

Fenyvesi, Anna and Réka Bakos, eds. *Óhazából az Újvilágba: A személyes történelem nyomában [Hungarian roots and American dreams: Tracing personal history]*. Szeged: Americana eBooks, 2024. 283 pp.

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Edited by the renowned Hungarian sociolinguist Anna Fenyvesi, together with HR consultant and genealogist Réka Bakos, this book comprises forty-eight stories of people who emigrated from Hungary (or, in earlier times, the Austro-Hungarian Empire) to the United States of America between 1852 and 1959. Most of the stories are documented by the offspring (children, grandchildren, or great-grandchildren) of their protagonists, who capture these personal stories through their lenses, preserving their ancestors’ struggles, triumphs, and ties for their Hungarian heritage from a distance of several decades, at times indeed more than a century. Some of the authors live in the United States (such as Daniel A. Terrick, Franklin Deak, or Sandi Kupcik Barber, who all write about their Hungarian grandparents). However, many of them live in Hungary, either because their ancestors eventually returned to the old country after trying their luck in America (such as János Szabon’s great-grandfather or Róbert Molnár’s great-great-grandparents), or because they left (some of) their family members behind when they emigrated (as is the case with Ákos Molnár or Ágnes Szegő, who both write about their American Hungarian great-grandparents).

As revealed by the editors in the “Foreword,” the entire project started with a social media post, which gradually led to the launch of the Facebook group called *Óhazából az Újvilágba – Hungarian Roots & American Dreams* in February 2024. In 24 hours, about 250 people joined the group, and it has almost 1,000 members at present (as of January 2025). Soon, the group became a veritable cornucopia of family stories and old photographs, with members reminiscing about emotional moments of their family histories, sharing sometimes uplifting, at other times tragic episodes of their ancestors’ journey to the New World. It was Anna Fenyvesi’s idea to collect these stories in a book to make them accessible to a broader audience, since, as the editors put it in the “Foreword,” these family stories capture Hungarian (and American) history in a unique, personal way.

As soon as one picks up the book, the first thing one notices is its exquisite layout and the high-quality visuals that illustrate the stories in it. Most of the images were provided by the authors. Still, some were specially made or edited by graphic designer János Pataky, such as the

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maps on pages 9 and 10, depicting the places of origin and destinations of Hungarian immigrants in the United States in the early 1900s. The locations of origin of the émigrés whose stories are documented in the book vary widely, covering almost the entire territory of the Kingdom of Hungary (as of the early 1900s). Still, the northern counties undisputedly constitute the majority, since emigration was the most intense in these northern parts of the country, along with certain parts of Transylvania and a few counties in the south, with these areas being the least prosperous parts of the country at the time. Their destinations on the other side of the Atlantic (i.e., the towns and cities that the immigrants settled in) exhibit a somewhat more homogenous distribution. As Balázs Balogh, the director of the HUN-REN Humanities Research Center remarks in the "Introduction," it was the East Coast and the Midwest that traditionally saw the most significant influx of Hungarian immigrants, especially throughout the first wave of Hungarian immigration, i.e., the five decades preceding the First World War, so it is also these regions that the stories in the book are set in. The geographical distribution was primarily driven by the need for labor in the mines and factories, which were abundant in these regions during the late 1800s and early 1900s. The socio-historical background is not explored in the book to greater detail, since the volume approaches the history of Hungarian immigration to the United States of America primarily from a personal rather than a societal perspective.

The book spans over a century, with stories dating back to as early as 1852 and the most recent one from 1959. However, forty-two of the forty-eight stories belong to the aforementioned first wave of immigration, which accentuates the dominant role of this first generation of immigrants in the volume, even though it also contains three stories from between the two world wars, two from 1956, and one that is even more recent than that, from 1959.

The first story in the book is about the nobleman László Baróthy, who fought against the Habsburgs in the 1848–49 War of Independence, emigrated to Turkey and then the US, but later returned to his birthplace, Nagyvárad (today Oradea, Romania) for the last two decades of his long and adventurous life. To give an idea of how exciting his life story was, authors Péter Homor and Réka Bakos mention that apart from being an officer in the Hungarian army in 1848–49, he also tried himself out as a lawyer in Nagyvárad and Pozsony (today's Bratislava), converted to Islam while in exile in Turkey, acted as Lajos Kossuth's bodyguard while the latter was giving a speech in New Orleans in 1852 (the year Baróthy emigrated to the United States), worked as a farmer in Iowa, and even though he spent the final two decades of his life in Hungary, he remained an American citizen until his death.

While it is evident that the present review cannot provide an overview of every one of the forty-eight stories included in the book, it has to be mentioned at this point that the second story is about László Baróthy's three sons: Kálmán, Örs, and Árpád, whose lives were comparably exciting and eventful. While Kálmán fought in the American Civil War and died at age ninety-nine in a veteran hospital in Lincoln, Nebraska, his brother Örs died as early as age twenty-two, as a result of what was commonly referred to back then as an American duel, in which the loser had to kill himself in three years. Örs Baróthy lost the duel, kept his word, and took his own life three years later. Luckily, the youngest of the three boys, Árpád Baróthy, did not follow in his brother Örs's footsteps and had a long and eventful life. Not only was he a successful physician, but he also acted as the chairman of the American Hungarian Federation and organized several conferences and assemblies for American Hungarians and their organizations, including the Hungarian American National Congress in Buffalo in May 1929. The Baróthys' stories are documented in the volume by Péter Homor and Réka Bakos.

A lot of other stories in the book are also about multiple members of a family, such as the Patz family's story, in which one of their offspring, Krisztina Héder, writes about several generations of her ancestors, most notably that of eight siblings, whose life stories span more or less the entirety of the 20th century. Another such example is that of the four Sonnenschein siblings (a name that might strike the reader as familiar from István Szabó's 1999 epic historical drama film *Sunshine*), who left Fonyód for New York, and whose story is documented in the book by István Varga. Tragically, many of those members of the Sonnenschein family who did not emigrate to the US died in Auschwitz. Still, their offspring eventually got in touch with their American cousins online, planning to reunite in real life as well.

Among others, the story of the Szigetközi/Sigite family demonstrates how inspiring it can be when such reunions indeed take place, even if language barriers may exist between the parties. Based on online genealogical research, American-born Randall Sigite found his relatives in Kompolt, Hungary, around 2010. After exchanging letters for a few years, the American side of the family finally visited their Hungarian relatives in 2014. They could only communicate with each other with the help of a translator. Still, the Hungarian Szigetközis eventually visited the American Sigites in 2017 and have been keeping in touch ever since. Another author in the book, Julie Galatocky, also found her relatives in Hungary based on online genealogical research and visited them with her son, as well as seeing her great-grandfather's grave in Felsőkelecsény, Hungary. Alternatively, there is Kati Csoman's story, who met her Hungarian relatives personally as part of a scholarship provided by NRIEP (Nationality Rooms and Intercultural Exchange Programs) at the University of Pittsburgh. She cherishes the memories of experiencing life in her father's birthplace, Szentdomonkos, first-hand during a summer in the late 1980s. Today, she is the director of the NRIEP program, making such intercultural experiences possible for other people, too. These are just some examples of the memorable and moving moments captured in the volume, the majority of which, unfortunately, cannot be explored in the present review.

Unlike most of the previously mentioned examples, several of the stories in the book present the life story of a single person, such as Jan Lesnak or István Hollósi, who both returned to Hungary after spending several years in the United States, having accumulated considerable wealth. Tragically, however, they ended up dying poor due to the stormy political changes that swept across East Central Europe after World War II. István Hollósi's story is presented in the book by his granddaughter, Erzsébet Hollósi, while in Jan Lesnak's case, it is his great-granddaughters, Márta and Ágnes Lesznyák, and Katarina Strazikova, who recount the eventful life of their shared great-grandfather.

As the editors put it in the "Epilogue," many times the ending of a story told in the book represents the beginning of something else: family ties intertwine again, reunited family members continue their family search with joint forces, preserving the legacy of their ancestors, and passing it on to generations to come. Even though many of the individual life stories in the book have been known before, this volume is unique because it portrays the history of entire generations of Hungarian-Americans together. At the same time, it is essential to note that it does so from the perspective of micro-history, shedding light on the interconnectedness of international political history and the lives of ordinary people, and the way they make important choices in their personal lives at major historical turning points.