

The Hungarian Community of Cleveland

S. B. Vardy

Hungarian Americans and Their Communities of Cleveland.
By Susan M. Papp. With an Introduction by Joe Eszterhás.
Cleveland: Cleveland Ethnic Heritage Studies, Cleveland State
University, 1981. 324 pp. \$10.00

Even as late as the mid-1960s, the field of ethnic history was still viewed with a degree of scorn by many professional scholars. In the course of the past decade and a half, however, the field was legitimized by the scholarly interests and activities of several successive waves of historians and social scientists. The result was a dramatic change for the better, which also affected the study of the Hungarian-American past. These positive developments do not, of course, mean that we have reached an ideal situation in the field. As a matter of fact, there is still much to be done, both in source collecting and in primary research, as well as in the production of basic monographs and summarizing syntheses on the past and achievements of Hungarian Americans. The last few years, however, have produced many results. Dozens of new research projects have been initiated, and scores of research articles and pamphlets have appeared, along with a number of substantial monographs and handbooks. These new publications will undoubtedly all serve as foundation stones and building blocks of a number of more comprehensive syntheses that are needed and are bound to appear within the next decade or so.

The resurgence of ethnic studies during the 1960s and 1970s have also resulted in the establishment of a number of ethnic studies centers supported by various foundations and governmental agencies. One of these is the Ethnic Heritage Studies Center of Cleveland State University, headed by Professor Karl Bonutti of the same institution. It is one of the few centers that pays particular attention to the history and culture of the Central and East European ethnic groups. This is evident, among others, from its "Monograph Series" that was initiated in 1975 and by 1981 contained well over two dozen volumes. What is most significant about this series, however, is the fact that over

half of its published volumes are devoted to people of Central and East European background, including most everyone from the Byelorussians to the Ukrainians.¹

The work under review concerning the Hungarian Americans is one of the later volumes in the series. It was written by Susan M. Papp, a graduate of Cleveland State University and a member of the youngest generation of Hungarian-American historians involved in the study of their people's past. Her work displays a visible dedication to her subject, which undoubtedly stems from her own experiences in the Cleveland Hungarian community. At the same time, however, it also shows a scholarly preparation that clearly distinguishes the members of her generation from most of their autodidactic predecessors. Ms. Papp's work certainly speaks well of her abilities as well as of her capacity for historical scholarship. Should she continue along these lines, she is bound to become one of the outstanding practitioners of Hungarian ethnic history in North America.

Hungarian Americans...of Cleveland is a sizable work which, in a sense, offers more than it promises. It does so by giving us not only the history of the Cleveland Hungarian-American community (pp. 151-289), but also a brief summary of Hungarian (pp. 7-59) as well as of Hungarian-American history (pp. 61-149).

Hungary's history is summarized in six brief chapters, largely on the basis of a half a dozen readily available popular works. It is basically a traditional interpretation that, until reaching our own century, follows the widely accepted periodization scheme elaborated by nineteenth-century historians. It also tries to avoid all controversies and extreme or unorthodox points of view. As such, it serves its purpose well, although at the expense of leaving unsaid some of the recent and often exciting conclusions of Hungarian historical scholarship that have altered many of our traditional views concerning the nature and course of Hungarian historical evolution.² The author's decision to follow the traditional course, however, may have been determined by the brevity of her coverage, as well as by the difficulty of incorporating many of these new views and interpretations into such a short summary of a nation's history. Although traditional, Ms. Papp's historical summary is critical, balanced and well-executed. Her desire to be fair is evident throughout the work, but it is particularly visible in her coverage of such

recent and controversial periods as those connected with the names of Horthy (1920-1944) and Kádár (1956-) — epochs that are generally subjected to various one-sided interpretations.

The fifty-odd page summary of Hungarian history is followed in Ms. Papp's book by a rather more extensive treatment of the Hungarian-American past; a treatment that stretches from the legendary "Tyrkers" (c. 1000 A.D.) and the very real Stephanus Parmenius of Buda (1583) to our own days. Except for the last few decades, Ms. Papp's summary of Hungarian-American history also follows the traditional path outlined by such earlier researchers as Eugene Pivány, David Souders, Géza Kende, Emil Lengyel, Edmund Vasváry, Leslie Könnnyű, Joshua Fishman, Joseph Széplaki and others.³ For the more recent period, however, she had made up her own scheme of these developments. In covering these developments she relied increasingly on sources other than the works of the above-mentioned authors, including Hungarian-American newspapers, calendars, anniversary publications, as well as on some of the relevant works of various non-Hungarian scholars of ethnicity, e.g. Victor Greene, Leonard Dinnerstein, Karl Bonutti, George Prpić, etc.⁴ (In the section on the Cleveland Hungarian community she further extended her sources by an increasing reliance upon personal interviews.)

Similarly to her coverage of Hungarian history, Ms. Papp's discussion of the Hungarian-American past is balanced and reliable, and it is certainly most useful to those readers who have little or no background in the history of this ethnic group in America. As a matter of fact, it is useful even to those who have studied the past of Hungarian Americans. Its primary shortcoming—at least to this reader—is the fact that the author's coverage of post-World War II developments is comparatively cursory; a phenomenon that also characterizes her coverage of the Cleveland Hungarian community. This may be the result of a lack of adequate treatment of this controversial period by most of her predecessors, but it may also be due to the author's desire to avoid the controversy that a much more extensive treatment of recent developments might have entailed.

Only after having provided her readers with panoramic portrayals of both the Hungarian and the Hungarian-American past does the author finally reach the essence of her work, i.e. the history of the development of the Hungarian-American com-

munity of Cleveland. And it is here where Ms. Papp has contributed most to the field of Hungarian-American history; and she rightfully calls her contribution “the first comprehensive history of this (Hungarian) community in Cleveland.” (p. 5) There were, of course, others who preceded her and who have tried their hands in producing such a history (e.g. H. F. Cook, T. Ács, I. Sári-Gál, J. Kőrösfőy, G. Szentmiklósy-Éles, etc.).⁵ But the resulting works were generally too fragmented, too short, too naive, or all of these combined; while others dealt only with certain limited aspects of Hungarian-American life in and around Cleveland. Moreover, a number of them remained unpublished, and most of them lacked the degree of professional preparation and scholarly detachment displayed by Ms. Papp in her own work. While Susan Papp’s *Hungarian Americans...of Cleveland*—as she herself admits—is not the final word on this topic, it represents a quantitative and qualitative step in the right direction.

Susan Papp’s treatment of the history of Cleveland Hungarians combines the chronological with the topical approach. It covers the Hungarian experience in that large center of Hungarian-American life from Kossuth’s visit in 1852 to 1980, and does so in three chronological periods. Of the three periods, however, the last two overlap (1920-1960 and 1945-1980). At first glance this seems strange, but there is a logical explanation for the same. Part II covers basically the development of the Buckeye Road Neighborhood and the lives, achievements and struggles of the first, second and third generation Hungarian Americans of the great turn-of-the-century “economic immigration;” while Part III concentrates almost exclusively on the post-World War II immigrants, including the Displaced Persons and the so-called “Freedom Fighters” or 56-ers. The pre- and post-World War II immigrants represented two completely different worlds, and as such they had to be treated separately, even if it meant a certain overlap in the chronological arrangement of the book.

In addition to detailing the history and development of the various Hungarian neighborhoods of Cleveland (while at the same time characterizing the several waves of immigrants) Ms. Papp has also supplied her readers with a discussion of various internal developments within the Hungarian-American community of that city. Thus, she has covered the development

of Hungarian religious and educational institutions in Cleveland, the foundation of newspapers and cultural, social and athletic organizations, as well as the rise of Hungarian-American literature, theater, specific folk traditions, and ethnic politics. Her coverage is balanced and objective. At the same time—similarly to her discussion of the Hungarian-American past as a whole—it is somewhat cursory when it comes to the events of the post-World War II period. As an example, she devotes very little attention to some of those issues that seem to have moved the Hungarian-American community (including the Cleveland community) ever since the 1950s. These include the long-standing division and antagonism between the so-called “Left” and the “Right” among the immigrants; the inherent conflict between those who have become “Hungarian Americans” and those who still regard themselves simply as “political immigrants” and reject all forms and levels of Americanization; and between those who have established or re-established some contacts (personal, scholarly, official, etc.) with the mother country and those who regard all such contacts as treasonable. And these are only a few of such critical issues with considerable ramifications for all Hungarian Americans. As a matter of fact, one’s position on these and similar issues are of first priority in determining one’s position in or one’s relationship to the Hungarian-American community; particularly to such a large, enclosed and traditional-conservative community as that of Cleveland, where many of the community’s spokesmen still represent views that used to be popular during the 1950s.

Susan Papp’s *Hungarian Americans...of Cleveland* is supplemented both by an interesting personal recollection by Joe Eszterhás, as well as by three separate essays on ethnic politics, on Cleveland’s St. Elizabeth parish, and on Hungarian contributions to world civilization.⁶ All of them have their own merits, but it may perhaps been better to simply incorporate the content of the last three essays into the main works. This would have been all the more desirable as the material in the first and second of these essays is somewhat repetitious within the context of the book as a whole. The work is also supplemented by several maps, charts, graphs and statistical tables, as well as by numerous illustrations; all of which enhance the value of the first comprehensive history of the Cleveland Hungarian community. Moreover, the book is relatively free

of factual and typographical errors, which is a major achievement in a work of this type which has to rely on a wide variety of sources, many of which are not in the most reliable category.

Susan M. Papp is to be commended for her scholarly efforts and achievements in having produced this work. Let us hope that she will continue her scholarly endeavours and that, in addition to many other works of similar nature, she will also author the next and even more comprehensive history of the Hungarian community of Cleveland.

NOTES

1. The "Cleveland Ethnic Heritage Studies Monograph Series," edited by Karl Bonutti of Cleveland State University includes volumes on the following ethnic groups of Central and Eastern Europe: Byelorussians, Croatians, Czechs, Greeks, Hungarians, Jews (mostly of Eastern Europe), Lithuanians, Poles, Rumanians, Serbians (two volumes), Slovaks, Slovenians and Ukrainians. In addition the series also has volumes on the Arabs, Asians, Blacks, Early Settlers of Cleveland, Germans, Irish and Italians, plus six additional volumes on various aspects of ethnicity.

2. The reference here is not to the so-called Sumerian roots of the Magyars (which is rejected by most learned historians) but to such accepted or at least seriously considered views that the Carpathian Basin had in fact been subjected to several invasions by Magyar or Magyar-like people before the traditional conquest of 896 A.D.; that the ruling prince of the conquering Magyars of 896 was not Árpád (who was only second in command: *Gyula*), but *Kurszán* who had the title of *kende* or *kündü*; that Árpád's or *Kurszán's* conquerors were much more skilled in agriculture than originally presumed and that "nomadism" did not mean the primitive kind of existence that is usually connected with that term; that the ethnogenesis and the national consciousness of the medieval Magyars was far different than portrayed by traditional historiography; that even the meaning and significance of the Ottoman conquest has to be viewed in a different light than traditionally presumed, etc.

3. The reference here is to such works as Eugene Pivány, *Hungarian-American Historical Connections from Pre-Columbian Times to the End of the American Civil War* (Budapest, 1927); David A. Souders, *The Magyars in America* (New York, 1922); reprint, San Francisco, 1969); Géza Kende, *A magyarok Amerikában. Az amerikai magyarság története* /Hungarians in America. The History of Hungarian-Americans/ (2 vols., Cleveland, 1927); Emil Lengyel, *Americans from Hungary* (Philadelphia and New York, 1948; reprint, Westport, Conn., 1974); Edmund Vasváry, *Lincoln's Hungarian Heroes The Participation of Hungarians in the Civil War, 1861-1865* (Washington, D.C., 1939); Leslie Könnyű, *Hungarians in the U.S.A.: An Immigration Study* (St. Louis, 1967); Joshua A. Fishman, *Hungarian Language Maintenance in the United States* (Bloomington, In., 1966); Joseph Széplaki, *The Hungarians in America, 1583-1974: A Chronology and Fact Book* (Dobbs Ferry, N.Y., 1975).

4. The books in question are: Victor Greene, *The Slavic Community on Strike* (Notre Dame, In., 1972); Leonard Dinnerstein and David M. Reimers, *Ethnic Americans: A History of Immigration and Assimilation* (New York, 1975); Karl Bonutti and George J. Prpić, *Selected Ethnic Communities of Cleveland: A Socio-Economic Study* (Cleveland, 1974).

5. Some of the earlier works on the Cleveland Hungarians include: Huldah F. Cook, *The Magyars of Cleveland* (Cleveland, 1919); Imre Sári-Gál, *Az Amerikai Debrecen: Képek a clevelandi magyarság életéből* /The American Debrecen: Portraits from the Life of Cleveland Hungarians/ (Toronto, 1966); *idem*, *Clevelandi Magyar Múzeum: Ríportok, versek, fényképek a clevelandi magyarság életéből* /The Cleveland Hungarian Museum: Reports, Poems, Photographs from the Life of Cleveland Hungarians/

(Toronto, 1978); John Kőrösfőy, ed., *Hungarians in America - Az amerikai magyarság aranykönyve* /The Golden Book of Hungarian-Americans/ (Cleveland, 1941); as well as two unpublished works by Géza Szentmiklósy-Éles that were apparently not used by the author of this book: *Hungarians in Cleveland* (M.A. Thesis, John Carroll University, Cleveland, 1972; and *Two Hungarian Immigrations: Victims of Misconception* (Cleveland, 1975). For additional relevant works, as well as for the discussion of Hungarian-American historiography see S. B. Vardy and Agnes H. Vardy, *Research in Hungarian-American History and Culture* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Studies in History, 1981). This work originally appeared in *The Folk Arts of Hungary*, ed. by Walter W. Kolar and Agnes H. Vardy (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Tamburitzans Institute of Folk Arts, 1981): 67-123.

6. The essays in question are: Dennis Frigyes Fredricks, "Ethnicity and Politics The Hungarian Experience in Cleveland," pp. 292-297; Rick Orley, "The Building of a Church by an Immigrant Community: The Case of St. Elizabeth of Hungary," pp. 298-303; and Lél F. Somogyi, "Hungarian Cultural Contributions," pp. 304-310. Joe Eszterhás's introduction to the volume (pp.1-4) contains some rather interesting and delightful reminiscences of his childhood and youth in the Cleveland Hungarian community.