



Most Slovenians who came to this country were from what is now the Slovenian Republic of Yugoslavia but was then the Austrian province known in English as Carniola. The Carniolians or Slovenians called this province Kranj, and so when they came to this country they called themselves Granish, and what are now Slovenian clubs used to be known as Granish clubs. This club in Bishop, Pennsylvania, still has the old sign.

Slovenian-Americans

The Slovenians are a South Slavic people who have lived for more than 1200 years in the hilly and mountainous areas of what is now northwestern Yugoslavia. Slovenia is bordered by Italy and Austria and was under Germanic domination from the time of the Emperor Charlemagne until after World War I, when it joined with Croatia, Serbia and several small provinces to form Yugoslavia, the Land of the South Slavs.

Slovenians were somewhat oppressed by their Austrian rulers and were largely restricted to peasant occupations. Yet, benefitting from the high cultural standards of the Austrian Empire, Slovenian villagers had a high literacy rate and many were avid readers. They thus presented the unusual picture of a largely peasant people who maintained their folk customs but also adapted to modern life. Yet the Slovenians could not avoid the economic distress that was attacking Central and Eastern Europe, and the dramatic lowering of infant mortality led to crowding on the already small farms. Many Slovenians emigrated in order to earn and save enough money to buy large farms.

Around the end of the nineteenth century, many young Slovenian men left their native province. Very few of them sold their land, and many of them were soon sending large sums of money home. Perhaps half of them returned to Slovenia, with their goal accomplished, but the other half remained in the United States.

Although a number of Slovenians went to Illinois, Minnesota, and elsewhere, most came to Ohio and Pennsylvania, which still have the majority of Slovenian-Americans. Cleveland is the largest center of their culture in this country.

Slovenians coped well with the new American environment. They learned English quickly and formed organizations to provide mutual help. The chief of these were the KSKJ, the Grand Carniolan Slovenian Catholic Union, founded in 1894; the American Fraternal Union, founded in 1898; and the SNPJ, the Slovene National Benefit Society, founded in 1904, which is today the largest, owing to mergers with smaller societies.





Granish Hill

“The reason they came is so that their offspring wouldn’t have to go to the coal mines...But they finally had to go to the mines because they couldn’t get jobs elsewhere.”

Mrs. Evelyn Stetar, her mother and friends reminisce at her home on Granish Hill, Burgettstown. Seated from left to right are Mrs. Mary Vajentic Gosteau, Mrs. Hannah Vietmeier and Miss Jennie Ferbezar; with her back to the camera is Mrs. Anna Laurich Kiss. Mrs. Evelyn Stetar is not shown.

Hannah Vietmeier: I was born in Bino Loka in 1903. My family died when they were young and I had to live with Grandmother. Grandmother didn’t want to work over there no more so she came to the United States. Then they brought me here in 1911. That article there (“Golden Anniversary at Granish Hill”) tells how we came to Burgettstown.

Jennie Ferbezar: Our fathers worked in a coal mine in Westmoreland County. The reason they came is so that their offspring wouldn’t have to go to the coal mines. I can remember my dad saying, “I don’t want my boys to go to work in a coal mine.” But they finally had to go to the mines because they couldn’t get jobs elsewhere. Later they got jobs with American Zinc and the Climax Company. It was safer and healthier and it paid better too.

Slovenian Weddings

Hannah: When I got married, the band played in front of the church. But they wouldn’t allow them in the church; they had to be on the road.

Evelyn Stetar: But your wedding lasted three days, didn’t it?

Hannah: I got married on Thanksgiving Day. The wedding went on till Sunday. With a barrel of wine – we made a barrel of wine – and some nut rolls and chicken and ham and that was it.

Hannah: They made the wine that year. It was red wine. I still remember it was New York Concord.

Jennie: When the bride comes home from church, after she’s married, you greet them with pots and pans, and you bang the lids; I remember that now; we were children.

Evelyn: Well, Maria here, when she got married, that’s what we did. The men didn’t let ‘em up the street.

Jennie: Oh yeah, they tied a rope across the street.

Evelyn: And Ray had to give money for a bottle of whiskey. Sure, I remember. And the kids; they threw pennies out to us kids and we scrambled around to get all those pennies.

Jennie: This is when we were little. I forgot all about that.

Evelyn: And then we would go and we would bang some more and they’d have to give us some more pennies.

Jennie: The reception was at the bride’s home. They just had one room set up to eat, upstairs in the bedroom, and dancing downstairs. They were afraid to dance upstairs because the floor might not hold them. We danced down in the basement. They always had an accordion. Nobody had

a band at weddings. They couldn’t afford it.

I can remember them throwing the pillow. They had a pillow dance. They’d throw it in front of someone and they’d kiss and then they’d dance. And then they’d throw it at someone else.

Hannah: First, the bride and groom. They’d throw it in front of them first.

Jennie: But the main thing was when the bride and groom came they ate a big dinner, then they danced and drank. And they’d break glasses for good luck when they’re eating.

Hannah: At the weddings and other times we’d drink slivovitz – that’s our whiskey name. It’s made from plums, and that’s why they call it slivovitz. And all I know about the wine is that red wine. I never even saw any other kind.



Stage curtain in the Slovenian Club in Burgettstown.

“Well, one thing my mother always did and we still do: we leave one light burning in the house somewhere all Christmas Eve. That’s the way they did it in Europe, and my mother always had one light on somewhere.”

Jennie: We used to have grape arbors; almost everybody had their own grapes to make wine.

Evelyn: We still have the thing that turns round and round and made the juice.

Jennie: The wine press; Mr. Taucher made my dad’s.

Hannah: One year we made slivovitza. This man brought us plums. There was so much plums that year. But we didn’t have a still, so my husband said – I wasn’t even married to him then, I was just going with him – he said, “I know where they make it all the time – that’s their business.” So, he had a truck, and I went with him for a ride. We went one way into Burkland mine, but he was afraid to come home the right way, so he took the back roads. It was raining and muddy and we got stuck. We got stuck by a farm called Harris’ farm. And I got out of the truck, and Joe was trying to push the truck, and he couldn’t, and I seen this man coming. He had apples in his hand, and I thought he had a gun. I was hollering, “Mr. Harris, please don’t shoot him, don’t shoot him.” And he says, “With what, an apple?”

Evelyn: Did you make it again after that

time?

Hannah: Never no more than that. I’ll never forget that.

Jennie: That’s the trouble with our people. They were afraid to do anything like that.

Holidays

Jennie: St. Joseph’s Day is a big thing.

Evelyn: That’s March 19th.

Hannah: They used to have parades, and then we’d go to church and they’d have a market outside like we have here, and they sold stuff. And after that everybody went to a gostilna – a tavern – where we’d get something to eat and drink. I can remember we always had chicken noodle soup and chicken, potatoes, and salad, and ham, and Slovenian klobase. That’s what we had for all holidays.

Jennie: For Easter we always had ham and klobase saved from butchering the pigs in the fall.

Evelyn: Hard boiled eggs and horseradish, always a must. And potitsa.

Jennie: And my mother always made krofe. That’s like a doughnut; and then you’d split them and put the ham in.

Hannah: My mother made zeludatz. After

we butchered pigs, we’d take the stomach from the pig, and we washed it good, turned it upside down, and then smoked it, and then filled it up with eggs and bread and ham, and baked it in the oven. That had to be for Easter.

Question: Did you also make that krvava klobase (blood sausage)?

Jennie: Yes, that was for the winter months. We generally had it for Christmas.

Evelyn: My mother kept it up in the attic on a stick.

Hannah: They’d take a pig’s head and lungs and liver and we’d cook all that. Take all the meat off the bones, and then cook so much rice, and put the seasonings in there, and there has to be so much blood. At Christmas nowadays there isn’t anything different. We’re all Americans now.

Evelyn: Everybody bakes, they’re busy. Everybody intermarried with all kinds.

Jennie: Well, one thing my mother always did and we still do: we leave one light burning in the house somewhere all Christmas Eve. That’s the way they did it in Europe, and my mother always had one light on somewhere.



“They used to have parades...” Brass bands, like this one from Burgettstown, were popular in the ‘20’s and ‘30’s.

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JENNIE: This is when we were little. I forgot about that.

Golden Anniversary at Granish Hill

Courtesy of the Burgettstown Enterprise.

On July 4, 1915, ten families and their 56 children arrived by train at the Burgettstown station at 2:30 in the afternoon to make their new homes in Burgettstown.

This event was vividly recalled by several members of the Slovenian Women’s Lodge, who attended a meeting at Granish Hall recently.

A little over fifty years ago, Domenick Vajentic, Sr., who lived and worked in the coal mines in a town called Adamsburg, Pennsylvania, decided that he didn’t want his children to grow up to work in the coal mines as he did. He gathered many of his friends together who had migrated from Austria to Adamsburg and he discovered that many of them felt the same way. At that time ten families decided that they would search for a new place to make their home, and find a place they did. They bought ten lots in a site that is known as Granish Hill, in South Burgettstown, and hired a contractor called Mr. Woodrow to build ten homes.

They brought with them all their personal belongings, including

several domestic animals and everything was transported in a box car. Listed among their belongings were two cows, two little pigs, one cat (which no one claimed) and twelve dogs.

When the box car was finally opened, all twelve dogs got loose and many people living in town thought that a dog show had come to town.

After everyone and everything was rounded up, they made their way to their new homes, all tired and excited with the trip behind them and the dream of seeing their new homes for the first time. But to their disappointment only three homes were completed, which meant that several families had to double up for several months until the other seven homes were finished.

Thanks to the thoughtfulness and kindness of their new neighbors, the women did not have to prepare the evening meal because Mrs. E. Scott and her daughter, Elizabeth Biddle, had prepared a meal for all the newly arrived neighbors, providing an opportunity for every one to get acquainted.