

## Original Article

**“Serbian Soko” in Oakland (California)**Pantelić Babić Kristina <sup>1\*</sup>Pavlović Petar <sup>2</sup>Živanović Nenad <sup>3</sup><sup>1</sup> University of Banja Luka, V.P. Bojovića 1a, 78 000 Banja Luka, Republic of Srpska<sup>2</sup> FIEP Europe Delegate and Vice-President of Section for History of Sports, Banja Luka, Serbian<sup>3</sup> FIEP Europe, President of Section for History of Sports, Niš, Serbia

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**Keywords:** Sokolism, society, record, assembly, administration.**Abstract**

Serbs in America (USA) in mid-1907 began to accept the very idea of Serbian Sokolism and in early 1909 began to emerge initiatives for the establishment of the first Serbian Sokol Societies. By the end of this year two Societies were established, in the upcoming 1910 five more and during 1911 three more societies, so by the end of that year there were in total ten Serbian Soko Societies. In 1912 the establishment of Serbian Sokol Societies continued, and among those societies was also Serbian Soko Society in Oakland, State of California, established in January. The subject of this paper is „Serbian Soko“ in Oakland (California) and aim is to investigate exactly when the Society was founded, who were its initiators and founders, which were its main activities and the importance it had on the development of Sokolism in the territory of the United States (America).

**1. Introduction**

Serbs in America in mid-1907 began to accept the idea of Sokolism, and the first ideas for establishment of Serbian Soko Societies (SSS) in this area began with the 1909. By the end of that year two societies were established, in Cincinnati (Ohio) and Detroit (Michigan). In the following 1910 five more societies were established in: Gary (Indiana), Chicago (Illinois), Barberton (Ohio), Akron (Ohio) and Indiana Harbor (Indiana). During 1911 three more societies appeared in: St. Louis (Missouri), Butte (Montana) and New York (New York), so by the end of 1911 there were in total ten Serbian Soko Societies in USA. In early October 1911 *Serbian Sokol Parish in America (SSPA)*, i.e. Union of Serbian Soko Societies in that area, was established with seven societies as first members. In the following

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\* E-mail: kristina.pantelic-babic@ffvs.unibl.org;

years Serbian Soko Societies continue to be established and in 1912, eighteen (18) new societies were established, and among them was also SSS from Oakland (California), which will be presented the following text.

The subject of this paper is Serbian Sokolism in America (USA), more precisely Serbian Soko Society in Oakland (California) with aim is to investigate exactly when the Society was established, who were its initiators and founders, which were its main activities and the importance it had on the development of Sokolism in the territory of the United States (America).

## **2. Material and methods**

During research authors used historical method. Available primary and secondary historical sources were reviewed and critically analyzed, upon which was made the reconstruction of the establishment and main activities of „Serbian Soko“ in Oakland (California).

## **3. Results and Discussions**

Establishment of Serbian Soko Society in Oakland and its work until end of 1912

During 1912, eighteen (18) SSS were established: three in California (Oakland, Los Angeles and San Francisco); four in Ohio (Steubenville, Cleveland, Columbus, and Beli Majls); three in Pennsylvania (Farrell, South Sharon and Stilton); three in Illinois (South Chicago, Kevans & Hegvić); one in New York (Lakavani); one in Iowa (Charleston City); one in Nevada (Kimberly); one in New Jersey (Elizabeth) and one in Colorado (Denver).

Initiatives for the establishment of the Serbian Soko Society in Oakland began with a group of Serbs at the end of 1911 and early January 1912. At that time Ilija Ljubibratic from Oakland sent a letter to the Serbian Sokol Parish in America (SSPA) in which he asked them to send him instructions for the establishment of the Soko Society. The letter was read at the SSPA's session on January 15, 1912. After reading the letter, the SSPA's Secretary Milan Muslin said that he had already sent the requested instructions. (Записник сједнице С. Соколске Жупе у Америци, February 1<sup>st</sup> 1912)

Based on the text from the records of SSPA's session on February 15, 1912 in Gary: „We read a letter from the 'Serbian Soko' from Oakland, Cal., in which they request to receive the rules, and also the prices of ceremonial and training suits and the terms under which they are accepted in the parish“ (Записник сједнице Српске Соколске Жупе у Америци, March 1<sup>st</sup> 1912, p. 39) and text in the „Soko“ newspaper, no. 3 from March 1, 1912: „The Serbian Sokol idea spreads throughout the United States: from the Atlantic to the Pacific. On January 18 t.y. Serbian Soko in Oakland was founded.“ (Српски Соко у Окланду, Кал., March 1<sup>st</sup> 1912, p. 43.) we can conclude that the founding assembly of the Serbian Soko Society in Oakland was held on January 18, 1912, when 57 members enrolled the newly formed society.

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The first Administration of the Society was also elected at the Assembly. The Administrative Board was elected with: Špiro Milošević, Senior; Petar Jovanovic, Deputy Senior; Ilija M. Stijepovic, Secretary; Grujo Dutin, treasurer and Djuro Čabrilo, accountant. The Supervisory Board: Jovo Glogovac, Pero Grgurevic, Dimitrije Preljevic and Milos Cetkovic. Miloš Dutin and Vido Radovanović were selected as flag-keepers, and for the leader was elected Nikola Četković. Ivo Vrbica was selected for a troop leader, Ilija Ljubibratić as economist, and Božo Kurilić as gatekeeper.

Immediately after the establishment of the Society and the election of the Administrative Board, they sent a letter to the SSPA requesting them to send them the Sokol rules, the conditions for admission to the SSPA, as well as the cost of exercising and festive suits; at the SSPA meeting, on February 15, 1912, in Gary, after reading their letter, they decided to send them the requested material.

In April 1912 minor changes were made in the Societies Administration. No changes were made in the Administrative Board. The Supervisory Board was re-elected: President Jovo Glogovac, and his deputy Pero Grgurević, and a new member S. Dabineilovic as the second deputy. Miloš Dutina and Vido Radovanović were re-elected for the flag-keepers, the first one for the US and the other for the Serbian flag. Ivo Vrbica was chosen for the position of leader replacing Nikola Cetkovic, the former troop leader. The economist and gatekeeper remained the same, Ilija Ljubibratić and Božo Kurilić.

Together with the Company's Administration which consisted of 13 people, at that time there were 43 sokols in the Society. (Српски Соко у Окланду, Кал., May 1<sup>st</sup> 1912)

At the beginning of August, a change was made in the Administration of the Society. Marko Zambeljić was chosen as the SSS Senior in Oakland, replacing the former Senior Spiro Milišić. The reason of the change remains unknown.

In the second half of 1912, the great enthusiasm that existed with the Serbs in Oakland after the founding of the Society began to recede, and for that reason, the Administration, in order to increase the interest of the Serbs for Sokolism, scheduled the holding of its public assembly on August 29<sup>th</sup> that year. Among other things, there will be speeches about the goals and tasks of Serbian Sokolism, as well as its significance for the Serbian people „... and appeal to Serbs to preserve that first nest in the Pacific.“ (Српски Соко у Окланду, Кал., September 1<sup>st</sup> 1912, p. 130.)

The assembly of the Society, as announced, was held on August 29<sup>th</sup> 1912 in Oakland, at „Foresters Hall“, Clyline Street, at 8 p.m. A flag-keeper of SSS from Oakland, Milan Dutina, after the Assembly was held described its work in a nice manner, as well as the work of the local Sokol Society for New York's newspaper „Srbobran“. Parts of this text were published in the „Soko“ newspaper, no. 10 from November 1<sup>st</sup> 1912. (Како раде напредни Срби – Један примјер за углед -, October 1<sup>st</sup> 1912, p. 138.)

The Assembly began working with the welcome speech of Senior of SSS from Oakland Marko Zambeljić (or Zembeljić) and then the Society's Secretary

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Ilija Stijepović talked about the previous work of the SSS in Oakland. After that they started with the agenda of the Assembly.

The senior of SSS from Oakland spoke about the goals of the Serbian and Slavic Sokolism, and after his speech which was warmly welcomed by the audience, the following young Sokols addressed to the attendees on the importance of Serbian Sokolism: Milan Dutina, Ilija Ljubibratić and Ilija Stijepović.

It was also spoken about the difficult situation for the Serbian people and the fight against the enemy attacks on the Serb homeland, and that in the struggle for their freedom Serbs can succeed only if they are united and the Serbian Sokolism is invited to unite all Serbs for them „... to have unity in their deeds, strength in their hands, courage in their heart and homeland in their mind.“ (Ibid, p. 140)

These words were accepted not only by SSS members, but also by many others. One of them, Milo Radjenovic, wanted to speak and among other things he said: „Brothers, I feel very happy to be among you and attend this evening’s assembly; be convinced that I am glad to hear about every valid and honest work, especially the one for the benefit of the Serbian people, and on this occasion I ask you and give you my right hand, to receive me as a member of your Sokol circle.“ (Ibid.)

His words were greeted by the turbulent applause. In the following Radjenovic spoke about the flaws of Serbian immigrants and that the common duty of all Serbs is to work intensively and continuously on the progress of Serbian immigrants. „Each of us has a brother, a relative, or a friend; we are trying to bring them into this useful society, where they will be of use to both themselves and their people. I am very sorry that I’ve been here only for a short time, so I barely know anyone, but I am convinced that in a short time I will acquire at least one friend from so many Serbs in Oakland, and that I will lead him with my example into Sokol circles and tonight in advance I pay his ticket.“ (Ibid.)

In the end Radjenovic invited those who were not yet members of the SSS to become so immediately that night, after the end of the assembly. After his call 16 participants who were not members of the SSS enrolled the Society.

After that, Ilija Ljubibratić, SSS's economist, led by the speech of Radjenović, greeted participants with words: „Who is my friend will enrol one new member to the Society until our first social meeting.“ (Ibid, p. 141) After these Ljubibratić's words 23 attendees promised that they will do so until the next meeting and will each pay \$ 2.50 in society’s treasury. Among them was Ljubomirka Riđušić, a Serbian woman, who said: „I will do everything that my gentle force allows me for the progress of this most noble Serbian institution, and I also promise that I will introduce one male or female member until our next meeting.“ (Ibid)

Grujo Dutina, the treasurer of the Society, suggested to make a decision that SSS from Oakland should access the SSPA. His suggestion was unanimously accepted and they instructed the Secretary of the Society to notify the SSPA about this. Among other things, a conclusion was made to find a Sokol hall suitable to open a school for all illiterate Serbs from Oakland and the surrounding area. With

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this ended the Sokol Assembly „... which laid a solid foundation for our young Sokol.“ (Ibid).

According to the conclusion of the Sokol Assembly, the secretary of the Society, Ilija M. Stijepović in early September wrote and sent a letter to SSPA, in which he informed them that they want to enter the SSPA membership and asked them to receive the conditions for admission (an application for access, etc.). They sent \$ 7 in the letter for two training suits.

After reading the letter at the SSPA's Session on October 4<sup>th</sup> 1912 in Chicago, the Parish's Secretary general Miloš Jokanović immediately sent all requested materials to sokols in Oakland. (Поповић, & Јокановић, December 1<sup>st</sup> 1912).

#### *Work of the Society from the beginning of 1913 to the end of June 1914*

During 1913 sokols continued their work on achieving the set goals and for the benefit of the Serbian people.

The Annual Assembly took place on January 15, 1913 in Oakland, where they, inter alia, unanimously decided that the Society should apply for admission to the SSPA. At that time there were 41 members in the Society. The new Administration of the Society for the year 1913 was also elected at the Assembly. At the Administrative Board were elected: Senior, Marko Zambeljić; deputy senior, Božo Knežević; secretary-general, Milan Dutina; treasurer, Grujo Dutina; economist, Marko Vidaković; deputies, Jovo Grgurević and Stevo Ćurić. At the Supervisory Board: Joko Milojević, Vlado Porobić and Spasoje Tripković. Nikola Cetkovic was elected as Leader of the Serbian Sokols and Mirko Obradovic as the envoy for the SSPA Assembly. (Српски Соко у Окланду, Кал., February 1<sup>st</sup> 1913).

Upon the conclusion of the Assembly they addressed an application for an admission to the Parish. (Поповић, & Јокановић, March – April 1913). Probably at the SSPA's session on January 31<sup>st</sup> or February 28<sup>th</sup> 1913 the Serbian Sokols from Oakland were admitted to the SSPA. In the same issue of the „Soko“ newspaper from March – April 1913, in which the records of the two aforementioned sessions of SSPA were published, a list of new members of the SSPA was also published, including the SSS from Oakland with its 41 members (39 male and 2 female members). (Нови чланови Српске Соколске Жупе у Америци, March-April 1913).

According to the annual SSPA report for the period June 25<sup>th</sup> 1912 – June 25<sup>th</sup> 1913, on June 25<sup>th</sup> 1913 there were 14 Serbian Soko Societies in the SSPA, including „Serbian Soko“ from Oakland with its 41 members. (Поповић, & Јокановић, August 1913).

They held assemblies, public classes, exercises, parties also for the benefit of other Serbian societies. Such an assembly was held in the first half of August 1913 for the benefit of the „Serbian Red Cross“ where they gathered „... a decent sum of money for the same thing.“ (Поповић, & Јокановић, October 1913, p. 247).

The regular Annual Assembly of Serbian Sokols from Oakland was held on January 5<sup>th</sup> 1914 during which, among other things, the new Administration of the

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Society was elected. The Administrative Board: Marko Zambeljić, Senior; Bozo Knezevic, Deputy Senior; Milan S. Dutina, secretary-general; Risto Vukojević, treasurer; Savo Dabažinović, economist; Krsto Gregovic and Savo Lalosevic, deputies. In the Supervisory Board: Velimir Medan and Nikola Samardzic. Sava Dabazinovic was elected as the leader of the Expert committee and Milan S. Dutina for the envoy to SSPA.

The hall where they've been practicing until then was far from the place where the majority of Serbs lived, so the Sokol idea did not find enough „... response among members themselves as it should“ (Дутина, January 1914, p. 23) and because of that at the Assembly they decided to find a hall in the area where the majority of Oakland Serbs live. A special committee was elected whose task was to find and rent the appropriate hall, but in the reviewed and available sources we did not find the names of the members of that board. The envoy of S.C.L.D. Society from San Francisco that attended the Assembly suggested that all Serbian organizations from Oakland and San Francisco together celebrate Vidovdan in 1914. His proposal was unanimously accepted and a special committee was formed for the preparation of this celebration.

#### **4. Conclusions**

Serbian Sokols in America began to accept the idea of Sokolism in 1907, while the first initiatives for the establishment of Serbian Soko Societies in that area came in 1909, when the first two SSS in America were established. By the end of 1912, a total of 28 Serbian societies were established. The Serbian Sokol Society in Oakland (California) was founded on January 18<sup>th</sup> 1912, with brother Špiro Milošević as its first Senior. On February 28<sup>th</sup> 1913 the Society was accepted in the membership of *Serbian Sokol Parish in America*.

The Serbian male and female Sokols from Oakland, since their establishment until the end of June 1914, have fulfilled their regular activities: they held assemblies and sessions, practiced physical exercise, held public classes, exercises and parties, participated in competitions, wrote for the „Soko“ newspaper (published in U.S.), held celebrations and took part in the celebrations of other societies and organizations, and also some other activities which all together made a significant contribution to the gathering and literacy of the Serbian people in Oakland, but also to the development of not only Serbian, but also Sokolism of other Slavic nations in America (USA).

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