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Croatian immigrants in the Keweenaw

Abstract

In the years between 1890 and 1920, there was an influx of immigration to Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Due to the copper mines, towns and villages, such as Red Jacket (now known as Calumet) flourished. Surrounding the mines were smaller villages, such as Ahmeek, located five miles northwest of Calumet. Among those that came for a new and "better" life were the Croatians. Most of the Croatians who made their way over were from the same area in Croatia, Ravna Gora. This immigration pattern is an example of chain-migration, people helping those from their country, from the area of the country that they are from, come over to the States. This also shows a trend in men who were hired into the mines and how they were hired. For instance, the employment application for Calumet and Hecla asked not only where the immigrant was from, but who they knew working in the copper mines. The employment applications also asked the relationship the applicant had to that person.¹

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CROATIAN IMMIGRANTS IN THE KEWEENAW

By

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In the years between 1890 and 1920, there was an influx of immigration to Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Due to the copper mines, towns and villages, such as Red Jacket (now known as Calumet) flourished. Surrounding the mines were smaller villages, such as Ahmeek, located five miles northwest of Calumet. Among those that came for a new and "better" life were the Croatians. Most of the Croatians who made their way over were from the same area in Croatia, Ravna Gora. This immigration pattern is an example of chain-migration, people helping those from their country, from the area of the country that they are from, come over to the States. This also shows a trend in men who were hired into the mines and how they were hired. For instance, the employment application for Calumet and Hecla asked not only where the immigrant was from, but who they knew working in the copper mines. The employment applications also asked the relationship the applicant had to that person.¹

Although the incoming Croatian immigrants tried to maintain their identity as Croatians, within the course of a generation they would become Americanized. Through employment in the mines, church, education, and families, the Croatian immigrants became enmeshed in the culture of the mining communities in Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula. In participating in this cultural mix, they adopted items from other countries, such as the Cornish pasty, while bringing over items that were Croatian, such as a favorite dessert, pavitica. It would be the wives of the Croatian immigrants through their cooking and socializing at church that would lead to the acculturation of their families. The wives would also come together in their push for the safety of their husbands in the mines and better living conditions at home. This push would culminate in the Strike of

¹ Research conducted by author – Calumet and Hecla mining records; employment applications. Michigan Technological University Archives. June 23-26, 2004.

1913 which, through a Christmas party planned and held by the women to boost the spirits of the miners and their families, would unfortunately end in tragedy. The tragedy of the Italian Hall “Fire” would cement the mixing of the various groups through their shared mourning.

In the course of their employment, the Croatians also had experiences similar to those of people from other Slavic backgrounds; they were seen as inferior by the mining companies, and thus had an extremely hard time in gaining employment as anything other than miner or lower jobs. Of all jobs found underground, to be a miner was to be at the top. Trammers, Timber Men, and Laborers were positions considered far beneath that of miners. In all actuality, Croatians very rarely achieved employment as anything higher than Trammer.² With the nickname of “beasts of burden,” Trammers picked up and pushed rock broken by the miners to the shafts for hoisting. The mining companies continued using Trammers even after there were some technological advances to lift, push, fill and unload copper rock. As an underground occupation, tramming was most physically demanding.³ Although the Croatians had some of the physically hardest jobs, they also received low-end housing when they rented through the mining companies. There is a difference in housing from Ahmeek Village and Ahmeek Location. Many of the Croatians who lived in the Village owned their own homes, and if they took in boarders, they were more than likely to rent out rooms to fellow Croats. In contrast, many of those that lived in Ahmeek Location rented their homes.⁴ In the 1920 United States census, many of the Croatians that owned their own homes valued them from a

² Larry Lankton. “From Cradle to Grave.” Oxford University Press. (New York, NY 1991) p 113

³ Lankton, p 32

⁴ United States Census of Puopulation, Keweenaw Country, Michigan, 1920, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Accessed through AncestryPlus, 20 February 2005

few hundred to a couple thousand dollars. There were some that owned their own businesses and it is quite possible that they lived in the upper floors of the business. With a home such as that, there is a possibility that the homes listed for greater value were those that were a combination of home and business. Many of the home/business combinations are still standing in Ahmeek, though not all have an actively running business.

Croatian immigrants would help family members come to the States from the Old Country, helping them with transportation, housing and employment. They would become active in the community through mining and through the women's roles in and out of the home. It would be the women who, through association and socialization, would band together through shared concerns and would push for the Strike of 1913. The women also led the way of their families into becoming a part of the culture of the Keweenaw. The Croatians were to become active in the community, being among those leading the Strike of 1913. Croatians had their own unique experiences while having shared experiences with those of the various ethnic groups in the area, especially those of Eastern European backgrounds.

Croatians came to the Calumet area seeking employment in the mines. Through family members and other contacts, many Croatian men found employment in the Calumet and Hecla (C&H) or Quincy mining companies. There were other mining companies, though they were not as large nor did they last as long as C&H and Quincy. Most of the copper mining companies in the Keweenaw, including C&H and Quincy, were privately owned. Calumet and Hecla, for example, had stock holders living in Boston.⁵

In the course of their employment at the mines, the underground workers, regardless of ethnicity, were in constant fear for their safety. This fear would culminate in the Strike of 1913. Due to their lowing paying jobs and inability to climb up the company ladder, Croatian men had more to fear than their Welsh and Cornish counterparts. If injury or death occurred to a Croatian they and their families would be less apt to be taken care of. Croatian miners were also less likely to have what we would see as adequate housing, though the mining companies, with their patriarchal attitude, especially James MacNaughton of Calumet and Hecla, believed they were taking care of their workers. The patriarchal attitude of the mining companies and their lack of taking care of safety issues and housing led the Croatian immigrants, as well as other ethnic groups, to start and continue with the Strike of 1913.

Almost all Croatian immigrant men found themselves hired at the very bottom of the company ladder, usually as a Trammer. A Trammer lived up to his nickname of “beast of burden,” as, what his job entailed was that of hauling stone and would have been more suited to an animal. A Trammer was a man who would pick up the rocks broken by the miners and push them in wheelbarrows to the shafts for hoisting. After the

⁵ Lankton 18

men pushed the contents to the shaft, they dumped it into an opening called a trip plat. Once the men had enough rock, they put it into kibles, which were wrought iron buckets, and hoisted it up to the surface.⁶ There were a few mines that were able to replace the men with horse, mules, and in the case of the Copper Falls mine, a small locomotive. The Copper Falls mine was located on a hill, so they were able to tram the rock out through a horizontal tunnel driven into the base of the hill called an adit. The adit intersected with a working level of the mine.⁷ Croatians would also secure employment as Timber men. The Timber men erected stalls and set timbers into the stopes. They also laid tram tracks; timbered shafts, laid skip roads, and erected ladders. To be a Timber man, the man would have to be physically fit as he was required to move large timbers throughout the mine.⁸ Through hard work, some Croatians were able to make it up to the rank of miner; though they very seldom did. Croatian immigrants did not make positions higher than miners nor did they secure employment in management. The Cornish, who were the skilled miners, protested, and actually walked off the job in the late 1850's due to the issue of status.⁹ Lankton defines miners as those who were "shaft-sinkers, drifters, and stopers who drilled and blasted rock."¹⁰ The reason the Cornish were upset was because they felt demeaned when Quincy Mining Company hired inexperienced men from other ethnic groups, such as Slavics, Italians, and Finnish, gave them tools for blasting rock, and called them miners. The Cornish felt that they, who were the experienced miners, lost status in the companies. The term miner, unless

⁶ Lankton, 31-32

⁷ Lankton, 32

⁸ Lankton, 32

⁹ Lankton, 30

¹⁰ Lankton, 30

otherwise specified will be used when generally speaking of those who worked underground in the mines.

Regardless of their position in the mines themselves, the men were in constant danger of injury or death. Statistics taken from C&H show that the years between 1895 and 1918 represented the mine's deadliest time. During this time, 29 percent of all under-ground employment consisted of miners. In turn, the miners also accounted for the same percentage of deaths. Trammers (the job in which many Croatians worked) made up 24 percent of men working and 25 percent of all fatalities. The ranks of Timber men and laborers were combined, as C&H used the terms interchangeably at this time, and they represented approximately 39 percent of the workers and 40 percent of the accident victims. Mining captains comprised a mere two percent of the work force, yet they accounted for four percent of the deaths. The last group to be analyzed is that of the boys working the mines. Although they made up 6 percent of C&H's underground workers, the boys fared somewhat better. The boys working the mines accounted for two percent of all fatalities. Although the deaths hurt the families financially and emotionally, the statistics for the boys are relatively good.

The compensation for death and injury varied greatly along ethnic lines. All races and classes put their lives on the line equally in the mines, yet there were some that fared better and were compensated better for their status. An example of the groups that were better taken care of is the Cornish. Eighty percent of Cornish that died in an accident worked as miners, bosses or captains. Only eighteen percent of the Cornish died while working as Trammers or laborers. Although the Cornish had higher percentages in death rates, their families were also better taken care of by the mining companies.

Because the Cornish men worked as full miners and in supervisory positions, they earned more money and they received greater disability benefits. In the event of their death, their widows were more likely to receive benefits, such as monetary compensation. As widows who lived in the better housing, the women were in a better position to receive boarders from the company. In contrast to the Cornish, the Austrians (who, at that time also consisted of Croatians) as well as the Italians, fared worse in the likelihood of benefits. They were, essentially, locked out of supervisory positions. Of the Croatian men who had fatal accidents underground, only one-fifth were full-fledged miners. This means that “more than half of them had risked their lives – and lost them – while still on the very bottom rungs of the wage-earning ladder.”¹¹

Accidents underground varied and precautions taken did not always ensure safety. Accidents included falling rock, machinery (mostly machines that transported either men or rock), explosives, or falling. From 1860 to 1929, at least 720 men died due to falling rock. The most likely scenario would be that the rock hanging on the ceiling would fall and drop down on a man; they could never be completely certain that the roof above their heads would hold. Rock fall from the ceilings, although tragic, usually only struck one or two miners at a time. There are, of course, exceptions to the rule. In an accident in the Copper Falls mine that occurred in 1874, seven men were caught and killed when a large shelf on the ground fell on them. By the time their fellow coworkers were able to get to them, they were almost unrecognizable due to rats.¹² The worst single-man accident occurred just a year earlier at the Quincy mine. While walking into a stope, Michael Sullivan had two tons of rock fall down on him. He was literally crushed and his remains

¹¹ Lankton, 113

¹² Lankton, 114

were essentially a mass of jelly.¹³ Deadly accidents involving rock would include rock that rolled down a stope or shaft. The incline of the shaft was usually extremely steep. Rock, especially heavy rock, could gain momentum and the miner would not have a chance of defending himself. Although only one or two men died at a time from falling rock, it was accidents due to falling rock that would cause the most deaths. The second and third leading causes of death included machinery-related accidents and explosives. From 1860 to 1929, machinery accidents would kill at least 316 men.¹⁴ Machinery included the cars used to transport the men in and out of the mines and cars used to transport rock and other machinery, such as drills. One drill, also known as the “widow-maker,” put the miners in even more fear for their safety. The “widow-maker” was a one-man drill developed and imported to the mines to replace the two-man drills. The dangers associated with the one-man drill exceeded those from the two-man drill. With the two-man drills, there was one man watching out for the other. With the “widow-maker,” they were on their own. This loss of support brought about many of the tensions leading to the Strike of 1913.¹⁵ The third cause of fatal accidents was death from falling off a ladder or walking or falling off a stope (a block of ground where miners extracted copper rock), shaft, or drift.¹⁶ Fire, though deadly when it occurred, was the least of the men’s concerns. Of all accidents located in the mines, fires claimed only 54 victims, with 30 of those coming from the Osceola mine fire of 1895. The main concern for the men was, and always would be, falling rock.

¹³ Lankton, 114

¹⁴ Lankton, 113

¹⁵ Lankton, 107

¹⁶ Lankton, 28

In all of the above, Croatian men were among the ethnic groups most likely to be killed, maimed or injured, yet it was almost impossible for them to obtain positions higher than that of miner. The Cornish, along with the Welsh, usually held higher positions in the mining companies. The miners from England held the higher positions for a variety of reasons, including that they spoke English. As the owners and upper management of the mines were either English or American, due to ethnic discrimination, and a language barrier, the English speaking miners (those from England or America) fared a lot better in gaining higher level jobs. A major reason used by the mining companies was experience. The Cornish and Welsh were accomplished miners in England. They came to the Keweenaw with mining knowledge that the other ethnic groups did not have. As a result, they were given better jobs within the companies, as well as better wages and better housing.

In a time when the best housing was provided by the mines, and housing went to those from highest ranking jobs down, Croatians usually had inadequate housing. While the average number of rooms in a C&H house was 4.6, Croatians had fewer rooms and lived in poorer conditions than the Cornish. Calumet and Hecla architects from 1898-1903 had three general plans in terms of housing for the miners and management. The first plan, the “Miner’s House,” measured 18 by 26 feet with a masonry foundation and a full basement with a concrete floor. The notation of the concrete floor shows the difference in housing. There are still homes in Ahmeek today with “Michigan basements,” basements that still have dirt floors and do not have much in concrete support. The miner’s house, which was built in the form of a rectangle, had two floors with the first being divided into a living room and a kitchen with a pantry. The second

floor was divided into three bedrooms. The miner's houses, which were barely adequate for living, did not have electricity, central heating, or an inside toilet. The "Captain's House" was a step up and also had a rectangular plan, though the larger home usually measured 25 by 48 feet. It not only had a concrete basement, but it also had a masonry foundation. The first floor was separated into a vestibule (entryway), parlor, sitting room for entertaining, dining room and a kitchen with a pantry. This house was equipped with plumbing as the five bedroom second floor also contained a bathroom with a toilet and tub. It was a step up from the miner's house as it had plumbing, but, like the miner's house, it did not have central heating or electricity. Upper-level managers had their own, custom-made homes. An example of a home is the C&H residence number 1138. This was a two-and-a-half-story home that was built in an irregular "L" shape. One side of the "L" measured 42 feet long while the other measured at 65 feet. It had a divided concrete basement. The rooms in the basement consisted of a cold cellar, storage room and a laundry room. The basement also contained a half-bath – more than that of the average miner's home! As this was just the basement, the main floor was also large, containing the same rooms as the Captain's house with additional rooms. This home's first floor also had an entry hall, den, pantry separate from the kitchen, kitchen, storage area and another half-bath. The kitchen was stocked with a range and a McCray ice-box refrigerator. The wainscoting and the woodwork throughout the home were oak. The second floor had four large bedrooms, a full bath and a dressing room containing a fireplace. There was also an attic, which could be considered a third floor that had finished space for a fifth bedroom. The attic also had unfinished storage space. Unlike the other two homes, the manager's house had electricity and steam radiators to provide

heat. Steam was piped in from an industrial line through C&H.¹⁷ Although the miner's homes sometimes paled in comparison to their contemporaries, those that worked the mines did what they could to get the homes for their families and there were not enough homes to be rented to the miners. An example of what the companies thought about Croatians, and ethnics groups similar to, would be a letter from Frank Denton to William A. Paine, C&H president, in regard to structures being built in Painesdale. He wrote that the houses were "adapted to our best families...., and they will not accommodate the Croatians, Italians, Finns and Armenians that we want to accommodate." Although Croatians and Finns may have been prejudiced against, they fared better than the Armenians, whom Denton wanted to keep in a camp that was "out of sight."¹⁸ In terms of housing in the Village of Ahmeek and the surrounding areas, research has shown that a majority of Croatians who owned their own homes resided in the Village of Ahmeek while those that rented, usually from the company, resided in the area near Ahmeek called Ahmeek Location.¹⁹ The Croatians that owned their homes, if they took in boarders, were more likely to take in fellow Croatians, Slovaks, and Austrians. The mining companies did allow those that rented from them to take in boarders. A widow with small children might be permitted to take in men that worked the mines. By doing this, the widow did not lose her home, and had some type of income, while the mines had a place to put their young, single, immigrant workers. There were times when the mines would help the widow further by not charging as much, if not any, rent if they took in

¹⁷ Lankton, 153

¹⁸ Lankton, 154

¹⁹ 1920 United States Census of Population, Keweenaw County, Michigan, National Archives, Washington, D.C. Accessed through AncestryPlus, 20 February 2005

boarders. If the widow fell on especially hard times, the mines, especially Calumet and Hecla, were also known to give the widow a larger plot in which to garden.

The miners' lives, regardless of their ethnicity, were fraught with danger and fear. Many Croatian men had more to fear than their Cornish and Welsh counterparts as their jobs put them in more danger with more safety issues. When death or injury occurred, due to their lower status in the mines, the mining companies were less likely to help the miners or their widows. When the miners came home, it was to houses that were less than fit for living while their supervisors and bosses had homes that were double and triple the size. The mining companies, with their patriarchal attitude, did care enough about their employees to provide adequate housing and to try to keep their widows in their homes; their thought of adequate housing was different from ours. They believed that providing a roof over their employees' heads was more important than ensuring that the roof was kept in good condition. It was company attitudes such as these that would lead to the Strike of 1913.

The Strike of 1913 was one of the most devastating times for the Keweenaw and the mining companies. By the beginning of 1913, tensions between the mining companies and their employees were at an all-time high. By this time, Henry Ford had already announced and put in place the \$5 day and the miners knew about it. Through their union, the Western Federation of Miners (WFM), the miners learned that their counterparts in Butte, Montana worked eight-hour days, earning \$3 a day. Their earnings far exceeded that of the Copper Country miners who were working upwards of 10-12 hours a day while earning far less.²⁰

²⁰ Lankton 220

The miners' pay was not all that concerned them. When the widow-maker was first introduced by the Quincy mine, the men fought bringing it in. They had many concerns regarding the one-man drill. Their first concern was that of safety. When the miners had the two-man drill, they had someone to keep them company. The two-man drill also gave the miners another person to watch out for them.²¹ Working in the mines was a dangerous occupation, with the loss of their partners; miners were now faced with the added fear of not having someone available to help them. The one-man drill posed financial concerns for the miners. The advent of the one-man drill meant that the two-man was no longer needed. This new drill led to cuts in employment. The miners were in fear of being demoted or completely losing their jobs, while the men in the lower positions were afraid of losing their jobs to make way for the miners.²²

The wives of the miners out of concern for their husbands' safety, started to push them to make a stand. The women were also worried about their children and their standard of living. The houses the mining companies were barely adequate when they were built. By 1913, many of the houses were starting to fall into disrepair. In mid-1913, the women started pushing even more.

The WFM, not getting response to their demands from the companies, called a strike on 23 July 1913. Calumet and Hecla was the company the strike was most targeted at, as it was the largest. James MacNaughton was not to be swayed from his position and would not give in to the demands of the union.²³ MacNaughton, as well as the other companies did not believe the strike would last into the winter. He stood by his decision

²¹ Lankton 107

²² Lankton 108

²³ Lankton 222

although his family had to leave their house out of concern for their safety and MacNaughton had to have an armed guard and sleep in a different bed every night.²⁴

The strike was wrought with violence from the beginning. On the 24 July, MacNaughton gave Houghton county sheriff James Cruse permission to call Governor Woodbridge Ferris. Cruse asked him to call in the National Guard.²⁵ The men were not the only participants in violence. Women also threw themselves into the strike. In one morning 15 women were arrested.²⁶ MacNaughton wrote to C&H president Quincy Shaw his opinion of the women:

“I cannot tell you to what length the Finnish and Croatian women are going in this matter....At the Trimountain mine last week, the Finnish women dipped up a pail of human excrement from an outside water closet. They put a long stick through the handle and carried the pail down the street followed by five other women with brooms, the intention being to smear any non-Union man they could find.”²⁷

The strike continued in this manner for months. After two months, men started returning to work. C&H reported that 98% of their Cornish and 80-90% of the Scots, Irishmen and Scandinavians came back. The only holdouts were the Hungarians, Finns, the Croatians and half of the Italians. By early October, only seven percent of Croatians returned to the mines.²⁸ To keep up the spirits of the striking miners and their families, the WFM Women’s Auxiliary planned different events. One event planned was a Christmas Eve party in the Italian Hall.

The Christmas Eve party started early in the afternoon and by 2 o’clock about 500 children and over 175 adults were in the hall that was filled beyond capacity. The families sang carols, the children saw Santa Claus, who had treats for each of them.

²⁴ Lankton 222

²⁵ Lankton 224

²⁶ Lankton 230

²⁷ Lankton 230-31

²⁸ Lankton 229

After exchanging small gifts, many of the families started to leave, though some stayed. At approximately 4:30, some shouted “fire.”

The following minutes were full of mass chaos. As the party was located on the second floor of the Italian Hall, the only way out was down the front steps into the street. In 1913 Calumet, the doors opened in. In the rush for the doors, women and children stumbled and fell, the staircase became packed with people. When the men outside were finally able to enter, they found 73 dead, the 74th passed away the next day. Of the 74 dead, twenty were Croatian. The community was struck by the number of those who perished. Among those who suffocated, sixty were children ranging in age from two to sixteen. There were so many dead that the county medical examiner had to set up a temporary morgue in the village hall and the dead were buried in a mass grave.²⁹ The tragedy brought a community torn apart by the strike together. It brought an end to the strike. By the end of January, 1914, the men that held out would go back to work.

The Strike of 1913 was the culmination of tensions between the men and the mining companies. The Croatian men who held out in the strike did so for their and their family’s safety. They worked hard for wages that were barely sufficient to live on and homes that were inadequate.

²⁹ Lankton 237

In the years between 1890 and 1920, there was an influx of immigration to Michigan's Upper Peninsula. Due to the copper mines, towns and villages, such as Red Jacket (now known as Calumet) flourished. Surrounding the mines were smaller villages, such as Ahmeek, located five miles northwest of Calumet. Among those that came for a new and "better" life were the Croatians. Most of the Croatians who made their way over were from the same area in Croatia, Ravna Gora. This immigration pattern is an example of chain-migration, people helping those from their country, from the area of the country that they are from, come over to the States. This also shows a trend in men who were hired into the mines and how they were hired. For instance, the employment application for Calumet and Hecla asked not only where the immigrant was from, but who they knew working in the copper mines. The employment applications also asked the relationship the applicant had to that person.³⁰

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³² Lankton, p 32

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States census, many of the Croatians that owned their own homes valued them from a few hundred to a couple thousand dollars. There were some that owned their own businesses and it is quite possible that they lived in the upper floors of the business. With a home such as that, there is a possibility that the homes listed for greater value were those that were a combination of home and business. Many of the home/business combinations are still standing in Ahmeek, though not all have an actively running business.

Croatian immigrants would help family members come to the States from the Old Country, helping them with transportation, housing and employment. They would become active in the community through mining and through the women's roles in and out of the home. It would be the women who, through association and socialization, would band together through shared concerns and would push for the Strike of 1913. The women also led the way of their families into becoming a part of the culture of the Keweenaw. The Croatians were to become active in the community, being among those leading the Strike of 1913. Croatians had their own unique experiences while having shared experiences with those of the various ethnic groups in the area, especially those of Eastern European backgrounds.

Michigan's Keweenaw Peninsula was a popular place to be in the early 1900's. Due to the success of the copper mines, immigrants were flooding the area looking for a better life. The men, who found employment in the local mines, were bringing their wives, as well as other family members over from the Old Country. The Croatian women immigrants were very much the same as their Eastern European immigrant counterparts, who were also following the men in the lives looking for a "better" place to be. The Croatian women had the same experiences immigrating through Ellis Island, and they were very traditional in that they did what they could to stay in the home, adhering to the ideology of separate spheres. It was their word at home that initially played a major role in the acculturation of their families. They were eventually pulled out of the private sphere, like their female counterparts in the rest of the nation, because of fear for the safety of their loved ones.³⁴ They became leaders in the Strike of 1913, a strike that unfortunately ended in tragedy. That tragedy, however, again aided the process of acculturation as it brought the Croatian women closer to women from the other ethnic groups in the area.

The Croatian women immigrants' experiences are similar to that of many Western European women immigrants. Many of the women who passed through Ellis Island had

³⁴ Evens, Sara M. *Born For Liberty; A History of Women in America*. (1997 Free Press Paperbacks, NY). 214

to go through a physical examination and, unlike their male counterparts, had to have a destination and chaperone in place. It was very hard for a female at the turn of the century to be admitted into the States without a male chaperone. If a female made it through the health check at Ellis Island, she would usually have to name her male chaperone and where she was heading. Many women were sponsored by male relatives (Brothers, Fathers, brothers-in-law) with whom they would live until they were married or found live-in employment.

Employment for Croatian women was the same as many other women with a Western European background; maids, laundresses, and homemakers.³⁵ One young woman, who worked as a live-in maid, earned 50 cents a day plus room and board in 1921. She also had to pay her sponsor back at a rate of \$5 a month; it took her approximately 18 months to pay for her \$80 ticket³⁶. There were some women who were industrious and opened their homes to boarders, usually fellow Croats. By doing this, they adhered to the ideology of separate spheres by staying in the home, while bringing in money to assist with family finances plus they were able to help their friends and family from the home country financially or loan them the money to come to the States. One example was the Lucas family (the surname name was changed when Mr. Lucas went through Ellis Island) who owned a boarding house on seventh and oak in Calumet. The Evanich and Severinski boarding houses were also owned by Croatian families. Mrs. Severinski took in so many boarders that on Sundays, she didn't have enough beds to accommodate them all. When the mines were running the different around the clock shifts, accommodations were fine. On Sundays, when the mines were closed, some of the

³⁵ Evans, Sara M. 131.

³⁶ Schute, Bernie. Interview by author. Eagle Harbor, Michigan, 17 June 2004.

men had to sleep on the floor. Due to the lack of beds, the men would physically fight each other to see who would get a bed³⁷.

As the women came to the Keweenaw Peninsula and became adapted to their surroundings and society, they managed to keep many traditions and recipes from the mother country. One of the side dishes they brought over was polenta, a corn-meal, water and salt mush. Shucla was a main dish of choice. A mixture of parsley, eggs, oleo and pepper within a paper thin crust, it was favored by many Croatians. A favorite dessert, which is still popular today and is served at many weddings and gatherings, is pavitica. Pavitica is similar to a strudel as it can have apples, prunes, walnuts or whatever else the baker may want to put in its paper-thin crust. The dough to pavitica is rolled and pulled out until it is so thin you can almost see through it. The Croatian people also loved lamb and the women would find different recipes involving it. As keepers of the traditions of their home country, Croatian women were sure to include soup and bread with almost every meal. Most made their bread daily, regardless of the size of their household. By serving these traditional foods, Croatian women helped ease the adjustment of their families to a new culture. These meals from the mother country were especially appreciated by the women's immigrant husbands and boarders, but, as much as the food and recipes from the mother land were loved and appreciated, it would be the pasty that formed much of the miner's diet.

As much as the women tried to keep up with the recipes from Croatia, one of the first things the young women learned upon making their way into the Keweenaw was the art of making pasties. Pasties were usually the meal of choice for the copper miners as they were relatively small yet nutritious. Packing meat, potatoes, carrots, rutabaga and

³⁷ Schute, Bernie. Interview by author. Eagle Harbor, Michigan, 17 June 2004.

onions in a pastry shell; the Cornish, who were experienced miners in England, brought the recipe over from England because it was a well rounded meal for the men. Pasties had more perks as they could also be eaten cold and they were made to fit in the small lunch pails that the men had to bring with them into the mines.

The homes in which Croatian women worked were barely adequate for living in. Due to most of their family members working low-end jobs in the mines, if they were able to get housing, they usually received low-quality homes. Many homes looked like barns and there were cracks that let the wind and cold in. Most had no in-door plumbing and had a dirt-floor basement. The Croatian women, along with women from other ethnic groups who lived in these low-quality homes, became angry about the living conditions that they, and their families, were living in.

The Croatian woman, as with those of many other ethnic groups, lived with the notion of separate spheres, the men worked (usually in the mines) and financially take care of the family while the women stayed in the home and raised the family. The women did assist with family finances by taking in boarders. The women were not only left in charge of raising the children, but they were also the ones that had the worry of childbirth. Although it can, even today, be extremely dangerous, it also had an interesting aspect. Antonia Erjavac remembered looking through the cracks in the outer walls of her home while in labor with her youngest child, a son. She would later say that she remembered watching the chickens pecking the ground and thinking that she had to make sure they were fed.³⁸ Many of the women who lived closer to Calumet (where the company hospital was located) gave birth at the company hospital there³⁹. When Antonia

³⁸ Erjavac family lore as told by Antonia Erjavac.

³⁹ Bach, Ann. Interview by author. Eagle Harbor, Michigan, 20 June 2004.

had her firstborn, she delivered at the company hospital. On the opposite side of the spectrum, when Anna Stajniger delivered her children, they were delivered by a midwife on the family farm. Within a few days of the birth, the doctor would then come in and check on mother and child. All ten Stajniger children were delivered on the farm by a local midwife, Midwife Osterman, while the Erjavac children were delivered by a company doctor.⁴⁰

Childbirth was only the beginning of the concerns mothers had surrounding their children. Both Antonia Erjavac and Anna Stajniger lost young children. Anna lost one of her sons shortly after childbirth and a daughter due to an unknown illness, possibly the flu. Antonia lost a daughter, Mary, to what she believed to be problems due to teething. There were also major health concerns, such as the 1918 flu epidemic. Antonia came down with the flu while pregnant. She was lucky; both she and the baby survived, although family friends were lost. The baby, a girl, had no health problems stemming from her mother's illness.⁴¹

Croatian women were much stronger and more intelligent than some may believe. There are famous Croatian women from the Keweenaw like "Big Annie" Klubochar Clemenc. The six-feet, two inch Michigan-born daughter and wife of Croatian immigrants, was one of the women who spearheaded the Strike of 1913. Annie, whose father and husband were miners, tried to keep the spirits of the striking community up. She led most of the marches, starting at six in the morning, bearing an American flag. A story that surrounds Annie and her commitment to the strike had to do with a handful of Michigan national guardsmen who was sent to keep order in the community. When at a

⁴⁰ Stajniger family lore as told by Julia Stajniger Erjavac.

⁴¹ Erjavac family lore as told by Frances Mueller.

march, it is said that “a cavalryman struck the staff of her flag with his saber and as she struggled to retrieve the banner, an infantryman raked her wrist with his bayonet. ‘Kill me,’ Anne shouted...’if this flag won’t protect me, then I will die with it.’”⁴² Miners pulled her to safety. One striking miner was reported in the Detroit Free Press of saying “that Annie and the other women of the Keweenaw kept the strike going.”⁴³ After the strike, Annie eventually settled in the Detroit area and was the first woman to be nominated to the Michigan Women’s Hall of Fame.⁴⁴ Although “Big Annie” was the one to become the most well-known in and out of the community, there were many other Croatian women who were strong-willed and boisterous. There were also women who could be very shy and apprehensive of crowds. An example of a woman who was like this was Mrs. Mary Stefanac. Stefanac, who was newly pregnant with her fourth child, took her three older sons to the Italian Hall to meet Santa on that fateful 1913 Christmas Eve. When she reached the top of the stairs and saw how crowded the Hall was, and never liking crowds to begin with, she felt uneasy. She told her sons that they were leaving and if the boys left without complaint, she would buy them some candy. The small family left and about five minutes later the “fire” occurred. Stefanac did not want to come to the States. She came only because her husband wanted her to, though she was able to delay her immigration to the States by claiming that with her pregnancy and birth of their first born, she needed the assistance of her mother.⁴⁵

⁴² Engle, Diana Paiz. “Standing Tall With Big Annie,” Michigan History Magazine. (July/August, 1999) 16-19.

⁴³ Engle, Diana Paiz. “Standing Tall With Big Annie,” Michigan History Magazine. (July/August, 1999) 16-19.

⁴⁴ Engle, Diana Paiz. “Standing Tall With Big Annie,” Michigan History Magazine. (July/August, 1999) 16-19.

⁴⁵ Bach, Anne. Interview by author. Eagle Harbor, Michigan, 20 June 2004.

There were also women who used their intelligence to benefit the community at large. Manda Evanich is an example of a Croatian woman who was not only physically strong, but highly intelligent. Her strength was well-known both in the States and in Croatia. It is said that she could physically pick up a man if she had to and through them out of her house. Evanich also had a way with herbs and was a known healer. If someone was ill, they went to Evanich. If someone got hurt, usually in a mining accident, they were taken to Evanich. There were times when she had to send the men to the company hospital, but usually not before she tried to help them. If a man was seriously wounded, Manda sent them straight to the hospital.⁴⁶

Due to accidents in the mines, many women were left widows. Unless they had family still working in the mines, they were dependant on the companies and their willingness to support the widow and any children she may have. According to Larry Lankton, Calumet and Hecla (C&H) treated the families best. C&H worked with the benevolent societies – matching their contributions - established by the different ethnic groups in their efforts to financially help the widows and their families. Calumet and Hecla also gave the families a small stipend (usually up to a year) for injuries suffered by miners. The widows who lived in company housing were an exception to the rule. As the breadwinner was gone, they were taking up company housing that could be used by another family. If the widow had an older son, she could stay in the housing as C&H would put him to work as soon as he was old enough. Widows had some choices to what they could do. Some widows chose to remarry, thus being able to keep their home and family together. There were widows who found employment as maids or in local shops

⁴⁶ Bernard Schute. Interview by author. Eagle Harbor, Michigan, 22 June 2004.

and some, if they had the money, left the area completely.⁴⁷ There were widows who agreed to take in boarders, which allowed them to stay in company housing. For the widows who went the boarder route, C&H may lower or eliminate their rent. Taking in boarders for the company was the option most used by widows. If the widows who had taken in company boarders still had trouble making ends meet, the company would, as long as the widow showed that she was trying to help herself, offer her more assistance. An example of C&H assistance might be a larger garden plot or free wood or coal. Out of the mining companies located in the Keweenaw, it is C&H that took care of its employees and their families. The other companies did not do nearly as much for the families as C&H. Although most of the companies, especially Calumet and Hecla were more likely to continue support of the widows of their captains than the families of the lower scales, such as Trammers.⁴⁸ As many Croatian miners held the job as Trammer, their widows were less likely to have the financial support of the company. In the end, it would be women, through the different societies, helped their fellow women.

Church was the main source of social functions for many immigrants, and each ethnicity had its own church. In 1901, after sharing a church with the Slovaks, the Croatians were able to build and start their own church in Calumet, St John the Baptist Croatian Catholic Church. The Croatians took their religion seriously and were one of the more religious of the different immigrant groups. They, as did many other groups, centered much of their lives on church. St John had different societies for different functions. As with many other parishes, they had a rosary alter society. They also had the Croatian Young Women's society. St John's also had a variety of different social

⁴⁷ Lankton, 191

⁴⁸ Lankton, 191

organizations, most were women's associations.⁴⁹ As women were the ones who were predominately the religious ones, it is only natural that most organizations founded at the church would be centered on them. As the population in Ahmeek grew, it was only a matter of time before the Croatians living in that area would want a church in the village. It was also much easier for those who lived on the farms on north of Ahmeek. In 1928, Sacred Heart Church in Ahmeek was opened, making two Croatian dominated churches in the Keweenaw. Among the first to be confirmed was Julia Stajniger, and John and Frances Erjavac. Frances was ten at the time of her confirmation. As the bishop only came once every couple years, Antonia made sure to have Frances ready for confirmation. It was Antonia, not her husband John, who prepared her children for their religious activities.⁵⁰ While the men took care of earning the money to support their families, the women took care of their home and religious lives.

The men had the worries of working in the mines, yet the women had their own unique concerns. Aside from running the home, they were in constant fear that their husbands, sons, and/or fathers would become hurt, or worse, due to accidents in the mines. Their fear became worse with the introduction of what became known as the "widow-maker." The "widow-maker" was a 150-pound one-man drill, which replaced the two-man drill. The two-man drill wasn't much safer, but at least the miners had someone else to watch out for and help them.⁵¹ When the Strike of 1913 occurred, the miners would say that it was their wives who pushed them to strike.⁵² To keep up the spirits of the striking miners and their families, the WFM (Western Federation of Miners)

⁴⁹ Mueller, Frances. Interview with author. 15 June 2004.

⁵⁰ Mueller, Frances. Interview with author. 15 June 2004.

⁵¹ Lankton, 107

⁵² Engle, Diana Paiz. "Standing Tall With Big Annie," Michigan History Magazine. (July/August, 1999) 16-19.

Women's Auxiliary No. 15 planned a Christmas party that would become known as the "Italian Hall Fire." The Christmas party was held on the second floor of the Italian Hall, which was filled beyond capacity. The mass chaos that ensued after a man yelled fire, many men, women and children ran to the front steps, one of the only ways out. As the doors opened in, people stumbled creating a mass of bodies going up the steps from the front door. Of the total 74 people who perished due to suffocation, twenty were Croatian. To make matters worse, sixty of the total deceased were children between the ages of two and sixteen. The day after the tragedy, a photographer took an haunting picture of a group of girls laying side by side in a makeshift morgue. There were so many dead that there is a mass grave located in the cemetery outside of Calumet for a majority of the dead.

The community, torn apart by the strike, became one in their mourning. The Croatians helped the Finnish; the Cornish helped the Slovaks, the women coming together in mourning for those lost. Women who did not lose family members did what they could by bringing food and comfort to those that did. The wives of the upper levels of management, though their families were untouched, did what they could to help the poor. For the women, this was a cross-cultural experience. After the tragedy, many of the women stopped supporting the strike. In the end, the strike and "Fire" brought the immigrant communities, especially the women, closer together. By this point in the strike, there were few ethnic groups, including the Croatians and their wives, who were still holding out for better wages and safer working conditions.

Croatian women were key in their homes as they took care of much in the lives of men. They made sure that the men had roofs over their heads and food in their stomachs.

The women, whether widowed, married or single, made sure that households ran smoothly. Until the Strike of 1913, they were very traditional in that they stayed in the home and raised their children. If they did work, it was in domestic service or bringing in boarders. They were industrious enough to start their own boarding houses; save funds to bring family and friends over from Croatia, and run their households smoothly. Women, especially Croatian women, took care of their children and ensured their religious education and a respect for their homeland. It was the Strike that brought them out of their homes and into the forefront of society. They were now activists and, through food, education and tragedy, they began a rapid acculturation within the community.

The Copper boom brought many Croatians to the Keweenaw. Many of the immigrants that came to the Copper Country were sponsored by family, friends or family acquaintances. It was through this chain migration that many social organizations and events came to place. For many Croatian men fresh from the Old Country, working the mines was a good place to meet others. For the women immigrants, Church and family served many of their social needs.

Upon arriving in the Keweenaw, there were Croatians that started boarding houses; many using their homes to help their countrymen come to the States. Families such as the Lucases used the earnings from their boarding house to assist those coming over from the Old Country. Through this chain migration, Croatian immigrants were meeting one another through fellow Croatian family members, friends and acquaintances. Two such immigrants were Antonia Severinski and John Erjavac. Antonia had come to Ahmeek through the sponsorship of her sister and brother-in-law. Antonia, as did many of her fellow Croats, came to America through Ellis Island and went straight to Ahmeek. Once in Ahmeek, Antonia, like many other young women, found employment as a servant in one of the boarding houses. John, on the other hand, did not arrive through Ellis. Due to an injury he received in Ravna Gora, he knew he would be turned away in New York. John entered the States by way of Quebec. From Quebec, he crossed the border at Sault Sainte Marie. He did not go straight to the Keweenaw, but went south. His father, who had come to the US, worked, and went back to Croatia with funds for John and his brothers to pay for passage to the States, told him about the lumbering down

south. Once Mr. Erjavac had enough money to send his sons to the States, he stayed in Croatia. John found employment as a lumberjack in Alabama, Florida and Louisiana making 25 cents a day. It was while he was there that he heard from other family members that the miners in the Keweenaw were making \$2 a day. John told his partner about the \$2 days, quit, and went up north that same day. In 1911, John arrived in Ahmeek. Shortly after John's arrival, a fellow boarder told him about an attractive young woman who worked as a maid at one of the boarding houses in Ahmeek. After a bit of prodding, John went to the boarding house and met the girl. While conversing with her, he found that she came from his part of Croatia, Ravna Gora Gorski Kotar.⁵³ Many single Croatian men and women would meet through means such as this. As many of the immigrants came from the same area of Croatia, and knew or knew of many of the same people, it was inevitable that the young immigrant men and women would meet through friends and acquaintances. If the new couple decided to marry, it was usually in the Croatian Church in Calumet.

In the late 1890's, Croatians attended mass at the Slovakian Church, which was Roman Catholic. As many Croatians were devout Catholics, in 1901, St John the Baptist Croatian Catholic Church was built in Calumet. The masses at St John's were said in Croatian and Latin. It was at this church, on October 3, 1914 that John Erjavac and Antonia Severinski would be married by a Croatian priest, Father Medin. Serving as witnesses were fellow Croatians Agnes (Aga) and Anton Schifner. Aga was one of John's cousins. Though St John's is still standing, it is no longer a church and is currently being used as a warehouse. As the Croatian population in Ahmeek grew, the idea of building a Church in or near the village started. The men in the area came

⁵³ Erjavac family lore obtained from John Erjavac and his son John Erjavac.

together to build a simple church. In 1928, Sacred Heart Church in Ahmeek held its first mass. Sacred Heart, which is still standing and is still a functioning Catholic church, had masses that were said in both Croatian and English. The homilies were usually said in both languages while the mass itself was said in Croatian. Masses are no longer said in Croatian, they are solely in English. Located on what is now US-41, Sacred Heart's first confirmation class was held in 1928, including John and Antonia Erjavac's eldest two children, John and Frances and John and Anna Stajniger's daughter, Julia. Frances was only ten when she was confirmed. As the church did not expect the Bishop to come back to the church for another four years, Antonia decided to accelerate Frances' religious teaching so that she could get confirmed at an early age.⁵⁴

Involving themselves in religious education was not the only way Croatian immigrants met one another in the church setting. Croatians also set up social organizations within the church such as the rosary alter society. Their daughters participated in the youth choir and their sons served as alter servers. By the 1910's, the Church was not the only place Croatians were starting clubs and organizations within their own ethnic group.

The Croatian-run boarding houses helped to ensure the incoming immigrants had connections with others from the Old Country, leading into social organizations within the community at large. The Croatian Young Men's Club was one such organization. Formed to help with the adjustment of the incoming immigrants, and eventually their children, the Young Men's Club provided an acceptable social outlet for the Croatian youth. The club arranged gatherings that would keep the young men out of trouble, and out of the local bars. They arranged social functions, such as dances, for the young men

⁵⁴ Erjavac family lore as told by immigrant John Erjavac.

to attend.⁵⁵ By 1910, the Croatians formed their own newspaper, written in Croatian. Articles centered on the daily lives and issues surrounding the area surrounding Red Jacket. The Croatian newspaper also informed the men when union meetings would take place.⁵⁶ Croatian men also formed a local chapter of the Croatian Fraternal Union (Hrvatska Bratska Zajednica). The men of the Union found an outlet to socialize with one another while contributing to the well-being of their Croatian family and friends. The Croatian Fraternal Union dues went toward what we would now call workman's compensation. There were rules regarding membership. To become a member, the men (they had to be male) must be of Croatian descent. They had to work for the mines or for an industry supporting the mines. When becoming a member, the men had to be under the age of 40, although membership would continue after that age, and be of good health and moral character. The Union also went as far as regulating membership to Roman Catholics who received communion at least twice a year.⁵⁷ Another stipulation of membership was the attendance of funerals. It was required that members attend all funerals of their deceased brothers. As members, their dues would go to a widow of a member killed in the mines or toward supporting the family of an injured member until he could go back to work. There was an initiation fee and monthly dues of 50 cents. If a man was killed in the mines, his widow would receive one large payment (burial benefit) of anywhere from one to a couple hundred dollars.⁵⁸ If a member was injured, the Croatian Fraternal Union would pay an average of \$15 a week to help support the family for up to a year. To show good faith with the Croatian Fraternal Union, as well as similar

⁵⁵ Schute, Bernard. Interview with Author, Eagle Harbor, MI 22 June 2004.

⁵⁶ Schute, Bernard. Interview with Author, Eagle Harbor, MI 22 June 2004.

⁵⁷ Lankton, Larry. 188.

⁵⁸ Lankton, 188.

organizations from other ethnic groups, Calumet and Hecla would match contributions. Whereas the Union assisted the family for a year, Calumet and Hecla's support ended at eight months.⁵⁹ The miner would have to be off work for about two weeks before support started.⁶⁰ In this way, the Croatian Fraternal Union served two roles, social and financial.

Civic organizations also served as a social and protective outlet for the Croatians. By early 1913, unions had entered the mines in full force. Many Croatian men joined the Western Federation of Miners (WFM) and their wives and daughters became active in its women's auxiliary. The WFM and its female counterpart would become synonymous with the Strike of 1913. The Women's Auxiliary, led by Annie Clemenc, was active in the Strike by staging protests, marches, and rallies. It was the women who, wanting to have an entertaining social event for the children affected by the strike, planned the fateful Christmas party that would end in tragedy and death.

The joining of the WFM and the women's auxiliary would bring Croatians into the community at-large. It would also enmesh them further into American culture through membership in a national organization. Although the Croatian immigrants tried their best to keep their culture alive in the community through church and social organizations, they were starting to become Americanized.

⁵⁹ Lankton, 188.

⁶⁰ Schute, Bernard. Interview with Author. Eagle Harbor, MI 22 June 2004.

The Croatians did as much as they could to preserve their ethnic identity. They started Newspapers and social organizations, such as the Croatian Fraternal Union, focused just on the immigrants and their children. They built a church, St John the Baptist, that had Croatian speaking priests, and masses said in Croatian. The women, who tried to preserve the Croatian culture inside the home, were rapidly finding themselves associating with those of other cultures. They introduced new recipes, finding them to be better suited to their husbands diets, and through fear for the safety and well-being of their children, they found themselves associating more and more with women of different ethnic groups. It was the women who were active in, and pushing for, the Strike of 1913 and it would be they through their efforts that would push their husbands into becoming associated with others. Their husbands, who within their work at the mines managed to keep with other Croatians would through their involvements

with the union, become active in the community at-large, not just the Croatian community.

Their American-born children would finish the acculturation process. As a result of their attendance in school they started speaking English, not just outside, but inside the home. They taught their parents and younger siblings English and they brought friends from the different ethnic groups in the area into their homes. By 1930, many of the immigrants' children would start marrying those from the different ethnic groups in the area. The intermarriage of the various ethnic groups with the Croatian children would signal the end of Croatian thought in regards to ethnicity. They were no longer thinking of themselves as Croatians, but as Americans with a Croatian background.

Within a generation, the children of the Croatian immigrants would end the identity that their parents fought so hard to keep. The Croatian immigrants, though they came to America for a better life, wanted to stay within the culture they came from. They resisted acculturation by forming their own social groups within the community. Yet, for all their resistance, they also started acculturation by introducing items from other cultures into the home, such as the pasty. This would signal the beginning of the end for Croatian identity.