můj' and 'Die Wacht am Rhein': Singing Loyalty and Disloyalty in Habsburg Bohemia during the First World War
Dr. Tamara Scheer

Before the World War I, the military frequently reported Bohemian Czechs and Germans singing "Kde domov můj" and "Wacht am Rhein," the last song to be banned in Austria. After July 1914, authorities arrested almost exclusively Czechs for singing nationalist songs. However, military records show that Czech behavior did not change, and authorities turned a blind eye to German nationalism. This unjust treatment increasingly undermined the confidence in the Habsburg legal institutions by Czech-speaking citizens. Sources discussed are largely from the Vojenský historický archiv in Prague. For background on this topic, please see the speaker's book, *Language Diversity and Loyalty in the Habsburg Army* (at theses.univie.ac.at/detail/57914#).

T11 Researching at the Midwest Genealogy Center
Katie Smith

The Midwest Genealogy Center (MGC) is one of the preeminent resources for family history in the United States, providing access to almost three-quarters of a million on-site materials. MGC's collections offer resources for genealogy research that span the United States and countries around the world. Join Midwest Center Director, Katie Smith, as she highlights available resources and shares tips for using the collections to assist in your genealogy research.

T12 Why They Left
Helene Cincebeaux

Most immigrants came from villages where ancestral plots were divided and reddivided over the generations until they could no longer support a family. Large families were the norm and villagers married young, but the rigors of childbirth and bouts of cholera claimed so many lives. Many hands were needed to fulfill obligations to the lord or landlord and still have enough left to survive. The young men also faced compulsory military service at age 18 for very little pay; and in the old days it could be a life-long commitment, so many left to escape the draft. And the alluring New World beckoned with tales of streets paved with gold. These and other unusual reasons will explain why they left.

AFTERNOON BREAK—2:45–3:15 P.M.

BREAKOUT 4—3:15–4:30 P.M.

T13 Sokol—A Worldwide Spy Organization in WWI?
Anna Cooková

"Without Sokol there would be no legions, and without the legions there would be no Czechoslovakia." Czechs could claim they were Austrian citizens and could therefore work at Austrian consulates and German shipping yards. This lecture focuses on the Sokol organization starting in Prague in 1862, the first Sokol unit in the US starting in St. Louis, MO, and the numbers of units across the nation. We will discuss the digitization of the entire American Sokol publication from 1879 to the present and how to access it for genealogy research.

T14 Researching Czech Census Records
Greg Nelson

Besides counting the population, Czech census records also include taxation and military conscription plus other opportunities to discover your family. After a brief review of the census and census-type records before 1850, this course will specifically look at Czech census records from 1857 to 1921. You will learn research strategies for the census records and how to locate the correct records when your family doesn't have an entry in the census records. You will also learn why census records are not always the first choice in building family trees with artificial intelligence.

T15 Latest AI Innovations from MyHeritage
Daniel Horowitz

Artificial Intelligence is the hit of the tech world, and MyHeritage has been leveraging it to bring family history to life since long before DALL-E and ChatGPT. From photo colorization, enhancement, and repair to photo animation and video creation, DeepStory, LiveMemory™, AI Biographer™ all the way to the super fun AI Time Machine™, MyHeritage enabled users to experience the past like never before. Daniel will also demonstrate how to use AI technology to enhance your family history research and give you a peek into the future of AI-assisted genealogy.

T16 How to Use the Czech Heritage Newspaper Hospodář (1906–1960)
Kate Vasicek Challis

The Hospodář (1906–1960), a Czech heritage newspaper about agriculture and horticulture, played a major role in preserving and promoting Czech language and culture in the United States. Not only does it contain valuable genealogical information about early immigrant ancestors, including births, marriages, and deaths, but it can also help fill in details about the rich lives and experiences of what it meant to be Czech in America. Newspapers were the social media of the early 20th century, and the Hospodář is no exception. This presentation will focus on how English-speakers with Czech heritage can use this Czech-language resource, available in its entirety in digital form to CGSI members."

Workshop 2—Fashion Jewelry from Czech Glass Beads
Daniela Sipkova-Mahoney
(Limit—25 participants; \$20 supplies fee; check on registration form)

Participants will learn about the history of jewelry making and will be able to identify different styles of beads manufactured in Northern Bohemia. Participants will create two pieces of jewelry from different Czech glass beads.

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 30, 6–8 P.M.
WELCOME RECEPTION AND EXHIBITOR FAIR

THURSDAY, OCTOBER 30, 8–9 P.M.
CZECH/SLOVAK FOLK SONG SING-ALONG WITH PETR HUSTÁK (GUITAR) AND BOB RYCHLIK (FUJARA)

FRIDAY OCTOBER 31**7:15–9:15 A.M.****ON SITE REGISTRATION AND CHECK-IN****7:30 A.M.–5 P.M.****EXHIBITOR AREA****8–9 A.M.****KEYNOTE ADDRESS AND OPENING SESSION**

Singing of Czech, Moravian, Slovak and Carpatho-Rusin National Anthems, and the Star Spangled Banner

**Keynote Speaker—
Dr. Tamara Scheer**

Life of Czech, Slovak, and Ruthenian Austro-Hungarian Soldiers during the First World War

The Austro-Hungarian army included soldiers from many regions of Central Europe. They spoke a variety of languages comprising about twelve idioms recognized as regimental languages. This talk focuses on Czech, Slovak, and Ruthenian soldiers, using examples from many different archives, including Ukraine, the Czech Republic, and Slovakia, as well as different types of sources (e.g., army orders, confidential reports and autobiographical sources). The talk looks at experiences of these soldiers on different fronts—in the East, in the Balkans, and in Italy. For more information, see the book [utheses.univie.ac.at/detail/57914#](https://theses.univie.ac.at/detail/57914#)

**General Announcements
(conference chair)**

BREAKOUT 1—9:15–10:30 A.M.

**F1 Developing a Genealogy Research Strategy for Your Family—Part I: Strategy
Bill Tarkulich**

Many individuals often take a haphazard approach to researching their family history, especially as it relates to European records. This often results in dead ends and lengthy, roundabout pursuits that lead to frustration and sometimes abandonment. This session describes a methodical approach towards information discovery, which greatly reduces time spent and increases success. The first phase identifies which immigrant information is critical and how to discover it. Foundational principles include establishing a research objective, constructing a chronology, why history matters, surnames, and village names. It also discusses the importance of establishing hypothesis and the importance of iterative research.

Part II: Research Methods (Session F9) uses the strategy presented to identify and use tools and methods to quickly and confidently acquire essential data.

**F2 Building An Empire:
Austro-Hungarian Empire
and Their Military
Sheri Volpe**

This presentation discusses the Austro-Hungarian Empire from 1814 to 1918, focusing on how the empire came into being, brief timeline of events, ethnic groups in the Empire, politics and the role of the military in people's lives, World War I and aftermath, military records (Militärakten), and where to find records.

**F3 Photo Restoration—
the Latest One-Click Tool
Gary W. Clark**

This presentation explores the newest generation of tools to restore old photographs damaged by fading, color shifts, scratches, and blemishes. Before and after examples will be shared and some restoration steps demonstrated. Many Artificial Intelligence tools are now available to provide simple, easy-to-use routines that previously only dedicated photo editing programs could address. We will look at expectations and realities and compare different products to help you decide which solution to choose. Originals and restored samples are shared with the audience.

**F4 Life in Bohemia and Moravia in
the 18th Century
Blanka Lednická**

You can explore the everyday lives of Czech serfs in 18th-century rural Bohemia—a period of relative stability. This presentation examines how the church, domain owners, and local authorities shaped their lives? Could they choose whom to marry, name their children, or decide their occupation and residence? It traces the serf life cycle from birth to death, highlighting customs around baptism, marriage, burial, and traditions—both religious and folk. Learn about inheritance of homesteads and occupations, career possibilities, and the challenges they faced because they were serfs.

**Workshop 3—Traditional Glass Bead
Ornaments by Rautis Company
in Northern Bohemia
Daniela Sipkova-Mahoney
(Limit—25 participants; \$20 supplies
fee; check on registration form)**

Participants will learn about the history of glass ornaments made of hollow beads, a craft that originated in Ponikla in Northern Bohemia. The instructor will discuss the Rautis company, which was instrumental in preserving traditional glass bead making technology and manufacturing processes dating back almost 150 years. Each participant will complete two traditional ornaments from glass beads.

MORNING BREAK—10:30–11 A.M.

BREAKOUT 2—11 A.M.–12:15 P.M.

**F5 Hussite Wars: Jan Žižka—
Hero or Villain?
Jan Dus**

This presentation delves into the complex legacy of Jan Žižka amidst the Hussite Wars, which were ignited by religious and political tensions in 15th century Bohemia. Žižka, a skilled military strategist and leader of the radical Hussite forces, achieved remarkable victories against domestic and foreign adversaries, earning him admiration as a symbol of resistance and defender of religious freedom. Yet, his use of brutal tactics on the battlefield has sparked controversy, leading some to question his moral character. This presentation confronts the complexities of historical interpretation of Žižka's life and deeds.

**F6 Panel 1: Women of our Past
Diana Bigelow,
Helene Cincebeaux,
Kate Challis**

While underappreciated in historical narratives, generations of our mothers have preserved their lived experiences by oral traditions passed down to us. This panel will discuss three aspects of female life in the towns and villages of our ancestral homelands:

- n Women's working lives as they evolved over the 19th century (Diana Bigelow)
- n The traditional role of the krstna mama (god-mother) in the life of her goddaughter (Helene Cincebeaux)
- n A modern re-creation of traditional Czech cloth production, ranging from textiles to needlework (Kate Challis).

**F7 Genealogical Treasures
in Military and Pension Files
Lori Berdak Miller**

Military or pension files are sources for a great deal of other information besides details about a person's military service. Get ready to see examples of the gems, which could include paperwork on birth and death, photos, baptismal/christening papers, marriage/divorce, employment, schooling, personal letters, plus more. We will also briefly touch over how to visit the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)—St. Louis to explore on your own.

F8 Ten Things Every Slovak Genealogist Should Know

Lisa Alzo

Learn how to maximize your Slovak genealogy research with the ten key things to know before you even begin. Get tips for planting your family tree online, how to use pre-existing family US-based records to determine names and places, and which online databases to check first. Discover the best practices for citing sources and recording information and learn what to expect when you "cross the pond." Designed with the beginner in mind, this session will demonstrate how to start off on the right foot with Slovak genealogical research to save time, money, and effort along the way.

LUNCH (included in conference fee)
12:15–1:45 p.m.

BREAKOUT 3—1:45–3 p.m.

F9 Developing a Genealogy Research Strategy for Your Family—Part II: Research Methods

Bill Tarkulich

Many individuals often take a haphazard approach to researching their family history, especially as it relates to European records. This often results in dead ends, lengthy and roundabout pursuits that lead to frustration and sometimes abandonment.

This session builds upon Part I—Strategy (Session F1) by identifying and using tools and methods that enable the researcher to succeed. Key elements include finding quality information, accuracy of old documents, what is "correct," migration pattern clues. It also illustrates powerful online tools often overlooked, and the importance of writing your family story.

F10 Ancestral Quest: Czech/Slovak Immigration Patterns

Sheri Volpe

This presentation discusses Czech/Slovak immigration to America from 1850 to 1914, focusing on the reasons for immigration (including history of countries and why they were leaving), Czech/Slovak diaspora (where are they coming from?), waves and patterns of migration, early US settlements, settlements outside the US, Canada connection, emigration and immigration records, and where to find records.

F11 Getting Started in Jewish Genealogy

Joanne Sher

Just getting started in Jewish genealogy? What are some of the basics? This presentation will provide information and resources about the Jewish calendar, Hebrew and Yiddish, Jewish personal names, Jewish surnames, villages of origin, Jewish vital records, Jewish cemeteries and headstones, Jewish newspapers, and Jewish organizations.

F12 Genealogy as Reading between the Lines

Jan Dus

This two-part lecture will first provide a brief, basic orientation in baptismal, wedding and death records. This section targets those who are new in genealogical research. The second, longer part will focus on subtle details that can tell us much. It is meant for experienced researchers who want to improve their skills at deciphering fine details and subtleties. We will ask, Can records be wrong? When and why did our ancestors change their last names? and "How do I find out what my ancestors never wanted me to know?"

AFTERNOON BREAK—3–3:30 p.m.

BREAKOUT 4—3:30–4:45 p.m.

F13 To the Depths of the Archives

Blanka Lednická

Discover the growing wealth of online resources from the Czech archives and explore what lies beyond parish books. This lecture introduces lesser-known sources such as seigniorial registers, censuses, school records, and chronicles. Learn how to navigate these records, which areas are already digitized, and what future digitization plans the Czech archives have. It also uncovers collections still hidden in archives, offering insights into their contents and potential. With practical examples, the presentation explains how to locate these sources and use them for family history research, opening new doors to uncovering the past.

F14 Cluster Research: The Key to Turning Dead Ends into New Discoveries to Find Your Ancestral Origins

Jill Johnson

Have you hit a dead end in your genealogy research? Discover the game-changing power of Cluster Research, a specialized technique that leverages the interconnectedness of immigrant communities to uncover clues about your ancestors' origins. Learn how to explore neighbor connections, analyze unrelated family lines, and apply chain migration patterns to overcome stalled research challenges. This session provides strategies to harness unconventional resources and piece together elusive details to narrow the search area for your ancestor's European homeland. Gain fresh insights to break through frustrating roadblocks and discover new paths to advance your genealogical journey.

F15 How Computers Can Help Us Understand Czech

Marek Blahuš

Knowing the Czech language is very useful for Czech genealogical research, but few people find the time and talent required to fully master the difficult Slavic language. Fortunately, a lot can be achieved today with the help of computers. This presentation, introduces freely available on-line tools useful for English speakers. You will learn to look up words (and word forms) in a dictionary, use machine translation in the browser, determine the correct pronunciation of Czech words and names, and produce the special Czech characters with diacritics where appropriate.

F16 The 460 Austro-Hungarian POWs from First World War buried in the Crypt of Santa Maria dell'Anima in Rome

Dr. Tamara Scheer

The lecture deals with archival research into identifying the 460 Austro-Hungarian First World War soldiers buried in the crypt of Santa Maria dell'Anima in Rome. These soldiers came mainly from Bohemia, Galicia and the Kingdom of Hungary. Research is dedicated to the history of the burial site and includes the soldiers' wartime and captivity experiences as well as biographies with a focus on how their families tried to gather information about the fate of their loved ones in the 1920s. First printed result is available in English at <https://tinyurl.com/4mzrehtw>.

6–7 p.m. DINNER
Optional—(registration form at cgis.org)

Roast pork, okurkový salát, braised cabbage, bread dumplings, rolls and rye breadbasket, and fruit torte.

7:15–8:45 p.m.—PARADE OF KROJE

Our emcees, Helene Cincebeaux and Ann Cramer, will have either full or partial folk dress for attendees to model who don't have their own kroje. Be prepared to share a description and short story with the emcees in advance of the conference telling how you obtained your kroj.

If you are interested in participating but do not have your own kroj, please contact either Helene at helenezx@aol.com or Ann at cramerann@ntd.net



SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 1

7:15–8:30 A.M.
REGISTRATION AND CHECK-IN

EXHIBITOR AREA
7:15 A.M.–3:30 P.M.

BREAKOUT 1—8–9:15 A.M.

S1 Profile of Czech Migrants to the Midwest
Jan Dus

This session will portray typical profiles of Czech migrants to the Midwest in late 1800s, focusing on history, cultural settings, and statistics of emigration from Czech towns and villages. We will speak about life in Czech lands in the late 1800s, analyze statistics, and ask what a typical immigrant looked like, including social status, education, profession, age, marital status, and religion. We will also look at later waves of emigration from Czech Lands.

S2 Can AI Help Me Find My Slovak Ancestors?
Lisa Alzo

Artificial intelligence, or AI, enables computers and machines to simulate human intelligence and problem-solving capabilities, and it is already helping to shape the future of genealogy. But AI is more than just the latest buzzword. This session will cover the basics of “deep learning” and “generative AI” and reviews AI components of some of the most popular genealogy websites such as Ancestry, FamilySearch, and MyHeritage. You will also learn ways to use ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Meta, and other popular photo, translation, and writing tools to find those elusive Slovak ancestors and share their stories.

S3 Language Diversity in the Austro-Hungarian Army
Dr. Tamara Scheer

The Austro-Hungarian army recognized about 12 languages, and the empire’s constitution required that they be trained in their own language. This was a controversial issue. Using different types of primary sources found throughout Habsburg Central Europe, this talk outlines how regulations were implemented during the First World War and how language diversity affected operations and morale of soldiers. For more information, please see the presenter’s book, *Language Diversity and Loyalty in the Habsburg Army*, at theses.univie.ac.at/detail/57914#

S4 Panel 2: Planning a Genealogical Trip to Your Villages
Helene Cincebeaux, Jill Johnson, Bill Tarkulich

Join three seasoned genealogical travel experts sharing their secrets for turning your family history research into an unforgettable journey of discovery. They will guide you through everything you need to know to plan and experience a successful ancestral homeland visit. Learn essential strategies for archive research, building relationships with distant relatives, cultural etiquette, and techniques for connecting across language barriers. Whether you’re planning your first heritage trip or enhancing your research skills, you’ll gain practical tips to transform your genealogical research into a profound personal journey that bridges generations and brings your family history to life.

Workshop 4—Egg decorating—the Flameless Method: Colored Wax Applied to the Surface of the Egg
Daniela Sipkova-Mahoney
(Limit—25 participants; \$20 supplies fee; check on registration form)

Participants will learn how to decorate eggs by applying colored wax to white eggs. The wax is heated by candles. Each participant will complete two eggs.

MORNING BREAK 1—9:15–9:45 A.M.

BREAKOUT 2—9:45–11 A.M.

S5 Uncovering Patterns and Connections in Nebraska and Kansas Czech Communities using the CGSI Digital Library and other Genealogical Resources
Jason Cadek

This session discusses analysis of the interconnections between two Czech communities in central Nebraska and northwest Kansas based on records of their lives. This will also be a primer, using several CGSI Digital Library tools, including Leo Baca’s Czech Immigrant Passenger Lists, the CGSI Member Surnames database, and the Villages and Cemeteries projects. Using other sources—including Czech language newspapers, other databases, and the Czech Regional Archives—we will begin to further understand and analyze these Czech immigrants’ lives and experiences.

S6 Reconstructing the Families of a Czech Village
Wesley Johnston

This presentation looks at a long-term project to reconstruct the families of Modřevovice in Central Bohemia over the centuries into a single database. The presentation aims to inspire others to do the same thing for their villages, and it deals with the practical matters of how to do it. Phase 1 of the project is at www.johnston.net/famhist/modrejovice-all.htm and at one-place-studies.org/europe/czech-republic/central-bohemia/modrejovice/

S7 Accessing and Acquiring Records of the Czech Republic and Slovakia: FamilySearch Efforts 2009–2025
Greg Nelson

Since 1991, FamilySearch has captured more than 75 million digital images from archives in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. It takes skill to locate the correct records for your research, and this lecture will review what has been captured, what remains to be captured, how to find the right records, and how you can assist other researchers. It will also cover data improvements, artificial intelligence tree building from Czech/Slovak records, and what technology will allow us to do in 5–10 years. This course will benefit those who need a good overview of the area and how to work with records in FamilySearch.

S8 Genetic Genealogy Success Stories Showcase
Marek Blahuš

Come and hear selected stories of Czech and Czech-American genealogists that have resulted from DNA testing. As a researcher and administrator of the largest Czech Facebook group on genetic genealogy, the speaker gets to hear many success stories. Descriptions will mention the tools and techniques (both autosomal and Y-DNA) that are used, and you may be inspired to take a test or view your results in a new light. And you will get a chance to share any success stories.

LUNCH (INCLUDED IN CONFERENCE FEE)
11 A.M.–12:30 P.M.

BREAKOUT 3—12:30–1:45 P.M.

S9 History of Czech-German Relationships in a Nutshell
Marek Blahuš

Czechs have always cohabitated with Germans, and Bohemia and Moravia were home to a German minority from the 12th century until the expulsion in 1945–46. Still today, Germany is the Czech Republic’s largest neighbor and its most important economic partner. Another neighbor, German-speaking Austria, was the center of the monarchy where Czechs lived from 1526 to 1918, i.e. during the whole “genealogical timeframe.” Nineteenth century nationalist movements like the German Unification and the Czech National Revival have eventually led to the creation of nation states, but German traces remain in Czech language, surnames, and society.

S10 Poor Widows?

**Surviving the Loss of a Husband
in 19th century Rural Bohemia**
Diana J. Bigelow

For our female ancestors, a husband's death meant the loss of the family's primary income generator. Denied an education, barred from training for a skilled trade, and subject to the most meager of pay scales, rural Czech women were ill-equipped to take on the sole support of their families. Yet less than 30 percent of widows chose to remarry. This talk takes a deep dive into historical sources to uncover the legal rights and survival strategies employed by widows of farmers, craftsmen, laborers, and soldiers.

**S11 Birth and Death
in Czech Folk Culture**
Kate Vasicek Challis

Birth and Death in Czech Folk Culture is a translation of Dr. Alexandra Navrátilová's work examining historic cultural practices surrounding birth and death in Czech life, many of which were closely tied to Catholic faith, culture, superstition, and doctrine. The book is full of interesting anecdotes about folk customs and beliefs, most of which did not survive in later Czech-American communities. The book's images and original source citations add a whole new layer of richness and interest for those of us trying to connect with our Czech heritage. It contains stories that will make you laugh, shudder, and gasp in horror.

**S12 Where are Baba's Records:
Chasing Genealogy Clues
to Find Elusive Female Ancestors**
Lisa Alzo

How do you research a female ancestor when you begin with the wrong surname, a mystery photo, and no prior knowledge of her life? Can you objectively sift through family lore to separate fact from fiction in your family tree? Through a series of mini case study examples, this session will demonstrate how to chase genealogy clues in photos, online records, family trees, and archival documents to search for women with seemingly unremarkable lives, and discover amazing stories. Learn how to use collaboration and connections to discover FANs (Friends, Associates, Neighbors) and overcome the challenges of tracking female ancestors.

AFTERNOON BREAK—1:45–2:15 P.M.

BREAKOUT 4—2:15–3:30 P.M.

**S13 Butcher, Baker,
Candlestick Maker—
What Our Ancestors Did
to Earn Their Daily Bread**
Helene Cincebeaux

Centuries after our ancestors ended a nomadic way of life and established villages, most of them worked in agriculture, forestry and animal husbandry. But most villagers were multitasking, e.g., the blacksmith who could play an accordion in the village band. As for women, their work was never done. They toiled all day in the fields then came home to cook and clean. Women were midwives and healers, made bread and soap, fed livestock, helped in birthing, and went to church. Spare moments involved weaving, spinning and embroidery by candlelight or flickering oil lamps. Come for a visual feast—images of our ancestors' occupations through the ages.

**S14 Czech Namesakes in Kansas,
Missouri, and Oklahoma**
Anna Cooková

When Jan Habenicht's Book Czechs in America was published in 1910, he estimated that about 10,000 Czechs were living in Kansas, and 8,000 in St. Louis, MO, let alone the rest of the state, and about 3,500 were in Oklahoma. As a result, many places have been named after Czech people or Czech icons. What are some of those icons? Who are those people: Český Lev, Kalich, Karel Jonáš, Karel Havlíček Borovský, Palacký? are some icons. We will discuss their significance to these early Czech settlers.

S15 Story of one Czech family
Blanka Lednická

How can you craft a family history using archival collections? This case study of a farming family spanning three centuries (17th–20th) will show you what the Czech archives offer online and offline, including parish books, estate registers, cadastral records, chronicles, maps, and censuses. The presentation explores ancestors' occupations, social status, living conditions, duties, and family dynamics, revealing how property ownership and family structure evolved. You can dive into sources that uncover the daily lives and legacies of past generations and get practical tips for transforming archival discoveries into a comprehensive family narrative.

**S16 Dating Old Photos
and Identifying People**
Gary W. Clark

Dating old photos can help the genealogist tell who a subject is and just as important, who it is not. After consumer photographs were introduced around 1840, photo technology, styles, and subjects' dress and looks changed frequently. Knowing when these traits were introduced and when they became obsolete helps date a photo—sometimes within a few years. Years of experience and tricks are shared to help compare subjects with a known image to determine if they are the same. The presentation includes scores of examples arranged in timeline fashions. Authentic examples are circulated during the program.

**4–5 P.M.—CGSI MEMBERSHIP
MEETING**

Come learn what your society has accomplished during the last year and what our future plans are. Vote for the new slate of candidates and meet your hard-working volunteers.

5:45–6:45 P.M.—DINNER
**Optional—see registration form at
cgsi.org**

Green salad with choice of dressing, chicken Marsala, mashed potatoes, seasonal vegetables, rolls, palačinky (crepes with jam and vanilla cream), coffee, tea, (cash bar for alcohol)

Vegetarian or special dietary substitute available. See online registration form.

7–9 P.M.—ENTERTAINMENT
**Included with paid meal; otherwise an
event admission fee of \$15—see cgsi.org**

Sugar Creek Ethnic Dance Group and Kolo Kids Dance Group directed by Anna O'Renack (see front cover); fujara music by Bohuslav "Bob" Rychlík.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

For Conference questions not covered in this booklet, please email Paul Makousky at conferencechair@cgsi.org or call 651-739-7543 evenings or weekends. The member registration rate applies if you join the CGSI by filling in the membership information on the registration page and paying the membership fee. All tickets for meals and entertainment will be held at the hotel and distributed with your ID badge. Registration and payment must be made online through the CGSI website at www.cgsi.org and clicking on 2025 Conference in the top right.

CANCELLATION POLICY

Cancellations will be accepted for any reason by a written notice, and received by September 28. After that date refunds, minus a \$50 fee, will be issued only for the death of a family member or a major illness to yourself or a close family member. Refunds, minus a \$50 cancellation fee, will be issued upon written notice and explanation.

Lisa A. Alzo, MFA, grew up in Duquesne, PA, and has written 11 books, including *The Family Tree Polish, Czech and Slovak Genealogy*, and the award-winning *Three Slovak Women*, plus hundreds of magazine articles. Lisa has served on the CGSI Board of Directors and contributes articles for *Naše rodina*. An online educator and writing coach, she has developed the Eastern European Research Certificate



Program for the International Institute of Genealogical Studies. For more information, visit lisaalzo.com.

Diana J. Bigelow is an avid genealogist with a special fascination for the migrant's journey. Bicycling the back roads of the Czech countryside gave her a taste of the world her immigrant ancestors left behind, but nothing like the vivid portraits that emerge from parish records. Bigelow draws from her years as a research scientist by applying the scientific method to query historical databases, sharing her findings in her book: *Quitting Bohemia: Discovering the 19th Century World That Created the Czech Diaspora*.



Marek Blahuš, based in Brno, is a Czech-Moravian IT scientist, computational linguist, polyglot, Wikipedia contributor and pioneer of Czech genetic genealogy. A genealogist since the age of 13, he learned English while researching a distant Chicago-Czech connection and helping members of a Czech-American mailing list. Today, he has a working knowledge of about ten languages. He has spoken at CGSI



conferences in 2019, 2021, and 2023. Marek is married and a father of three bilingual children.

Jason Cadek is a semiprofessional genealogist from Omaha, NE, and the current president of CGSI, board president of the Bohemian Cemetery Omaha Association, financial secretary of Sokol Omaha, and a member of the Omaha Czech/Slovak Cultural Club, the Lincoln Czech Club and the Great Plains Chapter of the Association of Professional Genealogists. Jason has had a passion for genealogy for more than 30 years, researching his own family, as well as communities in Central Nebraska and Omaha.



Kate Vasicek Challis is a fifth-generation Texas Czech with ancestors mainly from the Beskid mountains of Moravian Silesia and Wallachia. Kate has been researching her Czech ancestry since 2008, and her blog is called *Czech Out Your Ancestors*. With Lukáš Svoboda, Kate coauthored *The Researcher's Guide to the Czech Land Books* (2023) and with Tom Drusa translated Dr. Alexandra Navrátilová's book *Birth and Death in Czech Folk Culture* (2025). Kate is a PhD student in applied linguistics at Iowa State University. Her dissertation is about finding patterns in the garbled Czech surname spellings in the US census to make them more searchable. She lives in Utah with her husband and five children.



Helene Cincebeaux's roots fascination began in 1960 when she learned her husband's family traced back to the 1200s with handwritten records. Her sister, Rosalie Baine, became a doctor of genetics, and Helene was the first to use genetic genealogy on the internet. CGSI inspired her database of 30,000 Slovak surnames and villages. Her *Treasures Tours to Slovakia and Czechia* for 34 years led to incredible reunions. Helene is proud of finding living family for 98 percent of her tourgoers.



Gary Clark is a photographer, writer, and genealogist with a range of specialties whose career in technology blends perfectly with today's genealogy tools and research. As the publisher of more than a dozen books on old photographs, military history, gravestone preservation, and other topics, Gary also has presented at regional and national genealogy conferences since 2009. A native Kansan and resident of Wichita, Gary is a member of the Wichita Genealogy Society, Topeka Genealogy Society, and the National Genealogy Society.



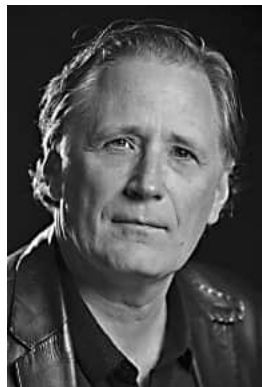
Anna Cooková grew up in Opava, Czech Republic, and now lives in Wisconsin, owning and operating *CzechTalk, LLC*. She is an independent scholar and dedicated to Czech-American ties. Since 2009, Anna has taught Czech Language & Culture courses online and in various Czech-American communities. She has served as president of Wisconsin Czechs, Inc., and is currently second vice president of Sokol Milwaukee and education director for the national American Sokol. A member of American Sokol, CGSI, NCSML, SVU, and others, Anna is passionate about Czech genealogy, Czech history, the impacts of that history on Czech migration especially through translating old letters and journals, and loves raising their daughter to embrace her Czechness.



Mary Dempsey has been doing her own genealogy research for a quarter of a century, enjoying every minute of discovery, especially finding her roots in England and Wales. She gets excited about teaching all that is genealogy, whether in a classroom setting or a one-on-one basis. She also enjoys learning, particularly about researching in other countries. What she loves the most, though, is helping others in their journey to make their own family discoveries.



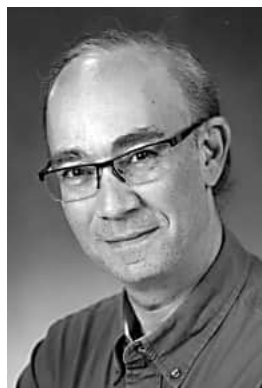
Patrick Dewane has performed *The Accidental Hero* more than 300 times, including at Washington, DC's Ford's Theater, the National World War II Museum in New Orleans, and during residencies at the University of Florida, Notre Dame, and Texas A & M. His annual Czech tour earned him a Medal of Honor from the city of Domažlice. Matt Konop, the story's protagonist, was posthumously named an Honorary Citizen. Dewane holds an MFA in theatre from Brooklyn College.



Jan Dus is a professional genealogist, Presbyterian minister, and humanitarian worker. Proficient in seven languages, he studied in Czechoslovakia, the United States, and Germany. Jan offers a variety of services related to genealogical research and trips to ancestral villages throughout Central Europe and for the past 20 years, he has provided services to more than 900 clients. Jan is CEO of the humanitarian organization Camino and frequently volunteers with Doctors without Borders. He has been presenting at CGSI conferences since 2009.



Daniel Horowitz has been dedicated to genealogy since 1986 and for 15 years has been the teacher and the study guide editor of the family history project "[Searching for My Roots](#)" in Venezuela. He is involved in several crowdsource digitization and transcription projects and holds a board-level position at the Israel Genealogy Research Association (IGRA). Since 2006 Daniel has been working at [MyHeritage](#) linking with genealogy societies, bloggers, and media, as well as lecturing and attending [conferences around the world](#).



Jill J. Johnson, MBA, an award-winning management consultant and expert genealogist, has combined decades of professional research expertise with a deep passion for family history. She has traced ancestral roots across eight European nations, uncovered village origins for her family's and her husband's lineage. Jill's genealogical journey began with a deathbed promise to her mother and is characterized by precision and relentless determination. She excels at breaking through genealogical dead-ends by uncovering new and unexpected research pathways.



Wesley Johnston began family history research in 1954, when he inherited the Johnston Family Bible. His mother's grandparents came to Chicago from Central Bohemia in the 1870s, and Wesley visited the Czech lands in 1981 and 2011. He has written many articles and books about family history, local history, World War II history, and art history. His family history web page is www.johnston.net/famhist. He holds master's degrees in history and mathematics.



Blanka Lednická is a professional genealogist and author of the Czech Genealogy blog. A native Czech, she divides her time between the Vysočina region and Ostrava, with ancestral roots spanning the entire Czech Republic. She holds a degree in history from Masaryk University in Brno and has been researching her own family history for more than 25 years.



Daniela Mahoney was born in Prague, where she studied international business and foreign languages. She came to the USA in 1982, but cherishes her Czech heritage and developed educational programs with emphasis on preserving cultural crafts. Daniela travels annually to Czech communities nationwide to offer classes and lectures on egg art, paper crafts, and fiber arts inspired by Czech customs and traditions. She holds a master's degree in geriatric social work from Portland State University.



Lori Berdak Miller, a military researcher, runs Redbird Research LLC. Her father, Sylvester Berdak, was proud of his Slovak/Rusin roots and retired Air Force service and shared his love of both with Lori. Lori visits the St. Louis National Archives and Records Administration facility each day to aid individuals, authors, television shows, associations and museums in their military needs. She also has taught and lectured for genealogy institutions and starred in podcasts and an international documentary.



Greg Nelson is content strategy specialist for Europe, East Europe, and Central Asia at FamilySearch. He holds a BA in Russian, an MA in Slavic linguistics and literature, and a BS in computer science. He resides in Stansbury Park, Utah.

Dr. Tamara Scheer, historian, is an adjunct professor at the Institute for Eastern European History at the University of Vienna. She was a visiting professor at the University of Hradec Králové during the winter semester 2024/25. In January 2025 she became head of a new project, "Linguistic diversity and the Roman Catholic Church in late Habsburg Austria," at the University of Innsbruck. Her publications (many in English) focus on language and religious diversity, the Austro-Hungarian Army, First World War Habsburg Occupation Regimes, and Habsburg Bosnia-Herzegovina (<https://univie.academia.edu/TamaraScheer>).

Joanne M. Sher has been a professional genealogist for 30 years, specializing in Minnesota, Wisconsin, and American-Jewish research. She serves on the Board of Directors of the Jewish Historical Society of the Upper Midwest (JHSUM) and the Foundation for East European Family History Studies (FEEFHS). Joanne has presented often at international, national, state, and local genealogical societies. Her articles have been published in the FEEFHS Journal, Minnesota Genealogical Journal, Minnesota Genealogist, MNopedia, and other genealogical society publications.



Katie Smith has directed the Midwest Genealogy Center since June 2022. With a career in libraries and archives spanning more than two decades, a profound passion for preserving historical legacies, and an unwavering enthusiasm for family history, Katie strives to bridge the gap between traditional research practices and modern technological advancements, making genealogy more accessible and engaging for diverse audiences.



Bill Tarkulich, BSEE, MBA, reconnected with his Rusin roots after extensive archival research, identifying his grandparents' villages and spending two weeks living with family. He has visited ancestral villages, meeting dozens of relatives. His interest in remote, small-town life became the basis for his latest research. He has written many articles and made presentations throughout the United States. Bill's website (iabsi.com) continues to be a hallmark resource for Slovak and Hungarian family research. He is retired and lives in Vermont.



Sheri Volpe is a genealogy reference associate at the Midwest Genealogy Center. Sheri holds an MLS and MBA and has been doing genealogy for more than 30 years for herself and others. Her current focus is international records (Europe, Canada, Latin and South America), surname origins, and DNA. She has taught classes from beginning to advanced and created classes for Irish, Scottish, and Italian genealogy, among others. She writes blogs on the topic and belongs to numerous genealogy social media groups.



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