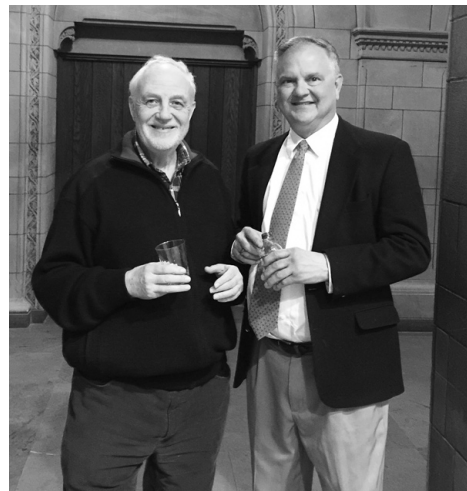


LECTURES AT CATHEDRAL OF LEARNING

by Milos Rastovic

On March 9, 2015, the Serb National Federation (SNF), in cooperation with the Yugoslav Room Committee, sponsored a lecture "From the East to the West Coast: Two Centuries of Serbian-American Presence" in the English Room in the Cathedral of Learning at the University of Pittsburgh. John Martich, President of the Serb National Federation, introduced the audience to the activities of the SNF and thanked the Yugoslav Room Committee for co-sponsoring the event. I introduced the two speakers, Milina Jovanovic and Dr. Krinka Vidakovic Petrov, who talked about the history of Serbs in America.



Serbian Editor of the *American Srbobran*, Dr. Aleksandar Petrov, left, with SNF President John Martich

was called *Serbian-Montenegrin Literary and Benevolent Society*. The very first printed medium was published by the Society in 1893 and during the last decade of the 19th Century, *Sloboda* was the only Serbian paper in the U.S. For these reasons, my research focused on California and a specific region known today as Amador County."

According to her lecture, Jovanovic said, "these are very important indicators of Serbian presence in the County and they are given a very special importance and visibility. Together with the St. Sava Church—the oldest Serbian Orthodox Church in North America—these objects form an 'Embryo of Little Serbia.' The St. Sava Mission with the children's camp, women's gathering place, a planned retirement home, Serbian festivities and cultural events celebrated by the entire city of Jackson and beyond, only add to this unusual picture about the influence of Serbian Americans in this region. The Milo Radulovich Memorial Library was also dedicated in December of 2013... And in Father Stephen Tumbas' words: 'You know, there is this tradition here in Jackson that all merchants don't take down their Christmas decorations until Serbian Christmas; this is an indication how influential our community is. Most definitely we've preserved our good reputation here. And the reason goes back to the fact that we were so influential.'"

Jovanovic pointed out the words of Fr. Tumbas: "The Serbian-American residents of Amador County have the longevity that is not present in other Bay Area communities. Just imagine: the great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers came [to Jackson] 110 years ago. The people who live here belong to the families of the original settlers in this area. They've been here almost as long as the French, and the Italian, and the Spanish, and the Irish...and together they've built this place now called Amador County. The Serbian presence here is real. Others who live here and don't have Serbian roots also know Serbian traditions..."

Jovanovic concluded her lecture with the following words: "Jackson is a symbolic home to Serbian Americans living on the West Coast and beyond. It is also a hometown of the Serbian Orthodox religion. When St. Sava Church was

built by the hardworking families of gold miners in 1894, the land was purchased in Newmanville. It was the land no one wanted. Ironically, today that same spot is a prime location. The Church is on Main St. and one of the very first objects that visitors see coming to Jackson. It is envisioned that one day we will have a retirement home next to the children's camp and women's gathering place. Many people are working hard to connect all generations and preserve our legacy. How successful will the new generations be in this endeavor? This is an important question for all of us and for future research."

Dr. Krinka V. Petrov is a professor at the Institute of Literature and Art in Belgrade, and served as Ambassador of Serbia in Israel (2001-2006). Dr. Petrov discussed two phases of Serbian immigration in the United States: first, Serbian immigrants who came from Boka Kotarska and Pastrovici, and second, those who came from the territory under the Austria-Hungary Empire (Lika, Kordun, Banija, Vojvodina and Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Montenegro.

Afterward, she talked about the first Serbian organizations in the United States. The first and the most important were Serbian churches such as SOC St. Sava in Jackson, insurance societies *Srpsko-Crnogorsko Literarno i Dobrotvorno Društvo* in San Francisco, *Srpski Pravoslavni Savez Srbobran* in Pittsburgh, *Prvi Srpski Bratski Savez* in Chicago, *Sloga* in New York, etc. The first Serbian newspaper *Sloboda* was published at the end of the nineteenth century in San Francisco, and at the early twentieth century *American Srbobran*, *Srpsbrana*, *Srpske Nezavisnosti*, *Srpske Straze*, *Srpski Dnevnik*, etc.



SNF Office Manager Cheryl Leydig discussing the evening with former SNF President George Martich

Although Serbian immigrants were widespread throughout the United States in the early twentieth century, everything that was going on in Europe, especially in the Balkans, united them. There were the Annexation crisis (1908), Balkan wars (1912-1913), World War I (1914-1918) and foundation of Yugoslavia (1918).

Serbian immigrants helped their homeland in several ways: collecting military and humanitarian aid, and volunteers went to the war to fight



Some of those who came to hear the lectures



Mr. and Mrs. Milos Rastovic, left, with Mim Bizic

from their "heart and mind."

Dr. Petrov distinguished some Serbian people from American-Serbian history who are almost unknown, but very interesting. One of them was Cedomir Pavic from Montenegro. He was a journalist, editor, student at Berkley University, and a volunteer in the Montenegrin army in the first Balkan war. He wrote a book *From Pacific to Skadar Mug* (San Francisco, 1913).

Budimir Grahovac from Lika was also a volunteer in the Balkan War and World War I. He was a very close friend of the poet Proka Jovkic who died during the war from typhus. Grahovac came back to America in 1916, and he was an editor of the *American Srbobran*. He published stories, poems, brochures about the war, and a report about the Congress of Serbian immigrants in Chicago in December 1918. In this report, he stressed the sacrifices Serbian immigrants from America have made in the war, and how they wanted the new Yugoslavia to recognize their voice in founding a new country. He pointed out, as Mihajlo Pupin before him, that Serbs won the war "by weapons, but not by ink."

Djordje Krstonosic, originally from Vojvodina, lived in Detroit. He was also a volunteer, but in the Montenegrin army because he had Austria-Hungarian citizenship. When Montenegro surrendered, he escaped with the Serbian army across Albania to Drac and Valona. He came back to the U.S., but in 1917 he went to the war in France. After the war, he wrote a book *Volunteers from America*, dedicated to his brother who died as an Austro-Hungarian soldier on the Russian front. Dr. Petrov expressed gratitude to Mr. Robert Gakovic who helped her to get a copy of Krstonosic's book.

After the lecture, visitors had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the lectures in more depth with the speakers at a reception.



Author Milina Jovanovic spoke to several people after the lecture

Jovanovic came from California to present her most recent book *All Roads Lead to Jackson: Serbian American Contributions in Amador County, CA since the Gold Rush* published by Sebastian Press, Western American Diocese Serbian Orthodox Church in 2013. According to Jovanovic, this book is a result of empirical research over ten years. In the book, she describes American-Serbian history from the 1850s into the new millennium on the West Coast, especially in Amador County, California. She stressed the importance of the first Serbian church built in North America (St. Sava, Jackson) and contributions to the development of Amador County. Many Serbian immigrants worked in Amador County in mines in the late 1820s, and later moved throughout California. Jovanovic says: "The earliest stable and organized Serbian communities in the U. S. were observed in California. The very first Serbian-American organization was formed in 1880 in San Francisco and it



Dr. Krinka Vidakovic Petrov