

WEEKEND BREAK



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FROM THE ADRIATIC

Tracing the history of Astoria's Eastern European immigrant communities

TO THE PACIFIC

Peter Korchnak
A sign in Astoria's Shively-McClure neighborhood pays tribute to the city's working class immigrants, including Yugoslavians.

By **PETER KORCHNAK**
For *The Astorian*

Atop a staircase on 15th street in Astoria sits a tribute to the city's working class foundations, including a mention of the local Eastern European immigrant communities.

As Astoria's fishing and canning industries boomed at the turn of the 20th century, area businesses employed a growing number of immigrant workers, including many from coastal areas near the Adriatic Sea. Croatian fishermen established villages along the Columbia River, including Clifton, near Westport. Among these was gillnetter Peter Dorcich, who in 1904 launched a decadeslong record of a single day's catch, netting 4,495 pounds of Chinook salmon.

By 1914, voters born in Austria composed 3% of all foreign-born Astorians, about the same share as Danish and English immigrants. Many ethnic Croatians listed Austria as their country of origin on official documents, but were also referred to as Yugoslavians. Emerging from the Austro-Hungarian Empire after World War I, Yugoslavia was a convenient, if inaccurate, regional tie. However, many found this greater regional identity to provide a sense of unity.

Eastern European immigrants in Astoria settled primarily around Scow Bay, between 16th and 23rd streets. While most plied the fishing trade, some changed occupations or started businesses.

Dominic Pincetich, who came to the region from the island of Vis at age 14 in 1899, quit fishing after a few seasons to pursue sales. Around the same time, immigrant Martin Franciscovich ran restaurants and saloons in Astoria and Seaside, as well as a wholesale liquor business, after spending years in the fishing industry.

At the dawn of Prohibition, Franciscovich wrote an open letter to his fellow Astorians, thanking them for a quarter century of patronage. However, in 1925, the Franciscovich family opened a new saloon at the corner of 15th Street and Marine Drive. There, the building, designed by architect John E. Wicks, still proudly bears the family name. A bike shop for many years, it now houses a music store.

Meanwhile, the Andrich family moved to Astoria from Sutter Creek, California, joining over a dozen other Croatian families. Their son, Joe, later operated a grocery store, as did fellow Croatians Antone Marincovich and Larry Gelalich. Larry Rosovich, known to many for his friendly greetings, was rescued at the age of 14 from the Great Republic ship when it wrecked at Sand Island in 1879. His son, Peter Cosovich, was a longtime owner of the Astoria Stationery Company and four-time president of the local chamber of commerce.

As a mayoral candidate, he was an early booster for Astoria tourism, advocating to develop attractions like the Flavel



Former Astoria Mayor Peter Cosovich greeting naval officer William Leggett Jr. on a May 1954 visit to Tongue Point.

House Museum. He served two terms as mayor of Astoria between 1951 and 1958. His family home, also designed by Wicks, still stands at the corner of Lexington Avenue and Pacific Street.

As the 20th century progressed, business held strong. Pete Vukovich co-owned, along with Italian immigrant George Celsi, a car dealership at the corner of 14th Street and Marine Drive. The upper floors housed offices and penthouse apartments. Liisa Penner, archivist at Clatsop County Historical Society, was one of the building's tenants. "I loved the family, they were wonderful people," Penner said.

Over time, area Croatians and their families moved away, died out or assimilated. Many with last names ending in -ich are descendants of Austrian Croatians. Take the Marincovichs. In 1987, Jack Marincovich was named to the Columbia River Maritime Museum board of trustees.

Today, two Astorians boast an -ić name in its original form and continue the business tradition. Djordje Čitović co-owns, with his wife Trudy, Fire Station Yoga and the Rosebriar Mansion. Čitović's parents, Serbian immigrants from Yugoslavia, raised him to think of himself as Yugoslavian. He first spotted the 15th Street plaque on a visit to Astoria in 2017. "I was pretty amazed," Čitović said of the recognition. "As far as I know, it was mainly people in the fishing industry that were coming here."

Fordinka Kanlić, who owns Drina Daisy restaurant in Astoria, is a native of Bosnia and Herzegovina. Hearing about the city's Eastern European immigrants, Croatian fishermen of Clifton come to her mind. "They're long gone," Kanlić said. She now believes she is the only Astoria resident born in the country of Yugoslavia.



Peter Korchnak

Djordje Čitović owns the Rosebriar Mansion in Astoria.