

Preserve Croatian Heritage Foundation Newsletter

Published for those interested in preserving St. Nicholas Church, N.S. and our Croatian Heritage

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Pennsylvania Historic Marker Approved for St. Nicholas Croatian Church, N.S. by Steve Willing

The application that PCHF submitted in December 2013 for a Pennsylvania Historical Marker, designating St. Nicholas R.C. Croatian Church, North Side as "The First Croatian Parish in the Western Hemisphere", has been approved by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission. A blue sign with gold lettering as seen across the Commonwealth will be placed to the right of the new seating area of the trail memorialization project that PennDOT is scheduled to complete in late fall of 2014. The marker will be placed where the main altar of St. Nicholas Church was located.



photo by Steve Willing

A dedication ceremony is currently being planned. More information will be announced as it becomes available.

Inside This Issue

Archeological Dig in Rectory
p. 4-5
Catherine Zivic PCHF Memorial
Fund.....p.2

Cornerstone to be Incorporated
in Memorial.....p.1

Mosaic Welcoming Sign for
Troy Hill..... p.3

New Historical Photos on St.
Nicholas Website.....p.7

PCHF Membership Thank You
p.3

St. Nicholas Banquet 2013.....
p.6-7

State Marker Approved for St.
Nicholas.....p.1

Cornerstone to be Incorporated in Memorial by Susan Petrick



The Route 28/East Ohio Street Project is progressing well as reported by Dan Cessna, Pennsylvanian Department of Transportation, P.E., District Executive, Engineering District 11. The contractor is finalizing details on the wall and walkway and construction of the new southbound lanes. The walkway and the grotto wall will be constructed later this summer. The plan is to complete this entire section by Thanksgiving.

Dan Cessna was also happy to report that the cornerstone from St. Nicholas Church, N.S. will soon be moved from the Hahn Road cemetery to be incorporated into the seating area at the memorial site.

We will continue to keep you informed of new developments on the memorial. as well as dedication plans.



photos by Susan Petrick

Catherine Zivic PCHF Memorial Fund

by Donna Zivic

I placed my mother's mail on the table beside her recliner late one afternoon. Cancer was taking its toll, and my mom napped more frequently during the day. She still enjoyed her favorite soap operas, the Penguin hockey games, and spending time with her family; but on this particular day, she had an extra spark of life. She was reading the articles in the February 2014 PCHF newsletter about the memorial that was planned on the site of her beloved St. Nicholas Croatian Catholic Church.



I was in another room, and she rang her little bell to call me and said "Donna, wait until you read about everything that is going to happen to memorialize our church!" She was so excited about the news. She was more excited than I'd seen her about anything lately, and it warmed my heart to see her face light up with joy as I listened to her tell me about all that was to be done. She then exclaimed, "Wait until you read everything! I never thought I would live to see this happen!"

Unfortunately, my mom died on March 13, 2014. She did not get to see our church as art on a retaining wall of Route 28, did not have the opportunity to read the interpretive panels rich with history and did not get to see the historical marker. She did, however, leave this world knowing that the church she loved would not be forgotten. I am sure she couldn't wait to talk to my dad about all of this when she got to heaven; but then again, he already knew.

My mom was a lifelong member of St. Nicholas and attended school there through the 10th grade. She loved singing in the choir or in the congregation, she loved the friendships that she made through St. Nicholas and she loved worshipping there. At the age of fifteen, my mom's mother passed away from congestive heart failure; and my mom took care of her father and raised her little sister, Mary Ann. Her sister told me that she and my mom adopted the Blessed Mother as their new mother and prayed to her all the time. Mom especially

loved the May Crowning ceremony and was so honored when it was her turn to be the May Queen. She loved all songs to the Blessed Mother and would play them on the piano at home and sing in her beautiful soprano voice. The entrance song sung at my mom's funeral mass as we said goodbye to her was "On This Day, O Beautiful Mother."

Catherine and Donald Zivic were married in St. Nicholas Church, N.S. on August 27, 1955. She was the most beautiful bride ever and my dad was so handsome. My brothers, Ron, Alan, Ken and myself were baptized there. My mom once said in an interview with Susan Petrick that she wished that her children had the beautiful memories of St. Nicholas that she did. My brother, Ken, read this in my mom's story board and, "we do have countless and beautiful memories." Communions, confirmations, and holiday masses and traditions were special memories, but we all enjoyed the 10:30 a.m. Latin Mass at St. Nicholas when my dad sang with the Men's Choir. We sat there as a family, and we knew every mass and every part and sang along in harmony.

My mom was thrilled and truly touched after learning that the efforts of the PCHF with PennDOT's assistance would soon lead to the creation of a beautiful place to gather, to pray and to reflect on all that was. For that reason, we saw fit to ask that donations be made to PCHF in my mom's name when we wrote her obituary. We thank our family and friends for their generous contributions. When we visit the St. Nicholas site, my mom and dad will always be with us in spirit. Their faith was strong, and they raised me and my brothers well. All we ever wanted to do was to make our parents happy and proud of us. The efforts of the PCHF gave my mom a very happy day near the end of her life; and for this, we thank you.



Hvala,

Donna, Ron, Alan and Ken

PCHF Membership Thank You

by Susan Petrick



A heart-felt thank you is extended to everyone who has taken time to send in their membership and for the many additional donations. Monies collected by PCHF is used to: cover the cost of the Pennsylvania Historical Marker to be installed at the St. Nicholas memorial site on E. Ohio Street; the cost of the Church and Grotto interpretive panels planned for installation along the hiking/biking trail at the St. Nicholas memorial site; maintenance costs of the www.stnicholasNS.org website and PCHF newsletter

photocopying and mailing costs.

PCHF Board members believe in and take seriously our commitment to preserve the Croatian culture of St. Nicholas Church, and we thank you once again for your PCHF membership and your continued support.

If patrons would like to become members or make donations, the annual membership fee is only \$15. You may mail your check made out to PCHF to P. O. Box 5812, Pittsburgh, PA 15209.

Mosaic Welcoming Sign for Troy Hill

by Tony Benvin

Those who attended the 2013 St. Nicholas Day banquet were treated to a presentation by Dan Cessna of PennDOT. Dan highlighted the final stage of Route 28 construction and the work that would be done at the base of Troy Hill. This work included parking lot renovation and beautification for the PennDOT-owned lot, now leased by the Penn Brewery.

Beyond the improvement work by PennDOT, Troy Hill Citizens, in cooperation with the Community Alliance of Spring Garden and East Deutschtown, will be installing a welcome sign for its own neighborhood.

Several years ago, Troy Hill Citizens, Inc. contracted with the artist, James Simon, to design and fabricate this sign. James' work is already well



known to the Pittsburgh area. He is the creator of the larger-than-life musicians downtown on Liberty Avenue; and most recently, he created the Bloomfield memorial for three police officers slain in the line of duty.

The Troy Hill sign, about 8 feet wide and 12 feet tall, will be placed at the lower edge of the parking lot at the intersection of Troy Hill Road and Vinial Street just about where the handicapped curb cut is now. The Troy Hill sign will be a mosaic of brightly colored glass shards similar to James' Uptown Tree sign and his welcome sign for Braddock. It is an abstract, urban landscape out of which grows a tall field of flowers; and its size and vibrant color will make it easily visible, announcing the neighborhood to outbound traffic on Route 28.

As a combination urban and pastoral images, it will fit quite nicely with both the urban landscape and the upcoming natural landscaping of the renovated parking lot and will be another means of drawing attention to our developing North Side communities.

Archeological Dig in the St. Nicholas, Oldest Croatian Rectory in the Western Hemisphere

In December 2013, a generous Director of Preservation Pittsburgh asked if would be permissible to remove and restore the rounded top stained glass window from the stairwell in the St. Nicholas Rectory. The new owner, PennDOT, graciously gave permission so that the finished window could be displayed publicly as heritage for all to see. I and two Preservation Pittsburgh

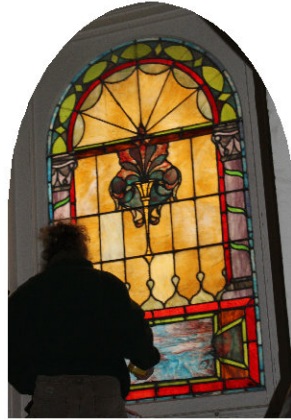


photo by Susan Petrick 2011

Directors, one of whom was a restorer of stained glass, went into the rectory on a very, very cold winter day with our gear -- cameras, tools, gloves, boots, and a bit of excitement. Going into the rectory which had been boarded up by Preserve Croatian Heritage Foundation reminded me of how well spent was that money to protect this building. It was eerie removing the plywood over the door and going into the dim light of what was once the spiritual, financial, and planning center of the oldest Croatian Roman Catholic Parish in the Western Hemisphere; and it was extremely cold inside. The dusty, golden dining room curtains hung, where they have been for perhaps 40 years, reminded me of all the people who have lived there and enjoyed that strongly built home. The stairwell stained glass window was removed after being photographed.

The bottom half of the stained glass was missing, but has since been located safe in someone's home. Using photographs from Preservation Pittsburgh, the bottom part can be rebuilt with new, matching glass if some original glass is missing. In the dirty windowed, dimly lit, dusty priests' house bedrooms, we felt a very, very silent place, yet with the roar of

cars going by. For 113 years, the priests heard that sound of traffic all day and all night. First there were horses, hitchings and wagons and now semi-tractor trailers! On the kitchen counter sat a shiny spatula which saw many an egg, pierogi or pancake. In whose hands did it get used? Stored in the rather clean basement was a miniature Nativity setting of the white-walled City of Bethlehem with tiny electric lights in each window of the walls of Bethlehem. How many children viewed this with awe in church at Christmases over many years as they learned about how Jesus was born? How many children wanted to show it to their children when they came of age? A gifted, Croatian-American carpenter and artist must have proudly made and displayed this each Christmas Eve at St. Nicholas Church. Two very old doorknobs, one hand-turned wood and one of cast metal, reminded me of the hundred years of hands of all the people who turned those knobs to do God's work in this home. On the floor in the attic were well-used pieces of linoleum which had been relocated from below when a new floor was put in. Showing wear of many holy feet, the linoleum also had an early 20th century design, suitable for framing...and so I framed it! The awesome five, art glass, crystal panels around the entrance door were carefully removed for restoration and to be displayed publicly along with the door with its art glass centerpiece. This beautiful formal foyer lined with beautiful multi-colored marble of rose/burgundy and white all is now demolished. But for 113 years, it welcomed visitors from Croatia, poor and



photo by Jack Schmitt 2013

Archeological Dig at St. Nick Rectory

cont'd. from P. 5

and rich and educated people and bishops. On the floor of the parish office laid a cheap styrofoam and tinsel wedding decoration which had made people very happy to have for their celebration of a new life



photo by Jack Schmitt 2013

together, in a new home with the hope for many young children. From the basement, we saved an "old world" scythe, a six foot long grain or grass harvesting tool. Could it have once been used to cut the grass near the priest's house? Or did it

harvest grain in Croatia? Who brought it here? Who last used it? I buffed it up and treated its rusty surface with oil...for display later.

Sixteen custom, handmade heavy steel and wood Christmas tree stands found in the gardener room brought to mind the Croatian American welders who made them and the men who lugged them up to the Grotto and Church each Christmas for scores of years and then cut the evergreen trees to go into them -- the evergreens reminding all of eternal life in the middle of winters of Christmases. Certainly these trees with their electric lights delighted many tens of thousands of people over the years during Christmastide celebrations. And then, a somewhat dirty red, white and blue fabric was found in



photo by Susan Petrick 2013

a corner of the garden room...yes a Croatian flag...how many proud years did it hang to be seen by 60,000 daily drivers on Route 28?

Suddenly in the dim light, someone shining a flashlight noticed that there was a hole in the wall



photo by Susan Petrick 2013

and steps lay beyond. A long-forgotten back stairwell in the rectory was re-discovered and on the landing could be seen a long forgotten original art glass window, perhaps 60 years since this back stairwell was

closed off to make a new bathroom upstairs. Carefully with the help of many tools this rounded top window was removed to be restored and displayed. Lurking on a shelf was the coiled up very old leather, possibly handmade, belt and buckle of a man who for many years did not have his pants fall down. Why was this old belt saved and carefully coiled? Who left it? Securing historic artifacts before the demolition was a vocation that we three enjoyed thoroughly. We look forward to their restoration and public display to tell of the unique Croatian Heritage with stories of how they were used and why. We thank the new owner, PennDOT, for allowing our common heritage to be secured to tell the story of our heritage to future generations of Croatian Americans and to people who are not like us.

by Jack Schmitt



photo by Jack Schmitt 2013

St. Nicholas Day Banquet 2013 by Steve Willing



The spirit of Christmas and St. Nicholas was alive and well at the annual gathering of the St. Nicholas Day Banquet at Pittsburgh's National Croatian Hall, Javor, on December 7, 2013. Over 70 former parishioners of St. Nicholas N.S., their families, and friends gathered to celebrate the evening with festive music, dancing, and delicious eastern European food. Guests were welcomed into Javor Hall, which was beautifully decorated in the holiday spirit. A wreath of vines bound by a ribbon of colors representing Croatia hung over a Christmas tree complete with a nativity scene near the front entrance. Tables were decorated with alternating red and green tablecloths, and miniature lights hung from the ceiling illuminating the dance floor.

In keeping with a time honored tradition, St. Nicholas made the rounds greeting each and every one of the guests in attendance and presenting them with a keepsake chocolate gold coin.



We were honored with the presence of Dan Cessna, District Executive, PennDOT District 11. Dan gave a detailed presentation of the last phase of the East Ohio Street Route 28 construction project which will be finished by the end of the 2014 construction season. Guests in attendance were the first to learn of PennDOT's plans to memorialize St.

Nicholas with a sidewalk trail that leads from Penn Brewery to the site of the former Church and Grotto. An octagonal seating area surrounded by canal



stones saved from the Pennsylvania Canal will serve as benches to sit on and reflect on the rich history of St. Nicholas. A stone wall reminiscent of the Our Lady of Lourdes Grotto will be built around the back side of the seating area. Six large historical images will be sandblasted into the cement retaining walls, with the largest image of St Nicholas Church at the far end of the wall, that will be visible to motorists on Route 28. Renderings of the design were on display for guests to view.

PCHF board member, Jack Schmitt, presented Susan Petrick with a small ceramic church and candles to symbolize the light she keeps burning by editing the PCHF newsletter all of these years. Thank you Susan!



A buffet of kolbassi & sauerkraut, pierogies, fried chicken, stuffed cabbage, tossed salad, rolls, and a vegetable medley was catered by Nova Cafe in nearby Millvale. Nick Simunovic of Javor, made sure everyone had their favorite beverage of choice.

We were blessed to have the Mikey Dee band return once again to entertain the crowd with Croatian medleys, polkas, and a mix of eastern European favorites. Traditional Croatian carols were sung to the delight of the audience. see page 7

St. Nicholas Day Banquet 2013



Bill Vergot introduced the crowd to the Rankin Junior Tamburitizans, who performed several folk dances for the Croatian faithful at Javor.

We look forward to continuing this most important tradition each and every year. Thanks to all who came to enjoy the evening. See you next year!



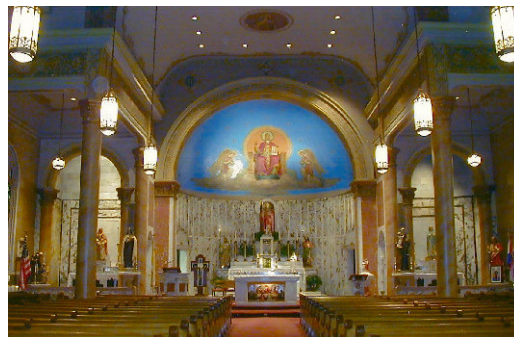
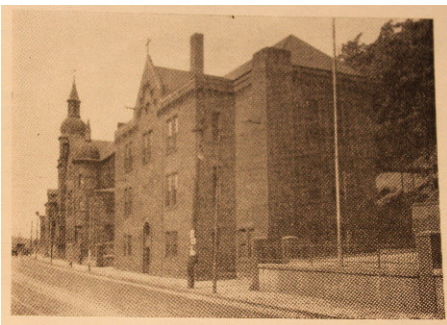
(All Banquet photos by Steve Willing)

Historical Photos Added to St. Nicholas Website

by Susan Petrick

In the research process of writing the text for the St. Nicholas Church, N.S. Interpretive Panel, we came upon many wonderful old photos of the North Side church, school, convent and groups of parishioners that we wanted to share with our readers. These most interesting photos can be viewed by clicking on to the "Gallery" Tab in the www.stnicholasNS.org website. Some samples of these photos can be seen below. More old photos will be added to the website as they become available.

And remember...both the Newsletters and the Gallery photographs can be viewed in color by logging on to the stnicholas.org website. ENJOY!!



WEBSITE





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Address Service Requested

How To Reach Us

E-mail us at **pchf@stnicholans.org**

You may call any of the following Executive Committee Members by telephone as shown below

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Bill Vergot	724 941-8673
Steve Willing	412 527-5764

UPCOMING PCHF EXECUTIVE AND GENERAL MEETING

All are welcome to attend!

Tuesday, September 2 at 7:00 P.M.

JAVOR HALL

805 EAST STREET, PITTSBURGH, PA 15212