

*Pennsylvania Migrants in the Austrian  
State Archives and Hungarian National Archives:  
Dual Repositories for Migrants from a  
Dual Monarchy*

Hundreds of thousands of migrants from the Austro-Hungarian Empire came to Pennsylvania from the 1880s through the First World War, and east-central European archives contain untold amounts of material documenting their experiences. Immigration historians have long researched in federal, state, and local records in the United States to tell migrants' stories, but they have less often made use of overseas documents about those same communities and individuals. Both the Austrian State Archives in Vienna and the Hungarian National Archives in Budapest are troves of Pennsylvania history. Austro-Hungarian officials collected information on many facets of migrants' American lives and organizations, from churches and benefit societies to social clubs and newspapers. In addition, several different branches of the Austro-Hungarian government documented their own work in the United States to financially assist migrant institutions, investigate industrial accidents and labor conflicts, and sometimes even monitor individuals politically at odds with the home government. European sources thus not only expand our evidence for examining familiar themes in Pennsylvania's industrial history, but they also speak to less familiar topics that connect Pennsylvania migrants to broader transnational and European political questions of mobility, nationalism, and citizenship.

Among the most striking insights gleaned from east-central European archives is how actively foreign governments operated on US soil. In addition to operating official embassies and consulates, the Austro-Hungarian foreign ministry supported Pennsylvania migrant churches (providing ministers' salaries and financing church mortgages) and newspapers (paying stipends for printing and distribution costs). These actions enriched the cultural life of Pennsylvania's migrants and also served an important political function for Austria-Hungary, as the government tried to use these organs to maintain migrants' loyalty to the homeland. Pennsylvania's Austro-Hungarian migrants had to contend,

then, with two sets of bureaucracies—American and Austro-Hungarian—both of which at times imagined them to be dangerous political actors. European archival sources portray migrants not as culturally “uprooted” or economically “transplanted,” as earlier interpretations have characterized them, but instead as politically and diplomatically engaged and significant.<sup>1</sup> Austro-Hungarians’ travels back and forth across the Atlantic forced the governments of Austria-Hungary and the United States to debate their parameters of citizenship, requirements for military service, and responsibility in cases of industrial accidents, and to consider how migration encouraged the transmission of such ideologies as democracy, socialism, and nationalism.

Records documenting Pennsylvania’s east-central European migrants appear in a number of archival collections in Vienna and Budapest.<sup>2</sup> The *Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv* of the Austrian State Archives houses the files of the pre-World War I Austro-Hungarian Foreign Ministry, the *Ministerium des Äußern*.<sup>3</sup> The Hungarian National Archives (*Magyar Nemzeti Levéltár*) overlaps somewhat with Austrian holdings on American affairs from the period of the dual monarchy but contains dozens of boxes of original material about migrants from the Kingdom of Hungary.<sup>4</sup> Aside from consular affairs, many of the documents in these archives address

<sup>1</sup> Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted: The Epic Story of the Great Migrations that Made the American People* (Boston, 1952); John E. Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington, IN, 1985).

<sup>2</sup> For an explanation of the history and structure of the Austro-Hungarian Empire’s archival holdings, see James P. Niessen, “Records of Empire, Monarchy, or Nation? The Archival Heritage of the Habsburgs in East Central Europe,” *Ab Imperio* 3 (2007): 265–90.

<sup>3</sup> Material on the United States and Pennsylvania can be found most reliably in two collections within the *Ministerium des Äußern* files: the Political Archive and the Administrative Registry. File 33 of the *Politisches Archiv* refers specifically to Austrian-US affairs from 1848 to 1917; batches 98–105 therein are particularly relevant for migration history. File F15 of the *Administrative Registratur* collection pertains to emigration and immigration. Two excellent recent works that make extensive use of these collections and other files in the Austrian State Archives and that address American affairs are Nicole M. Phelps, *U.S.-Habsburg Relations from 1815 to the Paris Peace Conference: Sovereignty Transformed* (New York, 2013), and Tara Zahra, *The Great Departure: Mass Migration from Eastern Europe and the Making of the Free World* (New York, 2016). Look for citations containing “HHStA.”

<sup>4</sup> The American holdings for before World War I are primarily in the files of the Prime Minister’s Office (the K26, or *Miniszterelnökség*, collection), which coordinated Hungary’s connections with migrants in the United States. The Hungarian National Archives hold additional material on Pennsylvania migrants in the K28 (Minority Department), K64 (Foreign Ministry, Political Department), and K131 (Pittsburgh Consulate) collections. For existing works that analyze these sources, see, for example, Julianna Puskás, *Ties That Bind, Ties That Divide: One Hundred Years of Hungarian Experience in the United States* (New York, 2000), and Paula K. Benkart, “The Hungarian Government, the American Magyar Churches, and Immigrant Ties to the Homeland, 1903–1917,” *Church History* 52 (1983): 312–21.

the development of Slavic national projects abroad and the efforts of the Austro-Hungarian government to maintain migrant loyalty, particularly through the use of migrant religious institutions, Roman Catholic, Greek Catholic, and Reformed alike. Language poses obstacles to fully utilizing foreign archives to write the history of Pennsylvania's east-central European immigrants. They spoke German, Hungarian, Czech, Slovak, Romanian, Yiddish, Carpatho-Rusyn, Serbo-Croatian, Slovene, and other languages. To the researcher, one of the benefits of Austria-Hungary's dual imperial structure is that many documents were routinely translated into or between the governments' main operational languages. Thus, a reading knowledge of *either* German or Hungarian can be sufficient to undertake productive research in either archive.

Pennsylvania's east-central European migrants lived transnational lives by becoming active citizens in Pennsylvania and the United States more broadly but also maintaining close ties to their homelands. As scholars seek to better understand migration history, international research will aid in illuminating the ways in which individual experiences often crossed national boundaries.

*College of William and Mary*

KRISTINA E. POZNAN