

State Museum Instructional Guide-English Language Arts Model Lesson

Author: Paula Dempsey, Oak Hill High School

Title: West Virginia: A Melting Pot

Big Idea: Analyzing Informational Text

Essential Question: Why did immigrants settle in West Virginia? What accomplishments/difficulties did they experience? What common experiences did most of the immigrants share?

West Virginia College and Career Readiness Standards

English Language Arts

ELA.10.R.C1 Cite strong and thorough textual evidence to support analysis of what the informational text says explicitly as well as inferences drawn from the informational text recognizing when the text leaves matters uncertain.

ELA.10.R.C5 Determine two central ideas of an informational text and analyze their development over the course of the informational text, including how they emerge and are shaped and refined by specific details; provide an objective summary of the informational text.

ELA.10.L.C.36 Demonstrate command of the conventions of standard English grammar and usage when writing or speaking.

- Use various types of phrases (noun, verb, adjectival, adverbial, participial, prepositional, or absolute) and clauses (independent and dependent; noun, relative, and adverbial) to convey specific meanings and add variety and interest to writing or presentations.

Social Studies

SS.10.H.CL1.4 Summarize the distinct characteristics of each colonial region in the settlement and development of America, including religious, social, political and economic differences.

SS.9-10.L.10 Read and comprehend history/social studies texts at or above grade level text complexity band independently and proficiently.

Learning Plan:

Prior to this cross-curricular unit coordinated between the 10th grade social study teacher(s) and 10th grade English teacher(s), the students will need a review of immigrants who settled in West Virginia which could be accomplished through the use of the Discovery Rooms 3,9, and 15 video links.

Each student will receive copies of all six informational texts (*"Where the Rails Turn Up" Slovenes Come To Richwood, Asturian West Virginia, In the Beginning South Charleston's Belgian Roots, Jewish Communities in West Virginia, VOLUME XIII, NO. 1 January 1999 Helvetia: Little Switzerland*, and the Excerpt from: *The Death of Constable Riggs: Ethnic Conflict in Marion County in the World War I Era*), the Document Analysis Graphic Organizer, and a highlighter. Each student will read and analyze each document and complete the Document Analysis Graphic Organizer. The students may use a highlighter as an active reading strategy to note the quotes or key ideas that support their responses to the Essential Questions. They will record their findings on the graphic organizer.

After completing this assignment, the students will write a paragraph summarizing their overall responses to the Essential Question-- What common experiences did most of the immigrants share?

Notes to Instructor:

This activity will take at least two 50-60 minute class periods as some of the texts are a bit lengthy. The teacher may want to model the highlighting activity and filling out one part of the graphic organizer using one of the informational texts as a whole class activity to ensure that all of the students understand the activity. The teacher will monitor the students to redirect or clarify information as needed. For struggling readers, the teacher may choose to reduce the number of informational texts by allowing them to select four of the six and complete only those sections of the graphic organizer.

This lesson may be used prior to assigning an Informative Essay with research using MLA format.

Links and other resources:

<http://www.wvculture.org/goldenseal/Winter00/slovene.html> - Contains the informational text of *"Where the Rails Turn Up" Slovenes Come To Richwood* by Nancy Svet Burnett which explains the immigration of the Slovenes (or Austrians) to West Virginia.

<http://www.wvculture.org/goldenseal/fall09/asturian.html> - Contains the informational text of *Asturian West Virginia* by Luis Argeo which explains the immigration of the Spanish Asturians to West Virginia.

<http://www.wvculture.org/goldenseal/winter11/Belgian.html> - Contains the informational text of *In the Beginning South Charleston's Belgian Roots* by Stan Bumgardner which explains the immigration of the Belgians to West Virginia.

<http://www.wvculture.org/arts/ethnic/jewish.html> - Contains the informational text of *Jewish Communities in West Virginia* which explains the immigration from Germany and other Germanic States to West Virginia.

<http://www.wvculture.org/history/wvhs1311.html> - Contains the informational text of *VOLUME XIII, NO. 1 January 1999 Helvetia: Little Switzerland* by Sara Akers which explains the immigration from Switzerland and Germany to West Virginia.

http://www.wvculture.org/history/journal_wvh/wvh52-4.html - Contains the informational text of *The Death of Constable Riggs: Ethnic Conflict in Marion County in the World War I Era* by Charles H. McCormick which explains some of the difficulties many immigrants had after settling in West Virginia.

Discovery Room 3 - <http://www.wvculture.org/museum/education/EDUdr3.html> - This room in the Museum of History contains information on the struggles and contributions of immigrants.

Discovery Room 9 - <http://www.wvculture.org/museum/education/EDUdr9.html> - This room in the Museum of History contains information on immigrants in Helvetia, WV.

Discovery Room 15 - <http://www.wvculture.org/museum/education/EDUdr15.html> - This room in the Museum of History contains information on immigrants working in the mines.

Student Materials:

Copies of each of the informational texts, a copy of the Document Analysis Graphic Organizer, a highlighter, pen/pencil.

Related Websites:

<http://www.wvculture.org/history/government/immigration05.html> - Provides further information about immigrants specifically hired in the coal fields.

http://www.wvculture.org/history/journal_wvh/wvh50-2.html - Contains information regarding the "Peonage" of immigrants including African American slaves who escaped slavery in the South.

Name: _____ Date _____ Class Period _____

Directions: As you analyze the primary source documents, complete the following graphic organizer.

| Document | <u>Essential Questions</u> Why did immigrants settle in WV? What accomplishments/difficulties did they experience? | <u>Evidence</u> Cite quotations or key ideas from the document that support your findings. |
|---|--|---|
| "Where the Rails Turn Up" Slovenes Come To Richwood | | |
| Asturian West Virginia | | |
| In the Beginning South Charleston's Belgian Roots | | |
| Jewish Communities in West Virginia | | |

Name: _____ Date: _____ Class Period: _____

___ Directions: As you analyze the primary source documents, complete the following graphic organizer.

| Document & Source | <u>Essential Questions</u> Why did immigrants settle in WV? What accomplishments/difficulties did they encounter? | Evidence Write quotations or key ideas from the document that support your findings. |
|--|--|--|
| Helvetia: Little Switzerland | | |
| Excerpt from: Excerpt from: The Death of Constable Riggs: Ethnic Conflict in Marion County in the World War I Era By Charles H. McCormick Volume 52 (1993), pp. 33-58 | | |

Asturian West Virginia

By Luis Argeo

Spanish immigrants came to Harrison and Marion counties by the thousands to work in the zinc factories during the early 20th century.

“We believed that they were going to the best place of the world, but they suffered a lot there. It was very hard for them. Very hard, yes.” Mrs. Covadonga Vega López speaks about her neighbors and relatives from Arnao, an Asturian coastal village that saw hundreds of metallurgical and mining workers shipping towards the other side of the Atlantic Ocean, far away, to the isolated mountains of West Virginia.

That was almost one century ago. They departed Spain seeking new opportunities, or as it is said in the movies, searching for the American Dream. The workers proceeding from the Arnao Royal Asturian Company of Mines ran up against a tepid welcome after landing at Ellis Island immigration offices in New York. They would eventually reach their own American Dream, although splashed with indifference, difficulties, and discrimination.

Their labor experience in mines, factories, and blast furnaces in their home country led them to those places where chimneys, shafts, and cooling towers proliferated among the woody green and the stony black of the coal valleys. They gathered in small company towns that were built for workers close to the factories — towns that belonged to the chemical and mining companies, with low-rent houses, storehouses, school, and church: towns like Spelter, Anmoore, and Moundsville in West Virginia, and Donora in Pennsylvania.

These were towns where Asturian immigrants were in the majority, places where for many years people could speak the Asturian language, ate fabada (mixture of beans and rice with chicken), played the bagpipe, and danced the traditional Xiringüelu for fun. Asturian and United States histories converged in the hills, valleys, and rivers of the Appalachian region, thanks to the zinc workers.

“Wherever there were zinc factories, there were Asturians. They were those who better could stand such a nasty and helly work,” Isaac Suárez, octogenarian, son of Asturians, and born in Spelter, says in Spanish. “That’s why the Spanish language was very common in the smelting furnaces.”

“The Asturians involved in the zinc industry thought of themselves as one community,” says Art Zoller Wagner, grandson of another Asturian who arrived in West Virginia in 1917. “They communicated with each other; traveled to each others’ fiestas, weddings, and funerals; and shared news about job opportunities. The experience of any of the locations would have had much in common with the others.”

Spelter, Harrison County, is today a dismantled and silent residential Clarksburg suburb. Nevertheless, its 175 wooden houses hosted 1,500 people of Asturian origin in 1915. All the families depended on the zinc mill that Grasselli Chemical Company had raised at the edge of the West Fork River. All of the families knew each other and, by and large, they were a happy community.

*You can read the rest of this article in this issue of Goldenseal, available in bookstores, libraries or **direct from Goldenseal.***

**Excerpt from: The Death of Constable Riggs:
Ethnic Conflict in Marion County
in the World War I Era**

**By Charles H. McCormick
Volume 52 (1993), pp. 33-58**

February 24, William Ross Riggs, aged 47, *American, constable; murdered in Farmington in a strike riot by foreigners.*⁴

The three lines combined some of the most familiar and disturbing national themes of the industrial age: conflict between middle-class Americans and immigrants, capital and labor and differing sets of cultural values....

The immigrant miners were part of a great exodus from southern and eastern Europe caused by a population explosion and facilitated by cheaper, quicker and more available trans-oceanic transportation. Between 1890 and 1920, more than eighteen million of these "new immigrants" entered the United States. One must be careful not to exaggerate the differences from the "old immigrants" of the mid-nineteenth century, most of whom came from the British Isles or northern Europe. The new immigrants were more likely to be adventuring, unattached and unskilled males, often inclined to sojourn than to settle.⁸ Throughout the northeast and midwest they filled the ranks of economically marginal, heavy labor jobs in mills, mines and construction. They often changed jobs and between one-third and one-half returned within a few years to their native lands.⁹

These laborers had their own, largely untold stories of pluck and luck, courage and hard work. Charles Elekes, who came to Farmington from Croatia in 1911, was typical. Like 80 percent of South Slavic immigrants, he was a single male, and as with most new immigrants, from a poor but hard-working, respectable farming background.... Croatian immigrants gravitated toward coal and steel in America and on the ship Elekes met a woman bound for Farmington, West Virginia, where her husband supposedly earned five dollars a day in the mines. That seemed a lot of money, so Elekes and his friends decided to go there. Upon arriving, a Croatian-speaking man at the saloon near Farmington Town Hall bought them beer and located them lodging at a boarding house. Three days later, the boarding house operator assisted them in attaining underground jobs at Jamison's "Over the Hill" Number 9 Mine. Elekes recalled that they were hired without even speaking to a company official.¹⁰

Four years later, Elekes and his fellow eastern Europeans remained unassimilated and unwelcome. In America, South Slavs were disparaged as "Huns," "Bohunks" and, most often, "Hunkies."¹¹ As Croatian historian George J. Prpic explains, his people were not "Americanized," but in many ways, neither did they retain Croatian lifestyles. They lived and worked mostly with their own people and other foreigners, knew little English and lacked enough mediators -- priests, intellectuals and educated men -- to help them adapt to the new environment and retain their identity.¹²

Marion County Croatians and other Slavs shared lowly status with the longer established and more numerous Italians. Italians had gained the partial acceptance of Marion County's Protestant establishment, possibly because operators had long experience with them as workers and the public perceived ordinary Italians as victims of Black Hand extortion. More likely, Democratic politicians were courting them as potential Democratic bloc voters....¹³

The most common general complaint from middle-class Americans against immigrants, from the time of the Irish arrival in the 1850s, was that they abused alcohol.¹⁶ As the temperance movement neared its goal of national prohibition in the 1910s and many states went dry, immigrant culture became a special target for reformers....

Despite the Dry state-wide victory, which won all but Ohio and McDowell counties, opposition to the enforcement of prohibition in West Virginia remained strong. Distilling and brewing interests, those who feared a loss of state revenue, the few urban sophisticates, civil libertarians and many rank-and-file Democrats balked at forced abstinence. The mass of voteless immigrant miners shared in this opposition.

The Yost Law, which spelled out the details of enforcement but reflected the legislature's hesitancy to ban drink completely, went into effect in July 1914. It forbade the manufacture, sale and importation for sale of liquor and beer, but allowed a person to import one-half gallon from outside the state for personal consumption. The importation loophole played into the hands of merchants in bordering Wet states who eagerly supplied the bottled goods. Thirsty Marion Countians, evidently mostly immigrants, made the round trip Saturday trains to nearby Point Marion, Pennsylvania, fulfilling a spiritual quest far different from that envisioned by reformers. In the coal camps, bootlegging flourished and with it the notoriety of a moonshine whimsically called "pick-handle." Despite Anti-Saloon League foreign language pamphlets designed to win them over, few immigrant miners backed the dry law. Why, they asked, deny poor working men one of their few consolations and deprive them of an essential element of their old world culture?¹⁸

...After Jamison official refused to talk to them, three to six hundred Farmington strikers took to the county roads. Side-by-side from mine to mine to the accompaniment of drum and bugle marched Italians, Poles, Russians and a large contingent of Croatians³⁰ or Serbo-Croatians.³¹ Brandishing stout hickory clubs or pick handles studded with lethal spikes or iron bolts, and perhaps carrying concealed pistols and daggers, they followed an American flag mounted above a red flag and a banner inscribed "United We Stand; Divided We Fall. Give Us Justice; or Nothing at All."³²

...Extant sources identify Italians and Croatians from the coal camps as strike leaders. Company officials blamed the work stoppage on the Italian miners, *contadini* from Calabria, the toe of the Italian boot. The strike, at least superficially, resembled a peasant "flash rebellion," a traditional form of spontaneous protest practiced by oppressed and powerless peasants. Such emotional, assertive outpourings, acts of frustration and desperation, frequently occurred in the Mezzogiorno region, southern Italy, Sicily and Sardinia.³⁴ In America, intolerable working conditions had sometimes goaded Italian workers into sudden, violent strikes without formally elected leaders. In fact, such rural protests were common in many parts of Europe.³⁵

Slavs had also rebelled, their most famous uprising occurring among mainly "Hungarian," actually Slovak, Polish and Italian hard coal miners near Hazleton, Pennsylvania. In September 1897, more than one thousand immigrants had taken to the roads parading with red flags, clubs, iron bars and other weapons before stoning a mine superintendent's house. The affair had turned bloody when the Luzerne County sheriff's posse opened fire during a confrontation with marchers on a road near Lattimer Mine. The hail of bullets killed nineteen and wounded thirty-nine foreign strikers. In 1913, ten Croatians had been tried for murder following the death of the deputy sheriff during a bloody strike of copper miners at Calumet, Michigan....³⁶

VOLUME XIII, NO. 1 January 1999

Helvetia: Little Switzerland

By Sara Akers

Helvetia, West Virginia is a small Swiss community in the central part of the state. It is about thirty miles from Buckhannon, halfway between State Route 20 and U.S. Route 219. The founders of this small community came from New York with the hope of finding freedom of religion, land and the freedom to practice their customs. Most of the people who settled in this area were from Switzerland with a sprinkling of settlers from Germany. Their language was Schwyzerdutsch, a dialect of German originating from the canton for which their country was named.

In 1869 they came to a wilderness area that was a seventy-five mile walk from the nearest railroad in Clarksburg. The first of these settlers to view the new home place were Jacob Hadler; Henry Asper, Sr., his wife and baby; Joseph Zielman; and Xavoir Holtzweg. They bought the land for three dollars an acre and sent for the rest of their people. That first winter, the group stayed in a bunk house that they all shared. The next spring they each helped one another in building homes and clearing lands for farming.

The first school for the children was built in 1873. The children in the first school were taught in English, German was a forbidden language. Most of the people of this new community were well educated, with several possessing college degrees from various European universities or trade schools. Every man and woman could speak High German and some could even speak more languages, but none were illiterate. Desiring to assimilate into their new country, the elders began to study English and soon all were adapted to American customs and had taken out citizenship papers.

Additional settlers arrived in Helvetia after hearing about this new Utopia in the newspapers of far away cities. An example was Christian Gimmel who decided to immigrate to West Virginia based on information he had received about Helvetia from newspaper accounts. According to Ann (Zumbach) Daetwyler, granddaughter of Christian Gimmel, her grandfather arrived in Helvetia with his family on December 13, 1873. Some of his descendants still live in the Helvetia community today. Christian Gimmel was what was called a whipsaw. He and an uncle sawed lumber that was to be cured and used in several buildings in Helvetia including the Helvetia Church.

Helvetians learned quickly that by working long hours, they could produce a surplus of grain, potatoes, beans, fruit, meat, milk, butter, and cheese, but unfortunately there was no outside market in which to sell their goods. On the farm, all the food for the family and the livestock was raised and preserved for winter use as food or feed could not be bought at any stores. At stores, only the most essential things such as salt, sugar, flour, rice and oatmeal, were stocked. Even getting these products was hard because travel in the winter months was almost impossible.

A man by the name of John Killenberger brought in a herd of Brown Swiss Cattle. Sometimes cows were trained for farm work, as were oxen. Horses were scarce in this early community, therefore oxen were used. Oxen were more sure-footed than horses but much slower.

Then, in 1913, Helvetia became a boom town. A rough board dance hall went up, a large hotel was built, Swiss dress was tucked away in trunks, and hand-me-down shirts and suits became the common dress. Virgin trees were felled, and the Alpine flowers were ground under. The change was due mainly to the development of the Buckhannon Chemical Company at Selbyville and the laying of the Baltimore and Ohio railroad line to Helvetia. Having new access to the outside and the opportunity for more diverse economic opportunities, the population of the lovely town quickly rose to about 1,000.

The boom was short lived and soon after came the decline. As in most West Virginia boom towns, the population quickly dropped to about 250 residents which is about what it is today.

In 1969, there was a big Centennial Celebration. Bill Thomas stated that:

"Helvetia is unique in that it has been able to resist the influence of the modern 20th century, to maintain an identity in keeping with its rich Swiss heritage. It is different and to show the world just how different, Helvetia this year is celebrating a centennial to which it has invited the public."

Helvetia continues to invite the public to visit and holds an annual fall festival which attracts several thousand visitors.

After 100 years, Helvetia retains its Swiss atmosphere. Many of its citizens still speak Schwytzerdeutsch and hold the old Swiss-German customs close. The town is a quaint little piece of the past sitting in the middle of the present. In keeping with its Swiss heritage, Helvetia is a rural retreat for those of us who need a bit of the past and a break from the hubbub of the cities and the hectic pace in which we live.

In the Beginning **South Charleston's Belgian Roots By Stan Bumgardner**

Prehistoric cultures had lived in the area for about 12,000 years. White explorers had found their way to the mouth of Davis Creek as early as the 1780's. But the history of the modern city of South Charleston dates to the arrival of a group of intrepid immigrant glassworkers and their families in 1907. Lured by free land and free natural gas — a key resource in glassmaking — these 20th-century pioneers relocated from two towns in Indiana to start glass factories in the Kanawha Valley. A large number of these glassworkers were Belgian, and their influence was strong in this important industrial community.

Around the turn of the 20th century, the Kanawha Land Company, headed by former West Virginia Governor William A. MacCorkle, had acquired most of the bottomland on the south side of the Kanawha River, just west of Charleston. MacCorkle, however, was having trouble attracting residents. Other than an old iron ore company, businesses had yet to discover the community that would later be known as the Chemical Center of the World.

MacCorkle convinced his fellow investors to provide free real estate and two years of natural gas to any company willing to build there. As luck would have it, two glassmaking companies in Indiana were struggling to find enough gas to meet their needs. In the spring of 1907, Felix Dandois, Aimer Lefevre, and Alfred Gilbert — three Belgian-born officials with Banner Window Glass of Shirley, Indiana — decided to accept the Kanawha Land Company's offer after first considering sites in Huntington, Milton, and Clarksburg.

The Banner Window Glass factory was built near the Kanawha River, beside an ancient Adena burial mound. (Today, a Rite-Aid store stands at the entrance to the former plant.) After the plant was built, it took some three weeks to fire up the glass furnaces to the necessary temperature for glass production. On December 12, 1907, Banner Window Glass manufactured its first piece of flat glass. This was an inauspicious start as the factory burned down the next day. Undeterred by the setback, the Belgians rebuilt the plant and restarted production several months later.

Banner Window Glass was a cooperative owned by 50 Belgian immigrants, all of whom worked in the factory. This arrangement derived from the European guild system, where laborers controlled the means of production. This, in their view, produced a more cost-efficient product and generated greater pay for the workers.

In the guild system, glassmakers and other craftspeople would apprentice for years to learn a specific skill. The guilds became tightly knit, invitation-only fraternities. In many instances, only the relatives of guild members were allowed to join. As such, crafts like glassmaking became family traditions, handed down from generation to generation. With glassmaking essentially a family secret, these skilled craftsmen held a corner on the labor market. This inside knowledge also meant they had special insight into how a glass plant should be run.

An example of this Old World tradition was the Dumont family, who emigrated from Ransart, Belgium, and eventually ended up in South Charleston.

*You can read the rest of this article in this issue of Goldenseal, available in bookstores, libraries or **direct from Goldenseal.***

Jewish Communities in West Virginia

West Virginia has numerous thriving Jewish communities, some of which are as old as the towns in which they are located. The members of these communities are primarily of Eastern European and German descent, and are now predominantly American-born. The first major wave of Jewish immigration occurred in the nineteenth century from approximately 1840 to 1880, mostly from Germany and Germanic states. Small but vibrant Jewish communities associated with this first period of immigration existed in Wheeling, Charleston, Huntington, and Parkersburg as early as the mid-1800's. Synagogues and Hebrew schools were soon established in the larger communities, creating a strong community focus which has helped to preserve both religious and ethnic identities up to the present. The first synagogue in West Virginia was founded in 1849 in Wheeling, the home of West Virginia's oldest Jewish community.

Events in Russia in the 1880s began the second major wave of Jewish immigrants to America, and had a profound effect on the size of the Jewish population in West Virginia. Jewish settlers from Eastern Europe came from countries such as Russia, Poland, Hungary, Latvia, and Lithuania. During the period from approximately 1888 to 1930, almost 3,000,000 Jews immigrated to America. The period also coincided with the coal boom, and many Jewish immigrant families moved into these new rural Appalachian communities in the vicinity of such towns as Beckley and Welch.

The arrival of Jews from Eastern Europe had a major impact on Jewish life in America, bringing a diversity of ethnic traditions as well as variations in religious practices. Small Jewish communities were present in most of the growing cities in West Virginia, and the new immigrants became a vital part of these existing Jewish communities. Shortly after the turn of the century some communities had two or more congregations, reflecting variations in religious practice from Orthodox to Conservative. Over the past 150 years, for example, the Northern Panhandle has had at least six congregations. Most of the larger communities in the cities have survived to the present, although Charleston is the only community which still has two congregations. There were also numerous smaller communities throughout the state, particularly in association with the mining towns. Most of these smaller Jewish communities have since folded along with the industries. The West Virginia Jewish population in general is much smaller now than it has been in the past.

Today there are numerous activities which promote heritage and strengthen bonds within the Jewish community. Religious life plays a primary role in preserving Jewish traditions and culture. A wealth of heritage is to be found in traditional Jewish services, and in community and family celebrations honoring religious holidays. These activities serve the dual role of maintaining tradition and bringing the local community together. The schedule of religious services varies from community to community, depending mostly on the size of the congregation. Larger communities hold a weekly cycle of religious services, while smaller communities might meet bi-weekly or monthly. Many of the smaller communities have services with visiting rabbis.

In addition to religious services, the celebration of Passover, Rosh Hashanah, Yom Kippur, Purim, and other holidays and festivals are important aspects of Jewish traditional life which bring family and community together. Judaism is a family-oriented religion, and many of the traditional activities involve home-based celebrations. Significant life events, such as passage of youth into adulthood (bar mitzvah and bat mitzvah) are also opportunities for the community to come together.

Year-round cultural programs such as classes, discussions, and music programs are a common element of West Virginia's larger Jewish communities. Several congregations host activities such as educational series and musical programs, providing cultural events for the Jewish community and the general public. For example, the Jewish Cultural Series in Charleston is a regular program highlighting speakers, musicians, and artists in the national Jewish community. Most of the West Virginia communities have regular classes in Hebrew for adults and children, and the larger communities have religious schools and Hebrew language schools for youth. Many of the

congregations have youth groups which provide religious and cultural education including the study of the Hebrew language.

Numerous social and service organizations are associated with the congregations. Temple sisterhoods are women's service organizations dedicated to programs for the synagogue, such as raising money for religious education. Hadassah, the Jewish Women's Zionist Organization, is a service organization primarily dedicated to helping local hospitals and the state of Israel. The Independent Order of B'nai B'rith is the Jewish men's lodge which has social and educational activities, including fund-raising and speakers on cultural and social topics. Local organizations in some communities are designed to welcome new Jewish families to the area and introduce them to the community. Other organizations having a long tradition in West Virginia include the Jewish Welfare Federation and the National Council of Jewish Women.

Today, the largest Jewish communities in West Virginia are in Beckley, Bluefield, Charleston, Clarksburg, Huntington, Morgantown, Parkersburg, Princeton, Weirton, and Wheeling. Smaller communities are still found in Logan, Martinsburg, and Williamson. Descriptions of most of these communities and contact persons can be found under their respective regional headings.

"Where the Rails Turn Up"

Slovenes Come To Richwood

By Nancy Svet Burnett

In the early 1900's, many Slovenes left their homeland in search of jobs and a better life in America. Now called Slovenia, this mountainous country in south-central Europe was until recently part of Yugoslavia, and, before World War I, was part of Austria. The Bartol, Jonas, Logar, Prelaz, Svet, Urbas, and Wise families of West Virginia were all Slovene immigrants from the village of Cerknica who settled in Richwood, determined to make a new life for themselves in a new land.

Crawling on their stomachs, young Frank Svet and his best friend Frank Tekavec pulled out the tinsnips tucked into their belts and cut the barbed wire separating the Italian and Yugoslav border. They slipped under the wire in the dark of a summer's night and made their way to Trieste to board a ship for America. The year was 1927.

Most emigrants to America did not need to make such a dramatic exit, but these two 17-year-old men were just one year shy of conscription into the Yugoslav army. There were other compelling reasons to emigrate, as well. The economy in the newly formed Yugoslavia was poor, and job prospects were virtually nil. So brothers, sisters, cousins, and employers who were already established in West Virginia recruited fellow Slovenes to work with them in the booming timber town of Richwood. The Slovenes - or Austrians as the locals knew them - were skilled woodsmen. Not only were the woods familiar to them, but their new home in Richwood looked strikingly similar to their hometown of Cerknica.

Travel to the U.S. was by ship with the immigrants packed into steerage-class berths; a normal crossing usually took around two weeks. After long days at sea, the first glimpse of America for the immigrants was the Statue of Liberty in New York harbor, and for many it became the most memorable event of their passage. No immigrant ever forgot seeing this famous symbol.

After enduring the rigors of Ellis Island, the Slovenes moved on to the next stage of their journey - the train station in Manhattan where they would board a train for Richwood. Wishing to reassure themselves about the upcoming train trip, the immigrants would frustratedly try to communicate in a strange language. Cecilia Tekavec Logar was able to finally ask the conductor, "What time clock train go?" The conductor pointed on his watch to the correct departure time.

Frank Svet was concerned about where he would get off the train. When he asked, the conductor gestured by lifting his hands up toward his shoulders, indicating steel rails bending back over themselves. "Son, just ride 'til you don't see any more tracks. Where the rails turn up will be Richwood - the end of the line.

You can read the rest of this article in the Winter 2000 issue of Goldenseal, available in bookstores, libraries or [direct from Goldenseal](#).