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Interviewee Joseph Kuljis
Interviewer H. T. Holmes

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interviewed by H. T. Holmes

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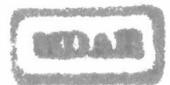
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KULJIS, Joseph

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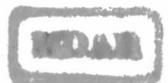
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NARRATOR: Dr. Joseph Kuljis, Biloxi, Mississippi
 INTERVIEWER: H. T. Holmes, Jr., Department of Archives and History, Jackson
 DATE: June 20, 1973
 PLACE: Holiday Inn, Biloxi, Mississippi
 SUBJECT: The Dalmatian Colony in Biloxi

Holmes: This is Henry T. Holmes, Jr., with the Department of Archives and History, interviewing Dr. Joseph K-U-L-J-I-S, Kuljis, in Biloxi, Mississippi at the Holiday Inn. We're going to talk about the Yugoslavian Colony here in Biloxi, and its origins, and the Dalmatian colony on the coast of Yugoslavia. Dr. Kuljis has a Gulf Coast feature report. It's the Daily Herald, in which he wrote an article. It's several pages long, it looks like, and we're going to start off talking about that.

Kuljis: "Several generations have elapsed since the first colonization of Yugoslavians on the Mississippi Coast, yet their presence is felt in all phases of today's economic, social and professional life. Those early emigrants from the Dalmatian Coast of Yugoslavia worked long and hard to achieve this distinct status for their families. A good number came from the Old Country to the New World penniless, and sought employment in a thriving seafood business. They weathered the seasons, and the shrimp and oyster boats, only later in some instances to acquire a fleet and become leaders in the fishing industry." They also acquired factories who these fleets worked for, and some of them went into the feed business for cats, what they call "cat food" business. We have a couple of those that are doing that. "While most of the Dalmatians," - or Slavonians as they are known today, which is a misnomer, - "have done very well, not all became seafood packers. Some have pursued the professional and business ranks, becoming physicians, dentists, pharmacists, attorneys, shipbuilders, and merchants. Others have displayed prominently in political and educational roles. The Slavonian population is the largest single foreign element on the Coast, settled primarily in the eastern section of Harrison County." That's near Ocean Springs back of the bridge. "Biloxi church records indicate a baptism in 1843, even though many of the countrymen are said to have arrived in the city between 1880 and 1918." Now, in 1843, see, the _____ came in. There were about seven brothers, and about 1860 there was another family. I just can't think of their names, but in 1875, there were the _____. They have family baptismal records in the Church of the Nativity up on Howard Avenue, since, at that time, the East End did not have a church. So, you know they were here in 1843. How much earlier, we don't know. "Dr. Joseph Kuljis," that's the speaker, "a prominent second-generation Dalmatian, whose knowledge of the Yugoslavian Colony can be credited to this story, is the son of the late Luka Kuljis," K-U-L-J-I-S, pronounced K-u-l-y-i-s to make it simple, "one of the earlier and well-known Slavonian settlers



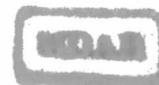
in the city. He came in 1903 as a young man of eighteen. The Biloxi physician remembers those hard-working days and struggling years. Some of the young people who began working in factories," that was the shrimp factories and the oyster factories, "at an early hour, leave for school, and after school return back to work until dark." Some of us forgot to wash up and the teachers would run us back home because our shirts were full of shrimp juice, and you know what the odor of shrimp juice produces! "But the older generation had better ideas for their offspring. These economical folks believed in and stressed education. Yugoslavia's unstable history, it might be said, was a factor in the attitude of its people to work hard in everything. The nationality has been subjected for centuries to the invasions of the Greeks, Romans, Goths, Visigoths and Ostragoths, Huns, Mongolians, and the countries of Hungary, Austria, Turkey, and a fall to Napoleon for a short period. Dalmatia, islands of the Adriatic in the northwest of the Balkan Peninsula, became a part of the federal republic of Yugoslavia in 1945. It is now a province of Croatia." To understand Yugoslavia, you must understand that Yugoslavia is a federated country that consists of about six of these smaller republics, like Croatia is one. They took over Dalmatia as a province, and became Croatia, so therefore, the island was known one time as Croatia. Then there's Serbia and Slovene - S-L-O-V-E-N-E - they are nearer the Italian border. And then we came in with...joined with Macedonia, came in, and then Bosnia - B-O-S-N-I-A - it came in, and about two more smaller republics in that region. One is Montenegro. It came in. The other one is Herzegovina. In other words, they are federated states. Let's see...that's the way you can understand the country. So these...so these Dalmatians as a province - Dalmatia is a province - were taken over by Yugoslavia, and didn't know who they had to rule them, since they haven't been free and independent since about the eleventh century, so they chose Austria rather than Hungary to rule them in those times. All right? Now, Yugoslavia..."Because of the early confusion in the names - by Americans - these Dalmatians became known as Slavonians." See? Now, really, Slavonian is a misnomer. You can say they were Slavs rather than Slavonians. Now. There is a country in Croatia called Slavonia, so if you come from that little country, which may be...I mean, three or four hundred thousand people...you would be known as a Slavonian. But that's three or four hundred miles from where we come from, so there's no connection at all.

Holmes: You came from Dalmatia?

Kuljis: Yes, we came from Dalmatia.

Holmes: And the proper name is Dalmatia?

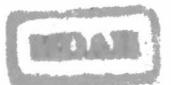
Kuljis: Yes, Dalmatia is a proper name, and it's a province now of Croatia, and Croatia then joined with this Yugoslav...with these Yugoslav



republics to make Yugoslavia, so Yugoslavia really consists of about six republics. Now, Dalmatia is a part of all of that. Now, "The majority of the Biloxi Slavonians originated from Brac," B-R-A-C with a - with a chevron turned upside down - "near Split, capital of Dalmatia. Others came from Hvar - H-V-A-R, some from Stavograd, Vis, and Molat." K _____, Long Island - Isle Longue, which they call Long Island - and several of the islands, and some came from _____ which is close to the Trieste, which is also close to the Italian border, and Trieste is owned now by the - I mean is taken over by the Italians rather than by the Croats - rather than by the Yugoslavs. Of course, the Italians have always said that the Yugoslavs have taken over their Dalmatia, and they call them "barbarians" - barbarians who do nothing but drink and sing, which is true! And the reason why they drink and sing is because they were subjugated for so many years by these foreign countries, especially by Turkey, they were subjugated about five hundred years, and they wasn't allowed to go to school, they wasn't allowed to communicate, so the only way they could communicate was by singing the history or whatever they wanted to tell the other generation. Of course, they had to drink along with it. Now, "One of the older settlers is ninety-one year old George Misko," M-I-S-K-O, "who reigned as Biloxi Shrimp Festival King in 1964. He came to the coastline city in 1903 from Brac with nine other young Slavonians. At that time, he was twenty-five years of age. He recalled working on the street car line for a dollar and a quarter a day. Those days were eleven hours long. Misko later ran boats, and raised a family of eleven. The retired boat captain is the oldest living member of the Slavonian Benevolent Association of St. Nicholas," of course, in Yugoslav it's pronounced Sv. Nicoli - S-V. N-I-C-O-L-I, or -E, "a fraternal organization that came into being in the early 1900s. Its basic purpose was to provide funds for the sick and needy and lend Old World fellowship after the long, hard days at sea." Which is correct. They all gathered at the clubhouse, you know. "Jacob Stanovich, father of Mrs. Dorothy Wink and Mrs. H. A. Laughran of Biloxi, was among the eleven founding members and was the first president of the organization that has grown to one hundred and forty strong." Now, we're up to 160. "Known to his friends as 'Captain Jake,' he was one of the first from Yugoslavia to arrive in 1876, and make his home in Biloxi." Of course, in the baptismal records we've picked up these 1843s - of course, they were a little earlier - but they did not belong to the society. "The late Mr. Stanovich worked as a fisherman and owned his own boat, The Little Joe, and for many years owned and operated a grocery store at 1301 East Beach, Biloxi, which is Point Cadet. He later became a stockholder in Seafood Packing Company in 1913, and took charge of their fishing fleet. Those other founding members of the original Austrian Benevolent Association in 1920 were in the spelling of the day." The reason why we called it "Austrian" is because Austria-Hungary was ruling Croatia and Dalmatia from 1818 to 1918, when

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in 1918 it became Yugoslavia - of these three nations, Croatia, Serbia and Slovene. they didn't have these three others. Now, you'll get such names as Nicola Skrmeta...you find out you have four consonants in that name - S-K-R-M-E-T-A - well, "r" sometime is a vowel.

Holmes: Really!

Kuljis: Yes, so that's kind of confusing. And then they had a vice president called Philip Wiliam! Well, he changed his name from "Miljam," M-I-L-J-A-M, to Wiliam. See, he was one of those smart cookies in his day. The secretary - and Victor Simonic was treasurer, S-I-M-O-N-I-C, with a little diacritic on it. And then you had Ivan Budinic, Ivan Letic - L-E-T-I-C, Vlaho Miljam, now, that's the brother of the fellow that called himself Wiliam; Ivan Louvetic, Tony Rosetti. Now, the Rosetti in those days was spelled correctly, R-O-S-E-T-I, Roseti, see, with that inverted "v" with the "t" - I mean with that inverted chevron or the "v" on top of the "s". Of course, the boys here have changed it to R-O-S-E-T-T-I, and it sounds like Italian, but it really isn't Italian, it's Roseti, see.

Holmes: How do they pronounce it now, Rosetti?

Kuljis: Rosetti, but the correct pronunciation is Roseti, because that "s" when you put those two "s" in there are plain "s" like we pronounce ours, in English, and then that inverted chevron "s" which is Roseti. See? Same way. "Marko Muljetovic and Ivan Gabric, G-A-B-R-I-C. Today the organization has a lodge on Point Cadet in eastern Biloxi, where the centers may still retain their own identity among brother Slavonians. Francis Nadalich, Jr., is president of the exclusive membership that claims to have a listing of forty-three men included in its roll in the business and professions." You see, we have forty-three of us that are either doctors or lawyers, or pharmacists, or fishermen, or some profession. Forty-three out of one hundred and forty-three we had in those days. Now, we have one hundred sixty, and the present president is Peter Barhonovich. Funny name, these "ichs" but most of the Slavic people have "ichs" for the simple reason - let me explain that "ich" business! Like Barhonovich - that means the son of Barhono, see? All right. Like you take... like you take, in Ireland or Scotland...when you have "Fitzgerald" that means "the son of Gerald", see, the "Fitz" and then the "Gerald" - Fitzgerald. That's correct, see. And MacDonald is the "son of Donald". We have ours on the tail end, see.

Holmes: Yes.

Kuljis: See. Some say it's "the family of", or whatever you want, but usually it means that that is "the son of". And, also, we take our names like Kavorchovich, which is - his name, Kavorch, means a blacksmith, see, and Kavorch - one time that was the name. Then he had children, and instead of calling them Kavorches, or

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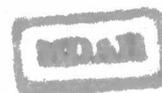
Kavorch, he called them Kavorchovich, put the "ich" on it, and made them the "sons of the blacksmith." Get the idea?

Holmes: Yes.

Kuljis: Or, you have somebody called "Barchovich". "Barcho" means "a boat", so "Barchovich" means the son of somebody that had a name like a boat. Get the idea? Or, like we have Mr. White, or Mr. Black, or Mr. So-and-So.

Holmes: Johnson.

Kuljis: Johnson. Johanssen, you know, and all that. Johanssen, like in those territories was the "son of Johnson", you know, and that's the way we did it, and we do it with an "ic". Of course, not all the names have "ic". Mine doesn't have it, but although I have looked up "Kuljis", and it's spelled correctly - K-U-L-J-I-S - because the majority of the poeple over there use it like that...but it's also spelled K-U-I-S...they leave the "l-j" out. The "l-j" is a - it's one letter, it's not two, and it's also spelled Kulicich, also, it has an "ich". Sometimes it has that over there where we don't have it. I guess it must have been an older generation. Now. "Slavonians are by nature clannish and said to be high-spirited and fun-loving people, and they are said never to miss an opportunity to sing." Which, in the olden days when these men were here they were clannish, they had nowhere to go. They couldn't understand the American-speaking people here so they had to stick together. There was no way out. It was just like colored people go with colored people, you know, and anybody can do that. So that's what these older people did. And they also had boarding houses for men, because they didn't have many Slavic women over here. They came over first, and then made enough money and sent for their sweethearts - that they knew when they left over there - and brought them over here. Or, some of them were older and were married, and they'd send for their wives and their wives and their children. Either way it works, they'd stay there like anybody would do, you know. Now. "On feast, and other observances, they liked to sing songs dating back hundreds of years." The only reason why they do that, they don't know the up-to-date songs. The up-to-date songs are just as complicated as classical music over there. I've heard some of them. But since we were peasants - and my people were peasants, as you call them - they were the poorer class. They were subjugated most of their lives and never did get a chance to go to school, but maybe to the fourth or fifth grade. They couldn't learn the complicated songs, so they learned the simple songs like "It Ain't Gonna Rain No More," you know, something like that, and they'd keep adding to it. "Many still dance the native dances. Dr. Kuljis tells of wedding celebrations and customs in those premature days. Long receptions were popular "doings," and as many as several hundred, including neighbors who were not Dalmatian, were invited; and, as the day progressed, the celebrations got merrier. Native dancing to the accompaniment of primarily an accordion," which is



not a piano-type accordion but a regular wind instrument, "and singing would develop toward the evening. Christening parties were big events being celebrated, however, to a lesser degree. The surge of their migration to the Coast came mostly between 1900 and 1908. Already here prior to the turn of the century was Peter Stojcich, Frank Kavacevich, Jake Kavacevich, John Jelucich, Nick Skrmeta, John Skrmeta, and Frank Cosovich, besides those already mentioned. After the 1900s came names synonymous in today's Yugoslavian Colony, names such as Rosetti," this time he used two "ts" - R-O-S-E-T-T-I - see, he'd changed his name in the meantime; "Pavlov" means the son of Paul, it's not a Russian name, it's a Yugoslav name. "Sekul," that's another name. We have a Judge Sekul here, and his sister's also a lawyer. He's an attorney. And then you have Pavich - P-A-V-I-C-H - again, "the son of Paul." And then you have Skrnich, which is really a matchbox - S-K-R-N - there your four consonants come again, but your "r" is probably a vowel. And then you have Pitalo - P-I-T-A-L-O - which sounds Italian, and most people think that it's Italian, but it really isn't. It's a Yugoslav word, comes from "pit," meaning to ask or to beg. And this here, this Pitalo comes from the past tense neuter of the word _____, like it says ono - O-N-O-J-E - yet Pitalo, see? It asks, see, in other words, it asks whatever you want to...this...see...or anything else. And that's where the name comes from, and it's not necessarily because it has that "o" behind it that it's Italian. That's not correct. Now, the other names are Filipich - F-I-L-I-P-I-C-H - or Fi-lip-ich, whichever way you want to pronounce it, and Mihojevich, Misko. I don't know whether it's a Misko up in the northern part of the country pronounces it M-E-S-K-O, which is also correct...the Serbians pronounce it M-E-S-K-O, I think; Covich - C-O-V-I-C-H - could be K-O-V-I-C-H; Gruich, Dr. Gruich is here; Trebotich, Halat - H-A-L-A-T - we have Peter Halat who has some kind of a state job here; and then you have Mavar, M-A-V-A-R, who has this big packing company that packs shrimp and oysters and cat food; and then you have the Kersanac, and Mladnich, or as we call it, M-lad-i-nich. They own the Fiesta here and the Siesta. They run nice restaurants. Radic - R-A-D-I-C - Grasich, and Rodolfich, Barhonovich, Jurich, Kulivan, and Tremantana. Even though Tremantana sounds Italian, still, it isn't Italian. "Both Mayor Daniel Guice, and Chamber of Commerce executive Walter F. Fountain of Biloxi, agree the ethnic group has elevated the city's economy by their loyal effort. 'They have brought our city a culture that is rich in custom,' believes Fountain, who succeeded Dalmatian descendant Anthony Z. Ragusin as the Chamber of Commerce general manager." See, Ragusin was general manager of the Chamber of Commerce for maybe thirty-five or forty years and had to quit because of illness. "The mayor concurs. Just as their founders deserve success, our community has been enriched by their presence toward a more vigorous, progressive city." Then they have pictures on the sheet.

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Holmes: What is the date of this?

Kuljis: This happens to be dated February 22, 1969.

Holmes: Of the Daily Herald. There may be a copy of that in the Archives. If so, we can....

Kuljis: I'll give you this one.

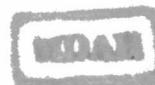
Holmes: Oh, okay.

Kuljis: And, on the front page here, you will see the Catholic Church, which is built round and scalloped, like an oyster, and they have on their windows the paintings of everything that pertains to the sea. Also, you have to the right the Slavonian Benevolent Lodge. See, that's the hall, right there. This end goes way back. This is the East End. This goes to the Ocean Springs-Biloxi bridge. You can see some of the boats right here. Now, you see the four pictures here of the four professional men who first became professional men from the second generation. You will see Dr. Joseph Kuljis - that's myself - first physician from the Yugoslavian Colony; Dr. Stephen Pitalo, a cousin of mine, the first dentist; and City Judge John Pitalo, another cousin, and first attorney; and Tony Rosetti, the first druggist - another cousin - all from Biloxi. See, we're all kin to each other, and we all came from the same place, see. So that's - I don't know, they kind of intermarry over there a whole lot, and I guess over here they do the same thing also. But since then, since this was written, there's been a lot more druggists, and several more doctors and several more pharmacists, and about three or four more lawyers. In fact, one of them teaches at Ole Miss.

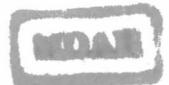
Holmes: Oh, really? What does he teach, law?

Kuljis: Law. His name is Mavar - M-A-V-A-R. I don't know whether his name is Sam or Nick or what. I've forgotten. His daddy's name is Nick, see. And he teaches law at Ole Miss. And he has two cousins that are lawyers here also, and they're helping run Mavar Packing Company. Their father's getting a little elderly, getting about sixty or sixty-five years of age, so the sons, instead of practicing law, decided to take up this big factory business; because shrimp, oysters, and cat food, you know, is a great product. They're great products. They used to have a lot of boats, but they sold the boats and found out it was easier to build bigger boats to catch these fish that make cat food. Instead of having numerous boats for shrimping, they just consolidated, and would build one a hundred and thirty feet long instead of the usual sixty-five foot boat, and draw a lot of water and go out into the sea - sea pogies, or whatever you want to call them - and they make good cat food.

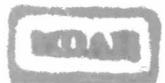
Holmes: Then this is a relatively new industry?



- Kuljis: Yes, it's a relatively new industry. It's not but about fifteen years old. Dejean is another company. Of course, it's not Slavic but it's right close to them - I mean, closely approximates the factory. They're right close together. Now, I don't know what else to tell you, unless you want to ask me some questions.
- Holmes: Well, I have some questions I want to ask you. What is the significance to the Dalmatians of St. Nicholas?
- Kuljis: Well, St. Nicholas? Well, you see the Catholic people - I mean, the Dalmatians are Roman Catholic; and they had the Roman alphabet. You can see here the way the names are spelled. They don't have any Greek alphabet or the Eastern Orthodox like the Serbians do, and the Russians, see. So, being a religious group of people, they will have a holiday, a saint's day, and they'll take a holiday off. Like we have about six to eight of them here, they'd have maybe ten or fifteen or twenty, and one of them would be St. Nicholas, see? And I just can't remember what he stood for, what St. Nick stood for. Like I know St Stephen, he was the day after Christmas - St. Stephen's. Of course, all of them don't take the name of St. Nicholas. It just happened that this bunch, or this group, from Dalmatia took up St. Nicholas. Evidently, St. Nicholas was a good saint over there. I'm not sure which way it was. I never did go into the history to find out about why St. Nicholas was chosen. But that's the reason why - they're usually like - they're all really a religious type of people. Of course, they curse considerably, too! They're not - they get aggravated easily, see, and they're very temperamental! They go from one extreme to the other. I could always recognize a person from Split or from Brac if I'd hear him in some night club. If he'd had a few drinks and he cut loose with those blasts of curse words, then I'd know where he came from!
- Holmes: That really marks him!
- Kuljis: I mean marks him! He's a marked fellow! Just like a fellow from New Orleans. I met him in France when I was over there. I could tell where he came from, the way he talked and the way he walked, that he was from New Orleans.
- Holmes: I see. The blessing of the shrimp fleet is this weekend, and....
- Kuljis: That is correct.
- Holmes: And I was talking to Mr. Pete Barhonovich this afternoon and he's invited me back down for it, and I think I'm going to come. Is this a custom that was brought over from the Old Country?
- Kuljis: Well, this custom wasn't exactly Slavic. It was started here with the French people, or the people across the bay, probably some of the relatives of Jean Lafitte or perhaps some of the Quaves who were on Cat Island and who didn't want to show the British how to get to New Orleans when Jackson had that battle and defeated them.



You see, he wouldn't show them. He wouldn't show them how to get through those bayous to get back in there; so, consequently, Jackson won the battle. And it started over on that side of Biloxi, which is called North Biloxi, and was held there for years; but they weren't doing so much with it so the Slavic people took it over about twenty years ago when we built this hall, and we made it a success. So, we kept it for so many years until the city tried to take it over and it became political. So then, when it became political - and we are a religious organization and a charitable organization who helps its members, you know, I said before that's the by-laws, it's not a moneymaking deal. It's whatever we make we have to mend or build a building or add on to it or whatever it is. So we, naturally when it became political since we don't allow politics in our by-laws, or even religion, to be discussed in the by-laws, although we are religious we don't permit religion to be discussed, to be talked about, or politics, while the meeting is going on. That must go on after the meetings have closed. We just don't allow it. It's strictly a fraternal organization. And we again regrouped. The French took it over - the Point Cadet French took it over - and the city, and it didn't go too well. The city couldn't do anything about it because the Slavic people didn't want to cook all these fancy dishes of seafood, because the little Dalmatian women said, "Why should we cook for the politicians. It don't belong to us any more!" So we told them not to do it. Really, the men's organization told them, "Just don't cook it, just refuse it." So then, the following year when they found out it was sort of a failure by being political, then they went back down to the Point Cadet and the Frenchmen took it over and used the old Coast Guard base as a dance place where they gave shrimp and beer; and they gave what they call a "fais-do-do - F-A-I-S-D-O-D-O - that means "dancing in the street." You see, the French do that a whole lot in their Cajun country, or bougalee country, or whatever you want to call them - in the bayou. So now, it's going to be the same way; and the queen will also be gotten from the Point, too. In other words, the city, the politicians, had no business taking that away from the fishermen. That strictly belonged to the fishermen. And when they took it away, they figured, well, they'd get a "Miss Blessing of the Fleet," and then a "Miss Biloxi," and then a "Miss Mississippi," and so on until they got to "Miss America." But that didn't seem to pan out. I know that's what they had in mind because we stopped that right quick. So we said, "It's strictly a local thing and it's not nationally advertised." Of course, a lot of people have come from all over the country because it's one of the biggest ones that's ever been held, but when they tried to break the thing up, well, it was bad. And then the fellows got disgusted. The fishermen said, "Why should I go up there with the politicians. They don't believe in it." So now, it's kind of gradually getting back to where it belongs.



Holmes: Then it's for the fishermen.

Kuljis: Yes, back to the fishermen again, and it's on Point Cadet. It's not in the middle of the town in a community house. See? And you don't know who's who, and you don't know who's invited, and nobody's invited, and you don't know what's it all about! Frankly, you go up there, and none of the fishermen are up there. They're all sick of the politicians! And that's what made it bad, so we just got - we had enough of it so we discouraged it; so, as far as we taking it over completely as we had before, we don't never want it completely. We want to share with the French - let the French do some work, too, we've done it long enough.

(End of Side One
Transcribed by Mary H. Mingee)

Kuljis: ...Spelled P-R-U-S-U-R-A-T-A, prusurata, see?

Holmes: Prusurata.

Kuljis: Which is merely a doughnut-looking affair. It's not round, it's more like a pastry, it's not like a doughnut, but it's round, and it's made usually with your flour and your regular milk and cream, and fruits that are added to it are raisins, cut-up apples, cut-up orange peel, lemon peel, and a few others the way people want to add to it. Of course, if you are poor and you don't have any money, you can only afford the flour and the water and just add your raisins. That's all you can do. Of course, as you become more affluent, you begin to add more of the ingredients to it.

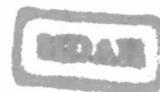
Holmes: Then, do you judge a person's affluency by the number of ingredients in his prusurata?

Kuljis: Well, a long time ago, yes.

Holmes: Oh, really?

Kuljis: Yes. In the beginning here, some of the families were so poor - they just came over - they couldn't afford to buy any more than the raisins that went in it. Now, later on, they could buy an apple, an orange, a little vanilla, you know, to add to it; and they began to put this icing on it, you know, this nice icing on them to make it taste better. In the last twenty years, they began to put icing on them. Prior to that it was just merely a piece of dough. See, you put it in and fried it - you put it in deep fat and when they came up to the top, well, they was cooked. It did absorb a lot of your oils, whatever you used.

Holmes: Made it quite rich.



- Kuljis: Yes, made it quite rich. It was a tasty pastry. And then you have another one called hrstula - H-R-S-T-U-L-A - hrstula. It's made up out of the white of an egg and flour, and it's made into bow-ties. It's made just like a bow-tie, and then it's fried in that deep fat. See, that's their second one. And then you have another one called hog-tails. I don't know what that's made out of; and then you have several others. But your original one is your prusurata - prusurat is the singular, prusurata means plural. And prusurata - that's what you will hear about, and it's an old Yugoslav pastry. Like anybody has a pastry, that's what theirs was.
- Holmes: Well, it seems to have made quite a contribution to the Coast culture, 'cause everybody knows about it.
- Kuljis: Well, everybody knows from one end of the Coast to the other - from Alabama, Mobile, New Orleans - because in New Orleans there's a big colony of Dalmatians.
- Holmes: Oh, really?
- Kuljis: Bigger than we have here. New Orleans' colony is lots bigger than we are.
- Holmes: Do the women still cook traditional food and styles?
- Kuljis: Yes. We cook - like we cook soup meat - like when we first came here we got a soup bone and we put an onion in it and potatoes, and either spaghetti or rice in it and that was the meal for the day.
- Holmes: Oh, really?
- Kuljis: That's all we had. We couldn't afford any more. And then for supper we may cook red beans and rice, or red beans and spaghetti.
- Holmes: You picked that up here, didn't you?
- Kuljis: No, ours was over there. That's called an Italian pasta fazzo, see, because the Italians lived over there for quite a while. I mean, they took over - the Venetians, see, took over these Dalmatians for hundreds of years, so we naturally learned to cook some of their ways, also. And pasta fazzo is really an Italian name. And we don't call it like that in Dalmatian - in Croatian, in Yugoslav! We call it another - it's another word. You wouldn't even recognize it. But we let it go as pasta fazzo. It means spaghetti and beans. See, it's simple because everybody knows it. Because a lot of the time I would be speaking Dalmatian, or Yugoslav - whichever way you want to call it - course Dalmatian language is becoming extinct.
- Holmes: Oh, really?
- Kuljis: Yes. It has the "i" in it. If I give you an example - like if I



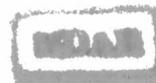
were to say "religion," I'm gonna give you the name of a religion and I'm gonna tell it to you in about the three dialects. We use the Dalmatian dialect vira - V-I-R-A, see, vir-r-r-a. You notice how we roll the "rs" all the time. All right. And is Serbs we use vera - V-E-R-A. Now, the "e" is always pronounced like "a" like you do in Latin. Now, in Croatian, or what the Yugoslavs are now trying to do, and the Croatians, trying to make everybody put the "j" in there, V-J-E-R-A, vjera. See, that's the difference. It's a long - it's a short "e", see, "j-e". Now, you have a long "e", "i-j-e". Now, I'll give you a name of a town over there, Rika. See, this is Rika, or Fiume in Italian. See, they always have two names over there. All right, now, Rika in Dalmatian is R-I-K-A, Rika. Simple, see? Now, the Serbs want it R-E-K-A. See? The Croatians, they want it R-(re) - R-E-I-J-E-K-A, Reijeka. See, they put the long "j" in there. See? So, they're trying to make everybody use the long "j", and we Dalmatians cannot get accustomed to the long "j". We still like to say "Rika".

Holmes: So, perhaps the language spoken over here is purer now than the Dalmatian spoken in Yugoslavia today.

Kuljis: Yes. Right now, we - a lot of us who have studied like I have, I read the Croatian - we call it Croatian because we call ourselves Croatians. Of course, we're actually Dalmatians. Now, what is the pure Dalmatian, we don't know. Because in 1500 B.C. you had the Ilyrians where we lived. You also had the Stone Age there and you had the Bronze and Iron Ages, and then you had the Roman Age and then, after that, you have the Yugoslav Age. That's the way they came. And that happened on the mainland as well as on the islands. See? So we've been Ilyrians for a long time, right where we came from, we were Ilyrians. And then, the Romans came in - which was Caesar. He came in B. C. - whatever it is, 100 or 200, I forgot which - and he took it over and he finally conquered the Ilyrians in about the year 100 - I mean the year 1 of A. D. - and then here's Augustus Caesar, and they all finished it off and it stayed Roman until about the fourth century. You see, we did. Now, the Croatians, the Slavs hadn't come down yet. See? Now, we stayed - fourth and fifth century - and then the Visigoths and the Ostrogoths and the Huns - you had Attila, or Attili, down there - he came in through there. And then after that time - in the meantime, then it became known as the Holy Roman Empire, which was then the Huns, you know, not the Huns, the Germans, see? They had the big king down there and they ruled it and then later on it became divided in about the fourth century into east and west. The west became Roman Catholics and the east became the Orthodox Catholics. Of course, the Roman Catholics grew faster than the Eastern Orthodox. They just didn't grow fast. And that break there started somewhere around the fourth or fifth century and it was completed - the division - in about ten hundred something, I've forgotten whether it was thirty-six, and they became Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox. Dalmatia

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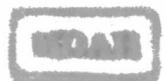
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was in itself at one time a kingdom. Of course, it was small, it only had five hundred thousand people. The Croatians had about three and a half to four million, so the Croatians naturally took us Dalmatians over. And we then became a province. We are known now as a province of Croatia. And then, what's ironic about the whole thing that the Turks had us for five hundred years. They had us from about the thirteenth or fourteenth century till 1818, when the Austrian-Hungarians took us over, and then we were Austrians. That's why, you see, a lot of the time we're called Austrians - because from 1818 till 1918 we were called Austrians - and then in 1918, after World War I, we became known as Yugoslavs; and that was because the three republics joined, that is Croatia, Serbia and the Slovenes. They joined and made it Yugoslavia. And then, later in 1945 when Tito - in the Second World War, they added three other republics to it and it became...I think they have six now. See? Like I mentioned Breznia and Macedonia and Herzegovina and Montenegro. See, they added those, which were poor countries, and they lived mostly out in the mountainous sections. And you wonder why we always have to sing? Because the Turks didn't let us go to school, or my ancestors. And that's where Adamic, one of the greatest Yugoslav writers in the United States, wrote that the clock went backwards for five hundred years, which is correct. We couldn't make any headway. The only way we could keep our identity was by singing these songs, we couldn't write because we didn't know how to write. That was simple. And that's where that came in. Now, you ask me if I am a true Dalmatian, or am I a true Yugoslav. I'd have to say "yes" as far as my father and mother came from Dalmatia and from one of the islands, they weren't mixed with anything. But, the mixture existed from the Ilyrians to the Romans, Huns, Visigoths, Ostragoths, and then the Turks; and then in about twelve hundred and something, I forgot which in there, Genghis Khan. In Genghis Khan's time, he came through there looking for King Bela. So he came right to the Adriatic Sea looking for him. Meantime, Bela skipped over to one of the islands and got away from him. He wanted to capture King Bela. B-E-L-A, some spell it B-E-L-L-A. If it's spoken in Italian it's B-E-L-L-A; if it's spelled in Yugoslav, it's B-E-L-A. Now, the Croatian language, the Yugoslav language, does not have double consonants. It cannot have R-O-S-E-T-T-I, it's R-O-S-E-T-I. There's no such thing as doubles. The Russians have double consonants.

Holmes: You said that you sang to keep up the traditions, and so forth. Do people still sing now here in Biloxi?

Kuljis: Yes, my brother sings all these songs that they sung over there in 1850...1815...1918...they brought those songs over and they still sing them. Now, "Mariano" is one that's very popular. It's not only popular here, it's popular in Cleveland where there's a lot of Croatians. In Cleveland, Ohio, the population there is the greatest, about fifty thousand. See? In Pennsylvania in the coal mines they have a great number. And then, you take Gary, Indiana, there's a



great number of Yugoslavs. Of course, that's Yugoslavs now, we're not talking strictly about Dalmatians, 'cause we're talking about all the six republics which form Croatia, which form Yugoslavia. Now, my group of people, my descendants, all come from Dalmatia, and the islands which are known as the Archipaelego, you know, in the Adriatic Sea. And we were born fishermen. Naturally, most of us left - not me, but my father and his brothers, sisters, and so forth - left this island and they came over here.

Holmes: To Biloxi?

Kuljis: They came over to Biloxi. First, they landed in New York, where there was a big group of them in New York, who work as stevedores; and they also work as putting this plaster around pipes, you know, for insulation. They are great for that. And then a great big bunch of them went to California. In fact, they had some there in 1849 - they had some there before the '49ers were there. And San Pedro is for these Dalmatians, really the meeting place for most of these Dalmatians. If you want to meet a Dalmatian, you go to San Pedro.

Holmes: In California?

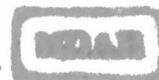
Kuljis: San Pedro, California, yes. And that's where most of them are. Of course, they're spread all up and down California, but most of them are concentrated in that area. I had an uncle who was in Watsonville. He was Joseph Kuljis - my same name, I was named after him. He stayed there and took care of the fruit - that's the fruit country, you know - he took care of that. So then he finally came over here - the last days that he lived he came over here. But we are actually all around; and there's a great group of us in Portugal, Buenos Aires - see, that was closer to get to and the immigration laws weren't as strict, so the majority of them are actually over there in South America.

Holmes: Well, let me ask you this. What are the historical reasons for immigration?

Kuljis: For them? Well, the reason was simple. In 1900, or whatever it was, or 1875, you had to join - you had to serve in the Austrian navy or army. They didn't like that. And they knew that one day they were going to fight against their own countrymen, which were the Serbs. See, the Serbs are Slavs, too. You notice in World War I the Serbs fought against Austria and then Dalmatia had to take over, had to fight with the Austrians, and they were fighting their own brothers, see? So they didn't like it. So they found out, "Why should I go serve three or four years in there, and then

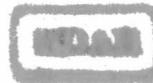
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on the other hand, here I am living on the island, and I can't go to school and I can't become a lawyer or businessman. The only thing I can become is a peasant." In our country, the United States, we call it a sharecropper. See? They raised wine and they raised olives - and they made wine. They made what they called Dalmatian wine - which is a good priced wine - until the vinyards were destroyed by a plague that killed all the vinyards; and then, they had to import the seeds and the vines of the United States, which was stronger and which could resist the fungus that destroyed all these vines. It's phyloroxia - or something like that - I can't remember just what, and it destroyed it and ruined it. But our reason for coming over is simple: we didn't want to serve in the army, in the navy, and we weren't getting anywhere.

- Holmes: Well, what kind of sympathies do you have for draft dodgers here in the United States who don't want to serve in the army?
- Kuljis: Oh, man, we don't like them.
- Holmes: You don't like them?
- Kuljis: No. We don't like draft dodgers. Not when you come in a country like this where everything was free, after we had been in captivity for eight or nine hundred years, then come in a free country and do what you wanted. I mean, obey the laws and become doctors and businessmen and all that, well, that was something entirely strange, or different.
- Holmes: Different situation.
- Kuljis: Different situation. So, naturally, you see, we don't like draft dodgers. In fact, I had thirty-three cousins in this world war, and that was first cousins! I had three of my own family and my brothers - we were in it - I had thirty-three first cousins, you see, because they have a lot of families. They have great - they have a lot of children. There's always six to eight, ten, eleven children in a family. So you had a lot of soldiers or sailors that could join, see, and....
- Holmes: Probably sailors, weren't they?
- Kuljis: Well, a lot of them was sailors.
- Holmes: Did they make wine when they came over here?
- Kuljis: Yes. They made wine and they made it out of grapes, they made it out of...they had grape vines in their back yards and they made wine; and later on, if one of the vines died, they'd learn how to make it out of raisins that they'd buy.
- Holmes: Do they still make it?



- Kuljis: Right now, we don't make so much, not at the present time. But the group there from 1900 to 1930-34, they made their own wine, and they also learned how to make moonshine!
- Holmes: This was during Prohibition.
- Kuljis: Yes. You see, they would take the mash that was left over from the wine and cook it, see? To make the moonshine out of it. See? It was simple. That could be done.
- Holmes: So, there's not a traditional drink, then, over here, other than Dalmatian-type wine would be?
- Kuljis: Well, it was here. They made their own wine and they all drank wine and they sang, which is traditional.
- Holmes: You usually do when you drink wine.
- Kuljis: Yes, and they did it all the time, and they did it up to - until we became businessmen and, actually, you couldn't do a lot of things. You had to sort of protect yourself against the people talking about you, you see. But, when they were clannish there and they were all just simple people without any education and could hardly speak English, well, then, that's what they did. They drank and they sang. That's the way they had of passing the time, because they were a bunch of bachelors. And then, when they got their wives or sweethearts, when they made money, they sent over and got them.
- Holmes: What about dances?
- Kuljis: Well, they danced. They had the polkas and the mazurkas. They had the regular dances.
- Holmes: Now, are those the traditional Yugoslav dances?
- Kuljis: That's what they danced over there - polka, and one was named - I remember one was named mazurka. I remember that name, see? And one of them went like: "Oh-yo-yo-angelicimo", see. They say it's a funny little thing. It says: "Oatmeal - I mean cornmeal - and something else is good," you know. And they keep saying, keep putting in little things, everybody makes it up, just like our crawdad song is over here. We don't have a crawdad song. It's similar to that, or like "Ain't Gonna Rain No More," either one. See? It's similar, so they played by that and then they'd have to play the polka. That was a separate tune. It was an entirely different form of music.
- Holmes: What kind of musical instruments did they play?
- Kuljis: They had the accordion, which was - which you played with two hands, you know - but it wasn't a piano-type like the present day big accordion that you see on Lawrence Welk's Show. It wasn't



that type. It was a simple little accordion.

Holmes: Sort of like a concertina?

Kuljis: Well, it's a little bit better than a concertina. It - you just played it with one hand, you see, and one - and the right hand stayed still, or whichever one you played with, see, which one you liked. And you had a set of keys, and when you went back with the thing pulling back it made one note, and when you pulled it in it made a different note. See? So you had to be pretty sharp at that. And my daddy was pretty smart at playing that thing. He learned it a long time ago.

Holmes: Do you remember what it was called? Was it called the accordion?

Kuljis: It was called the accordion, yes. They called it the accordion.

Holmes: Well, in my discussion with Mr. Barhonovich this afternoon, I picked up some topics for interviews when I come back. I would like to run over those and see if you have any suggestions. He said that he could connect me with somebody who could sing some of the old songs for me.

Kuljis: Yes, well, my brother sings. He sings like - I was just saying that "Oh-yo...oh-yo-yo....Apples and cabbages and something and all is good." That's one of the songs. And then you can sing that "Mariano" which is good.

Holmes: Now, are these in the native language?

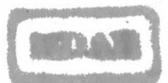
Kuljis: Yes, they are in native language. And you can sing that song and it goes something like this: "...". See, that means "Don't tell your Mama that I kissed you or that I love you." You know what I mean? Then they speed it up a little bit now. It's pretty nice; and then it has two types of music to it - that slow one at first, and then they all come in with something else and they all go a little faster - like this: (Singing) "Non, non, non, non, non," and so forth. See, that's a little different from that slow waltzing type of music.

Holmes: Is there somebody who still plays the accordion?

Kuljis: Yes, my brother does. He plays the piano-type, see. In fact, on the Southern..., or Down South, his picture's on there.

Holmes: Oh, really?

Kuljis: Yes. He's pictured with the piano-type since he learned that one, too. Now, I've got the old type of accordion at home at my house that my daddy used to play. Of course, it's all dried up and all the bellows in it, you know, all....



Holmes: Another topic I've got is to talk with some of the women about the cooking.

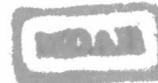
Kuljis: When you come to the cooking, these Yugoslav women can really make - besides just cooking staple food, you know, that they eat at home, like roast and pork and all that stuff. Of course, in the olden days when they first came here, they used to do a lot of barbequeing out in the back yard, and their favorite meat was a goat or lambs, you see, preferably a goat. They had a better taste, or stronger taste, and the next one was a hog. They just stuck it on there and wind - I used to wind that up a whole lot of times over the fire - and they'd put some kind of flavoring agent on it, you know, to make it taste better. And that's what they did for years here, oh, way up 'til about 1930, see? But then, as they grew a little bit and they got a little more educated, they got away from there, and all the sons that were able went to school. See, I'm sixty-five years old and in 1927 I went to Tulane, see, to study pre-med to become...and four years of medicine. And some went to Ole Miss, like the Sekuls. They finished from Ole Miss. Clara Sekul Hornsby, the sister, she finished from Ole Miss; and Dr. Stephen Pitalo, he finished at law in New Orleans, see, and that's the way we went there. Of course, we went to different schools.

Holmes: What about - I want to talk to somebody about the building of your church, the beautiful church.

Kuljis: Well, that church there was built - I don't know what date. Of course, we had another one that was destroyed by fire. The original one was on First Street. This one's on the beach, and I used to talk to Dr. Mullens, I said, "Put one on the beach and put a big cross on it so the fishermen can see it from way out there, see. So make it a landmark, see?" It's called St. Michael's Church, you know. So, he got the idea and he scalloped it, you know, like oysters are scalloped, as you see it here in the picture. If you get close to it you see that the outside is scalloped, you know. You can't see it here in the picture, but that's really a scallop, well, this church is built on that. And those tinted glass windows each have some significance pertaining to the sea; and every year the priest will get there and go - make the rounds of those tinted glass things, and will tell the people what all this means.

Holmes: At the Shrimp Festival?

Kuljis: No, he won't tell them at the Shrimp Festival. He picks a certain day, I don't know when that day is, see. And he will tell them what all - what the significance of these paintings - they're not just ordinary paintings put there and nobody knows what they mean, they mean something, and something that pertains to the sea. Some have ropes on them, some have chains, some have nets, you know, and you see all that. Some have, like, Jesus Christ when he was with



St. Peter and the boat was sinking and St. Peter couldn't walk on water, and all that. Well, some show something like that. And, well, that's the significance of the church. Of course, you wonder where we got all that money to build a church. Well, of course, you know everybody likes to play bingo, you know. That's our favorite sport down here, and most religious organizations like bingo. The bishops are against it up in Jackson, you know, they are against it, and in Natchez at that time before Jackson became the head of it. They never did - they kind of frowned on bingo. But you couldn't stop these poeple from playing bingo. So, the priest says, "Just let them play bingo." And they played it for the church. Said, "Well, we'll build another church. Let's play bingo." And they collected around \$250,000 and built this church.

Holmes: My goodness!

Kuljis: This church cost \$250,000. In fact, some of the altar came from Jerusalem. You see that stone in there, that big stone in there?

Holmes: I haven't been in it yet. I plan to go in Saturday.

Kuljis: If you go in there and see that big stone, that big stone in there - there's a big altar-looking stone in there - well, that came from Jerusalem, especially shipped over here.

Holmes: I'm looking forward to the mass Sunday afternoon.

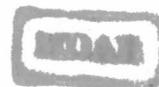
Kuljis: Well, the masses are not as spiritual and mystical as they used to be. The masses are becoming more now like the Protestants have their services. Now, the priest actually faces the audience, or the assembly, and he talks to them in English, and he doesn't say it in Latin like he used to, you know. Of course, anybody that could read a prayerbook had the Latin version on one side and the English on the other, so it was easy to follow.

Holmes: Yes.

Kuljis: They said they couldn't follow it. They said all you got to do is read the English, but now most of it's in English since Pope John stopped all that, and made everything in English; or of, you know, whatever country it is, you know - local.

Holmes: I've got - also, I jotted down this afternoon to try to interview, I think it's Mr. Marinovich, the netmaker.

Kuljis: Yes, Steve Marinovich - M-A-R-I-N-O-V-I-C-H. He's on the First Street there, 1321 First Street. You can go in there and he'll show you how he makes nets here locally for the local fishermen. He'll also show you how he makes nets that he ships overseas. He ships to Iran, he ships to - Persian Gulf, I don't know which lands, which countries in there. But he ships to some over there and he's made



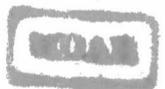
some for the government to catch certain types of fish or whatever it is in the Atlantic that don't go to the bottom. You know, trawls mostly shrimp on the bottom, but he has some specifications to make them so they can fish only so many feet down. And he's made all that, he sells trawls nationally. He's a little bragging fellow. He'll tell you.

Holmes: Sounds like he has a right to be.

Kuljis: Well, he has a right to brag, because he's done all that himself, and with no education. He was an orphan - he went to an orphanage - let's see, yes, that's right, because his daddy died early and he was somewhere off to school, somewhere in the orphanage. I'm not sure where he was. And then he came back and he went on a boat, and he shrimped with the regular fishermen who went out there and caught oysters - dredged oysters. And then he decided to make trawls, like my daddy did. But my daddy's eyesight was bad, so he quit it. He said, "None of you kids are gonna take it over. It looks to me like I'm sending all y'all to school, so y'all not gonna be fishermen, and y'all not gonna be fooling around with this." So he quit it. But he could have been one of the greatest net and trawl makers in the country without an education, because he had a knack for making things. He knew how they worked. He spent all his life fishing, not only here but the eighteen years that he was over there - he spent eight or ten of that stuff on the boats, fishing in the Adriatic Sea, right by this island that you saw there. And then they'd go over to Split, on the mainland, and sell the darned things, see. They couldn't sell it all to the island because the islanders didn't have any money, but the people in Split, which is a city of about 100,000 people or so, well, you could go over there and sell them. That was, from his part of the sound, about twelve miles. And they'd row over there, or sail over there, and sail back.

Holmes: Of course, I want to talk to a shrimper.

Kuljis: Well, now, you'll have to get my brother Peter, Peter Kuljis, to introduce you to some of the shrimpers. He has about five boats. And he's not too far from this church. In fact, he's right in here - one of these places in here - can't make it out just now, but he's one of these. And it's called Kuljis - Kuljis Seafoods. In fact, it's almost in front of this church, see? And he has captains that own the boats. Now the old captains, Dalmatian captains, they got too old, and most of them have died and their sons have taken over; so their sons speak English like you and I, see. But you're not gonna meet one that has that accent, you know, that will be a little difficult to understand, because all those are just about gone, except a few you might...you might get Matrie Pitalo, he's about seventy-two or seventy-five.



Holmes: Somebody mentioned Mr. Ragasin.

Kuljis: No, Matrie Pitalo. Ragasin lived in the middle of town. He never was actually a fisherman. He was more living in the business part of town and became the manager of the Chamber of Commerce.

Holmes: Are there any boat builders around?

(End of Side Two)

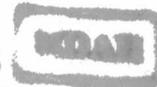
Kuljis: Yes, you have the Covacevichs - they spell it with a "C" - C-O-V-A-C-E-V-I-C-H - which is Tony Covacevich and his son have a shipyard on Back Bay, Back Bay of Biloxi, which is the northern part of this peninsula; and they're now building steel boats instead of the original Biloxi lugger, because everybody's converting over to steel. I believe that the shrimp - that the wooden boats are a time of the past, see. Just like we have our fiberglass boats, you know, and pleasure yachts, and all that.

Holmes: And then, I want to - I want to interview some of the canning or packing, shrimp-packing factories, or this cat-food factory, something like this.

Kuljis: All right, you can go to Mavar's - M-A-V-A-R - Mavar, he likes it to be pronounced, and he packs shrimp, he packs oysters - of course, oysters are out now, oysters are a wintertime product, see. But he packs shrimp, and then you have to find out when he's packing seafood, I mean cat-food. And then Mike Sekul's - Central Seafoods - he also has a place right there on the East Point, right there by the Slavonian lodge, close to the hall, and he packs shrimp and oysters also; and my brother is primarily in the frozen seafoods, see; he packs five pounds of shrimp, freezes and sells it - that's a little different from the canning.

Holmes: Well, can you think of any other topics in the Dalmatian Colony culture that I could talk to somebody about. That's all the way from music through cooking to factories. I think we covered pretty well the professional development of the society.

Kuljis: Well, yes. The cooking part, of course, like I told you, the favorite dish, because they were poor in the beginning, was just soup - soupbone cooked with potatoes and onions and spaghetti or rice, whichever one they elected to use; and a lot of beans and rice, which we used a whole lot; and then dobe and spaghetti, which was our favorite - our favorite food is dobe and spaghetti, see. Now, the Italians like meatballs and spaghetti. The Croatians - the Dalmatians - whichever one you want to call it, we like dobe and spaghetti and chicken spaghetti. We'd get a nice big hunk of meat, and we'd put it in there and cook it for several hours; and you even tie it up and put things in it, you put things and then wrap it around, you know, fill it up with something that's...condiments



in it. Well, that was our favorite, which it still is. In fact, somebody the other day told me he cooked a big - in fact, Dr. Gruich's wife cooked a big dobe and spaghetti. He got it from some meat market. He's got one Yugoslav, he operated on his wife for cancer, and the fellow said, "Here take it but don't open it till you get home," and it was a big dobe - D-O-B-E - you know, dobe and spaghetti. Well, that was our favorite. And another favorite is bacolar. It's called stockfish - it's a codfish but it's dried in the Scandinavian countries and it's called bacolar - B-A-C-O-L-A-R - bacolar, see. And it's originally - I found out it was a Spanish dish, see. Then the Norwegians or the Scandinavian countries over there caught a lot of this cod and they dried it. We called it a stockfish, and it's just as hard as steel when you find it in the store, and it has a very strong odor. In fact, it will smell you out of the place, see. But once you eat it, and learn how, it's just like people trying to learn how to drink Scotch. They don't like it in the begining, but when they learn how, they like it.

Holmes: I never have learned how.

Kuljis: Well, it's the same way with bacolar. See, it has an odor to it, but then, when you cook it with potatoes - it's usually cooked with potatoes - my wife even cooked it and she's not Yugoslav at all. She just got the recipe and cooked it, and she cooks it as good as the others. And our other favorite dish is tripe - tripe and potatoes. See, I like tripe like, you know, you cook canned tripe like we fry here, well, we cook it with potatoes. We get the real - the regular tripe, stomach, you know, you buy it from the store, and you buy five pounds, two five pound packages, and you keep them. They usually have them in these supermarkets. And you use that, and it's tough. You have to cook it for a long time - it takes about four hours to cook it. that's another favorite we had, because in those days, tripe was cheap, bacolar was cheap, beans and rice was cheap, meat was - dobe and spaghetti was cheap, see. So, we ate all that kind of stuff and we didn't go much for pastries in the way of desserts after meals, because we drank wine after meals. See, we drank wine, I drank wine up until I was a freshman in college.

Holmes: When did you start? How old were you when you started?

Kuljis: About ten - eight.

Holmes: Full strength?

Kuljis: Yes. Well, no, we would half - see, we drank a wine which is not a full strength. We have a particular name for it, peculiar name for it called bavonda. It's a mixture of wine and water, so the kids could all drink it and you could drink plenty of it. Now, the strong stuff like burgundy - our wine is claret, it tastes like good burgundy or claret, see. We also made a sweet wine which is real sweet-sweet, see. But that was used only on special occasions



because it was hard to drink sweet wine - you couldn't drink much of that stuff, see. But this claret stuff you could drink - hah! - quarts of it, see. And so that was our after meal for young kids. We all drank it. And it's surprising how none of us, or very few of us, became alcoholics. All the wine we had, after drinking in those days, now I can't get one of my brothers or sisters to drink a highball or drink wine. I don't ever drink it any more, see. We never did, although my daddy did - he drank it a whole lot, but he never got drunk. But wine, of course, was our favorite. We called it vina, and the Italians call it vino, you know, so - vina, we have a different way of pronouncing it. And that was our - most of our meals, to tell you the truth about it. And, of course, your dobe and spaghetti was a Sunday meal, and the bacolar was a Sunday meal, too.

Holmes: Oh, really?

Kuljis: Yes, that wasn't just an everyday meal. In those days that was a special meal. And soup was one of our favorites.

Holmes: That was a weekday meal, wasn't it?

Kuljis: A weekday meal. And if we had a banquet, like a marriage or a christening of a baby, we had that soup that was strained, you know, like a broth. You strain all of your meat out of it, or chicken, and then we served the meat or chicken separately, which was having good taste to it, still had a good flavor to it. We served that with onions, and it had a good flavor. Instead of throwing it away, we served it and everybody ate it.

Holmes: Sounds wonderful!

Kuljis: We had a seven or eight course meal at that supper, you see. They did it in their own way, it wasn't well-organized, but it was done. And it took you a long time to eat all that type of food. But we ate well, and all of them gardened - all of them had back yards. By the way, we never lived in camps down here like the French people or the Bohemians or Polacks, we always managed for some reason or another to live in a house, whether it was a three-room house, four rooms, six, seven, eight - whatever it was, we always managed. Most of these Slavic people managed to have a house. I don't remember any of them ever living in a camp. You know, camp was for the French people that came from Louisiana and you put them in a camp. The Bohemians came from Baltimore and you put them in a camp. But we never did. We always lived separately. So, then, we bought enough property so you had a big back yard or side yard, and in that you grew your regular turnip greens and cucumbers and watermelons and snap beans - or pole beans - and potatoes and tomatoes. Then, of course, most of them had a grape vine in it, and that way we had our vegetables for the whole year. And all of us had pecan trees

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or peach trees or fig trees in the yard, because they learned that from the old country, see. So everyone of them planted fig trees, planted peach trees. They planted anything that would grow, lemons, figs and all that. I used to eat all that when I was a young kid. I ate more fruit than the law allows, and also a lot of vegetables. I ate snapbeans till I was blue in the face. And, because that didn't cost us anything, you know, we planted it ourselves. The kids got out there - the mother showed them how to make those little plots, to grow them while they fathers were on the boat. They were out there - fishing way out there, you see. And we stayed home, and we did all this. So, naturally, if we made a dollar we saved ninety-five cents. We didn't spend but a nickel. And if I were working in a factory and I made two dollars, my mama gave me a nickel or a dime to go uptown to the picture show, and then I had to walk up there two miles, and walk back two miles. I was only ten or twelve years old, you see, and that's the way they do it. They were very thrifty; in fact, we were called stingy or greedy.

Holmes: Oh, really?

Kuljis: But they weren't actually stingy or greedy, they just wanted to save the money for their kids to have an education, regardless of what kind they got. If they wanted to become a schoolteacher, okay. They don't care what they did, as long as they finished - as long as you went to four years of high school and four years of college. Then, if you thought you wanted to be a lawyer, or a doctor or a dentist, or whatever you had in mind, "Go ahead, we'll work and make some more." And they did that. My daddy did that all his life. In fact, we had six in the family left. All but one went to college.

Holmes: That was remarkable for that time.

Kuljis: Yes. We had five. I have a brother that's a pharmacist, see, and I'm a doctor, and my sister, she went to Perk - college there, you know - and then this brother of mine that is working - Kuljis Seafoods. He had to quit Perk to come back and run it, and run the oil docks when we had the war. He's the only one that didn't go into the war, because he had convulsions, so we said, "Well, we're going to have him come out of school and run the oil business and the grocery business," since all of us was in the war, see. But you take there, five out of six gone to college, that's a lot.

Holmes: Yes, it is.

Kuljis: Two of them becoming professional men, and one becoming a big business man. In fact, he just borrowed \$250,000 from this loaning thing after the hurricane wiped out everything he had, and we lost a bowling alley down there. We had a bowling alley worth a quarter of a million, too. Worth more than that - the lanes were worth \$320,000 alone - worth half a million dollars. We lost that. It's down there - you'll see it down there when you go.



Holmes: Did you rebuild it?

Kuljis: No.

Holmes: Just what's left of it?

Kuljis All you see is the big girders across there. No, you can't rebuild, you can't get insurance down there, so what's the use of rebuilding if you can't get insurance? The same thing might happen again, you never know. But, anyway, most of these people, like I read to you, like you see in this paper here, believe in education. Since they couldn't get it, which they wanted, so they said, "By God, our children will get it." And that's what they did.

Holmes: That's wonderful.

Kuljis: See? they didn't do a thing but work. They didn't go anywhere, they didn't spend any money, all they did was made their little wine and they drank it, and that's all the fun they had, and having children, see. And that's all the fun they ever got out of life and the little singing they did. That's the first generation that came over here.

Holmes: I'm sure that's much more than they could have done in Dalmatia.

Kuljis: Yes. Oh, they wouldn't have gotten anywhere over there. They'd - at fifty-five or sixty-five they wouldn't have gotten anywhere - served in the army and got wounded. You couldn't get any pension because the government changed over from Austria to Yugoslavia and there wasn't any pensions left, so you just had to starve to death. And it was hard work over there. I mean, they worked from dawn to night; and the women carried these big baskets of grapes on their heads. Sort of just like you see a lot of people travelling, well, they had to do that. The women work over there, hard. The men fished in out places and the women did the home chores and worked the vineyards and olive trees. And so, it was difficult over there. You just didn't have a future. They saw that where - we just can't get anywhere. So, they were told that this was a free country and it was easy to make money if you work. But you couldn't get it for nothing. Of course, one of them came over here - his name was Philipich - and we called him Nick Disandocia. Well, Disandocia means - when he first came here to Biloxi...down at the point it was marsh. And he said, "Where did I come to?" See? And knelt down..."Where did I come to?" Marshland, see. Well, in that marshland he built a boat and educated some of his sons and they had grandchildren. Matter of fact, one of them is a priest. Nick Philipich is one of our Catholic priests. I forgot to mention that. He's a priest; and he serves over here. He has Perk and he has Lucedale. See, he takes that section. We want him to come here, but the bishop won't let him come here.

Holmes: Oh, really?



- Kuljis: He won't let him come here. I don't know why he won't let him come, but he sleeps over here now and then, and he'll come here for the festival. He's just like one of us, see, and....
- Holmes: Well, Dr. Kuljis, I've enjoyed talking to you. I hope I'll be back down this week-end for the Shrimp Festival, and I plan to be back this summer two or three times.
- Kuljis: Well, if you come on down and talk to Peter Barhonovich, and let him get you to talk to some of the others. Of course, the history I know more of it because I read it all time. Any chance I get, like this - they are known as Slavonians - I gave this, but that name business, I got that from the Croatian Fraternal Union, which is a big Slavic organization in Pittsburgh. It's an insurance, and it puts out a paper of its own - weekly paper. And he writes the "President's Corner," as he calls it, see. He'll give you some history in there and I'm always picking that up, too. Of course, I used to know a lot of it anyways, since I read that column, read it.
- Holmes: Well, like I told you earlier, I'm just starting out on this, and I'm going to listen to your tape again and talk to some other people, but if I have some more historical questions, I'll call on you.
- Kuljis: Here's your stuff right here, and this'll tell you a lot of it right here. Of course, when this lady, Mrs. Germanis, see this was - course, this was given to Mrs. Emily Germanis, see, Daily Herald staff writer, and she says the writing of the day...this fellow wrote...whoever wrote this...that funny English, you know. You know, that English that, what do you call that English where you make peculiar letters, you know, make them look real well? You know. You catch some of these guys that can write real well and they'll make a "c" look pretty with all kind - you know what I'm talking about? That's the way this fellow wrote these by-laws when he started it, this fellow Wiliam, or Miljam they call it. He was a real good writer. He was kind of an educated cookie in his day, and that was back up there in 1912, when this organization started, this Slavonian Benevolent Society. They call it an association down here, but it's really a society, because it's not an association. There's a difference between a society and an association, see. Association's a little more delineated, a little finer than an association, see. Association is a group of things, see. And we're not a group of societies, we're just a plain society, like the Biloxi Hospital Staff Society, or the Harrison County Society, see. We're not the Mississippi State Association, that's different - Medical Association, see. And that's the way we go. But you can have this and get all the stuff you want right out of this paper.
- Holmes: Okay.



Kuljis: See, I mean, this'll tell you more about...of course, there's a lot of the history and all about the church and all that I didn't mention in here, since she didn't want that. She just wanted what was down there now, and how we get along, and our dancing and all that, and what we did. Of course, now the dancing is not done anymore, because we are becoming absorbed by the native population, like in all minorities are gradually absorbed by the natives - that happens anywhere, see. Just like my name Kuljis, there's also a Kuljis in Greece. He came down here and says, "I'm a Greek." Well, I told my brother, I said, "I wish I had been there." He said, "I would have told him when the first Slavs came down, they came through Greece, see. But they were absorbed by the population. They stopped there and the Greeks absorbed them."

Holmes: So, he was more Slavic than Greek.

Kuljis: Yes, and that was in the year about 700 - you know, when they...they migrated from over there. I mean, that's when they hit the coast down here - I mean the Adriatic Sea. Of course, they started to migrate in the year 1, see. But you don't come right straight, like you go from here to New Orleans, or from here to Ole Miss. You don't do that - you may stop some place and stay four or five years, or a generation, before you move again. So it took some of them a whole - hah! - several generations to get here. But that was the name, Greece, I mean, this name Kuljis in Greece, because that bunch of Slavs was a small group and they were gradually absorbed by the native Greeks, but they held on to their identity, and you find that all through history these people hold on to their identity. Even in Germany, when they came down that way, you still have some names in Germany that are Slavic.

Holmes: Oh, really?

Kuljis: Slavic, that's how they identify them, but it's quite interesting. And this, the largest, by the way, nationality in Europe is the Slavic people. People won't believe that, but it is because it includes Russia.

Holmes: Yes, that's true!

Kuljis: Russia and the Poles and all that, see. So, they're the largest. See, they're billions and millions - hundreds of millions.

Holmes: I don't think they have to worry about being absorbed then!

Kuljis: No, they never will be. They're getting bigger, you see, they're getting bigger. The only thing that this little Yugoslavia has to worry is from Russia trying to take them over. See? And this is what is going to happen over there when Tito dies. Still got that thing on? When Tito dies, it's already in the books that you're



gonna have three representatives from each republic, to represent that republic, sort of like we have senators here, and then they will meet somewhere - in the capital, which is Belgrade, Serbia, see. And they will talk and see if they can run the country like that. In other words, if there's six republics, there's eighteen people, and they try to run it like that. Just like Russia has sixteen or whatever they have in their group, see. Well, that's going to be in the future when Tito dies, and Tito wants to quit. As long as he can, as long as he is alive, all those Slavs over there will listen to him. Now, he is a Croatian. He is not a Serbian, he's a pure Croatian like we're supposed to be. Of course, we're Dalmatians primarily, first, taken over by the Croatsians.

Holmes: And he's a Croatian first?

Kuljis: It's just like a city takes over a suburb and makes it part of that city. In other words, it incorporates a little section outside. That's what the Serbs - that's what the Croatsians did to the Dalmatians, they just incorporated us.

Holmes: Did they ask you?

Kuljis: Well, they did. They said - we were asked whether we wanted to be Hungarians or - they were questionable there whether they could go with the Hungarians or with the Serbs. No, no, they didn't ask you then! They just took us over. The Croatsians were then asked by the Austrians if you want to be Austrians or Hungarians.

Holmes: Well, that was nice of them.

Kuljis: Yes, nice of them.

Holmes: Thank you, Dr. Kuljis.

(End of Side Three
Transcribed by H. T. Holmes)

