

## “SERBIAN SOKO” IN CLEVELAND, OHIO

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**Abstract.** *The beginnings of Sokolism are tied to the second half of the 19th century, namely to the Czech Miroslav Tyrš and his system of physical exercise. After the founding in the Czech Republic, the Sokol movement began to spread into all Slavic countries, as well as in those countries where Slavic minority nations lived. In this way, Sokolism arrived among the Serbs who lived in America (USA), and they began to accept the idea of Sokolism in mid-1907. In early 1909 the first initiatives for the establishment of Serbian Soko Societies began to appear. During 1909 two societies were founded, the in the next year five more, in 1911 three societies and in 1912 more than ten. In the second half of 1911 the union of Serbian Soko societies in America was established, called the Serbian Soko Parish in America (SSPA). Serbian Soko Society in Cleveland, Ohio, which is also the main subject of this research, was founded in the first half of 1912. The aim of the authors is to explore and present the exact date of the founding of this Society, the main initiators and founders, members and activities of the Society during its work. In this study the authors used the historical method.*

**Key words:** *society, slet (gathering), assembly, journal, Parish.*

### INTRODUCTION

After the formation of the “Prague Gymnastic Society” in 1862 in Prague, and the change of its name to “Sokol” in 1864, the Sokol movement, as a way of physical exercise, started to spread to all Slavic countries, as also to ones inhabited with Slavic nations. That is how Sokolism arrived among the Serbs who lived in America (to be more precise, on the territory of the United States). They started to accept the Sokol idea in early 1907, and one of main initiators was Danilo Radjenović from Butte, Montana

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(Srpski Soko u Americi, 1907). But his idea about forming a Serbian Soko Society in that place was not realized at that time, but four years later, in 1911. During 1909, other initiatives also started, in other places of the United States where Serbs lived. In 1909 two societies were formed: in Cincinnati, Ohio (Pavlović, Živanović, Pantelić-Babić, & Pavlović, 2014) and in Detroit, Michigan (Pavlović, Pantelić-Babić, Živanović, & Pavlović, 2014), and in the next year, five more: Gary, Indiana, Chicago, Illinois (Pavlović, Živanović, Pantelić-Babić, & Pavlović, 2015), Barberton, Ohio (Pavlović, Pantelić-Babić, & Pavlović, 2015), Akron, Ohio and Indiana Harbor, Indiana (Pavlović, Pantelić-Babić, & Pavlović, 2014). The establishment of Soko societies continued into the future. In 1911 three societies were founded: in St. Louis, Missouri (Pavlović, Živanović, Pantelić-Babić, & Pavlović, 2016), Butte, Montana and New York, New York, and in 1912 more than ten, including the Serbian Soko Society in Cleveland, Ohio. In the second half of 1911, at the beginning of October, the Alliance of existing Serbian Soko Societies in America called the Serbian Soko Parish in America-SSPA (Pavlović, Pantelić-Babić, Pavlović, & Piršl, 2014) was founded.

The main aim of the current research is to explore and present the exact founding date of the Serbian Soko society in Cleveland, Ohio, the main initiators and founders, members and activities during its work and existence. During their research, the authors used the historical method.

#### THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS OF THE PROBLEM

##### **The establishment of a Serbian Soko Society and its work by the end of 1912**

The first initiatives for the establishment of a Serbian Soko Society in Cleveland was started by a group of local Serbs in April, 1912. For this purpose, Stevo Savić in the second half of April that year, sent a letter to SSPA in which he asked them to send instructions on how to establish a Serbian Soko Society. Based on the records of the SSPA meeting held on May 20<sup>th</sup> 1912 in Gary, in which, among other things, it was stated that: “Temporary Secretary of Serbian Sokol from Cleveland reports establishment of Sokol (Zapisnik sjednice Srpske Sokolske Župe u Americi, 1912 June 1<sup>st</sup>, p. 91), we can conclude that the Serbian Soko Society Cleveland was founded in early May, 1912. For the first senior officer of the Serbian Soko Society in Cleveland Stevo Savić was elected and as its leader, Slavko Borijanović.

Immediately after the establishment they began with intensive work and were able to prepare club members to perform at the First Serbian Sokol Slet (gathering) on June 22 - and 23, 1912 in Chicago. The following people participated at the Slet: Slavko Borijanović, the leader of the Serbian Soko members from Cleveland and five soko-exercisers: Bogdan Dragišić, R. Lotina, V. Savić, S. Simin and B. Stojsavljević. In addition, the Slet was also attended by a senior officer of Serbian Soko Society, Stevo Savić and two members, Živko Milovanović and Franjo Tomić.

Soko-exercisers on the first day of Slet performed “... the latest Czech simple physical exercises” (Soko, list Srpskih Sokola u Americi, 1912) and with them won third place and the corresponding prize, but we do not know what the prize was.

In the second half of July 1912, the society members elected their new senior officer, Živko Milovanović, replacing the previous one, Stevo Savić (Popović & Jokanović, 1912,

October 1<sup>st</sup>). At the end of July of the same year they received ordered caps and belts from the SSPA. Upon receipt of the ordered items they sent a letter to the Parish administration in which they posted 5.20 dollars for belts and hats, and requested that they send them prices of exercise equipment. The letter was read at the SSPA meeting on August 16, 1914 in Chicago.

The Serbian Sokos from Cleveland had not paid fees to the Parish for the previous three months (July, August and September 1912), and so they were admonished, and therefore the SSPA, during a meeting held on October 4, 1912 in Chicago, decided to write to them again and extend the deadline for payment until October 18<sup>th</sup> of the current year. If they were unable to make the payment by then, their SSPA would be revoked membership (Popović & Jokanović, 1912 December 1<sup>st</sup>).

In late November or early December 1912, the Administration of Serbian Soko Society from Cleveland through a letter sent to the SSPA payed \$7.50 for membership and \$3.75 for the “Soko” newspaper (\$11.25 in total). The Parish Administration was informed about it at the Parish meeting on December 15, 1912 in Chicago, when the letter was read (Popović & Jokanović, 1913, February 1<sup>st</sup>). In this way the Sokols from Cleveland settled their obligations to the Parish and were not deleted from its membership.

#### **The Society’s work since the beginning of 1913 to the end of June 1914**

During 1913, the Sokols continued their work on achieving the set goals. They held their meetings and the annual assembly, public classes, exercises, were in constant contact with the SSPA, participated in the preparations for the Second Serbian Sokol Slet in America, and so on.

In the first half of January, 1913 they sent a letter to the Parish in which they asked to receive 25 copies of the magazine “Ljetopis” and informed them “...that they will send the fees as soon as possible” (Popović & Jokanović, 1913a, March-April, p. 55).

Based on the letter that they sent to the SSPA in early February 1913 and which was read at the Parish meeting on February 28<sup>th</sup> the same year, we can conclude that at the beginning of February this year the society’s administration changed and redirected their work to achieving the set goals (Popović & Jokanović, 1913b, March-April). In reviewed sources we did not find the names of the new administration members.

In mid-March 1913 they sent the Parish: \$5.50 for an entry fee; \$5.00 for “Ljetopis Srpskih Sokola u Americi [The Chronicles of Serbian Sokol in America]”; \$6.00 for membership fee and \$3.00 for the “Soko” newspaper, i.e., \$19.50 in total (Popović & Jokanović, 1913, June). The Parish Administration was informed about it at the meeting on April 6, 1913 in Chicago.

During April 1913, there have been some, for now, to us unknown misunderstandings among the members of Serbian Soko Society in Cleveland, so the society’s administration was forced to revoke certain memberships. The SSPA was informed about these events through an official letter where the Parish was asked to exclude these people from Parish membership as well. It was discussed at the Parish assembly on May 18, 1913 in Chicago, when they decided that the Parish Secretary, Miloš Jokanović should “... write them suggesting they try to settle their disputes as brothers, and if not, to inform about all the details” (Popović & Jokanović, 1913, July, pp. 156-157). At the meeting of the Parish it was, inter alia, decided to annul the decision on holding a Slet in 1913 in Denver, Colorado, “...

for the material circumstances and anticipated difficulties, and that the Administration of S.S.P. will use all forces to ensure Sokol Slet in Cleveland, O. to be the best as possible” (Ibid, p. 157). As per the recommendation of the parish, from May 18, 1913, the members of Serbian Soko Society in Cleveland did not reconcile, they again, at the end of May this year, sent a letter to the Parish to inform them that they had not managed to settle disputes and therefore they are asking the Parish to mediate between them, in order to do so. The letter was read at the SSPA meeting on June 8, 1913 in Chicago, and after a debate it was decided to send one members of the Parish administration from Cleveland to help them, but before that Sokols from Cleveland had to “... oblige to agree to the following conditions:

- a) to give their honest word that they will agree to whatever solution this brother may give; and
- b) to pay the travel expenses of the same brother” (Popović & Jokanović, 1913a, August, p. 181).

The Serbian Soko from the administration of the Parish, whose name we did not manage to find, elected by the Board to go to the Serbian Soko Society in Cleveland to reconcile the quarreling brothers, succeeded. At the Annual General SSPA Assembly held on June 24, 1913 in Chicago, he filed his report on this matter. In this way, “... was resolved a dispute between members of the` Serbian Soko` in Cleveland, Ohio, so that both sides will be satisfied” (Popović & Jokanović, 1913, September, pp. 216).

According to the annual report of the SSPA for the period June 25, 1912-June 25, 1913, on the day of June 25, 1913 the SSPA had fourteen Serbian Soko Societies as members, and among them was also the society from Cleveland with its 27 members (Popović & Jokanović, 1913b, August).

Peter N. Kumanovac, the leader of the SSPA, during the month of August 1913 visited a Serbian Soko Society to see what and how they were doing, to feel the mood among Serbs for Sokolism, etc. Among others, he also visited the Serbian Soko Society in Cleveland and at the Parish assembly on August 24<sup>th</sup> that year in Chicago, where he submitted his report. Inter alia, he said that there is good enthusiasm for Sokolism among the sokols in Cleveland, but that they do not have enough skilled people to work with them (Popović & Jokanović, 1913, October).

In the second half of October the sokols from Cleveland sent the Parish \$15.00 for the entry fee; \$9.00 for the membership fee and \$4.50 for the “Soko” newspaper (\$28.50 in total). The Parish administration was informed about this at its meeting on November 2, 1913 in Chicago (Popović & Jokanović, 1913, December).

As part of preparations for the Second Serbian Sokol Slet in June 1914 in Cleveland, during a Parish meeting from December 1, 1913 in Chicago, it was decided to send a letter to the Serbian Soko Society in Cleveland to look over for the places (parks) in Cleveland that would be suitable for holding the Second Serbian Sokol Slet on Vidovdan (St. Vitus Day) 1914 and to inquire about prices (Popović & Jokanović, 1914, January).

Serbian Sokols from Cleveland held their Assembly in January 1914, where they, among other things, chose a new administration. For the Administrative Board, the following were elected: Novica Krivokapić, senior officer; Stevo Dobrić, deputy senior officer; Bogdan Radišić, Secretary; Nikola Diklić, treasurer; Arso Svilar, economist; Slavko Borjanović, leader and Milan Forkapa, deputy leader. Risto Mitričin was elected as the Chairman of the Supervisory Board, and Ljubomir Amidžić and Djuro Stojkov as members. Bogdan Dragišić was elected as delegate for the SSPA Assembly (Srpski Soko u Klivlandu, Ohajo, 1914).

Complying with the decision received from the Parish on December, 1913, the Sokols from Cleveland visited all the parks and other places suitable for the Second Serbian Sokol Slet and in the first half of January, 1914, addressed a letter to the SSPA in which they informed the Parish that Cleveland "... has many parks, where Sokol Slet could be organized, but they do not know which one would be suitable for this purpose" (Popović & Jokanović, 1914a, February-March, p. 49). The letter was read at the Parish meeting on January 24, 1914 in Chicago, and based on its contents they decided to send brother Petar Sekulović to Cleveland, a member of the Supervisory Board of Parish, so he can choose a park, negotiate a price for it, and make arrangements for music and other things necessary for organizing the Slet.

At the next Parish meeting on March 8, 1914 in Chicago, Peter Sekulović submitted a report about his stay in Cleveland and informed that for Slet, which is to be held on June 27-28, 1914, he chose "Sarek Park" for the price of \$40 and that music was found and arranged for the two-day Slet for \$144 (Popović & Jokanović, 1914b, February-March).

Regarding the organization of the Soko Slet in June 1914 in Cleveland, one Soko member from Chicago, who only left his initial J., wrote the following:

"Parish slet will be held this year in June in Cleveland, Ohio. On that occasion delegates from all Sokol societies will meet at the same place. At this meeting should be discussed the issue of training with weapons and ensure to get professional people who could organize and militarily educate all Sokolism, to be able to in time of need rush to help their brothers, because it is the son's and brotherly duty toward their homeland and brothers" (J, 1914, p. 3).

At the Parish meeting on March 8, 1914 among other things, it was decided to organize a Soko dinner on the Soko Slet eve on June 26, 1914 in Cleveland.

In early May 1914, the Serbian Sokols from Cleveland sent \$16.75 to the SSPA: \$7.50 for a membership fee; \$5.50 entry fee and \$3.75 for the "Soko" newspaper (Popović & Jokanović, 1914a, June).

In "Soko" magazine № 5 from May 1914, it was announced that the General Assembly of SSPA will take place in Cleveland as part of the Second Serbian Sokol Slet from June 27-29, 1914 (Glavna skupština srpske sokolske župe u Americi, 1914).

In the next issue of the "Soko" magazine from June 1914, a senior officer of the Parish Dušan B. Popović and secretary general Miloš Jokanović addressed an invitation for the Second Serbian Sokol Slet on June 27<sup>th</sup>-28<sup>th</sup> and the General Serbian Soko Assembly on June 29<sup>th</sup> that year in Cleveland. To this Slet they invited "... all Serbian and Slovenian soko societies, charity and educational organizations and all Serbs and Slavs" (Popović & Jokanović, 1914b June, p. 113), and for all the Serbian Soko Societies from America addressed a request to send their envoys to the Assembly, and bring as guests people from other Serbian and Slavic organizations.

Info about the Second Serbian Sokol Slet was also announced in Serbian newspapers and journals in Herzegovina and Bosnia. Thus, in "Srpska Riječ", no. 115 from June 12, 1914, the following was written:

“Second Slet of Serbian Sokol Parish in America will be held on 14<sup>th</sup> (27<sup>th</sup>), and 15<sup>th</sup> (28<sup>th</sup>) June this year in Cleveland, Ohio. This will be the first meeting of Serbian Sokols in America - after the avenged Kosovo-and in that day US Serbs will see their Sokols gathered in one place, where they will face to face on Vidovdan (St. Vitus Day) give each other their Serbian and sokol right hand, meet as brothers and agree for future cooperation.

We know how important this Slet will be for the Serbian Sokolism in America, and we admonish from our side, that we need Serbian sokolism almost more than back home, because it has a duty to guide our brothers who are in a foreign world, towards all that is good and useful, and to return them, healthy in body and soul, to their home.

For that reason have a blissful second Slet of Serbian Sokols in America.

Goodbye!” (Drugi Slet Srpske Sokolske Župe u Americi, May 30<sup>th</sup> (June 12<sup>th</sup>) 1914)).

In the reviewed and for now to us available sources, we found no information whether a planned second Serbian Sokol Slet and General Assembly of the Serbian Sokols was actually held. This will, hopefully, be explored by some future researchers of the history of Serbian Sokolism in America (US).

Certain articles published in the “Soko” newspaper in America, in addition to Sokols, were also interesting for the Austro-Hungarian courts in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Thus, the District Court in Mostar passed the sentence “... from 3<sup>rd</sup> of April 1915, st. 4/15., it has been declared by § 41 of the law on the press failed for no. 7. of periodic printed writing `Soko`, which is the organ of the Serbian Sokols in America and the newspaper of `national awareness` because its content makes the transgression of treason under § 111. b and disturbance of the public peace by § 142 of the pc. This issue was published in New York in July 1914” (Veleizdajnički proces 1915-1916, n.d., p. 83)

In the stated issue of the “Soko” newspaper, in the article “Serbian Sokol Fund for the liberation of the oppressed homeland”, among other things, the following was written:

“That same day, when in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Slavonia Austrian statesmen were out of their senses about the murder of their heir presumptive Ferdinand and when they held the nation unenlightened, nation against nation, brothers against brothers, on June 29<sup>th</sup> t.y. at the general assembly of Serbian sokol parish in Cleveland, O., at the proposal of brother Dusan B. Popovic, senior officer of Serbian sokol parish, `Serbian Sokol Fond` for the liberation of the oppressed homeland was founded.

It was decided, that all members of the Serbian Sokol Parish in America pay into this fund \$ 1 per year as from January 1, 1915.

This fund is completely independent of the other cash register of Serbian Soko Parish, will be placed in the specific savings account in the bank, and will be managed by the Serbian Sokol Parish and its treasurer. From this account not a single cent should be used, except in case of need in our oppressed country. In addition to regular membership dues of Serbian Sokols this Fund will receive also contributions from other Serbs and Slavs etc.

The establishment of this Fund was gladly accepted by all representatives of the Serbian Sokol Assembly in Cleveland, and we hope that it will be gladly accepted by other Sokols as well, as also all Serbs and Slavs, because of his noble cause etc.

Finally:

Brothers remember your birth land, which is under foreigners, and do not let it be destroyed by the enemy” (Ibid).

#### CONCLUSION

Based on the sources available to us we were unable to determine the exact date of the founding, but we can conclude that the Serbian Sokol Society in Cleveland, Ohio was founded at the beginning of May 1912, and that one of the main initiators and the first senior officer of the Society was Stevo Savić. Immediately after the establishment they began their intensive work. Members of the company participated in Sokol Slets, held regular meetings and annual assemblies, public classes, exercises; they were in constant contact with the SSPA, participated in the preparations for the Second Serbian Sokol Slet in America, etc.

Based on the aforementioned, we can conclude that the Serbian Sokol Society in Cleveland, Ohio, through its activities in the period from its establishment to the end of June 1914, has given its contribution to achieving the set Sokol goals, and therefore to the development of Sokolism on the territory of the United States, which represents one of its most important points.

The question that still remains open, because in the available sources we found no information about it, is whether the planned Second Serbian Sokol Slet and General Assembly of the Serbian Sokols was actually held. We leave this for the future researchers of the history Serbian Sokolism in America to explore.

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## “SRPSKI SOKO” U KLIVLENDU, OHAJO

*Počeci srpskog sokolstva vežu se za drugu polovinu 19. veka, tačnije za Čeha Miroslava Tirša i njegov sistem telesnog vežbanja. Posle osnivanja u Češkoj, sokolski pokret se počeo širiti na sve slavenske zemlje kao i na one u kojima su živeli slavenski narodi. Na taj način je sokolstvo stiglo i među Srbe koji su živeli u Americi (SAD-u) koji su sokolsku ideju počeli prihvatati polovinom 1907. godine. Početkom 1909. godine su se počele javljati i prve inicijative za osnivanje srpskih sokolskih društava. Tokom 1909. godine osnovana su dva društva, u narednoj godini još pet, u 1911. godini su osnovana tri, a u 1912. godini više od deset društava. U drugoj polovini 1911. godine osnovan je i savez postojećih srpskih sokolskih društava u Americi pod nazivom Srpska Sokolska Župa u Americi (SSŽA). Srpsko sokolsko društvo u Klivlendu, Ohajo, koje je ujedno i glavni predmet ovog istraživanja, osnovano je u prvoj polovini 1912. godine. Cilj autora je da istraže i prikažu tačan datum osnivanja Društva, glavne inicijatore i osnivače, članove, kao i aktivnosti Društva tokom njegovog rada. U ovom istraživanju autori su koristili istorijski metod.*

Ključne reči: *društvo, slet, skupština, list, župa*