

# FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

– the lives and times of Croatian settlers  
in New Zealand, 1858–1958



Stephen A. Jelich















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# Memorial Spomen Ploča

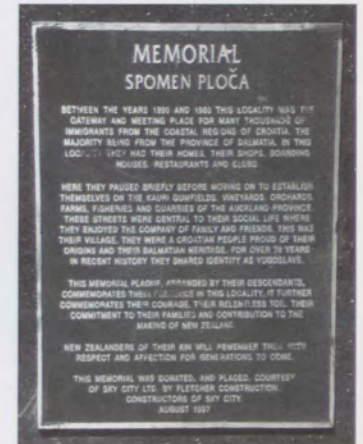
Between the years 1890 and 1980 this locality was the gateway and meeting place for many thousands of immigrants from the coastal regions of Croatia, the majority being from the province of Dalmatia. In this locality they had their homes, their shops, boarding houses, restaurants and clubs.

Here they paused briefly before moving on to establish themselves on the kauri gumfields, vineyards, orchards, farms, fisheries and quarries of the Auckland province. These streets were central to their social life where they enjoyed the company of family and friends. This was their village. They were a Croatian people proud of their origins and their Dalmatian heritage. For over 70 years in recent history they shared identity as Yugoslavs.

This memorial plaque arranged by their descendants commemorates their presence in this locality. It further commemorates their courage, their relentless toil, and their commitment to their families and contribution to the making of New Zealand.

New Zealanders of their kin will remember them with respect and affection for generations to come.

This memorial was donated and placed courtesy of Sky City Ltd by Fletcher Construction, constructors of Sky City. August 1997.



*The words of the memorial plaque, composed and implemented by the author, serves to set the scene for the pages that follow. It is mounted on a low wall in the forecourt of Sky City, Auckland, at the corner of Victoria Street West and Federal Street, to mark the period of early settlement of a Croatian people from Dalmatia, and to a lesser extent from other regions.*





*'Coopers', the chemist corner, Hobson & Victoria Streets, Auckland.*  
 PHOTO, BEN HOLWERDA



*The pub they all knew, 'The Aurora', corner of Federal and Victoria Streets, Auckland. The 'Hobson' and 'City' long gone.*  
 PHOTO, BEN HOLWERDA



*Marijan and Kate Glavaš shop and boarding house to left, the last one standing.*  
 PHOTO, BEN HOLWERDA



*The Empire Hotel, corner of Victoria and Nelson Streets, Auckland.*  
 PHOTO, BEN HOLWERDA





*Manchester Unity Building,  
corner of Hobson & Victoria  
Streets – centre of activities in  
'Yugoslav' days. Now the site  
of TVNZ operations.*

SOURCE, MANCHESTER  
UNITY ORDER



*Market Hotel – corner of Greys  
Ave & Cook Street – centre of  
community wedding celebrations  
in the 1920s–1930s. Owned by  
J.P. Molloy during the period,  
1923–1938.*

SOURCE, MOLLOY FAMILY



# Preface

THE story of Croatian settlement in New Zealand is presented in these pages as a selection of articles, biographies, documents and photographs. It is not a formal chronological history. I shall offer glimpses of the past through the lives of pioneer settlers, events of importance and archival material from public and private sources. This is by no means the full story; rather my aim is to provide sufficient information for a better understanding of Croatian immigration to New Zealand. It is a historical missing link for all New Zealanders but will more particularly satisfy the curiosity of the numerous descendants of the pre-1958 pioneer families and those who have settled in New Zealand in more recent decades.

This book is a tribute to my late parents Victor and Srečka Jelich, born in the village of Sućuraj on the Island of Hvar, Dalmatia, Croatia, who settled in New Zealand in the 1920s.

It is a tribute extended to their contemporaries who also ventured this far in search of a better life and a crust of bread. They cut loose from their homeland, turning their backs on poverty and political and economic chaos, leaving a land where there were few opportunities to advance themselves or provide for their families. New Zealand accepted them, but not without some doubts, as partners in the development of their adopted homeland. For this opportunity they have always been grateful, as indeed are their numerous descendants.

This book would not have been possible without the continuous support and encouragement of my wife Barbara. I am enormously indebted to her for this.

*Stephen A. Jelich*

B.Arch, FNZIA, ONZM

February, 2008

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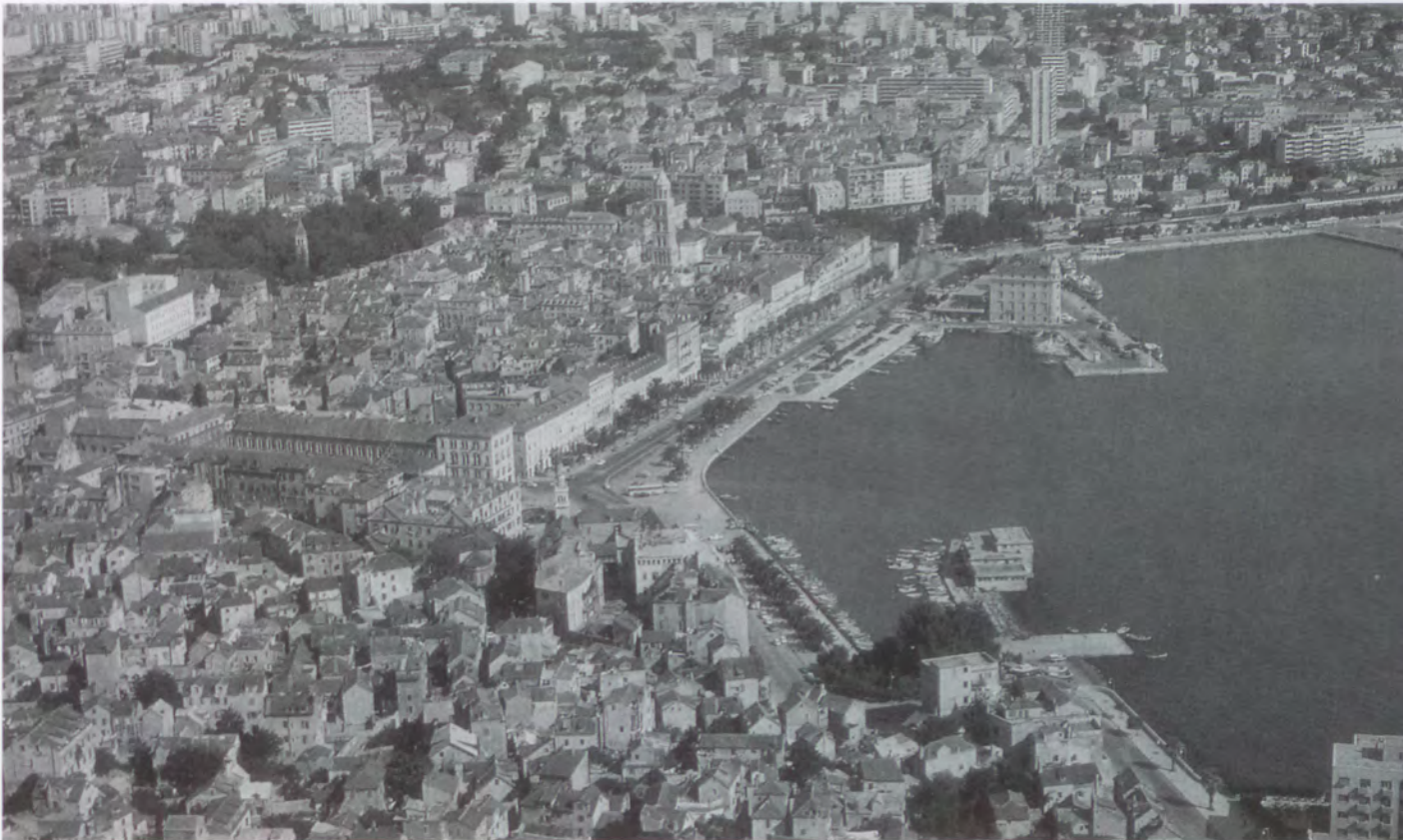


# Introduction

LET us consider these migrations. Between 1858 and the rush to New Zealand's northern gumfields from 1892, Croatian seafarers deserted their vessels in the South Island, lured by the prospect of finding gold. A few came as settlers. Their ports of departure, then under Austria's rule, stretched from Trieste (Trst) to the Albanian border – the full length of Croatia's Adriatic coastline. The main gumfields influx originated from Central Dalmatia including its immediate hinterland, the offshore islands and Pelješac Peninsula. In the first two decades it was an almost men-only invasion; 'birds of passage' was their label – temporary visitors intent on exploiting

the gumlands of the Auckland Province and then returning to their villages a little richer.

Prior to 1914, Croatians entered New Zealand freely as subjects of Austria, a nation regarded as a friend of importance by the British Empire. They were 'Austrians' but it was a title resented by the vast majority. Within their own circle they would say they were Croatians first, but it was their Dalmatian identity that bound them in comradeship and nostalgia. This is borne out by the fact that 90 per cent of those on the 'Alien Register' of 1917 identified as Dalmatians. Naturalisation records of the 1920s continue that trend, but after King Alexander decreed





the kingdom as Yugoslavia in 1929 the Yugoslav identity came to be recognised.

In August 1914, the immigrants' world was changed utterly. The declaration of war by Great Britain against Austria earned them the stamp of 'Enemy Aliens'. Outspoken leaders declared their community's resentment of Austria and their allegiance to the Allied cause and their brotherhood with the Serbs. When Serbia was attacked by the Dual Monarchy, Austria-Hungary, a surge of Slav patriotism swept through the community. South Slavism emerged as an ideal worth fighting for, an ideal that gained strength and acceptance through the formation of the Yugoslav Committee in London in 1915 by a number of émigré politicians and patriots. Their aim was to promote a union of Southern Slavs in the event of Austria-Hungary's defeat by the Allies.

After Austria-Hungary's defeat, the Allied powers, through

the Peace Treaties patched together from December 1918, without considered debate or understanding, the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (renamed formally as Yugoslavia in 1929). The province of Dalmatia formed part of the new kingdom. Serbia, as an allied nation, and with an army and administration in place, assumed domination of the new state to the detriment of Croatia and Slovenia. Short-sighted policies were adopted, which proved to be divisive, sowing the seeds of disharmony and ultimately disunity and destruction.

The Dalmatian Croatian community in New Zealand, distanced from the politics and affairs of the infant state, for the most part accepted the new nation and their new status without question. They saw the new state as a realisation of their dreams – a step towards Slavic unity. To be now officially recognised as 'Yugoslav' was proudly acknowledged. Their Croatian ethnicity, their language, culture and Catholic faith



*Korčula.*



were rarely disavowed, but henceforth the title Croatian hardly entered day-to-day conversation.

The politically and economically oppressive years of the kingdom under Alexander I during the 1920s generated a renewed exodus overseas. Many of those who had returned home in hope in 1919-22 reversed their decision and re-emigrated to New Zealand. Disillusioned young men and women sponsored and assisted by families in New Zealand added to the flow. During the height of the Great Depression of 1929 to 1935, the doors of admission were all but closed and only reopened after the Labour Party came into power in 1935. For the next five years, a large number of young people, relatives, offspring, fiancées and newly-weds settled in New Zealand to revitalise the community.

In 1939, the world plunged into another frightening abyss, another, more destructive and murderous clash of nations. In the beginning Yugoslavia remained uncommitted but unwillingly leant towards Germany. When the formal alliance with Germany was being negotiated in March 1941, huge demonstrations were mounted, particularly in Belgrade. Hitler's Germany reacted with massive air raids and crushed the nation with its armed might in tandem with Mussolini's Fascist Italy; they left fragments of states overlaying what was Yugoslavia. When war broke out in 1939, 'Yugoslavs' in New Zealand, whether born or not in Yugoslavia, were faced with resentment and suspicions of disloyalty. Even after Yugoslavia was crushed by Hitler, negative attitudes among New Zealanders persisted, fed by a media that showed little enlightenment when it came to dealing with world affairs. The stigma of 'alien' persisted until conscription scooped up Yugoslav nationals to serve in the armed forces or in essential industries. Only then did the authorities, the media and the public generally accept that New Zealand's 'Yugoslavs' were fully committed to the Allied cause.

In the homeland, after the total collapse of the Yugoslavia kingdom, the population rallied behind different causes, willingly and unwillingly. The conflicts that followed led to internal bloodletting and horrific destruction. The occupying German and Italian forces, the pro-Axis forces in Croatia and

Serbia, and the Partisans of Marshal Tito became locked in titanic struggles to the death. No one and nothing was spared. The community in New Zealand was numbed and shocked. It was beyond belief. An air of helplessness and sadness prevailed.

The divisions in the homeland cultivated by propagandists from the left and right in New Zealand negated major efforts in the early years of the conflict to provide material and moral support for those caught in the tides of war. Doubts were gradually dispelled as Tito gained ground with the support of the Soviet Union and the Western Allies. By 1944 local opinion and support swung almost totally behind his cause. The internal conflicts progressed to the bitter end with Tito triumphant as leader of the 'Federal People's Republic of Yugoslavia'. The nation's slogan was 'Death to Fascism, Liberty to the People'. The new Yugoslavia reborn was now a Communist dictatorship. It was an unhappy birth with enormous hurdles to be surmounted to bring a backward nation into the sphere of the modern world.

In New Zealand, the community's acceptance of the new state was almost unanimous; indeed it was accepted with considerable enthusiasm and relief.

The post Second World War years between 1945 and 1990 were years of consolidation and change for the Croatian community in New Zealand. It was a period of settlement, intermarriage, integration and dispersal. Refugee migrants, displaced persons, political émigrés and sponsored family members began to enter New Zealand. All, whether Croatians or not, were generally accepted as part of New Zealand society. A fine balance was struck by the old factions and the community progressed undisturbed by propagandists and zealots. People prospered, achieved prominence and evolved as significant contributors to New Zealand's progress in the fields of winemaking, fisheries, farming, fruit growing, catering and engineering contracting.

The political structure Marshal Tito set for Yugoslavia to be continued after his death in 1980 finally collapsed in 1990. Ineffectual divided leadership, hidden political agendas, corruption and economic chaos squandered the nation's hard-won unity. Rabid nationalism and religious divisions also



contributed to the nation's demise. Crisis after crisis led to individual components of the federation choosing their own paths. Declarations of independence were followed by bitter conflicts and warfare that tore the country apart. The road ahead was strewn with the dead and the maimed, and destruction as not seen in Europe for a half a century. The outcome was the spawning of several new sovereign states struggling to restructure themselves to complete in a world given over to globalisation.

Once again, as Tito's Yugoslavia fell apart the community in New Zealand, and indeed the whole world, reeled in shock. Once again, the majority had to accept that a new independent Croatia was their nation. For many brought up to believe in Yugoslavia, the sudden emergence of Croatia as an independent republic was hard to relate to. Others, in their zeal and enthusiasm, both the genuine and the newborn patriots, seized the banner of Croatianism as a sign of their unconditional support.

Within months the Yugoslav societies in New Zealand regrouped to reflect their divergent views, to be known as either 'Croatian' or 'Dalmatian'. Yugoslavia had ceased to exist.

New Zealand's Dalmatian Croats are notable for their passionate love of their old homeland in whatever shape or form it has survived. They have always rendered their people their moral, political and material support in their struggles for freedom – before and during the First World War, between the two wars, during the Second World War and more recently during the internal 'Homeland War' from which emerged the independent Croatian Republic. Their passionate love of their old homeland is matched by an equally passionate love of New Zealand, where their true loyalties now lie, where they and their descendants are interwoven within the fabric of New Zealand society and part of its history.



# Background History

THE history of Europe is full of dark pages, never-ending struggles between races, factions and religions, and against tides of barbarism that swept through the continent time and time again, wreaking death and destruction. Natural disasters, plagues and crop failures frequently wiped out whole populations.

Among the ceaseless waves of marauders that came from the eastern plains were the Slavic races. They radiated from beyond the Carpathian Mountains, from their gathering places in Poland and the Ukraine to reach as far as the Elbe River in Germany and to descend onto the rich Danubian Basin. They moved on



*Igrane.*



southwards to penetrate and envelop the mountainous Balkan Peninsula, overwhelming the Roman provinces and much of Greece. They absorbed the remnants of Illyrian civilisation, the scattered Roman colonies and the Bulgarian tribes. In Greece they themselves were absorbed.

In his biography, St Demetrius of Salonika describes the siege of Salonika in 617 AD and devotes part of his comments to the Slavs: 'Having first discovered how to outfit boats dug out of a single trunk, they armed them and sailed forth ravaging all Thessaly and the surrounding islands – Hellas, all Achaea, most of Illyricum and even the Cyclades.'

The Slav migrations from beyond the Carpathians extended over the 6th and 7th centuries. Tribal groups of similar language and custom settled in these empty lands and formed regional entities, consolidating their hold on the territories they now controlled. The far-ranging Croatian tribes broke through the Velebit Range from the north to gaze in wonder upon the Adriatic Sea in the mid 7th century. Gradually they occupied the entire coast, west of the Velebit and Dinaric Ranges and immediate inland areas, absorbing local populations and their settlements. This region was part of Roman Dalmatia named for the Illyrian 'Delmatae' conquered by the Romans in earlier centuries.

During the Roman centuries, Dalmatia stretched from the head of the Adriatic Sea to the Albanian regions, encompassing a thousand islands, indented by coves, deep harbours and eternally dominated by the harsh, terrible beauty of the limestone ranges which rose in places to heights of almost 2000 m. At the time of the Croatian invasion, the slopes and foothills reaching down to the sea and the islands offshore were thickly forested, but successive despoilers stripped these lands to provide timber for their galleys and sailing ships, to build their cities and towns and to furnish their palaces.

The Croats who occupied Roman Dalmatia were quick to adapt to their maritime surroundings. They became skilled shipbuilders and seafarers, fearless pirates, the scourge of neighbouring rivals. The earliest political force to emerge among them in the 7th and 8th centuries was the principality of Neretva that grew into a dominant power on the coast and

islands. A significant development at that time was the widening influence and power of the Venetian Republic at the head of the Adriatic Sea. It grew powerful enough by 992 AD to be granted the sole navigating rights and the policing of the Adriatic by Byzantium. To the south, Dubrovnik (Ragusa of old) was growing strong as a mercantile City State. Clashes between Croatian powers and Venice became inevitable.

For a brief period Dalmatia was part of the Croatian kingdom, united under King Tomislav and his successors from 925 to 930, but disunity and internal strife tore the kingdom apart. The Croatian nobles' solution was to invite the Hungarian King Koloman to accept the Croatian crown in 1102 AD. The ensuing close association with the dominant Hungarian kingdom lasted for 300 years when, in 1409, Ladislas of Naples, King of Hungary, sold to the Venetian Republic much of Dalmatia and rights to the remainder for 100,000 ducats. Except for the period 1499–1699 when part of Central Dalmatia was under Ottoman Turkish rule, Venetian control endured until 1797 when the once proud City State succumbed to the might of Napoleon.

Venice occupied the towns and ports, leaving the rural hamlets and smallholdings in the hands of the Croatian villagers. As a trading nation preoccupied with expanding its power and increasing its wealth, Venice showed little concern for her subjects and her possessions. Having stripped their own hinterland of forests, the Venetians proceeded to ravage the whole length of the occupied coastlands, gradually denuding the landscape, causing erosion and leaving the land bare and unproductive. As one learned Venetian Senator proclaimed, 'In proportion that Dalmatia is poor and a wilderness, so will her neighbours be less anxious to seize her.' Deliberate impoverishment forced the population of the province to become entirely dependent on Venice's goodwill and protection. The City State was at once their overlord, customer for their products and an ally in their long struggles with the Turks.

Today, Dalmatia with its forbidding infertile limestone landscape looks grimly over the Adriatic Sea. The sheer bluffs and lower slopes plunge sharply into the deep blues and jades of clear waters. The bare white ridges washed clean by autumn



rains, the cold blasts of winter and the fiery heat of the summer sun are etched in sharp contrast. Within the lower folds of these slopes are hidden green cleavages, gentle vales or 'polye' with their swathes of vegetation, where small towns and jewelled villages rest or cling to the rock outcrops or huddle like seabirds at the water's edge. The scene is echoed on the rugged offshore islands, which gird the coast like a defensive wall, and over the ranges in the Zagora districts, contrasting scattered clusters of villages and family hamlets cling close to available water and plots of soil.

Within this environment the villagers seemed fated to live a life of hardship and poverty. Primitive tools gave little chance of mastering nature. Life went on unchanging. Every fertile crevice was cultivated, every patch of soil laboriously protected by low stone walls or 'gomile' to provide protection from the winds and to prevent erosion.

Ante Kosovich, the Croatian gumfield's poet from Zaostrog, musing and dreaming in Waiharara in North Auckland, wrote in 1908:

Oh great peaks of the Dinaric Mountains, reflecting  
the sun's rays from the East, your crags and ridges tower  
high over storied Dalmatia, brooding silently over all else.  
Within your narrow clefts and open vales Dalmatia's  
towns and villages glow, washed by the wide Adriatic  
Sea evoking deep pride and heartfelt love.

Mountains guarding all, coast and islands and inland vales  
From times long forgotten.

(Trans. S.A.J.)

Geography, climate and soil conditions have for centuries led Croatian inhabitants of the province to cultivate vines, olives, fruits, nuts and herbs. The coastal people had the added advantage of fishing the seas and sailing their boats as traders. In the Zagora districts over the ranges, villagers around Vrgorac and Imotski were employed raising livestock and raising crops to supplement their subsistence farming.



Podgora.



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

As the Ottoman Turks advanced to Central Dalmatia in 1499, Catholic Croats fled before them to descend onto the coast and then onto the Venetian controlled islands – some even crossing the sea to eastern Italy. There was no choice – either submit to the Muslim Turks or surrender to Catholic Venice. From their reasonably secure base on the islands they fought her battles on land and sea until Dalmatia's coast and hinterland were liberated. Their sacrifices went unrecognised. Venice gave little credit to her Croatian subjects for their bravery and their loyalty. After the Turkish occupiers had been defeated and ejected by 1699, the recaptured lands were shared between Venetian nobles, prominent local merchants and the Church. In the process the

Church was delegated almost absolute authority over the lives of the destitute population – to judge, penalise and to reward. Men were forced into labour or military service and held in permanent readiness for the battles that were incessantly being fought. Virtual enslavement of the family through long absences or loss of their men changed women into beasts of burden. There was no escape, no justice or right of appeal and no Christian charity forthcoming. A fog of ignorance and superstition smothered the people and almost destroyed their will to survive. That they maintained any semblance of identity, their language and their customs was a miracle and a tribute to their passionate sense of nationhood and their faith in God.



## CHAPTER TWO

Dubrovnik – 'Ragusa'

# Dubrovnik – 'Ragusa'

THE city state of Dubrovnik began to develop as a Croatian trading centre during the 7th and 8th centuries A.D. For the next thousand years, until absorbed by Napoleon, the

city steered a precarious but carefully plotted course among rival, more powerful neighbours. Her ships, 'the Argosys', traded throughout the Mediterranean and Black Seas, often



*Dubrovnik.*



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

challenging Venice and Genoa. Her agents ventured into unknown lands throughout the Ottoman Empire as far as Persia to bring goods to her warehouses.

Dubrovnik ruling classes developed a culture and tradition that served as a beacon for the less fortunate Slavs beyond her frontiers. They cultivated the arts, architecture, literature and music, accepting the influence of the Renaissance without sacrificing their Croatian language, traditions and Catholic faith. The greatness of the city state's leading citizens is legendary. It flourished while in other parts of Dalmatia only the Glagolithic Liturgy stood between the Croatian people and complete Italianisation. Dubrovnik gloried in her independence, her enlightenment and freedom, aptly expressed in an excerpt from the play *Dubrava* by Dživo Frano Gundulić (1589–1628).

Oh glorious, oh dear, oh sweet freedom,  
Gift and rich treasure from God in heaven  
Source of truth born in our glory,  
Lone adornment of Dubrovnik.  
Not silver, nor gold, nor the lives of all mankind  
Can pay for your crystal pure beauty.  
(Trans. S.A.J.)

By the end of the 16th century Dubrovnik had created one of the largest merchant marines in Europe. Her sea captains and mariners served on the ships of many states – Spain and Italy in particular. Dubrovnik's maritime activities created awareness of other lands, of opportunities, of freedom, among all Croatian seafarers who were encouraged by the city's enterprise and spirit.

After Napoleon Bonaparte seized the Republic of Venice in 1797, pressure was gradually applied to Dubrovnik. In 1806 an appeal was made to her allies in a desperate attempt to remain independent, but the die had already been cast.

In 1808, by a directive of Napoleon's envoy, Marshal Marmont, the Republic of Ragusa (Dubrovnik) was abolished. Her territories were placed under the French administration of Dalmatia and Marmont was appointed Duke of Dalmatia. The senate accepted the directive under protest. Henceforth Dubrovnik became part eventually of the political sphere of Croatia.



# Exit Venice – enter France

**D**URING the 18th century the Republic of Venice gradually declined. The aristocratic government had drifted into a morass of uncertainty, challenged on all sides, her territories diminished and prospects undermined by the growth of trans-Atlantic trade. In the event Napoleon seized Venice and its Adriatic possessions – Istria, the Croatian Littoral, Dalmatia and the islands in 1797. By arrangement, Austria, Napoleon's ally, moved in to occupy these lands. However, France and Austria fell out and Austria was soundly defeated at the Battle of Austerlitz in 1805, leaving the French to assume control. The French found the Croatian provinces to be a political and economic vacuum, with a populace impoverished, and fearful of French intentions, expecting a new tyranny to be imposed.

Centuries of neglect, servitude, wars, oppression and pestilence had created a state of ignorance and wretchedness. The French administration moved with purpose and speed on plans to eliminate backwardness and to encourage trade. New laws were proclaimed granting equality for all citizens and all languages. Roads were laid, swamps drained, rivers controlled and a postal service started. The greater part of Slovenia, Istria, the Croatian Littoral and hinterland, Dalmatia and Dubrovnik were joined to become the Illyrian provinces, a part of Napoleon's French Empire. The Croats and Slovenes, their dignity somewhat restored, began to enjoy the revival of their national aspirations. In Dalmatia plans for a union with Croatia proper were debated, but it was not to be. The dream was dashed with the defeat of Napoleon in 1815. In terms of the Congress of Vienna that dismantled Napoleon's 'Empire', Austria was granted the French Illyrian provinces

which were now consigned to the status of a backwater.

Austria set about destroying any sense of nationalism that had begun to flourish under the French and to further drive home her antagonism of things Slavic. The Italian minority and Italian language were favoured at the expense of the indigenous Croatian population, further deepening mistrust and hatred between Slav and Italian. Decades of repression followed. The Croats' desperate position drove many to seek employment on the ships of maritime nations in the hope of helping their families suffering abject poverty. They might have survived better under Ottoman control than under Christian Austria.

The mid 19th century saw a measure of economic progress centred mainly on urban activities, shipbuilding, coastal trade, small business and crafts. The rural villagers continued on their path of self-sufficiency, but were encouraged to breed livestock, increase wine and olive oil production and to fish the seas commercially. Progress, however, was limited and insufficient to overcome the historical backlog of poverty, ignorance and suffering.

The 19th century was a momentous period in human history. In the wake of the French Revolution in 1789 and the conquests of the Napoleonic era, the populations of Europe began to free themselves from the shackles of corrupt, decadent dynasties. The hot breath of nationalism and the search for identity led to the shaping of new groupings of peoples of common race and heritage. Following the 1848 nationalist upheavals throughout Europe, the remnants of serfdom and tenant farming were abolished in most Croatian regions but not to the common



advantage of the uneducated masses. Power and influence remained in the hands of the privileged, the aristocracy, the great landowners and higher clergy. But from the ranks of the underprivileged emerged patriots, priests and laypeople who gave meaning and form to Croatian national aspirations. They also gave meaning to the hopes of union between Dalmatia and Croatia proper within the fold of Austria's empire. In 1861 the Croatian Sabor (assembly) debated how Croatia might best be served at parliamentary level in Vienna. Some pressed for autonomy within the Empire, others preached total independence.

Such ideals were checked by Austria's absolutist policies. In 1867 under pressure from the fractious Hungarians, the Dual Monarchy, Austria-Hungary, was created within which the provinces of Istria and Dalmatia remained under Vienna's direct rule while Croatia was subject to Budapest. The Diets of both Istria and Dalmatia were granted direct representation in Austria's parliament with no direct liaison permitted with the Croatian assembly in Zagreb. It was an unhappy arrangement that smouldered with dissatisfaction and suspicion, breeding distrust and insecurity. Thwarted on all sides by Austria-Hungary's negativity and hard headedness, Croatian attitudes in the provinces bowed in despair. Many found solace and hope in newborn Pan-Slavism and the ideal of south Slav unification

being propagated by a number of intellectuals and patriots. For a long time yet their dreams would remain locked into a system over which they had little influence.

In 1866 a short poem in *Glas Hrvatsko Slovinsko* expressed Dalmatia's frustration:

Dalmatia, that priceless jewel adorning  
The South Slav dominion lies forgotten  
And estranged on the lifeless pebbles of the Adriatic shore,  
Where once she proudly inspired the Slavic South.  
Now in suffering and poverty, bent under the weight of her  
Denuded mountains, severed from her blood ties with  
Croatia and Bosnia, she lies stifled after countless years  
Under the heavy yoke of foreign masters.

(Trans. S.A.J.)

Dalmatia remained Croatian under both Venetian and Austrian rule. Never was the yearning for unity with Croatia dampened, nor did they lose their cultural and national identity. Dalmatia even participated in attempts to standardise the Croatian language, and gave birth to much of Croatia's literature. In the 19th century it was in Dalmatia that the Croatian revival originated, ushering in a period of nationalism and inspiration.



# Migrations

THE Croatian nation disintegrated under the impact of the Turkish invasions of the 15th and 16th centuries. Whole populations were dispersed, displaced or enslaved. In fear of the Ottoman Turks, hundreds of thousands moved off their lands to settle in parts of Hungary, Austria, Slovakia and the Dalmatian coast and its islands. To a lesser degree large numbers crossed the Adriatic Sea to the Italian provinces of Apulia, Marche and Abruzzi: some historians estimate that 1,600,000 were forced or chose to abandon their lands in search of security and freedom. The figure is probably inflated, considering the confused state of affairs at the time.

Christian Venice served the coastal Croatians no better. Charity, compassion and honesty were not shared with its downtrodden subjects. In control of their lands, Venice consumed their resources to power her expansion. Men were forced into slavery to man her galleys in peace and war. Large bodies of men, artisans, shipbuilders and mariners were taken into service. A Venetian report of the period noted that 180 boatbuilders and their families were employed in the Arsenale, the great shipyard in Venice as favoured migrants. The peak period spanned 1525 to 1550. From Korčula and Vis islands, groups of skilled masons arrived to work on the mansions of the wealthy. The numbers were large enough to create the settlements of San Marco and Castello that developed as Dalmatian suburbs with their own church and school (Scuola degli Schiavoni). From the Dalmatian towns, Italian and Croatian merchants shipped their produce, cloth, hides, wax and timber to the city state. The seaport promenade alongside the Doges' Palace thus came to be known as the 'Riva degli Schiavoni' (the seafront of the Slavs).

When both Venice and Dubrovnik fell to Napoleon, large numbers of Croatian mariners were left high and dry. Reluctant to return to their defeated and shamed home ports, they joined the merchant fleets and naval forces of many nations. The demands of the Spanish trade with Central and South America attracted large numbers from the Dubrovnik fleets. Historic ties with Spain were forged by a commercial treaty in 1507 and reinforced by the presence of 'Ragusan Argosys' (ships of Dubrovnik) in the Spanish Armada that attempted to invade England in 1588.

There is evidence that a number of these mariners deserted their vessels in several locations, to establish footholds that grew into small settlements. To the north, similar groups settled on the eastern harbours and inlets of the United States. It is recorded that during the American Revolution (1763–88) over 7000 Venetians (probably Croatians) were engaged. One hundred years later during the American Civil War (1861–65) six companies of Dalmatians and Montenegrins fought on the Confederate side.

In the year 1848 gold was discovered in California, the same year that the state was ceded to the United States by Mexico. Overnight San Francisco became a boomtown, attracting the good and the bad from around the world. A large number of Croatians established themselves in the town, servicing the population with eating houses, bars, boarding houses and barber shops – much as happened in New Zealand in later years. The numbers prompted Nikola Banovic from Zaoztrog to promote the formation of the Slavonian Illyric Mutual Benefit Society in 1858. The title 'Slavonian' was in common usage,



reflecting trends towards Pan-Slavism in the 'old country'.

It was inevitable that when gold was discovered in Australia in 1851 and New Zealand in 1861 and 1864, prospectors would venture south across the Pacific Ocean. In their ranks came the 'Slavonians'. The names of many appear listed in New Zealand's archives as mariners, miners and settlers. Their descendants are well assimilated. Elsewhere in this story the reader will find how these men and their families made connections within the kauri gum industry.

According to Mary Stenning (née Alagich), a Sydney historian, there were many individual arrivals ahead of the gold rushes in Australia – sailors deserting their ships, adventurers and settlers whose names she has traced. Mary Stenning mentioned the whaler *Rambler* working between New South Wales and

New Zealand with Croatian crewmen, John Olivera and John Lovorovich. The many who followed the earliest arrivals came from Trieste, the Istrian ports and Dubrovnik. Commonly, names were modified or anglicised to avoid detection by Austrian authorities – thus their true identities were lost to their descendants.

In 1864, when gold was discovered in the Westland province, large numbers of miners of all races deserted the Australian fields that were becoming less productive. Many of the Croatian pioneers and itinerants of that period were researched some years ago by Dr Andrew Trlin for his groundbreaking history, *Now Respected, Once Despised* (1979). Their names are still to be found among descendants of those early arrivals.



## CHAPTER FIVE

# First contact with New Zealand: the Austrian frigate *Novara*

First contact  
with New Zealand:  
the Austrian frigate *Novara*

**A**N episode in New Zealand's history that some have claimed was the key to Croatian migrations from the Eastern Adriatic seaboard was the visit of the Austrian Naval frigate *Novara* between 22 December 1858 and 8 January 1859. The frigate was completing the Imperial Austrian Expedition of Circumnavigation over a period of three years, starting out of Trieste on 30 April 1857.

The Expedition was under the command of Commodore Wüllerstorff-Urbair and the *Novara* was under Commandant Poeck, who had visited New Zealand on the ship *Elizabeth* three years previously. One of the objects of the voyage was to provide experience for the ship's officers, cadets and sailors.

POSADA AUSTRIJSKE RATNE FREGATE "NOVARA"		
Stanje na dan 30. travnja 1857. s promjenama nastalim tokom putovanja		
Zapovjednik ekspedicije: Bernard de Wüllerstorff - Urbair.		
NB. Od ostalih članova posade prenosim ovdje samo one koji bi prema prezimenu mogli biti našinci.		
Kadeti: Andrija grof Borelli.		
Vođa palube: Cergonja Mato. - Umro u Aucklandu 1. I 1859.		
Mornar	I raz.	: Zabišković Ivan.
"	"	: Draganović Tomo.
"	"	: De Marinković Miho.
"	"	: Monara Mato.
"	"	: Tišac Ivan.
"	"	: Perišić Lujo.
"	"	: Škarpac Antun.
"	II "	: Susan Frano.
"	"	: Ivanović Ivan.
"	"	: Grdinić Bartul.
"	"	: Dakum Lovro.
"	"	: Kremenčić Josip.
"	"	: Pahljčić Ivan.
"	"	: Čar Mato.
"	"	: Bradčić Ivan. - Desertirao u Rio de Janeiro 6. VIII.
"	"	: Karavanić Đorđe.
"	"	: Milok Ivan.
"	"	: Perić Frano.
"	"	: Fabris Lovro Vicko.
"	"	: Slavčić Frano.
"	"	: Komarčić Đorđe.

Some Croatian members of the crew of the 'Novara'.

SOURCE, ZAGREB



The Austrian Naval Frigate, 'Novara'.

SOURCE, D.G.H.S.



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

On board were 315 crew, 30 officers and seven scientists, the last under the direction of Dr Ferdinand von Hochstetter, a German geologist. Of the ship's complement, 175 were Croatians.



Deck hands on the 'Novara', dancing.

Sir George Grey, once Governor and later Prime Minister of New Zealand, met the *Novara* at Cape Town as Governor of Cape Colony 1854–61 and urged the Expedition to visit New Zealand. The New Zealand Government took the opportunity to affirm Grey's suggestion by requesting a geological survey of the Drury coalfields south of Auckland. Upon their arrival, Hochstetter collected his team and carried out the survey. His report so impressed the colonial government that he was directed to complete mineral, geological and agricultural surveys of both the Auckland and Nelson provinces. As he noted at the time: 'I was placed in such a position that I could fully devote myself for the space of nine months to the exploration of one of the most remarkable countries in the world.'

Until the author examined a copy of the ship's complement, it was believed that deserters from the *Novara* led to the foundation of the Croatian colony in New Zealand. This proved to be incorrect. Desertions did occur in other ports, however: six in Shanghai, five in Rio de Janeiro, one in Hong Kong and one in Singapore. No one deserted in Sydney or Auckland. Four deaths were recorded at sea; one of these was a sailor, Mato Cergonja, who died of heart failure in Auckland on 1 January 1859 and was buried in the Grafton Gully Catholic cemetery. Mato's tragic visit to these shores is commemorated by a bronze plaque in the cemetery, arranged by the author in 1979.

The newspaper *New Zealander* of the day reported:

'On Monday, January 3rd [1859] the boatswain of the frigate *Novara* who died on Saturday January 1st, having received the last sacraments of the Church and all the consolations of religion, was interred in the Catholic cemetery. Two of the clergy of St Patrick's Cathedral, the chaplain of the frigate and six sanctuary pupils of the Cathedral composed the clergy. The Commodore, officers, the usual part of musicians and a large number of sergeants and privates of the frigate accompanied the deceased to the burial ground.

An earlier shipboard death was that of Djordj (George) Radić, sailor, third class, who died of dysentery near Stewart Island on 14 September 1858 and was buried at sea.

There is no record of the crew being greeted by compatriots in New Zealand at the time.

On their return to their towns and villages, the 175 Croatians in the ship's complement of 352, no doubt spread news of Australia and New Zealand among friends and relatives – perhaps influencing others to seek out these lands during the gold rushes.

The *New Zealand Times* of 27 March 1907 had this to say:

The Austrian Scientific Expedition on the frigate *Novara* in 1858 may possibly have been the originating incident in the immigration, but it was not until the 1870s that the first Austrian settlers appeared in New Zealand, attracted, it is said, by accounts given by Austrian sailors who had visited these parts.



John Totich MBE, an early settler and former Royal Yugoslav Consul, writing on the subject, added:

The Austrian frigate *Novara* visited New Zealand and on board were a number of young Dalmatian reservists serving their time in the Austrian navy. On their return to their homes they were full of praise for New Zealand and the way New Zealanders treated them.

*Slobodna Dalmacija* (Free Dalmatia), a newspaper published in Split, Croatia, noted in an article in 1982 that the *Novara* expedition was 'the first time so many of our men had sailed together around the world'.

Other Austrian naval vessels visiting New Zealand with substantial Croatian crews were the

<i>Elizabeth</i>	1857
<i>Heligoland</i>	1879
<i>Saida</i>	1885, 1891, 1893
<i>Panther</i>	1905

Three merchant ships have also been identified.

1882	<i>Tri Sina</i> (Three Sons), owned by the Turkovic family of Kraljevice.
1889	<i>Teresa Cosulich</i> , owned by the Cosulich family of Mali Losinj.
1892	<i>Beechdale</i> , owned by Henrik Jazbica of Trieste.

**Postscript:** The frigate *Novara* departed from Auckland on 8 January 1859 with two Maori crew members – Wiremu Toe-Toe Tumohe and Te Hemera Rerehau Paraone. They disembarked in Trieste in September 1859 and went on to Vienna where they were placed in the State Printing House to be trained in the printing business. On Hochstetter's return to Vienna in May 1860 it was arranged that the two Maori visitors be presented to the Emperor Franz Josef, who cordially received them. As the time to leave approached, the Archduke Maximilian, brother of the Emperor, asked them what they would like to take with them. They chose a printing press. En route to New Zealand they visited England where they were presented to Queen Victoria. They finally reached home after a two-year absence.

The press was used to publish a Maori language newspaper for the King movement (Kingitanga). In more recent times it has been rescued and housed in the Te Awamutu Museum.

First contact  
with New Zealand:  
the Austrian frigate *Novara*



# New Zealand background – early period

**A**BEL Tasman's fleeting visit to New Zealand's shores in 1642 remained a non-event until 1769 when Captain James Cook, the English explorer, rediscovered the land. He wrote glowing reports of the potential wealth in seals, flax and timber. The subsequent trade that grew in these commodities and the demands of pioneering settlers led to Britain's decision to incorporate New Zealand as a colony of the expanding British Empire in 1840.

Once attached to the 'motherland', organised groups of immigrants ventured this far to settle and ultimately to create the 'Britain of the South Seas'. The bonds of race, sentiment and mutual trade with the motherland were powerful factors in the creation of a new nation shared with the indigenous Maori people via the Treaty of Waitangi signed in 1840.

When the Austrian naval frigate *Novara* arrived for a brief scientific visit in 1858–59, the European population was almost 69,000. It took the gold rushes in Otago, 1861, Westland, 1864 to 1867, and Thames, 1867–69, to stimulate new waves of migrants from overseas. By 1867 the population of New Zealand numbered 217,000. Among these arrivals were Italians, Slavs, Greeks and Chinese. The Slavs were almost exclusively Croatians from the Austrian provinces of Dalmatia, Istria and Croatia proper on the Adriatic coast.

In spite of the wealth in gold and the gradual conversion of large areas of land for production by the slash and burn process, the century was troubled by the effects of wars with the Maori and the unstable markets for wool, wheat and other products. It took a man of vision, Julius Vogel, to foresee the need for investment in public works – roads and railways, telegraphic

services and buildings. In 1870 his progressive policies were adopted, linked with an enlightened immigration policy to service and implement his programmes. Danes, Norwegians, Italians and Germans came in force. Unfortunately, by 1879, New Zealand faced another depression that endured until 1896. The period witnessed a gradual exodus of immigrants, reducing gains in population dramatically. The Croatians of that era, scattered largely throughout the South Island of New Zealand and less in the north, similarly, returned to their lands of origin, New South Wales and California. A search of the naturalisation records confirms their movement to join more established Slav colonies overseas.

In 1890 the Liberal Party led by John Ballance came into power. His death two years later allowed the flamboyant Richard Seddon, 'King Dick', to assume the premiership. A tough, hard-hitting gold miner of old, he seized the opportunity to promote land settlement through cheap loans and to stimulate trade. The 1890s period was one of rabid nationalism and concern for protecting the purity of the British races. Latins, Slavs and Greeks were not regarded as being of equal status and intellect. The Chinese were cruelly victimised and sidelined by harsh political measures, which weren't lifted until 1944. The tide of jingoism, the patriotism for the mother country, peaked during the Boer War (1899–1901) when New Zealanders and other Empire loyalists flooded to the colours to fight and ultimately to defeat the Boers in South Africa. At the helm of the state Seddon promoted what became recognised as an emotional brand of imperialism. During those same years 1898 to 1902, the Dalmatian Croats on the northern gumfields, numbering over 2000 males,



came under scrutiny and two Acts of Parliament directly affected them. The Kauri Gum Industry Act 1899 and the Immigration Act 1900 restricted their access to Crown Lands and restricted their further migration to New Zealand.

The popular belief that the British Empire was insuperable blinded the New Zealand populace to the existence of other peoples and other cultures. This belief expressed in many ways by the media of the day, parliamentary debates, the enactment of laws and lesser actions, left non-British cast in the mould of second-class citizens, unwelcome intruders. Historian Guy H. Schofield, writing in the *Auckland Star* on 20 April 1907, noted that American experience had proved that Southern Europeans in particular were socially unfit and temperamentally unsuited for absorption by Teutonic nations (i.e. New Zealand): 'Italians, Greeks and Slavs had little inherent respect for the law and lacked mental discipline.' Schofield noted that when New Zealand looked outside Teutonic nations, the results were disastrous.

Italians, he singled out. In 1876, there were 297 Italians in New Zealand, introduced under Vogel's policy. They were sent to Jacksons Bay in South Westland, settled on the Okura River and given work on the Haast Road over the Southern Alps. They proved unfit for work under such severe conditions and further assisted immigration of Italians ceased. The settlement dissolved, some left for Australia and Italy, others settled around Wellington City – in fact very few remained. Schofield also condemned the Greeks because they took no part in public life and did not mix with other races. What did they expect? They would hardly have been encouraged in view of the open

antagonism they and other foreign nationalities were subjected to.

In 1893, about a year after the Austrian (Croatian) presence in Northland was agitating the colonists, the journal *Observer* cautioned British parents not to allow their daughters to marry Slavs (Croatians) for fear of producing a 'mongrel race' – overlooking the fact the colonists were already well intermingled with Maori and other races. Schofield, however, did change his tune later when he observed that Croatians – Dalmatians – had the characteristics that made the Scots and Norwegians good settlers.

The *New Zealand Herald* through the 1890s showed reasonable tolerance until an editorial in 1900 introduced a racial argument against Croatian migrants, suggesting that they might swamp the Teutonic race as they were doing in the United States. This was an incredible suggestion in view of the small number of them (about 2000) in New Zealand at the time. The Croatian community were normally quiet and law-abiding, but if disturbances occurred the press gave great prominence if they were involved. Reports of petty crimes, suspicions of disloyalty or family conflicts were exaggerated beyond reason. Anti-Croatian feelings reached three peaks: 1893, 1898–1902, and 1914–19 (the war years). The first peak was politically contrived prior to an election. The second was due to genuine concern with the numbers flooding into the country (no mention was made of those leaving). Press comments, letters to the editor and parliamentary debates pushed Government to take positive action as already noted. The third peak was the result of tensions created by the war (1914–19), dealt with elsewhere.

New Zealand background  
– early period



## Early pioneers – 19th century

**A**NDREW D. Trlin, PhD, formerly Associate Professor at Massey University, Palmerston North, broke considerable ground in his 1979 publication *Now Respected, Once Despised* a study about 'Dalmatian' settlement in New Zealand. His thorough research via the naturalisation records (dating from 1843) produced the names of 78 pre-1884 arrivals, 24 of which were in the North Island. The list included pioneers whom the author has researched as examples of loners who drifted into New Zealand in its formative years. They include Jerome Bakotich, Nikola Bassi, Thomas Carina, Lui Kinkela, Pavel Lupis, Nicolo Radove, Antonio Sarich, Nikola Sentch, Pietro Tomanovich, and Mariano Vella.

The author has extended Andrew Trlin's research to uncover a further 35 names – there were obviously others who modified their names or who 'went bush', never to be identified. Forty per cent came from the seaports of Trieste and Rijeka, and adjacent villages and islands. Mali Lošinj figures prominently. These origins are comparable with Australia. A further 41 per cent came from Pelješac Peninsula and the islands of Brač, Hvar, Korčula and Vis, and 17 per cent from Dubrovnik and Boka Kotorska. The balance came from isolated locations.

It has been difficult to find detailed information on most of the above mentioned. Descendants confirm that there was a general reticence to pass on their Croatian origins, preferring to identify themselves as 'Austrian' nationals – understandable where young lads went to sea on Austrian vessels or continued service in the Austrian navy. To get on in the world one had to speak German or Italian. The Croatian language, in fact, wasn't officially acknowledged until 1912. In New Zealand there was

contact between a number of fellow Croatians in the goldfield settlements, particularly in Westland. Brief case histories indicate this.

### Nicolo (Nikola) Radove (1834–88)

Nicolo left his native village on the Istrian Peninsula of Croatia as a cabin boy on a Sicilian coastal ship. He was raised in those early years in a region strongly influenced by the dominant Italian culture via several centuries of Venetian occupation. The Slavic Croatians who shared these lands thus spoke a mixed Italian-Croatian dialect. A letter from Vidal Burich to Nikola Sentch in New Zealand in 1864 is proof of that (see Sentch below). Radove himself was illiterate, in common with the vast majority.

Nicolo Radove saw service in the British navy and was one of the first in a landing party to scale the walls of a fortress during the siege of Sevastopol (Sebastopol) in 1854. He was wounded, then nursed back to health in one of the field hospitals conducted by the famed Florence Nightingale. During subsequent years he served as a seaman on clipper ships, before testing his luck on the Australian goldfields. He then moved on to New Zealand in 1860.

In New Zealand, Radove became known as 'Big Mick' because of his powerful physique. He was a temperate, thrifty, hard-working man with an adventurous spirit. For some years he worked on a number of stations (large farms) as a musterer and drover in the fabled Mackenzie country of the South Island. He combined his strenuous occupation with his equally strenuous exploration of the Southern Alps. It was an addiction that brought him into the limelight. The story has been told by Sir Julius von Haast, geologist and explorer on one of his



expeditions in the Alps, exclaiming to his surveyor, 'We are now higher than any man has ever been.' Hardly had he spoken when from a ridge above them a voice shouted, 'Hey, by crikey, you down there – you not disturb my sheep.' On another occasion the Governor-General, Sir George Bowen, arrived at Radove's Birch Hill Station with a Vice-Regal party in 1873. Acting as their guide Nicolo took them up to Mt Sebastopol and on to the Hooker and Tasman Glaciers.

George Hodgkinson acquired Birch Hill Station in 1865 to graze cattle in the charge of station hands and, after this, the impressive Radove took over management. After Hodgkinson's death in 1871, Radove's name was inscribed as owner. He invested his savings in Birch Hill. After three years, having done well through his industry and thriftiness, he sold out.

In 1875, the restless Radove bought Mistake Station, consisting of 250,000 acres (100,000 ha) complete with a flock of sheep, all for £3000. By 1876 all other runs between Cass and Godley were transferred to him. At about this time Nicolo married Irishwoman Ellen Fleming. No children survived them. A close neighbour, John McGregor, noted in his diary at the time that Radove's close friends seem to have been Italian speaking, which was not regarded favourably. This indicates that a close relationship existed between him and other immigrants from northern Croatian ports who had settled in the South Island. Like him they were probably former seafarers.

In 1879, tragedy struck as New Zealand went into depression. Five years later in the spring of 1884, heavy snows caused colossal losses of sheep and lambs. Several struggling run-holders walked off their lands. Radove himself sank deeper into debt and the mortgagee sold off his lands in 1885 to John, Edmund and Robert Rutherford, without giving Radove proper notice or the opportunity to refinance. Radove took his grievance to the Supreme Court claiming £2000 damages for alleged wrongful seizure of his lands by the mortgagee. His action failed. An injustice had been done and the devastated and impoverished Nicolo ended up employed at the Hermitage, Mount Cook, with his wife. They finally moved to Timaru where he died in 1888 aged 54 years.

He received the recognition he deserved in the naming of Mt Radove (2431 m) in the Hall Range, and nearby Zora (Dawn) Glacier and Zora Creek.

### Peter Tomanovich (1834–1920)

Peter (Pietro) Tomanovich, a Croatian by birth, from a village in Boka Kotorska, arrived in Gibbston in late 1863 in search of gold. At first he mined for some years across the river, where the low flat opposite Deep Creek is still known as Peter's Flat. He built a small house of puddle mud and stone on a one-acre section halfway down the track between the school and the river. He planted a large orchard, kept bees, mined for gold, and was the local pork butcher.



*Pietro Tomanovich's cottage, 1994 – with Ivan Martinovich.*  
PHOTO, DICK MARTINOVICH

He has left his mark, for most of the old-established fruit trees in Gibbston were grafted by him. Some very good examples of his experimental grafting were to be found in Charles Perriam's orchard on the Gibbston back road, where three varieties of apricots were grafted onto each tree. Variety is the word to describe his own orchard, in which he planted fig, mulberry, apple, pear, peach, cherry, almond and walnut trees, thus ensuring a long fruiting season. He kept about 80 hives scattered throughout his orchard, and placed others strategically by the front gate. The bees pollinated the fruit trees, and the honey gave him additional income (along with

### Early pioneers – 19th century



*Pietro Tomanovich, goldminer  
Arrowtown area. b. Boka Kotorska.*



a rather powerful honey mead), but one of their main purposes was to deter inquisitive visitors and casual thieves, for Peter lived alone and often kept gold in his house. Croatian peasantry had long used bees in this way as a defence against roaming bandits, as John Bell Thomson mentioned in an *Otago Daily Times* article (28 December 1868): 'Among Peter's reminiscences of his homeland was a story of Austrian bandits... The village defence against these raids was to tip over the beehives around the cottages. When the bees started stinging the horses, the raiders' activities came to an abrupt end.'

C.R. Scott recalls:

Peter's beehives were just boxes which he made himself – no frames, just one or two sticks across the middle of the box for the bees to start their comb on. When the honey was taken, the bees were killed. In the large hives, which had built up over the years, the comb was quite brown and the honey dark. The comb honey which we got from Peter was taken from one-year-old hives.

A common joke in the district was that Peter strained his liquid honey through the legs of old underpants: the fact was, Scott says, that fresh muslin was bought for this purpose every year – 'and I've seen it'. About the time of the First World War, new regulations required beekeepers to have patent or framed boxes, and to stop killing bees when taking honey. The story goes that when an inspector on a surprise visit told him his hives were below the required standard, Peter retorted that he had had the hives for many years and, if he had to do anything to them, 'he'd bury the buggers'. The Queenstown stock inspector turned a blind eye on Peter's last two or three years as an apiarist.

He kept mining until he was quite old, usually working with his neighbour, Hugh Harvey. Rather than mine their own ground, they would cross the Kawarau by the chair at Harvey's beach and walk downstream to Nevis Bluff to work. They must have got a good prospect there, and took water from Peter's Creek (near the Eastburn/Waitiri boundary), but the country was too unstable to run water, and operations were limited.

Tomanovich died about 1920 and is buried in a simple grave in Arrowtown. 'The last I remember of him,' C.R. Scott recalled, 'he was sitting in his homemade chair beside the open fire, smoking his long-stemmed pipe. It must have been 10 or 12 inches long, and seemed to be resting on his knees. He was quite wheezy, and was soon afterward taken to Frankton Hospital, where he died.' He was thought to have had little material wealth, but when his belongings were sorted, a tobacco tin was found containing 70 gold sovereigns – a substantial amount of cash for anyone to possess in those days.

The reports of this money made many people rather inquisitive about the cottage, and to deter them, Gerald Enright rigged up a 'Ghost of Peter' and hung it in the middle of the hut facing the window. 'My cousin and I were among those who peered through the dirty, smoky window,' Scott recalled, 'and I don't mind admitting we took off in a hurry.'

Others subsequently lived in the little house from time to time. Mr and Mrs Goodlet were there from 1932 to 1935.

Gerald Enright, a part owner, camped there for a time and made some memorable parsnip wine. A notable character that followed was Joe Kirby, a wool-classer by trade, and quite the opposite from the meticulous Peter Tomanovich. He'd let the hens roost inside with him, and his old tub of rainwater did service to slake the thirst of his animals, as well as provide water for the billy: not many callers would accept a cup of tea from him.

Joe greatly enjoyed any social gathering and is still remembered for his recitations of Banjo Paterson, especially 'The Bush Christening' and 'The Man from Snowy River'. Every now and again he would go on a drinking spree. Eric Sanders remembers lending Joe his bicycle to go into Arrowtown for the day, and 'it was a week before I saw it again'.

Joe has gone now, like Peter Tomanovich before him, but the little house still stands on the plateau above the river, surrounded by magnificent fruit trees, its sturdy walls full of memories.

(Reproduced from *The Gibbston's Story*, Central Otago by Anne Cook, 1985 – with her permission.)



## Mariano Vella (1855–1929)

Mariano Vella (originally spelt Vela), a native of the village of Podgora, was a significant early immigrant – a seafarer, fisherman and farmer – who arrived in New Zealand in 1878. He began fishing out of Paremata north of Wellington. In 1886, well settled and reasonably prosperous, he married Mary Ida Furze and in that year also he took up the sublease of Mana Island about 8 km off the coast. Drawing on the advice of others he learnt about sheep farming, creating in time a successful venture that he managed for many years.

Three children were born to Mariano and Mary – Andrew, Ida and William. In 1889, tragedy struck the family when Mary died suddenly. Five years later Mariano returned to Dalmatia, and journeyed to Mali Lošinj, an important shipping centre to the north off the Croatian coast. There he married his second wife, Elizabeth Catherine Tarabochia, and within days they headed back to New Zealand. Their long return journey was marred by disaster, when their ship, the *Wairarapa* was wrecked on Great Barrier Island in 1894 with the loss of 121 lives. The Vellas succeeded in reaching shore and soon returned to Paremata and the farming of Mana Island. Mariano continued to fish at Paremata to supplement their income as the sheep farm developed, but he regularly sailed out to manage the property.

The union between Mariano and Elizabeth generated four children – Matteo, Giovanni, Antonia and Mariano Jnr. The older sons by his first marriage, Andrew and William, took over the management of the property in 1909 on Mariano's retirement. Meanwhile he had invited a brother Peter and cousin Ivan (John) to work with him at Paremata in the 1890s, both of whom settled in New Zealand and later went their own ways. Mana Island continued to be managed by family members until 1929, the year that Mariano died, when the lease was transferred to Andrew who kept the property going until 1951. After his death that year the property was passed to others in 1953.

Mariano Vella was a settler who did much for his compatriots at a political level. As evidence of this a letter written by Rado Klarić, a gumdigger, to Pučki list in Split (28.8.1900) notes:

A number of Dalmatians left home for New Zealand in spite of warnings that they would not be allowed to land. They reached Sydney and were stopped. What could they do with no money and ignorant of the English language. Those with relatives in New Zealand were lucky because they could depend on their support. Ten or twelve managed somehow to get to Auckland but were forced to sail on to Wellington where they were imprisoned. They were cross-examined as to why they came – did they not know the law etc. Fortunately for them Mariano Vella, an old resident in the Wellington area, worked hard and used his influence to have them released. (Trans. S.A.J.)



*Marino Vella's woolshed, Mana Island.*

COURTESY OF GEOFFREY THORNTON

In 1900, in another case the *SS Waihara* was held in Sydney for three days with 15 intending Dalmatian immigrants on board. The ship was allowed to proceed to Wellington where Mariano Vella had arranged for the Prime Minister, Richard Seddon, to board the ship and talk to the men through him as interpreter. The men had to agree not to go north and to pay a £10 deposit as security. Mariano then took them ashore, arranged accommodation and jobs for several of the men. Mihovil Dominic (Mick) Vitali from Sućuraj, for example, fished for a period with Mariano's brother-in-law, but it was not long before the group found their way north to join relatives.

Mariano's brother-in-law referred to was probably Thomas Tarabochia, a labourer, who became a naturalised British subject in Wellington in 1890. Another probable relative was Antonio Tarabochia, a miner, naturalised at Foxes, West Coast, in 1902.

## Early pioneers – 19th century



*Mariano Vella – Plimmerton and  
Mana Island.*

SOURCE, FAMILY



### Nicholas Sentch (1839–1928) – settler

This immigrant could be described as a link with the later gumdigging arrivals in the Auckland Province. His true name was Pavao Doričić (Dorichich), one of seven children, born in the village of Kostrena Sv. Lucija, Croatia, located a few kilometres south of Rijeka (Fiume of old), a part of Hungary (1867–1918) and the main seaport serving Hungary and Hungarian controlled Croatia at that time. He was naturalised in 1902 in Waipu.

At the ripe age of 21, Pavao Dorichich left home and family to become a seaman. He spent some time in the India trade and came to New Zealand in 1864 on the ship *Calcutta* which he joined in Rangoon, Burma (modern Myanmar). The same ship transported an infantry regiment to Auckland to fight in the New Zealand Wars.



*Nikola Sentch (seated), son Alex and child.*

SOURCE, FAMILY



*Nikola Sentch with compatriots – boarding house, Waipu, 1905.*

SOURCE, FAMILY

About this time he changed his name to Nicolas Sentch – at times quoted as Sentich or Sincich. For example, in September 1868 an old friend, not quite certain of the correct spelling, addressed a letter to Niklis Sentich in Mercury Bay. It appears that they spent some time together in Lyttelton and that Sentch had not long departed.

Vidal Burich writes: 'All your greetings and good wishes are

now returned by those you mentioned in your letter, and I send my good wishes to you and all our other countrymen and friends, especially those who knew me.' (Trans. S.A.J.)

Who their contacts were remains unknown, although Thomas Carina from Sentch's home district and Vincent Duimovich from the Trieste region were engaged in timber milling in Mercury Bay and Tairua respectively. Sentch worked in Mercury Bay for a time, probably with Carina.

Sentch's movements prior to becoming a telegraph linesman in 1879 are not clear. He worked in the Bay of Plenty and Rotorua areas. Between 1881 and 1904 he was stationed in Waipu where on his retirement he opened a boarding house for his gumdigging compatriots going north or inland. In January 1907, an issue of the Croatian language newspaper advertised his 10-room boarding house plus the hire of horses and stables.

Nicolas Sentch's contribution to Croatian history in New Zealand was recorded in evidence given to the Kauri-Gum Industry Royal Commission in 1898, where among other matters he stated:

As far as I know, there is a person out here of the name of Paul Lopez (Pavel Lupis). I am speaking of 18 years ago (1880). He was digging at Dargaville and made a little money. He went home to Austria, got married there and brought his wife back to New Zealand with him, and also some of his relatives, and since then it seems to me that, by him giving them the idea that money could be made in this country at gum-digging, they have been advancing money to each other to come out.

In his latter days, Sentch began communicating with relatives in his home village, corresponding with an aunt and uncle from 1907 to 1909. There was further contact with others between 1923 and 1927. In Auckland he became well known within the community, one of his best friends being Josip Carina, a younger brother of Thomas Carina, whom he had known at Whitianga.

Nicolas Sentch died on 27 May 1928 at his home in Mackelvie Street, Ponsonby. His wife Margaret had died previously and they were survived by three sons and five daughters. Alexander Sentch, their son, served overseas in the First New Zealand Expeditionary Force (NZEf) during the First World War.



## Pavel Sabo Lupis (1834–1916)

Pavel Lupis was born into a seafaring family in the village of Nakovan on Pelješac Peninsula, in Croatia. The harsh karst landscape largely defied cultivation; only small village communities and a sprinkling of ancient towns could be sustained. Seafaring became a universal option. A strong seafaring tradition grew from historic links with Dubrovnik and northern seaports, and was proudly upheld and nurtured. The evidence remains in a landscape dotted with the villas of sea captains long gone, with gems of architecture, coats of arms and monuments. It is commemorated in literature, folklore, poetry and songs that extol the virtues and bravery of its sailors.

Such was the heritage of Pavel Lupis' family whose generations of menfolk had traded in the Mediterranean and Black Sea, shipping grain and luxury goods to the southern seaports of Europe. It was no mean task running the gauntlet during constant naval warfare, fending off pirates, risking violent storms. The Lupis family lost most of its men at sea. In his family, Pavel and a brother were the only two to die natural deaths.

Pavel Lupis himself went to sea aged 18 in 1852, probably to avoid conscription. He sailed the oceans on the ships of other nations servicing the expanding trade to the 'New World'. On these travels he came to Lyttelton in New Zealand's South Island on an immigrant ship in 1858. He was attracted to the land and so deserted. To avoid detection he hid with shepherds in the hills until his ship departed. Inland, prospectors were searching for gold and Lupis joined them, panning for gold in Otago and the Buller districts on the West Coast of the South Island. With a modest sum of money saved he came to Auckland in 1864 and bought a small section at the top of Swanson Street, and there he camped.

As an experienced seaman he found work as a waterman ferrying passengers to and from ships in the harbour to Wynyard Pier, at that time jutting out into Official Bay off the end of Short Street. The standard return fare was three shillings, which enabled Lupis to earn up to £17 per fortnight under contract – quite a large sum of money in those days. He did particularly well in 1869, servicing ships of the visiting British

Squadron – the naval vessels *Virago* and *Blanche*.

The next stage for Lupis was to buy two small fishing boats that he moored at Wynyard Pier. He resided locally in Princes Street. Little is known of this period, which probably extended over four or five years, 1871–76. His link with the sea was about to end and he sought other outlets for his energies.

Pavel Lupis was a Dalmatian giant, over 1.8 m (6 ft) tall, 119 kg (17 stone), powerfully built and tough. He spoke Italian and English in addition to his native Croatian, and was therefore much in demand as an interpreter even though he could neither read nor write. He became a well-known and highly respected citizen of Auckland.

In the early 1870s the kauri-gum industry of the Auckland Province was showing signs of high returns, up to £40 per ton. Production was climbing, although it didn't peak until after 1880. Lupis saw an opportunity and was drawn to the industry in the Northern Wairoa, where he probably joined a few of his compatriots. He did well enough to contemplate his future with some confidence. Nicolas Sentch gave evidence to the Kauri-Gum Industry Commission in 1898 saying that Pavel Lupis (quoted as Paul Lopez) 'was digging gum at Dargaville and made a little money' which helped him decide to return to his homeland in 1880. His return to his native village of Nakovan on Pelješac Peninsula after an absence of 28 years as a relatively wealthy man would have attracted widespread excitement.

The seafaring families of Pelješac were accustomed to news of the world and the exploits of their great sea captains, but Lupis was different. He had settled in the unfamiliar South Pacific land of New Zealand, barely recalled by a few who had heard vague mention of the *Novara* and merchant ships reaching Australia with shipments of stone for building purposes.

In May 1881, he married Maria Jakoba Pervančić (Pervanchich). They lingered on Pelješac where a son, Sebastian (Šabo) was born and then returned to New Zealand in 1882 with two or three members of the Lupis family. A few years later they were back in Nakovan where their son Rismondo (Mondo) was born in 1888. On their return trip to New Zealand they were accompanied by a few friends from Žrnovo on

## Early pioneers – 19th century



Birth Certificate, Pavel Lupis 1834.



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

**LUI KINKELA,**

HOBSON BOARDING HOUSE,

HOBSON STREET,

AUCKLAND.

—

Vlastnik gori spomenute kuće jest vrlo dobro poznat od našeg Hrvatskog naroda kao prvi od Hrvata koji je postavio gostionu u gradu Aucklandu.

Dakle neka svaki k' svomu idje.

*Lui Kinkela – Advertisement, 1899  
– Bratska Sloga, 'each to his own'*

*Vincent Kinkela, probably brother or cousin of Lui Kinkela. L to R – Nicholas Lipanovich (Nichols), Vincent Kinkela, Mara Ferri. Children – Mary Bradanovich and Kathleen Eyton, 1907.*

SOURCE, FAMILY

adjacent Korčula Island. The names Petar and Ante Jericevich and Domeniko Šale have been mentioned by both the late Ljubo Lupis and Petar Batistich of Kaihu (who arrived in New Zealand in 1895). The family went home for the last time in 1898, when Ljubo was born at sea. They all returned permanently in 1902. Meanwhile the small group from Žrnovo had grown in number and the word spread in the islands and the Makarska Coast. Lupis' frequent visits in themselves stimulated many to follow him to New Zealand, believing that wealth, freedom and opportunity awaited them. Thus the scene was set for the later mass exodus following the disastrous effects of the trade treaty of 1892 between Austria-Hungary and Italy, and the inroads of the vine disease phylloxera.

In 1903 Pavel Lupis became a naturalised British subject, his occupation – gumdigger. Pavel and Maria raised three sons, Rismondo, Anton born in 1893 and Ljubo. The family's ultimate destination was Mangawhai where extensive gumfields had been opened up. There he died in 1916 aged 82, survived by his wife Maria and their three sons. Maria died in the 1930s.

Stories about the adventurous Pavel Lupis abound. Older men interviewed 50 years ago referred to him as the key to the chain migration that flowed from Pelješac Peninsula and much of Central Dalmatia. Some said he lived on the corner of Victoria and Queen Streets where he had a garden and that he moored a boat in the Ligar Canal, which ran uptown on the site of modern Queen Street – this is an unconfirmed report.

### Jerome Bakotich (1856–?) – labourer

Born in Nerežišće, Brač Island, Jerome Bakotich was naturalised in Hunterville in 1890. The following account is from an article by Matthew Ferri in Napredak of 22 April 1908 (translated by the author).

I met Jero Bakotich in Wellington. His wife showed us to our rooms and in discussion revealed that her husband was a foreigner born in Dalmatia and that he was totally blind; he was 52 years of age. On asking him if he spoke the Croatian tongue, he stood surprised and then tearful and then he spoke Croatian.

This is what he said:

'I am touched by your visit – it's years and years since I have heard Croatian spoken and yet I remember it as if in my birthplace. But now because I am blind I am in a sorry plight. My name is Jero Bakotich born in Nerežišće near Šupetar on the island of Brač, Dalmatia. I left home in 1874 when I was 18 years of age. First I came to Auckland, not knowing how to read or write and with only 3/6 in my possession. There weren't any of our people in Auckland then nor did I know anybody. My first job was in Coromandel in a swamp and I earned 30/- per week. I saved a bit of money and wandered from place to place and saved more money. I did hear of gum digging but it never occurred to me to try this work. I went to Wellington, Nelson and other places.

At Hokitika I had luck in gold prospecting, but I was most successful as a contractor on my own account. I have had no schooling, but am self-taught and learned to make my way to success. I took on a contract for 22,000,000 feet of timber and then another to build 40 miles of road. I employed up to 100 persons. This is how I accumulated £17,000 sterling. Then I built three hotels in Wellington and sold them. I built one in Masterton and a regular guest of mine was Judge Kettle. Between 1891 to 1893 my eyesight failed and I have spent £10,000 sterling to find a cure. I intend to sell this hotel one day and settle near Auckland.'





## Lui Kinkela

His evidence, tabled before the Kauri-Gum Industry Royal Commission in 1898 in Auckland, is of interest.

I was born in the Istrian town of Lovran, close to Trieste. I have been in New Zealand fifteen years (arr. 1873) and was digging gum about three years in the Wairoa. Since then I have been keeping a boarding house. There were ten or twelve Austrians in the country at that time. I believe there are about fifteen hundred now. About five-sixths of the arrivals come to my place in Auckland. The influx of the Austrians started in this way: Three or four Austrians from Novi Vinodol went ashore in Sydney, and found their way to the New Zealand gumfields in 1885. Then there was one of their countrymen, Pavel Lupis, who for years had been following the occupation of fisherman in Auckland. These men wrote to their friends, and got their nephews and relations out, and the new arrivals acted in a similar way, thus the influx of Austrians increased every year. There has been no engaging of Austrians to come out to New Zealand and work particular gumfields. The reason why batches of Austrians all come to the same field is that, being unable to speak the language, they keep together; and I do not know that they are ever instructed by any agent what particular field they are to go to. When an Austrian wishes to come to this country he has to mortgage his property to some storekeeper or moneyed man who will advance the money, but I have never heard of any bank or monetary institutions advancing passage money. The mortgagee does not always sell the property up; sometimes they wait two or three years for their money. The Austrians are very honest people. Sometimes when they are short of money, I advance them a few pounds and they always repay it. Sometimes I have to wait five or six months but I always get it.

The Austrians have got to report themselves to the Consul here. Some of them emigrate to escape military service. Only about four or five Austrians who arrived here during the last twelve months, staying at my house, brought their wives with them. Very few of the Austrians that go away come back again. Many of those who go home take considerable sums of money with them. I know this because I go with them to the bank and help to arrange matters for them. There have been hard times in Dalmatia, the vines having failed.

## Matthew Harliwich (1857–1939)

Matthew Harliwich was born in the village of Zakotorac on the Pelješac Peninsula. He began life as a cabin boy destined for a life as a seafarer, but when his ship *Panama* reached Port Chalmers, Dunedin in 1877, he skipped ship. The 20-year-old young man cut his ties with family and friends and shipboard life to venture into the unknown. He was illiterate, a common failing in the villages of Dalmatia, then under Austria's iron rule, and this fact may explain the changes in his family name. The naturalisation records have him as Harlewitch, miner at Coal Creek, Roxburgh. This was modified to its current spelling Harliwich—close in sound to the original Harlovich.

Matthew's early years were ones of pick and shovel, horse and dray for cartage work plus general labouring for local farmers. In 1887 he married Elizabeth Jane Perrow, and they had a family of six sons and one daughter. The simple efforts of Matthew were to be transformed when one of his sons, Nicholas, bought a wagon and team of horses in 1906 to start carting coal and mining equipment in earnest. The opportunity arose to take over an abandoned coalmine in 1916 at Coal Creek. It was

Early pioneers  
– 19th century



*Matthew Harliwich in later years.*

*Matthew and Elizabeth Harliwich  
and children. L to R – Frank,  
Maude, Matthew, Nicholas, 1895.*

SOURCE, FAMILY





## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

eventually turned into an open cast operation and the firm became a major supplier of coal to the region over many years through to the Second World War and beyond. Gradually the company expanded its operations with new heavy equipment, to become contractor on the Roxburgh hydro dam (1946–60) – on the one hand supplying 7000 tonnes of coal per year to the hydro village and, on the other, carting tonnes of gravel to the concrete batching plants, and as base courses for roads. Nicholas, who drove the business, died in 1957. His sons Roger and Ken and their mother Doris (née Scurr) formed the Harliwich Carrying Company Ltd.

At the end of the Roxburgh dams' construction period, the Harliwich company cleared up the site, completed landscaping and dismantled the workers' village for re-establishment at Twizel.

For much of the 20th century they were involved with major roading and earthmoving contracts in Otago and beyond, using modern equipment – a long way from the horse and dray, and pick and shovel days of their inspiration, Matthew Harliwich.

*Matteo Gibens, Annie Teresa, Frederick William (front), Mary Elizabeth (Mrs) Mary, Francis Joseph. Westport 1909–1910.*

SOURCE, FAMILY



## Paul Arnerich (1847–?)

Paul Arnerich arrived in New Zealand aged 19 in 1866 from the village of Dol, on the island of Brač. He went gold mining at Kaniere near Hokitika and later to Goldsborough, where he worked with John Grgicevich on a claim of their own up to their retirement. His two nephews, Paul and Frank, joined him for four to five years but decided to go gumdigging instead in the Northern Wairoa. Among his friends were Stephen Beban, Andrew Baretich, Vincent Popovich, John Stanich and John Grgicevich. Paul Arnerich was naturalised in 1884 at Goldsborough.

## Andrew Baretich (1835–1937)

Andrew Baretich arrived in New Zealand in 1867, a gold miner much of his life, spending 60 years at Callaghan's in Westland. The last eight years of his life were spent in a rest home where he died at the age of 102 after a lifetime enjoying good health.

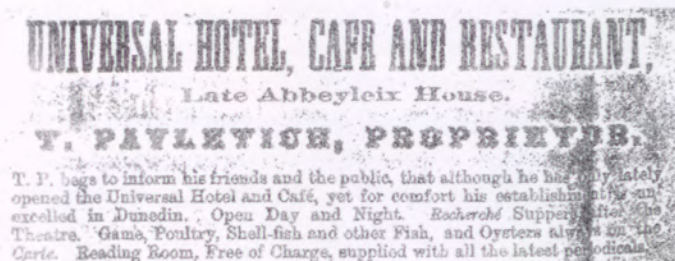
## Matteo Gibens (1857–1929)

Matteo Gibens was a native of the city of Dubrovnik, Croatia, who arrived in New Zealand about 1880. He deserted ship and went to the goldfields of Otago and Westland for about 10 years before settling in Karamea, where he married Mary Elizabeth Seiboth, daughter of Louis Franz Seiboth, farmer of Karamea. Matteo became a naturalised British subject in 1890, the year of his marriage. Matteo was a successful farmer and was well known for having the best herd of Jersey cows in the district. Around 1911 he became one of the first members of the Karamea Co-operative Dairy Company.



## Thomas Pavletich

Thomas Pavletich arrived in 1867 and within months he had bought the Universal Hotel in Dunedin. It appears that he was master of a ship and on arrival the whole crew deserted for the goldfields, leaving him high and dry. Whether he sold the ship or was wealthy in his own right is not clear.



## George Vucetich

George Vucetich arrived in 1862 in Lyttelton, a seafarer from Trieste. He worked as a bushman in the Rangiora district before turning to farming in 1865 in the Cust Valley, supplementing his income by droving cattle over the Teremakau Saddle to the West Coast – the second person ever to do so. He married into the Peebles family, and consolidated his property interests with large acreages near Chertsey where he settled with his two sons.

## Peter Vagnizan (Vranjičan) from Hvar Island

Vagnizan arrived in New Zealand in 1863 and a year later he joined the New Zealand colonial forces and served on a gunboat on the Waikato River during the wars with the Maori. St Patrick's Cathedral records three baptisms, Pauline in 1868, Clorinda in 1869 and Anna in 1872, daughters of Peter and Anna Vagnizan. Peter was naturalised in 1871 in Auckland – occupation, storeman. His name next appears in 1879 in San Francisco where he and family joined his brother, Luka.

Among this generation of pioneers there was a keen awareness of business opportunities and one finds hotel ownership at the top of the list. Seven have been identified:

Joseph Baloervich	Hokitika	1890–?
John Beroz (Berps)	Swiss Hotel, Hokitika	1878–79
Mitchell Covancevich	Hokitika	1869–?
John Dragicevich	Victoria Hotel, Westport	1878–81
Thomas Pavletich	Universal Hotel, Dunedin	1878–88
John Retatich	Cust Hotel, Cust	1880–81
T. Violich	Wallsend Hotel	1878–79

Early pioneers  
– 19th century

LEFT Thomas Pavletich,  
Universal Hotel, Dunedin, 1867.  
SOURCE, UNKNOWN



# Kauri gum



*Gumdiggers' Memorial, Dargaville – this statue was erected by the Dalmatian Pioneer Trust as a tribute to the early gumdiggers of the Kaipara district. Unveiled on March 8th 1997 by his Worship the Mayor, Mr. P.A. Brown, M.B.E.*  
 PHOTO, AUTHOR

THE kauri tree (*Agathis australis*) is one of a family of trees native to the lands of the Western Pacific stretching from Malaysia to New Zealand. The New Zealand species is found growing almost exclusively north of the 38th parallel. This magnificent, timeless tree of tremendous girth rises from the forest floor to average heights of 30 m uncluttered by branches before breaking out into a crown of green foliage high above the surrounding forest.

From the very first years of New Zealand's rediscovery by Captain James Cook, the kauri forest fell prey to the demands of English shipbuilders to meet their need for spars for their sailing ships. The British colonists in turn found that the kauri served their needs for general construction and furniture making. Its long dense grain provided a stable, easily workable raw material much in demand throughout New Zealand's history. A rewarding export market developed and whole forests were milled in a ruthless, thoughtless manner. Settlers themselves spreading in from the estuaries and harbours of the Auckland province solved their demand for more land by putting a match to inaccessible stands of forest. As Hochstetter of the *Novara* expedition wrote in 1859. 'The method usually pursued by colonists seems to be a perverse one – they burn again and again; the winds carry off all the ashes, the rain gradually washes the humus away.'

Kauri also holds importance for its by-product that very early in the country's history attracted the eagle eyes of colonial entrepreneurs. It is a tree rich in natural resin that exudes from abrasions or damage caused by storms, or other accidents of nature. The resin bleeds down the trunk or builds up in clefts

and on branches, finally to fall under its own weight to the forest floor, where it becomes buried in the humus of the kauri. On steeper contours it rolled down into hollows or swamps but wherever it settled it remained buried at varying depths to become fossilised over many centuries – even tens of centuries. As a commodity it became known as kauri gum.

The richest known gumfields were to be found to the north of Auckland, with lesser productive areas south of the city and in the Coromandel Peninsula.

Now, when one comes to seek information on the kauri gum industry, serious literature is almost non-existent – the archives hold many references, reports, statistics, maps and scientific material. There are several university theses, references in literature on other related subjects, and there is A.H. Reed's 1972 publication, *The Gumdigger*, which many have probably read. As Reeds notes,

In New Zealand's immemorial past, large areas of the northern portion of the Auckland province were clothed with great kauri forests. Long, long since perished, they left no trace of their whereabouts save some age-old fragments of tough timber and quantities of hardened gum, buried at various depths beneath the surface.

He also notes that his is a romantic story of kauri gum and the generations of diggers who, with the spade as their tool, excavated this product of the kauri pine to the value of £25,000,000, thus in great measure laying the foundation of northern New Zealand's prosperity.

W. Pember Reeves in his *The Long White Cloud* of 1898 was less than romantic: 'But most and the best resin is found in the



earth, and for the last generation the soul of the north has been probed and turned over in search of it, until whole tracts look as though they had been rooted up by droves of wild swine.'

The origin of the industry was referred to in a memorandum written to the late Mrs A.E. Harding of Aoroa in 1904–05 by Sir John Logan Campbell:

Away back in the thirties of 1800, when the Bay of Islands was a great resort for whale ships, the captains of the numerous vessels used to buy little parcels of kauri gum of pale amber colour. Mr Clendon and Mr Mair were then the two merchants at Raraweka and must have collected these amber specimens for the American captains. I think, Mr James Busby, who was Resident of New Zealand before it became a Crown colony, made the first shipment as a commercial speculator.

The Kauri-Gum Industry Inquiry Commission of 1893 records the first commercial shipment of gum in 1856 of 1440 tons valued at £13 per ton. Exports remained close to that level until 1868 then reaching 8404 tons in 1892 at £46 to £73 per ton. Gum-bearing lands were now distributed over 724,000 acres (380,000 on Crown lands, 150,000 on Maori land, 194,000 on private land, both European and Maori).

Kauri gum was now supreme in the production of varnishes and coatings in Great Britain, Germany and the United States. No other gums could compete, as its main virtue was its easy assimilation of linseed oil at lower temperatures than other gums. It was in great demand. Up to around 1870 surface gum collection was the sole preserve of Maori and settlers. The latter unearthed gum in the course of ploughing their land or clearing bush and scrublands. With better prices the gumdigging class of worker began to appear on the scene and in a few short years surface gum was exhausted and digging became necessary. Organised fields first developed close to Auckland at about that time – Papakura, Henderson's Mill and Riverhead – attracting itinerants and unemployed from the city.

As export values grew, more and more men entered the growing industry to exploit gum-bearing lands further afield, from South Auckland to the Far North. Coromandel was also beginning to come into its own. Lesser quality gum and smaller

sizes (chips) were equally in demand. Prices continued to rise and the digging population increased. In 1893, 6897 diggers were counted – British 4303, Maori 1244, Settlers 416, Austrians 519, and other foreigners 415. Gumdigging was exclusively a man's occupation, a rugged, strenuous existence in a hostile natural environment – inaccessible gullies, waterlogged swamps and steep hill country (especially on the Coromandel Peninsula). It was an industry that attracted a motley human tide from all parts of the world – British colonies, Germany, Italy and Austria.

The Croatian connection is discussed in other chapters – the *Novara*, Pavel Lupis, Kinkela, Joseph Franich and others. The reasons for their 'invasion' of New Zealand in the 1890s is also covered elsewhere. It was an invasion of 2000 to 2500 men that was seen as a threat to the livelihood of Maori and early colonists. It was a threat that prompted Royal Commissions, surveys, debates in Parliament and a number of strictures. The threat was not a matter of numbers but more a matter of their impact through systematic methods of gumdigging and the fear that they would deplete the fields with an attendant loss of income for both colonist and Maori. In 1893 gum was priced at £123 per ton, a year later £97.10 per ton, a decline ascribed to overproduction by the 'Austrians'. About that time the gumdiggers union was formed to add to the agitation against these 'foreign hordes'. The Royal Commission of 1898 was to strike a balance in favour of resident New Zealanders.

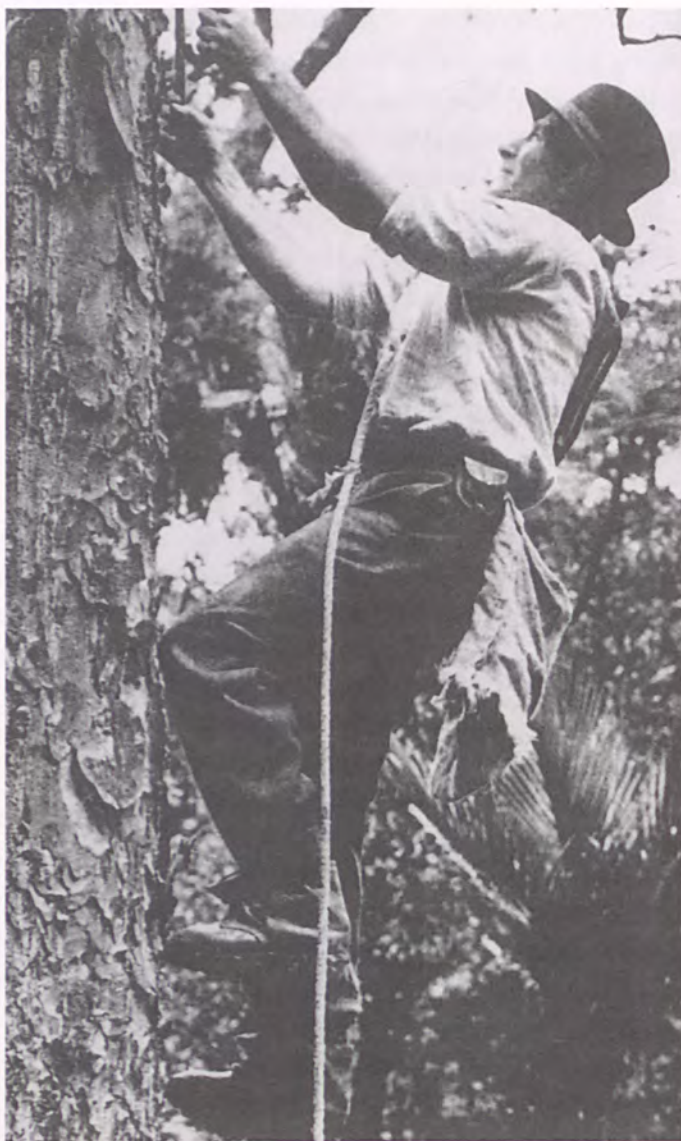
The consequence of much of the agitation was the creation of Crown Lands of the north, 100,000 ha (250,000 acres) from which aliens were excluded. With other strictures the discriminatory practices of Prime Minister Richard Seddon had the makings of an international incident involving the governments of Britain and Austria-Hungary. A by-product of these political antics was that early Croatians were forced to make the decision to take out citizenship papers and become settlers in order to survive. Those who chose to continue in the industry to the end of its economic worth diminished year by year, as diggers sought a livelihood in more rewarding fields.



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

*Nick Yakas climbing giant kauri tree, 1930s.*

SOURCE, TUDOR COLLINS,  
KAURI MUSEUM, MATAKOHE



RIGHT *Far North group – Awanui, Christmas Day 1915.*  
Rear, L to R, Jure Šendo, Ante Jelaš, Ante Polich, Ivan Radich, – Dixon,  
Jakov Rakich, Pat Kohe, Ante Matutinovich, Martin Nikolich, Stipan  
Bulog, Ambroz Petricevich.  
Front standing, L to R, Luka Jukich, Matě Divich, Stipan Jelavich,  
Ante Jelavich, Matě Zivkovich, Ante Čulav, Toma Bulog, Joze Bulog,  
Jovo Spilonja, Paško Vegar (bicycle).  
Seated, L to R, Matě Jelaš, Stipan Dominikovich (with bucket), Jure  
Divich, Dragomir Mirko (accordion), Marko Rakich, Peter Jelavich,  
Mate Jelaš. SOURCE, PETER VELAVICH

## The Yakas Kauri

As a tribute, two large kauri trees were named for pioneer bushmen. The Yakas Kauri is named in honour of Nick Yakas, gum climber and digger from the village of Žrnovo on Korčula Island, who arrived in New Zealand in 1903. He got to know Waipoua Forest better than most and became an expert climber, using handspikes and spiked boots. Working in the forest in his early years in New Zealand he discovered a giant kauri, now listed as sixth on the list of living trees. But it wasn't until he rediscovered it in 1966 that it was named in his honour, the Yakas Kauri.

## The Devcich Kauri

The Devcich Kauri was located by Sam Devcich, pioneer settler of Kaueranga Valley, south of Thames. The tree, which stands by the fourth branch of the Tairua River's headwaters, can be approached from a signpost on the Kopu-Hikuai Road, straddling the main ridge. Its circumference measures 16 m, height 21 m – the twelfth largest kauri in New Zealand (measured in 1978).





# Stages and reasons in the migration to New Zealand

## First wave (the early pioneers)

The loners, the men with seafaring connections, were mobile and unsettled. Their presence in New Zealand is evidenced by several family names – a few are reviewed in the preceding pages.

## Second wave

Due to economic pressure, men moved to and from the gumfields between 1892 and 1899, earning sufficient to meet their debts at home and to provide for their families.

## Third wave

From 1902 to 1914 – generally sons of the above group, sent out to help sustain their families at home or to avoid service in the Austro-Hungarian forces. This group provided the greatest number of settlers through naturalisation, intermarriage and the migration of wives and families to New Zealand.

## Fourth wave

From 1921 to 1940: re-migration in the earlier period, followed by a large-scale movement to New Zealand of wives, families and single men and women, which stabilised and enlarged the community through positive settlement.

## Fifth wave

From 1946 onwards, consisted of migrants from Serbia, Croatia and other parts of former Yugoslavia plus the continued chain from Dalmatia.

The main reasons for migration to New Zealand included the following.

### The seafaring connections

The seafaring connections of the Croats led naturally to the seeding of many settlements throughout the world during the 19th century. However, the mass exodus that spanned the years 1890 to 1914 was forced on the population by a range of events and the bankrupt policies of the Austro-Hungarian Government.

### Economic necessity

The prime motivator, economic necessity arose from:

- The inability of the land to sustain a rising population.
- Land fragmentation forcing families to disperse.
- A slump in the vine and fishing industries in the 1890s, brought about by Austria's trade agreement with Italy in 1892 permitting entry of cheaper Italian wines into the Empire and allowing fishing rights to Italian vessels in Croatian waters – all resulting in extreme poverty in the villages, bankruptcy and the necessity to seek a living in foreign fields.
- The incidence of phylloxera in the vines in 1880 to 1920, further damaging the economy and driving the villagers from their homes.

### Oppression

Oppression by Austria-Hungary through:

- denial of schooling and other public services;
- attempts to keep the Croatian population in total subjugation by restricting freedom and national identity;
- the requirement that all males serve in the Empire's military (for three years) and naval (four years) forces.



## The main influx

**D**RAWN by established connections, the influx that began to build up after 1885 peaked between 1892 and 1914, with considerable movement in and out of New Zealand. This coincided with the phase of heaviest kauri gum production. The flow was interrupted temporarily between 1900 and 1902 by the Immigration Restriction Act.

The chain to New Zealand that began in the northern ports and Pelješac Peninsula in Southern Dalmatia spread quickly to the islands (Otoc), the coast (Makarska Primorje) and the

hinterland (Zagora). By 1902 almost all villages in the primary source area of Dalmatia were represented in New Zealand. The chain was augmented by diggers from other districts in Croatia, particularly a group from Novi Vinodol that came initially via Australia in 1885.

The 1890s influx consisted mainly of younger married men, heads of families, seeking to relieve financial burdens in their homeland. They came as village groups, bound by kinship and driven by the need to sustain themselves and those left behind. They worked with great vigour and determination, creating an industry that changed the face of North Auckland in the space of a few years.

Their landfall on arrival was the city of Auckland where from 1895 onwards several boarding houses were established and operated by earlier arrivals to cater for their needs. Centred on Wyndham Street, Hobson Street, Victoria Street and Federal Street, their role was to greet groups of migrants on the wharves, provide bed and board and arrange clothing and gear before despatching them by rail and boat to the Far North, Northern Wairoa or Coromandel. In their comings and goings many of the early groups came out for two to three years, and having earned enough returned home.

The story is told of one large body of men who were despatched north by a boarding house keeper with the simple tag 'Mitchelson's'. Unable to speak more than a smattering of English, they took the train to Helensville, the boat to the Northern Wairoa and by the Kaihu rail branch to 'Mitchelson's lease', a rich field from which huge deposits of kauri gum were dug. They returned by the same path to Auckland and back

*Group from Podgora, 1910.  
Front, L to R – Phillip Sunde,  
Peter Dean, Jakov Borich, Ivan Nola,  
Matž Sunde. Rear – Ivan Nola,  
Simun Dean, Ivan Garelja,  
Ivan Vodanovich.  
SOURCE, FAMILY*





to Dalmatia with the barest contact with colonial settlers.

The migratory chain that jumped from village to village in Central Dalmatia brought whole families of men to New Zealand – fathers, four, five or six brothers and numerous cousins, leaving women, children and old men at home to cope with the vines, olives, fishing boats and gardens. The men moved about the gumfields in family or village groups. After 1904 a steady stream of young women undertook the same arduous journey, to join husbands, fiancés and childhood friends and others with whom marriages had been arranged. Thus the villages began to empty, never to be fully repopulated again. Today many stand as almost empty memorials to the families that once lived there.

The jump from hunger and oppression in Dalmatia, from a subsistence economy to one of relative wealth, 'from sandals to gumboots' as one said, awakened the Croatian migrants to the great opportunities waiting to be seized in New Zealand. In the quiet, isolated villages of Dalmatia, their labours went largely unrewarded, breeding indifference, laziness and lack of spirit. In New Zealand they responded to the rewards for their labours and were infected with the desire to succeed and to be in charge of their own lives. They gave all their energy, toiling laboriously under all conditions and anywhere, from dawn to dusk, with a dedication that earned them the respect of the colonists if not their affections. The Protestant work ethic happily suited the Croatian workers.

On the gumfields, these tough foreigners proved to be a formidable force. Their early vigorous efforts raised the eyebrows and the anger of colonial settlers. Working in organised family or village teams they systematically drained swamps, bulldozed the landscape by hand, potholed the back country and sluiced vast acres of derelict gumland to extract every ounce of kauri gum that might remain. Their methods were reminiscent of opencast mining, leaving scars on the land and soils depleted of any residual goodness – a landscape that took decades to heal.

In the beginning the Croatian diggers found it difficult to adapt to a lifestyle of endless toil, loneliness and isolation, in spite of the rewards. Generally shunned in the social sense by colonial society, they relied on their own people for comfort and

support, developing a reluctance to reach outside their circle. Without leaders, intellectuals or priests they initially felt overwhelmed by the extremely competitive society of New Zealand. They felt the need to maintain a low profile, keeping out of the limelight and dedicating themselves to the welfare of their families and improvement of their living standards. From all accounts they weathered the storms of prejudice and criticism without malice or violent reaction. They would not accept that they could be despised and showed little open hurt – but fighting back doggedly with all their resources when they felt strong enough to do so. The Croatian settlers from Dalmatia were and still are an outgoing people, generous to a fault and welcoming to all who approached them in genuine friendship. Frankness and honesty were notable qualities. A letter in Pučki List in 1893 says it all:



Group from Lumbarda, Korčula Island, 1905.  
L to R – John Nobilo, Steve Lipanovich, Nicholas Lipanovich, Frank Markovina.

SOURCE, UNKNOWN



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

RIGHT 'Permesso di Viaggio' – Permission to travel. Acceptable harbour master's certificate in place of a passport – note; Italian was the official language.

<p>Od c. kr. Vlade ovlašten Agentat preko-oceanskih putovanja, <b>JOSIP RIBOLI u SPLITU</b> daju sve nužne naputke i takogjer najjeftinije prevozne karte sa najbržim i najboljim parobrodima i sa američanskim željeznicama.</p> <p><b>CIENE ZA PREVOZ:</b></p> <p>iz Splita do New-Jorka *) K. 155          » » » New Orleansa *) » 155          » » » Puntarenas » 335          » » » Buenosaires » 180          » » » Antofogasta » 510          » » » Australije » 365          » » » Auklanda » 385          (Nova Zelanda)</p> <p>U ovim je cijenama uključena oskrba od lake, iz koje polazi dotični preko-oceanski parobrod.</p> <p>Tko želi za kojemu drugo mjesto Amerike, Australije i t. d. putovati, neka se svakako obrati na rečnog agenta.</p> <p>Polazak iz Splita za Amerika kucem svake nedjelje, za Australiju svake druge srijede.</p> <p>*) Samo za mjesec Kolovoz.</p>	
<p>Pučki list 1907.</p>	

Fares offered by Josip Riboli of Split, priced in Austrian crowns – 'for the month of August only'.

SOURCE, PUČKI LIST, 1907

Croatians are well regarded by the storekeepers with whom they trade because of the honesty they practise as a matter of personal pride. Their name is trusted to the extent that a new arrival need have no fears and can acquire all the necessities for life without difficulty. Men of other races do not enjoy such standing – even the English.

(Trans. S.A.J.)

As Amelia Batistich, a New Zealand author, once wrote, 'At home, life moved in a continuous stream of custom and ceremony, saints' days, name days, festivals, births, christenings, marriages, deaths and departures overseas.'

Much of this was lost to the men and women adrift on the gumfields. Here there were no traditions, few festivities. The 'villages' were loosely clustered temporary shanties of sacking, wood and corrugated iron, roads of dirt, with no modern amenities. The village priest was replaced by the occasional visit of a Mill Hill father who said Mass and administered baptisms, heard a few confessions and went on his way unable to communicate or satisfy the spiritual needs of the diggers and their families. Creating a replica of life in Dalmatia was a recognised impossibility. Hard work, material ambitions and plans for the future displaced the traditions of centuries. On the gumfields they had to reshape their lives and adjust to the harsh, bitter realities of virtual exile, unending toil and the loss of ties with their families left behind in their homeland.

N<sup>o</sup> 2216 N<sup>o</sup> e data del permesso politico. 2534/58 7.9.14/3 1909

# PERMESSO DI VIAGGIO

Libretto di servizio marittimo.

Per *Nola Stipan*  
 figlio di *Ivanov*  
 nato nell'anno *1893*  
 a *Podgora*  
 domiciliato *Podgora* (Capitanato distr. *Malpensa*)  
 di stato *Celibe* (Comitato)  
 statura *crescente* capelli *castagni*  
 occhi *bruni* naso *regolare*  
 marche visibili *nessuna*

Dal *F. R. Depretis* *8. Postava*  
*Podgora* li *20. Maggio 1909*  
*Il Gerente*  
*Casi*

30



# Gumfield camps

NEW Zealand conditions were austere. Survival was possible only through hard work and sacrifice. The influence of village co-operatives in Dalmatia was reflected in work organisation on the gumfields, and in the establishment of close-knit communities or camps for reasons of kinship or protection from difficulties within the host society. Coming from a survival background, they found New Zealand to be a land where material rewards were related to one's physical effort. However, the changed social conditions, the need to learn a new language, adapt to strange customs and work and live in subhuman conditions affected the new migrants' attitudes and well-being. Many succumbed to the strain of monotony and separation from their families. Boys aged 12 to 15 came to work in the gumfield camps as cooks, messengers and general roustabouts – being forced to leave home to help support their families. Their sad plight went unnoticed and their education neglected. Ultimately, for some in adulthood, suicide was the only way out – others were locked away in mental hospitals at Avondale and Tokanui.

Camps were set up near the richer fields – shanties built of manuka sticks, covered in sacking and lined inside with calico. An earth sod or tin chimney completed the picture. The longer-established camps sported a flagpole, a social hall, a fowl-run and vegetable garden. Management was arranged on a shared communal basis with a spokesman as representative of the group.



*Gum Camp Group, 1909.  
Desolation, shanties and a few fowl.*



# FROM DISTANT VILLAGES



George Sumich, 1907 – gentleman of fashion.



Visko Matutinovich – gentleman.



Far North Group. L to R, on horseback – Kuzma Matijevich, Jakov Rakich, Ante Culav, Ante Jelavich, Joze Bulog, Mark Dominikovich. Standing – Ante Matutinovich, Mijo Zidich. SOURCE, G. YELAVICH



Aranga Gum camp, Northern Wairoa, 1930s, and Tony Marinovich's transport. SOURCE, TONY MARINOVICH





## Gumfield camps

LEFT *The Soljak brothers from  
the village of Orak – Josip,  
Peter, Tony, Matē, 1906*  
SOURCE, PETER SOLJAK

RIGHT *Matē Lulich, Frank Lulich  
and Bartul Tomaš, 1914*  
SOURCE, FAMILY



*Vinodolci – ex Novi-Vinodol –  
Croatian Littoral, at Rustić camp,  
Northern Wairoa.*  
L to R – *Josip Mrzljak, Petar  
Krisković, Bogoslav Sokolich,  
Josip Petrinović, Josip Maričić.*  
PHOTO, S. M. UJDUR



# Life on the gumfields



*Sunday Recreation – Far North.  
Boxing bout, 1914.*

PHOTO, NORTHWOOD COLLECTION  
ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY,  
WELLINGTON, NZ REF # G11205 1/1

FROM the largest to the smallest camp leadership was assumed by the eldest or the most proficient in the use of the English language. The leader imposed rules of behaviour and standards of hygiene and acted as general agent, arranging supplies and selling the camp's gum at the best price for the benefit of the camp as a whole. Everyone shared equally.

Men kept physically fit by sheer hard work. Their foods were basic though very different from their traditional diet, often causing a decline in health. They lived on soups, stews, barbecued meat – and fish, when it was available. For festivities, pork would be cured and lamb barbecued. Garlic featured prominently in their diet since they believed that it kept them healthier. Bread was often baked and more settled camps also produced their own eggs, poultry, fruit and vegetables. Beer at 2/6 per gallon they adopted in preference to wine of dubious quality.

Cut off from family life and their womenfolk, many men on the fields saw life as a phase in purgatory. They had to manage, live and work with only occasional respite from the burden of toil and few persisted in gumdigging for spells of longer than five to 10 years before returning home or moving into other occupations.

In the summer when the ground was too hard to dig the men would congregate in the nearest towns. At times Croatian was the dominant language on the streets of Kaitia, Dargaville and in the Victoria Street area of Auckland where most of the boarding houses were centred.





*Dargaville 1910, family picnic.*  
SOURCE, UNKNOWN



*Andrija and Jurka Erceg, with Marica and Zorica, about 1911.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY



*Gumfields Party – children included.*  
SOURCE, PROBABLY NORTHWOOD COLLECTION



*Kauri Flat near Paparore, 1910. In cart – Matě Babich (with reins), Stipan Mustapich (seated), Ivan Erceg (panama hat), Vide Babich (cap). Bicycle – Jakov Babich. Boxers – Joze Lubina and Ivan Babich. Horseback – Josip Erceg, Ante Borovich and unknown.*



## Peter Yelavich (1896–1989)

**P**ETER Yelavich arrived in New Zealand from Ravča in 1912. He was a gumdigger, photographer, political activist and writer. His observations of life on the gumfields around Waiharara in the Far North are worth noting.

In the early morning new arrivals and older men were up to light the fire, boil the water for tea, coffee or cocoa, which the diggers enjoyed with bread and butter. If far from their camp, tea, sugar and a loaf of bread were shared. About 3 or 4 pm, a couple of men or lads returned to camp to prepare the evening meal – a joint of meat, macaroni or rice, or roast meat with potatoes and onions, plus of course, tea. Tea was drunk instead of wine. If the gumfield was far from roads or tracks from stores or delivery rounds, they ate salted pork and baked bread daily, which they cooked

in camp ovens, buried in embers for 2½ hours, while others in the party worked on.

After dinner the gum they had dug was tipped on the earth floor of the shanty and with a candle or two for light, they began scraping it to get a better price. A leather apron of sorts was spread over their knees for protection. In earlier days a slab of wood was used, but the noise upset those wanting to read a book or write a letter – more particularly if men were reading to comrades who were illiterate.

Day in and day out it went on – Sunday for washing clothes, collecting wood etc – some visiting other camps if there was time, where the welcome was always friendly, a good meal offered and a promise to return the visit. The diggers worked for 6-8 weeks to prepare gum for sale – then debts at the store could be settled

1918, Far North Group, Awanui.  
Rear, L to R – Petar Jelavić, Ivan Juranović, Nikola Delić, Ivan Grubiša, Dragomir Mirko, Stipan Jelavić, Mijo Kovačević, Kuzma Stipusić. Front row, L to R – Ante Tolić, Stipan Delić, Frane Kuničić (boy), George Fleming, NZ, Ruža Kuničić (girl), Matěj Rakić (Snr), Matěj Rakić (Jnr), Petar Čulav.  
PHOTO, PETER YELAVICH





and profits could be shared. At the store, purchases were offset, a usually one sided affair – the storekeeper weighed the gum, priced it and paid – having deducted the price of goods purchased plus interest – without reference to the digger or the law. He could refuse to take gum if the market was bad – so the price dropped.

With the gum sold, the diggers met to consider whether or not to move to new gumfields for more gum and better conditions.

In camps – bowls, jumping, tossing rocks and other homeland games took place. We would hear the Gusla [a one-stringed fiddle] and sometimes the accordion. Everyone who could, read. At first rarely did they hold dances. Language difficulties and ignorance of customs had to be overcome before they could enjoy social life in the district. The first social and sports contact was with Maori people who were friendly to us and accepted us as equals. As a result, many married Maori women – not the original intention and they would have wished otherwise. 90% of these unions weren't successful. Maori in those days lived very basically – with little relationship to European ways and laws. Their elders dealt with questions of marriage, crime and other matters. Even when other Europeans were in their fold they generally favoured our people.



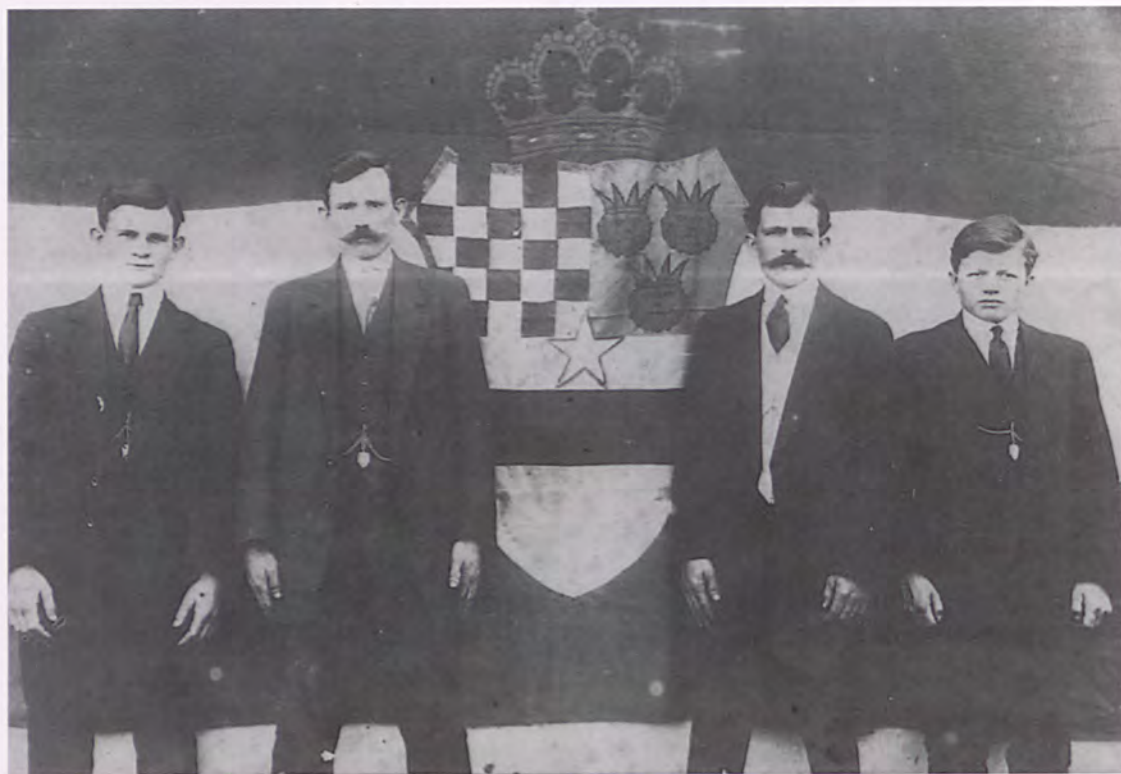
*Peter Yelavić and Joze Bulog, 1915.*

PHOTO, S. M. UJDUR

Peter Yelavich  
(1896–1989)



# Patriotism and kinship on the gumfields



Waipapakauri, 1912.  
L to R – Jur̃ Pandzić, Joz̃e  
Skender, Ante Jelavić and Paško  
Vegar, with the flag of the Triune  
Kingdom; Croatia, Slavonia,  
Dalmatia, mid-19th century hopes  
of union. SOURCE, G. YELAVICH

CROATIAN diggers, their preferred reference, were generally accused of segregating themselves from the rest of society. There were many reasons for this apart from the compelling need to live and work with their own kith and kin. Their camps, like their villages at home, afforded protection and relief from the stresses and toil in the harsh unfriendly gumfields. The more established camps were well organised, self-sufficient units, dominated by a flagpole over a small hall where meetings and dances were held and Mass was celebrated on odd Sundays by visiting Catholic priests.

An example was Mangawhare camp in Dargaville that attracted men from the village of Podgora in Dalmatia. Here on St Vincent's Day, the village feast day, up to 400 diggers would turn up to take part in bowling, wrestling and dancing to mark the occasion. If a priest could be found, then celebration of Mass formed part of the festivities. The other gatherings of significance took place at Easter and Christmas when beer and wine flowed freely. Drunkenness was not condoned.

Before and during the First World War years diggers felt it was patriotic to fly the Croatian flag over their camps or to bear it at the head of a church parade on Sunday. Uneasy settlers feared that the 'Austrians' were preparing for a military coup in the north and much time was spent in Parliament debating this potential happening. Neither the politicians in Wellington nor the media did much to quell these fears.



# Methods of gumdigging

**W**ORKING throughout the Auckland province – from Hikuai to Parengarenga, from Kaihu to Waiuku – the Croatians employed various methods to extract the gum.

Richer fields were tackled in force by methods known as paddocking – ploughing an area over, to a shallow depth. Deeper cuts taken down several feet in stepped stages, known as on-face digging, often swept through the landscape, undermining tracks, roads and fences.

Isolated patches of gum were potholed (the deepest known being 29 ft) and often tunnelled sideways under tree roots, and kept drained by a simple improvised pump – made from wooden boxing or tin downpipe. Unfilled potholes caused many stock losses in later years.

The most arduous operations involved the draining of swamps – originally to make gum extraction easier – but ultimately this resulted in bringing thousands of acres of land into farm production.

When swamps couldn't be drained, a 12–14 ft steel spear with a hooked end was used to work the lumps of kauri gum to the surface. Hooking (as this method was known), however, was a skill not productive enough for the average digger.

The diggers' basic tools of trade were gum spear, spade, shovel, bucket, sieve, rake and scraping knife. Special saws were developed for cutting through layers of peat and a variety of hand pumps contrived to keep gum holes and trenches free of water. Before 1910 long leather boots were worn. These were dried out over weekends and heavily oiled to maintain their usefulness. The introduction of full-length rubber gumboots in 1910 improved working conditions considerably.

Although methods of extraction changed partially through the introduction of mechanical processes, the basic tools remained the same up to the demise of the industry.



*Gum hole, 1909. A risky operation – note length of downpipe serving as water extraction pump.*

SOURCE, PROBABLY  
NORTHWOOD COLLECTION



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES



*Gumdiggers gear.*

*L to R – Kerosene tin, bucket, spade, spear, camp oven, chopper, steelyards (scales), brush broom, shovel – with hurdy-gurdy tank.*

PHOTO, VICTOR JURLINA

*Gumdigging 'on face'*

*– Far North, 1911.*

SOURCE, NORTHWOOD  
COLLECTION, ALEXANDER  
TURNBULL LIBRARY,  
WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND  
REF # G4937 1/1



LEFT Nick Kuluz on 'Bay City Digger', Tomorata Swamp, 1931  
– drained by Tony Petrie, and now farmed.



RIGHT Posing for the camera  
– Gum camp scene, 1908–1910.





## Methods of gumdigging



*Gum washing Plant,  
Ahipara Hill, 1931.*

*L to R – Filip Pavlovich,  
George Viskovich, Nikola Urlich,  
Ivan Yelavich, Joe Pavlovich,  
Matē Jovo Urlich.*

*SOURCE, M. J. URLICH*



*Drying out kauri gum chips,  
Sweetwater. Marin Kurte on  
front heap – 1920s.*



# Nicholas Covich (1887–1963)



*Nicholas Covich – Ahipara, 1928  
with wife Parē (Polly) Ann Peri.*  
SOURCE, PRIVATE

NICHOLAS Covich arrived in New Zealand from Tučepi, Dalmatia in 1905. Most of his life was spent on the gumfields in the Awanui and the Ahipara Hill areas, except for three to four years farming near Ahipara during the Depression years.

In 1913 he married Pare (Polly) Peri and they had 13 children. After Polly's death, Nicholas married Nancy Byett; they had one child together. He became naturalised in 1923.

Nicholas Covich was a natural born engineer who developed his own sluicing plant with a pressurised tractor pump attached. To obtain sufficient water he negotiated with Maori owners of land at Koroki to tap their water source to supply his venture on Ahipara Hill. The water was fed through channels, aqueducts

over gullies, tunnels under tracks and around hillsides to maintain a fall to a dam. From there the water was used for washing gum, and for driving a mixture of soil and gum chips down an open channel. The gum separated from the soil and could be collected and heaped to dry.

Nicholas went further by inventing a sluicing plant with a tractor pump under 85–90 lbs/sq inch pressure. The landscape was thus ripped open – often leaving old kauri stumps standing clear on their roots.

Between 1928 and 1940 there were 15 gum-processing plants on the 'Hill'.

Nicholas Covich was a highly intelligent, disciplined man, hard-working and inventive.



*Greeting Father Milan Pavlinovich,  
'Sokol' Hall, Ahipara Hill, 1934.*  
SOURCE, AUCKLAND CITY LIBRARY



## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

# Omamari

THE Omamari Block formed part of the original Kaihu No. 1 Block, an area of approximately 43,770 acres (17,508 ha). The block was leased out in 1871, but limited to the harvesting of flax, kauri gum, timber and grazing. In 1881 freehold was granted and in later years George Marriner of Auckland purchased 20,000 acres (8000 ha). This came to be known as Omamari.

The Omamari swamp could only yield gum by the hooking method from punts. This changed in 1908 when a hundred men in two groups, split between Visko Matulovich and George Franich, worked for six months cutting a canal up to 30 ft deep through from the swamp to a beach outfall. In places the cut had to be shored with timbers to retain the sand, which caused constant problems. The venture was not a financial success – a lot of trouble and time were lost for little return.

In 1927 a partnership was formed between George Marriner, Matē Franich and Alex McArthur, known as Marriner and Company, primarily to trade in gum. Under Matē Franich's direction a second attempt to extract gum from the area was made in 1930. The earlier canal had collapsed and a new canal was dug in three descending levels.

About 15 diggers were involved for nine months, staked by local storekeepers. Once drained they turned to digging out gum and there was barely enough to meet their debts. With the Great Depression closing in, gum prices tumbled and the company began to gradually convert the land to farming.



*Matē Franich, (1878–1971)  
M.B.E., 1958. PHOTO, AUTHOR*



*Drainage of Omamari Swamp by Dalmatian diggers.  
PHOTO, AUCKLAND WAR MEMORIAL MUSEUM*



# Gum merchants and buyers

ONCE the kauri gum had been extracted from the ground it was cleaned, graded and bagged before being sold to merchants in Auckland for export to Germany and the United States. Buying and selling the gum in the field was 'like a Cairo market place', gum out in piles, usually the best on the outside – and diggers and buyers haggling over prices.

Some were in for quick profits and many a digger was taken down by 'sharks' of all races. Dalmatian diggers entered the gum buying field early enough, Ivan Bartulovich and

John Petricevich (from Sučuraj) being among the first.

The city merchants and leaseholders were generally regarded with distrust, with allegations by diggers of price fixing.

Successive attempts were made to extract oil from kauri resin and kauri peat on a commercial scale. The process proved to be uneconomic and the most ambitious ventures failed by 1925. Mechanisation temporarily boosted the industry in 1919–20. For example:

- In 1918, 2418 tons were exported at an average price of £65 per ton.
- In 1919, 4128 tons were exported at an average price of £62 per ton.
- In 1920, 5481 tons were exported at an average price of £85 per ton.
- From 1927 the price of £59 per ton declined to £25 per ton by 1933.

The increased use of mechanical devices began to take over from spear and spade. Improved standards of living on the gumfields followed. The primitive sack and calico shanties were gradually replaced by more permanent structures of corrugated iron and kauri sidings with roughly lined interiors better suited to share with a wife and family.

As major deposits were depleted and sluicing became an established method of gum extraction, trailer pumps were used to wash the excavated material down a channel to a rotary power machine. The residue was then dried, winnowed or sieved to remove debris. In 1937, Nicholas Covich, a natural engineer, introduced sluicing on Ahipara Hill, one of the richest gumfields in the north (see Nicholas Covich).

*Grades of kauri gum.  
White – top quality (99% resin),  
Black, nuts, steel, chalk and chips  
– all lower grades.*

PHOTO, VICTOR JURLINA





Early gum brokers who serviced the needs of their people included: Ivan Bartulovich, John Petricevich, Josip Franich, Paul Kokich, Matē Ban, Peter Sumich, John A. Sumich, George Sutich, Mark Roglich, Felix Pobraica, Clem Jurlina, John Trubuhovich, Peter and Tony Dropulich, John Cvitanovich, Jim Vodanovich, Matē and Nikola Tolich, Marin Kumrich, Mick Ravlich, Jack Raos, Risto Marich and John Curin.

An article from the Croatian language newspaper *Zora* of 21 March 1914 reads:

Our readers will know that the Gum industry is of great importance to us Croats in New Zealand. Hundreds of our men have dug kauri gum to erase the debts that their fathers

fell into because of the misgovernment of Austria. Millions of pounds sterling have been gained through the labours of our Croatian workers in New Zealand – but, they nevertheless benefit very little. It is true, that when you compare the earnings of our gumdiggers with workers in other parts of the world, they are really the best off. But, if the income is reasonable, the work is extremely hard and we maintain that such labours are poorly rewarded. The greatest gains go to the capitalists and smaller traders, while the worker gathers only the crumbs, for example, a month's collection of gum will bring in £20 to £30 sterling. According to current rates offered by the gum traders – that may seem a lot to an outsider, but the same gum will sell for at least twice that figure in Europe or America...

(Trans. S.A.J.)

## Gum merchants and buyers



L to R – Tony Pervan, Ilija Petricevich, Joe Cvitanovich, Andrija Skokandich, Fred Housham, Tony Viskovich, Robbie Silva, Willy Pepania, Clem Jurlina – at Jurlina's, Sweetwater.

**JOHN URLICH,**  
General Storekeeper and  
Gumbuyer,  
**Lake Ohia**  
and Rangiahia.

▲ good stock of Groceries, Drapery,  
Clothing, etc., always on hand.

Best prices given for kauri gum.

"GIVE ME A TRIAL."

**JOHN URLICH,**  
Head Office: LAKE OHIA.  
Telephone No. 1.

John Ulrich, storekeeper –  
Advertising in 'ZORA', 1917.



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

*Mitchelson & Co. Kauri gum sorting, Auckland 1920s.*

PHOTO, NORTHWOOD COLLECTION  
ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY,  
WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND  
REF # F707MNZ 1/4



*LEFT Transport by bullock team, 1914, Far North.*

PHOTO, NORTHWOOD COLLECTION  
ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY,  
WELLINGTON, NEW ZEALAND  
REF # G10568



*RIGHT Tony Marinovich (left) – ex-Oratia, transport service Auckland to Dargaville. Supplies on the way up, kauri gum on the way back – 1930s.*

SOURCE, FAMILY





## Legislation and transition

IN the 1890s settlers and 'British' diggers were vocal in their dissatisfaction with conditions in the industry and their fear of the 'Austrian' influx and its effect on their livelihood. In 1893 the New Zealand Government asked the Kauri-Gum Industry Inquiry Commission to report with recommendations. The report suggested that the grievances relating to the 'Austrian' problem and public allegations of 'trucking' by storekeepers and leaseholders were exaggerated. Trucking was a dishonest practice whereby a gumdigger was forced to sell his gum to the owner or leaseholder of the land on which he was digging at the price offered by that landowner and then also to buy his provisions from the owner at the price demanded. The Commission also recommended a system of restrictive licensing of 'Austrians' but no action was taken.

Continued agitation and the growing influx of 'Austrians' caused Government to set up a further Royal Commission in 1898 to enquire into the kauri gum industry. The resulting Kauri Gum Industry Act of 1898 established kauri gum reserves and divided the North Island into kauri gum districts. In addition the issue of various classes of licences for gumdigging and gum buying were established. Aliens were excluded from these new reserves. Increased licence fees and the requirement for some residential qualification prompted many 'Austrians' (Croatians) to apply for British citizenship so that they might continue to dig for gum. The Immigration Act followed in 1900.

From 1903 to 1914 an average of 104 Croatians per annum became naturalised, with a peak of 217 in 1913. This period also saw changes in the nature of migration. Family heads chose not to remain under the conditions imposed by the Act and returned to their homeland, leaving their sons and kinsmen to adapt to the new situation. The wave of naturalisation that followed was paralleled by a gradual shift from the gumfields to other occupations based primarily on land. By 1914, 48 were farming, 20 were winemaking, three were fruit growing, 12 were storekeeping and 14 were bush felling. The shift to new occupations was prompted by many factors beyond conditions in the kauri gum industry. Confidence in their ability to survive alongside New Zealanders, the establishment of families with wives from Dalmatia, and intermarriage with Pakeha and Maori New Zealanders were important factors. The emergence of the Croatian language press, the closer involvement of the Church, the emergence of leaders and the interest of local politicians gave impetus to more permanent settlement.

Most of this progress dissolved with the declaration of the 1914-18 war. From 1914 (a year when 96 were naturalised) to 1922, Croatian diggers and settlers lived in a vacuum - rejected officially as enemy aliens and despised by public opinion, in spite of protestations by some and the fact that many had proved their loyalty by offering their services in the armed forces.



## George Marriner (1887–1970) – kauri gum broker, Northern Wairoa

Marriner's grandfather was a pioneer settler in the north. In the 1840s he managed business for Brown and Campbell and shipped goods from Mangawhare. He observed that Maori used to burn off scrub to get at the gum. Hundreds of canoes went up and down the river bringing in kits full of

gum. A chain of men would tip the kits in the shed and then heap up the kits for burning. Tohungas said it was unlucky to use the kits twice and it would occupy women's time making new ones, and thus keep them out of trouble.



Victoria Street, Dargaville, 1920s.

SOURCE, ALEXANDER  
TURNBULL LIBRARY



George Marriner comments:

The first Croatians in large numbers were married men who worked hard and lived cheaply on bread, lard and rice, and smoked Melrose tobacco at 1/- a packet, or later Bosnian Flag tobacco with Ban Jelacic cigarette papers. Packhorses took goods twice weekly to camps. Some large camps had a hall and the goods were left there. The Croatians were great beer drinkers and always celebrated their numerous saints' days. Beer was cheap, 2/6 a gallon and 2 five gallon kegs was a regular order. The young men were freer, and tended to sever ties with home. Well-known camps were Russian camp, Millers Flat, Ti Tree gully, Jerusalem, Horse gully, Turkish camp, Basin camp, Welcome camp and Fish camp. The richest field ever was on 1000 acres at Aranga.

George Marriner also noted:

Austrian occupation of the Slav provinces on the Adriatic Coast brought little change for the peasant population. They were fated to live a life of hardship and poverty. With their primitive tools they carefully cultivated every fertile crevice, every patch of soil. They built walls and laboriously terraced the infertile slopes to create vineyards, olive groves, orchards and gardens.

On a trip down the Adriatic Coast in 1957 he observed:

We were running alongside the coast, which was steep and rocky country with the cliffs right down to the water. We passed a small village and I asked Tony how they lived – a few olive trees, some grapes and fishing. I could not see where there could be soil to grow anything, but Tony says olive trees grow better between rocks and a bit of soil is collected to grow grape vines.

They built stone walls and through the years as the rain washes down the cliffs, the water settles behind the walls and deposits small quantities of soil. The whole of this Adriatic coast of Dalmatia is similar, with the high cliffs down to the sea everywhere.

These words could have been written 100 years before.

He notes further:

The fervent desire of all Dalmatians was to live in their own land and to achieve union with their fellow Croatians to the north. It was an ideal kept very much alive in their epic poems, their songs and in the words of the patriots, poets and priests. They had not lost courage during the 377 years of Venetian misgovernment in the hope that they would one day enjoy freedom as a Slav nation; they drew strength from Dubrovnik, the free City State that since its origins had nurtured the Slav dream.

George Marriner (1887–1970)  
– kauri gum broker,  
Northern Wairoa



# Žrnovo

**Ž**RNOVO is a village whose roots stretch back to the pre-Christian ancient Illyrian period. Situated on the island of Korčula, a short distance inland from the city of Korčula, the village saw many hundreds of its citizens emigrate to overseas lands in the late decades of the 19th century and early decades of the 20th century. The chain to New Zealand from Žrnovo

was one of the earliest on the gumfields of Northern Wairoa to where they were led by Pavel Lupis (see Lupis), a pioneer settler from Nakovan. These men celebrated their presence in New Zealand on their village saint's day by 10 of them posing for a photograph on the gumfields in 1896. The event occasioned a song composed by one Zore of Čara and sung by Antun Curać.



1896 group from Žrnovo, with the Austrian flag at Black Store camp, Hardings lease. L to R – Donko Tasovac – Mokular, Jakov Batistić – Surkić, Jerko Didović – Rade (upper), Andrija Šegedin – Repak (lower), Nikola Grbin – Subić, Nikola Šegedin – Kukumica, Jakov Cebalo – Babulić (lower), Ivan Didović – Zule (upper) and the brothers Donko and Nikola Tasovac.

SOURCE, UNKNOWN



A pamphlet was printed with the photograph and a lengthy poem. As translated in part by the author it reads:

Events are not forgotten

Our people abroad – their voice from a distant land.

The powerful attraction of one's birthplace does not develop in the same way among migrants of every race. A general social survey in America established that there was a greater devotion and stronger ties among the Croatian migrants in relation to their native land and their people. Such ties are maintained not only by correspondence and personal contact with relatives at home, and rendering practical assistance to support the 'old country', but also by fostering customs and cultural traditions. Furthermore, the mother tongue must be well cared for and cultivated despite many obvious difficulties.

One shining example of this commitment is the following song.

In the year one thousand eight hundred  
and ninety-six

we set out to dig for kauri gum  
and who could this day give praise  
and know not whose feast day it is?

All stood still and pondered  
and taking their spades, returned to camp.  
'Forgive us Lord, for our omission'.

By good fortune, a photograph taken on St Peter's day in the camp of Žrnovci near Dargaville has been preserved, presented here with song. This group of Žrnovci went to New Zealand in about 1895 and worked at digging gum near this camp. In this photograph you can see their shanty of boards and sacks to the right.

As we can see they are photographed with the tools and equipment of their trade and with the Austrian flag.

Žrnovo



## Josip (Joseph) Franich (1867–1921)

JOSIP came from the town of Vrgorac beyond the Biokovo Range, which towers over Dalmatia. The town is central to a widespread cluster of villages and hamlets extending

northwards to merge with similar settlements based on the town of Imotski. The numerous parishes in this wide region, known as Krajina or Zagora, were the abode of some 2000



*Josip Franich and Kathleen Keane's wedding, 1899. Including sisters, Mary (married Nick Lukich), and Margaret (married Frank Mihalovich). SOURCE, FAMILY*



emigrants who settled in New Zealand over an extended period.

Almost certainly the first arrivals from Zagora heard of New Zealand from the coastal villages whose people gave glowing accounts of money to be made to ease their burdens at home. However, there were many influences at work causing a general exodus from Central Dalmatia to overseas lands – as discussed earlier.

While there is no precise information on the migration from Vrgorac and Zagora generally, within months of the surge from central coastal Dalmatia overseas, the inlanders, too, were boarding steamers and joining the rush. Josip Franich was among them, arriving in Auckland towards the end of 1893 after spending six months in Australia.

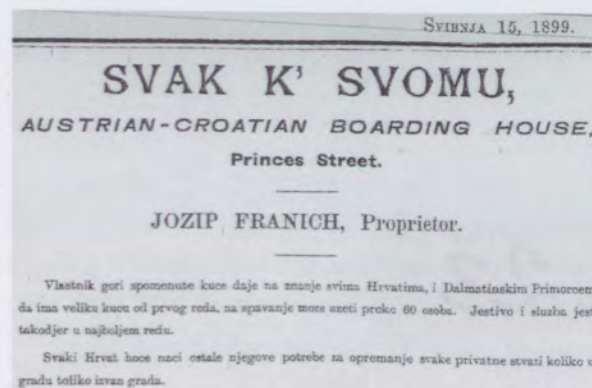
As he claimed before the Kauri-Gum Industry Commission of 1898,

I was a soldier (in the Austrian army) and completed my military service. At the completion of this I happened to see an Austrian newspaper called 'Narodni List' of Zadar. The date of the newspaper was April 1891. In it was an article written by Ante Mastolica and Pavel Lupis, and in the same paper appeared an advertisement signed by Mr Mitchelson, in which he notified that any person coming to his gumfield could make 10 shillings per day. I saw it myself. I read it in Zadar.

Attempts by the author to trace that issue of *Narodni List* have not succeeded, so that Franich's claim cannot be verified. In fact several references were made at Commission hearings in 1898 and in the Croatian press in New Zealand at the time that agents were tempting people to come to work in the gumfields. The finger was mainly pointed at Mitchelson Bros in the Northern Wairoa, who emphatically denied these allegations. The most articulate accuser was Matthew Ferri, who spoke of a campaign by a group of landowners and leaseholders to lure unsuspecting young men from Dalmatia to New Zealand.

Joseph Franich spent three years and eight months probing the swamplands of the north and extracting gum before moving to Auckland. It is apparent that he did well. When he arrived, an earlier arrival, Lui Kinkela, managed the only 'Austrian' boarding house in the city, but by 1897 four were operating –

Nikola Green (Zelenkovich) on the corner of Albert and Durham Streets (Kingston Street today), Visko Rokich from Vis Island, location unknown, Lui Kinkela from Lovran in Istria in Hobson Street above the Heritage Hotel site, and Franich himself.



Josip (Joseph) Franich  
(1867–1921)

LEFT Josip Franich – boarding house and gum store, Hobson Street, Auckland, above the Heritage Hotel.  
SOURCE, FAMILY



Josip Franich.  
SOURCE, FAMILY

LEFT BOTTOM Josip Franich – Advertising his 60-room accommodation, May 1899 – Bratska Sloga.



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

Josip Franich – tobacco grower,  
Swanson, West Auckland, 1915.



Josip Franich and family.

Franich opened his boarding house, 'Sydney House', on a corner of Wyndham and Albert Streets in 1897. Ever an opportunist, he sold out to Ivan Bilich in 1898 and set up a 60-bed establishment in Princes Street next to the old Grand Hotel where he remained until 1903 before returning to the city to acquire Lui Kinkela's property in Hobson Street. This building was added onto and a gum store attached; he named the property 'Bojana'.

Franich was regarded as a man of some influence – an imposing, determined, colourful personality, who became a father figure to many of his compatriots. He adapted readily to Auckland's colonial society and openly displayed his patriotism and love for his homeland. For all that, he, like many, was an Austrophile, strongly believing in an autonomous united Croatia within the Austro-Hungarian Empire. His views were expressed strongly in the New Zealand Croatian paper, *Bratska Sloga*, in 1899 and in *Napredak*, in 1906–09.

In 1899 he married Kathleen Julia Keane. The Matrons of Honour were Mesdames Franciskovich (Franchi) and Viscovich (Viscoe), wives of pioneer families from Istria, a northern province of Croatia.

In 1913, Franich was lured to Henderson where he bought Peter Milicich's 2.4-ha (6-acre) property in Swanson Road where he established 'Boyana' vineyards. During his years in Henderson, he attracted a new circle of friends and compatriots already established in vineyards and orchards in the district. His home, typically Dalmatian, became a meeting place and a social centre for many who passed through on their way to the gumfields of Kumeu and Taupaki, or who came to settle.

While he concentrated on producing wines, most probably a standard range of port and sherry, he also ventured into cultivating tobacco plants, perhaps influenced by Khaleel Corban's success. He engaged in correspondence with the Prime Minister and Minister of Agriculture. The *Herald* reported his negotiations on 9 September 1919: 'Mr Franich, who was a tobacco grower in Dalmatia before he came to New Zealand over 26 years ago, has been vine-growing in Henderson, but he got some tobacco seed out from his homeland and has had great success in its cultivation as an experiment.'

Franich argued that the quality of New Zealand tobacco could compete with that of Australasia and America. The government showed little interest, offering only to give the idea 'careful consideration'. In the midst of these deliberations, Joseph Franich became gravely ill and died in 1921. His vineyard survived for many years, managed by his widow and family.



## Ivo (John) Šegetin (1873–1960)

Ivo (John) Šegetin  
(1873–1960)

BORN in the village of Vručica (Vruchitsa) near Trpanj on the Pelješac Peninsula, Ivo Šegetin arrived in New Zealand in 1894 to join his brother Vlaho (Charlie) Šegetin who had arrived in New Zealand the previous year.

Ivo went north to dig gum with his brother, a cousin and six others from Pelješac and Sučuraj. After eight months he went to Auckland and opened a boarding house for a time. In 1899 he and three partners began publishing a Croatian language newspaper, *Danica*, in opposition to Matthew Ferri's *Bratska Sloga*. Having sold out his interest to Ivan Pavlinovich, Ivo became a commercial traveller peddling goods to his fellow countrymen in the gumfields. He recorded his journey, the places he visited and life in the camps, giving wild estimates of numbers of Dalmatians on the fields.

In 1901 or 1902 Ivo Šegetin bought a farm of 266 ha (665 acres) at Kaukapakapa with the intention of establishing a vineyard and winemaking business. For some reason he became a dairy farmer instead. In 1907, he married Emma Annie Piggot, an Australian (1879–1932) in Auckland. It seems that henceforward Ivo Šegetin moved away from community involvement. His name never again appeared in the affairs of the community.



1914 – a large 220lb piece of kauri gum dug from a hole 3.6m deep at Kaukapakapa by Ivo (John) Šegetin. His two children, Charley and Pat, flank the piece, valued at the time at £50.

SOURCE, FAMILY



Ivo (John) Šegetin.



# Matthew Andrew Ferri (1870–1936)



Matthew Ferri, taken 1928.

SOURCE, ZORA

A RESTLESS, intelligent but egotistical patriot who gave much to the community, Matthew Ferri never fully enjoyed their trust.

The Ferri family name in Trpanj (Pelješac Peninsula) goes back to the 16th century. It was most certainly of Italian origin in common with so many others on the Croatian seaboard whose families intermingled with the Venetian occupiers for over a period of 400 years. Matthew arrived in New Zealand in 1895, stayed for eight months before returning to the Kalgoorlie goldfields in West Australia. He then returned to New Zealand in 1897 with his father Andrew and settled in Auckland.

Andrew, a seafarer, brought his wife Maria out in 1899 and settled near Wellsford. Matthew, a man of some education, considered himself superior to his gumdigging compatriots. He was a journalist, well versed in colonial ways, and relatively erudite and well-spoken. The general opinion among his countrymen was that he was arrogant, difficult to deal with and, worse still, pro-Austrian.

In 1899 he persuaded Anton Bulat (Sučuraj) to publish a Croatian language newspaper, with himself as editor. Four issues of *Bratska Sloga* (Brotherly Unity) were duly published. However it crashed in the face of an opposition paper *Danica* (Morning Star) published almost in parallel.

Ferri was more successful with *Napredak* (Progress), published by his British and Austrian Newspaper Company from 1906 to 1909. The style and format was very much like *Bratska Sloga*, well edited and well informed. Another attempt occurred in 1919 when Ferri launched *Novi Svjet* (New World) with George Scansie. Unfortunately his tactics on all these

papers were to criticise, sometimes abuse, sometimes to posture arrogantly, often inviting court action for defaming individuals.

Matthew Ferri regarded himself as a patriotic Croat, although he always reminded himself and his readers that Austria should be honoured. One of his missions in his early life in New Zealand was to convince the press and authorities in Austria and the province of Dalmatia that the villagers should be discouraged from migrating to New Zealand. Having failed in this, he then decided that the New Zealand Government should be persuaded to offer incentives, such as cheap land, for 'Austrians' to settle in New Zealand. As a man of some standing, he assumed the role of protector and advocate, corresponding regularly with Prime Ministers and Members of Parliament to enlighten them and to argue his case for settlement.

Matthew Ferri was outspoken and abrasive, given to scheming and dreaming of his great plan to settle his people – but he so often rubbed people up the wrong way and made many mistakes. He came to be mistrusted and bypassed by others. During John Totich's consulate between 1927 and 1944 he tried to reassert himself as a self-appointed consular representative in Auckland while Totich worked in Dargaville from 1927 to 1938.

Matthew Ferri married Daisy Marsh in 1901. They had five children: Myrtle, Rudolph, Olive, Hilda and Raymond. He died on 3 August 1936. Disregarding his personality and his difficult relationship with family and others, he left his mark through his Croatian newspapers. His views were not unreasonable but often misguided, and we can thank him for depositing *Bratska Sloga* in the Turnbull Library, Wellington and *Napredak* in the Auckland Public Library.



## Herr Eugen Langguth Consul for Austria-Hungary

GERMAN-speaking Austrians contributed considerably to New Zealand's development through exploration, research and art. Pioneer non-German Croats from Austria's provinces tended to be pro-Austrian in their early decades in New Zealand, but by the time they began to move on to the gumfields post 1885, they gradually assumed a Croatian nationalist identity. Even so they remained Austrian subjects in spite of their general rejection of the title. As such they were dependent to a degree on the goodwill of the Austrian consul in Auckland, Eugen Langguth. Langguth was to be a central figure in Croatian settlers' introduction to New Zealand. Born in South Germany, he arrived in Auckland in 1884 with his old friend Karl Seegner.

Austria did not establish a consulate in Auckland until Langguth's appointment on 8 December 1897, prompted by the increased flow of Austrian subjects to and from the Auckland province. He took over the office from Karl Seegner, the German Consul who had since 1892 been acting Austro-Hungarian Consul. Seegner was chief executive of Seegner, Langguth and Co., merchants of Auckland, and New Zealand agent for the German Lloyd Steamship Company.

The Dalmatian Croats, as subjects of Austria, now had a consul who could not speak their language. A few spoke a smattering of German or Italian, but most depended on broken English to establish contact and understanding. Langguth was to prove sympathetic, friendly and sometimes generous in his dealings – though professional and aloof. He was particularly respected by Austrophiles in the Croatian community, men who dreamt of an autonomous Croatia within the Austro-Hungarian

Empire. It was alleged that some pretended to support Austria out of fear for the families at home.

There were many crises involving Croatian arrivals. In the wake of the 1899 restrictions on immigration from Austria, Langguth negotiated successfully to enable the entry of groups stranded en route to New Zealand in Sydney. Those whose difficulties compounded on arrival found in him a man of honour who served them as a friend, arranging loans and finding work – he was rarely described as an officious diplomat.

In a notable example of his support, he received in 1903 a community delegation led by Matthew Franich MBE, of Dargaville, seeking the appointment of a Catholic priest to serve the community. The resulting negotiations were fully supported by the Catholic Bishop of Auckland and led in the appointment of Rev. Josef Zanna, of the Mill-Hill order, a German speaking Austrian – a compromise choice.

As Consul, Langguth took special pleasure in supporting any signs of pro-Austrian sentiment in the community. When the Croatian language newspaper *Bratska Sloga* (Brotherly Unity) was launched by Matthew Ferri in 1899, Langguth made a speech at the opening function. Twice (1899 and 1909) during his term of office he announced decrees of amnesty or pardons on behalf of 'His Apostolic Majesty, Emperor of Austria and King of Hungary' for those who had failed to comply with orders to return to Austria to complete their military service.

When he proposed the establishment of an Austro-Hungarian Friendly Society in 1902 just after the immigration strictures of 1900 had been eased, the community reacted in opposition. A further uproar occurred in 1908 when he encouraged the

Herr Eugen Langguth  
Consul for Austria-Hungary



*Eugen Langguth – consul for  
Austria-Hungary, 1897–1914.*



Frank Mihaljevich –  
Diplomatic Secretary, 1914.  
SOURCE, FAMILY



formation of the Austro-Hungarian League initiated by Anton Šulenta, Karoly Resegger (Hungarian), Josip Franich, Ivo Šegetin, Peter Šulenta, M. Modrich and John S. Petricevich. The League was strongly supported by the paper *Hrvatsko Trubilo* (Croatian Bugle). Both attempts to create pro-Austrian organisations failed and those Croats who supported the schemes became less

interested as Austria's political agenda evolved in the critical years before the First World War. During these years Karl Klette, a Slovene, was diplomatic secretary. He spoke Croatian and this improved relationships with the community. For a time he was also secretary of Matthew Ferri's newspaper *Napredak* (Progress). Following him, Frank Mihaljevich served as diplomatic secretary until 1914.

When Austria declared war on Serbia on 28 July 1914, the reaction of the Pan-Slavic Croats in New Zealand was predictable and is dealt with elsewhere in this book. However, responding to a demonstration before the Austrian consulate by Croatian immigrants, Langguth protested strongly to the New Zealand Government to curb the 'anarchists'. At the same time he placed a notice in the daily papers calling up all Austrian reservists in New Zealand to report to him with a view to returning to Austria to serve the Emperor. Needless to say, it was all a waste of time. On 4 August 1914 the whole world was embroiled, and Langguth, representing an enemy state, was now without a job.

Eugen Adolf Emmerich Langguth became a naturalised British subject in July 1924, having remained free to carry on business during the war years, while 66 of his 'Austrian subjects', the Dalmatian Croats, were interned for various reasons. His business partner Karl Seegner, on the other hand, had his naturalisation revoked.

It is of some interest that prior to the declaration of war Eugen Langguth had sent a shipment of iron sand to the Krupps company in Germany for experimentation.



# Coromandel

THE Coromandel Peninsula to the east of Auckland city is dominated by a range of mountains that reach about 915 m at the highest point. The history of the area since the advent of Europeans is one of exploitation of natural resources, kauri forests, gold and kauri gum. The ranges and valleys were gradually stripped naked of trees, exposing volcanic ridges, peaks and outcrops of rocks. To the Croatian arrivals the ranges rising out of the Hauraki Gulf were reminiscent of the Biokovo Range hugging the coast of Central Dalmatia. The bared ridges and slopes of both were the product of ruthless exploitation by European settlers in one case, and Venetian predators in the other.

The gold rushes of the 1860s brought waves of miners and speculators to Thames. By 1868, a town of 18,000 had mushroomed. First they came by sea, by rail after 1898, and later by coach. The sea journey from Auckland took nine hours at the cost of three shillings. People of many races came to search for their pot of gold. From the coastal villages of Croatia two settlers from the Northern Adriatic and one from the south are recorded. Thomas Carina from Kraljevice arrived in 1862 and settled in Whitianga where he was involved in the timber trade. For a time he was in partnership with Vincent Duimovich. Carina built a seven-room hotel in Whitianga and a sailing trader. His lasting memorial is a rock outcrop near Coroglen known as Carina's Rock (or Kareena's Rock). In later years his brothers Marcello and Joseph also came to New Zealand.

Another pioneer of note was Vincent Duimovich from a village near Trieste who arrived in the late 1860s and became a successful timber contractor in Tairua. After selling his business interests he and his wife moved inland to Neavesville where he

died in 1910. A son, Thomas, served in the New Zealand army in the Boer War in South Africa, 1899-1902. During Duimovich's latter years, Neavesville, halfway between Hikuai and Kopu, grew into a scattered settlement with a hotel; which of course attracted Dalmatian gumdiggers up to about 1930. The area is now derelict. Whether Duimovich spoke his mother tongue or not is unknown, but his presence may have drawn some of his compatriots to the area.

*'Kareena's Rock' (Carina  
– early settler, Mercury Bay).*

PHOTO, VICTOR PIACUN



*The Scow, 'Saucy Kate' built  
by Thomas Carina of Tairua.*  
SOURCE, AUCKLAND INSTITUTE  
AND MUSEUM

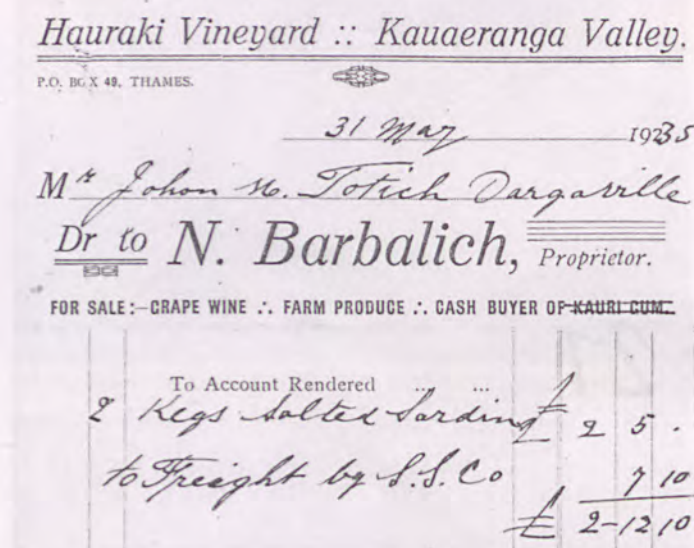


# Antonio Sarich and others

THE third pioneer settler was Antonio Sarich (1847–1926), possibly from Pelješac. His late son Claude believed that his father's true name sounded like Zečevich. Antonio joined a sailing ship as a cabin boy at the age of 10 and arrived in Thames via the Australian goldfields in 1864, aged 17. Later he married Rose Ryan, daughter of a well-known identity in the district, Captain Ryan. They had a family of five sons and three daughters.

Nikola Barbalich, Hauraki  
Vineyard, Kaueranga Valley,  
Thames, 1935.

SOURCE, TOTICH



When Croats began coming to the Coromandel region to dig gum they were known to have been befriended by Sarich, who helped with advice, assistance and hospitality. By this time he had almost forgotten his native tongue.

Coromandel was noted for its good quality kauri gum. Much of it was on the surface or at spade depth. Spears were needed only in the gullies and even there it was fairly shallow. Swamps

were particularly rich, but these often had to be drained before digging could begin. In many areas, local diggers set fire to the scrub and tailings of trees to expose possible gum-bearing areas. Thousands of young kauris were destroyed, much to the horror of Croatian diggers. Early Coromandel settlers noticed that these diggers kept to themselves, never going out to dances or socialising with colonists. They lived in small camps with shanties built of wood slabs or sack and calico. Survival at the best of times was difficult, but in the rugged Coromandel terrain, living in inaccessible places was stressful and lonely. Supplies had to be brought in by packhorses every four to six weeks – flour, potatoes, tinned goods and specials. Fresh meat, their mail and extras had to be collected weekly from the nearest store and carried back on foot. Mick Jelich, a digger in the area in 1926, said that he walked 10 to 15 miles to the store and back to camp over winding, often steep tracks. The effect of all this on their health was terrible. Nurtured on simple, healthy foods at home, and living in a dry climate, the change of diet and the cold, damp conditions took their toll – stomach ailments, bronchial problems and mental breakdowns afflicted many. Despite all this many made a good living and survived to see better days.

In the latter years of the 1890s, Croats, mainly from the Island of Hvar, were working the gumfields of Kaueranga Valley, Whitianga, Coroglen (formerly Guntown), Hikua and other locations. In 1900 Dick Bercich and Ivan Curin were storekeepers in Kaueranga Valley. Seven years later Curin was a gum buyer and finally an orchardist. In 1905 Nicholas Barbalich also ran a store and gum buying business in the valley. When





gum prices slumped some diggers left for Australia, others became bushmen or took on drainage work on the Piako Swamp (Hauraki Plains), already under way since 1907 and increasing in scale. Timber milling was also in decline and with the gum future uncertain the idea of a regular income drain digging was an attractive option for the diggers.

Gumtown (Coroglen) was a busy centre by 1904. The Harsant Bros store serviced several gum camps and timber milling camps by packhorse. Gum camps had distinctive names – Frying Pan, Starvation, Dirty, Bullsrun, Christmas Creek were examples. There were several Croatian settlers in the Gumtown area – George Piacun (Pearson), one of those who volunteered and served in the First NZEF in the First World War, Tony Radovanovich, Matě and Violet Rakich, who moved to Australia, and Paul Jovanovich (from Serbia) who ran the Zig-Zag store in the township. Between 1911 and 1918, Mick and Dick Vitali were also storekeepers and gum buyers there. In Thames Frank Kumarich, and in Kaueranga Simon Devcich and Nicholas Devcich ran similar businesses. At Whangapoua the Bonkovich brothers were known for their enterprise as gumdiggers and farmers.

Several had become bushmen. Tony Voykovich who arrived in 1906 dug gum for about 18 months before becoming a bushman, working with Frank Kumarich and Nicholas Voykovich building bush tramlines and bridges. Tony had a gang of 62 to build the notable Billy Goat Track with a pitch of 300 mm to 840 mm. Between 1924 and 1954 the Voykovich family ran a small vineyard and an orchard in the Kaueranga Valley to supply apricots to the Auckland markets.

During the First World War 'alien' Croatians were conscripted for national service on numerous public works. The drainage of the Hauraki Plains was one of these projects to which a large number were directed by Commissioner Cullen in charge of 'Yugoslav' aliens, in 1918. In September 1919, in recognition of their new identity as 'Yugoslavs' (officially subjects or nationals of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes) they were released from national service, although a number stayed on for 10 years or more to continue with draining the 'Plains' for local government or landowners. A good proportion of these labouring Dalmatian Croats, now referred to as 'Yugoslavs', settled on dairy farms in the Ngatea, Turua and Kerepehi areas. Others cut flax, threshed grass seed from the roadsides or worked on farms. A compact settlement grew on the plains from the comradeship of the gumfields.

Antonio Sarich and others



*Tony Voykovich, Kaueranga Valley – bushman, orchardist and winemaker.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY

FAR LEFT *The 'Billy Goat' track, Coromandel ranges – built by Tony Voykovich and others, 1910.*  
PHOTO, VOYKOVICH FAMILY



## Mihovil Dominik (Mick) Vitali

**M**IHOVIL Vitali arrived in New Zealand from Sućuraj, Hvar Island, Croatia, in 1900, at the time of the Immigration Restriction Act. In 1910, Vitali married Alice,

daughter of Joseph Viskovich (Viscovich-Viscoe) from Pula, Istria – a pioneer who arrived in about 1880.

The early Croatians came as individuals, sailors who found



*Vitali Wedding Group 1910  
Standing – Dick Erceg, Mihovil  
Vitali, Olive Viscovich.  
Seated – Martha Viscovich,  
child unknown, Alice Viscovich,  
Dominic Vitali.*



their way to New Zealand in English sailing ships in the 1870s and 1880s. They would have spread the word back home about New Zealand. Some early names recalled were Lui Kinkela, a sailor who initially settled in Russell, Bay of Islands, before coming to Auckland where he ran an oyster salon in Wellesley Street West in 1882. There were Ivan and Martin Bilich, Mariano Vella, Dick Ruskovich, Savo Kostich, a Montenegrin who had worked on the Suez Canal. From Sučuraj, it is believed Miche Franicevich, a mariner, came in 1892, Pave Juricevich 1895, the Bulat Brothers, Ante and Grgo soon after. The last were the first to go to the 'East Coast' (Coromandel). Other Sučurani of that early period were Matē Modrich (Snr), Frank Kumarich, George Jelichich (Martinov) and Dick Erceg. George's father went to New Caledonia with about 12 others because the Immigration Restriction Act prevented them from landing in New Zealand.

As Mick Vitali noted,

About six or seven years before I came, the United States Government imposed a quota system on immigration. It was then that an agent, Pirelli, in Trieste, began advising Croatians to go to New Zealand. My brother Dick was already in New Zealand when I left home, but because of restrictions imposed in the meantime, 16 of us were held in Sydney in quarantine for three weeks. We were finally allowed to leave on condition that we went to Wellington. Eighty or so others were similarly held and allowed to leave provided they did not go to Auckland. I came from Sydney on the SS *Waihara*.

The trip from Genoa to Sydney on a German boat took exactly 40 days, doing about eight or nine knots per hour. Conditions on board were bad and food was poor. A big load of potatoes on board rotted through the tropics and one had to hold one's nose to avoid the smell. There was no sugar or tea and cabins were ordinary. I arrived at a time of unemployment, when wages were low (5/- per day). Economic conditions were hard in Wellington. Within days of our arrival beggars came to our door begging for food. The main exports then were timber, gold, wool and kauri gum. Refrigerated ships, introduced in 1882, were now serving a growing market.

New Zealanders naturally thought that we would take their jobs, so it was hard all round, which decided us to be our own bosses on the gumfields rather than work for wages. We were

young and fit and the gumfields offered a free life, to do as one liked.

I had already lost a month between Sydney and Wellington owing to the restrictions, and when we arrived Marino (Mariano) Vella and a Mr Kennedy from the Union Steamship Company came on board to talk to us. They met Dick Seddon, the Prime Minister, who came on board and shook hands with us. He said; 'I'll let you land here providing you promise not to go north.' He told Vella that these were the sorts of men he wanted in the country. We had to sign an agreement and pay £10 deposit with the promise not to go north. Marino Vella was good to us. He came to us and found a house for us where we stayed. While in Wellington, I went fishing with his brother-in-law, but couldn't make a living so I left. One by one we scattered and went north, where we had relatives; we lost the deposit money that we had paid as security, in case of illness or being a burden on the state. We didn't care. I arrived in New Plymouth by train (the only line from Wellington) and then went by boat to Onehunga.

The 'English' people (New Zealanders) in those days were different. They regarded themselves as being kings, and you, nobody. They were jealous of us as workers, and used to say that they did not like us coming here because the wages were only 1 shilling per hour and we were taking their jobs.

We went to the gumfields because of our lack of means and lack of language. In those days you could only go to the goldfields, the bush or the gumfields if you were poor.

Most Sučurani went to the East Coast (Coromandel). The kauri grew there on the hills and in the gullies. One could find gum even when kauri is still alive and growing. When a strong wind blows even the roots start to leak and bleed and one could get pieces of gum up to three pounds in weight. Time purifies



Mihovil Dominik  
(Mick) Vitali

Gumtown Hall, Whitianga.  
PHOTO, VICTOR PIACUN



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

*Extract from the Vitali Bros Day Book recorded in their Guntown (Coroglen) store in 1910.*

[illegible]

gum. The longer it is in the soil, the better the gum. Gum from forked branches was the best. I remember one ton of gum being found under one stump, because it happened that the kauri grew over a stone that caused the tree to bleed when the winds blew up. One had to study the country, and search until a good gum colour was found. There was lots of shallow digging from 3 inches to 12 inches.

We made good money on the East Coast gumfields – it was the best gum in the country. At the turn of the century there were about three hundred diggers on the East Coast. We lived in deserted bushmen's camps, or in shanties of sacks lined with calico – which we would shift from place to place. The storekeepers would supply us with everything and also buy our gum. Some of us made enough for tucker, while others might make up to £200.

On Table Mountain on the East Coast, I dug gum which came from kauri on top of the mountain – they were not big kauris – about 4 feet in diameter. In the gully the trees were bigger. Other times one could follow old diggings and continue to dig in that area.

My brother Dominik (Dick) and I had a store in Gumbtown between 1911 and 1918. At times we bought 4 tons of gum from diggers at 130 shillings per hundredweight and sold it on for 160 shillings.

Gumtown once had a population of 3000, bush felling, gumdigging and some gold mining. There were still two or three gold mines being worked. Gumtown also had a two-storey hotel that burnt down later.

I collected money from fellow Dalmatians for a hospital in Mercury Bay – The Mercury Bay Public Hospital. We held picnics, sports meetings and other activities to raise funds. George Young was the Board chairman and later he wrote and thanked me for my work on behalf of the Board. The New Zealand Government subsidised the fund, pound for pound.

Already acquainted with the Viscovich family, Mick Vitali married Alice in 1910 at the Onehunga Catholic Church. They settled in Whitianga where the two brothers ran the store at Gumtown before moving to Auckland as the flu epidemic struck. After a time Mick and Alice farmed at Karaka before settling in Papakura. They had 11 children.

## Joseph Viscovich

Joseph left his native Pula in 1851 at age 15 with his family's blessing. With the help of a friendly sea captain he went to England from where he joined the crews of several different sailing ships over a period of 17 years. In 1868 he left a ship at Port Chalmers, Dunedin, and found his way to Auckland where he ran a small business in the present Civic Theatre block in Wellesley Street. Not long after this he married and moved to Onehunga. There he went back to sea as second mate on the *Rarawa*, a coastal ship working the southern ports, linking the small towns and communities in New Zealand's formative period. Joseph's wife died tragically and then he remarried later to Alice Freestone, daughter of a pioneer settler. They had six children, Alice being the one whom Mick Vitali married.



# The *Elingamite*

**A**N episode that Ante Kosovich recalled in his poem written in 1908 was the wreck of the *Elingamite*.

The steamship *Elingamite*, en route from Sydney to Auckland, ran ashore on West Island in the Three Kings Group, north of North Cape on 2 November 1902. Thick fog shrouded the islands, causing a disaster in which 45 were drowned out of a total of 194 on board. The court hearing in the aftermath heard charges against the 10 'Austrians' (Croats) on board – claiming that they had attempted to commandeer the lifeboats and life jackets. Some of the witnesses wanting scapegoats found the Austrians an easy target, because they were foreigners and lacked English language ability. The Austrian Consul Eugen Langguth, having conducted an enquiry into the charges against his nationals, could not confirm any of the allegations and all were withdrawn. The captain himself stated that the 'Austrians' had been co-operative in the rescue operations and could not be blamed. Eight years later an Australian naval survey proved that the charted location of the island group was as much as a mile and half in error and the captain himself was thus exonerated from blame. Charlie Huttley of Kaitia recalled in 1983 that after the wreck of the *Elingamite* at the Three Kings, survivors landed in Houhora Bay.

The noted Gumfields poet Ante Kosovich seized the opportunity to dramatise the event in a poem published in the Croatian language in 1908. This is part of a translation by the author where Kosovich noted only five Croatian names.

Carrying on board in truth  
in number one hundred and ninety four,  
people of many lands  
among them five Dalmatian men  
of proud Croatian heritage.  
Let me recite their separate names.  
Yure Prodan comes first to mind,  
from historic Makarska County  
Born in the hamlet of Veliko Brdo  
Crowded amidst wild and rocky spurs.  
The secondly Mijo Borich of Podgora  
Gemlike village in the lap of Biokovo,  
a beacon in Croatian's dreams  
and praised by all who are called Dalmatian  
and thirdly his fellow villager who is known  
by the proud name of Luka Lunjevich  
The fourth my dear friends was there  
by the name of Mijo Markotich  
from the celebrated town of Vrgorac  
home of brave men of old.  
Fifth comes Yure Pribicevich born well  
and nurtured through to manhood  
in the exalted village of Zaostrog  
strong guardian of Croatian rights.





SS Elingamite.

SOURCE, BILL LAXON MARITIME  
LIBRARY, NEW ZEALAND  
NATIONAL MARITIME MUSEUM.

The full list actually on board included: Yure Prodan, Mijo Borich, Luka Lunjevich, Mijo Markotich, Yure Pribicevich, Matē Sumich, Dick Fredatovich, Mijo Jelavich, Matē Beros and Ante Rošandich.

After introductory stanzas Kosovich goes on, vividly describing the desperate scene:

Rising mountains and deep sea valleys  
That beat upon the steamer riding high,  
and suffering this relentless scourge  
weary souls, dazed and sleepless  
stood in fear and wonder to face  
this seaborne fury bursting  
from the dark canopy of heavens above.  
All who gathered themselves in reason  
sent impassioned prayers from salty lips  
to seek great God's intercession  
To lead them in safety and in health  
To the waiting shores of New Zealand.  
They called upon their saints  
Turned over their thoughts, searched their souls,  
So too our men prayed fervently  
That dawn's early light might reveal their plight.  
To see which way fortune might take them,

But desperately dawn's light hesitates,  
A deathly greyness lingers on the edge of day  
And sheet walls of driven rain  
Hide the way and blind the vessel's path,  
Now rising to peaks or wallowing deep.  
In the ocean's deepest ravines  
Surging forward injured by tormented nature  
In desperate battle with unknown elements.  
At the wheel the captain struggles  
To keep his ship on landward course.  
But darkened seas obscure the way  
And end-to-end the ship is invisible.  
Thrown off course in blinding darkness  
Into a tunnel of watery hell  
Driven on by harsh angered seas  
In heroic battle with unknown forces.  
In the cold glimmer of dawning day  
Turgid scenes are perceived about.  
Wretchedness and sorrow await the ship  
At that moment into a cleft she surges  
Beneath the face of a rugged island peak  
Forced by wild unrelenting seas  
To fall upon the teeth of jagged crags  
On board the anxious migrants collapse  
As the ship heaves off and down again  
Like a hammer raised by Neptune's hand  
A deathblow struck her down  
Her broken seams opened to the sea  
To flood holds with salted torrents  
While those on deck wailed in terror  
Falling to their knees in anxious prayer  
Pleading fearfully to God on high  
To have mercy upon their souls,  
To receive them in heavenly forgiveness  
Should their lives be lost and souls departed.  
(Trans. S.A.J.)



## CHAPTER THIRTY

# Ante (Tony) Kosovich (1879–1958)

Ante (Tony) Kosovich  
(1879–1958)

**A**NTE Kosovich, the balladeer of Croatian settlers throughout his life, was born in the village of Zaostrog. Noted for its Croatian literary traditions nurtured by the Franciscan monastery, Zaostrog was a beacon of Croatian patriotism during the dark ages of economic and political oppression under Austria.

The first parish school in Dalmatia opened in Zaostrog in 1888, and Ante Kosovich was among its first group of pupils. He was a keen student and learnt to write in the popular folk style of Andrija Kačić-Miošić, a learned Franciscan monk and Dalmatian folk poet (1704–60). One of Ante's first poems at age 11 was recited by school children when strong feelings against pro-Italian autonomists in Dalmatia were openly expressed.

(NB: Pravaši – members of the Party of Rights.)

Pravaši each so easy to recognise,  
heroic of heart, honest and wise  
Oh villagers hear their words and cheer,  
long live Croatia, long live Croatia,  
down with the autonomists  
down with the renegades.

(Trans. S.A.J.)

In 1898, Ante Kosovich arrived in New Zealand to join his brother Nikola. They worked together for two years before Nikola returned to Zaostrog to his young wife and the child he had not seen. Ante's movements for the next five years are not known. He claimed he was a keen sportsman and encouraged his compatriots to become sport and fitness conscious.

At gatherings he asked them to tell all that they weren't Austrians 'but members of the mighty Slavic nation'. In 1905 he organised his first sports meeting at Houhora in the Far North, which he advertised with banner headlines, 'Hrvati-Croatians will hold an athletic meeting'. It was such a success that other meetings were held. In 1906, despite his concerns for his people expressed through his writings, he became a naturalised British subject. At the time he was gumdigging at Poroti, west of Whangarei.

In 1907, Ante was in Waiharara where he completed writing his collection of poems of life in a foreign land, entitled *Dalmatinac iz tudjine* (From a Dalmatian in Exile). The collection was published in Split in 1908, by the Split Printing Society and was dedicated to Croatian youth. The first poem, 'Longing for Home', translated by Amelia Batistich and Peggy Dunstan, is a heart-tugging cry of nostalgia, written only as Kosovich could write.

Dalmatia my homeland  
how often my thoughts return to your shores  
recalling my happy youth time,  
summers, fruitful autumns, winters  
when all my days were blest.

It ends with a message of despair.

Ah, Dalmatia, I give you news of your sons,  
how this wild, hard country beats them down  
in the lonely hell of gumfields.



Ante Kosovich – gumfields poet,  
1918.

SOURCE, UNKNOWN



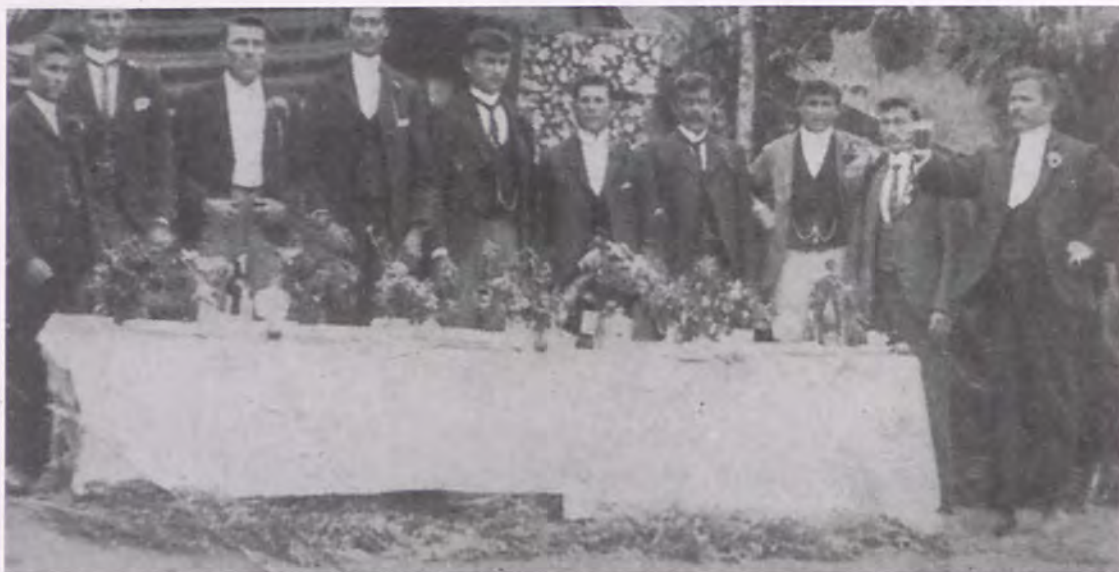
## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

'Longing for Home' and the 'Tragedy of the Elingamite' were both recited in Dalmatia's schools of that era. Amelia Batistich's late husband Tony from Žrnovo knew the Elingamite ballad by heart before ever coming to New Zealand.

The 1908 Kosovich collection of eight poems is a valuable part of New Zealand's history seen through the eyes of a wandering balladeer from a foreign land expressed in a foreign tongue. Ante Kosovich kept writing, as his original scripts show, in pencil. Several shorter poems appeared in the Croatian language newspapers *Napredak* (1906–09) and *Zora* (1913–16). When the First World War broke out, Ante organised a fundraising committee in Waiharara to assist the war effort, particularly the Serbian Red Cross. After war's end he published in 1920 *Uskrsnuće Jugoslavije* (The Resurrection of Yugoslavia), 108 pages of patriotic verse reviewing the war and events leading to the formation of new South Slav state. In similar style in 1947, in the aftermath of the Second World War he published *Uskrsnuće Slavena* (The Resurrection of the Slavs) covering the battles on the Eastern Front, and the exploits of Tito and the Partisan army leading to the creation of the federated Communist governed newborn Yugoslavia. His compatriots generously financed both publications.

Ante Kosovich toasting his homeland, 1907.

SOURCE, ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY



After settling in Auckland after the war, he joined a committee set up in 1925 to establish the Yugoslav Progressive Society. The first meeting was called for 21 November 1925, when a set of rules was adopted – but nothing eventuated through lack of support. In 1927 he appeared again as a founder of the Yugoslav Library which evolved to become Yugoslav Club and Library (Inc.) in 1930. For the rest of his life he remained a member of that club, continuing the writing of celebratory poems for various national functions and historic occasions. His efforts in the English language honouring Jean Batten, aviatrix, and Michael Joseph Savage, the first Labour Prime Minister in 1935, and his poem 'The children of Stalingrad' could not match his writings in his mother tongue.

Ante Kosovich died on 24 February 1958 and is buried at Waikumete Cemetery among many of his own people, people with whom he had shared pain and tribulation, people whom he celebrated in his writings. He was a rare individual who enriched the community with his musings and his humour. His epitaph reads,

Whoever steps before God our judge  
can have no one to plead for him  
only his deeds on earth are his  
witness and his defence.  
With his good God he meets  
and his deeds he submits  
seeking that these may  
alone serve the glory of God  
Let them not be dark deeds.  
here at the last judgement  
one's life's acts will decide  
the path to heaven or hell  
(Trans. S.A.J.)



## The *Panther* – Austrian cruiser

THIS Imperial Majesty's cruiser *Panther* visited Auckland between 25 September and 16 October 1905.

The *Panther* was on a world cruise but one of its purposes was to report on the condition of Austrian migrants in New Zealand and the effect of the government's new immigration laws. Furthermore, the report would cover living conditions, financial security and loyalty. Its other mission was to repatriate Austrian subjects of military age, to complete their service in the navy (four years) or army (three years) in Austria. The Austrian authorities in Vienna had supplied the consul in Auckland with a list of defectors that was passed on to the New Zealand Government who then instructed the New Zealand Police to locate and detain those listed.

J.V. Kurta, at that time a resident of New Plymouth, and a naturalised British subject since the previous year, was warned of the ship's coming by his family in Podgora, Dalmatia. At this stage his name had already been abbreviated in anticipation of such an event. However, even though naturalised, he discovered that his name was on the police list. When approached he, of course, denied any knowledge of anyone called 'Kurtich' and was left free.

On its arrival the *Panther* was warmly welcomed by colonial society. The Governor-General's representative, Capt. H. Boscowan, the Anglican Bishop of Auckland, Dr Neligan, the Consul for Austria, Eugen Langguth, the French Consul, the honorary German Consul, Carl Seegner and Sir John Logan Campbell visited the ship. Visits were also exchanged with the Mayor of Auckland, A. Myers, and the Catholic Bishop of Auckland, Rt. Rev. Bishop Lenihan.

The Captain reported as follows to the Geographic Society in Vienna,

The Austro-Hungarian colony in Auckland is numerous, but with the exception of Mr Romeo Bragato, viticulturist, and Mr A. Schischka, merchant, it consists of inferior elements. The two gentlemen were invited on board and they reciprocated by entertaining the crew for the whole period of their stay.

It was also reported that the locals generally took great care of the crew. Everyone was concerned for their welfare. In the newspaper *Napredak* in January 1907, Ilija Mandich took the opportunity of thanking all local Croatians who co-operated in honouring the ship's complement.

Romeo Bragato obviously didn't share the view that Croatian settlers were inferior elements. He advised the Austrian on-board authorities that he had successfully used his considerable influence with the New Zealand Government to help his Croatian compatriots when required, particularly by encouraging their winemaking endeavours.

Towards the end of the ship's visit, Bishop Lenihan invited Reverend Josef Zanna from the Far North to celebrate Mass on board. He gave the sermon in Italian.

With regard to repatriation, J.V. Kurta learnt that there were about 100 names being followed up, yet the official number of those who were detained and registered for duty was only 12.



# Jakob Vincent Kurta (Kurtić) (1877–1965)



Jakob Vincent Kurta (Kurtić),  
New Plymouth, 1960.

PHOTO, AUTHOR

JAKOV Kurta was born in Podgora, the home of numerous Croatian settlers in New Zealand, probably the largest number of all the villages in Dalmatia. The first settlers came independently: Mariano Vella in 1878, followed by Ivan (John) and Peter Vella. The main influx from Podgora towards the end of 1896 began with the arrival of Jakov Kurtich (Kurta), Ivan Borich and Ante Sisarich, as Jakov claimed. This was part of a major exodus from all the Eastern Adriatic coastal regions, sparked by Austria-Hungary's disastrous trade treaty with Italy in 1892.

Jakov Kurtich, as he was known at the time, was fortunate to attend a recently opened public school in the village between 1883 and 1889. He had to leave in the sixth year to help maintain his family's vineyards and olive groves. By village standards he was well educated; he could read and write and debate the problems of the nation with his elders. In 1891 or 1892 he learnt something of New Zealand from an article in *Narodni List* published in Dalmatia's capital city, Zadar. It was a land of opportunity, where one could emigrate and dig for kauri gum. It was probably the same article that Josip Franich read in 1891.

The effect of the trade treaty apparently didn't alter Jakov's position – perhaps his family was financially secure. He was, even at the early age of 16, engaged in anti-Austrian activities, brimming with patriotic fervour and fully involved politically. He joined the 'Pravaši', the Party of Rights, committed to establishing Croatian autonomy and union between Austria's provinces of Istria, Dalmatia and Hungary's provinces of Croatia and Slavonia. Austria's reaction to all this was ruthless and uncompromising. Jakov and his friends often had to go into

hiding in caves, old ruins and secret hideaways. Driven to the extreme, he decided, with his family's blessing and support, to emigrate to New Zealand. In his preparations for departure Ivan Borich and Ante Sisarich joined him.

They slipped out of Podgora secretly by night without passports, with birth certificates only. Via a series of prearranged agents they reached Naples in Italy and sailed to New Zealand on the German liner *Bremen* – changing ships in Sydney. The three friends arrived in Auckland with several others from different villages on the coast. The year 1896 was notable for the extraordinary large influx from every part of the Adriatic seaboard.

Arriving in Auckland on 26 November 1896, the three men, the first from Podgora, stayed at Lui Kinkela's boarding house in Hobson Street. Jakov was soon heading north to Opua on the *Clansman* and finally reached Kaikohe, which at the time was mainly a destination for 'Novjani' (men from Novi Vinodol). Without question they were helped in every way, a shanty built, equipment and credit arranged and instructions issued. The novices found the going difficult and strenuous, but as they gradually learnt the ropes and built up their strength, so too they began to earn a reasonable living. The three moved about the north for three and a half years before Jakov saw the futility of endless toil with no assurance of a regular income. He realised that there were other opportunities and better lifestyles, so he moved on.

In the decades around the turn of the century, Auckland's restaurants (known as oyster salons) were generally in Greek ownership. Chance led Jakov to become acquainted with the



Kostopolis brothers who owned two such 'oyster salons' in Queen Street. He was given a job in the business at the top of Queen Street and quickly learnt the trade and improved his English language skills. When the opportunity arose to buy the business he invited a friend, Ivan Pavlinovich, to join him in partnership. Pavlinovich with his better knowledge of English and business matters managed the business well and the partnership flourished financially.

In 1902 Jakov received a letter from his family in Podgora that unsettled him. They informed him that Austria was going to despatch the naval cruiser *Panther* to the Pacific on a training cruise but in the process would attempt to pick up Austrian nationals in New Zealand who had yet to complete their service in the army or navy. Jakov promptly sold his share to Pavlinovich and shipped out for New Plymouth in Taranaki, beyond the reach, he hoped, of Austria's long arm. Of course he was also out of reach of his community and his friends. In New Plymouth he was alone, the first Croatian to settle there.

His experience in the Auckland restaurant convinced him he was capable of running a similar business in New Plymouth. His partner this time was an Englishman. They were soon well established. Jakov joined the Taranaki Volunteer Rifles Brigade and in 1904 became a naturalised British subject but now under the name of Jacob Vincent Kurta. Secure, well respected and successful, he married Cristina Agostinelli, in 1907, a young Italian woman from Northern Italy. They had seven children who thrived in the union of two rich cultures.

The *Panther* is discussed elsewhere, but when the cruiser

finally turned up in Auckland in 1905, Jacob Vincent Kurta was beyond reach – or so he thought. He was questioned by the police but denied any connection with the Kurtich on their list. The validity of Austria's intention to repatriate all those listed is open to question, particularly where it concerned naturalised British subjects who had pledged loyalty to the British Crown. He now felt free, and decided New Plymouth would be his hometown. He could look at Mt Taranaki (Egmont) and Podgora's Biokovo was etched on his mind as a memory. During his lifetime he returned to his homeland only once in 1938 with his old friends Lovre (Laurence) Marinovich and Mick Ravlich, 42 years after his departure.

Jacob Vincent Kurta is a significant figure in the pattern of Croatian settlement in New Zealand. He was one of the first from Podgora to come to New Zealand to dig gum. He was the second of his people to open a restaurant in New Zealand. Louis Kinkela was the first in 1882. He was the key to the expansion southward of the restaurants cum fish shops owned and operated by his compatriots. Many of these sole owners had worked for Kurta, learnt the ropes in New Plymouth and were sometimes financed by him. The flow south built up gradually in the first decade of Kurta's presence in New Plymouth but widened in the 1920s as the gumfields became depleted.

Jacob Vincent Kurta sold his business interests in 1925 and retired after three and a half years gumdigging, 19 years in the restaurant trade and six and a half years in a fancy goods business. He was a prominent and patriotic member of the community, a proud Slav, Croatian and Dalmatian.

Jakob Vincent Kurta (Kurtić)  
(1877–1965)



# Oratia

Seasons in the valley, thus the years go by  
 Seasons when we laughed and played  
 Seasons when we cried  
 Seasons when the vines they thrived  
 Seasons when they died  
 Seasons in the valley, times goes drifting by.  
 – Rudi Sunde, of Oratia, 1980.

Oratia holds a special place in the pattern of Croatian settlement in New Zealand. Over a period of 50 years it attracted a strong influential community of families principally from the Dalmatian village of Podgora, on the Adriatic coast. These were a proud people, clannish and devoted to their village connections. In time they came to represent a sizeable proportion of settlers in New Zealand – about 16 per cent.

The settlement of Oratia grew from a minor migratory chain over several years, as men and women arrived full of hope, unafraid of hard work and committed to creating a secure future for their families. By 1920, over 80 per cent of Oratia's permanent settlers were from Podgora. By 1940 the ratio was down to 56 per cent. No wonder that their compatriots nicknamed it 'Mala Podgora' (Little Podgora).

Oratia lies to the west of Auckland City, spread across valleys and low ridges which unfold at the southern end of the Waitakere Ranges. The ranges fall back to the Manukau Harbour and the West Coast, extending northwards some distance, providing a shield against cutting westerly rains and serving as a backdrop to the many settlements on the eastern slopes and foothills. For the settlers there may have been an image of the homeland

Biokovo Range in their minds when they were first drawn to settle in Oratia, Henderson and Swanson.

At the beginning of the 20th century the land to the west of Auckland was sparsely settled, much of it in virgin bush, or reduced to tea-tree scrub and gorse. Between Oratia and South Kaipara Heads gumfields were still being exploited and kauri forests milled. Early gumdiggers were concentrated around Lincoln Road, Henderson, Taupaki, Kumeu, Waimauku and South Kaipara Heads. Limited amounts of gum were also being taken out around Glen Eden and Oratia. The result of deforestation, and kauri-gum 'mining', was an impoverished landscape difficult to work, and consisting mainly of light to heavy clay, with thin layers of soil, perhaps richer and deeper in the gullies.

Settlement in the west appears to have begun in about 1854 when kauri timber milling was at its peak. During the 1870s and 1880s hardy pioneer colonial settlers began to establish orchards and nurseries. The land had to be developed by laborious methods. It had to be well drained, fenced off against wild cattle and gradually improved by ploughing, fertilising and harrowing. Stimulus to further settlement followed after the completion of the Newmarket-Waikomiti (Glen Eden) railway link in February 1880. The line was extended to Henderson later that year. In 1882 a small school opened in Oratia to provide for growing families – however, the future of Oratia was already predetermined by the increased number of orchards in the area and the formation of the Waikomiti Fruitgrowers Association in 1896. A telephone service followed in 1897, a store opened at Waikomiti (Glen Eden) in 1900, and improved roading followed



to service the influx of settlers and the movement of produce and goods.

In 1903 John and Catherine Vella and family arrived from Otaki to take up land on Oratia Road (now West Coast Road). They cleared their land and planted grapes, and fruit trees. Grape varieties included Black Hamburg, White Muscat, Pinot Meunier and Albany Surprise. The decision to concentrate on grapes may well have been influenced by the efforts of the Corban family and Stephen Yelas of Henderson. It's also possible that the latter two and Vella were swayed by the advice of Romeo Bragato, a viticulturist in the New Zealand Government's

employ. But, John Vella had also grown grapes at Otaki.

The example of the Vella family and their apparent success attracted others to settle in the district. In 1904 with money made on the gumfields, five compatriots from Podgora, Stanko and Lovre Marinovich, Ante and Matě Borich, and Ivan Sunde purchased 65.2 ha (163 acres) of land on West Coast Road. On this land, 2.4 ha (6 acres) of grapes were planted. After Ante Borich died in 1906, Matě sold his interest to the others and started a vineyard at Riverhead. The remaining three shared out the land and Ivan Sunde in turn sold a block to two brothers, George and Matě Glucina (from Drašnice). The two Marinovich brothers were then joined by brother Matě.



*Lovre (Lawrence) and Marě  
Marinovich with son Tony, 1914.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY

*Standing, L to R – Unknown, Stanko  
Marinovich, Matě Marinovich.  
Seated, L to R – Lucy Borich with  
baby Nick Borich, Violet Marinovich,  
Mary Marinovich with child Daisy  
Marinovich, Annie Marinovich, Ivy  
Marinovich with Marin Borich,  
about 1916. Stanko and Mary  
married 1909.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

*The Sunde brothers, Oratia. Rear, L to R – Phillip, Dick, Adam, Tony. Front, L to R – Alex, Mrs. Neda, Rudy, Mrs. Slavka, Gloria, Gordon, Mary, Peter, Victor.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY

Other important arrivals were Phillip (Filip) and Dick (Dominik) Sunde who purchased 12 ha (28 acres) in Shaw Road, Oratia in 1913. The brothers arrived respectively in 1906 and 1908, worked on the gumfields in Northern Wairoa before settling in Oratia. They cleared and cultivated their block, planted a small lot of vines and much of the balance in apple trees. They were joined in 1924 by their brother Adam and in 1931 by Tony. Separate ways were decided in 1935 when Phillip and Dick formed a partnership, P & D Sunde.



BELOW *Adam and Mary Sunde's orchard, Shaw Road, Oratia, 1940s. L to R – Mary Sunde, Adam Sunde, Tony Sunde, George Viskovich, Walter Borich, Branko Devcich, Dennis Crowley, Ivan Jujnovich, Doreen Sunde. Front – Barry and Peter Sunde.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY



By 1920 there were 15 settlers from Dalmatia in Oratia, all from Podgora except for George and Matē Glucina from Drašnice. The number of orchards had increased while grape growing continued in a limited way as part of the traditional Dalmatian lifestyle. It was a symbolic gesture, a reminder of home left behind across distant seas. Now the conversation was peppered with the names of apples – Ballarat, Gravenstein, Northern Spy, Granny Smith and Sturmer.

Samuel Vella, son of the pioneer John Vella, gives his reasons for the decline in Oratia's winemaking capacity and Henderson's growth.

They took on grape growing [in Oratia] but, as pioneers, were unlucky. The spring showers would come over the Waitakere Ranges so constantly that the blossoms would not set into grapes. The rainfall was too much at 100 inches per year and crops would fail. Only four miles further away the rainfall was much less. We rooted out the vines and planted apples. So also did the others in Oratia.

This opinion is not supported by the late Ivan Sunde, son of an early Oratia settler. Ivan Sunde Snr. (who arrived in 1898) believed that the major factor in the decline was the vote for a non-licence law in the Eden Electorate in 1908, which included Oratia and part of Henderson. Wine could no longer be sold at the gate. The Oratia settlers took note of this and gradually switched over to fruit growing, maintaining only limited areas of vines for commercial sale and domestic use. Quite the opposite situation evolved in Henderson.

It would have been warming in later years to relish the sight of acres of apple blossoms spread across the landscape they had shaped – across land which men, women and children laboured so tirelessly to make productive. It was backbreaking toil, beset by problems, lack of money and endless crises. Initially the fruit was taken to Glen Eden to be railed to Auckland. In 1930 this was superseded by Steve Vranjes who began a trucking service to the city. The time came when the growers were able to tick off hundreds of bushel cases being sent to market weekly.





## Oratia

### *Oratia and Henderson settlers. 1923-1924.*

*Rear, L to R – Joe Babich,  
Matě Marinovich, Matě  
Glucina, Dan Sinkovich.*

*Next Row, L to R – Sandy  
Sinkovich, Stanko Marinovich,  
Marian Borich, ?, ?, Simun Ujdur.*

*Centre, L to R – ?, Lovre  
Marinovich, Ivan on lap, Tony  
behind, Mare Marinovich (Mrs L),  
Mare Marinovich (Mrs S),  
Lucě Borich, ? ? ? incl. three  
children, Steve Babich.*

*Girls, L to R – Ivy Borich, ?, Annie  
Marinovich, Violet Marinovich,  
Daisy Marinovich, ?*

*Children, L to R – George Marinovich  
(Rev), ?, Nora Marinovich, Clem  
Marinovich, Nick Borich, George  
Glucina, ?, Henry Glucina.*

*SOURCE, UNKNOWN*

### *Opening ceremony, Oratia Catholic Church, 1930.*

*PHOTO, D.N. SUNDE*

After the First World War progress arrived in Oratia – more telephones were installed, the motorcar came into use providing flexibility. There was more time for social life, gatherings, dances in the packing sheds, family lamb-on-the-spit, wedding celebrations and christenings. They managed to finance and build a small church in 1930 dedicated to Saints Cyril and Methodius, Slavdom's patron saints. From 1930, two national societies in the city attracted large gatherings where they could feel more relaxed, more at home among their own.

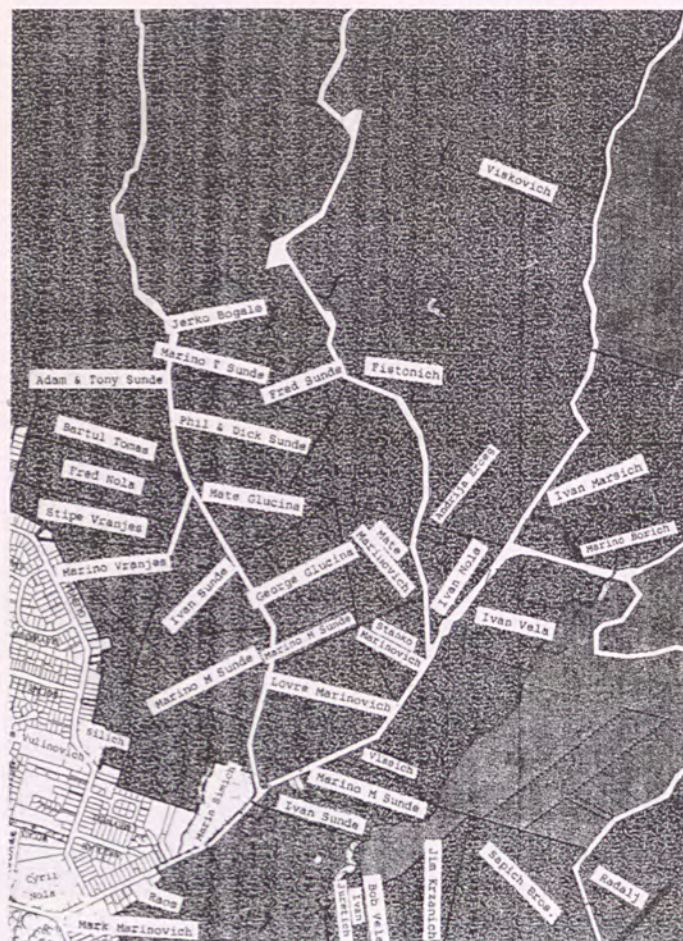
Through the 1930s the district grew in acreage under production. Roothing and communication improved and signs of affluence were evident. Their New Zealand born offspring were growing up and playing an active role on their family properties. Then, in 1939, war brought everything to a halt.







Ivan Sunde Snr, Oratia.



Oratia Settlers orchards, 1930s-1940s.

SOURCE, RUDI SUNDE

The growing export market and local distribution was put under the control of the Apple and Pear Marketing Board. Restrictions were imposed on gate sales or sales to fruit shops. Everything had to be channelled through the Board.

In more recent history Auckland's expansion has almost engulfed the remaining productive orchards and vineyards in Oratia and Henderson. Little remains except entries in the telephone directory and street names to remind one that here were hard-working pioneers from Dalmatia, Croatia, who had cast their die, proved their worth and established themselves as New Zealanders.

Three sons of pioneers from Oratia and Henderson took

up the challenges inspired by their parents to contribute their knowledge and organisational skills to the fruit growing industry. For their contribution they were honoured as leaders in the industry.

- **Victor Sunde** – son of pioneer Oratia orchardist and 'Yugoslav' activist Phillip Sunde. Victor was elected to the Apple and Pear Board in 1967 and became chairman in 1974, and remained so until 1988. In the New Year's Honours list of 1987, he received the MBE for his services to the industry.
- **Ivan Sunde** – son of Ivan Sunde Snr., an original Oratia pioneer. Ivan joined the Citrus Marketing Board in 1965 and was chairman between 1977 and 1982 when the Board was dissolved.
- **John Borich, JP** – son of Ivan and Ivka Borich, early settlers in Lincoln Road. John was Auckland Director of the New Zealand Fruit Growers Federation 1983-92. Currently he is an orchardist in Huapai.

The formation of the settlements at Herekino, Dargaville, Mangonui County, Henderson and Oratia arose from the need to congregate for social and economic reasons and to lend each other physical and moral support. As Peter Garelja noted in his university thesis on fruit growing, of all the established settlements, Oratia stood out as being unique, because it primarily revolved around a family and village grouping from Podgora.

Viticulture and horticulture were traditional callings that Dalmatians had followed in the environment of the Adriatic, where one had to nurture every ounce of soil to extract a livelihood. One imagines their amazement with the productivity of the soil in New Zealand and the erratic seasons. Long periods of windless weather and tranquil sunny days with blistering heat as experienced in Dalmatia were extremely rare. In New Zealand the seasons were confused. Winter and spring brought rainy squalls, gales, clouded skies and chilling temperatures. Summers were mild to hot and humid, sunny and often windy. Adaptation to the new conditions, the unpredictable climate and soft soil conditions created problems for the inexperienced, but through practice and observation they learnt to understand





*Fruitgrowers Field Day.  
L to R – A. L. Murray, Steve  
Covich, Henry Glucina, Lovre  
Marinovich, Steve Nola, Nick J.  
Borich, Nick Jurelich, M. Papa  
(1949).*

SOURCE, UNKNOWN

and adapt to these obstacles and differences and to develop skills and industry.

A serious impediment was their lack of knowledge of the English language that placed them at a learning disadvantage. Technical literature from Dalmatia on fruit growing was apparently almost non-existent. A small well-thumbed book used by Ivan Sunde Snr., *Knowledge of Fruit* (Umnoga Vočarstvo), appears to have been one source of information, which he shared among his fellow orchardists.

The mixed nature of Dalmatian holdings reflects the subsistence level of a village background and the need to be as self-sufficient as possible to survive through hard times. Properties invariably were family orientated and controlled, and everyone was expected to put their backs to the wheel in emergencies, to meet market deadlines, or cope with threatening disaster. Neighbours, the extended family circle and close village friends could always be relied on to help in a crisis.



*George Popovich, 1950  
– Delta Theatre, New Lynn.  
Oratia's community cinema.*

SOURCE, UNKNOWN



## John S. Vella (1863–1935) and Catherine Vella (1865–1952)

**J**OHN Vella, a first cousin of early settler Mariano Vella, arrived from Podgora in about 1888. He settled in Paremata, north of Wellington in 1889 where he was employed by his

cousin as a fisherman. In 1891 or 1892 he returned to Podgora to marry Catherine Marinovich. Two children, Victoria and Stephen, were born to them and the whole family returned to



*The Vella family, Oratia late 1800s. L to R from front – Samuel, John, Stephen, Catherine, John (Snr.), Victoria. Nina absent.*

SOURCE, FAMILY



New Zealand early in 1899 where John worked in a vineyard – possibly Mariano’s – at Otaki. He was naturalised in August of that year – occupation, labourer. Another cousin, Peter, had also joined Mariano during that period and probably worked on the Mana Island sheep property developed by Mariano. He became naturalised in August 1905 – occupation, sheep farmer.

In 1903, John moved north with his family to settle in Oratia, on the western outskirts of Auckland, becoming the pioneer Dalmatian settler in the district. A vineyard was established on West Coast Road that as of 1913 was producing 2000 gallons of wine on 6 acres yearly. A mixed orchard of 32 acres was also developed. Three other children were born to the family, two of whom, Samuel and John, survived.

The Vella’s Oratia vineyard was called Terrace Vineyard. The family home soon became a base and transit centre for a stream of arrivals from Podgora, mostly men heading for the gumfields of Northern Wairoa. They were welcomed, looked after and helped on the way north. John Vella became their mentor and father figure, already wise in the ways of colonial New Zealand, and a man of some influence.



*The Vella family home – Oratia, about 1908–1909.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY

Ultimate responsibility for the property became John junior’s, and Stephen ventured into Auckland’s fishing industry, the Oceanic Fish Company and Auckland Seine Boat Association Limited. He owned two fishing vessels, *Daisy Belle* and *Elsie Belle*. Stephen volunteered to serve in the NZEF in the First World War, and in later years he and his brother John were prominent members of the Auckland Viticultural Association. Stephen became Deputy Mayor of Onehunga for a period, president of the RSA and in 1947 New Zealand Singles bowls champion. In 1939, John sold the family property to the Fistonich family and retired to Auckland city.

John Vella and his family can claim to be the focus around which their compatriots from Podgora formed the basis of a Dalmatian settlement in Oratia. Stipan Jelas, Josip Radalj and Ivan and Martin Bilich can similarly claim to be founders of the Henderson settlement. The Vella property in Oratia became a social centre and staging house for the numerous young men and women arriving from Podgora in the difficult years early in the century. As Samuel Vella recorded in 1979,

They would stay at our place at Oratia for about six weeks or so until my father found some relative here who would accept the newcomer on the gumfields. I remember that in almost every case my parents would equip these young men with twenty or more pairs of white socks made from wool spun and knitted in their small cottage. Being close to Auckland we had frequent visits from men who came to the city for a break from life in the camps on the gumfields. They would stay at Pasko Cvitanovich’s in Federal Street or Josip Franich’s in Hobson Street and visit us from there.

John Vella senior died in 1935 and his son John Stanley Vella continued living and working in Oratia until 1939 when he sold his orchard and moved to Auckland, where he died in 1985.

The early Dalmatian settlers naturally gravitated to localities where they could live alongside their own people. Their need to be part of their own compatible community was necessary in a society that considered them intruders.

As Samuel Vella said, ‘Dalmatians were poorly regarded and could only be accepted in the humblest circles of the early colonials.’

John S. Vella (1863–1935)  
and Catherine Vella  
(1865–1952)



*John and Catherine Vella – founders of the Croatian Settlement of Oratia, West of Auckland.*

SOURCE, FAMILY



## Steve Ozich (1890–1994)



*Steve Ozich, Henderson, settler.*  
SOURCE, S. OZICH

**R**AŠĆANE, a village in the Vrgorac region, inland Dalmatia, was Steve Ozich's birthplace, and he came to New Zealand in 1906, aged 16, to join relatives on the northern gumfields. He worked at Kaiwaka and Mangawhai then switched to join gangs of fellow countrymen on road works and railway construction. When the First World War broke out he volunteered for overseas service but was declined because he was a man with a family. At that time in Dargaville he ran a building materials cartage business. In 1921 soon after war's end he took over an apple orchard for a short time in Glen Eden, before settling with his family in Henderson. A highly intelligent, ambitious man, he successfully passed real estate examinations and opened an office in Henderson in 1924. He recalled that at that time highly productive land on Lincoln Road was selling for £20 to £25 per acre. Having taken on property valuation, he became a member of the Institute of Valuers.

In 1931, Steve Ozich and his wife bought historic The Falls Hotel in Henderson and renamed it Central Private Hotel, running it as a boarding house and accommodating his real estate business until 1943 when he sold his agency and began a taxi service which operated until his retirement. In 1950 he served as a member of the Land Sales Court for a few years.

He joined the Henderson Men's Bowling Club in 1926 as a foundation member and outlived all those with whom he shared that distinction. To keep his fitness, at its peak he walked everywhere, miles at a time to the end of his days. A respected citizen of the district he came to be regarded as a founding father of Henderson and a notable figure among his Croatian compatriots for his enterprise and foresight. He died aged 104 in 1994.



# Ivan Bilich (1868–1907) and Martin Bilich (1870–1944)

Ivan and Martin Bilich, aged 19 and 17 respectively, migrated to Australia to work at Broken Hill. A short time later Martin returned to Dalmatia for a brief period before sailing to New Zealand towards the end of 1888. Ivan followed in 1891. The latter had married Louise, a German woman, in Australia. Nothing is known of Ivan's activities until 1896 or 1897, when he and Louise opened a boarding house, Sydney House, on the corner of Wyndham and Albert Streets to cater for the large influx from Dalmatia.

The ever-restless Martin again travelled home in 1893 to marry Maria Bradanovich, a sister of Nikola of Vis Island who had settled in Henderson and Auckland. For many years Nikola ran a barbershop in Victoria Street, Auckland. Martin probably returned to New Zealand in 1901 or 1902 (possibly even earlier) because in 1903 he leased 200 acres on Lincoln Road, Henderson and here with 11 diggers from Pelješac he began extracting kauri gum. This led Martin to buy a 40-acre block in 1905, one half of which he sold on to Ivan.

Naturalisation records show that the brothers had already assumed the name Bilich-White. Ivan (John) was naturalised in Auckland in 1902 – occupation, boarding housekeeper. Martin was naturalised in Henderson in 1905 – occupation, farmer. In that year his wife and children joined him from Dalmatia. In 1907, tragedy struck when Ivan was thrown from a horse and killed. Martin continued developing his holding as an orchard and small vineyard, which in later years passed on to Martin, his son. His vineyard was known as Bordeaux Wines. There is a report that Martin (Jnr.) exported the first batch of Golden Delicious apples to the English market,

80 bushel cases, fetching an incredible £2 per bushel.

Peleščani of the time encouraged and sponsored their own to settle in New Zealand. Ivan was a man of influence, and advisor to many. There was a belief that Peleščani tended to remain aloof, to fraternise only within their own circle. This was common to most village or regional groupings, but Slavic brotherhood usually brought them together into one fold for the common good. In the Bilich's case shared labour, exchanged

Ivan Bilich (1868–1907)  
and Martin Bilich  
(1870–1944)

*Bilich family group.  
Baldo Bilich, unknown, Ivan  
Bilich-White, Nicholas Jurich,  
Louise Bilich-White, Martin  
White, William White, 1904.*

SOURCE, FAMILY





# IVAN BILICH,

SYDNEY BOARDING HOUSE,

CORNER OF

WYNDHAM AND ALBERT STREETS,

AUCKLAND.

Vlastnik poznade dobro Engleskog jezika te sluzi kao tumačnik našim Hrvatim za svaku njihovu potreba, a spoznat sam između trgovaca od gume.

Ivan Bilich – Advertisement, 1899 – Bratska Sloga, also advertising as interpreter and connections with kauri gum trade.

RIGHT Martin Bilich-White – home, orchard and vineyard, Lincoln Rd, Henderson, 1910–1911. John Totich with Nicholas, Martin and Mara Bilich-White. SOURCE, FAMILY



Group from Pelješac at Ivan Bilich's farm on Lincoln Rd, Henderson, 1903. Front – Ivan Bilich-White, Louise Bilich-White, Martin Bilich-White Snr. SOURCE, FAMILY

visits and social contact within the Henderson and Oratia districts gave to all comfort and security in what they perceived to be an unfriendly society beyond their front gates.

The Bilich name is easily pronounceable and translates as 'whitish or white'. The brothers' early decision to hyphenate Bilich and White is difficult to follow; obviously they saw some advantage. In the end the Bilich name was dropped completely, probably in the 1920s. It is noted that one of Ivan Bilich's sons, William White, died in 1921 as a result of war wounds. He was also the first Croatian pupil at Sacred Heart College in 1905.





# Romeo Bragato (1859–1910)

Romeo Bragato  
(1859–1910)

**R**OMEO Bragato was born in the busy seaport of Mali Lošinj (Little Lošinj) on the Island of Lošinj at the head of the Adriatic Sea, then part of Austria. The town was renowned for its seafaring traditions. Its mariners served on the ships of many nations. Many of these men reached Australia and New Zealand through the 19th century and settled. In Bragato's day the population of the region would have been mainly Croatian, but with an administrative overlay of Italian officials and the influence of Italian culture. Under Austrian rule the official language was Italian and thus many Croatsians were identified as Italians in the records. It was a state-of-being inherited from centuries of Venetian domination, prolonged under Austria's occupation in 1815–1918.

Romeo Bragato gained a diploma at the Viticultural School of Conegliano near Venice. After a period of employment, he was invited to Victoria, Australia, to report on the state's potential for winemaking. His report to a Royal Commission identified many areas and advised on the establishment of a school of Oenology and Viticulture. He was appointed as Government Viticulturist and on his advice the establishment of the Rutherglen Viticultural College proceeded. It was opened in 1897. Considerable praise was heaped on him for his input into the project.

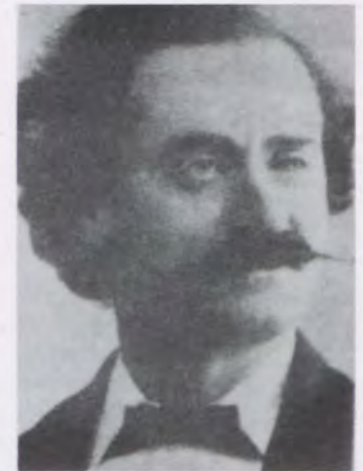
In 1895, Bragato was invited to New Zealand on loan from Victoria, to report to the New Zealand Government on the suitability of the country's soils and climate for viticulture. His opinion was that there were few parts of the country that were unsuitable. His report was positive and enthusiastic to the extent that he was appointed New Zealand Government

Viticulturist between 1901 and 1908. During this time he established the Te Kauwhata Viticultural Research Station, south of Auckland.

Bragato, Italian in origin, but with some affinity with Croatsians in Mali Lošinj, would probably have been bilingual. There is evidence of his regular contact with, and sympathy for, Croatian settlers in New Zealand. In a report in 1896 he observed, '...at Pahi (Kaipara Harbour) a number of Austrians are beginning to cultivate the vine on an extensive scale'. He believed that these 'Austrians' (Croatsians) would be good settlers. Reporting to the Department of Agriculture in 1904 on the Puhata settlement near Herekino, he said: 'Many of these men who were formerly looked askance and regarded by some as undesirable immigrants, may now be counted as industrious, sober and thrifty settlers with a permanent attachment to and a substantial stake in this country of their adoption.'

When the Austro-Hungarian Cruiser *Panther* arrived in Auckland in 1905 it was Romeo Bragato who stood up for Austria-Hungary's Croatian subjects in New Zealand. He advised the shipboard authorities that he had used his considerable influence with the New Zealand Government to help his Croatian compatriots when required – particularly in encouraging their winemaking endeavours.

Bragato's popular field days at Te Kauwhata attracted several Croatian winemakers keen to learn new skills. Stephen Yelas of Henderson is known to have borrowed £10 in order to attend a course on pruning methods adapted for New Zealand conditions. Others were close to Bragato. Tony Petrie, when a winemaker at Herekino, corresponded with him from time to time and it was



Romeo Bragato.  
SOURCE, UNKNOWN



well known that many were assisted by Bragato with regular advice, and this applied to all winemakers. On 1 May 1907, Mathew Ferri's Croatian language newspaper *Napredak* in Auckland noted: 'Our worthy fellow countryman, Mr R. Bragato, who is in government service recently married the charming and wealthy Miss Condon of Mt Eden. We wish the young couple good fortune for many years to come.'

Romeo Bragato left New Zealand in 1908 for Canada, where he took his own life in 1910 following a domestic crisis. His legacy, an infant wine industry backed by a research station of his invention, was sadly almost totally destroyed by the misguided prohibitionist lobby. Decades were to pass before the industry emerged from a long period of decline and neglect.

## CHAPTER THIRTY-EIGHT

# Wine – background

**T**O understand the exodus from Dalmatia to overseas countries in the latter stages of the 19th century, one needs to examine the factors that caused this. The stable markets for wine produced in Dalmatia, for example, disappeared totally, leaving a population bankrupted and forced to leave their lands, their families and their traditional lifestyles for more promising fields in foreign lands. One needs to follow the course of events leading up to the exodus.

In France in 1847 and Italy in 1858, blight ravaged vineyards, encouraging Dalmatia's winemakers to increase their plantings and to become highly profitable. The ravages lasted for about 10 years until a copper sulphate solution was used to bring the disease under control. In 1868 an additional incentive for Dalmatia's wine trade was the appearance of phylloxera (a tiny sap-sucking louse which feeds off vines' roots) that devastated the French vineyards, reducing their production drastically and widening the market for imported wine. The quality of

Dalmatia's wines suited the French and, after 1874, exports to France were enormous, and this continued up to 1885. Thereafter, as the French slowly switched to American phylloxera-resistant rootstock, the importation of Dalmatian wines ceased and in fact a duty was imposed on what imports there were.

However, the golden era for Dalmatian wines continued with increased trade opening up with the larger cities and industrial regions of Austria-Hungary. That demand continued to the beginning of 1892 when a trade treaty between Austria-Hungary and Italy allowed Italian wines into the Empire at satisfactory terms – duty free plus concessions. The trade for Dalmatian wines reached a crisis point and no longer could people depend on this traditional source of income. This treaty lapsed in 1905, by which time it was too late to recover. Bankrupt and burdened by debt, the men left their country, many never to return. This was the tragedy!



# Wine – New Zealand

**B**RAGATO'S presence in 1895, the activities of the North Auckland Vinegrowers Association and the presence of the 'Austrians' on the gumfields coincidentally stimulated the planting of small lots of vines to satisfy a demand among the gumdiggers. The establishment of more permanent camps prompted some individuals to import cuttings from Dalmatia and plant in larger areas. In their first two to three years they accumulated a little capital and then developed commercially. The growers at Herekino, Whangaparaoa, Henderson and other minor locations were in this category. They were driven by an inborn desire to recreate the wine tradition of 'home' in New Zealand. They planted with optimism and the assurance that the government would be encouraging and supportive in the wake of Bragato's positive conclusions.

Very early in the history of the developing industry, sadly for them, the prohibitionist lobby challenged the production of wine – 'the devil's work which would undermine society and corrupt Maori and European'. This powerful lobby achieved a no liquor district in Grey Lynn in 1905, and the Eden electorate (including Oratia and part of Henderson) in 1908. It simply meant that winemakers in Eden, for example, could no longer sell wine in their district nor accept orders. They were forced to peddle their wines door to door in other parts of the city and rural districts, travelling by bicycle, horseback or walking the miles to find customers. The situation had the makings of a disaster, as it proved to be for the industry.

In 1903 the New Zealand Viticultural Association was formed to succeed the North Auckland Vinegrowers Association, in order to stall the prohibitionist lobby and to promote New

Zealand wines. Their efforts went unheeded in the face of the lobby's pressure. Early Croatian winemakers became uneasy and began to move out of the industry; for example, Oratia vines were gradually replaced by fruit trees.

Were it not for the returned soldiers' vote after the First World War the whole country would probably have gone prohibitionist, as did the United States in the 1920s.

Courageously the Association fought for recognition of the industry and the licensing of winemakers. In 1912, John Vella, Stephen Vella (his son) Fabian Petrie and Lovre Marinovich were on the executive of nine winemakers in the forefront of the battle.

A further blow followed in response to the Kauri Gum Commission's report of 1914, when it was decided that a minimum two-gallon lot sale at any one time to any one person should be imposed. The effect was dramatic. Between 1910 (800 acres) and 1913 (500 acres) the decline was apparent – then in 1921 only 200 acres remained in production. Those Dalmatians who remained in the industry, mostly on small blocks, struggled to survive, selling wine house to house. Some of these produced a substandard product that achieved notoriety as 'Dally Plonk', supposedly sherries and ports.

Looking back, several winemaking ventures were getting under way in 1900. At Puhata in the Herekino district a number of men were encouraged to take up land under a Government Land Settlement Scheme. Between 1899 and 1908, 12 to 14 men were engaged in viticulture compared to 26 in other areas. For reasons already mentioned, several at Herekino and elsewhere failed, and they switched to raising cattle or dairy farming. For example, in the Croatian language newspaper *Napredak*



*Ivan Devcich with 120-year old vine, Kaueranga Valley, Thames.*

SOURCE, IVAN DEVCICH



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES



*John Totich and Marin Selak  
(founder of Selaks Wines).*

of 1907 it was noted that Matē Srhoj, Toma Jerkovich, Kuzma Matijevich and Matē Huljich had been before the bankruptcy court after their venture failed near Helensville.

After the First World War the industry found itself virtually at an end. The road ahead was pitted with problems. The enthusiasm of the Bragato era had been deflated by the rabid propaganda of the prohibition lobby. In addition, there was still great resistance to wine drinking. Government, politically in tune with brewing interests, did little to heed the plight of the industry. To protect their interests in the face of these conditions, the Viticultural Association of New Zealand was reformed in 1926 after a lapse during the war years. The new chairman was Simun Ujdur, the secretary K.A. Corban. The seven members were J. Balich (3 acres), J. Radaly (4 acres), G. Glucina (1 acre), P. and D. Sunde (1 acre), S. Yelas (6 acres), S. Ujdur (5 acres) and A.A. Corban (15 acres) – all on much reduced acreages since 1913. From 1926 to 1935, with the election of a Labour Government, little changed, although Labour's imposition of import restrictions favoured local wines to a degree.

Within the ranks of the producers, survival economics threw up differences of opinion leading to a clash between the larger and smaller producers, until Paul Goshek led a group to form the New Zealand Grape Producers and Manufacturers Association in 1943. Despite this cleavage the Viticultural Association continued to function successfully, mainly with Dalmatian participation. In 1965 all 11 executive members were of Dalmatian origin.



*Solid friends, Bartul Soljan  
(Pergola Wines) and Marino  
Selak (Selaks wines, Henderson).*

PHOTO SOURCE, UNKNOWN

During the years of the Second World War the presence of US troops in New Zealand stimulated expansion of the industry – without necessarily improving its quality. Table wines were rarely produced and most producers catered to the New Zealand taste for ports and sherries. The ultimate effect of the American military presence in New Zealand, however, was to broaden the taste for wine and create an awareness of its potential among growers. Consequently, a rush of expansion occurred accompanied by an influx of new winegrowers in the 1950s. The 200 acres under vines in 1921 increased to 320 acres by 1927, but it took the stimulation of the American military 'invasion' to push plantings up to 1000 acres by 1950, promising a better future for the industry. As Moran noted in his university thesis, viticulture was for most early growers a part-time unspecialised activity and a large part of the crop was sold for the table, which partly explains the concentration of vines near the Auckland market. This was about to change.

The turning point for the wine industry came in 1950 with the election of George Mazuran (Nakovan) of Henderson as President of the Viticultural Association. The industry was in a state of uncertainty as a result of decades of government apathy and antagonism and continuing public disinterest. Under George Mazuran's leadership the Association set about the task of rebuilding the industry around the smaller growers. An intuitive, stubborn and skilled negotiator, he launched a public relations programme which recreated the public's image of the industry. Through the Association's annual dinners and annual field days, close relations were built up with politicians and government officials, increasing their awareness of the industry's problems and establishing a valuable rapport for future negotiations. The change of attitude was dramatic. That the welfare of the industry became the concern of the nation's decision makers was due primarily to the personal leadership and manoeuvrings of George Mazuran in his relentless efforts on behalf of his Association. A wave of legislation followed – higher tariffs on imported wines, a big increase in resellers' licences, the licensing of restaurants and other decisions – all of which contributed not only to the growth of the industry but



also resulted in improved quality, better presentation and wider acceptance of New Zealand wines. The times were also kind. People were familiarising themselves with the world's wines through travel, wine literature and wine judging. The general impetus of wine appreciation and changing social attitudes augured well for the future of the industry.

The growth of wine as a sector of New Zealand agriculture moved sluggishly through the era of the 1920s, 30s and 40s, to take off after 1950 to reach its zenith in recent years. Throughout all these difficult periods, family based enterprises have been to the fore, retaining their independence, acquiring new skills through a better educated and more worldly generation of sons and daughters, but leaving their special stamp on an industry that has gained recognition in the established wine markets of the world.



Jack Anzulovich (left) with Peter Fredatovich, founder of Lincoln Wines, Henderson, 1950.

PHOTO, AUTHOR

Through the Viticultural Association and the presidency of men like Simun Ujdur, 1926–46, Bogoslav Sokolich, 1946–50, and George Mazuran, 1950–78, the wine industry reached a point where all growers, large and small, were merged in the Wine Institute of New Zealand in 1975; now the industry's coordinating body, its lobby with Government and its monitor of standards, promotion and marketing. George Mazuran once more took the chair between 1975 and 1979, and later between 1982 and 1985, Matē Brajkovich of San Marino Wines (today's Kumeu River Wines) was elected chairman.

(See also Mazuran, Brajkovich and Sokolich.)

### Postscript: Waiheke Island

Today Waiheke in the Hauraki Gulf is a premium wine producing area, with roots that go back to 1929 when Lovre Gradiška (ex Šibenik) and family bought a 7.5-acre block (3 ha) where 1 ha was planted in vines. He gradually increased his holdings to 8.8 ha. In 1933 Lovre obtained a licence to produce sherry and port. In 1947 Lovre's son, Svevlad, married Vera Mrsich and the family continued in business until 1957 when the vineyard was leased out for several years before closing down. Soon after, the Waiheke Council took over 2.8 ha for a recreational park.

## Wine – New Zealand



*This Memorial to pioneer winemakers was erected in Henderson, West Auckland, which for 110 years has been a centre of winemaking, dominated by many Croatian families.*

### THE PIONEER WINEMAKER

THIS STATUE IS DEDICATED TO THOSE PIONEERS WHO BEGAN GRAPE GROWING AND WINEMAKING IN WEST AUCKLAND. THEIR HARD WORK ENABLED THE NEW ZEALAND WINE INDUSTRY TO GROW.

The Sculptor – Anthony Stones, 1995

PHOTO, S.V. JELICICH



# Stephen Yelas (1874–1946)

STEPHEN Yelas was born in Drvenik, one of the many coastal villages between Makarska and the Neretva River delta with strong New Zealand ties. News of great wealth to be made in New Zealand spread from the seafarers of Pelješac, first to the islands, then the Makarska Coast and the immediate



*Stipan and Marē Yelas – pioneer settlers, Henderson.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY

hinterland of Zagora (beyond the mountains) to the villages clustered around Vrgorac and Imotski.

The first to arrive from Drvenik in 1895 were Ivan Kostanich, Valentin Ivicovich and Stipan Kosovich. Others followed in 1896 – Stephen Yelas and Nikola Divich were two who arrived in July on the SS *Te Anau*. There were 56 others on board travelling steerage, 26 from Novi Vinodol on the Croatian Coast to the north, the rest from Korčula Island and Pelješac. 1896 was the turning point when the exodus from the length of Croatia's coast to New Zealand and other lands gathered momentum. Drvenik was one of the lesser contributors to the New Zealand influx. By 1903 only 45 had arrived and many of these returned home in 1908. Those who stayed worked their way around the gumfields and a small number were pioneer commercial fishermen on the Kaipara Harbour.

Stephen Yelas' movements between 1896 and 1902 when he made his first 100 gallons of wine are not documented. He appears to have made enough money to jointly buy with Joseph Radaly (Radalj) a block of land at the head of a bullock track that is today Henderson Valley Road. It also had a frontage on Forest Hill Road. The land was probably left idle while Radaly went gumdigging and Yelas went to California hoping to be richer for the experience. On Yelas' return, the partners agreed to break up and divide the land between them with a stream as a common boundary – a decision apparently taken on the toss of a coin.

They each went their separate ways, clearing scrub, cutting out pockets of bush and cultivating the land with spade, pick and shovel. Stephen Yelas' first crops of potatoes and cabbage



were railed to Auckland in 1899 at a loss. In 1898 he had planted his small 0.625 ha (quarter-acre) vineyard of Black Hamburg vines. While it matured, he depended on selling his vegetable crop, fossicking for kauri gum on his own land or periodically working on the gumlands of Lincoln Road, Henderson, Kumeu and Taupaki. There is mention of him knowing Romeo Bragato and being encouraged by him. Yelas was certainly encouraged enough to expand his vineyard to 0.6 ha (1.5 acres) in 1903 and to 1.6 ha (4 acres) in 1913 when he produced 1300 gallons. Others followed him to Henderson – Martin Bilich 0.8 ha (2 acres), Stephen Kokich 0.6 ha (1.5 acres) and Peter Milicich 2.4 ha (6 acres). These were resourceful men determined to succeed in the face of restrictive legislation. For example, all five hotels between Henderson and Auckland were closed, placing crippling restraints on the infant wine industry. To Dalmatian growers of that period, Yelas was their guide and inspiration. His vineyard and winery became a training ground for a succession of winemakers over many years. Not all succeeded – in later years many came and went as the industry struggled from infancy to maturity.



Stephen Yelas' stroke of luck, however, was to secure the supply contract for Wendel's Wine Bar in Karangahape Road between 1911 and 1931. In 1931 he bought the licence and the building and installed his old friend Ante (Tony) Ivcevic as manager. The bar was renamed Dominion Wines Limited and was finally sold in 1992. It was an important factor in the successful growth of Pleasant Valley Wines Ltd. It is worth noting that only four wine bar licences were issued in 1881 New Zealand wide.

In 1908 Stephen Yelas married Maria Devcich from Podgora, who had come to New Zealand to join her four brothers, Simun, Marin, Nikola and Grgo in the Puriri area near Thames. Stephen and Maria had four children.

Pleasant Valley Wines, as it came to be known, was the first Croatian owned vineyard in West Auckland. It was founded by Stephen Yelas, who managed it from 1902 to 1939, followed by his son, Moscow, from 1939 to 1984, and now managed by Stephen's grandson, also Stephen. Pleasant Valley Wines survived in spite of archaic laws and attitudes. In fact it is the sole survivor of the early pioneering era of Dalmatian winemakers from Croatia and it continues in strength.

Stephen Yelas  
(1874–1946)

*Stephen and Mary Yelas family,  
about 1916. L to R – Olga,  
Stephen, Annie, Mary  
(née Devcich), Moscow, Elsie.  
Stephen and Mary married  
in 1908.*

SOURCE, FAMILY



# Frankovich brothers

**I**VAN, George and Frank Frankovich came to New Zealand from the village of Živogošće in 1894 or 1895. In 1896 together with two Matutinovich brothers they bought 12 ha (30 acres) in Arkles Bay on the Whangaparaoa Peninsula. The timing suggests that the partnership had accumulated enough capital from digging kauri gum to fund the purchase. Two years later the two families separated and the Frankovich brothers invested in 40 ha (100 acres) in Hobbs Bay (also known as Maori Bay) on the Peninsula, where they planted grapes on part of a block of 4–6 ha (10–15 acres) in 1898. Their venture paralleled similar developments in Herekino, the Northern Kaipara Harbour,

Henderson and to a lesser degree Stanmore Bay, where the Franicevich family established a vineyard on part of a 44-ha (119-acre) block. The price for this land was £300, giving an indication of land values in the district at that time. The latter went into mixed farming, while the Frankoviches were more commercially oriented as winemakers. Their vineyard would supply the Auckland trade when in full production. By 1908 the vineyard had expanded further and more land had been bought to graze livestock.

In 1907, the brothers established a boarding house and billiard saloon in Durham Street (now Kingston Street) where they sold wine to fellow Croatians. Unfortunately they crossed with the law and George Frankovich, who managed the premises, was charged in 1909 with selling wine to three 'Austrians' who 'consumed liquor in the premises' on a Sunday. George Frankovich pleaded that the wine was made at their vineyard by his brothers, but this did not impress the magistrate. The Frankovich boarding house became a haven and meeting place for those Croatians who favoured Austrian identity, mostly men who had served in the Austro-Hungarian army or navy. Plans to form Austrian Aligned Croatian Societies in 1902 and 1908 were tabled at meetings at Paul Cvitanovich's and the Frankovich's. The latter meeting attracted 60 Croatians.

At one stage six Frankovich brothers lived in New Zealand, Frank managing the vineyard, Nicholas the farm and George the boarding house. Ivan returned to Dalmatia in 1912 to marry Maria Franicevich of Sučuraj. The couple returned to New Zealand in 1914 before war broke out. The Alien Register of 1917 described him as a farmer. Ivan and family went back to

*Frankovich Bros. Original wine cellar, Hobbs Bay, Whangaparaoa Peninsula.*  
SOURCE, WAINUI HISTORIC SOCIETY, SILVERDALE





the New South Slav nation in 1921 with brothers Frank and Nicholas. New Zealand born Matē, son of Ivan, resettled in New Zealand in 1930 and joined the fishing fleet in Auckland (see Matē Frankovich).

When the boarding house in Kingston Street was sold to Luka Dean in 1916, the brothers opened a depot and shop at 149 Victoria Street West next to the Empire Hotel where they sold wine in case lots. Produce from Hobbs Bay was also sold there. As good businessmen they had bought the launch 'Kumi' to transport supplies from Hobbs Bay to the Nelson Street Wharf. The depot remained in business from 1916 to 1922 at which time George and another brother Matē became property developers.

A younger brother Andrew, a clergyman who had arrived in 1912, joined George Scansie's Croatian language newspaper *Zora* in 1913 as co-editor. The issues between August 1913 and June 1914 were heavily influenced by Andrew. Then he and Scansie were at loggerheads, clashing over matters of principle and Andrew was stabbed in the back by Scansie and denounced as a spy. Andrew retreated to the vineyard at Hobbs Bay where the Alien Register of 1917 described him as an assistant winemaker. Towards the latter part of the First World War, he

was interned on Motuihe Island where the German, Count von Luckner, and the crew of his ship were interned. When the war ended an embittered Andrew Frankovich turned his back on the community he had served. The treachery of some could not be forgiven or forgotten, so he assumed a name change and settled in Frankton Junction where he worked as a joiner. He became naturalised in 1924. Two sons of the Frankovich clan became notable achievers. Matē, son of Ivan, became an important figure in the fishing industry, and Matē, son of George, a well known Auckland solicitor and, more recently, Auckland coroner.

The Frankovich brothers were pioneer viticulturists, traders and businessmen. Almost as soon as they came to New Zealand, they set about creating an enterprise that set them apart. Their apparent Austrian affiliation was not of great concern. They accepted change and probably believed the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes would one day be a nation to be proud of. Andrew was really the only one to become active in the community via his interest and work in *Zora* as co-editor. His brothers kept a low profile and went about their work creating solid reputations and achieving a status to be proud of.



# Simun Mijo Ujdur (1882–1953)



*Simun Ujdur.*

**B**ORN in the hamlet of Čista on the outskirts of Gradac, Simun Ujdur joined the first group from the locality to come to New Zealand in 1895. He was a mere 13 years of age. They worked on the gumfields and after five years Simun returned to Gradac where he was conscripted to serving with the Austro-Hungarian navy for four years. During that time had the opportunity to learn Italian, German and the art of photography. Service completed, he considered remaining in his homeland, but economic and political conditions prompted him to return to New Zealand where he would be free to build his future.

On his return to New Zealand in 1904, another stint on the gumfields earned him enough to buy a good camera, which in the following years he put to profitable use, touring the Auckland province, visiting gumfields, small settlements, attending functions and weddings, recording images of his compatriots. At about this time his interest in Esperanto was awakened. An official language devised in Poland in 1887, it captured people's imagination in the early part of the 20th century. There was the universal belief that a common language would, in time, bring nations together. It certainly appealed to Croatian gumdiggers in the Northern Wairoa. Large numbers attended classes, and Simun Ujdur played a leading role as instructor. From 1904 to 1946 he remained in the forefront of the movement, and was appointed as the Dargaville branch delegate to First New Zealand Esperanto Congress in Auckland in 1911.

In 1911, Simun Ujdur purchased a 12-ha (30-acre) block of land in Swanson, West Auckland, where a growing number of Croats were settling, and there in 1914 he established his

vineyard of 8 ha (20 acres), which he called 'Birdwood'. A wide variety of grape varieties were planted, including Pinot, Malbec, Muscat, Seibel and Isabella. With Corban's and Vidal's he became one of the three big producers. He joined Stephen Yelas, Josip Balic and Joe Babich as a founding Croatian vintner in West Auckland. Ambitious and driven by a strong will to succeed, he played a leading role in the development of the wine industry. Between 1926 and 1946 he served as president of the newly formed Viticultural Association of New Zealand. In this capacity he encouraged his compatriots to prove their worth as winemakers if they wished to succeed. He served the industry at all levels, in matters of production, marketing and political influence.

The generous hospitality of his cellar at Birdwood, his role as a leading Esperantist, his photographic skill, together with his enthusiasm for literature, brought him into contact with a wide-ranging circle of influential friends and admirers. Undoubtedly, his standing in the wider New Zealand community led to an invitation to join the Masonic Lodge. This was an achievement of some importance considering his background, foreign origin and modest occupation. Later he became a Grand Master of the Lodge, a fitting honour for a man of his outstanding attributes.

Symbolising his scholarship and worldly interests, Simun Ujdur created a private library, where over many years some 36,000 volumes were housed. Early editions, valuable studies, works of great masters of literature were made accessible to academics, students and the curious. His love of books led him to send 120 Croatian language volumes to his village library in 1920. His memories and much of his heart still dwelt there.



The First World War threw the Croatian community in New Zealand on the defensive. As Austrian subjects they were now 'aliens'. George Scansie, publisher of the Croatian language newspaper *Zora*, seized the opportunity to speak for the community and to promote the South Slav unification cause. He appealed to his readers to rally around his *Zora* – but fractures were already evident and tensions developed as the New Zealand Government remained undecided as to the true status of 'alien Croatsians' in this country. By 1915 the émigré 'Yugoslav Committee' in London was lobbying the Allied Nations for a united South Slav state. The New Zealand community adopted their objective wholeheartedly. Now they proudly claimed to be South Slavs (Yugo-Slavs).

The decision to form branch committees in Auckland and Dargaville brought dissension within the leadership of the community out into the open. Simun Ujdur found himself in one camp, as president of the 'NZ Branch of the Southern Slav Committee' while George Scansie in opposition was president of the 'Yugo-Slav Committee', both based in Auckland. Ujdur and his supporters stood for freedom and progress for his countrymen, but Scansie accused Ujdur publicly of being pro-Austrian. The London Yugoslav Committee pleaded with the two factions to bury their differences. Ujdur willingly stepped aside and removed himself to devote his time to his business and other interests. Scansie's openly pro-Serb actions

led Ujdur and others to believe that he was ingratiating himself with the Serbian Government-in-exile. Their differences during those critical years did little to advance the community's unity.

In post Second World War years Simun Ujdur concentrated on expanding his many interests, Birdwood Vineyard, his library, his viticultural and Masonic interests and his people. He never married and was thus able to give all his time to these things. He was most generous to those in need and provided opportunities for many who came seeking his advice or seeking work. Simun Ujdur died in 1953.

In the aftermath of his death his library was dismantled and distributed or sold off, most of his photographic plates lost or damaged, and his vineyard slowly went into decline. In 1969 the Waitemata City Council acquired 10 acres (4 ha) under the Public Works Act, as a tip and a depot. In the 1970s the balance of Birdwood Vineyard was acquired and renamed Glen Road Reserve. Soon after that the block of land was renamed Te Rangi Hiroa Park. After 10 years of discussion and negotiation by Simon Ujdur Jnr., nephew of the founder of Birdwood Vineyard, the park was divided as a dual memorial, to the Maori people and the Croatian people. In the latter case, it served to honour the many hundreds of Croatian settlers from the Dalmatian coast who came to the west and contributed to its unique character and to its progress. They would also say they were provincial Dalmatians from Yugoslavia.

Simun Mijo Ujdur  
(1882–1953)



## Josip (Joe) Babich (1895–1983)

**J**OE was born Josip Petrov Babić in the small village of Runović close to the town of Imotski. The area is part of the province of Dalmatia directly inland from Makarska. Josip's father Petar remembered meeting Ivan (John) Vella in Podgora during one of the latter's visits to this homeland, probably in

1898. Vella had gone back earlier to marry and returned to New Zealand in February 1899 with his wife Katrina (Catherine) and two children. John Vella told Petar that a good living could be earned in New Zealand digging gum. Petar was persuaded that his sons should go to New Zealand to safeguard their future.



*A photo break at Paparore,  
Far North, 1910.  
Rear, L to R – Jakov Babich,  
Joze Erceg, Ivan Babich,  
Stefan Babich, Marin Lubina.  
Front row – Matě Babich,  
Ivan Erceg, Joze Lubina.  
PHOTO, JOSIP BABICH*



One by one they left – Jakov, the eldest, in 1904, Matē in 1906, Ivan in 1908, and Josip and Stipan in 1910.

Josip Babich recalled how at the age of 14 he went on foot with family members over the Biokovo Range to Makarska to join the steamer *Bosna* for Trieste, and how they travelled by rail via Rome to Naples. There they boarded the P & O liner *Orsova* on its maiden voyage to depart for Sydney, Australia. The final leg to Auckland was completed on the SS *Maheno*.

Josip had learnt to read and write from his father who had gained a limited education while in the Austro-Hungarian army, but English of course was totally foreign to this bright-eyed youth. He would learn in time and one day become competent enough to mingle with politicians as his equals, and assured enough to manage his business affairs.

After a brief stay in Auckland, another sea journey on the steamship *Apanui* brought him to Awanui in the Far North, where he met his brothers who initiated him in the art of gumdigging. Jakov and Matē owned a 20-ha farm at Paparore. At the same time Jakov ran a store and gum buying business at Waiharara.

At Kaikino, north of Awanui, the brothers planted Isabella grapes, and opened the 'Kaikino Wineshop 1916', producing port and sherry. Making headway in the industry was very difficult in those days, particularly in the Far North where there was competition from other Dalmatians to contend with. Advisedly they decided to leave the district and establish themselves in Henderson in 1919 on a block of land purchased previously by Jakov Babich. The land was farmed jointly for a while then divided. By this time Jakov had returned home in 1914 and Ivan died of pneumonia in the mid 1920s. Meanwhile Josip had bought Matē's land but Steve stayed on until 1930, taking over the orchard and the cows while Josip retained the vineyard.

Josip would have faced a daunting task to bring the hilly north-facing slopes into production, but this was his land and he would spare no effort to do just that. He planted 2 ha of vines, 2.5 ha of fruit trees and a small area of produce. It was a hands-on operation with no power or water laid on, with horse power

for ploughing and heavy work. During the years of waiting for full cropping of his vines, he took on labour contracts, ploughing, spreading fertiliser, and operating a cream run. Josip was determined to succeed without a mortgage around his neck. Year by year he made slow progress, building up his winemaking plant, increasing the vineyard, meeting debts and surviving as only Dalmatians knew how to. Most Dalmatian winemakers of that era were untrained in the industry. As in their homeland winemaking was a hit and miss affair, using traditional practices. Little scientific skill had been passed down through the generations; however, Josip Babich did insist on absolute hygiene while working in the limiting old traditions with no technology and no advisors to call on.

Josip Babich married Mara Grgich in Auckland in 1929, and a

Josip (Joe) Babich  
(1895–1983)

*Joe Babich and P.M. Walter Nash at  
Lincoln Vineyards Field Day, 1950s*



new phase in his life brought greater responsibility and greater urgency. His desire to succeed was paramount. He became involved in the politics of the industry, serving on the committee



of the Viticultural Association of New Zealand with others including Simun M. Ujdur of Birdwood Vineyards in Swanson. They became close friends and associates. Perhaps inspired by Simun's erudition and his library, Josip became an avid reader, a man of wide knowledge and a keen photographer, another of Simun's skills.

To progress within the constraints of the industry was difficult. Wine was regarded as an evil foreign concoction designed to demoralise 'decent people'. Attitudes remained fixed right up to the Second World War, and then the American armed forces arrived. Their presence and wartime restrictions on imported wines and spirits stimulated local production and the vineyard prospered. Post-war, returning servicemen, immigrants and travellers with broader tastes were opting more and more in favour of wine. The Babich vineyard was among the first few to produce a Chianti-style red wine to meet the changing market.

The 1958 budget that put a clamp on imported wines was a further stimulus, directing people's tastes towards local wines. Wholesalers were now demanding New Zealand wines, market

penetration was widening and the public expected better quality table wines. The winemakers were about to move into a new phase. Josip and Mara Babich were there to taste success in the ensuing years. Their vineyard expanded, new equipment, new technology and skills were brought into play and the company became one of the frontrunners in the industry. That they maintain that position today is due to their philosophy to produce the best wine at the best price – and not to ride the market.

Josip and Mara Babich had five children, Peter, MBE, Joe, winemaker of the year 1993, and Maureen (Mrs Radford) continue to manage and guide the business. Ivy (Mrs T. Cibilić) and Shirley (Mrs M. Kostanich) are not actively engaged but very much part of the tradition. As they grew to adulthood they each took a share of the burden. A family business is a family business and it was expected.

Josip Babich could be regarded as a patriarch of the industry. He died on 22 August 1983. His wife Mara survived him by 11 years and died on 16 June 1994. They left their mark on the industry and bequeathed a successful family-owned and operated winemaking venture dedicated to quality.



## Bogoslav Sokolich (1896–1986)

**A**s a preliminary to Bogoslav Sokolich's biography, a statement by Ivan Kabalin from Novi Vinodol in 1948 provides a background and a reason for the presence of the Novjani in New Zealand, a group from far to the north of the central Dalmatian source of the majority of Croatian migrants.

Ivan Kabalin stated:

I am 71 years of age and have been in the Paeroa area for 23 years. I first arrived in New Zealand as a lad of 18 in June 1896, and, went gumdigging for five years around Dargaville. The first men who came here from Novi Vinodol were Anton Sokolich and Ivan Maricich who heard about the country while working near Melbourne, Australia. They arrived in 1885. Soon after a group of 26 from Australia followed them. I would say that between 50–60

from Novi were here – 30 working for Mitchelson at Flaxmill and Babylon camps, the rest scattered around Kaikohe and Poroti. There was a group of about 50 from Hreljin about 25 km to the north of Novi. These two groups were from the Croatian Littoral – the rest came from Central Dalmatia and the Islands.

We came of necessity, not by choice from our poor coastal lands. I once had 1500 vines. Phylloxera wiped out the lot. Without an income it was impossible to replant, so we sought work elsewhere out in the world. We could not even afford fish. By nature Novjani are not fishermen or mariners, therefore the men of Crikvenica fished our rich grounds and sold to us, but there was little money, so we left our homes and families.

(Trans. S.A.J.)

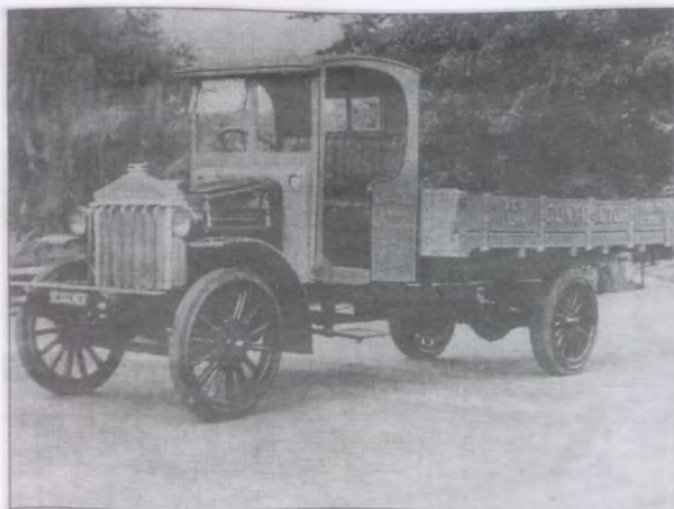
Bogoslav Sokolich, a son of Ivan and Brigita Sokolich, and a proud son of Novi Vinodol, followed in the footsteps of those who ventured to New Zealand in 1885. His more immediate predecessors came in large numbers in 1896 when 26 arrived on the *SS Te Anau* in Auckland. Bogoslav himself arrived in 1914, at the age of 18 years, just before the outbreak of the First World War. His immediate concern was to join relatives and fellow villagers in the Dargaville area, rich in kauri gum and a centre of the Croatian population. He spent two years there, then moved on to other jobs. In 1917, he was registered as an alien, occupation farm hand, employed by the Kokich brothers at Kokopu, then on to the Portland cement works before deciding to settle in the 'Auckland region.

He went to New Lynn on the western outskirts of Auckland and invested in an 8-ha (20-acre) block of land in Fruitvale Road in 1920. He built a house, worked the land and planted a few vines and crops. This was not enough to satisfy his ambitions.

Bogoslav Sokolich  
(1896–1986)



*Bogoslav Sokolich, honoured as life member of the Wine Institute.*



**FAMILY WAGON:** This Bessemer solid-tyred truck was the Sokolich family's pride and joy during the early 1920s. The family started a vineyard and contracting business at Fruitvale Rd shortly after World War I.

LEFT Sokolich family's  
first truck, 1920s.  
SOURCE, FAMILY



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

In 1922 he bought his first truck, which launched B. Sokolich, Contractors, probably the first in the district. His fleet grew to six vehicles in the 1930s, carting stone, metal and gravel for road works in the district. During the Depression, Bogoslav garaged his vehicles because there was no work offering so he did a stint working on the stone batters of Tamaki Drive on Auckland's waterfront to make up for loss of business income. With the change of government under the Labour Party in 1935 the economy improved and his trucking business came to life again. During the Second World War years his fleet and his services were commandeered by the New Zealand army to work in the north. When the vehicles were returned in 1941 he contracted to cart metal from the Western Springs quarries to form the new runways at Whenuapai Air Base.

In 1924, Bogoslav Sokolich met his future wife Vicē Sumich from Podgora, niece of Stanko, Lovre and Matē Marinovich, orchardists of Oratia. The couple married in 1925. They had five children, Ivan (deceased), Boris, Sophia, Sylvia and Lucy.

The newly-weds' first task was to see the creation of their



*Bogoslav Sokolich with wife, Vicē.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY

vineyard, on a 2.4-ha (6-acre) block of the property. The staple vines planted were Albany Surprise and the vineyard was named 'Vinodol' in honour of Bogoslav's birthplace. With family nurturing and care it grew into a profitable enterprise along with the cartage business. In the 1930s, there were many hurdles to overcome, strictures that made winemakers' lives a struggle, a struggle that could only be combated with skill and patience. Bogoslav and his contemporaries saw little future in this status quo so he joined the Viticultural Association in the 1930s, then under the chairmanship of Simun Ujdur of Birdwood Vineyards, Swanson.

In 1947 he became secretary of the Association and moved to seek remedies for injustices being experienced by the industry. For example, wartime rationing favoured bigger wine producers with large sugar quotas, necessary for sherry and port production. The small men were being discriminated against. Bogoslav's direct approach to the then Minister of Justice, The Hon. Reg Mason, settled that problem on a just basis. The other ongoing battle with Government concerned the question of distillery licences to maintain fortified wine production. The law again favoured the big producers owning 20 ha (50 acres) or more of vines, and there were very few. Bogoslav argued the case for a change. After four to five years it was finally agreed that growers of 2 ha (5 acres) minimum qualified for a distillery licence. In 1947, Vinodol Wineries was granted a licence. Pleased with his success as a negotiator, the Association elected him as chairman for the 1940-50 period, after which he retired from active involvement in the Institute's affairs. The chair now passed to the supreme lobbyist, George Mazuran.

In 1982, to cap his career as an industry leader and pioneer, the Wine Institute of New Zealand installed him as the first Fellow of the Institute jointly with other notables, Tom McDonald, Alex Corban and George Mazuran.

At Fruitvale Road, Boris Sokolich and his wife Shirley (née Modrich) occupy the original family home. The cartage business operated by Boris for some years is now much reduced and operated by his son Roy. The vineyard has long gone, much of the land subdivided as a housing estate.



# Mijo (Mick) Brajkovich (1888–1949)

Mijo (Mick) Brajkovich  
(1888–1949)

M IJO Brajkovich was a native of the ancient village of Živogošće, which had a history going back to Roman times. To give some depth to Mick's life and the venture that grew and matured as Kumeu River Wines Limited, one needs to say a little about the land the Brajkovich family settled on in Kumeu. The original block of about 18 acres (7.2 ha) was purchased in 1912 by Martin Lovich of Igrane. It came with a small plot of Albany Surprise vines. In 1916, Lovich sold to Stanko and Tomica Yurakovich, having gifted 1.25 roods of land to the Catholic Diocese of Auckland on which to build a church. The property remained in Yurakovich ownership for 28 years when Mick Brajkovich became the new owner in 1944. He took over a fairly run-down acreage, but toil, vision and optimism brought it under control. Then 10 acres (4 ha) of grapevines were planted and a small winery built in 1950. Sherries and ports were the order of the day, a basic offering to satisfy English tastes – sherry before dinner, port after.

In 1949, tragedy struck the family when Mick Brajkovich died. His son Matthew (Matē) took up the reins and moved on to create a successful enterprise. His father's dream was his to realise.

Stepping back in time, Mick Brajkovich arrived in New Zealand in 1907 aged 19 and proceeded north to join fellow villagers digging gum. He became naturalised at Waipapakauri in 1911 – occupation, labourer. In 1917 he was registered as an alien under The Registration of Aliens Act, at Waipapakauri – occupation, gumdigger. In May 1919 in Auckland he was involved in the Croatian community's political and legal status, protesting with others against the machinations of some of his compatriots

who claimed to speak for the community. Where the arguments ended is not clear. The situation was aggravated by the New Zealand Government's reluctance to accept naturalised Croatians as equal citizens. In the government's view they were still aliens even though the war had ended in November 1918 and Dalmatia became a province of a South Slav state endorsed by the victorious Allied nations after the Treaty of Rapallo. The only concession Government made in 1921 was the issue of 'certificates of identity' to these wishing to return to their homeland pending the issue of passports once a consul had been appointed. An estimated 400 took the opportunity.

In 1921, most probably, Mick Brajkovich himself went back to Živogošće to reunite with family and friends, long separated by war. He would have soon learnt that he would better serve himself and family in the village by returning to New Zealand, but he tarried to propose marriage to a well-chosen young woman, Kate Lozina. They married in 1925, but it would be some years before husband, wife and three children would set sail for New Zealand. In the interim period he and his wife Kate, hoping for improvement in the new nation's economy, opened a small store at Strn, a hamlet near the village, but it failed. Finally in 1937 he left for New Zealand. In the following year his wife Kate and three children, Matē, Franka (Frances) and Nevenka (Winnie), followed. This was made possible with the support of Mick's brother-in-law, Clem Jurlina of Awanui. They were now in a strange land but they were free to shape their future, enjoy freedom and achieve beyond their dreams.



*Mick Brajkovich, 1923. Founder of San Marino wines – now known as Kumeu River Wines Ltd.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

### Matthew (Matē) George Brajkovich OBE (1925–1992)

On their arrival in New Zealand, the Brajkovich family went north to Awanui to join their close relative Clem Jurlina at Sweetwater, once the centre of numerous Dalmatian gumdiggers. For the next three years, Mick Brajkovich worked on the surrounding gumfields for the Jurlinas while his son Matthew attended primary school until he was 15 years of age. The work was heavy and the earnings probably insufficient for his growing family. Times were hard; the gum industry was in decline and New Zealand was at war. In 1941, the family moved on to try a season share milking at Tomarata near Wellsford, but once more there was barely a living to be made. Within the year they were in Henderson, centre of a large established community of fellow Dalmatians. Father and son laboured in various vineyards and orchards in the district while they lived in a cottage on Stephen Yelas' property, Pleasant Valley Wines in Henderson Valley.

*Matē Brajkovich, honoured with the O.B.E. in 1985 by the Governor General, The Most Reverend Sir Paul Reeves, former Bishop of Auckland.*

SOURCE, FAMILY



The efforts of father, his wife Kate and son Matē enabled them to buy the Kumeu Block from the Yurakovich family in 1944. The decision was opportune.

Settled in Kumeu, Matē and his father tackled the tasks of clearing the land with enthusiasm and vigour. Cash crops were planted and a 10-acre block of vines established. With confidence they brought the land into production and within four years they were producing wine commercially. Their hopes and expectations were rising when Mick suddenly died in 1949. It was an unbearable tragedy, but it was a tragedy that drove Matē to ensure that the vision he shared with his father would be realised. The vineyard, San Marino Wines Ltd, was now Matē's to manage and recreate. One of his first moves was to produce a dry red table wine, Kumeu Dry Red, in 1950 – the label was designed by his old friend Ivan Mercep, a well-known Auckland architect. It was a style of wine akin to Chianti, a palatable customary European table wine. His Kumeu Red attracted the patronage of many notables from the city, writers, professionals, wine buffs and Matē's own contemporaries. To visit the cellar at San Marino Wines was an occasion to be enjoyed. Hospitality and friendship was extended to all, and it continues today at Kumeu River Wines, a title taken in 1989 to reflect the vineyard's location. Throughout the years of development, Matē's mother Kate, affectionately known as 'Baba' (Grandma), toiled alongside her men, offering advice and encouragement until the day she died in 1988.

A new phase in Matē's life began in 1958, when he married Melba Sutich of Dargaville. In the years that followed the vineyard and winery expanded, a new house was built and a new generation was in the making. Wine was in their blood and all four, Michael, Milan, Paul and Marjana, added their skills and energies to create an international reputation for Kumeu River Wines. Their relative roles are wine production, vineyard management, marketing and accounting. Notably Michael became a Master of Wine in 1989. Today Kumeu River Wines Limited is a successful family owned enterprise managed by Melba and her four children.

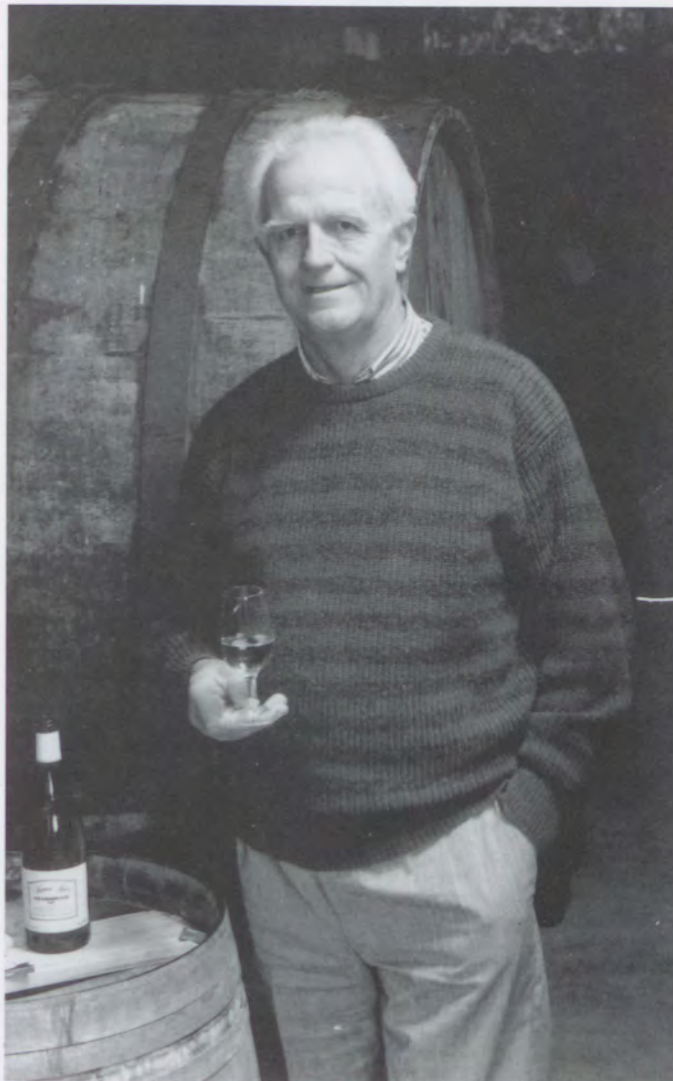


The following words of the Wine Institute memorial cover Matē's role and contribution within the industry:

MATTHEW GEORGE BRAJKOVICH, Officer of the Civil Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire, founded San Marino Vineyards at Kumeu in 1944, the name being changed to Kumeu River Wines Ltd in 1989. with the active involvement of three generations, his mother Kate, wife Melba, and sons, Michael (New Zealand's first Master of Wine), Milan and Paul, the family has expanded its vineyards and modernised its winery facilities. Matthew Brajkovich rendered long service to the Viticultural Association of New Zealand, serving two years as secretary, and some 20 years as vice-president, a loyal and active lieutenant to the long-serving president, the late George Mazuran OBE. Matthew Brajkovich, as a member of the Steering Committee, established in 1974 by the then three wine organisations, was one of the architects of the Wine Institute. He was a foundation member of the Executive Committee from 1975 to 1985, deputy-Chairman 1980-82, and Chairman, 1982-85. Prior to the formation of the Institute, he had been an industry

representative for several years on the Government's Viticultural Advisory Committee. For the past three years, he has represented the industry on the Pesticides Board. Mr Brajkovich was awarded the OBE in 1985, for his services to the wine industry, and to the community, especially in his home district of Kumeu.

In 2006, Matē Brajkovich was posthumously inducted into the New Zealand Wine Hall of Fame.



Mijo (Mick) Brajkovich  
(1888-1949)

*Matē Brajkovich, son of Mick,  
who assumed control in 1944 to  
create Kumeu River Wines Ltd.*

SOURCE, FAMILY - 1987



## Montana Wines Ltd – founded by Frank and Matē Yukich, 1961



*Montana Wines Ltd founder  
of the original venture – Ivan  
Yukich, 1894 to 1967 and Manda  
Rose Yukich, 1905 to 1998.*

SOURCE, FRANK YUKICH

**I**VAN Yukich (1894–1967), the family patriarch, arrived in New Zealand from the village of Živogošće, Dalmatia, in 1909. He was 15 years of age, a child by today's standards. Little is known of his early days in New Zealand, but it's certain that he would have followed others to the kauri gumfields. There is mention of him becoming a travelling salesman for a time, a not uncommon occupation that brought goods, jewellery, clothing and luxuries to the isolated settlers, workers and gumdiggers in the early decades.

After the First World War, Ivan Yukich took the opportunity in 1921 to return to his family and friends in the village. He joined a general exodus of single men and several families. Few had passports; the majority departed with a 'Certificate of Identity' authorised by the New Zealand Government. Those who, in their anxiety for their families, had returned earlier in 1919 travelled on German repatriation ships and as 'aliens', friendly aliens in fact, they were bundled in with the Germans as prisoners of war (see M. Rakich). For many dutiful sons, the return home was tinged with a mixture of hope and doubt. Their newborn nation held little promise for the future and day by day New Zealand seemed as heaven on earth, a desirable country to settle in, to raise a family and shape their future. As a prelude to re-emigrating to New Zealand they would marry, and plan for their wives and family to follow. Ivan Yukich, for example, married Manda Rose Ivankovich from the village of Bogomolje on the Island of Hvar. Four children were born to them in the village, Gloria in 1926, Matē in 1928, Joe in 1929 and Frank in 1931. That same year, 1931, Ivan obtained his passport and decided to return to New Zealand. The timing was bad,



being at the height of the Great Depression, but he was determined to establish a home and a living for his wife and children. They were not able to join him until 1934.

Ivan Yukich's sole ambition was to establish a vineyard in the tradition of his Dalmatian homeland, an ambition that many aspired to and achieved. His first years were devoted to market gardening to create a reserve of capital. In 1940 after almost nine years of toil and sacrifice he bought 4 ha (10 acres) high in the Waitakere Ranges, west of Auckland city. In 1948 an additional 12 ha (30 acres) was purchased. Ivan's son Frank recalled that his father stood on the property and, looking out over Henderson Valley and the upper reaches of the Waitemata Harbour, said, 'This spot reminds me of the mountains at home. I will call this I. Yukich & Sons, Royal Montana Vineyards.' Later it became simply 'Montana', derived from the Italian word 'Montagna' (pronounced Montanya) in common usage in Dalmatia. The vineyard of 1.2 ha (3 acres) of I. Yukich & Sons produced 1000 gallons of sherry and port in 1950; four years later, 1600 gallons annually. At this point Ivan's son Frank moved onto the stage.

### Frank Yukich (born 1931)

To quote Frank in brief:

In October 1954 I had discussed with my father and brother that I wanted to expand the vineyard to 40 acres. My father and brother disagreed. The reason my father refused was that he thought he was getting too old to start on my dream and he wanted to retire, but he said that he would lease the property at a nominal rent so that he, and my mother, could live comfortably. If we were successful he would sell us the property in a few years. I thought this was my big chance. My father was giving me an opportunity to put into action what I had planned, but the mammoth project needed capital. My total earnings in the past six years were £650, of which I had saved £35.

The following year, April 1955, I married at the age of 23. The next five years work went into paying for our home and a property of 25 acres, which we bought next door. The dream of vineyards and expansion was still only a dream. In 1960 we still had three acres of grapes. Working on the farm during the day and planning a 10 year project growth of the whole of the New Zealand wine industry at night gave me an average night's sleep

of two and a half hours. In July 1960 my brother agreed with me to take the first step at later what was called 'The Ten Year Plan'. We planted 22 acres, bringing our total acreage to 25. That was the first step of the 1000 acres required to make my 10-year dream a reality.

I became fired up with the vision of the potential of the New Zealand industry. When I tried to share this vision with other small winemakers they were unable to accept the incredible magnitude of my projections. With the encouragement of my father, and the complete support of my older brother, Matē, I resolved to form our own company to make the vision a reality. Remembering the day my father had named the first three acre vineyard and firm in my resolve to reach the peak of the wine industry in New Zealand, I named the company Montana Wines Ltd.

The stage was now set for a remarkable explosion in growth for the company. In Frank's words, the ingredients of success were careful planning, intensive propagation of classical vinifera grapes, application of modern vineyard and winemaking techniques and aggressive marketing. He foresaw a demand for better quality wines. Consolidation of the company's financial and distribution strength came following the formation in 1964 of Montana Holdings Ltd. Within three years Montana combined with Campbell & Erenfried Ltd and was joined by a prominent Auckland financier, Rolf Porter.

Vineyard planting increased with the establishment of the 104-ha (260-acre) Mangatangi block, and the opening of an automated modern winery in the Gisborne region in 1970. In 1973, Waihirere Wines was taken over. By this stage Montana had swung into table and sparkling wines. The company was now, after 10 years of development, on the threshold of a massive boom.

Ambitious and far-seeing, Frank and his brother Matē, through the evidence and analysis of scientific advisors, decided that the Marlborough province was a promising location for expansion. In November 1973 the company had gone public and the Seagram Liquor empire of the United States bought 40 per cent of the shareholding. The following year the Waitakere winery was closed down and a larger, more modern

Montana Wines Ltd  
– founded by Frank  
and Matē Yukich, 1961



*Frank I. Yukich – founding  
director and driving force  
of Montana Wines Ltd.*



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

plant was opened in Tamaki, closer to the Auckland market and the transport network. Meanwhile 1620 ha (4050 acres) of farmland were purchased in Marlborough by Montana on Frank's recommendation, and the first plantings were made on the Fairhall Estate.

In 1974 Frank and Matē disagreed with Seagram on a policy matter, causing Frank to step down from active management, although as one of the largest shareholders, he stayed on as director and deputy chairman until 1977.

The restless and energetic Frank Yukich continued his close involvement with the industry, establishing Castel Wine & Spirit Co. Ltd (1975), which in turn took over Penfolds Wines (NZ) Ltd in 1977. He reshaped Penfolds as a successful enterprise. In the midst of these business activities, Frank's brother Matē, who

was still with Montana, was tragically drowned in 1982.

Meanwhile Montana, the company he founded with his brother Matē, continued to expand. Penfolds was sold to Montana Wines Ltd in 1985. In 1986 Seagrams sold out to Corporate Investments Ltd, of Auckland. In 2000, the old family label 'Corbans' joined the Montana cellar and finally, in 2001, the company was acquired by UK based Allied Domecq PLC. Montana Wines Ltd was taken over by Allied Domecq Wines NZ in September 2004, which was in turn taken over by Pernod Ricard NZ Ltd in 2006.

In 2006, Frank Yukich was inducted into the New Zealand Wine Hall of Fame, a worthy honour for a man of distinction and a leader of the industry.



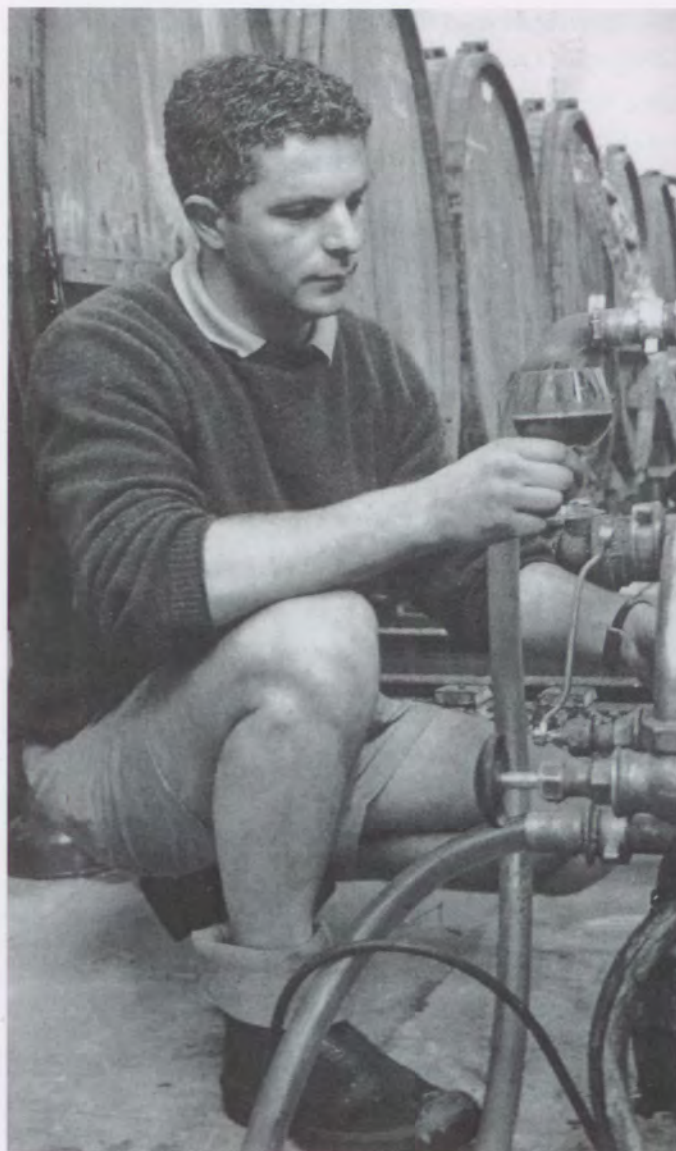
## Villa Maria Estate Ltd – George Fistonich DCNZM (born 1939)

Villa Maria Estate Ltd  
– George Fistonich DCNZM  
(born 1939)

**G**EORGE Fistonich was the son of Andrew and Mandica Fistonich. On arrival in Auckland in 1929 Andrew Fistonich was greeted by his cousin Andrew Zencich, who obtained work for him in a Rangitoto Island quarry. This was at the height of the Great Depression. He then moved to the northern gumfields for a while but there was barely a living to be made in the depressed market. He turned next to drainage work on the Hauraki Plains and then on to the Horotiu Freezing Works near Hamilton. On his return to Auckland, Andrew met Mandica Banovich, who had arrived in early 1935. The couple married at St Patrick's Cathedral in the same year. In 1936 they bought a 5-acre (2-ha) block of land for £500 in Kirkbride Road, Mangere, next to Andrew's married sister. In 1940 they planted their first vines to make wine for their own use and to supply locals through cellar sales. They would not have envisaged the future that would stem from this small beginning.

Their son George Fistonich was raised in a modest cottage on the family property. When he left De La Salle College he worked as a building hand and alongside his parents. In the mid 1950s and 60s changes were afoot. Travel, importation of dry reds (Chianti etc) and early 'experimental' reds from Henderson introduced a taste for table wines and a realisation among winemakers that they must adapt and be willing to progress beyond fortified wines.

George Fistonich married Gail Kirkpatrick in 1961, in the same year that he took over from his father. The couple moved to create a reputation for premium table wines. For 10 years they sold their product at the gate. They gradually built up their market share and, by 1970, the company had adopted an



*George Fistonich – earlier days.*



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

expansion programme on the back of an aggressive marketing campaign using whatever means were available – press and radio advertising, wine tastings and promotional functions. The 1970s were boom years. The market expanded – drinking table wines became the norm. The business, Villa Maria Wines, surged forward on the crest of this wave and with confidence took over the long established winery, Vidal's, in Hastings in 1976.

In November 1985, a complex set of circumstances forced Villa Maria into receivership and it is to the credit of George Fistonich, his loyal staff and numerous customers that the company was able to trade out of the crisis by April 1986. At the same time Villa Maria Wines Ltd was rebranded as Villa Maria Estate Ltd. The company bounced back, taking over Esk Valley



George and Gail Fistonich outside the House of Commons, London, UK, to receive a Trophy for the superior Gewurztraminer of the International Wine and Spirit judging in 1986.

Wines in 1987 and the Thornbury brand in 2005. After the Esk Valley takeover rapid growth and a reputation for great wines took Villa Maria to the forefront as one of New Zealand's leading wine producers. Over the years more than a thousand awards have been gained, endorsing the enterprise, the product quality and public acceptance of the brand Villa Maria.

From simple beginnings, Villa Maria's present \$30 million development in Auckland caps the company's achievements. It looks out over 40 ha of rich volcanic soil in Montgomerie Road, Mangere. The buildings house the company's headquarters, the winery, cellar store, bottling plant and functions centre. Much of the credit is due to George Fistonich, his wife Gail and long-serving staff. His efforts and his contribution to the industry were recognised when he was awarded the title of Distinguished Companion of the New Zealand Order of Merit, in the Queen's Birthday honours of 2005 – DCNZM.

George Fistonich and his winery earned many honours over the years in both New Zealand and overseas, the more prestigious being:

- 2001 Inducted into the Manukau Business Hall of Fame.
- 2003 Wine International Magazine – Wine Personality of the Year.
- 2004 *New Zealand Herald* – included as one of the Top 10 New Zealanders for 2004.
- 2004 *American Wine Spectator* magazine named Villa Maria Estate as one of the world's 50 great wine producers.
- 2004 *National Business Review* named George Fistonich as New Zealander of the Year.
- 2005 George Fistonich named New Zealand Wine Personality of the Year.
- 2007 International Wine Challenge, London.
  - Alastair Maling MW – 2007 White Wine maker of the Year
  - 2006 Single Vineyard Graham Sauvignon Blanc – Four trophies and Gold
  - 2006 Single Vineyard Ballochdale Sauvignon Blanc – Gold



## George Thomas Mazuran OBE, JP (1909–82)

BORN in Nakovan, Pelješac Peninsula, the eldest of three children, George gained a scholarship to study at the Knin Agricultural and Viticultural College for a period before deciding, at the age of 16, to join others leaving for New Zealand. Within days of arrival he found his way to Te Kuiti to work with a contracting team engaged in swamp drainage. George's job as a dogsbody entailed keeping the camp in order, setting traps for rabbits for meals, boiling the billy and attending to the numerous chores demanded by his elders.

Intelligent, ambitious, a man of vision, early on he set his heart on growing grapes and making wine some time in the future – but that goal meant hard work, patience and planning. For some years he continued labouring in districts far from his compatriots, in Nelson and on the West Coast, gaining strength and experience, and learning English and the ways of New Zealanders with whom he mingled. He became a naturalised British subject in 1934.

In 1932 he married Florence Lupis, New Zealand born daughter of Nikola and Frana Lupis who had settled originally in Waiharara where five children were born. Frana, who arrived in 1904, was one of the first Croatian women in the Far North. Frana was a warm quietly spoken lady who gave much to the confused, lonely young women arriving from home. She was their mentor, their comforter and in many cases served them as a midwife. After the First World War, Nikola, Frana and family returned to the newborn nation, The Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (Yugoslavia to be). They remained there from 1921 to 1924, hoping and perhaps expecting that they could adjust to a new life and find comfort in their homeland. It was not to be.

The post-war economic and political problems convinced the family to return to New Zealand – no doubt with a sense of relief. The parents went into the fish shop business in Point Chevalier and in later years moved to a similar business at



*George and Florence Mazuran in  
London to receive his honour, the  
O.B.E., from Her Majesty Queen  
Elizabeth II, 1972.*

SOURCE, FAMILY



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

120 Victoria Street West, Auckland. George and Florence took over the business after they married and carried on for a few years before their ultimate opportunity turned up.

In 1938 they bought 15 acres of land on Lincoln Road, Henderson to establish Mazuran's Vineyards Limited, which became known for its premium sherries and ports. In 1960, for example, the company sent a sample range to the International Wine Fair in Ljubljana in former Yugoslavia (today's capital of the Republic of Slovenia). Their sweet sherry won a gold medal and their dry sherry, a silver medal. This proved to them that New Zealand could compete with the best, a fact confirmed by continuing success internationally and locally in subsequent years.

On joining the Viticultural Association in 1950, an influential body of mainly small to medium scale Dalmatian growers, George found his feet as a spokesman and negotiator. He served on the executive and as president for 32 years to lead the Association in its struggle to keep in business. Conditions were damaging. After the Second World War relaxation of restrictions on wine imports dampened local production and prices plunged. George Mazuran saw it as his task to make the government aware of this situation, suggesting that preference should be given to local producers whose survival was critical to the country. Mazuran's persistence impressed both politicians and their officials. His arguments persuaded them of the value of the wine industry to New Zealand. Eventually the skilled negotiator foiled the tough opposition of the licensed trade, the brewers

and importers, a tremendously powerful lobby. The net result was the reimposition of duties on imported wines to protect local industry, plus other decisions that all up gave the measure of protection, which led to the development of the industry as we know it today. In 1972 therefore George Thomas Mazuran was honoured with an OBE. He and Florence journeyed to London to receive the honour from Queen Elizabeth II.

There's little doubt that his personal, relaxed approach in dealing with politicians in Wellington, at field days and wine makers' dinners, generated considerable support for the industry. His contribution was outstanding, but it must be remembered that his fellow members of the Association were always there to offer advice and endless effort in seeing that he succeeded.

He served the industry for 32 years as executive member and president. After the Association was succeeded by the Wine Institute he was there as foundation executive member. Not to be overlooked was his role in the advancement of the community as a member and a life member of the Yugoslav Society, later to become the Dalmatian Cultural Society (Inc.) in Auckland.

On Lincoln Road, Henderson, Mazuran's Vineyards Limited continues to produce its ports and sherries in an environment far removed from the orchards and vineyards developed by his compatriots in years gone by. It is overlooked by the products of relentless urbanisation – a peaceful island in a clutter of modernistic structures, signs and endless traffic.



# The Croatian press in New Zealand

The Croatian press  
in New Zealand

**B**ETWEEN 1899 and 1919, nine newspapers were published in the Croatian language in New Zealand, to service a floating population of some 2000 Croatian gumdiggers. Only two were successful with a readership wide enough to enable them to survive – *Napredak* (Progress), 1903–06, and *Zora* (Dawn) 1913–16. The others were short-lived and of those the most professionally produced was *Bratska Sloga* (Brotherly Unity), 1899, that managed to publish only four issues.

*Bratska Sloga* burst on the scene in 1899 when the community was being subjected to considerable antagonism on the gumfields, leading to legislation that restricted access to Crown lands and closed off immigration. This paper was published by Anton Bulat (Sučuraj) and edited by Matthew Ferri (Trpanj). The latter was a man of some journalistic experience who would claim the status of a worldly gentleman – a cut above his less educated and sometimes illiterate compatriots. In common with several other Croats he took a pro-Austrian position (see Matthew Ferri). Thus, when *Bratska Sloga* was officially launched with a fanfare on 23 May 1899, it was attended by the Austrian Consul, Eugen Langguth, a number of 'Austrians' and leading Auckland citizens. The occasion was concluded with the singing of the Austrian national anthem.

Although well presented and informative, *Bratska Sloga* misjudged the times and the temper of the Croats on the gumfields. Politically, 95 per cent would have been against Austria because of policies that caused them to abandon their homeland. Other factors, the mobility of the diggers and the instability of migratory trends, meant that a good 50 per cent would not remain in the country for more than four or five

years at a time. Matthew Ferri's appeal to their patriotism would therefore have fallen on deaf ears – especially when that appeal was tinged with Austrian sentiment. As an example, the 29 May 1899 issue was hardly tactful: 'Our Most Gracious Emperor and King who holds his people dear to his heart, will be delighted and pleased to see how his Croatian people will progress in this alien land.' Adding salt to the wound, the publication of stories of the Vienna Court caused many to view Ferri's politicking as traitorous. There was little support for his views. After four issues, *Bratska Sloga*'s predictable collapse was hastened by the appearance of an opposition paper *Danica* (Morning Star) with its nationalistic Croatian views and sympathies for the gumdiggers struggling for an existence on the scattered gumfields of the Auckland Province.

Matthew Ferri was, of course, more than angered by *Danica* and sought its suppression by the New Zealand Government. The vindictive tenor of his personal attacks on Ivo Segetin, editor of *Danica*, could be regarded as libellous, but insults were traded without recourse to the courts. As one early pioneer observed, 'our press here mainly attacked each other. People became sickened and would not subscribe, causing them to fail'. It appears that *Danica* would barely have seen the year out. The Croatian population was still to put down roots in New Zealand and then there weren't the numbers to make any such venture profitable. Petar Luksich (of Vis Island) seemed not to have learnt from the failed papers when he launched *Hrvatsko Glasilo* (Croatian Herald) in 1903. This paper left no trace of its brief existence.

Matthew Ferri, restless and forward thinking, launched his



Ivan Pavlinovich, co-editor  
'Danica', 1899.



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

paper *Napredak* (Progress), 1906–09 – this time better organised and anxious to meet the needs of his Croatian readers. The community was more settled and less mobile, and ready for a paper like *Napredak*. The paper presented a well informed,

### Bratska Sloga.

God. I. AUCKLAND, N.Z., SVIBNJA 15, 1909. Broj I.

### NAPREDAK. (PROGRESS.)

God. I. AUCKLAND, N.Z., DECEMBER 1, 1906. Broj I.

### NOVI SVIJET (NEW WORLD)

PRVO I JEDINO NEOVISNO NARODNO RADNIČKO GLASLO ZA JUŽNOLJAVE U NOVOJ ZELANDI. FIRST AND ONLY INDEPENDENT NATIONAL LABOUR JOURNAL FOR AUSTRALASIA IN NEW ZEALAND.

God. I. (1st Year) AUCKLAND, N.Z., SATURDAY, JUNE 1, 1914. Broj I.

### The United Front

("Slavensko Jedinstvo")  
(Bulletin of the Slavonic Council, Box 315, Auckland, N.Z.)

All letters and journals are invited to quote or reprint any article with acknowledgment to "The United Front," published by The Slavonic Council, Auckland.

No. 5. THURSDAY, JUNE 11, 1942. Price 6d.

### Jedinstvo

Glasilo Slavenskog Odbora za Pomorje S. Rastije za slogu i jedinstvo Slavenskog naroda.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 7, 1942.

"SMRT FASIZMU" — Sloboda Naroda

## SLAVENSKI GLASNIK

BULLETIN OF THE ALL-SLAV UNION

AUCKLAND, SATURDAY, DECEMBER 22, 1943

Narod bez granica.  
jest narod bez podanosti.

### VJESNIK

Mjesečni Glasnik Narodnih i Međunarodnih Događaja.  
Na Hrvatsko-Srbom jeziku.

Broj I. TRAVANJ 1946. Cijena 6d.

NZ Croatian Press – Mastheads.  
'Bratska Sloga' (Brotherly Unity),  
'Napredak' (Progress),  
'Novi Svjet' (New World),  
'The United Front', 'Jedinstvo'  
(Unity), 'Slavenski Glasnik'  
(Slav Herald), All Slav Union  
Bulletin, 'Vjesnik' (Messenger),  
Yugoslav Association Bulletin.

more balanced view of conditions, both in the homeland and New Zealand. *Napredak* was produced by the British and Austrian Newspaper Company. A soft 'Austrian' line was evident, probably to appease Austrian representatives in New Zealand. Readers were entertained and informed by articles, gumfields poetry, and letters to the editor and current kauri gum prices. A lively paper, it was, however, marred by persistent infighting, argument and character assassination. In the end good intentions were overcome by bitterness, and failing support, which caused the paper's collapse in 1909.

Two new publications between 1908 and 1910 added to the confusion. In 1908, *Hrvatsko Glasilo* (Croatian Bugle), edited by Anton M. Sulenta, was published in Awanui in the Far North. A staunch Austrophile, Sulenta was party to the formation of the Austro-Hungarian League, which failed to get off the ground. Sulenta's paper was followed by *Glas Istine* (Voice of Truth), published in Dargaville by Tony L. Suvaljko (Vrgorac), espousing the ideals of Croatian unity. No records of the above two papers exist. It was inevitable again that all three at loggerheads should fail to gain support within the limited market they sought to serve. In 1912, Suvaljko convinced himself that he must continue his mission to help his people and came back with the paper *Sloga* (Unity). The field was clear and he believed that there was 'a demand among our progressive people'. As he stated in the first edition, he was 'producing *Sloga* in our mother tongue to give life to the sons of our motherland in these antipodes, in this foreign distant group of islands'. It was claimed that *Sloga* had 300 subscribers, insufficient to sustain it beyond about 12 months.

In considering all these brave attempts, one must give credit to Matthew Ferri for all his shortcomings, as the only one who did most to bridge the gap in the first years between the struggling and often bewildered Croatian immigrants and the New Zealand situation. He gave them encouragement and sought to improve their lot in an alien land. He established a standard of journalism that compared with the best newspapers of the day, and it is clear that his vision inspired the most influential paper that followed – *Zora* (Dawn).



# Zora (Dawn)

THE publication of *Zora*, 'the only Croatian newspaper in all Australasia', on 16 August 1913 heralded a new era in Croatian journalism in New Zealand. It would be 'a paper of the people' as editor/owner George Leon Scansie declared, and he added, 'The earlier Croatian newspapers in this country gave us experience even though some were antagonistic to the people's wishes. Now that something superior and well put together is presented, the people are interested' – words of a salesman.

Encouraged by the patriotism generated by the Balkan Wars of 1912 and 1913, Scansie saw *Zora* as a means of promoting the concept of South Slavism. As editor he saw it as his role to provide leadership and inspiration via the printed word. The paper would become an influential propaganda tool under his guidance. In June 1914, he formed the Croatian Publishing Company Ltd, with a share capital of £5000 that was fully taken up. Twelve agents were appointed to promote sales, sell advertising space and to gather news. The paper's coverage was wide-ranging – news, information, kauri-gum prices, correspondence and political opinion kept the gumdiggers interested. An extra attraction was the use of a Croatian typeface imported by Scansie in 1915. Some 450 subscribers were listed.

In the first 10 months, Scansie was assisted by Andrew Frankovich, a Catholic clergyman who had left the church's service to settle in Auckland. Andrew was an astute, well-educated gentleman who acted as unacknowledged editor of *Zora*, contributing considerably to its standing and success. In June 1914, Scansie released Frankovich, the excuse being that the paper couldn't support him, but it was believed that it was

because he was allegedly pro-Austrian. A bitter war of words followed with Frankovich circulating a broadsheet, *Glas Istine* (The Voice of Truth), accusing Scansie of untrustworthiness and deceit. Andrew Frankovich retreated from the city to join his brothers in the Whangaparaoa winery for two years. However, the pro-Austrian accusation stuck and led to Frankovich's internment on Motuihe Island near Auckland for the last year or two of the war. Smarting from the injustices he suffered, he withdrew from the community, later changing his name and settling in the Waikato region.

*Zora* in its first year tried to impress upon the authorities, the press and the public the need to refer to 'our people as Croats and not Austrians'. In 1915, with the formation of the Yugoslav Committee in London, the propaganda drive was redirected to promote the Yugoslav ideal. This became the

'ZORA' The 'masthead' of the paper.





paper's foremost concern. Equally important, *Zora* admonished Croatian gumdiggers to fulfil their obligations by supporting New Zealand's war effort. In a strongly worded editorial on 31 August 1914, Scansie warned, 'By this time the pro-Austrian faction, who dreamt of Croatia participating in a federated Austro-Hungarian state in the future could not justify their credo. As one writer noted in *Zora*, 'They are not worthy of the Croatian name'.

His underlying intentions may have been honourable, but George Scansie could not resist attacking those who opposed his views. Abuse and criticism engaged both sides, destroying *Zora's* standing and losing ground financially. A climax was reached on 2 March 1916 when Scansie resigned as editor. A caretaker editor ran the paper before Scansie was persuaded to resume the role some months later.

After May 1916, *Zora* became the official organ of the London Yugoslav Committee, and now it would be aimed to inform New Zealanders. Much of the material was published in the English language, causing large numbers of Croatian subscribers to cancel their subscriptions. Within 18 months of the first issue it had been reduced from eight to four papers and finally, by January 1918, it had ceased to publish.

*Zora's* misfortune was to make its debut at the outbreak of the First World War. The confusion, the uncertainty, the wrangling between factions reflected the community's despair and disappointment. That they held together at all and met their obligations to their new homeland was due to the higher ideals expressed in *Zora*, and by individual leading spokesmen.





# George Leon Scansie (Skansi) (1877–1926)

A NATIVE of the village of Sumartin on the island of Brač, Croatia, George Scansie arrived in New Zealand in 1900 via the United States, following his brother John (Ivan), who had arrived in 1897. The brothers dug for kauri gum in the Puni-Waiuku area where on 27 October 1903 they became naturalised British subjects. In 1905, George and John went north by coastal steamer to Awanui, a busy port in those days serving the Far North regions. George and two partners opened a successful boot repair business, The Boot Emporium, which burnt down in 1909 under suspicious circumstances. Two years later, George Scansie settled in Auckland leaving two partners, M.J. Gaelic (Gilich) and Tony Gugich, to continue the business in Awanui.

George Scansie was an exceptional personality among his countrymen. His sense of duty, his ambitious nature and his negotiating skills set him apart. For these attributes he was respected, but his opportunism and flamboyance soon attracted criticism and anger from many with whom he clashed over political issues. He was one of a number of similarly inclined Croatians, such as J.M. Totich, S.M. Ujdur, P. Sulenta and M. Ferri, who assumed leadership roles in the community with the ability to organise people and to inspire a sense of patriotism during the First World War decade. He was the flag-bearer of the ideal of South Slavic unity.

Encouraged by the patriotism generated by the Balkan Wars of 1912–13, he decided to publish a Croatian language newspaper in Auckland titled *Zora* (Dawn). The first issue of this excellent paper was on the streets in August 1913. The Croatian Publishing Co. Limited was formed to ensure financial stability. It was a

success, attracting 450 shareholders, about 20 per cent of the Croatian population in New Zealand. Zora became George Scansie's personal mouthpiece, a platform for his political views that generally echoed those of his countrymen. (See *Zora*.)

On 3 June 1914, George Scansie married Caroline, the third daughter of Roland Lowe, of Bendigo, Victoria, Australia. They had two sons: Milan was killed as a pilot officer in 1942 in the Second World War; there is no information on their other son.

Almost a year after the launching of *Zora*, the First World War was sparked off in Sarajevo, Bosnia, on 28 June 1914 by the assassination of Archduke Francis Ferdinand of Austria. Diplomatic attempts to avert Austria's attack on Serbia, seen as the culprit, failed, and by 14 August 1914 Europe plunged into the abyss of a world war. George Scansie, through *Zora*, delivered blow-by-blow news of events in the Balkans and Europe, keeping the community informed on the implication and effects on their status and future in New Zealand.

After Austria attacked Serbia, on 28 July a large number of Croatians gathered at Paul Cvitanovich's boarding house at 94 Federal Street, Auckland, where it was resolved to form the Croatian-Slavonian Independence League. A Serbian War Relief Fund was established and a committee elected – George Scansie, president, Mark Simich, secretary, plus members Steve Modrich, Ivan S. Petricevich, Paul Cvitanovich, Tony Petrie and Peter Katavich. The protest organised against Austria is discussed elsewhere.

In 1915, Scansie contacted Ante Trumbic, one of the founders of the Yugoslav Committee based in London. The result was the founding of two branch committees, one in Auckland and the

George Leon Scansie  
(Skansi) (1877–1926)



George Leon Scansie.  
SOURCE, FAMILY



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

other in Dargaville. In short time the committee appealed for volunteers to form a Yugoslav Legion to join the Serbian army on the Salonika front in Greece. Similar appeals were launched in the United States, Chile and West Australia where army units were formed to serve overseas. In New Zealand disunity between two factions, one headed by George Scansie, the other by Simun Ujdur, negated any efforts to create such a unit. The committee in London stepped in, recognising Scansie as their official intermediary, and asking Simun Ujdur to stand down in the interests of the community and the war effort.

One of Ujdur's main criticisms levelled at Scansie was the latter's total backing of Serbia, overlooking his own Croatian roots. This became apparent when Scansie falsely represented himself as being of Serbian nationality, which he claimed could be proven by a certificate issued by the Serbian Embassy in London. According to him this document gave him the sole right to negotiate on behalf of the Serbian Government in exile. Preaching the 'Yugoslav' concept on the one hand and ingratiating himself with Serbian politicians on the other caused serious disunity.



*John and Mary Scansie.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY

In spite of Scansie's efforts, and those of others in the community, acceptance by the New Zealand authorities and the public was not achieved. Croatians were aliens, subjects of an enemy state, Austria, and therefore suspect. In spite of numbers who volunteered to serve in the New Zealand army overseas, and in spite of those who did go to Gallipoli and France, the government bowed to public opinion and drafted single men into public works schemes.

Scansie's appointment as Consul was a cut and dried decision. As strong supporter of Serbia and the South Slav State, and with his store of credit with influential New Zealanders and the Serbian authorities, he was an obvious choice in 1922. He moved quickly and decisively to bring some order within the community and to seek recognition within New Zealand society. In 1924 he gave non-naturalised fellow Croatian subjects of Austria the opportunity of registering as nationals of the new kingdom.

George Scansie moved onto the stage when Croatian settlers in New Zealand were adrift, scorned as enemy aliens and divided within. Scansie, once appointed to his cherished role as Consul, poured tremendous effort into bridging the gap between past and present to ensure that his people were accepted as equals by other New Zealanders. Overworked and under pressure, he died suddenly in Sydney in 1926. His widow Caroline and brother Ivan assumed responsibility for the consulate until John Totich was appointed in 1927.

In his short term as Consul he did much to promote the Yugoslav ideal as a force in the community without dismissing Dalmatian provincialism dear to most people's hearts. Before the First World War he had been an ardent Croatian liberal, then that image was put aside in favour of his wider aspirations as a Yugoslav.

To Scansie's credit was the creation of the Mayor of Auckland's Serbian Relief Fund, which through fundraising programmes – concerts, appeals and social gatherings – raised £13,178. Through his paper *Zora* he was able to tap the patriotism of his compatriots throughout the Auckland Province.



# John Mark Totich MBE (1882–1957)

John Mark Totich MBE  
(1882–1957)



*John Totich, M.B.E.*  
SOURCE, TOTICH

ONE of the more prominent and influential among George Scansie's Croatian compatriots for many years was John Totich, a native of Kuna on Pelješac Peninsula, a rugged mountainous territory that thrusts out into the Adriatic Sea and almost touches the Island of Korčula. It is a hard land with a long history of tenant farmers held in bondage by the lords of Dubrovnik. More than elsewhere on the Croatia's Adriatic Coast, strong links with the sea were forged over many centuries. The men of Pelješac became great sea captains, seafarers and boatbuilders. The sea brought wealth and security to the region. They were among the earliest – excepting Dubrovnik – to sail out into the world, to trade, to follow the trails of gold exploration in the 19th century, to desert ships and seed small colonies.

Almost every township and village shared in the prestige of families linked to the sea. Kuna also, detached from the surrounding waters of the Peninsula, could point to a long line of sea captains. The family of John Totich was among them, although he himself found that the long sea journey to the South Pacific was a severe test for his seaworthiness. As a youngster, John Totich was educated at the local public school to primary grade and then privately by Franciscan friars because his family believed that he was destined for the priesthood. At the time of his childhood, stories of New Zealand would have filtered through to several villages on Pelješac – in particular Nakovan, Trpanj, Vručica, Viganj and Oskorušno. His cousins, the Šegetins from Vručica, would have sent accounts to his family; in fact it was Vlaho (Charlie) Šegetin who suggested that John should join them.

Charlie had been in New Zealand digging gum for five years

before John Totich decided in 1898 to join him. He arrived in Auckland and was immediately taken in hand by his cousins Vlaho, Joseph and Ivan Šegetin. They worked on fields around Taupaki and Kumeu before going to the Northern Wairoa where he joined John Nobilo at Scottish camp and Baldo Tomich at Redhill. John Totich did well enough to purchase a block of land.

He was an assertive, forward thinking man who faced the problems of adjustment to a new culture in a positive way. He took lessons in the English language and began to play rugby and other sports. His commitment to New Zealand was sealed when he became a British subject in 1903 while at Redhill – his occupation, farmer. In an act of gratitude for his acceptance by New Zealand he gifted a small part of his land to the Redhill community on which to build a hall.

In 1908 John Totich settled in Dargaville. He bought a building in Victoria Street, where he and Dick Fredatovich opened a boarding house, billiard saloon and fruit shop. His life now moved into another gear. No longer a gumdigger, he found himself much in demand by his compatriots as an interpreter, scribe, negotiator and arbitrator. He became an important figure in Dargaville. His integrity was unquestioned, his honesty beyond reproach. The large Croatian settlement in the Northern Wairoa looked to him for leadership and this he gave whenever it was required of him.

John Gordon Coates was a well-known personality in the Kaipara region. He was particularly well liked by the Croatian population and he reciprocated by showing his sympathy and concern for their conditions and their acceptance by New Zealanders. When Gordon Coates accepted the Reform



Party's nomination for the Kaipara seat for the 1911 elections, Totich swung into gear and organised a committee of his fellow countrymen to canvass support for him. Numbers were encouraged to become naturalised so that they could vote in the elections. In the event the result was so close that another ballot was called for and this time Coates was successful. Whether or not Totich and his team swayed the vote is uncertain; however, Gordon Coates was forever grateful for Totich's efforts. He would henceforth be the voice of the community in Parliament and John Totich would be an advisor and a respected campaign organiser.

Totich's life was notable for his wide interests, his membership of societies and committees, and his outspoken views on the status of his people as Dalmatians from Croatia. In common with many other leading members of the community he publicly rejected any affiliation with Austria-Hungary. He fought endlessly, using his growing influence, for the recognition of Dalmatian Croats as loyal New Zealanders. He was always in the forefront in defence of his people. During the Balkan Wars 1912-13 he organised a fundraising committee in support of the Serbian Red Cross. When the First World War broke out he spoke on behalf of the community in the Northern Wairoa, condemning Austria-Hungary's invasion of Serbia. Throughout the Auckland Province many hundreds of erstwhile Austrian subjects of Croatian nationality rallied behind him and other leaders and offered themselves as volunteers to fight on the Serbian front at Salonika.

The New Zealand Government failed to understand the Croatian position, considering that they were aliens and should be interned. The public demanded action in spite of pleas from men like Scansie, Totich, Ujdur, Šulenta and others. In a case of bad decision making the government backed a commercially initiated deal to intern Croatian diggers in the Parengarenga area to dig gum. It was a doubtful project and it failed to proceed in the face of a public outcry. The enslaving of people commercially was distasteful on all grounds. To appease public opinion an Aliens Commission was appointed specifically to investigate the loyalty of the Croatian (now regarded as Yugoslav) community, and to advise Government as to future steps.

The findings of the Commission were most favourable, but in the face of anti-alien hysteria it was decided to conscript single Yugoslav males under the control of a commissioner and to direct them to public works.

During the First World War years John Totich joined in the formation of the Dargaville branch of the London Yugoslav Committee. He and the vast majority of settlers saw the creation of a united South Slav (Yugo-Slav) state as an ideal worth fighting for. When the war ended and the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes had been formed (later Yugoslavia, 1929) they saw this event as the realisation of their dreams.

Through the 1920s he continued to lobby Government through Gordon Coates, on matters of immigration, nationality and work. His people were now well committed to settlement in New Zealand. It was a painful period of establishment, uncertainty and economic strain, but progress was seen in the formation of families, of moves to diverse traditional occupations, and of gradual acceptance by New Zealanders. The community also now had a consul representing their nation, the controversial George Scansie (1922-26), who was represented informally in the Northern Wairoa by John Totich. When Scansie died in 1926, John Totich took over the office from 1927 to 1944. The consulate remained in Dargaville until 1938, when under pressure he moved his office to Auckland.

From the date of his appointment, John Totich followed the policies and procedures of George Scansie. He served the Royal Government of King Alexander and his successors unstintingly. He became a staunch royalist, and thus opposed Croatian autonomy and communist ideology. Almost without exception the pre-1920s settlers of his age group accepted his views on homeland politics, and adopted the Yugoslav/Dalmatian identity. Their lives were totally absorbed with work, their families and plans for a better future. Few of them had time to give to the new-wave thinking from Yugoslavia, whether it was of Croatian or communist ascendancy.

John Totich sincerely believed that the recently imported factions would tarnish the reputation of the established Yugoslavs. He saw the pioneer generations being discredited and maligned



John Mark Totich MBE  
(1882-1957)

by the more rabid devotees of Stalin and Machek. To counter their propaganda and influence he invited Rev. Milan Pavlinovich, Peter Šulenta in the Far North, Matthew Ferri and others to maintain a watch on these propagandists and to report to him and he in turn would inform the New Zealand Government of any potentially damaging situation.

The 1930s, years of the Great Depression, the election of a Labour Government and a renewed flow of immigrants, kept Totich busy. Early in the decade he negotiated with shipping companies on behalf of the Royal Government to repatriate a large number of ageing and destitute Yugoslavs. The 1930s was a decade of club formation, with the forming of the Yugoslav Club (Inc.), Auckland in August 1930 and the Yugoslav Workers Cultural Society (Inc.) in December 1930. In Dargaville the Yugoslav Society (Inc.) was formed in 1932 and as a measure of their respect the members of the Yugoslav Club (Inc.) Auckland appointed him as patron.

When the Second World War broke out in 1939, the Yugoslav community in New Zealand found themselves in limbo. Their homeland was now dominated by the Axis powers, which supposedly placed their loyalty to New Zealand in doubt. The government now decreed that all non-naturalised aliens must register and henceforth be subject to police control. Surprisingly, even after Yugoslavia entered the war on the Allied side in March 1941, the regulations remained in place. John Totich took strong exception to the government's stance. The community had declared its loyalty to New Zealand and the Allied cause and the societies were launching fundraising campaigns for the Patriotic Fund – yet the classification of aliens under the Emergency Regulations remained in force. Totich did his best, through the press, politicians and civil servants, to have this changed but to no avail. It was an unforgivable situation.

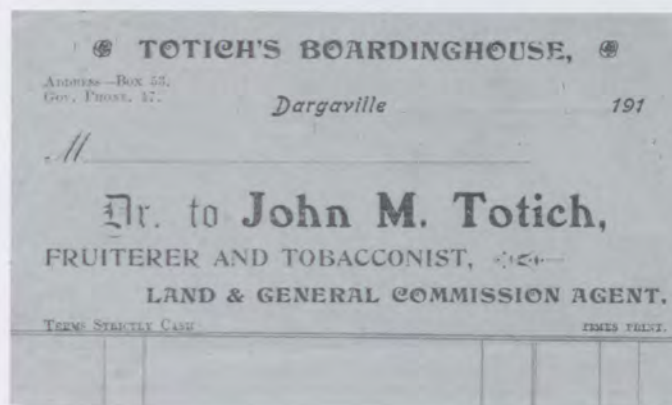
The events that unfolded during the war years, for example, the frictions and misunderstandings that developed over Mihailovich and his Chetniks on the one hand, and Tito and his Partisans on the other, tore the community apart. John Totich as Royal Consul for the exiled government in London stubbornly maintained his support for Mihailovich and so did many others.

Even when Tito was finally recognised and the community almost to a man had swung their support behind the Partisans, Totich remained correct as Consul. The frictions between the societies and the criticisms he personally had to suffer took their toll on his health.

With the successful victory in Yugoslavia of Marshal Tito and his Partisans and the establishment of a Federated State, albeit Communist controlled, John Totich's position became untenable. The New Zealand Government had already on the advice of the Yugoslav Ambassador in London withdrawn recognition of Totich in October 1944, but accepted that he should continue to service the consulate until a new appointee arrived. In 1945, a new Consul General was appointed in Sydney to represent the Democratic Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and he in turn from 1946 looked to the All Slav Union for day-to-day business, and it wasn't until 1951 that a fully accredited consul arrived in Auckland from the new Yugoslavia.

John Totich was a beaten man, unrewarded for his years of hard work and sacrifice, often misunderstood, but a man of compassion and honour. He collapsed at his desk while attending to a client and died on 8 October 1957. He was a true patriot for his times, a deeply religious man and a warm-hearted father to his daughter Marjorie, who stood by her father throughout his life. John Totich survived his wife Ethel May (Fry) by 22 years. He was buried in her family plot at Waikumete Cemetery.

In 1953 the New Zealand Government honoured him with the MBE for services to the community.



John Totich – letterhead,  
Dargaville, 1906-1907.



# Alfred Ernest Harding (1861–1946)



*Alfred E. Harding – Northern Wairoa settler. M.P. for Kaipara, 1902–1905. Hobson County Council, 1871–1900. A public-spirited gentleman and friend of the Croatian settlers.*

SOURCE, FAMILY

BORN in Waipukurau, educated in Napier and Wellington, he then worked for two years on his father's property before moving to Mangawhare to take charge of the Aoroa run in 1879, a block of 14,000 acres (5600 ha). He became owner in 1883 and, 10 years on, married Margaret Astley, a school teacher. They reared a family of four sons and four daughters. Alfred Harding was the complete public-spirited man, serving on committees, boards and associations that benefited the district and the community. His reward was to be elected a first Member of Parliament for the new Kaipara Electorate in 1903.

His contractual relations with Croatians in the late 1890s and beyond were fair and reasonable. A mutual respect grew during swamp drainage projects on the Aoroa block. He could relate to their work ethic and their desire to improve their lot, and this led him to be ever ready to defend them in the face of criticism and government strictures.

For example, the Parengarenga issue, discussed elsewhere, led him as president of the Kaipara Chamber of Commerce to protest to the Prime Minister, William E. Massey, and the Imperial Government in London in 1916. Many years ago, Margaret Harding, Alfred's widow, recalled that a businessman in Whangarei with a store at Parengarenga persuaded the Prime Minister to agree to segregate Dalmatians there to appease the growing anti 'Austrian' trends in the media and among New Zealanders. Plans for this proposal were leaked and John Totich

and Harding were advised. Strong protests followed. Harding published four good reasons for aborting the unsavoury issue:

1. To uphold the honour of the Empire and maintain the British tradition of justice, equity and fair play.
2. To secure continuance of the present amicable social relations between the two races.
3. To protect the business interests of people in North Auckland.
4. To protect the interests of private individuals who in some cases would be ruined if the proposal were adopted.

Pressured by A.E. Harding, Gordon Coates (then overseas in the armed forces) and by the kauri gum merchants lobby, the government relented and, in its wisdom, appointed an Alien Commission in 1916. Harding saw this a fairer way of resolving the matter and on 17 August 1917 moved the following resolution which was carried:

That this Chamber recommends that the services of all Slavonians in New Zealand be utilised on war services by the military authorities at the same rate of pay as New Zealand soldiers, and suggests that a conference be arranged in Auckland between representative Dalmatians and the Military authorities to discuss matters.

The above was endorsed after the Commission's favourable report had been published. It was actioned by the government in 1917.



# First World War

AUSTRIA'S annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in October 1908 set the stage for the drama that followed in 1914, when on 28 June the Archduke Francis Ferdinand was assassinated in Sarajevo. It was the spark that ignited the powder keg that exploded into total war, an unprecedented conflagration that saw nations torn apart, millions killed and the old order destroyed. Croatians in New Zealand sensed strongly that it had to happen. This had led many to choose settlement in New Zealand to avoid submission to Austria's increasing oppression in pre-war years. An indication is the figures showing male naturalisation for the period in question. They numbered 526 in 1901–07 and 789 in 1908–14, a total of 1315 when the Croatian male population averaged around 2000.

Matters came to a head when on 28 July 1914 Austria declared war on Serbia. In Auckland, Eugen Langguth, the Austrian Consul, ordered mobilisation of 'all army reservists and others liable to serve'. An amnesty was declared for evaders and deserters provided they joined the colours promptly. One hundred were expected to register but only about 30 responded – probably German Austrians. In any case by 4 August Germany, Russia, Britain and France were embroiled, dragging in other European nations.

The day after Austria's attack on Serbia, George Leon Scansie, editor of the Croatian language newspaper *Zora* in Auckland, called a meeting of his compatriots to phrase a message of support for Serbia. On the next day, 150 met at Paul Cvitanovich's boarding house at 94 Federal Street, where the Croatian-Slavonian Independence League was formed. A committee was elected and funds raised in support of the Serbian Red Cross. A similar

meeting was held in Dargaville, north of Auckland and the larger gum camps rallied with supportive demonstrations. In Auckland, a decision was also made to demonstrate outside the Austrian consulate on 1 August where the Austrian flag would be set alight. As this failed the flag was shredded and trampled on, after which the men marched up Queen Street in a body singing patriotic Croatian songs. The police had been pre-warned, but as there was no trouble, they stood aside.

The Austrian Consul protested to the Prime Minister.

*April 5th, 1915 – the first Croatians to enter Trentham camp for training. Jim Delich, Andrew Tomich, Ante Tomich, Joe Sunjich, Frank Hrslich.*

SOURCE, FAMILY





## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES



George Harliwich – one of four brothers who served 1st N.Z.E.F., WWI.

SOURCE, FAMILY

Zora, he claimed, 'was inciting revolution in Austria'. Scansie was an anarchist'. Langguth's appeal fell on deaf ears and, as it transpired, war overtook both Austria and New Zealand on 4 August 1914. Friends were now adversaries.

In November 1914 the New Zealand Government enacted war regulations by which all aliens were required to register. Croatians were now technically classed as enemy aliens – naturalised or not. They found themselves caught in a web of misunderstanding, suspicion and animosity in spite of their



WWI volunteers.

L to R – Clement Vidak, George Torkar, and unknown Parkinson – enlisted at Patumahoe, Franklin County.

expressions of loyalty and willingness to serve in the armed forces of Serbia or New Zealand. The government, politicians, senior civil servants and the public generally had no understanding of the intricacies of European politics, particularly of Southern Europe. The community in New Zealand was thus very much under siege, but by no means deterred from fighting for recognition as friendly aliens. Their insistence on that score before Britain and Austria were at war was temporarily to their advantage. Gordon Coates himself assured them that they would not be interfered with, but cautioned them to comply with regulations and report regularly to the police as required.

The police rode with a light rein. They visited gum camps occasionally to satisfy themselves that nothing was amiss, and insisted that, as aliens, Croatian diggers must obtain permits to travel more than 20 miles distant. The *New Zealand Herald* ran a flattering general article in February 1915: 'Their industry, patience and general bearing had overcome initial hostility and



Farewell to Matě Vujcich.

Back seat – Matě Jelaš, Mick Jovich, Ante Yelavich.

Front seat – Wm Christiansen, Matě Vujcich, Jure Borich (standing).

Standing – Ante Tolich, Petar Čulav, Tony Čulav, Steve Bulog, Joe Čulav, Paško Vegar, 1915.

PHOTO, MATĚ KULUZ



they were accepted, even if a bit grudgingly as useful members of New Zealand society'. A fair comment!

No records exist giving the exact number who volunteered in the first months of the war. The author's estimate gleaned from interviews is that about 300 of the 2000 or so male Croatians in New Zealand were prepared to serve overseas initially in the Serbian army but preferably the NZEF or in a Yugoslav Legion. The latter idea favoured by some never came to anything in New Zealand. Ultimately 85 were drafted into the New Zealand army, but only 60 went overseas between April 1915 and October 1916.

At that point the majority were pulled back from the front because of the desertion of a New Zealander of German extraction, yet one month later in November 1916 the Defence Department finally stated that it would accept Austrians of 'Yugoslav' nationality in the New Zealand army, provided they were naturalised British subjects. Scansie's propaganda in *Zora* and the Yugoslav Committee's efforts did no more than arouse nominal support for this move. Their earlier enthusiasm when large numbers volunteered only to be rejected would remain dampened. Factors that caused resentment and non-commitment were:

## First World War



*Matě Peko, volunteer WWI  
– Dargaville.*



*Ilija Mandich's store, Dargaville,  
1917. Fund raising for Slavonic  
Queen, Miss Jacqueline Mitchelson.*



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

- The secret Treaty of London, 26 April 1915, arranged between Italy on the one hand and Russia, France and Britain on the other, promising Austria's territories of Dalmatia and Istria to Italy as an inducement to join the Allies.
- The confusing machinations of the several leaders in the community who proclaimed their authority and demanded action by Government. The result was only to harden Government's attitude and to lead to the strictures that followed.
- The decision to proceed with internment of 'alien' Croatians at Parengarenga, which proved to be an embarrassment for Government (see Parengarenga).
- The appointment of John Cullen to administer the 'Jugo-Slav' programme of manpowering single men to work on various 'public works' in the North Island (see Cullen). Cullen's arrogance and ignorance cast a shadow over the hopes of Croatians to become citizens of New Zealand.



*Private John Jure Ravlich, born in Kozica, Dalmatia in 1880, arrived in New Zealand in 1901. He became naturalised in 1908 at Hikutaia, Coromandel region. At the outbreak of World War I he volunteered to serve overseas in the First NZEF in the 8th Reinforcements, Canterbury Regiment. Private Ravlich fought through the worst battles in France over a period of 3 1/2 years, surviving a disabling wound caused by a sniper's bullet, which hospitalised him in London for 10 months. On his return to New Zealand, he was discharged in April 1919. In 1926 he married Antica Fistonich.*



*Volento Trubuhovich, 1894–1965, WWI volunteer, Waipapakauri. Enlisted November 1916 in the 25th reinforcements, NZ Rifle Brigade. Served in Flanders, France. Prisoner of war, June 1918. Discharged April 1919.*



*Frank Hrstich.*



*Stephen Vella.*



# Parengarenga – internment or segregation?

THE New Zealand Government, through its tardiness and extreme caution, failed to resolve the problem of the Croatian settlers' status. Legally they were enemy aliens, subjects or former subjects of Austria-Hungary (usually referred to as Austrians). In spite of their vocal support for the Allied cause and in spite of the fact that 300 or so had offered their services in the armed forces of New Zealand overseas, and that a number did actually go, the community at large remained in limbo. The resulting uncertainty and frustration for both Government and the community became an embarrassment all round. The problem had to be resolved. Heavily under pressure through 1916, Cabinet turned more and more in favour of internment (segregation was the preferred term) as an answer, having failed to satisfy public opinion, which demanded drastic measures. In fact, of the 2000 male Croatians in New Zealand during the First World War, only 65 were interned for different periods, 17 on Somes Island, Wellington, and 48 at Featherston.

When the Parengarenga Gumfields Co. Ltd on Parengarenga Harbour in the Far North placed a proposition before Government offering attractive terms for the segregation of single Dalmatian Croats, it seemed an answer to the government's prayers. The Parengarenga gumfields had been a disappointment to those investors who had held it for several years. It was unpopular with gumdiggers because it produced mainly gum of poorest quality. An expert opinion in 1910 had claimed that the field could support about 1000 diggers. In 1916 it had 150, 70 of them Dalmatians.

Prime Minister Massey asked the three North Auckland MPs for advice on the proposition and an agreement resulted.

The company guaranteed to charge only current prices for stores and not to increase its royalties and to allow buyers to operate freely. The government agreed to advance half of the pre-war value on unsold gum. The men who were to be 'interned' should earn at least 10/- per day as averaged over the previous six months. The question of control was not addressed. How these men would be 'imprisoned', guarded, housed or cared for, and by whom was never disclosed, nor was how they would be able to conduct business independently. However, a contract was signed.

The ill-conceived plan was leaked and all hell broke loose. The *North Auckland Times* on 29 June 1916 wrote: 'So Cabinet was hoodwinked by the Company which endeavours to use a nation's patriotism to exploit an unoffending people.'

Alfred A. Harding, former member for Kaipara and at the time president of the Kaipara Chamber of Commerce, sent telegrams of protest to the Prime Minister and to the Imperial Government in London. John Totich as member of the Chamber and president of the Northern Wairoa branch of the Yugoslav Committee (London) appealed to the Governor-General and the Prime Minister. His telegram of 28 June 1916 read as follows: 'We, sir, as a loyal body, bitterly resent being classed as enemies of your government and the Allied cause. We protest against being handed over as coolies to an individual or a capitalistic organisation by whom we shall be exploited.' Totich also sent a strong protest to Trumbich of the Yugoslav Committee in London: 'We beg you to interview Asquith [British Prime Minister] asking him to prevent this injustice. Please represent our loyalty and request British Government to restrain New Zealand interning.'



Alfred Harding wired Gordon Coates on overseas service since early in 1916: 'Slavonians here now have the gist of the Parengarenga Agreement. Feeling of bitterness and resentment very acute. For heaven's sake get the government to make a definite promise to send Aliens Commission before Slavonian internment'.

Coates responded with the promise that a proper enquiry would take place before any action was taken.

The *Wairoa Bell* in Dargaville commented:

The pity is that the government took no adequate steps for proper inquiry before making its astonishing proposals to intern a large body of men whose loyalty appears, from evidence given, to be beyond dispute. That the government should be victim of alien hysteria is not to its credit and it seems to us a pity that the wild and foolish utterances of a man such as John Payne MP cannot be suppressed.

Finally, the weight of the gum merchants' opinion was added to the bitter wrangle. The deputation that went to Wellington in June were coolly informed that the government had made up its mind to intern the aliens (meaning Croatians only) at Parengarenga and no more was to be said about the matter. The merchants, over a period, pushed their case forcibly, expressing concern that they weren't canvassed for an opinion. They claimed that merchants, brokers and storekeepers would all suffer grievously if Government proceeded with its unfortunate plans. They pointed out that segregation of a

large body of men on the Parengarenga fields would result in stockpiles of unwanted low-grade black gum, which would be detrimental to the industry and more particularly to the Maori people in the area. Kauri gum, which was their base source of income, might be rapidly exhausted, jeopardising their future livelihood. Gordon Coates, writing from Europe to the Prime Minister, expressed deep concern that the whole matter was getting out of hand. He asked Government to leave the 'Austrians' alone and that they were his responsibility and should remain free except for single men who should be put to work on government schemes if necessary.

Alfred A. Harding and John Totich were privately tipped off about the scheme and jointly, via the Kaipara Chamber of Commerce and the Yugoslav Committee, publicised the proposition and sought to have it withdrawn. As Totich claimed, such a move would bring dishonour on his people and create terrible hardship. The Croatians saw it as a form of slavery and demanded that, if they must be interned, let it be done legally and in properly established camps. The government under severe pressure on all sides, and no doubt from London also, conceded their error of judgement and promised to set up a commission which would investigate the question of Croatian loyalty properly. The Yugoslav Committee in London welcomed the move as one that would at least provide an opportunity for all shades of opinion to be expressed and possibly silence the critics.



# The Yugoslav Committee – London, 1915

NAPOLEON'S seizure of Venetian territories in the wake of the French Revolution of 1789 led to the creation of the Illyrian Provinces, comprising Istria, Dalmatia and the City State of Dubrovnik. It was a short-lived venture for the people it encompassed – but beneficial materially, politically and nationally. The tragedy was that upon Napoleon's defeat at Waterloo, the same territories reverted to Austrian control to be absorbed and forgotten. The idea though, grew amongst Croatian intellectuals as the Illyrian Movement gained force in the 1830s and 1840s. Over the following decades it gradually matured into a broader concept of South Slavism, embraced by liberal minded people throughout South Slav lands. It's probable that the movement gained strength and inspiration from the advent of Pan-Slavism in Russia in the last decades of the 19th century.

Locked into the Austro-Hungarian Empire, politically, economically and socially, the dream would not be realised. The only hope was the prospect of a measure of autonomy for Croatia (including Dalmatia) and Slavonia. This led to the concept of the Triune Kingdom – Croatia, Slavonia and Dalmatia – being adopted. Although there was dissatisfaction with Austria-Hungary's rule, Croats and Slovenes did not wish to see the Empire destroyed. The clergy advocated a free Croat-Slovene state under the Hapsburgs as an option. On religious and historical grounds there was strong antagonism to union with Serbia. The fear was that Serbia would pursue its Greater Serbia ideal and the ultimate unification of all South Slav nations within its fold.

Significantly, the Croatian community in New Zealand,

95 per cent male, strongly supported South Slav ideals, proving this when they rallied behind Serbia's cause in the Balkan Wars of 1912–13. Fundraising for the Serbian Red Cross, resolutions of support and press releases were well supported. The newspaper *Zora*, first published on 16 August 1913, encouraged and informed its readers on progress at home and overseas. When Serbia was attacked by Austria on 28 July 1914, the editor, George Leon Scansie, trumpeted Yugoslavism, appealing to his people to take up arms – to join the Serbian army, form a Yugoslav Legion or join the New Zealand armed forces. 'Let's march to victory over Austria.'

During the first months of the war, a nucleus of three Dalmatian Croats in Europe, Frano Supilo (journalist), Ante Trumbic (politician) and Ivan Mestrovic (sculptor) met. Their aim was the creation of a Yugoslav state and to that end they lobbied Allied governments and South Slav communities overseas, notably in the United States and South America. The trio expanded into a powerful all-inclusive Slav body that was formally established in London on 30 April 1915. As if by design the Allies, Great Britain, Russia and France, signed the secret Treaty of London on 26 April 1915. To the horror of the newly recognised Yugoslav Committee the Treaty assigned South Slav lands to Italy in exchange for that nation's entry into the war on the Allied side. Gorizia, Slovenia, Istria and Northern Dalmatia were to be part of Italy, assuming the Allies won the war. What is rarely referred to is the Treaty's assignment of Bosnia, Southern Dalmatia and part of Eastern Slavonia to Serbia in recognition of its valiant efforts as an ally.

In New Zealand a branch of the Yugoslav Committee, London,



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

was formed in Auckland in 1916 and, from 13 May 1916, the newspaper *Zora* served as the Committee's official bulletin. To reach a wider audience the paper was later printed in the English language, in order to better represent the case for union. Within days of the Auckland Branch being formed, two factions emerged. There were arguments regarding the management and functions of the committee that caused many to wonder about the integrity of their leading citizens. Unfortunately, the arguments weren't dealt with within the community. Correspondence with Ministers and press statements highlighting conflicts within the community did little to help the 'Yugoslav' cause. Only pressure from the London Committee brought sense to the table and confirmed a leadership that was acceptable.

In Europe, with events moving rapidly, the Yugoslav Committee representative Dr Ante Trumbic met with Nikola Pasic, exiled premier of Serbia, in July 1917 on the Greek Island of Corfu. A declaration aimed at unifying all South Slavs in one state was signed. The six 'nations' would be ruled by the Serbian Royal House with a democratic constitution granting local autonomy. The acceptance of the Royal House provoked strong opposition from Croats and Slovenes in the United States, most of whom were republicans and anti-royalists. The declaration, of course, meant that Serbia had no need to

press home the terms of the Treaty of London and its concessions.

In December 1917, two other factors contributed to the foundation of the new nation. The United States entered the war and Russia was disabled by the Bolshevik Revolution. The United States, already swinging its support behind the Yugoslav Committee's objective, was not bound by the Treaty of London, so that the whole question was thrown open for renegotiation. As President Wilson of the United States would have it, the principle of self-determination would be exercised once the Allies had won the war.

On all counts therefore it was to Serbia's advantage to negotiate with the Yugoslav Committee preparatory to the successful conclusion of the war. The Committee's influence ceased as the newly established monarchy struggled to meet the diverse needs of an anxious, somewhat angry, and many would say, betrayed citizens in non-Serbian areas. In 1920, the Treaty of Rapallo was concluded with Italy cancelling Italy's claim on the coastal regions of the new state – except for Istria, three islands and the City of Zadar, which Italy retained.

In New Zealand, the Committee, with branches in Auckland and Dargaville, was dissolved at war's end. The Yugoslav concept was now well planted and regarded with satisfaction by the majority who saw it as an answer to the needs of their people in the homeland.

Telephone 4103  
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Official Organ . Newspaper "ZORA"

Office—  
38 HELLABY'S BLDGS.  
(opp. G.P.O.), Queen St.

*Jugoslavenski Odbor*  
*The Yugoslav Committee — Comité Yougoslave*

*Auckland, May 23rd. 1917.*  
N.Z.



# The Alien Commission

THE growing casualty lists of New Zealand fighting men overseas and the planned introduction of conscription of married men on 1 August 1916 generated increasing concern that the newborn 'Yugoslavs' were not taking the war seriously. A crescendo of accusations in the press, at public meetings and in Parliament of disloyalty, greed, immorality and treason forced Government's hand. Having failed in their plan to create an internment camp in the Parengarenga district, they sought to allay public fears by appointing an Alien Commission. It was designed specifically to report on the status of Croats in New Zealand – were they a menace to public safety, should they be interned or otherwise dealt with? Considering the small number of people concerned, the whole exercise seemed totally out of proportion. However, the wheels of state had to be seen to be moving on the matter. The two commissioners, J.W. Poynton and George Elliott, took evidence from 125 witnesses throughout the Auckland Province. Hearings began in Dargaville on 13 July 1916.

Evidence from prominent New Zealand citizens and the police reported that the Dalmatian Croats were highly respected, hard-working and that internment was unnecessary. The Commission's report published in the *Auckland Star* on 19 September 1916 was extremely favourable, much to the surprise of the authorities and sections of the population. The report noted several instances of abuse and insults by ignorant New Zealanders. Dalmatian Croats had shown remarkable self-control under much provocation. The report also concluded that the internment of steady, industrious men, mostly producers, would seriously affect business and production in the districts they worked in. They were totally free of serious crime and were not a menace to women and children. Alas, the fact that Dalmatians were not of British blood outweighed all else during wartime. Why they were singled out will never be clear but it was a decision that was accepted without rancour.



# Joseph Gordon Coates (1878–1943)



*Joseph Gordon Coates – Minister of the Crown and Prime Minister – a close friend of the Croatian settlers in the Northern Wairoa.*

SOURCE, ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY, WELLINGTON

BORN on the shores of Kaipara Harbour, Coates was a farmer, local body and national politician, Minister of the Crown and Prime Minister. At the age of 34 in 1912, he was elected as Reform Party candidate for Kaipara. His tireless efforts in Kaipara between 1912 and 1928, as a member of the Coalition Ministry in 1931–35 and of the War Cabinet in 1940–43 earned him respect and enduring loyalty. He married in 1914 and served overseas in the First NZEF from 1916 to 1918 with distinction. He earned the Military Cross and Bar, and was promoted to Major.

When Gordon Coates announced his intention to stand for the Kaipara seat, the Dalmatians formed a campaign committee headed by Paul Miosich and John Totich. This committee rallied support among the community and persuaded many to become naturalised British subjects in order to vote. Vote indeed they did and Coates was elected. Joseph Gordon Coates at this stage was well known to the Dalmatians (a commonly accepted title in those days) of the Northern Wairoa. A mutual respect and trust grew from an association dating back to his youth when he came to know many working in the upper reaches of the Kaipara or their visiting the family store at Matakohē.

The Dalmatians in the Northern Wairoa and other provincial districts now felt greater confidence about their future in New Zealand. They saw Coates as a sympathetic, fair-minded friend and ally in Parliament to whom they could relate. Soon after the election he visited Dargaville to be greeted by an uproarious welcome. Four of the biggest Dalmatians carried him shoulder high through the town. To them he was 'Kotsevich'.

The records of the 1911 election (December) show that Coates

did not have an absolute majority in the first ballot but in a second ballot soon after, he polled higher with a majority of 567. Some believed that the Dalmatian vote helped edge Gordon Coates to victory. In fact only 115 had taken out naturalisation papers in 1911, hardly sufficient to have a great bearing on the result. Nevertheless Coates was grateful for their support. Thereafter his door was always open to Totich's pleas on behalf of his people during the difficult First World War years and throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

During the First World War, the government dithered over the question of alien 'Austrians' – the Dalmatian Croats – and sought to appease public opinion at one stage by proposing to intern them in the Parengarenga district in the Far North. The outcry against this concentration camp mentality was such that Government had to back down. At the time Gordon Coates wrote from Europe to the Prime Minister, W.F. Massey, expressing his deep concern with Government's inept handling of the situation and requested that the 'Austrians' be left for him to deal with, that they should be left free as friendly aliens except for single men who should be directed to work on government works programmes – roading, railways, drainage and land clearance. This is what finally happened after the positive findings of the Alien Commission of 1917.

In 1924, Government decided to limit the intake of Dalmatians (now officially referred to as Yugoslavs). The recently appointed Consul, George Scansie (1922) expressed disappointment, but Government, reacting to public concerns and prejudices, set up barriers. Gordon Coates could not help or go against Cabinet decisions, but suggested that two committees be formed by the



community in Auckland and Dargaville to work with the Customs Department and assist with opinions and comments on applicants wishing to enter New Zealand. There is no record of any rejections. Part of this plan was to limit the number of Yugoslavs resident in the country at any one time to 3500, excluding wives and minors. This was generally closely adhered to.

During Gordon Coates' time as Minister of Works 1920-26 and as Prime Minister 1925-28, and indeed to the end of his days, he gave much time listening to the woes of his Dalmatian friends wishing to bring family to New Zealand or seeking employment. Much of this activity was generated through John Totich in Dargaville, now serving as Consul (1927-44). Totich was constantly in touch, requesting Gordon Coates' assistance where people were being discriminated against, thrown out of work or destitute. Coates recognised their abilities and their willingness to earn their keep the hard way. He was therefore always positive and helpful in his responses and did much to alleviate their problems, often in the face of criticism and allegations of favouring foreign workers.

During the 1928 election campaign Gordon Coates was asked by an interjector, 'What do you think of the Dalmatians?' The reply was, 'They are here, they are not crooked, they are hard working men. They carry out work that New Zealanders would not take on. Are these not factors in their favour?'

Coates remained a powerful and influential figure on the New Zealand political stage right up to his death in 1943 while a member of the War Cabinet. He was mourned by the whole of New Zealand and specially mourned by his many Dalmatian friends and supporters throughout the Auckland province and not the least by his old friend and colleague, John Mark Totich MBE.

As a postscript, here are the comments of Ante Ivicovich (1889-1966), who arrived in New Zealand in 1903:

In 1911 a big number of our people were in the Northern Wairoa area. John Stallworthy, sitting Liberal member and Joseph Gordon Coates, Reform Party, were standing for Parliament. Because Stallworthy was anti-Dalmatian, John Totich and friends organised the vote for Coates among Dalmatians and he was elected. I knew Coates in 1906 when he was 28. He started buying gum at Matakohe where he had a store. We were digging at Rehia, six miles away where he would visit to buy gum and sit down to lunch with us.

He went to serve in the army in France in 1916 and within months of his return in 1918 and now a Minister, he came to the Waikiki railway tunnel works in 1919 and 150 of us welcomed him and he remembered me. I, Jakov (Jim) Delich and Frank Botica were delegated to discuss our status. He told us that the war was not officially over but that we could soon be allowed to travel.

Joseph Gordon Coates  
(1878-1943)



# John Cullen



John Cullen.

SOURCE, TOTICH FILES

HAVING failed to implement the Parengarenga segregation scheme and in spite of the favourable outcome of the Alien Commission, Government felt compelled to 'organise the Yugoslavs' so as to appease public concerns. The departure in July 1917 of the Second Division, of conscripted married men, provoked sharper reaction to the apparent freedom that alien Dalmatian Croats were enjoying. Demands for action came from various quarters, one of the most influential of which was that of the Farmers Union which asked for the conscription of all enemy aliens for public works schemes. Sir James Allen, Minister of War, and Gordon Coates, MP for Kaipara, had already considered the idea of manpowering single alien Croatians to be employed on a programme of works – preparing land for returned servicemen, swamp drainage, railways, and roads and farm labouring. The designated works were railway construction between Kaikohe and Hokianga, between Whangarei and Mangapai, and north of Maungaturoto as well as the Stratford-Okahukura section. Other works were drainage between Kaitaia and Awanui, the drainage of Rangitaiki Swamp, Kerepehi, Hauraki Plains and stopbanks and other works at Paeroa. In October 1917 the Prime Minister finally introduced legislation requiring all aliens to register for national service (The Register of Aliens Act 1917).

John Cullen was duly appointed on 26 November 1917. On 4 January 1918, he placed a notice in Auckland's papers in the name of 'The Defence Department – Yugoslav Branch', requesting Yugoslavs to begin registering. From all districts 1900 men had registered by midyear. Most were prepared to accept government direction in a spirit of co-operation,

although they were extremely sensitive about being classed as enemy aliens. Cullen, once the Commissioner of Police, was not an enlightened man. He showed no understanding and adopted a dictatorial stance. He proved to be uncompromising and totally disinterested in the fact that his charges had time and time again demonstrated their loyalty to New Zealand and to the Allied cause.

Cullen's powers were increased by regulations gazetted in June 1918. Now, naturalised or not, all 'Yugoslavs' on the register could be directed to report for national service wherever Cullen saw fit. In fact a total of 600 were actually under his orders, the rest, it was agreed, were family men or men on essential work, on the land, in business or physically unfit for the tasks in mind. Henceforth those directed to work were warned that if they complained or 'stirred up trouble' they would be interned. For example, when 40 men directed to work on the railway at Okahukura near Stratford called a strike on pay issues, Cullen threatened internment if they didn't resume work. The men refused and were taken to court. The court hearing revealed that one of the real causes of dissent was the fact that the regulations of June 1918 still referred to them as enemy aliens, whereas in July 1917 the Corfu Declaration had been signed between the Yugoslav Committee, London, and the Serbian Government, aimed at unifying the South Slav nations. The concept was firmly favoured by the Allied nations but somehow the New Zealand Government missed the point – there was simply no understanding of the political status of Croats.

The tension and mutual hatred between Cullen and his workforce didn't contribute to the orderly progress of the work



1. The piecework issue.
2. Cullen's behaviour towards them.
3. The fact that they were referred to as 'enemy aliens'.
4. The fact that of all the other enemy aliens, they were discriminated against and conscripted for work.

The question that arose was: what was Government gaining by employing a high-salaried Commissioner, staff, offices, firemen, police, detectives and others just to control 600 'Yugoslavs'? With more reasonable management and fairer conditions peace might have been maintained. Cullen's paranoia was such that during the flu epidemic in 1918 he would not accept medical certificates except from doctors he approved. In January 1919 he warned 'Yugoslavs' via the newspapers that any who had been granted leave because of the epidemic or for other reasons must return to work or be prosecuted. He noted:

Incredible!

It was fortunate that throughout this unhappy period, there was still a measure of support and sympathy for the Dalmatian

DEFENCE DEPARTMENT.

JUGO-SLAV ORGANIZATION BRANCH,  
FORT STREET,  
P.O. Box 1205. AUCKLAND, 18th April, 1918

To IVAN SIMIC,  
Fruit Grower & Wine Maker,  
ORATIA.

You are hereby directed to report yourself to Mr. J. H. TRUSKIDR, at the Government DRAINAGE WORKS, THORNTON, RANGITAIKI.

~~Re~~ Proceed by S/S "Kgapuhi" on the 13th MAY, to TAURANGA.  
~~mat-leter-them-the~~ thence by Public Works train to MATATA.  
where you are to be employed at such rate of pay as may be fixed by Government.

You must not leave such employment without first reporting to me, in writing, of your intention to leave, and stating where you intend going. If you are discharged from employment you must also report where you intend going.

Failure to report as above will leave you liable to arrest and internment.  
Please call at JUGO-SLAV OFFICE, AUCKLAND, for instructions.

COMMISSIONER-IN-CHARGE.

Registration as Alien  
— *Matē L. Radich, Hamilton.*

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## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

Croats despite their poor treatment by the authorities. A report of 11 February by the Kaipara Chamber of Commerce noted, among other things:

The member of the chamber ventured the opinion that the Commissioner in charge of this Department [Yugoslav] was more anxious to conserve his billet than to recommend better treatment to the majority who were now recognised as co-workers of the Allies.



*Under Cullen's direction 55 men employed 1918–1919, improving the flow of the Awanui River between Kaitaia and Waipapakauri. 36 cuttings were made over a two-year period.*

SOURCE, FAR NORTH REGIONAL MUSEUM



# Report from M.P. Rakić – departure from New Zealand, 1919

Report from M.P. Rakić  
– departure from  
New Zealand, 1919

ON 4 March 1920 M.P. Rakić talked of his post-war departure from New Zealand in the Pučki List:

On my departure from New Zealand for the old country many of my friends and acquaintances begged me to report on my journey particularly because of the circumstances under which we were deported by the New Zealand Government. I will therefore write briefly the truth by which every Slav can judge whether the English are our friends or not.

On 9 February 1919 a directive was issued permitting non-naturalised Yugoslavs to return free of charge to their homeland – which they were to accept in writing. The majority decided not to sign any documents and asked the police for time to seek advice from the government as to the basis of the arrangements. It was therefore agreed to send a telegram to the Minister as follows:

Please advise us why you require our signatures to leave New Zealand or not. Either the Yugoslav Government wants us home or you are sending us as enemies. Tell us if we can take our possessions and savings. Furthermore can you guarantee that we will reach our homeland.

The reply was prepaid but none was received.

On 20 February, the police turned up again at their huts and everyone was forced to decide and to sign a document. Some confirmed that they would leave New Zealand for good. They had asked the authorities on several occasions on what basis they were being transported and they finally received this reply: 'You will leave freely for your homeland, because

you proved your loyalty to our cause during the war years – all of you can take your money freely – if you have property we will give you time to sell it and also to attend to other matters'.

From 20 February to 27 April 1919, they heard no more until the latter date when strict orders arrived instructing those who had agreed to return home to be ready in two days, and any who failed to do so would be arrested and jailed. They left their jobs and their possessions and were transferred to Auckland on 29 April. There was no time to visit the city or farewell friends. A whole company of soldiers was now allocated to guard them, counting them three times daily. The 46 men in this group were transferred immediately to Narrow Neck military camp where soldiers with rifles and bayonets awaited in two ranks through which they had to pass. They remained there for 15 days sleeping on loose hay under permanent guard. More men joined them, lamenting and wondering at the deception of the authorities. It was hard to grasp.

With the approval of the camp commandant groups of 10 men at a time were taken to the city by members of the Yugoslav Committee so that personal matters could be attended to. Guarantees were given to the commandant by fellow Croatians who had served overseas in the New Zealand army, that they would be returned to the camp. Finally the day came to leave. On 12 May 1919, a government official arrived asking how much money and what possessions they had, the names of relatives at 'home' and other details. Money and bank books were taken, only £5 per person was allowed. Everyone was given receipts for their money with a promise that they would receive the rest on their arrival in their homeland.



To quote Rakich:

Next day, on the 13th May, we all got up at the military camp along with the Germans who had been interned throughout the war. When we arrived in Auckland City we were immediately transferred to a train heading for Wellington. We were extremely unhappy leaving as prisoners and not being able to farewell our friends. A few called out 'Goodbye Auckland – forever'. The train sped on – everyone look crestfallen. One began to play on a Tamburica. Simun Piskulić opened his trunk and out came a harmonica (accordion) to play 'Ljepa Naša Domovina'. Our spirits lifted – and we sang patriotic songs. Next day we arrived in Wellington at 3 pm. En route we had breakfast and lunch – I won't tell you what it was like. In Wellington we transferred straight on to the vessel Willochra, where we met 40 other countrymen, and now on board we numbered 119. There were more Germans than us. The army guarded us without break. People stared at us as though we were 'hajduks' [bandits] brought into Split as prisoners. We were showed our bunks in the hold near the stern. It was disgusting to see – no room, discomfort, bad smells – and we were not permitted up on deck.

At 6 pm we left Wellington for Sydney – the sea was calm on the first night and day but later the weather deteriorated. On the 19th May we reached Sydney. The ship didn't berth but remained at anchor in the open sea. We waited and waited for the journey to continue. The second day all ships in port blew their whistles. We were on deck wondering what it was about. Many vessels let out great billows of steam. We found out that they were celebrating the return of the victorious Australian navy from Europe. We watched on unhappily because we knew under whom the Italians had seized our Dalmatia. On the 23rd May, we were visited by the Swedish consul, who advised that we would go under the Austrian flag to join Croatian prisoners of war, some 29 miles from Sydney (Liverpool) and would leave Sydney together on the 27th May, when we would be separated from the Germans and sent to our destination, while the Germans would continue to Germany via South Africa. Towards evening we reached their camp. I looked at their desolate quarters side by side spread over a large area surrounded by a high fence. The prisoners were not all together – but they totalled about 7000. I sought out the Commandant to find my brother who was interned there. He was helpful and sent a soldier with me to find him so that I could spend a night with him. When we met we barely recognised each other after 13 years apart. I had hardly

greeted my brother when over 100 of our brothers in the prison embraced me. Many wept with emotion, particularly my brother, who suffered many indignities through the war. Our meeting was tinged with sadness as we had heard that two brothers had been killed in the war. The soldier who brought me here, returned to his post and locked the door behind him. The guards were ever present, fully armed.

After a while I asked where the other prisoners were, and I was told they were a half a kilometre away. I also asked how long they had been here and he replied that up to a week ago they had all been together. The question was then asked by the authorities – would they who were 'Yugoslav' step outside the fence? All of us in this group announced that we were Yugoslav and began to move out. Then to our grief and surprise – hundreds of pro-Austrian Croats, screaming and yelling abuse, attacked us with some violence. Many of us were badly beaten up and taken to hospital. The soldiers tried to defend us, but without success. The unlucky ones at the end of the queue fared worst; after they were beaten they were thrown over a fence of about 2.5 m. Who were they? Austrians or Germans? – no, they were Dalmatians. There were those who would kill you if you had said anything against Austria. Among them was a group known as the 'Black Hand' – with their own president and 19 members. They were busy spying day and night, beating and bothering people. More than 50 died from such beatings. I ask again, how did the army permit this – but they were 30 to 1 – how then could you save anybody? Such were the acts of some desperate Dalmatians.

One day at about 3 pm we went with the guard to collect for ourselves a fork, spoon, knife, glass, etc. The building was close to the compound where our Australian brothers were imprisoned. We from New Zealand had a small tricolour sewn to our chests. As soon as they saw these – they began to yell. 'Hey, you Yugoslavs, where is your Yugoslavia, misery on your mothers, and you and your Yugoslavia. If only we could get at you.' We listened to this with surprise. We intended to greet them but they abused us and I wondered as to what could be wrong with such people.

On 31st May at 6 am we were told that we from New Zealand must enter the compound of the pro-Austrians. This announcement hit us like a thunderbolt, especially me, who realised what it was all about. What to do now? I sat down and wrote a letter to the camp commandant, in which I set out what would happen to us



from New Zealand should he mix us in with these madmen. I concluded in requesting of him permission to cable the New Zealand Government, should he not be prepared to defend us. I sent the letter via a soldier, whom I begged to deliver the letter urgently to the Commandant, which he did. Then I thought we might be housed separately, but to our surprise at 2 pm we were asked to move to the dreaded compound. I was in fear wondering what to do.

At 10 o'clock the news reached us from our unfortunate brothers that those who wished to be known as 'Yugoslavs' should not come near them without making out their wills first. All my comrades looked to me asking with their eyes – 'What shall we do?' I said, 'Well if we have to go to them, then let's go but none of us must quarrel with them because there were 700 of them and only 119 of us – and then some might change their minds. If they attack us, then we fight back – but let us be aware what we are dying for. Our song, thank God, has been sung. Our country is free after 800 years and these renegades don't want to hear that or accept that. They said, 'That's fine, but what will become of you?' – I replied, 'When we enter their compound, tell them that Marko Rakich remained in New Zealand, while I am correctly known as Marko Pavao Rakich.' – 'OK,' they said. 'If you fall, we all fall with you.'

At 2 pm, as arranged, we had gathered our belongings and went to the compound under heavy military guard. They must have been given orders to watch us.

It helped us considerably that the president or leader of the new compound had an acquaintance among us from New Zealand, who had served in the Austrian army with him. The latter told him that we would be peaceful.

That night we lay in our uncomfortable bunks. I was among Germans and Hungarians. There were also two from Vrgorac whom I knew. I found out in conversation that they were extremely pro-Austrians. I lay quietly and said nothing prejudicial, while they tried vainly to get information from me. I claimed that I knew little of Europe and that Austria must still be more powerful than before. I arrived an ignorant man in New Zealand, so when one doesn't read, one doesn't know much.

They then said: 'But your Marko Rakich, from New Zealand, writes in the papers against Austria and even burnt the Austrian flag and supports the so-called Yugoslavia. We have those papers here, and we thought you must be that Rakich, but they tell us you're not because as you say you can't write. Do you know that

that Rakich is blacklisted in Vienna, and we will deal with him before he reaches Austria.'

I replied that they had every right and I also had argued with him when I was in New Zealand. They went to sleep while I stayed awake, my mind in turmoil – should they discover that I was that staunch anti-Austrian Rakich – what then!

About 1 am that night, I heard a noise near the hut. I jumped up. When I went to the door I saw two policemen wandering by the building. One knew me, because I had discussed my situation with him. He said 'Sleep well, we have orders to inspect the camp during the night. The letter you wrote to the Commandant was worthwhile.' I returned to my hut and went to sleep.

In the early morning I saw my two roommates, one totally naked, searching my baggage. They were checking my name, and whether I used 'Austria' or 'Yugoslavia' as an address. But I had written, Vrgorac, Dalmatia. They wrote 'Austria'. Should I erase that – but no, I decided not to – as I would expose myself.

That same day at about 11 am a friend came to me to say that we had been betrayed, and that we were now under serious threat. I asked him what they had decided to do with me. He said that some wanted me killed immediately, another that I be thrown overboard at sea, others that I be bound three or four days out from Austria and then handed over on arrival.

I wondered what to do. I could escape with the help of friends, but that didn't excite me as it was difficult to hide in the Australian wilderness – and I would probably never get home. Furthermore my brother might pay with his life so I decided to remain for better or for worse. That same day at 3 pm my friend who knew the leader of the 'Black Hand' group came to me and asked me to present myself to Jakov Cace, the president – warning me to be careful.

We arrived there to find the leader at the door. We greeted him and went inside and all I could see were three or four newspapers (*Zora* from New Zealand). The leader asked me my true name and who I was. He mentioned that he had heard of my claim to be another Marko Rakich – yet others in my party denounced me as the perpetrator of the articles.

I replied – you are wrongly informed about me. I believe that you heard this from the maddest person to join us in New Zealand. He not only blackened my name but also the names of many others – as he might well do to you one day – just be careful and check with others about him. It is not my custom to attack people, even as bad as him. If you want to have innocent

Report from M.P. Rakić  
– departure from  
New Zealand, 1919



blood on your hands, then kill me, but you will lament your deed. The leader stood up and said that he would not stop the rumours against me until he was sure of my integrity. Behind him there hung on the wall a portrait of Carl of Austria. The leader proffered his hand and said that true Austrians had spent 100s of pounds a few days ago on the emperor's birthday, when they toasted their beloved monarch. I said that we were fortunate to have such a King of Croatia. He added, 'Here is a full list of those who have worked against his Apostolic Majesty – all will be hung.'

One day I found a newspaper, and when I looked through, I saw a photograph of the leaders at the Peace Conference; below it noted that Peace had been signed although this was not yet official. This was the best news for all of us.

The press brought news of the formation of Yugoslavia, but that didn't help, because the Austrophiles would not believe it. They were so taken up with 'Austria'. Today, 21st July 1919, the Sydney paper published a map of Europe, showing the new boundaries. Austria was completely decimated and there stood a new name 'Yugoslavia' – what great news – and curses on those who would have had us believe that Austria would remain great.

On the 26th July we had news from the Swedish consul that we could leave within 15 days – which we didn't believe – because of many previous deceptions. So I end my story and I hope to continue at a later date.

(Trans. S.A.J.)

Author's note: This was not to happen.



# Post First World War

THE signing of the Armistice on 11 November 1918 brought no relief to the 'Yugoslavs' in New Zealand. War Regulations would remain in force until 1921. The new Yugoslav state proclaimed in November 1918 included the Coastal Province of Dalmatia from whence many had migrated to New Zealand. They were legally in limbo as ethnic Croatians – still enemy aliens. They were unable to claim nationality in the new nation; even as British subjects they had little status. On 21 April 1919 a meeting of responsible 'Yugoslavs' sought to have wartime restrictions lifted so that they could be accepted as friends and not enemies. Yet almost three years were to pass before Croatians were recognised on 7 November 1921 as subjects or nationals of the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, and therefore friendly aliens.

In the meantime Cullen had been asked for a full report on the 'Yugoslav' minority on 30 September 1919, a full three months after the Treaty of Versailles had been signed. He had not one word to say in their favour. His was a colonial vision of a British New Zealand, a distinct Anglo-Saxon society as he saw it, with a special mission to exercise imperial power. His basic opinion was that 'Yugoslavs' were not desirable persons to remain in New Zealand. Some senior politicians and senior public servants and an influential body of public opinion were inclined to agree. Deportation was on their minds. Cullen, a rigid military man of little sense of justice, demonstrated his concentration camp mentality by adding to his report a list of 359 Yugoslavs who should be deported. His list was thorough with categories as follows:

135, Ill Health, including 33 in mental institutions  
105 with family ties  
99 trouble makers (41 of whom were naturalised)  
20 evaders – untraceable

He added, 'I regard these alien enemies as being most undesirable persons for naturalisation or other privileges of citizenship.' In fact the general policy adopted was not to issue naturalisation papers until such time as a consul (see George Scansie) was appointed in 1922. As an interim measure, in October 1920, the New Zealand Government was prepared to issue a 'Certificate of Identity' to enable travel to Europe cities where passports

*Peter and Nede Nola's family,  
Auckland.  
L to R – Rudolf, Nede (Mrs)  
Slavko, Luke, Victor, Leo,  
Peter (Mr), Olga (Mrs. Nick  
Ivicevich), around 1918.*

SOURCE, FAMILY






## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

Peter T. Anich – typical Letter of Identity, post WWI.


A sample bank draft, sent by Jerry Brajkovich's father, Ivan, to his wife, 1933.  
SOURCE, BRAJKOVICH FAMILY



DOMINION OF NEW ZEALAND.

LETTER OF IDENTITY.

THE BEARER of this document MR. PETER THOMAS ANICH stated to be a subject of Jugo Slavia whose signature and photograph are attached hereto has resided in the Dominion of New Zealand for the past twentytwo years and as there is no Consul for Jugo Slavia in the Dominion this document is issued for identification purposes only.



*Peter Thomas Anich*

Minister of Internal Affairs. 23rd February, 1921.

DESCRIPTION OF BEARER.

Place of Birth: Jelso, Ever, Dalmatia  
 Date of Birth: 5th August, 1881  
 Height: 5 ft. 6 ins.  
 Weight: 13 st. 8 lbs.  
 Complexion: Dark  
 Colour of Hair: Brown  
 Colour of Eyes: Grey  
 Nose: Straight  
 Mouth: Medium  
 Chin: Round

Signature of Bearer: *Peter Thomas Anich*

"The landing of the within mentioned subject has been authorised by the Secretary of State for Home Affairs - No. 327753/169".

No. 72/2413

£ 13.-

BANK OF NEW ZEALAND.



Auckland

No. 7548

19TH. APRIL 1933 193

On Demand of this **SECOND**

*Pay to the order of*

JANE BRAJKOVIC \*\*\*\*\*

THIRTEEN POUNDS \*\*\*\*\*

for value received.

To the Bank of New Zealand.

21, QUEEN VICTORIA STREET, MANSION HOUSE, London

*For the Bank of New Zealand*

*G. D. Lyth* Manager.

*J. J. J. J. J.* Accountant.

could be obtained from established embassies. For those wishing to go to their homeland sooner, Government issued a directive on 19 February 1919, permitting non-naturalised 'Yugoslavs' to travel free of charge on vessels repatriating German and Austrian nationals. Technically still enemy aliens, the 119 who chose this course to be with families stranded by the war would find little comfort, being confined as prisoners of war. The M.P. Rakić story tells it all.

While the New Zealand Government still agonised over the status of its small colony of Dalmatian Croats, the United States recognised the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes in February 1919, Britain in May 1919, and France in June 1919. Right through the war period little was said of the men in the community who had willingly served overseas in the New Zealand army. Excepting the conclusions of the 1917 Aliens Commission of Inquiry almost all other opinions and edicts were heavily weighted on the debit side of the ledger. One would not have expected it, but the same paranoia possessed the New Zealand Government when the Second World War broke out in 1939.



# Mark Simich (1885–1971)

Mark Simich  
(1885–1971)

**B**ORN in the village of Tučepi, a few kilometres south of Makarska, Mark Simich set out for New Zealand in 1900. He chose a bad time to travel. The impositions of the Kauri Gum Industry Act of 1898 were followed by the Immigration Restriction Act of 1900. The latter Act was designed mainly to prevent the entry of 'Austrians' (Croatsians) into New Zealand. Mark Simich reached Sydney and could go no further. He and many others on arrival in Sydney were marooned, left high and dry without money, without work and unable to communicate. Large numbers went to Queensland to work in the sugarcane fields and others found employment in the nickel mines and on road construction in New Caledonia. Mark Simich and Matē Maich were among the latter. The situation provoked by the New Zealand Government, under Richard Seddon's premiership, almost developed into an international incident. It was only resolved after considerable diplomatic pressure on the New Zealand Government by Austria-Hungary via the Colonial Office in London. When restrictions were eased in 1902 Mark Simich and many others resumed their broken journey to New Zealand.

Mark Simich was not encouraged by his three or four years on the gumfields. He soon realised that New Zealand had more to offer. Between 1906 and 1910 he joined separate gum-broking businesses with Joe Kraljevich and Ivan Luketina in Wyndham Street adjacent to St Patrick's Cathedral. Soon after he became a jeweller's traveller and as such took out naturalisation papers in 1912 while in Dargaville.

When Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on 28 July 1914, a public meeting of Croatian residents in Auckland was

called at Pasko Cvitanovich's boarding house at 94 Federal Street. Some 150 attended. The meeting's two purposes were to organise a protest against Austria-Hungary's attack on Serbia and to set up a fundraising committee. Mark Simich initiated the formation of the Croatian Slavonian Independent League and launched the campaign with a £100 donation. The funds raised were later distributed between the Serbian and Montenegrin Red Cross Societies.

The First World War years were difficult times for the Croatian community in New Zealand. Now effectively

*Mark Simich, Marin Tomas,  
Ivan Luketina, 1906.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY





## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

### Gum Brokers

Jedini i pravi prodavatelji kauriske smole uz 2½ postoška. Opremaemo svakovrstne stvari na zahtjev. Dajemo novac u predujam na smolu. Dobru prodaju i brzu opremu racuna osjegurijemo.

**M. SIMICH  
& CO.**

Dalgety's Bldgs., Customs St. W.

M. Simich & Co. – gum brokers, 1915, 'ZORA'.

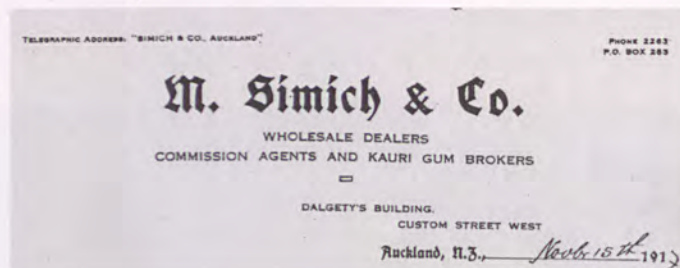
Letterhead, 1917.

M. Simich & Co., Auckland.

The Simich Building on site of Downtown Auckland carpark.  
SOURCE, M.A. MARINOVICH  
FILM, 1938

aliens, they fought for recognition as a friendly nation, but the government, the press and New Zealanders generally were unable to understand that they were Slavs and not Germans and that they were unwilling subjects of Austria-Hungary. Many volunteered to serve overseas, but this counted for little. Even after the province of Dalmatia became part of the new South Slav State, the New Zealand Government would not recognise the new status of New Zealand Croats. During these critical years Mark Simich and men like George Scansie, Simun Ujdur, Anthony Petrie and John Totich used all their influence to persuade the government to adopt a more conciliatory approach. They were totally ignored until the appointment of a consul, George Scansie, in 1922. In 1917, he served as president of the Auckland branch of the Yugoslav Committee.

During the difficult 1920s Mark Simich's business, M. Simich & Co. Ltd, moved away from kauri gum brokerage



into merchandising. As an import-export business the company imported a range of foodstuffs, much of which catered to the community, and then cigarettes and tobacco became the mainstay of the business. In 1924 Mark's brother Marin joined the firm as co-director. They were a formidable pair – influential, successful, strong minded but conservative. Both were forceful orators. Both were firmly aligned with the Yugoslav ideal exemplified by King Alexander's Royal Government.

The company's rising fortunes invited some criticism and allegations in the community of hard-headedness by Mark Simich. His Croatian customers, now referring to themselves as Dalmatians or Yugoslavs, looked on his success with a measure of suspicion and Mark Simich found himself being labelled as a capitalist, a royalist or a reactionary by the more recent arrivals from Yugoslavia who represented various shades of opinion, from Croatian autonomist, communist and anti-Serbian.

Mark Simich kept his views and when the Yugoslav Club (Inc.) was formed in August 1930 he was elected as founding President. During his long association with the Club he nurtured the ideals of the Yugoslav nation, and contributed to the Club's progress as a committed New Zealander, a patriot of his homeland but a royalist at heart.

Mark Simich, in a final act of patriotism, disposed of his critics when the Yugoslav Federal Government's ship *Partizanka* arrived in Auckland in January 1949. After Tito fell out with Stalin and the Communist bloc a rift developed between the Auckland societies, the Yugoslav Association and the now-named Yugoslav Society 'Marshal Tito'. To the pro-Stalin factions Tito was now a traitor and therefore the *Partizanka* would not be welcome. Difficulties during the loading of the vessel, individual excesses and lawbreaking brought down the wrath of the government and the press. The situation was not assisted by the new brand of anti-Titoism. More moderate members of the community sought to negotiate directly with Government. The outcome was a requirement of a guarantee, which was signed on behalf of the community by Mark Simich, Simun Mercep and the Yugoslav Club (Inc.). There were other conditions that had to be met but the ship did sail – thanks to the action of a few.



## Marin Simich (1891–1969)

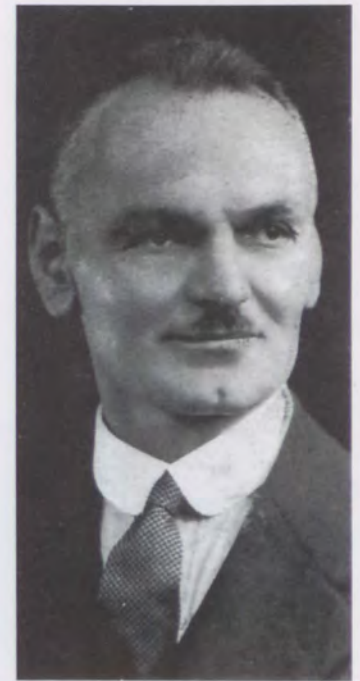
Marin Simich  
(1891–1969)

**A**BROTHER of Mark Simich, Marin was born in Tučepi, and migrated to New Zealand in 1906 to join his brother. His movements during the first few years of residence in New Zealand are not known. In 1916 he married Mary Sheehan from Whangarei at which time he was established as a hairdresser and tobacconist in Victoria Street West, Auckland. In 1924 he joined Mark as co-director of M. Simich & Co., at that time situated at the corner of Fanshawe Street and Customs Street West – the modern downtown carparking building location. He became naturalised in 1922.

In 1924 he was invited to join a committee instigated by the New Zealand Government to work with Customs Department officers to regulate immigration from Yugoslavia – although

purely advisory and with no status or power, the committee was set up to ensure that no undesirable immigrants entered New Zealand, meaning communists or Croatian separatists. In fact no one was ever rejected by either the Auckland committee or a parallel committee in Dargaville. With Marin on the Auckland committee were Peter Dropulich, John Scansie and George Jelichich.

Marin Simich also played an important part in the founding years of the Yugoslav Club (Inc.). He was a persuasive orator in both his native Croatian and his adopted English. His arguments were reasoned and constructive. For much of his life, the family lived in Oratia, as part of the wider Oratia 'Yugoslav' community.



*Marin Simich.*



## Kruno Marusić (1908–94)

KRUNO Marusić's father had been to New Zealand, done well on the gumfields, and returned to build a house in the village of Brist, where Kruno was born. In his infancy his father and uncle went back to New Zealand expecting to add to their earlier gains. The First World War overtook them and they were separated from their family until free to return home in 1921. It was Kruno's first clear sight of his father. Aged 13, at his father's urging he went to Zagreb, Croatia, to undertake a trade training programme. He chose to be a cabinetmaker.

As far as can be ascertained Raphael Berkovich was similarly

trained while Matē Nola learnt the carpentry trade, and there may be others who did similar courses. These were unique men, tradesmen, not labourers or men of the soil. When Kruno returned to Brist after his studies, his father offered him the chance to go to New Zealand to join family members and to progress with his skills. There were few opportunities in the newborn Yugoslav kingdom while in New Zealand he managed to get work with his uncle's help. He learnt new skills and managed to improve his knowledge of English. Opportunities and the promise of a settled future were lost in the era of the Great Depression. He became unemployed, took on casual work, and spent some weeks in the Wairarapa region, scrub-cutting with friends. The Depression passed and the Labour Party was elected as government in 1935. Things began to move again. He resumed his trade and was employed by various workshops for some years before establishing his own business in Victoria Street West, probably in 1947. He traded as Victoria Furniture. The standard of workmanship offered by his plant attracted a growing clientele and more and more tradesmen were employed. The time came to move to bigger premises. Kruno and a partner, Matt Hunter, decided to build in New Lynn and when the latter died, Kruno's son Terry bought out his share from the estate early in the 1970s. The decision was soon made to build bigger premises still in 1978 when the company became Dalma International Limited, fully controlled by Terry.

Kruno Marusić had a great love for his village, for Dalmatia and his people. His connection with the community began in 1931 when he joined the Yugoslav Club based in the Manchester

*Shack of kauri shakes – Anawhata, Waitakeres, West Auckland, 1917.*

*L to R – Mark Marusić and Matē Marusić.*

SOURCE, FAMILY





Unity Building in Hobson Street. The formation of the Club's national Tamburica (Tamburitsa) orchestra in 1935 under Mark A. Marinovich's tutelage led to the creation of a 'Kolo' (circle) dance group which became the Club's showpiece at annual balls, national occasions and during war years at patriotic functions. Kruno had observed Kolo performances at Šestić near Zagreb in his student days. He had no difficulty in convincing the club to adopt the idea, so the Kolo was invented Kiwi style by Kruno, assisted by Visko Gilich, Mark Marinovich and Elnika Yankovich, a member of the small Serbian community in New Zealand. The dance steps were varied in style and tempo. The effect was a colourful, vibrant and exciting dance. Mark Marinovich scored the music for the orchestra – drawn from Croatia and to a lesser degree Serbia. Elnika Yankovich's influence was profound in many respects. This Kolo was adopted by other Yugoslav societies during the 1930s through to the 1970s.

Kruno Marusić was a man of deep feelings who loved his Dalmatian heritage, his Croatian cultural traditions and his adopted country New Zealand, without reservation.

On his death in May 1995, Kruno's ashes were taken by his son Terry and daughter Linda to Brist, Dalmatia.

The eulogy by the village priest noted,

The sorrowful bell-ringing from our church has announced to the people of the small village of Brist, that somebody known to us has died. This time, our dear Kruno Marusić, long time emigrant in New Zealand, has passed away. We gather here in order to give his ashes with due reverence to his beloved native soil, his loved Croatian soil. (Trans. S.A.J.)



Kruno Marusić  
(1908–94)

*Kruno Marusic, with wife Nora, at the Captain's cocktail party on the way to Yugoslavia, 1972 – his first visit since leaving, aged 15.*

SOURCE, FAMILY



# Matē Marin Kuluz (1888–1932)



Matthew Kuluz, labourer, photographer, film maker, inventor, 1920.

THE brothers Ilija and Petar Kuluz were among the earliest of arrivals from Sučuraj on the Island of Hvar, Dalmatia. As was the custom Petar's three sons followed their father and settled – Matē, Nikola, Nedjelko (known as Dick). A daughter Apolonija (Polé) married Frank Piacun (Payk) and settled in Sydney.

Matē Kuluz (also known as Kulus) was born in 1888, the eldest of the family. It is almost certain that he arrived in New Zealand in 1904 aged 16. There is a record of M. Kuluz working for the Zealandia Canning Company Ltd at Batley at about that date – but soon after he left to join others from Sučuraj who were gumdigging in the Coromandel Range.

The Kuluz brothers were intelligent, enterprising men who soon moved into more rewarding occupations. All were competent photographers. In 1938, Nikola and cousin Dick bought a quarry at Wellsford from Tony Ivceovich. Nedjelko (Dick) became a building contractor and Matē devoted his life to photography. It was a skill he passed on to others on the gumfields and many an amateur photographer emerged from their ranks.

Matē Kuluz was naturalised in Tairua in 1908. He next appears in partnership with Jack Sarich in the Kulus and Sarich Photographic Studio, in Aratapu south of Dargaville in 1910. Kuluz roamed the district touting for business while Sarich ran the studio. Sarich apparently preferred the outdoors and pulled out of the partnership to return to gumdigging and farm work. Matē continued his interest, perfected his techniques and took to the wilds of New Zealand as a photographer. During the years 1914–18 he spent some of his time touring the northern

settlements and gum camps with Matē Sunde of Te Kopuru, with horse and wagon, showing silent films in barns, halls and private homes. His other interest, boatbuilding, distracted him for a short time. Just before the First World War he built a vessel, ominously named *Kaiser*, for a German customer. Photography was really his one and only obsession. Wherever he went he held classes for his compatriots. Peter Yelavich of Waiharara recalled attending such classes in a hall on Subritzky's gumfields near Awanui.

Kuluz ran his business under the name Slavia Gazette, a film company under which name he conducted his experimental and development work. As 'moving pictures' became more popular he sought permission to show films on Sundays. Mangonui Council advised him as follows in 1915: 'That you be granted permission to show your moving pictures on Sundays, provided that a suitable class of picture is shown, and that the proceeds are paid to Council with directions as to which fund you wish to benefit.'

His occupation in the 1917 Alien Register was that of 'Showman'.

Kuluz was a patriotic man who used his special skills to support the Allied War effort. For example, on 4 August 1916, on the second anniversary of the outbreak of the First World War, he showed films on Serbian Day at Waipapakauri. A Serbian flag donated by him was auctioned in support of the Serbian Red Cross. On 7 October 1916 he took films of a patriotic football game between Slavia and Awanui – the score 0–30. Could those films be in private hands or hidden in some local archive?

His greatest achievement was the invention of an automatic



photographic reproduction machine that he developed during the war years. In 1919 he took out a provisional patent and in January 1920 he and four others signed an agreement to raise £400 to further improve the machine. Kuluz retained a quarter of the share, the others shared the balance. Nine years later, probably urged by his partners and full of hope and confidence, he sailed for the United States to set up his venture in New York.

In a letter to his brothers in December 1929 he told them that he had refined his machine to perfection, saying that it would be ready to be launched in 1930. But, it was not to be. Eastman-Kodak began marketing an almost identical process at about the time he was ready, totally undermining his chances of reaping the rewards of his efforts and his inventive skills.

He died in New York in 1932 by his own hand, disillusioned, depressed and virtually forgotten.

Matē Marin Kuluz  
(1888–1932)



*Matē Marin Kuluz  
at work – 1920s.*



# Visko Matich (1890–1970)



*Visko Matich, Dargaville.*  
SOURCE, MATICH FAMILY

THE village of Račišće on Korčula Island is the birthplace of several family groups that have settled in New Zealand over the past 110 years – Botica, Druskovich, Franich, Govorko, Gugich, Jurisich, Matich, Sarich, Silich and Unkovich being the largest. Antecedents of the above began to occupy the Bay of Racisce in 1672. By 1721, some 17 families totalling 122 members were well established there. They were Catholic Croats fleeing from Ottoman Turkish pressure inland of Dalmatia. Their choice was to either remain in servitude under the Muslim Turks or submit to domineering Catholic Venice.

Among them was the Matich family, who came from the Vrgorac area directly inland from Zaoštrog on the coast. Headed by Ivan Matich, they filtered through over the coastal ranges to escape by sea to the Venetian controlled Dalmatian islands, principally Brac and Hvar and thence to Račišće and other destinations.

This brings us to Visko Matich and his brother Matë. Visko Matich arrived in New Zealand as a lad of 16 in 1906 and became naturalised in 1911. His brother Matë was born 1892 and arrived in New Zealand in 1906 and became naturalised in 1913. In 1914 Visko married Lucy Silich, daughter of John Silich of Hukatere, located at the head of the Kaipara Harbour. They had eight children, achievers without exception.

Visko Matich told his story in 1960.

I came across from Dalmatia with 14 others including my brother Matë, and stayed in Auckland at Lui Kinkela's boarding house in Hobson Street.

I went on to Dargaville via rail to Helensville and then by

ship to Mangawhare where I was to meet Matë Franich, but he had sent Fred Franich. Fred was a well-known strong man of the period who performed acts of strength at public functions and gatherings [see Fred Franich].

In 1906, Dargaville had a population of 760 – today [1960] 3400. Victoria Street was only mud. Matë Prasich had the boarding house that he sold to Jack Totich and Dick Fredatovich (later a New Zealand billiards champion).

There were no roads – we formed our own tracks from town to camps for the transport of goods. We set up camp usually near a spring. We were all united in the camps, even from various villages.

A group of us signed a contract to drain swamp (Mangatara) for Mitchelson, and involving 41 men at £1 per month royalty for 10 years, we did this and paid Mitchelson £4920 and when we had finished the land sold for £5 per acre. Today those 1200 acres are worth up to £150 per acre – totalling about £180,000. In the 10 years we took out £50,000 of gum and we could have bought the whole block for £1200 on time payment.

In 1909, Raymond and Co started gum cleaning by air pressure. F.V. Raymond, a well-known company promoter in the gum industry, came to camp and offered shares at £1 each. All took shares except me. They went throughout the fields soliciting prospective shareholders – three years later they were bankrupt. A lot of diggers were taken to court for not paying up their capital and they were issued with a judgment summons. If they did not pay up gum was taken as settlement. The gum business was not set up on a commercial basis. I dealt with only one merchant. Most of the other merchants in Auckland worked as a ring and manipulated the market.

In the First World War I volunteered but was not accepted because I was an Austrian subject. We were not well treated by New Zealand authorities and at one stage in 1916 the proposal



was put forward that all Dalmatians be collected and sent into internment camps at Parengarenga. The government had authorised the building of a fence east to west to contain 3500 men [author's note – more likely 1500 men]. A.E. Harding appealed before Parliament to have this project shelved, but he failed. Harding finally cabled Gordon Coates, member for Kaipara, overseas in the army. Coates wrote to Government asking that Austrians be left alone, that they were his responsibility and they should remain free, except that single men should be sent to work on government schemes if necessary [see Parengarenga].

In 1915 gum prices collapsed. As a result the best credit we could get was for one week. We could no longer carry on with gumdigging and one by one we began to leave the fields. In 1915 a group of 16 of us contracted to clean drains – 30 miles of drains at Ruawai, at 1/6 per chain we earned 9/- per day for the team.

In 1916 we contracted for four miles of the new Craven Road

drain at 11½ pence per yard. Others worked there for several years after us – in fact our people did 80 per cent of land drainage in the area.

In 1918 gum prices were on the rise again because of short supply during the war. Working with spades was finished and washing or sluicing of old workings provided 20 per cent of gum sold. About 500 men went back to the gumfields while others had moved onto other work and settlement. Good prices lasted until 1928 and then on the gum industry slid to a low level in 1930, until it finished by the 60s. On Melbourne lease, 14 miles from Dargaville, I paid a royalty of 7½ per cent on gum dug, to the Maori Land Board in Auckland, having taken over from Lichtenstein and Arnoldson who had held it for 15 years. I leased it for 10 years 1920–1930. The lease extended over 10,700 acres of open land. In 1921 Melbourne Lease Gum Co. Ltd formed with C. Clifton Webb, Wilfred Chatwick, Mr Nairn, Marin Kumrich, myself and Matē Matich – with a capital of £6000. I was in charge.

Visko Matich  
(1890–1970)



*Matich family.  
L to R – Maurice, John,  
Rodney, Nick.  
L to R, front – Lillian, Lucy,  
Visko, Lucy, Florrie, Mary, 1940.  
SOURCE, MATICH FAMILY*



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

We liquidated voluntarily in 1928 when the market collapsed. We employed 25 men and two gum washing machines. Water was pumped 250 ft uphill to a tank to supply two lower machines mounted on sledges. Gum and all were shovelled in and washed, then floated off in channels, dried and bagged. Matich Brothers kept a store there until 1938 in an area called Matich Bay (after Visko and Matē) on the river.

Scarrotts, Bassett Block, Tangaihi, Rehia, Red Hill and Te Kopuru today carry over 30 farms owned by very progressive Dalmatian families. They started with rough gum country, which they gradually improved over the years. They control about 130 farms in the Northern Wairoa today. Very few have mortgages, with stock free of debt and with well-built houses. We learnt farming from New Zealand friends, who were always very cooperative with sound, honest advice. In the very early days we weren't very popular because they did not know us well but in later years when we were better known they could not do enough

for us, for which we are very thankful.

Life in the old gumfields days was very hard. If we saved £40 per year net we could say it was a good year, as money was hard to come by. Everything was relatively cheap – a spade 4/6 compared with 41/6 today. Woollen flannel 5/- and today £2.5.0, dungaree and boots are 500 per cent dearer, a suit of clothes in Serge wool £4.10.0 (tailor made) now £28. In 1906 my passage from Italy to Sydney was £14 – today it's £210.

Old Tony Martinovich couldn't read or write but was an organiser in Marriner & Co. for six years. He went north and found Subritzky's 10,000 acres of land lying idle. Martinovich leased it for 10 years, charged £1 per head royalty. He later bought the land and sold a share to Thompson and after latter's death, McArthur bought in. They were partners for 30 years.

Swamps were drained say for three months and then we would dig for six months. We would put 41 tags in a hat for marked positions in the swamp and then go to our drawn spot

*Draining Mangatara Swamp,  
Northern Wairoa.*

*L to R standing on bank –  
Matē Matich, K. Radojkovich,  
M. Radojkovich, F. Botica,  
Matē Franich shaking hands with  
Jack Lelekovich, F. Lelekovich  
(between), P. Botica, C. Juretich,  
S. Jurisich, Vidē Unkovich,  
(lower) Sam Dean.*

*In drain, L to R – Visko Matich,  
P. Botica, J. Franich (left of Visko),  
A. Botica (rear of J. Franich).*





and mark out a circle 15 ft in circumference and dig. If no gum was there you would toss it in – but you still paid your £1. It could take five years to work through a swamp, draining in stages before opening up another block.

Most of our men were single and many wanted to marry New Zealand girls, but they did not trust us suspecting that we might already be married at home. Later, when we were able to speak better English, they thought we were fine chaps.

There were three dance halls on the gumfields. A few could play accordions. The camps used to visit each other, play with bowls made from kauri knots. Christmas and Easter were great events as were the village saints days – St Nicholas, St Vincent, St Anthony etc. We brought in kegs of beer and barbecued our meat (na ražan) all very happy but never drunk – nor fighting or brawling. The camps were all named – Scarrotts, Tikinui, Tangaihi, Te Kopuru, Mangawhare, Middlestore, Blackstore, Polyan Gully, Mangatara, Scottish Camp, Jerusalem, Turkish Camp etc.

We were always honest in our dealings. If the price of gum went down and we could not therefore meet our bills, the storekeepers trusted us and carried us until we could satisfy our debts. There were cases where men who borrowed money at home to pay for their passages to New Zealand and they would see old Leslie Marriner, the gum broker, and borrow money to send home. The debt was thus transferred to Marriner and it might take six months to a year to clear. When Marriner finished in the Northern Wairoa as a gum buyer after 18 years, he never lost a penny through these debts. [Note – on the death of Leslie Marriner in 1931, George Marriner continued as a gum broker – see George Marriner.]

A dairy factory was established at Mangawhare in 1902. There were very few farmers here then, and there were no separators. The cream had to be taken by horse and cart to creameries and on by boat to the factory, until a modern plant was built at Mangawhare. It was the second biggest in New Zealand. In 1904 there were 62 suppliers, in 1930 in the Depression, 980 suppliers, today (1960) 760 suppliers. In the Depression era everyone went milking even though butterfat dropped as low as 8½d for six months.

In the old days Dr Horton was in practice here. An Italian Doctor, Dr Markensini, served in Te Kopuru Hospital for four

years before going to Auckland. He was a very good surgeon. Later he returned to Italy. A lot of our people preferred to go to him because they knew a bit of Italian. There was another Italian, Dr Sisati, in private practice in Ruawai for a short time.

Many of our men ended up in Mental Institutions – loneliness, lack of sympathy, no wife or family, got to them. A few committed suicide or were found dead in the shanties. We got on well with the few Germans here (Herkt, Schick and Glinke) and with the Italians (Čada, Pitoni, Cortezi). Muslims came here from Bosnia (Trebinje) via the USA, for a while in 1906–1907 and dug at 'Turkish' Camp. When they went to court for some reason, they refused to remove their fezzes for religious reasons. The court was adjourned until this fact could be verified. Today only 204 men and women originally from Yugoslavia live here and about 1850 in radius of 40 miles can claim Yugoslav origins.

Matē Matich married Winnie, eldest daughter of Vincent Silich. He served his time toiling on the gumfields with his brother Visko. Together they built a house and general store in a bay, which came to be called Matich's Bay on Pouto Peninsula. They also traded as kauri gum buyers. In 1925 Visko and his family moved to Mt Wesley in Dargaville, leaving Matē to take over the store and gum trade until he settled in Ruawai to begin commercial fishing, later to supply Visko's Premier Restaurant in Dargaville, acquired in 1931.

Visko Matich never fished nor did he farm, but he developed a 1200-acre (480-ha) block at Mangatara, land that he had once drained. For a time he served on the Borough Council where his knowledge and experience were highly valued. He was also a founding member of the Yugoslav Social Club in 1932. He was a man of great determination and energy, remembered with respect and admiration by his family and descendants.

Visko's contribution to the development of the Northern Wairoa, and his unstinting efforts, with his wife Lucy, to support and educate their children, reflect their yearning for a life of fulfilment in New Zealand – something that would have eluded them in Račišće.

Visko Matich  
(1890–1970)



## Frank Nola (1879–1964)



*Frank Nola on his 80th birthday,  
Dargaville.*

SOURCE, FAMILY

FRANK Nola was a prominent Dargaville settler who arrived in New Zealand in 1898 as immigration from Dalmatia peaked. Nola quickly adapted to the rigours of pioneering New Zealand. Gumdigging in the Awanui and Poroti districts was followed by a spell as a bushman in the Coromandel Range. He then went further south to the King Country region to join a work gang, clearing bush to form a way for the main trunk railway (Auckland-Wellington). The line was completed in 1908, but already in 1907 he had taken out citizenship papers at Raurimu.

In 1910 Frank Nola detached himself from his labours to go back to his family village, Podgora, to marry Jaka Vodanovich. The newly-weds returned to New Zealand in 1911 and went to live in a Public Works cottage south of Taumarunui. It is hard to imagine life there for his wife recently arrived from the ordered environment of Podgora. The point was reached, persuaded by his wife's total isolation, that a decision was made to settle in Dargaville where Jaka's three brothers lived – Ivan, Jim and Peter Vodanovich, and where there was a whole community to relate to.



*Ivan (Jack) Vodanovich's  
gum store, Dargaville.  
Centre standing L to R – Jack  
Vodanovich, brother James,  
Matē Nola. Others unknown.*



With their meagre savings, Frank bought a small acreage on the outskirts of Dargaville and started a boarding house, which was managed by his wife. Frank, meanwhile, worked at the local timber mill. In 1917, the Aliens Register records the presence of both Frank – occupation, mill-hand – and his brother Steve (see Stephen Nolan) – occupation, bushman. Giving up mill work, Frank developed their block of land in 1918 as an orchard, market garden and vineyard. Add to that livestock and poultry and the growing family were almost self-sufficient.

Hard-working and enterprising, Frank Nola became a father figure to many young men and women who came to New Zealand seeking a better life. He gave his time equally to all, to his own people and to the Dargaville community at large. In 1932 he joined with others to found the Yugoslav Social Club of Dargaville.

On his death in 1964 he was survived by his children Ivy, Olga, Mary, Elsie, Nada, Frank and Dalma. His wife Jaka had predeceased him in 1936.

Frank Nola  
(1879–1964)



*L to R – Jack (Ivan) Vodanovich,  
Nikola Kokich, Peter Petroff,  
George Urlich (seated),  
Peter Vodanovich. Jim Vodanovich.  
Girls – Olga, Ivy, Nada and  
Elsie Nola, 1920.  
SOURCE, FAMILY*



# Matē Glamuzina (1894–1987)



*Matē Glamuzina, Dargaville.*  
PHOTO, AUTHOR 1984

*Matē Glamuzina, kauri log pulled out of Tangowahine Swamp and milled at Glamuzina's sawmill, Aratapu.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY

**M**ATĒ was born in the village of Stilja in the Vrgorac region. He arrived in New Zealand in 1914. Quoting Matē's words in 1984, 'In my day the ground around Stilja was stony and poor. Austrian rule was oppressive and even the Church leaned more towards the government than to the people. Although we could use the Croatian language, the state language was German and you had to conduct government and official business in that language, although Italian was also acceptable and people used this in preference.' Matē Glamuzina began gumdigging in the Northern Wairoa, but soon switched to ploughing contracts. In the early 1920s he joined in a partnership to establish a gum washing plant. It was a method of gum

extraction, which was destructive and ruinous, leaving the land barren. In 1924 he married Zorka, daughter of pioneer settler John Silich.

For a period Matē was a gum trader, joining with others at times, but with the market forecasts looking bleak, he finally took on dairy farming at Aratapu. An enterprising man, he bought two other blocks of land with self-sown pine trees and set up a mill at Aratapu employing three sons and one other person. Reflecting on his farming experiences he remarked that the land was poor and deprived of fertility. Constant digging, burning off and sluicing had stripped the topsoil off many areas. The only solution was to top-dress, disc, harrow, seed and top off with super phosphate. It was a long, expensive process to bring the land into profitable production. This was achieved. In 1954, Matē and Zorka left their farm to settle in Auckland, leaving their sons to carry on with the timber mill until it was finally sold to Carter Merchants in 1972.

Matē and Zorka had five sons and one daughter.





# Matē Matich (1895–1958)

**M**ATĒ Matich arrived in 1905 from Vrgorac, Dalmatia, initially gumdigging in the Far North. An extremely enterprising individual, he ventured into more rewarding fields to satisfy his thirst for success. In 1926 he married Anka Klinac and then set about bringing his block of land into production as a dairy farm, and at the same time beginning a kauri gum export business. He founded a butchery at Waipapakauri where he employed a relative as manager, leaving himself free to experiment with other ventures – for example, oil extraction from peat and tobacco growing for export to Australia under the label 'Product of the Winterless North', – Grower, M. Matich & Co., Waipapakauri. During all these sideline developments, dairying remained the family's economic base. The tragedy was that the promise of a bright future for his family was shattered by the demands of war. The Matich property and that of many others in the Waipapakauri district were taken for defence purposes by the Royal New Zealand Air Force in 1942. The airbase developed there is fully discussed in a well-researched book by Olwyn Ramsey of Kaitaia, 'Wings over Waipapakauri'. The Matich's had one consolation; their land and home were returned to them in 1946 after the end of the war and life could then resume as before.



*Matē and Anka Matich, 1924.*



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES



*Fred Matich, professional engineer  
in Toronto, Canada.*



*Ivan Matich, professional engineer  
in Toronto, Canada.*

**M.A.J (Fred) Matich** – F.E.I.C., F.C.A.E., P.Eng.

Consulting Engineer, son of the late Matē and Anka Matich of Waipapakauri, Far North, born in 1928. Fred Matich was educated at: Auckland University, 1950 – with a B.E. degree, with honours, Auckland University College, 1951 – with a B.Sc. degree, Harvard University, Massachusetts, USA, scholarship – with an M.S. (Master of Science) degree in 1953.

Settled and practicing thereafter in Ontario, Canada, he became a valued member and/or Fellow of several Canadian

Professional Engineering Institutions. He has also served on many Special Technical Committees concerned with Geotechnical Engineering. In recognition of his significant contribution to his profession, not only in Canada, but worldwide, Fred Matich has been the recipient of major awards. He has had a distinguished career spanning almost 50 years.

His brother Ivan graduated at Auckland University College, B.E. (Civil), in 1957 and he too settled in Canada.



*Matē Matich – tobacco farm, Waipapakauri.*



# Societies

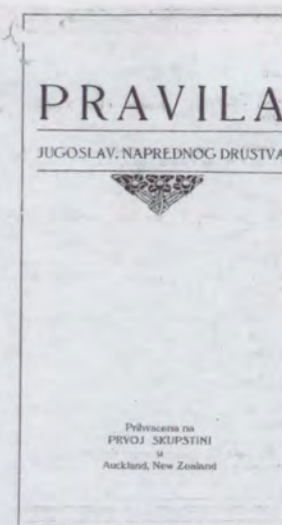
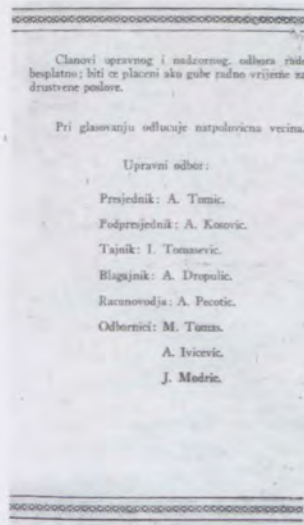
ATTEMPTS to form organised societies during the decades of settlement 1890–1930 rarely progressed beyond informal meetings. Social life generally revolved around the larger gum camps and gatherings in boarding houses, homes and at religious observances. The irregular publication of Croatian language newspapers during that period (1899–1919) barely provided leadership in the community's quest for unity and social life. When societies were mooted, they generally failed to gain enough support. The mainly male Croatian population, small in number, scattered, mobile and uncertain as to the future, had little heart for organised social or cultural life. What attempts were made were centred in Auckland, the base 'camp' for the community in its formative years.

Although labelled 'Austrians', the majority felt strongly about their Croatian identity, but it was from the ranks of minority pro-Austrian men who had served in Austria's navy or army, that the first plan to form a society was proposed. These men ran the boarding houses, small businesses and restaurants in Auckland. They counted Eugen Langguth, Consul of Austria-Hungary, as a good friend (see Eugen Langguth). Langguth, believing he had sufficient support, promoted the Austro-Hungarian Friendly Society in 1902. The announcement created such an uproar within the community that Langguth decided to pull back and shelve the idea. As one correspondent in the newspaper *Pučki List* in Split, Dalmatia wrote, 'We protest – we would prefer it to be known as the "Croatian Friendly Society". We are not Germans, or Magyars, but Croatians.'

The pro-Austrian clique tried again in 1908 when the idea of the Austro-Hungarian League was launched by Anton Šulenta of

Waipapakauri in the Far North. This was taken up in Auckland by the Frankovich brothers, who assembled a strong convening committee, which included the Consul, a Hungarian resident and eight established Croatian settlers. Once more, an uproar. In the face of bitter opposition, the League's conveners quietly pulled back and made no further plans to raise the Austrian banner.

In the period between the two pro-Austrian proposals, a small group of 'patriots' set out to establish a Croatian Residential Club in 1907. A committee was convened and a large house leased in the city but no more was heard. In the same year, Matthew Ferri, editor of *Napredak*, ever an opportunist, floated ideas for a Croatian Workers Benefit Society. Not disheartened by its failure, he tried again in 1908 with the United Croatian Youth Aid and Benevolent Society, 'to assist destitute young men on the gumfields', but it too didn't attract any support.



Rules & Committee members  
'Yugoslav Progressive Society'  
Auckland, 1925.



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

Seventeen years were to pass before another serious attempt would be made to form a national society. In the meantime the First World War years brought confusion and resentment on all sides. Croatians, as Austrian subjects, were required to register as aliens – despite the patriotic pronouncements of leading members of the community and despite their willingness to serve in New Zealand's armed forces overseas. They rallied behind patriotic political bodies to promote their cause and to defend themselves as allies in the face of prejudice and discrimination. To give greater strength to their cause, the New Zealand Croatian community linked with the Yugoslav Committee in London. Other chapters cover this period more fully.

The immediate years after the First World War were ones

of change in the structure of the community. Settlements consolidated and a flood of new arrivals brought with them political awareness of events in the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The time seemed ripe for the floating of a new society to cater socially and culturally for the needs of the growing community. In November 1925 the 'Yugoslav' Progressive Society (Jugoslavenko Napredno Društvo) was formed by a group of moderates. Prominent in its formation were Ivan Tomasevich, a politically left settler who was to become a major player in community affairs, and Tony Kosovich, the gumfields poet. A booklet of rules was produced, but lack of support brought the society to an end.

In August 1927 a body of 52 men met to establish the Yugoslav Library. Rules were adopted and a list of Croatian language

*The Yugoslav Workers Cultural Society, December 1930.*  
 Rear, L to R – Ivan Perjanik, Srećko Zidich, Ivan Pivac, Božo Sebalja, Nedjelko Kurte, unknown, Nedjelko Raos.  
 Middle row – Jakov Biliš, Stipe Alač (V.P.), Nikola Skokandich (Treas.), Ivan Tomasevich (Pres.), Ante Zidich (V.P.), Marin Ivicovich, Božo Kumarich.  
 Seated front – Matž Grljušich, Ante Cibilich.  
 SOURCE, D.G.H.S





newspapers agreed on, most of which were leftist or openly communist – surprisingly so, in view of the fact that the majority on the committee were early settlers. Perhaps their concerns plus the £1 membership fee deterred a growth in membership. The library spluttered along for the next 12 months with a membership of 71.

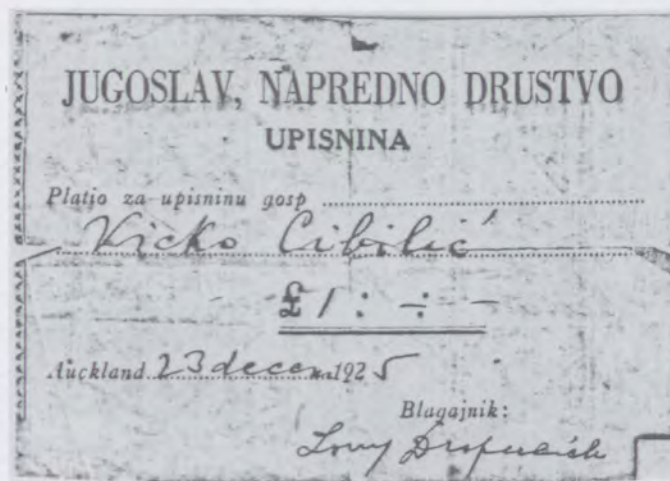
An important event in 1928 was the arrival of Rev. Milan Pavlinovich to serve as missionary to the Yugoslav community in New Zealand. From the start his royalist pretensions alienated large numbers of moderate compatriots. Ignoring ridicule and criticism, he attempted to launch the Workers Benefit Society (Radničko Pomoćno Društvo) in Auckland. He called a meeting of various factions in the city in the hope of achieving a united front, but Ivan Tomasevich and his supporters would have none of the priest's ideas. They saw him as a fascist and a reactionary. They pulled away and reorganised as the Yugoslav Reading Room, successor of the Library, in Customs Street West, where books and literature were available to members. It was immediately obvious that the Reading Room was politically far left, anti-clerical and anti-monarchist, contrary to the beliefs of the mainstream settlers, who wished to avoid domestic politics and to support their homeland, Yugoslavia, right or wrong. The evident divergent, uncompromising attitudes of the two factions deepened the rift between left and right. Accusations of 'communist' infiltration saw the police involved in answer to complaints by 'Royal Yugoslavs'. There was some suggestion that the police should close down the Reading Room because 'subversive' Croatian language literature was being imported and distributed in the community. Ivan Tomasevich himself was charged and brought before the courts (see Ivan Tomasevich).

At this precise point towards the end of 1929 Father Pavlinovich seized the initiative to open his Yugoslav Library in the Manchester Unity Building in Hobson Street, Auckland. As Tomasevich admitted in a letter, 'It did not last long [The Yugoslav Reading Room] and was soon captured by the friends and followers of the Yugoslav priest who arrived as a missionary to the community in 1928.'

Through 1929, Father Pavlinovich gathered around him a

band of settlers, loyal to the Kingdom of Alexander I, men who had established themselves successfully and who looked upon Pavlinovich as their guide and mentor in both political and religious matters. After the assassination of Stjepan Radić, leader of the Croat Peasant Party in the Belgrade parliament in 1928, King Alexander used the event to declare a dictatorship and to confirm 'Yugoslavia' in 1929 as the successor to the Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes. The re-creation of their nation gave added impetus to the founding of a society that reflected the Yugoslav ideal so many had long nurtured. In August 1930 therefore the Yugoslav Library was absorbed in the foundation of a new society, The Yugoslav Club and Library (Jugo-Slav at the time) with rented premises in the Manchester Unity building. The founders were native sons of Yugoslavia, they would say, not of Croatia or Dalmatia. They stood firmly behind the Royal Government of Yugoslavia and were intolerant of Croatian autonomists and of communist ideology. The Club's aims were: 'To provide for the social intercourse and recreation of members and in furtherance of such, to provide a reading room, a writing room and a library for members, etc.'

Claiming to be non-political and non-religious, and loyal to their adopted country, the Club's relationship with the vocal Father Pavlinovich and Consul John Totich led the society to openly support the Royal Government of Yugoslavia. Henceforth, members' views of events in their homeland were



Yugoslav Progressive Society,  
1925. Subscription receipt,  
Vicko Cibilic.



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

coloured by their patriotism for the Kingdom – the realities of the situation in their homeland never came to be questioned.

In contrast, at a meeting on 10 March 1930, the politically aware generation of more recent arrivals sent a cable to the Yugoslav Government on behalf of 'Yugoslav Workers of New Zealand', protesting at the execution of a number of alleged communists. The ranks of these men included a number who agitated for Croatian autonomy within a Yugoslav Republic and a small band of Communist Party members and their supporters whose aim was to see the destruction of the Yugoslav monarchy and to create a Communist Republic allied to the

USSR. It was doubly evident that there could be no common ground between the two opposing factions – no room for compromise.

In December 1930 a public meeting voted in favour of the formation of the Yugoslav Workers Cultural Society with clubrooms in Albert Street and a membership of 50. One thing the two societies did find common ground on, surprisingly, was the need to provide for the destitute and the sick in the community. Regarded as an interim measure the Yugoslav Benevolent Society was formed to span the period of the Great Depression. The new body struggled along with a small

*Founding members, Yugoslav Club (Inc.), August 1930.*

*L to R, Rear – J. Milat, Toma Blaskovich, John Kosovich, Lovre Marinovich, George Jelichich, Peter Sumich, Stanko Dean, Zivko Pavlinovich, Tom Misa.*

*Middle – Mladen Yankovich, Ante Gugich, Rafael Berkovich, John Matutinovich, Marin Simich, John Bakalich, John Barbarich, Nikola Tolich,*

*Front – Paul Kokich (V.P.), Jack Raos (V.P.), Mark Simich (Pres.), Rev. Milan Pavlinovich, John Scansie (Sec.), Frank Pasalich (Treas.), Jim Trubuhovich.*

*Absent – John Totich.*

*Inset – Tony Petrie.*

*Seated in front – George Marinovich (later Reverend).*

SOURCE, D.G.H.S.





membership between 1931 and 1934, but it revived under the management of Joe Antunovich. It gave the impression that it was more dedicated than the two parent societies. As it transpired the society was gradually infiltrated by a number of political activists, mainly pro-Croatian autonomists plus a few communists – all members of the Yugoslav Workers Cultural Society. Matters came to a head at the society's annual general meeting in January 1936 when the Yugoslav Benevolent Society was taken over by the activists and the name changed to Croatian Cultural and Benevolent Society. As one trusted member recalled, 'A new iron dictatorship moved into the society.'

The Yugoslav Workers Cultural Society went into recess and its members were absorbed into the Croatian Cultural and Benevolent Society (CCBS), which inherited assets at rooms in 313 Queen Street, Auckland, rented in 1935. As the gumfields declined, the families that drifted into Auckland for work opportunities tended to join the CCBS, giving it great strength and influence within the community. It became the flag bearer for the Croatian cause, attracting the politically left, the Croat autonomists, anti-monarchists and anti-clericalists.

The period 1937–40 was one of disunity and animosity. Leading members of the community independent of the clubs attempted to bring about an understanding, a better relationship in the interests of all 'Yugoslavs' but failed to break the political mould. Politics stood in the way of real progress and alienated thousands of New Zealanders of Croatian – Yugoslav – origin.

By 1939 when the Second World War was declared, the clubs in Auckland and Dargaville had developed a strong social and cultural base. Membership was up and down. During the 1930s, the Depression and post Depression periods, earnings were not high, families tended to be large, few owned houses, and few had savings. It was a hand-to-mouth existence. Even £1 membership fees became a sacrifice. But things gradually improved under the Labour Government of Michael Savage. Optimism pervaded society generally. Investment in fishing boats, orchards, vineyards and restaurants (grill rooms and fish shops) increased rapidly. The clubs provided for social life, debate, folklore activities and perhaps served as marriage bureaus.

The war years 1939–45 brought other problems. Because of Yugoslavia's flirtation with the Axis powers, the community were classed as potential enemy aliens and had to register as such. The narrow outlook of the New Zealand Government was reminiscent of the machinations of the First World War period. The clubs in Dargaville went into recess. In Auckland they rallied to support the New Zealand Patriotic Funds with balls, street collections and other projects to prove their loyalty.

On the political front, after Yugoslavia was smashed in March 1941 by the Nazi war machine, the name of General Mihaljevich was on everyone's lips and in New Zealand the 'Yugoslavs' were now allies. The situation continued until the USSR was invaded by Germany in September 1941. The CCBS and its allied groupings, the All Slav Union (1943–47), and the Yugoslav Association (1947–53) led the fundraising drive New Zealand-wide in support of Tito's Partisans and the USSR's war effort. The Yugoslav Club changed course itself in 1944 in support of Tito's cause, after years of being labelled Royalist, and joined the Yugoslav Association in its fundraising programme.

*The ferry 'Kestrel' Pine  
(Herald) Island, 1934.*

*The 'Kestrel' today serves as a  
floating restaurant in Tauranga.*

SOURCE, D.G.H.S





## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

*Croatian Cultural & Benevolent Society picnic,  
Oneroa, Waiheke Island, 1938.*

*Top left – unknown, Marin Ivceovich and Ned Raos.*

*Top right – unknown, Ann Bilis, Nevenka Batistich,  
Olga Nola, Neda Piacun, Dorothy Alac, unknown.*

SOURCE, CYRIL NOLA

The CCBS continued to exist but with a new identity, Yugoslav Society 'Marshal Tito'; later, from 1950 to 1983 it was known as the Yugoslav Benevolent Society.

The long established Yugoslav Club managed to survive with a declining membership and much reduced activity until 1983





when it merged with the Yugoslav Benevolent Society to create a strong Yugoslav Society. It took the break-up of the Yugoslav state in 1990–91 to split the society in two, resulting in the formation of the Dalmatian Cultural Society and the Croatian Cultural Society in 1992.

Auckland has always been the community stronghold but Yugoslav societies were also formed in other regions:

- 1932 Yugoslav Social Club in Dargaville, associated with... Yugoslav Club in Auckland
- 1935 Yugoslav Cultural & Benevolent Society 'Zora' in Dargaville, associated with the CCBS in Auckland
- 1936 The Wellington Yugoslav Club
- 1944 The Whangarei Yugoslav Club

1950 The Hamilton Yugoslav Club

1954 The Dargaville Yugoslav Club

Currently Wellington and Hamilton have assumed Croatian identity while the Yugoslav Social Clubs in Dargaville, Whangarei and Kaitaia have assumed Dalmatian identity.

All these regional clubs followed the pattern of activities initiated in Auckland. All represent Croatians from a small area on the central Dalmatian coast. They hold strongly to their traditional New Zealand concepts of national folklore, music and social activity. In the case of the Dalmatian Cultural Society, Auckland, they have created a genealogical and historical archive that is internationally unique.

## Societies



*Yugoslav Club picnic – Pine (Herald) Island, Auckland, 1939.*

*Rear, L to R, Standing – Ivka Versalko, George Gojak, Tony Mrsich, Jack Simunovich, Ante Ivceovich, John Totich, Ljubo Antonievič, Marian Jakich, Lovre Marinovich, Rev. George Marinovich, Joe Antunovich, Cyril Nola, Peter Soljak, Mick Devcich, Marin Simich, Mick Ravlich.*

*Centre, L to R, Kneeling – Antica Mrsich, George Versalko, Steve Sumich, Matě Ravlich, Matě Ravlich, Miloš Piacun, Matě Radonich, Dick Kullaz, Jack Raos, Milly Simunovich.*  
*Front, L to R, Seated – Cecil Versalko, Mark Sutlovich, Jim Pasalich, Tony Sumich, Tom Lucietich, Matě Pivac, Ivan Devcich (front), Matě Sumich, Ivan Versalko (front), Jack Sumich, Paul Kokich.*

SOURCE, D.G.H.S



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

*Yugoslav Club picnic group,  
Hinemoa Park, Birkenhead, 1944.  
Rear, L to R – Mark Marinovich,  
Marie Nola, Doreen Borich, Mary  
Blaskovich, Vinka Marinovich,  
Vera Sunde, Zita Sunde, Thelma  
Glucina, Patricia Glucina,  
Josephine Sumich, Edna Borich,  
Betty Nola.*

*Kneeling, L to R – Ivan Versalko,  
George Dragicevich, Milan  
Mrkusich, Tony Blaskovich,  
Vincent Blaskovich, Ron Milichich,  
Bob Dragicevich.*

*Seated, Cecil Versalko, Joseph  
Milichich.*

PHOTO, AUTHOR



*LEFT CCBS picnic,  
Oneroa, Waiheke Island.*

*L to R – Kleme Rosandich, Tony  
Radich, Filip Vela, Peter Nola,  
Marin Ivceovich, Ante Tomich,  
Jakov Vinac.*

SOURCE, UNKNOWN



*RIGHT A continuing custom –  
lamb on the spit – Henderson,  
Dargaville and Kaitiaia.*

PHOTO, AUTHOR





## Cultural activity

THE gum camps and boarding houses of the first decades of migration became islands of community life where newfound freedom could be expressed in music, song and poetry at their social gatherings. On village saints' days their lusty melodies echoed across the barren northern gumfields – songs of nostalgia for home, of the Adriatic Sea and songs of yearning, heroes and battles past. The freedom they came to enjoy in New Zealand was a rare bonus in their lives. In the villages where Austria ruled at the point of the sabre, Croatian nationalism was totally suppressed. Here they were free of gendarmes, spies and rapacious tax gatherers; here they could give free rein to their sentiments, to sing and to write of freedom.

The publication of Croatian language newspapers – *Bratska Sloga* (1899), *Napredak* (1903–06), and *Zora* (1913–16) provided encouragement for literary activity and kept alive an awareness of events in the homeland. From this flow of local and overseas newspapers were born the gumfields poets, who in the candlelight of their shanties brought into being the poems of separation, nostalgia and longing. They were the noble scribes whose words have come through to us. It is apparent that a competitive literary spirit developed. A few verses occasionally in the newspapers expanded to poems of epic proportions and the more ambitious began to publish their works for distribution.

The two most notable gumfields poets of the first decades of the 20th century were Mato Štula and Ante Kosovich. Štula published his book of verse in 1906, entitled *Od Nove Zelande Domovini* (From New Zealand to the Homeland), dealing with a migrant's arrival in Auckland and life on the gumfields,

Thus must I part from the city  
and journey to the lonely wilderness  
lost land where kauri gum is found  
where too my soul aches in despair.  
(Trans. S.A.J.)



Mato Štula and daughters.  
L to R – Djene (Mrs. M. Ivicovich),  
Nevenka (Mrs. P. Batistich).  
SOURCE, FAMILY



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

Štula's sole effort was surpassed by far by the productivity and literary skill of Ante Kosovich (see Kosovich). A writer and raconteur in the Zaostrog tradition in 1907, Kosovich in 1907 produced a series of poems relating to people, events and tragedies in New Zealand which were published in Split, Dalmatia in 1908, under the title *Dalmatinac Iz tudjine* (From a Dalmatian in a Foreign Land). His early heartaches and yearnings receded as he adjusted to life in New Zealand and became more active in community affairs in the Far North. His commitment to his people and enthusiasm for South Slav union excited his patriotism and as the First World War ended he began writing his epic 'Uskrsnuce Jugoslavije' (The Resurrection of Yugoslavia). Amelia Batistich in a radio talk in 1966 quoted his words of affection for his nation: 'I am proud that I am a true Yugoslav, body and soul, that the Yugoslav sun first warmed me in the place of my birth, Zaostrog, in the province of Dalmatia, Yugoslavia, I warm to that.'



Yugoslav Tamburitza  
Orchestra on a world tour.  
Rear, L to R – Janko Gajski,  
Ivan Plase, Peter Smatlik.  
Front – Mirko Stefić, Ivan Perusić,  
1924.

Through want of leadership and absence of people versed in Croatian literature, music and folklore, the community, essentially village based, had little chance of appreciating and enjoying the full breadth of their cultural heritage. George Scansie, Honorary Consul, showed a little awareness when he arranged a visit by the Yugoslav Tamburica group known as Zvonimir in 1924 to visit New Zealand as part of their world tour. A group of five players led by Ivan Gajski was a first for New Zealand. They were greeted, warmly received and heartily applauded at concerts held in all the main centres of Croatian population in the Auckland province.

In the 1920s there were signs of change as the community consolidated and moved into new occupations. Auckland was fast becoming a centre of 'Yugoslav' population and there was a growing demand for a social organisation. After the failure of the Yugoslav Progressive Society to take wing in 1925, more serious attempts succeeded in 1930, when two societies were established (see Societies). This was the period 1928–1935 that Matě Farac (Pupnat, Korčula Island), encouraged by the Zvonimir visit, formed a small national orchestra. A talented, self-taught musician, he created and instructed his group called *Jadranski Valovi* (Adriatic Waves). They were regular performers in Auckland. In 1934 they toured the northern settlements, bringing spirited national music to isolated communities, reminding them of times long behind them and arousing their hushed voices in song. Matě Farac formed a separate dance band in the same period.

In the Far North the need for music and song was answered by Peter Batistich, probably in 1932, with *Tamburaški Zbor, Sloboda* (Tamburica Orchestra, Freedom). The orchestra struggled against all odds to survive. The decline of the kauri gum industry, compounded by the effects of the Depression, depleted the numbers in the orchestra and after a period of two years it lapsed as its members moved mostly to Auckland.

Socially, throughout the gumlands and settlements, community spirit strengthened as wives and children added their influence. Weddings, christenings and funerals became social events of significance in themselves. The extended family,



village friends, and in isolated areas the whole community, shared in these occasions of joy or grief in time honoured fashion. The tradition remains strong to this day.

The advent of the clubs, two in Auckland and two in Dargaville in the early 1930s, stimulated cultural and social life and served as centres for a range of activities. The problem, though, was the lack of skilled tutors, leaders and enthusiasts to introduce new ideas and bring them to fruition. This was the case for many years with the clubs generating limited cultural activity, being more inclined towards folklore – Tamburica orchestras and the Kolo (circle) dance. Two attempts to establish libraries in 1927 and 1930 failed. Connections with the homeland were limited. The bureaucracy in Yugoslavia was barely interested in communities such as existed in New Zealand. Therefore history, the arts, literature, drama and language tuition played almost no part in the activities of the early clubs.

In the footsteps of Matē Farac and Peter Batistich, the Yugoslav Club in Auckland imported a full orchestral set of Tamburicas,

from Sisak in Croatia early in 1935. The club was fortunate that Mark A. Marinovich of Oratia accepted an invitation to undertake the training and management of a new orchestra that led to his long association with the Club's orchestra. He was a major influence in sustaining folklore in New Zealand through music and song.

The formation of Auckland's orchestras raised the prospect of national dances in the form of the Kolo. The Kolo or circle dance is traditional in many East European nations, more especially among Slavic people. The idea was sound but there was no one in New Zealand fully capable of advising on authentic Croatian/Dalmatian Kolo movements. The form of the final invented dance became an accepted routine in all the clubs and part and parcel of a New Zealand 'Yugoslav' tradition. It would be hard to estimate how many New Zealand born Dalmatians danced the Kolo. To them it represented an opportunity to enjoy something of the spirit and traditions of the 'old country'. For a period in the late 1930s and through

## Cultural activity



*Far North Tamburitza Orchestra  
– Sweetwater, 1932.*

*Rear, standing L to R – Matē Divich, Peter Martinac, Ivan Franicevich, Matē Radich, Jack Rakich, Matē Radich, Matē Nizich, Steve Erceg, Peter Biliš.*

*Standing with instruments,  
L to R – Nikola Belich (end),  
Matē Markotich, Tony Čibilich,  
Ivan Radich, Ljubo Soljak,  
Jack Zivkovich, Tom Bilcich,  
Frank Unkovich.*

*Seated etc – Marin Kurte, child,  
Milan Jurlina, Jack Jurlina,  
John Unkovich, Peter Batistich  
(leader), Ivan Martinac,  
Nikola Skokandich.*

*On ground – Natalie Biliš,  
Nikola Belich, Jim Belich, Mary  
Biliš, Tony Belich, Dick Jurlina,  
Olga Jurlina.*

SOURCE, JURLINA FAMILY



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

the war years it was accepted as part of New Zealand's own tradition and the community earned admiration and respect for sharing its folklore with other New Zealanders.

In latter years not a lot changed from the established framework – music and dance, language classes at clubs and university level continue. The creation of an archive is an unusual departure. The Dalmatian Genealogical and Historical Society, under the wing of the Dalmatian Cultural Society (Inc.) Auckland, prides itself in assembling a sizeable and valuable collection of historical and genealogical material. It is a unique venture among Croatian/Dalmatian communities worldwide. A wide range of material – literature, documents, photographs and reports – stand alongside a kauri gum collection, national costumes and family histories. The gathered material and the historic artefacts are a most important part of New Zealand history.



*Yugoslav Patriotic Ball, 1941.*

*L to R – Milan Mrkusich, Paul Pasalich, Ivan Vodanovich, Leo Nola.*

SOURCE, AUCKLAND STAR

*Yugoslav Club's National  
Tamburitza Orchestra,  
1940–1941.*

*Standing L to R – Fred Ravlich,  
John Bosnjak, Paul Pasalich,  
Ivan Vodanovich, Vincent Dean,  
Stephen Jelichich (author),  
Marino Tomas, Nick Jurelich.  
Seated L to R – Milan Mrkusich,  
Mark Marinovich (leader),  
Tony Blaskovich.*

*Peak performers at balls, concerts,  
on radio and national occasions.*





## Zlatko Balokovic: a well-known concert violinist

In an entirely different cultural sphere, Zlatko Balokovic, an internationally recognised violinist of Yugoslav-American origin, arrived in Auckland with his wife in 1931 on their ocean-going yacht *Northern Light*. He gave recitals in Auckland during August 1931 and attended a reception in his honour at the newly founded Yugoslav Club where he was entertained with music and song. His name is still remembered in Auckland via the Balokovic Cup donated to the Akarana Yacht Club, and competed for annually since January 1932. It is fair to say that his visit would not have culturally rated highly in the community – but people were both flattered and pleased by his presence in their midst.

## Sir James Belich: Mayor of Wellington 1986–1992

Born in 1927 at Sweetwater, near Awanui in the Far North. A son of Jakov and Maria Belich who settled there in 1926, Jim was involved in his early years with the cultural activities of



both the Auckland and Wellington Yugoslav societies. During this period he attended Victoria University in Wellington to gain a B.A. degree with Honours in Economics. In 1948, Jim was persuaded to assist the Yugoslav Consulates, for over 7 years, in both Australia and New Zealand, in normalising diplomatic and trade



Zlatko Balokovich.

SOURCE, AUCKLAND STAR

relations with the new Yugoslav state. During the interim post war years, 1945–1948, however, a caretaker diplomatic role was provided by Marin Ivcevic, representing the All Slav Union.

From the early 50s, Jim was active in business, local Government and the community. In 1986 he retired from business as Chairman and CEO of a major advertising agency and recently was one of three inaugural inductees into the New Zealand Advertising Hall of Fame.

His major voluntary activities included the UN Association and UNICEF, and from 1977 to 1981, he chaired the NZ Commission for the International Year of the Child (1979). Sir James was knighted in 1990 for services to the community and New Zealand. He and Lady Valerie Belich reside in Wellington. Their son, James Belich, ONZM, is Professor of History at Auckland University. It has been observed in Croatia that Sir James is the only person of Croatian extraction to be so honoured by the Queen.

## Cultural activity



*The Balokovich Cup,  
Royal Akarana Yacht  
Club, Auckland, 1931,*  
PHOTO, BEN HOLWERDA



*Dorothea Franchi –  
all round musician.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY



**Dorothea Franchi (1920–2003):  
musician and composer**

The name Franchi derives from Franciskovich, a family that emigrated to Australia from the coast of Istria in the 1890s. In 1896 they moved to New Zealand with son Peter, Dorothea's father.

Dorothea's lifetime in music began with a Trinity College medal in 1934, which led her to gain a degree in music, BMus, in 1939. After an impressive period building up the music department at Epsom Girls Grammar she left for London in 1948, returning after three years to serve as pianist for the New Zealand Ballet Company in the years 1952 to 1957. She then applied herself as composer of concertos, suites and a number of song styles. As her obituary in the New Zealand Herald records: 'Her "Four Pioneer Portraits" settings of poems by Robin Hyde, Eileen Duggan and Louis Esson is unequalled within the context of New Zealand music of the time'.

In the latter stages of her life she continued to influence concert programmes and as a harpist was a loyal supporter of younger composers.

RIGHT *Marie Pasalich, O.B.E.*  
*Professor of Education, Melbourne*  
*– champion swimmer, NZ.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY

**Professor Marie D. Pasalich-Neale, AM, OBE  
(1922–): scholar, academic and sportswoman**

The daughter of James and Ana Pasalich of Auckland, Marie was educated at St Mary's College, Herne Bay. Her interests were wide and varied, but she devoted most of her life to an academic career.

In early years she served as instructor of Kolo dance at the Yugoslav Club (1939–40), and through her prowess in swimming became Breaststroke Swimming Champion, Auckland 1939–42, and National Breaststroke Swimming Champion 1944–46.

She also excelled academically, gaining her BA, MA (1945), PhD (1956), and a post-graduate Certificate of Teaching and Diploma of Educational Psychology.

Moving to Melbourne, she was appointed first woman head of Foundation Chair of Education in studies of exceptional children, Monash University, Melbourne.

She studied and gained further honours in England, and married Dr Frank Neale, Biochemist at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Birmingham and later Director of Pathology at Sydney Hospital.

On retirement Marie was awarded the title of Emeritus Professor, Monash University.







*Vinka Marinovich – M.A. graduate,  
Auckland University.*

### **Vinka Millicent Marinovich (1926–): musician, teacher, composer and conductor**

Vinka Marinovich is the daughter of the late Vincent and Matija Marinovich, immigrants from Podgora, Central Dalmatia. Vincent was one of five brothers who settled in New Zealand. He arrived in 1914 aged 16, worked on a dairy farm in Taranaki, before moving to Napier to open a restaurant. In 1924 he returned to Podgora to marry Matija Lunjevich and on their arrival back in New Zealand that year they settled in Oratia for four to five years. They next moved to Wellington and operated two successful restaurants. Back in Auckland in 1935, they engaged in a succession of business ventures, dedicating their lives to their daughter Vinka and son Peter. Encouraged by their parents, both children developed into talented musicians.

Vinka pursued her musical education, graduating at Auckland University with BA (1947), BMus (1952) and an MA (1955). She has been honoured with many awards and has performed as pianist, violinist, organist and singer. In her professional career she served in the University Music Department from 1952 to 1956, then Head of the Department

of Music at Auckland Girls Grammar from 1955 to 1983, and tutor at the Auckland Technical Institute, 1965 to 1967. Her interests in the wider music scene were numerous – a conducting career at the Auckland Girls Grammar School, and then at St Patrick's Cathedral 1986 to 1987, plus her role as Cathedral archivist since 1989. Vinka also served the Society for Music Education as archivist from 1984 to 2000.

Hers has been a notable career matched equally by her late brother, Peter (1927–48) up to the time of his tragic death.



*Josip Alač – painter; a gift revealed in later life.*

### **Cultural activity**



*Dick (Menego) Jelich, craftsman.  
PHOTO, AUTHOR*



*Violin and case he made.  
PHOTO, BEN HOLWERDA*



# Mark Anthony Marinovich QSM (1908–91)



*Mark Anthony Marinovich – a man who played many roles in the community and in the NZ Bowling fraternity – Sportsman, musician, patriot, orator and carrier serving the Oratia orchardists for many years.*

MARK arrived in New Zealand from Podgora in 1925 and settled with relatives in Oratia. From the day he landed he applied himself enthusiastically to his newly adopted country. He took courses in English, and, as a keen rugby supporter, organised the Oratia Football Club, consisting mainly of young Croatian settlers. His strength lay in organising people; he was a born leader. In later years he initiated the foundation of the Oratia Bowling Club, and other ventures – one of these was the publication of the *Oratia Sporting Gazette* in 1933.

From 1930 to 1933 he became a commercial traveller, occasionally assisting Steve Vranjes, the local fruit trucker.

When the latter was killed in an accident in 1933, Mark took on the business until 1977. As a keen folklorist with a flair for music, he was approached by the Yugoslav Club in the city, to take on the formation of a national Tamburitza orchestra in 1934. A full set of stringed instruments had been imported. With his usual energy he set about instructing himself, writing parts for various instruments and organising an orchestra that performed at the Club's first annual Ball in 1935 accompanying the Kolo dancers. Mark was also involved in creating the New Zealand version of this national dance, which came to be performed for decades later. His strict discipline and regular





practice produced matchless playing of both lively and sedate melodies from the old country. The club, in gratitude for his efforts, gifted him a piano accordion that he mastered in no time.

Because the two Yugoslav societies formed in 1930 were at loggerheads, politically and philosophically, Mark Marinovich delayed joining either, but gradually he found greater satisfaction in strengthening his ties with the Yugoslav Club. During the years of the Second World War, in the wake of the destruction of Yugoslavia, Mark put a huge effort in to participating with the orchestra in fundraising efforts for patriotic purposes and later in support of the destitute in Dalmatia.

The clubs, during war years, diverged sharply in their objectives. Accusations of fascism were levelled at the Yugoslav Club by the Croatian Cultural & Benevolent Society and its parent organisation, the All Slav Union (later the Yugoslav Association). Mark saw the need for change and accepted the presidency of the Yugoslav Club in 1944, and immediately sought to find common ground for both opposing organisations – but a hard-headed pro-communist element prevented any move to find a solution. After two years of discussion, argument and reasoning, Mark gave up in despair. Through that period

he presented the case for common effort for the common good, with well-considered arguments in his usual eloquent Croatian. He was a great orator.

The story of that period and the political machinations of the single-minded misdirected members of the clubs and the community produced rifts that took almost 40 years to bridge. A by-product was the decision of the majority not to participate or support any society because of divisive policies, which eroded the spirit and the patriotism that people had nurtured in this distant land.

In 1945 Mark married Joyce Garelja of Henderson. They generated a family of five.

Mark continued to maintain the Tamburitza orchestra's skills, continued to support the Yugoslav Club's activities, but kept clear of factional fighting. His other love, bowls, led him to championship class and in later years to serve the newspaper Western Leader in Henderson with his weekly reports on bowling tournaments.

In 1985 Mark was honoured by the Queen with a QSM (Queens Service Medal) for his services to the Yugoslav community and to bowling.

Mark Anthony Marinovich  
QSM (1908–91)



NICK TALENTA  
EXPERT HAIRDRESSER  
101, Victoria St. - Auckland.  
GROOMING BY NICK TALENTA  
SATISFACTION GUARANTEED.

**Oratia Sporting Gazette**  
*Issued as an annual under the auspices of the*  
**ORATIA FOOTBALL CLUB.**

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One issue of the Oratia Sporting  
Gazette was produced by Mark.  
A. Marinovich of Oratia, 1933,  
after only 8 years in NZ.  
SOURCE, FAMILY

LEFT Mark. A. Marinovich's  
investiture, QSM, 1986, with  
daughter Helen, and wife Joyce.  
SOURCE, FAMILY



# Amelia Batistich QSM (1915–2004)



Amelia Batistich, author, raconteur.

AMELIA Batistich was a daughter of John Barbarich and Milka Matutinovich, pioneer settlers in the Northern Wairoa district. In her early years she was attracted to English literature, a love that served her well all her life. Her scholarship, the literary traditions of her father's village, Zaostrog in Dalmatia, and the love of her heritage, led her to write stories for the *Listener* in the 1940s and *New Zealand School Journal* in the 1950s. Her musings and recollections translated into a theme she called 'They came to the gumfields', an excursion into the Dalmatian experience in New Zealand.

Having set her course, she contributed short stories to a number of magazines and literary periodicals, finally gathering a collection of 23 into her first book, *An Olive Tree in Dalmatia*, in 1963. She continued to explore her ancestry and search her memories of childhood and girlhood in Dargaville, to produce many more short stories and seven books.

Her achievements attracted the attention of the Croatian Emigrant Foundation (Matica) in Zagreb, Croatia. In 1981 she was invited to visit her ancestral homeland as a guest of the Croatian Writers' Guild, who honoured her as a member. Unskilled as she was in her parents' Croatian language, she responded to the honour and willingly submitted to radio and television interviews where she expressed her love of her heritage in well-chosen phrases. It was a proud moment for her. Concurrent with this visit, two novels were published, *Pjevaj Vilo u Planini* (in Zagreb) and *Another Mountain, Another Song* (Auckland).

The second emotional occasion on that visit was her arrival in her family village of Zaostrog on the Dalmatian coast.

The village turned out to honour her with song and verse. But perhaps the most lasting tribute is recorded in Nina Nola's thesis on Amelia for 'her significant contribution to New Zealand literature' for which Nina gained her Doctorate in English (PhD) at Auckland University.

Amelia Batistich, who was awarded the Queen's Service Medal (QSM) in 1997, was in the forefront of New Zealand writers of Croatian origin. Her stories of the pioneering era, of customs, trials and tribulations and of heartaches, will be treasured by future generations of New Zealanders.

Her published works are as follows:

- *An Olive Tree in Dalmatia*, 1963
- *Pjevaj Vilo u Planini*, 1981 (Zagreb)
- *Another Mountain, Another Song*, 1981
- *Sing Vila in the Mountain*, 1987
- *Holy Terrors*, 1991
- *Never Lost for Words*, 2001
- *My Story, Autobiography*, 2003

## Dalmatians in New Zealand literature (contributed by Dr Nina Nola)

Immigrants from the 'South Slav' political alliance of six ethnic groups which comprised the former Yugoslavia arrived in a series of chain migrations primarily from the central Dalmatian coast of the Croatian constituent republic. Dalmatian migrants had been settling in New Zealand since 1860 in search of freedom from oppression by the Austro-Hungarian Empire to which they were subject, and a livelihood on the gold fields, the gumfields of Northland and then through farming, fishing and



horticulture. It was not until almost a century later when Amelia Batistich published her first Dalmatian story 'Roots' (1948) that the voice of the migrants was heard speaking for itself in English. Batistich shared a literary heritage with gumfield poet Ante Kosovich whose Croatian verse aimed, unsuccessfully, to discourage young village men from the harsh life in inhospitable Northland. The conversion of these barren gumlands into rich farming country, and the determined settlers into prosperous respected citizens, is traced throughout Batistich's two collections of short stories, two novels and many stories published in magazines including the *School Journal*. The assimilation of Dalmatians into New Zealand society runs not so smooth a course. *An Olive Tree in Dalmatia* (1963) is a testament to the Dalmatian community's commitment to their adopted country, and in the title story the psychic dislocation suffered by representative migrant Stipan is seen as the price paid for a new life. Through the motif of boot prints on both Dalmatian and New Zealand soil, Batistich plays out the migrants' attempt to inscribe themselves on shifting terrain; fulfilling a sudden and overwhelming desire to return to the Dalmatian village he left 53 years earlier, Stipan becomes a displaced person in the country of his birth. Anna Roberts in *Luka* (1987) also writes from an insider's view, the hero of his historical fiction the ideal self-sufficient migrant in the early 1900s whose lament 'our only crime in their eyes is being the wrong nationality' sums up the hatred directed by New Zealanders, particularly during the First World War, at the 'Austrians' whose passports bore an enemy stamp. The most enduring image of a Dalmatian in mainstream New Zealand literature is that of Nick the Dalmatian labourer in Frank Sargeson's 'The Making of a New Zealander' (1940). Calling into question cultural identity, the story pivots on the narrator's observation that Nick was not a New Zealander, nor a Dalmatian any more: 'He knew he wasn't anything any more.' In a similar masculinist narrative vein John Yelash's collection of stories, *Forty Thousand Beers Ago* (1957), depicts a narrator who has the misfortune of being the spitting image of 'Frank the Dally', whose epithet is intentionally derogatory. Vignettes of

gambling, boozing and womanising are framed by the unusually poor lot of the migrants in the down and out world of bars and boarding houses, 'Fighting Your Own Battles' hints at racial prejudices, telling of Dalmatian boys being cleverer than the others but ending up, like Frank, struggling to survive in adulthood. Pat Radonovich the failed gumdigger in Maurice Shadbolt's *Among the Cinders* (1965) who arrives in New Zealand too late to cash in on gum and gold prosperity ironically observes, in typical broken English, 'every man seem rich ... every man eat well, spend money'. He does not find the riches promised him, but he does find peace in rural isolation with his 'Dally Plonk'. Pat Booth has Dalmatian fishermen acknowledge that 'you're a Dally when they're up against you' in *Footsteps in the Sea* (1964), and Margery Godfrey's young adult fiction *South For Gold* (1964) includes Ivan Ivanovich, the good-natured trader about whom there is a suspicion of unscrupulous scale fixing. The commonest stereotype of the Dalmatian is that he – and he is invariably male – 'works as if God were in him' as Robyn Hyde claimed of Martinovitch (*sic*) the lumberjack in *The Godwits Fly* (1938). Industry, thrift and determination result in material wealth as parodied in Philip Andrew's *Terese* (1967): the half-Dalmatian heroine's father owns property, racehorses and a two-storey suburban brick and tile display of wealth. Naïve, aloof Terese is confused by her family's Catholicism and feels her difference but cannot articulate it. Emma searches throughout Joan Rosier-Jones' *Case Two Shadows* (1985) for a sense of identity, finding it at the end of claiming the Maori side of her ancestry at the expense of both Dalmatian and Chinese inheritance. Neither Terese nor Emma is able to reconcile herself to her Dalmatian blood, which contributes colour to both their skin and their temperaments but sees them still figured as Pakeha. Along with the Maori and Chinese, ethnicities aligned with Dalmatians include the Scots in Fiona Kidman's *The Book of Secrets* (1987). Third generation migrant Maria McLeod becomes infatuated with 'twinkling rough gypsy' Branco the road mender who slides 'in and out of the landscape as if he were one of the wild creatures that inhabited it'. Using her connection with Branco to make a declaration to her independence from



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

her puritan community, Maria finally becomes indifferent towards him; his outside status, and the distrust the other settlers felt for the wily Dalmatians, who were seen to make a success out of any venture, makes her injection easier. Maurice



Amelia Batistich with Dr Nina Nola, her biographer taken at the launching of 'Never Lost for Words', 2001. Amelia with celebratory cake and Dr Nina Nola with her 2000 thesis.

Gee's West Auckland includes a tapestry of Dalmatian vineyards and an appreciation of 'real' wine as *In My Father's Den* (1972), demonstrates. E.H. Audley's Mattie in *A New Gate for Mattie Dulivich* (1965) is unsurpassed as the Dalmatian stereotype, which bears little resemblance to the range of characters developed by Batistich, Roberts and Yelash from within the community. Stolid, square-jawed Mattie and his wife Vinka occupy a respectable position in small town New Zealand; Audley sums up all that is positive about 'a people so powerful, so strong, they can never be broken or their identity dissolved' in the neat phrase 'decency doesn't easily die'. This indissoluble identity is in question in 1995 as, with the Dalmatian region renamed Southern Croatia, New Zealand descendants of the community debate who they now are. There is yet to emerge a contemporary voice of the Dalmatians, referred by many today as Croatians, to rival the achievement of Batistich.

(The above reproduced with the permission of Dr Nina Nola, BA, MA (Hons), PhD and Oxford University Press.)



## The Church

CROATIA has remained within the Catholic fold ever since Prince Branimir pledged the loyalty and allegiance of his people to Pope John VIII in 879 AD. Subsequently Croatia has

been controlled or governed by native-born or foreign-born rulers – kings, princes, governors and ecclesiastics. There were the good and the bad but with few exceptions they maintained



1938, NZ Catholic Centennial.  
Yugoslav girls in procession,  
Auckland Domain celebrations.  
SOURCE, UNKNOWN



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

their positions of power in both temporal and religious spheres to the material detriment of those whom they ruled. For centuries, Croatia's people were called upon to submit to rulers who lacked commitment or principle and who showed little desire to raise their people above the level of ignorant serfs. Their lot was to work the land of their masters, to obey and serve them in wars, to submit to their whims. Geographically exposed on all sides Croats to the north suffered at the hands of pagan marauders and Christian conquerors alike. They fought their battles to the death resisting the invincible armies of the Muslim Turks, earning themselves the title 'Bastion of Christianity' from Pope Leo X in 1519 in recognition of their sacrifices for Christian Europe.

Throughout its history and with few exceptions the Church hierarchy in Croatia, and indeed throughout Europe, adopted a position of alliance with the ruling nobility and the gentry, neglecting their practical responsibilities to their downtrodden flock. An example was the concordat between the Austrian Government and the Vatican in 1855 that strengthened ties between the Austrian Empire and the emerging united

*Calvary statuary – memorial arranged by Rev. Josip Zanna (see following chapter).*

SOURCE, ST PATRICK'S CATHEDRAL



Italian state. It did little for the ordinary Croatian Catholics. The great landlords and the aristocracy, fearing that a more educated peasant class would be troublesome and a threat to their authority, would not tolerate change and the higher clergy acquiesced.

In the decades after the French Revolution and during the Illyrian period, increasing liberalism and demands for self-determination and national identity inspired an exceptional wave of patriot priests into action. They arose from the villages to lead and represent their people in the councils of Vienna and Zadar. They were strong, fearless, articulate men, a political clergy who took the cause of the people to the highest in the realm. A rare activist of a higher order during this period of the 19th century was Bishop Juraj Strossmayer who ranked high among his people, a great teacher and visionary who promoted the concept of South Slav unity. He personally opposed the Declaration of Papal Infallibility and encouraged the use of the Glagolitic Rite in Croatia, for which he secured protection from Pope Leo XIII.

Day to day the villagers' view of the Church and the wider world was dependent totally on the village priest who enjoyed a special status. Not only was he the community's spiritual pastor, but he was also their representative, teacher, advisor and scribe. He knew everything about everybody and was above reproach. His devout flock, born to ignorance and superstition, feared and respected him – and sometimes loved him. Ante Ivicevich, speaking in Auckland in 1959, said: 'In those days [1800s] illiteracy was common. People depended on priests and friars for leadership. There were good and bad among them; some were leaders in education and great patriots, others pursued only material interests, or were agents of Austria.'

In Dalmatia, as throughout agrarian Europe, a son entering the priesthood or a monastic order enhanced a family's standing in the community and invariably guaranteed material and social betterment. It was by far the highest calling for the son of a simple peasant. As dispenser of truth, wisdom and learning, he might be held in awe even by his own family. In this way the Catholic faith was firmly woven into the very fabric of daily life,



and despite the omissions of many of the clergy of all ranks, the Catholic faith sustained the populace through wars, oppression, pestilence and enslavement by both Christian and Muslim nations – Venice and Turkey, for example. As a consequence, the Church virtually became an all-powerful substitute for the government, ruling the lives of the rural and village classes totally and absolutely. Doubters had to conform or be ostracised. Thus with only one religion being practised in the nation, Catholicism automatically obscured the real problems of the community and suppressed liberal expression or criticism. Once separated from the strictures and impositions of village society and the clerics, the Croatian emigrant often broke with the faith and became a thoughtful, critical individual. One such writing from New Zealand to *Pučki List* in 1913 noted:

...and what is responsible for the ills of our country's backwardness. It is mainly to do with clericalism, which keeps our people in darkness and ignorance. In the days of the Illyrian movement our priests were national heroes, but today, it is the opposite. If they were true national heroes, what prosperity there might be for our people who have fallen behind other progressive and cultured people.  
(Trans. S.A.J.)

The above letter reflects the frustration and bitterness felt by many moving about the world, learning, experiencing life in other cultures, always questioning. When these men returned home they were always warmly welcomed by family and friends, but viewed with apprehension by clergy and government officials, who did not welcome their 'corrupt' ideas of freedom, politics and religion. The point was made by Ante Pucar of Kozica, who returned home from New Zealand in 1921: 'The priest in the village reported me and a cousin to the Yugoslav gendarmerie. At headquarters we were accused of being communists because we did not attend church. It was fortunate that I carried a guarantee signed by a member of central government known to me.'

Christianity, whether one adhered to its dogmas or not, was nevertheless accepted as a fact of life. Few men, particularly,

would admit to being atheists, but equally few would admit to being loyal members of the Church. For the majority nominal attachment was evident – mass at Christmas and Easter or some special occasion when sermons were given in the Croatian language. The church parades on the gumfields were an example. The early arrivals as a rule were rabidly anti-clerical; no more church, no more priests for them. They turned away from the practice of their faith almost to a man. The Dutch order, the Mill Hill Fathers, unlimited in compassion and understanding, failed to touch the Croatians because of their ignorance of their language. Contact would have been occasional because their first concern was for Maori. The few thoughtful men among the Croatians saw that the situation was getting out of hand. As one early pioneer noted, 'they began to go wild'. They believed that a Croatian-speaking priest might achieve more than the Mill Hill fathers. As Matē Franich MBE of Dargaville said in 1903, 'Newfound independence brought out old rivalries and bad behaviour to the fore. There were few family heads, no priests, in fact nobody and nothing to bring order into their lives.'

At the time Matē Franich spoke, families were being formed with colonial and Maori women and with arrivals from the 'old country' joining husbands and fiancés. This factor gave urgency to the need for a Croatian-speaking priest. One of these arrivals, Frana Lupis, arrived in 1904 to join her husband at Waiharara. She recalled, 'In 1904 and 1905, Father Brunner would come and visit our shanty in Waiharara. There was no shame as it was kept spotless. He said Mass at the Waiharara hall at three-monthly intervals and then the children would be baptised.'

Influenced by Matē Franich's approach to the Austrian Consul, Eugen Langguth, in Auckland, a deputation waited on Bishop Lenihan in 1900 with the plea that a Croatian priest be invited to New Zealand to minister to the spiritual needs of the Croatian gumdiggers. The Bishop could not see how this could be achieved unless the Mill Hill Order was prepared to extend its mission to the relatively small Croatian community of about 2500 souls. The Mill Hill headquarters agreed and they selected as the pastor for the 'Austrians' Father Josef Zanna, an Austrian from the Tirol region of Austria.



# Father Josef Zanna

Rev. Father Josef Zanna, Croatian  
Community priest, 1904–1910.

SOURCE, TOTICH COLLECTION



FATHER Zanna was a quietly spoken man who carried out his pastoral duties diligently and honestly for the period of his chaplaincy – but there were always those ready to condemn and criticise him – condemn him because he was an Austrian, and criticise him for his lack of fluency in the Croatian language. As one correspondent wrote in *Pučki List* in July 1904: ‘...everyone awaited the sermon, and what did we hear; a priest, who knew not a word of Croatian, but spoke only Italian. What does Rome

think – that we Croatians speak Italian; or is it a joke being played on us?’ No wonder Father Zanna was difficult and touchy at times, but he bravely tolerated the discomfort and criticism as he did his rounds on the gumfields on a regular monthly basis.

Credit must go to Father Zanna for collecting through Ferri’s Napredak (friendly at this stage) the finance necessary for the Calvary Group (Sveto Propeće) in St Patrick’s Cathedral in Auckland, collected from the Croatian gumdiggers. In a letter to Bishop Lenihan of 25 July 1907, Father Zanna expressed his surprise at how quickly the sum of £60 was collected to pay for the statuary that still stands in the Cathedral. The small surplus he noted was used to provide a plaque that was instructed by Matthew Ferri. The dedication reads: ‘Erected by the Croatian people of New Zealand as a memorial to their brothers who departed this world in this distant land’.

Before long Matthew Ferri began a campaign against Father Zanna, alleging that the latter had been warning young men not to frequent certain boarding houses in Auckland. The Rev. Zanna alleged that they were dens of iniquity, where gambling went on at all hours of the day and night and where drink was freely available. He suggested that one or two were being conducted as brothels. Ferri’s attack hurt Zanna deeply. The stress of his duties and the criticisms of the anti-clerical factions caused his health to decline and he was finally obliged to retire from the mission to the Croatians. That is well explained in his letter to John Totich in 1948. His final days were spent at the Little Sisters of the Poor in Ponsonby, Auckland where he died in 1961.



Apart from the prejudices, anti-clericalism and the language issue within the early community, Father Zanna's task was difficult enough by having to serve his widely spread flock in remote districts of the Auckland Province. Transport meant coastal steamers, horse, dray or simply walking between camps and settlements. Accommodation would have been basic, comfortless – and meals dependent on the goodwill of the few married couples in his 'parish'. His was not an easy role. He always felt that he was an outsider – but he is to be admired for his achievement in the face of the difficulties he endured in the short six years of his mission to the Croatian settlers in New Zealand.

After Father Zanna's retirement, the Mill Hill fathers continued to be available but close contact with the widely dispersed community was difficult to sustain. For the next two decades the Church lost much of the ground that Father Zanna had built up, even though for some years later he was available in Dargaville and Whangarei. The vacuum would not be filled until the arrival of the Reverend Milan Pavlinovich from Podgora in 1928 (see Rev. Pavlinovich).

The following letter from Father Zanna to the Consul, John Totich, is of great interest.

17.10.1948

Dear Mr J. Totich,

Accept please my belated thanks for the appreciative remarks you made on my work among your countrymen when both of us were yet in the bloom of our youth. No opportunity was given on the evening of that grand gathering which you staged for the hierarchy; so here goes now the undelivered speech: Pridragi (My dear) Mr Totich, you mentioned the hardship I was under in not knowing the Slav language on my landing in New Zealand. Too true: In being introduced by Mr J. Petricevich to lots of holidaymakers in Mr Joe Franich's boarding house by this remark 'Evo naš pop' (Here is our priest), I began feeling funny as some months previous a new Pope had been elected in Rome: surely I thought these good fellows don't mistake me for the new Pope. A short time after I came into St Patrick's Presbytery from the long and slow trip on a coastal boat (no meals provided) and felt hungry, so I asked for a second helping which was greeted by the late Fr Patterson, 'Here, Father Gumdigger, you seem to be

starving.' What a climb down. I lost all 'Holiness' there and then. Later on up in Aranga I began taking a census so that I might have some idea how many souls I had under my charge: In one shanty I was to hear the remark 'Ne kaži mu, on je špijun' (Don't tell him, he's a spy). Poor me, who had joined an English Missionary Society and hoped to get out to Borneo or India, found myself now dubbed an Austrian detective sent here by Vienna to find out where the lads were who had defaulted from their conscription for the army or navy. Little did they know how I was fished out of Mill Hill College and had three times to undergo the same examination like hundreds of other Austrian subjects and finally declared unfit for the army. At Easter I was to help out at the Cathedral and I got the word 'Hrvatski' (Croatian) in large letters put over the door of one confessional so anyone wishing to make his Easter confession would know which box to find me in. A friend of the Bishop was kneeling near it and a young person whispered to him 'Does Father Rats and Whiskey understand English?' He told her just a little so in she came. And now the best of the lot: when the war broke out in 1914 some 'war dogs' in Dargaville reported to Wellington that Father Zanna is no priest at all but he is an Austrian Army Officer in mufti who has been drilling secretly the 'Austrians' in the gumfields to be ready to attack New Zealand and collar it for Austria. How's that? I remembered then that on some Sundays after Mass to amuse themselves, the young fellows used to do drilling like it is done in the Austrian army (many fellows had served in it) and the Dargaville people who used to ride out to the coast on Sundays had seen me or my creamy horse at Peter Nola's camp and so the rumour was set going. Poor me again! In 1911 I had broken down completely in health and after spending six months in the Mater Hospital I was able to do ordinary mission work but no riding any more, and so it made an end to my travels up North etc.

Going back to the beginning, some time in 1900 a deputation of Dalmatians had approached the Bishop to get a priest for them like in the USA. He could not see his way to do so, but urged the Superior of the Mill Hill Fathers to ask Headquarters in Mill Hill to find one for the job: the reason being that the bulk of the gumdiggers were in those parts north of Helensville which were looked after by the Mill Hill Fathers and the promise had been made by the deputation that each of their countrymen would contribute yearly 10/- for his keep. It sounded like a good way of supporting the Maori Mission in that way and relieved the



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Fathers of an urgent job. I was then finishing my studies in England, and one day was asked by the Rector what language is spoken in Dalmatia. I answered to the best of my knowledge that on the shores of the Adriatic both Slav and Italian were spoken but in the backcountry mostly Slav. Months after I was told that possibly I may be sent to New Zealand to look after a lot of Croatians on the gumfield; but as I was too young yet for ordination I may have to go back to our branch college in South Tirol to teach for a year or so. Well, then I was ordained and still kept on the staff, as I was overseer of the building of the new College till Christmas. In 1903, when word reached me to be ready in February 1904 to sail with Fr. Jansen to New Zealand, I had procured also a small Slav-Italian grammar but no one could teach me the correct pronunciation, hence, when I landed I had got the thing all wrong – 'otak' for father etc. I was stationed with Fr. Westeinde in Kaihu and to get going I got a fine elderly man, Kovač, from Babylon to stay with me for a fortnight in Kaihu and as he knew Italian we could manage it somehow. He had served in the Austrian navy. After some months I was able to get myself understood and began striking out for the north. What a trip right to Parengarenga. Then to the South of Auckland right to Hamilton, and then over to the hardest part, the mountain range of the Coromandel Peninsula (East Coast). Within a year I had been practically everywhere except Great Barrier Island. I had nearly 800 communions and lots of baptisms (nine children in one family alone) to my credit. One thing I feel proud to tell is how I managed to collect enough to pay for the Calvary group in St Patrick's Cathedral as a memorial for the Dalmatians who died in New Zealand and so the story goes on till Ferri's paper



*Sunday drill after Mass  
1910 at Te Kopuru.*

*L to R – Ivan Sumich, Iko Sumich,  
Vincent Dean, Phillip Sunde,  
Dick Sunde, Ivan Nola, Peter  
Sunde, Steve Devcich.*

SOURCE, RUDI SUNDE

'Napredak' began publishing nasty things against me, especially as regards my support by the people, which had never been overdone; barely enough to keep me going and nothing to spare. Then, also a dirty rag from Split made its appearance on the gumfields, which unhinged many young fellows, and began ridiculing our religion. In Sweetwater Camp I nearly came to blows with one lad. He had been hearing some filthy stuff among Maoris against one of our best young Mill Hill priests who was doing also hard work among the northern Dalmatians. When Ferri attacked me for warning the good boys to avoid certain boarding houses in the city, I lashed out in one letter to him. He maliciously published it and so many (not knowing the full question) turned against me. In 1910 my annual income was not even £50, and my health gone. In 1911, I spent six months in the Mater Hospital, was prayed for for days in Catholic Schools, and the good care and nursing of Mater Sisters restored me sufficiently to get back to Dargaville, but no more riding possible, and so ended my job on the gumfields. One last thing I did then with the help of friendly Dalmatians who were naturalised British subjects, was to vote in December 1911 for the late Mr Coates and through their vote he won and became a leading man in New Zealand. Without their votes he would not have beaten Mr Stallworthy who had been so much opposed against Dalmatians digging on Crown Lands.

After seven years assistant priest in Dargaville I was put in charge of Whangarei Parish, which later the Bishop took over, and then I was sent to the Waikato. In 1909 I had been allowed some time off to learn Maori, and now I got the full chance of Mission work in the large district of Kihikihi. From there I was sent to take over Rotorua in 1918, and when the new College for Maori boys, St Peters, was opened in Northcote I was made Director there. I am so pleased to read in Mr M. Simich's speech that Fr. Pavlinovich was instrumental in getting the first Yugoslav boy to enter Mosgiel. I am also proud of having nursed the first vocation among my boys at St Peter's – the present Rev. Father Te Awhitu.

In 1933, I was suddenly recalled to Headquarters to go back to my old College in the South Tirol (which country had been sold to the Italians in 1919) as I knew the language the Superior General thought I might get on better than the Father in charge who knew no Italian (the people there spoke only German); what a change for me!

Živila Hrvatska! Pozdrav! (Long Live Croatia! Salutations!)



## Reverend Milan Pavlinovich (1879–1962)

THE hard-line attitudes within New Zealand society during the First World War and through the 1920s, 1930s and the early years of the Second World War compounded the general insecurity of the community. The Catholic Church, through its Irish dominated clergy and teaching orders, tended to be indifferent to the special needs of Croatian settlers, and little understanding of their problems and their temperament was evident. Even the most zealous in the community practised their faith with difficulty and many were lost to the Church during those difficult decades.

A second attempt to salvage the faith was made by a group of older settlers during the 20s. In 1927 a delegation approached the Right Rev. Henry Cleary, Catholic Bishop of Auckland. John Totich, Honorary Royal Consul, acted as spokesman, seeking support from the diocese for an urgent appointment to minister to the community. Concurrently a group of settlers from Podgora headed by Lovre Marinovich began lobbying the Bishop of Split to ensure the appointment of Rev. Milan Pavlinovich of Podgora. He was apparently available and responded positively to the approach. Bowing to pressure, Bishop Cleary agreed to accept Milan's appointment to the chaplaincy of the Yugoslav community in New Zealand.

Preceding the appointment, the following letter was received by Mr Lovre (Lawrence) Marinovich of Oratia in August 1927, from Rev. Milan Pavlinovich.

Dear Lovre,

Thank you for your letter, which delighted me, especially the suggestion that I, or one of our priests, come to New Zealand as pastor to our Yugoslav people. I have been expecting daily



a letter from Bishop Cleary, but it has not arrived. I have been talking too with our people in Podgora, to invite him to Podgora to honour him as is due to him.

He has approached the Nuncio in Belgrade who in turn approached the Bishop of Split to release a priest for New

*Rev. Milan Pavlinovich.*



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES



Rev. Milan Pavlinovich  
with Matē Nola.

Zealand. Yesterday I received a letter from the Bishop of Split in which he asks if I am willing to go – if so he would release me. My dear Lovre, I couldn't wait to tell you.  
(Trans. S.A.J.)

On arrival in Auckland in April 1928 Father Pavlinovich was warmly greeted by family members, friends and the wider community. They expressed their appreciation of his presence through gatherings and religious services – even going to great lengths to provide him with a house in Wellington Street, Auckland. Father Milan Pavlinovich played an important part in the community's affairs from the day of his arrival, not only to ensure that they returned to the practice of their faith, but also that they accepted Royal Yugoslavia. He was a major influence in the formation of the Yugoslav Club and Library (Inc.) in 1928, later to evolve as the Yugoslav Club (Inc.). His involvement and that of the Consul, John Totich, persuaded the club to align itself politically with King Alexander's dictatorship in Yugoslavia.

Aside from his political manoeuvrings, Rev. Milan travelled periodically throughout Auckland Province, ministering to settlements long without a priest of their race. He gave much needed support to the established and sometimes struggling settlers, avoiding newer migrants who regarded him with suspicion and outright antagonism because of his political sympathies with the Royalist and anti-Croatian Government of Yugoslavia. Father Pavlinovich openly championed the anti-communist cause and did all he could to counter the influence of its leaders. His efforts were strongly supported by John Totich, the Consul, and Peter Sulenta in the Far North. By association the Yugoslav Club was seen to be aligned with their views and it, in turn, was subjected to criticism by liberal minded and left leaning fellow countrymen.

Writing to *Hrvatska Straža* in August 1929, Rev. Pavlinovich observed:

Our people here [in New Zealand] as indeed at home, who find themselves apparently free and with a dollar in their pockets, are first to object to God, the faith and the priest. All the wrong that our priests at home committed fall on my shoulders and gives cause to our people here not to go to church, confession, communion and other Christian or human duty.  
(Trans. S.A.J.)

As a tribute to him and his labours as a priest he was invited to open and bless the Church of St's Cyril and Methodius in Oratia in June 1930. Oratia, predominantly settled by villagers from Podgora, enjoyed a special fellowship with the Reverend Pavlinovich and saw this achievement as a feather in their cap – a unique achievement on all counts. The Reverend's influence continued to grow. In 1932 he was appointed to act as Commissioner of Immigration and thus render support to the Royal Consul, John Totich, based in Dargaville at that time. Many believed that the two roles, religious and political, were incompatible.

After a visit to Yugoslavia in 1934, he resumed his dual roles – making one of his main concerns to keep Totich informed on 'communist influence within the Auckland community' – now accepted as more Yugoslav in name than Croatian or Dalmatian. Their true identity, historically and culturally, as Croats was generally put aside.

Time for Rev. Milan, however, was running out. Almost 10 years after his arrival he decided, because of ill health, to return to Podgora. He toured his widespread 'Yugoslav' parish stretching from Waiharara, Dargaville, Whangarei, Henderson and Oratia to Auckland. He was next heard of ministering to his new extended parish among Dalmatia's Partisan forces during the turmoil of the Axis occupation and the internal conflicts that followed.

In his footsteps came Father George Marinovich, son of Lovre and Marē Marinovich, Oratia, who was ordained in 1939 at St Patrick's Cathedral, Auckland.



## Reverend George Mark Marinovich (1915–93)

Reverend George Mark  
Marinovich (1915–93)

NEW Zealand born, son of pioneer Oratia settlers, Lovre and Marē Marinovich, the Rev. George Marinovich's task hard on the heels of Rev. Milan Pavlinovich would be difficult. The astute worldly pastor had returned to Dalmatia in former Yugoslavia in 1938. In that same year prior to his ordination, Fr. Marinovich was given the task of planning the participation of the 'Yugoslav' community in the 1940 Catholic Centennial Celebrations in Auckland. An imaginative note was the welcome to the Papal Nuncio, Archbishop Panico, by a flotilla of Dalmatian owned fishing boats that sailed out into the Auckland Harbour to greet the SS *Wanganella*. As part of the celebrations a large contingent of men and women from around the Auckland province marched to the Auckland Domain to take part in an open air Mass. Later a pageant at Western Springs was an occasion for 60 young men and 50 young women dressed in national costume to march behind the banner of Our Lady of Sinj.

Reverend Father George Mark Marinovich was ordained in St Patrick's Cathedral in December 1939. Through his hard work in the early years of his ministry he recouped much of the ground lost through Fr. Pavlinovich's political pretensions and his selective lobbying within the community. While the latter was royalist in the extreme, Fr. Marinovich looked more and more to his Croatian roots and his people's Catholic traditions. The views he espoused did not always please a flock generally supportive of Yugoslav idealism – but he successfully managed to maintain an open-door relationship with all of his people without serious friction. He did, however, disassociate himself from left wing-cum-communist elements.



Fr. Marinovich began his priestly duties at Takapuna Catholic Church. He was then transferred to St Patrick's Cathedral in 1943. In those days it was still central enough for most of the community. He proved to be a man of action. Within a year or two, a Yugoslav church choir was formed under recent émigré

*Monsignor George Marinovich –  
St Francis Parish, Pt Chevalier.*  
SOURCE, MONSIGNOR  
MARINOVICH



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

Prof. Ivan Ferega. Monthly masses with the sermon delivered in the Croatian language were under way; the Yugoslav Students' Society of St Jerome was formed together with the Yugoslav branch of the Holy Name Society. Croatian language classes were started, and a branch of the Legion of Mary established. It was a formidable programme that proved difficult to sustain. The Mass was maintained every month, but all the other activities lapsed after a time for want of support. There was obviously insufficient commitment in the community for serious cultural and religious activities. Deep political divisions also sapped enthusiasm and interest and countered any positive growth in cultural development. He observed in later years that the Catholic clergy of New Zealand generally regarded all Yugoslavs as communist fellow travellers because they supported Tito's Yugoslavia.

Fr. Marinovich was later transferred to St Francis Parish, Pt Chevalier where he was better located to serve the community whose centre of gravity was now more to the west of Auckland.



*The Dalmatian fishermen greet the Papal Nuncio arriving on the Wanganella in 1938.*

SOURCE, M.A. MARINOVICH FILM

He continued his ministry there, preaching in Croatian, hearing confessions and serving his people in many other ways, at baptisms, weddings and funerals. In 1952 he spent some time in Rome, and on his return he persuaded the Church hierarchy to bring Fathers Sebastian Palich and Matē Kolich, two Croatian priests, to New Zealand. They both duly arrived and were stationed in Wellington, with Fr. Kolich later transferring to Auckland. In 1988 the Catholic Croatian clergy was joined by Fr. Ante Klarich from Split, who established the Croatian Church and centre of St Antony in Te Atatu.

Jubilee celebrations for Fr. Marinovich were celebrated in 1964 (25 years) and 1989 (50 years) but his most important celebration was his elevation to the position of Monsignor in 1981 at the time of Bishop (now Cardinal) Kuharic's visit from Croatia. It was a well-deserved honour for a priest who worked hard, sometimes in the face of criticism and opposition within the community. However, he continued to serve as priest, advocate and mentor to all who accepted him, without reservation. He died in 1993 in Auckland.



# Herekino

IN May 1899, the Croatian language newspaper *Bratska Sloga* published in Auckland featured a letter from D.W. Pearse, a Herekino settler: 'Some twelve to fourteen [Dalmatians] have taken up land and I am credibly informed by them that others are waiting for a chance to do likewise if they decide to remain.'

The settlement of Herekino at the head of Herekino Harbour was linked to Kaitaia by a road of sorts passing through Herekino Gorge and linked to other places by scow. As an example, when the local wine industry developed, the producers sent wine in large barrels to Awanui by horse drawn wagon from whence it was shipped to Auckland or bottled for local sale.

The Herekino settlement grew around the stimulus provided by the Village Homestead Special Settlements Scheme created by the government in the 1880s to encourage land settlement. Land could be taken up on a perpetual lease basis in blocks of 50 acres and the lessee was eligible for advances towards the erection of a house, bush felling, scrub clearing and land development. Many of the potential settlers who took up these blocks pulled out discouraged by the difficult tasks confronting them in bringing the land into profitable production and by the district's isolation.

The numerous Dalmatian gumdiggers in the Far North, centred on Kaitaia, Awanui and Waiharara, may well have been inspired by Romeo Bragato's views on viticulture in New Zealand. The availability of land around Herekino at attractive terms therefore encouraged several to take up land offered under the scheme or land abandoned by others. Although the directories don't mention Croatian names until 1900, there were certainly a number in residence by 1898, clearing land and

planting vines. This is confirmed in Pearse's letter to *Bratska Sloga*. Driven by an inborn desire to recreate the wine tradition in New Zealand, the Dalmatian Croats began their plantings at Pahi on the Kaipara Harbour in 1896, Hukatere in 1901 by the Silich family and in Henderson in 1898 by Stephen Yelas and Joseph Radalj. Their enterprise encouraged others to follow.

Herekino remained the principal Croatian agricultural settlement in Northland until about 1917. Thereafter the centre of gravity shifted to Kaitaia and Awanui (1925) and

*Peter Lunjevich and Matija Vodanovich, Domjan Lunjevich, Ane Vodanovich, around 1909.*

SOURCE, FAMILY





## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

RIGHT Puhata – Ivan Posinkovich and Jack Stancich clearing bush, 1911.

SOURCE, FAMILY

Waiharara (1927) as dairying and stockbreeding became more acceptable callings.

In 1901, Herekino had a population of 130. The wine industry was in its infancy. The Dalmatians had cleared their land, built homes, started gardens and planted vines and citrus. During the winter months when the vines and fruit trees were dormant they went back to gumfields to earn money for a living and further investments in their land. A few men worked felling timber in the Warawara bush for weeks at a time to supplement their income. The Petrie (Petrich) brothers Tony and Fabian acquired 200 acres (81 ha) jointly with George and John Posinkovich while they continued to run a store in Waiharara. The Lunjevich brothers, Peter, Domjan and Matē, also took up land at Puhata on the seaward side of Herekino that they bought for £2–3 per acre. The three brothers lived in one house on their farm where 10–12 acres (4–4.8 ha) of grapes were planted. After Matē went home, Luke joined his remaining brothers in 1902. More land was purchased and cleared of bush over a number of years, ending with a 300-acre (120-ha) block, which was converted into a dairy farm. When butter fat prices dropped from two shillings and sixpence per pound to sixpence per pound, they switched to dry stock and sheep in desperation.

Wise's directory of 1901 lists 11 Dalmatian vigneron. In 1913 this had dropped to five, growing grapes on small blocks of 1 to 4.5 acres (0.4–1.8 ha), producing 300 to 1500 gallons of wine each,



LEFT Winemakers at Puhata, Herekino. L to R – Marin Juretic, Domjan Lunjevich, Peter Lunjevich, 1909.

SOURCE, FAMILY

selling at 1/- per bottle or 5/- to 8/- a gallon. Undoubtedly the prohibitionist movement caused many winemakers to rethink their plans. Herekino's decline as a winemaking district continued until only a few household acres remained. Timber







*Puhata Vineyards, 1913.  
Rear, L to R – Ivan Posinkovich,  
Bena Posinkovich, Mrs. J Stancich,  
George Posinkovich.  
Front – Andy Renner, Ladin  
Posinkovich, Mary Posinkovich,  
Edward Kunicich, Jack Stancich.  
SOURCE, FAMILY*

milling and gumdigging were gradually displaced by farming and with the timber camps and gum camps gone and beer drinking's appeal to the colonial taste, there was little point in pursuing viticulture, which developed more profitably near population centres, Auckland in particular.

The men referred to by D.W. Pearse of Herekino were J. Besich (Dubrovnik), Stephen and Jim Urlich (Drašnice), Joe and George Veza (Živogošće), Domjan and Peter Lunjevich (Podgora), George and Ivan Posinkovich (Bol), F. Petrich (Starigrad), Tadija Kunicich (Starigrad), George Bogunovich (Bačina) and Jack Stancich (Dol).



*Puhata – Ivan Posinkovich  
at vintage time, 1912.  
SOURCE, FAMILY*



# Tony Anthony Petrie (Petrich) (1882–1969) and Fabian Petrie (Petrich) (1878–1965)



*Anthony Petrie (Petrich)  
– entrepreneur.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY

**B**ORN in the village of Selca near Starigrad on the Island of Hvar, the Petrich brothers, soon after their arrival, saw New Zealand as a land of opportunity. Tony arrived in 1904

to work with his brother Fabian who had arrived in 1898. Their first venture was to join George and John Posinkovich in a vineyard and farming scheme. They each took up 50 acres (20 ha) under the Village Homestead Special Settlements plan at Herekino created by Government to encourage settlers into agriculture of various types. In Wise's directory of 1901 Fabian Petrarch was already described as a vigneron. On the 200-acre (81 ha) block only one acre of grapes was initially planted under netting and there is no record of the total area planted or how the rest of the block was used.

Fabian Petrarch became a naturalised British subject in 1903, while Tony followed in 1908, confirming their early commitment to a New Zealand future. In his application Tony stated: 'The place I now reside in is Waiharara, for although our farms are in Herekino, we have a store and are carrying on business in Waiharara, and I am the one who attends to it, while the others of our company are attending to the farms.' This application was written on his letterhead 'F Petrarch & Co, storekeepers and gumbuyers'. In 1907 he wrote to Romeo Bragato, Government Viticulturist, to say that he was still growing grapes.

In 1908 the brothers anglicised their name to Petrie. In 1909, Tony Petrie moved to Auckland while Fabian remained in Herekino. A year later, Fabian married Nina Gilich. In 1912 Fabian Petrie appeared as a member of the New Zealand Viticultural Association, formed to counter the pressures being exerted by the prohibitionist lobby. In vain this body petitioned Government to save the declining industry. It appears that Fabian, meanwhile, also moved on to Auckland because his name is not in the 1913 list of five remaining winemakers in Herekino. There was no



*Left – Marin Lunjevich.  
Right – Fabian Petrie (Petrarch),  
wife Nina, and son, Ivan –  
Herekino, 1912.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY



future in struggling to establish themselves to provide for a limited market in the face of so much opposition. Bragato's dream would not be realised for many years.

In Auckland Tony Petrie continued to be involved in the kauri gum industry, but the First World War intervened and he was now an enemy alien. The Croatians were at pains to explain their Austrian subject status which they had always rejected. They demanded recognition as Croats from the province of Dalmatia. To give force to their claims, George Scansie, editor of the Croatian language newspaper *Zora* (1913–18) called a meeting the day after Austria-Hungary declared war on Serbia on 28 July 1914. The Croatian Slavonian Independence League was formed to provide material and moral support for Serbia, and to declare their rejection of Austrian identity. Tony Petrie was one of seven elected to prepare for fundraising campaigns

and to generate support for the League's objectives among New Zealanders. He was also on the board of the Croatian Publishing Co. Ltd in 1914.

Divisions, disagreements, posturing and backbiting neutralised the community and brought it into disrepute during the war years. The New Zealand Government was at a loss to understand the endless bickering and unpleasantness. Finally the War Cabinet invited Tony Petrie and George Erceg to Wellington to establish a basis for military service for those who were prepared to go overseas and fight. The government proposed terms that Petrie and Erceg rejected because of their unfairness and harshness. However, the news of their meeting was published in the *New Zealand Herald* and seized upon by some of their compatriots. Petrie and Erceg were criticised and subjected to a smear campaign because some had wrongly

Tony Anthony Petrie  
(Petrich) (1882–1969)  
and Fabian Petrie  
(Petrich) (1878–1965)



*Gumdiggers, Tomarata area.  
Tony Petrie's men, 1931.  
L to R – Matě Farac, Dick Kuluz,  
Dick Kuluz (cousins), two  
unknown, Ivan Burmaz, Ned  
Meuli, Matě Farac, Tony Bakalich,  
Jack Frankovich, Tony Piacun,  
Dick Jelichich, Milan Yelavich.*

SOURCE, PROBABLY  
TUDOR COLLINS



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

assumed that they had submitted to Government's proposals without consultation. They were accused of treachery. Tony Petrie, a staunch Anglophile, but nevertheless concerned to get a fair deal for his people, saw little point in continuing in the face of so much criticism, and withdrew from further negotiation.

In 1916 Tony Petrie married Rita Evelyn Megerney. In 1919 lifelong interest in physical culture led him to promote, with 36 supporters, an organisation he called Sokol – Yugoslav Physical and Mental Culture Society, which appears to have stalled before it got started. The Petrie brothers were astute traders and self-educated businessmen, not satisfied with just any sort of job and always looking for new opportunities. Whereas Tony continued with his gumdigging interests and his brickmaking works at Waitakere, Fabian's interests now centred on the fishing industry.

During the First World War years, for example, Fabian and his brother-in-law Leo Gaelic (Živko Gilich) began hunting and shooting porpoises. Their skins were cured by Sutherland's

tannery and then they were reduced to bootlaces for the armed forces – hardly an acceptable business today. In the mid 1920s he looked into starting a sardine industry. He remembered the familiar rich harvests off the Island of Hvar in Dalmatia. In 1929, he decided to float a public company, its prime object being to take over the New Zealand Marine Products Syndicate that he owned. A prospectus was issued for a new company, Sardines and Marine Products (NZ) Limited. However, contrary to his hopes, the venture failed to attract investors and it lapsed. Times were bad; the world was gripped by an economic depression and many businesses were struck down. A by-product of this venture was Fabian's sponsorship of two highly qualified sardine fishing experts from Dalmatia, one his brother-in-law Visko Gilich, the other Josip Kuljiš. With the collapse of the sardine project, they became involved in Auckland's fishing industry where they were to contribute considerably to its growth.

In 1930, Tony Petrie introduced the first mechanical gumdigging machines at Tomarata, north-east of Wellsford. Two 'Bay City' excavators were imported from the United States. He believed the machinery would extract sufficient kauri gum to supply his gum purification plant in Henderson, near Auckland. The method used was one of refining the gum by solvent extraction. Again the tide was against change and innovation. A massive drop in gum prices due to the depressed market, combined with the development of synthetic coatings, brought this venture to an end.

Forever restless, he never gave up his search for new opportunities. At different times he ran sightseeing tours in the Waitakere Ranges, studied plant propagation, and became interested in horticulture. Other enterprises ranged from kauri gum dealing, brickmaking, land development, fish processing and mining exploration. He was an avid student and a keen physical culturist, a man of sharp intellect who remained active to the end of his life at the age of 87.

Tony and Fabian were formidable brothers, proud, energetic and far seeing, who brought credit to their people in New Zealand.

*Extra large lumps of kauri gum, Tomorata area, 1931. L to R – Tony Petrie, Fabian Petrie, Matē Farac, Dick Matusich.*

SOURCE, PROBABLY TUDOR COLLINS



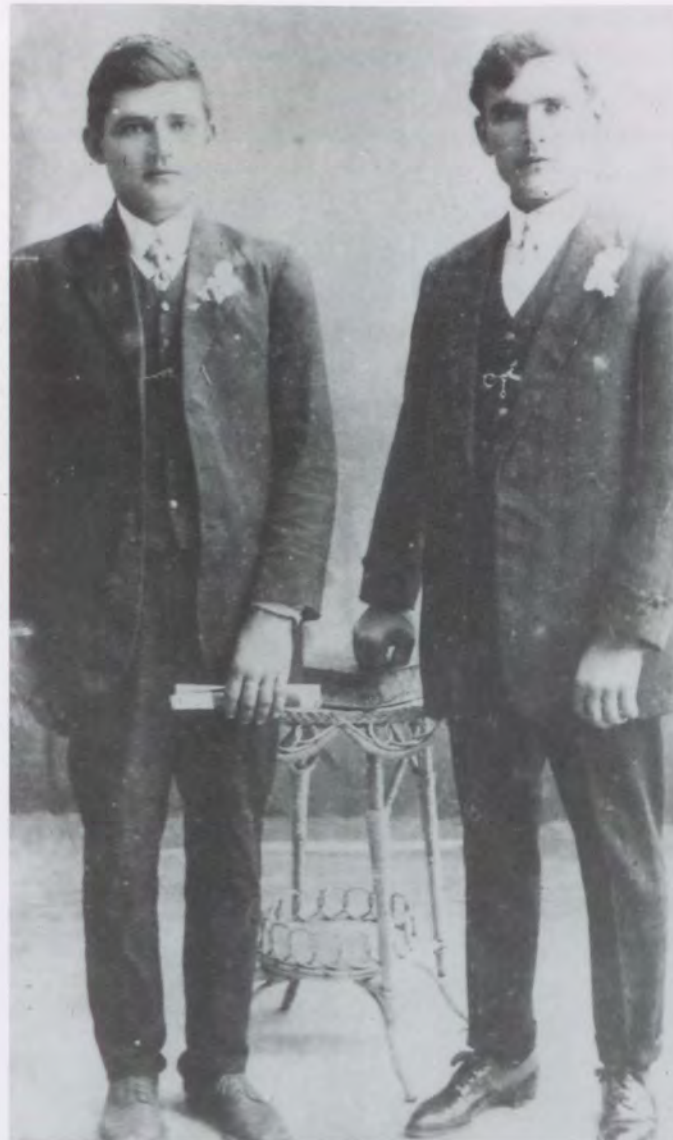


# Clem (Klemē) Jurlina (1889–1973)

CLEM Jurlina, sometimes spelt Yurlina, was born in the storied coastal village of Živogošće. Some 3000 years ago it was an Illyrian settlement, then a thriving Roman community, and since the 7th century AD a Croatian village in the province of Dalmatia. It is famed for its great spring which bursts out of the rocky foreshore below the 1760-m peak of Kapela and celebrated in a Roman inscription cut into ancient stone – ‘Oh, fountain, you are born of the rocks, to find death in the depths of the sea’.

Živogošće sent many settlers to New Zealand, mere boys, men and young women who ventured forth to marry these men – all cast out by their land into the raw New Zealand environment to seek a new, more rewarding life. Some of their family names, Brajkovich, Grbich, Franicevich, Frankovich, Jukich, Jurakovich, Jurlina, Klaricich, Lozina, Petricevich and Veza, are etched in the pages of Croatian history in New Zealand.

The Jurlina brothers of the Far North were examples of dogged determination and enterprise displayed by pioneer Croatian settlers. The family pioneer, and probably among the first here from the village, was Ante Jurlina, who arrived in 1896. His movements in the first two or three years are unrecorded, but it is recalled by one of his descendants, his grandson Davor Antunovich, that he bought a small block of land where the Farmers carpark building was sited and there he dug for kauri gum. In 1902 he sold this land for 100 gold sovereigns. Ante went to the Far North where he was joined by Niko Jurlina in 1902, and Clem Jurlina in 1904. The two older brothers worked alongside their uncle Ante at Black Quarry camp on the banks of the Aurere Stream at the mainland end of Tokerau Beach.



*Clem Jurlina (left) and Nikola Jurlina, 1912, in Kaitaia.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY

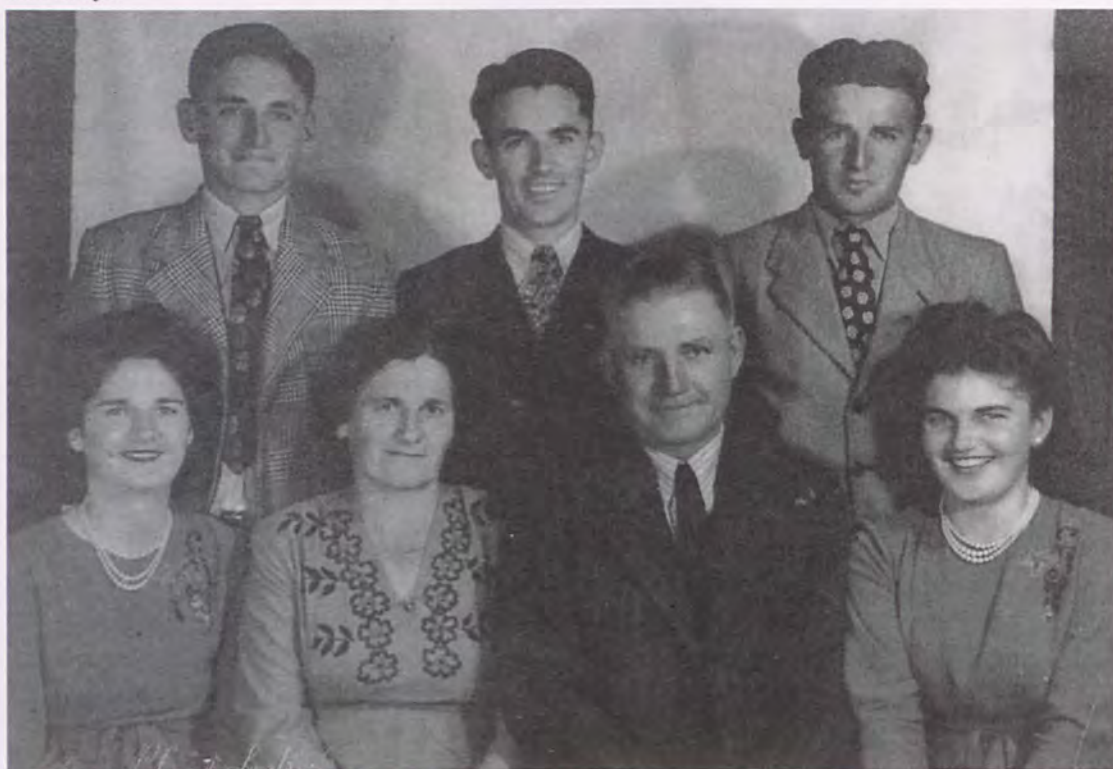


## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

They then went across to an area near Awanui Harbour and finally established themselves at Sweetwater, about 2 km from Awanui township.

At Sweetwater, the routine of hard work and thrift enabled them, Nikola and Clem, to open a general store and gum trading business together with a billiard saloon in 1909. Exports of kauri gum were riding high, averaging 8300 tons per year from 1909 to 1914, until the years of the First World War saw a slump in the industry. Sweetwater survived those years, and in the mid 1920s Clem opened another store at Waipuna, a gumfield south of Awanui. Nikola was no longer in the business. He returned to Dalmatia in 1927. The industry picked up, giving Clem the chance to benefit from the increased export market. Between 1920 and 1925 New Zealand's exports averaged 5600 tons per year. Thereafter, suffering from the Depression and the introduction of synthetics in varnishes and coatings, the industry gradually declined to an average of 3000 tons exported annually between 1930 and 1935.

*The Jurlina family, Sweetwater.  
Rear – Dick, Victor, Milan.  
Front – Olga, Karmela, Clem  
and Gladys.*



Well settled in Sweetwater, Clem Jurlina met Karmela Lozina, who had arrived to join her brothers in New Zealand. A village match was made and the couple married in 1925. She became the strength of the family, working under extremely difficult and trying conditions. She supported Clem in his efforts and played an important role in bringing families together long separated by war, by time and other circumstances. Clem meanwhile sponsored relatives, and many men and families from Živogošće who came to New Zealand usually ended up in the Sweetwater-Awanui area. He helped them set up camp, supplied tools and credit. Under his patronage, Sweetwater grew into a strong, lively community of Croatian families and single men. Social occasions, dances, fundraising and cultural activities kept people together and softened the pain of separation from distant homes and distant families. The gumfield communities throughout North Auckland were communities apart from mainstream New Zealand, but their zest for life, generosity and sober, hard-working habits won many hearts. In social life and in sport, there grew an easy mixing of the three peoples – Dalmatian, Pakeha and Maori.



*Clem Jurlina at Sweetwater, Far North. The office served as a shop at Waipuna, built on skids that enabled re-siting at the family property in the early 30s.*



Clem Jurlina's business endured many ups and downs over the years. He was astute and careful, as he watched his enterprise grow, but he was also generous and helpful to his employees and his compatriots, and reserved a special kinship for the Maori people, many of whom worked for him. To them he was 'Krema'. The Maori language rolled off his lips as easily as Croatian or English. He was always among them when he visited their camps or marae. They remained friends for life.

Clem Jurlina started his own gum exporting business in 1928 and it continued to the end of his days, but on a much lesser scale. In his lifetime he never returned home to visit his birthplace and family. This was typical of the majority of his pioneering generation. They found it difficult to take that step. He died in 1973 and was survived by Karmela by another 10 years. Their

family of five, Olga (deceased), Victor, Milan, Dick (deceased) and Gladys, continued their father's traditions on the Sweetwater property created by him over many decades. It is timeless land: timeless as the large slab of swamp kauri by their driveway incised with 'Jurlina' and carbon dated, in 1983, at 31,100 years.

Near the family house stands a small, detached office building, originally a store at Waipuna. It was hauled there on sledges by bullocks. Today it houses the Jurlina and Sweetwater archives, preserved since 1911 by Clem – account books, photographs, documents and various pieces of equipment used in gumdigging days. It stands there as a memorial to Clem Jurlina, his wife Karmela, and the many men and their families who once slaved in appalling conditions for a living on the surrounding lands.

Clem (Klemē) Jurlina  
(1889–1973)



*Jurlina family reunion,  
Sweetwater 2004, 100th  
anniversary of Clem Jurlina's  
arrival in New Zealand.  
Kauri slab carbon dated  
31,120 years.*



# Peter Mandeno Šulenta (1872–1964)



*Peter Šulenta as a young man.*

*Šulenta Bros. Vineyard,  
Waipapakauri, 1905.*

SOURCE, FAR NORTH  
REGIONAL MUSEUM



PETER Šulenta was one of the earliest arrivals from the village of Drašnice, 'home' of a large group of settlers in New Zealand. He claimed to have heard of New Zealand through friends and decided to come, paying for his own passage. The date of his arrival was 1894. His presence here is first recorded in evidence given to the Kauri-Gum Industry Royal Commission of 1898. Clearly he was already very competent in expressing himself in the English language, clearly also he had sharpened his skills as a negotiator, a dealer and a sometimes bush lawyer. He was a sincere patriot and a father figure to his compatriots in the Far North, in those days an isolated region dependent on coastal transport.

At the time of the Commission he was in partnership with Peter Bowker, an anglicised Greek. They traded as storekeepers and kauri gum dealers for about two years before parting company. In 1907 Peter Šulenta and his brother George were operating a flax mill in Awanui, one of several in the Far North. New Zealand flax (*Phormium tenax*) was a naturally grown product used by generations of Maori for various purposes, and harvested by the colonists from earliest days of settlement. From 1920 on, flax plantations were developed to counter the exploitation of natural sources. It was processed and exported for use in the manufacture of rope and twine.

In the years 1902 or 1903, Peter Šulenta and A. Subritsky bought a 4-acre (1.6-ha) block adjacent to the Awanui Hotel on which they established a small vineyard. In those years his English language skills, his wide knowledge, supplemented by a great ego, made him almost indispensable to his people who looked to him as their advisor, scribe and interpreter. He bucked authority, demanded justice and recognition. Ministers of the Crown became well aware of his complaints, his requests and his pleas. On one occasion he asked the Commissioner of Crown Lands to appoint him as agent to induce Dalmatians to settle on available Crown lands. He offered to arrange matters for a commission of one shilling per settler. He was turned down.

He spent a short time in Auckland as a real estate salesman and in that capacity became naturalised in November 1911. In the following year he called a meeting to form a Winegrowers' Association. This suggests that his vineyard in Awanui was still flourishing. The Association lapsed.



During the First World War years, 600 or so 'Yugoslavs' were directed into public works under the direction of an uncompromising Commissioner John Cullen. A large group of 55 men were at work clearing and widening the Awanui River. Because one of men had been sacked by the foreman in June 1918, the others downed tools, demanding that he be re-employed. Peter Šulenta acted as their spokesman and others became involved. His quick mind and forceful argument no doubt upset Cullen who ordered Šulenta's arrest on 18 July under military warrant and sent him to Auckland goal and then on to Somes Island in Wellington's Harbour. Two others were also charged and interned – Ivan Sumich and Mick Zidich. In November 1919, a year after war's end, Šulenta had his naturalisation revoked. There is no record of his status as a British subject being reinstated – 'colonial' injustice at its worst.

In the post-war years of the 1920s and 1930s Peter Šulenta kept up his barrage of correspondence with all sorts of people. After John Totich was appointed Royal Yugoslav Consul in 1927, based in Dargaville, Šulenta objected strongly to Totich's reliance on Matthew Ferri in Auckland, whom he regarded with contempt. He went further, requesting that Totich recommend him, Šulenta, as Royal Yugoslav Consul in Wellington. During Gordon Coates's premiership, Šulenta suggested to him that he (Šulenta) should be appointed chairman of a commission to protect Yugoslav interests, particularly on the gumfields.

Šulenta believed himself to be the overseer of the Yugoslav population in New Zealand. Again writing to Totich in 1933, he expressed shame 'that so many of our people follow Soviet Russia's doctrines and import dissident literature, including Croatian language newspapers and pamphlets'. He told Totich that he would write to the Minister of Justice asking him to prohibit entry of such literature, offering his services as a censor. He asked Totich to support him in this matter. John Totich went along with Šulenta to a degree and asked him to forward any doubtful material to him, pointing out that it was not practical or sensible to set up a censorship procedure. He advised Šulenta to keep the police informed if he believed it necessary.

Šulenta was physical, intelligent and well meaning but perhaps somewhat misguided in his opinions as to what was best for his people. They were ruggedly independent, self-reliant and hard-working and they were well settled in New Zealand and generally integrated within New Zealand society. They did not need a father figure or patriarch dispensing favours and advice. Perhaps he saw himself as a prince among his people. Why else would he seek Totich's support for his nomination for the Legislative Council (abolished in 1950)? He even wrote to the Prime Minister, the Rt. Hon. Michael Savage, proposing his appointment. He never succeeded in the many propositions he tabled and finally would have given up in frustration.

The best that can be said of him was that he was a big, outspoken, flamboyant man, who cut a swathe through the Far North community's affairs for about 50 years. A man sincere but misguided – too self-important and perhaps deluded – and there was always the black mark of his revoked naturalisation.

Peter Mandeno Šulenta  
(1872–1964)

*Šulenta brothers, Peter,  
George, Anton – winemakers.*  
SOURCE, FAR NORTH  
REGIONAL MUSEUM





## Matē Srhoj (1871–1964)

THE village of Bogomolje sits astride the narrow eastern tongue of Hvar Island. The village name means ‘prayer’, but it is more than likely derived from ‘Bogomolja’ which means

‘church’ or ‘temple’. The days when it was a thriving village have long gone; few people live there today. It stands in sparse rockbound landscape with the sea not too distant to both north



L to R – Kuzma Matijevich  
holding Nicholas, Jelena  
Matijevich (nee Srhoj) holding  
Jack, Vica Srhoj (nee Matijevich),  
Matē Srhoj holding Mary.

SOURCE, GEORGE YELAVICH



and south. Families, young men and young women left in the general exodus from the region in the 1890s and 1900s. Eleven family names are identified in New Zealand, Srhoj among them.

Three cousins, Matē and Jakov Srhoj and Toma Jerkovich, together with a close friend, Kuzma Matijevich, left the village in 1897, although Matē's passport was endorsed in December 1896. Arriving in Auckland in December 1897, they found that the door was wide open – no passports required – no customs officers to deal with. They would have stayed in one of several Croatian boarding houses before deciding to go by rail north to Helensville where they all dug for kauri gum. Jakov meanwhile returned home and the remaining three pooled their resources and bought a block of land where Kaipara College now stands. This may have taken place in 1900 or 1901. Grapes and fruit trees were planted. In 1903 all three became naturalised British subjects in Helensville – occupation, vine-dressers, suggesting that the vines were in production.

Matē Srhoj and Kuzma Matijevich each had strong romantic links with the other's sister. In 1902 Jelena Srhoj arrived to marry Kuzma and in 1905 Vica Matijevich arrived to marry Matē Srhoj. It is of interest to note that the latter couple were attended on by Ivan and Louise Bilich, pioneers of Henderson (see Bilich).

The five people now dependent on the venture were joined by their fellow villager, Matē Huljich, and it soon became apparent that it would be difficult to sustain. Being close to sea access, the Kaipara settlements, and the railhead from Auckland, did not prove to be an advantage. There was too much competition. In addition local gum reserves were diminishing, and customers were moving out of the area. In 1907, the three original partners filed for bankruptcy. The land was sold, debts settled and they all left Helensville for Northland. In that same year Toma Jerkovich married in Helensville.

In the early 1900s transport was difficult and tedious. It took them two days to reach Waihopo on the Houhora Harbour where they dug gum for a time, moving off in separate directions within the district. The Srhojs finally settled at Waiharara, the centre of a rich area of gumland. In the next few years they

opened two general stores, one at Waiharara and one at Bunkel to the north. During the First World War, Matē Srhoj and his friend Kleme Milich had the Slavia Hall built to which they later added a billiard saloon and small library. During those years Slavia Hall became the centre of many patriotic fundraising functions for both the Serbian and New Zealand Red Cross. A regular visitor was Matē Kuluz, an early photographer, who showed silent moves to local people. The hall and its facilities became a central entertainment centre (see M. Kuluz). The Bunkel Hall closed down in favour of Slavia Hall.

In the meantime the Srhojs were gradually building up their land holdings to about 400 ha (1000 acres) which they brought into pasture and established a dairy farm carrying 200 cows. They were the first of the Far North's Croatian settlers to venture so positively into dairy farming. When they took over the land it was rough gumland, turned over, potholed and stripped of much of its fertility. Patient hands and the help of

## Matē Srhoj (1871–1964)

*Slavia Hall, Waiharara in the Far North was built at the end of 1917 by five partners as a dance hall, for patriotic gatherings and cinema. The Slavia Picture Show regularly showed silent movies and films by Matē Kuluz. The hall served many needs – lectures (usually political), and a library was introduced to Waiharara, which at the time had a reputation of being a 'red' territory.*

*The photograph shows Peter Yelavich in the foreground, a local resident, and the family of Matē Srhoj (standing), Vica Srhoj (seated) and their daughter, Mary Srhoj (standing). Taken in 1918.*

SOURCE, GEORGE JELAVICH





## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

friends and growing family filled the potholes, burnt off scrub and with horse and plough gradually brought the land into production. Their dairy herd and other activities enabled the large Srhoj family of father, mother and eight children to survive reasonably comfortably. Their story was one of unrelenting labour, of progress from horse-drawn wagon to a motor truck in the 1930s, and then to a crawler tractor they shared with a son-in-law, Ante Yelavich.

There were many families in the Far North who took up land and equally succeeded as farmers. They all shared their labours and gave support to each other in good times and bad. The Srhojs were significant among these, being the first to farm on a large scale, and being the most successful in efficiency and productivity. Matē Srhoj was regarded as a patriarch by the northern settlers. His home virtually became a social centre and a way station for many young men not long out of Dalmatia.

The Srhoj's gave them encouragement and guidance, easing their dread of loneliness and the insecurity that many were burdened with.

In 1977, the 80th anniversary of Matē's arrival was celebrated in Waiharara with a large gathering of the clan, over 210, and they all weren't able to come. It was a supreme tribute. The occasion prompted the placing and dedication of a memorial to the northern pioneer Croatians, in the forecourt of the Church of Sts Cyril and Methodius. The memorial and the inscription fixed to a large bluestone boulder were willingly arranged by Matē and Vica's grandson, George Yelavich of Riverhead, Auckland.

In 1997, the Srhoj extended families gathered once more at Waiharara to honour the 100th anniversary of Matē's arrival in New Zealand.



*Memorial to Croatian settlers in the Far North, in the forecourt of the Church of St Cyril and Methodius, Waiharara. L to R – Millie Srhoj, Teresa Yelavich and George Yelavich.*



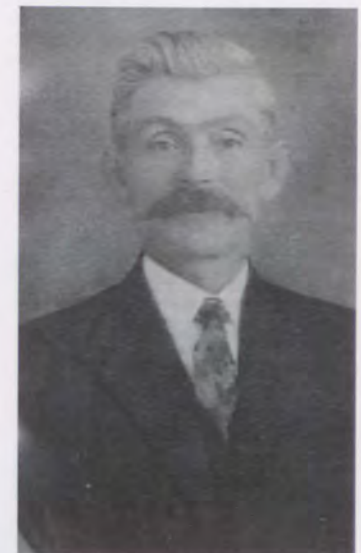
# Marino Glucina (1876–1936)

Marino Glucina  
(1876–1936)

**M**ARINO Glucina was among the first to emigrate to New Zealand from the village of Drašnice on the Dalmatian coast. His early years gumdigging in various parts of North Auckland enabled him to progress and settle permanently. In 1914, he married Neda Borich, recently arrived from Podgora. They took up farming at Ruakaka, south of Whangarei. This was followed by the setting up of a store in 1920 and the development of a small vineyard at Marsden Point to serve the needs of his fellow countrymen. Marino and his wife prospered and boldly invested in a large house in Bank Street, Whangarei, which was converted into a boarding house to cater for the many diggers and workers moving about the north. Many of these men were engaged on government works, building roads and railways – pick, shovel and wheelbarrow work with no machinery to cut through almost inaccessible barriers of hills, ridges and mountainous passes. Marino's son Milenko took to the road with his van delivering supplies to the scattered work camps – foodstuffs, equipment, sundry stores and mail. The state of the roads throughout the north was poor – deep mud in winter, dust bowls in summer. Father and son entered the quarrying business. They were already trucking material in 1934 but the opportunity of buying a crushing machine from the County enabled them to begin a metal contracting business until Milenko went overseas in the Second NZEF between 1943 and 1945. Contract work resumed for a number of years on his return from overseas.

As the gumfields went into gradual decline in the late 1920s through the 1930s, many families followed their footsteps, and settled on farms around Ruakaka, One Tree Point and

Takahiwai; family names recalled included Antonovich, Erceg, Papich, Pivac, Primi, Selak and Suvaljko.



*Marino Glucina –  
Whangarei (1876–1936).*

*Rear, L to R – Marino Glucina,  
Jack Simunovich, Matē Cebalo,  
unknown Glamuzina, Andrija  
Skokandich, Neda Glucina.  
Front – Matē Radich, Milenko  
Glucina, others unknown.*

SOURCE, FAMILY



# Fishing

**L**OVE of the sea is deeply embedded in the minds of Croatians settled on the shores of the Adriatic Sea. Generations of shipbuilders, seafarers, fishermen and landmen have occupied what was once Roman Dalmatia from the time

of the arrival of their ancestors in the 7th century AD. They traded around the Mediterranean and Black Seas, enriching themselves and creating a tradition which inspired the more venturesome to join mightier nations in trans-Atlantic exploration



*Viaduct Basin, Auckland,  
the fishing fleet in port.  
L to R on wharf – Steve  
Mihaljevich and Nikola Kokich.  
On launch – 'Dalmacia',  
Ivan Markovina.  
SOURCE, FAMILY*



and trade in more recent centuries. The City State of Dubrovnik led the way. By the mid 19th century Croatian seafarers had established colonies in North America – in Louisiana, California and British Columbia, following the path of individual settlers of earlier decades.

Once settled, these hardy seafaring pioneers turned to what they knew best: exploiting the oceans or cultivating and farming the land. Fishing would sustain them and a growing market would ensure success. The scale and strength of the fishing industry they created in the United States could not be matched elsewhere. The ventures in Canada were smaller; in South America it did not appear to happen; Australia's west coast saw a small industry grow in Fremantle and to a lesser degree in southern ports whereas New Zealand became a very active and relatively large industry, the main centre being Auckland.

New Zealand, a land surrounded by vast oceans, offered great opportunities. During the early gumdigging period small-scale fishing served to supplement the camp diet. Individual names appear in the records but from among early non-gumdigging arrivals emerged two notable pioneers: Romolo (Ronald) Scopinich from Losinj and Vlaho (Charlie) Zimich (from Trpanj), both of whom were employed by Masfields Mullet Cannery at Batley on the Kaipara Harbour in 1892. Scopinich became naturalised at Batley in 1894. Zimich's name is not recorded (see Scopinich).

Between 1910 and 1914 a number of diggers from Drvenik and Sučuraj were working the fields of South Kaipara Peninsula, north-west of Helensville. Two brothers from Drvenik, Tony and Barisa Antunovich, established themselves in Helensville in 1914 to fish for mullet and later flounder. In 1935 they moved to work out of Auckland (see Tony and Barisa Antunovich).

The prime mover and major influence in the Auckland industry has been Sanford Ltd ever since the company was formed in 1904. The company grew out of the early endeavours of the founder Albert Sanford whose smoked-fish ventures at Devonport, Pakatoa and Rakino Islands expanded to meet the demands of a growing city. Albert Sanford has become recognised as the father of the fishing industry in Auckland.

The decades of growth in the Auckland based industry, 1920–60, are identified with Dalmatian fishermen from Croatia. Their skills and seafaring traditions took the industry to great heights – they fished as Dalmatians and succeeded as Dalmatians.

In the 1920s and 1930s in Auckland and a number of provincial towns, the restaurant and fish retail trade – not forgetting 'fish and chip' shops, attracted many new arrivals from Dalmatia and from the declining kauri gum industry. Long hours and hard work for small returns did not deter them as they had their business, their shop and upstairs accommodation. It was the easiest and perhaps only path to follow. The wine industry had lost its appeal, its promise sapped by the prohibition movement. The dairy farming industry was still not an option for the majority. Growing fruit in Oratia and Henderson was well established in the hands of the pioneer settlers. But with Auckland's and small town populations growing, fish dealing appeared to be the best choice – catching, processing, distributing, selling fresh or prepared or exporting.

In 1923, two brothers, Matë and Ivan Yanovich, began seine

## Fishing

*Fisherman's Wharf,  
Auckland 1934.*

*L to R – Jack Viskovich, Mick  
Sisarich, Nick Kokich, Paul  
Cvitanovich, Paul Vodanovich,  
Tony Kriletich, Michael  
Marinovich – Len Jakich (basket),  
Paul Marinovich as a boy.*





## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

net fishing with their vessels *Busy Bee* and *Cobra* off the Nelson Street Wharf (SeaMart site). In the same year Sanford Limited also introduced Danish seine nets. A completely different venture was to be introduced by Fabian and Tony Petrie that is discussed in their joint biography. The same applies to Marin Devcich and Michael Marinovich in their biographies.

On a smaller scale, Oceanic Fisheries was established in 1931 as a processing plant, buying in fish from others as needed. It was operated by Visko Yurakovich, Jack and Dick Veza and Matē Yuran. With more and more boats entering the fishing fleet and three processing plants operating, Oceanic, Pearl and Waitemata, men flooded into the industry. The Depression years



Fishing vessel, 'St. Vincent' – originally built for Filip Vela and sold on to others later.

SOURCE, UNKNOWN



The 'Adriatic' was built in Wellington in 1929 and bought jointly by Vlado Nola and Ivan Sumich. On Ivan's death in 1942, Ned Nola bought the half share in the vessel. Photo taken in 1950, off Coromandel.

SOURCE, FAMILY

added urgency. Many of these men had not long married with young families to support. Fishing would be their saviour. They knew the sea, but would need to adapt to the unexpected in New Zealand waters – squalls, fickle winds, heaving ocean swells and hidden rock outcrops – all so different from the stable waters of the Adriatic with tidal movements measured in centimetres, with crystal clear waters and no currents. The boats they built echoed a land left behind – *Zora* (Dawn), *Adriatic*, *Dalmacia*, *St Vincent* and *St George* (patron saints of Podgora and Sucuraj) and *Podgora*. There were many others of a different flavour, *Zuyder Zee*, *Zealandia*, *Golden Gate*, *Tasman Star*, *Kia Ora*, *Melodeon*, *Busy Bee*, *Thistle* etc. plus the several 'Wai' boats of the Waitemata Fisheries.

Matē Paunović, a prominent industry entrepreneur, talks about that period.

I arrived in 1934 at the age of 15 and joined my uncle Mick Vela's crew on the vessel *Podgora* for six months, then I spent some time on Nick Kokich's *Dalmacia* followed by a period on the *Zealandia* owned by Mick and Ljubo Vujnovich, originally built by the brothers and Steve Mihaljevich. Mick later pulled out to build *Tasman Star* with Tony Kriletich, and at about this time *Melodeon* which was built by a German family was bought by Jack Raos, Bob Nola and Joe Duganzich. The Antunovich brothers worked the *Thistle*. The old *Busy Bee*, the original Yanovich brothers' boat, was now owned by Visko Gilich, Joe Kuljis and Jim Trubuhovich. The *St Vincent* was built by Filip Vela and Stanko Dean but the latter sold his half share to Jim Trubuhovich.

The above gives some idea of the ownership changes that dogged the industry for many years. Waitemata Fisheries remained firm with its own stable of 10 vessels.

The Dalmatian owned fishing fleet and the markets – Waitemata, Oceanic, Pearl and the Auckland Seine Boat Association – almost exclusively employed men of their own race as skippers, fishermen and knife hands in the processing plants. Some were employed on occasion by other plants, particularly Sanford Limited.

In 1935, six Dalmatian owned boats began to supply the Auckland Fishermen's Association Ltd. When they were





Seine Boat Association, Halsey Street, Viaduct Basin – The founders.

restricted to low limit catches, they rebelled and eight boat owners joined forces to found the Auckland Seine Boat Association (ASBA) in Halsey Street, Auckland. With the plant successfully established the company opened two retail outlets in Queen Street and Upper Symonds Street. Filip Vela was the prime mover in bringing together 17 shareholders, all owners or part owners of boats. The business was managed for a few years by Stephen Vella, a well-known Onehunga citizen and one time mayor of the borough, notable in lawn bowling circles. The ultimate fate of ASBA was to be bought by Jeff Brothers



Fishermen – Auckland – 1950s.

Rear – Bepo Mihaljevich, Tony Piculo, Ljubo Vujnovich.

Front, L to R – Tony Kriletich, Jim Jelich, Jerry Mihaljevich, Kleme Vela, Steve Mihaljevich, unknown – 1950.

SOURCE, PAUL MARINOVICH

Limited (JBL) in 1960 at \$20 per share after 24 years in business.

In other waters, Matē Matich started fishing in 1938 with his own boat on the Kaipara Harbour to supply his brother Visko's fish shop in Dargaville and outlets in the region. Over the same period Matē Franich fished with his sons out of Ruawai. In the 1950s Veseli (Happy) Yovich established the Hikurangi Fisheries that built up a lucrative trade in fish and crayfish tails to the United States. The company was taken over by Sanford Limited in 1988 with its main plant in Hikurangi and five depots in Northland.

Simunovich Fisheries Limited emerged as a highly successful fish export company in more recent years. The company bought the former Waitemata Fisheries site and buildings from Sanford Limited on the Viaduct Basin. Founded by Ivan Simunovich, the company grew into a large enterprise, which in 2004 fell back into Sanford Limited's hands. The original Waitemata Fisheries Limited site was once more theirs.

By 1937, 25 boats in Auckland were Dalmatian owned, with eight under the ASBA wing and the balance spread among other markets or independents. By 1939 about 70 per cent of

## Fishing



Peter Nola's fish shop, Upper Symonds Street, Auckland, 1930s.

SOURCE, FAMILY



Paško Vodanovich, fisherman – mending a net at Fisherman's Wharf.



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES



*George Devcich, Waitemata Fisheries Ltd, checking out the catch, 1950s.*

SOURCE, FAMILY

the fishing fleet and 54 of the 68 Auckland fish shops were Dalmatian owned. In New Zealand they operated at least half of the 785 fish shops.

Commercial fishing committed one to a hard life. The seine boat fleets ranged from North Cape to East Cape, remaining at sea for three to five days, sometimes longer, depending on the catch, the weather or the food and ice supply on board. Once at sea, the boat with its crew was alone, with no radiotelephone, no radar or other devices to guide them and keep them on course. The fish markets in Auckland had no means of monitoring a boat's progress, its condition or size of the catch until it tied up at the wharf. Once moored, the catch sold to the markets or to the dealers by the basket for processing and distribution, or to shopkeepers who did their own scaling, gutting and filleting at the markets before returning to their shops.

A visit to the fish markets was enlightening – a mixture of drama and comic opera. They opened before the light of day to cater for a boisterous assembly of shopkeepers, boat owners and marketers competing for supplies and jostling for a place at the cleaning benches. In the environment of their own markets, the Dalmatians went about their business with gusto, demanding, calling, cursing, teasing, laughing – enjoying an hour or two of bargaining and humour, rubbing shoulders with friends, exchanging words and renewing the comradeship that they so nurtured on the gumfields. There was a special character to the occasion that added flavour to their hard working lives and made up for the stresses of business and raising families. Their presence gave the market a distinct and colourful flavour. The wharves, the trucking bays at Turners and Growers and Radalys, the market floor and the streets reflected the



*Fisherman's Wharf – Viaduct Basin, 1940s–1950s.*

SOURCE, AUTHOR



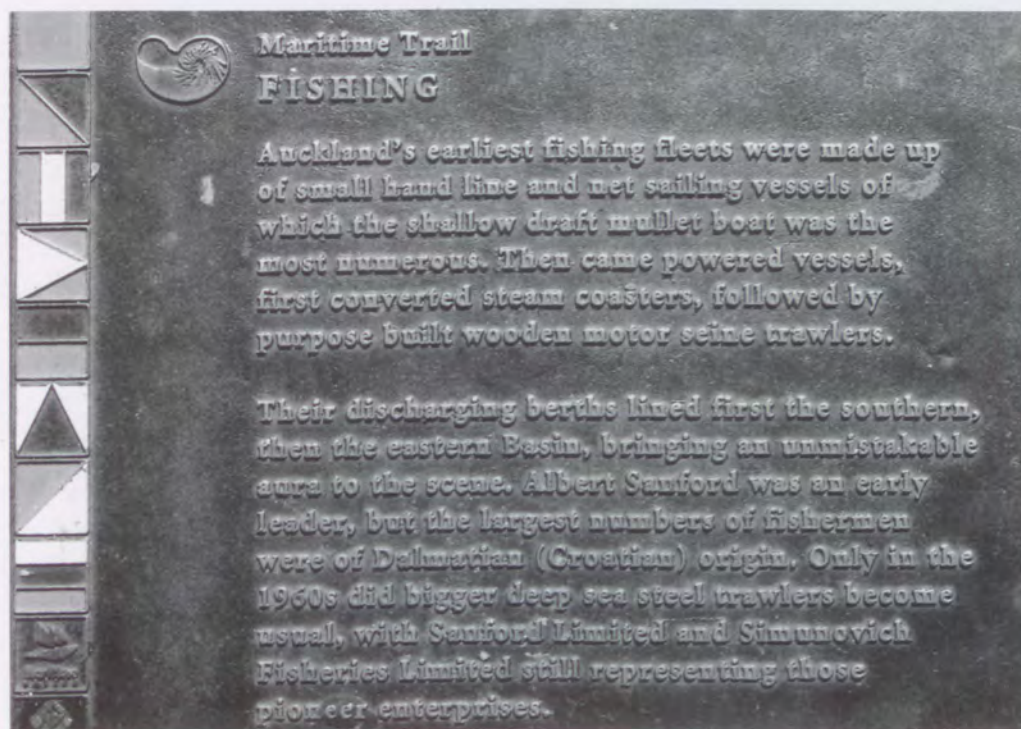
cosmopolitan makeup of Auckland's growing population. Here they mingled – the Colonials, Dalmatians, Chinese, Indians and other races, trading on equal terms.

All this changed after 1960, the year that Sanford Limited bought Waitemata Fisheries and JBL bought ASBA. Men took opportunity to retire or move out of the industry. Those young enough continued working for new masters both at sea and in the markets. Some enterprising individuals struck out on their own. An instance was the Jurie Fishing Co. Limited, based in Wellington but working out of the Chatham Islands (see Jim Jurie). Another, Henderson Distributors Limited, evolved from the partnership of Vlaho (Wally) Cibilic and Frank Bakarich merging with Jack Barbarich's Northern Poultry Supplies Limited in 1965. Matē Paunovic joined the company as plant manager. Rapid growth led to the launching of a public company in 1963 with a capital of £200,000. Fletchers bought 20 per cent of the shares and joined the board of the new renamed company, Marine Packers and Exporters Limited; the company traded successfully, leading to Fletchers gradually taking total control.

In 1968 the company was wound up and the fleet of three steel hulled trawlers, *Marine Star*, *Marine Maid* and *Marine Princess* were sold to Wattie's Industries Limited.

The tough hard-working Dalmatian fishermen who were at the core of Auckland's fishing industry for several decades earned that livelihood in small wooden boats ranging over the Kaipara Harbour, the Hauraki Gulf and the eastern coastal reaches of the Auckland Province. Their successors work in the comfort of their large, well-equipped trawlers or in the offices and boardrooms of their companies. They are the inheritors of the enterprise and industry of the pioneer Dalmatian fishermen – Simunovich Fisheries Limited (recently acquired by Sanford Limited), Talleys in Motueka, Vela Brothers in Hamilton, Anton Seafood's and Westpac Mussel Distributors Limited, both of Auckland.

The only permanent memorial for those hardy, enterprising fishermen who pioneered the industry, is a small bronze plaque set in the footpath outside Simunovich Fisheries Ltd in Market Place, Viaduct Basin, Auckland.



Memorial to Dalmatian fishermen set in the pavement outside Simunovich Fisheries, Viaduct Basin.

PHOTO, BEN HOLWERDA



## Romolo (Ronald) Scopinich (1841–1919)

PIONEER fishermen, Masfield brothers built a fish-canning factory at Batley on the Kaipara Harbour in 1886. It is unlikely that any Croatians were fishing on the Kaipara Harbour at that time but, in 1892, two or more were employed at Masfield's mullet cannery. The fact that Romolo (Ronald) Scopinich was naturalised at Batley in 1894 is proof enough.

Vlaho (Charlie Zimich) was with him but never took up citizenship. Scopinich claimed to have fought in the American Civil War (1861–65). In 1863 he went forth to the South Pacific on an American sailing ship and deserted on Great Barrier Island near Auckland where he was employed milling kauri timber. Scopinich appears to have been the driving force when he took



*Mullet Cannery, Batley,  
Kaipara Harbour, 1899.  
'Zealandia Canning Co. Ltd.'*  
SOURCE, MRS M. VILICICH



the decision to open his own cannery at Batley in about 1896 – the Zealandia Canning Company. From the 1890s on, Croatian gumdiggers plying the Kaipara Harbour would have been familiar with the cannery. In 1900 it is recorded that he employed Daniel Barach (Novi Vinodol), Ante Tomich (Čara) and Miho Vilicich (Trpanj) among others. Scopinich's cannery was one of four on the harbour – two at Batley, one at Helensville and one at Ruawai. It is believed that the government encouraged the industry with export subsidies.

In 1899, the Croatian language newspaper *Bratska Sloga* (Auckland) noted the cannery's existence and wished it every success. Ivo Šegetin (Trpanj) reported to John Totich in later years praising the company's efforts in 1899. Time, however, took its toll. The harbour mullet catch was diminishing.

The four canneries and numerous independent fishing boats had depleted stocks so much that the canneries closed down one by one, switching to fruit canning in a couple of cases. Scopinich retired in 1905, and the plant continued under the direction of Miho Vilicich until 1914, when it too closed. Matē Sunde of Te Kopuru mentioned how he had contracted to demolish the building in 1914 for the value of the salvageable material.

Scopinich, originally from Lošinj at the head of the Adriatic Sea, retired in Batley and died there in 1919. Zimich in later years managed the Thistle Hotel in Darby Street, Auckland.

Barisa Antunovich's recollections of meeting Scopinich at Batley are of a solidly built man who had worked as a bushman, then a spell on the gumfields before gravitating to the Kaipara Harbour.

Romolo (Ronald) Scopinich  
(1841–1919)



*Miho Vilicich, employed by  
Zealandia Canning Co. Ltd,  
Batley, and his wife.*



## Tony Antunovich (1889–1953) and Barisa (Bob) Antunovich (1892–??)

THE two brothers from Drvenik arrived in 1908 and 1909 respectively. They laboured on the gumfields of the South Kaipara peninsula, and on road and railway works, saving enough to afford their first fishing boat, the *Rata*, on Kaipara Harbour in 1914. They fished initially for the Masefield brothers of Maungaturoto who operated a mullet cannery at Batley close to Scopinich's plant. Working with set nets they could catch between 1500 to 2000 dozen mullet per week, receiving about 3c per dozen. As the mullet catches diminished the canneries closed down one by one. The brothers, financially solvent, each bought a 32-ft (about 10-m) fishing vessel – the *Star* and the

*Mascot*. They continued fishing out of Helensville but switched to flounder which were sold to Sanford Ltd in Auckland in the early 1920s, receiving sixpence (5 cents) per dozen for small flounder and 9 pence (7.5 cents) for large flounder.

The brothers were based in Helensville for 21 years (1914–35) as independent fishermen, before they decided to move their operations to Auckland to join the growing fraternity of Dalmatian fishermen. In later years when Tony and his son Tony were fishing on the Manukau Harbour in their boat, the *Thistle*, they were both tragically drowned crossing the bar when the boat foundered.



*Antunovichs and others from Drvenik.*

*Rear L to R – Ivan Antunovich, David (Vid) Antunovich, Tony Ivceovich (Snr), Tony Antunovich, not known, Ante Pervan, George Antunovich.*

*Front L to R – Jack Antunovich, Steve Antunovich, Barisa (Bob) Antunovich, Mick Ivceovich.*



## Marijan (Marin) Devcich (1879–1953)

**M**ARIN was one of four brothers and a sister who settled in New Zealand in the first decade of the 1900s. They were Simun, Nikola, Grgo, Marin and Marē (Mrs Stephen Yelas). Marin arrived from Podgora during the exodus from the village that began in 1896. His movements during his first five years in the country suggest that he worked around the

Coromandel gumfields with his brothers until they finally settled at Puriri and Kaueranga. Marin's decision to return to Podgora in 1902 was most probably the result of pressure from the Austro-Hungarian consul in Auckland who demanded that Austrian subjects of military age should return to their country to complete their service. It was implied that their families



Marijan (Marin) Devcich  
(1879–1953)



*Marin Devcich, founder of  
Waitemata Fisheries, Auckland.*

*Hauraki Fish shop and  
restaurant, Hamilton, 1930s.  
Mrs. A. Devcich at counter.  
SOURCE, FAMILY*



might be penalised in some way if they refused to do so.

Marin Devcich duly served his four years in the Austrian navy before returning to New Zealand in 1907 on his oldest brother Simun's advice and with his support. He worked in the Puriri district and in 1908 became naturalised – occupation, bushman. The four brothers were all well settled by the end of the First World War. The store in Puriri thrived under Nikola's management. Marin and Simun joined him and carried on the business of providing goods and buying kauri gum from their numerous diggers scouring the Coromandel Range. The latter two had farmed at Hikutaia before purchasing in addition a block of farmland at Puriri.

Marin meanwhile arranged for Antoinetta Lovrich to travel to New Zealand to become his wife. They were married in St Patrick's Cathedral, Auckland, in 1910. Her family had a long history in seafaring in Mali Lošinj, before settling in Podgora when she was aged 10.

In 1928, Marin Devcich sold his farm and took over the fish shop and restaurant of Emil Dean and Bob Papa in Victoria Street, Hamilton. His wife and family ran the restaurant while he invested in and operated two fishing boats based in Thames – the *Hauraki* and the *Hairini*. He drew his crews from recent arrivals from Podgora, Filip Vela, Nick Kokich, Ned Nola, Jack Vela, Vlado Nola, Nick Vela and Tony Devcich, all of whom went

on to play a major part in expanding Auckland's fishing fleet. The success of the Thames venture led Marin Devcich to transfer his operations to Auckland, setting up business on a block of land leased from the Auckland Harbour Board on Viaduct Basin. In 1935 with new processing buildings and a chiller completed, he formed Waitemata Fisheries Limited and a succession of 'Wai' fishing boats were built – *Waitemata*, *Waimana*, *Waiwera*, *Waikawa* and *Waipawa*. In addition he was associated with his three brothers-in-law, Matē, Tony and Nick Lovrich, in a larger vessel, the *Aorangi*. Waitemata Fisheries Ltd thrived. Processed fish was distributed far and wide throughout Auckland and via family businesses in Hamilton and New Plymouth.

When Marin retired, his second son George took over the management of the business, while son Leo and daughters Amelia and Violet managed the 'Hauraki' fish shop and restaurant in Hamilton. By 1960, the industry in Auckland had grown to meet the demands of an increasing population. The individual boat owners were pulling out and markets were changing hands. In that year JBL bought out Auckland Seine Boat Association and Sanford Ltd acquired Waitemata Fisheries. George Devcich joined Sanford Ltd's board of directors and remained so until his retirement in 1987. He died in 1994. In the 1970s the former Devcich operation was sold by Sanford Ltd to a newly formed company, Simunovich Fisheries Limited.



## Visko Gilich (1899–1989)

**V**ISKO Gilich was born in the fishing village of Sumartin on the Island of Brač, the largest of three main islands off Croatia's central coast. Brač has contributed a relatively small number of migrants to New Zealand, the greatest numbers going to South America (Chile and Argentina) and the USA.

In Sumartin, Visko qualified as a captain serving on sailing traders designed to transport bulk wines up and down the Adriatic Coast. His seafaring skills and knowledge of the fishing industry attracted the interest of his brother-in-law, Fabian Petrie, a pioneer settler in New Zealand. Correspondence between the two tempted Visko to consider a proposition to join Fabian's fishing venture. The presence of his sister, Nina, Fabian's wife, and his brother Živko (Leo) were added inducements.

The proposition from Fabian Petrie was that Visko should join a public company being launched to exploit the sardine potential in New Zealand waters. He accepted the offer and duly arrived in 1928 to serve as a specialist advisor. Another advisor, Joe Kuljiš, arrived from the island of Vis in 1929. No sooner had both men settled than disaster struck. The launching of the enterprise was stalled by the advent of the Great Depression of 1929. There were now insufficient subscribers and the venture failed to get off the ground. Visko and Joe Kuljiš were literally left high and dry, with no work, penniless and unable to return home.

The fishing industry based in Auckland gradually expanded from the old Nelson Street wharf to the Viaduct Basin. The Yanovich brothers, also from Sumartin, were followed by other individuals in the 1920s. The presence of Visko and Joe with their skills stimulated interest among Dalmatians further

and the fishing fleet grew year by year. A surge of development, new vessels, markets, the retail trade, grew from the energy and enterprise of the Dalmatians in the pre-war and post-Second



*Jim Vrankovich,  
Visko Gilich,  
Matě Jelichich.*  
PHOTO, AUTHOR



World War years. Seafaring was a natural calling for these hardy people. They dominated the industry for over 40 years in Auckland – building and manning boats, controlling the processing and marketing of fish, and for many years with wives and families managing about 80 per cent of the retail outlets in the city.

In the early 1930s Visko owned and operated the legendary vessel *Busy Bee*. In 1936 he joined the newly formed private company, Auckland Seine Boat Association. Seventeen Dalmatian boat owners of eight boats joined the co-operative that survived until taken over by JBL Industries in 1960. It is probable that growing competition from Oceanic Fisheries (V. Yurakovich, Jack Veza and Matē Yuran, 1931), Waitemata Fisheries Ltd (M.A. Devcich, 1935) and Pearl Fisheries (Mick Marinovich, 1934) contributed to the decision to form the group, although the main competitor would have been Sanford Limited.

Visko Gilich had other claims to fame. A highly intelligent, resourceful, outgoing individual, he played a significant role in the founding years of the Yugoslav Club Inc. (established in 1930) in Auckland.

In 1935 his close friend Mark A. Marinovich was invited to form a national Tamburica Orchestra in the club. This led to the idea of a Kolo (circle dance) group being formed. Mark called on Visko to help in its creation, and this gradually evolved with the input of Kruno Marusich and Elnika Yankovich. It was first performed at the Yugoslav Ball in 1935, creating somewhat of a sensation in the Auckland media. Visko Gilich's sister, Nina (Mrs. F. Petrie), took on the task of embroidering a whole set of costumes for the dancers, in a style adopted for New Zealand performances.

During the Second World War years Visko Gilich and his compatriots saw their country overrun, destroyed and bled by external forces and internal conflicts which brought the

population to its knees and wiped out hundreds of thousands of people. The unfolding events were beyond understanding and the community became divided between those remaining loyal to the old Yugoslavia of King Peter, the emerging communist presence of Marshal Tito and the Partisans, and those who remained neutral. Divided loyalties split the clubs, families and the community up to the time when the Allies accepted Tito and his campaign, and Mihailovich, representing the Royal Government was abandoned as a collaborator of the Axis powers. Members of the Yugoslav Club, caught in the dilemma, decided to elect a new committee – a pro-Partisan committee – led by Mark A. Marinovich (president), Visko Gilich (vice president), Jim Vrankovich (treasurer) and the author as secretary. Thereafter, sometimes in alliance with other like-minded societies or acting independently, the Yugoslav Club contributed to the various aid programmes during and after the war years.

The evolution of the Club and community affairs is another subject that is discussed elsewhere. Visko, although remaining a member of the Yugoslav Club, now devoted much of his time in re-establishing his family, long separated from him. In 1944 his wife Ljubica and daughter Davorka arrived from the refugee camp at El Shatt in Egypt. His son Leo joined the family in 1954.

In his later years his sympathies and support went out to the Croatian people and their aspirations for independence. In 1973 he therefore joined the newly founded Croatian Club (1972) and for a time served on the club's supervisory committee (Nadzorni Odbor).

As a postscript, Visko's son Leo recalled that in 1943 or 1944 Visko's nets snagged the wreckage of an RNZAF aircraft in the Hauraki Gulf. He salvaged the wreckage and the pilot's body. For this he was commended, although the official acknowledgement and compliments were addressed to the Auckland Seine Boat Association.



## Matē Frankovich (1916–2004)

MATĒ was the son of Ivan and Marija Frankovich, one of five children born in New Zealand. His father Ivan was one of the five Frankovich brothers (see Frankovich) who were early winemakers, boarding house keepers and property owners. In 1921 Ivan and family returned to newborn Yugoslavia, expecting to establish themselves in a venture that would provide a reasonable livelihood. They shared these hopes with many others who rushed back to their homeland between 1919 and 1922 only to be deeply disappointed. The consequence was that a large number re-emigrated to New Zealand as permanent settlers. After nine years Matē Frankovich decided that he would return, leaving the rest of his family in the Dalmatian city of Split.

Matē returned to New Zealand in 1930 during the unstable years of the Great Depression, and worked around Auckland odd jobbing in restaurants and in the fishing industry. In 1934 he began fishing with Fabian Yukich, whom he regarded as the most knowledgeable of all the Dalmatian fishermen. In 1949 he fished for Bill Costello in Tauranga, and then Frank Marks (Yurakovich) and Clive Gaelic (Gilich). His next move was to work on the all steel trawler *Sea Ranger* for Sam (Simun) Mercep of Auckland before transferring on the vessel to Tauranga as skipper for about three years. After *Sea Ranger* was sold Matē Frankovich continued fishing out of Tauranga for a range of boat owners until his retirement in 1982.

Interviewed on 10 February 1991 he had this to say about his experience as a fisherman:

In the early days nets did not open very much. When Danish Seine nets were introduced they needed eight ropes each side set in a

diamond pattern so that as you moved forward the net closed on the catch. Some nets worked off a stationary anchor and a circular movement followed. With trawling the nets were laid to one side. A net could be 40 m wide and 9 m deep. A heavy wire rope was snaked out with a finer rope to prevent the net slipping. Trawling meant dragging for hours at a time. The wood spreader and lead weights were discarded so I used a steel plate horizontally with float up and with an increased bridle 3.6 m long doubled. It was modified further with a V opening to the net to allow it to belly and take in fish. Two trawlers with heavy weighted nets could work for hours.

*Ivan and Marija Frankovich  
and family, Whangaparaoa.  
L to R – Marija, Lucija, Zorka  
(baby), Matē, May and Ivan.*

SOURCE, WAINUI  
HISTORICAL SOCIETY





## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

Frank Marks and Bill Costello were first to stern trawl from the *Vanguard* built in Tauranga. Frank used that method for 42 years. It was a method adopted worldwide. Frank was a good skipper and out-fished all others.

The *Sea Ranger* was first skippered by Jack Anzulovich, but he could not better catches of 300–400 lbs (135–180 kg) at a time. The problem was that the boards were set for a wooden boat and these tended to push net wings too widely and they flattened out. When Matē took on the role of skipper in Tauranga it took him some months to see the problem and to correct it by repositioning the boards at the end of the nets.

In the 1930s there were no marine inspectors and many boats were substandard. Life on board was uncomfortable – no toilet, no shower, bottled gas cooking and misery when the seas were

rough. On calmer days boats would tie up together and the crews played 'briškula' (a card game) and enjoyed a beer. There was a good team spirit between the crews. If good catches were made they signalled each other and shared. They also knew a lot about the movement of the schools of fish through the year. Main catches were snapper in November, December and January and tarakihi in February, March and April, which kept them in business, but they also fished for bluenose, hoki, John dory at 180 fathoms and orange roughy at 450 fathoms.

In 1948 Matē Frankovich married Charlotte McFarland, daughter of Augustin and Sestina McFarland of Western Samoa. They had six children.

Matē Frankovich's cousin bearing the same name became a well-known solicitor in Auckland; in recent years he served as Auckland City Coroner.



Matē Frankovich – fisherman,  
Auckland and Tauranga.



# Michael Marinovich (1907–2002)

Michael Marinovich  
(1907–2002)

MICHAEL Marinovich arrived in New Zealand from Podgora in 1924, the youngest of five brothers who settled in New Zealand – Simun (Sam), Vicko (Vincent), Stipan (Steve), Ante (Tony) and Mijo (Michael). He stayed briefly with Phillip and Dick Sunde of Oratia before trying farm work, but the rural life was not to his liking. The city was for him, working in restaurants, firstly for Emil Dean and Bob Papa in Hamilton in 1925 and then for Andrija Zarnich in Pukekohe before opening his own fish shop in Jervois Road, Herne Bay, Auckland, for two years. In 1929 his wife-to-be Marē Ban arrived from Podgora and the couple married in 1930.

In 1932, Mick, as he became known, leased retail premises in Karangahape Road and named his shop Pearl Fisheries Ltd. It grew into a highly successful enterprise. To ensure continuity of supplies, he leased premises from the Auckland Harbour Board on the Viaduct Basin where he opened a fish processing and wholesale business. He bought the vessel *Santa Maria*, renamed *Ahuriri* in 1934. A new vessel, *Pearl*, was launched in 1935 followed by the *Pearlin* in 1936. Some years later, the effects of the war years and problems in the industry caused him to sell all three vessels and to deal directly with independent suppliers on a contract basis. The business continued to grow, and another Pearl Fisheries retail shop was opened at 270 Queen Street, Auckland in 1939. After 50 years in business the whole venture was sold in 1983.

Mick Marinovich would say that horses kept him in business. He became owner, trainer and breeder of a string of horses at his Takanini stables where he commuted twice daily over a period of 30 years. Horse racing held a particular attraction for

his compatriots. The gambling urge was strong among the majority 'to follow the horses'. They yielded to its excitement and 'knew they must win'.

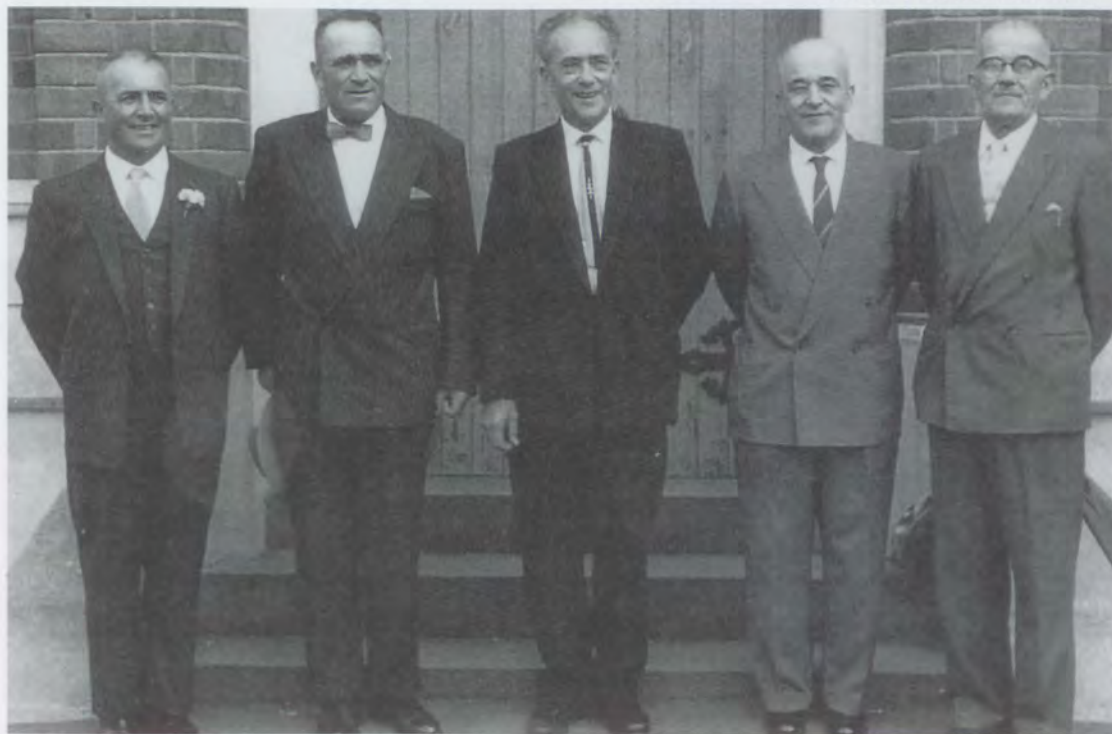
Mick's first successful horse was Hunting Bee. Ante Kosovich refers to it in his poem on 'Dalmatians Discussing Horse-racing' (Note: Nick Talenta was a barber in Victoria Street West.)

Mick Marinovich sings high praises  
In Talenta's chair a-shaving  
Hunting Bee's like a mountain lion  
well trained from head to hooves. (Trans. S.A.J.)

*The Marinovich Brothers  
– NZ settlers.*

*L to R – Mick (youngest), Ante or  
Tony, Steve, Vincent, Sam (eldest).*

SOURCE, VINKA MARINOVICH





## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

From then on he owned a series of successful horses, 20 at peak period, which brought him fame among his own people and racing circles generally. He was one of the first to make a consistent success. His special pride was to breed a winner for the 1953 Boxing Day Royal Stakes, which was raced in the presence of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II. The mare was appropriately named by his family – Royal Applause.

When Mick Marinovich eased out of the fisheries business some years ago, management passed on to his son Paul, until it sold in 1983. In common with other markets, Paul employed many fellow Dalmatians. One of these was the author's father.

Ante Kosovich, the Croatian balladeer (see Kosovich) expressed the love of racing in a lengthy poem, naming horses in the 1940s and 1950s and the many 'characters' who enjoyed their 'day at the races' at Ellerslie racecourse. Five stanzas express the air of excitement at Ellerslie and the colourful surroundings.



LEFT Mick Marinovich  
at the Viaduct Basin.  
SOURCE, PAUL MARINOVICH

RIGHT Son Paul Marinovich,  
with one of his father's racers, 1957.  
SOURCE, FAMILY

Ellerslie is beautifully adorned,  
The enclosure rimmed with rails  
To the west and stretching to the right,  
Enriched by great canopies of roses.  
Before the stand where most are seated  
Bloom beds of many coloured flowers  
Most beautiful of all, the violets  
their fragrance fills the air.  
In the paddock young horses neigh  
jockeys holding tight on reins.  
My brothers they're all well trained  
see their plaited tails in coils.  
They rear on their strong haunches  
Excited in frenzy they move  
their shiny coats groomed with care  
their animal wills proud and strong.  
Now awaiting the command to go  
Opponents eye each other  
Wondering who'll win this day  
at Ellerslie in glorious battle. (Trans. S.A.J.)





## Fabian Yukich (1910–2002)

FROM Živogošće, Dalmatia, Fabian Yukich arrived in 1926, following in the footsteps of his father. He joined Clem Jurlina at Sweetwater near Awanui and worked the gumfields, often for little gain. It was the doubly hard period of the Depression with lower gum prices, compounded by the poor state of his health. In 1933 he left Sweetwater and joined Jack Delich, an experienced fisherman who made a good living catching crayfish at Kennedy's Bay, Coromandel Peninsula. Fabian was now reunited with his first love, the sea. The two partners moved around the cray pots in a dinghy. Then they acquired an old fishing boat, *Waiheke*, and fished as far as Great Mercury Island for two years. Their final step was to move to Auckland to join the strong Dalmatian fishing fleet with their new vessel, the 41ft (12.5m) *Orion*, which they fitted with a Kelvin engine bought from the pioneer aviators' Walsh Brothers Flying School at Kohimarama. The partners prospered and commissioned the construction of the seine boat *Zora* (Dawn), one of the most modern and the envy of their compatriots.

Fabian gave up fishing in the 1960s, for a time owning a fish shop, then joining Marine Packers and Distributors Ltd in 1962 as production supervisor. In 1971 he joined Ivan Simunovich as a partner. He later sold his share to Simunovich but served as a skipper on call until 1986 when he retired permanently.



'Zora' crew.

L to R – Joe Jelichich, unknown, Fabian Yukich, Jim Delich.

SOURCE, FAMILY



The fishing boat, 'Zora'.

SOURCE, FAMILY



## Ivan Tomasevich (1897–1988)

Ivan Tomasevich was a strong willed influential figure in the Croatian/Yugoslav community from the time he arrived in New Zealand until the period following the fallout between the USSR and Marshal Tito of Yugoslavia in 1948. A highly intelligent, committed member of the Communist Party, Ivan Tomasevich never compromised on matters of ideology. He expected the same commitment from those whom he led. He was a dedicated communist, the apostle and servant of the Politburo within the Yugoslav community in New Zealand.

Ivan Tomasevich was born in the hamlet of Kosarni Dol (Kosarnido) on the Pelješac Peninsula in 1897. He completed his training as a merchant seaman in 1915 when he was conscripted to serve in the Austro-Hungarian army on the Italian front. When captured he and many other Croatian prisoners of war volunteered to serve in the Yugoslav Corps in the Allied ranks until discharged in 1920. A year later he joined the crew of the ship *Marija Makulata* and sailed for Australia where he and 11 other crew deserted in Fremantle. He drifted to Kalgoorlie to join many other compatriots engaged in cutting timber for mine props and railway sleepers. Some time later he reached Sydney and met the then consul, for the new Kingdom of Serbs, Croats and Slovenes, Neville Mayman, who took up his request to seek entry into New Zealand. In retrospect it was unusual that Mayman was able to obtain permission from the New Zealand Customs Department (then managing immigration) for Tomasevich to enter New Zealand with a view to gaining permanent residency. In Sydney also he was given John Totich's name, with the suggestion that the latter might find him a position on a sea-going vessel.

Tomasevich arrived in New Zealand in 1923 with an entry permit, but no passport, and while his status was being resolved he went north to dig gum at Waiharara. While there he wrote to John Totich, whom he regarded as a kinsman from Pelješac, introduced himself requesting his support for his residency application. The Consul for the Kingdom in Auckland, George Leon Scansie, meanwhile had warned Tomasevich that having entered without a passport and having deserted his ship, he might have to be repatriated. However, he did in fact gain residency – surprisingly.

Tomasevich and the many others who arrived in New Zealand through normal channels saw themselves as Croatian political refugees from a Serb controlled state – excluding those who went home immediately after the war. The new arrivals were more politically aware; they either supported Croatian nationalism and independence, or were ardent pro-communists. They maintained an intense interest and concern for events in their homeland. This new wave of political thinking alarmed people like John Totich, Matthew Ferri and George Scansie, who were genuinely concerned not to see the community compromised by rabid zealots of any brand. They hoped to see their people accepted by New Zealand society, to be fully integrated and to maintain a national identity socially and culturally, but not politically.

In 1925, Tomasevich married a New Zealand woman, Gladys Moynihan, and in the following year became a British subject. In 1925, also, Tomasevich made an attempt to form the Yugoslav Progressive Society with a committee consisting of earlier settlers – Ante Tomic (president), Tony Kosovich (vice-president),



I. Tomasevich (secretary) plus Marin Tomas, Ante Ivceovich and George Modrich. The society lapsed because of insufficient interest. When Consul George Scansie died in 1926, Tomasevich saw an opportunity. He advised John Totich that he would be applying for the consul's position and asked for his backing and recommendation to the New Zealand Government. A petition with 95 signatures was prepared. John Totich, already uneasy about Tomasevich politicising the community, replied that he could not support him because it would compromise his own plans. Totich of course was duly appointed with the blessing of Gordon Coates.

The failure of the Yugoslav Progressive Society made Tomasevich all the more determined to play a leading role in the 'Yugoslav' community in New Zealand. In August 1927, therefore, he called a meeting attended by 52 Auckland 'Yugoslavs' who made the decision to establish a library. Ante Kosovich was elected president, while Tomasevich was elected to the committee with several pre-1914 settlers. Tomasevich's influence was nevertheless evident in the choice of Croatian language newspapers to be subscribed to – *Novi Čovjek* (New Man), *Svet* (the World), *Nova Evropa* (New Europe), *Nova Doba* (New Age), *Borba* (the Struggle), *Radnik* (the Worker), and *Jadranska Straža* (Adriatic Sentinel) – all worker oriented socialist newspapers. Subsequent meetings of the Society attracted greater numbers of early settlers whose influence gradually displaced that of Tomasevich and his supporters. The Society drifted on with a membership of 70 to 80 members, struggling financially and divided internally. The division deepened with the arrival of Reverend Milan Pavlinovich in 1928. His influence was soon apparent. In October 1929, a special meeting attended by 45 members elected the Rev. Milan as secretary and the meeting discussed the prospect of forming a society separate from the Library. Although nothing was resolved, Tomasevich and his supporters became disillusioned while the Society drifted further into debt until August 1930, when it was agreed that the Library should be merged in the formation of the Yugoslav Club and Library (Inc.).

The new club, with its conservative policies and royalist

banner espoused by Reverend Milan Pavlinovich and many early settlers, produced an inevitable reaction. In December 1930, Tomasevich and his following of like minded people launched the Yugoslav Workers Cultural Society, a strongly left wing, pro-Croatian organisation, which set out to serve the more recent migrants. Disenchanted with the new Royal Yugoslavia, they sought fellowship in the new organisation. They were sincere, patriotic people, with a strong tendency to anti-clericalism and anti-capitalism. The underlying communist philosophy that guided the club's leadership was never openly adopted as part of the Society's policy. The formation of these two societies of opposing philosophies created divisions that weren't resolved until 1983 when their remnants merged into the Yugoslav Society (Inc.). In the meantime the community's development was neutralised and large numbers of settlers and their families were alienated.

Tomasevich was a professed communist. He and other Communist Party adherents came to the attention of the Party in Auckland in 1929. A. Eaglesham noted at the time: 'I have met several of them (Yugoslavs) and they are first class material with experience of the Yugoslav Party (in Yugoslavia) and with a very enthusiastic attitude to Communism. They can be made good use of.'

A Yugoslav section of the Party came into being with the Party laying down rules, objectives and actions that could be taken. For example, when the Yugoslav Workers Cultural Society was formed in 1930, it was agreed with the Party that the club would act as a central distribution centre for workers' literature, probably unbeknown to ordinary members. The Police Department began to take an interest, no doubt wised up by John Totich and others who were opposed to Tomasevich and his Party members. Although the Communist Party was legally free to exist and operate in New Zealand, there was concern that communist literature would generate dissension and sedition within the community and among New Zealand workers generally. In the event the Police raided Communist Party headquarters in Wellington and seized documents that established that Tomasevich was a Party member. The police



recommended that Tomasevich's naturalisation be revoked if it could be proven that he was 'disaffected and disloyal' by advocating violence and promoting ill will between different classes in society. The authorities went to extreme lengths to prove that Tomasevich was a conspirator, finally bringing him to court in 1933 to answer their allegations. As it happened there was not enough evidence for a conviction. But the Crown applied for a revocation of his naturalisation as he had been known to read communist literature and therefore he must be disloyal. In 1933 the revocation was notified.

Just before the decision was made, a Civil Liberties Union was formed, drawing on anti-war and anti-fascist groups. A Tomasevich Defence Committee followed, supported by the Party, the unions, National Council of Women and the RSA,

all of whom were worried that a citizen was being punished for holding opinions. The possible effect of this was the intimidation of all foreign born who read left wing literature, were engaged in strikes or who belonged to class-conscious organisations. The whole issue never came before Cabinet, but was dealt with by the Minister of Internal Affairs. The sequel recurred after the Labour Party had been elected in 1935 and the case was re-examined. In 1936 Ivan Tomasevich's naturalisation was reinstated.

Arising from this episode, Internal Affairs Officials suggested that a 10-year residency requirement be imposed on Yugoslavs without giving valid reason. Gordon Coates, with his special knowledge and interest in the community, berated the idea, saying that it would penalise desirable citizens without necessarily excluding undesirables.



# Nikola Skokandich (1906–93)

WHEN Nikola Skokandich from Žrnovo, Korčula Island arrived in Auckland in 1924, he felt 'lost and alone'. He observed that many young men spent their free time and their money in hotels and gambling dens in Croatian-run boarding houses. Not knowing English, they floundered around aimlessly, forgetting their homeland and families. Recognising the dilemma faced by many of his compatriots he persuaded a number of forward thinking friends that they should form an organisation to draw these 'drifters' away from the 'krčme' (dens/bars) and other doubtful places so that their moral and political security was better assured.

It is uncertain whether such an organisation eventuated. The large numbers that arrived between 1922 and 1928 did not remain in Auckland for long. It would therefore have been difficult to maintain a formal body with aims and objects in such a fluid situation. The first formal attempt in 1925, for example, failed to progress.

However, in 1930, hard on the heels of the newly founded Yugoslav Club and Library (Inc.), Nikola Skokandich, Ivan Tomasevich, Marin Ivceovich and Steve Alač founded the Yugoslav Workers' Cultural Society – the former in August, the latter in December (see Tomasevich). The two bodies were opposite in philosophy, loyalties and ideals. The Yugoslav Club, conservative and royalist, was the progeny of the earlier settlers, men who had successfully established themselves on the land (farming, orchards and vineyards, fisheries and in business), while the more recent in migrants, workers, small businessmen and others bitterly opposed the Royal Government in Yugoslavia and by inference opposed to these who gave them support in

New Zealand. Nikola Skokandich and his activist clique, being self-professed members of the Communist Party, were subjected to criticism and abuse by their more outspoken opponents. Boarding house keepers and royalist-inclined Yugoslavs spread dissension and rumours about the new society's policies.

From the beginning Nikola played an important part in the organisation's development, serving as secretary or treasurer at difficult times. In 1933, in his capacity as secretary he was delegated to attend a conference in Sydney, of Australian and New Zealand Workers' Organisations. When his ship reached Sydney, the police prevented him from landing because he was politically a suspect – so he returned to New Zealand aware that his movements were being monitored. His next step was to throw himself into organising 'workers' group in Kaitaia, Waipapakauri and Dargaville. He settled in Waipapakauri to concentrate on creating a political education cell, meeting twice weekly, and a Tamburitza orchestra which he claimed was the best, if not the only one, in New Zealand at that time. The political classes, he also claimed, generated a large number of outstanding activists who did much to promote workers' ideals in New Zealand.

In 1936, as the gumfields 'dried up', the gumdiggers and settlers in the Far North – Waipapakauri, Waiharara and Awanui areas – increasingly began to move to Auckland. The advent of the Labour Government in 1935, and the passing of the Depression, opened up work opportunities for the city-bound. They bolstered the 'workers' society and played a leading role in its evolution. The core of Communist Party members ensured that the Society observed the actions of all progressive movements throughout the world – giving moral



and practical support, for example, to the Spanish Republicans in their battle against Fascism.

When the Second World War erupted and Yugoslavia was attacked, the Society through the All-Slav Union spread its influence throughout New Zealand with considerable energy and skill. Almost everyone rose to help the National Liberation Front under Tito in war-torn Yugoslavia. In a short time a strong organisation was created with Nikola as president. Prior to this the Yugoslav Benevolent Society, successor to the earlier Yugoslav Workers Cultural Society, had been reorganised and renamed Croatian Cultural and Benevolent Society. To cope with the widespread community and capitalise on the underlying pan-Slavic spirit of the majority, a blanket organisation, the All-Slav-Union, came into being – which included Russian, Czech and Polish representatives. The ultimate objective was to enable aid to be sent to the war torn Slavic nations of Europe – Russia and Yugoslavia in particular.

Keen to be involved in the fight for freedom of his own nation, Nikola volunteered to join the New Zealand army, in the hope that in this way he could reach Yugoslavia and thus join the Partisans – but because of an earlier accident affecting his eyes and one ear he failed his medical test and was rejected. He restricted himself to fundraising and collecting clothing for his homeland and his own village of Žrnovo on Korčula Island.

After the war it was not easy to maintain these efforts because the Yugoslav state, although allied, was regarded as unfriendly because of its Communist government. Activities were restrained and subject to police surveillance. With many years of exhausting activity, and physical stress, Nikola took time off to recover and then in 1948 on the ship *Radnik* he returned to his homeland with his family to offer his energy and skills to rebuild 'our workers' country'.

In 1952, after a mere four years he came back to New Zealand, which suggests that he may have been disillusioned with the course of events in Yugoslavia.



## Marin Ivicovich (1901-95)

FROM Drvenik, Central Dalmatia Marin Ivicovich arrived in New Zealand in 1926, having served a term in the Yugoslav army. He first worked for Tony Ivicovich's lime works at Wellsford and later for Dick Matusich. In 1931, Marin and his brother Joe worked at John Barbarich's Bluestone Quarries Limited in Penrose, cutting and shaping kerbstones for the streets of Auckland. A staunch Croat, he believed in the philosophy of Stjepan Radich and the Croatian Peasant Party that argued the case for an autonomous Croatia within the new Yugoslav state. His personal learning's were left wing and at some time in the 1930s he joined the Communist Party's Yugoslav section in Auckland. In 1930 as a member of the newly formed Yugoslav Workers' Cultural Society, he led a delegation to Dargaville to establish a branch there, but the left wing propaganda did not persuade the solid rural Dalmatians striving to make a success on the land. When the Auckland Society evolved into the Yugoslav Benevolent Society, Marin became President. In turn this society evolved into the Croatian Cultural and Benevolent Society (CCBS) in 1937.

In the pre-Second World War years, Marin's efforts were directed towards serving the Party's objectives, on successive committees; for example, to support the victims of political oppression in Yugoslavia and the Spanish Republicans during the Spanish Civil War, 1936-39.

Soon after Yugoslavia was drawn into the Second World War, he was a delegate representing the CCBS on the Slavonic Council that was founded by a Czech, Bohuslav Pospisil, and when that lapsed due to internal dissension, Marin figured in the formation of the All-Slav-Union and its successor, Yugoslav Association,

which became a powerful influence within the community, with 17 branches throughout New Zealand raising funds, collecting clothing and sending a shipment of sheep. Funds were dispensed to help the National Liberation Army (Partisans) in Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav refugees at El Shatt in Egypt, the Kiev Hospital in the USSR and the Split Hospital in Yugoslavia.

Marin was noted for his depth of knowledge of Croatian history, culture and language. Articulate and eloquent in his native Croatian, his strong presence and powerful oratory

*Marin Ivicovich and  
Nikola Skokandich, 1931.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY





demanding attention. His reasoned arguments earned him respect. Throughout the years of conflict and dissension between opposing factions in New Zealand he was always ready to mediate but never gained the support of his more politically driven party colleagues who claimed his loyalty. However, tolerant and understanding of others' points of view he never wavered from his own political objectives. He saw Marshal Tito and his partisans as the realisation of his dreams: his homeland secure within the communist fold. That dream was, of course, shattered when Tito rejected Politburo's control

to develop his own style of communist dictatorship in 1948.

Marin Ivicovich worked within the Yugoslav Association in the post-war years, for a time informally handling consular matters on behalf of the Consul General in Sydney. It was a difficult burden for one not experienced in the details of administration and protocol required for such a role. He found the job extremely stressful.

Disagreeable as his political ambitions were to many, he was nevertheless respected by many in the community he served for so many years.



## Simun Mercep (1891–1982)

**B**ORN in Podgora on the Dalmatian coast, Simun Mercep arrived in Auckland in 1906.

Historic Podgora and much of Dalmatia were wrested

from the Venetians by the Ottoman Turks from 1499 to 1699.

The Venetian Republic then took repossession until 1797.

The records note the presence in 1620 of the Pavlicevic family,



*The marriage of Simun Mercep and Antica Vodanovich, 1926. L to R standing – Phillip Sunde, Simun Devcich, Antica Mercep, Mark Simich. Seated – Ruze Cvitanovich, Simun Mercep and Matija Devcich.*

SOURCE, FAMILY



considered to be one of the privileged families in Podgora. The Mercep families lived in Katuni near Zadvarje inland from coastal Brela. Martin Mercep moved briefly to Tučepi in 1775 before settling in Podgora where he met and married one of the Pavlic sisters (the name a shortened version of Pavlicevic).

Conditions in Dalmatia in 1906 are dealt with elsewhere, but there was sufficient cause for young men, even boys of 13 or 14 years of age, to leave their homeland in droves following the paths their fathers took in previous years. Families had been reduced to poverty, dependent almost totally on money from overseas emigrants, so there was little option but for the majority to leave, to ease their burden. The avoidance of conscription by Austria-Hungary was another factor determining the young age of those departing. On all counts for many it was a journey into exile, and for the majority there was no going back.

Simun Mercep's brother-in-law in New Zealand, Marian Kunac, lent 30 gold sovereigns to the family to enable Simun to journey to New Zealand. He followed the well-used path via Naples in Italy, to join the P & O Liner *Orsova*, transferring in Sydney for Auckland. Immediately on arrival he headed north, by rail to Helensville and by steamer to Dargaville. After a brief stay at Mangawhare camp where he was reunited with many village friends, he went by rail to Kaihu from whence he walked to Aranga with Joe Kunac. Simun recalled seeing Maori people for the first time 'digging kumara and growing maize and old ladies squatting and smoking pipes as gypsies did back home'.

Gumdigging continued for a time before he became involved in digging drains and canals on the Hauraki Plains where a large number of Croatians were moving from the depleted gumfields of the Coromandel Peninsula. In 1911 or 1912 Simun Mercep bought a small dairy farm at Patumahoe, west of Pukekohe. It was here in 1913 that he became a naturalised British subject, sealing his commitment to New Zealand and accepting exile from family and homeland. When the First World War broke out he was one of many 'alien' Croatians to volunteer for overseas service but was not called up because of government indecision, although he was, however, duly conscripted in 1918 under a government 'Manpower' scheme

which directed over 600 'alien Dalmatians' onto public works. Simun's fate was to work on the drainage of Otatau swamp near the Waikato River heads. In 1920 or 1921 he did drainage work briefly in the Waikato area, and then decided to settle on a 50-ha (125-acre) dairy farm, keen to make a success; but within two to three years the bank foreclosed for the sake of a £10 repayment he couldn't meet at that moment. His confidence shattered, he decided to forget farming and moved to Taumarunui in 1924 or 1925, to start a restaurant and fish shop.

Well settled and confidence regained, Simun Mercep, now aged 35, turned his thoughts to marriage. At that time young women coming from Dalmatia's villages, empty of suitors, were usually spoken for. If not, it was not uncommon to arrange a match through a friend. In the case of Simun, his desire was to marry a village lass from Podgora. A match was duly arranged with an exchange of letters and photographs initiated by the parents of the bride-to-be and Simun. Antica Vodanovich accepted the arrangement and came to New Zealand sight unseen. After four days' acquaintance the couple were married at St Patrick's Cathedral, Auckland in 1926.

Simun and Antica Mercep settled in Taumarunui where they raised a family of four. He became a leading citizen, taking an active part in the town's affairs and social life. His integrity and forthrightness earned him and his family considerable respect. In 1928 during the elections, he joined the Labour Party and his efforts for the Party earned him the Chairmanship of the Taumarunui District branch two years later. At this time he met Messers Savage, Fraser, Nash, Parry and other prominent Labour leaders. In 1931 he was elected chairman of the regional branch of the Labour Representative Committee. In the same year he was nominated for the Borough Council and the Hospital Board, but failed to be elected on both counts. One of the successful candidates said to him: 'Mercep, it is a pity that you were not elected. You made two mistakes, you spoke too long and you spoke the truth, which people do not want to hear.' He was disillusioned and unable to condone hypocrisy, retiring from politics to concentrate on his family and his business.

On the question of politics in Yugoslavia in his times, he was



incensed with the actions of King Alexander's dictatorship and the sufferings imposed on the Croatian people in the kingdom. The suppression of all signs of Croatian pride or nationalism led him and Nikola Mihaljevich (from Sučuraj) to plan the formation of a New Zealand branch of the Croatian Peasant Party of the assassinated Stjepan Radić (1929) and his successor Vlatko Macek. Simun Mercep as president made an announcement on 20 July 1931. A bitter exchange of correspondence between him and John Totich, Consul for Royal Yugoslavia, followed to the extent that Totich refused to process documents for Simun until pressed to do so by the London Embassy. It was unfortunate that Totich was totally absorbed with the belief that any expression of concern for Croatian rights at home was a revolutionary act, and therefore illegal and disloyal to King Alexander. However, the Croatian Peasant Party was never formally established in New Zealand and Simun in a mild about face wrote to Totich sympathising when Alexander was assassinated in 1934 – much to Totich's surprise.

During the years of the Second World War the Mercep family were heavily involved in fundraising campaigns for the Partisans, Aid to Russia, and the Homeland. Consequently when the family moved to Auckland in 1947, he and Antica joined the Yugoslav Society 'Marshal Tito' at 106 Hobson Street. The Society was linked with the All Slav Union and its successor, The Yugoslav Association, which through its many branches throughout New Zealand did an incredible job in raising funds for National Patriotic purposes. A strong communist core of membership controlled the organisation of totally dedicated men and women who sacrificed time and effort in rallying the community in support of their devastated homeland. Tito was triumphant and almost everybody accepted him as the saviour of Yugoslavia.

At the annual conference of the Yugoslav Association in December 1947, Simun Mercep was elected president and in that position he undertook to introduce Dr Grujica Zarkovic, the New Consul for the New Federated Yugoslav Republic, to other societies and communities in the Auckland Province. Dr Zarkovic was based in Sydney. He therefore entrusted Simun

with the task of welcoming the ship *Radnik* from Yugoslavia, due early in February 1948. The purpose of the visit was to repatriate men wishing to rejoin families at home and others returning for political or patriotic reasons. Prior to this funds totalling £60,000 had been raised to purchase wool, hides, machinery and live sheep, all of which were shipped on the *Radnik*.

The ship arrived on 9 February 1948, and it soon emerged that special approval for the export of a range of relief and personal goods would have to be obtained direct from the Prime Minister, The Rt. Hon. Peter Fraser. Because of illness he was out of contact. Simun Mercep was directed by his committee to go to Wellington and see what could be done. Blocked in every way, he risked a personal visit to the Prime Minister's home where sheer bravado enabled him to meet Mr Fraser, much to his anger at being approached so bluntly. Simun Mercep, drawing on their friendship and common Labour Party affiliation of the 1930s, appealed for approval of the *Radnik* venture. He said that in spite of ructions within the community, this was one situation where everyone was of one mind. Needless to say the Prime Minister approved as a gesture of support for the community's efforts for their people in Yugoslavia.

On his return to Auckland Mercep noted: 'I was received by our people like Christ on entering Jerusalem on a donkey.' The *Radnik* arrived and was moored in the stream and at 2 pm a party from the association went on board to greet the commander. A formal reception of welcome was held that evening in the city. With everybody's co-operation the ship was loaded in two days.

Simun Mercep's next step was probably ill timed. He wanted to promote a 'Dom' or 'National Centre' project. It gave his detractors the opportunity of denouncing him and his ideas – even though it had been discussed in committee a few days earlier. The Yugoslav Society 'Marshal Tito' lashed out bitterly, condemning Simun Mercep as though he had committed a crime. The conspiracy of a few party diehards in the end put him at a disadvantage – their organisation's propaganda machine, the local Croatian press and the *Napredak* in Sydney did their work efficiently. Simun Mercep, reacting to the falsehoods,

Simun Mercep  
(1891–1982)



Simun (Sam) Mercep,  
Taumarunui and Auckland.  
SOURCE, FAMILY



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

personally called a special meeting to spell his programme for a 'Dom'. The meeting was disrupted by his opponents, and ended in chaos. The Party's views prevailed.

In June 1948, the USSR broke with Tito's Yugoslavia and as Simun Mercep noted, 'Our wise men in New Zealand stuck with Russia against their own country.'

In January 1949, another ship, *The Partizanka*, on a similar mission to the Radnik, arrived in Auckland. The government had agreed on a certain quantity of goods for export but this time many people broke the law. The activities of some people drew unfortunate media attention to the vessel, and again men like Simun Mercep backed by Mark Simich and the Yugoslav Club had to plead with Government and act as guarantors for any export. After many hours of discussion a guarantee was finally signed by both societies in Auckland. The difficulties were

overcome and the ship sailed, leaving behind it a community in disarray, embittered and distrustful of its leadership.

After his experience with political elements in the community, Simun joined the Yugoslav Club and persuaded members to form The Yugoslav Dom Company, which purchased the building at 79 Hobson Street, in which the Club was housed. He was elected Chairman of Directors and remained as such until the building was sold to enable unification of Auckland's two societies in 1981, under the banner Yugoslav Society Inc., at 10-14 New North Road.

Of Simun and Antica Mercep's children, their son Ivan Mercep ONZM is a prominent New Zealand architect and a founding partner with the author and others in the successful practice JASMaD Group Ltd., Architects (today JASMAX) in Auckland.



*Aboard the 'Sea Ranger',  
Tony Gojak, Simun Mercep  
and Jack Anzulovich.*

SOURCE, FAMILY



## Dr Miroslav Crkvenac (1908–93)

**D**R MIROSLAV Crkvenac was born in Krapina, about 50 km north of Zagreb, Croatia. By profession he was a medical doctor, who had studied in Vienna and Zagreb, qualifying in 1933. He married Vjera Saban of Zagreb and they had two sons,

Mirko and Tomislav. Dr Crkvenac arrived in New Zealand in February 1939, having been appointed Jugoslaveniski Izaslanik (Yugoslav Commissioner of Immigration) to succeed Rev. Milan Pavlinovich who retired from the post in 1938 after 10 years in



*Picnic in Dargaville, 1955.  
L to R – Mark Marinkovich,  
Tony Radonich, John Totich,  
Dr. Miroslav Crkvenac,  
Nick Bakulich, Visko Matich.  
SOURCE, UNKNOWN*



New Zealand as pastor to the community, and latterly four of those years as Commissioner. The doctor's appointment was originally short term that he extended by six months, but the declaration of war intervened and he was stranded without occupation or income. In his role as Commissioner he reported directly to the Ministry of Health and Social Politics in Yugoslavia. He also wrote articles for Croatian newspapers in Yugoslavia, Canada and Australia.

Stranded in New Zealand by the war and the alienation of Yugoslavia as a pro-Axis power and with little chance of returning home, he decided that he and his family must accept the situation and remain in New Zealand at least until the war ended. He now applied to the New Zealand Medical Council for registration and the right to practise medicine. He communicated well in English and his personality was pleasant and adaptable. Sadly, political considerations ruled him out totally. He was refused registration because he did not hold citizenship and Yugoslavia was not regarded as a friendly nation, and there was no reciprocal professional agreement between New Zealand and Yugoslavia. Not one to be easily thwarted he continued to press his case for recognition through the Consul, John Totich, Catholic doctors and influential friends, most of whom were prepared to guarantee him financially and professionally.

The war in Europe meanwhile took a disastrous turn as Yugoslavia was concerned. Within days of that nation signing the Tri-Partite Act, a national uprising occurred, principally in Belgrade. The Nazis answer was to send waves of bombers to destroy the city intending to intimidate the nation – then the German war machine moved in, occupied the country, set up puppet administrations and plundered its resources.

With Yugoslavia in ruins, dismembered and silenced, it was accepted into the Allied fold. Dr Crkvenac reapplied for registration. The Medical Council granted him provisional registration and directed him immediately to take up the

position of charge doctor at Paparoa Hospital, south of Whangarei. He worked there until 1957, keeping close touch with his Dalmatian friends in Dargaville and Auckland, with both factions on left and right. His efforts at mediation, particularly between the societies in Auckland and Dargaville, never succeeded. Nevertheless he was respected and well regarded – a popular gentlemanly Croatian patriot who mingled freely with all.

Dr Crkvenac and his family left New Zealand in 1957, after an 18-year visit that was to have been a few months. He never considered returning to the new Yugoslavia under President Josip Broz 'Tito', instead he followed his ambition to practise in the field of tropical medicine in Southern Nigeria for seven years, followed by a similar stint in Nepal for five years, based in Kathmandu. In 1969 he finally settled in Harare, the capital of Zimbabwe, and practised there until 1988. He and his family finally settled in Calgary, Canada. Many of his old friends wrote to him regularly. The author did so in 1988 seeking a few details of his life after leaving New Zealand. Two paragraphs translated by the author read as follows:

I departed Yugoslavia at the end of 1938, as Immigration Commissioner in New Zealand. The war left me stranded. Our Dalmatians were good to me and to my family and I grew to like them, not only because they were Croats, but also because I admired their initiative and achievements. I saw Dalmatians as the most intelligent of the Croatian people.

There were two clubs then (in Auckland). The Yugoslav Club which didn't consider itself Croatian and didn't concern itself with Yugoslavia's politics. The Croatian Club (Croatian Cultural and Benevolent Society), however, was concerned with Pan-Slavic ideals. It was Marxist in spirit and supported Macek because he symbolised the anti greater Serbia policy of Yugoslavia.

Dr Crkvenac died in Calgary in 1993. His wife Vjera survived him until 2005.



# Fred Franich (1882–1969)

Fred Franich  
(1882–1969)

**F**RED was properly named Cvitan (Florio or Florius), an often-used name in the seaside village of Račišće on the Island of Korčula, his birthplace. He came to New Zealand, at the age of 16 in 1898. He went to the gumfields where he realised that he was gifted with great physical strength. The heavy work and never-ending drudgery strengthened his resolve and his ambition to succeed in the world of physical culture. He developed incredible muscle control and enormous strength. It was the post-Victorian era when international attention was being drawn to bodily development, personified by Bernard McFadyen, Eugene Sandow, and later Charles Atlas.

On the gumfields the unending grind in appalling conditions could only be offset on Sundays by contests of strength, athletics and traditional bowls. Many of these developing amateurs excelled in later years as wrestlers, boxers and physical culturists.

Fred Franich was one who emerged early as a mountain of strength. He was not a tall man, just short of 1.8 m (6 ft), but he was powerfully built. He became a naturalised British subject in 1905, while working as a mill-hand at Aranga, north of Dargaville.

In 1904, Franich wrestled with a well-known wrestler named Pearce, who was impressed enough to recommend him to a professional instructor. He soon proved himself to be one of the strongest and best-known amateur wrestlers of his day. That he never became a champion, it was said, was due to his stage shyness and lack of discipline. His feats of strength also attracted wide attention. In 1906 he repeated the act of Leon Stonfeld of London when he allowed an 1100-kg motor vehicle to be driven over his body while lying on a bed of nails. In another feat, he raised an 88-kg weight high above his head

with one arm. The great Franich became the toast of his compatriots on the gumfields. They followed his performances in large numbers. He toured North Auckland with William Perry and his troupe in December 1906, prior to undertaking a New Zealand wide tour of which included demonstrations at the Christchurch Exhibition.

In 1907, Ante Kosovich, the gumfields' poet, wrote his ode in praise of Fred Franich, whom he regarded as a heroic knight whose memory was worthy of great honour.

Dear gentle Lord on high today  
Here upon Dalmatia's son you gaze.  
He stands proud, a heroic figure  
Born and mothered in Račišće.  
(Trans. S.A.J.)

Kosovich sings his praises at considerable length. It was like a farewell song published by Kosovich in 1908 as Fred Franich left New Zealand to try his luck in Australia – where he appeared on stage in various acts and trials of strength. For a time he performed for Foley's circus, and performed feats of strength with another circus – Webster at Newcastle. They were described as Australian 'Sandows'.

In 1913, Fred Franich married Ruth Zillah Kent (1891–1981), and they had four children. Soon after marriage Fred and his wife settled in Broken Hill where he and a younger brother, Ivan, worked in the mines. They also managed a small boarding house. It appears that he had put aside his career as a strongman to maintain his family and to encourage his children to become well educated. In this he succeeded admirably.



*Fred Franich – strongman.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY



# Matthew Alach



MATTHEW ALACH.  
THE MUSCULAR PHENOMENON

*Matthew Alach.*

**B**ORN in Drvenik, Central Dalmatia, little is known about Matthew Alach's early life, but it is certain that he was inspired by the several well-known physical culturists of the first decades of the 20th century. Many of his compatriots took pride in developing their physiques on the gumfields. Trials of strength, wrestling, weightlifting and physical exercise were outlets for their need to excel. Outstanding among these was Fred Franich. Matthew Alach went further in his search for perfection. He developed a philosophy expressed in a booklet published in 1939. In the last paragraph he states:

Before we can hope to improve our physical or health standard, we must free ourselves or free our minds from the belief in disease, and realise the truth that our health or physical fitness depends entirely upon the understanding and practice of certain fundamental bio-chemical principles of our organic life.

Matthew Alach married a New Zealand woman but information about his family and his latter days is not recorded, nor did any of his compatriots have much to add beyond their awareness of his life as a physical culturist.

John Lesnie (1914–2003), a friend of the author, was a 'disciple' of Alach. He recalls the latter in the following paragraphs.

Writing about Matthew Alach is writing about a remarkable man. I was introduced to him, I think in 1938, at his professional rooms in Shortland Street. My first impression was overwhelming. I gaped in disbelief at his magnificent musculature and his control of it. I decided to attend on a regular basis of three times weekly.

He spoke softly and explained every aspect of his physical culture methods. I particularly admired his philosophy of life.

First, like me, he had divorced himself entirely from organised religion. He believed 'Health' was 'Function'. Function could be efficient or deficient. He claimed that efficient function was dependent on four fundamental principles that are: muscular activity, respiration, nutrition and elimination of the waste products. Repeatedly he would say to clients 'there is no disease, there is only "lack of function"'. No matter what problem clients had, he would teach them how to breathe correctly. He would point out that breathing was the result of muscular activity. His methods were based on biology and not as practised by orthodox medicine.

I came to admire his gentle manner and rational attitude to life. He actually was for a short time a member of the Rationalist Society but resigned, as I did, because they did not act rationally with their bodies. I became so attached to his philosophy that I regarded him with more respect than I had for my father.

Although he would have been referred to at that time as a 'Dally', he had mastered the English language and spoke with very little 'Dally' accent.

He hired halls and gave addresses on his methods. I joined him on the stage and we demonstrated the exercises followed by question time.

I regularly attended his studio for over twelve years. I have now had over 50 years to practise and evaluate his methods and have come to totally accept every aspect, had I not had his influence I could never have survived to my present age.

I went through 40 years as a photographer with no health problems. I regularly performed a routine of exercise six times a week. If I were religious I might give a biblical quote – 'By their fruits shall ye know them'.

It is a sad fact that when I 'go' Matthew's ideals will go with me. Technology has done nothing to improve world health. At present half the world is sick and the other half has something wrong with it.



# Sports

## Early years

Organised sport had little chance of developing in Dalmatia during the centuries of foreign domination. The few city schools were only for the privileged. A vacuum of neglect and ignorance denied the village and rural population any form of intellectual or physical advancement. The unstable decades of the monarchy between 1918 and 1941 saw a structured system of education introduced, but conditions changed little for the working classes and the rural population. The towns and cities may have fared better with their stratified sports bodies and gymnastic societies. The Sokol movement was the best-organised example. For the majority, physical recreation and organised sporting activity were luxuries beyond reach and it remained so until the formation of the Yugoslav Federal Republic after the Second World War.

Bowed by a system of political and economic oppression, generations of villagers found solace in their religious beliefs and in the festivities of the community. On a casual basis a form of bowls, common to many Mediterranean countries, was played.

Using rounded stones, the men pitched these along the uneven surface of the village square. The game required boisterous participation, and the rules were simple and easily bent to satisfy the players. Wherever Dalmatians ultimately settled, 'Dalmatian bowls' were played within their circle. In New Zealand, the game was played with equal enthusiasm on rough earth pitches formed between rows of shanties in the gum camps of North Auckland. The taunting and cheering against a background of endless conversation and laughter would have echoed strangely across the silent landscape during their times of relaxation. For the diggers, the game was a small reminder of a village left behind. Through it their spirits were revived and the hurt of separation from family and home softened.

During the early New Zealand decades, gumdiggers sharpened their bowling skills to a degree which enabled them in later years to become masters of the more polished 'English style' game. After the traditional 'rough' style of play, lawn bowls could be approached with assurance. For all that, the



*Sunday Recreation – Far North.  
Tug-o-war, 1914.*

PHOTO, NORTHWOOD COLLECTION  
ALEXANDER TURNBULL LIBRARY,  
WELLINGTON, NZ REF # F29846 1/2



old style game continues to flourish in the vineyards, orchards and backyards of the Auckland Province. At the height of its popularity during the 1940s, a Dalmatian Bowling Club was formed to perpetuate a tradition that has become part of folklore in New Zealand.

So they played their cherished form of bowls and also developed an enthusiasm for bodybuilding and athletics. As an example, on 28 December 1897, a renowned troupe of Australian wrestlers came to compete at annual games in Dargaville. As the paper *Crvena Hrvatska* (Red Croatia) later reported, 'They were ready to take on all comers and several of our heroic men took up the challenge and beat them.' There is brief mention of Ivan Štula (Podaca), a boxing champion in the northern settlements in 1896 who later returned to his homeland.

In another chapter, a report about a tug-of-war contest between Dalmatian and New Zealand diggers has been quoted. Through these tentative sporting contacts Dalmatians found growing acceptance at some levels of colonial society.

*Waiharara Football team, 1915.*  
Back row, L to R – Kleme Milich,  
George Tolich, Mick Katavich,  
George Banovich, Tony Kosovich,  
L. Lucietich, Joe Kosovich.  
Middle row, L to R – Steve Babich,  
Mick Zidich, F. Hagggar, Marko  
Buljan, Joze Lubina, Marin Juretich.  
Front, L to R – A. Robertshaw,  
J. Stewart, C. Shine.

SOURCE, UNKNOWN



Independent, hard-working and solid in physique, they developed a fitness and strength that was flaunted with pride. Natural showmen, they were prepared to challenge or take on all comers in bodily feats and athletic events.

The first recorded strongman of note was Fred Franich (Racisce) who arrived in New Zealand in 1898, aged 16 years old. He was soon renowned among his compatriots for his powerful physique and feats of endurance (see Franich).

He was greatly admired by his fellows who looked up to him as an example to follow, and it was probably due to the hero worship he inspired that a physical fitness mania developed among many of his youthful gumdigging friends. From their ranks, the muscle men, wrestlers and boxers emerged. Few aspired to prominence, but a trend had been established. Tony Petrie's failed attempt to form a physical fitness club in 1919 was token evidence of this fact. Where he failed, Matthew Alach and son later succeeded with bodybuilding courses catering to the general public (see Matthew Alach). It was a period when the foundations for a more professional approach to boxing and wrestling were laid.

## 1920–1940

These were the decades of positive settlement, family formation and consolidation. Participation in sport was still foreign to Croatian families. Their prime concern was to become economically independent and to keep out of trouble. New Zealand was not yet ready to embrace them fully as fellow citizens. As a prelude to these years, Ante Kosovich's participation in an athletics sports day at Houhora in 1905, and in the formation of an almost all-Dalmatian rugby football team at Waiharara in 1915, were significant. Significant, too, was the formation of the Slavonian Football Club in Dargaville in 1915, with John Totich to the fore as organiser and captain.

A fresh foray into rugby football took place in the growing Oratia settlement in 1929, when a party of predominantly 'Yugoslav' born young men formed a team. Beginning with friendly matches they fielded a team in the fourth grade in 1933. The enthusiasm of the Oratia people for their team was well





*Oratia Football Club, 1929. Rear, L to R – Dick Sunde, two unknown, Mark Marinovich, Matē Sunde, Marijan Sunde, unknown. Centre – Fred Sunde, John Vella (Jnr), Marin Vranjes, Allan Firth, Martin Jelichich, Adam Sunde. Front – Matē Pivac, Matē Vulinovich, George Simich, Jim Krzanich, unknown.*



*Dick Fredatovich – NZ Billiards  
Champion, 1924.  
SOURCE, FAMILY*

reflected in the pages of the *Oratia Sporting Gazette* published in 1933, a one-off production, which reviewed events in the district. The livewire organiser of the team, and editor of the *Gazette*, was Mark Marinovich, who adapted to New Zealand, its people, its customs and language with little difficulty. He provided leadership in many fields of activity within the community over many years (see Mark Marinovich).

Brief mention should be made of a few notable individuals who left their mark in New Zealand's record books.

- **Bill Vella**, son of pioneer Mariano Vella, an early Plimmerton settler, earned the title of World Blade Shearing Champion between 1915 and 1917.
- **Dick Fredatovich** (Vrbanj) in 1924 won the Amateur Billiards Championship of New Zealand.



*Team 14000, 1922, Far North. Back – Ivan Pavlovich, Lui Jurlina, A. Yerkusich, J. Grubisa, Mick Kovacevich, Mate Mrsich, A. Fistonich, D. Krivich, K. Stipisich. Centre – J. Yuranovich, J. Yerkusich, Martin Nikolich, J. Baran, J. Petricevich. Front – M. Katavich, T. S. Barbarich (Capt), K. Kovacevich. SOURCE, UNKNOWN*



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

RIGHT *Ivan Devcich – Athletics Champion.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY



*Nicholas Bradanovich – all round sportsman, Sacred Heart College. All Black 1928.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY

*Yugoslav Club picnic, Pine Island, 1939. Ivan Devcich in black – winner.* SOURCE, FAMILY

- **George Modrich** (Sučuraj), in the following year, 1925, was recognised as Heavyweight Boxing Champion of New Zealand by the Boxing Council after John Heeney had vacated the title in order to box in England. Modrich failed to retain the title when he lost to a challenger in the same year. He left New Zealand to become a professional wrestler in Great Britain and Australia, where he finally became a wrestling coach. He later retired to New Zealand where he died in 1979. (See p.258.)
- Interest in rugby football lapsed among the immigrants except for the Oratia venture, but one individual must be mentioned, **Nicholas Bradanovich** (1907–61) or Brad as he was known, was the son of a migrant (of the same name) from the island of Vis. He attended Sacred Heart College in Auckland as a boarder in the years 1922–25, where he captained the First XI (cricket) and First XV (rugby). His prowess as a senior player for Marist Brothers Old Boys earned him a place in the 1928 All Blacks when he played in two tests. He gained his degree in Dentistry at Otago University B.DS in 1932 and set up practice in Pukekohe.
- **Jim Jurie** (see Jim Jurie) – Juricevich (Sučuraj) arrived in 1926 and began his boxing career in earnest in 1929 in Hamilton. He continued to fight as an amateur and took part in 36 bouts, losing only three in his six-year career.



- **Ivan Devcich** began his athletic career as a founding member of the Thames Amateur Athletic Club in 1934. He gained a reputation in middle distance races and 440-yard hurdles. In 1940 he ran second in the New Zealand Centennial Championships. In 1942 he ran second again in the same race in the Waikato sub centre tourney. Ivan Devcich retired from athletics in 1949 having accumulated several trophies and certificates during his career.
- **Joe Devcich** followed his older brother in 1937 from the same club base. He won the Public Service New Zealand title in 120 and 220-yard hurdles and participated in the provincial Championships in 1944. In 1946 he came second to Eustace for the New Zealand title. Ivan and Joe Devcich were sons of pioneer Simun Devcich who began farming in the Kaueranga Valley near Thames in 1920.
- **Frank Borić** (see Frank Borić) (Gradac) arrived in 1926, wrestled professionally between 1938 and 1954 against opponents like Ken Kenneth, F. Irvine and Tai Yates. He was popular with the public and did much to enhance the standing of his people in this country.



- **Marie Pasalich** (see Marie Pasalich-Neale). During the years of the Second World War Marie Pasalich, as a member of the Auckland University Swimming Club, won the New Zealand Breaststroke Championship in 1944. Marie was active in the Yugoslav Club as a Kolo instructor in the first phase of the Club's development.

During the mid 1940s individual players showed promise in rugby and rugby league in a number of clubs in the Auckland province. Val Fredatovich, son of the billiards champion, Dick, played rugby for an army unit while on overseas war service. In Auckland Ivan Sumich and one or two others earned a reputation in rugby league. Perhaps it was the presence of an increasing number of players in the sports fields that led Jim Jurie (boxer), Matë Pivac (bowler) and Ivan Sumich (league player) to convene a meeting that resulted in the formation of Zora Sports Club in 1945. The creation of the club was greeted enthusiastically by the young non-political generation. The club developed quickly in numbers and strength. Independent of the established social organisations, the club vowed to keep clear of 'Yugoslav community politics' at all costs, strictly maintaining a policy of non-involvement. 'ZORA' was created primarily for the benefit of the young men and women born in New Zealand during the 1920 decade. The club promoted rugby league football and basketball. Funded by membership fees, donations, raffles, socials and other activities the club maintained a strong profile for several years. At its peak in 1948, ZORA fielded league teams, Senior A, Senior B, Third grade and Second B – its strength in basketball was represented by four teams.

- Senior Reserve: Zita Sunde, Captain; Mary Modrich, Vice Captain
- Second A: Amy Letica, Captain; Trixie Marelich, Vice Captain
- Third A: Draga Curin, Captain; Eileen Raos, Vice Captain
- Second B: Names not recorded.

In March 1948, ZORA applied for elevation of their Senior First Division Competition, but this was refused even though the team had won the Stallard Cup, had finished second equal in the second round competitions, and was otherwise sound financially and administratively. The Senior A team in June 1948, which achieved considerable success, comprised the following players:

Ivan Sumich	Reg Stanicich	Bob Borich
John Matich	George Marelich	Ruben Posa
Alf Pivac	Vincent Blaskovich	Len Garelja
Roy Garea	Noel Lake	Tony Staub
	Tom Antunovich	

With one exception, all were New Zealand born.

Under the chairmanship of Jim Jurie and Bob Borich, backed by their active committees, the Club made tremendous strides. The committee in 1948 included the following:

- Bob Borich (Chairman)
- Steve Jelich (Secretary)
- Ivan Sunde (Treasurer)
- Ted Sunde ('A' Team Manager)
- Tony Babich ('B' Team Manager)
- Tony Blaskovich (Basketball Representative)
- Jim Jurie.

The keen support of the community, more than any other factor, inspired the players to excel in their sport. The games were well attended by supporters and many awards were donated to encourage the individual advancement of players. In October 1947, for example, the following awards were made:



## Rugby League

- Sportsman's Cup – donated by Jim Jurie: Roy Garea
- Most Improved Player – donated by Bob Borich: Marin Simich Jnr.
- Most Promising Player – donated by Fred Harris: J. Cunningham
- Players for Sportsmanship – donated by ZORA: Ron Milicich & Tony Blaskovich.

## Soccer

Jadran Soccer Club was formed on the initiative of Yugoslav born members of the community. In 1946 Matē Paunovic assembled a number of enthusiasts, notably Branko Paladin, Paul Jelichich, Stan Bulog, Marin Lovrin and Frank Bilcich.

Matē Paunovic was the team's first president and coach.

Two teams were fielded in the 3rd grade, but generally the Club

played inter-house games and social tournaments. It survived for two and a half years. A revival followed in 1962. Meetings were held to form the Central Soccer Club. The first president of the Club was Matē Paunovic, whose energy and commitment earned him the patronage of the Ramblers and Metro Club. The other founding members were Paul Jelichich, Steve Pervan, Davor Antunovich, Ivan Vuksich, Marin Nola and Ivan Zonich. In 1965 under the name of Central Soccer Club, the club established its headquarters at the Kiwitea Street grounds. Although founded and backed by the 'Yugoslavs' community, the teams were open to all who wished to play soccer.

## Basketball

- Most Improved Player: Mary Jelichich
- Sportsmanship – donated by M.M. Sunde: Flora Vodanovich
- Most Consistent Player – donated by J. Ross: Mary Fistonich.

In its latter stages in the late 1950s, ZORA played two senior second division league teams. Basketball enthusiasts continued to play, but as ZORA declined they transferred to the Catholic Basketball Association for another 20 years or so.

ZORA satisfied the aspirations of the young post-Second World War descendants of the gumdigging generation, but it became difficult to maintain the level of involvement indefinitely. On the credit side, ZORA's achievements encouraged sportsmanship among many who may not have found it easy to enter competitive sport.



*'ZORA' Rugby League team, 1945.*

*Back row, L to R – Clem Marinovich, (Club co-Captain), Boris Kostanich, R. Posa, Marin Simich, Mike Devcich, Noel Lake and George Dragicevich. Middle row – R. Hargrave (Snr Coach), Leo Sunde, Miro Letica, Tony Babich, Roy Garea, George Marelich (Club co-Captain), Desmond Simich. Seated – Jim Juricevich-Jurie (Chairman of Club), John Borich, Ivan Sumich (Secretary), Hubert Borich (Captain), Jack Zane (V. Capt.), Ivan Sunde (Treas.), Matē Pivac (Pres.). Floor – Tony Staub, David Juricevich (mascot), Wally Erceg.*

SOURCE, AUTHOR





*'ZORA' Yugoslav Sports Club.  
2A Basketball team, 1947, winners  
A.B.A, 2A Championships.  
Standing, L to R – Vera Sunde,  
Zita Sunde, Gloria Borich,  
Cecilia Mercep.  
Seated, L to R – Joyce Modrich,  
Milly Posa (Capt.), Amy Letica  
(Coach), Mary Modrich (V.Capt.),  
Sarah Modrich.  
Front – Alma Raos.*

## Bowling

Note has been made of the 'Dalmatian style' game played on the gumfields, where the appetite for bowling developed. Now, encouraged and heartened, Dalmatian players burst into championship class in lawn bowls, a standard that they have maintained ever since. Mark Marinovich of Oratia, who has published 575 commentaries over several years on the game in the *Western Leader*, a Henderson based newspaper, made this review available,

The Yugoslavs in Auckland started taking interest in New Zealand style bowls in about 1925, and from then on there was a steady trickle of men joining various clubs. As soon as the word spread about the game their numbers went up and they won the first recorded championship in 1941. Since they have become

highly respected in many Auckland Clubs where they have no trouble in finding playing partners because they invariably display good versatility in the game. There are many people who think that Yugoslavs are gifted in the game, but that is not necessarily so. They only work hard and keep fit. Normally their averages are comparable with all the other members in the clubs they join.

There was only one group of 'Yugoslavs' who did something right from scratch. They formed, built and paid for a club of their own, but it was really because others were not interested. This situation gradually changed and the Oratia Bowling Club came to be regarded as a good example of racial harmony. This is where Marin Simich, Matē Marinovich, Ljubo Nola, Matē Sunde, Adam Sunde, Phillip Sunde, Alick Dracevich and



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES



Matě Borich – Hamilton  
Bowling Club, 1939.  
SOURCE, FAMILY

Leo Sunde took turns with other New Zealanders in acting as presidents, and where Mark Marinovich stayed on as secretary for 30 years. It is probably the only club of its kind ever built by settlers from another country and handed over, with compliments, to be used on equal terms by the whole community.

The first to achieve national renown in Lawn Bowls was Steve Vella of Onehunga, who in 1947 won the New Zealand Singles Title in Wellington. He was born in Podgora, Dalmatia and came as a boy with his parents to settle in Oratia. He served in the First NZEF in the First World War, was a prominent businessman in the fishing industry and a leader of some distinction in the Borough of Onehunga where he served a term as Mayor. Steve Vella was followed by a long line of successful contenders.

Special note should be made of Ivan Kostanich who represented New Zealand in the 1977 Commonwealth Games in Canada, and Nick Unkovich who represented New Zealand in the 1979 World Series in Australia. Nick Unkovich was National Champion on eight occasions. Although most of the bowling activity was centred in Auckland, 'Yugoslav' bowlers' names peppered the membership of clubs throughout New Zealand. Tony Kriskovich (Novi Vinodol) is the earliest recorded, playing from 1921 to 1974 in the Te Aroha club. Steve Ozich belonged to the Henderson Bowling Club from 1926 to 1994 (see Steve Ozich).

Kaitaia, Kaikohe, Dargaville, Whangarei and many other

centres had an active group of 'Yugoslav' players, most of whom excelled in the game. In 1983 and 1984, Jack Kosovich and Ivan Brajkovich won the Gold Star badge in Kaikohe. In Dargaville the early players were Matě Peko, Jack Radich, Ivan Urlich and Jim Vodanovich.

Once a year they came together according to established custom, to play bowls, to rekindle old friendships and to relax and enjoy themselves. The annual event started some years ago at Okahu Bowling Club where Nick Unkovich once played. Then it was transferred to the new Henderson greens and club facilities.

After the 'Homeland Wars' and the break-up of Yugoslavia, things changed. The Yugoslav name was shunned and the societies, now Croatian or Dalmatian, created separate bowling fraternities – Dalmatians based at the Onehunga Bowling Club and Croatians at the Henderson Bowling Club.

As the *New Zealand Herald* noted in 1985,

Yugoslavs' figure prominently in New Zealand bowls. There is cigar-smoking Tony Govorko, singles champion in the early 1960s and still bowling (and smoking) at 72. Ivan Kostanich, Mike Martinovich, Nick Grgicevich and Lou Musin are just some of the other names. 'Yugoslavia is a poor country,' Unkovich shrugs, 'we succeed in most things. That's why we succeed in bowls.'



The following bowls honours were earned between 1947 and 1980 – proof of the above statement:

1947	Steve Vella (Onehunga)	Singles	Wellington	Won
1948	Mark Marinovich, Steve Garelja (Oratia)	Pairs	Dunedin	Won
1953	Matë Borich – Skip (Hamilton)	Fours	Auckland	Second
1955	Matë Borich – Skip (Hamilton)	Pairs	Dunedin	Won
1959	Tony Sunde, Cliff Hill, A. Sunde, Mark Marinovich (Oratia)	Fours	Wellington	Won
1960	Tony Sunde, Mark Marinovich (Oratia)	Pairs	Dunedin	Third
1961	Nick Posa, Matë Vulinovich (Oratia)	Pairs	Auckland	Won
1963	Tony Govorko (Ngongotaha)	Singles	Wellington	Won
1963	Cyril Nola (Oratia)	Singles	Wellington	Second
1969	Tony Miosich, D. Borrie, Tom Radich, Dick Milat (Ellerslie)	Fours	Auckland	Won
1971	Nick Unkovich – No. 3	Fours	Wellington	Won
1975	Nick Unkovich – Skip (Okahu Bay)	Fours	Wellington	Won
1977	I. Kostanich (Helensville)	Singles	Auckland	Won
1979	Nick Unkovich (Okahu Bay)	Singles	Wellington	Won
1979	Nick Unkovich – Skip (Okahu Bay)	Fours	Wellington	Won

## General

The foregoing review is necessarily brief and doesn't cover every person or every aspect of sporting activity. The community has moved into a new phase of integration and assimilation.

Increasing intermarriage since the 1950s means that there are many more New Zealanders of dual nationality whose names no longer reflect their Croatian origin. The author can therefore only summarise and list those names known to him or those drawn to his attention. Taken in alphabetical order:

- **Vernon Bakalich** (New Zealand born), Pukekohe – played rugby league through the 40s and 50s. Between 1953 and 1958 inclusive, he played for the New Zealand Kiwis in all test matches against Australia, England and France.
- **George Stephen Borich** (New Zealand born), Auckland – (1927 to 1982), co-founder and director of Vuksich and Borich Ltd, won the welterweight wrestling title in 1948. His continued success earned him a place as a New Zealand representative at the Commonwealth Games in 1950. In the same year he won the Auckland title and was runner-up in the New Zealand Championships.
- **Vlaho Wally Cibilic** (born in Duba, Pelješac Peninsula), of Henderson achieved early success in the game of draughts

or checkers. He won the Auckland championship in 1950 and was runner-up in 1951.



- **Albert Hrstich** of Henderson, son of First World War veteran George Hrstich, also achieved outstanding success in draughts or checkers. Over a period of 20 years he was New Zealand Champion seven times between 1965 and 1984.
- **Dick Hrstich** (Drasnice) of Wellington was four-time amateur heavyweight wrestling champion and twice light heavyweight champion. He left New Zealand to wrestle in the United States where he retired.

## Sports



*George Stephen Borich – wrestler and founding partner of Vuksich & Borich NZ Ltd – civil engineering contractors.*

*Vlaho (Wally) Cibilič (1923–1993). Far right – Draughts champion, Life member of the Yugoslav Society, 1990.*

SOURCE, W. CIBILIC



- **Anthony P. Kriletich** (New Zealand born) of Auckland began his career playing for the Marist Old Boys. He played rugby league for the club for 16 years, during which time he was selected for the New Zealand Kiwis between 1967 and 1972 inclusive, against Australia, England and France. He was Vice Captain of the 1971 touring team and retired in 1974 after playing in 22 consecutive tests as a 'Kiwi'.



*George Modrich.*

- **Ivan Rosandich** of Auckland, a well-known New Zealand shearing champion. He went to England in 1979 to win the British Open Shearing Championship at the Royal Show. In New Zealand he won the Golden Shears Trophy in 1981 and the National Lamb Shearing Championship in 1983. For several years Ivan has competed at local shows throughout New Zealand.
- **George Stankovich** of Auckland held the New Zealand heavyweight boxing title in 1979 and was a member of the New Zealand squad at the Commonwealth Games at Edmonton in 1986. His brother Andrew was a middleweight contender.
- **Roger Sumich** of Oratia won the Bronze medal in the road cycling event at the Commonwealth Games in Brisbane in 1982, and was a member of the New Zealand cycling team at the Olympic Games in Los Angeles in 1984.
- **Ester Ujdur** (Makarska, Croatia) then Ester Paunovic, achieved fame in Yugoslavia as diving champion in 1952, 1953 and 1955. She emigrated to New Zealand, married Simun Ujdur of Henderson and resumed her diving career, winning the New Zealand title in 1958.
- **Ivan M. Vodanovich** (New Zealand born) of Wellington played rugby in Taumarunui between 1947 and 1949, before moving to Wellington to join Marist Old Boys. He played in the seniors and became a Wellington representative between 1952 and 1960 and then North Island representative in 1955, 1957, 1959 and 1960. The peak of his career was to be selected as an All Black in 1955. In 1966 he was appointed North Island selector, then 1967 to 1974, New Zealand selector. Since retiring from active play he has served continuously on the New Zealand Rugby Council Executive and was New Zealand member of the International Rugby Board in 1979. In 1970 he was Assistant Manager and Coach of the All Blacks South African Tour.



- **Ray Vuksich** (1925–96) of Auckland QSM (1988) and Order of (former) Yugoslavia – Gold Star (1983). Ray arrived with his parents from Kokorić near Vrgorac at the age of three and a half. A keen football player for much of his life, he came to prominence as a Poverty Bay representative. Between 1947 and 1953 he was a stalwart of the ZORA sports club, where he played rugby league. In the 1970s he was elected as Manager of the Waitemata Rugby Football Club in Henderson and took a team on a playing tour of Europe in 1975 – en route returning a visit to New Zealand by the Rumanian team. He was then invited to join the New Zealand Barbarian Rugby Football Club, an honour shared with several other colleagues of Croatian extraction. Between 1978 and 1986 Ray Vuksich organised rugby tours of Europe by teams of

New Zealand 'Yugoslavs' – playing in former Yugoslavia and other European nations.

The 'Dally All Blacks', as they were aptly named, were restricted to New Zealanders of 'Yugoslav' birth or descent. Ray's efforts in promoting these tours and hosting return visits of various national sports teams from former Yugoslavia earned him the recognition of the Yugoslav Government. As an example of his generosity and his affection for his birthplace, he sealed, at his own expense, about 3 km of roadway from his family village to the main highway. For his great contribution to relations between New Zealand and former Yugoslavia he was honoured with a Queen's Service Medal in the New Years Honours List in 1988.



## Sports

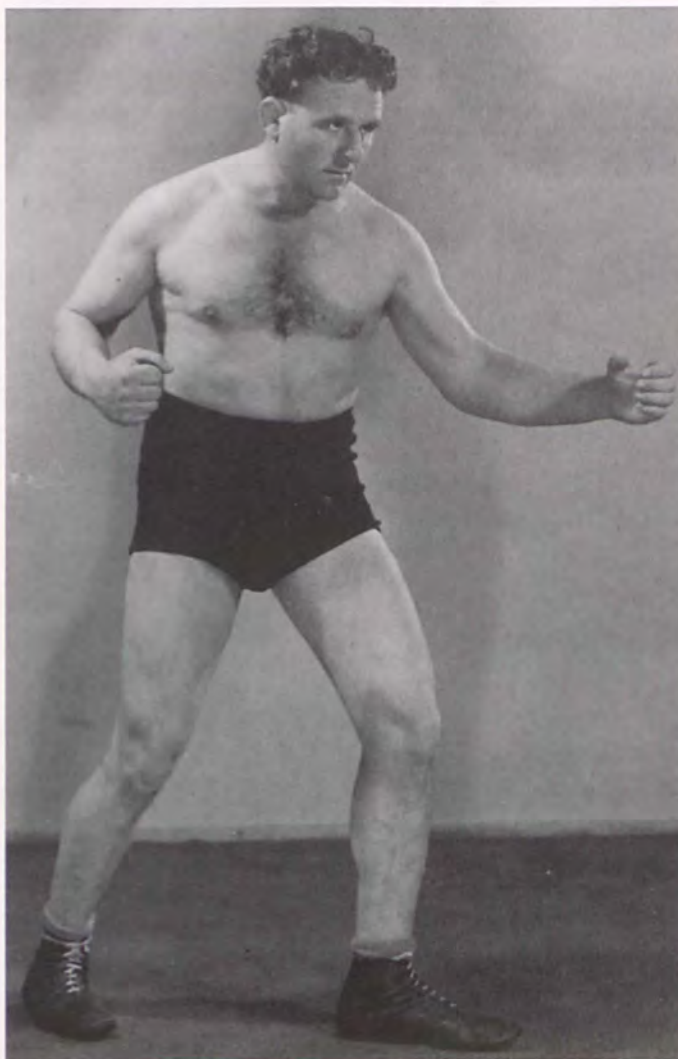


*Ray (Rade) Vuksich, QSM 1988.  
Sportsman and Promoter,  
founding partner of Vuksich  
& Borich NZ Ltd – civil  
engineering contractors.*

*NZ 'Yugoslav' Rugby team,  
tour of Yugoslavia in 1978 –  
organised by Ray Vuksich.  
Welcome in Vrgorac.*



## Frank Borić (1908–75)



*Frank Borić, wrestler, later orchardist Henderson and Riverhead.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY

**F**RANK Borić from Brist, Dalmatia arrived in New Zealand in 1927. He spent a few years labouring before working at the freezing works in Auckland where he had to defend himself from fellow workers. He decided to keep fit and became interested in wrestling. He trained for the New Zealand Championships in 1936. Between 1938 and 1966 he wrestled professionally throughout New Zealand, three times in the United States and for a period in Fiji. After the Second World War he wrestled with Zorro and Ken Kenneth in the Auckland Town Hall in aid of Yugoslav Patriotic Campaigns.

In 1942 he married Zorka Barbarich and established an orchard in Lincoln Road, Henderson. In 1962, his company, F. Boric & Sons Ltd, relocated on the corner of the Main Highway and Riverhead Roads, where it continues to trade.



*Frank and Zorka Borić, summer apples, Kumeu orchard, 1950s.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY



## Jim Juricevich (Jurie) (1911–2000)

JIM Juricevich was a native of the village of Sučuraj located on a small, protected harbour on the eastern end of Hvar Island. The village's strategic location 6 km offshore from the mainland exposed it over many centuries to attacks by Venetians, Turks, pirates, and Italians and Germans during the Second World War.

The Juricevich family is one of the oldest established in Sučuraj, dating back to the early part of the 16th century. A prominent member of the clan led many battles against the Turks on the mainland during the 17th century. The title Prince Juricevich accorded him has long gone, but the family still has a presence in the village.

Jim (Jakov) Juricevich arrived in New Zealand in 1926, aged almost 16, to join fellow villagers in the Coromandel Range to dig kauri gum, an activity he detested. He was a quick learner and the English language came easily to him. Thus he gained employment as a kitchen hand at the Spa Hotel in Taupo, where after two years he became Chef.

He was a proud, very physical man – a man with a commanding presence, an ambitious man determined to succeed. The obsession with physical culture was central to many Croatians in the early decades of the 20th century and Jim was one who proved himself as a boxer very successfully. He fought several bouts in 1928 and 1929 earning him the chance to fight in the Australasian championships. He boxed on until 1935 in 36 bouts, losing only three without even hitting the floor.

In 1935 he married Olga Dean, daughter of Luka and Marē Dean, orchardists of Oratia. To meet his wife's concern he gave up boxing.

An episode in 1934 brought him into the public limelight for a period. To quote his words on the Colin Glass affair:

I had been boxing the Auckland Town Hall one night and returning to my rooms went into the back yard to hang out the washing. I noticed a man on the roof of the next-door three-storey building. I questioned him and he said he was a policeman. I found, having telephoned the Police, that the person was lying. The detectives arrived and I climbed onto the roof with Detective Whitehead to confront the man, ordering him to stop. He had a pistol. Instinctively I grabbed the gun with my left hand and hit him with my right. Glass was out cold when the fire brigade and police arrived. He was arrested, charged and goaled – but soon escaped. Picked up, he was retried and goaled for a further two years. The police awarded me with a gold watch for my efforts.



*Jim and Olga Jurie (née Dean).  
Sportsman and Promoter founder  
of Jurie Shipping Co. Ltd (1964)  
and Jurie Fisheries.*



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

When the Second World War broke out in 1939, Jim Jurie, Ned Nola and Bob Nola volunteered to serve in the army. Initially accepted, they were then discharged because Yugoslavia was likely to join the Axis powers (Germany, Italy and Japan), even though they were naturalised British subjects. When conscription was introduced later and Yugoslavia was drawn into the war as an ally in 1941, they refused to enlist. The court accepted their explanation and they were directed to essential works. Jim was appointed supervisor of 12 warehouse buildings at Sylvia Park erected for the US forces based in New Zealand during the war years.

In the post-war years 1945–49, Jim Jurie fished out of Auckland and Tauranga, and then in 1949 lured by the prospect of big hauls he moved his operations to the Chatham Islands for the next six years. He bought a former naval craft on the Auckland-Coromandel run, the *Coromel*. The big solid vessel with a 12-man crew became the launching pad of Jurie Shipping Co. Ltd, centred in Wellington. The vessel was fitted out with freezers and geared for line fishing to exploit the rich Chatham blue

cod stocks. *Coromel's* voyages ranged from 14 to 28 days. Jurie eventually had processing plants in Wairarapa and Kaikoura, Blenheim and Havelock. In Wellington the company owned and operated a wholesale market and five retail outlets. At its peak, as many as 27 boats and 200 workers kept the business humming – fishing, processing, retailing and exporting; it was a highly successful enterprise in fact.

In all his business ventures his sons were shareholders and laboured alongside their father. When Skeggs Fisheries Ltd made an offer to buy the business, the family accepted.

Jim Jurie was a keen sportsman. In 1948 he was a foundation member of the Zora Sports Club that fielded teams in the rugby league code and in women's basketball. He sponsored a tour of the Yugoslav soccer team in 1973 and was twice member of New Zealand government trade missions.

After the sale of the business he and his wife Olga built a retirement mansion at Budva, a resort on the coast of Montenegro – within reach of his birthplace Sučuraj on Hvar Island. They both died in Budva.



## Ivan Yurjević (1909–79)

**I**VAN Yurjević is worthy of mention as he was one of a few rare individuals among Croatian immigrants, in that he chose to pursue a professional career. Born in Lumbarda, situated at the eastern end of Korčula Island, a mere 6 km from Korčula City itself, Ivan and his brother Mark emigrated to New Zealand in 1924 to join their father.



*Ivan Yurjevic, 1927.*

Lumbarda, in common with many villages on the island and on the Dalmatian coast generally, has a history that reaches back to Illyrian and Greek periods of occupation. In the Slavic centuries the Croatian settlement developed skills as stonemasons and sculptors. The Korčulani (men of Korčula) in particular were specially gifted. History records the fact that during Venetian domination they were encouraged to settle in Venice and ply their trade there. In New Zealand after their struggles on the gumfields they opened up opportunities as stonemasons in Auckland City and provincial towns.

The brothers Ivan and Mark came to New Zealand seeking a livelihood and a chance to better themselves. In their first few years they worked on various jobs in the cities and on the land. With the outset of the Great Depression, their paths diverged. Ivan was employed on 'Relief Work' on several Public Works schemes, where he learnt to be a skilled chainman. Enthused by the possibilities, he took a course with the International Correspondence School, studying a range of engineering subjects that would equip him for his career. In January 1931, occupation, linesman in Wellington, he became a naturalised British subject. Citizenship as a New Zealander would advance his career and open up opportunities. He would realise his ambitions. Settled and contented, he married New Zealand born Milly Matutinovich in December 1933.

Ivan gradually progressed in the Public Works Department, where he was appointed chainman in Palmerston North in 1936 and Engineer's Assistant in 1937. In 1950 he became Senior Engineering Officer involved in a wide range of major engineering works. As engineer in charge of major protection



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES



*Ivan and Milly Yurjevic, 1952.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY

works on the Lower Manawatu River he published a paper in the 'Engineers and Assistants Association' yearbook. In 1951 he presented a paper to the New Zealand Engineers Institute, titled 'Highway Transition Curves' which was published in the Institute's Annual Journal.

Ivan Yurjević proved himself capable and dedicated. He set a course that led him to a position of great responsibility in his adopted country, New Zealand. He could look back in pride and satisfaction over the span of time extending from his youth in Lumbarda to his retirement in 1968. Even in his retirement he continued as consultant to several organisations to the time of his death in 1980.

Ivan Yurjević was held in high regard both as a person and as an engineer. He had excellent command of the English language but never forgot his native Croatian. His wife Milly passed away in 1992, survived by a daughter, Sylvia, and son, John, who followed in his father's footsteps to qualify as a civil engineer specialising in traffic planning on the staff of Whangarei City Council.



# Anthony Eugene Vodanovich (1893–1949)

**A**NTHONY was one of the numerous Vodanovich clan who came to New Zealand from Podgora. He arrived in New Zealand in 1907 with his cousin Jack, who settled in Wanganui.

One of his sisters, Darinka, Mrs N. Yovich, settled in Whangarei. Anthony Vodanovich wielded spear and spade on the gumfields for a few years, farmed briefly, and became naturalised in 1913,



1920s restaurant, Wanganui.  
Right – Jack Vodanovich.  
Left – Joe Vodanovich.  
PHOTO, G. VODANE





*Ante Eugen Vodanovich.*

*L to R – Ante and Max, Rose, Eva (née Lehrke), George (aka Vodane),  
Chiropractor.*

a labourer at Riverhead, north of Auckland. During the First World War years his ambitions led him southwards to New Plymouth to join J.V. Kurta's restaurant business, a path followed by several others from Podgora over a number of years. During his sojourn in that city he boarded with Anton Lehrke and his family, members of the numerous Polish colony in Taranaki Province. The Poles, primarily an agricultural people like the Croatians, had been migrating to New Zealand in large numbers since 1872. The other parallel was a shared Slavic origin and they were also both adherents of the Catholic faith. There were sufficient grounds to attract Anthony to Anton Lehrke's daughter, Eva Annie Lehrke, and they duly married in 1919.

After his association with J.V. Kurta was dissolved in 1924, Anthony Vodanovich and his family moved to Patea to establish a restaurant. Hardly settled, they next went to Wanganui in 1927, there operating as a bookmaker, not an unfamiliar occupation for many Croatians, particularly in small towns. The family's final move was significant and unusual. Anthony became a publican, when he took over the Federal Hotel in Wanganui and later the Masonic Hotel in Patea, where they settled and lived until 1941.

Anthony Vodanovich retired and moved to Te Kuiti where he died in 1949, survived by his sons George Vodane (died 2006), a chiropractor in Hamilton, and Vasil, a fire safety officer also in Hamilton.



## Stephen Ivan Nolan (Nola) (1893–1985)

SEVERAL families of the Nola clan from Podgora have settled in New Zealand. Stephen arrived in 1911 following in the footsteps of an older brother, Frank, who arrived in 1898. A series of labouring jobs engaged him for the first few years, before the First World War. As an alien he had to register and then be manpowered to work on drainage projects in the Rangitaiki and Bay of Plenty districts. He was registered in 1916 in Dargaville, occupation mill worker, probably working with his brother Frank. At war's end he opened a milk bar in Waitara and a restaurant in Wanganui, which was destroyed by fire in 1926. The records show that he became naturalised in 1922 – occupation, restaurant keeper.

In the first decades of the 20th century there was worldwide interest in physical culture and nutrition. Stephen Nola became an enthusiastic believer in the benefits of regular exercise and good nutrition as promoted by his many idols. He extended himself as a rower, gymnast, weightlifter and athlete, often rising to prominence in Wanganui. His enthusiasm for bodily health led him to undertake studies at Palmer College of Chiropractic at Davenport, Iowa, USA, between 1926 and 1929. He graduated and returned to New Zealand at the height of the Great Depression and boldly set up practice in Wanganui in 1929. In 1931 he married Jennie Minto, a nurse, who involved herself in Stephen's career that extended to 1972. Between 1935 and 1942 they opened a chiropractic hospital catering for seven patients, which was managed by his wife. At about this time he modified his name to Nolan.

Stephen Nolan was a unique case among early Croatian settlers who pursued education to gain a professional qualification.

Stephen and his wife were survived by two sons, John and Warren (deceased in 1995). Both became chiropractors. John now practises with his daughter, also a chiropractor.



*Stephen Nolan (Nola) – chiropractor, Wanganui.*

SOURCE, FAMILY



## Ante (Tony) Marinovich (1904–81)



*Ante (Tony) Marinovich.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY

**T**ONY, born in Podgora, was destined for the priesthood, but to his parent's disappointment and shame he decided that life as a priest was not for him. He was conscripted in the new Kingdom's army, rising to rank of Sergeant, before deciding to emigrate to New Zealand in 1925.

On arrival he worked on roading contracts around Auckland and in Hawke's Bay. In Napier, he met Alverna Koorey (originally Khouri) of Lebanese origin. A romantic liaison led to their marriage in June 1930. In February 1931, a disastrous earthquake left them homeless and destitute. Possibly at the behest of his brother Vincent, the couple went to Wellington to work briefly for him, before acquiring premises, which they converted into a successful restaurant, called the Green Parrot.

A 'Yugoslav' patriot and a mentor for many new arrivals in the city, Tony was a driving force in the establishment of the Yugoslav Club in Wellington in 1936. It was more of a meeting place, billiards, card room and bar, rather than a social club, but it met the needs of a small close-knit community in that city. Tony, meanwhile, sold the Green Parrot to Ivan Jakić (Yakich) in 1940 and after a break opened Tony's in Manners Street, which gave the family a comfortable living. The business was finally sold in 1958 when they moved to Auckland.

During the Second World War years, Tony Marinovich was an organiser of the Wellington Branch of the All Slav Union, which was based in Auckland. The 17 branches put tremendous effort into New Zealand-wide fundraising programmes

designed to assist Tito's Yugoslav Partisans and post-war reconstruction in the new Federated People's Republic of Yugoslavia. It was Tony who arranged to purchase 90 Romney ewes and 10 rams through Massey University in Palmerston North as a gift to the new nation to boost their livestock numbers. What the Association failed to do was obtain prior approval to export live animals from New Zealand. The task of obtaining that approval was given to Simun Mercep as President of the Yugoslav Association (renamed in 1947) who managed with difficulty to meet the Prime Minister, Peter Fraser on 19 January 1948, to negotiate an agreement.

In the same year, 1948, deep divisions in the community were exposed by the rift between the Cominform and Tito's Yugoslavia. In New Zealand the Yugoslav Association's executive took little account of local feelings and proceeded to pass resolutions and issue memos military style condemning Tito and Yugoslavia. Ante Marinovich and many other influential members of the Association felt shamed by the attitudes of these elements and exhorted the community to support their homeland in the face of worldwide communist led propaganda.

Outside the boundaries of business and politics, Tony Marinovich was a successful racing horse breeder and keeping a stable at Otaki. His most notable horse was Tesla.

Tony, Alverna and their four children, Len (Dr), Julie, Vinka and Zorka, settled in the Three Kings area, Auckland where they lived out their lives close to family and the wider 'Yugoslav' community.



## Luka Parun (alias Peter Louis 1908–98) and Ivan Parun (1909–95)

Luka Parun (alias Peter  
Louis 1908–98) and  
Ivan Parun (1909–95)

THE remarkable Parun brothers arrived from the village of Igrane, Dalmatia in 1926. A year on the northern gumfields, then in steady decline, convinced them that there were better ways of earning a living. They joined the growing numbers

entering the restaurant trade during the late 1920s. Wellington seemed the place to begin, but three attempts in quick succession failed. Undaunted, the brothers started a shoe repair business in 1929 at the start of the Depression, and it proved to be reasonably successful.



*Luka Parun known as Peter Louis.*



*Ivan Parun.*



Luka Parun, a man of vision and natural business acumen, wanted something bigger to appease his ambitions. By chance he realised that there was an opportunity to build a business manufacturing women's shoes. As a keen dancer he noticed that young women wore heavy shoes on the dance floor, which seemed ungainly and inelegant. He took an interest in current fashions overseas, which promoted lightweight gold and silver strap sandals. His next step was to enrol in a four-month course at the Wellington Technical Institute to learn the art of shoemaking. Skilled and energetic, he began manufacturing dance shoes for women and opened a shop in Courtenay Place, Wellington. The enterprise was an immediate success.

The next step was to persuade the bank to provide a loan of £1000 with which to begin a factory. A huge market for the style of shoe was in prospect. The shoe repair business was sold and Ivan joined his brother in the fast growing venture. By 1935, Luka, aged 27, had 300 staff in his employ and 35 retail outlets throughout New Zealand. By this time, Luka Parun assumed the alias Peter Louis for business reasons and the company was called De Luxe Shoes Ltd. He remained at the helm until his death in 1998, aged 90.

During the Second World War, De Luxe Shoes was the only business permitted by Government to manufacture women's

shoes. In his wisdom and foresight 'Peter Louis' had built up a huge stockpile of leather, which obviously helped his case with Government.

Luka and Ivan were tireless workers, committed to their vision of success for their enterprise. Luka was the business leader, the driver, a lateral thinker. He was skilled, forceful and supremely confident in his ability. As Lou Parun, Ivan's son, noted:

The overall impressions I have of my uncle are that he was a very smart guy who always did things his own way. Allied to that, my father Ivan, and my uncle were in my humble opinion two of the greatest workers I have ever seen; no doubt this was due to their Dalmatian upbringing.

The family would finally say that Luka's Achilles' heel was his passion for horse racing. At one time he owned 70 horses, and even in this sport of kings he came out a winner time and time again.

Luka married Winnie Penn in 1947 and raised three adopted children. Ivan married Peggy Pike in 1943 and raised six children. One of Ivan's sons, Onny Parun, achieved world renown as a leading tennis player representing New Zealand.

(Original notes supplied by Lou Parun, Wellington.)



## Maori and Tarara

**A** PART from periodical intertribal strife, Maori lived relatively peaceably in the islands of Aotearoa-New Zealand prior to the coming of the white man in the 19th century, a century of expansion and exploitation followed by a massive movement of peoples from the 'old world' of Europe

to lands across vast oceans. The pattern of conquest, colonisation and enslavement of indigenous races was already well established in the 18th century. Rampant imperialism in the 19th century saw Great Britain emerge as the foremost colonial power, enjoying major control of the world's resources. The British



*The Jellick (Jelicich) family, 1923.  
Far right – Mick Jelicich and wife  
seated. Rear, standing 4th from  
right – Berislav (Bert) Jelicich.  
SOURCE, MARY AUKETT (JELICK)*



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES



*Maori women and child, shaped from kauri gum – artist unknown.*

FROM Z. & M. MRKUSICH COLLECTION

PHOTO, BEN HOLWERDA

Empire funnelled raw materials, riches and skills to serve the demands of industry with little thought for the welfare of those conquered. Yet, a rare gesture by the British in New Zealand linked the Maori to the British Crown in 1840 by the Treaty of Waitangi. It was designed to ensure that Maori would continue to enjoy possession of their lands and certain resources and that they would be treated as equal partners with white colonists. Land for the Maori was the prime consideration. Jim Henderson, in his book *Asbestos Cottage*, expressed Maori sentiment thus: 'The Maori with his sense of worth and continuity, of man's spiritual bond with the land, scrupulously recited his ancestors and scorned ignorance as the feebleness of slaves.'

As it transpired, the Treaty of Waitangi was trampled underfoot. In spite of its honourable intentions, overbearing greed and ruthlessness led to the alienation of Maori land through subterfuge and confiscation. Politicians, capitalists and colonists set out to destroy and negate Maori communal land tenure and to grab their lands forcibly and unjustly. Wars between Maori and Pakeha, and the harsh attitudes of Government and the public, detribalised and marginalised Maori. Beaten but not conquered, their numbers reduced by wars and disease, they survived separated or isolated on their remaining lands.

Harsh as attitudes and conditions were through the decades of colonisation, and in spite of crises and confrontations, a ready mingling of Maori and Pakeha brought gradual acceptance of each other. The evidence is there in the numerous Anglo-Saxon-Celtic family names borne by Maori families – not forgetting those of Croatian-Dalmatian ancestry. A recent survey suggests that over 100 Maori families bear Croatian names.

Early Croatians arriving in Auckland between 1892 and 1914 to work on gumfields north of the city soon became aware of the Maori predicament as second-class citizens. Like the Croatians they had been disadvantaged by historical circumstances and left to fend for themselves in a politically and physically hostile environment. Croatians thus found ready acceptance within the Maori communal structure, which was akin to their own in their homeland. Neither was individualistic – the family, extended

family, the village community or marae, were common to both. They accepted each other unreservedly, openly and warmly.

The earliest recorded contact between the two peoples was that of Andrew Kleskovich (see Kleskovich), who was most probably the first to marry into a Maori family in 1882. After the main influx in 1892, contact increased as the men moved onto the gumfields where Maori themselves worked seasonally. A few recollections of those early chance contacts are:

- **Matē Franich** MBE – pioneer Dargaville settler who arrived in 1896 and went to Tewai to work with his friends. He saw his first Maori, panicked and ran terrified to the camp.
- **Samuel Mercep** – at Kaihu in 1907 saw his first Maori group 'digging kumara and growing maize and old ladies smoking pipes and squatting like gypsies as back home'.
- **Peter Soljak** – arrived 1903 in Dargaville, where he asked a Maori girl in broken English the way to a certain camp. She astonished him by replying in Croatian, explaining that she was married to a Dalmatian settler who was farming in the district.
- **Milka Barbarich** – of Dargaville recalled the first Maori coming by day and camping near her home. She thought they were gypsies with babies slung over their backs.

Maori soon coined the name 'Tarara' to refer to Croatians – that's how their speech sounded to them. To a much lesser degree they were called 'Otriani' (Austrians). Individuals were also dubbed with Maori versions of their names. Clem Jurlina of Sweetwater became 'Krema', Mark Vuksich, 'Rata' and (Lovre) Lawrence Petricevich as Rorana Tarara, John Totich as Te Rata Totiti.

Adjustment to the New Zealand environment and the customs of the people, particularly Maori, had to be made before social life could be enjoyed. Gradually the trends formed through individual contact, sports days and joint celebrations that became the foundations of long lasting friendship. Hospitality was natural to both peoples. As Dame Mira Szaszy (née Petricevich) noted in a talk in 1990,



'They [the Croatians] seemed to be compatible and lived more like whanau [extended family], no colour consciousness, easy to relate to, enjoying dancing and competitive sport and working alongside each other. There was wonderful goodwill between the two races.'

Peter Yelavich of Waiharara commented some years ago:

Maori people were outgoing and open in their dealings and accepted us as friends. The result was that many of our men married Maori women or co-habited. Most formal marriages were successful – others failed because the men could not tolerate the apparent primitive living conditions, little related to European ways. Even though they were favoured and respected they parted permanently.

Senka Vrbančić, writing in *Mana* (Feb-Mar 2002), noted:

Croatian men, coming from a strong patriarchal society, often imposed their cultural values on their Maori wives. The children of these unions tended to see themselves as more Croatian than Maori, but that's changed and now more are claiming a Maori identity.

The attitude of New Zealand colonists is expressed by James McIntosh in his book *The Wilds of Maori Land*, 1914:

At the 'Travellers Rest', Waipapakauri, we sent our wet clothes to the kitchen whence our wretched meal had recently emerged, and where they took a back seat from the kitchen range among the malodorous garments of Maori and Croatian gumdiggers and varied other human nondescripts always present at inns in the New Zealand back blocks. The billiard room – here, brown skinned Maoris played with dusky Croatians. Though both Maori and Croatian were spoken, the conversation was mainly conducted in broken English.

Simon Petricevich, brother of Dame Mira Szaszy, speaking to the Maori magazine *Mana*, noted:

The two groups still have much in common. We both love to eat, love to be noisy and love to entertain. Tarara are boisterous like the Maori and love to socialise. They're also just as strongly family orientated as Maori. That's one of the greatest aspects of the relationship. They have an almost identical feeling about life and death, they cry and wail the same as us. That's why Maori and Tarara got on so well. It was a lucky 'mix'.

## Maori and Tarara

*Words on a memorial sited at the entry to the former Birdwood Vineyards, Swanson – founded by S.M. Ujdar.*

### THE UNION OF TWO PEOPLE WALK UNITED BEFORE GOD

This plaque commemorates the close bonds established between MAORI and CROATIAN (Tarara, Hrvati) Forefathers, unveiled this day of 28th February 1999, by his Excellency the RT. HON. SIR MICHAEL HARDIE BOYS, ONZM, CCMG Governor General of New Zealand and DAME MIRA SZASZY (PETRICEVICH)

PROUDLY SUPPORTED BY  
TE WHANAU O WAIPAREIRA  
TRUST and the CROATIAN  
CULTURAL SOCIETY (Inc.)  
AUCKLAND

PHOTO. S.V. JELICICH





## Andrija (Andrew) Klešković (1867–1952)

ANDRIJA Klešković was naturalised in 1901 at Houhora under the assumed name of Anderson, his occupation – interpreter. He was born in the borough of Mlini, south of Dubrovnik, Croatia, the son of Andrija and Ana. On the death of Ana, Andrija Snr. married Franica Turčinović, apparently difficult and demanding, and who appears to have resented young Andrija. The resulting clash between them led to young Andrija being taken to the USA by a cousin, a priest who planned to enrol him in an American seminary to study for the priesthood. After three years there, and in his late teenage years, he fell out with the seminary and the Church. The bitterness he felt from this clash estranged him totally from his Catholic upbringing. Only in his last days was he drawn to attend Mass.

Alone and disheartened, he found his way to San Francisco, the boomtown of California, a town founded on the wealth of the gold discoveries in the Sacramento Valley in 1848. In his day, probably in the early 1880s, many of his compatriots had already settled in and around the city where they were generally referred to as Slavonians. He worked there as a cook for one of them and then on bridge construction in the Bay area, on a much earlier structure than the Golden Gate Bridge.

Arriving in New Zealand in late 1880s, he headed north of Auckland to work on the gumfields near Awanui where he helped Maori buy and sell gum, at that time a ready source of income for them and early colonists. Speaking English and Croatian, Maori would have come easily to him. He quickly

came to like these brown skinned people. He found life among them, the sharing, the humour, the mutual respect, matched his own sense of community. He became one of them, helping and advising when needed and serving as interpreter at the Maori Land Court.

His commitment to the Maori of the Far North was made complete when he met Erina (Ellen) Kaka, his Maori princess, whom he married in Kaitaia in April 1892. She was the daughter of Hohepa Te Kaka and Annette Muropo. Hohepa was a well-respected warrior of the Aupouri tribe.

Andrija and Ellen settled at Spring Camp gumfields, Waihopo, where a family of 13 children was raised. During the period he would have come into contact with many of his fellow countrymen moving north to the gumfields. Some years later, the family moved to Dargaville and then Henderson, finally settling on a farm at Taneatua near Whakatane in 1939. There he spent his days of retirement tending his vegetable garden and orchard and, with Ellen, keeping open house for their ever-growing extended family.

Andrija was a big-hearted man who earned the respect and affection of all who passed his way. A fitting tribute to Andrija and Ellen was paid in a reunion book published a few years ago: 'We also acknowledge that we are descendants of two cultures, our Croatian heritage through Andrija and our Maori heritage through Erina, without which we would not be here.'



## Lawrence Petricevich (1887–1976)

Lawrence Petricevich  
(1887–1976)

**A** NATIVE of the seaside village of Živogošće, Dalmatia, Croatia, Lawrence arrived in New Zealand in 1903.

He became a naturalised British subject in 1911 at Parengarenga in the Far North. His close friendship with northern Maori led to his marriage with Makareta Raharuhi in 1914. The couple settled in the Waihopo district, north of Awanui, centre of large numbers of gumdiggers from Dalmatia. Lawrence and Makareta had eight children. Makareta died in 1924, which meant that the children often had to fend for themselves. Times were hard with little to eat, tattered clothing and no shoes, but as Lawrence's daughter, Dame Mira Szaszy, noted in *Mana* (Feb–Mar 2002) – 'we possessed great inner strength, which came from long ago interwoven strands of several cultures, Maori, Dalmatian and Pakeha, adhering together by faith and belief in a power beyond ourselves'.

### A tribute to Lawrence

Written in October 1976 by Alan Simpson – schoolteacher at Ngataki, who interviewed Lawrence.

In 1903 a young boy of 16 left Dalmatia to find a new life hundreds of miles across the sea in New Zealand where the gumfields offered more opportunity.

On 13 September 1976, Lawrence Petricevich, 73 years later, was buried from the Ahipara Marae, a signal of honour for a European. In traditional Maori custom he was farewelled by his immediate family whilst too his wider adopted family, Te Arawa and Te Aupouri, mourned the passing of a beloved kaumatua of the north.

It is difficult for us today to imagine what the lad felt as

the ship dropped anchor in Auckland, but there would have undoubtedly have been some trepidation. He had left all his family, all the security of community, language and customs, and like so many of his countrymen, he had only courage and determination to keep up his spirits as he surveyed the scene at Waihopo and Sweetwater where he was to spend many years trying to strike it rich. Life in the gumfields was tough and

Laurence Petricevich with  
Lord and Lady Bledisloe, 1931.  
SOURCE, UNKNOWN





competitive as the spear was driven deep in the endless search. Gradually, though, his back got used to the punishment and the techniques required to dig efficiently became automatic.

Yes, Lawrence learnt the hard way, but even so there were satisfactions and joy in the toil. Sometimes around the fire at night with the billy boiling or the wine laced with water, Dalmatia was remembered in song and dance. A developing pride in simple achievements helped in the acceptance of the new country and later a real belonging to it came about as progress was made and the newcomers raised their families.

Some of the successful diggers bought land but, about 1915, Mr Petricevich established a store at Houhora, then a thriving gum township. This commercial enterprise grew to include a dancehall to cater for the hundreds of diggers. It was a centre of Dalmatian life. Later he moved further north to Te Hapua to open another store but this time the Depression years of the 30s took their toll and he was forced to return to making a living by manual labour of all kinds. This even included baking and cooking for the workers at Te Paki Station. He told me once that these journeyings in the northern gumfields with rough tracks, hostile landscapes and language difficulties generated an almost overwhelming sense of desolation in him as he tried to re-establish himself.

We know something of what he encountered in the environment. Even in 1952, on our arrival at Ngataki School, the isolation, the way things shrivelled and waned regardless of care, the almost continual wind over the narrow peninsula, the sound of both coasts never still, the way winter rain soaked in like a sponge, the constant dust in summer oozing into everything, resembled nothing in our world either. It was baffling and foreign. How did one beautify the school grounds when the dahlias, poppies and sweetpeas peeped out, seemed aghast at what they saw and then withered. The cabbages too were caricatures of their southern sisters. Old Lawrence, as we affectionately called him, sighed with us and patiently explained that we had to give before we received – the first lesson from our wise old friend. We collected seaweed, vast mountains of the stuff from the beautiful but desolate foreshore, and we were

quick to hopefully follow the horses that passed the schoolhouse. Lawrence never tired of helping us, so together we struggled and finally achieved. Lesson number 2 – vegetables of great size and variety, flowers sweet smelling and beautiful, even the grape began to bear and Lawrence smiled, nodding with delight.

We had much to learn from him in other ways too. We learned particularly from his human dignity, from his ability to develop relationships, to make the best of things, to see possibilities for happiness. We gained a respect for each other that stemmed from the community involvement we shared, for he was always around the school or close by in his home, ready to help, as when the pine trees caught on fire and he led the rush to save the school. He was a man of high intelligence with a quick wit that was never used at anyone's expense, for he was a gentle man and very affectionate.

A tremendous spirit of affection emanated strongly from the children also, who came daily to us at school even on most Saturdays and Sundays. Trusting the Pakeha teachers, making shy overtures that later extended to delightful surprises for us as excellence at school matched their charms. Lawrence was a great influence on them. He cared for people. Small children in particular reached into his heart and found there a loving reception. No wonder he was a happy man for he also had a depth of knowledge, a level of wisdom that appealed to all ages. Undoubtedly much of this stemmed from his early becoming deeply immersed in things Maori, gaining something of their unique warmth and spirituality as he learned the language and grew to understand their ways and customs.

Twenty-five years later we still remember the code of reciprocal hospitality and tribal etiquette that he introduced us to when welcoming us to Ngataki. We remember also, his many children who obviously benefited from the extended family atmosphere prevailing that so effectively reinforced their lives. We remember so much with real affection and considerable gratitude at having known Lawrence Petricevich.

Everyone who knew him will have different things to remember, of course, and many will know him almost as a father and that's how he will be best remembered by most.



# Brickmaking

Brickmaking

THE following report appeared in the paper *Zora*, on 18 July 1914.

We learn from Kamo, Whangarei, that our well-known Croatian, Mr Matě Alach, has started a brickmaking factory in company with Mr McFarlane and Mr J. Shear. As we hear it Mr Alach had many problems before he succeeded, but he believes that the factory will be very profitable. It is a private company known as the Kamo Brick, Tile and Pottery Co. Ltd. Much money has been invested in the plant and equipment that is still not fully operational, but it is expected to be so at the end of this July. After which the firing of bricks will begin and expenses can then be met.

We are proud to see our workingmen progressing in this country, and we do not boast if we say that our friend's factory is the most progressive in the district. We wish our fellow countryman well in his undertaking.

This was further reported by Luka Saric:

At 2 pm I left Whangarei for Kamo to visit Croatian workers at a brickworks. On arrival I met the manager and founder of the factory, Mr Matě Alach. On questioning him he revealed that the majority shareholding was Croatian – and similarly the workmen. At that time many were in Auckland attending a national congress.

Mr Alach received me well and gladly allowed me to inspect the plant that produced earthenware pipes and bricks. The factory is efficiently laid out and is highly successful – a large order of bricks for Mr Bray in Whangarei was in production, to be used in a new hotel.

Subsequent to this venture, Matthew Alach became a sales representative for M.L.C. Insurance, where he was honoured with a gold medal for his successful work. He is a Croatian with a Yugoslav heart and soul and as such we wish him good luck and great success in the future.

(Trans. S.A.J.)



Brickworks at Kamo, north of Whangarei.

**TREBAM** vješta čovjeka  
koji ima iskust-  
va kod tvornice opeka i raznovrst-  
nih cigla, crijepova, cijevova i.t.d.

Nadnice veoma dobre

Obratite se na

**M. Alach**

C/o Mutual Life and Citizens  
Assurance Co., Limited,

**Auckland**

Matě Alach – Advertising for staff  
for the brickworks, 1915, 'ZORA'.



# Stonemasons and others

A SIGNIFICANT measure of the European coastline of the Mediterranean Sea is formed of limestone mountains, ridges and islands created in ancient millennia of planet earth. The coastline of Croatia is part of that massive limestone formation. It was natural that Croatian occupiers from the time of their arrival in the 7th century should develop skills in shaping and handling this boundless resource to provide shelter, pave roads and create endless walls and terracing to protect vines, pastures and gardens. It was everybody's building material, used with skill and sympathy, influenced in subtle ways by the presence of the relics and remains of Greek and Roman civilisation. A tradition of fine ornamentation and sculpture flowered through from the long overlordship of the Venetian Republic, reflected in many fine buildings, churches, palaces, villas and public spaces. It was a tradition advanced by internationally recognised Croatian sculptors such as Mestrović, Rosandić and Augustinčić over the past century.

The fine quality of Dalmatian stone attracted builders from all parts of the world, particularly the stone from the quarries of Brač and Korčula Islands. From Pučiste on Brač, stone went to enhance the White House in Washington DC, the Canadian War Memorial at Vimy Ridge in France, and from other sources to countless structures and memorials throughout the world. There are reports that Korčula stone was shipped to Sydney and Melbourne in the 19th century.

Dealing with New Zealand, Žrnovo on Korčula Island is of particular interest as the primary source of stonemasons who practised their craft in New Zealand. They were the core craftsmen supported by many others from Dalmatia's islands

and Pelješac; for example, Lumbarda and Pupnat on Korčula were their equals. They left their villages in the 1920s as the industry declined, to become the backbone of the New Zealand Dalmatian involvement in stonemasonry for the next 60 years or so. In 2007, the Lavas family business established in 1927, Auckland Stonemasons Ltd, continues the tradition.

Their stoneworking compatriots from Brač Island, much fewer in number, generally settled in the Northern Wairoa districts as farmers, having played little part in the New Zealand industry. The masons from Žrnovo, many of whom had qualifications or experience on the Island of Korčula, developed a reputation for stonewalling, kerbing, paving and facework on a wide range of projects. Their abilities came to be recognised by architects, constructors and local body engineers who relied on their experience and know-how.

There were a few exceptions to the general trend. Nicholas Lipanovich (Lumbarda) for example, arrived in the year 1900. While working for Wilson's Cement works on Mahurangi Harbour in 1905, he was asked to join Bouskill's, an old established stoneworking company in Auckland. In 1907 he went to San Francisco to try his luck, but soon returned rather disillusioned with the post-earthquake (1906) situation there, and resumed work as a mason in Wellington. There he created the sculpture on the Public Trust Building. Back in Auckland, he was employed on the construction of the Ferry Building. For a short time he was joined on the job by Marin Segedin (Žrnovo), a well-known citizen of Auckland in later years. During the 1920s Nicholas Lipanovich worked on the Auckland University Arts building in Princes Street, the National Bank's



façade sculpture and the figures on the AMP building parapet. Nicholas also worked on the memorial column in the grounds of Auckland Boys Grammar School.

The earliest evidence of Dalmatian involvement in basic stone construction was recalled in recent years by Marin Glucina (Drašnice):

In 1916 I joined Ante Urlich (Drašnice) to build stone walls in the Maungatapere district near Whangarei. We were employed by farmers who provided horse and sledge with which we collected loose stones from around the farm to construct walls for 16 shillings per day. The walls were built with a 1.0 metre wide base, 0.5 metre wide top and were 1.2 metres high, generally following the contour of the land. We worked there for three years and others followed us. Previously many Korčulani worked, walling farms.

Andrew Skodandich (Žrnovo) of Ruawai worked in the Maungatapere district in 1931 where he believed that groups of men from Žrnovo had built the original walls in the early part of the century. The walls were built to a height of 1.2 m to enclose orchards and farm properties against wind, and at the same time clearing the pastures of loose rocks. He noted that in more recent decades many of these walls were ploughed under in trenches and standard fencing erected in their place.

The concentration of masons in the Penrose district was encouraged by the construction of the waterfront road, Tamaki Drive, which skirted the bays and promontories of Auckland Harbour between Judges Bay and St Heliers Bay. The construction of this road spanned the years 1926 to 1931. It was a contract that firmly established the Dalmatians in the stoneworking industry. Not only did the scheme serve as an advertisement of their expertise, but also it prompted the opening of quarries in the Mt Wellington district, to the south of Auckland. A key personality of this period was Dick Lavas (Žrnovo) who began quarrying stone in a small way in Panorama Road, Ellerslie in 1925. His main objective was to service the waterfront road project and in 1928 to cut kerbs and to crush metal for road works. Hard on his heels, John Barbarich and Jack Matutinovich (both from Zaostrog) opened the Bluestone Quarry in Penrose in 1926 also to capitalise on the waterfront road contract.

Some comment should be offered on the stone produced by these pioneering endeavours. The quality of the material extracted from the Penrose quarries could not be described as having refined aesthetic merit. Rugged, grey and cleaner than the qualities of other volcanic flows, the hardcore basalt constructions became a recognisable trademark of Dalmatian stoneworking enterprise. Much harder and denser than the indigenous limestone of Dalmatia, basalt had to be blasted, handled, spalled and broken down to useable size to meet the demanding standards of the masons. The shaped blocks required more intensive labour at all stages of production, before they could be built into place. Scoria, a product of the same ancient volcanic eruptions on the Auckland isthmus, is a coarse, porous material, burnt red-brown in colour and abrasive to the touch. Being lighter in weight and easier to shape, it became popular as a cheaper walling alternative to bluestone.

## Stonemasons and others

*Family origins, and locations in Mt. Wellington Borough, Auckland. Occupations – quarry workers and stonemasons, 1978.*

INFORMATION COURTESY OF DR. A. TRLIN



FIGURE 6.5 Residential Distribution and Birthplaces of 'Yugoslavs' in Mount Wellington Borough (part), Auckland, 1971



Its decorative appearance appealed to designers who began to specify the porous rock as a veneer on concrete walls or as 'feature' walls. Well-known, highly skilled mason Ivan Lavas learnt his trade in his home village and practised it for 41 years in New Zealand, 21 of those years as a stonemason on Fletcher Construction Ltd's projects. Fletchers sent him to work on the Mt Cook Hermitage in 1950, one of his more unusual jobs.

Referring to the six-year waterfront road construction programme, the scheme occupied 20 to 30 Dalmatian stoneworkers whose primary tasks were to complete the sloping stone faces and the abutments to the two bridges. For some of the time, Marin Jericevich (Žrnovo) served as foreman. The bulk of the material for this contract was transported by truck to the site at £5 per load by Bluestone Quarry and Lavas' Auckland Stonemasons Ltd. As the waterfront project neared completion, a disastrous earthquake shook and destroyed the city of Napier in Hawke's Bay. The two quarries were awarded contracts to supply kerbing stones for the city's streets. The enormous task undertaken required quarry workers to hand-cut and shape 35,000 lineal feet of stone during the city's reconstruction. If one used Ivan Lavas' average of 280 lineal feet per five-day week, then the job would have taken 125 weeks in a straight run.

Around the quarrymen of Penrose a Croatian neighbourhood developed, as more men were attracted by relatives and friends, and as families formed. They settled in Panorama, Leonard and Ferndale Roads in that order of preference. It was an episode well discussed in Dr Andrew Trlin's book, *Now Respected, Once Despised*. The cluster in Penrose included quarry owners Stipan Cebalo, Jakov Jericevich, Steve Breich and pioneer Dick Lavas. Among the many stonemasons who gravitated to the area, Dick Milat (Blato) and Jack Milina settled in the vicinity, and numerous others came and went according to the demands of industry.

Throughout Auckland Province, Dalmatians opened and managed quarries for the supply of road metal or agricultural lime. An early settler from Pupnat on Korčula Island, Mark Ciprian (arrived 1893), began quarrying and crushing metal near Dargaville in 1916. Then in 1927 Frank Martinovich and

Jim Vodanovich were awarded a contract to extract and transfer stone from a local quarry, to prevent scouring of the riverbank near Ruawai. Marino Glucina (Drašnice), who arrived in 1898, began quarrying in 1930 to supply roadworks in the Whangarei district. The business moved into higher gear when his son Milenko assumed management. It continued to function at a lower level while Milenko served overseas for three years in the New Zealand army. On his return the operation was revitalised, employing 12 to 15 men, mostly from the Island of Korčula. As he recalled, the rock faces were brought down with spalling hammers before being passed through the crushers.

In the Te Hana area, north of Auckland, an early and enterprising settler, John Nobilo, found lime substratum on his farm, which he began excavating and crushing for agricultural purposes. Nick Krsinich was one of many young men from Lumbarda employed by Nobilo. He also introduced New Zealand to his young compatriots Mark and Ivan Jurjevich, Jack and Bob Kriletich, Nick Nobilo and others. Nick Krsinich decided with another Jurjevich and Visko Lipanovich to buy John Nobilo's interest. Together they developed the works and then Jurjevich sold out to the remaining partners before returning to Yugoslavia on the *Partizanka* in 1949. Finally Nick Krsinich bought out Lipanovich and sold up entirely in 1960. As Nick described it, the limestone was blasted out and broken up manually before being put through the crusher – this was the method before tractors, front end loaders and other machinery could be bought. The works, Te Hana Limeworks, had its own trucks to deliver and spread lime over local farms.

Between 1933 and 1946, Dick Matusich (Starigrad) and Mick Yelas (Drvenik) established their works near Wellsford, and in about 1939 Dick and Nick Kuluz established a small works also. Further to the south in Te Kuiti the brothers Matē and Milenko Beros (Podgora) took over an old quarry that was operated by the Railways Department. They remained in business supplying agricultural lime for several years before merging with Waitomo Cement Ltd, of which company they became directors.

At its peak the industry could list several Dalmatians as leaders in their field: Jack Milina, who subcontracted from



Whale's, the stone faces of the Auckland Harbour Bridge approach roads, Dick Milat, a master stonemason from Blato on Korčula Island, whose lasting memorial is the stone Church of St Thomas on the corner of Kepa Road and St Heliers Bay Road, Nick Klarich (Vis) based in Whangarei, whose Anglican Church at Waipu and the stonework at Forum North are testaments to his skill.

There are many others whose names no longer appear. They were the old tradesmen who brought a particular skill from across the seas to New Zealand and left an enduring mark on the landscape. Men as mentioned above, and men like Jim Tomich, Vlado Marsich and many more.

An enterprise similar to Marino Glucina in Whangarei was that of Yelavich Bros. Ltd of Riverhead, just north of Auckland.

Yelavich Bros. Ltd was founded by brothers Lou, Wally, George and Bob in 1947. Originally a transport company, it took over a quarry in Bethells Road, Te Henga district of West Auckland in 1951. The company blasted, crushed and shifted thousands of tonnes of andesite, a volcanic rock akin to basalt. Their main customer for many years was the Waitemata County Council who used Yelavich quarry metal for the base courses of all their roads stretching from New Lynn to Waiwera. In the year 2002 the business was sold to Wharehine Contractors. Bob, the youngest of the Yelavich brothers, and his son Milan bought back the business in 2006 and resumed its original role as a transport company, operating with a fleet of trucks from the depot in Riverhead.



*Yelavich Bros Ltd,  
Riverhead, Auckland.  
L to R – George, Wally, Bob, Lou.*



# John (Ivan) Barbarich (1880–1947)

JOHN Barbarich was born in the village of Zaostrog, a village notable for its Franciscan Monastery and its library, a village proud of its Croatian literary traditions. John Barbarich arrived in New Zealand in 1896, accompanied by a number of fellow villagers, and as was the custom went north in the footsteps of many hundreds of others to dig for kauri gum, in the hope of



L to R – Ivan Matutinovich, Milka Barbarich, Ivan Pribicevich.  
Children Peter and Amelia Barbarich. SOURCE, FAMILY

creating a nest egg for his future. After two to three years he moved to Auckland odd-jobbing and working briefly as a barman at the Grand Hotel in Princes Street. He next went to Katikati in the Bay of Plenty to assist the Catholic parish priest, Dean Van Dijk, a Dutch priest of the Mill Hill Order. He worked as a manservant weekdays, a barman at the Katikati Hotel on Saturdays and on Sundays served mass for the Dean and groomed his horse.

While in Katikati he wrote a letter to *Pučki List* (The People's Paper) in Split early in 1903, reporting as follows,

On November 1st All Saints Day 1902, we celebrated the day as is customary at home. On this great day in a place called Katikati at 2pm, a large gathering of New Zealanders met to compete in various games. We were only ten among several hundred. As the games proceeded they eyed us suspiciously, then one of their number challenged us to find one of our group to race against their best runner over a distance of one mile. We said yes, and Martin Lovich of Igrane volunteered. The New Zealanders chose their man. A mile was measured and a man from each side went to the finishing line. The New Zealander and Lovich took off. Lovich allowed his opponent to lead until halfway. The New Zealanders cheered and clapped to see their man in the lead – but when can a crow beat a falcon? Lovich, at halfway took off and left his opponent 10 metres behind. The crowd was dumbfounded while we waited and embraced our dear brother Lovich, singing in unison.

(Trans. S.A.J.)

After the Katikati sojourn, John Barbarich went to the Northern Wairoa to dig gum, clear land and dig drains. In Dargaville he became involved with community leaders like John Totich and



joined his committee to support Gordon Coates as Reform Party candidate for the Kaipara Electorate in 1911. On 15 April 1911, he became a naturalised British subject – occupation, labourer.

In 1912 he returned to his family village, Zaostrog, to seek a marriage partner. At that time the Balkan Wars were raging inland so there would have been apprehension as to Austria's intentions. The situation was unstable and probably clouded by rumours of a widening of the wars. He became betrothed to Milka Matutinovich, a young woman he had known in her childhood many years before. John made arrangements for her to follow him to New Zealand within months of his own return. Soon after her arrival, John and Milka were married at St Patrick's Cathedral, in Auckland on 9 July 1913. They settled in the Northern Wairoa district where John became a drainage contractor and then a farmer in partnership with his brother-in-law, Ivan (Jack) Matutinovich. The couple's next venture was to acquire Aurega House from the Hillary family, which became a home away from home for the hundreds of compatriots on and off the gumfields – wedding receptions, social occasions and christenings were open to all. The boarding house occupied

them from 1920 to 1925 when the family moved to Auckland.

A man of many interests and an astute businessman, John Barbarich and Jack Matutinovich opened the Bluestone Quarry business in Mt Wellington in 1926 following the lead of Dick Lavas, established there a year earlier. Both firms prospered, supplying kerbing and stone for the batters of Tamaki Drive along Auckland's waterfront. The contracts continued until 1931 and no sooner had they finished than the Napier earthquake of 1931 devastated that city. The Lavas and Barbarich quarries were key suppliers of bluestone kerbing; others joined the queue with newly opened quarries to meet Napier's needs.

By 1945, John Barbarich's quarry, a going concern well equipped and with committed contracts, was sold, after which he retired. The Tamaki Drive project, the Napier earthquake and the works created by the Labour Government and its successors from 1935 on proved him to be astute and successful businessman.

John Barbarich was a founding member of the Yugoslav Club (Inc.) in 1930. In 1935 daughter Amelia married Anton (Tony) Batistich (see Amelia Batistich), one of the quarry foremen.

John (Ivan) Barbarich  
(1880–1947)



*Jack Barbarich's Bluestone Quarry Ltd, Penrose, 1931.  
L to R – Tony Batistich,  
Joe Ivicevich, five unknown,  
Ante Stanisich, Marin Ivicevich,  
unknown, Jack Milina, Peter Bilis.  
SOURCE, AUTHOR*

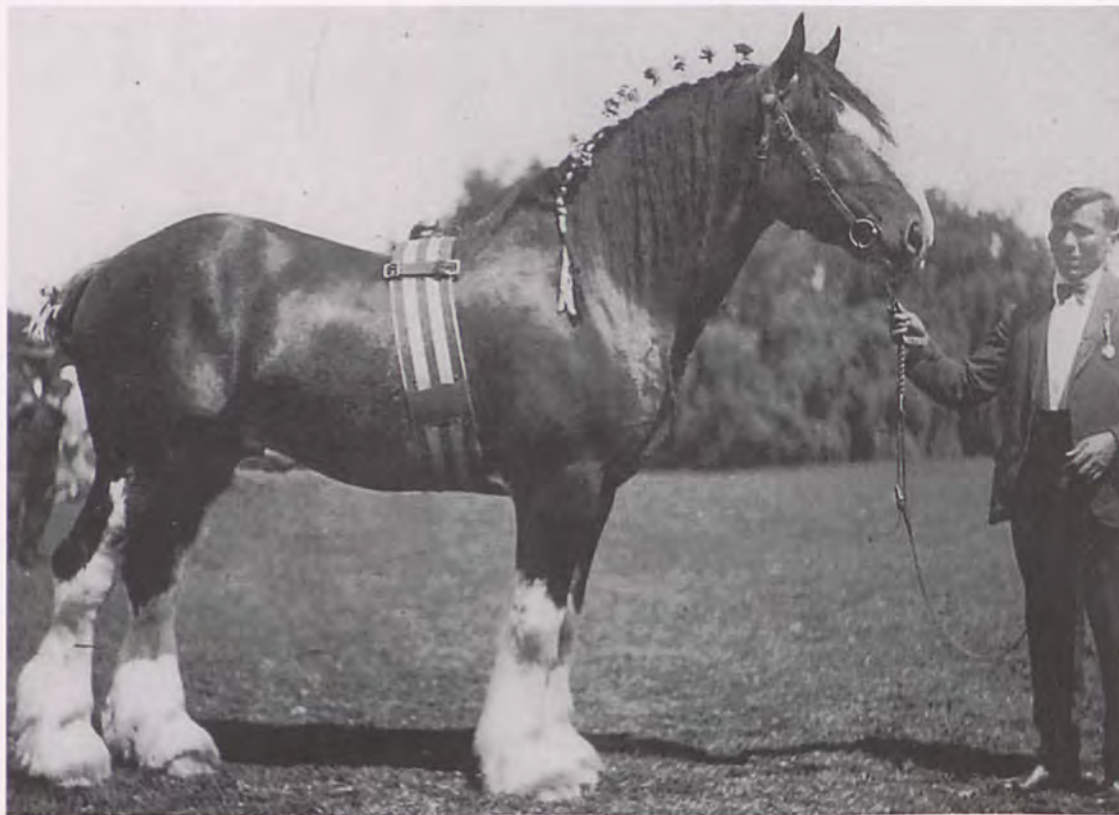


## Matē Druzianić (1895–1971)

**M**ATĚ Druzianić's birthplace, the village of Rašćane, is located in the broad expanse of Dalmatia's Zagora, beyond the Biokovo Range that screens it from the coastlands of the Adriatic Sea. It is a harsh uncompromising land with strings of villages surrounding the larger towns of Vrgorac and Imotski. During the latter decades of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century, these villages joined the migrant floods that left to seek opportunities, a livelihood and security

*Matē Druzianic with one of his prize-winning Clydesdale horses, Gisborne, 1920s.*

PHOTO FROM BRUCE  
ALEXANDER COLLECTION



in overseas lands. New Zealand was a choice for some hundreds.

Matē Druzianic arrived in New Zealand in 1913 to join others from Rašćane, among them the Lendich, Selak, Ozich, Pandzich and Belaich family names. Matē's name 'Druzianich' (early spelling) appears in the New Zealand Register of Aliens 1917, where he is described as a single man, a gumdigger at Waipapakauri, and north of Kaitaia. He was probably manpowered and under government direction sent to work on roading schemes and railways between 1918 and 1920, possibly employed in southern districts which may explain his presence in Gisborne where he became a naturalised British subject in 1923 – occupation, contractor.

Matē Druzianic was a solidly built man of firm convictions, a man of incredible energy and drive who would never mince words and didn't suffer fools gladly. Typical of his Croatian race, he was uncomplicated, direct and honourable. His generosity knew no bounds.

In Gisborne he contracted to work on a section of the road link through the Waioeka Gorge, with basic tools, pick, shovel and barrow, plus his blasting skills that would have been in demand. In those early decades road and railway building meant weeks away from one's home base, living in makeshift workers' camps in primitive conditions. With experience and business skills a succession of projects opened up many more challenging opportunities. In 1928, for example, he had a team of Clydesdale draughthorses working on the Tuai power station near Wairoa. It was a team that he cared for with pride, winning numerous prizes at country shows before advancement in earthmoving machinery made them redundant.



In 1929 Matē leased a 100-acre (40-ha) block of land at Awatoto, south of Napier, where he bached in a makeshift shed until 1931. In that year he married Marica (Maritza) Barbarich from the village of Zastraišće on Hvar Island. It was also the year of the Napier earthquake that devastated the city and disabled transport and communications in the whole region, but it was an event that created enormous opportunities for anyone involved in the building and services industries. Matē Druzianić with his knowledge of explosives was immediately in demand. His expertise enabled him to accept contracts to dynamite shattered buildings that posed a danger by total collapse or fire. His family recall Matē talking about the demolition of the remains of St Paul's Cathedral in the city. He guaranteed that he could

blow up the damaged shell of the building with gelignite and cause the debris to fall inwards without damaging adjoining properties. Those who had doubts were soon convinced.

Matē Druzianić's working life took him to many distant places to form roads with his gang of men and fleet of trucks. In 1940 he sold his beloved Clydesdales, his work horses and bought his first crawler tractor. The advent of the Second World War found him engaged on various Defence Department contracts, followed by draining swamps by dragline around Eketahuna and Pahiatua. His continuing success brought affluence and with it a desire to invest in property, particularly rural land, which he developed, subdivided and sold on.

After quitting the Awatoto block, the family moved to the

Matē Druzianić  
(1895–1971)



*Matē Druzianic (white shirt)  
demolishing structure of Napier  
Cathedral weakened by the 1931  
Napier earthquake.  
PHOTO FROM BRUCE  
ALEXANDER COLLECTION*



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

Havelock North property known as Emerald Hill. Here the children spent their teenage years and grew into adulthood. Emerald Hill was the secure base for the welfare and education of their children. In 1958, Matē and Marica bought a 1000-acre (400-ha) farm at Pirinoa in the Wairarapa district and from there in 1968 they retired to a small farm of 100 acres (40 ha) south of Carterton.

Matē and Marica never lost touch with their own people but were detached from the community at large. They were extremely proud of their New Zealand citizenship and brought their family up as New Zealanders. Typically, as others of their race they neglected to share even a little of their cultural heritage with their children, but kept in contact with their families in



*Matē and Marcia Druzianic, 1940s.*

PHOTO FROM BRUCE ALEXANDER COLLECTION

Croatia and, after the Second World War, sent regular parcels of clothing and food to sustain them in the troubled years. Matē and Marica never visited their homeland. He died in 1971 after 55 years in New Zealand.

Matē's wife Marica, née Barbarich (1904-93), arrived in Auckland in 1929, probably in one of the last major intakes from Dalmatia before the Great Depression closed the door on further arrivals. Adrift in a strange new world, virtually penniless, and non-English speaking, she would have cursed the day she walked up the gangway in Split to depart for New Zealand and to turn her back on her family and friends. She worked around the city of Auckland at menial tasks, waitressing, cleaning, housekeeping until the day that Matē Druzianic on a visit to the city was introduced to her. They made their commitment to each other and married in 1931. Marica was typical of Croatian womenfolk of that era. Once married they gave themselves unstintingly to their families and their households. Marica raised their five children, tolerating loneliness when Matē was away weeks on end on distant contracts. She was a strong, loving woman who outlived her husband by 22 years. For her they were years of pain and pleasure, reminiscing about the past and enjoying with pride the growing extended family. She died in 1993 at her son Bill's home aged 89, survived by her children, Ilena, Moreen, Bill, Barbara and Norma.



## Second World War

**W**AR erupted on 1 September 1939, when Germany invaded Poland. The German rampage continued through Europe with the seizure of France, Holland, Belgium, Denmark and Norway in 1940. In that year the Battle of Britain

was fought in the air, stalling German plans to invade Britain. In quick succession after Italy joined Germany and Japan in the Tripartite Pact, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria succumbed. Under severe pressure, Yugoslavia also signed the Pact on



*Yugoslav Club Patriotic Fund,  
Queen Street Parade, 1941.  
L to R – Neda Vodanovich, Mary  
Sunde, Vera Yakich, Mičelina  
Kokich, Perina Sumich, Lucy  
Sokolich, Milly Ravelich, Sylvia  
Sokolich (to rear), Ivan Gugich,  
Marta Devcich, Cecil Versalko,  
Tony Ravelich, Ivan Sokolich,  
two unknown.*



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

25 March 1941. Elements in the capital, Belgrade, reacted to denounce the agreement in favour of neutrality. A coup by a group of patriots failed to rally the nation. Germany attacked on 6 April, and on 17 April the nation capitulated. Within days Greece was attacked and it too capitulated on 23 April. On 22 June 1941, Germany invaded the USSR.

Immediately after the coup, both the Yugoslav Club and the Croatian Cultural and Benevolent Society sent separate cable messages to the Prince Regent, Paul, urging him 'to uphold the neutrality of Yugoslavia and to resist German demands'. Within days, as their nation yielded to Germany's onslaught, a meeting in Auckland unanimously resolved that, 'We Yugoslavs of New Zealand remain loyal to the country of our adoption which is

fighting for those same ideals for which Yugoslavia has made such sacrifices, and we pledge ourselves to give this country every assistance'.

These sentiments were endorsed by community groups throughout New Zealand, and immediate efforts were made by the societies to raise funds for New Zealand's patriotic purposes. As it transpired total unity was never achieved. With their nation trampled underfoot and carved up between pro-Axis elements, a sense of despair gripped the Yugoslav population in New Zealand. They were powerless to help their families in the homeland, contact was lost and confusion set in as arguments negated their best efforts to support the war effort. The New Zealand Government's attitude didn't help the situation – nor

*Masterton Branch of  
All Slav Union, 1944.*

*Rear, R to L – Bob Majstrovich,  
Marko Zidich, Mark Yurjevich,  
Jack Krsinich, Joe Pivac,  
Tom Radich, Frank Krsinich,  
Nikola Majstrovich, Stanko Bulog,  
Ivan Yurjevich.*

*Centre row – Frank Rosandich  
(seated), Bob Sumich, Victor  
Kurtich, Milos Pivac, Tom Cibilic,  
Wally (Vlaho) Cibilic, Joe Grbavac,  
M. Butarov, Dr. I. Reifer, Nikola  
Batistich, Roko Kumarich.*

*Front row – Victor Radich,  
Sylvia Yurjevich, Agata Batistich,  
Milly Yurjevich, Nora Yurjevich,  
Mrs. T. Radich.*

*On floor – John Batistich, Mark  
Yurjevich (Jnr), Shirley Radich,  
Alma Radich.*

SOURCE, W. CIBILIC





did it show sympathy for the status of its Yugoslav citizens. As an example, in August 1941, charges were laid under the Aliens Emergency Regulations against several Yugoslavs for changing address without notifying the police.

As the Consul John Totich complained to the government, 'We Yugoslavs are allies and should be exempted from the Regulations. These actions are not justified. They are resented and will only damper patriotic fervour.' The court, however, proceeded against these 'aliens'. Walter Nash, Deputy Prime Minister at the time, regretted the decision but 'it was necessary that every alien be registered. This did not mean that they were enemies.'

When the Aliens Emergency Regulations 1940 were first enacted, protests by the Consul and others prompted the government to offer a few crumbs of concession – 'to demonstrate its goodwill' and that was to allow the use of 'Serbo-Croatian' in ordinary mail services, but this was hardly useful when Yugoslavia was occupied and postal services ceased. When tens of thousands of Croats were shipped to Egypt as refugees in 1944, the concession finally proved invaluable in making contact with displaced relatives.

The years following Germany's attack on the USSR generated full-scale fundraising programmes by various patriotically inclined individuals and groups, beginning with the Royal Consul, the Yugoslav Clubs in Auckland and Wellington, the Slavonic Council, the Aid to Russia Committee, the Croatian Cultural Benevolent Society, the All Slav Union and its 17 branches succeeded by the Yugoslav Association and Yugoslav Society 'Marshal Tito'. Underlying these great efforts, bitterness and anger prevailed. Argument over the influence of General Mihailovich and the rising power of Tito and his Partisans tore the community apart. In 1944, the Yugoslav Club accepted Tito's leadership of the future Yugoslavia along with the vast majority, but little changed to improve the relationship between these bodies to the left and to the right. The All Slav Union, almost entirely of Croatian membership, was totally committed to supporting the USSR and the National Front in Yugoslavia (the

Partisans) – theirs was 'the only true organisation that existed and worked for workers'. In the face of these changing directions, the Consul struggled to survive as representative of a now defunct Royal Yugoslav Government in London. His earlier pro-Mihailovich views and unwavering commitment to that government brought him into disrepute among increasing numbers of his people. He tried to justify his position and to meet the demands of his mentors without success. He found himself embarrassed by the political in-fighting in the community and felt it necessary to explain the ructions within the community to the Prime Minister.

As already stated, being of Slavonic race, my people possess certain characteristic sentiments of their own towards other Slavonic nations, including Russia, and in view of the present heroic stand the people of Russia are making against our common enemy, this sentiment is more in evidence than formerly; so because of this, some of my countrymen, especially those who belong to the Croatian Cultural and Benevolent Society, are often misunderstood and suspected of possessing Communist tendencies, which may be classed as subversive. Even the Police are worried and have consulted me on the matter, but I'm glad to say that with the exception of a few of radical view, I found others to be moderate and rational: They could safely be left alone, especially when the whole democratic world looks to Russia and her heroic armies with hope.

It is doubtful whether this explanation achieved anything at all, but it might have relieved him of some of his own misgivings. The All Slav Union by this time had seized leadership of the community and rallied support for its fundraising from all parts of New Zealand. The core leadership were Communist Party members and in their narrow opinion other views must not be tolerated. There was little room for compromise with the Yugoslav Club in Auckland for example, even when the latter was prepared to join in patriotic endeavours, but to their credit the All Slav Union gathered in the Yugoslav community in wholehearted support for the Russian and Yugoslav Partisan forces and post-war construction in devastated Yugoslavia, including the support of the Yugoslav Club in Auckland.



## Second World War enlistment in New Zealand



*Pilot Officer, Ivan Marinovich  
(ex-Oratia) navigator on Noel  
Trigg's (V.C.) bomber – killed 1942.  
SOURCE, FAMILY*

AS SOON as war was declared in 1939, the New Zealand Government called for volunteers to join the armed forces to defend New Zealand and the British Empire. All told about 60,000 volunteered before conscription was introduced in June 1941. Among them were a number of Yugoslav born and men of Yugoslav parentage who accepted the call and made a commitment to serve this country when and wherever needed. Unlike their fathers, whose idealism during the First World War resulted in many offering their services for the liberation of their homeland, the new generation of sons saw the world through different eyes. They weren't as passionately concerned with the politics of Europe or the tensions that divided the land of their fathers. They might feel sympathy, but would never fully understand the agony of the community in the confused early years of the war.

Accurate statistics relating to enlistments during the first two years of the war are not readily accessible. Most were New Zealand born. It would be true to say that there was a reluctance on the part of the authorities to accept Yugoslav born nationals, naturalised or not, because of Yugoslavia's political situation at the time. The country was on the brink of joining the axis powers and likely to be declared an enemy state. Three naturalised Yugoslavs who volunteered at the time were rejected and later, when conscripted, refused to serve. Their appeal was allowed. As far as can be ascertained 202 men embarked overseas in the army, 42 in the air force and 12 in the navy and Fleet Air Arm. Some 50 known descendants of pre-gum industry pioneers also served. In addition 300 to 400 served in the Home Defence Forces. The rest of the able bodied remained in essential works

or were manpowered – including those who were not naturalised.

Two sets of regulations, enacted by Government, that did little to stimulate enlistment by Yugoslavs, were the Alien Emergency Regulations 1940, which required every alien to register, and the Alien Land Purchase Regulations 1942, which imposed restrictions on land purchase, mortgages and leases executed by aliens. When Yugoslavia rejected the Tripartite Pact in March 1941 and became a staunch ally of Great Britain and therefore New Zealand, Yugoslavs resident in New Zealand expected that they would be regarded as equals inasmuch that the restrictions would be relaxed. Government remained unmoved. The community expressed its resentment, recalling the machinations of Government during the First World War, when Yugoslavs were treated as if they were a potential fifth column. Notwithstanding the slight they felt, Yugoslavs declared their support for New Zealand's war effort and demonstrated this in practical ways by supporting fundraising campaigns and encouraging their sons to volunteer for the armed forces. Their effort doubled when Yugoslavia became involved as an ally in 1941.

After Yugoslavia capitulated to the Axis powers, the status of Yugoslav nationals changed to the extent that the non-naturalised were acceptable as volunteers in New Zealand's forces. The Royal Government in London asked the Consul in November 1941 to report on the number of Yugoslav subjects between the ages of 20 and 50 who could be relied on to volunteer. The Consul sought out the information from the aliens register compiled by the Director of National Service and sent it to London. There the question lay open until January 1942 when a conference of



consular representatives of Allied countries was called in Wellington by the War Minister, the Rt. Hon. Gordon Coates. An understanding was reached regarding Government's intentions on the role of those countries' nationals. Tentatively, New Zealand would continue to accept volunteers for home defence or service abroad, while Government proceeded with discussions through the United Kingdom's authorities, with the Royal Yugoslav Government regarding future compulsory service for their subjects. John Totich, forever anxious, independently cabled the Yugoslav Foreign Minister on 4 February 1942, seeking directions on the matter, and was advised on 2 March 1942: 'You can direct Yugoslav subjects of military age to join the Imperial forces but such soldiers should bear the shoulder tab "Yugoslavia".'

Realising that he had little influence in the matter among his people, he proposed that a meeting of representatives of the Yugoslav societies and leading members of community should be called to hear the views of the War Minister. The meeting didn't proceed because the participants feared that they had no mandate from the community to deliberate on such an important issue. The Minister's own belief was that such weighty decisions were for Government to consider in proper time, but meanwhile voluntary enlistment could continue as before. In the following month the Yugoslav Government in exile recommended to the Consul that all Yugoslav subjects in New Zealand should be directed to join the New Zealand forces voluntarily or when called upon.

Few would heed the call, while categorised as aliens in the same register as enemy aliens. The government offered one concession: Yugoslav nationals would not be required to take the Oath of Allegiance provided they obtained written permission from the government via the Consul to serve in New Zealand's forces. Those who enlisted could expect the same rates of pay, allowances, pensions and other privileges as applied to British subjects.

Reports of the various negotiations prompted a number of anonymous letters addressed to the Consul threatening his life. Shaken but undeterred, Totich worked to arrive at an understanding between the New Zealand Government and the Royal Yugoslav Government in London. His negotiations aroused the ire of many of his compatriots to whom he was fast becoming a person representing a government held in disrepute. But while the Royal Yugoslav Government in London enjoyed the recognition of the allies, Totich's representations were accepted as being official. In April 1943, an agreement between the United Kingdom and the London Yugoslav Government automatically gave New Zealand the power to call Yugoslavs resident in New Zealand to defend the Dominion as might be required of naturalised Yugoslav subjects. Now all classes of New Zealand residents, except enemy aliens, were subject to call up or register for either defence or essential services under the terms of the Industrial Manpower Emergency Regulations of 1942. The Royal Government was no longer concerned in the matter.



*Private Yelavichs serving in NZ.  
Matž, Joe, Wally, Lou and Peter, seated. Lou transferred to the R.N.Z.A.F.  
SOURCE, FAMILY*



*R.N.Z.A.F. Sgt. Pilot David Leo  
Nola (ex-Tatuanui) – killed in  
action 1941.  
SOURCE, FAMILY*



*Lt. W. Nicholas Silich  
(ex-Dargaville).  
SOURCE, FAMILY*





*Pilot Officer R.N.Z.A.F. Boško Bartulovich (Barton), being decorated for his part in the 1949 air race – England to Christchurch.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY



*W.A.A.F. Elsie Sunde (née Nola, Dargaville), served in R.N.Z.A.F. for 3 years.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY



*Flying Officer Nicholas Matich, D.F.M., D.S.O., R.N.Z.A.F. Bomber Squadron and Pathfinder Squadron, veteran of 49 missions. Shot down on 50th raid and found his way to Gibraltar with underground help en route, evaded the Germans and escaped.*



*Fl. Lt. Ronald Simich, D.F.C., R.N.Z.A.F., mentioned in despatches. Son of Marin Simich – footballer, yachtsman. Killed on return to NZ on training flight, Ohakea.*  
SOURCE, FAMILY



*Andria Tolich, QSM (born 1923). Born at Waipapa to Ivan and Margaret Tolich, farmers in the Kaikohe district. Andria joined the New Zealand Army in 1942 and served in the 2nd Battalion, Auckland Regiment, Countess of Ranfurly's Own (CRO). During 1943 and 1944 he underwent training before sailing for Egypt in June 1944. The Allied invasion of Italy saw further training and action with the New Zealand Infantry Battalion in its final push to Trieste. Hostilities ended in May 1945.*  
*On his return to New Zealand in October 1946, he joined the New Zealand Police in 1948, serving for 35 years and 6 months. On discharge he had achieved the rank of Sergeant. Andria married Valerie Radonich in 1949. In 1950, triplet sons, Peter, Michael and David were born to them.*



*Corporal Stipe (Steve) Marinovich, 1911–1986, born in Podgora, Dalmatia. One of a number of Croatian-born NZ'ers to serve overseas in the 2nd NZEF, WWII, in the Middle East, North Africa and Italy. He served in the second NZ Ammunition Company. When NZ forces were confronted by Tito's Yugoslav partisans in Trieste, Steve was in demand as an interpreter. His attempt to visit his parents in Podgora was approved by General Freyberg, but he was forced to turn back by the Partisans.*



# El Shatt – Egypt

El Shatt – Egypt

THE evacuation of some 40,000 civilians and wounded partisans from Dalmatia was a tremendous but extremely hazardous operation achieved through the co-operative efforts of Tito's Yugoslav High Command and the British and American navies based offshore on the island of Vis. The withdrawal of so many followed six months after the Italians had surrendered to the Allies in September 1943. The Yugoslav Partisan army moved in to fill the vacuum left by the departing Italian forces, expecting that the Germans supported by the pro-Nazi Croatian Ustaše would descend onto the coast soon enough. Fearing terrible reprisals against the strongly pro-Partisan population the Yugoslav High Command arranged with the Allies to evacuate the elderly, mothers and children and the wounded soldiers as soon as possible.

For almost three years the fate of people in the home villages, in Dalmatia particularly, was concealed from relatives in this country. Occasionally news of a death in the family filtered through via the Red Cross society, but of the terror, destruction and killings nothing was known. It therefore came as a total surprise that the evacuation had been ordered in March 1944. The community in New Zealand reacted in fear and disbelief, and concern for relatives who might be among those transported to El Shatt refugee camp, in the deserts of Egypt.

Then the letters began to arrive with their tales of terror, tragedy and destruction. As the news unfolded, relief and thankfulness tempered by frustration and sorrow brought the community together in sympathy for their loved ones caught in the web of war. The response in New Zealand was immediate. The path was cleared with the New Zealand Government to

free up the movement of money and packages to the refugees at El Shatt. The Reserve Bank permitted the remittance of £25 to each known refugee and the Post Office accepted parcels up to 22 lbs in weight for direct despatch through the Yugoslav Red Cross in Cairo. In addition the use of the Croatian language was allowed in the aerograph mail service. Furthermore the government agreed to permit the entry of relatives to join

*El Shatt – NZ army personnel on S.S. Bangora on the way home from El Shatt to Dalmatia, 1945.*

SOURCE, JERRY BRAJKOVICH





## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

families if they wished. The humanitarian attitude of the New Zealand Government throughout this episode resulted in 68 refugees entering the country. It was a gesture for which the community was forever grateful.

The El Shatt episode came to a happy conclusion when in mid 1945 at war's end, the refugees were shipped home from the desert of Egypt to resume their lives, gather about them the survivors, restore their homes, plant their crops and so to slowly heal the wounds caused by the unrelenting struggles of four years.

As Teresa Vujnovich (née Pavlovich) of Sućuraj reported of those who weren't evacuated,

Those who remained were overtaken by the German occupation forces, who immediately assembled us in the village and locked us in the Church for the night. The very next day all but ten or twelve were ferried across to Makarska and there taken by cattle trucks to places in Herzegovina and Slavonia to be billeted in a number of villages. We were not used as forced labour and were reasonably well treated. The reason for our transfer was to make Central Dalmatia a war zone, probably because the Germans feared an Allied invasion. (Trans. S.A.J.)

As a postscript, there were 570 births in the refugee camp and 700 deaths, the latter mainly the elderly and small children. The unbalanced diet, oppressive heat and extreme stress took their toll over the many months in exile.

(Statistics provided by Simun Ujdur, Kohimarama, Auckland.)



# Post Second World War – returning home

AFTER WWI, many Croatian men returned home to Dalmatia to be reunited with their families and friends to repair the hurt of the years of separation. In the back of their minds they believed that they might somehow share in the rebuilding of the new nation. Great were their expectations but severe was the disappointment as the realities of the situation were realised. The war-torn, misgoverned kingdom of Alexander I offered no prospect of a stable future for a man and his family. There were two choices – stick with their hopes, their dreams,

or return to New Zealand and accept permanent separation from their homeland.

Through the First World War they were enemy aliens and through the Second World War, after a period of uncertainty, nationals of an allied nation enabling their full participation in New Zealand's war effort. When the war ended they inherited a nation, a Yugoslav Republic with a strong Communist Federal Government headed by Marshal Tito. The vast majority of the community accepted that fact as a political reality.



*The repatriation ship 'Radnik',  
leaving Auckland, February 1948.*

PHOTOS, AUTHOR



As had happened after the First World War, a number of men sought to return to their families in Dalmatia after four years of separation. The earliest date they could do this was August 1947, when a group of 59 boarded the SS *Rangitikei* bound for Europe. Among them were a number of youths intent on joining labour brigades building the Zagreb-Belgrade railway. The episode of the ship *Radnik* (Worker) began when the Yugoslav Federal Government agreed to send the vessel to both New Zealand and Australia to repatriate settlers willing to return to their homeland. In New Zealand the Yugoslav Association had the task of co-ordinating the arrangements. An official of the Association was quoted in the *Auckland Star*: 'Wages in Yugoslavia are equal to those in New Zealand. The future is assured and living conditions are improving very quickly'.

The arrival of the *Radnik* on 9 February 1948 was, for the community, a momentous event. Only two ships had visited these shores previously – the *Vidovdan* in 1926 and the *Kupa* in 1942. As a special gesture, the Association arranged the purchase of 90 Romney ewes and 10 rams to improve depleted stocks in Yugoslavia. With some difficulty and effort by individual members this was achieved. In addition 450 bales of wool and 1200 sacks of hides were also despatched. The vessel departed on 14 February with 108 passengers on board returning to the 'old country', cheered on by huge crowds assembled from all parts of the province. However, the euphoria of those parting was dampened by the realities they faced at their destination. Few who returned found political conditions to their liking, and it was difficult to steer through the bureaucratic maze to leave the country. It was a harsh fact to accept that they were now in a police state.

A second vessel, the *Partizanka* (Partisan), arrived about a year later in January 1949.

In the interim Yugoslavia had fallen out with the USSR dividing the community politically, either pro or anti-Tito and his government. Party members, however, supported the Cominform decision to discredit Tito and to dismiss him and the Yugoslav Communist Party for their nationalistic deviation. Tito was a heretic and a traitor.

The *Partizanka* therefore arrived at a very tense moment. The New Zealand Government was also apprehensive and remained watchful without causing problems. The government accepted that the ship would take relief supplies to Yugoslavia and a small number (23) of passengers returning to their homeland. The government was therefore liberal in permitting reasonable quantities of foodstuffs on board, but, in their enthusiasm, their concern, their generosity, many overstepped the mark and provoked a threat by government to prevent the ship's departure. Senior neutral members of the community, men of some influence in political circles, persuaded the Rt. Hon. Walter Nash, Prime Minister, to allow the vessel to sail under certain conditions. These conditions were met.

It is certain that the government permitted the vessel to sail because they too realised what incredible hardships the people of Yugoslavia had suffered during the war. What was embarrassing was the twisting and turning of some leading members of the community, mainly pro-Stalinists, who felt no loyalty to their people because of the split between Tito and the USSR. Theirs was an extreme case of hair splitting which hastened their demise as a force in community affairs.



# Women – their lives in New Zealand

CENTURIES of hardship and suffering in village based rural communities throughout Europe placed a heavy and unjust burden on women. Long suffering and patient, they were expected to comfort and obey their husbands, work the fields and vines and devote their lives to the upbringing of their families. There was no reward, no holiday to look forward to, or any pleasure beyond seeing the cycle of life unfold into new generations, and perhaps see a son become an official, a priest or an emigrant; or a daughter marry well and so advance the family's fortune and standing in the community. Emigration to a distant land forced by economic conditions and the family's inability to survive was the final solution. Men went first, driven out by the need to sustain those left behind, and in the process separating from families for long periods.

As the villages emptied of heads of families and later young men, marriageable women suffered the pain of fear and anxiety. Raised in the belief that they must marry one day, have children and manage a household, they now faced the prospect of an empty future without a husband. There were no career prospects, their education was limited and they were virtually bonded to their families. To make matters worse they had to accept a greater share of the family's problems; someone had to tend the gardens, milk the goat, make cheese, pick and dry the fruit and care for ageing relatives. There was little hope of breaking free.

The original migrations to New Zealand were of an impermanent nature, men moved back and forth, rejecting any serious ideas of settling. A change began to take place in the first decade of the 20th century when the decision to settle was made. One by one wives and families began to emigrate. It was

not an easy decision to leave the security of a village community to be thrust into some hellish wilderness where one could barely survive. As a consequence, as the years went by, many of the young men were less inclined to return to their villages to seek brides. In the unrestricted freedom of New Zealand they could turn to Maori or colonial society, to marry, form liaisons and settle in the new environment, thus loosening links with their homeland. Matthew Ferri, editor of *Napredak*, thought he might capitalise on the situation with the following advertisement of July 1907:

Notice to every Croatian who plans to settle in this country and wishes of his own free will to marry a young Englishwoman – we advise that we can arrange fully satisfactory introductions. We have some with their own capital, property and good standing. We can arrange introductions to suit your requirements. All such negotiations and arrangements will be kept totally confidential until the happy day of your wedding – for further details contact the editor 'personally'.

How successful Ferri was as Cupid is unknown, but the advertisement reflects the apparent increasing interest in marriage with non-Slavic women in New Zealand.

The desire to marry and form a family was shared by both Croatian men and women, but many men enjoying the free New Zealand lifestyle hesitated for too long or were afraid to commit themselves. If they failed to arrange a suitable match with one of their own race, they resisted marriage with Maori or colonial women for fear of irreconcilable cultural differences. The evidence of marital collapse in some of these hasty unions was enough to dissuade the sceptics who preferred to remain



free if romance passed them by. Nevertheless, many a young Croatian formed successful and happy lifelong partnerships that survived cultural differences, but sometimes life was made more difficult by the attitude of a bride's family. New Zealand parents are known to have ostracised a daughter because she chose an 'Austrian' spouse. To the hard-working colonials, foreigners weren't a desirable class of people for young women of virtue to mingle with. If they persisted, the ultimate punishment sometimes was to be ignored or cut off by family and friends. Harder still to accept was an unexpected legal problem where the husband was not naturalised. It was a problem that caused undue stress. During the First World War when Croats were declared to be enemy aliens, a New Zealand colonial wife automatically lost her rights and privileges as a British subject. She could not vote nor be counted. It was an indignity that many non-Croatian wives had to contend with for the next 25 years or so. It wasn't until 1946 that nationality of birth was finally restored to these women.

Unions with Maori women were more relaxed and less subject to family discord – whether blessed by the Church or by way of a 'de facto' arrangement. The mutual friendship felt between Maori and Croats arose from their common sense of open community, their good humour and generosity. A lasting relationship developed between the two races whose mingling and marital relationships strengthened the bonds and generated numerous families who can today claim dual origins. The first recorded marriage between a Croatian and a Maori woman was that of Andrew Kleskovich (Mlini, Boka Kotorska) and Erina Kaka in 1892 (see Kleskovich). The family name was later changed to Anderson and many of their descendants live in Northland. As Percy Erceg, a former All Black footballer, once observed, Maori were natural linguists and therefore had no problems in picking up Croatian speech and blending into the Dalmatian community. Pioneer Peter Soljak recalled that on a return walk to his camp from Dargaville in 1903, he asked directions in his faulty English of a young Maori woman and was astonished to hear her respond in fluent Croatian, explaining that she was married to a Croatian farmer in the district.

Factual information about Croatian women coming to New Zealand is difficult to research although Peter Batistich, an old Kaihu identity, noted on the Northern Wairoa at the time of his arrival in 1895 the presence of four wives. They were Maria Lupis, wife of Pavel, Domenika Picinich, wife of Nikola and two others with the surnames Didovich and Lavus who have not been identified. The absence of wives is confirmed by the 1893 Kauri-Gum Industry Inquiry Commission, when Carl Seegner, an Austrian consular official, noted that there was no evidence of women from Dalmatia joining their husbands at the time.

The situation changed after the second Commission of 1898 had reported and the resulting Acts of Parliament had been enacted. A change of course was signalled and the community took its first positive but cautious steps to adjust to New Zealand and to plan for the future. Several wives and fiancées were prepared to join their men. From 1900 to the declaration of the First World War, a total of 166 women from Dalmatia entered the country. Later between the two wars a further 596 arrived. Statistics on intermarriage are incomplete and almost impossible to extract from the records. A preliminary survey by the author of pre-1925 marriages clearly shows a preference for in-race marriages at 60.5 per cent, marriages with New Zealand European women at 32.2 per cent and with Maori women 7.3 per cent. With their men they formed the hardy families who became the foundation of the community. They are the grandparents and great-grandparents of the many thousands of New Zealanders.

The Croatian women who came to New Zealand in those difficult days left their neat villages of well weathered stone to endure weeks of shipboard confinement, often travelling alone or sharing their fears with others, questioning the purpose of their journey into the unknown. Their fears and apprehensions were soon dispelled when they arrived in the shelter of Auckland's harbour, where the greeting of a husband or fiancé at the wharfside was warm and friendly. They were overcome by the compassionate embraces and outpourings of emotion, which cushioned the shock of the long journey. Their stay at a compatriot's boarding house in Auckland was all too brief before the next and final stage of the journey was undertaken



by train, steamer, wagon or horseback – unfamiliar means of transport – to some distant settlements or remote gumfield, where the realities of primitive living conditions awaited them. Now that she had arrived, sacrifices would be expected.

Alongside her husband she would work hard and they would dedicate their lives to the family they would share. Both would need all their strength to face the abominable conditions on the gumfields. Disillusionment was often total. Their new homes, which were impermanent and roughly put together, squatted in the desolate scrublands of the gumfields – walls and roofs of sacking, earth floors, lack of privacy, primitive sanitation and a few roughly made sticks of furniture became their inheritance. Frana Lupis, who arrived with her son John in 1904, remembered it well. Her husband Nikola met them in Awanui – they had come by sea from Auckland – and he took them on horseback to Waiharara. She was stunned by the emptiness and ugliness of the land, the lack of amenities, the loneliness and absence of friends or family to give support. Her assets of great strength and resilience helped her suffer the ordeal, to adjust her ways and to work alongside her husband, keeping their modest shanty spick and span, creating a vegetable garden and raising a family. She extended herself further, caring for the ill and seeing to it that children were properly baptised. As there were no maternity hospitals in the area, she assumed the added role of midwife and in her 20 years or so in the Far North, delivered 24 babies into the world.

There were many stalwarts like Frana Lupis who shared the burdens with their husbands in shaping a future for their families.

- Fanina Dragicevich joined her husband Anton in 1903 in the Northern Wairoa where over a period of years they developed four farms.
- Matija Jakich arrived in 1908 to marry Matē Maich. She and her husband Matē operated a store and boarding house in Dargaville and went farming in 1914. They were noted for the model farm they created.
- Jurka Erceg arrived in 1907 to join her husband Andrew and to work alongside him digging gum at Tikinui. Andrew delivered the children, built the house and furniture.

- Lukre or Lucy Zuvich arrived in 1907 to marry Frank Martinovich. They dug gum and farmed at Mititai and other areas. When aged 90 her celebration was the subject of a prize winning television documentary. Later she was honoured with an MBE.
- Mary Covacich, daughter of pioneer Peter Covacich of Otonga, married Visko Matutinovich. They dug gum and worked in Kirikopuni, where their home became a social centre for Croatians in the district.
- Jaka Vodanovich arrived in 1910 to marry Frank Nola, a bushman in the King Country. They settled in Dargaville in 1914 where they developed a block of land as a market garden and vineyard.

The last named three are referred to more fully in the book *Women of the North* by Jane Wordsworth, published in 1961.

What was common to all the above women was the commitment and vigour they displayed in supporting their husbands and their community. They developed in an independent, positive way; more sure of themselves as the years went by, always struggling with the English language and striving to understand the customs of the 'Englezi'. Life was neither easy nor full of great pleasures outside the comfort of their own circle. Total self-sufficiency had to be practised by every family – building the shanty or small cottage, gardening, keeping animals and fowls, spinning wool on distaff and spindle, knitting, sewing, crocheting, baking bread – and when required, working alongside their husbands gumdigging or bringing land into production. It was the lot of pioneering women of all races.

It was a life that was not always easy on children. They were expected to share in the workload and help run the farms and work with the rest of the family during the years of growing up and schooling. Further education at tertiary level was frustrated by the demands of family survival. They had to take on the continuing management of the farm or the vineyard. There was little option. Few parents could afford to send their children to boarding schools in the city or to university or a technical institute. Croatian parents had the added problem that they did not have



the knowledge and experience themselves to understand the needs of children who wished to advance themselves and spread their wings in newer, more satisfying occupations.

Between the First and Second World Wars, consolidation of the settlement and the feeling of security that prevailed led to an increasing number of family formations. Some 300 to 400 males returned to their villages after the war to be reunited with long-separated families, and others – single men – to seek brides and then to return to New Zealand. The husband usually returned first, promising to send for his wife and children as soon as a home and income were reasonably assured. It was a pattern of migration common to pioneering families of all races throughout the world.

But what of those whose circumstances prevented such an expensive expedition. They had a more difficult choice. There were few single women of their own race to choose from and they were reluctant to marry others. The only remaining options were to conduct courtships by mail or as it became necessary later, to marry by proxy.

Familiar with conditions in New Zealand through the writings of others, younger women were ready to accept offers of marriage sight unseen from faintly remembered young men whom they recalled from childhood days. There was no time for ardent courtship under the eye of the family. The contract was quickly sealed by an exchange of photographs, letters and a fare to New Zealand on the understanding that the couple would take their vows, as soon as possible after their meeting in New Zealand. For a 'mail order bride' it was a practical, sensible procedure. Romance rarely figured in the arrangement. That would follow, or at least that was the expectation.

The situation was complicated somewhat by a change in the immigration laws which prevented young women arriving 'on spec' and which forced many to marry by proxy. It was a potentially risky procedure. The knot was tied without the chance of a visual appraisal and one could not back out of the contract so easily. Such unions occasionally had disastrous results, with distraught women, feeling cheated, refusing to consummate the marriage.

In their optimism, anxious suitors created this problem for themselves and their unknown brides by tempting them with flattering photographs taken in their youth. The first confrontation wharfside was for some of these unfortunate young women a shattering experience. The 'deceived' wife in anguish or anger refused to accept the ageing stranger who was her legal husband, and tried in her distress to extricate herself. The gamble had failed for both of them. Connie Purdue (née Soljak) refers to one such case in an article:

A well-to-do Dalmatian Victoria Street boarding house keeper was rejected on sight by his young bride on arrival at the Auckland wharf. She found a younger man. The former sued and lost. But, married to an orchardist, long hours and hard work were still to be her lot.

For the majority the arrangement was agreeable. Couples generally accepted each other and worked harmoniously towards the creation of their families. Happiness did not follow all of them all the way. They had their share of disappointment, estrangement and even bitterness. There were frustrations that bedevilled many families, but overall they rode out most difficulties knowing that there was a commitment to stand by each other and their families.

Undoubtedly the life force in Croatian families has always been the woman. As wife and mother she remained the heart of the household, the preserver of the mother tongue, national traditions and the faith. In her subtle ways she ruled the home and held the family together, earning their love, respect and lifelong care. In the days of primitive conditions, isolation and loneliness, many tended to retreat into themselves, depending on their husbands for contact with the world beyond the front door and the farm gate. Fear of the 'Englezi', unfamiliarity with their language, led to reticence and a lack of confidence that prevented their full participation of many in their children's education and outside interests. It was this sense of insecurity and resignation that sometimes led these unfortunate women into deep depression and mental illness.





*Dr Maurice D. Matich, Dargaville.*

**Dr Maurice D. Matich** OBE, Mb.Ch.B., Dip.Obstetrics RCOG (Eng), FRNZGP, of Dargaville noted some years ago that women came to New Zealand from former Yugoslavia in the first decades of the 20th century to be reunited with their husbands or to marry unknown grooms on the gumfields. They were literally imported by arrangement and thus were not prepared for such a traumatic change in their circumstances. They left behind the security of the village, their extended families, church and traditions. In New Zealand within a few days of their arrival they faced loneliness, poor housing, endless toil and language difficulties. Depression and psychoneurosis were not uncommon, but cases of serious mental illness were rare as were cases of Parkinson's disease and senile dementia. Arthritis was a problem for many, but heart disease was not.

(Mental health records list only male inmates in institutions – 17 in 1916, and 33 in 1919.)

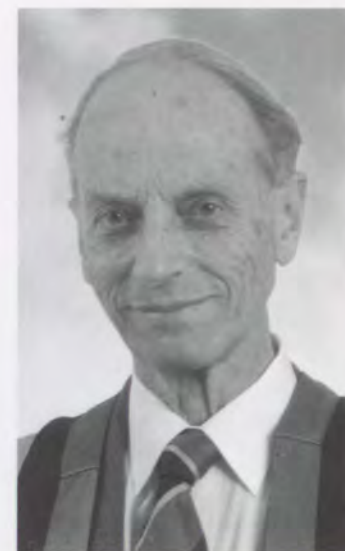
Dr Matich was chairman of the Medical Association in 1973–74, now known as the New Zealand Medical Association.

**Dr Ronald Valentine Trubuhovich** is the eldest son of the late Volento and Violet Trubuhovich of Auckland. A scholarship led him to gain professional qualifications at Otago University, a B.D.S. (Dentistry) – 1953, and an MB.Ch.B. (Medicine) – 1961. He then went to the United Kingdom as a Nuffield Scholar to gain an Anaesthetic Fellowship of the Royal College of Surgeons in 1966, as well as a research degree, M.Sc, in 1968 from Oxford University. Ronald returned to New Zealand in the same year to join the Auckland Hospital Acute Respiratory Unit, a forerunner of the Department of Critical Care Medicine, where he dedicated his long working life to care of critically ill patients.

In the years prior to his clinical retirement in 1998, Dr Trubuhovich served in many roles within the hospital system and as a member of distinguished medical bodies, including the Australian and New Zealand Intensive Care Society (ANZICS), the Faculty of Intensive Care, Australia and New Zealand College of Anaesthetics. He has played a leading role in these and other associated medical bodies, contributing considerably to the advancement of Intensive Care Medicine. For his industry, his writings and his commitment, he was awarded the ONZM (Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit) in 1997.

In Sydney in June 2007, Dr Ronald Trubuhovich was further honoured with the presentation of the Medical of the Joint Faculty of Intensive Care Medicine. Ross C. Freebairn, Board Member of the Faculty noted in his citation,

"Whether it was as a clinician, a patient advocate, a counsellor to colleagues, a role model for his juniors or elder statesmen of intensive care, Ron has always gone beyond the call of duty, but, in his typically self-effacing manner, he has never sought great rewards for what he has done. We are privileged to have Ron as one of our founding fathers."



*Dr Ronald Valentine Trubuhovich.*



## A village and the author – Sućuraj

I WAS born in the village of Sućuraj on the island of Hvar, Croatia in 1923. It is an ancient seafaring and fishing village on the eastern tip of the island. In pre-Christian times the



*Mother – Srečka Jelich, son Stephen and daughter Lucy (d.1926) prior to departure for NZ.*  
SOURCE, AUTHOR

Illyrians lived there, then came the Greeks, then the Romans and finally the Slavic Croats. Because of its strategic location it was exposed to the ravages of pirates and battles on land and at sea, as few other places in Dalmatia suffered. The worst era was the period between 1499 and 1699, when the village joined in the first battle against the Ottoman Turks on the frontiers of the Venetian Republic, the Turkish Empire and the City State of Dubrovnik. The Turks destroyed the village on five occasions, 1526, 1539, 1571, 1663 and 1664.

Sućuraj suffered terribly during the Second World War (1941–45). It was flattened by bombardment and aerial attacks by both the Axis and the Allies. It was wrecked and plundered, its residents banished or deported. In that war 58 villagers were killed, about 10 per cent of the population, fighting for the Partisans. The village emerged from the war facing a doubtful future, but gradually it was rebuilt and its survival today is centred mainly on tourism.

Sućuraj is a beautiful seaside village but a century of political instability, troubles, wars and lack of opportunity has caused an exodus that has left it almost desolated. In the 20th century 228 villagers settled in New Zealand, lesser numbers went to Argentina and the United States. The rest migrated to the cities in more recent years to seek work on the continent or inland Croatia. However, every summer, Sućuraj comes to life when its sons and daughters and their families return for weeks or months to show that they have not been entirely lost to their kinfolk in the village.

The Jelich family is one of the oldest in Sućuraj, dating back to 1576. My mother's family began with Franco Piazzoni,



a Venetian official who married in the village. It is obvious that with the fall of Venice to Napoleon in 1797, he, as other Venetians, decided to remain and live in Dalmatia. Thus the name Piazzoni was modified to Piacun – my mother's maiden name.

My grandparents, Stjepan Jelich (Iko) and Nikola Piacun (Nikolac), caught in the downward spiral of poverty, joined friends and relatives to venture to New Zealand's gumfields to make good their losses at home. Each made three visits, but still they could not survive, so of Nikola's family two sons went to the United States, two to Australia, a daughter, my mother, to New Zealand. Of Iko's family, two sons and two daughters came to New Zealand, including my father Victor.

On his last journey to New Zealand Iko introduced his son Ivan (Jack) to the skills of gumdiggers in the Gumtown (modern Coroglen) area of the Coromandel Peninsula. Iko went home in 1913 and Jack remained to persuade and finance my father, Victor, to join him in New Zealand in 1914 just as the First World War broke out. They worked together with fellow villagers in the Coromandel and Helensville regions. In 1921, my father returned home to marry Srečka Piacun, in 1922. I was born on the following year, as was a sister, Lucy, in 1924 who died in infancy. In 1924 Victor returned to New Zealand accompanied by his sister Maria (Mary – later Mrs Matě Modrich). My mother and I followed in 1927. Dad was a labouring man. We settled in Parkhurst, north of Helensville, our first home, until 1933, when he was forced by illness to give up heavy work, especially drain digging. We settled in Nelson Street, Auckland, close to Uncle Jack, the city centre, St Patrick's Cathedral and the harbour. In the vicinity a large community of Dalmatians gave us a sense of belonging and a sense of security.

Eight children joined the family: Stephen, Lucy (d), Ivan (d), Edward (d), Mary, Ian, Hilda and Anne.

My own brief biography begins at Marist Brothers Primary School, Vermont Street, Ponsonby, followed by three years at Sacred Heart College, Richmond Road (now St Paul's). My progress was reasonably good and having finished in the fifth form I went to work for the Public Works Department. Starting as a clerk, I arranged a transfer to the Architectural Division.

The chance to become an architect was not to be missed.

After three years I enrolled for the degree (B.Arch.) course at Auckland University; six years later in 1949 I was capped as a Bachelor of Architecture. I was now fired with ambition and saw my future in a field of design that was totally consuming. I was capped on a Friday and, on the following Monday, opened a design practice with Desmond Mullen, architect, and Milan Mrkusich, designer and artist. The latter became New Zealand's pre-eminent abstract painter and an icon of New Zealand; it was a great honour. The firm broke new ground in domestic architecture, interior design and graphics, and soon we had the chance of opening a retail shop selling well-designed furniture,



## A village and the author – Sučuraj

*Shipboard group en route to New Zealand – middle row Tada Piacun, Kate Botica, Srečka Jelich and son Stephen (author). Srečka's brother Frank in Sydney – white shirt right. Clem Rosandić behind Kate Botica.*  
SOURCE, AUTHOR



## FROM DISTANT VILLAGES

houseware, crafts and a wide range of related products. Brenner Associates Ltd, as we were known, lasted 10 years. I decided to withdraw in 1958, the year I married Barbara McLennan of Grafton, NSW, Australia. For the next five years, 1958 to 1963, I ran a solo practice – designing homes, factories, a church and showrooms. The children started arriving in the midst of all this. We had settled in a house I designed and built in Meadowbank, which we now shared with six children, Nicole, Milenka, Fiona, Gabrielle, Stephan and Matthew.

My involvement in Town Planning issues in Auckland led to the formation of the Architects Planning Group of which I was Convener. Among the many colleagues involved I found common ground with my future partners, the late John Austin, the late Graham Smith, Ivan Mercep and Rodney Davies, and JASMaD was formed. After Graham's death, John Sutherland was appointed director. The firm was in the forefront of architectural practice, attracting a wide range of work – university,

hotels, community buildings, houses and commercial work. The firm survives today under the guidance of a team of younger committed directors, and it is the largest practice in New Zealand. Ivan Mercep is the only partner who maintains a part-time active connection with the firm now known as JASMAX Ltd.

On my withdrawal from the firm some years ago I continued working in domestic architecture from home, but my main interest swung into historical research. It was an interest that grew from my association with the old Yugoslav Club where I served as secretary for two years, 1944 and 1945, and as a member of the Yugoslav National Tamburitza Orchestra for several years. I began listening to some of the pioneer settlers, learning of their lives, their trials, their achievements and their failures. Even when I moved away from active membership for family and business reasons, I kept close to the community and its activities. In 1979 I joined a combined committee of the two societies in Auckland to organise the community's Centennial Celebrations. As a result I was invited with five others to visit the Croatian Federated Republic of Yugoslavia in 1981 as a guest. My last major act in the society was to share in the creation of the Dalmatian Genealogical and Historical Society, which is unique in the world of expatriate Croatians.

The book that you have been reading is a personal journey into the history of Croatians in New Zealand via the lives of provincial Dalmatians who settled and made their mark here. Its contents capture the spirit of those men and women who made the long journey here to plant their families safely and securely within the wider New Zealand community.

Stephen A. Jelich  
B.Arch., FNZIA, ONZM



*Stephen A. Jelich – Graduation  
B.Arch., 1949, with parents,  
Victor and Srečka.*  
SOURCE, AUTHOR







A village and the author  
– Sućuraj

*Sućuraj – the harbour frontage,  
1972.*

PHOTO, AUTHOR



# Glossary

## Pronunciation

ē	as	bed
c	as	ts
č, ć	as	ch
ž	as	zh (azure)
j	as	y
lj	as	li (William)
nj	as	nu (annual)

b.	born
m.	married
d.	deceased
WWI	World War 1
WWII	World War 2
N.Z.E.F.	New Zealand Expeditionary Force
C.C.B.S.	Croatian Cultural and Benevolent Society
D.G.H.S.	Dalmatian Genealogical and Historical Society

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THE author, Stephen A. Jelich, born 1923 in Dalmatia, Croatia, migrated to Auckland, New Zealand in 1927. Educated by the Marist Brothers in Vermont Street, Ponsonby and Sacred Heart College he gained a degree in Architecture at Auckland University in 1949. In that same year he initiated the formation of Brenner Associates Ltd, a design firm (1949-1958). Private architectural practise (1958-1963) was followed by the formation of Jasmad Group Ltd in 1963 - now practising as Jasmax Ltd. A lifelong interest in his heritage and his involvement in the Dalmatian/Yugoslav/Croatian community has led to the publication of this book.

He holds the titles of Bachelor of Architecture, Fellow of the New Zealand Institute of Architecture and Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit.





THE story of Croatian settlement in New Zealand is presented in this book as a mixture of articles, biographies, documents and photographs. It is not a formal chronological history. The book offers glimpses of the past through the lives of pioneer settlers, events of importance and archival material from public and private sources. This is by no means the full story; rather the aim is to provide sufficient information for a better understanding of Croatian immigration to New Zealand. It is a historical missing link for all New Zealanders but will more particularly satisfy the curiosity of the numerous descendants of the pre-1958 pioneer families and those who have arrived in more recent decades.

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