



Plakat Srpskih: Poster of Serbian Volunteers in World War I



Serbian Bomber
"American Serbian" in 1943

ON OUR 120th ANNIVERSARY YEAR

by Milos Rastovic

The Serb National Federation (1901), the oldest Serbian-American Fraternal organization in the United States, marked its 120th anniversary last month on June 15 and will continue to celebrate this milestone over the coming year. Throughout its long history, the Serb National Federation has economically and financially helped its members, the homeland, students in high schools and universities, Serbian Orthodox churches, children's church camps, Serbian Kolo Sisters, Serbian charities and charitable causes, and sponsored athletic, cultural, and social events to preserve and perpetuate the Serbian tradition and heritage on the North American continent.

Fr. Sava Vojvodić from Pittsburgh describes the main task of the Serb National Federation published in the first edition of *American Srbobran* (1906): "Raise and help, wherever possible, Serbian Orthodox churches and altars, establish educational institutions and Serbian hearths, so that our children, our youth – our hope does not wither before time, does not get lost, does not melt into something else that is not ours, so that we do not create here from hundreds of thousands of worlds of the Serbian people another black Serbian Kosovo."

The SNF was founded in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. The base mainly consisted of immigrants engaged in agriculture, livestock, and fishing in their homeland. They did not realize that they would work in the mines and steel mills on the new continent. Most of the Serbian immigrants who arrived in Pittsburgh came from the Krajina region (Lika, Kordun, and Banija) in Austria-Hungary and Montenegro, not necessarily from

Serbia, at the end of the nineteenth century. By arriving in America, Serbian immigrants carried in their rural purse folk songs and memories of the bravery and heroism of their ancestors, their willingness to work hard and sacrifice for the ideals of freedom. In his memoirs, SNF Founder Sava Hajdin said that the first Serbs who came to America from the Krajina region were Nikola Vujnović from Gomirje in 1886, Milenko Maravić in 1887, and Petar Vignjević in 1888. After them, others came: Nikola Maravić, Stevo Trbović, Adam Maravić, Mićo Stipanović, Rade Mamula, and Lazo Mrvoš. They came from Dubrava, Plaški, Primišlje, Vojnić and other places. Hajdin came to America in 1892 at the age of sixteen. He and other pioneers who founded and built Serbian-American organizations and societies laid the foundations of the organizations that today represent the basis of Serbdom in America.

Industrialization of the "New Land" caused suffering and bitterness for Serbian immigrants arriving for the rest of their lives. Dr. Božidar Purić, the Consul of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes in San Francisco and Chicago, in a conversation with one Herzegovinian, found out how immigrants felt about the New Land: "I have never seen anyone in this country feed a hungry person or a thirsty one. If you don't have money, you will die like a dog on the street." When the Serbian immigrants gathered at their rallies, they mostly talked about the homeland that they left behind. Separation from their home made them think about organizing societies that would remind them of the homeland.

Initially, Serbian immigrants did not establish their organizations and fraternal societies due to their small number. They joined the Russian, Croatian, and Slovenian societies. However, as the number of Serbian

immigrants grew, so did their awareness of establishing their societies for national, economic, and social reasons. Although most of the immigrants were illiterate, they began to organize their organizations and societies. Serbian clubs, organizations, and other societies were the main gathering places for Serbian immigrants. Since most did not speak English, these organizations became their spiritual home. The success of these organizations is based on the Serbian ideal of freedom, creativity, and working spirit woven into the Serbian ethnic being and supported by the American democratic tradition.

At the time, workers were neither organized into unions nor had health insurance. Due to significant accidents and difficult working conditions, workers and their families needed protection and financial security. Fraternal societies offered financial security and stability for workers and their families. In 1901, Sava Hajdin traveled from Pittsburgh to New York to get support from Nikola Tesla, a recognized Serbian-American scientist and inventor, for founding such a society. With Tesla's support, Hajdin founded the Serbian Orthodox Federation Srbobran (SOFS) and became its first President. When they founded the Serbian Orthodox Federation Srbobran, the inscription on the board of the organization was placed in Cyrillic. A few days later, someone destroyed the board with inscription. Hajdin commented on the event in his memoirs: "Serbdom and Serbian ideals were not on a piece of the board, but in our fiery youthful hearts." Such a fight against Serbs gave Hajdin and other pioneers even more will to continue in their efforts in organizing Serbs in America. The society soon developed into "a strong tree that spreads its branches wherever there are Serbs in America and Canada."

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Djokovic: Chasing History in the Era of the Big Three



by Kristina A. Glusac

Novak Djokovic, the World Number 1 in the ATP Tennis Rankings, has been chasing history since his entry onto the professional circuit in 2003. The tennis world at that time was beginning to shift towards the domination of Roger Federer (Switzerland) and Rafael Nadal (Spain) at the Grand Slam tournaments. However, Djokovic would soon be making a name for himself. Even though there was a tennis history from the former Yugoslavia, including most notably Slobodan Zivojinovic, Monica Seles and Goran Ivanisevic, the impact from Novak Djokovic's accomplishments is one of a kind and still evolving.

Stats of Djokovic

This is the era of the Big Three (Djokovic, Federer, Nadal) who have combined for an

incredible total of 59 Grand Slam singles championships between the four majors (Australian Open, French Open, Wimbledon and U.S. Open) since 2004. Djokovic's breakthrough singles title at a Grand Slam tournament was the Australian Open in 2008 and since then only 9 players outside the Big Three have claimed a major singles championship. At that time in 2008, Federer and Nadal had won a combined 14 major titles since 2004, and Djokovic was considered the third wheel, upsetting the balance of tennis titles. This reign of titles between the Big Three for the sport's most prestigious events is unprecedented and whoever ends up on top will most likely hold that record for the foreseeable future. Currently Federer and Nadal are tied at 20 Grand Slam titles each. With Djokovic's French Open win in June 2021, he is at 19. Djokovic is the youngest of the three at 34 and appears to be the freshest and

most complete player, positioned to surpass his top rivals. To put the pace of this race into context, Djokovic has won seven of the last eleven major singles titles. His current head-to-head over his top two rivals is 30-28 over Nadal and 27-23 over Federer.

Djokovic has won 9 championship titles at the Australian Open which is the most of any other player in history. Wimbledon is also a favorite tournament of his with five championship titles; followed by the US Open with three and the French Open with two. He is also one of eight players, in men's singles, to complete the Career Grand Slam and is the only man in the Open Era to complete a double Career Slam. Djokovic is one of only three (Rod Laver and Don Budge) to hold all four tournaments at the same time for a Calendar Slam in men's singles.

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In the memoirs, Hajdin also pointed out that the SNF foundation is the American democratic ideal, working with people and for people. Hajdin saw the SNF as the center of Serbdom and St. Sava's tradition in America. The SNF is still guided by these goals in its work today.

To strengthen Serbian organizations and make them efficient, Mihajlo I. Pupin, a Serbian-American scientist and inventor, worked to unite them for years. As a result, on September 21, 1929, Sloga, Svesna Srbadija, Sloboda, and the Serbian Orthodox Federation Srbobran were merged into one organization named the Serb National Federation with 19,764 members and a monetary reserve of \$780,188.23. At the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the SNF in 1951, the SNF had 183 adult societies and 141 youth circles with 16,213 adult members and 6,484 youth members. The assets amounted to about \$4 million. Today, the SNF has about 12,500 members, and the society is worth approximately \$50 million.

At the convention in 1929, Pupin became its Honorary President and Nikola Tesla in 1935. When Tesla was elected Honorary President of the SNF, he replied in a short letter:

"It would be better if you choose someone more valuable. However, as you want, I have to accept it. Thank you, and I wish you the best of success." Nikola Tesla

The Serb National Federation made great humanitarian, military, and financial contributions to the homeland in World Wars I and II. Twenty thousand Serbian volunteers organized by Mihajlo I. Pupin, SOF Srbobran, the American-Canadian Diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church, and Serbian National Defense Council of America came to fight for their homeland in World War I. Most of them had never seen Serbia because they lived in the Austro-Hungarian empire, but the connection with their homeland and sense of belonging to it was unbreakable. Hajdin's patriotism is also shown because, since he has no sons he sent his sixteen-year-old daughter Ružica to the Thessaloniki front to fight for the homeland. As members of the SOF Srbobran of Lodge 82 "Banović Strahinja," ten Vajagić brothers from Gary, Indiana, voluntarily went to fight for Serbia against Austria-Hungary. The eldest brother was 40 and the youngest was 20 years old. The eldest brother, Risto Vajagic, received the highest Serbian decoration, Karadjordje's Golden Star for Courage. According to Dr. Božidar Purić, twenty-five percent of the Serbian-American population in America went to volunteer to defend the homeland: "What other nations have that? Thanks to them, Kosovo's sowing was reaped in distant America." At that time, Serbian-Americans were the only free Serbs in the world, and that is why they stood by their people to fight for the liberation of the homeland. More than half of the Serbian-American volunteers did not return to their families who remained in America. In 1943, members of the SNF bought a bomber and donated it to the U.S. military to fight the Nazis. The bomber was called "American-Serbian."

After the founding of the SOF Srbobran,



Sava Hajdin,
Founder of the SNF

its members soon realized that they could not make progress if they did not have a newspaper informing Serbian immigrants about their work, ideas, and calling on them for unity and cooperation. Therefore, to expand its influence in America and Canada, the SOF Srbobran began publishing in 1906 the *American Srbobran*, the oldest Serbian continuously published newspaper. The *American Srbobran* was initially published only in Cyrillic. From 1906 to 1916, the *American Srbobran* was a weekly newspaper; and from 1916, a daily newspaper. In the 1930s, an English section was added to the newspaper for the first generation of immigrants whose native language was English to become more acquainted with the Serbian culture and tradition. Today, the *American Srbobran* has Serbian and English sections, and is a semi-monthly newspaper.

The primary role of this newspaper was described by Father Vojvodić in the first issue of the newspaper from January 18, 1906, edited by its first editor Milivoj Buzadžić:

"Our newspaper will guide our readership on the path of Serbian national awareness and dedication to the holy Orthodox Faith, so that in this distant land they do not forget the faith and the nation they have come from and for which our ancestors have shed so much blood, leaving us these two holy legacies to defend and preserve... Furthermore, we will try to make this fraternal organization [SOF Srbobran] spread as much as possible because we are fully convinced that salvation, progress, and help lie only in our community ...Even now, we hear a soft voice in our hearts whispering Christ's words: 'Assuredly, I say to you, in as much as you did to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.'"

As in the past and today, the *American Srbobran* has published news about the success of Serbian-Americans, their aspirations and views on the "New Land," the work of Serbian Orthodox Churches and church di-



Youth Members of the SNF in 1932



Bishop Nikolaj Velimirovic
with Representatives of the SNF

oces, economic and cultural-educational activities, singing and athletic clubs, and societies, published books, the social life of immigrants and events in the homeland. During World War I and II, the *American Srbobran* was a defender of the freedom and truth of the Serbian people. Dr. Kosta Elesin, former editor-in-chief of *American Srbobran*, says: "The *American Srbobran* serves the interests of freedom of democratic America and Serbs as a whole ... (and) will continue to fight for the unification of all Serbian countries in the spirit of the times in that form, which will be of the greatest benefit to the Serbian people, and which will suit their vital interests, and which will protect their national existence." The SNF society Jedinstvo," (Lodge 99), describes the attitude of Serbian-Americans in the *American Srbobran*: "*Srbobran* defends and stands on the defense of humiliated and ruined Serbs, and at the same time raises and maintains the Serbian spirit and ethics, which we need so much today."

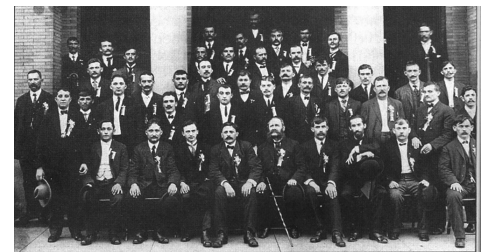
Many famous Serbian novelists have contributed to the *American Srbobran* such as Jovan Ducic, Milos Crnjanski, Ivo Andric, Desanka Maksimovic, Vojislav Ilic, Milan Rakic, V. Rev. Dr. Stavrofor Mateja Matejic, Charles Simic, Vasko Popa, Vasa Mihailovich, and Dr. Aleksandar Petrov among others. In addition to authors who contributed to the *American Srbobran*, it has also been granted interviews with famous Serbs such as Mihajlo I. Pupin and Nikola Tesla, and Novak Djokovic, World Tennis Champion among others. In 2001, the *American Srbobran* was awarded "Best Newspaper" at the Pennsylvania Fraternal Congress.

Today, the SNF is a non-profit fraternal organization that provides life insurance and annuities following the needs of its members. The long traditions of selling life insurance and annuities and services have made the SNF a respected fraternal organization in the United States. Unlike commercial insurance companies, the SNF invests its income in preserving Serbian culture and tradition as it has for more than a hundred years. By investing in the SNF, its members are investing in the future of Serbian families and the preservation of the Serbian ethnic identity in America. The main idea is that Serbs in America have one umbrella organization that will protect its interests and help its members.

As it was said, the activity of the SNF is based on preserving Serbian culture and tradition by organizing cultural, athletic, and social events where participants have the opportunity to socialize, learn more about their culture, origin, and language. In that sense, the SNF sponsors the oldest Serbian basketball tournament in the United States since 1936, two annual golf tournaments, and a bowling tournament. The event SNF 3Day, initiated as Serbian Day by Mihajlo I. Pupin to raise funds for orphans in Serbia during World War I, has traditionally been organized since 1917. In 2016, this event was declared the oldest ethnic event in Kennywood Park by the municipality of Pittsburgh. The event "Jasenovac: Unspoken Genocides and the Holocaust, 1941 - 1945" was held in the U.S. Congress in Washington, D.C., in November 2019. It was an opportunity for members of Congress, senators, diplomats, foreign ambassadors, and the American media to learn more about the suffering of Serbs, Jews, and Roma during World War II. Last year, "Serbian Heritage Night" was held in the basketball arena in Cleveland to support Serbian basketball player Nikola Jokic, who plays for the Denver Nuggets. The SNF also gives support to Novak Djokovic, the famous



"Sloga" with Mihajlo I. Pupin
in the middle



The Fourth Convention
of the SOF Srbobran in 1905

Serbian Tennis Player, on his American-summer tour every year. He became an Honorary Member of the SNF in 2015. This year, the SNF sponsored an Essay Contest for students in high schools and universities in the United States and Canada thanks to the generosity of an anonymous member. The main idea is to encourage students to contribute new ideas about improving the relationship between the homeland and the Serbian Diaspora.

The SNF sponsors a Serbian Move Festival at the University of Pittsburgh, which expanded in Washington, D.C., and Boston in 2019. In addition, the SNF supported the promotion of the film "Tesla Nation," directed by Zeljko Mirkovic in Pittsburgh and Washington, D.C. This movie shows what Serbian immigrants have contributed to the United States and the world over 200 years. Thanks to the SNF, this film has been archived in many American and world libraries including the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C., the American Film Academy in Los Angeles, Harvard, Yale, New York, Columbia, Princeton, Oxford, Hoover Institution at Stanford University, Pennsylvania University, Duquesne, Ohio State University and other universities, the French National Library in Paris, the Russian National Library in St. Petersburg, the Alexandria Library in Egypt, and others.

At the celebration of the 50th anniversary of the Serb National Federation, St. Bishop Nikolaj Velimirović pointed out that the SNF, like other Serbian-American organizations, stood by the Serbian Orthodox Church, cared for its young people, sacrificed itself for the ideals of freedom "both for Serbdom and for America: It was nothing related to some person, family, or the Serbian people, or America, without our Serb National Federation doing the most it could do... And that's why – all Serbs on their feet! To congratulate the Golden Jubilee of the Serb National Federation with all our heart and soul, gratitude, and praise! Amen, God grants us!"

Material from: *Serb National Federation - First 100 Years*, edited by Dr. Krinka V. Petrov, Graphics Management Press, Los Angeles, CA, 2001; *Споменица Српског народног савеза*, edited by Nikola J. Vurdelj and Sava N. Vujnović, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, 1951; Archive material of the *American Srbobran*.