

# **The Balint / Balyi Family of Záhор, Slovakia, and The Meglisz / Meglész Family of Lekárovce, Slovakia: A Family History and Research Narrative**

During my childhood and early adult years I was very close to my maternal grandfather, Paul W. Balint. I was always interested in the stories that he and his siblings would tell me about their parents, George and Suzanna (Gabriž) Balint. And I was immensely intrigued by the stories that their parents had told them while they were growing up – concerning their lives in Europe before their immigration to the United States, and concerning their early years in America – which my grandfather and his siblings repeated to me. At this time in my life I also took advantage of the opportunity to gather some information about the earlier generations of the family from some of my grandfather's cousins. My grandfather, all his cousins, and all his siblings save one, have now passed away. I am glad that I made a point to learn from these people the things that I did learn from them, all those years ago. It would be impossible to learn many of these things today.

Among the stories that my grandfather and his siblings passed down to me from their father, two in particular stand out. On one occasion, when George, as a boy in the "Old Country," was harvesting wheat in the field with a sickle, he cut off the last digit of one of his fingers. To stop the bleeding, he wrapped a piece of pork or bacon, that he had brought as a part of his lunch, around the end of the finger, and tied it with a piece of leather string. He then continued with his work. By the end of the day his exposed nerve had become in some way attached to this improvised bandage, so that when he removed the piece of meat from his finger, he felt a strange pulling sensation inside his arm all the way up to his shoulder. (George Balint's World War I draft registration card, dated Germantown, N.Y., Sept. 12, 1918, includes this notation: "Lost one finger on left hand.")

The other memorable story involved two boyhood friends of George Balint, who worked for the village undertaker. Their job included picking up the bodies of deceased persons, and transporting those bodies in the back of a wagon to the undertaker's home. On one occasion a man on the outskirts of town died at home alone, and his body was not discovered for a while. When it was discovered, the boys were sent to pick up the body. It was already after dark. Because the decedent had been dead for a time, rigor mortis had begun to set in. While they were transporting the body, as they were sitting on the bench in the front of the wagon, the muscles of the body tightened up in such a way as to cause the dead man to sit up in the back of the wagon at a 90° angle. As the body contracted in this way, the air that was left in its lungs was forced out, causing the vocal cords to sound one last time in the form of an airy groan. With a groaning dead body sitting up in the back of the wagon right behind where they were seated, in the darkness of the night, the boys were so frightened that they practically beat the horse to death with their whip, as they pushed the horse to run to the undertaker's house as fast as it could.

My grandfather's maternal cousin Julia (Gabriž) Nemchek – the daughter of Suzanna's brother Štefan Gabriž – told me that my great-grandmother Suzanna Gabriž had come from the village of Košariská (known earlier as Kosaras) in the western part of the modern state of Slovakia. In 1997 I visited this village, and saw my great-grandmother's baptismal entry in the church register of the Lutheran congregation, to which her family belonged. (The parish pastor who baptized one-day-old "Zuzanna" on Aug. 3, 1879, was Pavel Štefánik. He was the father of the famous astronomer and Slovak patriot Milan Rastislav Štefánik, one of the co-founders of the new nation of Czechoslovakia after the First World War. Milan was only a year younger than Suzanna. They grew up together in the same small village and village church.) The Košariská congregation had been organized in 1871 – about seven years before Suzanna's birth and baptism. Before 1871, the Lutheran families of Košariská were part of the Lutheran

congregation in the nearby town of Brezová pod Bradlom. During this trip I was not able to gain access to the registers of the Brezová congregation, and therefore was not able to trace the history of the family beyond the names of my great-grandmother's parents (Štefan Gabriž and Katarína Pagáč). But in 2002, I hired a professional genealogist in Slovakia to trace the history of this family, utilizing the parish registers that were housed in the governmental archive in Bratislava. This research resulted in the tracing back of my great-grandmother's pedigree for several generations, to the seventeenth century, involving ancestors who lived in Kosariská, Brezová pod Bradlom, Podkylava, and Krajné.

My grandfather's paternal cousin Anna Warga – the daughter of George's sister Mary (Balint) Warga – told me that my great-grandfather George Balint had come from a village in Hungary called "Zahores." She said that his father was Michael Balint, born 1838, died 1922, and that his mother was Ilona Meglitz, born 1849, died 1889. (Subsequent research in primary source documents has shown that three of these four years are in error.) She identified four children in this family: Anna, George (my great-grandfather), John, and Mary (her mother). She confirmed information that my grandfather and his siblings had already shared with me, that the family surname was originally Balyi. According to Anna, Michael had changed his name in order to distinguish himself from the numerous other individuals in the village who were also named Balyi. Also according to Anna, Ilona, the mother of the family, died as the result of a bite from a poisonous snake, which she received while doing laundry in a river or stream. According to the story, the snake had been carried by the current into her laundry bucket, and it bit her when she reached in to get the clothing.

My relatives told me that George had come to America at the age of sixteen (that is, in 1890), with his father. George was already sporting a full mustache, even at that young age. The plan was that they would work in America for two or three years, and then return to Europe with the money they had earned. The family was very poor, and it was not possible to find lucrative work in Europe. "Balint Mihaly," age 50, and his son "György," age 16, arrived in New York as steerage passengers on the Steamship Fulda, from Bremen, Germany, on March 4, 1890. Both were described as citizens of Hungary, and the "calling" of each was described as that of "labourer." According to my relatives, father and son first went to western Pennsylvania, where they worked in an iron foundry. George had told his children that occasionally small drops of molten iron would splatter on his pants, burn through the material, and become imbedded in the flesh of his legs. After a couple years the father did return to Europe, as planned, but George decided to remain in the New World. He moved to the Burden community near Linlithgo, N.Y., where he worked in the Burden Iron Mine. He had the job of leading the mules that pulled the ore cars into and out of the mine.

At this point in George's life he met and married my great-grandmother, Suzanna Gabriž. "Susanna Gabris" is listed among the steerage passengers who arrived in Philadelphia on the S.S. Pennsylvania, from Antwerp, Belgium, on March 20, 1896. (She was described on the ship's manifest as 20 years old, single, a laborer, unable to read or write, "Hungarian" in nationality, from the town of "Kosariszka," and destined for "N.Y.C.") During much of the time of her and George's courtship, Suzanna was working as a chambermaid in Fraleigh's Hotel in Clermont, N.Y. When he wanted to visit her, George would have to walk from Burden to Clermont. When he came to the Roeliff Jansen Kill (on his way down and back again), he would take off his shoes and socks, roll up his pants, and wade across. The marriage of "George Balint" and "Susanna Gabris" was solemnized on Dec. 11, 1898, in Manhattan, by the Slovak Lutheran Pastor Ludevít Novomesky. At the time, both of them stated that their residence was "Burden, N.Y."

After the wedding, George and Suzanna lived for a time with another couple in a house in the Nevis section of Clermont, in which the four residents experienced several haunting phenomena. From time to time in the middle of the night, the two couples – who were sleeping

in bedrooms on the second floor – would be awakened by loud crashing sounds in the downstairs portion of the house. When they rushed downstairs to see what was happening, the noise would stop, and they would find everything in place. On one such occasion, as they turned to go back upstairs, they saw a ghostly image of a woman standing at the top of the stairs, wearing a white dress, and holding her head under her arm. (Walter V. Miller, a local historian with whom I was well-acquainted during my childhood, informed me that a murder – involving the decapitation of a young woman on the night before her wedding – had occurred in that house previous to my great-grandparents' residing there.)

Before long George and Suzanna had saved enough money to be able to purchase a farm on Lasher Avenue in Germantown, N.Y., where they raised a family of eleven children: George Arnold, b. July 10, 1900; Stephen Gabriž, b. May 16, 1902; Anne / Anna, b. Aug. 31, 1904; Elizabeth Sophia, b. Feb. 24, 1906; John Benedict, b. April 21, 1906; Paul Weeks, b. June 29, 1911; Richard Michael, b. June 1, 1914; Katherine Judith [twin], b. Feb. 10, 1916; Kathaleen Florence [twin], b. Feb. 10, 1916; Iola / Ilona Suzanna, b. March 29, 1918; and Barbara Margaret, b. Oct. 15, 1920. When the Balints purchased this property it had a barn, but not a house. They therefore lived at first in the barn, until the house was constructed – largely through George's own labor.

My grandfather told me that in Europe his father George was a member of the Reformed Church, and that his mother Suzanna was a member of the Lutheran Church (known among the Slovaks as the Evangelical Church of the Augsburg Confession). In Germantown, the Balint family attended the Lutheran Church.

George Balint died before I was born. His wife Suzanna died when I was two years old, so that I do not have any memories of her. I do, however, have a treasured "four-generation" photograph of her holding me on her lap, flanked by my mother and grandfather. I never had an opportunity to meet any of Suzanna's siblings, but on one occasion in July 1977 I did meet George's sister Mary. "Aunt Mary" was 93 years old, and was not able to be very communicative. But she did tell me about how, when she was a little girl, she would enjoy so much riding in the wagon with her father when he went to the city (probably Ungvár – see below) to sell the produce that he had grown. She also talked about how hard people had to work in the old days.

Through an Internet search for common appearances of the surname "Balyi," I had determined that the likely hometown of the Balint / Balyi family was actually the village of Záhó (previously known as Zahár), in the far eastern part of the modern state of Slovakia, directly adjacent to Slovakia's contemporary border with Ukraine. Historically, when this area was a part of the Kingdom of Hungary (within the Austro-Hungarian Empire), Zahár was within the Ungvár region of Ung County. The administrative center of this county was the city of Ungvár, now the Ukrainian city of Uzhhorod. When Czechoslovakia was formed in 1920, the territory of this old Hungarian county was included as a part of that new country. At the end of the Second World War, however, the Soviet Union annexed approximately two-thirds of this territory (including Ungvár / Uzhhorod), and incorporated it into the Soviet Republic of Ukraine. The other third of the historic territory of Ung County (including Záhó) remained in Czechoslovakia, and is now, since the "velvet divorce" of 1993, a part of the independent Slovak Republic. In civil records, people with the "Bali" surname are recorded among the residents of Zahár as early as 1772.

In April 2008, inspired in part by the success of the professional genealogist I had hired to do research on the family of my grandfather's mother, I set out to see what I could learn regarding the family of my grandfather's father. At the Family History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah, I examined a microfilm copy of the records of the Reformed Church in Záhó, Slovakia. As I expected, I did find my Balint / Balyi ancestors in those records.

The Záhó / Záhár records go back only to the year 1875. Before that year, the Záhó congregation was yoked with a larger Reformed Church in the town of Tarnovci, and the pastoral acts performed for the members of the Záhár congregation would have been recorded in the register of that church. The town of Tarnovci, now known as Tarnivtsi, is located on the other side of the modern border, in Ukraine. The records of this congregation are not available. It is known from many American sources that George Balint was born on Feb. 5, 1874. His birth and baptism would therefore not have been recorded in the Záhó records. The birth and baptism of his older sister Anna likewise would not have been recorded in the Záhó records. But there are entries in the Záhó register that do pertain to various members of George's immediate family:

András, son of Bálint Mihály and Meglésh Ilona, of House #30 in Záhár, was born and baptized on Feb. 11, 1876.

András, son of Bálint Mihály and Meglésh Ilianna, of House #30 in Záhár, died of Small Pox on Dec. 18, 1878, at the age of 3 years, and was buried in Záhár on Dec. 20.

János, son of Balyi Mihály and Meglésh Ilona, of House #30 in Záhár, was born on Oct. 24, 1878, and was baptized on Oct. 25.

Liricz János, of Záhár, Greek Catholic, age 25, and Bálint Anna, daughter of Bálint Mihály and Meglésh Julianna, of House #30 in Záhár, Helvetic [Reformed], age 21, were married on May 26, 1885.

Mihály, son of Bálint Mihály and Meglésh Ilona, of House #30 in Záhár, died of Scarlet Fever on Dec. 24, 1880, at the age of 10 years, and was buried in Záhár on Dec. 26.

Family tradition had not preserved a knowledge of the existence of the two brothers who died in childhood, so this was an interesting – and poignant – discovery. As I perused the church register, I noticed that child mortality in general was quite high in the town at this time in history. John (János) Balint, whose 1878 birth and baptism were recorded in the Záhár Reformed register, immigrated to America in 1897, and eventually settled in Ansonia, Connecticut. He was married twice: first to Anna Mizzicko, and second to Suzanna –. According to John B. Balint (my grandfather's brother), "Uncle John," at the time of his second marriage, commented happily to his brother George that "now we each have our own Zuska." John Balint (the immigrant) died in Ansonia on June 7, 1957.

The Záhó church records also identify the names of the probable paternal grandparents of my great-grandfather George Balint in the following death entry:

Lörinczi Borbála, widow of Balyi András, of House #30 in Záhár, died of terminal weakness [old age] on March 4, 1890, at the age of 88 years, and was buried in Záhár on March 5.

The Lörinczi or Lörincz surname is not associated historically with the village of Záhó, and there were no entries in the Záhó records that shed any light on Borbála's origins.

During the 1870s and the 1880s, House #30 in Záhár was inhabited by a fairly large extended family. Living there were Borbála Lörincz the widow of András Balyi; her presumptive son György Balyi Balint (b. 1833, d. Oct. 23, 1917) and his wife Anna Denczi; her presumptive son Mihály Bálint (Balyi) (b. 1840) and his wife Ilona Meglisz; her presumptive son András Balyi Bálint (d. before 1876) and his wife Maria Balyi (no doubt a distant relative); and her presumptive son István Bálint (Balyi) (b. 1850, d. Oct. 20, 1923) and his wife Anna Denczi (no doubt a relative of her brother-in-law György's wife, who bore the exact same name). Each of

these couples also had its own children. Before her death in 1890, at least two grandsons of Borbála (András the son of András, and Mihály the son of György) had also gotten married and begun their families while living in this house. For a time at least, another member of this extended household was one Mihály Denczi (the presumptive father of Anna Denczi the wife of István Bálint), who was a resident of House #30 when he died on November 28, 1879 (at the age of 62). One naturally wonders how large – or small – this house was!

According to family tradition, as noted above, my great-grandfather's father Mihály had changed his surname from Balyi to Bálint, due to the fact that the Balyi name was so common in his town. My examination of the Záhórchurch register confirmed this. The name Balyi is indeed very common. Mihály's brothers also changed or altered the name in a similar way, either by *replacing* the "Balyi" surname with the new "Bálint" surname, or by *adding* the name "Bálint" to their previous Balyi surname, so as to have a double surname. The "doubling" of surnames in this fashion was actually done by various families in this region, when they perceived a need to distinguish themselves from their kinsmen in the community. According to Balint family lore, a relative called "Basci Steve" Balint or Balyi, who lived in Quebec, Canada, visited the George Balint family in New York on at least one occasion. ("Basci" is pronounced like "Bachi," and means "Uncle" in Hungarian.) I do not know who this was.

In October 2009, at the Family History Center in Mesa, Arizona, I had an opportunity to examine the church records of the Greek Catholic churches in the villages of Bežovce and Lekárovce, both of which are near Záhórchurch. The birth and baptism of Mary Balint, the youngest member of the Mihály and Ilona Bálint family, had not been found in the Záhórchurch Reformed register, but it was found in the Greek Catholic records in Bežovce (previously known as Bezö):

Maria, daughter of Mihály Balind, Reformed, and Meglisz Ilona, Greek Catholic, of House #30 in Zahár, was born on Feb. 3, 1884, and was baptized on Feb. 4.

Mary (María) Balint immigrated to America in 1904, and eventually settled in Somers, Connecticut, with her husband Michael Wargha. She died in Somers on March 11, 1978. Mary's baptismal entry identifies her mother Ilona as a member of the Greek Catholic Church. Presumably she was a communicant at the Bežovce congregation, which served the Greek Catholics living in Záhórchurch.

The Bežovce Greek Catholic register was checked also for references to Mihály and Ilona's known older daughter Anna, or to any other additional children, and this interesting entry was found:

Anna, daughter of Bály Mihály and Meglisz Ilona, of Zahar, died on April 26, 1867, aged 3 years and 7 months; buried in Zahar on April 28.

This child's stated age at death calculates to a birth in Sept. 1863. But when another daughter of Mihály and Ilona named Anna, who lived to adulthood, got married in May of 1885, she was said to be 21 at that time, which would put *her* birth somewhere between May 1863 and May 1864 – in the same time frame of the birth of the daughter Anna who died in childhood. A possible explanation is that these two daughters were twins; and that when one of them (name unknown) died, the name of the other one (Anna) was mistakenly entered into the death register by the priest. Another possible explanation is that the daughter Anna who grew to adulthood and got married in 1885 was born soon after the death of the earlier daughter Anna in 1867; and that this second Anna's age at marriage was overstated by three years.

The death of Ilona, the mother of the family, was also recorded in Bežovce Greek Catholic register:

Meglész Ilona, wife of Balind Mihály, of Zahár, died on Jan. 6, 1891, at the age of 45 years, of edema, and was buried in Zahár on Jan. 8.

I do not know what connection there might be between the edema and the story of the snake bite.

There were other entries in the Bežovce records for people with the Meglisz / Meglész surname, but nothing further was found concerning Ilona or her family. Ilona and her ancestors were found, however, in the records of the Greek Catholic Church in the village of Lekárovice (previously known as Lakárt):

Balyi Mihály, of Zahár, Helvetic Confession, age 23, and Meglisz Julian., of Lakárt, Greek Catholic, age 18, were married on July 28, 1863.

Julianna, daughter of Meglisz János, Greek Catholic, and Meglisz Anna, Greek Catholic, of Lakárt, was baptized on Sept. 10, 1842.

Meglisz János, Greek Catholic, husband of Meglisz Anna, of Lakárt, died on Feb. 19, 1852, at the age of +/- 60 years.

Meglisz Anna, Greek Catholic, widow of Meglisz János, of House #149 in Lakárt, died on April 28, 1855, at the age of 50 years.

Aña, daughter of Georg. Meglész and Helena Kondat, of Lakárt, was baptized on Feb. 3, 1803.

The maiden name of Ilona's mother Anna was the same as the surname of her husband János. According to the format of the Lekárovice records at this time in history, the name Meglisz, as attributed to Anna in the entries for the baptisms of her and János's children, is definitely a reference to her maiden name, and not to her marriage name. Another couple, with the names János Meglisz and Anna Mészáros, were also having children in this parish during the same time frame as the births of the children of János Meglisz and Anna Meglisz, but because of the consistent use of the respective mother's maiden name in each entry, the children of each couple can easily be distinguished. (The children of our János and Anna, as recorded in the baptismal register, were: Maria, bp. Nov. 9, 1832; Ferensz, bp. March 25, 1835; Borbála, bp. June 29, 1837; Susanna, bp. June 8, 1840; Julianna [Ilona], bp. Sept. 10, 1842; Simon, bp. Feb. 10, 1845 [d. Feb. 17, 1845]; and József, bp. Feb. 18, 1847 [d. Feb. 26, 1847].) In the previous generation there was a similar kind of overlap in the baptismal records between our György Meglész and his wife Ilona (Helena) Kondat', and another couple, named György Meglész and Ilona (Helena) Krupa. But again, the use of the mother's maiden name in the various entries makes it easy for us to know which children belonged to which couple. (The children of our György and Ilona were: Anna, bp. Feb. 3, 1803; Mihály, bp. Aug. 24, 1806; and Maria, bp. Sept. 15, 1812.)

János Meglisz and Anna Meglisz (Ilona's parents) were certainly related to each other, but the nearness of their kinship cannot be established. There is, however, a fascinating entry in the Lekárovice death register that does raise some intriguing possibilities:

Petrus Meglisz, of Lakárt, died on March 23, 1806, at the age of 96 years.

Petrus's age at death calculates back to a birth around the year 1709. There is a possibility that he was the grandfather of either János or Anna, and that whichever one of these two was not his grandchild, was a grandchild of a brother of Petrus. The marriage of János Meglisz and Anna Meglisz cannot be located in the Lekárovice register.

Ilona's given name appears in the Lekárovice records as "Julianna," which at this time in history was the standard way of Latinizing the Hungarian name Ilona. (In earlier decades the name Ilona was Latinized as "Helena" in these records, and before that, when the records were written in Slavonic – in Cyrillic script – the name usually appeared as "Elena." Other versions of this given name that I have noticed are "Ilianna" [very close to the modern Slovak form of the name: Iliana], Ilya [a diminutive form], and "Ylha" [another diminutive form, in Cyrillic].) Ilona Meglisz's age at marriage is given as 18, but she was actually 20. Likewise, at the time of her death, the Bežovce register states that she was 45 years old, whereas she was actually 48. Ages are often off by a year or two, and occasionally by three or more years, in the records of this period. We must also remember that at the time of Ilona's death, her husband Mihály – who would likely have known her actual age – was in America. The person from whom the priest obtained his information, or the priest himself, may simply have made an educated guess as to how old she was.

The Lekárovice parish register goes back only to the year 1792. János Meglisz – the father of Ilona – was born about 1791 (as calculated on the basis of his age at death). His birth and baptism are not recorded in the Lekárovice register. I have, however, determined the probable identity of his parents in another way. The Lekárovice register includes this record of the death of a woman who lived in the same house where János and Anna (Meglisz) Meglisz lived (House #149 – identified as Anna's place of residence in her death record):

Meglész Ilona, Greek Catholic, widow of Hreháné [no given name is included], of House #149 in Lakárt, died on Dec. 7, 1853, at the age of 60 years.

Our assumption would naturally be that this woman was a sister either to János or to Anna – in whose house she resided. But we are in fact able to know that she was not a sister to Anna, since her baptismal entry in the Lekárovice register (written in Slavonic, in Cyrillic characters) shows a different set of parents than Anna's parents:

Elena, daughter of Miykhala Meglyes' and Elena, was baptized on July 20, 1794.

Our conclusion, therefore, is that she is almost definitely a sister of János – younger by about three years – and that her parents are János's parents. And with that in mind, this death entry in the Lekárovice records most probably refers to the mother of Ilona (Elena) and János:

Helena Meglisz, Greek Catholic, of Lakárt, died on July 23, 1811, at the age of 54 years.

In September 2015, I had occasion to do some additional searching, online, in the records of churches in other communities near Záhó. The baptism of Borbála Lörincz, wife of András Balyi, was found in the records of the Reformed Church of Pinkovce, Slovakia (formerly Ungpinkóc, Hungary), which go back to the year 1790. Pinkovce is a village located between Lekárovice and Záhó. Borbála's family actually lived in Lekárovice, which was included within the parish area of the Pinkovce Reformed congregation. "Borbálát," daughter of "Lörintz János," was baptized at Lakárt (Lekárovice) on Aug. 21, 1805. This means that her stated age at death (88, in 1890) was actually about four years off, which is not uncommon for the death records of this period. Borbála was apparently an important name in this family (likely the name of a grandmother), since she had had two older deceased sisters who also bore this name. "Borb.," the daughter of "Lörinsz Ján," was baptized on Apr. 7, 1798. It would seem that this child died soon after her baptism (although no record of death or burial was found for her in the Pinkovce records), since another "Borb.," daughter of "Lörinsz Ján," was baptized on March 24, 1799. This child was the "Borbálát," daughter of "Lörintz János," who was buried on Feb. 28, 1804, age 5 years.

The parents of these girls were married on Jan. 12, 1796. On that date, "Lörintz János," a resident of Lakárt, was united in marriage with "Ersébeth," single daughter of "Jakab András." "Lörintz János" was buried on Jan. 9, 1822, age 50 years. (The date of death, which was probably two days before the funeral, is torn from the record.) His stated age at death calculates to a birth in or around 1771. "Jakab Ersébeth," widow of "Lörintz János," died on Feb. 6, 1822, age 45 years, and was buried on Feb. 7. Her stated age at death calculates to a birth in or around 1775. Their other children included György (bp. Apr. 16, 1797) and Mihály (bp. Aug. 16, 1801). The marriage of the third and surviving daughter named Borbála, and András Balyi (my ancestors), is not recorded in the Pinkovce register.

A remarkable entry in the funeral register of the Pinkovce church book, records the burial of "Lörintz Mihály" of Lakárt (Lekárovce) on Jan. 6, 1809. The decedent's age was given as 113 years! This calculates to a birth in or around 1695. This man may very well have been the grandfather of János, and the great-grandfather of Borbála.

A question that I sought to answer in the course of this research, is what the ethnicity of my Bálint / Balyi and Meglisz / Meglész ancestors was. Were they Slovak, or Hungarian, or a combination of Slovak and Hungarian? Katherine (Warga) Ayers, a granddaughter of Mary (Balint) Warga, shared with me copies of several important documents regarding her grandmother's immigration and naturalization. When "Balint Maria" was listed among the steerage passengers who had arrived at New York on June 5, 1904, on the S.S. Slavonia (from Fiume, Hungary – now Rijeka, Croatia), that document stated that her "race or people" was Magyar. Several others on the list identified themselves as Slovak, so this would have been an option for Mary if she had wanted to describe herself in that way. (The manifest also stated that she had most recently been residing in "Zahar," and that her "calling or occupation" was that of a servant.) In Mary (Balint) Warga's Petition for Naturalization, however, dated January 7, 1938, she identified her "race" as "Slovak." The 1920 federal census entry for the Michael and Mary Warga family (in Somers, Connecticut) indicates that Mary's "mother tongue" was "Slavish," and that the "mother tongue" of each of her parents was likewise "Slavish." The 1930 federal census states that the language spoken in Mary's home before her coming to the United States was "Slovak." The 1920 federal census entry for Mary's brother George Balint (in Germantown, N.Y.) indicates that his "mother tongue" was "Magyar Hungary" and that the "mother tongue" of each of his parents was also "Magyar Hungary." (The census-taker probably intended his notation to be understood to mean "Magyar: the language spoken in Hungary.") The 1930 federal census indicates that the language spoken in George's home before his coming to the United States was "Czech." I have not been able to find John Balint – the brother of Mary and George – on the 1920 federal census. But John's entry in the 1930 federal census (in Ansonia, Connecticut) indicates that the language spoken in his home before his coming to the United States was "Slovak." (We can probably dismiss the statement in George Balint's 1930 census entry, that his family had spoken Czech, as the result of a misunderstanding on the part of the census-taker. George and his wife Suzanna each stated that year that they had been born in "Czechoslovakia." The census-taker may have assumed that the native language of all of Czechoslovakia was Czech, and wrote that down.)

The predominant testimony regarding the family's ethnicity is that they were Slovak. The fact that the territory of Slovakia was under the political, cultural, and linguistic dominance of Hungary and Hungarians during this time in history might explain why there are a couple "Magyar" references as well. We would not be surprised if ethnic Slovaks, living under such conditions, might absorb certain aspects of a Hungarian identity. But under these circumstances, it would be extremely unlikely that ethnic Hungarians would absorb certain aspects of a Slovak identity. It is also possible that the background of the Bálint / Balyi side of the family was ethnically Hungarian, while the background of the Meglisz / Meglész side of the family was ethnically Slovak. As a general rule, the Reformed Church – to which the Bálints and Balyis over several generations belonged – would usually be associated in this part of Europe with people of Hungarian ethnicity. By comparison, the Greek Catholic Church – to



which the Megliszes over several generations belonged – would usually be associated with people of Slovak and Rusyn ethnicity. And yet we must also take note of the fact that a large majority of the families in Záhör have historically identified themselves as Slovak and not as Hungarian – even during the time of Hungarian cultural and linguistic ascendancy. According to my grandfather, his father George Balint was able to speak five different languages: English, Slovak (or “Slavish”), Hungarian, German, and another one that he could not remember with certainty, but that he thought might have been Polish.

Beginning with my great-grandfather George (György) Balint, the following Ahnentafel can be constructed on the basis of the above research:

1. George BALINT, b. Záhör, Slovakia [Zahár, Hungary], 5 Feb. 1874; d. Stuyvesant Falls, N.Y., 27 Jan. 1957; m. New York, N.Y., 11 Dec. 1898, Suzanna Gabriž [b. Košariská, Slovakia (Kosaras, Hungary), 2 Aug. 1879; d. Maplewood, N.J., 13 Sept. 1964]. Son of 2 & 3 below. Religion: Reformed.
2. Mihály BÁLINT / BALYI, b. prob. Záhör, Slovakia [Zahár, Hungary], 1840; d. 1922; m. Lekárovce, Slovakia [Lakárt, Hungary], 28 July 1863, Ilona MEGLISZ. Son of 4 & 5 below. Religion: Reformed.
3. Ilona MEGLISZ, bp. Lekárovce, Slovakia [Lakárt, Hungary], 10 Sept. 1842; d. Záhör, Slovakia [Zahár, Hungary], 6 Jan. 1891. Daughter of 6 & 7 below. Religion: Greek Catholic.
4. András BALYI, b. & d. prob. Záhör, Slovakia [Zahár, Hungary]; m. Slovakia [Hungary], Borbála LÖRINCZ. Religion: Reformed.
5. Borbála LÖRINCZ, b. Lekárovce, Slovakia [Lakárt, Hungary]; bp. Pinkovce, Slovakia [Ungpinkóc, Hungary], 21 Aug. 1805; d. Záhör, Slovakia [Zahár, Hungary], 4 March 1890. Daughter of 10. & 11. below. Religion: Reformed.
6. János MEGLISZ / MEGLÉSZ, b. Lekárovce, Slovakia [Lakárt, Hungary], 1791; d. same place, 19 Feb. 1852; m. Slovakia [Hungary], Anna MEGLISZ / MEGLÉSZ. Son of 12 & 13 below. Religion: Greek Catholic.
7. Anna MEGLISZ / MEGLÉSZ, bp. Lekárovce, Slovakia [Lakárt, Hungary], 3 Feb. 1803; d. same place, 28 April 1855. Daughter of 14 & 15 below. Religion: Greek Catholic.
10. János LÖRINCZ, b. prob. Lekárovce, Slovakia [Lakárt, Hungary], 1771; d. same place 7 Jan. 1822; m. same place 12 Jan. 1796, Ersébet JAKAB. Religion: Reformed.
11. Ersébet JAKAB, b. prob. Lekárovce, Slovakia [Lakárt, Hungary], 1774; d. same place 6 Feb. 1822. Daughter of 22. & 23. below. Religion: Reformed.
12. Mihály MEGLÉSZ / MEGLYES', b. & d. prob. Lekárovce, Slovakia [Lakárt, Hungary]; m. prob. same place, Ilona –. Religion: Greek Catholic.
13. Ilona –, b. prob. Lekárovce, Slovakia [Lakárt, Hungary], 1757; d. same place, 23 July 1811. Religion: Greek Catholic.
14. György MEGLÉSZ / MEGLYES', b. & d. prob. Lekárovce, Slovakia [Lakárt, Hungary]; m. prob. same place, Ilona KONDAT'. Religion: Greek Catholic.

15. Ilona KONDAT', b. & d. prob. Lekárovce, Slovakia [Lakárt, Hungary]. Religion: Greek Catholic.

22. András JAKAB, b. & d. prob. Lekárovce, Slovakia [Lakárt, Hungary]; m. prob. same place — (name unknown; given name pos. Borbála). Religion: prob. Reformed.

23. — (name unknown; given name pos. Borbála) , b. & d. prob. Lekárovce, Slovakia [Lakárt, Hungary]. Religion: prob. Reformed.

The technical challenges of this research were significant. The various records were written, at different times in history, in Slavonic, Latin, and Hungarian. Terms and names were sometimes abbreviated. Different kinds of information were included at different times in history, and different formats in arranging the data were used during different periods. Each minister or priest who made entries in these registers had his own orthographic style and unique way of forming certain letters. Some of them wrote in Cyrillic characters (in both archaic and modern script); some of them wrote in Latin characters; and some of them wrote in a combination of both alphabets. Pages were torn and darkened with age. Sometimes the ink was faded, and sometimes it bled through to the back of the page, obscuring the entries there. But as I continued to peruse and digest these registers, and thereby to become more and more familiar with the names and family connections of the people whose life stories, and stories of faith, are recorded therein, it became easier to decipher and understand what those records were telling me. In a certain sense, I immersed myself in communities and in a culture that no longer exist. But while I was so immersed, I was gratified to be able to come to know these people, and to learn just a bit about their joys, their griefs, and their hopes. I went to these registers to look specifically for my ancestors. I did find them. But I also found their relatives, their friends, their pastors, and their fellow parishioners, whose stories were and are an integral part of my own ancestors' stories. This research validated the important genealogical maxim that a researcher should not look for individuals *per se*, but he should look for families. And then, within those family groups, he will probably find the individuals he is seeking. In hindsight I can see that my many years of experience in genealogical and historical research in general, as well as my eight years of living in eastern Europe (in Ukraine, from 1997 to 2005), prepared me in important ways for this project.

David Jay Webber

Phoenix, Arizona

January 23, 2016 (slightly revised on February 7, 2020, and again on August 22, 2020)



Reformed Church in Záhó (formerly Zahár), Slovakia  
*The village coat of arms is in the upper right*



Reformed Church in Tarnivtsi (formerly Tarnovci), Zakarpats'ka Oblast, Ukraine  
*sister church of the Reformed Church in Záhó*



Greek Catholic Church in Bežovce (formerly Bezö), Slovakia



Greek Catholic Church in Lekárovce (formerly Lakárt), Slovakia (exterior)



Greek Catholic Church in Lekárovce (formerly Lakárt), Slovakia (interior)



George and Suzanna (Gabriž) Balint on their wedding day (Dec. 11, 1898)



George Balint's wife Suzanna with their first five children





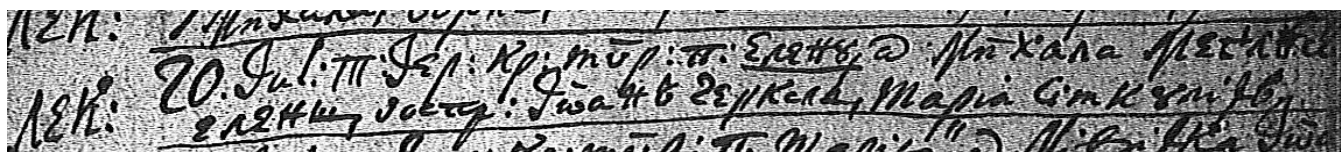
George and Suzanna Balint with their ten surviving children  
*Their oldest son (George Arnold) had died before this photograph was taken*



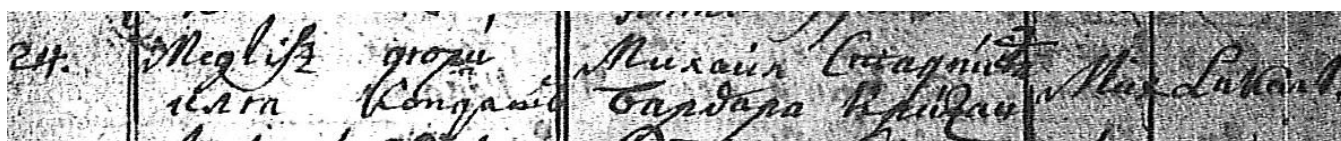
George and Suzanna (Gabriž) Balint (my great-grandparents)



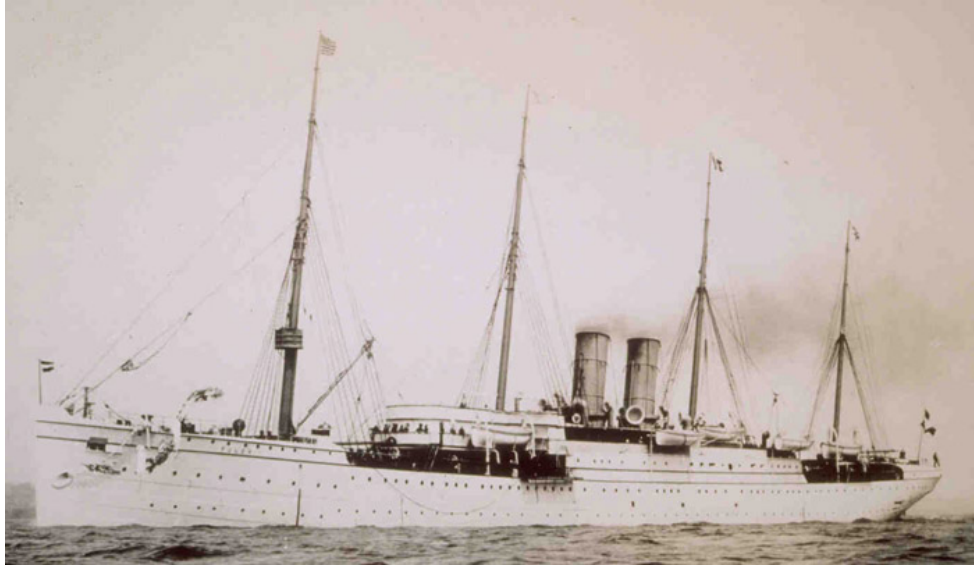
Suzanna (Gabriž) Balint (my great-grandmother) holding me on her lap, flanked by her son Paul W. Balint (my grandfather) and by Paul's daughter Joy Ann (Balint) Webber (my mother)



Baptism of Elena (Ilona), daughter of Miykhala Meglyes' (Mihály Meglész) and his wife Elena (Ilona), July 20, 1794, as recorded (in old Cyrillic script) in the Lekárovice Greek Catholic Church Register.  
These are my great-great-great-grandaunt and my great-great-great-great-grandparents.



Baptism of Miykh[aiyl] (Mihály), son of Meglisz Dyuriy (György) and his wife Ylha (Ilona) Kondat', Aug. 24, 1806, as recorded (in a mixture of modern Cyrillic and Latin script) in the Lekárovice Greek Catholic Church Register.  
These are my great-great-great-granduncle and my great-great-great-great-grandparents.



the Steamship Fulda, on which Mihály and György Bálint came to America in 1890