

May 21, 2002

Interviewer: *BRUCE COX*

Transcribed: January 16, 2003

RK: My ethnicity is Croatian. My Dad was born in a town called Perkos and near Perkos is Closta and Evenich Grad. In the early 1900s, probably 1910 my father and his four brothers left Croatia and came to Ironwood, MI. Their purpose was to work in the iron ore mines. They did not speak English, yet they were able to arrive to their destination by having on their necks, a sign that said Ironwood, MI. The names of the five brothers are as follows: Josip, Ludwig, Dragutin, Matt, and Josip. I think I gave Josip already. The fifth one was Miho. While they were here they worked in the Newport Iron Ore Mine, which is located on Jesibell. Not only the 5 brothers, but many, many Croatians came to the Jesibell area, worked in the mine, raised their family, supported the educational system, and were valuable contributors to the range. Not only from their ethnic background, but from their socializing with the many other ethnicities that were found, not only in the Ironwood area, but the entire range area itself. Of the five brothers in 1914, there was a cave in where Ludwig was working. It was May of 1914. The cave in was severe. It crushed him. He was rushed to Newport Hospital, and at Newport Hospital he was treated, but they could not save his life. So he died. Of course it was a traumatic experience for the four remaining sons who didn't know how to deal with it so they avoided talking about it and never dealt with it. They went their separate ways. Dragutin stayed in Ironwood, had a family of 8 children. Two of them died young. There were 3 sons and 3 daughters. They lived on Bunday St., which is very near to Newport School, just one block away. The brothers then decided they would not stay in Ironwood, with the exception of my father, Dragutin. He stayed there and raised his family. The other four did different things. Josip went to Milwaukee and raised his family there. He was eventually buried in Milwaukee. The brother, Miho went back to Croatia, raised his family in Croatia in Evenich Grad, which is a beautiful city. I've been there and it's really neat. That's where I still have relatives today. Matt went to New Mexico and lived there. He eventually passed away in Truth or Consequences, NM. He was buried there. Finally Dragutin left Ironwood and moved to Phoenix and passed away in Arizona. They were a very close family. They raised their children and did a good job. One of the things that is interesting is that they had their heritage and valued it a great deal. They belonged to the CFU, the Croatian Fraternal Union and many of the Croatians at that time belonged to it.

My Dad was born in 1897 and passed away in 1980. He did learn to read and write English. He was a member of the Croatian Fraternal Union. It was an organization that supported Croatians through sponsoring activities. One of the activities that they sponsored was a group since 1937 called the CFU Tamburitzans. They are located in Pittsburg, PA and they have been performing nationally throughout the country since 1937. Not only that, they have performed in Europe and their music is Slavic, Croatian, Bulgarian, Romanian, Armenian...and they do it on each concert that they have. The students are selected and given scholarships at Duquesne University. They have performed in Ironwood many times. Whether they still do or not, I don't know. But I remember attending concerts at the Ironwood Theater. Also I remember attending concerts in Phoenix, AZ. That was one phase of their support. Not only that, they provided children's homes for miners who were killed in the mine. If they had no support, they

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could be a part of that children's home. One that I remember vividly was Displanes, IL. The reason I remember is because one of my Dad's brothers, Josip passed away when his children were very young. My Dad wanted to take them in, but there were 6 children and we didn't have the room. He felt badly about it. The 4 children from Josip were placed in the Croatian childrens home in Displanes, IL. I still know them today and I know their family. So not only did they provide that aspect for the miners, but they also provided insurance. Anyone who wants to can get life insurance through this Croatian Fraternal Union. It's a very active organization and it still supports the people in that area. Any area of the United States, or the world. We have lodges in Canada as well.

The capital city of Croatia is Agreb. Croatia is a beautiful country. It's situated on the Adriatic Sea. The sea is beautiful and clear. It's a great place to be. Not many people know about it because of the Balkan problems that they had. But it is about as nice a place you can visit. I've been there and I'm going to go there this summer again. As far as the people on the range, they were hard working, they raised their children. We had excellent schools. They put the very best schools...the leadership on the range...Ironwood, Bessemer, Wakefield, Hurley, Watersmeet, Marinessco, the leadership in the schools came from New England and with them they brought the very best education. The children that lived there really benefited from it. The mining company, the Pickens-Mather Mining Company was a great company. They provided for their employees very well. One of their mines was the Newport Mine where my Uncle Ludwig was killed in the accident. At that mine, and at that center, or location, they saw fit to build a hospital. The hospital was called Newport Hospital. Unfortunately, it's not there. There's no history of it. But it was available to all the people that worked there. There was no fee, hospitalization, health care insurance. Everything was provided by the Pickens-Mather Mining Company. The people had all their medical care provided at Newport Hospital. It's located in the area where the historical sign is, indicating the location of the Newport Mine by a Harvard University engineer. I don't know the name. I'm sure the name is on the historical marking monument. There is also a Newport Hall, which was the place where the people got together and socialized, had parties, wedding receptions, and the likes. The mining headquarters is still there. It's up on the hill. It's visible.

INT: Are there any other stories of Croatian families? (very faint, microphone is not close enough)

RK: Yes, I certainly can. There's a Pavlovic family and as a young boy I can remember things that would take place for the State Mining Inspector. One man, John Pavlovic would run for the mining inspector position. He would be elected regularly.

INT: When was that?

RK: That was during the 1940s. They called him the nickname Woodchopper. He had a family. There is one son that I know of from Woodchopper. He still lives in Ironwood. His name is Nick Pavlovic. He is probably 75 years old now. His dad successfully became a mining inspector. There is another one, Frank Pervic. His name was Fatty.

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They used to call him Fatty Pervic. He became sheriff of Gogebic County. He was elected by the people and did a good job. There was also a Ulysic family, and they started the Ulysic Family Grocery on Bunday St. They had quality meats. It was probably the best butcher shop on the range at that time. There were a number of brothers that worked there. The father started it. There were brothers by the name of John, Matt, Pete, and another that I don't recall at this time. They ran the butcher shop for 40-50 years. I think it eventually closed in the '80s. They had a service, they delivered groceries to anyone who wanted to have them delivered. During the Depression it was a difficult time. What the Ulysic brothers did is allow the people to run up a bill. They knew the people would pay it, but during the time of the Depression, they were not getting their money. It was necessary for them to check. I remember as a young boy, Matt Ulysic coming to our house, I lived at 231 Bunday St. I remember Matt coming to our house and saying to my mother about the bill. She said we would pay it. I remember that the bill was paid. By in large, all the bills, maybe a few, but by in large the bills were paid by the people who owed them money during and after the Depression. As far as what has happened to Jesibell, it was a community that was like many of them on the range. The community is still there, from the early 1900s. The streets are still there, the homes are still there, the yards are still nice. Newport School is still very pretty even though it's been closed now for a year. There is a project afoot to have the school placed on the National Historic Registry, and then secondly to convert it into a regional range museum where all the people will be able to have their artifacts and pieces of interest displayed at Newport School. The reason it's such a gem and such a place for this to happen is because it was built in 1921. The school itself is in a beautiful setting, perfect for a neighborhood school. Instead, Newport School will no longer be Newport School, hopefully it will become a Regional Range Museum. The sole purpose of that museum will be to perpetuate the rich legacy, history, and culture of all the people that lived on the range, that worked on the range. The leadership of the range was so important in the early part of the 20th Century. It was so important that the leadership provided quality education, quality opportunities, quality structural buildings, along with Newport School, the architects of Luther L. Wright High School is another one. To go there and see the beauty of that school and the surrounding area. The initial school for L. L. Wright was built in 1900. In 1925 it was replaced by the present structure. They have the building site sign. I'm forgetting what you call it, but anyway, the building site sign is still in the hall and it was re-set in 1925. Newport School was originally set in 1924.

INT: ??? too faint Did the other families come from the same part of Croatia?

RK: They came from different parts of Croatia. The Dalmatia area is in northern Croatia by Italy. They came from the area around Zagreb, the area around the city of Dubrovnic. The interesting thing is we don't know why they came there. Who was the one that encouraged them to come there. You take the entire range, it has such an ethnic background and we don't know the stories of how they came there. I don't know how my Dad came. I do know that he came by train from the city of Evenich Grad.

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RK: He did know that he was coming to Ironwood. I don't know how it came. I think what happened, this is my assessment. What I think might have happened was that the mining company needed laborers, much like laborers are needed in the United States today. So with the discovery of iron ore, not only here but in Minnesota, the Messabi Range and the entire upper peninsula of Michigan, the companies probably advertised. Through their advertisements the people spoke to each other and said this is where we are going. One of the reasons my Dad and his four brothers came...I know this for sure because he told me. One of the reasons, the main reason they came was they knew there was an impending war, World War One. Instead of having their sons at home and fighting for the Austro-Hungarian Empire and not Croatia, because Croatia was not an independent country, it was never independent until 1991. It was always a part of somebody else. The father and mother could not see them staying there and fighting in a war they knew was coming. So they had them go to the United States. The unfortunate thing...this doesn't happen today, but the unfortunate thing is of the five brothers that came to Ironwood, only one went back to see his mother and father. That was Miho. The parents never saw their other sons again. So in a way there is tragedy in this story. But to indicate the history of the ethnic groups...let me talk about the range, the UP, let me talk about it in relationship to other parts like downstate Michigan. The loyalty, the feeling of respect and admiration for each other that exists from people around the range and around the upper peninsula of Michigan...they say "where you from" "I'm from the UP" Everybody knows you're from the UP. But if you ask somebody from the lower peninsula there doesn't seem to be that cohesiveness. The amazing thing that happened in the early history of the upper peninsula and in particular the Gogebic-Ontonogan County range, the fabulous thing is these people came together and were so close and so much a part of American history. They provided sons and daughters that became leaders. They provided sons and daughters that to this day are strong members of the range, of the community. But the thing that is not here is the leadership, the culture, the legacy that we used to have. The danger is that legacy could be lost. The history of the Italians on the range, the history of the people from Finland, Sweden, other areas, England...Many of the English people came to the range because they said this was a great place and wanted to be here. It grew to a place with a population of almost 20,000. It's not only true of Ironwood, but of the surrounding areas. But the main one was Ironwood. It was the main center for the western upper peninsula and northern Wisconsin. All these things were so much a part, that even today it's there. But the sad thing is we're losing some of our culture. We're losing some of our legacy. We're losing some of our history. And if the leaders of today, if the people who are in education, if the people who are in business, they must support the preservation of their legacy. The people of Hurley must do it. We must solidify together, our strength. We must say this is a good thing. One thing I want to leave...and I'll part. Converting Newport School. This is very, very important. You preserve your legacy by that building, by that structure, that school, and you've converted it into the Regional Range Museum. Whether it's from Wakefield, Bessemer, Anvil, Puritan, Hurley, Saxon, Marinesco, Watersmeet...that legacy, that heritage is there and we encompass it in Newport School, and what a better place than Newport School. When the architects made the drawings for Newport School, for an

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elementary school, they couldn't have done a better job. Today you would never see that plan. You would never see that drawing or direction. And I speak from experience because I taught in a school for many years. I am not retired of course. But I saw the schools in lower Michigan, Arizona, throughout the United States. Since I've traveled, I have not seen one elementary school that is as strong as Newport School. I have pictures of all the schools in Ironwood. I have beautiful pictures of L. L. Wright. I have gorgeous pictures of Newport School, Slate School, Norey School. The negatives of those schools, I will leave with Ronny Supernaut. He will have all the pictures I've taken of Ironwood. Also, if you're interested in looking at pictures, if you go to Tacanelli's in downtown Ironwood, on the corner of Suffic and McCloud, I left 3 albums with Pete Tacanelli and they're in his waiting area. If you're ever there, pick up the pictures and you'll see that the iron range is a beautiful spot. I did it for Ironwood and I'm hoping somebody will say I want to do it here. The best thing to do is walk and take a camera wherever you go. You'll see a nice place to take a picture. You'll appreciate having done it. I'm going to say goodbye for now. I hope things work out for the range and that the people are still as strong now as they were when I was a young boy going to school. Thank you very much for your time and attention. Have a good day.