

FIRST SERBIAN SOKOL SLET IN AMERICA IN 1912

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ABSTRACT

Czech body workout system, better known as Sokol system, was founded in Czech Republic in 1862. Soon after it spread to all Slavic countries and other countries inhabited with Slavic people. That is how it came to area with Serbian people too. First Serbian Sokol societies in America started in the mid 1909, and their first meeting was held on 1st, 2nd and 3rd October in Gary (Indiana). At that meeting they formed Serbian Sokol Union in America and started the initiative for holding a First Serbian Sokol Slet (First Serbian Sokol competition) in America. Competition was held on June 22nd and 23rd 1912 in Chicago (Illinois) with presence of great number of spectators. Besides Serbian Sokols other Slavic Sokols have also participated, as also educational, gymnastics and charity societies.

Different primary and secondary historical sources were reviewed and analyzed, most of all sources originated in the time of First Serbian Sokol Slet (competition), as also the ones originated later.

Keywords: Sokols, župa (union), Sokol societies, Sokol Slets (gatherings), competitions

INTRODUCTION

Czech body workout system, better known as Sokol system, was founded in Czech Republic in 1862. Soon after it spread to all Slavic countries and other countries inhabited with Slavic people. That is how it came to area with Serbian people too. First Serbian sokol societies in America started in the mid 1909, and by the time of forming the Serbian Sokol Union in America (SSUA) in 1911, there were eight sokols societies: Cincinnati (1909), Detroit (1909), Gary (1910), Barberton (1910), Akron (1910), Indiana Harbor (1910) and Sent Luis (1911). Their first meeting was held on 1st, 2nd and 3rd October 1911 in Gary (Indiana). At that meeting they formed Serbian Sokol Union in America with all named Sokol Societies, except the one from Sent Luis. They also started the initiative for holding a First Serbian Sokol Slet (gathering) in America. Slet was held on June 22nd and 23rd 1912 in Chicago (Illinois) with presence of great number of spectators. Besides Serbian Sokols other Slavic Sokols also participated, as also educational, gymnastics and charity societies.

The main subject of this paper is Serbian Sokolism in America, and the goal is to highlight what preceded the First Serbian Sokol Slet in America, as also when it was held and what was its program.

METHODOLOGY

Historical methodology was used in this paper. Different primary and secondary historical sources were reviewed and analyzed; most of all sources originated in the time of First Serbian Sokol Slet, as also the ones originated later.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**Preparations for the Slet**

Initiative for the First Serbian Sokol Slet in America (FSSS) was launched at the first meeting of the Serbian Sokols in America that took place on 1st, 2nd and 3rd October 1911 in the premises of Serbian Sokol society in Gary (Indiana). On Monday, 2nd October the same year, delegates of Serbian Sokol Societies began working at 9 a.m. Adopted agenda had six points, and at number five they discussed about going public with the work of Serbian Sokol Societies in America, and decided unanimously to hold the first Serbian Sokol Slet in America in Chicago on first Sunday of Vidovdan (30th June 1912). Newly elected government of SSUA, led by the provost Luka R. Grkovic, managed the preparations for the Slet.¹⁵

From that day began intensive preparations for the Slet: a committee to find place for Slet was appointed as also a Board for finding music; exercises and regulations for Slet were written, invitations were sent to all Serbian Sokols in America, to prominent Serbs (Mihailo Pupin, Pajo Radosavljevic), Board of the Slet and Main Board of the Slet administration were appointed, dress-code and code of conduct for seniority and leaders of Serbian Sokols were written.¹⁶

First Serbian Sokol Slet in Chicago

The first Serbian Sokol Slet in America, as changed in the meantime, was held on 22nd and 23rd June 1912 in Chicago. On Saturday, 22nd June of that year, in the morning, the Serbian Sokols and other members of the Slet gathered and after a fraternal meeting headed to "National Grove" in North 40 Avenue and from there to a place where the Slet will be held. "The day was wonderful, almost like appointed for that purpose, and the Sokols were cheerful, especially the athlete members, because it was the day when they can show what they've been working for."¹⁷

15 Петар О. Стијачић: Први састанак Српских Сокола у Америци, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 1; бр. 1, Њујорк, 1. новембар 1911, стр. 10.

16 For more information consult: Прва сједница Српске Соколске Жупе у Америци, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 1, бр. 1, Њујорк, 1. новембар 1911., стр. 12.; Сједница Српске Соколске Жупе у Америци, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 1, бр. 2, Њујорк, 1. децембар 1911, стр. 28.; Записник сједнице Српске Соколске Жупе у Америци, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 2, бр. 1, Њујорк, 1. јануар 1912, стр. 9.; Записник сједнице Српске Соколске Жупе у Америци, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 2, бр. 2, Њујорк, 1. фебруар 1912, стр. 29.; Петар Н. Кумановац: Српским соколима у Америци, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 2, бр. 2, Њујорк, 1. фебруар 1912, стр. 19-20.; Српска вежба палицом, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 2, бр. 2, Њујорк, 1. фебруар 1912, стр. 20 – 26.; Лука Р. Грковић и Милан Муслин: Пропис за Први српски соколски слет у Чикагу (22. и 23. јуна 1912.), Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 2, бр. Видовдански број, Њујорк, јун 1912, стр. 20 – 24.; Лука Р. Грковић и Милан Муслин: Пропис за Први српски соколски слет у Чикагу (22. и 23. јуна 1912.), Организација Српскога Соколства на слету, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 2, бр. 3, Њујорк, 1. март 1912, стр. 35 – 39.; Записник сједнице Српске Соколске Жупе у Америци, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 2, бр. 4, Њујорк, 1. април 1912, стр. 60.; Просте вјежбе, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 2, бр. 4, Њујорк, 1. април 1912, стр. 63.; Лука Р. Грковић: Српским Соколима у Америци, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 2, бр. 4, Њујорк, 1. април 1912, стр. 50.; Први српски соколски слет у Чикагу, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 2, бр. 4, Њујорк, 1. април 1912, стр. 52.; Записник сједнице Српске Соколске Жупе у Америци, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 2, бр. 5, Њујорк, 1. мај 1912, стр. 75 – 77.; Са сједнице Главне Управе Слета, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 2, бр. 5, Њујорк, 1. мај 1912, стр. 74.; Лука Р. Грковић и Милан Муслин: Позив на Први Српски Соколски Слет у Чикагу, Ил. на дан 22. и 23. јуна 1912. године, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 2, бр. 5, Њујорк, 1. мај 1912, стр. 72 – 73.; Записник сједнице Српске Соколске Жупе у Америци, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 2, бр. 6, Њујорк, 1. јуни 1912, стр. 90.; Адреса Првог Српског Соколског Слета у Чикагу, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 2, бр. 6, Њујорк, 1. јуни 1912, стр. 93.; Паја Р. Радосављевић: Поштованом Господину Луки Р. Грковићу, старјешини Српске Соколске Жупе у Америци, Гери, Индијана, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 2, бр. 6, Њујорк, 1. јуни 1912, стр. 88.; Први слет и Прва скупштина Српских Соколова у Чикагу, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 2, бр. 6, Њујорк, 1. јуни 1912, стр. 81.; Лука Р. Грковић: Пропис за старјешинство и вође српских соколских дружина пригодном првог српског соколског слета, 22. и 23. јуна у Чикагу, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 2, бр. 6, Њујорк, 1. јуни 1912, стр. 87.

17 Први српски соколски слет у Чикагу, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 2, бр. 7 и 8, Њујорк, 1. август 1912, стр. 105.

At 10 a.m. all participants gathered in the park. First, they were greeted by provost of SSUA, Luka R. Grković, then spoke SSUA leader, Petar N. Kumanovac. After that the Sokols parted their ways to prepare for the show.

Sokols from the following Sokol Societies in SSUA participated in the show: Barberton (7), Gary (7), Cleveland (6), Cincinnati (7) and Chicago (27). From other Sokol Unions: Czech Sokol "Havlicek Tyrs", Czech Sokol "Oak Park", Slovenian Nitrin Sokols with youth and female Sokols and Romanian Gymnastic Society "La Speranta".

Among others present were also: Luka R. Grkovic, provost of the SSUA; Milan Muslin, secretary of SSUA; Mato Ćuk, treasurer; head of the s.s. from Barberton, Vasa Ivanov and members: Milorad Andjelic, Ljubomir Glavaski, secretary Nikola Jurisic and Alexandra Pavlov; head of the s.s. Gary, Mihailo M. Ducic; head from s.s. Detroit, Njegovan Bogdanov; head of the s.s. Cleveland, Stevo Savic and members, Zivko Milovanovic and Franjo Tomic; head of the s.s. New York, Petar O. Stijacic; head of the s.s. Cincinnati, Milan Glisic and members: Josa Amaljev, Jasa Zivkov and Sredoje Tomic; head of the s.s. South Sharon (Farrell) Pavle Mrdaljevic and members Bozo Djurdjevic and Dusan Milojevic; head of the s.s. Chicago, Petar Sekulovic; members from s.s. Akron Lazar Sekeric and from Steubenville Milan Duda.

Members of the Steering Committee of the Slet were also present: Luka R. Grkovic, Scepan Grujicic, Mihailo M. Ducic, Uros Ducic, Jovo T. Maric, Jovo Osilic, Dusan B. Popovic, Vlado Savovic, Petar Sekulovic, Ilija Tarailo, Dusan Celovic and Mitar Sulic.

From the invited guests was present Mihailo I. Pupin, professor at the Columbia University, Honorary consul of Kingdom of Serbia in New York, President of Union of Serbs "Sloga" and Serbian Cultural and Charity Fond. The editor of Czech Sokol Journal "Borec" was also present, and he was making notes about the happenings at the Slet.

The referees, mostly "[...] teachers and leaders – experts, who made notes and prepared the marks all the time"¹⁸ were Czech Sokols: Kostlan, Čermak, Rajman, Vermoch and Hegver, from „Sokol Slavsky” Z.F.T.; Styublo, member of „Sokol Plzensky” N.J.S. and S. Klaric, member of Croatian Sokol.

The competition started at 11 a.m. and with lunch break lasted until 5 p.m. First started the youth from s.s. Chicago, and after them senior members were performing their exercises. The competitors from s.s. Barberton performed simple exercises with bats and looms. Sokols from Gary: exercises with spears, maces, cannonballs, simple exercises and exercises with equipment. Sokols from s.s. Cleveland performed Czech simple exercises, and Sokols from Chicago: exercises with spears, simple exercises and exercises with equipment. Exercises of all Sokols were also planned, but were not performed because all Sokols could not learn them in time. After competition and dinner Serbian Sokols and other participants "[...] were celebrating and dancing until late."¹⁹

At the end of the first day Sokols won following prizes:

- For simple exercises first place won Sokols from s.s. Chicago, second from s.s. Barberton and third from s.s. Cleveland and youth from s.s. Chicago.
- For exercises with spears – first place Sokols from s.s. Gary, second from s.s. Chicago.
- For exercises with equipment the best were Sokols from Gary.
- Sokols from Cincinnati won third place for exercises with cannonballs.

The prize was wreat with golden writings delivered to heads of Sokol societies. The provost of SSUA Luka R. Grkovic and his deputy Petar Sekulovic delivered the prizes on Sunday, June 23rd the same year, around 3 p.m., after the first performance of Slet program.

On Sunday, 23rd June the same year, near Serbian Orthodox Church in Wicker Park, at 9 a.m. gathered Serbian and Slovenian Sokols and educational and charity societies. After the formation of the parade, at 9:30 a.m., when the music struck up "Serb happily goes to solders", cortege headed to the venue of the competition. At the head of the procession was the music and behind her car where were: provost of the SSUA, Luka R. Grkovic, prof. Mihajlo I. Pupin and several members of the Board of Administration of the Slet and Management of Union. Behind them were: Slavic and Serbian Sokol societies with standard-bearers and the elders, the Sokol music and charities.

The procession passed down the Wood street and Webster Avenue up until Clybourn Avenue, and then through the Serbian colony near Clybourn Avenue, "[...] which was laden with Serbian and American flags and various inscriptions,"²⁰ and proceeded to Belmont and Western Avenue, all the way to Elston, and from there by special trams they drove to the park where the Slet was held. The whole procession with music went through the park and stopped at a certain place. Provost of the SSUA welcomed all present, saying he is happy to see at the First Serbian Sokol Slet "[...] this many brothers, Serbs and Slovenes"²¹ and because "[...] he sees dear guest and its member mr. professor Mihajlo I. Pupin"²² who was, for his contribution to the Serbian people and for the development of the Serbian Soko, named for honorary provost by the SSUA. All participants welcomed the decision loudly with words: Hail!²³ Upon completion of the Luka R. Grković's speech were lunch, rest and celebration.

At 1 p.m. there was a banquet in honour of Sokols, prominent Slavs, Serbs and other guests. At the end of the banquet to all attendees, around 50 of them, addressed professor Mihajlo I. Pupin with chosen words, in which, among other things, he said that the Slet is extremely important, not only for Serbian Sokolism, but also for the entire Serbian people; that he was glad that Sokolism was accepted by Serbs in America and that he was particularly glad, happy and joyful that he was chosen by the Serbian Sokols as a honorary provost and that "[...] this was his dearest distinction and honour, this one received from the Serbian Sokols"²⁴, and finally he promised to do everything for the further development of Sokolism so it could rise to the level it deserves.

At 2.30 p.m. they started performing exercises. First performed youth of s.s. Chicago with simple exercise, then were awarded prizes for the first day of the competition, and after that Sokols performed their exercises in the following order: exercises with spears – members of s.s. Gary; simple exercises – Sokols from Chicago; exercises with maces - Sokols from Gary; simple exercises - Czech Sokols "Havlicek Tyrs", simple exercises - Sokols from Barberton; exercises with sticks – Sokols from Cincinnati. Upon completion of the exercises, with the approval of the Administration of Slet, members of the gymnastic society "La Speranta" from Romania, dressed in folk outfits, perform their folk dances.

In addition to the above mentioned exercises, there were also competitions in stone throwing, jumping from the spot and running 300 feet in length. Djordjo Vujovic from s.s. Chicago was the best in stone throwing and running, and for that he received the award of 20\$ in gold, and for the jumping from the spot, also 20\$ in gold got Djordjo Vujovic and Milan Rebraca, leader of the s.s. Gary. After that the celebration continued with singing and dancing up until 11 p.m., when all participants of the Slet happily parted their ways.

CONCLUSION

Serbian Sokol movement in America began in 1909 when first Serbian Sokol societies began to appear. Until October 1911, when Serbian Sokol Union in America was founded, eight Sokol societies were already formed. Initiative for organizing the First Serbian Sokol Slet (gathering) in America was launched at the first meeting of Serbian Sokol societies on October 2nd 1911 in Gary. From that day

18 Ibid, pp. 105 – 106.

19 Ibid, p. 107.

20 Ibid.

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.

23 Почасни старјешина Српских Сокола у Америци, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 2, бр. 7 и 8, Њујорк, 1. август 1912, стр. 115.

24 Први српски соколски слет у Чикагу, Соко, лист Српских Сокола у Америци, год. 2, бр. 7 и 8, Њујорк, 1. август 1912, стр. 109.

began intensive preparations for the Slet.

Slet was held on 22nd and 23rd June 1912 in Chicago with the presence of a large number of observers, and it was attended by not only Serbian, but also other Slavic Sokol and educational, gymnastics, charity and other societies. Among other observers and many participants, the Slet also attended the honorary provost of SSUA, distinguished professor of Columbia University, Mihajlo I. Pupin.

Upon the completion of the Sokol competition on June 23rd 1912 continued celebration, singing and dancing up until 11 p.m., when all participants of the Slet happily parted their ways.

We hope that this paper will encourage researchers in the field of the history of physical education for further research on this interesting and under-treated field of history of Sokolism in America.

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