

 **OBSERVER-DISPATCH**

The Little Falls-Slovakia connection

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Hundreds migrated to Little Falls from the same small city in Slovakia, all because of one mistake. Now, some residents are working to keep the tie between the cities alive.

By

It all began with a mistake.

It was 1892, and Anna Mocko, originally of Myjava, Czechoslovakia — now Slovakia — had just finished a year of service in Minnesota that paid for her ticket to the United States.

Eager to meet up with her friends in Little Falls, N.J., she headed to the train station, only to find the staff there couldn't understand her speech. Determined, she penned "Little Falls, N.J." instead, and soon she was on her way.

When she arrived, though, her friends weren't at the station. In fact, she wasn't in New Jersey at all. The staffer mistook her "N.J." for "N.Y."

"A guy named George Washington Boyle ... was the station master at the time," said 75-year-old Peter Adasek, who said Boyle was the landlord of the West Main Street home he moved into in third grade. "He found (Mocko) a place to live."

For Adasek, having close ties to Boyle is personal: both of Adasek's grandparents came to the city from Myjava after Mocko began spreading the word in the early 1890s.

“I get tingly all over at the prospect of that,” he said.

Decades later, Adasek isn't the only one with roots to the small, Slovakian town he's visited several times. A 1918 register shows that 300 individuals — many of which were family heads representing more than one person — from Myjava resided in Little Falls at the time. It's only grown since.

Now, he and about five others are working to keep ties between the cities — official sister cities as of this year — going strong, and to pass along stories of migration and culture to younger generations.

The group is planning a host of events for 2016, including a Little Falls Historical Society Museum exhibition with paintings, dolls, jars, articles and more collected from and about Myjava.

“This is the largest group that has moved into Little Falls from a particular community in Europe,” said Louie Baum, head of the Historical Society. “But the people that have very definite ties (to Myjava) are in their 80s and 90s, they're dying off. We're trying to memorialize this particular event in Little Falls history.”

For Little Falls native Martin Babinec, no stranger to travel, a 1986 trip to Slovakia managed to completely move him.

Decades ago, around the turn of the 20th century, Babinec's grandfather, just 16, had packed up his things, leaving everything he knew behind and heading to Little Falls from Myjava.

“As I looked around and saw the conditions in which people were living, it gave me an appreciation for the decision that my grandfather made to come to America,” Babinec said. “My life today has been made possible because of that decision.”