

## FEATURES OF THE EARLY SETTLEMENT OF HUNGARIAN IMMIGRANTS IN CHICAGO

Fejős, Zoltán

Preceding to the period of mass emigration from Hungary, the first Hungarian settlers in city of Chicago, Illinois were the emigrants of the Hungarian War of Independence in 1848–1849. In 1851 about eighty people settled and scattered all about the city. Many found employment at a railway company, others became successful doctors, language teachers, while others became salesmen, restaurant owners, clerks and journalists. A smaller group of the first emigrants took part in the American Civil War. A riflemen league - *Lincoln Riflemen* – was established under the leadership of Géza Mihalóty. Mihály Pipady, who emigrated from Miskolc in 1848 opened the first Hungarian restaurant on the South Halsted street in 1861 that became the gathering place of the first Hungarians.<sup>1</sup>

The Kossuth-emigrants were followed by enterprising travellers, businessmen, entrepreneurs and craftsmen. We have very few information on the first settlers, however, it's presumable, that there were some contacts as single relations or personal contacts between the refugees of the Hungarian War of Independence, the early Chicago Hungarians who arrived individually and the representatives of the first labour emigrants.

One of such contact persons was József Beifeld (Byfield). He was born in the multiethnic city of Pozsony (Bratislava) in 1853 and arrived to the United States at the age of 14. He had a great career. First he owned a taylor workshop, then a cloth factory, and later a famous hotel. He bought his first hotel, the Sherman House, in 1902 that he fashioned into one of the most distinguished hotels of the United States, while he had other stakes as well. He died in 1926.<sup>2</sup> Károly Zádeczky, who emigrated from Gönc (a village in Northern Hungary's Abaúj county) was one of the first Hungarians in Chicago, and worked as a manager in his factory.

"Thousands and thousands worked under his control" as the chronicle says. He could provide with jobs many of his compatriots. It's very likely, that the first people from Gönc and Abaúj (Northern Hungary) came to Chicago through him. His house became a "real 'Hungarian house' with Hungarian friendliness and heartiness" - we can read in an article. The founder of the Hungarian daily *Szabadság* (Liberty), Tihamér Kohányi, whom he also supported during

his stay in Chicago remembers as follows: "His fate was tragical. The overwhelming work abused him, it made him nervous, his fortune was spent on doctors and at last he returned to Gönc, to die."<sup>3</sup>

Beifeld initiated the first Hungarian society in Chicago also, he started the *Deák Circle* together with Lajos Weber in 1871. The aim of the Circle that organized the small group of emigrants of 1848–1849 as well as more recent arrived entrepreneurs and educated people was to provide opportunity for communication and to preserve Hungarian language and customs. Their activity expanded step by step. The Circle produced jobs for the arriving immigrants and supported the needy. In 1891 with changing its constitution the Circle carried on with its activity under the name of *Chicago Hungarians' Charity Society*. Although, a Hungarian architect became the first president of the organization its official language was German in the first years. In 1895 Adolf Weiner, who was also born in Pozsony, succeeded as president and made Hungarian the language of the Society. Its members were multilingual middle class businessmen, mostly Germans, immigrated from the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy successful both in business and social life.<sup>4</sup>

The Society was in good relationship with the city authorities that espoused their activity. The Society enjoyed the support of Jewish charity organizations in Chicago, transportation companies and of American and Hungarian private individuals. For instance in 1900 out of 112 appeals that arrived to them, it fulfilled 92 in the value of about 1500 \$. In three cases it granted large families to start their own business. The society not only granted cash for the needy but fuel, groceries and railway tickets also. The Society counted 142 members in 1901 and within ten years (1892–1901) it distributed nearly 10.700 \$ among the 'poor compatriots'. At that time the daily wage of an unskilled worker was between 1,5–2 \$.<sup>5</sup> The *Deák Circle* and *The Charity Society* performed a well perceptible transitional role between the early Hungarian settlers and the new immigrants arriving in the end of the 1880's in Chicago.

Big territorial mobility and relatively flexible changes of working places characterized the newcomers before World War I because of the changing labour market. They were motivated partly also by their own intention, that is, they arrived to the United States with the aim of temporary employment. Continuous remigration identified the prewar period. Itinerant life fundamentally influenced the forming of the settlements. The question is how the development of Chicago Hungarian communities appear in this general picture? What are the local characteristics of settlement compared to other American Hungarian settlements?

The differences derive from the geographical location of Chicago. Chicago is situated in the heart of the country app. 630-750 miles from the East Coast of the United States and about 380-500 miles from the industrial region in the Eastern part of the country. Chicago was unanimously the gate to the West in the beginning of the century. It was the westmost city where a reasonable group of Hungarians settled down. Comparatively few turned up more west from Chicago. Only some small 'colonies', 'islands' emerged as St. Louis, Omaha or in the mining areas of Montana or Colorado or around Butte and Denver (the later ones didn't prove to be lasting communities).

According to the statements of immigration statistics, the number of Hungarians moving to Mid-West states became significant only after 1905.<sup>6</sup>

Examining the 1910 census of the city of Chicago we can come to the same conclusion. In the Hungarian centres of Southern and Western quarters, in the sample of 368 persons enumerating the heads of families, 48% emigrated after 1905:

*Table 1. Heads of families, per quarter, year of emigration; house owners and American citizens, 1910.*

	S.Chicago	Burnside	W.Pullman	W.Side	Total
<b>Persons Emigrated</b>	50	178	115	23	368
1880-84	1	2	6	-	9
1885-89	-	2	14	-	16
1890-94	9	14	11	-	34
1895-99	4	15	8	1	28
1900-04	14	53	31	8	106
1905-	22	91	51	13	177
native	-	1	1	1	3
no data	1	-	1	-	2
<b>Citizen</b>	5	21	21	1	47
<b>House owner</b>	4	28	15	1	48

Source: Census Manuscripts, 1910. Enumeration Districts: 456, 1549, 1571 (South Chicago), 1429-1430 (Burnside), 1448 (West Pullman), 1454, 1456, 1458 (West Side).

Chicago was not the primer target city for the immigrants as the low figures of the 1880-90s suggest for its relatively far location. The Table 1. indicates well, that only the minority of the persons (families) involved in the sample took the first step towards integration and settlement: 13 percent bought an own house and assumed American citizenship. It is to be noted that these figures do not mean necessarily the same people (families).

The individual biographies can serve as another source to complete these data to be able to ascertain the major types of migration and settlement. However, biographies provide good points of reference, one has to take into account that settlement developed in subordination of the time factor. The majority of biographies in our disposal are dated from the early 1840s, thus, in the documents used early settlers are represented in smaller proportion than in real. In spite of this, it's likely, that this source reflects the major tendencies of settlement in Chicago well.

The biographies derive approximately in half according whether the primer target of immigration was Chicago (or its neighbourhood) or another city in the United States.

*Table 2. Immigration targets according to biographies*

Source	Persons	1	2	3	4*
Szabadság	130	54	58	-	8
Káldor	47	18	21	-	8
Chicago South Side	281	66	49	67	99
East Chicago	238	27	30	64	117
Indiana Harbor	119	42	37	30	8
Others	37	18	10	-	10
<i>Total</i>	<i>843</i>	<i>225</i>	<i>205</i>	<i>161</i>	<i>243</i>

\* 1. Migrating further, 2. Migrated straight to Chicago, 3. Second generation, 4. No information.

Source: Zoltán Fejős: A chicagói magyarok két nemzedéke 1890-1940. Budapest 1993. Appendix, I.,2.

1. The first type: Chicago as *secondary target*. In the beginning the first Chicago settlers arrived from the Eastern States. On the ground of biographies it can be ascertained that the first emigrants in general reached Chi-

chicago after certain experiences, through further migration. In lack of data we don't know how 'pioneers' as Károly Zádeczky got to Chicago. In the period of mass migration the most regular route led from Pennsylvania, from the industrial region around Pittsburgh or from the mining areas to the Midwest. Cleveland or its neighbourhood meant a stop over often.

Some people stayed in Chicago only temporarily as Tivadar Kohányi.<sup>7</sup> While others 'commuted' among different cities. József Kiss for example started his American life in New York in 1911. First he left for Chicago and after another 6 months travelled to Cleveland. He stayed there for one and a half years when he returned to South Chicago to a steel factory. He didn't stay long but returned to Cleveland soon where he joined the Hungarian group of Industrial Workers of the World (IWW).<sup>8</sup> For others the Midwest metropolis or its neighbourhood grew to be the terminus of their American migration. József Kovács, who emigrated from Kenyhec (Northern Hungary) in 1890 spent almost two decades in Pennsylvania. In 1908 he moved to Chicago, where he opened a liquor store with his large family.<sup>9</sup> János Zelenák arrived from Bodrogszerdahely, Zemplén County (Northern Hungary) in 1901. First he lived in Uniontown, Pennsylvania later in Huron, Ohio, then he moved to Whiting, South Bend, both Indiana. He settled finally in a southern quarter of Chicago in 1915. Gyula Tóth from Vaján, Ung County (Eastern Hungary) emigrated also in 1901. He worked as a miner in Hollister, OH when after four years he returned to Hungary. In 1909 he emigrated again and settled in Whiting close to Chicago, where he found employment in an oil refinery.<sup>10</sup>

In the early times (roughly before 1905) this type can be considered more general than migration directed straight here in the development of Hungarian communities. However, migrating further from East to West was continuous later as well. The favourable work and life conditions stimulated this process. Pál Sebők was born in Tiszabercel in 1882. As his father passed away early, he had to start to work at the age of 10: he became a servant at a big farmer. After his military service was over he got married. He emigrated in 1906 to Youngstown, Ohio where he worked in iron factories. In the hope of better payment for the recommendation of the people of his village he moved to the area of Upper-Michigan copper-mines. He brought his wife and daughter over also. In 1918 the enlarged family encouraged by his brother and brother-in-law moved to Chicago to Burnside, where he became a worker at the Illinois Central Railroad. He died at the age of 91, in 1973.<sup>11</sup>

2. The second type: *Chicago as primer target*. One who intended to come here had to *know* something about the city of Chicago and vicinity. Either personal contacts or certain previous knowledge could be the source (or both at the same time). The salesmen, entrepreneurs, intellectuals or skilled workers could possess more knowledge about Chicago in the beginning than the unskilled workers coming from peasant environment.<sup>12</sup> However, there are some very early examples against the previous statement: Antal Balogh emigrated from Tiszabezeréd in 1891 and moved to East Chicago, Indiana what he never left.<sup>13</sup> In the case of peasant emigrants this form came forward from the mid-1900s and succeeded in a larger scale after a couple of years only. In the 1910s compared to the Eastern states the work conditions were better in the Midwest. It was easier to get a job in Chicago and the neighbouring industrial areas than in the mining fields or in the industrial towns of state of Pennsylvania.<sup>14</sup> Those who migrated to Chicago straight, did not necessarily stayed in the city for good. With the industrial development of the area mobility within a more narrow region gained importance. The migration of Hungarian settlers from Chicago, mostly from the quarter of South Chicago to the industrial towns of Calumet Region of Indiana seems to be typical.

There were migrations further on eg. from East Chicago to Gary, Indiana or to Chicago West Side even from here. The life of János Czako examples the combination of the first and second type: he emigrated from Hejce, Abaúj County (Northern Hungary) to South Norwalk, Connecticut. A year later he went to South Chicago and after another three years he moved to East Chicago.<sup>15</sup>

Some of the immigrants moving to Midwest arrived to Chicago or to its neighbourhood from the mining region of Southern Illinois. It's possible, that the early Hungarian immigrants who worked in the mines of West Virginia and Pennsylvania found out about the softcoal-mines of Southern Illinois through mining and news reaching the mining colonies. Westville as well as East-St. Louis and vicinity in particular attracted immigrants from Hungary in fairlay large numbers. Workers of these places seeking for better conditions wanting to move to a city, moved to Chicago.

Although, out of the migrants who moved to Chicago some wondered around the country from here. The 50 year jubilee issue of *Szabadság* illustrates it in connection with the biography of Ferenc Bella as: 'Upon arrival he went to West Pullman, but just as almost every immigrant he was



moving around for a time seeking better opportunities, more congenial neighbourhood, getting acquainted with the new country, and learning its language.’<sup>16</sup>

3. On the bases of biographies it seems clear, that after the development of migrational chains, that we will return later, the emigrants found an easier way that led straight to Chicago. Regularly, the second or the third emigrant of a family didn’t need to adventure many places before choosing their final residence. Having family in Chicago meant a well prepared way to the city. The case of Benkő brothers, who were probably the most well-known businessmen in South Chicago, renders it more perceptible. The older brother, Ferenc, left Kiscejőc, Ung County (Northeastern Hungary) in 1885. He went to McKeesport, Pennsylvania first and moved to Chicago in 1891. He opened a grocery there immediately, and became a successful wholesaler soon. His brother, Ambrus followed him in 1903. He started in his brother’s shop, and learned to be a butcher. In 1908 he returned for the last enlisting but he was not declared fit for military service. He got married and returned for good with his wife. He entered into partnership with his brother and took over the shop some time later.<sup>17</sup>

The characteristics of Chicago settlement derive from the frontier feature of the city. The evolving Hungarian settlements were far from any other significant Hungarian centres of the United States. In the beginning it meant some sort of isolation also. As an example, the countrywide Hungarian-American newspapers in the end of the last century and at the turn of the century – the *Amerikai Nemzetőr* (American National Guardian), the *Amerikai Népszava* (American People’s Voice), the *Szabadság*, the *Amerikai Magyar Népszava* (American Hungarian People’s Voice) – in general reported on the Chicago Hungarians as a distant, fairly known community. Sándor Harsányi, who was a Protestant pastor in Cleveland, Ohio at the time, summarized the experiences of his third mission trip to the West in October 1896:

“Undoubtedly Chicago with its immense territories, numerous quarters, huge industry, is one of the places that encloses the biggest group of Hungarians. Whether the far west situation or by being scattered or for neglecting the tools of enthusiastic work, I don’t know, but the fact is, that there is very little sign of salutary movement and very rarely only from the white city. (...) I consider it to the circumstance, that moving powers are missing, those not only able to initiate and to espouse single noble and

saint matters but are brave to fight for their success even."<sup>18</sup>

The long distance from other settlements, being scattered within the city itself, weak organization of community, missing leaders is the balance of the early years. From one of Reverend Harsányi's remarks it seems, that he was invited for the urge of a worker who moved to Whiting, Indiana from Niles, Ohio (close to Cleveland) not long before. This also shows as the examples of Beilfeld and Zádeczky, that information spreading through family and personal relations played an important role in settlements in Chicago and in its neighbourhood. Two years after his quoted visit Reverend Harsányi established the First Hungarian Reformed Church in South Chicago, that became a significant step in the development of the community.

As a conclusion, it can be ascertained that one of the strongest characteristics of the Chicago Hungarians is that the Hungarian community stands meant small communities within the city in real, as well as many boundlessly dispersed groups and individuals in the immense area of Chicago and its neighbourhood. In addition, the constant altering was also typical to the local Hungarian communities. All this had strong consequences on the development and forms of the immigrants' social and cultural identity.

## Notes

1 Pierce, Bessie L.: *A History of Chicago*, Vol.2. (1848-1871). Chicago, 1937.; Ed. by: Tihamér Kohányi: *Az amerikai magyarság múltja, jelene és jövője*, Cleveland, 1901. (Jubilee issue of the 10-year-old Szabadság/Liberty/) 19.; Julian Kune: *Reminiscences of an Octogenarian Hungarian Exile*. Chicago, 1911. 69-124.; Károly Rácz-Rónai: *Az amerikai magyar telepek története*, VII. Chicago. *Külföldi Magyarság*, 1922. No. 13. p. 2.; Géza Kende: *Magyarok Amerikában I*. Cleveland, 1927. 179-180.; Ödön Vasváry: Lincoln és a chicagói magyarok. *Amerikai Magyar Népszava*, February 1939; Gilbert Mihályi: Az első magyarok Chicagóban. *Chicago és környéke*, 11 11 December 1982., 19 February 1983; Gilbert Mihályi: *Kune Julian: a chicagói 48-as magyar Lincoln eszméi szolgálatában*. Chicago, 1976.

2 "Byfield József", Vasváry Collection, Szeged, B6: 75-77., V.Ö./I. 221-222.; *Magyar Tribune*, 24 September 1926 .

3 Kohányi, *Az amerikai*, p. 19.; Returned home in 1905, See, *Szabadság*,



9 October 1905; *Kohányi Tihamér élete, küzdelmei, sikerei és politikai végrendelete*, Cleveland, 1913. 26–27. Sámuel Zádeczky, ‘the old American’ was presumably his brother, who died at the age of 60 in Chicago: *Magyar Hirlap*, 7 November 1913.

4 Kohányi, *Az amerikai*, p. 23.; Kune, *Reminiscences*, p. 144.; History of Cook Country, Vol. II. Ed. by Goodspeed, W. A. – Healy, D. D. Chicago, 1909. p. 792; Pál Berák: Visszaemlékezés a chicagói magyarságra. *Az Írás*, 27 August 1937; On Adolf Weiner see *Amerikai Népszava*, 2 September 1896, *Magyar Hirlap*, 20 March 1910, *Magyar Tribune*, 19 November 1920.

5 *Szabadság*, 12 September 1901. The 1900 Annual Report of the Charity Society: *Szabadság*, 21 November 1901; Kohányi, p. 23.; On Wages see Gillette, pp. 27–28. After a couple of years wages rose to 1,75–4 \$. See *Szabadság Naptár*, 1907. p. 189.

6 Reports of the Immigration Commission. Vol. 3. *Statistical Review of Immigration 1820–1910*. Washington, 1911. 307.

7 *Kohányi Tihamér élete*, 1913. pp. 26–27.

8 National Archives, Washington, DC. Record Group 65, Roll 810/368807. József Kiss was a member of the Social Democratic Party in Hungary.

9 Census Manuscripts, 1900. Enumeration District: 1420.; *Amerikai Magyar Népszava Naptára*, 1912.

10 *Hungarians in America. Golden Jubilee*. Cleveland 1941. pp. 199., 198.

11 On the bases of death bulletin of Pál Sebők (a copy at the possession of the author); *A Chicago South Sidei Magyar református Egyház családi albuma*. Chicago 1942. pp. 52., 71.

12 Cf. Keil, Harmut–Jentz, J.: From Immigrants to Urban Workers: Chicago’s German Poor in the Gilded Age and Progressive Era, 1883–1903. *Vierteljahrschrift für Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte*, Vol 68. 1981. 1. 52–97. (p. 79)

13 *Egyházi és gyűlkezeti krónika az East-Chicagói Első Magyar Evangéliumi és Református Egyház és Templom harmincöt éves fennállása jubileumi ünnepére*. East Chicago 1942. p. 61.

14 *Magyar Hirlap*, 13 April 1913.

15 *Indiana Harbori Első Magyar Evangéliumi és Református Egyház családi albuma*. Összeáll.: Balla Zsigmond. Indiana Harbor 1943. p. 37.

16 *Hungarians in America*, 1941. p. 188.

17 Imre Gellért: *Amerikai magyar karrierrek albuma*. New York, 1923.; *Hungarians in America*, 1941. p. 188.; Kálmán Káldor szerk.: *Magyar-Amerika írásban és képben*. St. Louis 1937. p. 141.

18 *Amerikai Nemzetőr*, 21 October 1896.