

Museum houses Slovak treasures

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Special to the Capital Times

The silver-haired gentleman took down one of the exhibits, a hand-carved, five-foot-long, pear wood flute. He blew into it. A low, hollow tone echoed through the Jednota Slovak Museum.

"Shepherders in the grassy meadows of Slovakia would have played this *fujara* to pass the time away," said Edward A. Tuleya, curator and archivist of the museum, which sits on Rosedale Avenue, just a few minutes from the Penn State Harrisburg campus.

Starting before World War I, thousands of poor Slovak immigrants came to the U.S. and the Steelton area to work in the iron mills and coal mines. Most sold everything, Tuleya said, including pieces of their heritage, to come to this land of opportunity.

But here at the Slovak Museum and Archives, their heritage is preserved.

"No matter where you come from, there is always something rich in your past you should honor," Tuleya said, standing beside one of the intricately embroidered dresses in the museum.

The hand-made costumes, modeled on mannequins, are unique to different villages, Tuleya said. Cards display the names of towns like Tekov, Raznany, Presov and Cizmany, from which the costumes came.

But the Slovaks were practical, non-nonsense people.

Parents didn't worry about child psychology, Tuleya said. If a child misbehaved, "they got the paddle out—one or two whacks and the kid was cured."

Slovak men wanted women who were useful, not necessarily beautiful, Tuleya said.

"If she was ugly, they had a midnight marriage," he said, chuckling.

A Slovak woman's wealth was advertised by the number of petticoats she wore. The more she wore, the richer she was.

Unmarried Slovak girls wore plain bonnets and babushkas (scarves), while married women wore more intricate bon-

nets, adorned with beads, sequins, ribbons and lace.

The museum also displays carved colored eggs, a goosefeather pastry brush, coal miners' gear and an intricately carved confessional from the Old St. Gabriel Church in Pittsburgh. A satellite photo shows the Slovak landscape as seen from space.

The Slovak nation the museum celebrates is part of Czechoslovakia, but may some day launch its own independence movement, Tuleya said. Some of its neighbors are Poland, Hungary, Austria and the Czech Republic.

Slovaks famous in the U.S. include actors Tom Selleck and Richard Chamberlain, drummer Gene Krupa, comedian Ernie Kovacs, Cleveland Browns quarterback Bernie Kosar and Daniela Gajdusecka, 1957 Nobel Prize winner in microbiology, Tuleya said.

The museum is located on 325 acres of rolling lawns in Lower Swatara Township.

Jednota, which means "union" in Slovak, was a self-help organization designed to provide insurance and other services for the Slovak immigrants, who began to arrive in the U.S. in the 1870s, Tuleya said.

Jednota also sponsored the Jednota Orphanage, whose handsome brick buildings still stand. The orphanage took in children of Slovak immigrants killed in wars or the coal mines, Tuleya said.

In its prime, between World War I and World War II, it housed 4,000 children, Tuleya said. It closed in the '70s, he said.

Now, the buildings store items the museum has no room to display in its 4,000-square-foot room in the Jednota Press building.

Proud of his heritage, Tuleya said it is important for everyone to keep his heritage alive by talking with older relatives, recording their conversations and collecting old pictures to pass down to future generations.

"The longer you wait, the harder it becomes to find and celebrate your heritage," Tuleya said.

The museum is open for tours from 9:30 a.m.-3:30 p.m., Monday-Friday.



Photo by Mike Givler

Curator Edward A. Tuleya blows into a hand-carved, five-foot-long Slovak flute during a tour of the Jednota Slovak Museum in Lower Swatara Township.

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Duke foster racism in the name of pride. They claim to be proud of their heritage.

I'm not proud of my Portuguese/Gypsy heritage. Hell, I've never even been to the Azores, or anywhere my Gypsy ancestors roamed. I am proud to be an American.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not proud of everything America stands for, or has done.

To name a few things: our internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II, slavery, the exploitation of the migrant Chinese worker, and the treatment of Irish-Americans in the early twentieth century all sucked. We've got our share of skeletons. Who doesn't? Let's learn from our mistakes and not repeat them.

Yes, I admit to my prejudices. I try to control them; however, I have one prejudice I hope to keep strong.

If Chino Wilson, David Duke and everybody who thinks like them can't see their way to judge people as individuals, I hope they all drop dead—soon.

Any comments?

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