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An Outline of the Cultural History of the Serbian Community in Chicago

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Serb immigration to the U.S. began in the second half of the nineteenth century. The first Serbian American churches, cultural institutions, fraternal organizations and newspapers were established in the last two decades of the nineteenth century. There were three periods in the early stages of Serbian American cultural history. They were associated with three cities in which cultural activities were concentrated: San Francisco, Pittsburgh, and Chicago.¹ The present study is focused on the earliest phase in the growth of the Serbian American community in Chicago, which is least known and researched. It covers the years ending with the first decade of the twentieth century.

1. Chicago from Serbian Perspective

The earliest account of Chicago from Serbian perspective comes from Nikola Jovanović, the author of *Phoenix City (Feniks grad)*, a booklet written in Serbian and published in Belgrade in 1895.

Jovanović was from a fairly well-off family in Serbia, so the reasons for his trip to the U.S. in 1869 were neither economic nor political. He came to Chicago with two close Serbian friends. All three were young and adventurous. Unlike his friends, Jovanović was keen on advancing his education, so he spent a year studying in Chicago before moving to other universities in New York. While his two friends settled in the new country, Jovanović eventually returned to Serbia, where he lectured and worked as a journalist. In December 1894, Jovanović, also known as “the American,” delivered an interesting lecture at the University of Belgrade. On this occasion, he shared his experience of America with an audience eager to know more about this far-away country. By this time, the U.S. had become the most attractive destination for thousands of European immigrants seeking

¹ *Serbs in the United States and Canada. A comprehensive Bibliography*, compiled by R. P. Gakovich and M. M. Radovich (University of Minnesota, 1992), 129-130.

democracy and economic opportunities. Due to this interest, Jovanović's lecture was published in Belgrade the following year.

The "phoenix" metaphor refers to the rebirth of Chicago from the ashes of the great fire that swept through the city in 1871, the year Jovanović was there as a student. Although he left to pursue his studies in New York, Jovanović revisited Chicago nine months later and was amazed at the reconstruction and growth of the city. He wrote how Chicago had risen like a phoenix on the wings of "labor" and "order." Jovanović emphasized that the reason why he admired the people of Chicago was their moral fortitude rather than the physical strength necessary to rebuild the city.

According to Jovanović, Chicago was the city of cities. In this context he draws an interesting comparison: just like America, Serbia can strive and grow on moral strength, labor, and the love of its people. This is the main point of Jovanović's lecture. In a reference to Serbian history, he points out how difficult it was for the small Serbian nation, subjugated for centuries and reduced to utter poverty, to rise towards freedom and progress. The Serbs, wrote Jovanović, had already risen from the ashes of history. The Serbs had not only restored their freedom, but had also resurrected their state that had been "entombed" for centuries.

The tasks of "our time" are much easier, wrote Jovanović, but the force behind the rebirth of nations, countries and cities is the force of human endeavor and entrepreneurship—"the holy fire of human labor." In conclusion, he declares the time has come to create a new Belgrade in the embrace of the two rivers, the Sava and the Danube, so Belgrade could become "the phoenix of Eastern Europe."

Unlike Jovanović, who was a thoughtful student rather than a toiling immigrant, the Serb immigrants arriving in America during this period found low paying industrial jobs, lived in ethnic ghettos, had a hard time learning English and no time for education. Their cultural isolation was double: they were eradicated from the original environment in the Old Country and not yet integrated in the new American environment. Thus they sought to transplant their culture in America and to preserve the main features of their identity: religion, language, customs, and tradition. In order to do so, they began organizing themselves. Their first organizations were cultural, educational and religious. These were followed by fraternal organizations providing basic social and health insurance.

2. The First Cultural and Fraternal Organizations

We have no information on the number of Serb immigrants in Chicago in the late nineteenth century. They began to settle in the city in the late 1880's.

During the Columbian International Exposition, Chicago's first World Fair held in 1893, the city organized a public event involving the participation of all the ethnic groups living in Chicago. We know that "there were enough Serbs to join the 'Parade of Nations' as Serbians—flag and all—after winning a protest against being classed as 'Austro-Hungarians' and later grouped with many others as just 'Slavs'."² The need and capability of the local Serbs to promote their specific ethnic identity on this occasion reflects the earliest efforts of the Chicago Serbs to act in an organized manner.

The founding of the first Serbian cultural organization in Chicago is associated with one of the first Serb immigrants in this city. His name was Ivan Vučetić. He was a Serb from Budva, one of many Serbs from Boka Kotorska (Bokelji) that had arrived in America during the first period of immigration in the nineteenth century. Most of the Bokelji had settled in the coastal areas around New Orleans, New York, and especially San Francisco. During the Gold Rush, some of them settled in California's hinterland and Alaska. Others sought jobs in mines and industrial centers and established communities in Butte (Montana), Douglas (Alaska), Chicago, etc. The Bokelji were later joined by immigrants from Herzegovina and subsequently by many more from Serbian lands within Austria-Hungary.

Vučetić and his fellow Bokelji living in Chicago decided in 1878 to establish a cultural and educational club, which they named *Obilić*. As the membership of the club grew, in 1881 the organization was renamed and reorganized as the cultural club; it was transformed into a fraternal society called the *First Montenegrin Benevolent Society (Prvo crnogorsko dobrotvorno društvo)*.³ The society was mentioned in the minutes of another Serbian society founded in 1880 in San Francisco, the *Serbian-Montenegrin Literary and Benevolent Society (Srpsko-crnogorsko literarno i dobrotvorno društvo)*, which welcomed the establishment of the Chicago organization. As the San Francisco society had already been registered, they assisted the new organization in Chicago by sending them their charter and by-laws.⁴ In 1895 the Chicago fraternal organization changed its name to *Serbian Unity (Srpsko Jedinstvo)*.

² Vladimir Lugonja, "A Brief History of the S. S. S. Branko Radičević", in the publication dedicated to the 50th anniversary the Branko Radičević Choir, Chicago, 1956, 16.

³ Palandačić, Đuro: "Srbi i srpske organizacije u Čikagu", *Amerika*, 1956, 49-55.

⁴ By this time this organization had many years of active service to the Serbian community in San Francisco, which had been established several decades prior to the founding of the community in Chicago. Therefore it could have served as a model for new Serbian organizations that were being set up at the turn of the century.

By the last decade of the nineteenth century, there was a number of local and regional Serbian fraternal organizations in America. The biggest were the *Serbian-Montenegrin Literary and Benevolent Society* in San Francisco, *Serbian Unity* in Chicago, *United Serbs (Sjedinjeni Srbi)* in New York and *Serbian Unity (Srpsko jedinstvo)* in Butte. The Chicago organization was the first to attempt uniting all Serb organizations on the national level. The initiative came from Špiro Srzentić, former editor of the San Francisco newspaper *Liberty*, and was publicly advocated by Vasa Dinić, former president of *United Serbs*. In 1899 the Chicago organization began lobbying for unification, which was later accepted by three of the above-mentioned organizations, but not by the one in San Francisco. It seems the federation was formally established in 1903. It was based in Chicago and named the *First Serbian Fraternal Benevolent Federation (Prvi srpski bratski dobrotvorni savez)* or *FSFBF*.

3. The First Serbian Fraternal Benevolent Federation

The San Francisco society did not join, probably because at that time it was better organized than other Serbian organizations in America.⁵ This was due to the fact that San Francisco had for several decades been the home of one of the oldest and most numerous Serbian communities in America. During the last two decades of the nineteenth century, San Francisco was the most important Serbian-American cultural center and the home of the first Serbian newspapers published in America: the short-lived *Serbian American (Srbin Amerikanac)* began publication in 1893, at the same time as *Liberty (Sloboda)*, founded by members of the *Serb-Montenegrin Literary and Benevolent Society*.⁶ *Liberty* was for some time the only Serbian newspaper in the country. For several years the San Francisco-Oakland area had two Serbian newspapers: *Liberty* and *Serbian Independence (Srpska nezavisnost)*

⁵ Vladimir I. Popović, *Život i rad Srpsko-crnogorskog literarnog i dobrotvornog društva u San Francisku* (Oakland, 1905), 86. The issue of joining the Chicago federation was considered in 1902 and a negative response sent in December of that same year. According to the by-laws, any change of status of this organization required a consensus, which was not the case in this instance.

⁶ An interesting detail regarding the earliest Serbian editors in America is the case of Vladimir Čelović, a Bokelj educated in Italy, who was editor of the Italian American newspaper *Voce del Popolo*. One more interesting Slavic newspaper was established in San Francisco in 1893: it was called *Draškova sloga* (renamed later *Slavjanska sloga*); its editor seems also to have been a Serb by the name of Draško.

established in 1904. Both newspapers featured a number of articles on the *FSFBF*.

When the process of establishing this federation began in 1899, Chicago had no Serbian language newspapers, so *Liberty* from San Francisco was asked to act as their unofficial organ. This cooperation lasted until 1903, when *Liberty* published one of its last articles regarding the activities of the FSFBF—its annual convention held in August 1903. The article gives us an insight into the organizations that were members of the federation at that time: *Serbian Unity* (Chicago), *United Serbs* (New York), *Serbian-Slavic Benevolent Unity* (Anaconda), *Serbian Unity* (Butte), *Serbian Benevolent Society* (Angels Camp) and *Serbian Benevolent Unity* (Los Angeles).

By this time, a competing federation of fraternal societies had been established in Pittsburgh by Serbian immigrants, mainly from Krajina, who were arriving in large numbers at the turn of the century. Most of them settled in Pennsylvania and found jobs in the mines and steel mills located in this area. Their organization, established in 1901, was called the *Serbian Orthodox Society Srbobran* (*Srpski pravoslavni savez Srbobran*). This was the only federation that had a religious marker in its name. Initially, its official organ was a newspaper titled *The Srbin* (*Srbin*), published in Pittsburgh, and publicized as “the only Servian weekly newspaper in Eastern States in the U.S.”

Two trends characterized the first years of the twentieth century. One was the intensive inflow of new Serbian immigrants, who sought to join existing fraternal and cultural organizations. The other one was the development of competition and controversies within and among these organizations.

4. The Life of an Immigrant

The new immigrants arriving at the turn of the century settled mostly in the major industrial centers and mining towns. The jobs they had were dangerous, back-breaking, and low-paying. The immigrants accepted them for two reasons: their income in the Old Country had been even lower; and they perceived their stay in the U.S. as a temporary one. Their goal was to earn and save money in order to return to the Old Country in a few years and start a new life there. An authentic description of what their life was like is provided by the memoirs of an immigrant by the name of Jovo Marić.

Marić was born in 1881 in Trebinje. He emigrated from his native Herzegovina in 1901. Like most immigrants of that period, he first arrived in New York, which he soon left in search of a job. With no knowledge of English, no qualifications, no experience and no support, the lives of these

early immigrants would have been unbearable were it not for their resilience and determination to survive and succeed:

Life was bitter and painfully toilsome, but these distressful currents were overcome by my sole ambition of acquiring a fortune as soon as possible in order to return home with financial security for my family. Nothing—ill health, hunger, pain or deprivations of any kind—would change the promise I had made myself when I left home. I was to succeed in this new nation of opportunities and only death would put an end to this ambition. I clenched my fists, grit my teeth and sharpened my wits daily in order to grasp the least opportunity to get ahead. It was an empty life, living the way I didn't want to live and knowing it, not liking the way things were and unable to see any way to change them.⁷

Like other immigrants, Marić were unaware that this new land would become, at least for some, the home of their children and that perhaps they would never see their native land again. Many of those that married and had a family would become reluctant to return to the Old Country. Many of the single young Serbian men working in mines opened in faraway places eventually returned. However, all of them felt the social and spiritual need to organize cultural clubs, fraternal organizations and church-school congregations

Stories of these immigrants, who sought to rebuild their lives in a new and alien environment, are imbued with nostalgia and a feeling of spiritual malaise even when the initial hardships and deprivation had given way to economic prosperity and social success. This feeling is expressed in an inscription found on a monument at the St. Sava Monastery in Libertyville. Marić quotes it at the beginning of his book:

Nepravde silom gonjen da se seli,
Mlijeko i med će zemljom poteći,
Al' srpski iseljenik tugom će u grob leći.

Driven by injustice away from his home
Sorrow will follow the Serb immigrant to his grave
Although the land will overflow with milk and honey.

⁷ John Marich, *Memoirs of John Marich* (typed manuscript), translated by Nada Marich Martin, available to me courtesy of Ned Marich.

Ties to the land of birth and childhood were never severed. They remained as the invisible roots of a tree that branched out throughout the new Homeland. It is this underground world replete with memories defining one's identity that the immigrants cherished to the last days of their lives. Marić wrote in his memoirs that he had "one more ambition" before he departed this life—to revisit the town of his birth and relive the memories of his childhood. The "sorrow" came from the need to unite two worlds, two homelands, and two cultures, to reconcile the duality most first generation immigrants felt very strongly.

5. *Srbobran* Lodges in Chicago

Marić described his first few years in America, including his "railroad days in Chicago." His stay in Chicago was brief, but important in many ways. It was here that his friend Ilija Arandelović approached him, inviting him to join the effort of establishing a local Serbian fraternal society:

The meeting was held at 306 East Randolph Street, which at that time was known as "The Heart of Chicago." As a bystander, I learned that this organization was formed in the interest of aiding and uniting immigrant Serbs. I was in accord. Brother Ilić spoke of the founding of the society, its ideals, rules and regulations and goals. On October 25, 1901, I was accepted as the 25th member of the Lodge. It was at those meetings that I met Aćim Lugonja, a native from the province of Herzegovina; Manojlo Jovanović and Milovan Ilić, natives of the province of Serbia. These men were already well established in private enterprises in the north-central part of Chicago. Within a few years, membership counted to over 300 members and I am happy to say that I maintained my membership throughout my lifetime.⁸

Marić enrolled in a lodge that joined the *Srbobran* federation based in Pittsburgh. The latter was one of several competing fraternal federations working "in the interest of aiding and uniting immigrant Serbs" and the only one with a religious marker. Among other things, this was reflected in the names of its member lodges: all had names of saints.

A Serbian local society by the name of *Balkan* had been established in Chicago in 1899. It later joined the Chicago fraternal federation, where it stayed until 1905. Due to their dissatisfaction with this organization, the growing *Balkan* society decided to join the *Srbobran* federation based in

⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

Pittsburgh. Both old and new members, almost 200 of them, easily supported the switch from one federation to the other. The main point of discussion was the name of the new lodge. One of the leading members, Nikola Grahovac, proposed it be called *King Peter I* because he was the king of all Serbs “wherever they lived.” This was important for two reasons. This was the first time a lodge within the *Srbobran* federation refused to adopt a name bearing a religious marker. Furthermore, this secularization implied a political statement, i.e., support from Austro-Hungarian Serbs living in America for independent Serbia as the center of Serbdom and for its new ruling family, the Karađorđevićs. Very soon the *King Peter I* “brotherhood” was complemented by the *Princess Milena* “sisterhood.” The name of choice was designed to highlight the smaller Serbian state of Montenegro. As the first organization of Serbian women in Chicago, it was a predecessor of the *Circle of Serbian Sisters* (*Kolo srpskih sestara*) in Chicago, established ten years later.⁹

6. Fraternal Federations: Divisive Issues

Serbian newspapers published at that time in San Francisco are a valuable source of information on the relationships between these federations. Especially interesting is *Serbian Independence* edited by Veljko Radojević. The latter was a strong advocate of uniting the fraternal organizations into one strong Serbian American institution on the national level. Despite the merits of this idea, it ran into a number of obstacles. One of them was rooted in the origin of the immigrants. Most of them came from Austria-Hungary, where they were divided in provinces and regions with no central Serbian institution, except for the Serbian Orthodox Church, which also had a difficult relationship with the Austrian authorities. The special status of one province, the Military Border (*Vojna Krajina*), had involved stringent isolation for centuries. This situation was reflected in the mentality of the immigrants and was exacerbated by the fact that in America they lived in fairly small communities dispersed throughout the continent, with no means of regular communication. In the early period of immigration, their “localism” was still an active factor that hindered efforts to translate the awareness of a common Serb identity into the reality of a centralized national organization.

This was one of the main topics debated in the early years of the Serbian American press. The names of many local organizations contained the word “unity,” reflecting the goal that would be achieved only in a gradual process that took several decades.

⁹ The first *Kolo srpskih sestara* in America was established in 1909 in Cincinnati. The *Srpsko sestrinsko društvo* of Chicago was established in 1915.

As pointed out by Radojević, in 1904 there were two federations, in Chicago and Pittsburgh, with a joint membership of around 4000. This was roughly 5% of the total Serb immigrant population in America. Therefore, in the early years, the priority task of the grassroots fraternal organizations was to promote membership growth on two levels: local and national. On the national level there was strong competition among them, coupled with personal leadership rivalries. These three negative factors (competition, leadership issues and “localism”) were partially mitigated by political events taking place in the Balkans, triggered by the “annexation crisis” (annexation of Bosnia and Herzegovina by Austria-Hungary). These events imposed new priorities and acted as a factor of convergence.

The second annual convention of the Chicago federation was held in July 1904. At that time the two federations had a total of 80 member organizations. According to Radojević, the main obstacle for the unification of the two federations in 1905 was one associated with religion. The Chicago federation was secular, while the one in Pittsburgh involved a clear religious (Serbian Orthodox) identity. Both were interested in developing their activities beyond insurance, thus assuming social, political and cultural roles.¹⁰ *Srbobran*’s restriction of membership to individuals belonging to the Christian Orthodox faith became a divisive issue, especially in the San Francisco community, where Catholic Serbs from Dalmatia were not only welcome, but also highly respected. Opposing positions on this issue can be explained by the different historical experiences with Catholicism in Krajina on the one hand, and Boka Kotorska–Dalmatia, on the other. This issue also involved Bosnia and Herzegovina, where there were Serbs whose ethnic awareness was not obliterated by their conversion to another religion (Catholicism or Islam). The position of *Srbobran* involved some understanding for the historical situation that brought about conversion of Serbs to other religions, but their own historical experience had taught them to resist imposed conversion, which in the long run involved suppression of the Serb identity. Furthermore, the *Srbobran* position was that Serb immigrants in America were living in a free country as far as religious orientation was concerned. Therefore, those who had been pressured to abandon the Serbian Orthodox Church in the Old Country were now free to return to the faith of their forefathers, if they wished to do so.

¹⁰ This was clearly articulated by Radojevic: “Htjeli bismo da nasa drustva ne budu samo bolesnicka i ukopnicka, da njihov rad utice i na dusu nasega naroda.” Mi zivimo u zemlji gdje pod firmom slobode vlada najveca tiranija, mi smo robovi najjaceg svjetskog tirjanina—mi smo robovi kapitala”, *Srpska nezavisnost*, 1905, no. 13.

A further complication of the religious issue came also as a consequence of the situation in the Old Country. This had to do with the fact that the Serbian Orthodox Church in Serbia had insufficient control over the Serbian Orthodox Church in Austria-Hungary. The policy of the Austrian authorities was to control religious institutions on its territory and to block the unification of the Serb Orthodox Church. Franz Joseph I had passed the so-called *Rescript*, which was binding for the Serbian Orthodox Church in Austria-Hungary:

The Rescript had a host of negative effects on Serbian Orthodox Church and the Metropolitanate in Sremski Karlovci, not only prior to the establishment of the Serbian Patriarchate but also many years after the passing of the unified constitution of the Serbian Orthodox Church on November 16, 1931, and furthermore it was also effective in America. Many of those who emigrated to America because they did not agree with the policies of Austria-Hungary, accepted this imposed protestant Rescript, which had no connection with the doctrine of Serbian Orthodox Church or its canonical laws.¹¹

Another developing divisive issue at the beginning of the twentieth century was the social problem generated by the prevalent economic and cultural status of Serbian immigrants in America.¹² The fraternal organizations were established to mitigate this problem, but in the early twentieth century there were competing workers' organizations advocating socialist-political programs on a cross-ethnic level. They perceived ethnic fraternal organizations as not contributing to their goals—the struggle for social justice unhindered by specific ethnic interests.

The competition between the Chicago and Pittsburgh federations was further complicated by the existence of several additional federations; *Prvi crnogorski savez* (*First Montenegrin Federation*) in Chicago, *Srpsko-crnogorski savez* (*Serbian-Montenegrin Federation*) founded in Butte and later transferred to Chicago, and the small *Srpska bokeljska dobrotvorna zajednica* (*Serbian Boka Benevolent Association*) in Butte.

In 1909 a meeting was convened in Cleveland in order to try once again to unite all the fraternal federations. The *Srbobran* federation based in

¹¹ Sava, episkop šumadijski, *Istorija Srpske pravoslavne crkve u Americi i Kanadi 1891-1941* (Kalenić-Kragujevac, 1994), 66-67.

¹² Here is a typical comment by Radojević: "Mi živimo u zemlji gdje pod firmom slobode vlada najveća tiranija, mi smo robovi najjačeg svjetskog tirjanina—mi smo robovi kapitala." *Srpska nezavisnost*, 1905, no. 13.

Pittsburgh and two federations based in Chicago (*The First Serbian Fraternal Benevolent Federation* and the *First Montenegrin Federation*) merged into a new organization called *Savez sjedinjenih Srba Sloga* (*Federation of United Serbs Concord*) based in New York. Although the merger did not hold for long, the Chicago federation ceased to exist as an independent organization in 1909.

7. The First Serbian Orthodox Church in Chicago

Interesting first-hand information on Chicago Serbs was provided by an exceptional figure in the history of Serb immigrants in the U.S. This was Sebastian Dabović, the first American born Serbian clergyman. Dabović's parents came to America from Boka Kotorska, like many others who emigrated from this area in the second half of the nineteenth century. Born in California in 1863, John Dabović spent his childhood years in California and was later sent to Russia in order to study theology. After graduating from the Russian theological academies in St. Petersburg and Kiev, he was tonsured and assumed the monastic name Sebastian. He became a deacon in 1887 and returned to America in 1892. Since in America there were no Serbian churches at that time, Dabović was ordained by the Russian Bishop of Alaska and incorporated into the Russian Orthodox Church in America.

The Metropolitan of Belgrade Mihailo sent archimandrite Firmilian Dražić to Chicago in 1892. He did so in response to a letter by Krsto Gopčević, who had addressed the Metropolitan on behalf of the Greek-Russian-Serbian Orthodox parish established in Chicago in 1891. Gopčević suggested that the Metropolitan send a priest who could speak Serbian, Greek and also "a little Arabic, since there are quite a few Syrians here."¹³ Services in this parish were conducted in a small chapel improvised in a private home since the parishioners struggled to provide enough financing from their small community. Archimandrite Dražić returned to Belgrade six months later. After his departure from America, the Serbian Orthodox Church in Belgrade was not in a position either to send a permanent priest or to provide financial support for this parish, which was unable to provide funds for its own survival. Even though the parish was extinguished, its short-lived efforts were an indication of the Chicago Serbs' need to get organized in order to be able to fulfill their religious needs.

In 1893 Chicago hosted the World Exhibition, which attracted a great deal of public interest. Dabović visited this city for the first time in the company of Metropolitan Nicholas of the Russian Orthodox Church in America. In his

¹³ Sava, episkop šumadijski, 22.

account of the visit, Dabović mentioned that in Chicago he met only some twenty Serbs living there. Dabović was a clergyman of the Russian Church, but throughout his clerical career his main mission was to assist the establishment of Serbian church-school congregations and parishes. His visit to Chicago was an opportunity to explore these possibilities. In Chicago he met a person who would later become instrumental in his mission. This was Paul Stensland, one of the officers in charge of the World Exhibition. Stensland had been in contact with the Russian Orthodox Church in Chicago and had assisted the Russian clergymen in purchasing land for the church and cemetery.

After this visit, Dabović returned to Minneapolis, where he was the administrator of the Carpatho-Russian parish. However, he maintained a very close relationship with the Serb communities in California, which he knew very well from his early years. Thanks to the endeavor of Sebastian Dabović and the support of the Russian Bishop Nicholas of Alaska, the Serbian parish of Angels Camp established and consecrated the first Serbian Orthodox Church in America in 1894. This was the Church of St. Sava in Jackson, CA. Following the example of the small Serbian community in Angels Camp, several Serbian parishes were established in the next few years: in the Pennsylvanian towns of McKeesport (1900) and Steelton (1903), and in the Alaskan town of Douglas (1902). This strengthened Dabović's resolve to establish a parish in Chicago.

On his second visit to Chicago in 1903, he found a stronger and bigger Serb community there. In 1904 Dabović came to Chicago once again, commenting "this time we were able to discuss seriously the needs of the Serbs and the need to establish a Serbian parish and church in Chicago."

Dabović used his diplomatic skills and contacts to the benefit of Serbian interests.¹⁴ In 1905 Russian Orthodox Church in America appointed Dabović as head of the Serbian mission. This motivated him to reinforce his contacts with Serbian Orthodox Church both in Serbia and Austria-Hungary.

Dabović once again visited Chicago in 1905. There he found out that some 200 Serbian families had established a church-school congregation, but did not yet have a church. Recalling Paul Stensland, who had in the meantime become the president of a Chicago bank, Dabović contacted him in order to

¹⁴ Since he was a clergyman of the Russian Orthodox Church and this was the time of the Russia-Japan war, the Slavic immigrants in America formed an alliance in order to raise aid for Russia through the Red Cross. The Slavic Alliance for Red Cross Aid was established first in New York and later in Chicago. In New York Dabović worked closely with the Russian consul, who had previously been posted in Belgrade. He suggested to the consul to invite Mihailo Pupin in this effort. Pupin would later use these and other contacts in his efforts to support Serbian wartime interests.

discuss plans for constructing or purchasing a building for a Serbian church. Stensland showed him a building that could be converted into a church, located in an area populated by Polish, Czech, Slovak, Norwegian and Swedish immigrants. The price of the building was \$10,000. However, when Stensland realized that the Serb parishioners would hardly be able to raise this amount, he reduced the price. Thus the parishioners bought the building and established the first Serbian Orthodox Church in Chicago—the Holy Resurrection of Christ. Dabović offers an account of this event:

We mounted a cross on the building. Then we installed an icon screen in the living room and in only five days we had a small church-chapel that we dedicated to the Resurrection of Christ. The late Stanko Stanišić (who had only one hand) donated a nice, fairly big icon of the Resurrection of Christ mounted in a gold frame, while his wife provided the curtain for the altar door.¹⁵

A letter of the Chicago congregation addressed to the Serbian Patriarch highlights an important issue regarding the relationship between Russian and Serbian Orthodox Churches. In 1905 Russian Church in America formally announced that Serbian Orthodox churches in America would be incorporated into its fold. Serb immigrants responded with reservations because their strong wish was to develop both informal and formal connections with Serbian Orthodox Church in the Old Country, which at that time had two branches: one in independent Serbia (Belgrade), the other in Austria-Hungary (Sremski Karlovci). In view of the growing number of Serbian church-school congregations, the immigrants were considering the possibility of organizing, some time in the future, a diocese of Serbian Orthodox Church in America. These issues were reflected in a letter of the Chicago parish to Patriarch Georgije in Sremski Karlovci:

We Serbs in the city of Chicago have purchased a three-story building and land for a church and we have founded a Serbian Orthodox congregation...Our parish priest is Sebastian Dabović, a Serb born in this country, who studied theology in Russia and says he is the administrator of every Serbian Orthodox church in the United States and that is all we know about him. Father Dabović claims that we

¹⁵ Sebastijan Dabović, "Prvi dani u Čikagu", *Amerikanski Srbobran*, April 4, 1936. Another important donor was Charles Crane, founder of the Slavic Department at the University of Chicago. On visiting the church, the Russian Metropolitan Tichon presented the church with valuable gifts.

legally belong under the Russian Consistory and that we cannot join any Patriarchy or Consistory and that only the Russian Consistory in San Francisco could confirm our parish priest. These three points are in our church by-laws, which we have not yet signed because there are various reasons why our people would not like to acknowledge Russian authority...¹⁶

Dabović was acting on the advice of Metropolitan Mihailo: safeguarding the religious needs of the Serb immigrants the only way possible at the time, which was through the good services of Russian Orthodox Church in America. Nonetheless, this letter highlights the same request Dabović himself had presented in 1887, when he had written to Metropolitan Mihailo Jovanović in Serbia, requesting the latter's opinion on the idea of establishing an "independent Orthodox Church" in America. The Metropolitan's reply was as follows:

I cannot establish and consecrate an independent Orthodox Church in California and America because there is already an Orthodox Church supported by Russian Orthodox Church. Furthermore, we do not have the resources for this...I think you should agree and listen to your Bishop and he will help you and protect the Serbs and Orthodoxy and he will safeguard Serbian national customs. I think that you should reconsider all the above and refrain from doing anything that would be against the interests of Serbs living there.¹⁷

Dabović was well aware of this situation, but he could not prevent Serbian congregations in America from circumventing him in their communication with the representatives of Serbian Orthodox Church in the Old Country. That is why in 1909 he resigned from his post of the head of the Serbian Mission, dedicating his subsequent efforts to the advancement of the Serbian Orthodox Church in America.

8. Political Issues and the Serbian American Press

The third annual convention of the Chicago federation was held in July of 1905 and was assisted by delegates of 13-member organization out of a total of 17. By this time the federation had begun publishing its own organ. It was

¹⁶ Sava, episkop šumadijski, 25.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 23.

called *United Serbs (Ujedinjeno srpstvo)*¹⁸ and the first editor was Đorđe Čokorilo.

Čokorilo was a journalist and editor from Bosnia-Herzegovina. The Austro-Hungarian arrested him as editor of *The Serbian Word (Srpska riječ)* in Sarajevo. After that, he fled to Serbia, then went to Paris and in 1906 arrived in New York, where he joined his cousin Paja Radosavljević. Čokorilo had previously published two books: *The Secret History of Austrian Policy and Its Continuation in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Tajna istorija Austrijske politike i njezino produženje u Bosni i Hercegovini)* and *Significance of the Cultural Struggle in France (Značaj kulturne borbe u Francuskoj)*.

As the title of Čokorilo's first book suggests, these were the years when Austria-Hungary intensified its anti-Serbian policies as it planned to annex Bosnia and Herzegovina (which had been its protectorate since the Berlin Congress of 1878). Discrimination, harassment, arrests, political trials and death sentences against the Serbian population generated their resistance, political organization and emigration from Austria-Hungary, which manifested clear hostility towards overall Serbian interests. This mobilized the Serbian community in America, which consisted mainly of immigrants from Austria-Hungary. The majority of Serb immigrants that came to America at the turn of the century still held Austrian passports. Austrian consulates sought to suppress anti-Austrian political activities reflected in Serbian newspapers published in America. This explains why the Serbian American community, preoccupied until then mostly with immigrant issues, suddenly became highly politicized and active. In 1907 the Serbian community in San Francisco established the Serbian National Fund, which sent the following appeal to Serb immigrants in America:

The present generation has not avoided the difficult fate of the Serbian nation since Kosovo. That fate has left the iron hand of foreigners weighing on our neck and forced us to abandon our homes, our beloved Homeland, in order to seek freedom and life in America...The Serbian National Fund, supported by the Serbs throughout America, will staunchly support the development of Serbian ideas and will thereby instill courage into the hearts of our brethren on the other side of the ocean, when they realize that Serbs remember their Homeland wherever they may be, staying forever loyal to the Serb idea. The Serb National Fund is a witness to this

¹⁸ Later renamed *Jedinstvo* and *Srpsko jedinstvo*.

awareness of American Serbs and the interpreter of our wish to contribute to the freedom and progress of our nation.¹⁹

In view of his professional experience, Čokorilo was appointed editor of *United Serbs*, the publication of the Chicago federation. Although he seemed to be the perfect man for this job, he soon found himself confronting influential members of the local community. According to Božidar Purić,²⁰ Čokorilo's problems began when he refused to publish articles submitted by some of the local leaders, which he did for professional rather than political reasons (because he deemed them "illiterate"). The confrontation culminated with his dismissal from the job in 1907. Radojević commented that while Čokorilo edited *United Serbs*, it was "the best Serbian newspaper in America." Čokorilo was replaced by Mićo Ćuda, who had in 1904 been the editor of *Slavic Unity* (*Slavensko jedinstvo*), a Serbian newspaper published in Butte. The controversy regarding the editor of *Serbian Unity* divided the Chicago federation.

During his tenure, Čokorilo assumed an active role in the Chicago Serbian community, trying to attract and organize the best representatives of the community, especially the young generation, and to promote the unification of the two fraternal federations. He initiated the "Small Serbian Popular Library" designed to provide for the needs of Serb immigrants in America, and he supported the establishment in 1906 of *Serbian Light* (*Srpska luča*). The latter was an educational-political society of the Serbian youth in Chicago. Its motto was: "Education for freedom—for freedom with joined forces."

The organization of the Chicago federation was a gradual process, which took several years beginning with 1899. Radojević comments that when he arrived in San Francisco in 1900 to assume the post of the editor of *Liberty*, he knew nothing about the Chicago federation. All attention was focused on the growing Pittsburgh federation. In a letter addressed to Čokorilo, Radojević comments that up until 1902, the Chicago federation was rather passive (especially compared to Serbian organizations in San Francisco and Pittsburgh). Čokorilo's activities could have had a catalyst effect were it not

¹⁹ *Srpska nezavisnost*, 1907, no. 34.

²⁰ Božidar Purić, *Biografija Bože Rankovića. Doprinos istoriji srpskog iseljništva u Severnoj Americi* (Munich, 1963), 34.

for the strong internal disputes that prevented the federation from assuming a more active role on the national level.²¹

9. Development of the Serbian American Press in Chicago

The development of the Serbian American press in Chicago is associated with an immigrant by the name of Ivan Palandačić (John Palandech). He was a Bokelj, born in Luštica, near the town of Herceg Novi. He arrived in America in 1888 as a fourteen-year-old boy and settled in Fresno, where he had cousins who had emigrated earlier.²² He first visited Chicago in 1893, the time of the International Exposition, and relocated there several years later. He turned out to be a keen businessman and soon became one of the leading members of the Chicago community.

After Čokorilo's resignation, the editing of *United Serbs* was assumed by the controversial M. Ćuda. Very soon he too left and Palandačić took over the ailing newspaper. After the federation was dissolved in 1909, Palandačić had free reign to edit and finance it to the best of his abilities. Very soon he expanded the size of the original four-page newspaper and raised its circulation. Under his ownership and management, the newspaper continued publication for the next thirty years.

After consolidating *Ujedinjeno srpstvo*, Palandačić began publishing an almanac called *Serbian popular calendar United Serbs* (*Srpski narodni kalendar Ujedinjeno srpstvo*). Such almanacs, called *kalendari*, were at that time very popular both in the Old Country and among Serbian immigrants. The name of this periodical genre comes from the fact that they contained the Orthodox calendar in addition to that numerous articles on Serbian political, historical and cultural topics as well as literary contributions (poems, stories, essays). Following the launching in 1907 of a new weekly called *Balkan World* (*Balkanski svijet*) and realizing the popularity of the *kalendari*, Palandacic began publishing an almanac titled *King Peter the Great* (*Kralj Petar Veliki*) in 1906. *Balkan World* continued publication after 1914 under a new name: *Yugoslavia* (*Jugoslavija*). *King Peter the Great* was later renamed *America* (*Amerika*), which was to become the foremost such publication in the U.S. with an unrivaled publication span of over fifty years. Palandačić edited 52 issues during his lifetime. The almanac's publication continued for five additional years following the death of Palandačić in 1959.

²¹ Before leaving America in 1907, Čokorilo visited Butte and Pittsburgh, where he delivered public lectures, as noted by Radojević in *Srpska nezavisnost*. Čokorilo left "disappointed in American Serbs."

²² Borivoje Karapandžić, "U spomen Ivana R. Palandačića", *Amerika*, 1960.

Having dedicated his efforts to the publishing business, Palandačić opened a bookstore catering books from the Old Country. Later he complemented them with his own publications. The first book he published was Njegoš's *Mountain Wreath*; he published collections of folksongs and folktales from the Serbian oral tradition (*Marko Kraljevc, Miloš Obilić, Boj na Kosovu, Crnogorske junačke pjesme* and a collection of folktales compiled by Vuk Karadžić); popular novels such as Vidaković's *Kasija carica* and Veselinović's *Hajduk Stanko*; the first Serbian schoolbooks (*Srpski bukvar* and *Srpska čitanka*).²³ The bookstore also catered records and music scores. His shop, first located in Van Buren Street, was later expanded and relocated on Dearborn.

Palandačić viewed Serbian publications as a specific part of the foreign language press in the multi-cultural city of Chicago. He was well acquainted with these publications and their editors. His active contribution to the Foreign Language Press Association of Chicago, involving around sixty foreign language publications, earned him the post of president. Among Serbian publishers, Palandačić was the leading and most successful professional, who clearly realized the significance of the foreign language press of his time:

Mr. Palandech recognized the need of the immigrant for orientation in the busy new world of his choice. Mr. Palandech saw the difficulties of the new American, and particularly of the Yugoslav who willfully transfers his roots from one civilization to another. He saw that the problems of transition from one culture to another are very great, and he meant to do something to help the immigrant find himself, as it were, in the machine civilization of America—in a world of industry and rapid transportation... He interpreted America to him, gave him an explanation for the sometimes puzzling happenings around him. And in doing so, he performed an outstanding service.²⁴

Palandačić also played an outstanding role in supporting Serbian Orthodox Church in America, cultural organizations in the Old Country and the war effort. In 1905 he became the first president of the Serbian Orthodox Church in Chicago and later contributed to the founding of the Monastery of St. Sava in Libertyville. He donated to the Serbian cultural society *Prosvjeta* in Sarajevo and established a fund for the education of students from Boka

²³ *Ibid.*, 20-21.

²⁴ Stephen Stepanchev, "The Story of Palandech's Newspaper Career", *Amerika*, 1956, 137-38.

Kotorska. He was also responsible for organizing transferring the association of charities for Boka Kotorska and Herzegovina from Butte to Chicago.²⁵ During World War I he supported the activities of the Serbian Red Cross, was the secretary of the Liberty Loan and a member of other organizations contributing to the war effort. His patriotic work is reflected in the conferences and rallies he organized in support of wartime Serbia. After the establishment of Yugoslavia, Palandačić supported the new state. He published the English language version of the new Yugoslav Constitution. After visiting his homeland in 1934, Palandačić published a series of articles on Yugoslavia in his own newspapers and the *Chicago Daily News*.²⁶ Together with Mihailo Pupin, Palandačić played an important role in promoting Serbia and Yugoslavia in the American public opinion. For all those contributions Palandačić received high decorations both from King Aleksandar Karađorđević of Serbia (Order of St. Sava.) and King Nikola of Montenegro. A book of outstanding citizens of Chicago (published in 1931) cites Palandačić as one of the five most honored citizens of Slavic background in the city.

This early period of the Serbian American press in Chicago witnessed the appearance of several more periodical publications, but these were fairly short-lived and far less influential in the Serbian American environment than Palandačić's publications. One of them was a publication dedicated to church affairs. This was the *Herald of the Serbian Church in America* (*Glasnik srpske crkve u Americi*) established by Dabović. There were two socialist publications: *The Workers' Sentinel* (*Radnička straža*) established by the Yugoslav Socialist Federation and *The People's Voice* (*Narodni glas*). *Balkan* was a political weekly. Gakovich and Radovich list two more publications, *The Yugoslav Herald* (*Jugoslovenski glasnik*) and *Liberation* (*Oslobođenje*).²⁷

10. Music, Theater and Literature

Chicago was the home of the first Serbian *tamburitsa* band in America. It was established in 1905 and called the *First Serbian Tamburitsa Society Srbadija*

²⁵ Uroš Dučić, "Novi legator i veliki dobrotvor Prosvete", *Amerika*, 1956, 66-67; Karapandžić, 22-23.

²⁶ Karapandžić, 22.

²⁷ *Glasnik srpske crkve u Americi*, editors Sebastian Dabović, Filip Sredanović and Petar Stijačić; *Radnička straža*, 1907, published by the Yugoslav Socialist Federation, editor M. Glumac; *Narodni glas*, 1911, published by the Jugoslovenski socijalistički savez u Americi, editors B. Savić, S. Marković, V. Bornemisa and T. Cvetkov; *Balkan*, 1907, edited by Petar Stijačić; *Jugoslovenski glasnik*, 1905; *Oslobođenje*, 1910. (See Gakovich—Radovich, *Serbs in the United States and Canada*).

(*Prvo srpsko tamburaško društvo Srbadija*). The two musicians that proposed to organize the band were Risto Baltić and Milica Ilić, while the first president was Stanko Ivković. One of their first public performances was given at a dance following the convention of the Chicago federation. This was the beginning of a rich and long tradition of Serbian *tamburitsa* music in America.

The first Serbian choir in America to achieve exceptional growth and excellence was also established in Chicago in 1906.²⁸ It was named after the Serbian nineteenth century lyrical poet Branko Radičević.²⁹ Its first director was a teacher and violinist from Bosnia by the name of Jovo Kraguljević. During the next five decades the directors of the choir were Risto Baltić, Cufalo (a Czech), Nenad Maksimović, Ratković, Arno Mario Hess (also Czech), Milutin Janković, J. Grivski, Joe Kindl, L. Korolisin (Ukrainian), Sergei Sokoloff (former director of the Kuban Cossack Chorus) and Aleksandar Savin.

The choir initially had twenty members and consisted only of male singers “because there were almost no women among the Serbs in Chicago” at that time. Later it became a mixed choir with an outstanding female soloist, Milica Stanižan. The patriotism of the immigrants and their support for the unification of Serbs in the Balkans “had its best expression in folksongs and Serbian artistic music.” This too was a tradition that found fertile ground among Serb immigrants in America. The choir performed popular Serbian songs as well as religious music.³⁰ At a later stage the choir regularly participated in the church liturgy and expanded its activities. On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of Branko Radičević’s birth, the choir sent a donation for a monument dedicated to him to be erected in Belgrade. During World War I the choir took part in rallies and bond drives, donating to the American Red Cross and Serbian charities. In 1917 Mihailo Pupin was invited to become an honorary member of the choir. Pupin accepted with the following words:

This is indeed a great honor for anyone to receive for his achievement, and I assure you that my work on behalf of my dear Serbian

²⁸ Lugonja, 16-18. Also, D.M.P., “Srpsko pevačko društvo ‘Branko Radičević u Čikagu 1906-1956’”, in the publication dedicated to the 50th anniversary of the choir, Chicago, 1956, 20-23.

²⁹ Among its founders were Stojadin Ivković (the first president), Ilija Tarailo, Petar Sekulović, Risto Jelić, Nikola Jelić, Stanko Ivković, Krsto Đorđević, Simo Proviđžalo, Manojlo Jovanović, Đorđe Milojević. They were assisted by the local parish priest P. Stijačić.

³⁰ Some of the secular patriotic songs performed by the choir were *Hej trubaču, Padajte braćo, Doline tutnje, Ostre su naše sablje, Srbin sam Srbin, Jadna majka*. Among religious compositions were the excellent *Rukoveti* by Stevan Mokranjac.

brothers is more important to me now that I see it is valued. I truly do not seek any reward for fulfilling my sacred duty, but I am pleased to receive assurance from my modest brothers that they agree with me. This assurance is more precious than medals from kings.³¹

The youngest member of the choir was a fifteen-year old boy by the name of Vljako Lugonja. Lugonja later moved to Detroit, where he founded two new choirs (*Filip Višnjić* and *Ravanica*). However, his greatest achievement was the establishment of the *Serbian Singing Federation* in 1931, whose first president was Petar Sekulović (the father of the well-known actor Karl Malden). Among the five original charter members of this organization were two choirs from Chicago, *Branko Radičević* and *Sloboda*, which later merged, assuming the name *Branko Radičević*. The prize at the festivals of the choir federation was the Memorial Cup donated by Pupin's daughter Barbara Smith.

As far as theater performances are concerned, Radojević noted in 1905 that a Serbian theater group had been established in South Chicago by Mirko Suvajdžić and that their first performance was the humorous play titled *Graničari*, written by the Belgrade author Ilija I. Vukićević. The same group headed by Mirko and Zora Suvajdžić also performed this play in Pittsburgh and surrounding Serbian communities.³² However, these efforts lacked the organizational and financial infrastructure that could secure their long term activity. That is the reason why the need of the community for theater could best be satisfied, at this time, by a larger cultural organization such as the *Branko Radičević* choir.

The *Branko Radičević* choir produced several musical plays, which were very popular. At first they attempted to perform a play with music titled *The Village Scamp* (*Seoska lola*), but since the choir had no female singers, they had to switch to a play without music. Their choice was *The Bokelj's Dream in America* (*Bokeljev san u Americi*), which at that time was a popular work written by Lazar S. Ćurić, a Serbian author living in San Francisco.³³ The

³¹ Sava, episkop šumadijski, 385.

³² Krinka Vidaković Petrov, "The Serb National Federation; Champion of Serbdom in America", in *Serb National Federation. First 100 Years 1901-2001*, ed. By K. Vidaković Petrov (Pittsburgh, 2001), 39.

³³ Lazar S. Ćurić was one of the earliest Serbian authors in America. He was from Boka Kotorska and lived in San Francisco. This work was originally a poem that was later adapted to a play by Veljko Radojević. The topic of the play is patriotic. The protagonist is a Serbian miner in America who dreams he is in the Old Country, where the Austrian authorities come to arrest him (this was a very common

response of the audience to the plays was so enthusiastic that the choir decided to continue their theater activities, especially after becoming a mixed choir. They performed a total of 50 plays, which brought them the reputation of representing the amateur Serbian national theater in the U.S. Their selection of plays included *Koštana*, *Divljuša*, *Devojačka kletva* and *Boj na Kosovu*.

Chicago became a Serbian publishing center only after Palandačić developed his publishing company towards the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. Therefore, most of the literary activities of Serbs in America in the early years of the twentieth century evolved far from Chicago. The first Serbian writers in America—Lazar S. Ćurić, Nikola Musić, Petar Luburić and others—published their works in cities that had experienced Serbian editors and printers.

When Dabović was visiting Chicago to explore the possibility of establishing a Serbian church there, he met various members of the Chicago Serbian community. Two of them left a lasting impression on him. One was Čokorilo. The other one was Proka Jovkić. Having heard that there were many Serbs working in the Chicago slaughterhouse, Dabović went there to meet them. This was the most unlikely place to find a poet, but that was exactly what happened;

There I found a diamond, a gem, the soul of souls, a man with a beautiful [poetic] voice—Proka Jovkić. His insensitive father and stepmother had urged him to get a job in the slaughterhouse, where he worked in sweat and blood: but he would secretly come to us, to relax and enjoy the Serbian cultural environment.³⁴

For Jovkić, the church was a home for his soul, a place where he could appreciate the world of faith, culture and art—the world in which his imagination and creativity could grow. During his unfortunate Chicago days, Jovkić wrote many poems, but he published most of them in the two San Francisco Serbian newspapers, which were open to literary contributions of Serbian American writers. Radojević especially recognized the literary talent of Jovkić and in order to assist him he offered him the job of assistant editor of *Serbian Independence*. Jovkić soon moved to Oakland, CA, where he was

occurrence at the beginning of the century). The play was very popular because it was one of the first works dealing with a two themes specific to Serbs in America; nostalgia for the Old Country and patriotic emotions strengthened by a feeling of political injustice.

³⁴ Dabović.

able to dedicate himself to writing. However, his difficult Chicago experience left an indelible mark in his personality and his writing. He became a poet of the deprived, of those yearning for freedom both in the earthly and the heavenly world.

11. Conclusion

During the first decade of the twentieth century the Serbian community in Chicago was one of the fastest growing Serbian communities in America. However, the effects of this growth would become obvious only in the twenties. Many changes took place during those turbulent years. During the two Balkan Wars and World War I, the Serbian American community assumed an extremely active role. By 1919 the wars had ended with the triumph of Serbia and the establishment of a new state, Yugoslavia, so the political goal of the Serb unification in the Old Country was achieved. The seat of the important organization *Srpska narodna odbrana* (*Serbian National Defense*) was in Chicago. By the end of the second decade of the twentieth century there were thirty church-school congregations in America and Canada. The American-Canadian Diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church was finally established in 1921, and its seat was in Chicago. Then came the building of the Monastery of St. Sava in Libertyville. In 1919 the first Yugoslav consulate was opened in Chicago and three outstanding diplomats served in this consulate: Branko Lazarević, Božidar Purić, and Radoje Janković. Thanks to Palandačić, Chicago would also become a strong Serbian publishing center. During World War II, Jovan Dučić lived in the vicinity of Chicago.

The foundations for this impressive Serbian American cultural structure built in Chicago was laid by people such as Jovanović, Gopčević, Dabović, Vučetić, Marić, Jovkić, Palandačić, Čokorilo, Lugonja and many others mentioned in this study, who had no predecessors. They were the ones who established the first church, the first cultural society, the first fraternal organizations, the first newspaper, the first printing press, choir and theater in Chicago. This study highlights the challenges they were faced with and the courage, sacrifice and love for their nation, which enabled them to prevail.