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Michele Ueltri Tajnik

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We Are All Brothers: The Slavic Fraternal Lodges of Crested Butte

by
Michele Veltri

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Preface

Until a decade and a half ago, ethnic history in the United States was not considered very important. Fortunately, the general public now seems to have a more balanced appreciation of the vitality, variety and richness which the mulligan stew of immigration has given us.

Of course, this favorable shift of attention has encouraged strident aggressiveness by some ethnics in every group, local Slavs being no exception, but I have yet to see a silver lining without its cloud.

For most of the century of its existence, Crested Butte, Colorado, was inhabited by plain people whose occupations and personal preference guaranteed anonymity. In recent years, politics and geology have conspired against that relatively peaceful oblivion, so that the small Rocky Mountain town has had national and even international recognition. Much of the publicity was accompanied by misinformation — some deliberate, some resulting from superficial research.

There is a danger that readers having a particular ethnic bias or, lacking historical perspective, will read into this paper things which are not there. South Slav immigrants and their children played an important role in local events, yet they, too, were influenced by their new neighbors and new country. The structures for which builder Jake Kochevar is remembered were not copied from his native Slovenia but rather the frontier towns of the American West.

Ethnic prejudice is another area of misunderstandings and distortion. A couple of local Slavs have related with dramatic and somewhat inaccurate bitterness of their early struggles. Anti-Slav feeling did exist and is mentioned here, but they were capable of similar narrowness. Furthermore, the nucleus of true believers in the United Mine Workers represented every major ethnic group.

An attempt away from shoddy research, this paper began as a brief article in 1971 for the *Zajedničar*, official organ of the Croatian Fraternal Union of America, and was rewritten several times before reappearing in the same paper in 1978.

Much of this history is intimate personal experience for the friends who shared their knowledge and blew the breath of life into local history. Their contributions can never be acknowledged with mere footnotes. In particular, I am grate-

ful to Anne and Margaret Malensek and their brother, A. J. Mihelich, descendants of one of the first Croatian settlers in Crested Butte; to Frank and Mary Yelenick, who explained the basics of the fraternal insurance system, and to Frank Orazem, an articulate repository of fascinating information.

Faculty members of Western State College also aided me. Dr. Philip Jordan's guidance enabled me to change a loose, rambling tale into a concise, logical theme. Dr. Clarence Beck, generous with time and broad knowledge of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, answered questions and raised tantalizing new ones.

While not as directly connected with this particular project, all my best work bears the influence of Prof. Abbott Fay, an example of integrity for many who aspire to be true students.

Michele Veltri
Crested Butte, Colorado

Notes on Pronunciation, Place Names, Surnames and Generic Names

This guide is intended for the linguistic layman and is not to be considered conclusive. Closely related, Croatian and Slovenian languages use the same alphabet, lacking the q, w, x and y. Each letter has only one pronunciation and hence does not change as the a in bake and ball or the o in order and tool. There are no silent or double letters. Slav languages are guttural and a Scots burr helps in pronunciation. C is pronounced ts, never k or s. The hard č is ch as in church; the soft ć is so similar no distinction is attempted here; the Slovenes do not use it. E as in men; i as in key; j as in yes; š as in shed; ž as in Asia or leisure. Phrases and place names are given in Croatian or Slovenian but given names and surnames are anglicized when possible, even though it is thus impossible to show these names as they were originally. Paul Panian, for example, was Pavao Panijan. In cases where Slav authors did not become Americans, such as Trešić-Pavičić, I retained the diacritical marks in their names.

Conforming to local usage, I translated *Hrvatski Dom* into Croatian Hall, though technically this is incorrect. Use of the term "South Slav" was unfortunately repetitious, but these people were not yet Yugoslavs, so political implications prohibited its alternate use.

Introduction

In his introduction to *The Uprooted*, Oscar Handlin wrote: "Once I thought to write a history of the immigrants in America. Then I discovered that the immigrants were American history."

Many have disagreed. Franklin D. Roosevelt once angered a convention of the Daughters of the American Revolution by addressing his audience as "fellow immigrants." The Old World presents civilizations with foundations in a primeval past and it is easy to believe that they were always so awesome and stable. In the New World, too, the desire for gentility, tradition and a glorious past equal to that of venerable Europe caused descendants of early settlers to encourage the notion of their hoary permanence. As Marcus Lee Hanson observed:

"Popular usage recognizes a distinction between those settlers who reached America before 1776 and those who came later. The former are described as "colonists," the latter as "immigrants." In selecting ancestors for social reasons, it is well to have a large portion of the former among them."

His barbed limerick may have been merely political, but perhaps Woodrow Wilson recognized this when he quipped:

"Here's to good old Boston,
the home of the bean and the cod;
Where the Lodges speak only to Cabots,
and the Cabots speak only to God",

even though he himself traced his family heritage from the Scotch Covenanters of 1638.

Crested Butte, Colorado, was a product of the larger society from which it came, reflecting its attitudes and methods. Therefore, the old distinctions of established society were part of the freight jolted over the mountain passes, but in a frontier setting the attempt to preserve old facades was only partially successful, for barriers are harder to maintain when the same dust blackens the face of foreman and common coal digger alike. There was no real difference between John Hunter Arnott, the Inverness mechanic who came in 1890, or Josip Šporčić, the barefoot shepherd boy from Velike Drage, whose brother paid his passage in 1909. Both came "with stomachs after bread" and their blood mingled here.

If this is false, so are the tombstones among the sage brush. Why else did they come from Dalmellington, Scotland; Plemenitaš, Croatia; Ribnica, Slovenia; and Grimaldi, Italy, converging on snow-bound obscurity.

In all probability, Professor Handlin never heard of Crested Butte, yet he would understand completely the goals, hardships, hesitations and sorrows of its people. This paper is a study of one of the least known peoples of the "new immigration," the South Slavs. Their story in an isolated mining town is, for the most part, an affirmation of his conclusions. Handlin noted: "The history of immigration is a history of alienation and its consequences . . . With old ties snapped, men faced the enormous compulsion of working out new meanings to their lives, often under harsh and hostile circumstances."

One solution to surviving the present and securing the future was the fraternal benefit society. Probing the effectiveness of that solution is the purpose of this paper.

We Are All Brothers: The Slavic Fraternal Lodges of Crested Butte

The history of the United States is the story of immigration, reaching epic proportions in the nineteenth century and profoundly affecting every corner of the vast new land. A giant symbol of greeting awed the newcomers, for the nation was impatient for their brawn and shrewdness. But this mighty upheaval produced severe strains, demonstrated during World War I and its aftermath. Even the more materially successful, who may have been citizens for decades, again found themselves viewed with suspicion and distaste. That some people would hereafter be considered more desirable than others kept alive the raw soreness of uprooted people, not yet fully American, yet now too sophisticated and restless to settle back into the narrow confines of their old existence.

It is well documented that mass resettlements of long-established peoples is neither easy nor pleasant, regardless of what caused them to leave that which had been dear and comfortingly familiar. The universality of ethnocentrism is also manifest. Of the successive arrivals few indeed were welcomed by a Massasoit or a Jane Addams. The renowned scholar, Alvin Johnson, never forgot that he had been "that nasty little Dane."¹

Therefore, while not denying the uniqueness of any immigrant group, it is clear that common problems forced similar responses, whether in agricultural methods or provision for the destitute of one's own group. The ethnic mutual aid society was the immigrant answer to the novel physical and moral perils they faced. A buffer between the grim realities of

Social Darwinism and its members, the fraternal lodges provided a rough, often clumsy big brother security and guidance.

Many early attempts at unity failed, but as the survivors established themselves and prospered, they moved past protection of the widow, orphan and burial of the dead to include cultural pursuits. Denied, or even unaware of the sentiments of self-determination in their homelands, it became a duty to celebrate the birth of Robert Burns, honor the discovery of Columbus, recount the mighty deeds of Kraljević Marko.

This fierce resolve not to sink into cultural oblivion is one of the most poignant results of the uprooting. They came looking for bread and freedom, and in varying degrees found it. But truly, man does not live by bread alone; it would be sacrilege to forget their birthright, a debt owed to brave and selfless ancestors. The necessity of assimilation was recognized, but resisted. Even when the old ways were repudiated — language, customs, one's very name — the uncertainty and pain remained.

The fraternal lodge provided a subtle source of assimilation by teaching the uneducated immigrants the rules of parliamentary procedure and sophisticated fiscal policy. In many cases, the southern and eastern Europeans created organizations which equalled their indigenous counterparts in resources, membership and sponsorship of cultural and civic activities. Resolving for various reasons to remain aloof from social and political issues, the immigrant societies were frequently embroiled; urging their members to become citizens, it was impossible to expect them not to exercise duties and privileges. These tangible proofs of success bolstered the immigrant ego, especially when membership in a fraternal order was a pressing need and not merely a recreational outlet.

A product of its time, it was only natural that Crested Butte, Colorado, should attract the immigrants, profit from their labor and in turn be rejuvenated by them. Removed from the mainstream of events, Crested Butte's people were spared the urban slum, yet denied triumphs such as Michael Pupin, Carl Schurz or Irving Berlin. Still, great latitude existed for success, failure and innovation, allowing scrutiny of the conclusions from the broader field of immigrant history.

Crested Butte, Colorado, was part of the maelstrom called the American frontier: boisterous, nonchalant, pragmatic; a community of adventure and opportunity, appealing to the

solitary prospector, small businessman, cattleman and powerful industrialist. Situated twenty-eight miles north of Gunnison, the county seat, Crested Butte was officially incorporated in 1880. A supply station and jumping-off place for the mining towns surrounding it, Crested Butte was itself a mining town, site of the Colorado Fuel and Iron Company's Big Mine, the largest bituminous coal producer in the area, and the terminus of the Denver and Rio Grande Western Railroad.

The neighboring towns of Irwin and Gothic, though larger, went into a permanent decline by the mid-1880s in true boom town fashion. Surrounded by precious and industrial metals, with excellent bituminous and anthracite coal,² Crested Butte has been the second-largest community in Gunnison County for ninety-five years, and a major source of affluence for its southern neighbor.

The economic activity attracted large numbers to the region. Crested Butte came into being because of such transplanted easterners as Howard F. Smith, its first mayor, John Tetard and V. F. Axtell. Place names like Smith Hill, Rogers and Baxter Gulch reveal the Anglo-Saxon origins of these pioneers. Even so, Europeans played an important role from the beginning. Indeed, many of the town's first residents were directly from Britain — Scots, Irish and Welsh — continuing age-old family occupations as coal miners.

Until recently, current local folklore avenged old wrongs at the expense of accuracy, claiming that southern and eastern Europeans settled the town, but the names of fifty-nine men killed in the Jokerville Mine explosion of January 24, 1884, are mute evidence to the contrary.³

It was not until about 1890 that Italians, with Slovene and Croat subjects of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, began to settle in appreciable numbers, and not until the turn of the century that they left their stamp permanently on the town's character. These Balkan Slavs were destined to become the most numerous and influential of all immigrant groups.

Sweeping generalizations may be hazardous to complete accuracy, but any discussion of the South Slavs requires some background, for even in Europe they are not well understood. "A caricature of an Italian or a Jew on a vaudeville stage would be as readily recognized as that of an Irishman. Is this true of any Slavic group?"⁴

An ancient European people, the Slavs have traditionally pushed westward, surrounded and opposed by more warlike

populations. The Slav legacy in such German names as Leipzig, from *lipa*, the sacred linden tree, show their ancient hold on central Europe.⁵ Pressure from Magyar, German, Italian and Turk helped isolate and divide them. Hence the tension between Roman Catholic Croat and Greek Orthodox or Moslem Serb, in spite of common blood and language.

Bordering Austria and Italy, the Slovenes from Carniola (*Krajnska*) were the northernmost of the South Slavs who ventured into the Elk Mountains of Gunnison County. Numerically weak even in their own homeland, they underwent great Italo-Germanic pressure but retained their cultural integrity. South across the river Kupa were their Croatian neighbors, in the center of the South Slav world. Unlike Slovenia, Croatia (*Hrvatska*) was once an independent kingdom, but internal misfortunes and external pressure insured its demise. Turkish onslaughts molded their brothers into Serbs, men of passion, pride and courage.

They struggled equally against the land. Even New Englanders accustomed to hardscrabble farms, were "appalled at what is here called pasture."⁶ Indeed, some areas could not support their populations; every year after the harvest, peasant farmers became itinerant laborers and peddlers.⁷

It is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss the question of oppression from Vienna and Budapest. Let it suffice that the conviction of wrong was exacerbated by widespread poverty.

Unlike Crested Butte's Italians who originated almost entirely from one village in southern Italy, nearly every part of modern Yugoslavia was represented in Crested Butte. In general, however, those who settled permanently had been close neighbors, many Slovenes coming from the *Bela Krajina* (White Earth) region, of which the county Semič is a part; across the river Kupa were Croatians from Severin, in Vrbovsko, and from Brod Moravice in Delnice. A combination of ignorance and indifference caused them to be labeled Austrians, a term many of their descendants misuse today, claiming to speak "Austrian" instead of Croatian or Slovenian.

Local researcher Richard Aspinall had a limited awareness that immigrants had "been the making of Crested Butte over the years,"⁸ but he gave the subject such superficial treatment his remarks on Italian and Slavic immigration require complete quotation:

"Around the turn of the century, there was a great influx of people from Europe. The majority of new-

comers to Crested Butte were of Austrian descent. Second only to the Austrians were the Italians, and least in number were a few Germans. The majority of these people brought with them their customs, and religious principles. Because the majority were from Southern Europe, the predominant religion of these new-comers followed the doctrines of the Roman Catholic Church."⁹

Needed but not always wanted, the most obvious benefit to the community (and the industrial interests) was the labor and thrift of the South Slavs. Some were able to achieve dreams of land and cattle, but even they were ruled by the tyranny of the mine whistle. Without the Croatians and Slovenes, local coal production would have been seriously affected, for they gradually became the vast majority of miners. For example, a list of twenty-six men employed at the Pueblo Mine in 1913 shows only three non-Slavic names.¹⁰

Many native residents enjoyed the profits generated by the foreigners but still resented their alien presence. **Elk Mountain Pilot** editor J. D. Philips was an exception, casting an approving eye on the economic stimulus provided by the Slav pioneers:

"Later on, a colony of Slavonians (sic) arrived. They proved to be good miners and loyal citizens. I was postmaster from 1889 to 1893, and right around payday we have taken in as much as \$3,000 on the sale of foreign money orders, going to the Old Country to bring more families and relatives."¹¹

The undeniable importance of the South Slav is best revealed by the local proverb which declares with reluctant admiration: "When the blackbirds start gathering and the Roundheads start chopping wood, you know winter's coming."¹²

For much of the town's existence, the Slavs comprised a significant part of its population. The earliest census records do not begin until 1890, when the population was 857, but Aspinall speculates there may have been "almost 2,000 people in Crested Butte during the winter of 1882."¹³ If so, that figure has never been reattained. There were 998 people in 1900, rising to 1,100 by 1902, then dropping to 904 by 1910. War demands stimulated the economy and in 1920 1,213 people lived in Crested Butte. Some sources indicate that 500 of these residents were Croats, making a bigger Slav settlement than those in Denver, Pueblo or Leadville!¹⁴ Emily Greene Balch listed Crested Butte as one of the four largest Croatian colonies in Colorado.¹⁵ There are no figures for Slovene set-

tlers, except for a compendium published in 1925, which listed current membership in St. Joseph's Society at eighty-four.¹⁶ This is disputed by local sources and it is quite possible that at least 150 Slovenes once lived in Crested Butte.

Barring an inordinate amount of snow shoveling, the immigrant's life was not much different from that of his fellows elsewhere. Indifferently educated, intensely agrarian and poor (the surname Nemanić means "I have nothing"), the South Slavs came to America "S trbuhom za kruhom" (with stomachs after bread). Instead of working in familiar orchards and vineyards, they provided labor for the unpleasant jobs which only a growing industrialism can create.

The majority being young, single men or those forced to leave families behind, relaxation and companionship was found in many saloons — not the most desirable environment, no matter how genial the proprietor. Liquor-induced aggression and infractions of the law, however innocent, did not endear the greenhorns to their already contemptuous neighbors; it was sometimes necessary to shoulder a pickhandle when the "Roundhead" left his own neighborhood.

With conditions like these, it was imperative that the immigrant create organizations which would help "retain identity, preserve his mother tongue, keep strong his Catholic faith and provide material assistance in time of need."¹⁷

The earliest South Slav fraternal benefit societies in the United States were Croatian, founded in San Francisco in 1857 and in New Orleans in 1871.¹⁸ With the ever-increasing flood of new arrivals, these societies were too provincial to accommodate their needs. The time was ripe for national organizations.

In 1892, Zdravko V. Muzina arrived in Chicago from the city of Rijeka on the Dalmatian coast (Croatian littoral) and within two years was publishing **Danica** (Morning Star), the first Croatian newspaper in Pennsylvania. Appalled by the status of his people, he "advised the Croats to organize themselves on a purely Croatian basis, in view of their early return to their native country."¹⁹ This negative view was opposed by other Croat editors, but philosophy was unimportant; without external means of assistance, unity and self-help was the only answer.²⁰

By September 1894 Muzina and a few others succeeded in welding six independent lodges in the Pittsburgh area into the **Hrvatska Zajednica** (Croatian Society).²¹ From 1897 the

combined lodges were known as the **Narodna Hrvatska Zajednica** (National Croatian Society) and in 1925 it merged with two other large fraternal benefit societies to form the **Hrvatska Bratska Zajednica** (Croatian Fraternal Union) of the present.²²

The Slovenes had come to the same conclusions. They, too, had organized in small, financially insecure lodges of limited potential. In 1891 the Rev. Francis Sustersic was persuaded to leave his parish in Slovenia to create one for his people in Chicago. He soon realized that the urgent needs of his new parishioners required more than he could give as a spiritual leader, and he conceived the idea of a Slovene mutual aid society allied with the Catholic Church. Supported by other Slovenian clergymen, the **Krajnska Slovenska Katoliška Jednota** (Grand Carniolian Slovenian Catholic Union, now called the American Slovenian Catholic Union) became a peniless reality in April 1894 at Joliet, Illinois. The new organization was unable to institute disability payments or raise mortuary benefits to the customary \$800 until its third convention, twelve years later.²³

Although Slav settlements in the West were sparse, the urgent need for unity was just as great; four or five Italian²⁴ and ten South Slav societies in a community substantially under 2,000 in population demonstrates this dramatically. Isolated from progressive influential leaders in the east, the Slavic community in Crested Butte was in the fraternal forefront, since lodges were started there earlier than in many areas of Illinois, Ohio and Pennsylvania where Slavs had settled earlier and in far greater numbers.

The eight-hour day was still part of a vague but frightening Red Anarchy when the Slovenes founded Crested Butte's first Slav fraternal lodge on July 1, 1893.²⁵ Its records were neglected and destroyed, so little is known about the **Društvo Sveta Jožefa** (Society of St. Joseph). Remaining independent for nine years, St. Joseph's Lodge joined the KSKJ in 1902.²⁶

Not until February 1920 did another Slovene lodge under the misnomer **Planinski Orel** (Eagle of the Plains), make its appearance as a branch of the **Slovenska Narodna Podporna Jednota** (Slovene National Benefit Society)²⁷, organized nationally in 1904. The most militant South Slav fraternal in the United States, the SNPJ, was proudly socialistic, waging campaigns to improve the condition of labor during a time when such a position was un-American. Professing an official

policy of aloofness from religious affairs and personal freedom of conscience for its members, nevertheless, the Catholic Church was frequently attacked by the society's organ, **Prosveta** (Enlightenment). Considering the history of local labor struggles, it seems odd that Eagle of the Plains Lodge was so long in coming to Crested Butte.

The fraternal impetus had waned considerably by the time Crested Butte's last Slovene fraternal was founded. Columbine Lodge, No. 54, of the Western Slavonic Association, headquartered in Denver, was established with six charter members on June 1, 1938, but has always been of minor importance.²⁷

What may have been the earliest Croatian **društvo** is also the most illusive, since little more than its name is remembered. Called **Ban Jelačić** after the popular Josip Jelačić, military governor (**ban**) of Croatia, it probably did not survive a decade.²⁸ Another forgotten Croatian society was the **Dr. Sveti Duh** (Holy Ghost). It was still active as late as 1912.²⁹

The Society of St. Barbara, No. 202, of the old National Croatian Society had a turbulent ten-year existence, due to a schism in the membership concerning support for the United Mine Workers Union. For a time the non-union element predominated but this faction was defeated when St. Barbara's merged with St. Mary's Lodge in 1914.³⁰

The Croatian League of Illinois was represented by its own St. Barbara Society, No. 133, organized in March 1917. This lodge survived until the 1925 merger which created the modern Croatian Fraternal Union.³¹ Another short-lived lodge was **Hrvatsko Gospojinski Društvo Srce Marijino** (Croatian Women's Society of the Sacred Heart of Mary) which merged with St. Mary's Lodge in 1918.³² Pine Tree Lodge, No. 92, a branch of the American Slovenian Women's Union, has existed since October 1938.³³

The **Dr. Pomoćnice Blažena Djevica Marija** (Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Perpetual Aid, known as St. Mary's Lodge) became the most dynamic South Slav fraternal in Crested Butte, and the best known. It precipitated the most dramatic event in local Slav history, the moving of the Croatian Hall. Organized August 1, 1895, by eight men from Severin, it was independent until joining the old Croatian Society in October of that year.³⁴

Since all these ethnic insurance groups existed to serve

the same basic ends, by-laws were fundamentally similar. Unlike indigenous fraternal lodges such as the Knights of Pythias, Oddfellows and Masons, emphasis on a secret ritual was minimal; payment of mortuary and disability benefits, based on a table of rates, was of paramount importance. This reflected living conditions facing early arrivals — men separated from families and employed in dangerous jobs.

For example, St. Mary's Lodge called a special meeting October 2, 1912, concerning member George Lacy who was killed in a coal mine near Glenwood Springs, Colorado. All funeral arrangements were made by the lodge and a member was appointed to bring back the body at the expense of the son, Joe Lacy.³⁵ Martin Brajdic, a single man who died in January 1913 was not even a member of St. Mary's, but its officers brought his body from Trinidad, Colorado, for burial.³⁶

During the early years of these ethnic fraternal, the maximum life insurance coverage was \$800. At its convention in 1895 the Croatian Society adopted a provision for acceptance of associate members (*bračni drugovi*, commonly called "death benefit members"). Under this provision a surviving husband received half the amount of his insurance premium if his deceased wife had been enrolled as an associate member.³⁷

"The wives, and later husbands, could be written up as "bračni drugovi" without any evidence of insurability, and they actually permitted a member to enroll his wife in this category even though she was still living in the old country. In fact, it was this specific provision which was responsible for the society's inability to obtain a license to operate in a number of states. The provision was later changed so that only wives living with husbands in this country could be insured . . . and they were forced to pay assessments for death claims.

"There appeared to be a high mortality rate among wives in those days, because the delegates . . . ruled that a member could collect benefits for only three wives . . . They discontinued issuance of "associate memberships in 1912."³⁸

Monthly dues ranged from twenty-five to sixty cents, sick or disabled members receiving one to two dollars a day, occasionally less. This was an attractive offer when daily wages were not much more than that, and many people joined a second lodge for more coverage. Most of the early independent societies were small, with limited resources and one sick member could bring his lodge to the verge of bankruptcy.

Had St. Mary's and St. Joseph's lodges remained small independent orders, probably neither would have survived.

An example was young Tom Grgurich, a member of St. Mary's who died in 1914. The lodge was still paying seventy-five cents a day sick benefit when Grgurich was first mentioned in the minutes of March 1, 1912.³⁹ Since hard and dangerous labor as a miner was virtually the sole livelihood open to an uneducated foreigner, an epileptic like Grgurich was certain to be a heavy burden.

In addition to the rest of its sick benefit payments, the lodge was obligated to provide a male nurse for him.⁴⁰ During intervals between seizures, he engaged in the town's most popular pastime, causing frugal members to threaten: "Well enough to drink, well enough to work."⁴¹ Relations between Grgurich and his brothers were frequently strained:

"A special meeting of the officers was called by Steven Krizmanich to discuss the matter of Tom Grgurich, for we had business with him. He demanded a sick benefit payment of \$39 which had already been made. The society borrowed \$15 from John Kuretich IV as there is not enough money in the treasury."⁴²

Indeed, some members must have grown bitter, because after Grgurich's death, "John Mihelich moved that a dollar fine be levied against any member who leaves the cemetery before services are concluded."⁴³ Even so, the young unfortunate was cared for, even beyond the call of duty; donations were made and at one point the other lodges were asked to contribute.⁴⁴

Recovery was often slow and large claims common. In April 1919 \$751.50 was disbursed to twenty-one victims of the great flu epidemic.⁴⁵

But it is incorrect to assume from this that benefit claims were quickly and cheerfully accepted, for while local people were asked to bleed themselves white for outsiders, the members themselves were subjected to a ruthless scrutiny whenever a claim was presented.

"The sick member, as a general rule, was not permitted to attend entertainments or do any type of physical labor. There were instances when a member would be denied benefits if he was caught carrying firewood into his home . . . and woe to the one who took a little more of hard drinks than he was able to handle. There was lively debate at lodge meetings when such benefit claims

were read, and this was carried down to more recent times . . . ”⁴⁶

In many cases, objections against benefit claims were carried to ridiculous extremes, violating the privacy of members.

Not content with mere impersonal payments, an active interest in each member prompted the lodges to conduct sick watches and wakes, regarded with the same lack of enthusiasm the general public has for jury duty, for even members working at “Katika” (Gothic) nine miles away were not exempt, and this during an era of pedestrian travel.⁴⁷ Even so, the utility of such a provision was acknowledged, for medical care in Crested Butte was haphazard for many years.

Upon the death of a member, an impressive funeral publicized cohesion in a hostile or, at best, indifferent world. To enhance this display of fraternal solidarity, all the lodges usually marched together, even if the deceased belonged only to one. Plains Eagle Lodge was an occasional thorn in the sides of the rest by considering compulsory attendance at the funeral mass an infringement on individual rights.⁴⁸

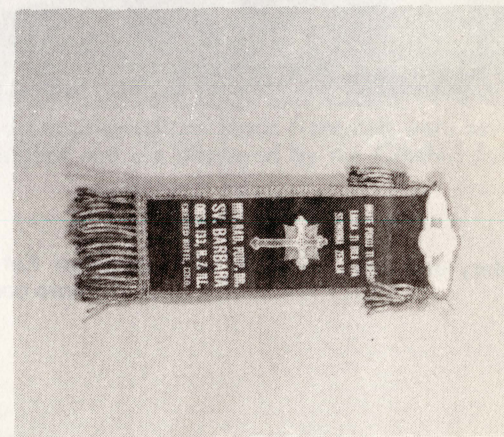
Fines were levied for absence at funerals and for years the combined memberships were able to force the coal mines to suspend operations on a funeral day, for en-masse attendance left hardly anyone but the bosses. This situation ended, however, when Mike Chesnik was killed in the Smith Hill Mine in 1928. Lodge members preparing to march in his funeral procession were threatened with dismissal at the Peanut Mine and possibly the other mines as well. Such tactics by the mine operators had previously failed, so this was a special test of strength, since Chesnik had been president of Plains Eagle, but the power of industry asserted itself and never again did the Slav miners attend a funeral as a bloc.⁴⁹

But perhaps economics aided the mine superintendents in coercing the miners: Chesnik’s death came soon after the abortive “Wobbly” strike of 1927 and most miners were deeply in debt. It was a hard choice to miss a shift or be fined a dollar for fraternalism.⁵⁰ Lodge processions continued for other occasions but the self-consciousness of younger members balked first at the regalia and finally at the parades themselves.

Marching on holidays or when a visiting dignitary arrived, these parades were a colorful interlude to an otherwise humdrum existence. With the beautiful flags, regalia and military



Outwardly the **Hrvatski Dom** remained virtually unchanged for nearly eighty years.
Photo by Myrtle M. Veltri



Badge from St. Barbara's Lodge, Croatian Society of Illinois. For all its harshness, America was still a place of hope: inscription reads, "Deceased brother, may you rest forever in this free land."
Courtesy Joe Sporcich



Mary and John Mihelich, with daughters Katie and Mary, circa 1902.
Photo courtesy Margaret Malensek



Martin and Anna Kuretich were **Kumovi** (godparents or sponsors) of this flag, giving it to St. Mary's Lodge in 1936. In procession the flag was taken to St. Patrick's Catholic Church and blessed. This flag and all other artifacts and documents from Slavic fraternals were saved from destruction by the author and are displayed by the Crested Butte Society Museum.

Tamburiza orchestra
at the Croatian Hall,
circa 1905. Back row, l.
to r.: ?; John Mu-
fich; Andrew Kurelich.
Front row, l. to r.: ?;
Martin Mufich, Sr., tal-
ented composer; ?;
George Spehar. Cour-
tesy Martin Mufich, Jr.



Zapisnik Redovite Sjednice 15 tog Travnja 1917
Koji Otvara predsjednik brat M. Sprajcar
Zapisnik prošle redovite sjednice prima se
u cjelosti. Odsuda Poroka za Ivana Sutej
kako sjedi, bratu Ivanu Sutej Odobrena je
boles. podpora, a za ono što je pisal
proti bruzstvo globljen je za dva dolara
Simunu Panian je poslana prestupna
listina, posto je na vrijeme uplacena
pristojbi. Za Andro Krizmanić posto
nije odgovora od njega preneseno do
druge sjednice. Odobrena bolesnika podpora
sljedece Misko Muhrić \$ 158.00 dolari
Misko Medved 14.00 dol. Jakov Jakić 24.00
Stjepan Krizmanić sabiratelj za milodare
u svrhu Srpske siroci i Ivan Mihelić
Kontorni Odbor predsjed. Grgor Stajduhor
i pomocnici Jurjo Salinger i Pavlo Klavrlar
posto nije niti jedan došao na sjednicu
a niti nikomu izmieno globljeni su svrhi
po 50. centi. Primljena članica Katarina
Mihelić iz Grijeda br 50 Pomoćak N. H. Z.
Placeno i primljen novac dug od Crkve
\$ 396.95. Zaključeno za Ivana Krizmanić
da se spomen za dug, da nešto
uplati jerbo ćemo postupat po pravilima
Fruretić, Tajnik

Ivanredna Sjedinica 29 Travnja 1917.
Koji Otvara brat predsjed. Martin Sprajcar
u svrhu dabi išli u paradu, k svetoz misi
kako father Kepp zahtjeva Predložio brat Ivan
Mathović i zaključeno sa većinom da idemo
u paradu, na 13 tog Srbinja k drugi misi,
Isto zaključeno da idu djeca snama koja
pripadaju Grijedu Pomoćak N. H. Z. i to da se
djeca skite sa zastavicom Sjed. Dn. i sa
stranikom trobojnicom

At its regular meeting on April 15, 1917, St. Mary's Lodge disbursed a large sick benefit payment, began a fund for Old Country poor and received payment on a loan to St. Patrick's Church. Frank Kurelich, the very able secretary, served as a delegate to national conventions and was president of Holy Ghost Lodge in Paonia, Colorado.



Woman's and man's badges, St. Joseph's Lodge.
 Courtesy Frank Orazem



St. Mary's Lodge badges.
 Courtesy Pete Stimac



Woman's badge and men's badge, Eagle of the Plains Lodge.
 Courtesy Frank Oražem

bearing of the marchers, the ire of their neighbors was sometimes aroused: July 4, 1918, trouble was narrowly averted when the lodge banners were mistaken — probably intentionally — for national flags of Austria.⁵¹

Whether specific or implied, the promotion of educational and economic standards was part of the ethnic society's concern; American citizenship was therefore encouraged.⁵² The utility of assimilation was recognized, but fear of cultural oblivion troubled immigrant pioneers. Suppressed in Europe, only brief decades before they had suddenly been fired with hopes of national consciousness, only to find themselves in a strange country, where again they were dominated. Determined that his language and customs be preserved, Steven Krizmanich started a night school about 1914 which functioned at the Croatian Hall until the late 1920s. The quality of instruction varied widely with the men chosen annually to teach and so did the amount of devilment they had to contend with, for the work-weary children resented this highly regimented curtailment of already brief play time, even though it was only once a week.

The school was supported by the national headquarters, which supplied and printed some of the texts. An intermediate reader, the *Početnica*, was printed in Zagreb under the auspices of the new Kingdom of Yugoslavia, complete with a formal portrait of Alexander I.⁵³ Reading and writing a tongue no longer native, the students read brief essays describing the vast American geography and the Anglo-Saxon triumphs in American history.⁵⁴ The aims and operations of the NCS were studied, and, of course, they sang the fervent anthem "Lijepa Naša Domovina" (Our Beautiful Homeland).

The individual maintained close personal ties with the Old Country, but his lodge helped. Any large organization published its own newspaper, featuring European items of international and purely local interest.⁵⁵ Throughout the nation and beyond it, ethnic fraternalists maintained a web of close-knit mutual aid. Operating on stringent budgets was second nature but it is amazing, nevertheless, that these lodges supported unknown individuals and abstract causes — often generously. Spearheading fund raisings for the Old Country poor,⁵⁷ donating to schools and military institutions in Croatia,⁵⁸ members of *Bl. Dj. Marija* also took a sympathetic interest in their transplanted kin, scraping together ten dollars for "our striking brothers" in the *Dr. Majke Božje* (Mother of God) at

Claridge, Pennsylvania.⁵⁰ When a letter from another lodge urged the dismissal of all "Skebi ili strajkolomci" (scabs and strike breakers), agreement was unanimous.⁵⁰

There is no evidence to suggest that St. Joseph's Lodge ever engaged in similar activities. News in the official organ was limited strictly to religious matters and after World War II, money was collected for the rebuilding of churches in Yugoslavia and for no other purpose.⁵¹

Neither did St. Joseph's support labor unions, though its members were all workmen. No doubt Plains Eagle Lodge had visions of taking the lead in such matters, but as the largest, most financially secure lodge, St. Mary's was the most important single element in the labor question among local Slavs.

An important coal producer, Crested Butte became one more arena for the struggles of the proletariat against the captains of industry. To its residents, the Haymarket Riot and the Ludlow Massacre were harsh warnings of future possibilities.

Crested Butte had its share of contention, sometimes bloody and, with one exception, always bitter. The first strike, local and short-lived, came in 1891. It was so serious the Italian Consul in Denver asked the editor of the *Elk Mountain Pilot* to print a telegram addressed to the "Minatori Italiano" in which he begged them to cease resistance against the Colorado Coal and Iron Company (later the CF&I) and to trust in the justice of the authorities.⁵²

In 1902, United Mine Workers leader John Mitchell called 150,000 men from the Pennsylvania coal fields in a fight for better pay and working conditions. Crested Butte joined the strike in 1903. Women who spoke no English learned to shout "Go home, scab!" at passing strike breakers.⁵³ The militia was called in⁵⁴ and the strike dragged on into 1904.

The entire nation, newcomers included, discussed labor unions with passion. The local Slavs were deeply divided; having little to begin with, their peasant pragmatism caused many to be skeptical of the prolonged struggles which were far from certain in their outcome. A cynical proverb neatly expressed the scab viewpoint: "Bog je svojo brado naj prvo ustvaril" (God made His own beard first).⁵⁵ For this lack of conviction (or understanding) the non-union men were accorded that special animosity reserved for brothers and apostates.

Sylvia Smith, the fiery newspaper editor who was forcibly removed from Marble, Colorado, because of her stand against the Yule Marble Company, had no love of foreigners, especially when embroiled in labor disputes; this caustic comment appeared on the front page of her *Weekly Citizen*:

"A fracas (sic) ocured at the Croation (sic) saloon Sunday night. A number of Emperor Joseph's former subjects got into a wholesale mixup in debating the work or non-work proposition and the fighting hosts would have filled the trenches with corpses had Sheriff Watson dealt gently with them. They had put their phalanxes in firm array and were fighting with dreadful shouts and horrid clash, — to the extent of demolishing a large window and tearing big holes in the atmosphere when the fighting spirit was put to flight by the sudden appearance of the sheriff.

"The quietness that has prevailed in that part of town since Mr. Watson read the riot act to the obstreperously inclined would rival the burial of Sir John Moore."

During the previous year of 1903, Miss Smith's reaction must have been nearly unprintable when the volatile Paul Panian attempted to rid the town of several non-union countrymen gathered in the Croation Hall saloon. Waiting nearby, he injudiciously lit the fuse to about twelve sticks of dynamite but then was unable to get it into the building. He hurled the powder into the street, blowing an immense hole but injuring no one.⁵⁷

Other union men were more successful. During the 1913-1914 strike, the Floresta trestle, Smith Hill breaker and two businesses in Crested Butte were destroyed by arson. A vacant home owned by a non-union Croation miner was burned by a roving Croat who was paid a gallon of wine to commit the crime.⁵⁸ During this same strike, the homes of three strike breakers were burned in one night; union members were blamed, but declared the fires were set deliberately by the mine owners to besmirch the union.⁵⁹

Throughout the trying period there emerged a man who strove to serve his people, often at the expense of his own interests. Born in Blaževci, Severin, Vrbovsko, in 1869, John Mihelich was viewed by his elders as a young man of promise, urging him to become a teacher. But he became imbued with the rising spirit of nationalism, and, refusing to serve in the army of a regime he considered oppressive, Mihelich left his bride of six weeks and came to America in 1891. Widespread

economic ills caused him to wander from Pennsylvania to Pueblo, Colorado, about 1892. Shortly thereafter he was on the Western Slope, where his wife joined him in 1895.⁷⁰

Urging support for fraternal solidarity, whether ethnic or occupational, his rigid honesty and outspoken manner alienated the timorous; for this he lost his membership in St. Barbara's Lodge, No. 202, which was dominated by the non-union element.⁷² Still, because of his command of English and sympathy for any underdog, Mihelich was frequently called upon as a firm but temperate speaker and arbiter.

Blacklisted because of his support for the United Mine Workers Union, he more than once was forced to leave town at night with only the clothes on his back, once traveling as far as Red Lodge, Montana, where he was injured in a mine accident.⁷³ Mihelich's legacy was his example, demonstrating that it was possible to become accepted and respected, even though he endured discrimination and personal danger to achieve it.

The position of Slav immigrants in organized labor is confusing and contradictory. This was partially due to the ambivalence felt by native Americans who frequently wished to exclude foreigners from unions, but feared their depressing affect on conditions and wages. Long-term commitment was hard to understand, for Karl Marx to the contrary, these agrarian peasants had not been proletarian: "There is something in the way trade unionism is carried on that does not appeal to the practical judgment of the Slav, Lithuanian, and Magyar."⁷⁴

On the other hand, Emily Greene Balch, the student and champion of Slav immigrants, felt that the Slav — naive but not stupid — soon appreciated the labor union: "Even the young women . . . told very simply and distinctly what the strike was for — no family could live when wages were fifteen or sixteen cents an hour and the number of hours of work amounted to but \$5.50 or \$7.40 a week."⁷⁵ She continued:

"This adaptability to union life means a political sense (in the best meaning of the word political) with which the Slav has not commonly been credited. It means among other things that men inheriting all sorts of racial feuds and animosities, which have been systematically fostered by government for centuries, can and do sink those hatreds in cosmopolitan unions. At one meeting, for instance, interpreters will address their people in Slovak, Polish, Bohemian and Lithuanian. Of whatever unwisdom, and

worse, unions may stand accused, they teach at least a nobler, more intelligible and more practical lesson in democratic self-government than most ward politicians."

Local conditions seem to have fallen between the two extremes. Bitter internecine strife shows that John Mihelich was not alone in urging combination. Three factors operated in favor of Local Union 3256: The local economy was more highly diversified: beside the many mines which were not monopolized by a single corporation, there was logging and ranching to help absorb the work force. Many Slav miners were citizens and homeowners; unlike mining camps in the southern Colorado coal fields, there were no guarded perimeters or evacuation threats. Finally, since they were the majority of miners, unanimity as a people meant strength as proletarians.

Yet these things were not enough, and if many scabbed, perhaps they cannot be judged too harshly. Crested Butte had joined the national UMW strike of 1902-1904, which was zealously suppressed. Then for eighteen long months in 1913-1914 local miners again supported a lost cause. The Union local survived, but was a weak organization thereafter. It was one thing to agree unanimously to dismiss all "scabs and strikebreakers" but quite another to actually accomplish it.

Even so, St. Mary's Lodge really did attempt to strengthen labor's hand. What else but altruism would have moved its members to aid those "striking brothers" in distant Pennsylvania? For years the Croatian Hall was rented to the UMW and this alone did much to insure good relations.

The UMW had another potential ally in St. Barbara's Lodge, No. 183, which in 1920 invested \$100 in a cooperative store run by the Union. Within three months, however, the money was withdrawn because the Union preferred to sell shares in the venture.⁷⁷ The withdrawal was wise, for the co-op failed and many staunch union families lost heavily.⁷⁸

From this it can be seen that the South Slav fraternal orders did weave their members into the fabric of local society, however reluctantly and unintentionally. Again, attention must focus on St. Mary's Lodge with its Croatian Hall (Hrvatski Dom), tangible proof that here was a force to reckon with and respect.

Although St. Mary's total membership was only forty-six as late as 1913,⁷⁹ the lodge was affluent enough to purchase its own building, the former Knights of Pythias Hall, in

March 1902 for \$1,750.⁸⁰ Located on Elk Avenue, the main street, the big metal-clad building; was jacked onto log rollers, then dragged backwards to its present location on Second Street. According to the generally accepted story, the job was done entirely by volunteer hand labor. The job took about one month, men helping after work or on days when the mine was idle. Night watchmen were posted for fear of arson.⁸¹

Others maintain that the task proved too great and that horses, presumably two four-horse teams, were used to steady the corners,⁸² while still another version claims that a contract was let, but for reasons now forgotten the teamster refused to finish, so the *braća* did it themselves.⁸³

Reasons for moving the hall also are contradictory. Friction between the native Americans and Slavs was acute, so the Croats determined to move the hall to their own neighborhood.

Robert Alexander of Canon City, Colorado, is probably the only man still living who saw the hall being moved. He feels ethnic friction had little to do with this episode, recalling that his father, Andrew Alexander (at that time Big Mine superintendent), was well liked by the Slavs, and that he stopped to give advice and encouragement, as did George Thompson, manager of the Crested Butte Light and Water plant. Alexander does feel, however, that arson was "quite possible."

Another explanation is a dispute with the town council; St. Mary's wanted to operate a saloon on the ground floor but this was prohibited on Elk Avenue. Such an ordinance was passed, but not until 1907, five years later.⁸⁵

Once established, the *Hrvatski Dom* became one of the town's focal points, on a par with the City Hall. In addition to the ever-popular saloon, social events were frequent and happy crowds danced the *Primorsko* ("By the Sea") and *Igraj Kolo* ("Play Dance," loosely) to the jolly, robust accordion and the haunting strains of the *tambura*, liquid and bittersweet. The Croatian Hall transcended ethnic or occupational barriers; the Young Ladies Society, town councilmen, Knights of Columbus and "demokrat stranka" (Democratic Party) gave dances and masquerade balls there, while families rented the hall for wedding receptions. Since Crested Butte people loved a good time, these entertainments were frequent and brought in considerable revenue. To encourage this St. Mary's purchased a piano in 1922.⁸⁶

St. Mary's Lodge made a substantial contribution to the local economy, trading at the CF&I "Suplaj Stor" and buying lumber from pioneer businessman S. C. Robinson. Angus Taylor, physician, merchant and mayor, profited most, selling huge amounts of paint and varnish. The labor disputes which so irritated Sylvia Smith probably never troubled Dr. Taylor, since he sold the lodge several window panes.

No doubt it was unintentional, but St. Mary's Lodge circulated money through its own ranks, for its dearly acquired property was evidently in need of extensive repair. Members were often hired on a rough rotation to fix roofs and chimneys and install doors, locks, partitions and windows. Lodge members were paid to take tickets and keep order at social events, even hiring *tamburitza* orchestras for dances.⁸⁸

Financial dealings grew more sophisticated. Funds were transferred from the Supply Store to the bank,⁸⁹ Liberty Bonds purchased and the hall was well insured.⁹⁰ By December 1920 an audit showed cash on hand to be over \$2,000, a considerable advance since the days of Tom Grgurich.⁹¹

The lodge also acquired a house adjacent to its Croatian Hall which may have originally been intended as an infirmary, because in 1913 "A motion to build a new home for the disabled was rejected."⁹²

All this is evidence of dynamic, progressive growth, but to some, the Crested Butte Slavs did not appear so. In 1904-1905 a Croatian politician and writer, Dr. Ante Trešić-Pavičić, toured Croatian settlements in the United States. After speaking in Ely, Minnesota, he was engaged to lecture in Crested Butte. Weary from the long journey, he viewed the mining town with a jaundiced eye from the beginning.

"The lecture in Crested Butte was a miserable failure, with only 15 people attending. He had made an agreement that the sponsors of the . . . lecture were obligated to pay him only the fare from Denver, which amounted to \$14.00, but the gate receipts were not even sufficient to pay for the printing of the tickets. And to add to his discomfort and disappointment, he had to spend the night in a shack without any toilet or running water . . . He was glad to leave Crested Butte."

But in St. Louis, Missouri, public response was comparatively worse, and in Crested Butte at least there had been privacy, however dry. In the metropolis with its \$38,000,000

City Hall, Trešić-Pavičić shared a room "with a drunken boarder who snored all night."⁹⁴

Generally, the Slav fraternalists enjoyed peaceful relations with their neighbors and each other, considering the background of narrow loyalties and petty jealousies. (In this context it should be noted that in a town six blocks square, ethnic neighborhoods were clearly marked, and even employment was influenced by descent.)

Potential antagonism did exist in the guise of the Junior Order of United American Mechanics⁹⁵ and an Italian order, the *Fratellanza Italo Tirolese* (Fraternity of Italians and Tyrols).⁹⁶ The very existence of the former was a protest against cheap foreign labor, while the Tyrol had long been a bone of contention between Italy, Austria and the South Slavs. Frictions usually remained on an individual level and were fostered by individuals, not groups. Even with the advent of a hooded fraternity which met to burn crosses instead of issue benefit checks, there were threats and ill will, but no actual violence.

During the first jingoistic days of World War I, St. Mary's Lodge found itself under the suspicious eye of the Federal Government. The minutes indicate that John Mihelich drafted an answer to the Committee on Public Information, stating that the lodge was a benefit society, avoiding politics. "Besides," it concluded, "most of our members are Americans."⁹⁷

On the whole, relations with the Catholic Church were very cordial. Benefit dances were held at the Croatian Hall to help pay for St. Patrick's Church and its beautiful altar was donated by St. Mary's Lodge. Unfortunately, economics were different in America than in Austria-Hungary, a religious state, where the Church was endowed with property and political approval. In Europe the burden of support seemed easier and was not so noticeable. Indeed, during hard times the Church provided alms from its rich holdings, but in the United States it depended on the tithe for income.⁹⁸ The poor immigrant heard more requests, which was irritating. In addition, a serious shortage of Croatian (but not Slovenian) priests gradually weakened respect for, and obedience to, the Roman Catholic Church.

At a special meeting called by President Frank Panian on August 6, 1910, St. Mary's members agreed to cancel all parades and cease attending mass, since the priest insisted on a ten-dollar fee from the *društvo* each time he celebrated

mass, in addition to what each member gave as an individual parishioner. An "ekstra" Our Father and Hail Mary was to be recited at meetings as a substitute for church attendance.⁹⁹ The rift had closed by the following April, when a motion by George Spehar was passed to give the priest \$200 "for his kindness in serving us during our trouble."¹⁰⁰ St. Mary's periodically loaned substantial amounts to the local parish.¹⁰¹

Language was a barrier to faith and Slovenian priests such as Father Ciril Zupan came periodically from Pueblo and St. Joseph's Church in Leadville to alleviate the situation, but even this could cause trouble:

"April 17, 1912. A special meeting was called to discuss the matter of the local priest calling in another priest to hear confession. Moved by Anton Kuretich to give \$20 to the priest. Also passed by majority vote was the motion that if our priest calls in another priest without consulting us he won't be paid."¹⁰²

No disagreements ever appeared between the Church and St. Joseph's Lodge. In fact, so strong were the ties between the KSKJ and the Catholic Church, members were suspended or expelled for failure to perform their Easter duty (that is, to receive Holy Communion between the First Sunday of Lent and Trinity Sunday).¹⁰³ Today, even for something more serious — marriage invalid in the eyes of the Church — members become inactive but cannot be expelled.¹⁰⁴

It would be interesting to compare the activities of the Slav lodges with their Italian contemporaries but this is impossible, since nearly all documents have been destroyed.

On examining the actual composition of these fraternal societies, they appear top-heavy with overlapping offices and a membership struggling with unfamiliar parliamentary procedure. But these drawbacks cannot be given undue consideration in view of their successes, both financial and cultural.

It is natural to expect that the functions of the lodges would prepare their members for a fuller participation in local government, but this was not so. There were attempts. In an obvious plan to combine the latent power of Slavs and Italians, John Rozic and John Pogna campaigned together for council seats in 1903. It was reported in the *Elk Mountain Pilot* (by somebody who knew very little about citizenship and voting requirements) that fifty-two Italians had gone to Gunnison to take out naturalization papers so they could vote in the town election the next day.¹⁰⁵ Rozic and Pogna were defeated

and it was many more years before a Slav sat on the board.

But perhaps the life style of Crested Butte did not encourage political beings, and if this is so, the Slavs were no different from their neighbors. Perhaps it was the enervating toil, but at any rate, very few men in the town's history have had the art of, and taste for, political manipulation. Hence, when the Slavs did ascend to positions of authority it was due to a demographic shift, and almost by default.

To summarize, the ethnic society was the successful attempt of uprooted people to establish roots once more. The lodge provided a rough big brother security and guidance in a world of physical and moral dangers. The lodge meeting was a temporary haven from the "foreign" world of America. Here one could talk, laugh or even argue in his own comfortable tongue. The self-esteem of the illiterate was bolstered by quasi-official tasks. But the lodge also encouraged contacts with and imitation of the adopted country and its established citizens, reflected by speech patterns and increasingly efficient financial methods.

As recorded in Genesis, 4:9, brotherhood can be irksome. Members chafed under numerous duties and restrictions (some being the unreasonable demands of pompous officers) and were threatened more often than persuaded: A self-important member of St. Mary's Lodge once demanded that a member in advanced pregnancy join a procession to the cemetery, a distance of nearly a mile. Her husband did not allow it.¹⁰⁵ Still, the obligations were accepted because disunity meant failure.

To what degree they might have failed without the lodges is a reasonable question. The answer lies in the anxiety of the Federal Government during the early years of the twentieth century, for the country could not burden its taxpayers with the paupers of Europe, and a head tax was levied against those passing through the ports of entry to care for the inevitable indigents. When it is remembered that the better educated and more highly skilled German and British immigrants who came before also created their mutual aid societies, it is certain that a more poor, illiterate and less skilled group would depend on such institutions even more. By its concern for such men as Tom Grgurich and Martin Brajdic, St. Mary's Lodge solved the social problems caused by the misfortunes of its members, sparing the native-born taxpayer.

Concerning the success of their cultural endeavors, this

writer cannot yet make a positive judgment. It is well documented, generally, that the second generation tended to be ashamed of their Old Country heritage, to try to assimilate with a vengeance. Happily, this was not true in Crested Butte, although close family ties and not the fraternalism seem most responsible. Generally, the second generation probably would have been proficient in the language of their parents anyway, but it does appear that the school run by St. Mary's Lodge was qualitative. The Slav woman, with her neat home and garden, prudent thrift and culinary achievements probably did as much as anything to present a favorable look at South Slavs to their new neighbors.

With the closing of the town's sole remaining payroll, the Big Mine, in 1952, the fortunes of the Slav lodges came full circle. Faced with a dwindling, apathetic membership, the Croatian Hall was sold in 1959 to Dr. Hubert Winston Smith of Austin, Texas, who made it the nucleus for his Law-Science Academy.¹⁰⁷ St. Joseph's and St. Mary's Lodges meet in the home of Frank Yelenick, an active officer of each.¹⁰⁸ No longer dynamic and almost forgotten, it is very doubtful that these societies will ever again have an active role in the town's affairs.

The metamorphosis from awkward immigrant to American citizen is over. Just as the Slavs replaced the original settlers, they in turn saw their quiet, self-sufficient little world discovered and made anew. Where the sad and liquid notes of the tambura once offended Anglo sensibilities, the rock bands of long-haired minstrels repeats the cycle.

This narrative has tried to show a cross-section of a frontier community profoundly influenced by great migrations of Europeans. Here common laborers and prominent citizens elbowed forward their hopes, fears and responsibilities, opportunities and limitations, passions, pettiness, but also an unexpected sense of justice. Crested Butte was part of democratic yet inconsiderate frontier life, and from this immortal womb came a heritage of faith and strength. In spite of tremendous obstacles and their own limitations, these immigrants produced a monument, greater than any individual, to faith, hope and charity. May future generations do as well.

Footnotes

¹Ray Ginger, *Age of Excess: The United States from 1877-1914*, (New York: The Macmillan Co., 1967), p. 80.

²"State-by-State Reports on Coal West of the Mississippi, Including Canada", *Coal Age*, LXXVIII (Mid-April, 1973), pp. 80-83. Crested Butte field forms the southeast corner of the Uinta coal field or region, containing an estimated reserve of 250 million tons, of which thirty-five million is anthracite. (This paper was written before public knowledge of the third-largest known molybdenum deposit in the world, an estimated 165 million tons of ore.)

³Richard D. Aspinall, *Early History of Crested Butte*, (published Master's thesis, no facts of publication, thirty-six pages, p. 27.

⁴Emily Greene Balch, *Our Slavic Fellow Citizens*, (New York: Arno Press and The New York Times, 1969), p. 6.

⁵*Ibid.*, pp. 18-19.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 49, and interviews with Frank Orazem, Recorder, St. Joseph's Society, No. 55, KSKJ and Treasurer, Plains Eagle Lodge, No. 397, SNPJ, February 3, 1972, and John L. Panian, February 27, 1971.

⁸Aspinall, p. 10.

⁹*Ibid.*

¹⁰Letter from Justice of the Peace Mike Welch to Edwin V. Brake, Deputy Labor Commissioner, July 5, 1913. The most noteworthy of these immigrant Slavs was the Croat Martin Kuretic, who began as a timberman and rose to serve as superintendent of the Floresta operation and mine foreman at the Big Mine. His son Bill notes that while the first comers may have found mining distasteful, when the Big Mine closed there was "wailing and gnashing of teeth".

¹¹*Gunnison News-Champion*, August 29, 1935, p. 0.

¹²Frank Orazem interview.

¹³Aspinall, p. 10.

¹⁴George J. Prpic, *The Croatian Immigrants in America*, New York: Philosophical Library, 1975), p. 174.

¹⁵Balch, pp. 27-28.

¹⁶Žoze Zavertnik, *Ameriški Slovenci/American Slovenes*, (Chicago: Slovene National Benefit Society, 1925), p. 273.

¹⁷"KSKJ History", 1894-1962, Silver Convention, Grand Carniolian Slovenian Catholic Union of the United States of America, (Steelton, Pennsylvania: 1962), p. 10.

¹⁸Prpic, pp. 117, 50.

¹⁹Stjepan Gaži, *Croatian Immigration to Allegheny County: 1882-1914*, (Pittsburg: Croatian Fraternal Union, 1956), p. 27.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 28.

²¹*Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

²²*Pravila i Zakoni, Hrvatake Bratske Zjednice u Americi/Constitution and By-Laws, Croatian Fraternal Union of America*, Chicago: International Printing and Publishing Co., 1926), p. 3.

²³"KSKJ History", p. 11.

²⁴Marcello Gondolfo, *Gli Italiani Nel Colorado, 1899-1900/The Italians of Colorado, 1899-1900*, Denver: Dove Printer and Publisher, 1900), p. 184.

²⁵Zavertnik, p. 273.

²⁶Letter from Louis Zeleznikar, Supreme Secretary, American Slovenian Catholic Union, to the author, October 20, 1970.

²⁷Zavertnik, p. 558. More than fifty years ago when it became expedient to conduct lodge business in English, the name *Planinski Orel* (Mountain Eagle) was erroneously translated as Eagle of the Plains and the error stuck. No persons interviewed were aware of this. Upon publication in the *Zajedničar* in 1978, it was spied by readers who assumed it to be a mistake originated by the author.

²⁸Letter from Howard J. Krasovich, Secretary, Western Slavonic Association, to the author, January 14, 1970.

²⁹*Elk Mountain Pilot*, December 29, 1903, p. 1.

³⁰John Louis Panian interview.

³¹*Zapisnik, Redovite i Izvanredne Sjednice, Društvo Pomoćnice Blažena Djevica Marija, Odsjeka Broj 26/Minutes, Regular and Special Meetings, Society of the Blessed Virgin Mary of Perpetual Aid, Lodge No. 26, 1908-1934*, translated by Anne Malensek and annotated by Michele Veltri, p. 96.

³²*Zapisnik, Društva Sveta Barbara, Odsjeka Broj 133/Minutes, Society of St. Barbara Lodge, No. 133, 1917-1925*, pp. 1, 84. Practical considerations, not lack of originality caused two lodges to be named for St. Barbara, patron saint of miners. Orazem interview.

³³Letter from John Badovinac, Supreme President, Croatian Fraternal Union, to the author, January 21, 1970.

³⁴Interview with Anne Malensek, December 12, 1971.

³⁵Badovinac letter.

³⁶*Zapisnik, Bl. Dj. Marija*, p. 65, and interview with Joe Lacy, May 4, 1970.

³⁷*Ibid.*, p. 71, and Malensek interview.

³⁸"From the Desk of the Supreme President", *Zajedničar*, May 26, 1971, p. 2.

³⁹*Ibid.*, and Yelenick interview. Mrs. Antonia Sporcich, born in 1884 and admitted to St. Mary's Lodge in 1902, is Crested Butte's sole remaining bračni drug member.

⁴⁰*Zapisnik, Bl. Dj. Marija*, p. 52.

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴²*Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁴³*Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 102.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁴⁶*Blagajnički Dnevnik, Dr. Bl. Dj. Marija/Treasurer's Daily Ledger, St. Mary's Society, 1915-1921*, p. 27.

⁴⁷"From the Desk of the Supreme President", *Zajedničar*, December 2, 1970, p. 2.

⁴⁸*Zapisnik, Bl. Dj. Marija*, p. 16.

⁴⁹Orazem interview.

⁵⁰Interview with Frank Yelenick, President, St. Joseph's Society, No. 55, KSKJ; Secretary, St. Mary's Society, No. 26, CFU, and Mary Yelenick, Secretary, St. Joseph's Society, No. 55, KSKJ, May 2, 1976. Mr. Yelenick is an officer in two other lodges, but duties and titles are too numerous to mention.

⁵¹Interview with Matt Malensek, December 29, 1977.

⁵²*Zapisnik, Bl. Dj. Marija*, pp. 147-148.

⁵³*Pravila i Zakoni*, p. 138.

⁵⁴Interview with A. J. Mihelich, Treasurer, St. Mary's Society, No. 26, CFU, February 3, 1972, and Malensek interviews. No mention of the school is ever made in the lodge minutes.

⁵⁵*Početnica / Intermediate Reader*, (Zagreb: [Zemaljske Vlade] Temporal Government, 1922); *Citanka/Reader*, (Pittsburg: National Croatian Society), 1923. A third text, the *ABECEDARKA/ABC Book*, was unavailable for citing.

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

⁵⁷Balch, p. 383.

⁵⁸*Zapisnik, Bl. Dj. Marija*, p. 134.

⁵⁹*Ibid.*, pp. 94, 100.

⁶⁰*Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁶¹*Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁶²Orazem and Yelenick interviews.

⁶³*La Patria/The Fatherland*, December 15, 1891, p. 1.

⁶⁴Interview with Anna Gulliford, 1967 or 1968.

⁶⁵*Zavetnik*, p. 273.

⁶⁶Orazem interview.

⁶⁷*Crested Butte Weekly Citizen*, February 19, 1904, p. 1.

⁶⁸Panian, Mihelich and Malensek interviews.

⁶⁹*Zavetnik*, p. 273 and Panian interview.

⁷⁰*Ibid.*

⁷¹Malensek interview.

⁷²*Ibid.*, and Prpic, pp. 326-327. Mihelich was a friend of Joseph Marohnich, NCS president and newspaper publisher, printer and author. Marohnich published a Croatian-English dictionary compiled by the lawyer Francis Bogadek, in 1919, still considered the best of its kind.

⁷³*Ibid.*

⁷⁴Peter Roberts, *The New Immigration*, (New York: Arne Pres and The New York Times, 1970), p. 106.

⁷⁵Balch, pp. 290-291.

⁷⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 291-292.

⁷⁷*Zapisnik, Sv. Barbara*, pp. 9, 14.

⁷⁸Malensek and Orazem interviews.

⁷⁹*Zapisnik, Bl. Dj. Marija*, p. 72.

⁸⁰*Elk Mountain Pilot*, April 8, 1902, p. 3.

⁸¹Mihelich, Malensek and Panian interviews.

⁸²Orazem interview. Orazem's neighbor, John Ivanetich, helped move the Croatian Hall and claimed draft horses were used, but Robert Alexander, a sixteen year old boy who watched the procedure, claims no animal power was used.

⁸³Mihelich and Orazem interviews.

⁸⁴Interview with Robert Alexander, March 20, 1972.

⁸⁵Interview with Frank Kuretic, September 18, 1970 and *Elk Mountain Pilot*, August 8, 1907, p. 1.

⁸⁶*Blagajnički Dnevnik*, pp. 16, 67.

⁸⁷*Ibid.*, pp. 7, 83, 5.

⁸⁸*Zapisnik, Bl. Dj. Marija*, pp. 1, 9, 13, 37.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*, p. 50.

⁹⁰*Blagajnički Dnevnik*, pp. 16, 67.

⁹¹*Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁹²*Zapisnik, Bl. Dj. Marija*, p. 84.

⁹³"From the Desk of the Supreme President", *Zajedničar*, April 24, 1974, p. 2.

⁹⁴*Ibid.*

⁹⁵Letter from George F. Lounsbury to W. J. Morgan, September 25, 1897.

⁹⁶Gandolfo, p. 184.

⁹⁷*Zapisnik, Bl. Dj. Marija*, p. 150.

⁹⁸Roberts, p. 207.

⁹⁹*Zapisnik, Bl. Dj. Marija*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁰¹*Ibid.*, pp. 22, 134.

¹⁰²*Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹⁰³*Constitution and By-Laws, Grand Carniolian Slovenian Catholic Union*, (Cleveland: American Home Publishing Co., 1934), p. 163.

¹⁰⁴*Constitution of Incorporation and By-Laws, American Slovenian Catholic Union*, (no facts of publication or date; effective January 1, 1975), p. 42.

¹⁰⁵*Elk Mountain Pilot*, April 7, 1903, p. 6.

¹⁰⁶Interview with C. W. Greenfield, May 20, 1976.

¹⁰⁷Yelenick interview.

¹⁰⁸*Ibid.*, and Anna Panian, Financial Secretary, Eagle of the Plains Lodge, No. 397, SNPJ, January 21, 1978. St. Joseph's present membership is 156, with only fourteen members still in Crested Butte. St. Mary's membership totals 135, with only twenty-one still residing in Crested Butte, while the total Plains Eagle membership is forty-five, with twelve members (of which the author is one) living in Crested Butte. Only two members of Columbine Lodge remain in town and all officers of Pine Tree Lodge live in or near Gunnison.