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"BETWEEN THE EARTH AND THE SKIES": THE CHALLENGES
TO CATHOLIC INSTITUTION-BUILDING IN PENNSYLVANIA'S
CROATIAN COMMUNITIES, 1894-1924

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**"BETWEEN THE EARTH AND THE SKIES":
THE CHALLENGES TO CATHOLIC INSTITUTION-BUILDING
IN PENNSYLVANIA'S CROATIAN COMMUNITIES, 1894-1924**

A Thesis in

History

by

Michael J. Colarusso

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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the role of ethnic parishes in the assimilation of Pennsylvania's Croatian immigrants. In addition to synthesizing the works of several scholars, it draws upon ethnic newspapers, fraternal society minutes, and oral interviews, as well as the parish records and anniversary programs of Croatian Catholic churches established in Pennsylvania between 1894 and 1924. The experience of the Croatians, a large but little-studied ethnic group, contradicts a widely-held historiographical conclusion citing parishes as the chief assimilative agent among Catholic immigrants.

To understand why Croatians relied less on churches during the assimilation process, an examination of cultural, intellectual, political, social, economic, and religious factors reveals points of divergence between their experience and that of other immigrant groups. An assimilation model developed by Silvano Tomasi provides the framework for this comparison.

The thesis concludes that several unique factors contributed to the anomalous religious organization of the Croatians, including a higher illiteracy and poverty rate relative to other immigrants that stagnated economic mobility and limited funds for church-building; an extremely high return migration rate--higher than that among many other Catholic immigrants--that reduced Croatian commitment to permanent institution-building in Pennsylvania; and a less certain national identity rooted in the complex Balkan *milieu* and the rise of *Jugoslavenstvo* (the Yugoslav idea) which made Croatian-American community leaders reluctant to equate religion with ethnicity. The last factor especially revealed itself in the schism between those Croatians--often led by priests--who equated Croatian ethnicity with Catholicism and those who advocated a secular approach to ethnic institution-building.

The timing of Croatian migration to Pennsylvania also influenced religious organization. Croats arrived just when the growing steel industry demanded unskilled labor. Unlike unionized coal-mining--dominated by Poles, Hungarians, Slovaks, and others--non-unionized steel work, which employed a high percentage of Croats, demanded more hours, paid less, and brought even greater hazards. Croatians found themselves with less time and fewer financial resources to commit to church-building and worship. Moreover, benevolent societies, especially the National Croatian Society (NCS), successfully competed against churches for the immigrants' limited time and dollars. The much-needed workers' insurance benefits provided by the society to Croatian laborers guaranteed its continued popularity, growth and viability.

Unlike the Poles, Bohemians, Slovaks, and Slovenes, who established vibrant Catholic fraternal societies by 1885, secularism marked the NCS. Early on, those favoring a nonsectarian approach gained control of the society, prohibiting it from providing fund-raising support to new Catholic parishes just as a sense of anomie reached its height among Croatian immigrants. Thus, when the immigrants turned inward to escape conflict with the host society, the NCS stood ready to ameliorate their discomfiture, offering social, cultural, and athletic pursuits that helped ease their sense of isolation from mainstream American society.

The fundamental conclusion of this thesis is that the National Croatian Society became the locus of Croatian community life in Pennsylvania, fulfilling the assimilative role performed by Catholic parishes for many other immigrant groups. In contrast, Croatian parishes bore responsibility for providing an education to immigrant children that stressed their cultural and linguistic heritage, as well as for preserving a strident nationalism that eschewed "Yugoslavism" in favor of a free and independent Croatia.

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"I am a Catholic Christian, And the Holy Church is my Mother, And thank God for all of eternity, That I am allowed to call myself her son. Before the entire world I acknowledge her, and my faith I proclaim loudly. I shall be thankful to God for eternity, that I am a Catholic Christian."

--poem from a Croatian schoolbook, 1879

"our radically and irreligiously inclined elements....began to vomit out their destructive, revolutionary, atheistic propaganda....their efforts...were not without...success....winning over a considerable segment of our working people...their false promises stirred up considerably those of us who remained steadfast and loyal to our God and to our national patriotic and religious ideals..."

--Pamphlet of the Croatian Catholic Union, discussing early Croatian religious life in the United States

INTRODUCTION

Between 1880 and 1924, almost 27,000,000 European immigrants arrived in the United States.¹ By 1896, this new wave of immigration had assumed an ethnic character unlike that of years past. No longer predominately Irish, German, British, or Scandinavian, two thirds of the immigrants came from Southern and Eastern Europe.² Italians, Jews, and many Slavic peoples derisively labeled by contemporary Americans as "slabs," "hunkies," or "Polacks" migrated in record numbers, and comprised a majority of all arrivals until the passage of immigration restriction laws in 1921 and 1924.³

Slavs became the largest component of this immigration, and most of them were from the Austro-Hungarian Empire.⁴ Prior to its dissolution in the wake of World War I, all Slavic nationalities--except Russians and Bulgarians--lived within the Habsburg Kingdom. Of these, the Poles, Slovaks, and Croats came to the United States in

¹ Niles Carpenter, *Immigrants and Their Children, 1920* (U.S. Bureau of the Census, Census Monographs, VII, Washington, D.C., U.S. Government Printing Office, 1927). See also James P. Shenton, "Ethnicity and Immigration," *The New American History*, Foner ed., (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 1990), pp. 254-258.

² Shenton, p. 258. See also Branko Mita Čolaković, *Yugoslav Migrations to America* (San Francisco, Robert D. Reed, 1973), p. 15.

³ Gerald Shaughnessy, *Has the Immigrant Kept the Faith?*, (New York, the MacMillan Company, 1925), pp. 271-273. The 1921 law was called the Johnson Act or the "Emergency" Quota Act. It effectively ended unrestricted immigration from Europe, limiting the annual number of new immigrants to 357,803. National quotas insured that few of any future immigrants would be southern or eastern Europeans. The Immigration Restriction Law of 1924 was characterized as "permanent," further reducing the annual quota of new immigrants to 164,667. Its formula for determining national quotas was even more biased in favor of northern Europe and the United Kingdom than the 1921 law; two percent of each foreign nationality residing in the United States in 1890 could enter annually. Since the greatest migration of Slavs, Jews, Italians, and Greeks did not really begin until after 1890, the law immediately stanching the flow of people from southern and eastern Europe.

⁴ Josephine Wtulich, *American Xenophobia and the Slav Immigrant*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1994), p. 23. By 1900, Slavs were 60 percent of new arrivals; Anglo-Saxons had declined to 14 percent.

greater numbers than any others, and more settled in Pennsylvania than anywhere else.⁵

While the Polish and Slovak immigration experience has been studied in some detail, that of the Croatians remains comparatively untouched, particularly from the perspective of religious history. This thesis begins to redress that imbalance by examining Croatians in Pennsylvania from 1894-1924, exploring why they established churches and parishes, which factors influenced that process, and how those factors shaped the role of the parishes.

The ethnic parish did not seem to enjoy the primacy in Croatian communities that it did among other immigrants. A comparison illustrates the point: by 1910, twelve parishes (six of them in Pennsylvania) served the perhaps 400,000 Croatians in the United States.⁶ Meanwhile, the Poles had established over 500 parishes, the Italians more than 220, and the Slovaks 120.⁷ While these ethnic groups were larger than the Croatians, numerically smaller immigrant groups also established more parishes in the same time period; the Bohemians (Czechs) established 166 parishes while the Slovenians opened twenty of their own. Orthodox Slavs seemed equally devoted to

⁵Emily Greene Balch, *Our Slavic Fellow Citizens*, (New York: Charities Publication Committee, 1910), p. 256; The U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth U.S. Census*, (Washington, D.C., 1913), vol. I, table 21, pp. 992-993; *The Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, (Thermstrom, ed., Cambridge, Massachusetts, Harvard University Press, 1980), p. 937. For the decade ending in 1908, 209,697 Poles, 169,116 Slovaks, and 121,311 Croatians & Slovenians had migrated to Pennsylvania. Because of the combined entry data for Slovenes and Croats, it is difficult to know exactly how many Croatians arrived in Pennsylvania. However, migration data from steamship agencies indicates that Croatians were a majority of the combined Croat/Slovene count, probably accounting for 60-70% of the total after 1900. According to the thirteenth U.S. census, this marked a reversal of trends from the preceding decade, when more Slovenes than Croats arrived. Nationally, there were still more Slovenes than Croatians in 1910, but they were outnumbered in Pennsylvania because the majority of Slovenian immigrants concentrated in Cleveland while Croatians massed in Allegheny, PA. Croats were thus the third largest Slavic group in Pennsylvania, with the Ruthenians and then Slovenes following.

⁶George Prpić, *The Croatian Immigrants in America*, (New York, Philosophical Library, 1971), p. 192.

⁷Balch, pp. 386-387. Note: The official American Catholic Directory of Churches for 1909-1910 listed 408 Polish parishes, less than Balch's figure but still high.

their churches; by 1910 the Russians had founded sixty-six parishes, the Ruthenians 108.⁸

A consideration of parish-to-parishioner ratios is even more illuminating. By 1910 there was roughly one ethnic parish for every 18,000-21,000 Croats in Pennsylvania (nationally, the ratio was even higher, at approximately one parish for every 33,000 Croats). By comparison, the Slovenians had established a parish for each 5,000 residents, the Poles one for each 4,000, the Slovaks one for each 3,300, and the Bohemians one for each 3,000.⁹ In both aggregate and per capita terms, Croats lagged behind other Catholics in parish establishment.

Apparently, the pace of Croatian religious organization did not accelerate over time. By 1916, there were only 22 churches in the United States using the Croatian language at all. Fourteen used Croatian exclusively, 5 used Croatian and English, and 3 used Croatian as well as other "Slavic" languages. The total membership in these churches was 47,693. Even if every member in these parishes were Croatian, and they were not, they would still represent no more than 10 percent of Croats in the United States (or 30 percent of all Croats in Pennsylvania). While a certain number of Croatian immigrants must have joined non-Croatian parishes, the language barrier likely made this a rare occurrence. Allowing for the probability that some Croats were identified as Austrians or Hungarians, these figures still seem to suggest that many Croats did not participate regularly in parish life.¹⁰

⁸Wtulich, pp. 104-105. Croats are compared against non-Catholic Russians and Ruthenians to demonstrate that most Slavs, regardless of their specific Christian faith, were devoted to church-building in the United States. In fairness, it should be pointed out that the parishes of Russians, Ruthenians, Ukrainians, and other immigrants affiliated with the Great Mother Church in Russia received financial support from Europe, whereas Catholic immigrants had to raise parish funds themselves.

⁹Balch, pp. 280, 386-87. Figures based upon lower-end population estimates for Slovaks and Poles, divided by the number of churches they established by 1910.

¹⁰Shaughnessy, pp. 218-219. Compiled from data in the American Catholic Church's *Religious Bodies*, 1916, Part II, p. 654, and Part I, pp. 81-82.

This is puzzling in light of the central assimilative role ascribed to parishes by historians and sociologists alike. The mystery deepens when considering that in Pennsylvania, Croats lived alongside Poles, Slovenes, Slovaks, and Bohemians, were subject to the same social and economic forces, and yet apparently ascribed a lower priority to religious organization than did their immigrant neighbors.¹¹ No one has adequately explained the reasons for this striking difference.¹²

Scholarly belief in religion's centrality to immigrant life stems almost entirely from case studies of much larger ethnic groups. Lloyd Warner and Leo Srole analyzed religious behavior in a predominately Irish, Polish, and French-Canadian immigrant community --"Yankee City," a pseudonym for an undisclosed New England industrial town--and concluded that

[Ethnic parishes served as] the first line of defense behind which immigrants could organize themselves and...preserve their group...identity....The church structure to an ethnic group threatened with loss of identity serve[d] *more than any other structure* to organize the group as a community system.¹³

Warner and Srole gave impetus to Silvano Tomasi, who concluded in his examination of New York City Italians that "the ethnic parish was born as a compromise between the demands of immediate assimilation and the resistance of immigrants to abandon their traditional religiosity." ¹⁴ In other words, ethnic parishes protected

¹¹ Ibid., pp. 386-387; also Richard Linkh, *American Catholicism and European Immigrants*, (New York, Center for Migration Studies, 1975), p. 108. The low number of Croatian churches has caused writers such as George Prpić, Kenneth Miller, Josephine Wtulich, and Monsignor M.D. Krmpotić--an influential Croatian-American priest--to characterize Croats as less faithful to Catholicism than other European immigrants.

¹² Prpić did speculate that perhaps a lack of Croatian clergy in the United States caused the difference. However, by itself, the shortage of priests does not adequately explain the fewer numbers of Croatian churches; other immigrants experienced shortages of native clergymen and still organized religiously on a scale well beyond that achieved by the Croats.

¹³ Lloyd W. Warner and Leo Srole, *The Social Systems of American Ethnic Groups*, (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1949), pp. 160-218. Italics mine.

¹⁴ Silvano Tomasi, *Piety and Power: The Role of the Italian Parishes in the New York Metropolitan Area, 1880-1930*, (New York, Center for Migration Studies, 1975), p. 3.

immigrants from the hostility of a host population that wanted them to surrender quickly their native culture and "foreign" ways.

Historian Richard Linkh also examined the role of the ethnic parish, focusing upon the immigrant assimilation policies of the American Catholic Church's predominately Irish hierarchy. Linkh synthesized the religious experiences of Poles and Italians.¹⁵ Much like Warner, Srole, and Tomasi, he concluded that the ethnic parish provided comfort, serving as the newcomers' primary defense against a society so intolerant of cultural pluralism that even the Church feared to champion immigrant social and religious needs.

Reinforcing the findings of the focused case studies of Tomasi, Linkh, Warner, and Srole, immigration historians Oscar Handlin and John Bodnar concluded that ethnic parishes were the key institutions in the transplanted immigrants' society, preserving ethnic identity and providing solace.¹⁶ Handlin argued that

The more thorough the separation from the other aspects of the old life, the greater was the hold of the religion that alone survived the transfer. Struggling against heavy odds to save something of the old ways, the immigrants directed into their faith the whole weight of their longing to be connected with the past.¹⁷

¹⁵Linkh provided an excellent overview of the American Catholic Church's policy towards immigrants. Interestingly, he also discussed the religious character of differing ethnic groups, advancing a theory--also held within the American Catholic hierarchy around 1900--regarding two types of Catholic immigrant groups; the "self-supporting type," and the "missionary type." The self-supporting groups were identified as the Poles "and other Slavs," who built many churches, schools, etc. The missionary group contained Bohemians and Italians because of their tendency to convert to Protestantism or otherwise fall away from Catholicism. Linkh's theory implies that the Croats were prolific (Slavic) church builders, despite the fact that they established fewer parishes than either Bohemians or Italians. His book made no mention of Croats, although the numerically fewer Bohemians, Lithuanians and Slovenes were discussed.

¹⁶See John Bodnar, *The Transplanted: A History of Immigrants in Urban America*, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1985), pp. 144-67, or Oscar Handlin, *The Uprooted*, 2nd Edition, (Boston, Little, Brown & Co., 1973), pp. 105-28.

¹⁷Handlin, pp. 105-106.

Bodnar agreed and sought a more thorough explanation for "the feverish level of religious affairs among newcomers." Understanding that churches fulfilled more than spiritual needs, he noted that

[While] much of the initial impetus toward immigrant church formation involved a desire to hold on to traditions, which appeared threatened....Immigrant church communities were also founded on premigration regional and kinship associations which served as powerful inducements to keep them intact....In a sense, because they were an extension of communal ties, they continued to serve important social functions.¹⁸

In summary, many authors have identified religion--embodied by ethnic churches--as at the heart of a reasonably consistent pattern of immigrant community organization. However, the Croatians did not hold to the pattern. Both nationally and in Pennsylvania, they established a relatively small handful of churches. In some very large Croatian immigrant communities, such as Ambridge and Monessen, Croats did not even establish churches until many years after the great immigration to Pennsylvania, too late for the churches to fulfill an assimilative role.

It is not immediately evident why the Croatian experience followed a path unlike that of other immigrants, but applying Silvano Tomasi's immigrant assimilation model should reveal some of the reasons for their meager religious institution-building. Developed during his study of New York's Italians, Tomasi's model progresses through three phases, each predicting the needs and motivations of ethnic groups at key moments during their transition to life in a new country.

In *the first phase*, the new immigrants play a marginal role in the host society; they have limited economic power, they suffer discrimination, and experience intense social and emotional conflict in their contact with the native-born population. The newcomers feel alienated from the established religious institutions of their new society, which seem

¹⁸Bodnar, pp. 146-148.

radically different from the almost mystic, culturally imbued religious practices of central and southern Europe. This contributes to the immigrants' initial preference for isolation and their desire to build their own parishes quickly.¹⁹

In *the second phase*, a transition occurs. As the group permanently establishes itself in its new country, a stronger collective identity and expanding economic capabilities provide it with sufficient strength to "bargain" with the host society, to win fairer treatment through labor organization, the legal system, or unified economic and political action. This phase is characterized by the rapid growth of ethnic institutions. Usually, church-building begins very early in this phase, as soon as the ethnic group has sufficient capital and organization to create "sanctuaries" safe from conflict with the host society. In addition to providing refuge, the parish helps strengthen national ethnic identity among peoples divided by regional, provincial, economic, or political differences carried with them from Europe.

The final phase heralds achievement. The immigrant group attains sufficient cultural integration and acceptance, as well as economic mobility and success, to participate on an equal footing with all other members of the host society. In other words, the immigrants achieve total social and cultural assimilation.²⁰

Tomasi's model is a viable social science tool; it possesses the flexibility needed to study disparate peoples. While it predicts uniform psychological needs among newcomers, it does not forecast rigidly how each immigrant society will attempt to fulfill those needs. For example, when establishing institutions after experiencing intense discomfiture among the native population, immigrants have several options. They may turn to social halls, benevolence societies, churches, schools, banks, saloons, newspapers, or any combination of the above. While most immigrants of the period

¹⁹Tomasi, p. 5.

²⁰Ibid., pp. 6-10.

used the same tools to assuage their sense of social displacement, Tomasi's model acknowledges that important social and cultural differences may influence the behavior of each ethnic community in the United States, particularly within the realm of worship. The role of organized religion in a transplanted society derives as much force from Old World traditions as it does from New World experiences, neither of which were uniform among the groups flowing into the United States between 1880 and 1924.

But which important elements of their social and cultural heritage separated the Croatians from other European immigrants? Does a lack of religious fervor really explain the paucity of their parish development in Pennsylvania? If the ethnic church played such a pivotal role in other immigrant communities, why did it not among the Croatians? If the parish was a chief agent of resocialization, conflict resolution, and cultural preservation in other immigrant communities, how did so many Croatians do without it? How did they successfully assimilate and simultaneously preserve their ethnic identity without relying upon a strong religious foundation as other Catholic immigrants did?

Another line of questioning emerges when considering the relative dearth of parishes among Croatians in Pennsylvania. Should the number of churches even be considered as a barometer of faith? ²¹ Is it possible that ethnic churches were just as central to the Croatian assimilation experience as they were in other groups? If so, how did a handful of churches successfully minister to the needs of hundreds of thousands, when other Catholic immigrants established many more churches to fulfill the same social, spiritual, and assimilative needs? Did Croatians seek to establish more parishes but perhaps become frustrated in their efforts by forces which remain unclear? Did Croatians turn away from Catholicism? Did other institutions supplant the role of the ethnic parish in

²¹ For a listing of the Croatian Catholic churches/parishes established in Pennsylvania, see *Appendix A* of this thesis.

the Croatian experience? Considered within the context of the Tomasi assimilation model, the answers to these questions can impart new lessons about the role of religious institutions in Croatian assimilation while simultaneously clarifying the past of an obscure yet fascinating people.

However, studying the Croats is no easy task. Relatively little scholarship has been devoted to them. Some histories quickly surrender to the impulse to group all South Slavs together. While correctly identifying a shared racial heritage among Serbs, Slovenes, Croats, and others, these studies fail to acknowledge each group's distinct cultural, national, and historical identity, emphasizing superficial similarities between them while ignoring fundamental differences. Most scholarship of this type reaches conclusions regarding nationality *based upon common language*, defining the tongue of the Croats and Serbs as either "Serbo-Croatian" or "Croato-Serbian."²²

This treatment of the South Slavs as an ethnically homogeneous, religiously heterogeneous mass is not confined to society or academia; it has been echoed in American governmental circles for decades. For years, census and immigration records lumped together Croats, Serbs, Slovenes, Montenegrins, Macedonians and Bulgarians. Slovenes and Croats, while speaking very different languages, were placed in a joint

²² Author's note: The origins of this development reside as much in the "Illyrian" or "Yugoslav" movement as they do in any linguistic morphology. The concept of a common Serb-Croat language was first codified in the 1850 *Literary Accord*, an agreement between leading Serbian and Croatian intellectuals that the ijekavian variant of štokavian (spoken by some people in both Croatian and Serb lands) was the *literary* language of Croatia and Serbia. By 1892, both the Serb and Croat governments had officially sanctioned the agreement, but by then štokavian-ekavian had become the dominant form in Serbia.

Even among Croats and Serbs sharing the "same dialect" (be it ijekavian or ekavian) differing social and historical associations have created significant spelling and accent variances. But Croatian and Serbian are not separated merely by accent or spelling. Besides possessing thousands of different words, Croatian and Serbian are also divided by hundreds of identically spelled words with completely different meanings. Of course, the most visible and important difference between the two languages is the use of the Latin alphabet by Croats and the Cyrillic alphabet by Serbs. Several other languages in Europe are more closely related to each other than Serbian and Croatian, such as Swedish and Norwegian.

MAP 1: POLITICAL ADMINISTRATION OF CROATIAN LANDS IN 1900



HABSBURG EMPIRE:

-  AUSTRIAN LANDS
-  HUNGARIAN LANDS

-  KINGDOM OF ITALY
-  SERBIA & MONTENEGRO
-  BOSNIA (TO AUSTRIA 1908)

CROATIAN LANDS UNDER:

-  HUNGARIAN RULE (HRVATSKA-SLAVONIA)
-  AUSTRIAN RULE (ISTRIA & DALMATIA)

category in the statistical record. Conversely, officials recorded people arriving from Dalmatia, Bosnia, and Herzegovina as members of separate and distinct ethnic groups, even though their lands are simply geographic regions peopled in various proportions by Croats, Muslims, or Serbs.

The confusion arising from such classifications began with the complex political situation existing in Europe at the turn of the century. Ethnic Croatians lived in lands under the administration of several different governments. The Croatians of Dalmatia (coastal Croatia) and Istria (northwestern Croatia) were governed by Austria, while those in the region known as Hrvatska-Slavonia (continental Croatia, to include Zagreb) were ruled by a Hungarian-appointed governor, known in Croatian as the *Ban*. In Bosnia-Herzegovina, ethnic Croatians fell under Ottoman dominion, passing to Habsburg rule only a generation before the First World War (see Map 1).

As a result of this partition, regional identities often superseded national ones, and some ethnic Croatians entering the United States identified themselves as Venetians, Italians, or Austrians.²³ In addition to these self-identifications, immigration officials entered many other Croatians into the records as Hungarians or even Turks. Further complicating matters, Croatian lands contained large minorities of Orthodox Christians, as well as several large ethnic minorities. Many of these peoples also migrated to the United States, identifying themselves as native to Croatia yet ethnically Serbian, German, Hungarian, or Italian. Conversely, others identified themselves as Croats, but as Orthodox or Serbian Croats. The American confusion resulting from this mixture of regions, nation-states, ethnicities, and religions is rooted in Croatia's past.

²³ John Commons, *Races and Immigrants in America, 2nd Edition*, (New York, The MacMillan Co., 1920), p. 81. Describing Croatian immigrants in 1907, Commons remarked that they were "a vigorous people, hating Hungary which owns them and calling themselves 'Austrians' to ward off the name 'Hun' by which Americans mistakenly designate them."

CHAPTER I: "MY POOR NATION IS PERSECUTED": BACKGROUND TO CROATIAN IMMIGRATION

Before examining religious practices among Pennsylvania's Croatians, it is necessary to search their pre-migration *milieu* for factors that most powerfully shaped their religious and political beliefs. Even a cursory look at the Croatian past reveals experiences that set them apart from other immigrants in the United States. The most important differences stem from their early nationalist Catholic heritage, their geographical position along the military frontier between Christianity and Islam, 800 years of subjugation by Hungary, and the nineteenth-century challenges to Catholic-based ethnic identity posed by both a minority Orthodox population and a growing Illyrian (later Yugoslav) movement. This heritage ensured that some Croatians would carry strident Catholic nationalism to the United States, while others would bring a more secular variant with them. The struggle between these viewpoints would slow the pace of Croatian religious organization in Pennsylvania significantly.

Despite their recent involvement in the most devastating European war since 1945, the Croatians remain enigmatic to scholars and lay-people alike. In part, this is due to the long-standing ethnic and political complexities of Balkan history. While historians offer several competing theories about the Croatians' earliest homeland, most agree that by the seventh century the Croats had migrated south of the Danube River and into the Balkans. After pacifying the marauding Avars on behalf of the Byzantine Emperor, they ranged west of the Drina River, consolidating their control over most of present-day Croatia and Bosnia-Herzegovina, as well as parts of Slovenia and Montenegro. Within a century, Frankish missionaries introduced Christianity to the Croatians, who were the

first Balkan Slavs to embrace the new faith. By 846, Benedictine monks were active in the country, and they established the first monastery in Croatia by 852.¹

Although nominally under the rule of first Byzantium and then Charlemagne, by 880 the Croats had organized their first state, one that reached its greatest heights of power and influence under King Petar Krešimir IV, who ruled from 1058-1074 (see Map 2). However, a religious dispute threatened the stability of Krešimir's reign.² Much of the Croatian clergy, in an attempt to resist the "Latinization" of their faith by the powerful bishops residing in the old Roman settlements along the Dalmatian coast, continued to use Croatian Glagolitic (*glagolitsa*) script and the Slavic language in the Catholic liturgy. These practices intensified despite the Lateran Council's decree in 1059 mandating the liturgical use of Latin throughout the Christian world.

Wishing to maintain cordial relations with the Pope, King Krešimir sided with Rome in the dispute, but he failed to eliminate the Glagolitic movement. Over the next two centuries, Croatian priests, with the support of their parishioners, tenaciously resisted Latinization and continued to celebrate masses in the vernacular. Unwilling to risk a schism with the Croats, in 1248 Pope Innocent IV finally permitted them to use their own language in the liturgy, the only people in Europe granted this privilege prior to Vatican II.³ Rome's acquiescence ended a centuries-long struggle which provided ample evidence of the early connection between Croatian Catholicism and Croatian nationalism. The contest established the Croatian clergy as the chief standard-bearers of the nationalist movement, a role that remained constant in the years to follow.

Croatia had been independent for over 200 years, but in 1089 a royal succession

¹ Marcus Tanner, *Croatia: A Nation Forged in War*, (New Haven, Yale University Press), p. 8.

² *Ibid.*, p.11.

³ P.D. Ostović, *The Truth About Yugoslavia*, (New York, Roy Publishers, 1952), p.7.

MAP 2: CROATIA IN THE ELEVENTH CENTURY
(during the reign of King Petar Krešimir IV, circa 1073)



Source: *Hrvatski povijesni zemljovid* [Croatian historical atlas], (Školska knjiga, Zagreb, 1993)

crisis caused the Hungarian king to claim the Croatian throne. After a decade of internecine warfare, Croatia's nobles sued for peace and acknowledged the authority of the Hungarian monarch in the *Pacta Conventa* of 1102. This treaty bound Croatia to Hungary--with only minor interruptions--for the next 816 years.⁴ However, Croatian nationalism did not wither. The limited autonomy offered by the *Pacta Conventa* insured the survival of the Croatian *Sabor* (Parliament), and the desire for independence lived on despite Hungarian dominion.

An autonomous spirit survived in other parts of the kingdom as well. Bosnia, an integral part of the Croatian kingdom, took advantage of its greater distance from Budapest and refused to submit to Magyar authority. Although Hungarians were fellow Catholics, Bosnia's Croats resisted them in much the same way Croats had resisted Latinization a century earlier. Despite the *Pacta Conventa*, Bosnia's *banovi* (governors) continued to behave as independent rulers. By 1377, *Ban* Stefan Tvrtko had become powerful enough to declare himself king of both Bosnia and Serbia, seizing large parts of the Dalmatian hinterland in the process. In addition to Tvrtko's conquests, Venice had begun raiding Croatia's coast even before the Hungarian-Croat union. By 1420, the Venetians had conquered coastal Dalmatia and would not relinquish it until four centuries later.⁵

Up to this point in history, Croatia had been partitioned only by Catholic kingdoms. The eleventh century schism between Rome and Constantinople held fewer religious implications for the Croats than it did for the Serbs, Bulgarians, and other Slav adherents to Orthodoxy; the Croats continued as Catholics. However, in the 1380s the Ottoman Empire began an unchecked advance up the Balkan peninsula that would have a dramatic affect upon Croatian religion and national identity.

⁴Ibid., p. 8.

⁵Tanner, p. 18.

In 1386 the Ottomans overwhelmed Macedonia. In 1389, at *Kosovo Polje*, they decisively defeated the Serbs. In 1453, Constantinople fell. Bosnia's turn came next; Sarajevo fell in 1451, and the rest of the country succumbed in 1463. After a series of preparatory raids over several years, the Turks then moved decisively against Croatia, routing the Hungarian-Croat army at *Krbavsko Polje*, southwest of Zagreb, in 1493.⁶ While fresh assaults further constricted its territory, Croatia continued to resist. Centuries of dogged, religiously-motivated defense against Ottoman expansion increased the centrality of Catholicism in Croatian life, causing an admiring Pope Leo X to designate Croatia as *Antemurale Christianitatis*--the bulwark of Christendom.⁷ Yet despite the fortress-like connotation of this flattering label, Croatia continued to recede under continued Turkish military pressure.

The Magyars fared little better than the Croatians. In 1526, the Ottomans crushed a Hungarian army at Mohacs, killing King Louis II. Turkish forces entered Buda a week later, and civil war erupted in the face of continued Ottoman aggression. Recognizing that Hungarian military power had been broken, in 1527 the *Sabor* offered the Croatian crown to Austria in exchange for military assistance.⁸ The Habsburg emperor accepted the throne but provided little protection to Croatia in return; the "bulwark of Christendom" remained ripe for Turkish conquest.

Accordingly, the Ottoman Empire continued to expand at Croatia's expense, reaching its greatest extent in 1600. By then, only a small strip of territory around Zagreb, the *Reliquiae reliquiarum* or "remains of the remains," continued to be free of Ottoman control (see Map 3).⁹ The Habsburgs organized much of the *Reliquiae* into the

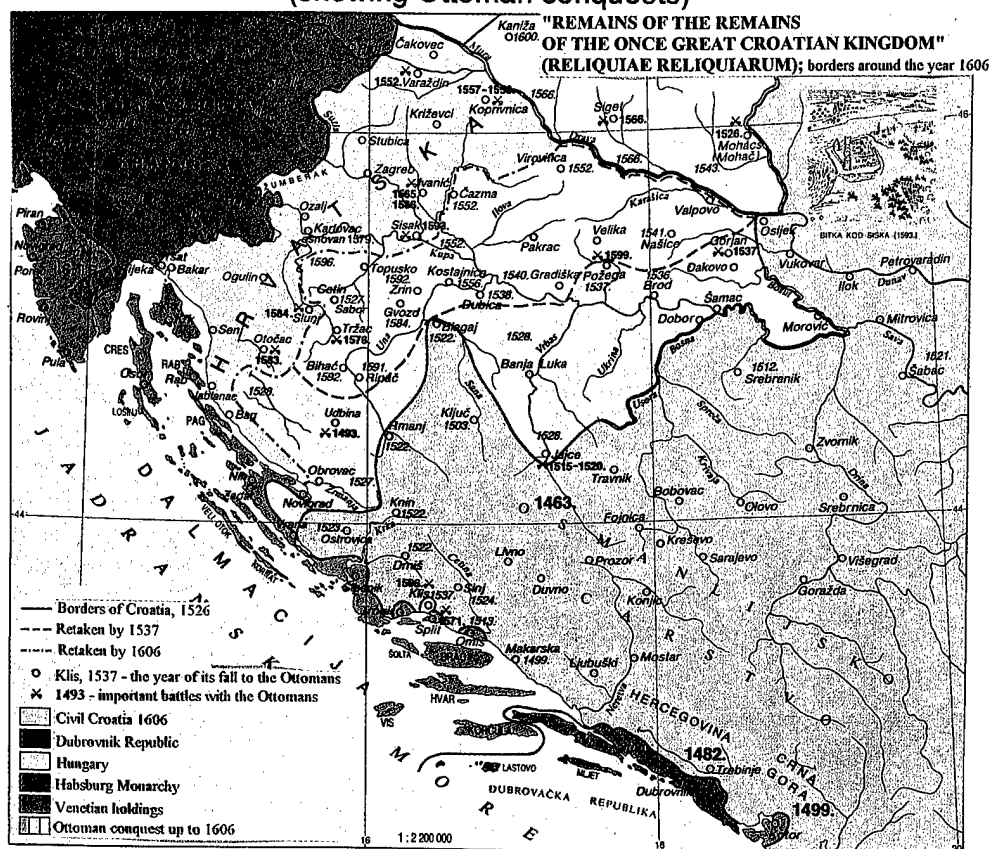
⁶Ibid., p. 30.

⁷Ibid., p. 32.

⁸Ostović, p. 10.

⁹Tanner, p. 50.

MAP 3: CROATIA AT THE END OF THE SIXTEENTH CENTURY
(showing Ottoman conquests)



Source: *Hrvatski povijesni zemljovid [Croatian historical atlas]*, (Školska knjiga, Zagreb, 1993)

Vojna Krajina (a military frontier). The area was administratively severed from "Civil Croatia" and removed from the control of the *Sabor*. The people of the *Krajina*--the *graničari* (literally "border people")--were freed from serfdom in exchange for a lifetime of Habsburg military obligation. In 1630 an imperial edict, the *Statuta Valachorum* (Status of the Vlachs), confirmed their rights and granted them extensive self-government.¹⁰

The title of the document referred to the people who had settled in the *Krajina*. Their identity is a contentious point in history. While most Serbian historians affirm that the Vlachs were Serbs, Croatian historians generally conclude that they were a non-Serb people. Regardless, the Vlachs were largely Orthodox Christians.¹¹ Organized into military units, they were given their own lands for subsistence farming. While farming was always a secondary endeavor among them due to constant involvement in military affairs, the *graničari* had the advantages of self-rule and land-ownership not enjoyed by the Catholic serfs in Civil Croatia.

The loss of control of the *Krajina* and its resultant evolution into a largely non-Catholic land exasperated both the Croatian clergy and the nobles in the *Sabor*. It seemed symptomatic of Austrian policies deliberately designed to keep Croatia prostrate. In addition to Vienna's *Krajina* policy, the Croats grew quite impatient with the Habsburg emperor's seeming unwillingness to make war upon the Turks and regain lost Croatian lands. In the Croatian view, the occupation of most of Croatia by Orthodox or Moslem practitioners seemed to doom any hopes of resurrecting a vibrant, autonomous Catholic state.¹² Frustration over these policies reached its peak in the late seventeenth century, and the Croatian nobility revolted in 1671. They were immediately

¹⁰Ibid., p. 52.

¹¹Ibid., p. 39. According to Tanner, the Vlachs, or Morlachs, were mostly Orthodox with a sprinkling of Catholics. Tanner argued that most Vlachs did not begin to identify themselves as Serbs until the nineteenth century, due to the dramatic rise of Serbia and the influence of the *Krajina's* Serbian Orthodox clergy.

¹²Ibid., pp. 49-50.

crushed by the Austrians. With their power broken, most of the nobility's land and titles passed to ethnic Germans and Hungarians.¹³

After decades of war, by mid-eighteenth century the Habsburgs had liberated the rest of present-day Croatia from Turkish rule, administratively joining these territories not to Civil Croatia but to the growing *Vojna Krajina*. The Austrian emperor's offer of freedom from serfdom extended to any citizens in these new sections of the frontier. This accelerated the arrival of Orthodox settlers into previously Catholic Croatian lands. Vienna repeatedly ignored Croatian demands for the return of this territory, a symptom of rising Habsburg absolutism.¹⁴

This overview of Croatian history through the eighteenth century imparts a vision of a fiercely nationalistic Catholic people chafing under policies which permitted the massive influx of Orthodox settlers into their country. Nineteenth-century developments fanned this resentment into a full-blown nationalist awakening. In 1809, most of Croatia enjoyed a brief respite from Habsburg absolutism. Defeated by Napoleon, Austria ceded Pannonian (central) Croatia and Slovenia to France, although Zagreb and Slavonia (eastern Croatia) remained under Habsburg control. The French emperor quickly united these lands with Venetian Dalmatia, creating a new administrative unit called the Illyrian Provinces, or more simply "Illyrium," the ancient Roman designation for the region. Illyrium, bound loosely to Napoleonic Italy, contained Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs. The French provided a much more enlightened administration than did the Habsburgs; they did not seek to suppress ethnic identities. Liberal educational, legal, and cultural ideas flourished in the provinces, and Catholics and Orthodox citizens peacefully coexisted. While religious freedom continued, the French encouraged the

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

formation of secular "national" Illyrian values among the population in order to transcend the historical frictions created by religious nationalism.¹⁵

Although Illyrium was short-lived, its seven-year existence re-ignited Croatian nationalism and also fueled a nascent south-Slavism known as the "Illyrian" movement.¹⁶ Consequently, after regaining control of its Balkan possessions in 1815--which were enlarged by the additions of Istria and Dalmatia--Vienna embarked upon a Germanization program within the Habsburg Empire, insisting upon the use of spoken and written German despite constitutional arrangements making Latin the official language. Remarkably, while the Hungarians resisted Germanization, they simultaneously attempted to impose the Magyar language upon Croatia.¹⁷ Hungarian became compulsory in Croatian schools in 1843. In that same year, the terms "Illyrian," "Illyria," or "Illyrium" were banned throughout Croatia by King Ferdinand, and the word "Yugoslav" began to replace the outlawed terms in political circles.¹⁸ The *Sabor* responded to these decrees in 1847, declaring Croatian as the only official language in Croatia-Slavonia.¹⁹

Resistance to Hungarian hegemony peaked in 1848. As subjects across the Habsburg Empire rebelled against Austrian rule, the Croats--who had come to resent Magyarization at least as much as Hungarians despised Germanization--remained loyal to the Austrian monarch. The Croatian *Ban*, Josip Jelačić, abolished serfdom in Croatia--securing popular support in the process--and led an army against Hungary on behalf of the Emperor.²⁰ However, the Emperor did not reward Jelačić's loyalty. After

¹⁵Gojko Vuckovic, *Ethnic Cleavages and Conflict: The Sources of National Cohesion and Disintegration--The Case Of Yugoslavia*, (Aldershot, UK, Atheneum Press Ltd., 1996), p. 61.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 61.

¹⁷Ostović, p. 12.

¹⁸Charles Jelavich, *South Slav Nationalisms: Textbooks and Yugoslav Union Before 1914*, (Columbus, Ohio State University Press, 1990), p. 8.

¹⁹Vukovic, p. 61.

²⁰Ostović, p. 12.

the revolts were crushed, Croatia remained an Austrian vassal. Yet to the disbelief of the Croats, the Hungarians were rewarded for their rebellion with the proclamation of a dual Austro-Hungarian kingdom that revitalized their dominion over Croatia. The new arrangement only increased resentment toward Budapest and would eventually cause the Hungarians to play upon religious tensions between Croatia's Catholics and Orthodox to split the growing national resistance to Magyar rule.²¹

In 1868, a new political settlement (*Nagodba*) between Hungary and Croatia fixed the constitutional relationship between them. As Frances Kraljić pointed out:

Croatian autonomy was recognized in matters of administration, justice, *public instruction, and religious affairs*....Croatia's financial system, weights, measures, commercial treaties, banking, exchange, patents, copyrights, maritime commerce, mining, customs, trade, post and telegraphs, railways, harbors and shipping were directed from Budapest.²²

The *Nagodba* hobbled Croatia. The northern Medimurje region and the Adriatic port of Rijeka (Fiume) were detached and incorporated into Hungary.²³ In addition, the continued economic and financial dependence upon Hungary codified in the *Nagodba* restricted Croatian freedom of action even in areas of constitutionally-acknowledged authority. Finally and perhaps most ominously for Croatia, Hungary's prime minister gained the power to appoint the *Ban*, who would no longer be accountable to the *Sabor*. Historically the *Ban* had been Croatian, but by the late-nineteenth century only Hungarians or the most Magyarone Croats served in the position; Budapest would not risk another Jelačić.²⁴ Anti-Hungarian feeling ran high, particularly among the Catholic clergy. The words of Croatian archbishop J.J. Strossmayer reflected Croatian sentiments towards Hungary:

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13

²² Frances Kraljić, *Croatian Migration to and from the United States, 1900-1914*, (Palo Alto, Ragusan Press, 1978), p. 6. Italics mine.

²³ Tanner, p. 99.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 98-99.

The Hungarians are a proud, egotistical, and in the highest degree tyrannical race, and my poor nation is persecuted, oppressed and ill-treated.²⁵

Resistance to Hungarian rule had ethnic and religious implications within Croatia. Seeking to create the national cohesion needed to combat Magyarization, in 1874 the *Sabor* passed the Mažuranić Law, secularizing education. Intended to remove religion as a cause of disunity between Croatia's Catholic and Orthodox citizens, the bill had the opposite affect. Both the Catholic and Orthodox clergy, who had been responsible for education prior to the law, vehemently opposed it. While the Catholic clergy eventually relented in their opposition, the Orthodox clergy in Croatia, appointed by the autocephalous Serbian Orthodox Church, did not. The Mažuranić Law seemed a more ominous development to them, since it coincided roughly with Serbia's independence in 1878 and a period of dynamic Serbian nationalism fomented both by its newspapers and the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church.²⁶

Dispute over the law waned temporarily until the monarchy integrated the *Vojna Krajina* into Civil Croatia in 1881. With the integration, the *Sabor* immediately gained authority over 190,000 Orthodox citizens, whose share of the total Croatian population jumped to 25 percent. Years of self-government and the regional rise of Serbia had strengthened the Serbian ethnic identification of the *Krajina's* inhabitants. Viewing the Mažuranić Law as an attempt by Croatia to culturally assimilate or convert them, the *Krajina* Serbs objected strenuously to the law and refused to abide by it. In 1888, the *Sabor* had no choice but to grant Serbs in Croatia the right to form their own autonomous religious schools, and Orthodox communities no longer had to provide financial support to public schools.²⁷ Catholics did not receive an equal charter and

²⁵Ibid., p. 95.

²⁶Jelavich, p. 14.

²⁷Ibid., p. 47.

their clergy therefore resented the "special" privileges accorded the Orthodox. The Mažuranić Law was one of the first major collisions between Serbian and Croatian nationalism. It confirmed the role of religion as a component of ethnic identity in the Balkans and drove a wedge between Croatia's Orthodox and Catholic populations.

The Hungarian authorities were not blind to Catholic-Orthodox tensions in Croatia. In 1883, an ethnic Hungarian--Karl Khuen-Hedervary--became *Ban* of Croatia. Viewing the religious discord as a valuable tool to split the masses and distract them from their discontent with Hungarian rule, Hedervary catered to the Serbian Orthodox minority in internal Croatian political affairs.²⁸ He successfully intensified religious and ethnic conflicts while simultaneously embarking upon the most intense Magyarization program ever, determined to break the nationalist movement in Croatia. His policies deliberately retarded the country's internal development. Hungary denied Croatia infrastructural improvements; new roads or railroads were scarce, and those that existed all seemed to link Croatia to Hungary rather than knitting Croatia together as an economically viable unit.²⁹ John Commons, a turn-of-the-century American author and social scientist, noted that

The natural resources of Croatia are by no means inadequate, but the discriminating taxes and railway freight rates imposed by Hungary have prevented the development of these resources. The needed railways are not obtainable for the development of...Croatia.³⁰

Croatia was unable to fund internal improvements itself, since Budapest culled 55 percent of all Croatian revenue for expenditure in other parts of the Hungarian kingdom.³¹

²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17

²⁹ Kraljić, p. 6.

³⁰ Commons, p. 84.

³¹ Tanner, p. 99. See also T.A. Mursalo, *In Search of a Better Life: A Story of Croatian Settlers in Southern Africa*, (Epping/Cape, Printpak Ltd., 1981), p. 41.

In addition, the inept agrarian reforms which occurred in the wake of the failed revolutions of 1848 had eliminated the centuries-old communal grazing areas and forest lands adjacent to most villages, bringing increased fuel and forage costs for peasant farmers.³² The new costs increased the farmers' reliance on cash crops. But even so, Croatian farmers could not compete with the new large landowners, often Hungarians, who used modern agrarian techniques that made them more efficient and undermined the value of the peasants' crops. Fiscal policies and trade agreements also eroded income. The vineyards of Croatia were struck by "an unfavorable commercial treaty developed by Austro-Hungarian interests [which] opened the Croatian [wine] market to severe Italian competition and resulted in a further impairment of the local growers' economic condition."³³ As a result of these Hungarian agrarian and fiscal policies, by 1905 the mean daily agrarian wage in Croatia and other Hungarian possessions had dropped to 22 cents for men, 14 cents for women, and ten cents for children.³⁴

Such consequences resulted from policies deliberately intended to cause financial hardship and food shortages. A Croatian school teacher diplomatically summed up the effect of Hungarian policies upon the Croatian food supply, writing that "our dear Croatia...cannot feed her children because she is not free nor the mistress of her own money."³⁵ Hungarian authorities hoped that Croats would *choose* to migrate so that ethnic Hungarians could be settled in their stead. The program accelerated during Hedervary's reign. From 1880 to 1914, an estimated 600,000 Croats left the country while 200,000 Hungarians settled in Croatia.³⁶

³²Handlin, p. 28.

³³Kraljić, p. 14.

³⁴Shaughnessy, p. 174.

³⁵Balch, p. 184.

³⁶Kraljić, p. 56.

While Hedervary's economic policies were harmful enough, his heavy-handed Magyarization efforts elicited violent social responses. Unrest deepened in 1902 when he ordered authorities to raise the Hungarian flag in public places throughout Croatia. Railway and street signs in the Magyar language soon proliferated as well.³⁷ By 1903, anti-Hungarian riots swept Zagreb. Emigration to the United States from Croatia-Slavonia spiked upward in response, from 38,000 in 1901 to 50,000 annually over the two years of great unrest, retreating sharply to 32,000 after Hedervary had been recalled to Budapest.³⁸

In addition to the destructive economic aspects of the Magyarization program, many young Croatians migrated for personal freedom rather than economic well-being. Hundreds wished to avoid mandatory military service in the army. In 1881, the Habsburg Empire issued a military service decree subjecting Bosnians and Herzegovinians--nominally Ottoman citizens until 1908--to military service. Insurrections immediately broke out in ethnically Croatian Herzegovina and Dalmatia, only to be quickly and brutally suppressed.³⁹ In accordance with the same law, Croatian men could not marry until completing their military service. Since early marriage was the social norm in Croatia's village communities, interference with this Catholic sacrament was viewed as particularly onerous and one of the few instances where Hungarian rule directly encroached upon religious freedom. John Beck, a Croatian immigrant in Monessen, Pennsylvania, recalled his father's distaste for the law and stated that several of his father's friends came to the United States specifically to avoid complying with it.⁴⁰

³⁷Jelavich, p. 19.

³⁸Prpić, p. 465.

³⁹Shaughnessy, p. 162.

⁴⁰*Monessen Project: The Croatians*, (Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1977), interview with John Beck.

Conversely, thousands of immigrants left Croatia because they had been *freed* from military service. When the Habsburg government abolished the special status of the *Vojna Krajina*, it also released the *graničari* from their lifetime military obligations, allowing them to migrate. Predominately Orthodox, these people had become increasingly restless since the abolition of serfdom in Civil Croatia, which had eliminated the chief advantage of their special status while leaving them trapped in a hard-scrabble life of military obligation, trying to eke out a living through subsistence farming. Thus, the Orthodox became a significant component of the migration from Croatia to the United States, and their presence within Pennsylvania's Croatian communities would later fuel debate over the merits of church-building versus secular institution-building.⁴¹

Catholic priests also fled Hungarian Croatia. Many left because their strident nationalism made it impossible for them to secure parishes in Croatia. In fact, Charles Jelavich posited that "with a few obvious exceptions, the clergy and their followers gave their undivided loyalty to their nation."⁴² Many used the pulpit to voice opposition to the economic policies and agrarian reforms that caused intense suffering among the Croatian people. Others became politically active members of the nationalist Croatian "Party of Rights," which supports Jelavich's argument that "the church hierarchy and clergy perceived themselves as the sole custodians of the nation and its heritage."⁴³

While it is clear that Hungarian political and economic policies contributed heavily to mass migration from Croatia, there were other reasons behind the exodus that did not originate in Budapest. In Dalmatia and Istria, declines in the wooden ship-building and

⁴¹ Branko M. Čolaković, *Yugoslav Migrations to America*, (San Francisco, R & E Research Associates, 1973), p. 44.

⁴² Jelavich, p. 58.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

fishing industries forced migration. In addition, the ravages of a phylloxera blight devastated Croatia's vineyards and wine-making industry.⁴⁴

Explosive population growth also led to mass departures. After centuries of stability, Croatia's population, along with that of the rest of Europe, increased dramatically in the nineteenth century.⁴⁵ With a shortage of land, fewer young men inherited sufficient property to make a living, the same dilemma that had pushed pre-industrial Americans westward across their continent a half-century earlier. Balkan social and legal customs compounded the problem:

Families...were patriarchal, and the father of a family had authority over the activity and behavior of all its members. On his death his possessions were not passed on according to primogeniture; *the inheritance was shared equally by all his sons.*⁴⁶

Lack of property meant a lack of social status, a fall from peasant to mere paid laborer, and increased the willingness to seek capital abroad to establish one's own place. The departure of young men inevitably delayed marriages or separated newlyweds, threatening the very fabric and continuity of village society.

The rising population triggered more than social unrest. Without a corresponding revolution in agrarian techniques, food prices rose and shortages became more common in Croatia, a land which had previously been self-sufficient in food.⁴⁷ In addition, a series of droughts and consecutive poor harvests caused many farmers to default on loans. As food became scarce and output began to drop due to the vagaries of weather and the migration-induced absence of men, a steady recession in the standard of living followed. More and more Croatians sought to leave home. They were

⁴⁴Kraljić, p. 56.

⁴⁵Handlin, p. 22.

⁴⁶John Fine, *The Bosnian Church: A New Interpretation*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1975), p. 25. *Italics mine.*

⁴⁷Handlin, p. 23.

hungry and poor, and they decided in droves to work abroad, even if they did so just long enough to make money for their financial needs in the homeland.

Economic factors alone did not determine where the immigrants would go. Some went to South America, others to Canada. But the majority came to the United States. Rising industrialization created the need for new workers, and nowhere was that need more pressing than in Pennsylvania. As a result, in the 1870s and 1880s several American industries began to contract for large numbers of European laborers through steamship companies and other employment "agents."⁴⁸ In addition, the transportation revolution made the United States a prime destination. While earlier crossings had taken over a month and were quite expensive, by the 1880s, the growth of European railroads and the advent of scheduled trans-Atlantic steamship service reduced the time and expense of a journey to the United States and brought the cost of the trip within reach of more people than ever before.⁴⁹

In summary, Croats began to leave Europe in great numbers at a time of significant political, social, ethnic, religious, and economic upheaval stemming from factors with deep roots in their history. Relations between Croatia's Catholic and Orthodox citizens had soured, fueled by resurgent faith-based nationalism in both Croatia and Serbia. Hungarian policies deliberately heightened ethnic and religious tensions while simultaneously creating economic conditions detrimental to Serbs and Croats alike. Consciously grounded in a desire to create a Croatian exodus, such policies ensured that many Croatian emigres, particularly priests, would bring a highly-charged nationalism into their Pennsylvania communities. Their anti-Hungarian views would be echoed by a significant percentage of the laity. When asked to explain why he

⁴⁸Commons, p. 85.

⁴⁹Handlin, p. 48.

planned to go to the United States, one immigrant answered "*Mi idemo tražiti ima li još pravice na svijetu,*" ("We go to see if there is any justice left in the world.")⁵⁰

⁵⁰Balch, pp. 51-52.

CHAPTER II: "BETWEEN THE EARTH AND THE SKIES": CROATIANS ENCOUNTER NATIVISM

Beginning around 1880, but accelerating after 1890, Croats came in large numbers to the United States. So many came, in fact, that some scholars assert Croats had the highest emigration rates of any European nationality.¹ Political unrest, ethnic tensions, poverty, hunger, competition for land, droughts and blights, the growing affordability of an Atlantic crossing and the active recruitment of labor all combined to bring thousands of Croats to the coal and steel towns of Pennsylvania.

While the journey had become easier, it still required grit. John Beck recalled the cross-continental trek to Le Havre, where he waited "with so many Italians" for three weeks before securing a berth on an American-bound steamship. The delay in France exhausted his funds, leaving him barely enough for travel between New York City and his uncle's boarding house in Monessen, Pennsylvania. After a nine-day Atlantic crossing and the few days needed to reach Monessen, his six-week odyssey ended.²

From Le Havre, Bremen, Antwerp, Hamburg, Trieste, or later Rijeka (Fiume), Croatian immigrants such as Beck departed for the United States, paying perhaps twelve dollars for passage in steerage.³ Thousands made the crossing prior to 1890, but the biggest wave came between 1890 and 1914, when perhaps 400,000 Croats arrived upon American shores.⁴ Despite a significant and ongoing return migration, enough stayed so that by 1910 there were an estimated 400,000 Croats in the United States.⁵ Most were single men, the vast majority of them 14 to 44 years old. Initially, Croatian women did not comprise a significant component of the immigration. By 1901,

¹George Prpić, *South Slavic Immigration in America*, (Boston, Twayne Publishers, 1978), p. 23.

²*Monessen Project: The Croats*, interview with John Beck.

³Handlin, p. 48.

⁴*The Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, p. 248.

⁵Balch, p. 280.

the percentage of female Croatian immigrants among new arrivals had not yet exceeded 10 percent. Not until 1912 did a growing number of families begin to emigrate, and the percentage of women among Croatian immigrants subsequently increased to 30 percent.⁶

Croatian immigrants were generally poor, arriving with an average of \$16 if they were from Croatia-Slavonia, \$11 if from Bosnia-Herzegovina. This made them poorer than average German, Czech, or even Italian arrivals.⁷ Croatian immigrants also lacked marketable job skills or technical training: from 1899-1910, over 86 percent of them were peasants or common laborers.⁸

These poor, predominately male peasants had little education as well. In 1900, entry data placed Croatian and Slovenian illiteracy at 37.4 percent, the highest among all Slavic immigrants.⁹ From 1901-1909, the proportion of illiterate Croatians and Slovenians arriving in the United States rose to 45 percent, again among the very highest of all the Slavic immigrants of the same period.¹⁰ The inclusion of Slovenes in the statistics kept the percentages much lower than they would have been if Croatians were considered independently. This seems a reasonable conclusion when considering that 48 percent of Croatia's male population was illiterate in 1900.¹¹ This was not so among the Slovenes, who were generally literate.¹² An explanation for the difference between them is revealed in Linda Bennett's study of ethnic identity maintenance.

⁶Ivan Čizmić, "Emigration and Emigrants from Croatia Between 1880 and 1980," *GeoJournal*/vol. 38, no. 4 (April 1996), p. 432.

⁷Kraljić, p. 22.

⁸Čolaković, p. 44.

⁹*United States Industrial Commission*, Vol. XV, pp. 282-3, in Balch, p. 479.

¹⁰Čizmić, *GeoJournal*, p. 432.

¹¹Balch, p. 167. 62 percent of women were illiterate. See also Jelavich, p. 54. In 1880, 75 percent of all inhabitants of Croatia-Slavonia were illiterate; in 1890, 68 percent; in 1900, 46 percent. These percentages were likely higher among the peasants who were coming to the United States.

¹²*The Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, p. 935.

Bennett discovered that at the time, the Slovenian educational system was much better than that in Hungarian-administered Croatia.¹³ The illiteracy of the Croats stood in marked contrast to other ethnic groups as well. For example, the Czechs enjoyed single-digit rates. Even the Poles had a much higher literacy rate; entry data from 1899 to 1904 indicated that 71 percent of all Polish arrivals could read and write.¹⁴

While immigrants from Dalmatia dominated earlier Croatian migration, by the late 1890s, the majority were coming from Croatia-Slavonia. A large percentage of the immigrants came from Lika, Kordun, Baranja, and Srijem, Croatian regions with large Orthodox Christian populations. For the most part, the Orthodox practitioners coming from Croatia-Slavonia identified themselves as Serbian. Census data for 1910 confirms this. Of the approximately 25,000 foreign-born who identified their mother tongue as Serbian, 16,676 were from Austria-Hungary (Croatia-Slavonia, Bosnia, or Vojvodina), while only 4,321 were from Serbia.¹⁵ In the same census, 73,329 native Croatian-speakers also identified their birthplace as Austria-Hungary. Assuming that statistical errors are uniform across both groups, this indicates that roughly 20 percent of immigrants from Habsburg Croatia identified themselves as ethnic Serbs by 1910.¹⁶

Many Croats coming to the United States settled in Pennsylvania. Estimates in 1901 indicated that approximately 38,000 Croats had arrived in the state, increasing

¹³Linda Bennett, *Personal Choice in Ethnic Identity Maintenance*, (Palo Alto, Ragusan Press, 1978). See also Jelavich, p. 57. The 1910 illiteracy rate in Slovenia was just 15 percent. Also, a great number of Slovenes spoke German because their schools provided more hours of instruction in this language than in Slovenian. The ability to speak German was likely of great benefit to the Slovenes in America, particularly in Pennsylvania, allowing them to foster good relations with the established German immigrant community. The realm of employment probably saw the benefits of this advantage as much as any other area of social interaction.

¹⁴Victor Greene, *The Slavic Community on Strike: Immigrant Labor in Pennsylvania Anthracite*, (Notre Dame, University of Notre Dame Press, 1968), p. 17.

¹⁵Čolaković, p. 41.

¹⁶U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Thirteenth U.S. Census*, (Washington, D.C., 1913), vol. I, table 21, pp. 992-993.

to over 100,000 by 1915. The majority of the newcomers settled in Allegheny County.¹⁷ It was the steel industry which lured most Croatians to Pennsylvania.¹⁸ Growing in size throughout the late nineteenth century, companies such as Pennsylvania Steel introduced technological innovations to their mills just as Croatians began arriving in large numbers. These improvements decreased the need for skilled laborers and increased the output of the mills, creating a demand for cheap, unskilled labor.

After the arrival of the first Croatian settlers in the steel towns, their clannish and provincial countrymen tended to follow them, a phenomenon characterized by immigration historians as "chain migration."¹⁹ If there was no familial connection, newly arriving Croatians would arrange to stay with fellow villagers who had preceded them to Pennsylvania, often in ethnic boarding-houses.²⁰ Very often, steel companies established informal contracts for new laborers with the boarding-house operators, as well as with Croatian bankers and steamship agents, who helped funnel their countrymen into the mills.

As a result, by 1910, 33 percent of all steel industry labor was Slavic, the largest proportion of that third comprised of Croatians and other South-Slavs.²¹ In Steelton, the Croatians became the single largest immigrant group employed in the mills along the banks of the Susquehanna River.²² In Pittsburgh, Croatians worked in steel by the thousands; a November 1901 newspaper account stated that 8,500 Croatians worked at the Schoenberger Works, the American Bridge Works, the Carnegie Bridge Works, the

¹⁷Prpić, p. 176.

¹⁸Higham p. 114.

¹⁹Čolaković, p. 10.

²⁰*Monessen Project: The Croatians*, interview with John Beck. Beck's experience was typical; as soon as he arrived in Pennsylvania, he moved into his uncle's boarding house.

²¹Wtulich, p. 81.

²²U.S. Immigration Commission, *Reports of the United States Immigration Commission: Immigrants in Industries, Part 2: Iron and Steel*, 2 vols., Doc. 633, 61st Cong., 2nd sess., serial 5669 (1911), I, 631, in Bodnar, pp. 159-160.

Carbon Steel Company, and in other mills as well.²³ While the farmers of Zagorije or the vintners of Dalmatia did not possess skills uniquely qualifying them for employment in the steel industry, they took any work that became available, and found themselves wielding "hunky banjoes" (shovels) in the open hearth, merchant mill, or blast furnace of steel plants. The timing of their arrival and economic circumstances had combined to concentrate Croats in the most dangerous, lowest paying industrial jobs in all of Pennsylvania.

The hazards and low pay of the steel industry might have been alleviated by an effective labor union, but one did not exist. The old Amalgamated Association of Steel and Iron Workers, then one of the most important unions in the American Federation of Labor (AFL), had reached a peak membership of 24,000 men in 1891. However, a series of unsuccessful strikes, particularly the Homestead strike in 1892, had broken its power. By 1901, the union had ceased to wield sufficient strength or influence to champion workers' rights, and seven-day work weeks, twelve-hour days, low wages, no vacations, and dangerous conditions became commonplace across the steel industry.²⁴ On every sixth day, bleary-eyed steel-workers often pulled a 24-hour shift in the mills.

A smaller number of Croats worked in the bituminous coal fields of southwestern Pennsylvania. Even fewer worked in the anthracite mines of the northeastern quadrant of the state: Slavs who had preceded them in immigration had come to dominate there. Because the miners had an effective union (the United Mine Workers Union, or UMW) and the steel-workers did not, the wage inequities between the two occupations were significant. In 1910, Pittsburgh steel mill workers were earning approximately 15 cents an hour, while miners in the Pittsburgh district earned 30 cents an hour. Miners

²³ *Napredak*, No. 47, November 21, 1901.

²⁴ Matthew Magda, *Monessen: Boomtown and Steel Community, 1898-1980*, (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, 1985), p. 49.

received \$2.36 for an eight hour day, while unskilled steel-workers put in twelve hours and received \$1.80 to \$1.98 daily.²⁵ Steel wages across the state were generally the same or lower. For example, from 1890-1910, the average unskilled wage in the Steelton mills was only 11 cents an hour.²⁶ While some steel mill foremen earned wages far in excess of the common miner's wage, these jobs went to old-stock Americans: Bodnar's study of Steelton showed that Croats for the most part did not enter these positions prior to World War II.

Not only were wages and conditions in the steel industry bad in 1890, they would continue to worsen just as huge numbers of new Croatians migrated to the mills. While real wages in steel declined, there was a simultaneous and dramatic rise in miners' wages from 1890 to 1910.²⁷ Thus, as the economic potential of some ethnic communities in Pennsylvania grew, that of the Croats remained relatively flat. This seems to partially explain why Poles, Slovaks, and others were more prolific church-builders than the Croats: collectively, they enjoyed greater financial resources.

With the exception of South Bethlehem and Steelton, major Croatian settlements were concentrated in southwestern Pennsylvania.²⁸ They followed a generally north-south course along the meandering banks of the Monongahela River, where industrial towns sprang up by the score. Besides Monessen, Pittsburgh, and Rankin, these included the steel or coal centers of Ambridge, Centerville, Clairton, Cokeburg, Duquesne, Greenville, Johnstown, McKeesport, McKees Rocks, Sharon-Farrell, and Versailles. Smaller Croatian communities grew in several other towns throughout the state. The resulting distribution of Croats in Pennsylvania survives to this day.

²⁵Balch, p. 285.

²⁶Bodnar, p. 38.

²⁷Balch, p. 287.

²⁸Bodnar, p. 112. There were over one thousand Croats in Steelton by 1902.

Like the other new immigrants, Croatians did not always receive a warm welcome among Pennsylvanians, and they displayed intense discomfiture when they first encountered the host population of their new land. The deep dislike and intolerance that many native-born Americans felt for late-nineteenth-century immigrants compounded the problem. Even after becoming familiar with American social customs and the English language, immigrants who had not completely shed their native ways and mannerisms still felt isolated, unaccepted and unwanted by most native-born Americans. As one Croatian put it:

We are somewhere between the earth and the skies, and we feel that we are no longer "immigrants" as we used to be; now we are a special class, alienated from the homeland and not accustomed to this new world."²⁹

The very ordeal of migrating had changed the Croatians forever. To their chagrin, they realized that they were now "different" from the people in the old country. Yet despite the changes American society worked upon them, they were still regarded as "alien." In Pennsylvania, one especially strong social force heightened their sense of anomie: nativism.

Anti-immigrant fervor has recurred throughout American history. The post-Civil War era had seen a general decline in hard feelings toward immigrants, but by the late 1880s the ethnic and religious character of the "new" immigrants triggered a resurgence in anti-foreign, anti-Catholic feeling. This latest stirring of nativism would ebb and surge from 1880 to 1920, sometimes receding but never completely disappearing. For forty years, it was an ever-present element in American society.

Pennsylvania witnessed its share of nativist activity, becoming a hot bed of anti-alien sentiment stimulated by its growing foreign-born industrial work force. At first, objections to the immigrants had an economic basis. An early and violent expression of such

²⁹Prpić, p. 223.

sentiment manifested itself in the 1870s among Pennsylvania's Welsh, English, and Irish coal miners. Mine owners recruited Slavs, Italians, and Hungarians for their supposed docility, believing that the newer immigrants would not demand higher pay or better working conditions. Consequently, the foreign-born workers seemed to represent management's anti-labor attitudes and therefore drew the scorn of native-born miners or earlier immigrants such as the Irish and Welsh.³⁰ Slavic and Italian immigrants:

were abused in public and isolated in private, cuffed in the works and pelted on the streets, fined and imprisoned on the smallest pretext, cheated of their wages, and crowded by the score into converted barns and tumble-down shanties....the first of them to arrive in western Pennsylvania...in 1874, were met by riots and armed attacks in which several of the newcomers were killed.³¹

Over time, objections to the immigrants also took on a racial aspect. Many native-born Americans looked upon the concentration of Croatians and other foreigners in towns across the country with dismay, lamenting the arrival "of large numbers of degraded peasantry...foreign in birth and often in language...with habits repellent to our native people, [and] of an industrial grade suited only to the lowest kind of manual labor..."³² Unlike Northern Europeans, extreme poverty, "alien" religious beliefs, "clannish" mannerisms, different manners of dress and hygiene, and an inability to speak English characterized the newcomers. Slavs in particular were believed to be violent, anarchical, impossible to organize, dull-witted, alcoholic, and inured to living in poverty and squalor.³³ E.A. Ross, a nationally prominent sociologist at the University of Wisconsin, felt that Slavs were decidedly unsanitary and backward. Condemning their "pigsty mode of life," he wrote:

³⁰Higham, p. 47.

³¹Ibid., p. 48.

³²Commons, p. xvii.

³³Michael Barendse, *Social Expectations and Perception: The Case of the Slavic Anthracite Workers*, (University Park, The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981), pp. 32-33.

Slavs are immune to certain kinds of dirt, [and] they can stand what would kill a white man....[They] violate every sanitary law and yet survive.³⁴

Rumor held that "Huns" were in fact so barbaric that they "frequently ate stray dogs for a feast."³⁵ They were also considered lawless "member[s] of an inferior class, from which there is practically no chance of escaping....They have no large sense of citizenly motives....How different from the qualities of the typical American citizen...!"³⁶ These views gained wide acceptance, seemingly becoming conventional wisdom at the turn of the century. Even Woodrow Wilson, future author of the Fourteen Points and champion of European minority rights, contrasted the "men of the sturdy stocks of the north of Europe" with "the more sordid and hopeless elements...of the south of Europe...men out of the ranks where there was neither skill nor energy nor quick intelligence."³⁷

Fear that these Slav "brutes" would undermine American culture and "race" ran deep in many sectors of Pennsylvania society.³⁸ Nativists and eugenicists played upon these fears. Couching their opposition in the pseudo-technical language that held such sway in an era respectful of science, they spoke of the impossibility of new immigrants ever "evolving" into good citizens. Madison Grant, a widely read anthropologist, lawyer, and self-styled champion of "Anglo-Teutonic superiority," captured the flavor of anti-immigrant sentiment in the United States:

These new immigrants are no longer exclusively members of the Nordic race as were the earlier ones who came of their own impulse to improve their social conditions. The transportation lines advertise America as a land flowing with milk and honey and the European governments take the opportunity to unload

³⁴David H. Bennett, *The Party of Fear*, (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1988), p. 164.

³⁵Bodnar, p. 78.

³⁶Commons, p. 10.

³⁷David Bennett, pp. 163-164.

³⁸For additional examinations of "native" American fears and concerns regarding immigrants, see Ray Billington's *The Protestant Crusade: A Study of the Origins of American Nativism*, (New York: MacMillan, 1938) or John Higham's *Strangers in the Land: Patterns of American Nativism*, (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1988).

upon careless, wealthy and hospitable America the *sweepings of their jails and asylums*. The...new immigration...contains a large and increasing number of the *weak, the broken and the mentally crippled...drawn from the lowest stratum of the Mediterranean basin and the Balkans*....The whole tone of American life, social, moral and political has been lowered and *vulgarized* by them....The man of the old stock is being crowded out...by these foreigners....These immigrants adopt the language of the native American...*but they seldom adopt his religion or understand his ideals*...³⁹

The fear and loathing of southern and eastern European immigrants gained an organized voice in the 1880s. A host of anti-immigrant workingmen's and citizens groups sprang up across the United States. Three of the most prominent organizations originated in Pennsylvania. The first established was the Order of United American Mechanics (OUAM), an organization which had been in existence since the Civil War. Demonstrating a new vigor fueled by growing anti-immigrant fervor, in 1887 it spawned the Military Order of the Loyal Legion of the United States, composed of Union Army veterans parading in uniform throughout the urban industrial centers of Pennsylvania. In 1889, a third nativist association emerged when the more dogmatic Junior Order of the OUAM split from its parent, quickly growing to a membership of 60,000 by 1890. The OUAM and JOUAM became particularly active in Allegheny County, holding annual conventions in Pittsburgh.⁴⁰ The OUAM was also quite active in Dauphin, York, and Cumberland counties, all in the vicinity of Steelton, which had its own OUAM chapter.⁴¹

In addition to these groups, the Knights of Labor, led by Pennsylvanian Terence Powderly, also expressed vehement opposition to immigrant workers, particularly if they were recruited by the management of steel mills, coal mines, or railroads. While not willing to endorse an all-out restriction of immigration, the Knights of Labor did call for

³⁹Madison Grant, "The New Immigrants: Survival of the Unfit," quoted in Leon Fink, ed., *Americanization on Whose Terms: Major Problems in the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era* (Lexington: D.C. Heath & Co., 1993), pp. 262-263. Italics are mine, and serve to highlight the xenophobic themes present in much of the anti-immigrant rhetoric of the time.

⁴⁰Higham, p. 57.

⁴¹Bodnar, p. 39.

laws outlawing the active recruitment of "ignorant and brutal foreign serfs," for American industry.⁴²

By the early 1890s, anti-Catholicism also swelled the chorus of anti-immigrant rhetoric. Writing about the phenomenon, John Commons argued that

the peasants of Catholic Europe, who constitute the bulk of our immigration...have become almost a distinct race, drained of those superior qualities which are the foundation of democratic institutions.⁴³

Such sentiments gave rise to the most significant anti-immigrant organization of the era. The American Protective Association (APA), although begun in Iowa, enjoyed a strong membership across the United States. By 1894, the APA had enrolled perhaps 500,000 members, 16,000 in Pittsburgh alone.⁴⁴ APA members were required to take an oath vowing never to vote for or strike alongside a Catholic. In addition, the faithful had to swear they would never hire a Catholic immigrant when native-born Protestants were available for the job.⁴⁵

This oath seemed to have real meaning for many Pennsylvanians, particularly some within the management of Pennsylvania Steel in Steelton.⁴⁶ During the depression of 1907-1908, Croatian workers found themselves among the first fired at the steel mill, and those who kept their jobs often suffered deep pay cuts. For employees in the open hearth (257 out of 419 were Croatians) wages were cut by 25 percent. The entire Steelton labor force experienced hardship during the depression, but the Croatians, Slovenes and their fellow Catholic immigrants continued to suffer even during the following economic upturn, as preference in the rehiring process went to Protestant

⁴²David Bennett, p. 165.

⁴³Commons, pp. 11-12.

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 81.

⁴⁵Ibid., p. 62.

⁴⁶Bodnar, p. 81. Steelton's APA chapter was founded in 1896.

workers.⁴⁷ Quite obviously, Protestant plant managers and workers shared their prejudices against Catholic immigrant workers.

Stephan Zoretich, an American-born Croatian in Monessen, recalled the lengths immigrants went to for a mill job:

There was always discrimination of foreigners. Any kind of foreigner, not only Croatian....In fact, even for a job--some places you had to pay to get a job...but it was done in a secret way like. They had a boss in the wire mill and he used to frequent the Croatian club down here....When he came in, everybody that...wanted a job in the wire mill had to go to the bar, you know, and you call for a drink. You put twenty dollars there, and twenty dollars was a lot of money in them days. All right, call for a drink and you'd get the change there, but...[you] didn't pick the change up. All that change the boss would pick up....What could you do? ⁴⁸

John Beck had similar experiences in Monessen, recalling the same need to buy the old-stock bosses a "drink" at the Croatian club or even to give them a Christmas "gift."⁴⁹

Anti-immigrant fever spread not only among industrial workers and management in Pennsylvania, but through the corridors of government as well. The proliferating anti-immigrant societies in the state wielded great political influence. While Pennsylvania had been one of many states officially promoting immigration in the 1860s and 1870s, in the 1890s the legislature worked diligently to undo this policy. An 1895 law excluded all aliens from employment on state or local public works projects. In 1897, a bill established residency and English-language standards for miner certification, a direct attempt to limit the growing number of immigrants in the coal fields of the state. The most onerous component of the bill directed the withholding of a special state tax from the pay of alien laborers.⁵⁰

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 87.

⁴⁸*Monessen Project. The Croatians*, interview with Stephan Zoretich.

⁴⁹Ibid., interview with John Beck.

⁵⁰Higham, pp. 72-73.

While overturned by the Pennsylvania Supreme Court as unconstitutional, the Immigrant Tax Bill had made it through the legislature, and that alone says much about Pennsylvanians' attitudes toward immigrants in the 1890s. Laws demonstrating an intense dislike of immigrants continued to find expression in the state legislature. By 1909, racially motivated laws had emerged; the state prohibited all aliens from gun or dog ownership. Ostensibly a hunting law, the real intent of the legislation was to keep weapons out of the hands of people perceived to be dangerous.⁵¹ The law had been introduced to the Pennsylvania House by Edward Beidleman, the representative from Dauphin County, home of Steelton and its vast Croatian community.⁵²

Croatians had left Europe in flight from a host of economic and political problems, only to encounter anti-immigrant sentiments among a large segment of Pennsylvanians. Late-nineteenth-century nativism had a particularly virulent anti-Catholic bent, which caused social and economic hardship for Croatians in their adopted country. Both the shock of arrival in a strange land and encounters with Americans who wanted them to return to Europe created intense discomfiture among the Croats. Despite this, they struggled on as other immigrants did. While proving determined in the face of those wishing to ban them from society, how would Croats react to agencies seeking not to exclude them but to assimilate them? An examination of their encounters with Pennsylvania's Protestant missionaries and educators, as well as with the Catholic Church's hierarchy, reveals the answer.

⁵¹Ibid., 152.

⁵²Bodnar, p. 83.

CHAPTER III: "ONE COUNTRY, ONE LANGUAGE, ONE FLAG": MISSIONARIES, EDUCATORS, AND THE CATHOLIC CHURCH

In addition to the nativist organizations seeking to exclude Croatians and other immigrants from Pennsylvania society, ostensibly more welcoming agencies stood at the ready as well. Charitable Christian societies, the YMCA, municipal leagues, town councils, and the public education system all wished to work their transformational magic upon the newcomers, to strip away the distinctive culture of the immigrants and replace it with "Anglo-Teutonic" conceptions of faith, law, hygiene, and social conduct.

Croatians resisted these efforts more strongly than many other immigrant groups. In Steelton, several agencies in town attempted to convert Croatians from Catholicism. The Methodist church established a "foreign school" with the mission of converting Catholic and Orthodox Slavs through religious instruction. Despite its best efforts, it never enrolled more than ten Croats.¹ The Steelton YMCA also attempted to convert Slavs to Protestantism, distributing King James Bibles printed in Croatian, but the Croats studiously avoided the place.² For the most part, Croatians did not abandon their ancient faith for Protestantism.

If the net cast by the Protestant churches and associations remained relatively empty, perhaps the public education system could do better. Hostility toward immigrants caused the state legislature to treat the education of foreign-born children as a security risk rather than a social challenge; the Commission of Public Safety and Defense oversaw immigrant education issues.³ The commission required

in every public elementary school such instruction conducive to the spirit of loyalty and devotion to the state and national governments as the board of

¹Bodnar, p. 92.

²Ibid., pp. 89-92.

³Frank Thompson, *Americanization Studies: The Acculturation of Immigrant Groups into American Society--Volume I: Schooling of the Immigrant*, (New York, Harper & Brothers, 1920), p. 268.

school directors, with the approval of the proper superintendent of the schools, may prescribe.⁴

Communities responded to the decree. At the direction of school superintendents, immigrant children were taught patriotic songs and the following pledge: "We pledge our heads, our hearts, our hands, to our country, one country, one language, one flag."⁵

The public school curriculum in Pennsylvania required special English language instruction, civics classes, American history, and hygiene courses. Steelton opened a "hygienic" school as early as 1881, where immigrant girls learned the "domestic sciences" while boys received "manual training" to prepare them for work in the steel mills.⁶ In fact, industry often provided financial inducements to encourage communities to provide vocational training to the next generation of immigrant labor. For example, Pennsylvania Steel paid \$80,000 to build the Felton School in 1882, donating it to Steelton with the stipulation that each male student would receive two years of mechanical drawing instruction. The town accepted the school and complied with the steel company's conditions.⁷

Yet in Steelton, at least, the assimilationist curriculum ultimately failed to transform the Croats. Their children did not attend the public schools. Instead, they went to St. Mary's parochial school, founded in partnership with the Slovenes in 1903. In part, preference for Catholic school stemmed from Croatia's recent past. Until the law secularizing Croatian education in 1874, priests had always served educational and informational functions in Croatia.⁸ Even after the secular education bill became law, priests still retained seats upon local educational committees throughout Croatia, and

⁴Ibid., p. 287.

⁵Bodnar, p. 89.

⁶John Yetter & Harold Kearns, *Steelton, Pennsylvania: Stop, Look, Listen*, (Harrisburg, Triangle Press, 1979), p. 21.

⁷Ibid., pp. 21-22.

⁸Jelavich, p. 58.

"Catholicism remained an integral part of Croatian education."⁹ Croats in Pennsylvania preferred Catholic education for their children as well. As late as 1927, St. Mary's parochial school enrolled over 500 students. At about the same time, a graduation list for the public elementary school contained only three Croat or Slovene names.¹⁰

Steelton had no parochial high school. Thus, it fell to the public school system to try and "convert" adolescent Croats. However, this effort failed as well, because Croatian children did not attend the Steelton high school. In 1924, only three Slavs graduated from the school.¹¹ Croats avoided public high schools in Rankin, Monessen, and Pittsburgh as well. A few reasons explain this. First, children were expected to work as soon as possible, to make a financial contribution to cash-strapped households. So too, Croats experienced discomfort among the "Americans," who often ridiculed them. The cultural heritage of the Croats made them extremely distrustful of anyone outside of their provincial circle of family and immediate friends. They preferred not to leave their children in the charge of the native population.

But perhaps the biggest reason Croats avoided high school can be traced to the legacy of their school experience in Europe. The rudimentary school arrangements in rural Croatia, the lack of the curriculum's relevance to peasants, and the poor quality of schools resulting from Budapest's economic and political policies created an indifference to higher education among the Croats. John Beck's recollections are typical:

School [in Croatia] was like the Army....The teacher checked our hands for cleanliness each day. If your hands were dirty, the teacher hit them with a *šibica* (a small willowy branch used to discipline children). We went to school just for half a day...because there was farm-work to do. From 1910 to 1912 we had a new school that lasted all day...but often I would miss school...because of work.

⁹Ibid., p. 108.

¹⁰Bodnar, p. 129.

¹¹Ibid., p. 129.

When the war came in 1914, school went back to half a day....All together, I had six years of school like this.¹²

Despite his limited exposure to school, Beck had an advantage over his parents, immigrants who *never* had attended school in Croatia. John Matko's parents had a similar experience. Matko, a first generation Croatian-American from Monessen, recalled that his mother "never went to any school [in Croatia] and my dad went for about a year."¹³ Mrs. Ante Bukovac, a Croatian-Slovenian immigrant who lived in both Croatia and Slovenia during her childhood, often missed school to "raise cows and tend fig trees, or...farm the family plot...of about three acres." By the age of ten, she had perhaps two years of schooling in Europe. She then attended school in Pennsylvania for three years.¹⁴

For Croatians, then, formal education for the most part ended in the eighth grade.¹⁵ Frances Pastorkovich, who grew up in Rankin, recalled that "you didn't need more than that" in those days. School merely prepared young people for mill work. Of Pastorkovich's eight brothers, none went to high school. Six of them became mill workers like their father, while the remaining two became a cook and a mechanic.¹⁶ Mrs. Bukovac's children emulated her own limited educational experience. Only her daughter completed high school, while her two sons finished the eighth grade and immediately followed their father into the local mill.¹⁷

For Croatian children in Pennsylvania, the public school experience likely proved an unpleasant one. The tone of school textbooks certainly did not sound welcoming. As one scholar described them:

¹² *Monessen Project. The Croatians*, interview with John Beck.

¹³ *Ibid.*, interview with John Matko.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, interview with Mrs. Ante Bukovac.

¹⁵ Bodnar, p. 103.

¹⁶ *Monessen Project. The Croatians*, Interview with Frances Pasterkovich.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, Interview with Mrs. Ante Bukovac.

Most textbooks used in Pennsylvania...were especially critical of...Pennsylvanians from southern and eastern Europe....One referred to English, Irish, and Germans as immigrants but labeled as 'aliens' Poles, Italians, Hungarians...and Jugo-Slavs.¹⁸

Told by educators that transformation was critical to success, youngsters began to feel like strangers in their own homes, coming into conflict with parents who seemed more alien to them with each passing day. And on the part of the parents, the public school acculturation program created a desire to imbue their children with Croatian traditions before they were lost, "to preserve the Croatian language" and culture.¹⁹

Like the nativist movement, the efforts of assimilation-minded educators heightened the sense of social displacement among the Croats. The fact that "Americans" offered a "Protestant" education, with little relevance to steel work, combined with the legacy of poor schools in Croatia, downplayed the importance of formal education in the Croatian emigre's mind. As a result, they studiously avoided the efforts of both Protestant missionaries and progressive educators to transform them.

While nativists wished to exclude the southern and eastern European Catholics from society, assimilationists hoped to convert and absorb them. Despite the seemingly vast difference between these viewpoints, the theme central to both is a resounding denouncement of ethnic and religious pluralism. American culture needed protection, either through policies of exclusion or through assimilation and Americanization.

Just as these competing yet complimentary ideological forces greeted Croats arriving in industrial Pennsylvania communities, so did the American Catholic Church. The immigrants presented tremendous challenges to the Catholic leadership in the United States. As one writer noted:

¹⁸Simon Bronner, *Ethnic Ancestry in Pennsylvania: An Analysis of Ethnic Self-Identification*, (Harrisburg, The Pennsylvania State Data Center, 1996), p. 3.

¹⁹Bodnar, p. 115.

Never in the history of the world has a religious organization faced an obligation such as that confronting the Roman Catholic Church of the United States. To shepherd these millions of souls speaking thirty different tongues, to house them in churches, to soothe racial prejudices, to recruit an adequate number of priests, these are the problems that no ecclesiastical body before in the history of the Christian faith has been called upon to solve.²⁰

But which ideology, nativism or assimilation, would characterize the Church's policies toward the immigrants? Or did American Catholicism stand somewhere apart in its attitude toward regarding the newcomers? Historians answer the question differently.

In Josephine Wtulich's view, the Church was the *chief* agent of Americanization acting upon the immigrants:

Partly because it was determined to survive in America, the Roman Catholic Church tried desperately to downplay any ethnic strains in the parishes. Because they could speak English, the [predominately] Irish Roman Catholic hierarchy easily manifested their own American-ness while other Catholics, who entered the United States, were made to drop their ethnic identity, at least as far as language was concerned. In fact however, the Slav immigrant never completely capitulated to the American Roman Catholic hierarchy and was permitted instead to retain the use of his language in selected parts of liturgical services. Nevertheless, the Church had become one of the most forceful, if not *the* most forceful, of all agencies of Americanization...²¹

Wtulich credits the immigrants with forming ethnic parishes in a seemingly hostile environment, one in which even the American Catholic hierarchy sought to demolish the cultural and linguistic heritage of the new arrivals.

While there is some truth to this interpretation, the Church's position was much more complex than Wtulich credits, particularly after 1900. In the 1880s and 1890s, the American Catholic Church confronted the tremendous task of trying to bring order to its rapidly expanding, non-English-speaking membership. Although by 1890 most American archbishops and bishops were Irish-born or of Irish heritage, their common ethnicity did not prevent them from splitting over Church policy toward immigrants. The

²⁰Peter Roberts, *The New Immigration* (New York, MacMillan Company, 1912), p. 201.

²¹Wtulich, p. 103.

leadership divided into two ideological wings: a conservative one which condemned attempts to "Americanize" the immigrants as nothing more than nativism masquerading in the guise of charitable behavior, and a liberal wing which wanted to assimilate the immigrants quickly.²²

According to historian Richard Linkh, the liberal wing of the Church, partly due to its own prejudices but also in fearful response to nativist attacks, rose to ascendance from 1890 to 1900, just when Croatians began to arrive in Pennsylvania in significant numbers. James Cardinal Gibbons of Baltimore argued in favor of absorbing foreigners quickly to deflect criticisms of the Church as the instrument of a foreign power. Key archbishops in the Church openly endorsed the value of public education, the need for school instruction in English, and the necessity of teaching "American" culture to the immigrants.²³

However, immigrants did not accept passively pressures from Catholic leaders to "Americanize." In 1883, Peter Paul Cahensly, a leader among Europe's Catholic emigration societies, visited the United States. After hearing the complaints of German parishioners and clergymen, he was convinced that "the Catholic Church in America was sustaining a tremendous loss because of massive defections of immigrants," stemming from the prejudices of the Irish-dominated hierarchy. In 1891 Cahensly circulated a memo citing the loss of sixteen million immigrant Catholics due to the policies of the American Church leadership.²⁴

Other indictments followed. During the 1890s, the liberal wing of the Catholic Church in France sought a model for improved church-state relations, and looked to the example of the American Church. Proposing that Catholic practices be revised to make

²²Linkh, pp. 13-14, 22.

²³Ibid., p. 2.

²⁴Ibid., pp. 7-8.

them acceptable to non-Catholics and more in consonance with the political liberalism then holding sway in France, these clerics called their concept for church reform *L'Americanisme*. Conservative French church leaders responded that the recommended changes, ostensibly American in character, were heretical.

Rome never directly attributed this French version of "Americanism" to the Catholic Church in the United States. Nonetheless, by 1899, the Pope had condemned *L'Americanisme* in the encyclical *Testem Benevolentiae*. The American clergy quickly distanced itself from the condemned doctrine, stating that it was a French construct that had never honestly represented liberal Church thought in the United States. Yet despite the denials, the American Church became much more guarded in its language regarding the efficacy of rapid Americanization of European immigrants.²⁵

As a result of the *Testem Benevolentiae*, a new American Catholic viewpoint regarding immigrants emerged after 1900, one advocating their *slow* assimilation. Cardinal Gibbons came to regard the ethnic parish as a temporary and necessary expedient, one which should be encouraged as long as it was religiously useful, and then jettisoned when no longer needed to hold immigrants to their faith.²⁶

Linkh's analysis of the schism within the Church over issues of assimilation and ethnic parishes provides a background for discussion of the local Church hierarchy Croats encountered in Pennsylvania. By the 1890s, the Croats had settled in several diocese throughout the state, the largest number in Allegheny County, where they became the responsibility of the Pittsburgh diocese and Bishop Richard Phelan. Croats in Steelton fell under the jurisdiction of Bishop John W. Shanahan's Harrisburg diocese, while those in Sharon-Farrell were members of Bishop John E. Fitzmaurice's Erie diocese. When examining these diocese, it becomes apparent that

²⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 13-14.

²⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 23, 30.

Linkh was correct; each bishop established his own policies toward immigrants. Some worked to assist them in establishing ethnic parishes, while others either passively or actively supported policies maintaining the pre-eminence of "Americanizing" Catholicism, referred to by some immigrants as "Irish" Catholicism.

In the late nineteenth century, the Harrisburg diocese did not seem keen to encourage ethnic parishes. During the 1890s in Steelton, the predominately Irish management of Pennsylvania Steel automatically withheld "donations" from Croatian and other recent Catholic immigrants' wages to support the long-established St. James parish, where wealthy Irish parishioners sat in reserved front row pews while Croatians sat or stood in the rear of the church.²⁷ Such practices went unchecked, turning many Croatians away from interest in the Church and giving impetus to the establishment of a Croatian-Slovenian Catholic parish.²⁸

Croatians seemed equally unhappy in the Erie diocese of Bishop Fitzmaurice. The first church they established in Sharon was a schismatic one, "outside the local diocesan jurisdiction."²⁹ The early split stemmed from the close supervision of parishes, which had to submit annual financial reports to their diocesan leaders yet received no fiscal assistance in return.³⁰ Unless a bishop took steps to ensure immigrants felt warmly welcomed, these administrative requirements cast him as a meddling bureaucratic overlord. Some outraged parishioners even joined the Slovak Lutheran church in Sharon, one of the few known instances of Croatians leaving

²⁷ John Bodnar, "The Formation of Ethnic Consciousness: Slavic Immigrants in Steelton," in *The Ethnic Experience in Pennsylvania*, (Bodnar, ed. Cranbury, New Jersey, Associated University Press, 1973), p. 312.

²⁸ George Prpić, "The Croatian Immigrants in Pittsburgh," in *The Ethnic Experience in Pennsylvania*, (Bodnar, ed. Cranbury, New Jersey, Associated University Press, 1973), p. 276.

²⁹ *Program of the Fortieth Anniversary of St. Anthony Church: 1924-1964*, (Sharon, 1964).

³⁰ June Granatir Alexander, *The Immigrant Church and Community: Pittsburgh's Slovak Catholics and Lutherans, 1880-1915*, (Pittsburgh, University of Pittsburgh Press, 1987), pp. 55-56.

Catholicism for Protestantism. In this case, internal discord and Protestant Slovaks, fellow Slavs rather than native-born missionaries, had been instrumental in the change of faith.³¹

Meanwhile, the Pittsburgh diocese, where four Croatian parishes eventually took root, had a bishop who genuinely supported ethnically-based religious organization. In 1894, Bishop Phelan took several steps to help establish the first Croatian parish in the United States, St. Nicholas Church in Allegheny City. On behalf of the immigrants, Phelan corresponded with Croatian Archbishop J.J. Strossmayer to help arrange for the arrival of a priest from their homeland. The Bishop's sensitivity to his Croatian parishioners can also be seen in his refusal to select the name of their church's patron; instead he instructed the young Croatian priest and his congregation that it was their right to do so.³²

Presiding over the dedication ceremony for St. Nicholas Church in 1895, Phelan characterized the moment as "a day of history" for Croatian-Americans and said the new church would help "preserve the Christian spirit of the[ir] homeland." ³³ According to the new pastor, Rev. Dobroslav Bošić, Phelan also remarked that "God should be praised by all nations *in their own* mother tongues." ³⁴ In 1895, expressions of support in such terms ran counter to the prevailing views of the American Catholic leadership championed by James Cardinal Gibbons.

Phelan could ill-afford to be unsympathetic to newcomers. An immigrant himself, his diocese owed its rapid growth to the influx of the foreign-born. In 1889, Catholics comprised 24 percent of the population of Pittsburgh and 13 percent of Allegheny City's

³¹ Prpić, p. 191.

³² Rev. Boniface Sorić, *Centennial: The Life and Work of the Croatian People in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania*, (Pittsburgh, The Croatian Historical Research Bureau, 1947), p. 45.

³³ *75th Anniversary Program, St. Nicholas R. C. Church*, (Pittsburgh, 1969).

³⁴ Ćismiċ, *History of the CFU*, p. 60.

citizenry. The two towns were served by over fifty Catholic churches, with masses in Latin and sermons in the vernacular of each parish. In 1890, Pittsburgh counted 70,410 Catholics, but by 1906 that number had more than doubled, reaching 150,545.³⁵ In view of this dramatic growth, Phelan feared "leakage" among the immigrants, a slow drifting away from the Church. Consequently, he worked tirelessly to demonstrate interest in the ethnic communities for which he had spiritual responsibility.³⁶

In 1900, the Croatians of St. Nicholas undertook the construction of a newer church for their growing congregation. Bishop Phelan offered his support, directing Father Bush, the pastor at nearby St. Peter's, an established "old-stock" parish, to provide all immediate help possible.³⁷ Bishop Regis Canevin, Phelan's successor and the first American-born bishop in Pittsburgh, continued the policies of his predecessor.³⁸ Therefore, while some American bishops exhorted their immigrant parishioners to rapidly Americanize--or were at best indifferent to their needs--others offered spiritual and material support whenever possible.³⁹

Just as Croatians had successfully resisted the attempts of nativists to exclude them from society, they also succeeded in frustrating the assimilative efforts of missionaries, public educators, and the "Americanizing" wing of the Catholic church. While loathe to abandon their traditional faith, Croats also experienced deep misgivings over the Catholicism they encountered in certain quarters. Already feeling a deep sense of displacement due to the actions of nativists, the insistent transformational urgings of "progressives" and Catholic Church-leaders alike heightened their discomfiture. But to whom could they turn for succor or comfort? As of yet, there were no Croatian

³⁵Ibid., pp. 28-29.

³⁶Alexander, p. 29.

³⁷75th Anniversary Program, *St. Nicholas R. C. Church*.

³⁸Alexander, p. 29.

³⁹Linkh, p. 26.

institutions in Pennsylvania, no churches led by understanding priests from the homeland. Feeling intensely isolated, Croatians behaved as most immigrants did: they drew near to each other for support, unknowingly taking the first step toward community organization.

CHAPTER IV: "SAFE FROM THE AMERICAN CLASS OF PEOPLE": THE CROATIANS TURN INWARD

Native-born Americans did not know the difference between Herzegovinians and Slavonians, Istrians and Dalmatians. They simply characterized Croats, Poles, and other Slavic immigrants as "slabs" or "hunkies." Ironically, though, this ignorance--or racially-motivated disdain--played a significant and positive role in the Croatian immigrants' lives. By defining themselves in terms of who they were *not* (not Hungarian, not Polish, not "hunkies"), Croats had to identify who they *were*. As Tomasi's assimilation model rightly predicted, "the immigrants derive[d] from their conflict with other ethnic groups already established on the American scene a new social identity more universal and effective."¹

This new "universal" Croatian identity did not evolve overnight. While very early on, most Croatian immigrants sought out communities of their fellows in which to live, this stemmed less from a strong sense of Croatian ethnicity and more from the desire to escape conflict with the host population, to be "safe from the American class of people," as one Croatian immigrant put it.² In the "chain migration" that followed, successive waves of immigrants followed cousins, uncles, or fellow villagers across the Atlantic, often choosing to settle in the same communities as their kinsmen. From their earliest days in the United States, allegiance to the old village remained a powerful force among Croats. The *selo* (village) had represented a fixed point in Croatian lives, and villagers composed a clan "connected within itself by ties of blood" and by generations of intermarriage.³ Each village had a reputation, a church, a patron saint, and other trappings that marked its independence from the wider world.

¹Tomasi, pp. 6-7.

²Bodnar, *Steelton*, p. 112.

³Handlin, p. 9.

Evidence of the Croatian village's enduring influence revealed itself throughout Pennsylvania. By the turn of the century, Croatians had established five separate fraternal lodges in Steelton, each one comprised of immigrants from individual Croatian villages. John Bodnar contended that of all the ethnic groups in Steelton, the Croatians were most conscious of their ties to the villages they left behind.⁴ The pattern of village reconstitution in Pennsylvania repeated itself in Monessen, which drew many immigrant families from the Žumberak region of Croatia.⁵ Not only did traditional village affiliations draw Croatians to certain towns, it further concentrated them in specific sections of their new communities. In Allegheny City, for example, any Croatian immigrant arriving after 1880 could find the *Mala Jaska* district, named for its residents transplanted from a small town near Karlovac, Croatia.⁶

However, as a "universal" Croatian identity grew in importance, village affiliations slowly receded. The sprawling nature of American industrial communities hastened this development. In Pittsburgh, one hundred villagers from a tiny *se/o* could not live in the same splendid isolation they had enjoyed in Europe. Croatians from different villages now settled side-by-side in growing ethnic communities. In Monessen, they concentrated in the "Wireton" section of town.⁷ In Steelton, they could be found in the town's "Lower End."⁸ Neighbors may have referred to each other as *Ličani* or *Vojvodinci*, but within the larger society they now identified themselves simply as Croatians.

In towns with smaller Croatian populations, the earliest settlers often lived among fellow Slavs--particularly the Slovenes, Bohemians and Slovaks--because they

⁴Bodnar, p. 111.

⁵Magda, pp. 45-47.

⁶75th Anniversary Program, St. Nicholas R. C. Church.

⁷Magda, p. 13.

⁸Bodnar, pp. 16-17.

possessed cultural, religious, and linguistic similarities which fostered some semblance of comfortable familiarity. In addition to a natural cultural affinity carried from Europe, the same social conditions that nurtured Croatian ethnic identity also brought disparate Slavic groups closer together, at least initially. Uniformly regarded by many Americans as a single nationality, Slavs experienced shared indignities at the hands of intolerant nativists. This helped create a sense of community among them. In part, Slavs perceived themselves as kindred spirits because the host population treated them all the same way.⁹

Evidence of this kinship existed in larger Croatian communities as well. The Bohemians in Allegheny City seemed particularly supportive of fellow Slavs. They opened their meeting hall to the later-arriving Croatians to help them organize their ethnic community.¹⁰ They also joined in the opening celebration for the Croatians' first church, St. Nicholas. On the church's dedication day, several Bohemian lodges marched in the procession through town, accompanied by their band, while a little Bohemian girl clutching flowers waited to greet Bishop Phelan in the Croatian church rectory.¹¹ In Ambridge, the Poles attended the Croatian church (as did the Slovaks) until a Croatian priest helped them organize a Polish parish.¹²

Slavs did not just socialize and worship together, they lived together as well. Boarding houses often saw a mixture of Czech, Slovak, Polish, and Croatian residents,

⁹Barendse, preface. Also see Tomasi, pp. 6-7. Speaking about the host population, Barendse postulated that "expectations concerning immigrants in American society produced perceptions that fulfilled those expectations." Tomasi concurred, adding that the immigrants' actions, expectations, and self-identity were shaped by the social perceptions and treatment of the host population.

¹⁰*Danica*, January 4, 1894. When the Croatians in Allegheny City began to organize their first fraternal society, they met in the Bohemian Catholic School on Main Street.

¹¹Sorić, p. 47.

¹²*Biography of Reverend Bosiljko Bekavac*, unpublished biography in the holdings of the Croatian Ethnic Institute, Chicago.

all reasonably comfortable with the familiar cultural practices of their fellows.¹³ The petition for the first charter of the Croatian Union showed how closely connected these different Slavic nationalities had become by the 1890s. Of the sixteen members who signed the petition, four were Czech, one was Slovene, and one was Slovak.¹⁴

But beyond the friendly co-existence with these Eastern Europeans, Croats shared even closer religious or linguistic connections with some of their fellow South Slavs. For example, in Allegheny, Bethlehem and Steelton, co-religionist Croat and Slovene communities became tightly intertwined with each other. They established joint newspapers, parishes, and fraternal societies.¹⁵ The Slovene Catholic Union initially included many Croats, and just as many Slovenes could be found in the early lodges of the National Croatian Society.¹⁶ St. Mary's in Steelton and St. Joseph's in Bethlehem both began as joint Slovene-Croat parishes, as did St. Nicholas Church in Allegheny City.¹⁷ Intermarriage between Croats and Slovenes also became commonplace.¹⁸

In the same way that Catholicism brought Pennsylvania's Croats and Slovenes together, a similar spoken language reduced the barriers to friendship between Serbs and Croats. Croats and Serbs jointly commemorated the opening of new lodge halls or churches, be they Orthodox or Catholic. When the Croats opened their lodge hall in Johnstown, "among those present were many distinguished personalities from the Slovak, Slovenian, Serbian...and other communities."¹⁹ In Steelton, South Slavs marched together in Independence or Memorial Day parades while Italians, Germans,

¹³ *Monessen Croatian Oral History Project*, Interview with Mrs. Ante Bukovac. Bukovac and her family lived in a Slovak boarding house after arriving in this country in 1913.

¹⁴ Sorić, p. 55.

¹⁵ Bodnar, p. 103.

¹⁶ Čizmić, p. 45.

¹⁷ Sorić, p. 45.

¹⁸ *Monessen Croatian Oral History Project*, Interview with Mrs. Ante Bukovac. Bukovac was married to a Croatian, and was herself the product of a Slovene-Croat union.

¹⁹ *Zajedničar*, January 7, 1998.

and African-Americans fielded separate but equally proud contingents. A mixed contingent of "foreigners" participated in a Steelton parade honoring Serbian King Alexander in 1909.²⁰

Thus, an initial pattern of cooperation among the Croats and other Slavs seems quite evident. Joint religious and fraternal societies indicated a loosely-held sense of common identity. However, while most Slavs continued their cordial relations, a distinct pattern of fragmentation along ethnic lines emerged as distinct identities hardened and each group acquired a sufficient population and economic base for independent action. Thus, Pennsylvania's Slovaks and Poles were among the first Slavs to establish their own ethnic organizations. Bohemians also banded together quickly.²¹ The Croats, following the example of others, finally began to organize "Croatian" institutions. This led to an inevitable Croat-Slovene schism, and both nationalities moved to establish separate churches and societies.²²

In immigrant communities, ethnic banks, libraries, saloons, and shops became the earliest manifestations of nascent identity. More important expressions of ethnic solidarity came with the organization of newspapers, churches, and fraternal organizations. Upon reaching the institution-building phase of their assimilation process, some ethnic groups, such as the Poles, proceeded rapidly in the parallel development of churches and secular institutions. As early as 1894, Pennsylvania's growing Croatian population--especially that centered around Allegheny City--seemed poised for a similar experience.

²⁰Bodnar, p. 104.

²¹*Danica*, January 4, 1894. Also see Čizmić, p. 10. The Bohemians had already organized a Catholic parish in Allegheny City. Nationally, they organized the first successful Slavic fraternal society, *Slovanska Lipa*, in 1862.

²²Bodnar, "The Formation of Ethnic Consciousness", p. 311.

Just as in other immigrant communities, the Allegheny City Croats were led by the most prosperous and influential among them, normally those committed to remaining in the United States. Zdravko V. Mužina, a prominent banker and lawyer, emerged as an early leader among the Croats. He established their first newspaper in Allegheny City, a publication called *Danica* (Morning Star). Simultaneously, Mužina and other prominent local Croats worked to establish a fraternal organization for their people.²³ The initial move to establish a secular society rather than a church reflected a pattern other immigrant groups followed in ethnic institution-building.²⁴ Mužina and other leaders felt that organizing Croats in fraternal lodges was a precondition to church-building: only through the pooling of ideas and financial resources could such a large endeavor as building a church succeed.

In addition to providing a sound financial basis for the organization of Croatian religious life in the United States, the establishment of lodges served a more fundamental purpose: to provide death and burial benefits to Croats killed on the job. Working mostly in hazardous steel mills and coal mines, Croats were comforted to know that an organization could offer them a decent burial and pay a stipend to their survivors in the event of an industrial death.²⁵

Such deaths were commonplace. According to the parish records of one Croatian church, St. Nicholas, between 1894 and 1901, 274 Croats died in Pittsburgh. Since the median age of the Croatian immigrant population was about 30 and few were over 45 years old, it is clear that a significant proportion of these deaths resulted from industrial accidents, not age or infirmity.²⁶ Further statistics reveal the extreme hazards of steel work:

²³Sorić, p. 37.

²⁴Bodnar, *Steelton*, p. 102.

²⁵Prpić, p. 126.

²⁶Sorić, p. 53.

ILLUSTRATION 1: ZDRAVKO V. MUŽINA
(founder of the Croatian Union)



Source: Rev. Boniface Sorić, *Centennial: The Life and Work of the Croatian People in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania*, (Pittsburgh, The Croatian Historical Research Bureau, 1947).

Allegheny county...shows for the year ending June 30, 1907, 526 men killed and...over 2000 injured in their work....Of the 526 men killed, 189 were born in *Austria-Hungary*....117 were killed in steel manufacture, 15 in railroading, 34 in mining and thirteen in other work.²⁷

Pittsburgh was not the only hazardous locale. In Steelton in 1905, five "*Austrians...Jurovic Marovoic, Gatis, Muza, and Radjanovic*" were burned to death "in a horrible manner" when molten metal from the open hearth poured on them.²⁸

Monessen's wire mills were equally dangerous. Speaking of his father, Stephen Zoretich recalled:

They didn't have too much safety equipment then. They didn't....care if you got hurt. You could be out, and they would get someone else....Anyhow, [my father] got caught in the blocks. They had to feel the wire for scratches on its way around the wire block. His glove got caught between the wire and the block and dragged him around the block several times....A lot of men got their fingers cut off feeling the wire. There were no safety devices then.²⁹

And finally, figures from the National Croatian Society showed that for the year 1905-1906, 95 of its members were killed in industry and a further 85 permanently disabled.³⁰

Beyond the lost income of those killed or maimed, burial and medical expenses placed another financial burden upon families. Something that cost far less in Croatia was relatively expensive in Pennsylvania. Therefore, it is not surprising that even those Croatians planning to return to Europe were motivated to establish fraternal

²⁷Balch, 301. Italics mine. Croatians were often identified as Austro-Hungarians at the time, although the figures almost certainly include Hungarians, Poles, and Slovaks as well. Note the preponderance of steel deaths.

²⁸Bodnar, p. 38. Italics mine. Most of the names appear to be Croatian or Serbian. However, since only seven Serbs worked in the open hearth compared to over 250 Croatians, it seems likely that at least some of the victims were Croats.

²⁹Magda, p. 48.

³⁰Balch, p. 302.

benevolence societies that would pay \$300 to the survivors of male members or \$100 to survivors of female members. There would be a cost for the insurance (60 cents a month, or half a day's wages) but given the hazardous industrial climate of the time, few workers objected to the expense.³¹ As Mužina said later:

[Although] by our toilsome and hard work *we are hardly able to save a few cents for our young ones*,...these few cents...we are paying our society are a trifling matter.³²

In addition, Pennsylvania laws made it illegal for companies to pay survivor benefits to dependents residing abroad.³³ Workers felt that a Croatian benevolence society would ensure their loved ones in the homeland somehow received their benefits.

For all these reasons, supporting the formation of a fraternal benevolence society seemed a good investment to most Croatians. In January 1894, they established their first fraternal lodge in Allegheny City. *Hrvatsko Radničko Podupirajuće Društvo Starčević u Allegheny* (The Croatian Workingman's Beneficial Association of Allegheny) was named for Ante Starčević, leader of Croatia's *Stranka prava* (Party of [State] Rights) and the father of modern Croatian nationalism.³⁴ While the name of the lodge clearly suggested both the economic motivation behind its establishment and the immigrants' growing sense of national identity, Mužina also wanted the new association to help organize the religious life of Croatians in Pennsylvania. He made this clear in his correspondence with Archbishop Strossmayer of Croatia. In an April, 1894 letter, Mužina appealed to the archbishop for help in securing a Croatian priest for his community. Strossmayer responded:

I was very glad to receive your letter of April 23rd of this year, and even more glad to know that you intend to form a fraternal union which will embrace in its

³¹Sorić, p. 41.

³²Čizmić, p. 47.

³³Balch, p. 302.

³⁴Sorić, p. 37.

fold all the existing Croatian lodges....My greatest delight, however, is in knowing that you will place all of these under the protection of Our Lord, and that *as a basis of your Union you plan to establish your own church* for the Croatians of your own parish, and to have a patriotic Croatian as your pastor.³⁵

Other Croatians anticipated a growing role for religion in their new communities as well. Over the next nine months of 1894, several other Croatian settlements established lodges, ostensibly for the same purpose as the worker's beneficial association in Allegheny City. However, the founding names of these lodges differed in one key way: they immediately and directly indicated a commitment to religion. By September 1894, twenty-two Croatian lodges, with names such as St. Lawrence, St. Vitus, Holy Ghost, Blessed Virgin Mary, or Saint Michael, had formed in Pennsylvania.³⁶ Each usually included Croatians from a particular region in Croatia, and lodge names were derived from the patron saints of villages in their homeland. Indeed, very often the lodge's namesake was that of the actual village church left behind in Croatia, a conscious attempt to remain spiritually connected with the old *župa* (parish) and its provincial religious practices. By the end of 1894, these twenty-two lodges had joined with eleven others in Ohio, Illinois, New York, Iowa, Colorado, and Montana to form the *Hrvatska Zajednica* (Croatian Union).

After establishing their first national benevolence society, Croatians next turned to the task of religious organization. It would not be easy. The legal separation of church and state in the United States, coupled with an overt hostility to Catholicism from many native-born Americans, presented many European immigrants with unheard-of challenges to their religiosity. This was particularly true for the Croatians, who remained

³⁵Ibid., p. 43. Italics mine. Strossmayer's letter demonstrates his effort to provide succor to a nascent nationalism in an age of Croatian dominance by--and subordination to--Hungary. While some Croatian priests and bishops were committed to reforming the Habsburg state, a few advocated Croatian independence or a union with the other South Slavs. Regardless, hatred of Hungarian domination seemed uniform across the clergy.

³⁶*Danica*, September 6, 1894.

devoted to their Roman Catholic roots. Throughout Croatian history, Catholicism had been a component of state and national identity in a region fraught with religious wars against the encroaching Ottoman Empire.

For generations, the village had been the center of the Croatians' world, and the Catholic Church stood--literally and figuratively--at the village's center. Croatian parishes were centuries old. As far back as collective memory could reach, they had been a central force in all lives and across all generations. One historian described the relationship between Croatian villagers and their churches, noting the way

peasants hold celebrations...on special days throughout the year....On one day they perform a special ritual to insure the health of livestock, while on another day certain ceremonies guarantee the success of the crops. Each village has its own special holiday....A peasant's...religious loyalty center[s] around his home and his village, and his religion is...expressed in terms of particular practices, namely those rites necessary to guarantee the health and welfare of a baby (baptism), or the rest and welfare of the dead, which the peasant believes are rites that must be performed by a priest.³⁷

Given this tradition, the ever-present possibility of death in the industrial workplace may have provided as much impetus to church foundation as it did to the formation of benevolence societies. So too, future newborn children of the immigrants would require baptism in a Croatian church to "guarantee the[ir] health and welfare." To meet these needs, the immigrants would have to recreate, in less than a generation, a religious system that had taken twelve centuries to evolve in Croatia.

In Pennsylvania, Croatians found that, just as in the rest of the country, the onus for ethnic church-building rested with them and not with the diocesan hierarchy. To fend off nativist accusations of "foreign-ness," the Catholic Church's top leaders did not encourage ethnic parish establishment. Even sympathetic or encouraging bishops could provide little material support. For example, the Allegheny City Croatians found

³⁷Fine, pp. 12-16.

Bishop Phelan to be an interested and supportive spiritual leader. Yet despite his quick approval of their request to establish a Croatian church, Phelan could not support them financially: the Croatians would have to finance the new church themselves.³⁸

Of course, it took more than money to establish the parish. Knowing that their American bishop could not provide them with a Croatian priest, the Croatians turned to the one man they knew who could; Archbishop Strossmayer in Croatia. Strossmayer quickly fulfilled the immigrants' request, dispatching Father Dobroslav Božić from Bosnia to serve the Allegheny City Croatians. Arriving in August 1894, Božić presented himself to Bishop Phelan and received spiritual authority over his new parishioners.³⁹ Working in concert with the laity, by 1895 Božić had opened St. Nicholas, the first Croatian Roman Catholic Church in all of North America.

The most successful early Croatian parishes focused more on securing a place of worship and less upon constructing an imposing church building. St. Nicholas' parish is a prime example. In its first incarnation, the parish church had been a two-story house. Purchased for \$8,500 in September 1894, the church committee raised \$900 to convert the dwelling into an adequate place of worship.⁴⁰ Accomplished economically and quickly, on January 27, 1895, the church opened for its first religious service. Despite bitter cold, a large, multi-ethnic crowd accompanied the Croatians in procession from the Baltimore and Ohio railroad station to the new church. Bishop Phelan participated in the final leg of the march. According to local accounts, he was quite moved by the warm reception he received, stopping to bless the little girls who greeted him with flowers.⁴¹

³⁸Sorić, p. 43. The Croatians received Phelan's approval on August 10, 1894, noting that the Bishop "received Father Božić and his committee in a very friendly manner."

³⁹*Spomen Knjiga, Zlatnog Jubileja ili 50. Godišnjice Prve Hrvatske Rimokatoličke Župe Svetoga Nikole, 1894-1944*, (Pittsburgh, PA 1944), pp. 129-130.

⁴⁰Sorić, p.47.

⁴¹*Ibid.*, p. 47.

ILLUSTRATION 2: FATHER DOBROSLAV BOŽIĆ
(pastor of the first Croatian church in the United States)



Source: *Spomen Knjiga, Zlatnog Jubileja ili 50. Godišnjice Prve Hrvatske Rimokatoličke Župe Svetoga Nikole, 1894-1944*, (Pittsburgh, 1944).

The story of the origins of St. Mary's parish in Steelton is similar. Founded jointly by Croatians and Slovenians, Rev. Božić served as the first pastor here as well. After encountering difficulties with the laity in Allegheny City over control of parish property and finances, Božić left St. Nicholas when the St. Lawrence lodge in Steelton made it known that they needed a pastor for their growing community.⁴² Replicating his winning formula for parish establishment, Božić asked his new parishioners to be content with the purchase of a pre-existing structure for their church. Securing an old wooden Lutheran chapel, the young priest demonstrated a highly charitable nature by donating his entire life savings of \$750 towards the purchase price. Although he had arrived in Steelton only two months previously, Božić celebrated his first mass in St. Mary's Church on October 23, 1898.⁴³

The third Croatian church in Pennsylvania, St. Nicholas, serving the parish of Bennett (modern-day Millvale), had a troubled beginning. The impetus for the new parish really grew out of continued disputes over control of nearby St. Nicholas Church in Allegheny City, the same problem that had caused Božić's departure. Such disputes seemed commonplace, occurring in Italian, Polish, Slovak, Serbian, and Croatian parishes.⁴⁴ Immigrant church lay-committees often believed that since they were instrumental in both organizing and funding churches, they, and not priests, should control church finances. Božić's replacement at St. Nicholas, Father Franjo Glojnarić, did not intend to let the church laity dictate parish policy to him.

Arriving from Croatia right after Christmas in 1898, Glojnarić quickly became aware of a movement in the parish to seek a new site for the church, ostensibly to meet the

⁴²Čizmić, p. 61.

⁴³Bodnar, p. 115.

⁴⁴Linkh, Bodnar, Tomasi, and Alexander all noted this phenomenon among the ethnic groups they studied.

needs of the growing congregation.⁴⁵ Some parishioners wished to build a new church in sparsely-populated Bennett, a few miles north of Allegheny City. Other parishioners argued that this would take St. Nicholas beyond the easy reach of most Croatians, who lived closer to the original parish church. Glojnaric called a meeting to put the matter to a vote. The turnout was light, and powerful church committee leaders such as Zdravko Mužina did not attend. Those present voted to move the church. Father Glojnaric quickly reported the vote to the bishop, who granted permission to relocate the parish.⁴⁶

Those who had not participated in the vote quickly wished they had. They appealed to Glojnaric to rescind the move, but the priest remained determined to shift the parish beyond the control of what he regarded as a dictatorial church committee.

Subsequently, the committee, led by Mužina, Petar Pavlinac, and Josip Marhonic, called a mass meeting to solve the issue. When Glojnaric and the faction favoring the move to Bennett boycotted the meeting, the lay-committee of St. Nicholas Church appealed directly to Bishop Phelan for a new priest. Wishing to prevent either faction from leaving the diocese and forming a schismatic church, Phelan agreed to let the old St. Nicholas remain in place while a new parish established itself in Bennett.⁴⁷ (Phelan's fears of a schism were well-founded: the Croatians later established a short-lived schismatic church in Sharon.)⁴⁸

The Bennett church had a small following. Funds were tight, and so Father Glojnaric sought and received the bishop's permission to hold services in a barn on the proposed building site. Despite very little money, construction moved ahead quickly. On November 25, 1900, the St. Nicholas Church of Bennett opened its doors, the first

⁴⁵Soric, p. 107.

⁴⁶Ibid., p. 107.

⁴⁷Ibid., p. 107.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 147.

Croatian church building erected from the ground up in the United States.⁴⁹ The heavy mortgage that had been necessary to finance the church proved to be an almost unmanageable burden for the parish.

The fourth Croatian parish in Pennsylvania, St. Rochus, was organized in Johnstown in 1901. By comparison to the controversy swirling around the Allegheny City churches, the establishment of St. Rochus seemed a quiet affair. Its first pastor, Rev. Dr. Mirko Kajić, arrived from Croatia in 1901 and began planning the construction of a new church. As in other Croatian communities, the local lodge of the Croatian Union proved instrumental to the success of the project. Božo Gojsović, a "Croatian Orthodox" and president of the lodge, worked tirelessly to raise funds and assist Rev. Kajić.⁵⁰

At first glance, the pace at which the Croatians established new churches seemed commensurate with their needs. In just six years, they created four parishes. Petty disputes had been party to the process, but the disagreements mirrored those plaguing other immigrant congregations. Yet after the formation of these first parishes, religious organization did not keep pace with the continued and explosive growth in Croatian population. In 1901, four parishes ministered to an estimated 38,000 Croatians in Pennsylvania. By 1910, however, only six parishes served an estimated 130,000 Croatians. While the number of parishes had not quite doubled, the number of potential parishioners had more than tripled.⁵¹ The pace of parish establishment did not increase over time. In fact, only two more Croatian parishes formed in Pennsylvania before 1924.

⁴⁹Ibid., p. 145.

⁵⁰Prpić, p. 184.

⁵¹The 1901 population figure was tabulated by the prominent Allegheny Croat, Josip Marhonić, who published a census of Croatians in the United States. The 1910 estimate is from Balch, p. 271. Even if slightly in error, the figures indicate that the Croatians at least doubled--and more likely tripled--their Pennsylvania population from 1900 to 1910.

This does not seem in consonance with the behavior anticipated by Tomasi's assimilation model and displayed by other Catholic immigrants. The Croatians had a growing population, an established fraternal society, and an apparently capable community leadership committed to remaining in Pennsylvania. If they fit Tomasi's model, they should have experienced explosive growth in their churches. What had caused a reasonably auspicious start toward religious organization to sputter after 1901?

**CHAPTER V: "COWARDS, SCOUNDRELS AND RASCALS":
THE CHALLENGES TO CHURCH-BUILDING**

All immigrant communities in Pennsylvania seemed as prone to conflict from within as from without. Religious matters became a particular source of internal friction. Because of theological disputes, many Bohemians and Italians left Catholicism to become Protestants, while some Poles and Italians established schismatic churches and refused to submit to the moral and economic authority of their ethnically Irish or German bishops. Yet despite such frictions, the organization of Catholic religious life within immigrant communities proceeded.¹ The Croats were no different in this regard. Generally speaking though, they readily acknowledged the authority of the American Church hierarchy. But another source of conflict within their community had severe implications for religious organization: debate brewed over whether the National Croatian Society should be a Catholic organization or not.

Although Allegheny County's Croatian Union (CU) organized partly to influence Croatian religious life in Pennsylvania, its goals soon changed. As the CU grew, becoming the National Croatian Society (NCS) in 1897, it retreated from the Catholicism evident in its lodge names and early church-building activities. Consequently, cooperation within its ranks soon gave way to strife.

Why did a debate over religion threaten to split the Croats? By 1900, some of their Pennsylvania communities were over twenty years old. In accordance with Tomasi's model, after that much time Croats should have enjoyed a clear identity and purpose, resulting in the rapid creation of ethnic religious and economic institutions. But consensus among Croatian community leaders fractured in the late 1890s, and finally disintegrated in 1902, over the role of religion in the NCS. Why did some feel the

¹Linkh, pp. 105-117.

Society had to be Catholic? Why did others resist making the NCS a non-secular organization, even though several other ethnic groups had established successful Catholic societies?

The answer resides in the religiously-derived nationalisms of the South Slavs, especially those of Serbs and Croats. Unlike other immigrants of the period, particularly the Slovenes, Italians, Slovaks, and Poles, Croats did not come from a religiously homogeneous land. A large part of the Croatian migration to Pennsylvania consisted of people from Lika, Kordun, and other Croatian lands within the old *Vojna Krajina*, many of whom were Orthodox Christians. In the early years of immigration, some of them maintained that they were Croats.²

The first convention of the Croatian Union furnished an example of such feeling. Josip Žegudović, representing the St. George's NCS lodge of McKeesport, proposed changing the national organization's name to "the Croatian Catholic Union." Another delegate, Šimo Mamula of Lika, objected, warning that "one should not confuse religion with nationality." He pointed out that he was "Orthodox, but still a Croat from Croatia."³ Catholic delegates supported Mamula's objection:

It would be all right, but we intend to have members of the Orthodox faith join with us; therefore, if we use the caption CATHOLIC [sic], we would deprive the Orthodox of membership...⁴

The proposal for a Catholic Union was tabled, and this solution established an official policy of religious plurality in the CU and NCS that endured. The quickly resolved debate suggested that in the 1890s, some Catholic and Orthodox Croats in

²Prpić, p. 184. Božo Gojsović, the Orthodox Croat president of Johnstown's St. Rochus Croatian lodge is the most notable example. His Orthodoxy did not prevent him from achieving an influential position within Croatian society or the Croatian Union. Also see Tanner, p. 39.

³Čizmić, p. 45.

⁴Sorić, p. 55. Notice that the dissenters did not refer to the prospective Orthodox members as Serbs, but merely as Orthodox. Apparently, after considering the objections, Žegudović cheerfully withdrew his proposal.

Pennsylvania did not think Orthodoxy was incompatible with Croatian nationality. However, a growing number of the immigrants *did* consider religion as integral to ethnic identity, a product of heightened Serb-Croat tensions in Europe at the end of the century.

In the Balkans, Serb and Croat relations had been cordial for the first three-quarters of the nineteenth century. In fact, some intellectuals in both countries found the idea of a Serb-Croat union an attractive one, particularly when both states were under Ottoman or Habsburg dominion. However, between 1878 and 1902, both Serbian and Croatian nationalism hardened. As one historian wrote:

...having achieved independence in 1878, it was natural that the Serbian government should concentrate on other national goals....National enthusiasm continued to be fostered through *the press, the church, and the schools*....[Meanwhile], in its national program, the Croatian leadership had...not made major gains....[The 1868 *Nagodba* with Hungary] placed an apparently permanent block to attempts to reunite the lands of the Triune (Croatian) kingdom....[Such] political failures made more nationalistic programs appear increasingly attractive, and they encouraged the maintenance of conflict and tension between Serbs and Croats.⁵

The nationalisms of Croatia and Serbia had mutually incompatible goals. Croats demanded unity and autonomy within the Habsburg Empire and claimed Bosnia as a historic and integral part of their kingdom, while Serbs also claimed Bosnia, and most of Croatia, as historically Serbian.⁶ Writers in both countries inflamed conflicting nationalisms. A 1902 article published in a Belgrade newspaper and reprinted in *Srbobran*, the principal Serbian periodical in Zagreb, read:

⁵Jelavich, p. 16. Italics mine. In particular, Serbian priests and schools helped reorder the self-identity of Croatia's Orthodox citizenry. The Orthodox in Croatia attended their own schools, which were administered by the autocephalous Serbian Orthodox Church; there was no Croatian Orthodox church.

⁶Ibid., p. 21. According to the author, "the strength of Serbian national sentiment can be measured in a number of ways....The most popular Serbian almanac...published a large, multi-colored map that identified all the South Slav lands...as being Serbian. Only Slovenia and Bulgaria were excluded..."

[The Croats do] not have their own language, nor common customs, nor a strong common identity, nor, what is important, consciousness of belonging to one another, as a result of which they cannot be a separate nationality....[The struggle between us will go on] until either we or you are eliminated. One side must surrender. That it will be the Croats is assured by their inferiority, geographic position, circumstances...

In response, "Croats took to the streets, beating up Serbs, breaking their store windows, and generally harassing them." ⁷

Against this political backdrop, many Orthodox Croatians, assisted through the ministrations of their clergy, came to regard themselves as Serbian. After living in Croatia for hundreds of years, only their religious orientation separated them from their Catholic neighbors. Yet the difference proved sufficient enough to call themselves Serbs. Perhaps, as Raju Thomas argued, it is true that

Under conditions of nationalist fervor, religious identity tends to override language and cultural identities in determining a person's loyalty. One need not be religious, however, to act...on the basis of religion.⁸

Regardless, between 1878 and 1902 tensions between Serbs and Croats rose dramatically, and many Orthodox Croatians came to consider themselves Serbs. Pennsylvania's Croatians knew of these tensions in their homeland, and in an effort to prevent discord in their transplanted communities they avoided making Catholicism the basis for membership in the NCS.

This policy did not please everyone. Writing to Archbishop Strossmayer in Croatia, Father Franjo Glojnaric, the conservative parish priest in Bennett, said that:

We organized the Croatian Society with its lodges all over America. This is an insurance society based on Catholic rules the same as the societies of other *Catholic nations* in this country. Unfortunately, some semi-educated outsiders imbued our Croatian Catholic workers with Masonic ideas. This is the root of all evil....I am, therefore, asking your Eminence for the following moral support:

⁷Ibid., 19.

⁸Thomas, *South Slav Conflict*, p. 16.

should your Eminence ever receive a request [from the NCS] to send a priest wherever he may be needed, will you please stipulate that [first] the Society should not only delete from its by-laws every point directed against our sacred faith, but that also, following the examples of other *Catholic nations* in this country, Catholic rules should be accepted by the Society.⁹

Although the NCS was not the Catholic organization Glojnarić and others wanted it to be, religious activity on the part of local lodges continued. In Pittsburgh, Steelton, Ambridge, Rankin, and other towns, the local chapters of the NCS continued to secure funds, priests, and the other necessities of parish development.

At the same time, the NCS experienced dynamic growth. By 1900, the Society had assumed a larger role in Croatian communities than merely providing death and disability benefits to members. The NCS became highly politicized, with the politics of the homeland as its central concern. The naming of the first lodge after prominent Croatian politician Ante Starčević had been a clear sign that some of the society's founders possessed ardent Croatian nationalism. Other signs followed. When Zdravko Mužina motioned that St. Nicholas be known only as a Croatian church, Slovene members left the initial parish committee.¹⁰ The largest of three bells for the church, which were paid for through the organizational efforts of early NCS leaders, was inscribed "Sts. Cyril and Methodus, pray for the greater united Croatia."¹¹ At the Second Convention of the NCS, the distinctive red and white checkerboard shield, the *Hrvatski Grb*, or Croatian national seal, was adopted as the Society's emblem. Prior to adopting the *Grb*, the coat of arms of the Triune Kingdom of Croatia-Slavonia-Dalmatia had represented the Society, but now this was despised as too "Hungarian" a symbol.¹²

The NCS also organized massive national celebrations and processions to mark the openings of new lodge halls, the presentation of lodge banners or Croatian flags, the

⁹Čizmič, p. 62. Italics mine.

¹⁰Sorić, p. 45.

¹¹Ibid., p. 113.

¹²Ibid., p. 44.

thousandth anniversary of the crowning of Tomislav, the first Croatian king, and other important occasions.¹³ A benediction from one of the Croatian Catholic priests became a hallmark of these events. Clearly, some early leaders of the NCS saw the need to foster a strong sense of Croatian nationalism within their community, a nationalism traditionally associated with Catholicism. Because discontent with Hungarian rule figured quite largely in the Croatian migration to the United States, it is not surprising that strident nationalism manifested itself early.

As time passed, however, other NCS members began to question whether the Society's dynamic, faith-based nationalism was in the Croatian community's best interest. Despite the liberal NCS by-laws which had attracted their enrollment, many Croatian Orthodox practitioners began to abandon the organization. By 1902, many had joined *Srbobran*, the new Serbian Orthodox Union of America.¹⁴ Some members blamed the Orthodox flight on the religious nationalism manifested in parades, celebrations, and other NCS-sponsored events, where Catholic ceremonies played a central role in the festivities.

In 1902, the NCS convened its Seventh National Convention in Allegheny City. The proceedings made it clear that two separate camps had emerged within the organization. Those championing a non-sectarian role for the society were well-represented on the Supreme Board, notably by Petar Pavlinac, the president. Dr. Milan Kovačević, an influential member of the Bennett lodge of the NCS, led the opposition. Kovačević was joined by his conservative parish priest, Father Glojnarčić, as well as Father Bosiljko Bekavac, who arrived in Pittsburgh in 1900 to serve as pastor of the Allegheny City St. Nicholas.¹⁵ Another vocal opponent of the Society's evolving non-

¹³Ibid., p. 60.

¹⁴Ibid., p. 45.

¹⁵*Biography of Reverend Bosiljko Bekavac.*

sectarianism was Ivan Ljubić, who had been the first president of the NCS (then the CU) in 1894.

As the convention got underway, lodges from Steelton, Chicago, and Kansas City appealed to the board for financial assistance to build their churches. They were flatly refused. In fact, boardmembers argued that there were a sufficient number of Croatian Catholic churches in the United States, even though the number of new parishioners had grown much more rapidly than had new parishes.¹⁶ The refusal to aid in church-building galled the opposition. They denounced the behavior of the Supreme Board and threatened to start a competing Catholic fraternal organization. In response, President Pavlinac later circulated a letter among all NCS lodges, alleging that certain "highbrow betrayers of the Croatian people" were being employed by Hungarian authorities to splinter and destroy the NCS.¹⁷

In the Pennsylvania Croatian community of 1902, there could be no greater insult than accusing a Croat of Hungarian sympathies. Pavlinac's letter alleging Magyarone tendencies among Kovačević, Ljubić, and the priests demonstrated an emerging linkage between the political and religious debates within the NCS. The immigrants split on the best political course for their homeland.

Mirroring the divisions in Croatia, some wanted unification of all Croatian lands, freedom from Hungarian rule, and incorporation into a trialist (and coincidentally Catholic) Habsburg kingdom, with Croatia's status being equal to that of Austria or Hungary. The opposition leaders at the 1902 convention adhered to this view. For example, Ivan Ljubić attended the convention as an official representative of the *Franz Joseph* / NCS lodge in Wheeling, West Virginia. Formed in 1892, the lodge had been

¹⁶Sorić, p. 62.

¹⁷Čizmić, p. 93.

named after the Austrian monarch on Ljubić's suggestion.¹⁸ Ljubić's political beliefs closely mirrored the platform of Starčević's Party of Rights in Croatia, which insisted that a unified and independent Croatia be linked to the Habsburg Empire only through the person of the Emperor as King of Croatia.¹⁹ Like Starčević and thousands of others in Croatia, Ljubić and Kovačević believed that Croatian unity and confederation within the empire offered the best way to cast off Hungarian rule. Accordingly, Kovačević delivered a blistering response to Pavlinac's accusations:

There is nothing for us but to tell you openly in front of all the Croatian people that unless you prove that either myself or any of my "highbrow" friends received a single cent from the Hungarian Government to split and destroy the NCS, or that we are associated with any person or government against our Croatian brothers, thus being traitors, we consider you [the Supreme Board of the NCS]...together and individually mean cowards, scoundrels, and rascals.²⁰

Some weeks after the convention's stormy session, Ljubić, Kovačević, Glojnarić, and Bekovac established the Croatian Catholic Labor Union (CCLU) in Bennett, with Ljubić as president. The new organization was not warmly received, particularly by other influential NCS members who also opposed Pavlinac's policies. Franjo (Frank) Zotti, editor of *Narodni list* (National Gazette), the most influential Croatian newspaper of the time, felt that the CCLU seriously weakened opposition to Pavlinac within the NCS, ultimately strengthening his hold on the organization. Zotti believed the opposition should remain in the NCS and battle Pavlinac for control. Speaking on the need to expel the president and his allies, whom he referred to as "proletarian intelligentsia," Zotti said, "Let them flirt with anarchism and nihilism or even spiritualism in their own union founded with their own money and their own hard-won earnings."²¹ Reverend Dr. Mirko Kajić, the Johnstown priest, shared the opposition's religious and political

¹⁸Sorić, p. 40.

¹⁹Tanner, p. 104.

²⁰Čizmić, p. 91.

²¹Ibid., p. 64.

outlook. Echoing Zotti, Kajić issued a statement appealing to his associates not to establish the CCLU and split the NCS. Despite these pleas, however, five lodges of the NCS quickly joined the new group.²²

In view of the divergent political viewpoints of the NCS leadership and the nationalist Croatian laity and clergy, the rift in the NCS is understandable. In particular, most priests had imbibed deeply from a Catholic-nationalist tradition that made it difficult for them to countenance ethnic pluralism within Croatian organizations. Unlike the earlier immigrants who left Croatia before rising ethnic tensions, the first Croatian priests did not join the trans-Atlantic migration until 1894, at a time of rising Serb-Croat discord in Croatia. Like those whose policies they opposed, they were young men. Franjo Glojnaric was only 34 when he arrived in Pennsylvania, while Bosiljko Bekavac was 30 when he reached Pittsburgh in 1900.²³ Other priests were equally youthful. The first Croatian priest in Pennsylvania, Dobroslov Božić, arrived from Bosnia at the age of 33. Rev. Mato Matina arrived in Rankin from Croatia at the "old" age of 44.²⁴

Some of these men were fleeing persecution for their political viewpoints. In Bosnia, Rev. Božić had been embroiled in conflicts with his Franciscan superiors over their deference to Habsburg policies which he deemed unjust. Rev. Kajić of Johnstown had been a follower of the Movement for the Union of South-Slavs in Austria-Hungary, and came to Pennsylvania as a political malcontent.²⁵ Rev. Matina, a well-known author in Croatia, accepted an invitation to serve as the first pastor of St. Mary's Church in Rankin partly due to his persecution by the Hedervary regime.²⁶ And Rev. Martin Krmpotić came to the United States because his membership in Starčević's Party of Rights had

²²Sorić, p. 57.

²³*Biography of Reverend Bosiljko Bekavac.*

²⁴Sorić, p. 133.

²⁵Čizmić, p. 59.

²⁶Prpić, p. 183.

prevented him from receiving a parish in Croatia.²⁷ While there were notable exceptions, many of the first Croatian priests in the United States held strong political convictions echoing the views of Starčević, who despised Hungarian rule, warned against Croatian inclusion in a centralized, Serbian-dominated South-Slavic state, and advocated an independent Croatia within a trialist Habsburg kingdom.²⁸

Simultaneous to the growth of inter-ethnic conflict, a viewpoint advocating ethnic unity had also risen in nineteenth-century Croatia, and it too had adherents among Pennsylvania's Croats. By the 1890s, a segment of the Croatian middle-class had begun to find Starčević's refusal "to admit to the separate [ethnic] identity of the Serbs in Croatia...[as] old-fashioned." Growing anti-clerical sentiments in Croatia reflected a belief that a Croat's religious affiliation was irrelevant.²⁹ After all, the Habsburgs were the enemy, not the Serbs. They believed Orthodox and Catholic citizens could peacefully coexist within one nation, just as Catholic Bavarians and Protestant Prussians did.

These views were bound up in *Jugoslavenstvo*, or South-Slavism, a Croatian political movement going back to Napoleon's founding of the short-lived Illyrian provinces. While under fire during the heightened nationalism of the late-1890s, *Jugoslavenstvo* maintained a tenuous hold upon Croatian intellectuals in both Europe and Pennsylvania. The pluralistic, non-secular policies of the NCS's youthful leadership--men such as Pavlinac, Mahronić, and Janković--reflected in part the spirit of *Jugoslavenstvo*, as their actions over the following decade would prove beyond doubt.

²⁷Čizmić, p. 59.

²⁸Tanner, p. 105. Starčević's views towards Serbs softened later in life, but for most of his political career he viewed Belgrade with mistrust and also refused to acknowledge any Serbian ethnicity on the part of Croatia's Orthodox population.

²⁹Ibid., pp. 106-107.

In 1903, American *Jugoslavenstvo* received renewed impetus from two developments in Europe. In that year, Hungarian authorities recalled *Ban* Hedervary from Zagreb to Budapest to placate the rioting Croats' demands for his removal. As chief agitator of Serb-Croat relations in Croatia, his departure had a soothing effect. Secondly, the assassination of Serbia's King Alexander Obrenović that same year brought to the throne Petar Karadjorđević, a man believed to be sympathetic to the ideas of south-Slav cooperation. The lessening of Serb-Croat tensions facilitated by these two major leadership changes gave new life to *Jugoslavenstvo*, and the youth movements within Croatia gradually adopted a South-Slav political outlook.³⁰ The growing *rapprochement* between Croatia's Serbs and Croats also resulted in the formation of a joint anti-Hungarian political coalition in 1905, its underlying principle being *narodno jedinstvo*, or national unity. The coalition accepted the idea "that the Serbs and Croats were one people, but it stressed that each had developed a separate historical identity."³¹

These developments seemed to confirm the wisdom of the NCS leaders who had advocated a secular Croatian society. Such a political climate doomed the separatist CCLU, which failed by 1905. Condemned as a divisive element, its membership never topped 1,000, and it lacked the financial or organizational base needed to succeed.³² But the division within the Croatian community that the CCLU represented survived. Croatian-Americans remained split over the role of their pre-eminent fraternal organization. Some felt it should aid in Catholic church-building, just as Polish, Slovene, Slovak, and Italian fraternal societies did. Others felt that the society should remain

³⁰ Jelavich, pp. 19-20.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

³² Čizmić, p. 64.

above divisive religious matters, that Croatians possessed a multicultural, multifaith nationality.

This pluralistic attitude, a legacy of the *melange* created by Ottoman conquest in the Balkans, was unique to the Croatians. It caused them to diverge from the behavior forecast in phase two of Tomasi's assimilation model. Ethnic, religious, and political rifts within their community ensured that Croatian churches would not benefit from the financial and organizational talents of one of the largest and most influential ethnic fraternal societies in the United States. It was no coincidence that the development of Croatian parishes in Pennsylvania stalled precisely at the moment when political divisions rattled the Croatian immigrant community in Pennsylvania.

Yet more than political divisions slowed Croatian church-building in Pennsylvania. Early on, the shortage of clergy became a genuine problem, because few priests took it upon themselves to emigrate. Usually, they were dispatched by Croatian bishops responding to the plaintive requests of immigrants. In 1902, the Church in Croatia finally recognized the growing need for priests in the United States, and the Archbishop of Zagreb circulated a letter among Croatian priests, petitioning them to cross the Atlantic. While acknowledging that there was an acute shortage of priests in Croatia, the Archbishop believed that at least a few should work among the immigrants to "revive the faith and impart solace in the mother tongue."³³

By the end of 1902, each Croatian parish in Pennsylvania had a priest from their homeland, but for those communities wishing to organize new Croatian parishes, the shortage of priests still presented an obstacle. It was unlikely that parishioners would earmark money for a Croatian church if the chances of getting a Croatian priest were slim.³⁴ Without one, the local bishop would end up appointing any available priest, and

³³Čizmić, pp. 58-59.

³⁴Bodnar, 150.

chances were high that any diocesan appointee would deliver his sermons in the lilting tones of Hibernian-accented English.

The experiences of the Slovenes provide a useful comparison here. Coming from a very similar Catholic religious tradition, they at first established churches with their Croatian neighbors. However, over time each ethnic group began to worship independently of one another. The Slovenes, while fewer in number than the Croats, created more new parishes. An important factor explaining this development may be the abundance of Slovene priests in the United States prior to the arrival of large numbers of Slovenian immigrants. Inspired by the missionary work of Rev Frederick Baraga, who had died in Michigan in 1868, "scores of fellow Slovene priests" had followed him, "especially in the final third of the nineteenth century."³⁵

While a shortage of priests probably slowed Croatian parish growth, the immigrants' desire to return to their homeland also may have cooled church-building fervor. As was the case among other recent arrivals in this period, many Croats planned one day to return home. This *animus revertendi* kept them from committing themselves financially or emotionally to institution-building. Silvano Tomasi offered the following observation regarding the notorious returnism of Italian immigrants:

The indecision to settle permanently affected the development of organized life in the immigrant community. If America was only a temporary place of work and quick enrichment, it was perfectly normal for the immigrant to focus on economic profits rather than on his future place in the adoptive country.³⁶

This was as true among the Croats as it was with the Italians. Croatian returnism rates from 1908 through 1923 ranked among the very highest. Statistics from the U.S. Department of Labor showed that Croats/Slovenians in the United States had a European return rate of 51 percent. This was much higher than rates among Germans

³⁵*The Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic Groups*, p. 935.

³⁶Tomasi, p. 21.

(18 percent), English (21 percent), French (21 percent), Scandinavians (22 percent) or Greeks (46 percent). Among Slavic immigrant groups, the Croatian/Slovenian return rate also eclipsed that of the Poles (40 percent) and Bohemians (19 percent). During some periods, Croatian returnism spiked upward even further.³⁷ For example, from 1907 to 1912, the Croatians and Slovenians posted a European return rate of 59 percent.³⁸

Returnism may have stifled church-building among Croatians, but poverty had an even larger effect on the pace of their religious organization. As Oscar Handlin argued:

The problem of finances was sufficiently oppressive....With the most devout in the world, a church would not appear unless there were funds for an edifice and a staff for its service.³⁹

And so it was with the Croatians. Unlike their brethren in California who had arrived a generation earlier and started prosperous vineyards, restaurants, and fisheries, the Pennsylvania Croatians were poor, even by immigrant standards. Illiteracy, higher among Croatians than any other Slavic immigrants, certainly contributed to their low wage-earning potential. For example, while they became the most numerous immigrant group in the Steelton mills, the Croatians' average yearly earnings were second to last; only the late-arriving Serbs and Bulgarians earned less. It was not just the old-stock immigrants such as Germans and Englishmen who out-earned the Croats; the Slovenians earned an average wage 50 percent higher than that of the Croatians.⁴⁰ It seems possible that other than their slightly earlier migration to Pennsylvania, the most pronounced advantage Slovenes had over Croatians which would explain this wage

³⁷Kraljić, p. 46.

³⁸Ibid., pp. 31, 44.

³⁹Handlin, p. 113.

⁴⁰Ibid., pp. 159-160.

disparity was a much higher literacy rate resulting from a better European school system.

Families in the homeland significantly drained any income the Croatians could muster for religious organization. As among other groups with a pronounced inclination to return to Europe, Croatians sent large sums of money home.⁴¹ Some of it supported relatives left behind or paid for their later passage to the United States. Some of it went to the old church in the immigrant's *se/o* (village). Some went to ameliorate conditions for relatives jailed by the Hungarian authorities, particularly during the strife-ridden years of 1902-1903.⁴² Much of it was earmarked for a triumphant return to Croatia, where the returnees would pay off debts, build homes, or buy enough property to create viable family farms. Finally, bound up in the financial calculations of prospective returnees was the need to amass sufficient funds for the return crossing.

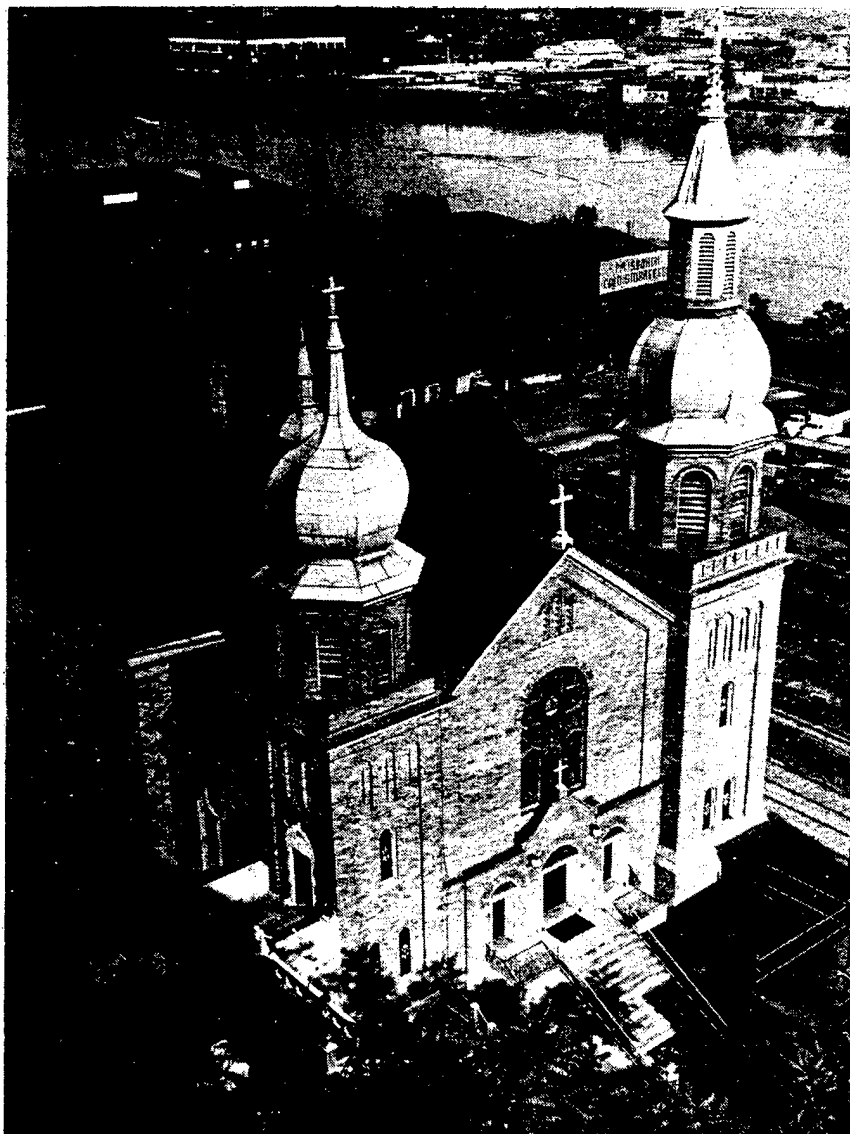
It is clear that the grinding poverty of Pennsylvania's Croatians limited the organization of their religious life. The construction of St. Nicholas Church in Allegheny City illustrates the point. As the first Croatian church in Pennsylvania and North America, it was a point of pride for its countrymen across the continent. The building committee canvassed funds not only among the parish community, but also from Croatians throughout Pennsylvania and the United States. The response was overwhelming, and even Canadian Croatians contributed to the construction.⁴³ Yet despite its preeminent status, St Nicholas could not, "for practical reasons," open a

⁴¹ Prpić, p. 213. According to a U.S. government report on immigrant banks, Croatians sent \$13 million to Croatia from 1892 to 1902.

⁴² Balch, p. 189. Also see Čizmić, *History of the CFU*, p. 59. In 1903, the NCS sent \$5,900 (a seventh of its assets) to Croatia to assist victims of the riots.

⁴³ *Spomen Knjiga, Zlatnog Jubileja ili 50. Godišnjice Prve Hrvatske Rimokatoličke Župe Svetoga Nikole, 1894-1944*, (Pittsburgh, PA 1944), pp. 129-40.

ILLUSTRATION 2: ST. NICHOLAS CHURCH, PITTSBURGH
(first Croatian parish in the United States)



Source: *Seventy-fifth Anniversary Program,*
St. Nicholas R. C. Church, (Pittsburgh, 1969).

a parish school until 1931.⁴⁴

For communities lacking the distinction of being "first," with a subsequently narrower economic base to draw upon, the dearth of dollars seriously hampered efforts at religious organization. In Steelton, the Croatians had planned the construction of a second Croatian church when the Depression of 1908 caused them to abandon the project forever.⁴⁵ The battle to construct a Croatian church in Sharon, Pennsylvania, illustrates the point, too. As early as 1902, the Croatians of that community organized a church-building committee. By 1903, they had purchased land to build upon, but they could proceed no further. By 1912, when the community still had not saved enough money to erect a church, the Croatians decided instead to build a "Croatian home," a cultural center. Finally, the Croatians succeeded in building their church in 1916, but a dispute with the diocese resulted in an "independent" parish. The Croatians' unwillingness to acknowledge spiritual and financial diocesan authority divided their community. Deprived of unified financial support, the parish failed almost immediately. The Croatians did not succeed in constructing another house of worship until 1925, when they built St. Anthony's Roman Catholic Church.⁴⁶

Supporters of the second St. Nicholas Church, built in Bennett in 1901, argued that it was needed to serve Allegheny City's growing Croatian population, estimated at over 10,000 people by the parish priest.⁴⁷ Even so, this large Croatian community could not financially support a second church. The original plan called for a building costing \$20,000, but due to lack of funds the church was shortened twenty feet to cut costs in half.⁴⁸ Despite acknowledging the need to hold costs to \$10,000, the building

⁴⁴Ibid., p. 160.

⁴⁵Bodnar, p. 87.

⁴⁶*Fortieth Anniversary Program of St. Anthony's Roman Catholic Church*, (Sharon, PA, 1964).

⁴⁷Sorić, p. 143.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 145.

committee actually spent \$33,838 dollars. With a debt of \$23,000 against it, the church's financial future seemed quite dim.⁴⁹ More than once, the church was threatened with sheriff's sale.⁵⁰

The Croatian parish in Rankin was also plagued by financial shortfalls. Although St. Mary's was completed by 1904, it was not constructed to the scale which had been planned. Bishop Regis Canevin disapproved an initial projected cost of \$36,000-\$38,000. Recalling the problems of the Bennett parish, Canevin did not think the congregation could raise that amount of money, and he proved to be correct. He sanctioned a more modest church costing \$23,000, and building went forward. Yet even this amount proved beyond the capabilities of the parishioners. They raised only \$8,000, the remainder being covered by a mortgage that strangled the life out of the new church and its pastors. The first parish priest, Reverend Mato Matina, presided over the church for less than a year, resigning when he became too physically and emotionally drained to continue. He died just three months later at the age of 47. His successor, Father Francis Glojnarić, labored under the financial burdens as well, and also died when just 47 years old. Not until 1941 was the debt on the church successfully retired.⁵¹ Financial pressures also delayed a parochial school proposed in 1921, and it ultimately was never built.⁵²

As the 1890s began, Pennsylvania's Croatians seemed poised to build churches and other ethnic institutions at a rate commensurate with other immigrants. But by 1900, several unique social and demographic factors had combined to create barriers to

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁵⁰ *Biography of Reverend Bosiljko Bekavac.*

⁵¹ *75th Anniversary Program of the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary Church*, (Rankin, PA, 1979), pp. 5-6.

⁵² *Biography of Reverend Bosiljko Bekavac.*

religious organization that could not be easily dismissed. New obstacles would emerge in the years ahead.

CHAPTER VI: "STEADFAST AND LOYAL TO OUR GOD":
YUGOSLAVISM, THE NCS, AND THE CCU

By 1906, the Croatians had established their last parish in Pennsylvania until the founding in 1924 of St. Anthony's in Sharon.¹ Despite the continued growth of Croatian communities, cultural, political, and economic obstacles to church-building prevented any new parish growth. This relative handful of churches would have to meet the spiritual needs of all Croatians in the state.

Meanwhile, as the NCS continued to grow, it knitted the Croatian community together. As phase two of Tomasi's model predicted, Croatians needed ethnic institutions to reduce their sense of anomie. Unlike many immigrant groups, however, the Croatians relied more heavily upon secular rather than religious institutions. More than any other organization in Pennsylvania, the NCS met the psychological, emotional, and social needs of the Croatians.

In 1904, the NCS boasted 281 chapters and 22,000 members, and had paid out over \$600,000 in benefits to its members.² It became the locus of Croatian community life. Singing societies as well as athletic associations, called *Soko/s* (falcon), sprang up in Croatian communities across Pennsylvania, sponsored by local lodges of the NCS. In Steelton, the St. Lawrence lodge, and not St. Mary's church, served as the center for Croatian social and cultural activity.³ New lodge halls that doubled as social centers sprang up in significant numbers. As Ivan Čizmić noted:

the most important social function for the lodges was organizing entertainment....entertainment and picnics were organized more and more...some lodges organized them two or three times a year. Importance was given to dances which were often held during religious holidays and for the New

¹St. Joseph's was established in Bethlehem in 1913, but this church had a majority Slovene congregation, and was organized with the assistance of the smaller Croatian community in town.

²Prpić, p. 179.

³Bodnar, p. 112.

Year holiday....Whenever possible, lodges would form their own tamburitza orchestras....⁴

In spite of occasional economic downturns, such as the Depression of 1907-08, the NCS remained solvent, its treasury holding the contributions of thousands of new immigrant members. By 1915, the society had established a junior order for children, and total NCS membership reached 36,000.⁵

The NCS also remained politically active, both at home and abroad. Particularly sympathetic to the workers' movement, the society encouraged its members to enroll in American labor organizations.⁶ In 1902 it donated \$500 dollars to striking coal miners in Pennsylvania, receiving the grateful thanks of John Mitchell, president of the United Mine Workers Union.⁷ The politics of the Old World commanded NCS attention and action as well. In 1903, the society sent thousands of dollars to Croatia for victims of political unrest.⁸ For the priests and laity who still desired a Catholic society, such activities must have provoked fury: the NCS spent thousands of dollars on strikers and political struggles, but it refused to assist in church-building.

Despite its social and political dominance within the immigrant community, internal discord still simmered within the NCS. Worse, the issues being debated had become more complex. As the NCS grew in the 1900s, so too did *Jugoslavenstvo*, both in Europe and Pennsylvania. Since its rebirth during the political *rapprochement* between Croatia's Serbs and Croats in 1905, certain influential members of the NCS, notably Josip Marhonić, who became the society's president in 1912, were adherents of the Yugoslav idea.⁹ Marhonić and his associates were opposed by men such as Franjo

⁴Čizmić, p. 14.

⁵Prpić, p. 179.

⁶Čizmić, p. 120.

⁷Ibid., p. 113.

⁸Prpić, p. 179.

⁹Ibid., p. 180.

"Frank" Zotti, the powerful banker and Croatian newspaper editor who opposed any union with Serbia.

The religious opponents to a secular society who had launched the failed CCLU remained active as well. Rev. Dr. Mirko Kajić, the Johnstown priest and an associate of CCLU founder Rev. Glojnaric, grew increasingly displeased with the political and spiritual direction of the Croatian community, and allied himself with Rev. M.D. Krmpotić, a like-minded Croatian priest in Kansas City.¹⁰ Like Zotti, both men opposed the concept of a union with Serbia. In addition, they believed the NCS had come under the influence of radical, socialist forces. To them, the NCS's secularism, support for organized labor, and growing spirit of *Jugoslavenstvo* seemed to confirm their viewpoint.¹¹

In fact, a relationship existed between the Yugoslav movement and socialism, although the priests overestimated socialism's influence. Yugoslavism extolled the virtues of a multi-ethnic struggle for freedom against oppressive, wealthy monarchical powers, and the class aspect of the struggle had particular appeal for socialists. As early as 1903, the first Croatian Socialist club in Pennsylvania had been founded in Allegheny City. By 1910, this club merged with Serb, Slovene, and Bulgarian socialist clubs, forming the *Jugoslovanska Socialistična Zveza* (Yugoslav Socialist Federation--YSF). The organization published a Croatian-language socialist newspaper titled *Radnička Straža* (Workers' Sentinel), but it did not seem influential among Croats. Over 80 percent of YSF members were Slovene, and the organization never enrolled more than 2,000 members.¹²

¹⁰Ibid., p. 181.

¹¹*30th Anniversary Program of the Croatian Catholic Union*, (Gary, IN, 1951), p. 6. Commenting on the early situation within the Croatian community, the program stated that "atheistic and destructive elements....were well entrenched in the existing societies....in almost complete control of them."

¹²Bodnar, p. 192.

While the YSF lacked the influence to win new devotees to *Jugoslavenstvo*, the NCS and its official newspaper *Zajedničar* (Fraternalist) had no such problem. In 1910, *Zajednicar's* editor was Nikola Grsković, a Catholic priest and confirmed believer in the Yugoslav idea.¹³ Grsković wished to form a national Croatian political organization advocating a South-Slav union, and he used the NCS newspaper to win converts to his program. While Zotti's influential *Narodni List* editorialized against Grsković, Mahronić, and the Yugoslav movement, the idea of union with Serbia gained popularity among some Croats. In 1912, the *Hrvatski Savez* (Croatian Alliance) was founded during the eleventh convention of the NCS in Kansas City. Within a few months, the alliance had 110 lodges, demonstrating that it enjoyed greater support than its opponents wished to admit.¹⁴

When the war in Europe began in 1914, the Croatian Alliance threw its support to the Yugoslav Committee in London, an organization that sought to represent all Habsburg Slavs and desired union with Serbia and Montenegro. In March 1915, it held a convention in Chicago, drafting a resolution of support for the formation of a Yugoslav state after the war. The resolution was forwarded to President Wilson.¹⁵ The priests in opposition to the Yugoslav movement reacted to the resolution with anger, and Rev. Kajić drafted a letter titled *Naša Izjava* (our declaration), denouncing "pan-Serbianism" and demanding the formation of an independent Croat-Slovene republic instead.¹⁶

When the war ended and Serbian troops moved into Croatia, the *Hrvatski Savez* rapidly collapsed. Both its followers and leaders were chagrined to see a federal, authoritarian, Serbian-dominated state established instead of the confederative South-

¹³Prpić, "The Croatian Immigrants in Pittsburgh," pp. 281-283. Grsković was one of few priests supporting union with Serbia. He left the priesthood in 1917.

¹⁴Prpić, *The Croatian Immigrants in America*, p. 180.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 235.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 237.

Slav nation they had envisioned.¹⁷ Grsković was attacked in the newspapers as a traitor, and his supporters abandoned him. An opportunity for the clergy-led opposition to win new adherents seemed at hand. Yet despite disappointment with the Yugoslav program championed by the NCS, its rank-and-file membership remained loyal. The NCS avoided mass defections to the opposition by condemning "pan-Serbianism" in as loud a voice as anyone while continuing to offer excellent disability benefits and cultural pursuits.

From 1900 to 1918, during the rise and fall of *Jugoslavenstvo* within the NCS and the Croatian community, Croatian churches in Pennsylvania continued to celebrate masses and provide spiritual support to parishioners, but they never became the assimilative agents they could have been. In fact, the churches played little to no assimilative role among Croatians, because the NCS took over that role instead. The society encouraged union membership, naturalization, the use of English, and other "Americanizing" activities.

Churches remained the domain of the priests, strident Croatian nationalists who eschewed the Yugoslav idea and sought to keep Croatians, "steadfast and loyal to our God."¹⁸ Other than ministering to the spiritual needs of Croatians, however, their role in assimilation had been circumscribed by the success of the NCS. Despite this, churches maintained the responsibility for educating Croatian children. Three of the parishes in Pennsylvania--St. Mary's in Steelton, St. Rochus in Johnstown, and the Sacred Heart of Jesus in McKeesport--had opened parish schools before the end of World War I, and the motivation behind their establishment seemed to be "to preserve the Croatian language."¹⁹

¹⁷Ibid., p. 246

¹⁸*30th Anniversary Program of the Croatian Catholic Union*, p. 5.

¹⁹Bodnar, p. 115.

Yet even in an area of endeavor that remained unchallenged by the NCS, the churches struggled. St. Mary's of Rankin wished to construct a school but lack of funds "made it necessary to defer action...until more propitious times."²⁰ The more propitious time never came, and St. Mary's never established a school. Still, when schools opened, parents enrolled their children in significant numbers. St. Nicholas of Bennett, struggling with the burden of a heavy mortgage, did not open its school until 1921, but 100 children immediately enrolled.²¹ The first Croatian church in Pennsylvania, St. Nicholas of Allegheny City, could not establish its parish school until 1931 due to "practical reasons." When it did open, 240 pupils quickly entered.²²

While schools allowed the clergy to maintain its influence among the children, by the 1920s, the same priests who always had advocated a Catholic fraternal society believed they saw a real decline in Catholic religiosity among working-age Croatians. In 1921, they established the Croatian Catholic Union (CCU), hoping it would slow the slipping away of their once-faithful countrymen. Rev. Kajić of Johnstown attended the opening meeting of the union. Unlike the failed CCLU, the CCU became a viable and enduring organization. Launched during a time of general economic prosperity in the United States, and with a large and aggressive founding committee, the CCU established its own newspaper and offered very competitive insurance and benefits programs. By 1925 it had 2,500 members in 45 lodges, the most active being in Pittsburgh, McKeesport, Sharon-Farrell, and Ambridge.²³

The CCU strove to do what the NCS would not; it helped to organize parishes. Despite its small size, it succeeded nicely in this endeavor. Establishing the St.

²⁰ *Biography of Reverend Bosiljko Bekavac.*

²¹ *Spomen Knjiga, 50-godišnjici opstanka Hrvatske Rimokatoličke Crkve Svetoga Nikole u Millvale*, p. 114.

²² *Spomen Knjiga, Zlatnog Jubileja ili 50. Godišnjice Prve Hrvatske Rimokatoličke Župe Svetoga Nikole*, p. 160.

²³ Prpić, p. 263.

Joseph's lodge in Ambridge, the CCU helped create a parish in the town by 1926.²⁴

But by this time, however, the great flow of Croatian immigration had ended. Restriction laws had stopped the arrival of more newcomers. The Croatian community in Pennsylvania was almost fifty years old; the "new" immigrants were no longer new. Croats had successfully passed through the most difficult years of the assimilation process not by relying upon churches, as Tomasi's model suggests, but by relying upon the NCS instead.

²⁴ *Zlatni Jubilej, 1929-1979: Hrvatska Katolička Župa Presvetog Trojstva.*

CONCLUSIONS

The Croatians came to Pennsylvania firm in their faith. An early acceptance of Christianity, centuries of battle against the Ottoman Turks in defense of their Catholic practices, and an almost mystic affection for their ancient village parishes all seem to suggest that Croatians embraced their faith no less zealously than other immigrants.

Yet while much of the existing historiography has concluded that ethnic parishes served as the chief assimilative agent among immigrants, this is not true for the Croatians. Several unique factors contributed to their anomalous religious organization, including a higher illiteracy and poverty rate relative to other immigrants, which stagnated economic mobility and limited funds for church-building; an extremely high return migration rate--higher than that among many other Catholic immigrants--that reduced Croatian commitment to permanent institution-building in Pennsylvania; and a less certain national identity rooted in the complex Balkan *milieu* and the rise of *Jugoslavenstvo* (the Yugoslav idea) which made Croatian-American community leaders reluctant to equate religion with ethnicity. The last factor especially revealed itself in the schism between those Croatians--often led by priests--who equated Croatian ethnicity with Catholicism, and those who advocated a secular approach to ethnic institution-building.

The timing of Croatian migration to Pennsylvania also influenced religious organization. Croats arrived just when the growing steel industry demanded unskilled labor. As a result, a very high percentage of them found jobs in steel work. Unlike unionized coal-mining, dominated by Poles, Hungarians, Slovaks, and others, non-unionized steel work demanded more hours, paid less, and brought even greater hazards. As a result, Croatians found themselves with less time and resources to commit to church-building and worship. Moreover, benevolent societies, especially the

the National Croatian Society (NCS), successfully competed against churches for the immigrants' limited time and dollars. The much-needed workers' insurance benefits provided to Croatian laborers by the society guaranteed its continued popularity, growth and viability.

Unlike the Poles, Bohemians, Slovaks, and Slovenes, who established vibrant Catholic fraternal societies by 1885, secularism marked the NCS. Early on, those favoring a nonsectarian approach gained control of the society, prohibiting it from providing fund-raising support to new Catholic parishes just as a sense of anomie reached its height among Croatian immigrants. Thus, when the immigrants turned inward to escape conflict with the host society, the NCS stood ready to ameliorate their discomfiture, offering social, cultural, and athletic pursuits that helped ease their sense of isolation from mainstream American society.

The fundamental conclusion of this thesis is that the National Croatian Society became the locus of Croatian community life in Pennsylvania, fulfilling the assimilative role performed by Catholic parishes for many other immigrant groups. In contrast, Croatian parishes bore responsibility for providing an education to immigrant children that stressed their cultural and linguistic heritage, as well as for preserving a strident nationalism that eschewed "Yugoslavism" in favor of a free and independent Croatia.

APPENDIX A: CROATIAN CATHOLIC PARISHES IN PENNSYLVANIA

Harrisburg Diocese.

1--Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary (*Uznesenje Gospino*).

Address: 815 S. 2nd Street, Steelton, PA 17113.

Parish established: October 23, 1898.

Church opened: 1917.

First Pastor: Rev. Dobroslav Božić.

Parish school opened: 1903.

Notes: No longer ethnically Croatian, it was the largest Croatian Church and parochial school in the United States. The church is now called Prince of Peace.

Johnstown-Altoona Diocese.

2--St. Rochus (*Sveti Rok*).

Address: 314 8th Avenue, Johnstown, PA 15906.

Parish established: April 14, 1901.

Church opened: April 14, 1905.

First Pastor: Rev. Anton Politeo.

Parish school opened: 1908.

Pittsburgh Diocese.

3--St. Nicholas (*Svetoga Nikole*).

Address: 1326 East Ohio Street, Pittsburgh, PA 15212.

Parish established: August, 1894.

Church purchased, then opened: January 27, 1895.

First Pastor: Rev. Dobroslav Božić.

Parish school opened: 1931.

Notes: First Croatian church *operating* in the US. New Church built in 1921.

4--St. Nicholas (*Sveti Nikola*).

Address: 24 Maryland Avenue, Millvale, PA 15209.

Parish established: January 21, 1900.

Church opened: November 25, 1900.

First Pastor: Rev. Franjo Glojnaric.

Parish school opened: 1921.

Notes: First Croatian church *built* in the US. Destroyed by fire in 1921. New church consecrated in 1922.

5--Holy Trinity (*Presvetog Trojstva*).***

Address: 415 Melrose Ave, Ambridge, PA 15003.

Parish established: 1926.

Church purchased, then opened: March 30, 1929.

First Pastor: Rev. Rudolph Potočnik.

No parish school.

Notes: A new church was built in December 1950.

APPENDIX A: CROATIAN CATHOLIC PARISHES IN PENNSYLVANIA (Cont)

6--Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary (*Marija Pomoćnica*).

Address: 309 Kenmawr Avenue, Rankin, PA 15104.

Parish established: August 20, 1903.

Church opened: August 14, 1904.

First Pastor: Rev. Dr. Mato Matina.

No parish school.

7--Sacred Heart of Jesus (*Presveto Srce Isusovo*).

Address: 705 Shaw Avenue, McKeesport PA 15132.

Parish established: October 1906.

Church opened: March 11, 1907.

First Pastor: Rev. Ferdinand Duić.

Parish school opened: 1914.

Notes: Church was rebuilt in 1956.

Greensburg Diocese.

8--Saint Anthony's (*Sveti Ante*).***

Address: 1178 Leeds Avenue, Monessen, PA.

Parish established: May 31, 1952.

Church opened: December 24, 1957.

First Pastor: Father Theodore Benković.

No parish school.

Notes: New church completed September 1967.

Erie Diocese.

9--St. Anthony's of Padua (*Sveti Ante*).

Address: 804 Idaho Street, Sharon, PA 16146.

Parish established: March 19, 1924.

Church consecrated: December 20, 1925 (burned down July 17, 1928).

First pastor: Rev. Leon J. Medić.

Parish school opened: 1960.

Notes: An earlier, "independent" Croatian church was acquired by the parish in 1929 to replace the burned down church. A new church was dedicated June 19, 1938.

Allentown Diocese.

10--St. Joseph's (*Sveti Josipa*).

Address: 416 E. Fifth Street, Bethlehem, PA.

Parish established: July 1913.

Church consecrated: Oct 1917.

First pastor: Rev. Anselm Murn (Slovenian priest).

Parish school opened: 1926.

Notes: This is a Slovenian-Croatian parish.

*** Established after 1924: These churches failed to establish parish schools. Note that of the earlier parishes, all but one established a parish school.

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