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“IMAGINED COMMUNITIES” IN SHOWCASES: THE NATIONALITY
ROOMS PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH (1926-1945)

by

Lucia Curta

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“IMAGINED COMMUNITIES” IN SHOWCASES: THE NATIONALITY
ROOMS PROGRAM AT THE UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH (1926-1945)

Lucia Curta, Ph.D.

Western Michigan University, 2004

From the inception of the program in 1926, the Nationality Rooms at the University of Pittsburgh were viewed as apolitical in their iconography. Their purpose was primarily didactic. Designed as classrooms meant for lectures and seminars, they were however ad-hoc museums for the display of symbols of national identity. In many ways, they constitute an excellent illustration in terms of the decorative arts of Benedict Anderson’s concept of “imagined communities.”

The identity referent of the symbolism attached to the decorative arrangements of these rooms was not that of the ethnic communities in Pittsburgh, for whom the rooms were supposedly designed to serve as repositories of national traditions. The examination of five of the six earliest classrooms considered in this dissertation (the Romanian, Hungarian, Yugoslav, Czechoslovak, and Polish Classrooms) reveals that governments overseas saw the Nationality Rooms program as an opportunity to showcase their version of national identity. However, through the sustained efforts of Ruth Crawford Mitchell (1890-1984), who initiated the program, the original designs proposed by architects and artists overseas were adapted to the context of the Cathedral of Learning, with further changes implemented in some cases by committees

set up by ethnic communities. Soon after their inauguration, some rooms rapidly turned into national shrines, as the “imagined communities” they represented were confronted with occupation and mayhem brought by World War II. Others became loci for redefinition of the identities of ethnic communities in Pittsburgh and America, especially in cases when the countries represented in the classrooms were at war with the United States. Hence the design of the Nationality Classrooms is inextricably linked to the idea of “imagined communities” as museum showcases.

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To my husband, Florin,
and my daughter, Ana Andreea

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Lucia Curta

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

“Once I had an idea, I thought to myself: If we were to sing some of our songs and explain what they were about—would it surprise them to learn that we sang about such things and had such feelings? If we told them how we lived in the old country, how we worked the land, the crops we grew, the little money we saw from one year’s end to another, our holidays and festivals—would they realize that even though we spoke different languages we were still men like themselves, with the same troubles, the same hopes and dreams?” (Thomas Bell, *Out of This Furnace*, 1941)

In Pittsburgh, perhaps more than anywhere else in America, the word “immigrant” for a long time conjured up a picture of steel-mill workers covered in sweat and dirt, inhuman working conditions, and ethnic neighborhoods. Much like Mike Dobrejcek, one of the main characters in Thomas Bell’s novel *Out of This Furnace*, those born to the first immigrants arriving in Pittsburgh in the late nineteenth century still felt like “foreigners in a strange land, ignorant of its language and customs, fearful of authority in whatever guise.”¹ Like Dobrejcek, they were often confronted with deep hostility and contempt for “non-Americans,” the “savage and undisciplined horde” of Hungarians, Slavs, and Southern Europeans.² Today, any visitor to Pittsburgh interested in immigration history would be well advised to start with the Hungarian, Czechoslovak, Yugoslav, Italian, and the other Nationality

¹ Thomas Bell, *Out of This Furnace* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1941; reprint Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1976), p. 123.

² H. C. Frick, cited in Burton J. Henrick, *The Life of Andrew Carnegie*, vol. 1 (Garden City: Doubleday, Doran et Co., 1932), p. 378.

Rooms at the University of Pittsburgh. It would indeed be very difficult to miss them, for they are located in one of the tallest buildings in the city, a skyscraper owned by the University of Pittsburgh known as the “Cathedral of Learning.” The building embodies the dream of University Chancellor John Gabbert Bowman (1877-1963) to create a structure that would serve the community, express its goals, and help to form a distinguished and particular identity not only for the university but also for the city of Pittsburgh.

To this day, the Neo-Gothic building dominates Pittsburgh. The Cathedral of Learning is a school, a museum, and a cathedral (at least in an architectural sense) at the same time. Given that it was built on a steel framework without any flying buttresses to support its walls, the skyscraper is an unmistakable symbol of modern technological prowess and American capitalism. As such, its Gothic appearance can be misleading, for to some this was not truly Gothic Revival.³ But to Chancellor Bowman, function and meaning were inextricably intertwined. Above all, the soaring volumes of the Cathedral were a practical solution to the desperate need for additional spaces, which the university had in the early twentieth century. But its location (on Oakland, the cultural center of Pittsburgh) and Neo-Gothic appearance also indicate that the skyscraper was meant to be a landmark that only the cathedrals dominating the skyline of the medieval European cities could match. Until 1926, the skyline of Pittsburgh had been dominated by industrial architecture and the only

³ See Paul Venable Turner, *Campus. An American Planning Tradition* (New York/Cambridge, Mass.: The Architectural History Foundation/The MIT Press,

buildings that reminded immigrants of their European homelands were the churches, Catholic or Orthodox, erected in various ethnic neighborhoods, often associated with schools and with a sense of distinctive identity. None of these churches aspired to imitate the grandiose architecture of the religious monuments of medieval Europe. From an architectural point of view, the Cathedral of Learning was therefore expected to put Pittsburgh on a par with some of the most important urban centers of the Old World. In both name and appearance, the building is at the same time a symbol of the New World, in which education embodies the fundamental principles of progress and civilization. Schools and universities are the cathedrals of the modern era, as democracy could not be conceived without enlightenment. In a cultural and political context, the architectural medievalism of Pittsburgh served a rather different purpose. In Bowman's words, the awe-inspiring skyscraper was expected to "so grip a boy that he could never enter the building with his hat on." What architectural style other than Gothic could produce such results?

The Nationality Rooms are the quintessence of Bowman's concept of memorial and monumental architecture. With the assistance of Ruth Crawford Mitchell (1890-1984), the real force behind the Nationality Rooms Program, the chancellor intended to equip the Cathedral of Learning with classrooms that would epitomize the identity of the nations that supplied workers for Pittsburgh's furnaces. Pittsburgh was a city of immigrants. From an early twenty-first century perspective, classrooms embodying the ethnic diversity of the urban landscape seem an

1985), pp. 110-120. The second wave of Gothic Revival in the early 1900s found inspiration in monastic architecture, not cathedrals.

understandable choice for the only university in Pittsburgh in the early twentieth century. But it is important to remember that Pitt thereby distinguished itself from all other universities in the United States, and to this day the Nationality Rooms program remains a unique feature of that university campus. Celebrating ethnic diversity may appear now as the “politically correct” approach, but in the aftermath of the National Origins Act of 1924 it was definitely not the expected course of action.

Various ethnic communities of Allegheny County were invited to create classrooms that would represent significant periods in their histories or aspects of their heritage. Bowman’s idea met with a rapid and energetic response. Nationality committees were formed in Pittsburgh and in the respective countries overseas. In such cases, governments in those countries offered substantial financial assistance: in addition to architects, artists, and materials, all in order to assure not only quality, but “authenticity” of décor as well. In others, decisions in matter of both authenticity and decoration were entirely in the hands of the committee members. Neither the Great Depression, nor the Second World War could deter the nationality committees and the university from their goals. It is precisely during the 1930s and 1940s that the project bore its first fruits and a great number of classrooms were inaugurated.

From the inception of the Nationality Rooms Program in 1926 until the completion of the Irish Room in 1957, the rooms followed principles derived from Bowman’s philosophy of education. First and foremost, they were to be cultural and apolitical in their iconography. In theory, there was no place in the classrooms for either political symbols or portraits of living political personalities. The Nationality Rooms Program had a primarily didactic goal. Although displays of political symbols

were in general avoided, nevertheless the rooms became stellar examples of how material culture can be used for political claims. In the Nationality Classrooms, “tradition,” “history,” and “culture,” Bowman’s guiding principles, were given new meaning by designers, often architects residing overseas, who, with few exceptions, were rarely concerned with the overall rationale of the Cathedral of Learning and only marginally interested in observing political “neutrality.” As images of national identities, the rooms thus became vehicles for more or less overt political claims. In more than one way, the Nationality Rooms illustrate Benedict Anderson’s concept of nations as “imagined communities.”⁴

Anderson is one of the most influential scholars currently engaged in analyzing phenomena of nations, nationalism, and their cultural reproduction. He suggests that the nation is a construct that requires representational labor, and is produced in and by representational work of some sort. More important for the topic of this dissertation, he emphasizes the cultural processes through which the idea of nation is made and remade, a point discussed in detail in Chapter I. Not surprisingly, most recent studies indebted to Anderson focus on the complex articulation of national identity through language and literature, historiography, painting, or architecture. Comparatively little attention has been paid to the construction of national identity through the decorative arts. The overall significance of the Nationality Rooms was produced by the manipulation of material culture in specific historical circumstances. Material culture was not a mere illustration of the idea of

⁴ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities. Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London/New York: Verso, 1991).

nation, but truly participated in its creation and continuity. To explore this raises questions about how, where, and when the nation is imagined, by whom, and on whose behalf.

On the other hand, the Nationality Rooms were primarily classrooms meant for lectures and seminars. Designed as ad-hoc museums, their most fundamental function was education. For architects and committee members overseas, classrooms designed for an American university could educate not just students, but a larger American audience about the specific cultural and national values of particular nations. In many ways, these classrooms serve as teaching aids. From an overseas perspective, they were often viewed as exemplars of national culture. Chapters IV through VI examine the significance of the museum-like setting of several classrooms opened in the early years of the program. My intention is to reconstruct the meaning behind artifacts or decorative patterns in the specific historical context in which each of these rooms were inaugurated. I focus on the complex articulation of the sophisticated concept of learning that inspired the program, and the use of material culture (decorative arts) for expressing national identity.

To what extent did the classrooms represent not just various nations, but the respective ethnic communities in Pittsburgh? Chapter II is a survey of the problems associated with the origin, structure, level of organization, and national consciousness of the various ethnic groups in late nineteenth- or early twentieth-century Pittsburgh. I will argue that the specific circumstances in which these rooms were designed and inaugurated affected the choice of decoration idiom. As a consequence, in some cases, specific “portraits” were in the end created for local ethnic communities

“represented” in the rooms. The Nationality Rooms were initially designed as classrooms. Today some of them are treated as “national(ity) shrines.” Built within their design is a political statement based on the idea of “imagined communities” as museum showcases. The degree to which the classrooms represent perennial values unchanged by history is not only the basic tenet of Bowman’s philosophy, but also the fundamental question of this dissertation. At least in the case of the Czechoslovak and the Yugoslav Classrooms, the rooms clearly outlived the political realities which they showcased. Although Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia have disappeared from the world map, the Czechoslovak and the Yugoslav Classrooms continue to attract both students and visitors.

I was inspired to write this dissertation by my first visit to Pittsburgh in the Fall of 1994. While at Carnegie Mellon University, a librarian suggested the Nationality Rooms as a must-see for any visitor to Pittsburgh. Most rooms were open for visitors at that time, but I was particularly fascinated by the Romanian Classroom. The decorative choice for that room made little sense to any Romanian accustomed to a rather different expression of national identity. In no aspect of its decoration does the Romanian Classroom fit the stereotypical emphasis on specific national heroes, poets, or landscapes. It was clear to me from the very beginning that the context in which the room had been designed and inaugurated must have been a special one. I was initially convinced that those specific circumstances pertained to the history of the American Romanian community in Pittsburgh, but was later surprised to learn that it was more a matter of politics in Romania. It was only after examining in detail

several other rooms that I realized that though “speaking different languages,” they were the expression of similar “troubles, hopes, and dreams.”

CHAPTER II

NATIONS, “IMAGINED COMMUNITIES” AND MUSEUMS: PROBLEMS OF APPROACH

What is a nation? In 1926, when the Nationality Rooms Program at the University of Pittsburgh was first implemented, the question had little importance. Nation(alitie)s were taken for granted: they must have been already in existence in order to be represented in the Cathedral of Learning. Only in the 1970s was a definition of nation incorporated into the revised principles governing the project. With twenty classrooms already opened at the time, that definition offered more a summary of accumulated experience than a solution to an already complicated scholarly issue: “a body of people associated with a particular territory and possessing a distinctive cultural and social way of life.”⁵ Given the size of the current historiography of the problem, the misgivings of those in charge with the Nationality Rooms Program are hardly surprising. It is vital, though, to realize that defining the concept of nation became a major concern only *after* various nations had been already “defined” in the interior decoration of several classrooms. In this dissertation, I take the opportunity the richness of that decoration offers to study the representation of the nation. The results are significant not necessarily because they question the definition adopted some thirty years ago by the Nationality Rooms program, but because they

⁵ E. Maxine Bruhns, *The Nationality Rooms* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1994), p. 8.

demonstrate that, in Pittsburgh, nations were literally in the making long before they received a definition.

If we are to interrogate successfully the source material showcased in the Nationality Classrooms, it is vital to pose the right questions. There is a range of issues about nation, art, education, and museums on which scholars have only recently been able to elicit meaningful responses. Did the formation of nations predate nationalism or was it a result of the latter? How was the nation imagined and represented in visual arts? What is the relationship between nationalism and museum displays? Within a system of public education with curricula stressing such subjects as literature, history, and geography, what constitutes nationalism? How is nationalism in decorative arts different from that identified in other arts or academic disciplines?

The very act of posing these questions underlines the peculiarity of Nationality Rooms project. Nonetheless, its interpretation cannot escape either the conceptual framework or the theoretical underpinnings of a long tradition of scholarship. The more recent literature abounds in attempts to provide meaningful and operational answers to these questions, but students of nationalism conclude on a negative note: there is as yet no satisfactory definition of a nation. Indeed, all three concepts, “nation,” “nationality,” and “nationalism” have been so far largely resistant to definition and analysis.⁶ As Hugh Seton-Watson once observed, despite the

⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, pp. 3 and 5. Theorists of nationalism have been thwarted by a number of factors. First, it is difficult to find a common denominator among modern nationalisms or to verify the “ancient” pedigrees advanced by modern

absence of a “scientific definition” of nation, the modern nation state is still a potent force.⁷ Nationalism and the emergence of nations have been traditionally associated with developments taking place in capitalist society and with what is known as “the process of modernization” originating in Europe in the eighteenth century.

But as Anthony Smith, one of the leading scholars of nationalism, has noted, additional problems emerge when scholars tie together too closely questions of ethnicity and nationalism to modernization. Such a perspective dismisses too easily the importance of ethnic roots that go back into the distant past. Moreover, it does not do justice to the influence that xenophobic neo-traditionalism has exercised upon national sentiments.⁸ Smith distinguishes between two types of nationalism. One is purely historical: as an ideological movement, it emerged in the late eighteenth century and should therefore be regarded as a purely modern phenomenon. The other, which he calls “the sociological thesis,” presents nationalism as a “modernizing force” that one may explain in terms of anterior processes of modernization.⁹ According to Smith, studies of nationalism are prone to ignoring

nationalists. Second, the formal universality of nationality as a socio-cultural concept is irreconcilable with the irremediable particularity of its concrete manifestations. Finally, the political power of nationalism manifests itself in inverse proportion to its lack of theoretical underpinnings and to the relative incoherence of diverse its analyses.

⁷ Hugh Setton-Watson, *Nation and States. An Enquiry into the Origins of Nations and the Politics of Nationalism* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1977), p. 5.

⁸ Anthony Smith, *Theories of Nationalism* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1983), p. ix.

⁹ Smith, *Theories*, p. x.

research on ethnicity and ethnic revivals. By doing so, they bypass Max Weber's idea of communities created by common political and social experiences, such as the destruction of feudalism. The narration of such experiences takes the place of heroic accounts in traditional societies. Such "heroic legends of primitive peoples" lie at the heart of what Smith calls "inner nationalism." Crises and dilemmas are partially resolved by means of rediscovering the past with its ideal images and exemplary deeds presented as models for social and cultural innovation.¹⁰ Since the past itself is often, albeit not always, a function of a master narrative, with known authors or precisely defined audiences, "rediscovery" is a matter of social dialogue. In more practical terms, the question is how are such models eventually internalized and through what kind of channels does the narrative reach its audience, in order to invest it with a sense of nationhood? In this dissertation, I will attempt to provide plausible answers to these questions by means of a series of case studies. Before doing so, it is however important to grapple with the imaginative powers of the nationalist narrative.

The most important advocate of nationalism as a function of imaginative powers is Benedict Anderson. He persuasively argues that both nationality (as a sense of nation) and nationalism are in fact cultural *artifacts*. To understand them properly, one has to study their history as artifacts, that is to investigate how they came into existence, in what ways their meanings have changed over time, and why they still

¹⁰ Ibid.

command allegiance today.¹¹ Building on recent anthropological research, primarily on Edmund Leach's idea that social units are produced by virtue of a subjective process of categorical ascription that have no necessary relationship to observers' perception of cultural discontinuity, Benedict Anderson proposes that nations are imagined political communities, conceived both as inherently limited and as sovereign.¹² Such communities are "imagined" because although their members only occasionally meet face to face, they all partake in the image of their communion.¹³

But how is this image of communion created and disseminated? Is it the offshoot of some preexisting cultural configuration? Ernest Gellner rejects the idea of nationalism as the awakening of nations to self-consciousness. To him, nations cannot exist but in an environment imbued with nationalism. Nationalism *invents* nations where they do not exist.¹⁴ The creation of a Romanian nation in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Transylvania was the result of a political and cultural movement capitalizing on the medieval concept of *natio* ("privileged group") and its peculiar usage within a Habsburg context. Similarly, Irish nationalism long pre-dates and prepares the rise of an Irish nation. At a closer look, most modern nations are

¹¹ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 4.

¹² Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 6. Edmund Leach's thesis is presented in his *Political Systems of Highland Burma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954).

¹³ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 6.

¹⁴ Ernest Gellner, *Thought and Change* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1964), p. 169.

“inventions” (in the sense of the Latin term *inventio*, “finding”) of nationalism. But to Gellner, “invented” is to be understood not just as “found” or “discovered,” but also as “fashioned” or “constructed.” Gellner’s nations are “artificial,” in that they are the result not of the “natural growth” of human communities, but of the deliberate intellectual efforts of certain groups or individuals in society. By contrast, Anderson shifts the emphasis from “invented” to “imagined” and thus emphasizes the creative role of the nationalist imagination. To him, any community larger than primordial villages of face-to-face social relations is “imagined.” He thus chooses to leave out assumptions of “natural” vs. “artificial” and to focus instead on the *style* in which such communities are imagined.¹⁵

The nation is imagined as *limited* since even the largest have finite, albeit elastic, boundaries. The nation is also imagined as sovereign, a concept that emerged in the age of Enlightenment and Revolution and was used in part to justify the destruction of the Old Regime. Finally, the nation is imagined as a community, because in spite of the fundamental inequality between “inventors” and “invented” that presides over its creation, every nation is conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship, a particular sort of fraternity.¹⁶

Nationalism should therefore not be regarded exclusively as an ideology, for nationalism has much more in common with such social phenomena as religion or kinship than with other *isms* (liberalism, fascism, Communism). Anderson notes that

¹⁵ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 6.

¹⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 5.

the most important cultural systems at the end of the eighteenth century and in the early nineteenth century were the community of faith and the dynastic realm.¹⁷ But imagined communities of nations did not simply grow out of, or totally replaced, religious communities and dynastic realms.¹⁸ Nationalism is not just different from the aforementioned cultural systems, it also represents a new and different *kind* of cultural system. Indeed, how are we to distinguish *a priori* the nation from other cultural and political entities? Eric Hobsbawm distinguishes between objective and subjective definitions of the nation: objective definitions employ criteria such as language, ethnicity, and common territory or history. Some of these criteria, especially ethnicity and language, are by nature fuzzy, shifting, and ambiguous—hence the failure of many objective solutions to the problem.¹⁹

Subjective definitions of the nation may be subscribed to Ernest Renan's famous adage "a nation is a daily plebiscite" or to the Austro-Marxist idea that any nationality may be attached to any person choosing to claim it, regardless of where and with whom that person chooses to live. But defining a nation by its members' sense of *belonging* is tautological and provides only an *a posteriori* guide to what a

¹⁷ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 12.

¹⁸ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 22.

¹⁹ E. J. Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780. Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), p. 6.

nation really is.²⁰ However, nationality itself cannot be reduced to just one, single dimension, whether political or cultural.²¹

Hobsbawm also points to the problematic relationship between the concept and the reality of a nation: the *Nation* as conceived by nationalists can only be recognized prospectively; the real *nation* is always *a posteriori*. Much like Gellner and Anderson, Hobsbawm stresses the importance of cultural artifacts, of invention and of social engineering that enter into the making of nations.²² Nations as a natural, inherent political destiny are nothing but a myth. The only reality, according to Hobsbawm, is nationalism, which takes pre-existing cultures and turns them into nations, sometimes inventing nations, and most of the time altering the pre-existing cultural makeup. Nationalism thus pre-dates nations: states and nationalism are not made by nations, but the other way around.²³ Territorial unity—or the desire to establish such a unity—is insufficient to create a nation. Instead, Hobsbawm believes that society must reach a stage of technological and economic development, a prerequisite associated with Marx's argument that nationalism is a product of capitalism. It is through capitalism that some of the most important ingredients for the invention of national communities become readily available. A standard national

²⁰ Hobsbawm, *Nations*, p. 7.

²¹ Hobsbawm, *Nations*, p. 8.

²² See the various essays in *The Invention of Tradition*, ed. by E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

²³ Hobsbawm, *Nations*, p. 10.

language, one of the important elements in nation building, cannot be conceived without journals and books, mass literacy, and public schools.²⁴ Public education is indeed a key concept in the emergence of nationalism.²⁵ Beginning with the nineteenth century, European governments set up carefully designed curricula stressing the teaching of national languages, literature, history, and geography as means by which students could learn they belonged to a larger community, the nation. But schools were not the only institutions contributing to the rise of the imagined community that is a nation. Benedict Anderson points to three other key factors present in the mid-nineteenth century: the census, the map, and the museum.²⁶ All three have profoundly shaped the way in which a certain image of the nation was promoted among its members.

Museums and the “invention of traditions” through museum institutions are indeed profoundly political. Before *ca.* 1800, museums had served only small and limited audiences, mostly occasional visitors of royal and imperial collections or of university museums. The transformation of the museum into a public institution was the result of the French Revolution. By 1793, the revolutionary government

²⁴ Hobsbawm, *Nations*, p. 10.

²⁵ A theme explored in several seminal studies: Jeffrey Brooks, *When Russia Learned to Read: Literacy and Popular Literature, 1861-1917* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); Maria Cristina Leuzzi, *Alfabetizzazione nazionale e identità civile: un piccolo popolo per una grande nazione (1880-1911)* (Rome: Anicia, 1998); Sandie Eleanor Holguin, *Creating Spaniards. Culture and National Identity in Republican Spain* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2002).

²⁶ Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, p. 163.

nationalized the royal art collection and subsequently declared the Louvre an institution “for the people.” A royal palace was thus reorganized as a public museum open to everyone free of charge.²⁷ The Louvre was thus turned into a metaphor for the fall of the old regime and the rise of the new order. While another symbol of the Old Regime, the Bastille, was utterly destroyed, the act of the demolition turning into a powerful image of the revolution itself, the Louvre was preserved, adapted to new demands and “returned” to the people through nationalization. Old artifacts and art works were given new meanings. In this new context, old symbols were not destroyed, but obscured and distorted. Formerly the property of the king, artifacts from the Louvre were now presented as public property and as the means by which a new relationship between the individual as citizen and the state as benefactor was symbolically enacted.²⁸

²⁷ Carol Duncan, “From the Princely Gallery to the Public Art Museum. The Louvre Museum and the National Gallery, London,” in *Representing the Nation: A Reader. Histories, Heritage and Museums*, ed. by David Boswell and Jessica Evans (London/New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 304. For the “prehistory” of the Louvre museum, see also Yveline Cantarel-Besson, *La naissance du Musée du Louvre. La politique muséologique sous la Révolution d’après les archives des musées nationaux* (Paris: Ministère de la culture/Editions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1981); Yvonne Singer-Lecocq, *Le Louvre inconnu; quand l’Etat y logeait ses artistes, 1608-1806* (Paris: Librairie académique Perrin, 1986); Andrew McClellan, *Inventing the Louvre. Art, Politics, and the Origins of the Modern Museum in Eighteenth-Century Paris* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1994). For the National Gallery in London, see Michael Levey, *The National Gallery. A Brief History* (London: Pitkin Pictorials, 1968); Nick Prior, *Museums and Modernity. Art Galleries and the Making of Modern Culture* (New York: Berg, 2002), especially Part I, chapter 2 (“The Peculiarities of the English’: The Formation of the National Gallery, London”).

²⁸ Duncan, “From the Princely Gallery to the Public Art Museum,” p. 306.

In the museum, the rights of citizenship could now be translated into art appreciation and spiritual enrichment. But equal access to museum displays did not *per se* make anyone capable of understanding the subtle message of museum displays. The museum by itself could not, and cannot, create an imagined community. Instead, the museum operates as an institutional synecdoche for the nation as a whole. It is in museum displays that the nationalist discourse finds the most appropriate illustration. It is museum artifacts that first illustrated the cultural artifacts—books and journals—now designed to mass-educate citizens in the national spirit. By displaying together selected artifacts rearranged in a new cultural environment, museums literally created palpable *images* of imagined communities.

Visitors to public museums of the nineteenth century were bourgeois citizens in search of personal enlightenment and rational pleasures. In the museum, the citizen found the culture that supposedly united him or her to other citizens, regardless of their respective social positions, as well as to the national past. Visitors also encountered the state in the very form of the museum. Indeed, the state acted on behalf of the public and appeared as the keeper of the nation's spirituality and the guardian of its culture. Museums made it possible to represent the relationship between citizen and state "as realized in all its potential."²⁹

The re-arranged treasures, trophies, and icons of the past thus became objects of history and art embodying the new function of the museum as a treasure of

²⁹ Duncan, "From the Princely Gallery to the Public Art Museum," p. 309.

cultural and historical wealth. The museum environment was structured in such a way as to bring out this new function and eliminate or mute any other, old meanings. The museum became a “powerful transformer,” an institution specifically designed to turn tokens of the splendor and luxury that the defunct aristocracy had enjoyed into *objets d’art* without owners or users, and to convert them further into national heritage and pride.³⁰ In the Louvre, for instance, the visitor was supposed “to re-enact that history of [the national] genius, re-live its progress step by step and, thus enlightened, know himself as a citizen of history’s most civilized and advanced nation-state.”³¹

Following the example of the Louvre Museum, national galleries were organized in most European countries on the basis of already existing royal or imperial collections. Even before the French Revolution, some crowned heads of Europe, such as those of Austria and Saxony, had opened parts of their collections to the public. This development continued during the Napoleonic Wars, as public museums opened in Madrid, Naples, Milan, and Amsterdam. By 1825, the capital-city of almost every European country, whether monarchy or republic, had a national museum.³²

From its inception, the national museum was a powerful institution for forging collective identity and building communities. As such, it was rapidly harnessed by the nation-state as a political resource for creating, representing, and maintaining national

³⁰ Ibid. See also Stephen E. Weil, “Courtly Ghosts, Aristocratic Artifacts: the Art Museum as Palace,” *Museum News*, November-December 1998, pp. 44-49.

³¹ Duncan, “From the Princely Gallery to the Public Art Museum,” p. 309.

consciousness.³³ Museums thus impelled individuals to identify with a particular civic, national character. A visit to the museum was a way to pay homage to a "collective" identity, in the form of artifacts previously selected as most representative. As Didier Maleuvre has observed, to this day the museum is a totem invested with the authority of the "great ancestor" giving his blessing to the cultural politics of the regime.³⁴ The nation-state is much more than just a territory, or a geopolitical entity. It is a mythic body, an emanation of history.³⁵ The task of the national museum is to preserve and present the image of that mythic body to present and future generations.

The function of museum collections also changed over time. Initially, they were the symbol of power proclaiming the glory of autocracies, theocracies, kingdoms, and empires. Collections and displays were intended to unite a populace, to reduce conflict and to ensure political stability and continuity. By contrast, with the advent of egalitarian ideologies, museums increasingly became institutions through which individuals and groups attained recognition. These were now spaces in which both elites and rival social groups expressed their ideas and views of the world. Unlike palaces, churches, or temples, in museums there is no hereditary or ordained

³² Duncan, "From the Princely Gallery to the Public Art Museum," p. 314.

³³ Didier Maleuvre, *Museum Memories, History, Technology, Art* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), p. 107. See also Danielle Rice, "The cross-cultural mediator," *Museum News*, January-February 1993, p. 38.

³⁴ Maleuvre, *Museum Memories*, p. 107.

³⁵ Maleuvre, *Museum Memories*, p. 108.

monopoly of access, possession, and display of symbols of power. Although it is true that the *Weltanschauung* of nineteenth- or early twentieth-century European elites can still be recognized behind some collections and displays of objects and symbols of power, museums were truly meant to be public. From their beginnings, national museums were designed to accommodate a rather diverse audience, making accumulated knowledge widely available.

In an insightful paper on the Pacific museum in the post-colonial era, Adrienne Kaeppler raises the question of precisely how artifacts become *objets d'art* suitable for museum displays.³⁶ Could such a phenomenon possibly be a sign that the nation is on the verge of losing its culture? But the opposite also seems to be true: when artifacts become *objets d'art*, this can only mean that the nation has recognized the value of its past and, on that basis, has begun an “educational conversation” with its citizens.³⁷ In any case, the educational function of museums stands out. The function of museums has long been viewed as essentially educational, namely to pass onto visitors the most precious values of national culture. Museums are thus thought of as treasure houses that can assist in forging cultural, ethnic, or national identities

³⁶ Adrienne L. Kaeppler, “Paradise Regained: the Role of the Pacific Museums in Forging National Identity,” in *Museums and the Making of “Ourselves”*. *The Role of Objects in National Identity*, ed. by Flora E. S. Kaplan (London/New York: Leicester University Press, 1994), p. 19.

³⁷ The phrase “educational conversation” is that of David Carr: “the museum is one of those places in society that ‘tends to educate’, not as an explicitly educational institution, but as a center where conversations that involve the presentation of self and story can occur—must occur.” See David Carr, “The Need for the Museum,” *Museum News*, March–April 1993, p. 32.

and serve as a link to a future that recognizes its roots in the past.³⁸ The museum may be seen as a stage on which artifacts play their respective parts with entrances and exits. As Kaeppler notes, each artifact in its time plays many parts. But museums are themselves part of a larger play and of a larger stage, for they too are cultural artifacts. The specific way in which they manifest themselves is a function of the culture and history of a particular place at a particular time. Museums are thus good mirrors of social change.

Ever since the nineteenth century, museums have been plugged into a wider network of institutions for mass education. Today, education outside an well-organized school system is almost impossible to imagine. The early 1800s witnessed the rise of integrated national school systems in every European country. The French Revolution cleared the ground not only for the emergence of the first public museum but also for the first unified curriculum and system of compulsory education. Through the public school system, every European government envisaged forming not just a literate population capable of reading and writing in a national language, but also of a nation aware of its history as a community. A visit to a museum was best when preceded by a proper lecture on national history. Moreover, during the nineteenth century, pictures of artifacts in museum displays found their way onto classroom walls. The presence of pictures in the classroom acted as a visual reminder of the nation's greatness. As classrooms began to take on some of the functions of the

³⁸ Kaeppler, "Paradise Regained," p. 20. For nineteenth-century museums as "a curious mix of education and entertainment," see Richard W. Flint, "Living the Legacy," *Museum News*, September-October 1990, p. 65.

national museum, photographs and paintings hanging on classroom walls became teaching aids, as they assisted teachers during history class in projecting an image of the nation. A visit to an actual historical site or to a museum reinforced and solidified the images conveyed during class. Once inside the museum, every schoolboy or -girl participated in the re-enactment of national history following the narrative provided in history textbooks.

A system of public education and leisure time for visits to museums were first possible within industrial societies. Capitalism transformed the means of practical and intellectual communication through improved transportation, physical mobility, and print.³⁹ But the transformation took place at different rates within different countries. According to Hobsbawm, the national consciousness developed unevenly among various social groups and regions of any given country. Initially, “nation-building” was only cultural, literary and folkloric, without any particular political or even national implications. Only later did a body of pioneers and militants of the national idea give nationalism its political edge. It is this stage that Hobsbawm identifies as the beginning of political campaigning for the national cause. During the third and final phase, nationalist programs enrolled mass support.⁴⁰

Crucial for my discussion of museums and schools is the transition from the second to the third phase. It is at this juncture that the efficacy of national schooling

³⁹ As Hobsbawm noted, standardized national languages, whether spoken or written, emerge from printed literature and mass literacy resulting from public schooling. See Hobsbawm, *Nations*, p. 10.

⁴⁰ Hobsbawm, *Nations*, p. 12.

and public museums was put to test and individuals began adhering symbolically to the “imagined community.”⁴¹ The end product of this process was in some cases an excessive identification with a common culture and group, which stifled individuation, while promoting instead the collective essence of the *Volksgeist* represented in such metaphors as national “blood” or “soil.”⁴²

Artifacts on display, rearranged to illustrate the nationalist narrative presented for and to the public, also empowered the individual to the extent that he or she identified with a particular group. However, neither identification nor empowerment could have taken place without much resistance to cultural and political assimilation, as many sadly similar examples of the late twentieth-century clearly indicate. In the late nineteenth century, the newly created national galleries and public museums tended to celebrate the rise of Republicanism or surviving monarchies struggling to regain prestige.⁴³ Representation in and access to museums was directly associated with representation in and access to political life. This may indeed explain the reluctance of the British Parliament to support the creation of a national gallery.⁴⁴ Britain was ruled by an oligarchy of great landowners that presided over a highly ranked and strictly hierarchical society. Landed property was not only a

⁴¹ Maleuvre, *Museum Memories*, p. 110.

⁴² Maleuvre, *Museum Memories*, p. 111.

⁴³ Duncan, “From the Princely Gallery to the Public Art Museum,” p. 319.

⁴⁴ The British National Gallery opened in 1824, after more than twenty years of public debate with no parallel in the museum history of France or Germany.

source of wealth but also the key to political power and social prestige. Art collections, too, marked their owners as legitimate rulers (i.e. politicians), as well as marked the boundary separating polite from vulgar society and those with from those without political power. The first effective attack on the culture of privilege came in 1820s and 1830s, and the first proposals for public art galleries date back to those decades. In the context of early nineteenth-century Britain, those efforts were highly political in nature and directly furthered a larger project to expand the conventional boundaries of citizenship. The cultural strategy involved opening up traditionally restricted ritual spaces and redefining their content as a means of advancing the claims of *the nation*.⁴⁵

The refusal of the British Parliament to establish a national gallery is a case in point. It serves as a good example of the interaction between such public institutions and emerging national identity, as well as the process of expanding political rights. By 1800, to encourage nationalism in Britain was to encourage an inclusive principle of identity that could become the basis for a political demand to enlarge the franchise.⁴⁶

Who was actually behind the *nation* in early nineteenth-century Britain or, later, in many other European countries? It is important to note at this point that the word *nation* was at that time a synonym for *society*. More often than not, the word

⁴⁵ Duncan, "From the Princely Gallery to the Public Art Museum," p. 321.

⁴⁶ Linda Colley, "Whose Nation? Class and National Consciousness in Britain, 1750-1830," *Past and Present* 105 (1986), 97-98.

was employed in the context of a middle-class campaign to dispute the claim of the privileged few to hold on to political power. Ultimately, the founding of a national gallery did not alter the distribution of real political power and did not give more people the right to vote. Nonetheless, the British National Gallery did remove a portion of prestigious symbolism from the exclusive control elites had on power, only to “return” it to the nation.⁴⁷ In England, as well as elsewhere, the transfer of property from the privileged few to the whole society, to *the nation*, and the shift in its symbolic meaning associated with the creation of the National Gallery, came through the mediation of the bourgeoisie and was sanctioned by a state that began to realize the political advantages of such public spaces.⁴⁸

Today, the museum appears as an institution almost exclusively designed to serve the community. It acquires, preserves, makes intelligible and, as an essential part of its function, presents to the public the material evidence concerning humanity, history, or nature. In doing so, the museum provides opportunities for study, education, as well as entertainment for a consumer society. But deciding over the degree to which a museum should or indeed could serve a community remains a controversial issue. Much like the nineteenth-century concept of nation, “community” and “people” are fluid concepts in constant re-definition. And like nineteenth-century

⁴⁷ Duncan, “From the Princely Gallery to the Public Art Museum,” p. 322.

⁴⁸ It is interesting to note that the British National Gallery came to rival the Louvre Museum only in the third quarter of the nineteenth century, during an era in which the franchise was enlarged to include all male citizens. This was the era in which the state eventually recognized the advantages of a monument that symbolized a nation united under presumably universal values.

politics revolving around the creation of national museums of art or history, current debates focus on the political boundaries of the community served by any given museum (or the access to decisions about what is displayed therein) or the level of education required or expected for making museum displays intelligible. It is easy, therefore, to forget that in the nineteenth-century, the idea of public museum was somewhat limited. In the British Museum, for example, visitors were only admitted in groups of fifteen and were required to submit credentials for inspection prior to admission.⁴⁹ When changes to this policy were proposed, they were met with fierce resistance from trustees and curators, who feared that the mob would damage the neatly ordered display of culture and knowledge.⁵⁰

The most significant shift in attitudes towards museums and the problem of access to such institutions was marked by the opening of the South Kensington Museum in 1857. Administered by a Board of Education, this museum was meant to serve an undifferentiated public and had opening hours and an admission policy designed to maximize its accessibility to the working class. It proved remarkably successful, but it remains debatable to what extent this success showed the

⁴⁹ Alma Stephanie Wittlin, *The Museum. Its History and Its Task in Education* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1949), p. 113.

⁵⁰ Tony Bennett, "The Exhibitionary Complex," in *Representing the Nation: A Reader. Histories, Heritage and Museums*, ed. by David Boswell and Jessica Evans (London/New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 343. Such apprehensions may explain why in 1848, as the Chartists marched to present the People's Charter to the Parliament, the government took measures for the military defense of the museum. For more details on this episode, see Edward Millar, *That Noble Cabinet. A History of the British Museum* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1974).

willingness of the British ruling class to acknowledge the inclusion of the working class into the nation. The opening of the South Kensington Museum marked not only a significant turning point in the development of British museum policy, but also a significant moment in the history of museums as instruments of public education.⁵¹ In 1883, the British Museum followed the example of the South Kensington Museum and introduced evening visiting hours, which made the museum accessible to a much larger audience.

By the late nineteenth century, the role of the state in the promotion of art and culture, in forging a national identity and in creating the imagined community, had greatly increased. It could take many different forms, which Nicholas Pearson has classified as “hard” and “soft” approaches. The former consisted of a systematic body of knowledge and skills forced in a systematic way onto specific audiences primarily by means of institutions of public education. The “soft” approach worked by example rather than pedagogy.⁵² This type of education was less intrusive and emphasized encouragement over coercion. Its field of application was largest with those institutions whose hold over the audience depended on voluntary participation.

There is no doubt that those two types of education completed and complemented each other. Although they responded to different needs in the end they contributed together to the process of making the population (and hence, the nation)

⁵¹ Bennett, “Exhibitionary Complex,” p. 344.

⁵² Nicholas Pearson, *The State and the Visual Arts: a Discussion of State Intervention in the Visual Arts in Britain, 1780-1981* (Milton Keynes: Open University Press, 1982), p. 35.

governable. Through those institutions, however, the government made the population assent to its governance, and enlisted popular support for the values and objectives enshrined in the state.

In this socio-political context museums were typically located in downtown areas of major cities where they stood as incarnations, both material and symbolic, of a power to “show and tell.” How did that power influence museum displays? How was the exhibition space organized in order for the museum to fulfill its educational function? The model, followed by most European museums, was again the Louvre. In the Louvre the historicizing principles of museum display were for the first time put to work. The works of art were exhibited in galleries devoted to different periods with the clear intention to emphasize their progressive historical development. This type of museum aimed at an integrative construction of historical totalities, suggesting an essential and organic connection between artifacts displayed in rooms classified by period.⁵³

The use of historicizing frameworks for the display of human artifacts in nineteenth-century museums was an important innovation. During that same period, the historical novel became a genre on its own, and history was established as an academic discipline.⁵⁴ The museum, the historical novel, and history-as-discipline

⁵³ Bennett, “Exhibitionary Complex,” p. 348.

⁵⁴ Stephen Bann, *The Clothing of Clío: a Study of the Representation of History in Nineteenth-Century Britain and France* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 85-86.

contributed to the imagining of the community by promoting images of people, states, and civilizations through time conceived as a progressive series of developmental stages. Since the museum was an important instrument of the modern state, its method of displaying artifacts made extensive use of the dichotomy between the universal and the national. In doing so, museums contributed greatly not just to promoting the so-called “national schools” in various fields of art, but also to the development of political rhetoric regarding national artifacts and achievements as the culmination of the universal progress of human civilization.⁵⁵

The museum as a public institution introduced an order of things that was meant to last. The museum provided the modern state with a deep and continuous ideological backdrop. The only apparent problem was that this ideological backdrop could work only *à la longue* and was not easy to adjust to short-term ideological changes. Once organized along certain cultural or political principles, museum displays tended to “freeze” in time a particular image of the nation with little, if any, room left for future adaptations. The educational function of the museum implies its ability as a public institution to create and communicate an image or a system of values to its audience. Since the nineteenth century, that communication has taken many forms. More often than not, the preferred form was visual, and thus implied much more than just artifacts. The Louvre Museum spelled out its ritual program through elaborate ceiling decorations.⁵⁶ After a revolution or a coup, the new

⁵⁵ Bennett, “Exhibitionary Complex,” p. 349.

⁵⁶ Some of those ceiling decorations are still visible. A good example is the decoration from Musée Napoleon, which depicts in four medallions the principal art

government quickly allocated funds for new ceiling decorations, inscribing in this way its own symbols and insignia upon the museum⁵⁷. This type of visual communication would eventually spread beyond the museum walls and into the urban landscape dotted with numerous statues. In France, sculptures displayed in open-air within cities acquired increasingly nationalistic tones after the Franco-Prussian war. In the aftermath of the disastrous collapse of the Second Empire, the Third Republic literally invented itself by means of public monuments. Its fragile government sought new ways of establishing bonds of loyalty. In the controversial political environment, the government began erecting statues commemorating famous personalities as weapons against political enemies.⁵⁸ By analyzing the choice of subject and style we could distinguish the same didactic demands that were placed on the public museums in the new *democratic* society. Public monuments erected on city streets and public museums were the means by which the nation forged its identity, bringing together the past and the present by means of art and display.

historical schools, each impersonated by a female figure holding a sculpture. The important schools represented were Egypt, Greece, Italy and France. The message on the walls enforced the message communicated throughout the museum: France was the final stage of artistic progress, the final great moment in art history. See Duncan, "From the Princely Gallery to the Public Art Museum," pp. 309-310.

⁵⁷ Good examples are the Salon Carré and the Hall of Seven Chimneys decorated in 1848 by the government of the Second Republic. For description and discussion, see Duncan, "From the Princely Gallery to the Public Art Museum," pp. 311-312.

⁵⁸ June Hargrove, "Shaping the National Image: the Cult of Statues to Great Men in the Third Republic," in *Nationalism in Visual Arts*, ed. by Richard A. Etlin (Hanover/London: University Press of New England, 1991), pp. 49-50.

Through this process of mapping out the uncharted territory of public space and marking its nodal points with artifacts of re-assigned meaning, by infusing nationalism with history, folklore, and art, the nineteenth-century nationalists left very little ground uncovered. During the following century, it would become exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, to empty such artifacts of their nationalist symbolism. Every aspect of history was perceived as national, every folk creation as the product of the *Volksgeist*. The tendency to instill nationalism in every aspect of life had begun with the opening of public museums during the decades following the French Revolution. It continued with the creation and growth of the public school system, and expanded into the streets through displays of public monuments.

Similarly, the earliest museums in United States were created in the spirit of Enlightenment, and education, not collecting, was their main concern. Post-Revolution America was not very wealthy and private collections were not numerous. However, in a country where patriotism was viewed as a facet of democracy, the desire to disseminate knowledge to larger audiences made some Americans open up their private collections to the public, sometimes for a small fee.⁵⁹

The most prominent art museum opened in the United States was the Metropolitan, founded in 1870. From its inception, the Metropolitan was designed to rival the best European museums. In 1882, in the pages of *New York Times* James Jackson Jarves clearly described the museum in such terms: “The Metropolitan Museum in New York enjoys in Europe the reputation of being a national

institution... Its cosmopolitan reputation... overshadow[s] the other American museums.”⁶⁰ In the Metropolitan, art had to be presented in a complete collection, with objects reflective of the history of art from the beginning to the present. In doing so, as well as in the particular arrangement of artifacts, the Metropolitan was to follow the example of the Leipzig Museum, the Amsterdam Museum, and the National Museum at that time still under construction in Berlin. However, the executive committee of the nascent museum decided to adopt the more revolutionary concept of London’s South Kensington Museum. The reason for this change of mind is that unlike the German and Dutch Museum, the Metropolitan was intended as a museum for the general public, an idea well attuned to the democratic values of the early Republic.⁶¹

Much like the Metropolitan, American museums were created for the education of the masses. As a consequence, the version of history presented in their display endorsed the already existing narrative about great men and great things that had happened in the nation’s past, carefully excluding both the history of the land before colonization and any references to slavery. Furthermore, because they opened their doors to large numbers of people, American museums were also designed to entertain. This was clearly the case of Charles Willson Peale Museum in Philadelphia, an institution initially created for education purposes alone. That

⁵⁹ Andrea Stulman Dennett, *Weird and Wonderful. The Dime Museum in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), p. 1.

⁶⁰ Steven Conn, *Museums and American Intellectual Life, 1876-1926* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 193.

⁶¹ Conn, *Museums*, pp. 195-196.

entertainment of large numbers of people was an idea linked to democratic value was a point that Peale himself raised on several occasions, for he was convinced that in America, unlike Europe, cultural institutions should serve the masses:

In Europe all men of information prize a well regulated museum, as a necessary appendage to government, but in several parts of that quarter of the earth, the means of visiting those repositories, are within the reach of particular classes of society only, or open on such terms or at such portions of time, as effectually to debar the mass of society, from participating in the improvement, and the pleasure resulting from a careful visitation.⁶²

In Europe, museums developed from formerly private, often royal, collections, that slowly opened up for public access, while at the same time they were used by local governments to shape national identities. By contrast, in the United States museums often started as concepts and slowly developed into collections with a primarily educational purpose.

The American equivalent of the European preoccupation with museums serving the national cause was the house museum movement. Andrew Jackson Downing's *The Architecture of Country Houses* (1850) offered to the promoters of that movement the theoretical basis for their claims that visiting historic houses had a great influence in molding characters, morally uplifting the nation, in addition to a significant contribution to stabilizing the American Republic.⁶³ Mount Vernon and the Hasbrouck House (Washington's military headquarters at Newburgh, New York)

⁶² Cited in David Brigham, *Public Culture in the Early Republic. Peale's Museum and its Audience* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1995), p. 2.

⁶³ Patricia West, *Domesticating History. The Political Origins of America's House Museums* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999), p. 2.

were among the earliest historic houses opened to the public, shortly before the Civil War, and they were both associated with the rising cult of George Washington. The purpose of opening the Hasbrouck House to the public was clearly spelled out by the New York legislators:

If our love of country is excited when we read the biography of our revolutionary heroes, or the history of revolutionary events, how much more still the flames of patriotism burn in our bosoms when we tread the ground where was shed the blood of our fathers, or when we move among the stones where were conceived and consummated their noble achievements... No traveler who touches upon the shores of Orange County will hesitate to make a pilgrimage to this beautiful spot, associated as it is with so many delightful reminiscences of our early history. And if he has an American heart in his bosom, he will feel himself to be a better man; his patriotism will kindle with deeper emotion; his aspirations for his country's good will ascend from a more devout mind, for having visited "Headquarters of Washington."⁶⁴

Most remarkable in this plea for historic houses is their association with history books, namely with the genre of biography, as well as with pilgrimage sites. It was through sacred sites such as the Hasbrouck House that patriotism was to be taught to future generations. Removing houses from the private sphere and reorganizing them for public access was therefore a patriotic duty.

In the following chapters, I will discuss a particularly illustrative, albeit comparatively later, case of manipulation of artifacts, interior decoration and material culture for the creation of "imagined communities" within the public space of an American university. Throughout the twentieth century, this public space has become a privileged locus for imagining the nation for a multitude of ethnic groups living in or around Pittsburgh at the beginning of that century. The Nationality Rooms at the

⁶⁴ West, *Domesticating History*, p. 4.

University of Pittsburgh are neither art museums, nor historic houses. But the concept of a classroom decorated in such a way as to transform it into a museum *sui generis* derives from the specifically American idea that museums are essentially institutions of education. On the other hand, the use of decorative arts for the representation of the “imagined community” is a direct development of the association established in Europe between museums and nationalism. The unique character of the Nationality Rooms Program, to which I will return in the Conclusion, is thus the result of a combination of ideas of various origins, all revolving around the concept of museum as a public institution.

CHAPTER III

PITTSBURGH AND THE PITTSBURGH COMMUNITIES

At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, Pittsburgh emerged as the quintessential symbol of the American industrial city. The position acquired was the result of its incredible industrial development that in turn attracted an important number of immigrants who forever changed the face and the composition of the city.

According to many historians, the iron-and-steel industry was the vital organ of the city.⁶⁵ Of concern here are real forces behind the transformation of the city and its industrial success – the people of Pittsburgh. Where did they come from and how did they represent and perceive themselves in the New World? Did the new life in Pittsburgh push them toward assimilation or preservation of their ethnic and national identities? Was national and ethnic identity an individual choice in the new context? What was the role of the ethnic community in shaping a certain *national* outlook?

In this chapter I will address some of the questions relevant to issues of (self-)representation and “imagining” of national groups. The historiography of Pittsburgh’s growth and development is still dominated by approaches rooted in labor and industrial history. The cultural and ethnic history of the Steel City has

⁶⁵ For more on this see *Pittsburgh*, ed. by Roy Lubove (New York: New Viewpoints, 1976) and John E. Bodnar, Roger D. Simon and Michael P. Weber, , *Lives of Their Own: Blacks, Italians, and Poles in Pittsburgh* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1982), pp. 13-25.

received comparatively less attention. The goal of this chapter is therefore not to survey comprehensively immigration or labor issues, but to illuminate those aspects that may have a role in the shaping and eventual success of the Nationality Rooms program idea. In doing so, the chapter draws heavily from archival sources, especially from taped interviews of the Pittsburgh Oral History Project, an initiative of John E. Bodnar. Hired as historian in 1971 by the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission, Bodnar was put in charge of the Ethnic Studies Program.⁶⁶ His task was to preserve the historical record of various ethnic groups; his goal, however, was to move beyond folklore and to write social history. Bodnar founded the Commission's collection of publications and newspapers in foreign languages. He was also very active in establishing contacts on behalf of the Commission with ethnic organizations and their leaders. Most important, however, was his decision to collect data on the everyday life and culture of various ethnic groups by means of interviews with their members. The project began in 1973 with interviews of Irish and Welsh immigrants. Bodnar received enthusiastic support and assistance from many students and professors at the universities of Scranton and Pittsburgh. Between 1974 and 1978, the project expanded to include Slavic peoples and Jews. The result is a collection of 196 individual interviews, including 45 of Poles, ten of Slovaks, ten of Serbs, four of

⁶⁶ The experience and knowledge he accumulated in this position became the basis for his celebrated books, *Lives of Their Own* and *The Transplanted. A History of Immigrants in Urban America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1985).

Ukrainians, and two of Croatians. This collection, now in the archives of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Collection in Harrisburg,⁶⁷ is very rich in details otherwise not captured by sources historians traditionally used to write labor or social history. It also offers an important dimension to ethnic communities in Pittsburgh and raises the question of their involvement in the Nationalities Rooms program to be discussed in the following chapters.

At the turn of the nineteenth century Pittsburgh was the largest iron and steel production center in the United States and one of the largest in the world. At least 150,000 people worked in the city's steel and iron mills. It was during this period that the city attracted a large number of immigrants from various parts of Europe. By 1900, most people working in the mills came from Italy, Austria-Hungary and Russia.⁶⁸

Immigration was by then a familiar aspect of Pittsburgh history. Between 1830 and 1880, as the city changed from a trading into a manufacturing center, many immigrants came to Pittsburgh. Almost all of them were from the same countries as the city's pioneers. Most important among them were the Irish who by 1850 represented 21.4 percent of the city's population. Their outlook was different from the previous Irish immigrants fleeing their famine-ridden country; many had left behind the areas of Ireland that were more advanced economically.

⁶⁷ Pittsburgh Oral History Project (hereafter POHP) record groups 5, 7, 8, 10, 13, 14/2, 18, 19/1, 21, 23-25, 27, 28, 31, 32, 33, 41, 42, 44, and manuscript group 409 Box 2. For the standard questionnaire used in interviews, see Bodnar, Simon, and Weber, *Lives of their Own*, pp. 277-279.

⁶⁸ Bodnar, Simon and Weber, *Lives of their Own*, pp. 13-25.

The Irish Catholics settled in three neighborhoods of Pittsburgh: one on the edge of the central business district, around St. Paul's Cathedral (a church that was erected for and by them), another less prosperous neighborhood on the Hill, and a third in the lower Strip district.⁶⁹

The second largest group of immigrants during the first two thirds of the nineteenth century was German. By then, Pennsylvania was already dotted with pietistic German communities, and strong communities of industrious farmers and artisans of the Lutheran and German Reformed churches existed in Philadelphia. Pittsburgh had a very different German population. No tradition of folk craftsmanship existed there that could be compared to that of rural communities in southeastern Pennsylvania so powerfully illustrated by painted chests and other examples of Pennsylvania German folk art.⁷⁰ Between 1850 and 1870, ten to fifteen percent of the population of Pittsburgh and the surrounding Allegheny County was of German origin. The Pittsburgh Germans were a less homogeneous group than the Irish, with many differences among them based on religion, social class, regional origin and political outlook.⁷¹ This may explain the difference

⁶⁹ Nora Faires, "Immigrants and Industry: Peopling the 'Iron City'," in *City at the Point. Essays on the Social History of Pittsburgh*, ed. by Samuel Hays (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh, 1989), pp. 5-7.

⁷⁰ Gary B. Nash, *First City. Philadelphia and the Forging of Historical Memory* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), pp. 35 and 36 fig. 12.

⁷¹ For German immigrants, their economic and social mobility, as well as the communities and associations they founded, see Faires, "Immigrants and industry," pp. 7-9. The Pittsburgh Catholic College, now known as Duquesne University, was founded in 1878 by Joseph Strub, a member of the Congregation

between the impact they had on the Nationalities Rooms project and the interest contemporary historical and art institutions in Philadelphia were taking in things German American. Shortly before and after 1900, the Philadelphia Museum of Art founded in 1877 began to collect systematically Pennsylvania German folk art. In 1926, a kitchen and a bedroom from a German American miller's house were installed in the museum in an attempt to showcase the aesthetic taste and craftsmanship of the state's largest ethnic group.⁷² By contrast, no Pennsylvania German folk art is represented in the German Classroom opened on July 8, 1938 in Pittsburgh; instead the room's interior decoration imitates the sixteenth-century great *Aula* of the University of Heidelberg.⁷³ Responsible for the bicentennial celebration of the first arrival of German immigrants that took place in Philadelphia in 1883 were primarily second-generation American Germans. All five members of the German Classroom committee were born in Germany and came to the United States after 1890.⁷⁴

of the Holy Ghost, whose members had been exiled from Germany after the congregation's suppression by Bismarck.

⁷² Nash, *First City*, pp. 36-37.

⁷³ Ruth Crawford Mitchell, *The German Classroom. The Cathedral of Learning, University of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1941). Nevertheless, many contributors to the German Room fund, whose names are recorded in the "Golden Book" on display in a glass cabinet in the Classroom, were "persons of German birth or German descent living in Pennsylvania" (Mitchell, *German Classroom*, p. 12).

⁷⁴ Mitchell, *German Classroom*, pp. 12-14. All members of the committee were also wealthy members of the German community of Pittsburgh. The committee's chairman, Reinhard Ullrich, had been the founder and president of the German-American Federation in the Allegheny County.

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the only other newcomers besides Irish and Germans were English, Scots, and Welsh. It has long been noted that these immigrants quickly acquired key positions in manufacturing and, as a result of their history of political activism prior to migration, played an important role in the development of the Pittsburgh industry. However, in the absence of any special study devoted to this particular group of immigrants, it is difficult to assess their relative importance.⁷⁵ Nor is it possible to identify residential patterns associated with English, Scottish, or Welsh immigrants, while the history of their associations and communities remains to be written.

The heyday of industrialization and immigration in Pittsburgh was between 1880 and 1930. It was during this period that the city population nearly tripled, from 235,000 to 670,000. The driving force behind this demographic growth was immigration. By 1890 Pittsburgh had a population of 340,000 inhabitants, of which almost a third were recent immigrants. Together with Pittsburgh residents born of foreign parents, immigrants represented two thirds of the city population. This trend continued uninterrupted until 1930, when for the first time the immigrants' contribution to the population growth dropped under twenty percent. The importance of the immigration process on the industrial and cultural development of Pittsburgh is more than evident if we consider the fact that between 1880 and 1930 immigrants and their children made up between half

⁷⁵ See Nash, *First City*, p. 37, who notes the absence of sources for the early history of the Scots-Irish, one of Philadelphia's largest immigrant groups.

and two thirds of the city's residents.⁷⁶ It is important to note that migration to Pittsburgh was in some cases preceded by a prolonged exposure to migratory lifestyles, as people sought work outside their village or community. It would be a mistake to see all immigrants coming to Pittsburgh as destitute individuals abandoning their rural world in exchange for a golden opportunity. Economic and financial constraints pushed some of them to emigrate. Most dreamed of making enough money in the New World to be able to buy a large piece of land upon their return.

The parents of Michael Zahorsky, a Slovak born in Aliquippa, Pennsylvania, came to the United States from the eastern part of what is now Slovakia:

My father was John Zahorsky. And he came here about 1897 or '98. [...] The people who came to America from that section of the country where parents come from came here because of economic reasons. There was no freedom from oppression because [in] the part of Austria and Hungary that our people came from they had the privilege of religious freedom. They lived under a feudal system you might say. They weren't even sharecroppers. They worked for the lord and they were just nothing more than a little bit above a slave. They returned to their homes at night. But it was strictly economic, absolutely, because to come over here and make two dollars a day... Now my father made eleven cents a day on the first job he got, so even that to him was something.⁷⁷

⁷⁶ Faires, "Immigrants and Industry," p. 10.

⁷⁷ POHP interview with Michael Zahorsky, July 31, 1974. The "privilege of religious freedom" is a reference to Catholicism, one of only four denominations officially recognized within Austria-Hungary. Ever since the mid-seventeenth century, Catholics, Lutherans, Unitarians, and Calvinists had been the "privileged nations" under Habsburg rule.

Others were looking not only for economic and financial opportunities but also for political and religious freedom. Anthony Kovalovsky, another Slovak interviewed by Bodnar, presents a different picture:

At the time when my parents came here, that country was Austro-Hungarian Empire and if you know, there was a First World War and that changed the map of Europe. So, we developed a Czechoslovak Republic. So, my parents come from Austro-Hungarian Empire, but my parents were of Czechoslovak lineage. And we were very much oppressed in the Austrian-Hungarian Empire. We could not speak our language. We were persecuted by the Hungarians and the rest. In other words, they wanted to finish us, as a nation, out. So in just about 1918 when the First World War was over, the Czechoslovak country had won and we established the Czechoslovak Republic and I come from the Czechoslovak Republic already. And it was so sweet to speak our language. Before we could not. I'm a Roman Catholic, the country was Roman Catholic, same religion, but is funny that they won't let us speak our language. And sometimes we are very bitter about that. Some of us people, they even leave the Catholic church on the account of that. You see, they weren't the police, but they should [have] see[n] to those injustices. But not much was done. Not [that] this is bad, you know what I mean. [...] When I was there [i.e., in Austria-Hungary] I was only allowed to speak Hungarian, I wasn't allowed to speak my language. In school they [were] beat[ing] us up, you know I'd be speaking like me and you, the kids, and the teachers beat us up, no reason. It was a crime to speak the Slovak language.⁷⁸

Many young people were sent overseas by their families eager to remove their sons from a continent preparing for imminent war. In his interview, John Waskowitz, the son of Polish immigrants, talked about his father: "My father left Austria; he didn't want to serve. You see it was compulsory there, to serve for the government. When you came to be twenty-one, you had to serve three years. So,

⁷⁸ POHP interview with Anthony Kovalovsky, August 17, 1974.

before he was twenty-one, he got out of there and he went into Italy. And he sailed from Italy to here, the United States.”⁷⁹

Numerous among the immigrants of the second wave were the Poles. By 1903 more than 50,000 Poles lived in Pittsburgh.⁸⁰ They came from all three empires that had incorporated Polish territories in the aftermath of the three partitions of Poland (1772, 1793, and 1795). They carried with them the deep resentment towards what they perceived as a most hostile environment. Moreover, by the end of the nineteenth century many Poles had lost their lands and ties to the countryside as a result of industrialization and overpopulation. Within so-called Congress Poland (the part of eighteenth-century Poland occupied by Russia), the population grew 179 percent during the second half of the nineteenth century.⁸¹ As a consequence the migration of Polish workers on a seasonal and permanent basis intensified in the last few decades of that century. It is symptomatic that most of the Pittsburgh Poles came from Congress Poland, especially from districts with a high density of population, such as Kalisz, Kielce,

⁷⁹ POHP interview with John Waskowitz, July 8, 1974.

⁸⁰ Carol Ann Golab, “The Polish Communities of Philadelphia, 1870-1920: Immigrant Distribution and Adaptation in Urban America,” Ph.D. dissertation (University of Pennsylvania, 1971), pp. 50-51.

⁸¹ See Bodnar, Simon, and Weber, *Lives of their Own*, p. 37. See also the studies collected in *Wies i rolnictwo pod wpływem industrializacji w XIX i XX wieku na Górnym Śląsku i w okręgu ostrawskim* (Village and Agriculture During the Nineteenth- and Twentieth-century Industrialization of Upper Silesia and the Ostrava Region), ed. by Stanisław Michalkiewicz (Katowice: Uniwersytet Śląski, 1982).

Warsaw, and Piotrków.⁸² Polish villagers traveled to Prussia, Bosnia, Brazil and United States, as they sought to supplement their income and in some cases return with their earnings to purchase land. The attempts of the Russian power to conscript Poles from Congress Poland into the army of the tsar forced many to emigrate.⁸³ Some Poles interviewed in the Pittsburgh Oral History Project mentioned their service in the Russian army in Asia, perhaps during the Russo-Japanese War of 1904-5.⁸⁴ Since the army was an assimilationist institution *par excellence*, it is not surprising that Polish memories of the tsarist army were particularly resentful: “Well, my dad must have been close to the Germans, [I mean] to the Russians, because they drafted him to the Russian Army and he ran away from there and came to the United States.”⁸⁵ Peter Gottlieb, of Polish descent, also reveals in his interview the reason for which his parents moved to the United States:

They [his parents] were born in the Russian part of Poland. My dad was born in the town Suwalki, which is near the present Russian border. And my mom was born in the region Suwalki. [...] And my relatives were

⁸² Piotrków was the most industrialized region of Congress Poland, the seat of the Dąbrowa coal basin and a major center of the textile industry. While the textile industry relied on Jewish labor, heavy metal industries (e.g., foundries in Ostrowiec), sugar refineries, and leather factories employed primarily labor force of Polish origin from the surrounding countryside. See Golab, “Polish Communités,” p. 192.

⁸³ Bodnar, Simon, and Weber, *Lives of their Own*, p. 38.

⁸⁴ POHP, interviews with Walter K., July 2, 1974; Valerian D., July 8, 1974; John B., March 3, 1976; Stanley E., September 9, 1976; John S., September 30, 1976; Stanley P., November 11, 1976; and Carl M., November 11, 1976.

⁸⁵ POHP interview with Peter Lewkowicz, September 17, 1976.

already here [i.e., in Pittsburgh], who came early because of the fact that they had a few run-ins with the Russian provincial authorities who were after them to arrest them for their so-called radical activities among the Poles in that area of Suwalki and Grodno. [...] They were so-called Polish liberals or some people called them Socialists who worked in conducting underground activities to disrupt the Russian rule of the Poles in that area or region in which they wanted to do away with the Russian officials and supplement [sic] them with their own.⁸⁶

Emigration from Congress Poland started in earnest *ca.* 1880 at a moment when anti-Polish policies promoted by the tsarist government made an already difficult situation impossible to bear.⁸⁷ Poles coming from Prussian territories had also enjoyed some mobility before arriving to the United States. Some had previously moved to Berlin or to the heavily industrialized Ruhr Valley region and had thus acquired skills that put them at an advantage in the Steel City, as well as a knowledge of industrial urban environment that served them well in the New World. Many had worked in the Prussian mining industry before coming to Pittsburgh.

The least adapted or prepared immigrants of Polish origin came from Galicia (the Austrian section of Poland). At the beginning of the twentieth century, two thirds of all males from this region were agricultural workers or day laborers. Only a little more than six percent were craftsmen with some industrial

⁸⁶ POHP interviews with Peter Gottlieb, May 13 and 20, 1976.

⁸⁷ The economic situation was even more difficult as a result of the unequal distribution of land after Alexander II's Emancipation Act and land reform.

skills.⁸⁸ These Poles had been driven out of their native land by extreme pauperization,⁸⁹ following the emancipation of serfs in Austrian lands and the subsequent social and economic pressure of numerous peasants without any land. Cultural and political persecution has also played an important role in their decision to leave for America. Polish immigrants quickly established enclaves within the city of Pittsburgh, in Lawrenceville, the South Side, and on the Polish Hill. In 1875 the first Polish parish was established in Pittsburgh, centered on the church of St. Stanislaus Kostka.⁹⁰ Until 1930, the church remained the heart of a vibrant ethnic community. In doing so, the church strove to maintain its central position against secular and religious challenges from both the Polish National Catholic Church and Polish nationalist organizations. St. Stanislaus Kostka was particularly eager to show the support of its parishioners for the homeland. During World War I, the church became a recruiting center for volunteers willing to enroll in the French army in order to fight for the liberation of Poland.⁹¹

⁸⁸ Celina Bobińska and Andrzej Pilch, *Employment-seeking Emigrations of the Poles World-Wide XIX-XX cc.* (Cracow: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1975), pp. 43-9 and 84-7.

⁸⁹ Most immigrants chose immigration as a means to put a stop to the decline in social status as a result of ever decreasing landed property. Some immigrants planned to return with the money to purchase properties. It is symptomatic that more money was sent from the United States to Galicia than to any other sector of Poland. See Bodnar, Simon and Weber, *Lives of their Own*, p. 39.

⁹⁰ The church grew considerably as more and more Polish immigrants found jobs at the mills. During the following half-century, a school was established and many parish societies were organized.

⁹¹ Faires, "Immigrants and Industry," p. 12. For the American-Polish lobby for the self-determination of Poland as a prominent feature of post-World War I

The Poles also established a number of fraternal societies that would play an equally important role in community life. Most important among them were the Polish Falcons, an organization that rivaled St. Stanislaus Kostka in organizing the recruitment of Poles for the war effort in Europe and the liberation of Poland.

The second largest group of immigrants of the second wave was the Italians. Many came from southern Italy, the Mezzogiorno, including the much-impooverished provinces of Abruzzi, Molise, Campania, Puglia, Basilicata, Calabria, as well as from Sicily. In Mezzogiorno, the land had been the property of the royal family or of the state. The land reform of 1806 divided the public land among emancipated serfs. A few independent landowners received only land of inferior quality. The *contadini* ended up selling their land to wealthier owners. By the late nineteenth century, *latifondi* (large estates) were predominant in southern Italy.⁹² These historical circumstances may explain why, unlike Poles, Italians show little, if any, attachment to land. Their expectations were shaped to a greater degree by the complex socioeconomic structure of the town community in which they had lived. Very few Italians from the South were either agricultural workers or day laborers. However, like Poles, the Italians had already experience in

American political life, see Lynn Dumenil, *The Modern Temper. American Culture and Society in the 1920s* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1995), p. 206.

⁹² Bodnar, Simon, and Weber, *Lives of their Own*, pp. 43-4. See also Antonio Prampolini, *Agricoltura e società nel Mezzogiorno all'inizi del '900. L'inchiesta parlamentare sulle condizioni dei contadini nelle provincie meridionali e nella Sicilia* (Milano: F. Angeli, 1981).

moving outside their communities in search for work, to supplement their income. While some continued to follow the harvest moving around Italy, others migrated across the ocean.⁹³

The goals and expectations of Italians moving to the United States is still a matter of debate. Until recently, historians believed that most Italians migrated because of a deterioration of their social and economic status, as they were looking for jobs in industry, as opposed to agriculture. Doubts about this interpretation were raised especially after John Briggs brought to the fore the evidence of adult male passports showing that most immigrants had indeed been occupied in agriculture. According to Briggs, those more likely to immigrate were farmers and townsmen who had a stake in society (such as a skill or a piece of land) and who believed in their ability to influence effectively their own future. Briggs concluded that Italians from the lowest social strata were the least likely to leave. Moreover, he insisted that Italian immigrants with a fairly decent socioeconomic status were ready for improvement in the new American society and had high expectations of social mobility.⁹⁴ The evidence of interviews conducted with Italian immigrants from Pittsburgh substantiates this conclusion. Many Italians immigrating to Pittsburgh were from Abruzzi. People interviewed

⁹³ It is symptomatic that the Italian government took note of this trend. Government officials and newspapers such as the *Annuario Statistico Italiano* were very concerned about this phenomenon. For more details on the official reaction in Italy and for a breakdown in numbers of immigrants to continents and regions, see Bodnar, Simon, and Weber, *Lives of their Own*, p. 44.

⁹⁴ John W. Briggs, *An Italian Passage: Immigrants to Three American Cities, 1890-1930* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 2-12 and 77-8.

by Bodnar and his colleagues had not thoughts of returning to Italy, not even for a visit, and definitely saw their arrival to the Steel City as an opportunity for improvement.

Felix D., one of the Italian-Americans interviewed for the Pittsburgh Oral History Project, revealed that his father had come to Pittsburgh because of what he had perceived as his inferior position as an apprentice in Italy: “he was only allowed to sweep floors.” He had decided to move to the United States, “where everyone was making money.” Nicholas R., a first-generation immigrant, talked about Pittsburgh offering “greater opportunity” than Italy. He felt he could succeed in the new city, which is why from the beginning he had no desire to return to Italy.⁹⁵

The Italians moved into several neighborhoods in Bloomfield⁹⁶ and East Liberty. In 1897, the first Italian church opened in East Liberty⁹⁷ and immediately became the center of the Italian-American community. As with Polish immigrants, kinship was important among Italians. The entire Italian migration to

⁹⁵ These interviews were conducted by John Bodnar, Gregory Mihalik, and William Simons in Bloomfield and in the East Liberty area between 1975 and 1977.

⁹⁶ Bloomfield was the neighborhood where most of the POHP interviews were conducted. Until 1890, when Italians began clustering around Liberty Avenue as well as Pearl, Juniper, and Edmund streets, the neighborhood was mainly German. Most Italians settling in Bloomfield came from Abruzzi, but by 1900 new immigrants from Calabria and Sicily substantially increased their numbers.

⁹⁷ Bodnar, Simon, and Weber, *Lives of their Own*, p. 47.

United States was based on kinship and serves as a “classic” example of chain migration. The Italian stronghold established in Bloomfield was built primarily on a kin structure already growing strong before 1890.⁹⁸

The first Slovak immigrants arrived in western Pennsylvania during the mid-1880s. The Slovak case reveals clear-cut chain migration patterns.⁹⁹ For example, those coming from the southern area of the Borsod-Zemplén County of northern Hungary settled in close quarters in Frankstown; Slovaks from the central region of that same county moved to Woods Run, on the northwestern side of the Steel City. Slovaks from the northern Spiš district went to the South Side, where they often worked in mines, instead of mills,¹⁰⁰ while those from central Spiš settled in Pittsburgh’s North Side.¹⁰¹ Regional ties seem to have been

⁹⁸ Interviews conducted with Italian-Americans offer plenty of information substantiating this conclusion. Relatives already living in Pittsburgh often brought other members of the family from Italy. They offered a support network that provided money for the trip, housing upon arrival and even a job for the newcomer. Frank A., one of the Italian-Americans interviewed, pointed out to a quarrel with his father and to the incoming war from Europe as the reason behind his decision to move overseas. He chose Pittsburgh, because three of his sisters already lived in the Steel City.

⁹⁹ June Granatir Alexander, “Moving Into and Out of Pittsburgh: Ongoing Chain Migration,” in *A Century of European Migrations, 1830-1930*, ed. by Rudolph J. Vecoli and Suzanne M. Sinke (Urbana/Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1991), p. 204.

¹⁰⁰ Spiš was one of the most important mining districts of Austria-Hungary and many Slovaks coming from that region had experience of working in the mines.

¹⁰¹ For the Slovak immigrants and residential patterns associated with them, see Greg M. Chaklos, *The Unmelting Ethnic: A Brief Profile of Early Slovak-American Immigration in the Metropolitan Pittsburgh Area* (Pittsburgh: Greg M. Chaklos, 1974), pp. 4 and 8.

paramount in the movement of Slovak workers within and outside Pittsburgh. A dramatic example of such ties is the accident that took place in 1901 at the Jones and Laughlin Steel Plant, in which eight people were killed and three injured. Not only were all eight victims Slovaks from five neighboring villages in northern Hungary, but three of them were in fact from the same village, but had come at different times from elsewhere in Pennsylvania to work at the mills. Proximity in the old country even overcame religious differences. Slovak Catholics and Lutherans who had lived in separate communities in Liptov County now settled side by side in Pittsburgh's Sixth Ward. More importantly, people of different ethnic backgrounds coming from the same narrowly defined region of Austria-Hungary chose to stay together. Slovak neighborhoods of Pittsburgh also included Hungarians coming from the same regions of the Borsod-Zemplén County.¹⁰²

Of a comparatively smaller size was the Croatian community of Pittsburgh. By 1900, there were some 7,000 Croats in the city, almost all of

¹⁰² This may explain why in April 1914, an emissary of the Hungarian government, Count Mihályi Károlyi, was sent to the United States to gather the support of American Slovaks for a union of Slovaks and Hungarians in an independent Hungarian state. The Slovak League of America, with its headquarters in Pittsburgh, organized a number of meetings and demonstrations against Károlyi. As a reaction to his mission, the League produced a Memorandum written in several languages and distributed to influential politicians in Europe, as well as in the United States. Against Károlyi, the Memorandum demanded complete autonomy for Slovakia. See Molchan Casper, "The Development of the Slovak Community in Pittsburgh, 1880-1920," M.A. thesis (University of Notre Dame, 1948), pp. 99-101.

peasant origin, who worked primarily as unskilled workers in the mills.¹⁰³ They had left their homeland in the aftermath of the devastating grape phylloxera pest had destroyed in 1883 almost all vineyards in Croatia and Slavonia, on which the economy of the region was based. Many had come to America hoping to earn enough money to return and replant their vineyards. Some had previously lived elsewhere, especially in Chicago. The migration had started in the 1880s, but many who had come to Pittsburgh from various areas of Croatia, then part of Austria-Hungary, had returned home after a few years. Those who stayed did not live together in a single neighborhood, but scattered in various communities both inside and outside Pittsburgh.¹⁰⁴ The first Croatian Catholic Church dedicated to St. Nicholas opened in 1895 on East Ohio Street, after successful negotiations between the leaders of the Croatian community and the Catholic bishop of Zagreb, Josip Juraj Strossmayer (1815-1905), whose portrait would later be displayed in the Yugoslav Classroom (see chapter V). The first ethnic association, the Croatian Fraternal Union of America, was established in 1894 with the declared purpose of educating Croatian immigrants in the ways of life in America and of promoting Croatian culture. Another association, the Croatian Falcon, was

¹⁰³ Of 1225 Croats employed by the Carnegie Steel Corporation in March 1907, only 21 were skilled. See Stjepan Gaži, *Croatian Immigration to Allegheny County* (Pittsburgh: Croatian Fraternal Union of America, 1956), p. 45.

¹⁰⁴ Gaži, *Croatian Immigration*, pp. 24-28. The largest number of Croats lived on East Ohio Street. Since the majority of them came from counties located in the Jaska region, south of Zagreb, the street was known until recently, at least amongst Croatian Americans from Pittsburgh, as the “Jaska Street.” The dedication of the first Croatian church to St. Nicholas has also to do with the fact that Nicholas was the patron saint of Jaska (Gaži, *Croatian Immigration*, p. 34).

created in 1912 with more politically radical goals. The association soon became involved in the organization of meetings and demonstrations protesting the assimilationist policies in Austria-Hungary.¹⁰⁵ Some of the participants in these demonstrations were Serbs, for the deteriorating political atmosphere overseas had triggered cooperation between Croatian and Serbian ethnic associations. A third organization of Croatian Americans, the Croatian Alliance, had apparently only cultural goals. In fact, the organization, whose headquarters moved to Pittsburgh in 1913, raised funds for Croatian students in Zagreb, as well as for such nationalist parties overseas as the Croatian-Serbian Coalition or for the release from Austrian-Hungarian prisons of such prominent Croatian nationalists as Stjepan Radić.¹⁰⁶ The Alliance was also behind the assassination, in 1913, of a government official in Croatia by a young Croatian American, Stjepan Dojčić.¹⁰⁷

Hungarians, Czechs, Serbs, Greeks, Romanians, Bulgarians, Russians, Ukrainians, Rusyns, and Finns also established their own communities, churches, and fraternal associations in Pittsburgh.¹⁰⁸ However, due to either comparatively

¹⁰⁵ Gaži, *Croatian Immigration*, pp. 48 and 53.

¹⁰⁶ For Radić's life and political activity, see Ivo Perić, *Stjepan Radić, 1871-1928* (Zagreb: Dom i svijet, 2003); Mark Biondich, *Stjepan Radić, the Croat Peasant Party and the Politics of Mass Mobilization* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2000).

¹⁰⁷ Gaži, *Croatian Immigration*, pp. 48-49.

¹⁰⁸ The U.S. Bureau of Census data lists the population of Pittsburgh between 1890 and 1940 by "country of birth." White immigrants came from Austria, Bohemia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania, and Russia. However, the information provided may at times be misleading. Before 1920, Czechs and Slovaks were probably recorded as Austrians and Hungarians,

smaller numbers or the lack of interest on the part of social historians, their respective stories are less known than those of Poles, Italians, and Slovaks.

The establishment of ethnic and fraternal associations has been interpreted as a “creative adaptation to an alien hostile environment.”¹⁰⁹ Those who founded the first associations in Pittsburgh began their work in an adverse environment, without knowing the language and without prior experience with ethnic associations. They came primarily from the rural areas in which the only institution that brought the community together was the church. The adverse conditions they encountered stimulated newcomers to care for each other in the form of a system of mutual benefits that would make their life in the New World safer and more predictable. Yet these associations were the products not only of adverse conditions, but also of life within a new, democratic society. In the fraternities and ethnic associations established in Pittsburgh at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century the founders combined principles of fraternalism and democratic government with ethnic exclusivity. More than just caring for the financial needs of their members, those associations organized and legitimized an expression of ethnicity. They brought the community together and they preserved and fostered the development of

respectively, although some Czechs were obviously recorded as Bohemians as well. Ukrainians and Rusyns, two important and active ethnic groups in Pittsburgh, appear as Russians. By contrast, Poles are recorded as coming from Poland even before its restoration by the Treaty of Versailles.

¹⁰⁹ Margaret E. Galey, “Ethnicity, Fraternalism, Social and Mental Health,” *Ethnicity* 4 (1977), 19.

ethnic heritage and ethnic consciousness.¹¹⁰ By 1900, Pittsburgh already had thirteen ethnic fraternal associations, including the Polish Falcons of America, the Croatian Fraternal Union, the National Slovak Society, the Russian Orthodox Catholic Women's Mutual Aid Society, the Serb National Federation, the Ukrainian National Aid Association, and the Živenia (Slovak Women's) Beneficial Union.¹¹¹ Although criteria for membership varied, national origin was a fundamental eligibility requirement in all associations. Initially, this was in fact the only criterion of member recruitment. For example, between 1926 and 1944, the Polish Falcons admitted only people of Polish birth and descent. Only after 1944 did the association accept Lithuanians, Rusyns and other Slavs.¹¹²

A fundamental element defining the ethnic identity of every group was language. The associations provided the place for the group members to socialize and participate in cultural activities conducted in the language of their homeland. Although actively promoting and maintaining the members' allegiance to the former homeland, most associations emphasized and facilitated the learning of English, as well as the understanding of American institutions and ways of life. In the ethnic associations, members negotiated their position in the new homeland. By preserving "national consciousness" as long as that was not in conflict with

¹¹⁰ Galey, "Ethnicity, Fraternalism," p. 21.

¹¹¹ Ethnic associations continued to appear even after 1945. In 1960, the organization of the Italian Sons and Daughters of America was added to the list of preexisting fraternal associations in Pittsburgh.

¹¹² The relaxation of the nationality criterion was probably a consequence of the dramatic decrease in membership during the 1940s.

American patriotism, the associations were thus able to mediate between loyalty toward the old and the new country.¹¹³ National consciousness was fostered by means of school courses in native languages, celebrating the national holidays, and sponsoring traditional musical and dance groups. This type of instruction and cultural activities geared toward fostering the national consciousness were important especially during the Depression years. Many members of the ethnic groups who found themselves without a job took advantage of their free time by becoming more involved in the life of the community and by taking classes offered through ethnic associations. The POHP interviews frequently refer to such involvement as having been a key factor in keeping people going during difficult times.

Strong identification with the homeland could sometimes take an even more active and direct form. Beginning with the 1910s, several societies began raising money to liberate their homeland and alleviate the plight of the poor.¹¹⁴ In 1934, the Ukrainian National Aid Association declared as its primary goal to provide moral and material support for the people “back home.” In 1932, the Greek Catholic Union established a fund for Rusyn national and religious causes. The Polish Falcons were very active in their efforts to liberate Poland. The association raised money, sponsored publications, and increased American

¹¹³ Galey, “Ethnicity, Fraternalism,” p. 28 .

¹¹⁴ Galey, “Ethnicity, Fraternalism,” p. 29.

awareness of the Polish cause. They also organized training groups to fight together with the Allied Forces during World War I.¹¹⁵

Nationalism was also fostered and maintained through a number of newspapers printed in native languages and sometimes in English as well. Associations would often required members to subscribe to these newspapers. Through newspapers members learned about events in their former country and activities taking place within the ethnic community, practiced reading in their native language, and kept contact with each other.¹¹⁶ Although promoting and maintaining “national consciousness” among members was a major goal, the ethnic associations were also concerned with transforming immigrants into good American citizens, especially during and immediately after World War I, a period marked by hostility towards immigrants. Organizations as different from each other as the Knights of Ku Klux Klan (founded in 1866) and the American Federation of Labor (founded in 1886) were in favor of restrictions to immigration, especially from Southern and Eastern Europe, and promoted nativist policies.¹¹⁷ Leaders of ethnic communities understood very well that in order to

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid.

¹¹⁷ For an example of nativism among Klan leaders, see Hiram Wesley Evans, *Attitude of the Knights of Ku Klux Klan Toward Immigration* (Atlanta: Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, 1923). See also Dumenil, *Modern Temper*, pp. 235-249. For the changing views of the leaders of AFL, especially of its secretary Frank Morrisson, see Sylvie June Ericksson, “The Attitude of Organized Labor Toward Restriction of European Immigration, 1900-1924,” Ph.D. dissertation (Cornell University, 1959); Gwendolyn Mink, *Old Labor and New Immigrants in American Political Development: Union, Party, and State, 1875-1920* (Ithaca:

succeed in the new country, while maintaining their ethnic groups' individuality, naturalization and integration were not only desirable, but also necessary. In response to nativist policies, ethnic associations promoted pluralism and insisted upon demonstrating a strong sense of loyalty to American society.¹¹⁸ Ethnic associations thus took a leading role in educating immigrants and organizing courses in English. Before 1943, the year in which the American Service Institute was established in Pittsburgh, local ethnic associations and churches were in fact the only institutions facilitating the learning of English and integration into American society.¹¹⁹

The favorable attitude ethnic associations had towards education and the efforts they made to promote learning went beyond the immediate needs of their members. The Polish Falcons financially supported the Alliance College (Alliance, Pennsylvania) and the Kościuszko Foundation (New York), while the William Penn Fraternal Association contributed to the Hungarian Studies Foundation. It is therefore no surprise that many ethnic associations supported the University of Pittsburgh initiative based on ethnic diversity in Pittsburgh, the Nationality Rooms project.¹²⁰ The involvement of ethnic fraternal associations in sponsoring the project is a key factor in understanding both the intentions of the

Cornell University Press, 1986). For restrictions to immigrants and nativism in the American political culture, see also Dumenil, *Modern Temper*, pp. 203-207.

¹¹⁸ Dumenil, *Modern Temper*, p. 254.

¹¹⁹ Galey, "Ethnicity, Fraternalism," p. 30.

¹²⁰ *Ibid.*

University of Pittsburgh representatives and the ultimate result of their efforts to promote “authenticity” and “universality.”

Ethnic associations that began as grass-roots organizations *par excellence* offered financial support to their members, but also a legitimate expression of their ethnic consciousness. By becoming a member of the association, the individual identified with the group and the group as a whole sanctioned and passed on the cultural heritage from one generation to the other.¹²¹ The rise and success of ethnic associations and their social and cultural impact shows that pre-World War I immigrants coming to the United States did not sever ties with their homelands. It is now clear that even people with little formal education remained in contact with their kin group in the old country, for they wrote and received letters from their relatives, and even traveled back there. Newspapers published in their native languages kept them informed, while church and ethnic associations collected money for charities, as well as for national and political causes. The existing evidence clearly points to active involvement in national(ist) politics, but it is much more difficult to assess the degree to which immigrants had a national consciousness at the moment of their arrival. Nevertheless, many came from multinational empires with which they clearly refused to identify. It is therefore possible that at the moment of their departure from their homeland, national identity had already become a function of a continuing process of inventing (i.e., representing) the nation.

¹²¹ Galey, “Ethnicity, Fraternalism,” p. 31.

To a certain extent religious institutions and ethnic associations attempted to mold identities and “invent” the nation in a way similar to policies promoted by national governments eager to educate their citizens in the national spirit. The end result, however, was somewhat different in the United States, where specific elements, such as the English language or strong individualism, were uniquely combined with values and customs brought over by the newcomers.

Social and educational differences undoubtedly existed among those who chose immigration. Some had left because of political repression (such as the Czechs who immigrated after 1848), others for purely economic reasons or because of a combination of political and economic factors (such as the Slovaks and Romanians fleeing Hungarian assimilationist policies implemented in the aftermath of the *Ausgleich* of 1867). Those who left behind a better social position and were better educated may have thought of themselves as more nationalistic or with a higher level of national consciousness. Nonetheless, the less educated were also definitely aware of their national identity, especially when practicing a number of customs that distinguished them from others.

The questionnaire in use of the POHP interviews included a number of questions pertaining to the cultural profile of the interviewees. One of them was about the language used in the household. To this particular question most people interviewed answered that they did indeed use their native language with family members and tried to teach it to their children.¹²² Language was without doubt a

¹²² Not all children seem to have been receptive to this idea. Some of the immigrants interviewed mentioned their children’s tendency to answer in English

quintessential element in defining one's national identity but clearly not the only one. Another question used in the questionnaire addressed the specific customs practiced by the immigrants. The great majority of answers focused on traditional foods prepared on special occasions, such as Christmas or Easter. Also mentioned were specific ways in which houses were decorated at important times of the year:

Yes, you must say this: they did decorate their homes. They were ornate, but they weren't as extravagant as they are today with Christmas trees. They all wanted a Christmas tree. I can remember – they had a Christmas tree with candles and I can remember when my father came home a little bit loaded one time and he lit the candles on the Christmas tree and the Christmas tree burned up. And it almost burned the house down, you know. But they did this. They had customs for instance, on, I think it's Whit Sunday, they get the boughs and they decorate the homes with fresh boughs. It's right after Easter. And it just abounds with the boughs [sic]. And they had the various customs of for instance where there was a girl that was ready for marriage or something, they had something about on the premises, about the home that would invite the young fellows in, you know.¹²³

Peter Hnat and his wife, both of Polish origin, recalled the Christmas customs:

Christmas, we started Christmas. Well, they used to have a Christmas Eve supper and that was a great occasion, for all, not only just the Polish. The Polish, the Slavish [sic], the Russians had theirs later on and all. And they used to celebrate. Of course you didn't have now like you have with the lights and all, but they use to get hay and put it on the table and cover it. On Christmas Eve they use to have their supper – *we* use to have rather... [sic] Then there was the custom of having the – they used to go around homes – they had Herod and they had, I don't know what you call it. They dress up, they make like a king, make like a Jew, [...] like a nativity. And

even when asked questions in their parents' language. Immigrants who married outside their ethnic group opted for English as the only language in the household.

¹²³ POHP interview with Michael Zahorsky, July 31, 1974.

they use to go to their own kind of people, and they'd come and they'd sing and they'd give them donations and that was the Christmas spirit.¹²⁴

Church attendance was always part of the picture immigrants had of themselves as members of particular ethnic groups.

This [Church attendance] was a must. This was as necessary as your daily bread. You absolutely – there was no such thing as missing church. I never remember missing church. ... Now you take in Austria-Hungary a priest, a pastor of a church is next to God and the king.¹²⁵

Weddings were especially important occasions for displaying markers of ethnic identity, such as national costumes, specially hired musicians and traditional dances.

Then they had the weddings that lasted three or four days. And at one time there was as many as thirty Gypsy orchestras around Homestead and Braddock. There were thirty Gypsy orchestras because this is what played for the Slovanic [i.e., Slovak] people.¹²⁶

It is this type of events that provoked the adverse reaction of native-born Americans in Pittsburgh, who often used the arm of the state against the ethnic customs of the immigrants. A local publication, the *Presbyterian Banner*, encouraged and approved the use of constables in breaking up “the unruly” wedding celebrations in immigrant communities. The newspaper fought for the enforcement of the Sabbath observance and the enactment of temperance laws. The Presbyterian Church, on the other hand, tried to combat “pernicious” customs

¹²⁴ POHP interview with Peter Hnat and his wife Katherine, June 26, 1974.

¹²⁵ POHP interview with Michael Zahorsky, July 31, 1974.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

by organizing missions “to educate” immigrants and bring them into the Presbyterian fold.¹²⁷

The Pittsburgh Oral History project also focused on participation in ethnic associations. Almost all people interviewed were involved in one way or another in association activities and some were very proud of their important positions on various committees. The cultural activities promoted by ethnic associations enjoyed great popularity among members of ethnic communities. Some immigrants mentioned taking part in reading groups and courses organized by the associations, and all referred to weekend balls as events attended by people from all generations.

We used to have over here a Falcon hall, a Polish hall, they had the Falcons here down in the “Bottoms” and they used to hold dances. [...] The Sokowi, or the Polish Falcons, were the ones that had the hall. We used to have our Parish dances there. The lodges used to have at least once a month. And the people used to go and have a good time. [...] And everybody had a place to go at least once a month and it seemed like the parents would go, the children would have a good time, and the young people would have a good time and everybody looked forward to it. It wasn't that it was a club where everybody would go drinking and everything. The elders had the drinks, but say like the younger people, they enjoyed it. They used to have another hall, it was a Ukrainian Hall, and they used to have these name bands because it was a bigger hall.¹²⁸

¹²⁷ Faires, “Immigrants and Industry,” p. 13. The Sabbath observance was the main bone of contention because many working-class people viewed Sunday as the day for recreation, not rest, an interpretation directly linked to the consumption of alcohol on weekends. For the boisterous working-class leisure and the Protestant reformers’ efforts “to induce a more regimented sense of time and more orderly behavior,” see Dumenil, *Modern Temper*, p. 81.

¹²⁸ POHP interview with Peter Hnat and his wife Katherine, June 26, 1974.

How much did those immigrants come to learn about the history, art, and culture of their respective nations remains unknown. From the POHP interviews it is clear that most of them were familiar with the recent history, especially with the developments before, during and after World War I. But ethnic associations could not have been anything but selective in their zeal to promote knowledge of the homeland culture. The interviews show that a certain version of “authentic” customs was often preferred over what came to be associated with national culture in the homelands.

In other words, judging from their answers, the picture immigrants drew of themselves as members of one ethnic group or another differed substantially from the image national governments established after 1918 strove to promote. Some of the ethnic boundaries immigrants built to create their image of a nation were of a definitely more ephemeral nature. By identifying their ethnicity with traditional food, music, dances, Christmas or Eastern customs, the immigrants of Pittsburgh did not leave any visible, long-standing testimony to their cultural construction of an imagined community. There is, however, one notable exception, namely the churches built by ethnic communities in the middle of their respective neighborhoods. Churches were “national” to the extent that, for example, Catholics identified themselves separately as Polish, Italian, Slovak, or Irish. Particularly Poles resented the direction taken by the Irish-dominated

Church hierarchy. They successfully defended the ethnic cast of their parishes and the use of the Polish language in church and schools.¹²⁹

The still standing buildings erected with money collected from members of ethnic associations thus point to a complicated and in many ways unusual combination of ethnic and religious markers that is also reflected in the Nationality Rooms program to be discussed in the following chapter. The choice of a religious setting (chapel or monastery) for many classrooms opened before 1945 on the ground floor of the Cathedral of Learning may have indeed been inspired by the strong association of Church and Nation underpinning the self-representation of many ethnic communities in Pittsburgh. Indeed, this very mechanism of self-representation may be responsible for the lasting imprint ethnic communities left on the Steel City as a whole. With its separate ethnic neighborhoods and a population that preferred to stay within the city perimeter,¹³⁰ Pittsburgh was unlike any other contemporary industrial city in America. In Philadelphia, for example, Italian and Jewish immigrants mingled closely with the

¹²⁹ Similarly, many Slovaks opposed the Ruthenian-dominated hierarchy of the Byzantine Rite Catholic archdiocese of Munhall-Pittsburgh. Consequently, although still of the Greek Catholic rite, the church of St. Macrina in Monongahela (south of Pittsburgh) is not under the jurisdiction of the archbishop of Munhall-Pittsburgh, but under that of the Roman Catholic archbishop of Philadelphia. See Chaklos, *Unmelting Ethnic*, p. 9. For Polish identity and separatism within the American Catholic Church, see Dumenil, *Modern Temper*, pp. 177, 255, and 258.

¹³⁰ It is interesting to note that in Pittsburgh many houses are kept within the same family for many generations, a pattern very similar to that of European cities, but unlike contemporary trends in other American cities, such as Chicago or New York. See Dumenil, *Modern Temper*, p. 255.

city's black citizens in the Southwark neighborhoods or in the Seventh Ward.¹³¹

By contrast, the residential pattern of Pittsburgh that may be associated with migratory developments is very similar to the layout of some of the European cities of the Industrial Revolution age (Dortmund, Manchester, Katowice).

Diversity and the model of a European city is exactly what Chancellor Bowman and the trustees of University of Pittsburgh had in mind when discussing in the 1920s the idea of a new university building. The end result of this dimension was the Cathedral of Learning, one of the most grandiose monuments of Pittsburgh, strategically located in the middle of the city in front of the Soldiers and Sailors Memorial, erected in 1910 as a tribute to the Civil War veterans. The building was designed to bring ethnic communities together, an idea without any precedent in the history of Pittsburgh. Whether or not the building does indeed represent the ethnic diversity of Pittsburgh is a different issue altogether. But that ethnic communities in Pittsburgh chose to identify themselves with the Nationality Rooms within the building is a clear indication that in no case was the neo-Gothic architecture of the skyscraper viewed as an impediment for the representation of the nation. True, from the very beginning, the interior decoration of the Nationality Classroom had to adapt to an already existing space. In some cases, there was a precedent in the old country for the adoption of architectural elements of medieval inspiration for the representation of the nation and of its past. But there were also cases in which no such association was possible or even recommendable. The vision members of the ethnic communities of Pittsburgh had

¹³¹ Nash, *First City*, p. 286.

of their respective nations differed substantially from that of leading representatives of the political and cultural life in their countries, as indicated by the changes brought to the initial classroom designs through the intervention of the classroom committees, which are discussed in chapters IV, V, and VI. Such decisions were at least partially determined by the general layout of the building, itself the result of a number of artistic and political changes. It is therefore necessary to turn now to the history of the building itself.

CHAPTER IV
THE CATHEDRAL OF LEARNING AND THE NATIONALITY ROOMS
PROGRAM

The title of the editorial Robert L. Duffus wrote for the October 1930 issue of the *Harper's Monthly Magazine* contains a rhetorical question: "Is Pittsburgh civilized?" The social and cultural life of Pittsburgh during the bleak interwar years, with their culturally torpid and comparatively stagnant economical atmosphere, appeared to Duffus as completely dull. He blamed the "barbarism" of the city on the machine age and its excessive individualism.¹³² In sharp contrast with such other American cities as New York, Chicago, or Cleveland, Pittsburgh had apparently not progressed "beyond the mere accumulation of money and power." According to Duffus, Cleveland had no chances to compete with Paris or Vienna, in spite of sustained efforts on the part of the local museum to acquire works of art of the so-called "Cleveland School." But unlike Pittsburgh, Cleveland had at least somewhat advanced "beyond the troglodyte stage". In a prophetic, albeit ironic, remark, Duffus declared he had never visited Pittsburgh without a "sense of a splendid vision waiting to be realized". A "truly civilized

¹³² Robert L. Duffus, "Is Pittsburgh civilized?" *Harper's Monthly Magazine* 161, October (1930), 537-545, reprinted in *Pittsburgh*, ed. by Roy Lubove (New York/London, 1976), pp. 158-170. The question of "civilization" also appears in the chapter dedicated to American small towns Duffus wrote for *America Now. An Inquiry into Civilization in the United States by Thirty-Six Americans*, a collection of studies edited by Harold Stearns (New York/London: C. S. Scribner's Sons, 1938).

Pittsburgh” was waiting to be built by “races” until then thought to be good only for the sweat and dirt of the mills.

At the time, Duffus's article may have well passed for a good piece of journalistic talent, but its author certainly lacked any sense of history. His visits to Pittsburgh must have either taken place long time before the publication of his editorial or deliberately avoided the downtown area. Duffus was clearly unaware of what at that time both the city council and various nationality groups represented in the city population viewed as a most imposing project. Four years prior to his editorial for the *Harper's Monthly Magazine*, ground was broken for a new 42-story Gothic building of the University, itself a genuine symbol of the city's new life.

The University

The University of Pittsburgh was born on February 28, 1787 as the Pittsburgh Academy, a small private school founded by a Scottish immigrant, Hugh Henry Brackenridge (1748-1816). A graduate of Princeton, a Philadelphia lawyer, and an avid Whig, Brackenridge was elected to the state legislature and in 1786 secured the establishment of the Allegheny County.¹³³ From its inception, the institution was designed “to preserve the wisdom and the grace” of the great

¹³³ Together with the Philadelphia printers John Scull and Joseph Hall, Brackenridge also established the first newspaper of Pittsburgh, the *Pittsburgh Gazette*. For Brackenridge's life and work, see Daniel Marder, *Hugh Henry Brackenridge* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1967). For his writings as a journalist both before and during his staying in Pittsburgh, see Martin George Galvin, “Hugh Henry Brackenridge and the Popular Press,” Ph.D. dissertation (University of Maryland, 1977).

European universities that served as its model. The new democracy also played a major role in shaping the profile of the new university. Making a living, revering God, building a democracy, and educating the youth: these appeared to contemporaries as the guidelines of the Pittsburgh community and they were promptly translated into the main tenets of the ideology behind the foundation of the University.¹³⁴ In 1817, the Academy of Pittsburgh became the Western University of Pennsylvania, a change in name that echoed the growth of the city and its role within the state of Pennsylvania.¹³⁵ In the early 1800s, the main university buildings were on the Third Street, until destroyed by fire in 1845. A second fire in 1849 ravaged the building now on Duquesne Way. As a consequence, classes at the university were suspended for six years. They resumed in 1855, and until 1882 classes were held in a new structure at the intersection of Ross and Diamond Streets, only to be moved to Allegheny City after that. Finally, in 1908 the University was moved to Oakland and the name was changed to University of Pittsburgh.¹³⁶

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the institution grew considerably, as it now served the needs of an industrial city. A number of scientific courses dealing with coal, glass, steel, electricity, and aluminum were added to the traditional, classical curriculum, and new colleges appeared shortly

¹³⁴ Agnes Lynch Starrett, *The Cathedral of Learning 1921-1937* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1937), pp. 5-6.

¹³⁵ Throughout the nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth century, this was the only university of Pittsburgh, as the Pittsburgh Catholic College (founded in 1878) and the Carnegie Institute of Technology (founded in 1900 as the Carnegie Technical School) did not receive university status until after World War II.

¹³⁶ Starrett, *Cathedral of Learning*, p. 6.

before and after 1900: the School of Medicine in 1892; the School of Law and the School of Mines in 1895; the School of Dentistry and of Pharmacy in 1896; the School of Economics and the School of Education in 1910; the Graduate School in 1912 (although graduate courses were already offered since the 1880s). The first Summer sessions and the Evening School opened in 1907, while the Extension Division appeared in 1913.¹³⁷ Rapidly adapting to the growth and demands of an industrial city, the university produced the leading engineers, merchants, physicians, lawyers, and statesmen of the subsequent decades. Besides changes in curriculum, the university spearheaded initiatives to change the architectural environment of the city. While the university did get a mention as an important landmark in the *New Descriptive Handbook of the Pennsylvania Railroad and Traveler's Guide to the Great West* published in Pittsburgh in 1859, its author did not fail to notice “the utilitarian spirit of the place [which] has been antagonistic to the culture of the fine arts generally; and although there are a “favored few” of the Muse’s children here, we are inclined to believe that Pittsburgh will ever boast more of the real than of the ideal.”¹³⁸

By 1900, the university had become an important ideal of the Pittsburgh business and civic community. Under chancellors William Jacob Holland and Samuel Black McCormick, the curriculum expanded to include not just summer sessions and an Evening School, but also schools of Education and Economics

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ George B. Ayres, *New Descriptive Hand-book of the Pennsylvania Railroad and Traveler's Guide to the Great West, Exhibiting the Geography, History, and Statistics of the Entire Country Traversed by the Road, Gathered on the Spot and Compiled from the Best Authorities* (Pittsburgh: W. S. Haven, 1859), cited by Starrett, *Cathedral of Learning*, p. 7.

(the latter became the School of Business Administration).¹³⁹ During McCormick's tenure, the university building was moved to Oakland, in the cultural center of the city. McCormick is also credited with the change of name from Western University of Pennsylvania to University of Pittsburgh. By 1920, therefore, the university had truly become an emblem of the city's development. As such, it was now facing new challenges. At the end of McCormick's tenure (December 1920), the most important were the integration of the foreign-born into the Pittsburgh society and the education of citizens born abroad. In addition, as the student population increased at a rapid pace, there was a desperate need for more classrooms, library space and laboratories.¹⁴⁰

When John Gabbert Bowman (1877-1962) became chancellor of the university in 1921, these were in fact the priorities on his agenda. The need for more space seems to have been paramount, but Chancellor Bowman turned this practical demand into an opportunity to address what he saw as an even greater need for beauty in university life, as well as in the city of Pittsburgh as a whole. In his vision, the university's expansion meant not just an increasing educational role by means of learning in a set academic environment, but also a fundamental change in the life of the people of Pittsburgh by means of art and architecture. Bowman wanted

to build character and happiness in young people. A chance to catch from great teachers and from physical surroundings the joy that is in books, in art, in ideas, in friends, and in common things. A chance to stand alone in the presence of these things and think justly and to a purpose. To keep and to project the essential self of Pittsburgh through the work of the

¹³⁹ Starrett, *Cathedral of Learning*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

University.¹⁴¹

In short, Bowman wanted a university building with which the citizens of Pittsburgh would identify and which would become the symbol of a new era in the history of the city. Judging by the existing evidence, Bowman's building was expected to be not just a structure to provide the necessary space for students, but a fundamental institution in Pittsburgh, at the same time cathedral, school and museum.¹⁴²

The Cathedral of Learning

In Pittsburgh as elsewhere, great buildings express the attitudes and the aspirations of their builders, architects, and patrons. They can play a major role in forming opinion, shaping history, and influencing the future. Although monumental architecture is commonly considered in relation to large entities such as states or elites,¹⁴³ buildings can also carry messages referring to smaller social

¹⁴¹ Bowman's inauguration speech of 1921, quoted by Starrett, *Cathedral of Learning*, p. 9. For some of Bowman's ideas and aesthetic concepts, see his *The World that Was* (New York: Macmillan, 1926).

¹⁴² See John G. Bowman, *Inside the Cathedral* (Pittsburgh, 1925). The combination of cathedral, school, and museum appears at several points in his correspondence collected in *Unofficial Notes* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1963).

¹⁴³ The literature on architecture and (national) politics is vast and continuously growing. Among the most recent contributions are Helmuth Wehsmann, *Das rote Wien. Sozialdemokratische Architektur und Kommunalpolitik, 1919-1934* (Vienna: Promedia, 1985; reprint 2000); William Howard Coaldrake, *Architecture and Authority in Japan* (London/New York: Routledge, 1996); Godehard Hoffmann, *Architektur für die Nation? Der Reichstag und die Staatsbauten des Deutschen Kaiserreiches 1871-1918* (Cologne: DuMont, 2000);

units. The significance of the Cathedral of Learning in the history of the University of Pittsburgh, as well as in the history of the city, may illustrate this idea. This central and dominant structure has become a symbol and a visual embodiment not only of the institution to which it belongs (the University), but also of the city and its ethnic mosaic. It embodied Bowman's dream to create a structure that would serve the community, express its goals, and help to form its distinguished identity. The building itself was the product of a complex and dynamic interaction between Bowman, the architect Charles Zeller Klauder (1872-1938), the trustees, and the people of Pittsburgh, which led to several alterations in the plan before the completion of the building in June 1937.

By 1921, the university was confronted with a \$1.24 million debt, severe overcrowding, and a poor image, very similar to the impression Pittsburgh apparently left on Robert L. Duffus.¹⁴⁴ Initiating new administrative policies, the new chancellor produced a financial surplus at the end of his first year, and began extending the university's facilities in 1923.¹⁴⁵ He found a new site in Frick Acres, a fourteen-acre plot in the heart of Pittsburgh's civic center. He persuaded Andrew and Richard Mellon¹⁴⁶ to buy the property at a cost of \$1.5 million and to pay the

Maria Georgopoulou, *Venice's Mediterranean Colonies. Architecture and Urbanism* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

¹⁴⁴ Mark McCullough Brown, *The Cathedral of Learning. Concept, Design, Construction* (Pittsburgh: University Art Gallery, 1987), p. 1.

¹⁴⁵ Through Bowman's efforts, the "friends of the University" had a substantial contribution to the liquidation of the university's debt. See Starrett, *Cathedral of Learning*, p. 10.

¹⁴⁶ There is yet no study on the influence of the Mellon family on the architectural and cultural history of Pittsburgh. The standard history of the Mellon tycoons remains Harvey O'Connor, *Mellon's Millions. The Biography of a Fortune* (New York: John Day Company, 1933).

remainder of the University's debts.

From the archival evidence in existence at the University of Pittsburgh's archives, it is not clear whether the idea of a skyscraper emerged in the first place or only later.¹⁴⁷ At any rate, Bowman's project for a tall building was inspired by the ideas of John Ruskin (1819-1900) and Ralph Adams Cram (1863-1942).¹⁴⁸ In his *Seven Lamps of Architecture*, Ruskin recommended that ornament should be sacrificed in favor of increased scale, in particular where resources were limited. He also insisted that preservation of the past was an important duty of national architecture.¹⁴⁹ Cram was a proponent of the Gothic Revival, stressing the aesthetics of revealed structure and stripped historicism, two of the most prominent features of his most celebrated master plans for the United States Military Academy at West Point (1900) and for Princeton University (1906).¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁷ There were many objections to a tall building: that the building would sway in a strong wind; that students would fall out of the windows; that elevators would be impracticable or dangerous; that the building would commercialize education and give the impression of an office building; and, finally, that it was against both the tradition of college architecture and the traditional architecture of Pittsburgh. Equally vociferous were those in favor of a tall. They argued that one the same amount of would simply not be available in lower buildings; that height provided better lighting, less noise, and better ventilation, while saving time for students and faculty; that the university saved money by heating one building instead of many; and that faculty members and students of various departments would be accessible to each other, providing more unity and more academic success. For more pros and cons, see Starrett, *Cathedral of Learning*, pp. 10-11.

¹⁴⁸ Brown, *The Cathedral of Learning*, p. 3.

¹⁴⁹ John Ruskin, *The Seven Lamps of Architecture*, 2nd ed. (London/New York: Cassell, 1909), pp. 117 and 250. For Ruskin's idea of tradition in architecture, see the studies in *The Lamp of Memory: Ruskin, Tradition, and Architecture*, ed. by Michael Wheeler and Nigel Whiteley (Manchester/New York: Manchester University Press/St. Martin's Press, 1992).

¹⁵⁰ For Cram's life and work, see Robert Muccigrosso, *American Gothic: The Mind and Art of Ralph Adams Cram* (Washington: University Press of America,

Bowman was profoundly influenced by these ideas. In his view, the new building was expected not only to solve the need for space but also to provide a powerful image of the University's mission to the people of Pittsburgh, and a skyscraper answered both these needs. Bowman saw the University's role as instilling in its students the pioneering spirit that had built the city's industrial success, and, like Ruskin, he believed that architecture should express power, nobility, courage, daring, achievement, and spiritual reverence.¹⁵¹ His insistence upon the "active emotions" expressed in architecture would be a major source of frustration for several architects employed for the University project. Bowman associated spiritual aspiration and reverence with Gothic ornamentation, and, at the same time, appreciated force and daring in the height of a building. Ruskin argued that "it should be a joy and a blessing to pass" by a beautiful church "in our daily ways and walks."

In a similar vein, Bowman wanted his tall building, which he characteristically, though paradoxically, called *Cathedral of Learning*, to impress itself upon thousands who would pass Frick Acres every day, just as passing by a beautiful church.¹⁵² Bowman viewed his building as a modern equivalent of a

1979); Douglas Shand-Tucci, *Ralph Adams Cram: Life and Architecture* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1995); Ann Miner Daniel, "The Early Architecture of Ralph Adams Cram, 1889-1902," Ph.D. dissertation (University of North Carolina, 1978). For Cram's work at West Point and Princeton, see Turner, *Campus*, pp. 230-234. See also Peter Fergusson, "Medieval Architectural Scholarship in America, 1900-1940: Ralph Adams Cram and Kenneth John Conant," *Studies in the History of Art* 35 (1990), 127-142.

¹⁵¹ John Gabbert Bowman, *The Cathedral of Learning of the University of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1925), p. 9: "The mass, proportion, and parallel perpendicular lines convey a mood of power."

¹⁵² Ruskin, *Seven Lamps*, p. 47; Bowman, *Cathedral of Learning*, p. 12.

medieval dome, the incarnation of the spiritual values of the era: “A hundred years from now, perhaps a thousand years from now, people may look back, see through history these present days as the beginning of a new age, and say, ‘The first expression of the creative-spiritual force that changed the world came into being at Pittsburgh’.”¹⁵³

The first architect employed was Edward Purcell Mellon,¹⁵⁴ a nephew of Andrew and Richard Mellon, who traveled to Oxford and Cambridge to research the project and worked on a development plan between 1922 and 1924, before being dropped in favor of another architect. Mellon had arranged low buildings in irregular quadrangles around a tall building, but Bowman wanted them consolidated into one taller structure. Mellon's second design, with Byzantine and Romanesque elements reminiscent of his 1925 work on the Presbyterian Hospital in Pittsburgh, was higher and significantly more massive. Bowman was still dissatisfied and he approached Charles Z. Klauder, a Philadelphia architect, who had gained a reputation for his academic architecture, including work in the Gothic style at Princeton and Yale.¹⁵⁵ Initially, Klauder was no more successful than Mellon. According to Bowman’s notes, what inspired both men to agree on a

¹⁵³ Bowman, *Cathedral of Learning*, p. 19.

¹⁵⁴ Brown, *Cathedral of Learning*, pp. 5-6.

¹⁵⁵ Brown, *Cathedral of Learning*, p. 6. For Klauder’s work at Princeton, see Turner, *Campus*, pp. 235 and 236 figs. 239-240. For Klauder’s work at the University of Colorado in Boulder, see Cabell Childress, “Dance Building, University of Colorado, Boulder,” *Architectural Record* 172 (1984), 154-157. For his work in Pennsylvania, see also Kurt W. Pitluga, “Charles Z. Klauder at Penn State: the image of the University,” M.A. thesis, Pennsylvania State University (University Park, 1990).

final Gothic skyscraper was the “Magic Fire” music in Wagner's *Die Walküre*.¹⁵⁶ Unfortunately, none of the first sketches inspired by Wagner survives, but a later sketch published in *Pencil Points* in 1925 reveals the characteristics of the completed Cathedral of Learning in its arrangement of buttresses, treatment of corners, and multistory recessed windows. A design based on the idea of that sketch was presented to the assembly of trustees, faculty, press, and citizens on November 6, 1924. It is at this meeting that Bowman first used the name “Cathedral of Learning,” alluding to the Woolworth Building in New York City, the first monumental Gothic skyscraper and the tallest building in the world at that time, which was known as the “Cathedral of Commerce.”¹⁵⁷

The building was to be “more than a schoolhouse”; it was to be “a symbol of the life that Pittsburgh through the years had wanted to live” (Fig. 1). It was to make “visible something of the spirit that was in the hearts of pioneers, as, long ago, they sat in their log cabins and thought by the candlelight of the great city that would sometime spread out beyond their three rivers and that even they were

¹⁵⁶ Bowman, *Unofficial Notes*, p. 127. See also Brown, *Cathedral of Learning*, p. 6.

¹⁵⁷ He may not have done so willingly, for he later declared to Klauder in a letter that “the title ‘Cathedral of Learning’ is one which does not please me.” See Bowman, *Unofficial Notes*, p. 131 (letter of 1925). For the 1925 sketch, see Turner, *Campus*, p. 237 fig. 241. The Cathedral of Commerce was commissioned in 1910 to Cass Gilbert. It housed the headquarters of Frank W. Woolworth’s multi-chain store empire, until the company declared bankruptcy in 1997. Gilbert long objected the association between the Woolworth Building and a Gothic cathedral, but its arches, spires, flying buttresses, and gargoyles truly make it a twentieth-century version of a medieval cathedral. See Edwin A. Cochran, *The Cathedral of Commerce, the Highest Building in the World* (New York: Woolco Realty, 1925); Gail Fenske, “The Image of the City: the Woolworth Building and the Creation of the New York Skyline,” in *Cass Gilbert, Life and Work: Architect of the Public Domain*, ed. by Barbara S. Christen and Steven Flanders (New York: W. W. Norton, 2001), pp. 193-217.



Figure 1. The Cathedral of Learning at the University of Pittsburgh. From Bruhns, *Nationality Rooms*, p. 7.

starting to build.”¹⁵⁸ The fund-raising campaign launched after the meeting of 1924 resulted in about \$5.6 million donated in just five months, a notable civic performance, given that Pittsburgh had never before united behind a charitable cause or given so much money to one at once. Pittsburgh citizens and corporations were both very active. Local industries donated steel, cement, glass, elevators, plumbing and heating materials for the Cathedral of Learning.¹⁵⁹ Individual donations were also important. During the last month of 1924, following the November meeting, the University received contributions from 114,000 citizens of Pittsburgh; 97,000 came from school children who each donated 10 cents to “buy a brick” in the Cathedral of Learning.¹⁶⁰ Although financial shortfalls and design concerns considerably altered in both height and form Klaunder's initial project, Bowman persisted in the idea that the University demonstrate its intention to keep faith with its contributors.

Bowman's concept of memorial and monumental architecture found its ultimate expression in the Nationality Rooms Program, which provided the Cathedral of Learning with classrooms intended to epitomize the ethnic identities of the citizens of Pittsburgh. The Commons Room, the program's central feature

¹⁵⁸ John Gabbert Bowman, quoted by E. Maxine Bruhns, *The Nationality Rooms* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994), p. 5.

¹⁵⁹ Bruhns, *Nationality Rooms*, p. 5; see also Starrett, *Cathedral of Learning*, p. 11. The list of industrialists and business corporations that made larger gifts is very long and includes such names as Aluminum Company of America; American Window Glass Company; American Radiator and Standard Sanitary Corporation; Gulf Oil Corporation; Mellon National Bank; Standard Steel Car Company; United Engineering and Foundry Company; United States Steel Corporation; Vanadium-Alloys Steel Company (National Steel Corporation); and West Penn Electric Company.

¹⁶⁰ Bruhns, *Nationality Rooms*, p. 5.

and the heart of the University life, remained a designed problem for ten years. Bowman's intention was to "so grip a boy that he could never enter it with his hat on."¹⁶¹ This space was meant to be as awe-inspiring as the exterior structure. Various designs were proposed, ranging from a Northern European Gothic hallway to a high, well-lit space with a minimum of piers in the Italian Gothic style of the Palazzo Pretorio in Pistoia. The Loggia dei Lanzi in Florence inspired other trial designs. In the end, the style was changed back to a severe Gothic (Fig. 2). In the spring of 1936, detailed drawings, including details of details, were made to guide the quarry workers and the stonemasons. Every stone was individually cut. The webbing between the vaults' ribs was constructed with acoustic tile produced by the Guastavino family in New York.¹⁶²

Work in the Commons Room began in 1937 under the supervision of Charles Z. Klauder and Albert A. Klimcheck, the new University architect. On June 4, some sixteen years after his appointment, Chancellor Bowman laid the cornerstone of the Commons Room and thereby marked the end of the substantial phase of construction of the Cathedral. The completion of many classrooms was deferred until a later time. The "Great Hall," as it was known at first, is a vast two-story room, with openings corresponding to the entrances on all four sides of the block-sized building. The Commons Room would later be surrounded by the Nationality Rooms: the northern and eastern sides, each with four rooms, the southern with five, and the western with four, in addition to the English Classroom located in one of the side wings (Fig. 3).

¹⁶¹ Quoted by Brown, *Cathedral of Learning*, p. 12.

¹⁶² Brown, *Cathedral of Learning*, p. 13. The tile absorbs the noise in the cavernous three-story room, and helps to keep the atmosphere hushed.



Figure 2. The Cathedral of Learning, Commons Room. From Bruhns, *Nationality Rooms*, front cover.

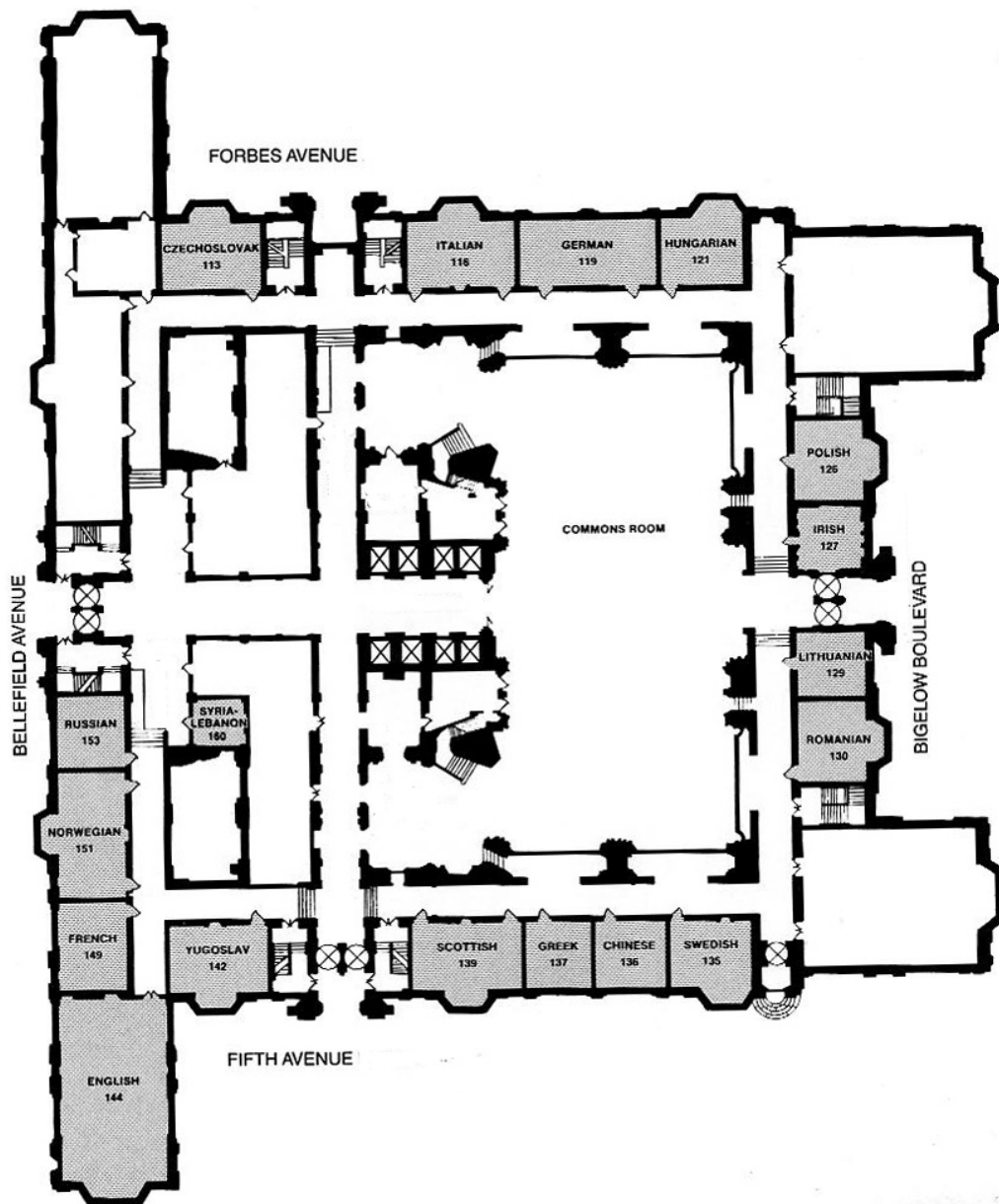


Figure 3. Cathedral of Learning. First-floor plan with Commons Room and surrounding classrooms. Form Bruhns, *Nationality Rooms*, p. 60.

The Nationality Rooms Program

Under the dynamic direction and supervision of Ruth Crawford Mitchell (1890-1984), the Nationality Rooms Program provided the spiritual and symbolic foundations of the Cathedral as nineteen rooms were completed between 1938 and 1957. The idea behind this program may appear as inspired by Bowman's concept of memorial architecture. Indeed, initially Bowman entertained the idea of having classrooms dedicated to various political or cultural personalities. He may have viewed these personalities as permanent examples of moral, ethical and cultural values that the university students were supposed to emulate. However, the Cathedral of Learning was primarily a public institution, created by and for the community of Pittsburgh. As a consequence, Bowman soon abandoned the idea of rooms dedicated to personalities.

Instead, he invited the ethnic associations of the Allegheny County (see chapter III) to create classrooms representing highly creative periods or aspects of their heritage. Bowman's initiative, though not exactly derived from Ruskin's concept of memorial architecture, generated an enthusiastic response that spread rapidly across the nation and then across the ocean, to the countries from which the Pittsburgh immigrants had come and in which committees were now formed to assist in planning the classrooms. In most cases, local governments provided generous support, architects, artists, materials, or monetary gifts to assure the authenticity and superb quality in the classrooms. Perhaps the most powerful indication of that enthusiastic response is the fact that the project survived the troubled decades before World War II and then the war itself. The Great Depression and the desperate drama of World War II, as nations fought political,

ideological, and military battles, do not seem to have deterred the Pittsburgh nationality committees from their goals. In several cases to be discussed in the following chapters, there is a significant coincidence between events overseas and the inauguration of the rooms. For example, the Czechoslovak room was inaugurated just a few months after the Munich Pact, the Greek one on November 7, not long after the invasion of Greece by German and Italian troops, in April of that same year. At the moment the Polish and Lithuanian rooms were opened in 1940 on February 16 and October 4, respectively, Poland and Lithuania had ceased to exist as independent states, and were occupied by German and Soviet troops. A similar case could be made for the Chinese and French rooms, dedicated on October 6, 1939, and January 23, 1943, respectively. The Nationality Rooms project not only outlived the conflict, but also, in such cases, provided a basis for the expression of cultural values and even political aspirations during and after the war.

The Nationality Rooms were meant to have a basic commonality of purpose, authenticity, and cultural, *non-political* emphasis. Two major concepts played a key role in this project, namely those of nation, "as recognized by the United States Department of State," and "neutrality," understood as display of values with no political or "nationalistic" connotations. Each Nationality Room was supposed to illustrate some outstanding architectural or design tradition of the nation represented, as known to history before 1787, the date of the United States Constitution. To avoid political implications in the classroom displays, no political symbols were permitted in the decorations, nor could a portrait or likeness of any living person appear in any room. A display of political symbols

was allowed, however, in the stone above the room's entrance in the corridor.¹⁶³ These explicitly "non-political" requirements point to the increasing involvement, ever since 1925, of the Pittsburgh nationality committees that came to include nearly a half million people, as well as to the University's far-reaching program of international cultural and educational exchange.

At the end of the war, in cooperation with the Nationality Committees, the University instituted a formal program of educational exchange to provide awards for students and faculty members to travel and study abroad and for foreign students to attend the University. As an international university, the institution pursued scholarship beyond the limits of contemporary diplomacy, seeking to share and understand the ideas and values of different cultures. The U. S. Secretary of State Christian A. Herter acknowledged in 1960 that the University's "vision of a new horizon" was an active interest and participation in the international exchange idea.¹⁶⁴ An important consequence of this approach was that the purpose of the Nationality Rooms was primarily didactic. It was through "perennial," "universal" values such as honesty, order, courage, love of nature, freedom, respect for learning, and the "urge to create beauty," that these rooms were expected to illustrate the University's international program. In a foreword to the presentation of the Romanian classroom, Chancellor Bowman typically stressed these values "untouched by change or time."¹⁶⁵ The paradox behind his

¹⁶³ Bruhns, *Nationality Rooms*, p. 8.

¹⁶⁴ Burt Evans, *Rooms With a View. Achievements of the Nationality Committees and the Office of Cultural and Educational Exchange* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1961), p. 5.

¹⁶⁵ John G. Bowman, in Ruth Crawford Mitchell, *The Romanian Classroom. The Cathedral of Learning, University of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1944), p. 3.

idea was that, though designed to exemplify diversity, the Nationality Rooms Program denied history, particularly in its political dimension, and looked for 'frozen' values, as if education and culture were products of timeless human action. If all rooms were supposed to express the *same* fundamental ideas, on which education, as a cultural act, was based, how could ethnic or national communities, particularly those truly involved in the Nationality Rooms Program, be distinguished from each other? The existing evidence suggests that the question never received an explicit answer. Though display of political symbols was avoided, the Rooms themselves were examples of material culture in political context. By simply focusing on "tradition," "history," or "culture," the designers, often architects residing overseas,¹⁶⁶ left their imprint on the supposedly politically "neutral" Cathedral. It is true that the Rooms were designed as images of national identity, but these identities were themselves creations not in a vacuum, but in a setting already laid out by history. The choice of elements to be displayed in these rooms was often the product of political factors in a given country and the leaders of the respective ethnic community in the United States. In other words, the Nationality Rooms are an excellent illustration of Benedict Anderson's concept of nations as "imagined communities" discussed in the introduction. The overall significance of the message communicated by these rooms may have appeared as fulfilling Bowman's expectancies, but in reality the meaning was produced by manipulation of material culture in specific historical

¹⁶⁶ E.g., Teng Kwei from Beijing (Chinese Room); Bohumil Sláma from Prague (Czechoslovak Room); Jacques Carlu from Paris (French Room); Dénes Györgyi from Budapest (Hungarian Room); Ezio Cerpi from Florence (Italian Room); Antanas Gudaitis from Kaunas (Lithuanian Room); Nicolae Ghica-Budești from Bucharest (Romanian Room); Reginald Fairlie from Edinburgh (Scottish Room); and Vojta Braniš from Zagreb (Yugoslav Room).

circumstances. Material culture, therefore, was not just a reflection of the social system (in this case, of the “nation”), but truly participated in its creation and continuity.

The political use of material culture is particularly evident in the sudden shift from personalities to nationalities that marked the beginning of the Nationality Rooms Program. This shift raises two questions that are fundamental for the thrust of the argument developed in this dissertation. First, who was ultimately responsible for the idea of classrooms decorated in “national styles”? Second, and perhaps more importantly, did the Nationality Rooms program truly create a sense of (national) community through architecture and decorative arts? Was the ethnic community as a whole engaged in the creation of its image encapsulated in the classrooms or was this image imposed, almost stamped, upon the ethnic community from the outside, by people who had little, if any, understanding of the community’s own self-representation? Are these classrooms images of self-“invented communities” or do they represent stereotypical images concocted by others?

One way to answer these questions is to turn to the body of evidence provided by the Pittsburgh Oral History Project mentioned in the previous chapter. Educated or not, many people more or less directly involved in this project through active participation in nationality committees or through donations were immigrants of the second wave that reached the Pittsburgh area. Some of them do indeed fit the portrait of Polish, Irish, or Slovak immigrants described in the previous chapter. I have shown that most people interviewed for the Pittsburgh Oral History Project who were first- or second-generation immigrants had vivid memories of their places of origin, family relations, work,

and education. They all defined their ethnic affiliation in terms of language or religious traditions. But it is also clear that to many, if not to all of them, “traditions” were to be kept alive not through monumental architecture, but through more mundane and ephemeral markers of ethnic identity, such as particular ways to decorate the Christmas tree or, more importantly, ethnic foods. Foodways have recently become the object of research in anthropological studies of ethnicity, as the emphasis has now shifted from conceptual frameworks of group definition to the *practice* of ethnicity. The ethnic boundary is not what one is “in principle,” but what one does in a peculiar, unique way or what one eats or cooks.¹⁶⁷ An important conclusion of the recent literature on ethnic foodways is that the consumption of such foods is often associated with special, ritual occasions, such as religious festivals. This remark is particularly important for this study, because almost all nationality committee members who donated money for the Nationality Rooms Program were also active in “ethnic” church communities. More often than not, money for that program was raised through religious festivals and feasts celebrated within the church community and involving consumption of ethnic foods. In more than a metaphorical way, therefore, the ephemeral markers of ethnic boundaries contributed to the creation of a permanent image of ethnic identity. But was this contribution limited to financial support or did it also involve the selection of material culture elements

¹⁶⁷ See Diane Tebbetts, "Food as an ethnic marker," *Pioneer America Society Transactions* 7 (1984), 81-88; Lauri S. Z. Greenberg, "You are what you eat. Ethnicity and change in Yucatec immigrant house lots, Quintana Roo, Mexico," Ph.D. diss., University of Wisconsin (Madison, 1996); Jeffrey M. Pilcher, *Que vivan los tamales! Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998); Sherri Inness, *Pilaf, Pozole and Pad Thai. American Women and Ethnic Food* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001); Martin Bruegel and Bruno Laurioux, *Histoire et identités alimentaires en Europe* (Paris, 2002).

for the representation of the “nation”?

The working hypothesis with which I began researching the archives of the Pennsylvania Historical and Museum Commission in Harrisburg was that the people interviewed for the Pittsburgh Oral History Project, people who made their living by working in the steel mills, could not have possibly had any direct involvement in the Nationality Rooms Program. Judging from the existing evidence, that program seemed to be an “elitist” project, not a grass-roots initiative. Moreover, it turned out that many people interviewed in Pittsburgh in the seventies were not particularly interested in education, nor did they have any appreciation of Bowman’s concepts and education ideals. In that sense, the interviews are important because they offer a glimpse into “tradition” as defined by members of various ethnic communities, the background against which Bowman intended to make his message clear to the people of Pittsburgh. While gathering the archival material concerning the Nationality Rooms Program, it became evident that the key question to ask was how much involvement was required to classify anyone as an active participant in the program, and whether or not money donations or fund raising on behalf of that cause could pass for sufficient participation. To be sure, the archives in Harrisburg did produce evidence of direct involvement and active participation. In the words of an immigrant of Slovak descent, Michael Zahorsky:

You see, Czechoslovakia was founded in Pittsburgh, founded on May 30, 1919 at the Moose Temple. That’s over there, not far from Hinez Hall, up that street there. And I was there; I was an eleven-year-old boy at the signing of the Pittsburgh Pact. And I remember seeing Thomas Garrigue Masaryk and some of the other people. As a matter of fact, I even met his daughter. I spoke at the Frick Art Gallery here some time ago. We had the observances, and I built the Nationality Rooms at Pitt, and I got into these

things.¹⁶⁸

While Zahorsky's "building" of the Nationality Rooms should undoubtedly be taken as figurative speech, there can be no doubt about his witnessing the events surrounding the Pittsburgh Pact, "Masaryk's triumph," and the creation of Czechoslovakia.¹⁶⁹ He must have accompanied his parents when seeing Masaryk and his daughter on the occasion of that historical event. There are good reasons to believe, therefore, that his involvement in the Nationality Rooms was substantial, whatever the interpretation of his claims may be, that he "built the Nationality Rooms at Pitt." Ethnic groups of Pittsburgh took and continue to take pride in being represented in the most imposing cultural institution in Pittsburgh. To Zahorsky, at least, "building" the Nationality Rooms was as important for his identity as seeing Masaryk in person. Moreover, he proudly spoke publicly about his memories of the circumstances surrounding the Pittsburgh Pact on more than one occasion.

¹⁶⁸ POHP interview with Michael Zahorsky, July 31, 1974. The Pittsburgh Pact was signed in 1918, not 1919, by representatives of three organizations of Slovak and Czech immigrants to the United States: the Slovak League of America, the Czech National Federation, and the Czech Catholic Alliance. It was the first political forum on either side of the Atlantic to decide on the creation of Czechoslovakia. The Moose Building stood on Penn Avenue until 1992, when it was razed to make room for the Allegheny International skyscraper now dominating the Pittsburgh skyline. Detailed information on the Pittsburgh Pact, including journal articles, correspondence and memoranda, is available in folders 13-18 of the Collection of Ruth Crawford Mitchell (1926-1980) in the archives of the University of Pittsburgh. There is yet no study to make use of this extraordinary archival material.

¹⁶⁹ The phrase "Masaryk's triumph" is that of George J. Kovtun, *Masarykův triumf. Příbeh konce velké války* (Prague: Odeon, 1991).

The True Founder: Ruth Crawford Mitchell

A second interview discovered in the State Archives in Harrisburg throws a rather different light on this issue (see Appendices A and B). On February 12 and April 11, 1975 Louis Rubin interviewed Ruth Crawford Mitchell, the driving force behind the Nationality Rooms Program and its first president. Both interviews are more than two hours long (surviving on three audiotapes, each almost 50 minutes long) and cover a variety of aspects of Mitchell's life, education, and work in Pittsburgh. The longest interview is that of April 11 (Appendix B). Although in her eighties at that time, Ruth Crawford Mitchell had a remarkable memory of minute details concerning the Nationality Rooms Project.

Born in Atlantic Heights, New Jersey, in a family with Scottish and Irish roots, she was a 1912 graduate of Vassar College, with an early interest in immigration problems. In more than one way, her interest and later political views were a product of her upbringing in a family with which she began traveling across Europe from the age of nine. While at Vassar College, Mitchell opposed the attempts of the US Congress to limit immigration, for she believed that "stopping or even putting limits on immigration would be disastrous for this country."¹⁷⁰ Since in the early twentieth century, the field of social work was still in the making, her degree was in Economics, although her research had social implications. Very active on the Vassar campus, she championed the idea of "letting the immigrants come in." From Vassar College, Ruth Mitchell Crawford

¹⁷⁰ POHP interview with Ruth Crawford Mitchell, April 11, 1975.

went to Washington University for graduate studies. She finished her master's degree with a thesis on immigration and in 1916 got her first job offer from YMCA as a field secretary. She worked on immigration and farm communities in such areas as Massachusetts, New Jersey, and New York. Her first connection with Pittsburgh dates back to her early work for a church-based initiative to match young women of Slovak or Hungarian descent working in the cotton mills in New England with young men from the Pittsburgh area who worked in the steel mills. Her work as a field secretary was also influenced by the Pittsburgh survey of 1900-1912. Familiar with its conclusions, which she summarized as "bad air, bad housing, inhumane conditions," Mitchell pioneered similar techniques in New England. She implemented a path-breaking survey using such criteria as the number of people of various national origins living within the region, their housing conditions, educational choices, health problems, and basic needs. This has been rightly viewed as the first step taken in the direction of a comprehensive government program for immigrants, especially for those considered least adapted to the American society.

In her 1975 interview, Mitchell also spoke extensively about her experience with immigrant men seeking enrollment in the US army, which she viewed not only as a desire to gain American citizenship on a faster track, but also as a chance to fight for the independence and national rights of overseas co-nationals. Mitchell was actively involved in the organization of hostess houses that were designed to offer not just shelter, but also an "immigrant-friendly" environment to the would-be soldiers. To work in such houses, YMCA hired women who spoke the men's native language. Mitchell befriended Alice Masaryk, the daughter of the first president of Czechoslovakia, who at that time

was studying social work in the US.¹⁷¹ In this context, she talks about the committee that established the Republic of Czechoslovakia in Pittsburgh. Before becoming president of Czechoslovakia, Thomas Masaryk was the first president of that committee. While his daughter Alice set up the Red Cross organization in Czechoslovakia, she called upon Mitchell to help her with a social survey of the city of Prague and with the implementation of the social work network in the new country. Mitchell brought back to the United States the wives and children of Czech and Slovak immigrants who had fought during the war in the Czechoslovak Legion together with French troops. She gained President Masaryk's support for that initiative, as well as for the four scholarships for Czech students in the United States, which she established upon her return in 1921.

In the second part of the 1975 interview, Mitchell talks mostly about the Nationality Rooms Program. Shortly after moving to Pittsburgh in 1924, she was invited to teach a course on Immigration History as lecturer at the university. At the time, many undergraduate students majoring in Liberal Arts were children of first-generation immigrants. One of the first assignments Mitchell gave to her students was to sketch the portrait of a relative or acquaintance that had come from the old country. The results of her teaching experience were alarming: her second-generation students knew practically nothing about the country from

¹⁷¹ Masaryk's daughter had been imprisoned by the Austrian-Hungarian authorities for several months during the First World War, in retaliation for her father's activity in America on behalf of the Czech national cause. Alice Masaryk became the head of the Red Cross in Czechoslovakia, a position she held between 1920 and 1938. For Alice Masaryk as a social worker, see Nadežda Kubičková, "Historical Portraits of Important European Leaders in Social Work. Alice Masaryk (1879-1966) – Czechoslovakia," *European Journal of Social Work* 4 (2001), no. 3, 303-312.

which their parents had come. They had no memory or knowledge of fairy tales, nursery songs, or children rhymes. According to Mitchell, it was at that moment that she realized a major gap has opened in the cultural background of her students. In her words, “they might have [as well] hanged on trees and just dropped in the US.”¹⁷² She thus realized the urgent need to find ways of expressing the cultural contribution and experience of the new citizens of Pittsburgh. Through her Nativity Study, a survey of University of Pittsburgh students carried over a period of four years (1926-1930), Mitchell attempted to collect enough information for drawing a portrait of the Pittsburgh multi-ethnic community. According to the 1975 interview, the results of the Nativity Study were presented to the legislature, at the same time as the budget for the University of Pittsburgh. The survey showed that the university had the “right proportion” of students born from immigrant parents.

The Nativity Study brought Mitchell to Bowman’s attention. This is exactly the moment in which the old idea of rooms dedicated to historical personalities was on the point of being abandoned. Mitchell had seen the “Aristotle room” and immediately thought of involving the Greeks from Pittsburgh in decorating the room. No university in the United States at that time officially recognized that immigrants had any cultural heritage worth studying and potentially useful to the university. In the light of the 1975 interview, I am therefore inclined to believe that the Nationality Rooms Program was the result of the first meeting between Ruth Mitchell Crawford and Chancellor Bowman. At

¹⁷² POHP interview with Ruth Crawford Mitchell, April 11, 1975. The annual reports of the Nativity Study are in the Collection of Ruth Crawford Mitchell in the university archives in Pittsburgh, UA 90 F 12, Box 4, folders 104-109. Three other universities (University of Buffalo, Yale University, and the University of Chicago) conducted similar studies, the papers and conclusions of which are also preserved in the Collection.

any rate, she had the idea of raising money for the project through contributions from ethnic communities. In doing so, she may have enabled Michael Zahorsky, among others, to “build the Nationality Rooms at Pitt.”

The third part of the 1975 interview deals with how Mitchell’s idea became reality. She made extensive use of her previous experience of conducting surveys in the United States and Czechoslovakia. She began compiling lists of ethnic community leaders, professionals (doctors, lawyers, interpreters, and city officials), as well as women involved in women organizations. At her initiative, Chancellor Bowman met with several “nationality leaders” in separate meetings. Large meetings were organized for such groups as the Italians. Other groups, such as the Romanians, played no significant role in the Pittsburgh community. However, Romanians were well represented in the student population at the University of Pittsburgh, mostly by international students, an important target of Mitchell’s activity.

Another one of her goals was to obtain the involvement of foreign governments. The chairman of the Hungarian Room committee, a graduate of the University of Budapest, had connections in the Hungarian government. He approached the Hungarian minister of education with requests of assistance. A small number of educational leaders were invited by the minister to form a cooperative committee in Budapest, which would organize a competition of selected architects. The committee eventually selected two designs to be sent to Pittsburgh, not to Mitchell, but directly to the Hungarian Room committee. In more than one way, the Hungarian Room, to be discussed in detail in the following chapter, is thus the result of the combined efforts of foreign architects in Hungary and American architects in Pittsburgh. This is also true for other

rooms.

Concerns with authenticity that were expressed from the very beginning of the program prompted Mitchell to go abroad, establish direct contacts with architects and cooperative committees overseas, and identify artists that would work on various designs of such items as blackboards and chairs. Exemplary in this respect is the story of the Polish Room, as told by Mitchell in the 1975 interview. Andrzej Szyszko-Bohusz, the Polish architect invited to design that classroom, had chosen a ceiling decoration that Albert A. Klimcheck, the Pittsburgh architect in charge with the Nationality Rooms Program considered impractical for a university classroom. But Szyszko-Bohusz obstinately refused to make any alterations to his initial design, and Mitchell had to go to Poland to convince him otherwise. She eventually selected the decorative pattern of the beam-painted ceiling in the Wawel Castle in Cracow, with the restoration of which Szyszko-Bohusz had gained his reputation in Poland.

The original choice of nationalities to be represented in the classrooms was reputedly based on the 1920 census. “What about the English and the Scots?” Mitchell asked Chancellor Bowman. “Nonsense,” replied Bowman, “there is no difference between English and Americans.”¹⁷³ The English Room is one of most important topics in Mitchell’s 1975 interview. Before the war, architects had been invited to submit drawings, two of which were selected, a Georgian and a Tudor. The English cooperative committee preferred the Georgian, but in the end submitted both. In Pittsburgh, the Committee chose the Tudor design, which was better suited for the Gothic style of the Commons Room. With the outbreak of the war, work on the English Room was interrupted. During the war, Mitchell asked

¹⁷³ POHP interview with Ruth Crawford Mitchell, April 11, 1975.

for a leave of absence in order to join the United Nations relief and rehabilitation organization. She was gone for two and a half years. During her absence, Bowman died and the new chancellor did not have much interest in the Nationality Rooms. However, he did approach the Mellon Foundation for financial support, and it was with funds from the foundation and from a donation of Alfred Bossom that the English Room was eventually finished. Many original items from the Parliament heavily damaged by German bombs during the war were later incorporated into the English Room, although they were in no way part of the original design. The English Room thus became “historical.” This “authentication procedure” was applied in the case of other rooms as well.

The Nationality Rooms Program was the only University of Pittsburgh project that survived the Great Depression. In the 1975 interview, Mitchell mentions the extraordinary support that the project received during those years, especially from women. “The men stopped working but the women did not give up, they took over the committees, they cooked, baked and had little parties on the thirteenth floor with 25-cent admission.” In this way they kept the accounts growing, if only slowly. Ten-cent donations from students that went to the fund for the Nationality Rooms were recognized with certificates signed by Chancellor Bowman. Promotions were used in the form of posters in order to raise money.

After 1945, the educational philosophy at the University of Pittsburgh underwent significant changes. According to Mitchell, before the war, Pittsburgh had looked westward, after that the University was turning eastwards, toward Europe and the world. This reorientation brought serious challenges to the traditional curriculum, for nothing had been taught before on Eastern Europe, Russia, or Asia. Consequently, the Nationality Rooms Program too took a

different direction. A program of educational exchange was developed, but since the nationality committees continued to play an important role, funds were now raised for educational scholarships and the introduction of languages other than German and Spanish.

The nationality committees are responsible for the implementation of such key programs of the current University of Pittsburgh curriculum as Asian Studies and Slavic History. Books on Italian, Romanian, and Polish literature were written by members of those committees and distributed to public school teachers. Education was now understood in primarily international terms and nationality committees had a major contribution to the implementation of this new approach. Even after her retirement in 1974, Mitchell continued to be involved in the now complex activities of the Nationality Rooms Program. The 1975 interview mentions her role in the selection of the second (and current) director of the program, E. Maxine Bruhns, and in some of the changes taking place under her leadership. The interview thus highlights the position and experience of the first director of the Program and her efforts to bring a university initiative to reality. Ever since World War II, that reality is in continuous changes, as the Rooms have turned from showcases for “imagined communities” into “national shrines.

CHAPTER V
ROOM OF RELIGIOUS INSPIRATION: THE RUSSIAN AND ROMANIAN
CLASSROOMS

One of the aspects most intriguing to anyone visiting the Nationality Rooms at the University of Pittsburgh is the role religion plays in the representation through decorative arts. In more than one case, the source of inspiration for the decoration of classrooms were monuments invested with sacrality in both functional and symbolic terms. For example, the Irish and Armenian classrooms are said to be directly inspired by the Killeshin Chapel and the Sanahin Monastery, respectively. The cornerstone of the Armenian Room is a basalt stone from the ruined eleventh-century library of the Sanahin monastery, one of the most remarkable monuments of Armenian medieval architecture. Five of the oldest Armenians living in Pittsburgh at the time the room was opened pressed their thumbs into the mortar behind the stone. Their fingerprints, together with the handprint of a toddler, the youngest member of the Pittsburgh Armenian community at that time, are clearly visible from any corner of the room. Similarly, Killeshin was a monastery founded by King Diarmid of Leinster in the mid-1100s, right before the Anglo-Norman conquest of Ireland. The cornerstone of the Irish Classroom was brought from the ruins of the Clonmacnoise monastery, the most famous religious center of medieval Ireland. It is carved with an inscription in Gaelic: "For the Glory of God and the honor of Ireland." These visually powerful examples suggest that specific religious elements were chosen for the representation of the "imagined community" in a broader political context, which makes the religious inspiration of these settings a fascinating topic of

scholarly inquiry. However, in the context of the Nationality Rooms program at the University of Pittsburgh, the Irish and Armenian rooms, opened in 1957 and 1988, respectively, were by no means unique. The idea of classroom settings inspired by religious art dates back to the very inception of the program and is illustrated by some of the earliest classrooms. This is particularly true for the Russian and Romanian classrooms.

Inaugurated on July 8, 1938, together with the German and Scottish Rooms, the Russian Classroom is unique, in that it was designed and decorated entirely without any overseas participation (Fig. 4). Indeed, the room was the result of the combined efforts of various artists who either had already been in the United States at the time of the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 or had immigrated to the United States shortly thereafter. As a consequence, imperial Russia was the source of inspiration for the room opened sixteen years after the defeat of the Whites in the Civil War (1921). In more than one way, the Russian Classroom serves a reminder of the “truly” national values of Russians opposing the Communist government.

The room was designed by Andrei Avinoff (1884-1949), at the time director of the Carnegie Museum in Pittsburgh. Born in Tulchyn (near Vinnytsya, Ukraine), Avinoff had served as judge and marshal of the nobility in the Poltava province, before being appointed ambassador to the United States in 1914. When the revolution broke out, he decided to remain in the United States and seek American citizenship.¹⁷⁴

¹⁷⁴ Anonymous, *The Russian Classroom. The Cathedral of Learning. University of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1940), p. 5. Avinoff became assistant curator of entomology at the Carnegie Museum in 1924 and was promoted to director in 1926. He was interested in science, religion, mysticism, iconography, music and art. He was also a painter working in various artistic media but with strong preferences for watercolor. Among his most remarkable



Figure 4. Russian Classroom. View toward the vyshivka, with *krasnyi ugol'* icon. From Bruhns, *Nationality Rooms*, p. 47.

works is a collection of 350 watercolors known as “Wildflowers of Western Pennsylvania and the Upper Ohio Basin.” Avinoff also illustrated the booklet *Rooms with a View*, published by the Nationality Rooms program at the University of Pittsburgh, and *The Fall of Atlantis*, a “series of graphic impressions” of George Golokhvastoff’s poem (Pittsburgh: Eddy Press Corporation, 1944), mainly in Art Deco style. For Avinoff’s life and work, see Virginia Elnora Lewis, *An Exhibition of Andrey Avinoff, the Man of Science, Religion, Mysticism, Nature, Society and Fantasy, Presented by the Carnegie Institute and University of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Institute/Department of Fine Arts, 1953); and Lyndra Pate Fox, *Andrey Avinoff. A Review of the Life of One of the Twentieth-Century Most Versatile Geniuses* (Griggsville, Illinois: Nature House, 1975).

The Russian Classroom is located on the first floor of the Cathedral of Learning, on the western side of the Commons Rooms, towards Bellefield Avenue. The massive classroom door is made of oak with wrought-iron hinges. Its top was cut in half-octagonal shape, a detail most typical for Russian interior decoration. The door is hung between deeply recessed wooden jambs carved with geometrical and floral designs that also appear on wall carvings and furniture decoration. The lintel has a carved sun, which Avinoff apparently viewed as a symbol both of the vast extent of his Russian homeland and of hope for a better future. The white plaster walls without any decoration contrast sharply with the oak woodwork and the red velvet of cushions and benches, the velvet behind blackboard and radiator grilles, and the velvet drapes hanging on each side of the windows from the ceiling to the floor. The blackboard was designed as a triptych, a three-leveled frame employed in Russia for icons. At the top, the blackboard is decorated with two birds with crowned female heads, the *sirin* and *alkonost* that symbolize joy and sorrow and are always represented alike in Russian folk, for joy and sorrow are the two sides of life.¹⁷⁵ The *sirin* and *alkonost* originated in the post-Sassanian art of eighth- and ninth-century Persia and appear in the decoration of medieval pottery and jewelry found in both Chersonesus (Crimea) and Kiev.¹⁷⁶ By 1700, the two birds with female heads were among the most

¹⁷⁵ *Russian Classroom*, p. 7. For *sirin* and *alkonost*, see Alison Hilton, *Russian Folk Art* (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 179-180.

¹⁷⁶ The *sirin* appears together with doves, peacocks, and other birds in the foliage borders and at the heads of pages in a twelfth-century Gospel manuscript from Iur'ev, as well as in the fourteenth-century Onega Psalter. Both *sirin* and

popular motifs used in the decoration of household items, trunks, and cupboards. In monumental art, the *sirin* appears on the “Golden Gates” and on church walls in Vladimir and Suzdal.¹⁷⁷ Its most common image is that of a fantastic creature with female head and breasts, a body covered with feathers, wings and a long spreading tail. This is also the image represented on the blackboard frame in the Russian Classroom. More often than not, the *sirin* appears wearing a crown or with a halo-framed head, an indication of its association with the Garden of Eden and its role as heavenly bird of happiness. By contrast, the *sirin*’s counterpart, the *alkonost*’, is the bird of sorrow and appears as such in opposite position on door frames and cupboard panels.¹⁷⁸ This principle of dual representation served as inspiration for the blackboard’s top panel. When closed the doors of the triptych blackboard display a grille of carved wooden spirals over a flat ground of red velvet, a motif repeated over the radiators. This ornamental pattern is reminiscent of the so-called “Russian border” design imitating traditional embroidery motifs that became extremely popular in the late 1800s especially through the mass

alkonost’ appear on an exquisite golden earring (*kolt*) with enameled ornament from Kiev, dated from the eleventh to the thirteenth century. See *Gold aus Kiew. 170 Meisterwerke aus der Schatzkammer der Ukraine*, exhibit catalogue edited by Wilfried Seipel (Vienna: Das Museum, 1993), pp. 293-294. The *sirin* is much more frequently depicted in seventeenth-century manuscripts and books. See Hilton, *Russian Folk Art*, p. 174 fig. 12.4 for an early eighteenth-century representation of the *sirin* on the lid of an iron-bound trunk from Olonets province.

¹⁷⁷ Hilton, *Russian Folk Art*, p. 172.

¹⁷⁸ Hilton, *Russian Folk Art*, p. 144.

production of calico from the Moscow and Vladimir provinces.¹⁷⁹

A low wainscot of oak boards laid horizontally decorates the room all around. There is a markedly uniform decoration on the blackboard, the opposite wall, the cupboard placed in a corner, and the wainscot running around the classroom. The most impressive element of this decorative pattern is the *kiot* (wall frame) placed on the wall across the room from the blackboard. The *kiot* supports a *vyshivka* (a votive banner in combined appliqué and embroidery technique) of St. George killing the dragon. The work of Helen Viner, but designed by Andrey Avinoff, the *vyshivka* seems to have been inspired by works of the Novgorod school of icon painting.¹⁸⁰ Its message is rendered clear by the accompanying inscription on the base of the frame, in both English and Russian (old orthography): “Saint George, symbol of valorous youth, victorious over forces of evil and darkness.”¹⁸¹ Following the practice of the Novgorodian school,¹⁸² St. George is depicted as a young horseman on a white horse. He wears a red-and-yellow cape and holds a spear in his right hand. The face and hands of the saint are embroidered, in sharp contrast to the horse and all other details of the *vyshivka*, all of which were done in the appliqué technique using sixteenth- and

¹⁷⁹ N. P. Levinson, “Khudozhestvennaia promyshlennost’ (Home crafts),” in *Istoriia russkogo iskusstva*, ed. by I. E. Grabar’, V. Kemenov, V. Lazarev et al., vol. 9 (Moscow: Nauka, 1961), pp. 325-327; Hilton, *Russian Folk Art*, p. 221.

¹⁸⁰ V. K. Laurina and V. A. Pushkarev, *Novgorod Icons, 12th-17th Century* (Leningrad: Aurora, 1980).

¹⁸¹ Anonymous, *Russian Classroom*, p. 8.

¹⁸² The background of the banner is very similar to that of fourteenth-century icons of St. George killing the dragon.

seventeenth-century fabrics such as brocade, velvet, *petit point*, and damask.¹⁸³

According to the canons of icon representation, the background of the *vyshivka* is in gold color, without any sense of perspective. Rocks and other landscape features are simply sketched in darker hues. Finally, the hand of God is depicted in the upper right corner of the *vyshivka*, blessing the warrior saint out of a dark cloud.

In all its minute details, the Pittsburgh *vyshivka* is a good example of a late nineteenth-century type of needlework most popular with Russian aristocratic women, who used to donate similar votive banners for church decoration.¹⁸⁴

However, decoration of the *vyshivka*'s wooden frame (the *kiot*) was treated in the same way as the rest of the classroom furniture with geometric designs and floral patterns of folk inspiration. Most conspicuous are the two vases with flowers carved on the left and the right bottom sides of the frame. An original seventeenth-century icon of the Holy Virgin of Vladimir was originally set in the northeastern corner of the room.¹⁸⁵ The icon was painted on wood in tempera and

¹⁸³ The fabrics were purchased in Vienna and Paris; see *Russian Classroom*, p. 8. Helen Viner was the sister of Igor Sikorsky (1889-1972), the inventor of the helicopter. See Dorothy Cochrane, Von Hardesty, and Russell Lee, *The Aviation Careers of Igor Sikorsky* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1989); G. I. Katyshev, V. R. Mikheev, and V. N. Dalin, *Aviakonstruktor Igor' Ivanovich Sikorskii (1889-1972)* (The Aviation Constructor Igor Ivanovich Sikorskii, 1889-1972) (Moscow: Nauka, 1989); John W. R. Taylor, *Sikorsky* (Stroud: Tempus, 1998).

¹⁸⁴ For embroidery and *kustar* workshops organized in the 1890s by women of the upper class, see Wendy R. Salmond, *Arts and Crafts in Late Imperial Russia. Reviving the Kustar Art Industries, 1870-1917* (Cambridge/New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 46-48.

¹⁸⁵ A newer icon has in the meantime replaced the old one, presumably for preservation reasons.

adorned with a repoussé silver frame (*oklad*) encrusted with jewels. Following the Russian folk tradition of placing the icon in the corner of the room opposite from the oven, the Pittsburgh icon is hanging literally half-way between ceiling and floor, at the meeting point of the northern and eastern walls. This is clearly an allusion to the *krasnyi ugol'* (“red,” but also “beautiful corner”) of Russian peasant houses, which usually had one or more icons set in a case (called *bozhnitsa* or *kiot*), much like that in the Russian Classroom.¹⁸⁶ Beneath the icon there is a corner cupboard, a piece of furniture most typical for Orthodox churches, in which it is used to store votive candles. The cupboard is decorated with stars and sunflower motifs identical to those on the lower panel of the blackboard frame. The choice of location within the room for this cupboard is particularly important in respect to the religious inspiration of the Russian Classroom, since Orthodox Christians entering the church first light (votive) candles before venerating the icons (i.e., bowing in front of them, crossing themselves, and kissing the holy images). Judging by the clearly intended analogies and correspondences described above, and given the designed movement flow inside the room, the meaning attached to the organization and decoration of the Russian Classroom would imply that anyone entering the room make a right turn at the door, and approach the icon and the cupboard, before turning around to face the blackboard and the lecturing professor.

The classroom furniture is made of light-colored oak. The seminar table consists of long slabs of wood held together by ornamental keys. Its apron is

¹⁸⁶ According to Hilton (*Russian Folk Art*, p. 25), the “beautiful corner” was the spiritual focus of the Russian *izba*. According to Russian customs, anyone entering the *izba* would have first revered the icon(s) before greeting the hosts or speaking.

richly decorated with carved motifs, most typical for the folk art of the Vologda district. Similarly, the backs of the student chairs and benches are decorated with crosslike openings inspired by folk furniture of the provinces of Vologda, Perm, Novgorod, and Yaroslav. Each chair has an individually carved design within a triangular space on the top rail, depicting a sturgeon, a lion, a reindeer, a peacock, and a swan. The sturgeon was often associated with the region of the Volga, the lion¹⁸⁷ with Scythia (southern Russia), and the reindeer with the northern tundra. The peacock is an old Christian symbol of eternal life, while the swan may have been associated with the metamorphosis of fairy tale princesses.¹⁸⁸ The professor's chair has S-shaped and spiral openings. The top back rail also contains a carved decoration inscribed in a triangular shape, with two birds flanking a tree, most likely the sacred tree of life, an ancient motif in early Christian art. The lectern stand is also of ecclesiastical inspiration, as it imitates the *analoï*, a stand on which icons are placed in Orthodox churches.

The ornamental hardware, all designed by Andrey Avinoff and executed by Hyman Blum,¹⁸⁹ includes the strap hinges on the door decorated with undulating lines flowing into symmetrical flowers. The metal hinges on the cupboard, with their curved double joints, imitate folk art motifs of the Volga district. The radiators are hidden behind wrought iron grilles with an elaborate

¹⁸⁷ Lions, griffins, and other heraldic beasts were especially common in medieval Vladimir and Suzdal'. From there, they moved into the Muscovite decorative repertoire to adorn chests, cupboard doors, boxes, and *lubki* (folk prints) in merchant and well-to-do peasant houses. In such cases, the lion was probably attributed protective powers. See Hilton, *Russian Folk Art*, p. 172.

¹⁸⁸ *Russian Classroom*, p. 6.

¹⁸⁹ Hyman Blum lived in Pittsburgh, but had learned the craft in his Russian homeland. See *Russian Classroom*, p. 9.

design, inspired by Russian ecclesiastical metalwork, much like the latches and plates on the entrance door, blackboard, and corner cupboard. The windows are hand-made of geometric panels with bands of colored glass in warm tones of raspberry and gold, as well as spots of ruby red and emerald green, reminiscent of jewelry decoration. The window frames are decorated with the octagonal flower stars that appear on the furniture and the wainscot running around the room. Both walls and ceiling are plastered white, with corner molds representing the four seasons. In each case, out of a sun quadrant emerges a highly stylized stem and plant: the bud for spring, the sunflower for summer, the grape for fall, and the pinecone for winter. This ornamental pattern contrasts somewhat to the overall decoration of the room and may be attributed to Avinoff's penchant for floral decoration and nature. Indeed, this is the only original element of the interior decoration of the room, with no analogy in Russian art. Walls and ceilings of Russian houses were commonly painted or had carved ornaments. Several lavishly decorated rooms with painted walls are known from Karelia, Arkhangel'sk, and Vologda provinces. During the twelfth century, such ornamental choices were also applied to churches interior decoration, and in the late 1500s, they were also adopted for the decoration of noblemen's homes. Finally, painted walls and ceilings made their appearance on a large scale in peasant houses around the year 1800.¹⁹⁰ The ornamental repertoire included geometrical designs that would accent the structure of the room, free-hand renderings of floral and animal ornaments, as well as mottled or rippled patterns imitating the expensive woodwork from city dwellings. The same patterns are

¹⁹⁰ Most famous for painted interiors in the nineteenth century were peasant houses in the Viatka region and around Tiumen' (southwestern Siberia). See Hilton, *Russian Folk Art*, p. 25.

found on the walls, ceiling beams, furniture and household items. There seems to have been a considerable concern with unity, as the whole room was treated as an ensemble.¹⁹¹

At a first glimpse, the Russian Classroom in Pittsburgh took the traditional Russian *izba* as the main source of inspiration, but elevated the ornamental repertoire to a modern, subdued, and more acceptable version, while replicating ornamental motifs of folk art in costlier materials and with more labor-intensive techniques. At the same time, there was a deliberate attempt to bring into the classroom decorative patterns commonly associated with ecclesiastical art, either in monumental or "minor" form.

What were the reasons behind this particular choice of ornamentation? More importantly, why did the committee consider a *vyshivka* representing St. George as a key element in representing national and ethnic identity for all Russians? The image of a horseman carrying a spear first appears on thirteenth-century Russian coins and seals. A 1497 seal of Ivan III Vasil'evich the Great, the grand prince of Moscow and Vladimir, first added a dragon to the iconography of the mounted warrior, thus narrowing its interpretation to the very popular figure of St. George. Beginning with Ivan IV (1533-1584), the dragon-killing horseman appeared on the Muscovite coat of arms, usually placed on the chest of a double-headed eagle. The horseman was depicted with a crown and sometimes with a mantle, and as such was identified with the tsar himself. By the late 1600s, the horseman on the eagle's chest had become the standard symbol of the crown-successor, the scion of the Byzantine emperors.¹⁹² Both Russians and Westerners

¹⁹¹ Hilton, *Russian Folk Art*, pp. 27-28.

¹⁹² See the official description of the Russian seal and coat of arms of 1667. My understanding of the iconography of St. George is based on A. B. Lakier,

interpreted the horseman as an image of St. George, mainly because of the association of that image with the Orthodox icon of St. George killing the dragon. But the horseman was not “officially” recognized as St. George until 1730. This definite shift seems to have coincided with an understanding of the horseman as knight, that is as a symbolic representation of Russia’s wars against infidels. Saint George, on the other hand, was the patron saint of Prince Iurii Dolgorukii (r. 1149-1151 and 1155-1157), the founder of Moscow. As such, the saint had been adopted at a very early date as the patron of Moscow. It is under Ivan III that the arms of Moscow (St. George killing the dragon) were combined with the double-headed eagle of Byzantine inspiration,¹⁹³ which became the basis for the imperial blazon of later times. As a consequence, it was most likely Ivan III (r. 1462-1505) who first linked officially the iconography of the dragon-killing saint with his military campaigns against the Tartar infidels. At no point in time was St. George specifically associated with Russia, nor did he become a Russian “national” saint.¹⁹⁴ The all-time patron saint of Russia was not George, but Andrew, who was believed to have given Russia an apostolic foundation.

Russkaia gerald'ika (Russian Heraldry)(Moscow: Kniga, 1990) and V. Artamonov and G. Vilinbakhov, *Gerb i flag Rossii, X-XX veka* (The Coat of Arms and the Flag of Russia, from the Tenth to the Twentieth Century)(Moscow: Izdatel'stvo “Iuridicheskaja literatura”, 1997).

¹⁹³ In 1497, Ivan III married Zoe Palaeologos, a niece of Constantine XI, the last emperor of Byzantium. Beginning with that date, the double-headed eagle, which had been a symbol of the Palaeologan family, proclaimed the power of the Russian tsar over East and West.

¹⁹⁴ SS. Boris and Gleb or St. Vladimir had much more powerful associations with medieval Russia. Boris and Gleb were the first Rus’ martyrs, while Prince Vladimir of Kiev (980-1015), though canonized only in the 1200s and never quite as popular as Boris and Gleb, was credited with the conversion of Rus’ to Christianity.

Why then was St. George chosen by the Russian Classroom committee, in particular by Andrey Avinoff, who was ultimately responsible for the interior decoration design? In my opinion, the answer must be sought in the Christian militant ideology associated ever since the late fifteenth century with the iconography of St. George slaying the dragon. In Christian imagery, the dragon or the snake is the primary symbol of evil, the enemy of mankind. As such, the icon of the dragon-killing saint became a symbol of a Christian's spiritual struggle against the devil and his hosts. As in traditional Byzantine and Russian icons, the Pittsburgh *vyshivka* has St. George carrying a thin spear, which he holds in a most delicate manner. This is a symbolic way to suggest that the power to slay the dragon did not come from his own physical strength, but from his faith in God, whose presence is made visible by the hand reaching out from the cloud. For Orthodox Christians, the Great Martyr and Trophy-Bearer George is a heavenly intercessor for any kind of struggle against evil. He had been a soldier; as a consequence, he became one of the most popular saints amongst soldiers. A ready helper for all who called upon him for assistance in their spiritual or physical battle with evil, St. George became very early a symbol of the *milites Christi* (soldiers of Christ) engaged in battle against the infidel.¹⁹⁵ The *vyshivka* image may therefore be seen in the more discrete historical context of post-Revolution Russia as a symbol of holy war against the Bolsheviks.

That the committee for the Russian Classroom were probably hostile to the new Soviet regime can be deduced from the fact that there was no overseas

¹⁹⁵ I wish to express my gratitude to the members of the Early Slavic e-mail list for all their useful clarifications regarding the position of St. George in Russian history and iconography. I owe a special debt of gratitude to Fr. Mark Smith of Alberta, Canada.

participation. The Russian Classroom was built and decorated exclusively with money from Russians and Rusyns residing in the United States.¹⁹⁶ The Russian Committee had three officers and twenty members at large.¹⁹⁷ Andrey Avinoff was also the chair of a committee that included only representatives of prewar Russia, eager to display their allegiance to the “true” and “authentic” Russia that existed before the Bolshevik revolution. Moreover, the committee had a remarkable sense of inclusiveness. Ethnic Russians worked side by side with Carpatho-Rusyns, who had come to America not from the empire of the tsars, but from either Austria-Hungary (before 1918) or Czechoslovakia (between 1918 and 1938). The Pittsburgh Rusyns had refused to participate in either the Czechoslovak or the Hungarian committees, and instead decided to join forces with the Russian committee. There were also Ukrainians working for the Russian

¹⁹⁶ *Russian Classroom*, pp. 10-11. The United States did not recognize the Soviet regime until 1933. Some of the most important financial contributions for the Russian Classroom came from such associations as the Greek-Catholic Union of Russian Brotherhoods in the United States of America, the Federated Russian Orthodox Clubs, the Carpatho-Russian Union of North America, the United Russian Orthodox Brotherhood of America and the Carpatho-Russian Day of Greater Pittsburgh. In its annual meeting taking place in Kennywood Park, the latter organization had voted to defer its profits for two years to the Russian Classroom fund. For Carpatho-Rusyns in America, see Paul R. Magocsi, *Our People. Carpatho-Rusyns and Their Descendants in North America* (Toronto: Multicultural History Society of Ontario, 1984).

¹⁹⁷ Members at large: Paul and Wilma Barna, Joseph Harsky, Andrew Hlebe, Anna Kalnas, S. V. Karpova, George Komlos, Michael J. Kormos, Peter Korpos, V. N. Krivobok, John P. Lois, John Masich, Peter Ratica, Michael Roman, John P. Sekerak, Fr. Michael Tidick, I. P. Tolmachoff, D. I. Vinogradoff, Fr. John Yanchishin, and Fr. John Zitinsky. As the list shows, the committee included three priests. The three officers were Andrey Avinoff (chairman), P. I. Zeedick (vice-chairman), and Michael V. Smirnoff (secretary). See *Russian Classroom*, p. 11.

Classroom.¹⁹⁸ Moreover, the Committee included representatives of both the Russian Orthodox Church and the Uniate (Greek-Catholic) Church.¹⁹⁹

This remarkable diversity is well represented in the ornamental repertoire of the room. Folk motifs, especially floral ornamental patterns, became very popular in the late 1800s in the context of the Art and Crafts movement. The ideas of John Ruskin and William Morris and their call for the creation of an original art rooted in each nation's cultural traditions, found supporters not only in London, Dublin, Vienna, or Paris, but in Moscow as well. Like elsewhere in Europe, the Russian artists and patrons engaged in the Arts and Crafts movement supported the idea of social reform through art. They were also animated by a commitment to maintain a distinct cultural identity. The expression of these aspirations was the revival of *kustar* (peasant handicraft) art.²⁰⁰ Educated elites were well aware of the impact of the industrial revolution on traditional forms of art. Many peasants, especially those who were now *kulaks* rejected their own traditional culture and adopted factory products and city dress in their desire to move upward on the social ladder. Such developments were perceived as

¹⁹⁸ From the moment the Nationality Rooms project had begun, Ukrainians from Pittsburgh had voiced their wish to have a Ukrainian Classroom. The impediment seems to have been Mitchell's decision to allow representation only from ethnic groups originating from countries recognized by the League of Nations. A Ukrainian Classroom was finally opened in 1990, two years after the commemoration of "Ukraine's millennium of Christianity." See *The Millenium of Ukrainian Christianity*, ed. by Nicholas L. Chirovsky (New York: Philosophical Library, 1988).

¹⁹⁹ *Russian Classroom*, p.10. The Russian Classroom was inaugurated in the presence of both Greek-Catholic and Orthodox priests who jointly celebrated the liturgical service for the occasion. Chancellor Bowman, who was present at the ceremony, was offered bread and salt from the committee.

²⁰⁰ Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, pp. 1-3.

dangerous, for in Russia the peasantry passed for the main retainer of national identity, since the aristocracy had assimilated western values and culture ever since the reforms of Peter the Great. In the words of the painter Viktor Vasnetsov, Russian aristocrats lived “in houses built on European models,” wore “French fashions,” and ate “like the French or the English”: “Our entire environment—dishes, plate, furniture—is foreign, with not even a corner left for independent national creativity.”²⁰¹

The interest in collecting folk art as a preoccupation of Russian art connoisseurs dates back to the early nineteenth century and must be viewed as a reaction in the spirit of Romantic nationalism to the Napoleonic invasion and defeat of 1812. However, by 1870, reinventing the tradition of the *kustar* crafts (*kustarnye promysly*) had become the goal of many collectors, scholars, historians and artists. According to them, the best solution to the rapid degradation of traditions was to organize private workshops in order to retain *kustar* men, women, and children engaged in production.²⁰² The end result was a controlled *kustar* production that responded to the needs, values, and tastes of a more urban and affluent clientele. This combination of folk art and modern taste was also viewed as truly national, an art with which Russians everywhere could identify themselves.

It is this utopian image of Russia that Avinoff brought to light in the Russian Classroom. A careful reading of the interior decoration of the room reveals the intention to summon traditional, but also “young” Russia to fight against the

²⁰¹ Cited by Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, p. 6.

²⁰² The *kustar* revival was without any doubt a “reform from above” and a paternalistic movement founded on an inherent paradox: trained artists were supposed to teach peasant craftsmen their own folk art. See Salmond, *Arts and Crafts*, pp. 80-114.

forces of evil. The inscription carved on the wooden frame of the *vyshivka* may serve as a label for this project: “Saint George, symbol of valorous youth, victorious over forces of evil and darkness” (Fig. 5) The orthography of the inscription (e.g., Георгій) reveals a deliberate choice to ignore the changes brought by the 1923 orthographic reform (among others the abandonment of the letter *i*, now substituted with *и*).²⁰³



Figure 5. Russian Classroom. Inscription on the wooden frame of the *vyshivka*. Drawing from Bruhns, *Nationality Rooms*, p. 46.

With this orthographic choice, the Russian community in Pittsburgh dissociated itself even stronger from the decisions of the new regime in power in their former country. The mission that the members of the Russian Classroom committee set for themselves was thus defined as the preservation of an authentic image of Russia through decorative arts, as well as the mobilization of the faithful against the atheist regime.

A similarly political message becomes evident through the analysis of the

²⁰³ Russian émigrés correctly interpreted the orthographic reform of 1923 as an attempt by the Bolshevik government to abandon the cultural traditions of tsarist Russia. Viewed as a linguistic distortion of Russian, the change provided additional ammunition to the Ukrainian separatists. Ukrainian is still written with *i* as well as *и*. See Charles Halperin, “George Vernadsky, Eurasianism, the Mongols, and Russia,” *Slavic Review* 41 (1982), 485.

Romanian Classroom. Much like the Russian case, the image of Romania conveyed by this classroom is a complex, historically determined construct that has much to do with the specific historical context of its creation. Unlike the Russian, the Romanian Classroom was designed from the very beginning as a “shrine.” Amidst the material and shifting values of modern life, in which American Romanians were then living, it was expected to reflect their understanding of the unchanging national inheritance.

The first notation in the University records about the Romanian classroom reads as follows:

September 1927. Miss Christine Galitzi who is at present taking her doctor's degree at Columbia, passed through Pittsburgh on her way east after a summer at the University of Chicago. Miss Galitzi was delighted to hear about the plans for the Cathedral of Learning. When she was told about the idea of having Nationality Rooms, she asked what the Romanians were planning to do. Miss Galitzi was told that the Romanian group in the city of Pittsburgh numbers *only a few hundred: therefore, there was very little probability of this particular group being able to do much for the University of Pittsburgh.* However, since there were *two* Romanian students at [the University of] Pitt[sburgh], arrangements were made for Miss Galitzi to have a conversation with them [emphasis added].²⁰⁴

The immediate result of Christine Galitzi's visit was the formation of a committee of Romanian students. The secretary, Iuliu P. Drăgușanu, a graduate student in the School of Mines, prepared in 1928 a statement asking the Romanian government to help build, among the Nationality Classrooms in the Cathedral of Learning, a Romanian room. This document was sent together with

²⁰⁴ Note in the Nationality Rooms Program archive, cited by Ruth Crawford Mitchell, *The Romanian Classroom. The Cathedral of Learning, University of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1944), p. 9.

photographs and blueprints to the Romanian Legation in Washington, where George Anagnostache, a University of Pittsburgh graduate of 1923, School of Mines, was a member of the staff. The memorandum was warmly approved by Ambassador George Cretziano, and forwarded to the Foreign Office in Bucharest. Additional political support was further secured by another student, Ionel Ionescu, who, while spending his summer holidays in Romania, was received in 1929 by both Queen Maria (1875-1938) and the prime minister at the time, Iuliu Maniu, head of the recently created National Peasants' Party.²⁰⁵ It is important to observe that the idea of a Romanian room, though first emerging among American Romanians, received political support from officials in Romania.

Meanwhile, American Romanians from Pittsburgh organized a preliminary committee headed by John Craiovean and Emanoil Varga.²⁰⁶ One of the most important tasks of this committee was to gain support from all American Romanians, and especially from the recently formed Union and League of

²⁰⁵ Queen Maria's early involvement in the Romanian room requires an explanation. Besides her major role in Romanian cultural life at the time, Maria had recently returned from a very successful visit to the United States, which greatly contributed to the consolidation of Romania's international status after the Treaty of Versailles. During Ruth Crawford Mitchell's visit to Bucharest, in November 1936, Queen Maria told her that though she did not ordinarily like skyscrapers, she found the Cathedral of Learning (which she labeled "The Tower of Babel") interesting. Mitchell, in turn, viewed the Queen as "a gloriously beautiful woman, sad... a figure of great dignity in black velvet with long ropes of pearls," standing in a long hall "with a simple curve of the utterly plain white vaulted plaster ceiling typical of Romania above her head." See Mitchell, *Romanian Classroom*, p. 15.

²⁰⁶ The Pittsburgh committee was active between February and April 1929 and included thirteen members: John Craiovean, Emanoil Varga, George Balint, Joan Boariu, Valer Huza, Aurel Luca, E. Luca, Nicolae Lungociu, Traian Oneț, Achim Orocupp, George Opreș, Theodore Russu, and E. Tătărean. At least one of them (Valer Huza) was a (Uniate) priest. See Mitchell, *Romanian Classroom*, pp. 11 and 18.

Romanian Societies in America. The Union called for a meeting at its headquarters in Cleveland on April 7, 1929, which was attended by American Romanians from all parts of the United States. The Legation in Washington sent George Anagnostache. The idea of a Romanian Classroom was enthusiastically endorsed and a National Committee of fifteen was elected, under the chairmanship of Michael T. Roman, vice-president of the Union and League. A nation-wide campaign for funds was authorized. By the end of the year, American Romanians across the United States had contributed 7,000 dollars in cash.

Good organization distinguished this effort from similar attempts by other ethnic groups, as well as from later developments of American-Romanian history. In only eight months and without any misgivings, every local lodge of the "Union and League" from the Atlantic to the Pacific sent a contribution. There was also a constant support from the Romanian-language press, the various meetings and benefits being fully reported in the newspapers and every donor's name published. The money was collected chiefly by means of coupon books, and every individual gift was recorded in a book still preserved in the archives of the Romanian Room committee. The committee's president, Michael T. Roman, also visited Romania in 1929, in order to discuss the choice of architects and designs with Mihail Oromulu, president of the Society of the Friends of the United States in Bucharest.²⁰⁷

Early in 1930, a second memorandum was prepared, including photographs, blueprints, typewritten explanations of the idea of a Romanian Classroom, and the conditions under which the architect was expected to prepare his design. The memorandum was forwarded to George Cantacuzino, then the

²⁰⁷ Mitchell, *Romanian Classroom*, p. 12.

leading figure among the younger generation of Romanian architects.. The committee hoped that Cantacuzino, who had been trained at Beaux Arts in Paris, would undertake the responsibility for the interior decoration of the Classroom as a form of patriotic service. An important reason behind this choice may have been Cantacuzino's constant interest in applying principles of medieval or Renaissance architecture to tall urban buildings, such as the Crisoveloni Bank in Bucharest.²⁰⁸ In February 1930, George Cantacuzino signified his interest and willingness to collaborate, but a second letter named as designer Nicolae Ghica-Budești, one of the most distinguished architects of the old generation, whose special field of interest was the study of medieval architecture. In November 1936, Ruth Crawford Mitchell met with Ghica-Budești in Bucharest. In a letter to the Romanian Committee in Pittsburgh, she described him as follows:

Professor Ghica-Budești is a Romanian of the old school, with a long beard, a finely pointed nose, black eyes. In his black Astrakhan collar and high fur hat, as I saw him in Bucharest, he was a picture. Mme Ghica-Budești is French, a relative of the distinguished French artist Puvis de Chavannes. Both the father and the son studied architecture at the Beaux Arts in Paris. The reputation of the elder Ghica-Budești rests upon *years of meticulous research that have been spent in measuring and sketching*

²⁰⁸ According to the standard history of Romanian architecture [Grigore Ionescu, *Istoria arhitecturii în România* (The History of Romanian Architecture), vol. 2 (Bucharest: Editura Academiei RPR, 1965), p. 474], Cantacuzino's work in the 1920s was typical of an early reaction to modernism in Romanian architecture. Later, in the 1930s, Cantacuzino became a leading modernist, as indicated by his designs for the main buildings of the aircraft factory IAR in Brașov (1933) and the Rex Hotel on the Black Sea shore at Mamaia (1937). On modernism in Romanian architecture and the problem of the “Neo-Romanian style,” see the various studies included in *Arts & Architecture 1920-1940. Between Avant-Garde and Modernism. Proceedings of the International Symposium, Bucharest, Romania, 23-24 April 1993*, ed. by Maria Celac and Rodica Crișan (Bucharest: Union of Romanian Architects, 1993); as well as Luminița Machedon and E. R. Scoffham, *Romanian Modernism. The Architecture of Bucharest, 1920-1940* (Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1999).

the architectural details of old Romanian churches... Into the design for the Romanian Room, Professor Ghica-Budești has put the results of fifty years of absorption in Romanian art [emphasis added].²⁰⁹

Ghica-Budești was the director of the National Committee of Historical Monuments and Sites and he was then working on his major project, the building of the State Ethnographic Museum in Bucharest, which features elements of medieval architecture from Walachia and Moldavia.²¹⁰ The drawings he sent to Pittsburgh were highly formal, inspired by the Romanian ecclesiastical architecture of the late Middle Ages. It is perhaps no accident that the letter recommending Ghica-Budești arrived just as the University of Pittsburgh received a visit from Nicolae Iorga, former minister of education and rector of the University of Bucharest, who had brought gifts of books and rugs and the government's promise of collaboration. But Iorga played an important role in the Romanian cultural context of the time. As the most important figure of the Romanian historiographic school and one of the most important European historians of the day, Iorga was then facing serious attacks from the "New school" of younger historians (e.g., Constantin C. Giurescu), particularly because of his ideas about the Romanian Middle Ages.²¹¹ Iorga was then writing his monumental work on "Byzantium after Byzantium," in which he was claiming a

²⁰⁹ Mitchell, *Romanian Classroom*, p. 15.

²¹⁰ Ionescu, *Istoria*, p. 456 and fig. 339. Ghica-Budești also designed the newer buildings of the University of Bucharest (the present-day departments of History, Chemistry, and the Institute of Southeast-European Studies); see Ionescu, *Istoria*, p. 474.

²¹¹ Alexandru Zub, *Istorie și istorici în România interbelică* (History and historians in interwar Romania)(Iași: Junimea, 1989), pp. 171-172.

Byzantine heritage for the Romanian medieval civilization, an idea he had first expressed at the International Congress of Byzantine Studies in Athens (1931), shortly after his visit to the United States.²¹² His visit to Pittsburgh may thus have influenced the decoration and style of the Romanian Classroom. At any rate, Ghica-Budești's designs were approved and officially adopted at a meeting of the Romanian Classroom committee in Youngstown, on March 22, 1931.

While Mitchell was still in Bucharest, the model for student armchairs drawn up at the Industrial Arts School was redesigned, and new models were ordered for the carved wall paneling and the carving for the entrance door frame. To insure the greatest degree of authenticity in construction in the United States, samples of limestone, of Rușchița pink marble, and of oak with the desired antique finish were obtained.²¹³ Mitchell spent hours with Ghica-Budești and his son Jean, discussing every detail of the revisions. When both models and drawings arrived in Pittsburgh, however, the war began and further shipments from Romania became impossible, as even correspondence with Bucharest ceased. Fortunately, Andrei Popovici, the Romanian Consul General in New York and the Commissioner of the Romanian exhibit at the New York World's Fair of 1939-1940 proposed the idea of furnishing the Romanian Classroom in part with items from the Romanian Pavilion. University representatives were thus invited to visit the Romanian Pavilion and the Romanian House after the World's Fair

²¹² Nicolae Iorga, "Les grandes familles byzantines et l'idée byzantine en Roumanie," *Académie Roumaine. Bulletin de la section historique* 18 (1931), 1-21. See also Nicolae Iorga, *Byzance après Byzance. Continuation de l'Histoire de la vie byzantine* (Bucharest: Institut d'Etudes Byzantines, 1935).

²¹³ Rușchița is a renowned quarry in southwestern Transylvania (in the Poiana Ruscăi Mountains) that provided white or pink-colored marble for a large number of buildings and monuments in interwar Romania.

closed in mid-1940, in order to select materials and furnishings. Meanwhile, drastic political changes had taken place in Romania in that same year: King Carol II was forced to abdicate and power was transferred to General Ion Antonescu and to a government including members of the Iron Guard, a fascist organization backed by Nazi Germany. A cable was nonetheless sent to Antonescu requesting the gift of certain art objects and materials for the Romanian Room. On November 20, 1940, Antonescu issued a decree by which the University of Pittsburgh was made one of three custodians of materials from the Romanian exhibit at the New York World's Fair.

In this way the University came into the possession of the Brâncoveanu mosaic, the icons, the wrought-iron gates, and the hand-carved frames of the student chairs. Albert A. Klimcheck, the University architect, undertook the challenging task of incorporating these materials into Ghica-Budești's original design, although the inscriptions added to the mosaic were selected by Andrei Popovici.²¹⁴ In this final form (Fig. 6) the Romanian classroom was dedicated on March 16, 1943, in the presence of priests of both the Orthodox and Uniate rites. The ceremony was attended by thousands of American Romanians from

²¹⁴ Mitchell, *Romanian Classroom*, p. 17. Unfortunately, I have been unable to locate any sketches or drawings relating to Ghica-Budești's original design, in order to compare it with the existing room. However, I suppose that his originally serene ecclesiastical concept would have used the back wall for a fresco, not a mosaic, but there is no way to prove the point. According to Mitchell, who had talked to him in Bucharest, the problem of instilling warmth into an otherwise very austere room baffled Ghica-Budești, for he had no way of seeing the room during construction. The initially austere setting was greatly mellowed by the colors of the mosaics and icons. Nothing is known about Ghica-Budești's reaction to these changes, but since his original design was respected one may presume it might have been positive. The Romanian architect never had the opportunity to see the room or hear again from Mitchell, for he died in 1943, the year in which the Romanian Classroom was dedicated.



Figure 6. Romanian Classroom. View of mosaic on the rear wall. Photo: Courtesy of the University of Pittsburgh, Nationality Rooms Program.

Pennsylvania and the neighboring states, who asked in advance for special leave from their wartime jobs. Stella Roman from the Metropolitan Opera sang Beethoven's "Worship of God in Nature" and Andrei Popovici delivered the inaugural speech, in which he emphasized the deep feeling of loyalty that Romanians had to the cause of democracy. Finally, the president of the Romanian Committee, Pompiliu Popescu, handed the key to the Room to Chancellor Bowman.²¹⁵

The entrance into the Romanian Room has a monumental door frame carved in American limestone, whose color and texture are similar to the Romanian limestone used in the Royal Palace in Bucharest (Fig. 7). The door frame stretches like a threshold from the marble floor to the plastered ceiling. Stone thresholds are characteristic of medieval monastery buildings in both Walachia and Moldavia. The floral arabesques and other carved details of this door frame are typical of late medieval architectural works, particularly those built under Constantin Brâncoveanu, Prince of Walachia (r. 1688-1714). The architectural style of this period is characterized by the revival of early sixteenth-century ornamental patterns, such as richly decorated portal stone frames, that often include a dedication above the entrance. Mitchell believed that the source of inspiration for the door frame in Pittsburgh was the stone carving on the main entrance into the monastery church at Hurez, commissioned by Brâncoveanu in 1693, but a much closer formal analogy is the portal stone frame of the Old Court Church in Bucharest. This may indicate that Ghica-Budești source of inspiration was a royal, not a monastery church. I will discuss below the political

²¹⁵ Mitchell, *Romanian Classroom*, pp. 17-18.

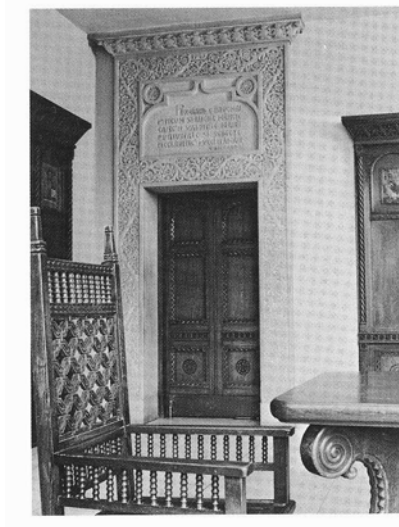


Figure 7. Romanian Classroom View toward the entrance. From Bruhns, *Nationality Rooms*, p. 44.

implications of this significant choice.²¹⁶ For the moment it is important to note that the Romanian coat of arms appears above the door, outside the room: the royal eagle, with the emblems of the main Romanian provinces (Walachia, Moldavia, Transylvania, and Bessarabia) and the inscription "Nihil sine Deo" (Nothing without God). As for stylistic parallels with early eighteenth-century decorative sculpture, the lower panels of the frame, though not decorated with elaborate rosettes as in the case of the Old Court Church, are very similar. The specific vine scroll decoration (*rinceau*) filling both sides of the frame and its upper part, around the inscription, is indeed a borrowing from the sculptural motives of the portal frame in Bucharest. The upper part of the inscription panel was also inspired by the braced decoration with two angels above the door of the Bucharest Court Church, with simple rosettes replacing the angels' heads on the Pittsburgh inscription panel.²¹⁷ To the same model points the richly decorated cornice close to the ceiling. However, the inscription above the door is not a religious dedication, but a few lines from an ode by Vasile Alecsandri (1821-1890), chiseled in relief in the carved head of the door frame:

Românul e întocmai
Precum stâncile mărețe
Care'n valurile mării
Furtunate si semețe

²¹⁶ Ghica-Budești was certainly capable of making the distinction between a princely chapel and a monastery church in terms of both function and sculpted decoration. The choice of limestone similar to the one used in the Royal Palace in Bucharest substantiates the political associations of this distinction.

²¹⁷ Erected *ca.* 1550 by Prince Mircea the Shepherd (r. 1545-1554 and 1558-1559), the Old Court Church had long been used as a chapel for the princely palace located nearby (hence its name). In 1715, the stone frame mentioned here was added to its portal. See Ionescu, *Istoria*, p. 376 and fig. 347.

Neclintite'n veci rãmân.²¹⁸

The position of this inscription and its analogies (dedications of churches) combine sculpted decoration support and literary metaphor in an intricate message. Though not the greatest nineteenth-century Romanian poet, Alecsandri was however one of the first to use folklore explicitly as a source of inspiration, following a Herderian cultural program set up in 1840 by the publication *Dacia literarã*, of which he was the editor. He also authored the famous *Hora Unirii*, a *Marseillaise*-like anthem written on the occasion and in celebration of the political union of Walachia and Moldavia (1859) that led to the creation of modern Romania. Alecsandri is one of the most representative personalities of the Romanian revolutionary generation of 1848, both poet and politician. The basic idea behind his poem inscribed above the entrance door in the Romanian Classroom is that Romanians survived all historical tragedies. Whatever happens with the “sea,” a common Romantic symbol for history, they remained unmoved and *unchanged*. One can hardly fail to notice that Alecsandri's poem exactly matches Bowman's expectations. It is indeed a piece of art supposed to communicate the idea of continuity and resistance. However, as discussed below, the immediate referent of this text is not Bowman's code of values, but the Romanian politics of the early 1940s.

²¹⁸ “The Romanian is like the mighty rock which amidst the waves of the stormy and majestic sea forever remains unmoved” (translation from Mitchell, *Romanian Classroom*, p. 5).

The entrance door itself is made of oak, with iron strap hinges, a wrought-iron lever-handle and key escutcheons designed by Samuel Yellin.²¹⁹ The floor of the room is laid in square blocks of pink marble brought from the Rușchița quarries. The room itself is rectangular, with an apse-like alcove on the window wall, which is shut off from the main part of the room by wrought-iron gates hung in an arch. The rear wall is decorated with a large mosaic executed by the Romanian artist Nora Steriade in Bucharest. The mosaic is embedded in the wall's white plaster surface and surrounded by a painted frame, decorated with crosses and dots. A wrought-iron protection frame is attached to the wall immediately under the lower part of the mosaic. Above the mosaic, there is a painted and gilded, bilingual inscription, which reads:

"Constantin Voda Brâncoveanu și familia lui au îndurat martiriu pentru ca credința în Dumnezeu și națiune sa înflorească în veci în inimile Românilor (Prince Constantin Brâncoveanu and his family laid down their lives so that faith in God and nation may forever endure in Romanian hearts)."²²⁰

²¹⁹ Born in Poland, Yellin had come to the United States in 1906. From 1909 to 1940, his shop in Philadelphia turned out grilles and gates for churches, museums, banks, colleges and estates of Gothic and Renaissance inspiration. During the 1920s, his firm employed more than two hundred blacksmiths. Yellin's work can be seen at Yale University and at the National Cathedral in Washington. In New York, he produced the ornamental ironwork for the Cloisters, the Morgan Library, and the Federal Reserve Bank on Wall Street. On his life and work, see Richard J. Wattenmaker, *Samuel Yellin in Context* (Flint: Flint Institute of Arts, 1985); Jack Andrews, *Samuel Yellin, Metalworker* (Ocean City: SkipJack Press, 1992); and Jane Colihan, "The Salt and Pepper of Architecture," *American Heritage* 46 (1995), no. 6, 96-100.

²²⁰ Brâncoveanu, the last of a long line of native princes of Walachia, was executed in Constantinople in 1714, together with his four sons, at the order of Sultan Ahmed III.

The lettering for the text of this inscription, inspired by the revival of medieval studies in the late 1930s and early 1940s, was executed by Alexander Seceni, an American Romanian painter who had decorated the St. Demetrius Romanian Orthodox Church in New York City. The mosaic in gold, turquoise, bronze, ruby red, and black, shows a votive scene in which Brâncoveanu appears with his entire family, all in court attire, and makes the characteristic gesture of dedication to God. The dedicated church is symbolically represented in Brâncoveanu's hands, who offers it to Christ, shown as Pantocrator sitting on the heavenly throne. The mosaic is clearly inspired by votive scenes that commonly appear on the western walls of Orthodox churches. The theme is treated in a traditional manner, with very few, if any, details related to the “real” portraits of the characters depicted: there is no differentiation between Brâncoveanu's sons and daughters, while the only bearded figure is the prince himself.²²¹ This symbolic language is directly borrowed from late seventeenth-century Walachian church frescoes. In natural light, the mosaic gives a particularly shiny appearance to the rear wall. Without any concern with perspective, much like the *vyshivka* of the Russian Classroom, the mosaic provides the room with depth.

The choice of a mosaic, instead of a fresco, may seem at first glance unusual. The use of mosaic in church interior decoration is not very common in medieval Orthodox Europe, despite the fact that the technique is commonly regarded as “Byzantine,” mainly because of the sixth-century mosaics in Ravenna. However, because of its glowing effect and of the hieratic features of

²²¹ According to the canons of Orthodox fresco or icon painting, beards are to be treated as symbols of political or ecclesiastic authority.

those represented, a mosaic reinforces the idea that the characters depicted are linked to the divine order and, in any case, has imperial connotations.²²² There is a clear, obviously unintended contrast between the scene depicted and the accompanying inscriptions. The former conveys Brâncoveanu's political claims in the specific language of the post-Byzantine art of Eastern Europe, by describing him in a hierarchical relation to both Christ and his family. In an evergetic posture, Brâncoveanu is not only the ruler, but also the exemplary Christian, using his power and wealth to consecrate churches to God Almighty. The inscription takes this symbolism at its face value and simply extends the meaning of the term “faith” to include not only God, but also the nation. Brâncoveanu's tragedy, an outgrowth of an intricate political drama, thus becomes a symbol of martyrdom not only in a Christian context (the Christian prince vs. the Muslim tyrant), but also in a national context (the Romanian prince vs. the sultan of the Turks). “Invented” national heroes proliferated in modern Romania. Prominent among them are Michael the Brave, the late sixteenth-century Prince of Walachia who for the first time brought together under the same ruler the three traditional provinces of later Romania (Walachia, Moldavia, and Transylvania), or Tudor Vladimirescu, the leader of the 1821 revolution in Walachia. What is striking in Brâncoveanu's case is his use as a political, rather than religious symbol. Unlike Stephen the Great (Prince of Moldavia, 1457-1504) or Michael the Brave, Brâncoveanu was rarely, if ever, used to inspire militant political action, perhaps

²²² Suggestive of the contemporary debate on the Byzantine traditions of Romanian art is the theory of the “national character of the Romanian painting” advanced by the Romanian painter Olga Greceanu. See Ruxandra Demetrescu, “Olga Greceanu between tradition and modernism,” in *Arts and Architecture, 1920-1940. Between Avant-Garde and Modernism. Proceedings of the International Symposium, Bucharest, Romania, 23-24 April 1993*, ed. by Maria Celac and Rodica Crişan (Bucharest, 1993), pp. 76-78.

because his grim tragedy, followed by the very end of the native dynasty of Walachia, was not seen as productive for the state.

Along the front wall and the corridor wall stretch two blackboards mounted in oak frames paneled and carved in the manner of an iconostasis, with arched panels separated by hand-carved twisted columns. The blackboards are supported on a sub-base of carved wooden panels, decorated with rosettes. The dark finish of the carved oak screen contrasts with the light, smoothly plastered walls, which support these blackboard frames. White arva paint mixed with color gives the walls a pink blush much like the tone of the floor marble. There is an ancient icon embedded on each blackboard's wooden panel. The two icons on both sides of the front wall blackboard represent the Holy Virgin with Child Jesus (on the left) and Christ Pantocrator (on the right). One has an inscription in Greek, the other in Cyrillic. On the corridor wall blackboard, there are two other icons, one depicting St. Mark (on the left), the other the entombment of the Holy Virgin (on the right), both with Cyrillic inscriptions. Judging from my own experience with such works, these icons painted with oil on wood may be dated to the seventeenth or early eighteenth century and could thus be seen as authenticating the historical setting of Brâncoveanu's times. The window wall is finished in simple painted plaster without adornment except for six windows with rounded heads symmetrically placed. The source of inspiration for this type of window is ecclesiastic architecture and was often employed in modern buildings done in the so-called "Neo-Romanian style."²²³

Two small window casements are deeply recessed and have marble

²²³ Such as such as the Bucharest houses designed by Petre Antonescu in the 1910s and 1920s. See Ionescu, *Istoria*, pp. 466 and 467 fig. 347.

window ledges. The four large center windows form an alcove separated from the room by wrought-iron gates, swinging back in folded sections against the plaster walls. Mitchell mentions blue silk draperies lavishly embroidered with silver and gold threads. Both the wrought-iron gates and the draperies came from the banquet hall of the Romanian House at the World's Fair in New York. I did not find any draperies during my last visit to Pittsburgh in 1998. Nor was the windows' glass musty gray, as indicated by Mitchell, which suggests that minor changes may have occurred since 1944.²²⁴ The original wrought-iron screen taken from the Romanian House was larger than the alcove's entrance, so that several of its panels were converted into a radiator grille, topped with an eight-foot slab of highly polished marble. Mitchell's description of the classroom also includes a fifth, larger icon depicting Christ enthroned with Mary, his Mother, and John the Baptist. The icon was mounted on a carved and gold-leafed easel, resting directly upon an exquisite red and gold needlepoint embroidery.²²⁵

The classroom furniture is made of dark oak. There are thirty-five student chairs, with back splats carved in Romania by peasant artists. The decoration consists of five different patterns. The professor's chair is the only armchair in the room, and has a red velvet seat pillow. The reading desk is an adaptation of a church lectern to a table with four curved, hand-carved feet. The decoration pattern applied to the panels of the sub-base supporting the two blackboards is repeated on the wooden wastepaper-basket and on the lectern.

²²⁴ Mitchell, *Romanian Classroom*, pp. 7-8.

²²⁵ Mitchell, *Romanian Classroom*, p. 9. According to E. Maxine Bruhns, *The Nationality Rooms* (Pittsburgh, 1994), p. 44, the icon is displayed only “on special occasions.” There was however no icon in the alcove when I last visited the classroom.

Mainly due to the dedication and enthusiasm of the Romanian Classroom committee, the room was finished in only one year. By the time it was inaugurated, the political circumstances had changed so dramatically that the ceremony had to include an element of “re-dedication.” Romania had experienced the tragedy of 1940 marked by the occupation of eastern Moldavia by the Soviet Union occupied eastern Moldavia, of northwestern Transylvania by Hungary, and of southern Dobrudja by Bulgaria.²²⁶ On June 22, 1941, Romania joined Germany in the war against the Soviet Union, which led the British declare war on December 7. Two days after Germany and Italy, on December 12, 1941, Romania declared war upon the United States, but Antonescu's ambivalent attitude is epitomized by a declaration made on that same day: "I am the Reich's ally against the Soviet Union. I am neutral in the conflict between Great Britain and Germany. *I support the Americans against the Japanese* [emphasis added].”²²⁷ On June 5, 1942, President Franklin D. Roosevelt signed the declaration of war against Romania. By that time, however, the American attitude toward this remote enemy had been made clear when on October 11, 1940, all

²²⁶ The current historiographical view about German influences in Romania is that the turning point was the trade agreement of March 23, 1939, by which Germany took control of Romania's oil production and exports. The Soviet occupation of Bessarabia began on June 27, 1940, while the second Vienna Award, through which large parts of Transylvania were given to Hungary, was signed on August 30 of that same year. On September 6, King Carol II abdicated and power was transferred to the “leader of the state,” General Ion Antonescu, who immediately brought Romania into the German-Italian alliance. See Andreas Hillgruber, *Hitler, König Carol und Marschall Antonescu* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1965).

²²⁷ Gheorghe Barbul, *Memorial Antonescu, al treilea om al Axei* (The Memory of Antonescu, the Third Man of The Axis) (Iași: Insitutul European, 1992), p. 141.

Romanian assets in the United States were frozen.²²⁸ It is this decision that apparently prevented the return of the Romanian exhibit from the 1939 New York World's Fair. Antonescu's decree of November 1940, designating the University of Pittsburgh as custodian of certain items taken from the Romanian exhibit and Romanian House and eventually employed in the decoration of the Romanian Classroom, may thus have been an elegant solution to an embarrassing problem. At any rate, the same circumstances may have been responsible for the meaning American Romanians attributed to the Romanian Classroom on the day of its dedication in March 1943. The war had created a conflict between the loyalty they owed to their new country and the feelings derived from their national identity. I suggest that by looking at the historical context, one may find the reason behind the overall significance attributed to the Romanian Classroom, as it now exists. The emphasis on the tragedy of the prince-martyr Constantin Brâncoveanu, the absence of "traditional" national symbols, such as heroic historical figures (Stephen the Great, Michael the Brave) or great poets (Mihai Eminescu), the religious connotations of both Ghica-Budești's original design and the more recent changes—all this points to a specific message expressed by this room. Despite Bowman's plea for "eternal values," those expressed by the Romanian Classroom can best be understood in the particular context of the early 1940s. The national tragedy of 1940 and the following events called for a redefinition of Romanian identity. In the turmoil of the war and under the shadow that has already begun to cover that part of Eastern Europe, the need for new, more stable, if possible "*eternal*" modes of shaping collective identity and

²²⁸ Reuben H. Markham, *Rumania under the Soviet Yoke* (Boston: Meador, 1949), p. 152.

imagining the national community was greater than ever. Both the Romanian Classroom and the Romanian exhibit at the New York World's Fair may have thus represented “codified” messages meant to strengthen national solidarity and to offer a “national image” to the outside world. By defining Romanians as “mighty rocks” standing tall amidst the waves of history, by pointing to their role as martyrs and soldiers of Christianity, the Romanian Room thus conveys an implicit appeal for support.²²⁹ Its significance is therefore highly political, even propagandistic, though in a refined, almost imperceptible form. American Romanians, particularly those participating in the inauguration ceremony of 1943, may have added to this political message their own concerns about current developments overseas. Museumizing some of the items previously displayed at the World's Fair, the Romanian Classroom repositioned them as regalia for an “imagined,” but threatened community. To the American Romanians attending the dedication in March 1943, the room had become a “temple” of “eternal values of their mother country.”²³⁰ In the Cathedral of Learning, Brâncoveanu's chapel was thus meant to preserve memory for dispersed members of an “imagined community.” Artifacts previously used for political propaganda eventually became relics.

One important conclusion following from the examination of the Russian

²²⁹ It is important to note in this context that at the beginning of the war against the Soviet Union, both King Michael and General Antonescu, in their joint proclamation of June 22, 1941, called for a “holy war” against Communist Russia. See Friedrich Joseph Berber, “Rumänien,” in *Monatshefte für auswärtige Politik* 8 (1941), no. 6, pp. 665-667. It would be interesting to investigate the use of the image of St. George in war propaganda and to compare it with the anti-Communist stance of the Russian émigrés responsible for the creation of the Russian Room.

²³⁰ Mitchell, *Romanian Classroom*, p. 18.

and Romanian classrooms is that the more or less immediate political context in which the rooms were designed, executed, and inaugurated played a major role in the choice of ornamentation and the meaning ultimately attached to these works of interior decoration. Can a case be made for these rooms fulfilling Bowman's dream of "perennial values" within the University precincts? More importantly, did they represent the Russian and Romanian communities of the Pittsburgh area or rather some distant and imagined community from afar? In both cases, there is an obvious emphasis on religion, mainly Orthodox, but also Eastern (Greek) Catholic. Woven into visual texts of a fundamentally religious nature are hints at traditional peasant values and culture deriving from late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century preoccupation with national definition and cultural traits. There is, in fact, no substantive contradiction between the religious and folk inspiration of these two rooms. However, the religious theme is what ultimately gave both their primary meaning. It is against the background of religious associations, allusions, and contrasts that the context in which the Russian and Romanian rooms were inaugurated begins to shed some light on their meaning. The choice of religious themes was not a response to the idea of "perennial values," nor was it an attempt to redefine the nation along religious lines. The cooperation between Greek Catholics and Orthodox in both cases is a good indication that not religion, but politics ultimately mattered in terms of identity definition. The image of the Russian and Romanian communities of Pittsburgh thus appears as highly political, despite requirements from University administrators that everything be based on apolitical, fundamental values. Encapsulating what may have passed for the essential ingredients of nation imagining and representation, the rooms need to be seen in a historical context and permitted them to function as "national shrines."

CHAPTER VI
ROOMS OF FOLK INSPIRATION: THE HUNGARIAN, YUGOSLAV, AND
CZECHOSLOVAK CLASSROOMS

To many, nationalism in decorative arts conjures the image of a museum of folk art. Through the “invention of traditions,” discrete expressions of material culture at a particular moment and from a particular area are promoted to the position of “national art” and thus viewed as representative for a wide variety of similar expressions, none of which was selected for the museum of folk art by the “inventors of traditions.” Once the choice is eventually made for the best artistic representation of the nation, folk art is almost forced into a more or less permanent struggle for authenticity, as “true values” are now measured against the standards of the national art. This inherent tension between authenticity and the “invention of traditions” is the organizing principle of a number of classrooms of folk inspiration.

Out of a total number of twenty-five Nationality Rooms, six can be classified as of folk inspiration: Czechoslovak, Hungarian, Lithuanian, Norwegian, Swedish, and Yugoslav. This chapter will analyze three such classrooms opened prior to World War II, namely the Hungarian, the Yugoslav, and the Czechoslovak classrooms.

Hungarians and the Hungarian Classroom

The Hungarian Classroom is located on the first floor of the Cathedral of Learning on the northern side of the Commons Room, next to the German Room,

with windows opening to Forbes Avenue. The room was dedicated on September 29, 1939. In the opening speech Samuel Gomory, the chairman of the Hungarian Committee, explained the importance of the room in terms of the role the Hungarian nation had played in world history:

The word “university” means a place where the whole universe is represented – the universe of the past, the present, and the possible future. If everything has to be represented, it is natural that something should be there about the Hungarians; about their past and present, about the people who represent the ancient Ural-Altai culture and civilization; the people who are the descendants of the Akkadians, Urs, Medes, Ugurs, Scythians, and Unga – the men and women who call themselves Magyars. Now we have a place in the University as a part of the universe. If we would be just happy, thankful, and contented, we would be a part of the past, like any other piece of historic stone in a memorial; but we want to live, and it is our resolution to learn, to cooperate, and be a creative part in the future of the University’s great work for humanity and science – to make this world a better world. So help us, our God. *AZ UR*.²³⁰

The concept of a Hungarian Room in the Cathedral of Learning at the University of Pittsburgh emerged as early as 1927. In that year, Chancellor Bowman was presented a check in the amount of 2,000 dollars for a Hungarian Classroom. The money for this impressive donation had been raised in August 1926 during the celebrations of the Hungarian Day taking place in Kennywood Park. The participants and the donors were representatives of every Hungarian church and society in the Pittsburgh area. They quickly formed the first committee chaired by Odon Vasvary. A second, smaller committee was elected in 1928, this time under the leadership of Samuel Gomory, a faculty member of the University of Pittsburgh Medical School and a graduate of the University of

²³⁰ Ruth Crawford Mitchell, *The Hungarian Classroom. The Cathedral of Learning University of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1942), p. 14.

Budapest.²³¹

The idea of a Hungarian classroom was also met with enthusiasm in official circles in Hungary. At that time, Admiral Miklós Horthy was ruling the country ever since 1920, as Europe's first nationalist dictator.²³² Despite signing the Treaty of Trianon, one of the most important political issues of the Horthy regime was a constant preoccupation with the revision of that treaty and the restoration of the old, greater Hungary.²³³ Such ideas eventually had a great

²³¹ Mitchell, *Hungarian Classroom*, p. 13. Samuel Gomory was a medical doctor, mostly known for a survey of industrial mental hygiene he co-authored with two of his colleagues, C. H. Henninger and T. M. T. McKennan. The results of their research were published by the University in 1934.

²³² Horthy had come to power during very difficult times. The Austrian-Hungarian Empire collapsed in 1918 in the aftermath of the First World War. Mihály Károlyi's short-lived attempt to establish a democratic republican government eventually collapsed in March 1919. This brief experiment with democracy was followed by Béla Kún's 133-day Bolshevik republic, the first communist regime outside the Soviet Union. The Romanian and the Czech armies drove Béla Kún out of power at the time Miklós Horthy was organizing the counterrevolution. The Hungarian National Assembly restored the monarchy, but in the absence of a king, it also elected Miklós Horthy as regent. In June 1920, the new regime signed the Treaty of Trianon, which was a de facto recognition of the dissolution of historical Hungary ("the lands of the crown of St. Stephen").

²³³ The political elites in interwar Hungary viewed the Treaty of Trianon as the greatest blow to their nation since the catastrophe of Mohács (1526) and the subsequent occupation of Hungary by the Ottoman Turks (1541-1699). The popular song "Nem, nem, soha!" (No, no, never) almost dethroned the national anthem from its prestigious position in collective memory, while maps of four black pieces of Greater Hungary surrounding the white body of the motherland were put everywhere on public display. For the Hungarian political culture of the 1920s and 1930s, see the essays collected in *L'epoca Horthy. L'Ungheria tra le due guerre mondiali. Atti del convegno tenuto a Venezia (23-24 gennaio 1997)*, ed. by Francesco Guida (Rome: Lithos, 1997). For the political myth created around the Trianon Treaty during that period, see Balázs Ablonczy, "Trianon-legendák (The Trianon Legends)," in *Mítoszok, legendák, tévhitek a 20. századi magyar történelemről*, ed. by Ignác Romsics (Budapest: Osiris, 2002), pp. 85-113.

influence on the Hungarian Classroom in Pittsburgh. Several Hungarian politicians and cultural personalities visited Pittsburgh in 1929. Among them, Július Kornis, the state secretary of Education, and László Ravasz, the bishop of the Reformed Church in Hungary, were particularly receptive to and supportive of the idea of a Hungarian Room. Upon their return to Hungary, both had a great influence in persuading the Ministry of Education to organize a competition to select a final blueprint for the classroom design.²³⁴

The selection took place in 1930 in Budapest, not in an open competition, but by invitation alone. Count Kuno Klebelsberg, the man behind the reorganization of the education system in post-war Hungary, had been nominated the honorary president of the selection committee. Its chair was the vice-secretary of state for Education, K. Robert Kertész. The six-member committee included Elek Petrovics, the director of the National Art Museum, and László Agotay, the director of Industrial Art School.²³⁵ The committee invited five renowned architects to submit plans for the future room. In the end, however, the committee could not make a decision between sketches submitted by Györgyi Dénes and Károlyi Bodan, both professors at the Industrial Art School in Budapest. As a consequence, both designs were sent to Pittsburgh, where the University officials and the Hungarian Room Committee were expected to reach the final decision. That decision was in fact entirely in the hands of the committee, as Chancellor Bowman clearly acknowledged in an official note to László Alexy, the Hungarian consul in Cleveland:

²³⁴ Mitchell, *Hungarian Classroom*, p. 5.

²³⁵ Ibid.

In selecting professor Györgyi's plan, this Committee has been influenced primarily by the simplicity of the wall material, which inspires restful surroundings not likely to disturb the students' attention. The color scheme is delightful, especially in the design for the ceiling. The furniture is restrained and dignified. *I personally concur in the choice of the Committee* [emphasis added].²³⁶

Dénes Györgyi (1886-1961) was one of the most important Hungarian architects of the twentieth century. In Hungary, his contribution to modern art is viewed as even more important because of his blending of avant-garde with national traditions.²³⁷ He was born in Budapest on April 26, 1886 in a family of Austrian origin that had an already established artistic reputation. Dénes's grandfather, Alois Griengl, had received a solid art education at the University of Vienna. He had made the choice for complete integration into Hungarian society by changing his name into Alajos Györgyi. Dénes's father Géza was an architect who had received his formal training in Berlin under the direct supervision of Miklós Ybl (1814-1891). Dénes's uncle Kálmán was the director of the School of Fine Arts at the Institute of Art in Budapest.²³⁸ The two brothers had been entrusted with the building of a new wing for the Royal Castle in Budapest and with the interior decoration for a summer residence of Emperor Franz Josef.²³⁹

Dénes studied architecture in Budapest with Ödön Lechner (1845-

²³⁶ Mitchell, *Hungarian Classroom*, p. 6.

²³⁷ Mihály Kubinszky, *Györgyi Dénes* (Budapest: Akadémiai kiadó, 1974), p. 1.

²³⁸ Kubinszky, *Györgyi Dénes*, p. 2 and fig. 1. For Ybl, see Csilla Ottlik Perczel, *A History of Architecture in the Carpathian Basin, 1000-1920* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), pp. 170-171.

²³⁹ Mitchell, *Hungarian Classroom*, p. 6; Kubinszky, *Györgyi Dénes*, pp. 2-3.

1914).²⁴⁰ He signed his first blueprint as independent architect in 1908 when he was just 22. At the time he was still under the stylistic influence of his professor's "puritan" style anchored in the then-popular Secession movement.²⁴¹ His first major commission was the decoration for the 1916 coronation ceremony of Charles IV (Emperor Charles I) as King of Hungary.²⁴² He would author many more private and public projects in Budapest and other cities, before establishing an international reputation.²⁴³ In 1926, he designed the Hungarian Pavilion at the Philadelphia exhibition. Three years later, as he was invited to submit his sketch for the Hungarian Classroom from University of Pittsburgh, he was working on the Hungarian Pavilion at the Barcelona exhibition. Between 1930 and 1939, as he was working on the Hungarian Classroom in Pittsburgh, he also authored the

²⁴⁰ For Lechner's work, see Perczel, *History of Architecture*, pp. 182-184.

²⁴¹ Two years later, Györgyi was offered a position at the National School of Fine Arts, where he continued teaching until 1923. In 1912, together with a group of leading Hungarian artists, he became involved in the Socialist movement. His ideological leanings were not unusual for a Secession/Art Nouveau artist, given that movement's attempt to transpose into art the revolutionary ideals socialism had brought to politics. Like many European artists of that period, Györgyi was also concerned with theoretical issues, as well as with the social impact of his art, as well illustrated in his *Szociális kultúra – építészet – művésznevelés* [Social culture, architecture, art Movement] published in Budapest in 1919. But during the Bolshevik revolution of Béla Kún, Györgyi distanced himself from the politics of the day and even chose to leave Budapest for the region of the Balaton Lake, where he remained for several years. While in the area, he authored some of his most important projects, including the Balaton Museum (Art and History Museum) in Keszthely, the Vidék Castle and the Yachting Club House in Balatonalmádi. For a complete list of his early projects, Kubinszky, *Györgyi Dénes*, pp. 29-30.

²⁴² Kubinszky, *Györgyi Dénes*, p. 7.

²⁴³ During that same period, Dénes Györgyi became professor at the Industrial Art School in Budapest and member of practically every art and architecture society and association in Hungary.

building of the Hungarian embassy in Amsterdam (1934), as well as the Hungarian pavilions at the Brussels (1935) and Paris international exhibitions (1937).²⁴⁴

Györgyi's international reputation, and especially his work in Philadelphia, greatly impressed the members of the Hungarian Room committee. Unlike his rival, Györgyi offered an impressive portfolio including several designs for schools and public museums in Hungary, as well as experience with the use of architecture for the representation of his nation at prestigious international exhibitions.²⁴⁵ Equally important seems to have been Györgyi's style combining severe functionalism with a Romantic nostalgia for traditional art, which he considered to be preserved in its purest form among Hungarians in Transylvania.²⁴⁶ In his own words, his project for the Hungarian Classroom in

²⁴⁴ Kubinszky, *Györgyi Dénes*, p. 5.

²⁴⁵ Between 1911 and 1913, Dénes Györgyi designed five elementary schools in different Hungarian small towns. He also authored the buildings for the Museum of Agriculture (1912) and for the Museum of Folk Culture (1923), both in Budapest, as well as for the Déri Museum in Debrecen (1923-1929). See Kubinszky, *Györgyi Dénes*, p. 19.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁴⁶ Secession influences from the English/Scottish architecture of Baillie Scott, Voysey and Macintosh are most evident in his Košice and Debrecen houses and villas. Györgyi was also influenced, although to a lesser extent, by the Finnish architects Saarinen and Gallen Kallela, as well as by such Wiener Werkbund artists as Josef Hoffmann and Josef Maria Olbrich. He had a genuine interest in Gothic art and in the Gothic Revival, a penchant that went hand in hand with Secession influences and the Romantic preference for the preservation of traditions. His project most influenced by Gothic models is the City Hall in Gyöngyös which shows many similarities with the Vajdahunyad Castle in Budapest, itself a masterpiece of Gothic Revival. Finally, Györgyi's interest in Hungarian folk art and plea for a return to traditions, as the only solution for creating an original and valuable form of national art, first became apparent in his early blueprints for Debrecen buildings, such as the Gyarmaty house (1911), as

Pittsburgh was supposed “to follow clearly the Magyar folk ornament, the character of which lies in the fact that in the main it is quite simple, yet in certain places it is highly ornamental.”²⁴⁷ Indeed, the “simplicity of the wall material,” which so much impressed Chancellor Bowman, was achieved by covering the Hungarian Classroom’s walls on three sides with an oak-veneer stained in a warm tobacco brown (Fig. 8). The panels were carefully selected and arranged to match each other in order for the natural grains to form symmetrical and fluid patterns. The natural light coming into the room through the southeastern windows enhances that effect. Györgyi had already tried out this type of wall decoration, albeit with thinner wooden panels, in his interior decoration for the Museum of Agriculture in Budapest (1912). In 1926, he used the same type of paneled walls for one of the earliest apartment buildings in Budapest furnished in the Art Déco style.²⁴⁸

well as in his early designs of elementary schools. During World War I, Györgyi’s work was marked by a peculiar form of eclecticism, most evident in his projects of Budapest buildings and in the decoration for the 1916 coronation. Beginning with the 1920s, however, he returned to more classical forms, illustrated in the Hungarian Pavilion in Barcelona, but his art remained firmly attached to traditional (folk), classical, medieval (Gothic) and Art Deco architecture. During the 1930s, he worked on apartment buildings projects, in which the functionalist component of his eclectic style is most pervasive. See Kubinszky, *Györgyi Dénes*, pp. 30-32.

²⁴⁷ Mitchell, *Hungarian Classroom*, p. 6. See also Kubinszky, *Györgyi Dénes*, p. 21, who comments upon the classical style most evident in the first sketch for the room.

²⁴⁸ The apartment building on Honved Street was designed for an electric company and combined a minimalist approach in terms of the general structure of the building with rich, but settled and elegant decorations of the stairs, hallway and elevator. See János Bonta, “Functionalism in Hungarian architecture,” in *East European Modernism. Architecture in Czechoslovakia, Hungary, and Poland Between the Wars, 1919-1939* (New York: Rizzoli, 1996), p. 156.



Figure 8. Hungarian Classroom. View toward the blackboard wall. From Bruhns, *Nationality Rooms*, p. 29.

The simplicity of the wall decoration sharply contrasts with the ornament of the ceiling, the most striking feature of the classroom. The ornament consists of seventy wooden squares suspended from a wooden frame. The squares are painted in paprika-red and decorated with various Hungarian folk motifs in green, white, and turquoise-blue, all painted in Budapest by Antal Diossy.²⁴⁹ According to Györgyi, the source of inspiration for the ceiling ornament was the Hungarian folk art, more exactly the beauty of the Hungarian peasant's "life in the open," which has been "lovingly treasured" in the Hungarian "little white houses, every one of which is adorned with embroidered or carved or painted roses, tulips, carnations, lilies, pomegranates, cornflowers, forget-me-nots, daisies, and lilies of the valley."²⁵⁰ Although it is true that individual floral or bird motifs employed in the ceiling paintings in Pittsburgh appear on various pieces of folk furniture, on pottery, and embroideries, there are no examples of a similar ceiling decoration in any Hungarian peasant house.

The square cut and painted ceiling is nevertheless not a completely original decoration. Similarly decorated ceilings appear in village churches in Transdanubia (western Hungary), with a most striking analogy in that from Szenna (Somogy County), painted between 1785 and 1787 in a decorative style in favor mostly in those regions of Hungary that had embraced the Reformation. While eighteenth-century Catholic churches and houses of the Hungarian nobility were built and decorated in Baroque style, Reformed churches preserved many decorative elements of the late Renaissance repertoire. The Szenna ceiling

²⁴⁹ Antal Diossy also executed the similarly decorated ceiling of the Hungarian Pavilion at the New York World's Fair (1939).

²⁵⁰ Mitchell, *Hungarian Classroom*, p. 7.

painting was executed by peasant artists from the neighboring Baranya County.²⁵¹ The southwestern section of present-day Hungary in which the county is located produced more evidence of folk artistic decoration and craftsmanship than any other region of the country. Hungarian ethnographers treat this region as one of the most traditionalist, in which peasants remained attached to the basically same repertoire of decorative motifs for the last two to three hundred years. Now just a small town in the Baranya County, Komárom, was the most important center of Hungarian folk art prior to World War II. In the 1700s and early 1800s, peasant artists from Komárom traveled across the country taking their art and skill to other villages and worked on the painted interior decoration of many Reformed churches. A close examination of the decoration of two churches located at a considerable distance from each other, namely those in Szenna and Szentes (the latter near the present-day Hungarian–Romanian border; the church was painted in 1761), reveals that the Komárom artists played a fundamental role in the creation of the basic repertoire of the Hungarian “folk art” of the most recent past.²⁵²

²⁵¹ Edit Fél, Tamás Hofer and Klára K. Csilléry, *Ungarische Bauernkunst* (Budapest, Corvina, 1958), p. 44 and pl. 152. For the folk art of the Somogy County, see also Orsolya Kapitány and Judit Imro, *Somogy megye népművészete* (Folk Art from the Somogy County)(Kaposvár: Somogy Megyei Múzeumok Igazgatósága, 2001).

²⁵² It is interesting to note that at first the painted decoration and furniture originating from Komárom was the work of female artists. In the 1700s, the sculpted ornament was primarily the work of male artists, while the Painted furniture and decoration was the done by women. As more and more people throughout Hungary showed preference for painted motifs, male artists gradually took over the trade. By the late eighteenth century or shortly after 1800, painted birds were added to floral elements in imitation of ornamental patterns used in embroidery. See Fél, Hofer, and Csilléry, *Ungarische Bauernkunst*, pp. 29 and 77-78. See also Ilona R. Tombor, *Old Hungarian Painted Woodwork, 15th-19th Centuries* (Budapest: Corvina, 1967).

Between the richly decorated ceiling and the wooden panels on the walls, there is an inscription frieze in both Hungarian and English, with the first two stanzas of the Hungarian national anthem written in 1823 by Ferenc Kölcsey (1790-1838):

Isten áldd meg a magyart,
 Jó kedvvel, bőséggel;
 Nyujts feléje védő kart
 Ha küzd ellenséggel;
 Balsors akit régen tép,
 Hozza reá vig esztendőt!
 Megbühödte már e nép,
 a multat, 's-jövendőt!

Bless the Magyar, O our God,
 Bountifully, gladly!
 Shield with Thy protecting hand
 When his foes smite madly!
 Fate, of old, has rent him sore;
 May it now bring healing!
 By-gone sins are all atoned,
 Ev'n the future sealing.

Given the initial guidelines of the Nationality Rooms program, the presence of this inscription is surprising, if not altogether inappropriate. From its inception, the program has stressed the need for every room to avoid any political statements. No display of values or messages with blatantly political overtones was permitted. There is little doubt that in their choice of the first two stanzas of the national anthem, both the architect and the Hungarian Classroom committee responsible for the final version of decoration disregarded the university guidelines, as this was a direct statement charged with national and political meaning. The national anthem is the product of an historical era dominated by nationalism, a period during which Hungarians were not only defining their own

identity but also actively seeking independence within the borders of the medieval kingdom of St. Stephen.

The entrance door is made out of carved wood, decorated with floral motifs (mainly tulips), pomegranate leaves, daisies and sheaves of wheat placed on alternate panels. On the central panel one could read on two separate lines “Magyarország/19 Hungary 38,” an indication that the door was made in Hungary in 1938. In reality, in order to ensure the authenticity of the door carvings, plasters were made in Budapest after the architect’s designs and then shipped to the United States where carvers used them as guidelines.²⁵³ The carved door, the painted ceiling, and the simply paneled walls create a contrast that is quite typical of Hungarian folk art with its emphasis on rich decoration of otherwise simple structures.

The student chairs are made of oak. They follow a simple design with only limited decoration of tulips and other floral motifs on the backs. In contrast with most other decorative elements in the room, the professor’s desk has straight, severe lines reminding one of the Arts and Crafts Movement. Another conspicuously modern element is the five-seat bench running along the back wall of the classroom. It is completely devoid of decoration, with the exception of the blue-leather seats. Again, the design is simple, geometrical, of clear Art Déco inspiration.

There are notable differences between Györgyi’s original blueprint and the final product. The initial design had a painted panel with historical personalities on the back wall of the classroom. The panel depicted five figures: Arpad, St. Stephen, Ladislas I, Simon de Kéza, and Matthias Corvinus. The walls

²⁵³ Mitchell, *Hungarian Classroom*, p. 9.

were also adorned with coats of arms of the most important Hungarian cities.²⁵⁴ None of these decorative elements appear in the classroom today. On the other hand, the furniture designed by Györgyi included a seminar table and student chairs, all in Art Deco style combining severity and purity of straight lines with the natural and organic curves. This blueprint resembles the furniture designed by Györgyi for the Museum of Agriculture in Budapest.²⁵⁵ In the end, his choice seems to have been abandoned in favor of individual student chairs. However, the build-in bench was part of the original blueprint, which was a combination of modern and more traditional, historical and folk elements. The final product, no doubt the result of choices made by the Hungarian Classroom committee, retained all folk elements, added new ones, and eliminated some of the historical references.

Along the corridor wall there is a cabinet placed on a “tulip chest” extending from the door to the front wall. The cabinet was built into the wall in order to maximize the use of space. The chest is decorated with carved tulips and two medallions with stylized carved birds and tulips, with good analogies in the ornamental repertoire of dowry chests in use in Hungarian villages, which have either painted or carved tulips. The cabinet that rests on the chest is composed of four parts. The central two parts have glass doors and serve for display, while the sides have doors of oak veneer, lined with panels painted in the same style as the ceiling. The painted wooden doors of the cabinet could be opened and closed as desired. Both cabinet and chest were part of Györgyi’s original design, although

²⁵⁴ The drawing clearly shows the coat of arms of Bratislava (Pozsony), a city that at that time was not any more within Hungarian borders. See Kubinszky, *Györgyi Dénes*, fig. 31.

²⁵⁵ Kubinszky, *Györgyi Dénes*, fig. 21.

the blueprint provided for a four-part cabinet with only glass doors. In the original blueprint, the chest extended into the room to support a bust-statue of Saint Ladislav (king of Hungary between 1077 and 1095, canonized in 1192).²⁵⁶ Together with St. Stephen and his son St. Emeric, Ladislav is a member of the Hungarian triumvirate of royal saints. It remains unclear why Györgyi's initial idea of having a copy of a reliquary displayed in the room was eventually abandoned, but the decision may have had something to do with concerns about Ladislav being perceived as a divine intercessor more than a national hero.

A different kind of relics is on display in the two parts of the cabinet that are closed with glass doors: Herendi and Zsolnai porcelains; two Hungarian dolls dressed in folk costume; lace work and embroideries. Placed on a velvet cushion is a glass replica of the crown of St. Stephen. Glass replicas of the royal crown were produced and sold as souvenirs on the occasion of Charles IV's 1916 coronation. They usually contained samples of soil from all parts of the

²⁵⁶ The statue is a copy of the head reliquary of Saint Ladislav, originally in the cathedral chapter in Oradea (Romania), now in the Cathedral treasury in Győr. Ladislav was a member of a collateral branch of Arpadian family, who had taken the throne by force from his rival Salomon. When the native dynasty died out in Croatia, he occupied and annexed that country by force. Following his canonization, his life became the subject of an important body of legends, which ultimately transformed the eleventh-century king who had died before the Crusades into the epitome of crusading ideals. As such, the figure of St. Ladislav appears frequently in both Hungarian and Croatian medieval art. See Kornél Szovák, "The Image of the Ideal King in Twelfth-Century Hungary (Remarks on the Legend of St. Ladislav)," in *Kings and Kingship in Medieval Europe*, ed. by Anne J. Duggan (London: King's College Centre for Late Antique and Medieval Studies, 1993), pp. 241-264; László Veszprémy, "Dux et praeceptor Hierosolimitanorum. König Ladislaus (László) von Ungarn als imaginärer Kreuzritter," in *"...The Man of Many Devices, Who Wandered Full Many Ways..." Festschrift in Honor of Janos M. Bak*, ed. by Balázs Nagy and Marcell Sebök (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999), pp. 470-477.

Hungarian kingdom.²⁵⁷ One such souvenir was presented to Chancellor Bowman by Joseph Urban, secretary of the Hungarian Committee, at the opening ceremony. Given the powerful symbolism of the true crown,²⁵⁸ its glass replica encapsulates the political message of the entire Hungarian Classroom. It may have well been an addition not entirely according to Györgyi's plan, but it surely represents now a focal point for the modified version of his initial design.

The blackboard on the front wall is completely exposed. The only decoration on this wall is the carved coat of arms of the University of Buda (founded in 1388), surmounted by the crown of St. Stephen and framed by stylized tulips and flowers. The association of the university coat of arms and of the crown is no accident: the university was a royal foundation, albeit not of a heir of Arpad's house, but of Sigismund of Luxemburg (1387-1437).

Initially the bay windows were made out of simple glass with velvet draperies and embroidered net curtains. The needlework was done in Budapest, in the establishment of Erzsebet Bodrog. Decorated with butterflies, hummingbirds, and carnations, the curtains imitate the ornamental patterns of the eighteenth-century gowns of Empress Maria Theresa. At a later time, the simple windows adorned with rich embroidered curtains were replaced with stained-glass windows, showing scenes from some of the Hungarian history's most famous pages. By means of stained glass, the Hungarian Classroom eventually incorporated some of the historical themes in Dénes Györgyi's original design. The rear window shows King Nimrod and his sons, Hunor and Magor, who,

²⁵⁷ See Mitchell, *Hungarian Classroom*, p. 10.

²⁵⁸ For the Crown of St. Stephen, see József Deér, *Die Heilige Krone Ungarns* (Graz/Vienna/Cologne: Böhlau, 1966); Endre Tóth, *Die heilige Krone von Ungarn: Könige und Krönungen* (Budapest: Ungarisches Nationalmuseum, 1996).

according to the legend of *The Miraculous Stag*, pursued a white stag from the east all the way to the Danube Plain.²⁵⁹ The left window depicts St. Stephen, King of Hungary and his son, St. Emeric; the heads of both are inscribed within the petals of two flowers. The first middle bay window depicts another Hungarian king, Matthias Corvinus, within a tulip-like flower, while the second has the portrait of an unnamed *kurut* rebel of the late seventeenth-century. Finally, the right bay window depicts three cultural personalities of the nineteenth century, the composer Franz Liszt, the poet Sándor Petöfi, and the painter Mihály Munkácsy, the portraits of whom are again inscribed in the petals of flowers. It is important

²⁵⁹ According to the story, first recorded, if not concocted, by the thirteenth-century chronicler Simon de Kéza, the Biblical hunter Nimrod had two sons, Hunor and Magor. One evening, a miraculous, white stag appeared on the edge of the forest. Hunor and Magor rode off to capture the stag. When they returned the brothers told of a rich and fertile land by a blue lake where the white stag had disappeared. One day, Hunor and Magor saw the white stag again and tried to capture it. This time the stag took them to a cluster of white birches, and then disappeared. Within the circle of white birches the brothers saw some beautiful maidens dancing in the moonlight with the daughters of King Dul. Hunor and Magor lifted the daughters of the king onto their horses and galloped off with them. The beautiful girls became the brides of Hunor and Magor, the leaders of the tribe after the death of Nimrod. Hunor left the land of the rising sun to seek new lands to the West. His descendants were known as Huns and reached great power under their leader Attila. When in the end Attila suffered defeat, the survivors decided to seek a permanent home. Again the white stag appeared. The Huns followed him across a great range of mountains, through a blizzard, into a great sweeping valley, a land rich in game and green pastures. There they settled between two rivers. Some centuries later the descendants of Magor, led by Arpad, came from the East and joined the descendants of Hunor. They established themselves on the plains of the Danube River. They called their country Hungary and their language Magyar. See E. Maxine Bruhns, *The Nationality Rooms, University of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994), p. 28; Mitchell, *Hungarian Classroom*, pp. 4-5. For the role of this story in the narrative strategies employed by the medieval chroniclers of Hungarian history, see László Veszprémy, "Historical past and political present in the Latin chronicles of Hungary (12th-13th centuries)," in *The Medieval Chronicle. Proceedings of the 1st International Conference on the Medieval Chronicle. Driebergen/Utrecht 13-16 July 1996*, ed. by Erik Kooper (Amsterdam/Atlanta: Rodopi, 1999), pp. 260-268.

to note that nineteenth-century cultural personalities were among the choices made by early twentieth-century Hungarians and Hungarian Americans. In the eyes of the Hungarian political elites of the 1930s, the 1848 generation, members of which all three personalities had been, had fought not just for independence from Austria and for democratic government, but also for the integrity of the Greater Hungary.

The stained-glass windows function as a picture gallery *sui generis*. It shows a cursory interpretation of Hungarian history, from its mythical founding heroes to the Christian kings. In doing so, the iconographic program of the Hungarian Classroom stained-glass windows perpetuates an old idea originating in medieval chroniclers but reformulated at the dawn of the modern era by Ferenc Nádasdy's *Mausoleum*.²⁶⁰ Nádasdy has repeatedly compared Arpad to Joshua: just as Joshua has led the Hebrews into the Promised Land, so did Arpad take his Hungarians to Hungary.²⁶¹ The comparison extended well into the conquest period, for which the most appropriate parallel was drawn from the Book of Exodus. "The Hungarian nation is just as much a chosen people of the Christian era as were the Jews in the Old Testament," wrote László Szörényi in his introduction to Miklós Zrinyi's *Fall of Sziget*.²⁶² In his work, Count Zrinyi (1620-

²⁶⁰ A work initially published in Latin 1664, the *Mausoleum* was first translated into Hungarian in 1773 and played an enormous role in shaping the historical consciousness of several generations of Hungarian political leaders and cultural personalities of the nineteenth century. See Katalin Sinkó, "The Modern Nations and Their Images of the Past: the Reception of the First Millennium in Nineteenth- and Twentieth-Century Hungary," in *Europe's Centre Around A.D. 1000*, ed. by Alfried Wiczorek and Hans-Martin Hinz (Stuttgart: Theiss, 2000), p. 6.

²⁶¹ Sinkó, "The Modern Nations," p. 6.

²⁶² Cited by Sinkó, "The Modern Nations," p. 6. See also Miklós Zrinyi, *Der Fall von Sziget. Obsidio Sigetiana* (Budapest: Officina, 1944).

1644) had also enunciated the idea that the kingdom of Hungary, as well as the history of the Hungarian kingdom, was the fulfillment of the divine plan for this world. In Late Antiquity, the Huns had been the scourge of God for the sinners of the world, while during the Christian era Hungarians played the role of missionaries and defenders of Christianity.²⁶³ Such ideas, extremely popular in the nineteenth century, were placed at the foundation of national(ist) history. The transformation of the Middle Ages into a usable form of the past is most evident in the iconographic program of Hungarian Classroom windows. An equally potent symbol, repeated in the interior decoration of the room, is the crown of St. Stephen. King Stephen, ever since his canonization of 1083, has been viewed in Hungarian historiography as the most important hero of *holy* origins. Beginning with his reign, conveniently associated with the year 1000 (the only date marked on the stained-glass windows in Pittsburgh), Hungary became a Christian kingdom. At the same time, his crown became the symbol of the country and of the (aristocratic) nation.²⁶⁴ It is important to note at this point that not all those who were involved in the Hungarian Classroom project were of Reformed background. Indeed, how acceptable to all Hungarians could be this symbol of an “angelic crown”, and the cult of *Saint* Stephen? There is no doubt that the cult never fully integrated all those living in Hungary, regardless of the form of

²⁶³ The idea that Hungary was at the “gate of Christendom” goes back to attempts of the thirteenth-century kings of Hungary to establish a prominent position in their confrontation with the papacy. By 1800, that idea had been turned into a myth of national history. See Nora Berend, “Hungary, ‘the Gate of Christendom’,” in *Medieval Frontiers: Concepts and Practices*, ed. by David Abulafia and Nora Berend (Ashgate: Aldershot/Burlington, 2002), pp. 195-215.

²⁶⁴ Sinkó, “The Modern Nations,” p. 6. See Tóth, *Die heilige Krone*.

government or the borders of that state in recent history. In his *Admonitiones*, the first piece of medieval legislation in Hungary, King Stephen himself had argued that a country with one single language and one single tradition was weak and fragile.²⁶⁵ Paradoxically, this idea served the nineteenth-century nationalists who claimed that an independent Hungary could only be established within the borders of St. Stephen's kingdom. The cult of St. Stephen was thus cited in political debates as a clear proof of Hungarian "traditions" of tolerating other nationalities, precisely at a time the cult itself was under fierce attack from both Protestant Hungarians and the intelligentsia of those nationalities that were tolerated in its name. How then was it possible for this symbol to remain so powerful throughout the nineteenth and even twentieth century?²⁶⁶ Part of the answer, in my opinion, is that nineteenth-century artistic works greatly contributed to the perpetuation of the powerful imagery associated with those symbols and heroes, as well as with their reinterpretation in relation to the present.²⁶⁷ In Pittsburgh, as well as elsewhere in Hungary, St. Stephen appears in the company of the cultural

²⁶⁵ Jenő Szűcs, "Szent István intelmei: az első magyarországi államelméleti mű (The Admonitions of St. Stephen. The first Hungarian constitutional history)," in *Szent István és kora*, ed. by Ferenc Glatz and József Kardos (Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézet, 1988), pp. 32-53. For Stephen's legislation, see also Gábor Hamza, "Die Gesetzgebung Stephans der Heiligen und Europa," *Ungarn-Jahrbuch* 22 (1995-1996), pp. 27-34.

²⁶⁶ As late as the 1980s, St. Stephen figured prominently in Hungarian pop culture. Judging by the enormous crowds it drew for its audience, the rock opera *István a király* (1984) marked an important re-assertion in a Communist country not just of the powerful symbol of Stephen's conversion to Christianity, but also of the nationalist imagery associated in the more recent past with this historical episode. See Zoltán Falvy, "Stephan der König: eine ungarische Rock-Oper," in *Mittelalter Rezeption III: Mittelalter, Massenmedien, neue Mythen*, ed. by Jürgen Kuhnel et al. (Göppingen: Kümmerle Verlag, 1988), pp. 85-91.

²⁶⁷ Sinkó, "The Modern Nations," p. 8.

personalities of the nineteenth century. By means of art, national history thus takes on an evolutionary turn: from pagan times to Christian kings and nineteenth-century national icons. The driving force behind this historical process is progress, the enrichment of culture and nation.²⁶⁸ A similarly historicist approach may be found in the nineteenth-century frescoes lining the staircase of the Hungarian National Museum and decorating the main hall of the Hungarian Academy of Science.²⁶⁹ What made the old Christian symbols work in the new historical context was precisely the historicist (as opposed to religious) approach. The old cult and symbols were now used for legitimizing a new kind of power. Under this new light, they became part of the public consciousness of the nation.²⁷⁰

What was the image of the national past that Hungarians were trying to convey to the world in the context of the University of Pittsburgh classroom? On one hand, there is a clear emphasis on the “eastern” origin, on mythology and on the Conquest. On the other hand, St. Stephen’s life and work are clearly used as the best illustration of a historical effort to embrace the West. The Hungarians perceived and portrayed themselves at the crossroads, between the East and the West, through ever-changing historical circumstances. It has been argued that it was precisely those myths and historical fictions that prevented generations of Hungarians from accepting the constraints of the latest historical crisis, the existence of a “little Hungarian” state imposed by great-power machinations that culminated in the Trianon Peace treaty. Identifying with *little* Hungary, which in

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Painted by Károly Lotz.

²⁷⁰ Sinkó, “The Modern Nations,” p. 10.

any case was the political reality at the time the Hungarian room was designed and inaugurated, does not seem to have been an option for either the architect who designed the room or the members of the Hungarian Classroom committee. With the exception of folk art elements, all other aspects of the interior decoration of this classroom operate as a permanent reminder of national ideals and goals set up during the struggle for independence against Austria in the 1800s. In that respect, the folk inspiration of the Hungarian Classroom obfuscates a more poignant political message, for which it actually serves as a “cultural cushion.” Györgyi may well have thought of incorporating traditional ornamental motifs, such as tulips, into more modern decorative formulas. In the glass-stained windows, historical portraits are themselves contained within stylized tulips, a reminder to all Hungarians that the true heroes of history were the flowers of the national soil. The painted decoration of the ceiling, the soil in the glass crown, and the iconography of the stained-glass windows participate in creating a subtle, yet very powerful message about the generative powers of Hungarian history.

One of the most interesting aspects of the Hungarian Classroom is the important number of gifts that are now part of the permanent collection of the Nationality Rooms Program. Some of those gifts were received and collected by Charles Kline, Mayor of the City of Pittsburgh, and after his death presented to the Hungarian Committee by the mayor’s wife. Among many decorations and testimonial certificates received by Mayor Kline during his visit to Budapest in the summer of 1929,²⁷¹ there is also an enameled and jeweled watch that had

²⁷¹ In March 1928, the city of Pittsburgh was visited by a delegation of Hungarians remaking in an almost pilgrimage-like manner Lajos Kossuth’s trip across the United States (1851-1852). In response to the hospitality that was shown to them by Charles Kline, the Mayor of Pittsburgh was invited to visit Budapest the following summer. During his visit to Budapest, the Hungarian

presumably belonged to Lajos Kossuth. Among the most valuable treasures, there is an original letter written by Kossuth on September 27, 1851, the day he reached Marseilles on the United States cruiser *Mississippi*, after being released from the house-arrest in Kutahya that had been imposed on him by the Ottoman authorities.²⁷² The letter has been donated to the University by George Zimmerman, the treasurer of the Hungarian Classroom committee. The Kossuth tradition is also associated with two old glass goblets presented as a gift to the committee by Ilona Varady. The goblets are decorated with the inscription “Eljen a Haza” (Long live the country) accompanied by the date 1848. In addition to the already existing relics on display in the cabinet, such original artifacts and historical documents have transformed the Hungarian Classroom into a shrine for Hungarian Americans. Moreover, the university encouraged and supported faculty and student research on topics related to Lajos Kossuth’s visit to the United States. There is no doubt that the fascination with Kossuth’s intriguing personality went beyond the circles of Americans of Hungarian descent.

Despite numerous setbacks during the depression years, the Hungarian Classroom became a reality through the effort of the Hungarian community from United States as well as Hungarians abroad. Two separate committees were organized for the Hungarian Classroom, one in Pittsburgh (1928, reorganized in 1936), the other in Budapest. For eleven years the two committees collaborated and exchanged information regarding the construction of the Hungarian Classroom. Samuel Gomory, the chair of the Pittsburgh committee, made two

municipal authorities presented him with a number of gifts that were later donated by his wife to the Hungarian Classroom. Mitchell, *Hungarian Classroom*, p. 11.

²⁷² Lajos Kossuth’s release from prison was negotiated by the United States government. Mitchell, *Hungarian Classroom*, p. 12.

trips to Budapest, five other members of the Pittsburgh committee spent time in Budapest working with artists, architects and Hungarian officials. Hungarian newspapers gave ample space to the story of the Hungarian Classroom and co-opted the public opinion in supporting this endeavor. In the end, the Hungarian Classroom received the bulk of the financial contributions from the Verhovay Aid Society and the Hungarian Reformed Federation, both national organizations that collected money from Hungarians across the United States.

During the depression years, sub-committees of women were organized in Duquesne, Homestead, Hazelwood, McKeesport, Cheswick, and Allegheny. Those women kept going from house to house to collect money for the Hungarian Classroom Fund. They organized baking sales and various social events to keep the money coming and the community together.²⁷³ Some of the funds came from a number of benefit concerts, such as the 1936 winter concert of the Budapest University Chorus or the 1937 Francis Aranyi violin concert.²⁷⁴

At the time of the classroom's dedication on September 29, 1939, less than a month after beginning of World War II, Horthy had already scored the first success in revising the Trianon Peace Treaty. By allying Hungary with Hitler's Germany and Mussolini's Italy, Horthy received a section of Slovakia in 1938, in the aftermath of the Munich Pact. One year later, in August 1940, the second Vienna Award would give Hungary a substantial part of Transylvania. The reconstruction of Greater Hungary was already on its way.

²⁷³ Mitchell, *Hungarian Classroom*, p. 13.

²⁷⁴ Ibid.

Croats, Serbs, and Slovenes in the Yugoslav Classroom

The Yugoslav Classroom is located on the southern side of the Commons Room, between the English Classroom and the entrance from Fifth Avenue, towards which its windows open. The Yugoslav Classroom was dedicated on March 31, 1939, just ten years after the proclamation of Yugoslavia in 1929. Given the significance of both dates for the understanding of the classroom, it is necessary to begin the analysis with a brief introduction to the history of Yugoslavia.

Before 1929, Yugoslavia and the Yugoslav unity existed as an idea. By 1918, as the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes (as Yugoslavia was called before 1929) appeared on the map of Europe, the Yugoslav idea was almost a century old. It was first formulated in the 1830s by the “Illyrianist awakeners,”²⁷⁵ who were mostly of Croatian origin. The basic rationale behind this idea was the belief that the South Slavs had the same origin, they spoke essentially the same language, therefore they were a single people, or nation. In the context of the nineteenth-century rise of nationalism, the South Slavs (or *Yugo-Slavs*) had a “natural right” to aspire to independence and unity within a state of their own.²⁷⁶

By 1900 Yugoslavism had been embraced by a large number of Serbs,

²⁷⁵ Long before the 1830s, language played a major role in shaping the Illyrianist ideology. For the role of linguistic pursuits in the rise of nationalism among the South Slavs, see Rado L. Lencek, “The Enlightenment’s Interest in Languages and the National Revival of the South Slavs,” *Canadian Review of Studies in Nationalism* 10 (1983), 111-134. Among the cultural personalities whose portraits are on display in the Yugoslav Classroom, there are several names with key contributions to both linguistics and nationalism.

²⁷⁶ Dennison Rusinow, “The Yugoslav Idea Before Yugoslavia,” in *Yugoslavism. Histories of a Failed Idea, 1918-1992*, ed. by Dejan Djokić (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2003), p. 12.

Croatians, and Slovenes. If Serbs may have seen Yugoslavism as the means to achieve the Greater Serbia and a way to protect all the Serbs in a single state, Croatians and Slovenes saw it as a protection against Austrian, Hungarian, and Italian domination.²⁷⁷ The Yugoslav idea did not necessarily originate from the desire to live in a common state, but from the need to provide a common protection for all Southern Slavs against assimilation by Hungarians, Germans, and Turks. In other words, the Yugoslav idea had an important anti-imperial component.²⁷⁸ This may also explain the initial layout of the state. The kingdom of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs established in 1918 recognized and protected the interests of the three constituent nations (Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes), while others (Macedonians, Montenegrins, Albanians, and Hungarians) were relegated to the status of minorities.²⁷⁹ The Yugoslav Classroom closely follows in its design and interior decoration this official ideology recognizing Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes as bearers and promoters of the common national culture and

²⁷⁷ Rusinow distinguishes between two Yugoslavist ideologies. One of them, the so-called “integral Yugoslavism” or “Yugoslavist unitarianism” denies the separate nationhoods of Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs. Instead, it promotes the idea of a Yugoslav nation subdivided in three historical “tribes.” Conversely, the other Yugoslavist ideology maintains the idea of separate nationhoods within a federal, multi-national state. It is this ideology that was eventually responsible for the creation of the Yugoslav state, but throughout the brief history of that state there was permanent tension between the two ideological poles. See Rusinow, “The Yugoslav Idea,” p. 26.

²⁷⁸ Dušan Nečak, “Historical Elements for Understanding the ‘Yugoslav Question’,” in *Yugoslavia. The Former and Future. Reflections by Scholars from the Region*, ed. by Payam Akhavan and Robert Howse (Washington/Geneva: Brookings Institution/United Nations Research Institute for Social Development, 1995), p. 15.

²⁷⁹ Nečak, “Historical elements,” p. 24.

history.

The author of the overall project of the classroom is Vojta Braniš, a sculptor and professor of decorative arts in Zagreb. In 1932, Braniš, a Czech by birth, became the first director of the Industrial Art School in Zagreb.²⁸⁰ He laid out the standards and the curriculum for that important institution of art education. In his eyes, the decorative arts were to play a key role in this new, modern type of school. The Industrial Art School in Zagreb ranked among the most important European centers of education in decorative arts and in 1937 was visited by Le Corbusier.²⁸¹ As a sculptor, Braniš worked in wood, stone, and metal. He traveled throughout the kingdom in search for authentic folk art. He

²⁸⁰ For more details on the Industrial Art School before and after its separation from the Museum of Arts and Crafts, see the brief presentation, year by year, on the website of the School of Decorative Arts and Design in Zagreb (<http://www.skola-primijenjene-umjetnosti.hinet.hr/html/povijest.html>, visit of April 8, 2004).

²⁸¹ As stated in the official catalogue of the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris, Zagreb was viewed as “un véritable foyer d’art décoratif,” and Croats were “les mieux organisés” in Yugoslavia. During their history, the Croats and the Slovenes have been deeply influenced by Western cultural trends, especially those coming from Vienna and from Italy. After 1878, when the Museum of Arts and Crafts was founded, soon followed by the Royal County Craft School established in 1882, Zagreb began competing with London, Vienna, and Paris for a prominent position in the world of arts. It is important to note that almost all the objects on display at the 1925 exhibit in Paris, as well as the overall design of the National Pavilion representing the Kingdom of the Slovenes, Croats, and Serbs, have been made in Zagreb. The initial design submitted by the Belgrade architect Miroslav Krejček was an attempt to bring together motifs from Slovenia, Serbia, and Croatia. The design was rejected by the Paris exhibition committee on grounds of excessive eclecticism. As a consequence, the pavilion eventually designed in Zagreb was criticized in Belgrade as “monotonous and common.” See Željka Čorak, “The 1925 Yugoslav Pavilion in Paris,” *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 17 (1990), 37; Ljiljana Blagojević, *Modernism in Serbia. The Elusive Margins of Belgrade Architecture, 1919-1941* (Cambridge, Mass./London: MIT Press, 2003), p. 92.

was one of the first interior designers in Yugoslavia to apply folk art decorative patterns to modern, industrial design. Outside Zagreb, he was already known for his participation, together with other fellow Zagreb artists, in the 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris.²⁸² Braniš was commissioned to carve the decoration for the main entrance door of the Yugoslav Pavilion, designed by the architect Stjepan Hribar. The door was made out of oak cut in classical lines but covered with a rich decoration of folk inspiration. In a conversation with Ruth Crawford Mitchell, Braniš explained his penchant for folk art as a result of the deep understanding of peasant life and art that he had gained in the course of many trips across Yugoslavia: “I had only to shake my sleeves, and out tumbled hundreds of different motifs.”²⁸³

After being commissioned for the Yugoslav Classroom project, Braniš came twice to Pittsburgh. First, he took the time to survey the site, and to understand the location, the space and the atmosphere of the Cathedral of Learning. His second visit took place while the room was under construction. At that time, Braniš worked in person on some of the carved decorations. While on site, he was also able to make the final decisions in terms of color and finish. As a consequence, the Yugoslav Classroom may appear as unique among all other contemporary rooms. In this case alone, the artist in charge with the interior decoration not only participated in its final execution, but also had the opportunity

²⁸² Ruth Crawford Mitchell, *The Yugoslav Room. The Cathedral of Learning University of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1942), p. 5, attributes to Vojta Braniš “the prize-winning Yugoslav pavilion at the Paris Exposition.” In reality, responsible for the 1925 pavilion was the Zagreb architect Stjepan Hribar (1889-1965), while Braniš only authored the main entrance to the pavilion, for which he did indeed win the Grand Prix. See Čorak “The 1925 Yugoslav Pavilion,” p. 38; Blagojević, *Modernism in Serbia*, p. 92 with fig. 3.10.

²⁸³ Mitchell, *Yugoslav Classroom*, p. 5.

to supervise it, thus preventing alterations of the initial plan by other factors, such as the decisions taken by members of the classroom committee. In reality, as shown below, the decoration of the Yugoslav Classroom is also the result of modifications brought by the classroom committee.

The walls are covered with Slovenian oak²⁸⁴ panels decorated with a rich variety of carved ornaments of folk inspiration (Fig. 9). Prominent among them are stylized hearts arranged in horizontal and vertical patterns, rosettes, and the zigzagging running borders with diamond-shaped motifs. All three elements are relatively common on a vast array of artifacts found in peasant houses in the Balkans, particularly on furniture and kitchen utensils, musical instruments, weapons, and agricultural implements. Equally important is their presence among motifs commonly employed in embroidery and tapestry.²⁸⁵ Moreover, the technique used in the decoration of the panels is notch carving with a penknife, a technique most typical for folk decorative arts. Braniš's idea seems to have been to enhance the dramatic light effect produced by the grain and the color of the wood by means of sharp incisions.

His initial design had a specially carved panel for the corridor wall across from the bay window, decorated with the stylized coat of arms of the Yugoslav

²⁸⁴ Due to the specific ecological niche in which it can be found, the Slovenian oak (*Quercus petraea* L.) grows more slowly and is smaller than any other subspecies of oak, which contributes greatly to its extremely fine grain. See Matijac Cater, *Vpliv svetlove in podtalnice na naravno in sajeno dobovo mladje (Quercus robur L.) v nižinskem delu Slovenije* (The Influence of Light and Humidity in the Growth and Development of the Young Oak in the Slovenian Lowlands)(Ljubljana: Gozdarski Inštitut Slovenije, 2002).

²⁸⁵ See Nikola Pantelić, *Traditional Arts and Crafts in Yugoslavia* (Belgrade: Jugoslovenska Revija, 1984), pp. 86-131 and 158-176.



Figure 9. Yugoslav Classroom. View toward the entrance. From Bruhns, *Nationality Rooms*, p. 57.

kingdom.²⁸⁶ The coat of arms consists of a double-headed eagle²⁸⁷ bearing a shield divided in three parts. On the left side of the shield reserved for the representation of the symbols of Serbia, there is a cross with four letters C (the Cyrillic letter for Latin “s”) between its arms, which stand for “Samo sloga srbina spasava” (“Only unity saves the Serbs”). On the right side of the shield there are twenty-five squares, representing the Croatian counties. On the lower part of the shield appear three stars arranged in an inverted triangle, the traditional coat of arms of the counts of Celje, under whose rule Slovenia was first united during the late Middle Ages. A decorative border of zigzagging geometric design surrounds the coat of arms. On the lower part of the border there is an inscription that reads “Belgrade 1839 – Ljubljana 1596 – Zagreb 1662.” This is a reference to the three major universities functioning at that time in Yugoslavia, with their respective foundation dates. The inscription stays true to the two alphabets in use in Yugoslavia, as the word “Belgrade” is written in Cyrillic, while “Ljubljana” and “Zagreb” are in Latin characters.

Most likely because of his ability to understand the specific location of the room and to control the execution of its interior decoration. Braniš achieved a remarkable harmonization of walls and ceiling decoration. Like the walls, the ceiling is covered with Slovenian oak square panels suspended from a wooden frame. Two basic motifs appear in the decoration of the ceiling, both executed in the notch carving technique used for the wall decoration: the stylized flower inscribed in a circle and the stylized swastika inscribed in a square. The

²⁸⁶ A less stylized version of the Yugoslav coat of arms is carved in stone above the entrance to the room from the Commons Room corridor.

²⁸⁷ The double-headed eagle is a symbol of the division of the Roman Empire into an Eastern Empire centered in Constantinople and the Western Empire centered in Rome.

alternation of these motifs creates a chessboard effect. Suspended each at four points are four wooden chandeliers, each with eight arms that were carved in Zagreb before being shipped to the United States. The chandeliers are an imitation of those in the Royal Palace (*New Konak*) built in Old Belgrade in 1924.

All furniture in the room is made of Slovenian oak decorated with carved motifs of folk inspiration. Special treatment received the professor's and the two guest chairs, which were carved in Zagreb by Braniš's students at the Industrial Art School. Each spindle on the backs of these chairs is carved in a different decorative pattern. By contrast, the student chairs have a much simpler design, and have been executed in Pittsburgh from a model designed by Braniš in Zagreb.²⁸⁸

The decorative elements that anchor the Yugoslav Classroom into history are the portraits of historical and cultural personalities arranged above the wall panels on three walls of the room. The choice of personalities represented is crucial for the interpretation of the alteration of Braniš's intended message (his initial design had no portraits), but also for what both the Yugoslav Classroom committee and the university viewed as important in the heritage of a country that at that time was no more than twenty years old. Displayed in pairs on the front, back and sidewall are six portraits painted in oil on canvas with oak frames. On the front wall, above the blackboard, is Vuk Stefanović Karadžić (1787-1864) next to Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer (1815-1905). A Serb and a Croat, both figures of great significance for Serbian and Croatian nationalism, respectively, were thus selected for the portraits that students in the Pittsburgh classroom would see behind their professors, every time a lecture would be delivered from

²⁸⁸ Mitchell, *Yugoslav Classroom*, p. 6.

the front of the room.

Karadžić's portrait was made by one of the most prolific painters of interwar Yugoslavia, Uroš Predić (1857-1953), who for the most part of his life worked in the Vienna realist style.²⁸⁹ Karadžić is shown in his later years, sporting a formidable white mustache and wearing a fez-like hat together with a black silk tie and a coat of Western cut in a combination most revealing for the blending of old and modern that is so typical for his life and work. Born in Serbia under Turkish rule, Karadžić is known for his reform of the Serbian language. He devoted much of his adult life to a long campaign for replacing what he viewed as the artificial Old Church Slavonic with Serbian inflections favored by the conservative Serbian Orthodox clergy with a literary version of the Štokavian dialect. His translation of the New Testament into that vernacular was published in Vienna in 1847.²⁹⁰ Karadžić's bold move broadened the definition of "Serbdom" to include all those who spoke Štokavian, regardless of their religious affiliation (Orthodox or Catholic). The Štokavian dialect was common to both Serbs and Croats, but to Karadžić the Croats were just Serbs who happened to be Roman-Catholic. A friend of Jacob Grimm, Karadžić thus firmly established the Serbian national ideology on the basis of the Herderian idea that language was the

²⁸⁹ Predić is known for religious paintings, such as the Kosovo Virgin (1917), but also for large paintings in historicist style, such as the "Refugees from Herzegovina," now in the National Museum of Art in Belgrade. Both works have been attributed a strong nationalistic symbolism. For Predić's life and work, see Miodrag Jovanović, *Uroš Predić* (Novi Sad/Sombor: Galerija Matice Srpske/Zlatna grana, 1998).

²⁹⁰ *Novi zavet gospoda našega Isusa Hrista* (Vienna: U Štampariji Jermenskoga manastira, 1847). See also Peter Kuzmić, *Vuk-Daničićevo Sveto pismo i biblijska društva na južnoslavenskom tlu u XIX stoljeću* (The Gospel of Vuk and Dančić and the Biblical Society in the South Slavic lands during the nineteenth century)(Zagreb: Kršćanska sadašnjost, 1983).

quintessence of the national spirit.²⁹¹ Since Croats and Serbs used the same Štokavian dialect, they must have belonged to one and single nation.²⁹²

Strossmayer's portrait was made by a Croatian painter, Zlatko Šulentić (1893-1971). A leading figure of Croatian expressionism,²⁹³ Šulentić depicted Strossmayer not as a Roman-Catholic bishop, but wearing the white-collar dress of a simple priest. The bishop's look is intense, while both the expression on his face and his hair convey an image of energy and determination. Indeed, Strossmayer had been the principal proponent of *jugoslovjenstvo* (Yugoslavism), a version of Illyrianism updated to the needs of the nineteenth century. His program provided for the spiritual unification of the South Slavs based on a common literary language and culture. He believed that the only way to resist anti-Slavic Austro-Hungarian policies was Slavic unity. A citizen of the empire, Strossmayer was in favor of a unified state of all South Slavs within a federalized Habsburg Monarchy. However, he also envisioned a federal South Slavic state to

²⁹¹ For Herder's influence of the rising nationalism of the South Slavs, see Holm Sundhausen, *Der Einfluß der Herderschen Ideen auf die Nationsbildung bei den Völkern der Habsburger Monarchie* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1973). Although not specifically addressing the issue of Karadžić's linguistic reform, Sundhausen's book describes the cultural atmosphere in which the reform was given a political edge. Karadžić's bold attack against the language favored by the Orthodox Church has been rightly compared with the linguistic nationalism epitomized in Greece by Adamantios Korais. See Claudia Hopf, *Sprachnationalismus in Serbien und Griechenland. Theoretische Grundlagen sowie ein Vergleich von Vuk Stefanović Karadžić und Adamantios Korais* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1997).

²⁹² Ivo Banac, *The National Question in Yugoslavia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1984), pp. 80-81. For Karadžić's life and work, see also Duncan Wilson, *The Life and Times of Vuk Stefanović Karadžić, 1787-1864. Literacy, Literature and National Independence in Serbia* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).

²⁹³ See Željko Grum, *Zlatko Šulentić* (Zagreb: Moderna galerija, 1974).

include both Serbia and Montenegro and established on the ruins of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire.²⁹⁴ Despite his attachment to the idea of a Croatian political nation, Strossmayer had a great contribution to the advancement of Yugoslavism as the only means to unite all South Slavs under a common name. He financed and encouraged many cultural institutions, in order to foster local traditions, but at the same time to take Croatia out of its isolation and bring it in line with the modern European culture. In 1866, Strossmayer founded the Yugoslav Academy, the most important institution for the promotion of Yugoslavism. As a Roman-Catholic bishop, he made serious attempts to bridge the religious differences between Serbs and Croats, not least by allowing the use of the Old Church Slavonic liturgy banned by the papacy ever since the late eleventh century.²⁹⁵ Strossmayer's dream of a reconciliation between Rome and the Eastern Church was intimately related to his preoccupation with ending the schism that had so

²⁹⁴ Banac, *National Question*, pp. 89-90. See also Kosta Milutinović, *Štrosmajer i jugoslovensko pitanje* (Strossmayer and the Yugoslav idea)(Novi Sad: Institut za izučavanje istorije Vojvodine, 1976).

²⁹⁵ See William Brooks Tomlianovich, "Bishop Josip Juraj Strossmayer: Nationalism and Modern Catholicism in Croatia," Ph.D. dissertation (Yale University, 1997). For the use of the Old Church Slavonic liturgy and of the Glagolitic alphabet in medieval Croatia, see M. Tadin, "La glagolite (glagolitica) en Istrie, Croatie et Dalmatie depuis ses débuts jusqu'à son apparition, limitée et bien définie par le Saint Siège," in *Kyrillo kai Methodio tomos heortios epi te 1100 heteridi*, ed. by I. E. Anastasios (Thessaloniki: Theologike Schole Aristoteliou Panepistemiou, 1966), pp. 291-329; Benedikto Želić-Bučan, "L'écriture cyrillique croate dans les diocèses méridionaux de la province ecclésiastique de Split jusqu'au bout du XIIe siècle," in *Vita religiosa morale e sociale ed i concili di Split (Spalato) dei secoli X-XI. Atti del symposium internazionale di storia ecclesiastica, Split, 26-30 settembre 1978*, ed. by A. G. Matanić (Padua: Editrice Antenore, 1982), pp. 417-441; Eduard Hercigonja, "Glagolists and Glagolism," in *Croatia in the Early Middle Ages. A Cultural Survey*, ed. by Ivan Supičić (London/Zagreb: Philip Wilson/AGM, 1999), pp. 369-398.

much affected the unity of the Slavs.²⁹⁶

On the entrance wall, across from the bay windows, are two more portraits of Baron Georg von Vega (1765-1802) and of Petar II Petrović Njegoš (1813-1851). Vega's portrait was made by Matej Sternen (1870-1949), one of the greatest Slovenian impressionist painters, more famous for his paintings of women and for Slovenian landscapes than for historical portraits.²⁹⁷ However, much like in his earlier, typically impressionist paintings, Sternen used the spatula for the portrait of Baron von Vega's portrait, shown in his aristocratic attire, wearing his medal of honor and holding a book in his hands. In the upper left corner of the painting, an inscription in Latin gives Vega's name, birth and death dates, and calls him "Slovenus de Carniola, eminens mathematicus."²⁹⁸ Indeed, Vega was born in a peasant family in Carniola and became an officer in the imperial army, taking part in many anti-Ottoman and anti-French campaigns, in which he distinguished himself in the Austrian mortar battery units. Later in his life, he was a professor of mathematics in the Imperial Artillery School in Vienna. He is most famous for his tables of logarithms and trigonometric functions, which he published in 1783.²⁹⁹ There is very little in Vega's life and work that would

²⁹⁶ Banac, *National Question*, p. 90.

²⁹⁷ Jure Mikuz, *Matej Sternen. Retrospektiva razstava. Ljubljana, Moderna galerija 23. December 1976-13. Februar 1977* (Matej Sternen. Restropective exhibit. Ljubljana, the Modern Gallery, December 23, 1976-February 13, 1977)(Ljubljana: Modern galerija, 1976); France Stele, *Slovene Impressionism* (Ljubljana: CoLibri, 1994).

²⁹⁸ For a good color reproduction of the painting, though without any indication of author, see an anonymous short online biography of Vega (at <http://www.h-e.si/est/vega/vega.html>, visit of April 8, 2004).

²⁹⁹ For Vega's life and work, see Sandi Sitar, *Jurij Vega* (Ljubljana: Partizanska knjiga, 1983).

justify placing his portrait among those of famous cultural personalities with a crucial influence on South Slavic nationalisms. Unlike Karadžić, he was not preoccupied with linguistic problems; unlike Strossmayer, he was an officer of the imperial army, not a man of the Church. But his world-famous contribution to mathematics seems to have been sufficient reason for his selection in the gallery of Yugoslav cultural personalities depicted in Pittsburgh.³⁰⁰

The other portrait on the entrance wall depicts Petar II Petrović Njegoš, the Prince-Bishop of Montenegro and one of the greatest Serbian poets. Much like with Karadžić's portrait, Uroš Predić depicted Njegoš in exotic attire combining elements of the traditional Montenegrin male costume with the black tie and the white collar of the Western nineteenth-century fashion. This is in fact a reproduction of a 1851 photograph of Njegoš as Montenegrin mountaineer, with some important changes. In Predić's painting, Njegoš's hand rests not on the hilt, but on a book. Behind him in a painting hanging on a wall astonishingly similar to those of the Yugoslav Classroom itself, the viewer is invited to take a snapshot of Montenegro's hilly countryside. Njegoš is one of the most interesting personalities of Serbian culture. On October 1830, he inherited his uncle's title and became the head of the Montenegrin theocratic state. He began by taking a number of drastic measures meant to modernize the country. During his reign Montenegro received its first representative body, the Senate, with which the prince now shared power. Njegoš dreamed not just of a modern and independent Montenegro, but also of the liberation of all South Slavs from the Ottomans. In 1833, he traveled to Russia to be ordained bishop of Montenegro and tried to gain

³⁰⁰ A similar rationale seems to have been behind the decision by the Slovenian National Bank to put his portrait on the most recent issue of the 50-tolar banknote.

Russian support and protection for his planned anti-Ottoman insurrection and subsequent liberation of all South Slavs.³⁰¹ On his way to Russia, he met in Vienna with Vuk Karadžić. Njegoš showed his work to Karadžić who encouraged him to write even more in the “Serbian-Croatian language.” In the context of the Yugoslav Classroom, it is important to note that in his poetry, as well as in his actions as a statesman, Njegoš was a staunchly anti-Ottoman promoter of Slavic independence.³⁰² Much like Karadžić, but perhaps more importantly, since he was a man of the Church, Njegoš promoted the literary use of the vernacular. Like Strossmayer, he used culture to formulate political statements, first and foremost about the nation and its spirit buried deeply in folk culture. Like both Karadžić and Strossmayer, Njegoš firmly believed that obtaining the independence of his own country was just the first step towards a much greater goal, that of unifying all South Slavs within a single state.

³⁰¹ For Njegoš’s life and work, see Dimitrije Mašanović, *Lovčenski Prometej: ličnost i djelo Petra Petroviča Njegoša* (Prometheus on Mount Loveč: the life and work of Petar Petrović Njegoš)(Belgrade: Zavod za udzbenike i zastavna sredstva, 1991). Njegoš purportedly told at one time to a Serbian diplomat that he liked Russia, but not bearing the price of its aid. In the same breath, he mentioned his wish to visit the United States, and added: “It is proper for free Montenegro to receive aid only from a free country, such as America, seeing that it cannot get along without aid.” See Dusko Doder, *The Yugoslavs* (New York: Random House, 1978), p. 233.

³⁰² To the point that his epic *Gorski vijenac* (The Mountain Wreath), long hailed as the greatest work of South Slavic literature, has been recently reviled as a blueprint for the Serbian ethnic cleansing of the 1990s and banned from school curricula in Bosnia. See Andrew B. Wachtel, “How to Use a Classic: Petar Petrović Njegoš in the Twentieth Century,” in *Ideologies and National Identities. The Case of Twentieth-Century Southeastern Europe*, ed. by John R. Lampe and Mark Mazower (Budapest/New York: Central European University Press, 2004), pp. 133 and 145.

Njegoš's *magnum opus*, *The Mountain Wreath*,³⁰³ was first published in 1847, the same year in which when Karadžić published his translation of the New Testament. The *Mountain Wreath* is considered one of the most important masterpieces of Serbian literature, and recent attempts to claim Njegoš for Montenegrins (as opposed to Serbs) have not removed his work from its prestigious position in the history of South Slavic literature.³⁰⁴ For some Serbs, at least, the work still epitomizes the spirit of the Serbian nation, not least because its introduction includes an invocation of the legendary Serbian hero of the battle of Kosovo (1389), Miloš Obilić. In the late 1940s and early 1950s, Njegoš was frequently referred as Montenegrin, not as Serb, and his rehabilitation in a Communist context involved the replacement of his mausoleum on Mount Lovćen with another designed by the Croatian sculptor Ivan Meštrović, fully endorsed by Montenegrin officials eager to de-Serbianize Njegoš.³⁰⁵ However, at the time his

³⁰³ The *Mountain Wreath* is based on a purportedly historical event, the seventeenth-century extermination of the Muslim converts of Montenegro. The author used the historical event as a pretext to point to his own problems and the problems of his time: the struggle for freedom and the anti-Ottoman campaigns. The turncoats were seen as the enemy within since their allegiance was to a foreign power. Njegoš depicted the conflict as one between good and evil, between Christians and infidels, between oppressed and conquerors. Perhaps more importantly, the *Mountain Wreath* was dedicated to Karađorđe, the leader of the first Serbian uprising against Turkish rule (1804). The epic has been translated into English by Vasa D. Mihailovich (Irvine, CA: Charles Schlacks, 1986; also available online at http://www.rastko.org.yu/knjizevnost/umetnicka/njegos/mountain_wreath.html#foreword visit of April 8, 2004).

³⁰⁴ See Wachtel, "How to Use a Classic," pp. 145-147.

³⁰⁵ The destruction of the old mausoleum to make room for Meštrović's new one did not go without resistance. An entire double issue of the journal *Umetnost* was banned by the Yugoslav officials in 1971 at the height of the controversy surrounding the event. See Wachtel, "How to Use a Classic," pp. 143-144 and 153 with note 26.

portrait was hanging in the Yugoslav Classroom in Pittsburgh, Njegoš was still a Yugoslav (as opposed to either Serb or Montenegrin) writer, if not “secular saint” as well, especially after the 1925 translation of his remains from Cetinje to the first mausoleum on Mount Lovćen.³⁰⁶ The plaque placed on the mausoleum by King Aleksandar himself hailed Njegoš as a Yugoslav national writer, “the immortal apostle and herald of the unity of our people.”³⁰⁷

On the rear wall of the Yugoslav Room there are two more portraits: Rudjer Bošković (1711-1787) and France Ksaver Prešeren (1800-1849). Bošković’s portrait was painted by the Croatian painter Jozo Kljaković (1888-1969), well known for his post-Cubist frescoes above the main and side entrances into the Yugoslav Pavilion at 1925 Exposition Intenationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes in Paris.³⁰⁸ The classicist morphology and the dramatization

³⁰⁶ Before the transfer, the remains of Njegoš were exposed, like those of a true saint, first in front of King Aleksandar and his wife, and then again on Lovćen in the presence of the entire Orthodox church hierarchy. See Wachtel, “How to Use a Classic,” pp. 138-139. For the medieval cult of saints among South Slavs, see Ljubomir Maksimović, “The Christianization of the Serbs and the Croats,” in *The Legacy of Saints Cyril and Methodius to Kiev and Moscow. Proceedings of the International Congress on the Millenium of the Conversion of Rus' to Christianity, Thessaloniki, 26-28 November 1988*, ed. by A. E. Tachiaos (Thessaloniki: Hellenic Association for Slavic Studies, 1992), pp. 167-184. For “secular saints” in late twentieth-century Eastern Europe, see Katherine Verdery, *The Political Lives of Dead Bodies. Reburial and Postsocialist Change* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999).

³⁰⁷ Wachtel, “How to Use a Classic,” p. 139.

³⁰⁸ Čorak, “The 1925 Yugoslav Pavilion,” p. 38. At the time of his contribution to the decoration of the Yugoslav Pavilion, Kljaković was also working on the frescoes at St. Mark’s in Zagreb, one of the city’s major churches built in the Middle Ages. A painter, but also a sculptor, he was a friend of and would work several times together with Ivan Meštrović. For Kljaković’s work, see the Memorial (permanent) Exhibit opened in his honor in Zagreb (<http://www.likovni-centar.hinet.hr/jozo>, visit of April 8, 2004).

of plastic volume that have been the hallmark of Kljaković's art are easy to recognize in Bošković's portrait, which takes almost the entire space of the canvas. At the same time theologian, philosopher, mathematician and astronomer, Bošković is depicted engaged in his writing, with the library shelves behind him. A pioneer in geodesy, his left hand rests on the world globe. A Jesuit, he is depicted in the garb of the Society's members. Bošković was one of the first European scholars to adopt Isaac Newton's theory of gravitation. He published numerous works on optics, gravitation, astronomy, meteorology, and astronomy. He was also a poet and wrote extensively in both Latin and Croatian. In 1764 he became a professor of mathematics at the University of Pavia, serving at the same time as the director of the Brera Observatory. When the Jesuit Order was suppressed in Italy in 1773, Bošković was invited to France to become the director of optics for the marine, a position created for him by Louis XV. Ten years later, Bošković returned to Italy, now a member of the Académie Française and of the Royal Society.³⁰⁹ Although a skillful diplomat on behalf of his native Republic of Ragusa (now Dubrovnik), Bošković can hardly be viewed as a Croatian nationalist. Much like Vega, his selection for the series of cultural personalities to be depicted in the Yugoslav Room must have been based on his extraordinary contributions to various disciplines such as mathematics, astronomy, and optics.

The other portrait on the rear wall, above the wooden cabinet, represents France Ksaver Prešeren, the greatest Slovenian poet. The portrait was made by the Slovenian painter Božidar Jakac (1899-1989) during his sojourn in Pittsburgh.

³⁰⁹ Mitchell, *Yugoslav Classroom*, p. 10; Dusko Doder, *Yugoslavs*, p. 204.

The depression year of 1933 seems to have caught Jakac by surprise, as he was desperately looking for work in order to find the money to return home. His early works are under the strong influence of Evdard Munch, but following his trips to Algeria and the United States, he shifted from mainstream expressionism to what has been aptly called “lyrical realism.”³¹⁰ Prešeren’s portrait is thus very similar to his most-celebrated, 1930 *Washington self-portrait*.³¹¹ Depicted in a most Romantic pose with his early nineteenth-century coat open at the front and his hands behind his back, Jakac’s Prešeren is very different from all other portraits in the room. He was indeed neither a supporter of Karadžić’s ideas, nor a champion of South Slavic unity. As a matter of fact, he belonged to a group of intellectuals who were against the unity of South Slavs. Initiated during the Napoleonic Wars by the poet and linguist Valentin Vodnik (1758-1819), this movement for a separate Slovene linguistic standard culminated in Prešeren’s major works, the *Wreath of Sonnets* and *The Baptism at the Savica*.³¹² A reaction against Croatian Illyrianists and their attempt to impose the Štokavian-based linguistic standard on the Slovenes, the movement formed the basis for Slovene nationalism.³¹³ Although not exactly a figure to be associated with Yugoslavism, Prešeren was first and foremost a poet, namely the national poet of Slovenia, and that alone justified his inclusion in the gallery of portraits in the Yugoslav

³¹⁰ Milcek Komelj, *Mladi Jakac* (The Young Jakac)(Ljubljana: Slovenska matica, 2000), p. 47.

³¹¹ In 1948, Jakac painted a second and much different portrait of Prešeren, now in the Jesenice Museum (see http://www.preseren.net/ang/2-7_upodobitve/30.asp, visit of April 8, 2004).

³¹² Mitchell, *Yugoslav Classroom*, p. 10.

³¹³ Banac, *National Question*, pp. 112-113.

Classroom.³¹⁴

The six portraits were not part of Braniš's initial design. They have been presented at various times by various donors as gifts for the Yugoslav Classroom. The portraits of Strossmayer and Bošković were a gift from Ivan Meštrović, the Croatian sculptor already known in Pittsburgh for his donation to the University of two of his own sculptures, a self-portrait and a bust portrait of Michael Pupin (1854-1935).³¹⁵ Uroš Predić's portraits of Karadžić and Njegoš were gifts to the University from Michael Pupin himself.³¹⁶ Finally, Vega and Prešeren's portraits were gifts from a Ljubljana committee chaired by Archbishop Gregory Rozman and including such members as the Major of Ljubljana and the Rector of the University in that city. Responsible for the specific arrangement of the portraits in

³¹⁴ For Prešeren's cultural and political influence, see the essays collected in *Prešerniana. Atti del convegno internazionale "Dalla lira de France Prešeren. Armonie letterarie e culturali tra Slovenia, Italia ed Europa"*, ed. by Janja Jerkov and Miran Košuta (Rome: Il Calamo, 2003).

³¹⁵ Born in Croatia, Ivan Meštrović (1883-1962) died in South Bend, Indiana. A leading modernist artist, he had embraced the Art Deco style and taken it into a new direction. At the time of his donation to the Yugoslav Classroom, Meštrović was known for his most important work in the United States, *Indian with a Bow*, commissioned in 1926 by the city of Chicago and displayed in the city's Grand Park. The sculpture is a hallmark of Meštrović's style marked by a combination of monumentality and dynamism, as well as by Art Déco stylization and linear quality of the detail. After World War II, the artist returned to the United States and displayed his work in a 1947 exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. He remained in the United States, and taught first at the University of Syracuse and then at the University of Notre Dame. See Branko Stipančić, "Ivan Meštrović's melancholic Art Deco," *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 17 (1990), 55 and 58. For his Pittsburgh sculptures, see Mitchell, *Yugoslav Classroom*, p. 12.

³¹⁶ Born in the Serbian part of the Banat region, Michael Idvorsky Pupin was a professor at Columbia University and a world-famous scientist and inventor, with remarkable contributions in telephony, telegraphy, and radio. Among many distinctions, awards, and medals, Pupin also received the 1924 Pulitzer Prize for his autobiography, *From Immigrant to Inventor*.

the room, as well as for the decision to combine personalities of different origins in pairs on every wall, must have been the members of the Yugoslav Classroom committee.

In addition to the six portraits, the classroom has a few more works of art on display. In the bay window, there is an original bronze sculpture by Vojta Braniš, entitled *Post-War Motherhood* (Fig. 10). It depicts a barefooted mother nursing her child. This characteristically Art Deco piece of art is echoed by another decorative element of the classroom, a lace portrait of the Madonna of Brezje in a silver frame placed in a glass showcase on the rear wall, between and below the portraits of Bošković and Prešeren. The lace was made in Yugoslavia by two female artists, Leopoldina Pelhan and Mila Božičkova, who worked for six months to complete the project. Slovenian female artists were well known for their fine lacework, but the Pittsburgh Madonna is more than just an example of their extraordinary skills and craft.

In 1935, the Roman-Catholic archbishop of Slovenia, Gregory Rozman, visited Pittsburgh. He was very impressed with the efforts Slovenian women from the Pittsburgh community made to keep alive the national tradition of lace making. The archbishop promised that on his return to Slovenia he would send to Pittsburgh one of the finest pieces of handwork made by Slovenian women. Back in Ljubljana, he discussed the donation for the Yugoslav Classroom with B. A. Račić, at that time director of the State School for Encouraging Home Industries. Together, they decided to send the Madonna of Brezje, one of the most precious images of the Holy Virgin in Slovenia. The donation to the Yugoslav Classroom is associated with an episode from the First World War recorded in the history of the State School for Encouraging Home Industries. As during the war many who



Figure 10. Yugoslav Classroom. Vojta Braniš, *Post-War Motherhood*. From Bruhns, *Nationality Rooms*, p. 18.

had taught at the school were away from Ljubljana in a refugee camp, they spent most of their time making a lace reproduction of the portrait of the Madonna of Sveta Gora, near Gorica. When the war had broken, the original portrait had been taken to a safe place and the newly made lace Madonna was meant to replace the original for the duration of the conflict.³¹⁷ The lace Madonna with Child and Braniš's bronze statue of a mother nursing her child, are powerful links between the overall meaning of the Yugoslav room and the experience of the war for the people who came to constitute Yugoslavia at the end of that conflict. Like the St. Ladislav statue initially intended for the Hungarian Classroom, they function as focal points for the entire room. Unlike the Hungarian Classroom, they point to suffering and endurance as determining factors in the imaginary construction of the nation. Both the choice of these two works of art and the arrangement of portraits in the room thus point to the key role the classroom committee played in turning Braniš's carefully crafted interior decoration statement into a powerful political message.

The Yugoslav Classroom committee was first organized in 1926 under the leadership of Anton Gazdić and then reorganized in 1933 with Steve Babić as chair. It was one of the largest nationality committees in Pittsburgh. The three ethnic groups--Slovenian, Croatian and Serb—had six representatives each. The Yugoslav Women's League, serving as an auxiliary of the committee, organized many of the benefit entertainment events that brought the community together and provided money for the Yugoslav Classroom Fund. All the proceeds from the Serbian Day at Kennywood Park were donated for sixteen successive years to that

³¹⁷ Mitchell, *Yugoslav Classroom*, p. 13.

fund.³¹⁸ At a relatively early stage, the committee sought financial support from the Yugoslav government and in 1929 they addressed a formal petition for assistance to the Yugoslav Ministry of Education. As a consequence of that course of action, Bozo Maksimović, then Minister of Education, recommended that the project be granted 300,000 dinars (at that time, the amount was equal to some 5,000 dollars). Maksimović explained his recommendation to the Yugoslav officials: “Only in such a way will our state be in a position to prove our national progress, with which not only the American public will become acquainted, but also about one hundred thousand of our emigrants who are living in the vicinity of Pittsburgh.”³¹⁹ In a subsequent note to the Yugoslav Classroom committee sent with the corresponding check, Maksimović explained one more time the rationale of his gesture:

The Ministry of Education is pleased that you have communicated with this Ministry, so that Yugoslavia may extend its help to you. As we highly appreciate the undertakings of your Committee, and as we highly esteem the great significance of the Cathedral of Learning, our State is delighted to approve the petition of your Committee. Our help should not be considered merely as a fulfillment of a duty: we hope that it will be accepted by your Committee as an expression of the love which our State always feels towards its nationals in foreign countries, and we hope that you will not measure it by the amount given, but by the good will and promptness with which it is given.³²⁰

It is important to note that at the time the Yugoslav Classroom project was brought to the attention of the Belgrade politicians, Yugoslavia was experiencing

³¹⁸ Mitchell, *Yugoslav Classroom*, p. 15.

³¹⁹ Mitchell, *Yugoslav Classroom*, p. 12.

³²⁰ Ibid.

increased problems and ethnic conflicts. Defining the Yugoslav nation and preserving the newly formed Yugoslav state were top priorities on King Aleksandar's agenda not just abroad, but especially at home. Ever since 1918, the new state had been unable to achieve a balance and complete cooperation of the recognized nationalities. Following the 1919 elections, Croats boycotted the *Ustavotvornu Skupštinu* on the grounds that they favored the Serbs and eliminated any notion of federalism. The 1921 Constitution did not contribute much to easing tensions between Serbs on one side and the Croats and Slovenes on the other. The "Vidovdan Constitution" (so called because it was enacted on the day of St. Vitus's festival in the Serbian Orthodox calendar, which was also the Serbian national day)³²¹ was viewed as serving a territorially much increased Serbia at the expense of the other nationalities represented in the kingdom. The feeling was that the state was multinational only in its triple name, a minor concession to non-Serbs. Beginning with the 1920s, leading Croatian intellectuals and politicians who had supported the idea of a South Slav unity in the early 1900s were now demanding a Croatian national independence or, at least, autonomy.

The ethnic conflict escalated and culminated in King Aleksandar's decision to dissolve the Parliament and the constitution and to impose an authoritarian regime. This was the moment at which the country changed its name from the Kingdom of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes into Yugoslavia. Through this act, the king and his government wanted to declare their intention of integrating

³²¹ June 28 was also the day of the Kosovo battle of 1389 and of the 1914 assassination of the Habsburg Archduke Ferdinand. Both dates were charged with historical and political symbolism that seems to have been a major obstacle in the acceptance of the 1921 Constitution. See Agneza Bozic-Roberson, "The Politicization of Ethnicity as a Prelude to Ethnopolitical Conflict: Croatia and Serbia in Former Yugoslavia," Ph. D. dissertation (Western Michigan University, 2001), pp. 105-106.

Serbian, Slovenian, and Croatian identities, until then separated, into one, single Yugoslav identity. Yugoslavism was now not a political solution against external pressure to assimilate, but the name for an authoritarian regime's policy of internal assimilation.

There is therefore little surprise that when the Pittsburgh committee addressed in 1929 the government officials in Belgrade, asking for their support for the *Yugoslav* Classroom, the response was immediate and substantial. The Yugoslav Classroom thus became a battleground for different interpretations of the Yugoslavist project and a stage for the promotion and redefinition of national values and traditions associated with every one of the three recognized nationalities. Although Croats often expressed frustration with the degree of political representation in the kingdom, they clearly dominated the kingdom's cultural life. This has clearly been the case of the 1925 Yugoslav Pavilion in Paris (1925), essentially the product of the work of leading Croatian artists, who promoted their own national traditions, not the political agenda of the government. This was also true for the interior decoration of the Yugoslav Classroom, as the design of the room and much of the wood-carving work have been done by Croatian artists, either in Zagreb or in the United States. Apparently, the overall message of the classroom was still that of the Kingdom of the Serbs, the Croats, and the Slovenes. At a closer analysis, the cracks in the national edifice were already visible. Nevertheless, and despite troubles in Yugoslavia, the Yugoslav Classroom committee made serious and genuine efforts to achieve equal representation of Serbs, Croats, and Slovenes: the six portraits of cultural personalities can easily be divided into three equal groups. The Yugoslav Classroom was in fact the ideal projection of a South Slav community, for which

there was no corresponding reality at that time. Given the more recent events that led to the disintegration of Yugoslavia in the 1990s, it is hard to escape the strong feeling that the Yugoslav Classroom stands for a failed political and national experiment. There is no room in the Yugoslav Classroom for the representation of the muted voices of interwar Yugoslavia, those of Bosnians, Macedonians, or Hungarians. The Pittsburgh Yugoslavia is essentially Christian, Catholic and Orthodox, with nothing to remind one, as had been the case at the Paris Exposition of 1925, of Muslims in Sarajevo.³²² All donations of books the Yugoslav Classroom received and which are now in wooden cabinets at the back of the room are in either Latin or Cyrillic alphabet and concern only the three recognized nationalities of Yugoslavia. In that sense, the Yugoslav Classroom project was therefore reductionist, as it strove to create the image of a three-tier nation out of a much more complex ethnic and cultural configuration. In her conclusion to the presentation of the Yugoslav Classroom, Ruth Crawford Mitchell wrote in a cogitative note that “men and women are happy when given an opportunity to share with others those ideals which they cherish. This satisfaction is heightened when the effort takes on a relative degree of permanency in a transitory world.”³²³ In the Yugoslav Classroom, the preoccupation with expressing the ideals of Yugoslavism eventually led to a most curious phenomenon. Unlike other rooms (with the probably exception of the Czechoslovak Classroom), the Yugoslav Classroom is no more a focal point for

³²² The Yugoslav Pavilion for the 1925 Exposition included a “modernized Bosnian room” designed by the Serbian architects Helen Baldesar and Dušan Smiljanić, as well as a “national shop” located at the Esplanade des Invalides, in which “pure Turkish coffee was served from copper pots from Sarajevo.” See Blagojević, *Modernism in Serbia*, pp. 92-94 with figs. 3.11 and 3.12.

³²³ Mitchell, *Yugoslav Classroom*, p. 15.

any one of the nationality groups supposedly represented there. A receptacle of Yugoslavist ideology, this can be no shrine for American Serbs, Croats, or Slovenes. The fruit of many political and cultural hopes, the Yugoslav Classroom appears to its early twenty-first century visitor as an empty shell. More than any other rooms in the Cathedral of Learning, it has become a museum. To bring back the original ideals that have animated its creators, and to dust off the historical oblivion that has darkened the grain of its interior decoration, one needs the expertise of a museum curator and the imagination of an historian capable of refilling the shell with long-lost meaning.

Czechs and Slovaks in the Czechoslovak Classroom

The Czechoslovak Classroom was dedicated on March 7, 1939 on the eighty-ninth anniversary of the first president and founder of the country, Thomas Masaryk. The auspices of this inauguration were not very good and the gloomy news from overseas required a special rhetorical effort to cheer up the audience. The task of doing just that fell on Jan Masaryk, the son of the former president, and he spared no reference to events taken place at that time in his occupied country as well as in Europe in general:

May I say, thank you, that you have given this safe corner to the memory of the first President of Czechoslovakia, that the principles he lived for are safe in your gentle, firm hands. How proud I was to walk into this Cathedral of Learning where I have seen rooms belonging to many nations and where I saw proud American children of parentage of these countries, imbibing the free unbiased truth of learning. I'm going to pray to God tonight that Europe some day will be like that—that we shall be men and women of this or that nationality or parentage or race or creed, but working together for the common good of ourselves and those who come

after us.³²⁴

Jan Masaryk's words carried a message of hope, quite appropriate for the occasion. Six months prior to the dedication of the Czechoslovak Classroom, Hitler, Chamberlain, Daladier, and Mussolini had decided at Munich the fate of Czechoslovakia. Since October 1938, the country had been occupied by German troops. On the day of the inauguration, therefore, the Czechoslovak Republic must have been in the fresh memories of anyone reading the newspapers, for the simple fact that, for all practical purposes, it had ceased to exist.³²⁵ However, the symbolism of the inauguration could have hardly escaped to anyone of those attending the event. In Pittsburgh, the American city in which representatives of the Czech and Slovak communities had come together to lay the foundations of the new state, the image of Czechoslovakia as envisioned by its founder, Thomas Masarick, was much more than headline news.

Located on the northern corridor of the Commons Room, the Czechoslovak Room opens its windows toward Forbes Avenue. By the time he was commissioned to design the interior decoration of the room, Bohumil Sláma (1887-1961) had already gained reputation in his country for several government

³²⁴ Ruth Crawford Mitchell, *The Czechoslovak Classroom in the Cathedral of Learning* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1940), p. 5.

³²⁵ A week later, the Czech region of the former republic became the (German) Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia, while a separate republic was proclaimed in Slovakia under the government of Jozef Tiso. See Pavel Maršálek, *Protektorát Čechy a Moravy. Státoprávní a politické aspekty nacistického okupačního režimu v českých zemích, 1939-1945* (The Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia. Legal and Political Aspects of the Nazi Occupation Regime in the Czech lands, 1939-1945) (Prague: Karolinum, 2002).

schools.³²⁶ The choice for Sláma was made by a “cooperating committee” (*Zahraniční Ustav* or *Committee for Czechoslovak Colonists Abroad*) organized in Prague immediately after the Pittsburgh committee, organized in 1927, had approached the Czechoslovak government with demands of assistance. The members of the “cooperative committee” were prominent men and women from Prague and Bratislava.³²⁷ Members of both committees traveled back and forth between Prague and Pittsburgh to inspect the site and ensure the continuous support of Czechoslovak officials.

The Czechoslovak Classroom combines architectural elements inspired by the Slovak farmhouse with elements of country church design (Fig. 11). The wooden ceiling is a replica of a typically Slovak farmer house ceiling. It is made of a combination of flat overlapping boards placed between heavy beams. The ceiling and the cabinets are made of Slovak larch wood varnished with linseed oil to bring out the rosy hue most typical for the grain of this species.³²⁸ The ceiling is decorated with flowers painted accurately in a naturalistic style, with great attention to detail. The heavy beam chamfers are also painted in red, green and white. The decoration of the ceiling is the work of Karel Svolinský (1896-1986)³²⁹

³²⁶ In the early 1930s, Sláma also designed the Radio Palace in Prague, as well as the post office building in Kladno.

³²⁷ The cooperating Committee organized in Czechoslovakia had twelve members: Hana Benešová, Zdeňka Havránková, Imrich Karvaš, A. Z. Kratochvíle, Alice Masaryková, Jaroslav Preis, Emanuel Purkhart, Reverend F. Ruppeltdt, Joseph Stybr, A. Štrimplová, V. Tlapák, Zdeněk Wirth. See Mitchell, *Czechoslovak Classroom*, pp. 12-13.

³²⁸ Mitchell, *Czechoslovak Classroom*, p. 6.

³²⁹ Karel Svolinský was a renowned book illustrator, post stamp designer,



Figure 11. Czechoslovak Classroom. View toward the window bay. From Bruhns, *Nationality Rooms*, p. 19.

painter, and set designer. He had also taught graphic art and painting at Charles University in Prague. See Jan Spurný, *Karel Svolinský, the Lyrical Painter* (Prague: Artia, 1962).

and of his wife Marie (1903-1986).³³⁰ Ceilings painted with floral motifs are most typical for country churches especially in eastern Slovakia. The most striking feature of the ceiling are the six wooden panels placed at a slight angle in the front of the classroom and separated from the rest of the ceiling by a heavy crossbeam. Sláma's goal with this element of decoration was to make sure that these particular panels could be observed from any location within the classroom. This ornamental device is directly inspired by the architecture of eighteenth-century wooden churches in northeastern Slovakia, particularly of those in the Bardejov region, in which the decoration typically continues from the ceiling onto the wall, just above the iconostasis.³³¹

In Pittsburgh, each of the eight panels bears the portrait of a Czech or Slovak political, cultural or religious personality. The artist commissioned for this work was Richard Wiesner, a renowned Czechoslovak portraitist. Wiesner had studied at the Art Academy in Prague under the direct supervision of Vratislav Nechleba. Nechleba instilled in his students the passion for the old masters, which placed him squarely outside the mainstream interest in modernism so evident with many Czech artists of that time. His student, Richard Wiesner, also had a clear interest in modern art. He was a quite versatile painter with a preference for

³³⁰ Mitchell, *Czechoslovak Classroom*, p. 6.

³³¹ Three late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century churches from the Bardejov district—(Uličské) Krivé, Frička, and Hrabova Roztoka—present a similar feature. In all three cases, the panels placed at slight angle are decorated with holy figures. For the wooden churches of northeastern Slovakia, see Jana Bozová and František Gutek, *Drevené kostolíky v okolí Bardejova* (Wooden Churches in the Bardejov District)(Bardejov: Sajancy, 1997).

portraiture in which he experimented with both brushwork and color effects.³³²

Wiesner's first panel depicts SS. Cyril and Methodius, the "apostles of the Slavs." Cyril is shown in the monkish garb he donned when, shortly before his death in Rome (869),³³³ he took the monastic vows and changed his name from Constantine to Cyril. Cyril has a long, double cross in his left hand and carries a large book under his right arm, most likely his translation of the Gospels into Old Church Slavonic.³³⁴ That language passed in the 1930s as "the first literary

³³² Miroslav Lamac, *Contemporary Art in Czechoslovakia* (Prague: Orbis, 1958), pp. 15-16. See also Václav Furmánek, *Národní umelec Richard Wiesner. Výber z díla. Katalog k výstave* (The Popular Artist Richard Wiesner. Introduction to His Work. Exhibit Catalogue)(Prague: Svaz českých výtvarných umelcu, 1972).

³³³ For Cyril's double name (Constantine-Cyril) and the practice of changing names upon taking monastic vows, see Tadeusz Wasilewski, "Dvojnité imena-svetskite (kráshtelnite) i monasheskite - na slavianskite apostoli Konstantin-Kiril i Metodii i vāprosāt za identifikaciata na chlenovet na manastirskoto bratstvo, zatocheni zaedno s Metodii v Reichenau (The double names—baptismal and monastic—of the Apostles of the Slavs, Constantine/Cyril and Methodius and the problem of the identification with Methodius of a member of the monastic community in Reichenau)," *Palaeobulgarica* 16 (1992), 18-25. For the location of his grave in Rome, see Leonard E. Boyle, "The Site of the Tomb of St. Cyril in the Lower Basilica of San Clemente, Rome," in *Christianity among the Slavs. The heritage of Saints Cyril and Methodius. Acts of the International Congress Held on the Eleventh Centenary of the Death of St. Methodius, Rome, October 8-11, 1985*, ed. by Edward G. Farrugia, Robert Taft, and Gino Piovesana (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium, 1988), pp. 75-82. For Cyril's presence in Rome in 868, see also Francis Dvornik, "Sts. Cyril and Methodius in Rome," *St. Vladimir's Seminary Quarterly* 7 (1963), 20-30; Ivan Duichev, "Constantin Philosophe-Cyrille à Rome au début de 868," *Slavia. Časopis pro slovanskou filologii* 38 (1969), 521-527; Anthony-Emil Tachiaos, "Cyril and Methodius' Visit to Rome in 868: Was it Scheduled or Fortuitous?" *Palaeoslavica* 10 (2002), 210-221.

³³⁴ There are no surviving manuscripts from that period, but it is generally accepted that the earliest translations made by Constantine (later Cyril) and his brother Methodius were the Gospels. See F. J. Thomson, "Has the Cyrillomethodian Translation of the Bible Survived?" In *Thessaloniki Magna Moravia* (Thessaloniki: SS. Cyril and Methodios Center for Cultural Studies, 1999), pp. 149-163. Two manuscripts found in the St. Catherine monastery on

language of the Czechoslovak tribes.³³⁵ By contrast, his brother Methodius is depicted as Archbishop of Moravia,³³⁶ wearing the episcopal garb and miter, carrying the crosier in his left hand, and making the sign of the blessing with his right hand. There was no continuity between the ninth-century mission to Moravia and the interest in the Cyrillo-Methodian work in the modern period. Long lost after the demise in the 1100s of the Old Church Slavonic center of learning at the Sázava monastery in Bohemia, the cult of SS. Cyril and Methodius had to be revived in that region of Central Europe by the Jesuit propaganda of the late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century.³³⁷ However, the cult did not have any particular impact on cultural politics in either Bohemia or Slovakia until the late nineteenth century. Following Pope Leo XIII's bull *Grande munus* of September 30, 1880, which extended the feast of the saints to the entire Catholic world, as well as the historiographic rediscovery of the Cyrillo-Methodian

Mount Sinai (the *Fragmenta Sinaitica* and the *Euchologion of Sinai*) indicate that Constantine and Methodius also translated the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom. See Ioannis C. Tarnanidis, *The Slavonic Manuscripts Discovered in 1975 at St. Catherine's Monastery on Mount Sinai* (Thessaloniki: Hellenic Association for Slavic Studies, 1988).

³³⁵ V. Chaloupecký, "The Period of Princes and Kings," in *At the Crossroads of Europe. A Historical Outline of the Democratic Idea in Czechoslovakia* (Prague: Club, 1938), p. 32.

³³⁶ In 869, Pope Hadrian II appointed Methodius bishop of the restored see of Sirmium and in 873 he became Archbishop of Moravia. See M. Tadin, "Les ordinations romaines des premiers disciples slaves et la date de la consécration épiscopale de Méthode, frère de Constantin/Cyrille," in *Akten des 11. internationalen Byzantinistenkongresses*, ed. by Franz Dölger and Hans Georg Beck (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1960), pp. 609-619.

³³⁷ For the cult of SS. Cyril and Methodius at Sázava, see W. K. Hanak, "Saint Procopius, the Sázava Monastery, and the Byzantine-Slavonic Legacy: Some Reconsiderations," in *Byzantium and East Central Europe*, ed. by M. Salamon, G. Prinzing, and P. Stephenson (Cracow: Secesja, 2001), pp. 71-80.

mission in the 1860s and 1880s, the cult was however rapidly given a nationalist aura.³³⁸ In the 1930s, the issue was more important for the Slovaks than for the Czechs. Under the separate Slovak Republic proclaimed in 1939, the feast of the saints celebrated on July 5 became a national day, a tradition continued after the war in the “Slavic Days” celebrated every year between 1945 and 1951 in Devín.³³⁹

The second panel depicts St. Wenceslas, the first native (royal) saint of Bohemia. He is depicted as a young knight, wearing a ducal hat, with a lance with banner in his right hand and his left hand resting on a shield decorated with the emblem of a black eagle. A victim of a family feud, King Wenceslas was assassinated in 929 (or 935) at the orders of his own brother Boleslav. He was buried in the St. Vitus cathedral in Prague and became the first patron saint of Bohemia. His brother Boleslav obtained his canonization from Rome and actively promoted his cult. The life of the saint can be reconstructed from a number of early texts: an anonymous Latin legend (known as *Crescente fide*); an Old Church

³³⁸ For the rediscovery of SS. Cyril and Methodius in the late nineteenth century, see Angelo Tamborra, "La riscoperta di Cirillo e Metodio nel secolo XIX e il suo significato," in *Christianity among the Slavs. The Heritage of Saints Cyril and Methodius. Acts of the International Congress Held on the Eleventh Centenary of the Death of St. Methodius, Rome, October 8-11, 1985*, ed. by Edward G. Farrugia, Robert F. Taft, and Gino K. Piovesana (Rome: Pontificium Institutum Studiorum Orientalium 1988), pp. 315-341; Giannis Malingoudis, "He kyrillomethodiane paradose ston slabiko kosmo kata tous 19o kai 20o aiona," in *Thessaloniki Magna Moravia* (Thessaloniki: SS Cyril and Methodios Center for Cultural Studies, 1999) pp. 17-24. For the political use of the Cyrillo-Methodian tradition in nineteenth- and twentieth-century Slovakia, see Richard Marsina, "La tradition des saints Cyrille et Méthode en Slovaquie," in *Thessaloniki Magna Moravia* (Thessaloniki: SS Cyril and Methodios Center for Cultural Studies, 1999) pp. 113-119.

³³⁹ Marsina, "La tradition des saints," p. 118.

Slavonic *Life* surviving in a Croatian-Glagolitic redaction; Gumpold of Mantua's *Life of Wenceslas, duke of Bohemia* written for Emperor Otto II at some point between 975 and 985; and Christian's *Life and passion of St. Wenceslas and St. Ludmila, his mother* probably commissioned by Bishop Adalbert of Prague (983-997). None of these early texts, which glorify Wenceslas as a very pious and ascetic prince, has served as inspiration for the iconography of Wenceslas in the Pittsburgh panel. In fact, Wenceslas carrying a shield bearing the emblem of an eagle (initially thought to be an indication that the Bohemian ruler had become a vassal of the Roman-German empire, but later the eagle became accepted as Wenceslas' own coat of arms) does not appear as an independent iconographic type until the early twelfth century.³⁴⁰ The image of the saint as a ruler, standing and armed, wearing a ducal hat, holding the lance with a banner in his right hand and the shield with an emblem of an eagle in his left hand, dates back to the time of Emperor Charles IV (1346-1378). A good analogy for the Pittsburgh panel is the image of the saint on the seal of the University of Prague, as well as the polychrome statue over his tomb in the Wenceslas Chapel, most likely the 1373 work of Heinrich Parler.³⁴¹ It is this image that became most popular after the Hussite Wars, during the re-Catholicization of Bohemia from the late fifteenth century onwards.

The third painted wooden panel shows Jan Hus (1370-1415), the Czech champion of religious freedom. Born in Bohemia in 1370, Hus was a professor of

³⁴⁰ Franz Machilek and Margarita Machilek, "St. Wenceslas: Cult and Iconography," in *Europe's Centre Around A.D. 1000*, ed. by Alfried Wiczorek and Hans-Martin Hinz (Stuttgart: Theiss, 2000), p. 591.

³⁴¹ Machilek and Machilek, "St. Wenceslas," pp. 592-593.

theology at the University of Prague, a preacher and eventually the rector of the Charles University in Prague. He led the first major movement for the reformation of the Church before Martin Luther. His execution on July 6, 1415 gave new momentum to the Hussite ideology that spread throughout Bohemia and Moravia and sparked a most popular movement, the first in Central Europe to use religion in order to mark “national” boundaries. Furthermore, in the 1930s, the main cause of Hussite Wars appeared to have been “the despairing rising of a nation whose existence was threatened.”³⁴² In Pittsburgh, Hus is shown in his professorial garb, carrying a book in his left hand and looking to his left (towards Jan Amos Comenius), with his back turned to SS. Cyril, Methodius, and Wenceslas. The juxtaposition of an image of the great reformer and of more or less canonical representations of Catholic saints may seem surprising. In fact, in the semantic grammar of the Pittsburgh panels, much like the death of Wenceslas, that of Jan Hus is given the status of martyrdom. Both have laid the foundation of the national pantheon.

The fourth panel shows another important Czech personality, Jan Amos Komenský (or Comenius; 1592-1670). He is shown carrying the crosier in his right hand and reading from his papers. Indeed, Czechs remember him as the last bishop of the *Jednota Bratrská*, the Unity of the Bohemian (Moravian) Brethren, the puritan Protestant Church of the Czech lands prior to the Thirty Years War. The Austrian occupation that followed the Peace of Westphalia (1648) suppressed the Moravian Brethren and re-started the re-Catholicization of the country. As a consequence, Comenius became a great figure of Czech religious and, later, national identity. In this testament, Comenius wrote that “after the tempest of

³⁴² Chaloupecký, “Period of Princes and Kings,” p. 61.

God's wrath shall have passed the rule of thy country will again return unto thee, O Czech people." That Comenius was a great source of inspiration for the Czech nationalists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is demonstrated, among others, by Thomas Masaryk's own words:

As a Czechoslovak and a Slav ... I stand with Hus, Chelčický and Žižka, down to Havlíček and his successors. The foundation of the modern humane and democratic ideal has been laid by our Hussite Reformation in which ... the Bohemian Brotherhood Church was especially significant, in as much as it surpassed in moral worth all the other churches and the earlier attempts at reform.³⁴³

On the other hand, Comenius is also viewed as the "father of modern education" and as a great figure of the Enlightenment. Both are strong arguments in favor of his selection for Wiesner's series of portraits. In his writings, Comenius insisted that education started in the earliest days of childhood and continued throughout life. He was the first to use pictures in textbooks (*Orbis sensualium pictus*, 1658; translated into English in 1659 under the title *The Visible World in Pictures*). He was in favor of formal education for women, a novel idea for the seventeenth century. His educational philosophy was labeled pansophism (all knowledge), but to a Czech historian of the 1930s, it appeared as nothing less than the "Christian humanism" revived in the early twentieth century by Thomas G. Masaryk.³⁴⁴ For him the process of learning and that of spiritual and emotional growth were intimately linked. Comenius was invited to become

³⁴³ Cited in Samuel Harrison Thomson, *Czechoslovakia in European History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp.109-110.

³⁴⁴ J. L. Hromadka, "The Heritage of the Bohemian Revolution," in *At the Crossroads of Europe. A Historical Outline of the Democratic Idea in Czechoslovakia* (Prague: Club, 1938), p. 120.

the first president of Harvard College, a honor that he apparently declined because of his commitment to the Moravian Church. The presence of his portrait in the Czechoslovak Classroom may have an even more complex meaning. During the nineteenth century, in the midst of the national struggle, the Czech leader František Palacký declared himself a successor of Comenius.³⁴⁵ Later, Thomas Masaryk, the founder of the Czechoslovak Republic, did the same by confessing his commonality of spirit and goals with all spiritual leaders of the Czechs, from Jan Hus through Comenius to Palacký. The days of Jan Hus and Comenius were regarded as the Golden Age of the Czech history, whose memory had been transmitted through the nineteenth-century writings of Palacký and others to the post-war generation, members of which founded the new state of Czechoslovakia.³⁴⁶

The next panel depicts Jan Kollár (1793-1852), a Slovak poet and nationalist. He is appropriately shown engaging in his writing, holding the papers in his left hand and the pen in the right. Kollár was a supporter of pan-Slavism and wrote his poems in Czech, not Slovak. In his sermons published in 1823 and 1844, he emphasized the ideal of Slavic unity. He had many friends among the Czechs and strongly believed that Czechs and Slovaks had a common cultural heritage and therefore needed to share the same literature. An initiator of the Pan-Slavic Congress of 1848, Kollár had a great influence on the national movement

³⁴⁵ František Palacký wrote the first History of the Czech People, now viewed as a monument of Czech modern culture. He also wrote a biography of Comenius whom he characterized as a fellow Moravian and a leader of the last phase of the Hussite reformation. In this work, Palacký placed himself and his activity on behalf of the national cause in the same line as Comenius. Thomson, *Czechoslovakia*, pp. 203 –204.

³⁴⁶ Thomson, *Czechoslovakia*, p. 204.

in Slovakia as well as on Slavic identity in the Austrian Empire. Among his most dedicated followers was the Czech nationalist František Palacký. By contrast, because of his use of Czech, Kollár had little influence on the younger generation of Slovak poets who turned to Slovak to express their ideas.³⁴⁷

The last panel depicts two Slovak personalities, L'udovít Štur (1815-1856) and Štefan Moyzes (1797-1869), a poet and a bishop side by side. In the years before 1848, Štur became the leading spirit of the young generation of Slovak patriots in Bratislava. He antagonized the older generation, especially Kollár, when he began to advocate the use of a written form of the Slovak language instead of Czech. He is therefore rightly considered the father of Slovak literary language. The basis for this language was the dialect of central Slovakia, which differed more from standard Czech than the dialect of western Slovakia. It was also the language popular among Protestants, not Catholics. By defining themselves on the basis of the language proposed by Štur, Slovaks were now emphasizing a separate identity in relation not just to their Hungarian rulers, but also to other Slavs, especially their Czech neighbors.

But in the 1840s, neither Czechs, nor Slovaks could make any final decisions regarding their political and cultural future. The ultimate decision remained with Vienna. In 1848 when absolutism in Vienna collapsed and the reconstruction of the monarchy became a subject of debate, a union of the Czech and Slovak regions into one administrative whole was first proposed in Palacký's plan for a federalized empire. The linguistic differences to which Štur had pointed in 1846 did not deter some of the Czech and Slovak patriots to envision a

³⁴⁷ Carol Skalnik Leff, *National Conflict in Czechoslovakia. The Making and Remaking of a State, 1918-1987* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 27-28; Thomson, *Czechoslovakia*, p. 263.

common future for their nations.³⁴⁸ Slovak nationalism gained popular support especially after the *Ausgleich* of 1867, which gave the green light to policies of Magyarization that would ultimately threaten to deprive Slovaks of any cultural and political force.³⁴⁹ In the late nineteenth century, Štur's cause seemed closer to a realistic assessment of the situation than Palacký's dream of a federalized empire.

Štefan Moyzes was Bishop of Banská Bystrica and the founder and chairman of the first institution dedicated to Slovak culture, the Matica Slovenská established in 1863. From its inception and until it was abolished by the Hungarian government in 1875, this was designed to be a cultural institution for all Slovaks actively promoting the Slovak national culture.³⁵⁰ In addition to Matica, Moyzes's activity led to the foundation of several Slovak *Gymnasias*, three of them in Banská Bystrica. He strongly believed in pan-Slavism, promoted at that time by the cultural institutions he had founded. His efforts may be seen as the last attempt to advance the cause of Slovak national culture until the cultural disaster brought by the *Ausgleich* that almost wiped out Slovak identity.

Another personality that may be seen in association with those depicted in Wiesner's panels, but which also stands apart in the Czechoslovak Classroom, is Thomas Garrigue Masaryk (1850-1937). Below the wooden painted portraits, on the wall above the blackboard, there is a bronze portrait of him separating the words "Pravda Vitezi" (Truth Conquers), the motto of the Czechoslovak Republic. Under the portrait there is an inscription reading "T. G. Masaryk." The

³⁴⁸ Thomson, *Czechoslovakia*, pp. 262-264.

³⁴⁹ Leff, *National Conflict*, p. 28.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

bronze was executed in high relief by Oskar Spaniel, a Czech sculptor and professor at the Academy of Fine Arts in Prague. Representing Masaryk from profile, the bronze portrait imitates the jubilee medal struck in 1935 for the eighty-fifth anniversary of the first president of Czechoslovakia.³⁵¹

The presence of this portrait in the classroom is highly unusual and in clear contradiction with the guidelines of the University of Pittsburgh for classroom displays. According to the guidelines no portrait or likeness of any living person was allowed in any room. It is very unlikely that Mitchell, Chancellor Bowman, or any other university officials did not notice this blatant violation of their own regulations. In her book on the Czechoslovak classroom, published shortly after the inauguration, Mitchell explains the presence of the portrait in the following terms: “The thought is that in the presence of this portrait nothing unworthy can be taught or learned.”³⁵² A philosopher and a professor, Masaryk was the symbol of the newly formed Czechoslovak republic. He was the leader of the Czechoslovak National Council that in 1918 had become the *de facto* government of Czechoslovakia, and the president of the newly recognized republic between 1918 and 1934. In the Czechoslovak Classroom, he does not appear as either philosopher or professor, but as a president and, more important, as a political figure. The association between his portrait and the state motto substantiates this interpretation.

It is therefore more likely that Mitchell turned a blind eye to this particular choice of decoration. As shown in Chapter III, Mitchell was a friend of Alice, Thomas Masaryk’s daughter. In her own words, she had been “lucky,” during one

³⁵¹ Mitchell, *Czechoslovak Classroom*, p. 8.

³⁵² Mitchell, *Czechoslovak Classroom*, p. 9.

of her trips to Czechoslovakia, to have the honor of being invited to lunch by President Masaryk. There is no doubt that Mitchell was an admirer of Masaryk and of the Czechoslovak people for and with whom she had worked in the years following World War I in order to establish the Czechoslovak Red Cross and the educational system for social workers.

On the window wall across from the entrance door there is a wrought-iron cabinet with the letters TGM that stand for Thomas Garrigue Masaryk. In the cabinet, framed in a glass case is a letter written by Masaryk in 1929, as he was still in office. Within the text of that letter written in English, Masaryk included a message to the students of the University of Pittsburgh: "Our Komenský, the teacher of all nations, proclaimed education the *officina humanitatis* (the workshop of humanity). I hope the American students of this and all universities will agree with him and follow him."³⁵³

The walls of the Czechoslovak Classroom are of white plaster decorated with delicate paintings inspired by the folk art of Moravia. Karel Svolinský, the painter who completed the ceiling decoration, is also the author of the wall ornamentation. The wall painting is used to accentuate some of the architectural features of the room. On the window wall the artist painted two miraculous trees complete with flowers, birds and insects that fill out on a vertical line the two wall panels that frame the window. On the rear wall, in a niche, Svolinský painted the tree of life. In the middle of the niche and of the tree, there is an imitation (in English) of the foundation charter for the University of Prague issued by Charles IV, King of Bohemia, in 1348. The branches of the tree spring from behind the charter.

³⁵³ Mitchell, *Czechoslovak Classroom*, p. 9.

The classroom door and the doorway are nicely decorated with *intarsio* or wood inlay. There are two larger panels for the door itself and five small panels for the doorway. Karel Svolinský signed the design for all these panels, which were a gift from the “cooperation committee.”³⁵⁴ The furniture is all made of oak. The back splats of the student chairs are decorated with a cut-out décor in the form of a heart. All chairs are upholstered in dark red leather, which contrasts nicely with the white plaster walls and complements the red flowers and buds in the wall and ceiling decoration. The red and white colors present throughout the room are to be interpreted symbolically, as they were also the national colors of Czechoslovakia. In addition to the student chairs, there are three wooden benches along the rear wall and on either side of the bay window.

The professor’s desk and reading stand are decorated in the same technique used for the classroom door – *intarsio*. The desk panels depict the five university faculties: Philosophy, Law, and Medicine—on the front side; Technology and Biology—on the left and right sides. The teacher’s stand is decorated with a spray of a linden inscribed in a triangle. The national tree in Czechoslovakia, the linden was viewed as a symbol of home-life. The window frames are painted in red and flanked by ivory linen curtains that were designed and executed by the members of Czechoslovak Ladies Auxiliary, a sub-committee organized during the Depression years. The committee organized monthly meetings in the Cathedral of Learning with guest speakers, music, and traditional food.³⁵⁵

The Czechoslovak Fund received many donations from private citizens.

³⁵⁴ Mitchell, *Czechoslovak Classroom*, p. 11.

³⁵⁵ Mitchell, *Czechoslovak Classroom*, p. 15.

Reports on the money collected were published on a regular basis in the Czech and Slovak newspapers. Important contributions came from Czech or Slovak national societies such as the National Slovak Society, the Slovak Evangelical Union, the Women's Society *Živena*, and the Slovak Gymnastic Union Sokol. The community of Czechs and Slovaks came together one more time in the city of Pittsburgh in the troubled years of the 1930s when the existence of the new republic was in question. The dedication of the room took place only a week before the Republic of Czechoslovakia ceased to exist. On October 1, 1938 Göring had told Mastný, the Czechoslovak minister, that Germany would no longer tolerate Beneš as president. As a consequence, Beneš resigned on October 5, 1938 and left to the West a few days before Hitler send his secret order on to the Wehrmacht regarding the occupation of the remainder of the Czechoslovakia.³⁵⁶

The Czech and the Slovaks gathered in Pittsburgh, the place where on June 30, 1918 the first agreement between the American Czech and the Slovak societies was signed that eventually led to the creation of Czechoslovakia. This time they were coming together to dedicate the classroom “to liberty, freedom, democracy, and truth,” as well as to hopes of preserving Masaryk’s dream. Much faster than any other classroom in the Cathedral of Learning, the Czechoslovak Classroom was turned into a national shrine. Mitchell noted that

³⁵⁶ Thomson, *Czechoslovakia*, p. 400; Věra Olivová, *The Doomed Democracy. Czechoslovakia in a Disrupted Europe, 1914-1938* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1972), p. 264. As the United States was the first country to condemn Hitler’s occupation of Czechoslovakia in March 1939, Beneš believed that President Roosevelt’s attitude will change the opinions of the European leaders as well. In a confidential meeting with Beneš, Roosevelt declared that “for him Munich did not exist.” See Edvard Taborsky, *President Beneš. Between East and West, 1938-1945* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 1981), pp. 45 and 47.

since its dedication one week before the occupation of Prague, the Czechoslovak Classroom has become a shrine, visited by thousands. Among those visitors in the spring of 1939 were Eduard Beneš and Madame Beneš. In June, Dr. Alice Masaryk, who had been an active member in the Prague Committee, spoke in the Czechoslovak Classroom. ... The Czechoslovak Classroom is one of the few places in the world where there is recognition for the historic ideas of the Czech and the Slovak peoples.³⁵⁷

In the late 1930s and early 1940s, the Czechoslovak Classroom was a symbol of a seemingly lost cause, a home not just for the Czechs and Slovaks living in United States, but also for those whom the war had sent into exile to various parts of the world. The windows opening towards Forbes Avenue were those of a “little Czechoslovakia” standing as a *pars pro toto* for a country now under foreign occupation. Much like Thomas Masaryk himself in the years before the proclamation of the Republic, the Czechs and Slovaks attending the inauguration ceremony must have entertained hopes that the humane ideals, which according to the former president had nothing specifically Czech, would eventually prevail:

The English expression of it [i.e. of the humane ideal] is mainly ethical; the French, political (by the proclamation of the rights of men); the German, social, or Socialist; and our own, national and religious. Today it is universal, and the time is coming when all civilized peoples will recognize it as the foundation of the State and of international relationships.³⁵⁸

Showcasing Masaryk’s dream, the Czechoslovak Classroom entered very

³⁵⁷ Mitchell, *Czechoslovak Classroom*, p. 15.

³⁵⁸ Thomson, *Czechoslovakia*, p. 448.

early a phase of rigidization of cultural and political meaning that is also pervasive in the Yugoslav Classroom case. After being a national shrine during the war, the Czechoslovak Classroom has gradually ceased to appeal to either the Czech- or the Slovak-speaking community in America. Masaryk's ideals had become irrelevant in the light of both the Communist experience in Czechoslovakia and its eventual, albeit peaceful, dismemberment in the 1990s. It may be that in 1940, the classroom was "one of the few places in the world where there is recognition of the historic ideals of the Czech and the Slovak peoples." By now, the room has become a museum dedicated to the history of the ideals that had brought the Czech and Slovak people together and to the place (Pittsburgh) where those ideals first received public recognition.

CHAPTER VII

A ROOM OF ROYAL INSPIRATION? THE POLISH CLASSROOM

The Polish Classroom was dedicated on February 16, 1940, only four months after the invasion of Poland by Nazi and Soviet troops. On that day, Władysław Raczkiewicz (1885-1947), the president of the Polish government-in-exile in France, sent a message to the Polish Classroom committee from Angers (France). In his message, Raczkiewicz unknowingly echoed Bowman's call for perennial values, to which he gave a completely different meaning: "Kindly convey my heartiest esteem to the Committee and the Poles of Pittsburgh for their patriotic efforts in founding the Polish Room at the University, a worthy monument of Polish culture never to be destroyed by the barbaric invaders."³⁵⁹

In the days following the dedication, the Polish Classroom quickly became a permanent reminder of the homeland and a national shrine not just for the Poles living in Pittsburgh and the surrounding area, but also for all Poles in exile in various other countries. As Mitchell aptly observed in 1941,

the history of the Polish Classroom is indeed an epic. Conceived and blueprinted during the happy days of the Polish Republic, the plans were executed during the 1938-1939 period of political tension. Poland had been occupied by force for a fourth time when the Polish Classroom was formally opened. Thus the Polish Room first enlisted the enthusiasm of

³⁵⁹ The telegram was received by Colonel Teofil Starzyński, who had chaired the Polish committee until the spring of 1939. See Ruth Crawford Mitchell, *The Polish Classroom, The Cathedral of Learning, University of Pittsburgh* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1941), p. 11. According to the stipulations of the Constitution of Poland, Raczkiewicz had been designated successor by the former president of Poland, Ignacy Mościcki, on September 17, 1939. For Raczkiewicz's life and work as in-exile President of Poland, see Marian Marek Drozdowski, *Władysław Raczkiewicz*, vol. 2 (Warsaw: Oficyna Wydawnicza Rytm, 2002).

men and women who helped to create the Republic in 1918. Later, it provided an outlet for their September, 1939, agony of spirit. Today it is cherished by those who have come to seek in the peace of the United States a refuge for Polish culture. Those men and women believed that Poland, like the phoenix, shall rise again and that the Polish Classroom in the University of Pittsburgh stands the symbol of its resurrection.³⁶⁰

The room was designed by Adolf Szyszko-Bohusz (1883-1948), a prominent architect of interwar Poland. A graduate of the Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg, Szyszko-Bohusz had been in charge with the restoration of the Wawel Castle in Cracow,³⁶¹ a long-drawn process that had begun in 1905. His plan was to restore the building to its condition during the reign of the last monarch of Poland, Stanisław Augustus Poniatowski (1732-1798), in an attempt to obliterate the history of the building following the partitions of Poland. While working at Wawel, Szyszko-Bohusz was also commissioned for a number of other important buildings in Cracow, such as the Savings Bank and the country residence of the president of Poland. He designed the refectory chapel at the famous Jasna Góra Monastery at Częstochowa, as well as the sarcophagus of the Polish poet Juliusz Słowacki, buried next to Adam Mickiewicz in the crypt of national bards in the Wawel Cathedral in Cracow. A member since 1912 of the *Sztuka* society, the principal representative of Polish modernism, Szyszka-Bohusz endorsed that society's declared goal of gaining recognition for Polish art both inside and outside the country. However, unlike other members, he does not seem to have been an advocate of the Polish Arts and Crafts movement.³⁶² Instead, he

³⁶⁰ Mitchell, *Polish Classroom*, pp. 13-14.

³⁶¹ See Jan K. Ostrowski, *Wawel. Castle and Cathedral* (Cracow: Karpaty, 1996).

³⁶² Jan Cavanaugh, *Out Looking In. Early Modern Polish Art, 1890-1918* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. 60-63 and 241-242. Of all

was an admirer of the Polish Renaissance art. Between 1928 and 1939, Szyszko-Bohusz served as the curator and conservator of the Wawel Castle.³⁶³

There is therefore no surprise that the style selected by Szyszko-Bohusz for the Cathedral of Learning project was the early sixteenth-century Polish Renaissance so vividly illustrated in the Wawel Castle. The 1500s represent the Golden Age of Polish art and culture, the period of Nicolaus Copernicus and Jan Kochanowski.³⁶⁴ This was also the period of the so-called “democracy of the gentry,” a political formula that inspired much political debates in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. A period of political expansion and cultural achievement of the Commonwealth of Lithuania and Poland, the legacy of the sixteenth-century Golden Age was later absorbed by the Polish thinkers of the Enlightenment and Romanticism. The “democracy of the gentry” became a model for modern democracy, and Joachim Lelewel, the greatest Polish historian of the Romantic period, even believed that the “democracy of the gentry” was the only depository of the ancient Slavic principles of political freedom. Eduard Dembowski, the leading spirit of the revolutionary movement in Poland and of

members of the *Sztuka*, only Stanisław Wypiański incorporated Art Nouveau elements in his works. Most members of the Polish society were openly hostile to the Viennese Secession and had little, if any, respect for such artists as Gustav Klimt. See Cavanaugh, *Out Looking In*, p. 97.

³⁶³ Stanley Sokol, *The Artists of Poland. A Biographical Dictionary from the 14th Century to the Present* (Jefferson/London: McFarland and Co., 2000), p. 217. For the architecture of Jasna Góra, including the refectory chapel and the Janitorium, both built by Szyszko-Bohusz, see chapter 6 in Antoni Jachowski, Jan Pach, and Jan Stanisław Rudziński, *Jasna Góra* (Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Dolnośląskie, 2001).

³⁶⁴ Harold B. Segel, *Renaissance Culture in Poland. The Rise of Humanism, 1470-1543* (Ithaca/London: Cornell University Press, 1989), pp. 127-137 and 250-262.

the Cracow uprising of 1846, called the sixteenth century the “epoch of splendor,” the first major step towards national self-awakening. According to Adam Mickiewicz, the “democracy of the gentry” had attempted to establish society on the basis of the inner impulses of its members, upon their “good will” strengthened by “enthusiasm and exaltation.”³⁶⁵ The legacy of the Golden Age and of the Commonwealth resurfaced in the political and cultural climate of interwar Poland, as questions of national identity were now reformulated.

The Polish Classroom is located on the western side of the Commons Room, with windows opening toward the Bigelow Boulevard. Access to the room is permitted through a massive door made of oak carved in a distinctively Gothic design. The work of a Pittsburgh-based carver who had learned his trade in Lwów (now Lviv in Ukraine), the door is a gift from the Polish Women’s Alliance of America. Its doorknob is a bronze replica of a Wawel Castle doorknob.³⁶⁶

The most striking decorative feature of the Polish Classroom is the ceiling, a remarkable example of a Polish adaptation of Italian Renaissance art combining Gothic architectural elements with Renaissance decoration. The ceiling is composed of fourteen massive eighteen-foot beams (Fig. 12). One distinctive feature of those beams of Italian Gothic inspiration is that the moldings have a terminal point that stops short of the walls. All beams are painted in blue, green, red, and light brown in a characteristically geometric Renaissance design that softens the roughness of the wood.³⁶⁷ The authors of the paintings are Szyszko-

³⁶⁵ Andrzej Walicki, “The Political Heritage of the 16th Century and its Influence on the Nation-Building Ideologies of the Polish Enlightenment and Romanticism,” in *The Polish Renaissance in its European Context*, ed. by Samuel Fiszman (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), pp. 42-45.

³⁶⁶ Mitchell, *Polish Classroom*, p. 7.



Figure 12. Polish Classroom. View toward the rear wall. From Bruhns, *Nationality Rooms*, p. 43.

³⁶⁷ Mitchell, *Polish Classroom*, p. 6.

Bohusz's sister, Anna, and her husband Waclaw Szymborski. They have been employed by Szyszko-Bohusz for the painted restoration of the Wawel Castle. Anna Szyszko-Bohusz Szymborska and Waclaw Szymborski spent more than three months of 1938 in Pittsburgh to finish the painting of the Polish Room and supervise the execution of its carved decoration.³⁶⁸

In notable contrast with the painted ceiling, the walls are of simple plaster with only a garland frieze painted under the ceiling in the Italian Renaissance style. The Szymborskis used the same palette of colors for the decoration of ceiling and walls. In both cases, the sources of inspiration were decorative patterns from the Wawel Castle. In her 1975 interview, Mitchell recalls the problems posed by the original design. Szyszko-Bohusz seems to have initially designed a Gothic crystalline ceiling in diamond-cut plaster inspired by the interior decoration of the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. But this idea was impractical for many reasons. First, the Polish Classroom was in the making "long before the cleaning of the city," which in Mitchell's words means that the white plaster would not have remained immaculate for too long in a highly polluted city. Second, the crystal-effect of the ceiling was no compensation for it being too low. Mitchell knew that Szyszko-Bohusz had a reputation of stubbornly defending his blueprints against any subsequent changes. She decided to stop in Cracow during her 1936 visit of several European countries involved in the Nationality Rooms Program. She met with Szyszko-Bohusz, but the first meeting was not very successful, most likely because of the translator, who, according to Mitchell, seems to have been intimidated by the architect's stern appearance. Mitchell, however, was not ready to give up. She immediately befriended the

³⁶⁸ Ibid.

architect's wife, Sława, and noticed Adolf's love for and great care of his dog. Once she came to understand that Szyszko-Bohusz was a sensitive man, she was determined to obtain from him the approval for changing his initial blueprint: "so I did not listen to the 'no' and I kept on and on." Just before leaving, she asked for one last meeting in Szyszko-Bohusz's office in the Wawel Castle. In the 1975 interview, she describes how after a brief conversation, and since there were no visitors at that time, the Polish architect invited her to stroll along the castle's hallways and take a good look at all rooms. In case she would see anything that she particularly liked, he asked her to let him know. In the end, it was Mitchell who chose the beam painted ceiling and the brass hardware for the decoration of the Polish Classroom.

In 1975, Mitchell remembered clearly that the trip to Cracow and the problems she encountered with the Polish Classroom have convinced her that architects and decorators needed to come to Pittsburgh in order to understand the structure of the space and to complete or supervise the execution and installation of the decoration. Only in this way could classrooms become "true [and] authentic" in their design and execution. Since Szyszko-Bohusz refused to come in person and the imitation of the Wawel ceiling decoration had to be painted in Pittsburgh, the architect's sister and brother-in-law came instead not only to paint the ceiling and the walls of the Polish Classroom, but also to supervise its completion.

Unlike other classrooms, the end product is a close imitation of the architectural style of one particular building, not a combination of elements of different origins. The royal palace on the Wawel Hill in Cracow was rebuilt and redecorated by the Italian architect Franciscus Florentinus, who had been

commissioned by King Sigismund I (1467-1548), a great admirer of the Italian Renaissance, especially after his marriage to the Italian princess Bona Sforza. Most typical for Florentinus' work at Wawel is the combination of Florentine Renaissance and Gothic architecture. Florentinus had a deep appreciation of the native stone- and woodcutters and of their late Gothic ornamental repertoire.³⁶⁹ The blending of late Gothic and Renaissance artistic elements is also evident in the painted decoration of the Wawel Castle, the source of inspiration for the Polish Classroom.

The walls of the Polish classroom are finished off through the addition of an oak plank wainscot, which skirts the entire room, provides the support for the blackboard and incorporates and covers the radiator placed in the bay window. The floor is parquet done in a combination of light oak and dark oak that alternates in squares. There is a remarkable harmony of materials and colors used for floor, walls, ceiling, and furniture. The main piece of furniture is the seminar table, a copy of the fifteenth-century walnut table in the State Dining Room at Wawel.³⁷⁰ The table was designed to accommodate ten persons. The chairs have both seats and backs covered with full-grain cowhide in a warm brown. Their ornaments consist on one hand of large bronze rosette nail heads and on the other of a simple geometrical inlaid design on the crossbars between the legs.

Above the seminar table hanging from the middle of the ceiling there is a

³⁶⁹ Irena Piotrowska, *The Art of Poland* (New York: Freeport, 1971), p. 9. See also W. F. Reddaway, J. H. Penson, O. Halecki, and R. Dyboski, *The Cambridge History of Poland from the origins to Sobieski (to 1698)* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1950), p. 288. For Florentinus, see also Sokol, *Artists of Poland*, p. 60.

³⁷⁰ Mitchell, *Polish Classroom*, p. 7.

bronze chandelier surmounted by a stylized eagle. The Polish eagle, the coat of arms of the kingdom of Poland, also appears sculpted in stone above the entrance door, in the hallway. The eagle with the head poised to the right first appears on coins minted for Boleslaw the Brave (Chrobry, 922-1025) and Władysław II (1138-1146).³⁷¹ By the end of the thirteenth century, especially during the reign of Przemysław II (1279-1296), the eagle was depicted with a crown. On the royal seal of Casimir the Great (1333-1370), the eagle appears for the first time with outspread wings and raised beak. As such, the white eagle remained the coat of arms of the Polish kingdom until the late 1700s. Following the partitioning of Poland, it appeared on a variety of personal objects, such as medallions, bracelets, brooches, or pendants, as *pars pro toto* and constant reminder of the lost kingdom. In 1918, after the restoration of Polish independence, the crowned white eagle became again a state emblem (but the crown was dropped in 1945). The meaning attached in the 1800s to the coat of arms of the Polish kingdom is also evident from its use in the Polish Classroom. The eagle appears not only as a state

³⁷¹ The following discussion of the heraldic symbolism of the eagle is based on *Orzeł biały – 700 lat herbu państwa polskiego* (The White Eagle. 700 Years of the Polish Kingdom's Coat of Arms), exhibit catalogue ed. by Stefan Krzysztof Kuczyński (Warsaw: Ośrodek Wydawniczy Zamku Królewskiego w Warszawie, 1995). For Boleslaw's denars with the eagle and the inscription "Princes Polonie," see Henryk Łowmiański, "Dynastia Piastów w wczesnym średniowieczu (The Piast dynasty during the Middle Ages)," in *Początki państwa polskiego. Księga tysiąclecia*, ed. by Kazimierz Tymieniecki, vol. 1 (Poznań: Poznańskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk, 1962), p. 127 fig. 12; Stanisław Suchodolski, "The Earliest Coinage of Poland," in *Europe's Centre Around A.D. 1000*, ed. by Alfried Wiczorek and Hans-Martin Hinz (Stuttgart: Theiss, 2000), p. 124. The eldest son of Boleslaw III the Wrymouth (1102-1138), Władysław II was granted Little Poland and became Grand Duke of Poland through "Wrymouth's testament" of 1138. As a consequence, ever since 1138 the "royal white eagle" also appears on the coat of arms of Cracow, despite the fact that in the ensuing conflict with his brothers, Władysław eventually lost his possessions and title and was forced into exile.

emblem carved in stone above the entrance into the room, but also on the chandelier and in the coats of arms of various Polish universities represented on the stained-glass windows. There is an unmistakable association between light and the white eagle, a symbolic link similar to that between soil and history in the Hungarian Classroom.

Next to the bay window, there is one of the most striking artifacts included in the interior decoration of the Polish Classroom. It is an enlarged replica of a small sixteenth-century astronomical instrument—at the same time a clock, a globe, and a calendar—known as the Jagiellonian Globe. The name derives from the library of the Jagiellonian University in Cracow, where the original globe was kept in a most-famous collection of astronomical instruments. The Jagiellonian Globe establishes a direct connection between the Polish Renaissance style of the classroom’s decoration and the University of Cracow, the center of scientific research in sixteenth-century Poland. Founded in 1364 by King Casimir the Great and the second oldest university in central Europe, the University of Cracow collapsed in 1370 and had to be reorganized in 1400, under the reign of Queen Jadwiga and her husband Władysław Jagiełło. Patterned after the University of Paris, the Jagiellonian University soon became the most important university in central Europe.³⁷² It was also one of the most important centers of humanism on the Continent, most famous for studies in mathematics and astronomy. During the second half of the fifteenth century, the Jagiellonian University became the leading center of astronomy in Europe. By 1500, the university acquired a unique collection of astronomical instruments from Marcin Bylica of Olkusz. An

³⁷² Andrzej Wróblewski, “The Cracovian Background of Nicholas Copernicus,” in *The Polish Renaissance in its European Context*, ed. by Samuel Fiszman (Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 147.

alumnus of and later professor at the university, Marcin Bylica (*ca.* 1433-1493) taught astronomy in several other European universities, such as Padua (1463) and Bologna (1463-1464). By 1464, he was the astronomer of Pope Pius II. In 1466, he was invited to Hungary to teach at the University of Bratislava (Pozsony) founded by King Matthias Corvinus. He maintained contacts with Cracow during all his European peregrinations.

Upon his death, he donated all his books and astronomical instruments to his Alma Mater. One of the most famous items in the Bylica collection is the celestial globe, an enlarged copy of which may be seen in the Polish Classroom. The original globe was made in Vienna in 1486 on Marcin Bylica's request.³⁷³ It was first on display at the University of Cracow in 1494 when all students and masters were encouraged to see it. According to Andrzej Wróblewski, young Copernicus may have well been amongst the students who first saw the globe in 1494.³⁷⁴ Presented to the University of Pittsburgh by the Polish National Alliance, the enlarged copy of the Cracow globe is in fact Szyszko–Bohusz's idea. He may have been inspired by the fact that the globe is the first to depict North America as a separate continent. The replica is four times larger than the original, the work of Henryk Waldyn, a Cracow smith who worked for five years to complete the project. The original was put into motion by small inner wooden pieces; the replica has an electric engine.³⁷⁵ The Jagiellonian Globe serves also as both clock

³⁷³ The collection Bylica donated to the university also included one of the oldest Arabic astrolabes dating to 1054 and a late thirteenth-century *torquetrum* from 1284. For the Bylica collection, see Wróblewski, "Cracovian Background," p. 151.

³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁷⁵ Mitchell, *Polish Classroom*, p. 8.

and calendar. The time of the day is indicated by means of a star-shaped object, which represents the sun, and the equatorial circle on which the hours are marked. The globe turns one revolution each day and once a year the sun moves around its ecliptic circle. Months and days are indicated on the ecliptic circle, which is also marked with the zodiacal constellations. Positioned in the center of the bay window, the globe is aligned with the axis of the door. Both openings of the Polish Classroom are thus associated with the permanently rotating globe, a powerful synecdoche for the world outside the room. The message of this interior decoration arrangement is very clear: in order to know the universe beyond the classroom's windows, students attending classes there needed to learn first about its mechanisms. This interpretation is further substantiated by the subtle repetition of the hexagonal shapes of the honeycomb decorative pattern of the stained-glass windows on the equatorial circle of the globe.

Inserted within the wall to the left side of the windows is the cornerstone of the Polish classroom. It is an original fragment of a Gothic cornice from Collegium Maius, the oldest building of the University of Cracow (1364). Previously in the lapidarium (collection of stone fragments) of the university museum, the cornerstone was presented to the faculty of the University of Pittsburgh by Jerzy Potocki, the ambassador of the Polish Republic in Washington. The Polish ambassador himself set the cornerstone into its place on June 26, 1938, an event commemorated in a short inscription on a bronze ribbon above the cornerstone: "Cornerstone set June 26, 1938/ Original stone from Jagiellonian Library Jagiellonian University in Krakow, Poland. Established 1364/ Room dedicated February 16, 1940." It remains unclear whether having an authentic piece of Gothic decorative sculpture incorporated into the Polish

Classroom was a part of Szyszko-Bohusz's initial blueprint or perhaps Mitchell's idea. In any case, the June 1938 ceremony was the source of inspiration for a number of other subsequent decisions to employ elements of medieval architecture brought directly from their original overseas locations for the interior decoration of the University of Pittsburgh classrooms. Some of the decorative elements of the English Classroom, inaugurated on November 12, 1952, such as the linenfold paneling, the fireplace, or the stone brackets carved in Tudor rose design, are in fact original pieces recuperated from the ruins of the House of Commons destroyed during the 1941 bombing of London. The cornerstone in the Irish Classroom, dedicated on May 18, 1957, is a fragment from the Clonmacnoise Abbey, reused for the carving of a modern inscription in Gaelic. A basalt stone from the Sanahin Monastery serves as the cornerstone of the Armenian Classroom, dedicated on August 28, 1988. In all these cases, the original piece of architectural sculpture represents not just a symbolic link with the history of the "imagined community," but also a basis for establishing the legitimacy of the new foundation in the New World.

However, unlike all subsequent examples, the cornerstone of the Polish Classroom had long ceased to be an integral part of a medieval building by the time it was shipped to Pittsburgh. Instead, it was now a part of a museum display moving from the museum of one university into the classroom of another. The procedure turned the classroom itself into a museum, if not into a shrine.³⁷⁶ It may have been inspired by a contemporary fascination with medieval art and a penchant for recycling on American soil *spolia* from ruins of medieval buildings in Europe, as superbly illustrated by the architecture of the New York Cloisters

³⁷⁶ Mitchell, *Polish Classroom*, p. 9.

opened in May 1938. Like in Pittsburgh, but on a much greater scale, disassembled elements from five medieval French cloisters—arches, pillars, and vaults—were shipped to New York and reassembled in the Fort Tryon Park in order to house the collection of medieval art donated in 1925 to the Metropolitan Museum of Art by John D. Rockefeller.³⁷⁷ By contrast, in the Polish Classroom in Pittsburgh, the medieval *spolium* is not an integral part of the room’s architecture. It does not have any structural role whatsoever. Set in the bay wall at the level of the window ledge, the fragmentary Gothic cornice has definitely lost its original function. But the choice of position suggests that the *spolium* was given a new, symbolic meaning. In the general economy of the room, the cornerstone in the Polish Room is similar in its position in respect to the windows to the wrought-iron cabinet on the right side of the window bay in the Czechoslovak Room. In both cases, a “relic” was inserted into the wall structure, that also functioned as time capsule: a fragment of Gothic architectural sculpture in the Polish Classroom; and Thomas Garrigue Masaryk’s 1929 letter to the students of the University of Pittsburgh, in the Czechoslovak Classroom. In both cases, the goal seems to have been to turn the classroom into a sacred place, a shrine of sorts, by means of “direct quotes” from history.

³⁷⁷ For the history of the Cloisters, Hubert Landais, “The Cloisters or the Passion for the Middle Ages,” in *The Cloisters. Studies in Honor of the Fiftieth Anniversary*, ed. by Elizabeth C. Parker and Mary B. Shepard (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art/International Center of Medieval Art, 1992), pp. 38-51; Jessica Si-Ca Olivia Aphrodite Tang, “Cloisters, the Dream Goes On. Neue Studien zum mittelalterlichen Zweigmuseum des Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York,” M.A. thesis (University of Zürich, 2000). The Cloisters museum building incorporates architectural elements from the twelfth-century Abbeys of Saint-Michel de Cuxa (near the Spanish-French border) and Gellone (near Montpellier); the twelfth-century priory of Froville (near Nancy); the Cistercian abbey of Bonnefont (near Toulouse); and the Carmelite abbey of Trie-sur-Baïse (near Lourdes).

The most prominent figurative decoration in the Polish Classroom is a large painting on the back wall of the room. The painting was made in Cracow by Anna Szyszko-Bohusz Szymborska a few months after her return from Pittsburgh, and shipped to America with the last trans-Atlantic trip of the MS “Batory” before the invasion of Poland by German troops.³⁷⁸ The work is in fact a replica of a famous oil painting on display until the German invasion in the main assembly hall at the University of Cracow.³⁷⁹ It represents Copernicus surrounded by astronomical instruments and manuscripts looking up to the night sky from the observation tower balcony in Frombork. In the background, one can see the roofs of the old town houses and the steeples of the Frombork cathedral. Entitled “Conversation with God,” the original painting is a 1872 work by Jan Matejko (1838-1893),³⁸⁰ one of the most prominent Polish artists of the late nineteenth century. Matejko viewed himself as the spiritual mentor of the Polish nation and strongly believed that national history, much like Catholicism, should inspire artists working on behalf of the national cause, an idea well attuned to the theories espoused at the time by the critic Michał Grabowski.³⁸¹ Unlike contemporary

³⁷⁸ Mitchell, *Polish Classroom*, p. 10.

³⁷⁹ The original painting is now in the Jagiellonian University Museum in Cracow.

³⁸⁰ For a good color reproduction of the oil-on-canvas painting (real size: 221 x 315 cm), see the website of the Nicolaus Copernicus Museum in Frombork (<http://www.frombork.art.pl/Frombork-foto/k4.JPG>, visit of April 24, 2004).

³⁸¹ Juliusz Starzyński, *Jan Matejko* (Warsaw: Sztuka, 1955), p. 11. For Grabowski’s ideas and the association of historicism and religion in the late nineteenth-century art, see also Elżbieta Grabska and Stefan Morawski, *Z dziejów polskiej krytyki i teorii sztuki* (From the History of Polish Art Criticism and Theory), vol. 1 (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1961), pp. 70-86.

painters in Europe that favored the genre of historical painting, Matejko conceived of his work as a political commentary on the past. He was criticized by conservative critics for his direct attack in such paintings as “Stańczyk” (1862) on the irresponsibility of the Polish aristocracy that led to their eventual fall and the loss of independence for Poland.³⁸² But he also produced a complete series of portraits of the “Polish Kings” (1890) which became the standard representation of Polish monarchs to be reproduced in thousands of school textbooks and publications to the present day. As Irena Piotrowska noted as if on behalf of all Poles, “although we know many of the kings of old Poland from contemporary portraits and from pictures created by historical painters living just before Matejko, the memory we conjure up of every great king of the past is always unconsciously his image conceived by Matejko.”³⁸³ Matejko’s art has been rightly called “the romantic ‘old school’ of thought, which mythicized Poland’s past greatness” and this certainly applies also to his portrait of Copernicus.³⁸⁴ In his lifetime, Copernicus never really involved himself in the affairs of the church and could hardly be considered a mystic. Yet the painting shows him fascinated by his own discoveries while contemplating in ecstasy the night sky. Copernicus’ pathbreaking theory of heliocentrism, a major contribution to the development of modern astronomy, is referred to in the painting by means of a chart reproducing Copernicus’ drawing of the solar system, which first appeared in his *De Revolutionibus orbium coelestium*, a book published in Nuremberg in 1543, the

³⁸² Cavanaugh, *Out Looking In*, pp. 20-22.

³⁸³ Piotrowska, *Art of Poland*, p. 61. Copies of Matejko’s portraits of Polish kings are on display in the museum of the Polish Roman Catholic Union in Chicago.

³⁸⁴ Cavanaugh, *Out Looking In*, p. 187.

year of Copernicus' death. Yet in Matejko's painting, the astronomer appears as a young man. More important, although the scene depicted takes place in the middle of the night, Copernicus' chart and face are illuminated from above, as if the great discovery was in fact divinely inspired.

In the Polish Classroom, the replica of Matejko's painting serves a double purpose. First, the illuminated chart depicting the heliocentric system is a subtle parallel to the Jagiellonian Globe in the window bay. Second, the large canvas not only decorates the back wall of the room, but also provides depth to an otherwise relatively limited space. When looking from the opposite end of the room, the most distant image that meets the eye is not the white plaster wall, but the steeples of the Frombork Cathedral.³⁸⁵ The presence of Copernicus in the Polish Classroom is certainly not surprising, given the associations with the University of Cracow invoked by both the replica of the Jagiellonian Globe and the fragment of the Gothic cornice set in the wall. Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) had studied in Cracow and his training at that university has a major importance for understanding his astronomical and philosophical ideas, as well as his version of humanism.³⁸⁶ But the choice of Copernicus for a *Polish* Classroom may also have had deeper implications. Ever since the late eighteenth-century partitions of Poland, the issue of Copernicus' "national affiliation" has become a source of lively debate. Since the Polish lands where he was born had been incorporated

³⁸⁵ In the context of the Polish Classroom, "back wall" is more a figure of speech than an accurate description. The Polish Classroom is different from all others in existence at the time of its inauguration because of the absence of both teacher's desk and chair. Designed for seminars, not lectures, the room has a front and a backside, respectively, only because a blackboard and a historical painting were placed on opposing walls.

³⁸⁶ Wróblewski, "Cracovian Background," p. 158.

into Prussia, during the nineteenth century German historians turned Copernicus into a German, mainly on the basis of the statutes of the German Nation at the University of Bologna, in which Copernicus was listed as a member. The family name was traced to the German town of Koppernigk near Nysa, in Silesia; his genealogy became the subject of intense scrutiny for “German blood”; and many were quick to point out that Copernicus never wrote a word in Polish and never signed his name with initial M (from Mikołaj, the Polish version of Nicolaus).³⁸⁷ By 1939, the controversy had taken strong political overtones, as Toruń, Copernicus’ hometown, was increasingly mentioned in relation to the corridor across northern Poland required by the Nazi regime to secure access from Germany to Danzig. In the United States, the controversy continued well into the post-war period. Soil from Toruń was placed at the basis of Copernicus’ statue erected in Philadelphia in 1973, on the 500th anniversary of his birth, as the American German and American Polish communities in the city were engaged in a lively debate in the local press over Copernicus’ “national affiliation.”³⁸⁸ The

³⁸⁷ For a survey of the historiographic dispute, see Edward Rosen, “Copernicus and His Relation to Italian Science,” in *Convegno internazionale sul tema “Copernico e la cosmologia moderna (Roma, 3-5 maggio 1973)* (Rome: Accademia nazionale dei Lincei, 1975), pp. 66-68.

³⁸⁸ The statue is located at the intersection of the 18th Street and the Benjamin Franklin Parkway and is the work of the American sculptor Dudley Talcott. Talcott’s sculpture has no relation to Copernicus as a historical personality, but is meant instead to be an abstract representation of his heliocentric system. The debate over Copernicus’ ethnicity was eventually settled by spelling his name “Kopernik” in the inscription accompanying the monument. Instrumental in effecting that change was the Polish Heritage Society of Philadelphia founded in 1965, especially its founding member and president Joseph Zazyczny (1935-1990). See a brief description of the Zazyczny materials (mss. 136), especially box 3, folder 1, in the archives of the Balch Institute for Ethnic Studies of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania

painting hanging on the rear wall of the Polish Classroom in Pittsburgh is most likely an earlier part of the same debate. In the historical context of the room's inauguration in 1940, a portrait of Copernicus was clearly more than a tribute paid to the Jagiellonian University of Cracow and an attempt to link the newly opened university classroom to the traditions of Renaissance Poland. The replica of Matejko's painting may in fact have been a powerful political statement. Given that it was made by Anna Szyszko-Bohusz Szymborska, it is actually possible that the painting was part of the initial blueprint for the decoration of the room.

The windows of the Polish Classroom are modeled after windows in the Wawel Castle. The glass is all hand-made and cut in hexagonal roundels. The translucent roundels are mixed with stained glass depicting the coat of arms of ten Polish universities, two for each of the side windows and three for each of the middle windows. Depicted within the first window are the coats of arms of the Agricultural School of Warsaw and the Lwów Polytechnic School. The second window contains the coat of arms of the Catholic University in Lublin, the Jan Casimir University in Lwów, and the Piłsudski University in Warsaw. The third window has the emblems of the University of Poznań, the Stefan Batory University in Wilno, and the Jagiellonian University in Cracow. Finally, the fourth window displays the coats of arms of the Commercial Academy of Warsaw and the Warsaw Polytechnic School.³⁸⁹ Together with the fragment of a Gothic cornice from Cracow, these stained-glass windows with Polish university coats of arms suggest that Szyszko-Bohusz's initial idea was to link the Polish Classroom

(http://www.balchinstitute.org/manuscript_guide/html/zazyczny.html, visit of April 24, 2004).

³⁸⁹ Mitchell, *Polish Classroom*, p. 11.

in Pittsburgh to the old tradition of university life and organization in the nation-state the classroom was supposed to represent. More than any other contemporary room, the Polish Classroom was conceived from the very beginning as a university space and, at the same time, as a museum of the “imagined community” of Poland.

That it represented the American Polish community is less evident from the room’s decoration. Yet the opening of the Polish classroom would not have been possible without the constant support and the dedication of Polish Americans in and around Pittsburgh. The Poles were after all the most numerous group of immigrants of East European origin. As a consequence, the Polish Classroom committee, chaired by Teofil Starzyński, was one of the largest: it had six executive members to whom six other members at large were added at a later date.³⁹⁰ Starzyński was well known among American Poles, especially as president of the Polish Falcons. In that capacity, he had organized the American-Polish Legion made up of volunteers willing to fight alongside the American troops in World War I. A good friend of the famous Polish pianist and statesman Ignacy Jan Paderewski (1860-1941),³⁹¹ Starzyński secured Paderewski’s gift for the Polish Classroom, the manuscript of his only opera “Manru,” now in the

³⁹⁰ Poland’s consul general Heliodor Sztark was a honorary member of the committee, and Teofil Starzyński its honorary chairman. Chester Sierakowski was the chair of the committee, and Thaddeus Starzyński its vice-chairman; G. S. Rupp, the University of Pittsburgh bursar was the committee’s treasurer. The six members at large were Karol Herse, V.C. Kolski, Anthony Mallek, Mrs. Sierakowski, Aurelia Sumeracka, and Francis Tarnapowicz. Mitchell, *Polish Classroom*, p. 14.

³⁹¹ On Paderewski’s life and political activities on behalf of the Polish national cause, see Marian Marek Drozdowski, *Ignacy Jan Paderewski. A Political Biography* (Warsaw: Interpress, 1981).

archive cabinet of the classroom.³⁹² The Polish Classroom committee received assistance from many other Polish associations in America, first and foremost from the Polish Women's Alliance. The Alliance formed a sub-organization with the specific purpose of supporting the cause of the Polish Classroom, the Polish Women's League.³⁹³ The president of the League became the vice-chair of the Polish Classroom committee and received sustained support from women's lodges of the Polish National Alliance, the Polish Falcons, and the Polish Roman Catholic Union. It is important to note that the Polish Classroom project brought together people and organizations that had not always been willing to cooperate, and were often at odds, with each other, such as the Polish Roman Catholic Union

³⁹² "Manru" was first performed on May 29, 1901 in Dresden, and less than one year later in New York. The libretto written by Alfred Nossig is based on the novel *Chata za wsiq* (A Cottage Outside the Village) by one of the most prolific nineteenth-century Polish writers, Józef Ignacy Kraszewski (1812-1887). For "Manru" as a hallmark of late Romantic musical thought, see Dominique Quasnik, *Manru et le démon humain* (Paris: Editions de l'ensemble vocal "Marian Porebski", 1991). By the time he made his gift to the Polish Classroom, Paderewski already enjoyed an enormous popularity among Poles in the United States. He had been chosen honorary leader of virtually every Polish association in America. Through his activities and continuous work during the First World War, he had an instrumental role in the creation of the new Poland. His memorandum prepared in January 1917 and presented to President Woodrow Wilson laid the foundations for what later became Point Thirteen of Wilson's proclamation. When the Versailles Peace Treaty was signed in 1919, Paderewski was already the Prime Minister of Poland. In the aftermath of the German invasion of Poland in 1939, he refused to become Prime Minister but nevertheless helped with the organization of the government-in-exile. He remained in Switzerland during the war, but traveled to United States in order to gain support for the Polish cause. He died in New York in 1941 during one of these trips.

³⁹³ The Polish Women's League had seven members on the committee and twenty-four members at large. See Mitchell, *Polish Classroom*, p. 15.

and the Polish National Alliance.³⁹⁴ The Polish National Alliance, the Polish Falcons, and the Polish Women's Alliance had the greatest financial contribution to the project. Most other contributions came from individuals of Polish origin residing in the United States. The project received enthusiastic coverage in the pages of the *Polish Weekly Pittsburgher*. An important role in maintaining the financial support that the project needed during the Depression years was that of the Polish Women's League. Through picnics, suppers, and card parties in their homes or in parish houses all around Pittsburgh, the League secured a constant supply of funds for the Polish Classroom.³⁹⁵

In addition to domestic support, the Polish Classroom committee received assistance from an ad-hoc group in Poland. At the request of the Polish government, whom the Polish Classroom committee had already contacted with demands of assistance, the Polish-American Society in Warsaw organized in 1931 a committee in charge with finding a suitable architect who could draw the blueprint for the Polish Classroom.³⁹⁶ The committee supervised the design of

³⁹⁴ Relations between the Polish Roman Catholic Union and the Polish National Alliance were already strained in the 1880s, because of the criticism the former (founded in 1873) had leveled at the latter (founded in 1880) for expanding recruitment among non-Catholics. By 1900, the Alliance had more members and assets than the Union, and actively promoted anti-clerical policies.

³⁹⁵ Mitchell, *Polish Classroom*, p. 12.

³⁹⁶ The members of this cooperative committee in Poland included Stanisław Arct, Helena Bisping, Władysław Michalski, and Antoni Wieniawski. Leopold Kotnowski was the first president of the committee; Michał Kwapiśwewski, the director of the Polish-American Society, was elected the second president. The committee enlisted the cooperation of some important personalities from Cracow: Roman Dyboski, professor of English; Tadeusz Estreicher, professor of History and Western European Law; and Edward Kuntze, director of the Jagiellonian Library. It is the cooperative committee in Poland that organized Ruth Crawford Mitchell's visit of 1936, during which she succeeded in persuading Szyszko-Bohusz to change the original design. Mitchell, *Polish Classroom*, p. 12.

various artifacts made in Poland before being shipped to Pittsburgh. The committee's activities were also coordinated with and received support from the World Alliance of Poles Abroad. Together they financed Anna Szyszka-Bohusz Szymborska's work on the replica of Matejko's painting. They also covered the travel expenses of both the painter and her husband Waclaw Symborski to and from Pittsburgh.

With so many individuals and organizations involved in the Polish Classroom project, it is difficult, if not impossible to pinpoint a single, most determinant influence responsible for the final of the interior decoration of that room. It is nevertheless remarkable that although sometimes on ideologically divergent positions, all those who supported the project identified themselves in one way or another with Szyszko-Bohusz's idea of representing Poland through the art of the sixteenth-century Golden Age. At a closer examination, it appears that this was by no means a unique choice. In interwar Poland, the Jagiellonian Commonwealth was not just a historian's concern, but a true political model. Józef Piłsudski, the head of the new Polish republic emerging in 1918, envisaged a resurrection of the Commonwealth in the form of a political federation of Poland, Ukraine, Lithuania, and possibly Latvia and Estonia.³⁹⁷ The cultural

³⁹⁷ Konrad Syrop, *Poland between the Hammer and the Anvil* (London: Robert Hale, 1968), p. 107. The presence of the coat of arms of the University of Wilno is certainly a reflection of this political ideal. Vilnius (Polish: Wilno), initially in the newly proclaimed independent Republic of Lithuania, was soon occupied by Piłsudski's troops and subsequently incorporated into Poland together with the surrounding countryside (1922). Vilnius was Piłsudski's hometown: upon his death in 1935, his body was laid to rest in the Wawel Cathedral in Cracow, but his heart was taken to Vilnius. For the Polish diplomatic efforts to obtain international recognition for the occupation of Vilnius, see Stanisław Sierpowski, *Piłsudski w Genewie: dyplomatyczne spory o Wilno w roku 1927* (Piłsudski in Geneva. Diplomacy for Vilnius in 1927)(Poznań: Instytut Zachodni, 1990).

legacy of the Golden Age had an important role in such political aspirations. While Piłsudski's troops occupied Wilno and Kiev, Szyszko-Bohusz's restoration of the Wawel Castle appeared as an attempt to restore the glamour of the Polish court of the 1500s. By the time the Polish cooperative committee made its decision on the architect in charge of the interior decoration of the Polish Classroom, the political climate in Poland was marked by the newly-installed "regime of the colonels" devoted to Marshall Piłsudski and the political ideals that had brought him to power through the coup d'état of May 12, 1926. Unlike the earlier period, Piłsudski had largely abandoned the federalist dreams in favor of more conservative ethnic policies. But the Golden Age of the Jagiellonian rule remained a model in a period of increasing opposition to the "sanacja" (moral cleansing of the political life) introduced by Piłsudski.³⁹⁸ The sixteenth century had nothing remarkable to offer in terms of military victories, conquests or annexations; instead, it was a period of extraordinary prosperity and blossoming of arts and scientific achievements, serving as a model for the economic and cultural prosperity following Piłsudski's coup d'état of 1926. Cracow epitomized both the "democracy of the gentry" and the political aspirations of Piłsudski, who had begun in Cracow his military and political activities on behalf of the Polish national cause.³⁹⁹

On the other hand, the evidence of the 1975 POHP interview with Ruth Crawford Mitchell is indisputable: she, and no one else in either the Polish Classroom committee or in Poland, made a number of important decisions

³⁹⁸ For contemporary reactions against the "sanacja," see Marian Leczyk, *Piłsudski i sanacja w oczach przeciwników* (Piłsudski and "Sanacja" in Contemporary Eyes)(Warsaw: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1987).

³⁹⁹ See Józef Buszko, *Józef Piłsudski w Krakowie, 1896-1935* (Piłsudski in Cracow, 1896-1935)(Cracow: Krajowa Agencja Wydawnicza, 1990).

regarding the interior decoration of the Polish Classroom. But her decisions were made within a framework defined by Szyszko-Bohusz's stylistic and cultural choices. Mitchell could not have picked anything outside the Wawel Castle or the Polish Renaissance theme. Ultimately, Mitchell's influence was limited by his determination to give the Polish Classroom a Jagiellonian appearance. In that sense, the Polish Classroom cannot be treated as either of folk or of religious inspiration. In the end the source of inspiration for this room were two monuments of Polish Renaissance culture in Cracow, the Wawel Castle and the Jagiellonian University, both royal foundations. In that sense, the Polish Classroom was inspired by the early twentieth-century political and cultural revival of the sixteenth-century Kingdom of Poland. However, what Szyszko-Bohusz and his contemporaries were trying to emulate was not a monarchy, but a "democracy of the gentry" and its remarkable cultural achievements.

CHAPTER VIII

CONCLUSIONS

Interpreting the history of any nation from its representation in decorative arts is an enterprise fraught with risk. Material culture does not have a meaning *per se* outside the social context in which it is used for a variety of goals by a variety of people. Reconstructing the social and political context in which *objets d'art* and ornamental patterns were invested with cultural and political meaning requires the use of external sources, for no examination of artifacts alone, no matter how detailed, will ever bring back the meanings attached to them by past producers and users. However, decorative art representation is also multi-layered and can be a source of contradictory interpretations. Without any rigidly assigned meaning or a “dictionary of symbols” at hand, subsequent users may re-define the symbolism initially attached to ornamental arrangements even without a significant physical alteration of the original setting. The result is often a complicated stratigraphy of symbols, for the understanding of which it is necessary to reconstruct the interaction between an already existing design and its users. Far from being a passive mirror of social or political practice, decorative arts can thus participate actively in the construction and interpretation of history.

The Nationality Classrooms were initially thought as an expression of the diversity of the Pittsburgh community and of the contributions of the immigrant population to the prosperity of the city. While there is little doubt that the communities of Pittsburgh were involved in the project and enthusiastically contributed through work and money to its success, it remains unclear whether

the rooms were indeed a reflection of their aspirations and self-representation. With just one exception (the Russian Classroom), those who designed the settings were architects or artists overseas, who had little or no understanding of the structure of the immigrant groups and of the cultural background of people living in America. Although sometimes committees in Pittsburgh did indeed have a saying in approving the blueprint, their members often did little more than subscribing to the decorative arrangements contained in the overseas proposals. While the committee in Prague, working closely with Mitchell, was ultimately responsible for all elements of decoration in the Czechoslovak Classroom, neither the Hungarian, nor the Yugoslav Classrooms can be seen as products of Györgyi's and Braniš's initial designs, respectively. They have both been altered by committees eager to make room for portraits of national heroes or for memorabilia. In the case of the Romanian Classroom, such alterations were brought more by historical circumstances than by that room's committee: the Brâncoveanu mosaic came to Pittsburgh from the World Fair in New York, because it could not have gone anywhere else while Romania was at war with the United States, not because it was requested by the members of the Romanian committee. By contrast, and despite Mitchell's own role in selecting the decoration pattern for the ceiling, the Polish Classroom is a direct reflection of Szyszko-Bohusz's plan and of his idea of modeling the room after a castle and a university of Cracow. There is no known case of a significant alteration of the initial plan that would reflect the self-representation or the aspirations of any Pittsburgh community. Indeed, there is very little in the classrooms opened before or during World War II that speaks about the immigrants. The classrooms are not about working in the mills, ethnic associations, or festivals. Instead, they

showcase the imagined communities that immigrants had left behind when moving to America. The earliest evidence of a visible presence of the Pittsburgh residents in any University of Pittsburgh classroom dates to the 1980s. In the Armenian Classroom opened in 1988, the venerable age of the cornerstone from the ruins of the eleventh-century library of the Sanahin Monastery is in sharp contrast to the handprint of a six-month old child born shortly before the room's inauguration. In the late 1920s and 1930s, classrooms were designed to represent not individuality, but abstract notions of loyalty and patriotism. Even in those cases where cooperating committees were organized overseas at the request of governments in those respective countries, the involvement of the Pittsburgh committees in decision-making was minimal.

The idea of having overseas architects directly involved in the project came into discussion at a very early stage and must be seen as the direct result of concerns with authenticity, clearly expressed by both Chancellor Bowman and Mitchell. It was Mitchell who, as the initiator of the project and its first director, insisted on both high-quality and genuine representation of "national traditions." The question of possible differences between the representation proposed by overseas artists and that of the immigrant communities in Pittsburgh was never raised. Indeed, the self-representation of ethnic communities never played any significant role in any discussion or important decision pertaining to the Nationality Rooms program. Nor was there any doubt that the image of the nation as advanced by artists and governments overseas was the "correct" one. That it was also the image that members of ethnic communities in Pittsburgh were expected to embrace is shown by Mitchell's assessment of the degree to which ethnic communities were interested in their own traditions. She had clearly

expressed surprise at the lack of interest following the survey that she had conducted in the 1920s among her students at the University of Pittsburgh. From Mitchell's perspective, the issue was one of collective amnesia: "I realized then that they could have hanged out of trees and fallen into America." Nothing is mentioned in the survey about either the climate of intolerance towards immigrants that may have been responsible for the answers Mitchell received from her students. Nor does she seem to have been aware that her sample group consisted of people who had already chosen to "assimilate" when entering the University. Nevertheless, the situation required immediate recuperative action, not an investigation of changes in tastes and attitudes of immigrant communities. What the immigrants of Pittsburgh needed was to learn (again) about their presumably defunct identity, the only way for them to reestablish links with their roots. This may have also been a turning point in Mitchell's life and career, as she decided to *create* a heritage for the ethnic communities of Pittsburgh, one to which students like hers could always go back to discover their roots when in danger of being assimilated. "I had to do something," she recollected in her 1975 interview. Without her will and determination the Nationality Rooms Project would have never existed. When Chancellor Bowman pushed for rooms dedicated to important cultural and political personalities, Mitchell presented to him a new idea of heritage-oriented rooms, which must have taken Bowman by surprise. From her point of view, heritage was about traditions, not personalities. To Bowman's historicist approach, she replied with the Herderian concept of *Volksgeist*, which she now expected to imbue the hearts and minds of the Pittsburgh immigrants. In doing so, she was definitely ahead of her own time. To Mitchell, the solution of contemporary problems in America was celebrating

ethnicity, not assimilation.

Having come to Pittsburgh with extensive experience in working with immigrants, but also with foreign cultural and political institutions and personalities, Mitchell had a deep understanding of the cultural gap between elites in home countries and common immigrants in the United States. Her idea of classrooms dedicated to nationalities was meant to fill that gap and to create commonality of national consciousness where none existed before. But the intended audience was certainly not restricted to the immigrant communities of America. While reminding the latter that they had every reason to be proud about their ethnic heritage, Mitchell also formulated a sharp criticism of contemporary nativist policies and of current ideas that turning immigrants into good American citizens meant educating them to become copies of white Anglo-Saxon Protestant Americans. Indeed, the fact that no trace can be identified under the vaults of the Cathedral of Learning of the local immigrant communities of Pittsburgh may also be interpreted as a deliberate attempt to show that the immigrants were not a “savage and undisciplined horde” of Hungarians, Slavs, and Southern Europeans working in the mills. Instead, they were a great addition to civilized America, as they were coming from all those great nations overseas, which had already made important contributions to civilization. The Rooms speak little, if at all, about “how we worked the land, the crops we grew, the little money we saw from one year’s end to another, our holidays and festivals.” Nevertheless, Mitchell’s vision of the Nationality Rooms seems to have been directly inspired by the dream of Mike Dobrejcek, one of the main characters in Thomas Bell’s novel, *Out of This Furnace*: one day, “they would realize that even though we spoke different

languages, we were still men like themselves.”⁴⁰⁰

The Nationality Rooms Program was thus based on the idea that America was not a *melting pot*, but rather a *salad bowl*. Mitchell’s project was initiated at a crucial moment in the immigrant history of America. In 1924, the National Origins Act was adopted with overwhelming majority. Throughout the 1920s, the proclivities mirrored by the anti-immigration legislation fueled intense hostility toward immigrants in almost every facet of American social and political life. In a political atmosphere marked by nativist reactions, Bowman’s endorsement of Mitchell’s idea may have appeared as suicidal. In fact, it was a move away from the problems associated at that time as well as later with the working population of immigrant origins: unionization and general strikes. That the project eventually succeeded is a clear indication of both Mitchell’s visionary understanding of current politics and of Bowman’s willingness to transform the university into an institution of fundamental role in shaping the future of Pittsburgh. Although the Nationality Rooms can hardly be viewed as a representation of immigrants, they clearly celebrated diversity. Within an institution of higher education, they conspicuously served to educate people about who was truly civilized.

The association between the Nationality Rooms Program and the Cathedral of Learning was also an aspect that secured the success of the former. The Cathedral was the tallest structure in Pittsburgh until the 1970s, a symbol of the city’s capitalist growth and, at the same time, of its new aspirations. Through the adoption of the Nationality Rooms Program, the Cathedral, already a symbol of power and authority placed in the cultural center of the city, conveyed a message of inclusion and respect for other nations, while encouraging the

⁴⁰⁰ Bell, *Out of This Furnace*, p. 196.

recognition of their contribution to the emergence of this nation. Surrounding the Commons Room, the classrooms decorated in “national styles” are meant to call attention upon the key contribution immigrants had to the history of Pittsburgh. At the same time, the Program suggests that there is more to the immigrants than just their net contribution to the industrial growth of Pittsburgh. Out of the furnace came the steel, but part of the price for the tremendous economic growth was the almost total obliteration of traditions and a sense of alienation. By introducing the *Volksgeist* between the walls of the Neo-Gothic skyscraper, the University provided a place for the safekeeping of quintessential traditions that could serve as both guidelines for the future development of the ethnic communities in Pittsburgh and a reminder for the rest of America that the greatness of the nation is the combined result of multiple cultural influences.

In this light, the University of Pittsburgh’s initiative may be seen as the first important monument in America created for, and to a certain extent by, immigrants to celebrate immigrants. While the Statue of Liberty is often associated symbolically with the immigrant experience in America, it is ultimately a symbol of America, not of the immigrants.⁴⁰¹ Indeed, viewed from the top of the torch, all immigrants reaching to American shores look alike. There is no room in the Statue for differences between Poles, Italians, Ukrainians, Russians, Finns, Slovaks, or Serbs. What the Nationality Rooms Program provided was exactly that political and cultural space in which immigrant identities could be celebrated in themselves and for themselves, separately but at the same time together. In that respect, that the Program ultimately speaks less

⁴⁰¹ Marianne Debouzy, *In the Shadow of the Statue of Liberty. Immigrants, Workers, and Citizens in the American Republic, 1880-1920* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1992).

about the immigrants then about the nations from which they derived their identities in America must be seen as a calculated effect, not as a failure.

The project had also the great advantage of offering opportunities to various parts involved in its completion to assign different and sometimes even contrasting meanings to the final product. The University enthusiastically supported the idea for it ultimately put Pitt in a unique position among American universities and under world exposure. The ethnic communities and associations took pride in this project, primarily because a monument of the size of the Cathedral of Learning made their presence in the urban landscape highly visible. With the Russian Classroom, the members of the ethnic community involved in its decoration also marked the distinction between their version of the national image and that of the Soviet government overseas. In other cases, the Nationality Classrooms made it possible for communities struggling with conflicting loyalties during and after World War II to re-define themselves and in the process re-configure the meaning attached to the rooms. Overseas governments in Europe generally saw the project as a unique opportunity to promote the national image and to influence the American public opinion at a time of growing American influence in international politics. Because of the considerable importance given to how national communities were imagined overseas, as opposed to amongst immigrants in Pittsburgh, the interference of the political discourse about the nation in use at that time in any given country was sometimes overwhelming.. As a result, some Nationality Classrooms represent nation-states, not nations. The Yugoslav Classroom speaks of Yugoslavia as a Yugoslavist idea, not about the Yugoslav people either overseas or in Pittsburgh. As a consequence, the room is in fact a juxtaposition of meanings assigned by the artist responsible with the

blueprint (a Croat) and the members of the classroom committee (some Croats, some Serbs). The example of the Yugoslav Classroom suggests that the sharp contrast between the image of political and national unity conveyed by some classrooms and the political realities at home made it possible to treat the University of Pittsburgh classrooms as the only place where the image of the national community could be preserved without being altered by the course of history. This is particularly true for those rooms that were opened at a time of intense political or military crisis at home, such as the Polish or the Czechoslovak Classrooms. In such cases, it is quite clear that America, in general, and Pittsburgh in particular were treated as a safe haven for the values seriously threatened at home. America was now a second home, while the sons and daughters of immigrants born on American shores were the only hope and model to be followed in trouble times. "I'm going to pray to God tonight," declared Jan Masaryk at the dedication of the Czechoslovak Classroom, "that Europe some day will be like that—that we shall be men and women of this or that nationality or parentage or race or creed, but working together for the common good of ourselves and those who come after us."

It is in cases such as that of the Czechoslovak Classroom that we see more clearly the extraordinary, yet paradoxical success of Mitchell's idea: not only have the Nationality Classrooms become repositories of the *Volksgeist* for the benefit of local communities of immigrants in need to re-connect with their roots, but they were also national shrines for non-American members of the "imagined community." A reflection of post-Versailles Europe, the Nationalities Rooms Program was a unique locus for the construction of the "imagined communities" that have come into existence after World War I. It is only in Bowman's cathedral

of perennial values that the sacred image of the nation could be preserved for posterity. Indeed, the Czechoslovak and the Yugoslav Classrooms, respectively, have clearly outlived Czechoslovakia and Yugoslavia.

Despite turning on occasion into shrines or museums, the Nationality Classrooms never ceased to be classrooms. All architects responsible for the decoration of the classrooms discussed in this dissertation had in mind rooms for educational activities. By the time most of them were inaugurated, a tradition had begun at Pitt of teaching foreign languages in the respective rooms, a tradition continuing well into the most recent past. Above all, Mitchell's idea had been to teach students about heritage: artifacts, paintings, and interior decoration were thus meant to stir intellectual curiosity and to encourage more learning about the national culture represented in each room. The learning process may be considered more complete in such settings, for the rooms offered a dimension that was not readily available in any regular classroom. The Nationality Classrooms offered "walks" through different time dimensions and cultures. Every individual artifact or element of interior decoration could become a teaching aid, as lectures or seminar discussions could thus engage the reconstruction of the historical context and lead to a more meaningful experience of that culture.

On the other hand, the obsessive preoccupation with authenticity that characterizes the earliest rooms of the program is certainly responsible for the presence in some classrooms of objects of great value that were integrated into the decorative arrangement much like in a museum display. The presence of glass cases or cabinets with glass doors in the Czechoslovak or Hungarian Classrooms is a clear indication that it was the intention of their respective designers to provide a context in which such objects as the glass replica of the crown of

Hungary or a letter from Masaryk could retain their authority, as their authenticity could be adjudicated in the process of a lecture or seminar. In that sense, those Nationality Classrooms that were designed for display of artifacts are clearly imitations of art, not history, museums, for the objects inside glass cases or cabinets continue to retain their “aura” and sometimes were invested with an aura that they did not have in the first place.⁴⁰² It is important to note that some classrooms also incorporate architectural fragments that were already museum display artifacts before being brought to Pittsburgh, a clear indication that at least in such cases rooms were meant to be *like* museums. The English Classroom became the repository of the largest collection of architectural fragments from the ruins of the Parliament building destroyed by German bombs during World War II. Even more significant is the example of the Syria-Lebanon Classroom, which is in fact an original seventeenth-century room from a house in Damascus that was shipped in its entirety to Pittsburgh for the opening of the room during that same war. Clearly such issues as artifact function and authenticity present themselves in a much more complex light in the Nationality Rooms than in a regular museum. Even if the rooms are functional, to the extent that they are still used as classrooms, the function of the original artifacts incorporated within their decoration was re-negotiated in the Pittsburgh context. In the Cathedral of Learning, the glass replica of the Hungarian crown is not anymore a souvenir and the lace portrait of the Madonna of Brezje had ceased to be just a wartime substitute of the true icon. Both have become museum display artifacts. In fact, they are museum artifacts in action, for not only could they be used directly in the process of teaching and learning, but also be transformed into relics during and

⁴⁰² See Conn, *Museums*, p. 194.

for the celebration of festivals and ceremonies organized by members of the ethnic communities in Pittsburgh inside the university.

The Nationality Classroom Program was the backbone of the now renowned international program at Pitt, although they were initially intended just to educate the community of Pittsburgh about the cultures of those represented in the Cathedral of Learning classrooms. At an early stage, the rooms served for the teaching of foreign languages by members of the same ethnic communities that contributed to the success of Mitchell's idea. To this day, the University of Pittsburgh offers summer programs in foreign languages and cultures, especially for public school teachers all across America. Various classroom committees are known to have set up scholarships for Pitt students with special research interests in the study of the cultures or histories of those respective nations. At the same time, after World War II and the political transformations in Eastern Europe between 1945 and 1989, the classrooms that represented the nation-states resulting from the peace process at the end of World War I have lost their initial meaning, as the image created through them could not serve any more to legitimize the existence of those nations and to create a sense of imagined unity. Furthermore, although the Nationality Rooms Program began at a moment of great hopes in international cooperation, some of the earliest rooms were dedicated at the time the geographical and political configuration established in Versailles was brought under question. While that configuration appears contested by the political meaning attached to the Hungarian Classroom, both the Czechoslovak and the Yugoslav Classroom may be interpreted as indirect endorsements of the Versailles decisions. Viewed from that perspective, the audience of all rooms discussed in this dissertation was the American public. It

remains unknown to what extent did the Pittsburgh public opinion of immigrants of Hungarian, Croatian, or Serbian origin change because of the Nationality Classrooms. In any case, Chancellor Bowman's idea of a Cathedral of Learning was not to effect immediate change, but to start a new era: "A hundred years from now, perhaps a thousand years from now, people may look back, see through history these present days as the beginning of a new age..." The Cathedral of Learning is in itself a remarkable technological achievement. But what makes this building stand up the passing of time and marks it as the beginning of a new era is not the skyscraper of Neo-Gothic design. Instead, it is the Nationality Rooms Program treasured within its walls.

Appendix A
Transcript of the February 12, 1975 interview with Ruth Crawford Mitchell
(Pennsylvania State Archives, MG-409, Pittsburgh Oral History Project 69-1 and 2)

LR: I am Lois Rubin, the day is February 12, and the place is Walnut Street in Shadyside. My interviewee is Ruth Crawford Mitchell. What is your age, Mrs. Mitchell?

RCM: This year I will be 87.

LR: And your place of birth?

RCM: Atlantic Heights, New Jersey.

LR: What is your ethnic origin?

RCM: Crawford is obviously Scotch, and Mitchell was acquired, also Scottish-Irish, and on my mother side I was in England. And, I guess, the day of the first Smith who arrived on the good ship Elisabeth, who came shortly after Mayflower, but it wasn't Mayflower.

LR: What is your occupation? Or what was your occupation before you retired?

RCM: The Nationality Rooms and the nationality interests at the University of Pittsburgh.

LR: Your religion?

RCM: Episcopalian.

LR: Any political affiliation?

RCM: I am a Democrat, registered Democrat, but that does not get me to vote in the primary. I really wish to vote in the primary and be an independent, maybe I can some day.

LR: OK. That's just for the record. My first question goes way back to the very beginning. How did you, of course, become interested in the immigrants and what was your first job in working with the immigrants?

RCM: I went to Vassar. And my class was 1912. And during the years when I was at Vassar, from 1908 to 1912, one of the great questions waved across the country was the question of admitting over a million immigrants a year at the peak of the pre-World War I immigration, coming here to work in the steel mills and coal mines in great, great numbers. And there was a very strong movement in Congress to limit it. Of course, it fell. And as I look back now, I can see myself in college being very aggressive, feeling that any numbers should be allowed to come into United States, and very much opposed to senator Read of Pittsburgh and his whole party, which wanted to limit the number, saying that this would be disastrous for this country. And I now realize that there is a great deal of wisdom in Senator Read's fear. It's comparable to the fear of what pollution will do, the energy, you see, people wouldn't accept it at first. And he later had the idea of quota which landed numerically at the time I was in college, it was augmented by careful selection, however there were such a lot of questions and I was such a lucky person in those days, the whole class was to be under professor Mills, a very great leader in Economics. And there was no Sociology in those days, the Economics were [with] social implications. And we stayed for hours on campus to let the immigrants in, we all came to this great free country, so forth and so long. And I lived long enough to see that that was not a very wise think to do and I would like to refer to a chart which comes in the ethnic issue edited by Maxine Bruhns, the present director of the Nationality Rooms Program,

which uses a chart that shows very clearly and anybody interested in the subject, I suggest, should look at this chart, which begins in 1820 and shows to the depth the rise and fall and the tremendous height of immigration just before World War I. Now, I was interested in this whole question of the immigrant. I had a personal reason. And that was that my mother and father... yes, that's them... had, daily, at home as the only child in... That was a home of tremendous romance and happiness. Never had I questioned that I have ever known nothing but complete companionship, happiness and carrying for each other, and right thinking and right doing in the world. They have met as students in Germany, when my father was doing postgraduate work and she was studying Art. And this romance was summers in the Schwarzwald, walking in the Thüringer Wald, doing all kinds of things. So later on, in their married life, all they wanted to do was to go to Europe in the summer to catch more of this thing and go on with their studies and their interests. And I was taken, as soon as I was able to go, I was taken. This put into my life when, I think the first time I was able to go, I was nine. I was nine and there wasn't a grandmother to leave me with anymore, and so that I began very, very early to travel all over the world and I had all those feelings in college and I must find some piece of work... or this was just before... to carry, to make use of those travels. This is the point that I really wanted to make. And the opportunity of course came along and when I graduated my father said to me, "You can have any kind of training you want. I can give it to you. And remember the more training and experience you have, the higher, the longer the ladder will be when you start." So I took my M.A. at Washington University in St. Louis, and met a very active and fine person who taught a course on immigration. I took that. It became the

subject of my Master's thesis, which is still brought up to me. Only a couple of months ago, I had a young person. And I am so embarrassed. It's called *The Immigrant in St. Louis* and it is the only written document on coming of immigrants, on immigration in St. Louis, and it is perfectly ridiculous in its classifications and in many statements. I blush. But it is still unfortunately being used in reference libraries. But that focused it. And this was in 1916. And some other people read this article and one of them was ... there were two people, two women. One was Miss Terry Bremer, who had just become the head of the national YWCA program for immigrant girls, a new national program. And the other one was Francis Keller. I can't tell you for sure, but she was the representative of a group of industrialists, maybe it was something like a national chamber of commerce, the section on immigrants, that is the manufacturer and the industrialists looked for labor supply of cheap labor, and they got it from Europe. She was the person who was managing it and promoting the idea on this side of the Atlantic. And both of them offered me a job because of this silly, little book. And this was my first job. I went to my father and I asked him quickly which one he thought would be better for me to accept. And he thought and he finally said, "Well, the YWCA represents a very fine caliber and type of women. I think that you would stand a better chance of growing further and I think you would stand a better chance of working where you would be happy, because of the respect and the fine caliber of the women you would be associated with." He didn't say anything about certain aspects of big business and big industry and women at that time. Remember, this is 1914. It took World War I to liberate American women and that's one reason I had such opportunity, because in World War I with all the horror and all

the danger that men went through, women had all opportunity to go overseas. So, I went to YWCA just before the outbreak of the war and I was what they called a field secretary. "Field" for immigration and farm community. And my area was New England and New Jersey, and New York; those were the field areas. Which meant that I got to see places like Wist... no, Lawrence, Massachusetts, where they had the great strike in the cotton mills. I got to Passaic, where it was the greatest Mecca for single women to work industrially in the Botany Mills, which made the handkerchiefs and linen, just as the coal mines attracted the men. And the thing that you found in Passaic was that there were hundreds and hundreds of single girls streaming out of the fields in Poland, in Slovakia, in Hungary. And they came together and lived in boarding houses, what was more likely in those days. And the organizations of that community, the nationality organizations and clubs and so forth always had big parties on Saturday night, of course all of these pink-cheeked and fine husky girls. Single men in Pennsylvania, Ohio, New York discovered that this was the best place to go and get a wife. So the parties they had, and the drinking that went on Saturday night, and what went on after that let the priests of the Catholic Church to the brink of desperation, because they were left with these girls being pregnant and then in trouble and heartbroken. On the other hand there were a great many that got married and left [laughs] the area for Pittsburgh and the coal mines. So this was one of the first instances that asked for a YWCA secretary. And I had, I got what I am telling you from Ingram (?) the priests. And so we went in, and Fjeril Hess, who later on worked in Czechoslovakia with me, was the YWCA secretary in charge with the responsibility of teaching English, and particularly in the homes which the Catholic

priests and I guess with the help of in those in primary ..., officers who really were concerned with what was happening... They persuaded some of the girls who would listen to live together in houses which is... which were rented and take the living room and make it in to a little chapel with an altar and to take the pledge not to...never go out, to go from this home where they lived to the mill, twos, in twos, two by two, never to go alone; secondly to wear their handkerchief over their hair and not to put on the American hat. So they were marked right away as being entirely different from the other girls, who were very quickly doing what they were doing with their hair and what they were doing in the way of cosmetics and so forth trying to be quickly Americanized. And it was to this group that she taught English, and in her own way did the best she could to help them to reset some contact with the world. This is the kind of job, you see, that when the YWCA started, and Mrs. Garfield (?), she was doing, so I, I... This was the job, and to say, there were others in Lawrence, Massachusetts, and there were other opportunities and times for me to go into, but this gave me a perfect, tremendous insight into what the conditions were in industrial towns for women and indirectly for men, because my chief, Edith Terry Brown, a very rare and brilliant person, who could see and taught me everything I've tried to teach to Maxine [...] it's not from me, it's from her, she is the one who talks about principles, she is the one who said this wise thing: "When you are planning a program for the immigrant, it was aimed at reaching the one who was farthest upstream, that means the one who is the least Americanized, if your program will reach *that* person, it will, it will also what the rest of them want more, they will take over, and this I have always... because this is, wait a minute, look, recently you see I have

illustrations of a educated, third-generation person of Italian background, who won't accept and has, you see, has no appreciation of the need and therefore everything peters out and this is what is happening in the United States today. It seems to me that idealism and (the) concept of cultural values of the past have left the minds that were interested. Anyway...

LR: OK. Actually you covered almost every question I wanted to ask you without me saying a word...

RCM (laughs)

LR: Let me just summarize. In your work with the Y(WCA), what were your exact duties? You were not teaching English.

RCM: No, I was a secretary. Field secretary.

LR: Field secretary...

RCM: Field secretary for this whole area, which meant that I went to the areas where we were told there were problems among the immigrant girls. I made what I called a path-finding survey: how many immigrants were there in the community, of what nationality, what were their housing conditions, what were the education opportunities, what was the influence of the church, where did they work, and in what conditions did they work, and what were their human needs.

LR: Right.

RCM: This is what I did. Now, you see, there is a perfect thread that went right straight through, has gone right straight to today, when you make a survey for many other reasons, but it is what I call a path-finding survey, and this was influenced by

the fact that the Pittsburgh survey, which... Have you ever heard of the Pittsburgh survey?

LR: Yes.

RCM: It's, it's... what, I don't know, eight or ten volumes, made in 1912, in which they have the ... This is what Pittsburgh, the black name of the bad housing, bad air, twelve hours of work in the steel mills, immigrants, the men coming out of the mill at night and getting into a bed that was still warm because of the people of the day shift have been... or the night shift sleeping during the day and they came and slept during the night. I mean, Pittsburgh got a perfectly terrific name and it's still hold on despite all that has been done, as well the challenges due to the Mellon and to the Air Foundations to try to get rid of any of those conditions. And that's 1912. And I at that time, I was going back and forth, and I was studying the survey in my economics course with Professor Mills. I lived in St. Louis, and I can remember lying awake at night until we got to Pittsburgh, where we changed engines and so forth, and with my nose glued to the window, looking at the gorgeous spectacle, as we wound around from Homestead and up to here, into full Pittsburgh, with the open blast furnaces. So Pittsburgh got into my mind in a dramatic way, and I have never had any idea coming my way, never ever. But I was prepared for Pittsburgh, when the war finally came along and my... the work of our department changed abruptly into a world war job and the YWCA on the basis of Ms. Burnham's (?) analysis of the needs of the immigrant, and again the immigrant man as well as the immigrant woman, YWCA conceived of the idea of hostess houses. Now, World War I was very different form World War II. In World War I, there was a tremendous national federal fund raised

for work of those, let's not just call it welfare, but for the well-being of the soldier, and one of their, his well-beings, particularly when you are still in this country, was contact with his family, with his wife, with his mother, with his daughter. And YWCA was one of the national agencies that received a grant from this large federal fund to their programs, this was their program, that they will erect what they called hostess houses within the camp, where the men were being trained, to which the women could come Saturday and Sunday, when there were visiting hours, and there was a hostess, a YWCA secretary, in every single camp. Well, Mrs. Burnham pointed out that in these, there were many-many young men, because at that time you could become a citizen if you entered the United States army, and hundred of aliens from all industries were enlisted, not only because they would become citizens quicker, but because this was a way of fighting with the United States army for the independence. Remember, the basic cause for World War I was the desire of Czechs and the Slovaks to come together in an independent Czechoslovakia. Poles wanted to be free of Russia, the Yugoslavs wanted to come together out of, out of Austria, so by enlisting in the American army you had a chance to fight. And others went abroad in legions, and I am coming to that in just a minute, because we had a very strong part to play, again in, in... with the women. So I had responsibility for selecting and staffing the hostess houses throughout the country with able women of foreign birth who spoke a foreign language, the language of the soldier, the alien soldier, in the cantonment. And this taught me a very, a very great deal. Now, the... the... this went, this satisfied me as a war job. But it also made me ready, when the war was over, to be interested in what happened. The war came to an end. This was... I was running the

hostess houses, in about 1917. Well, in 1918, with the war over, there was still money left over in this big federal fund. And permission... you see, it was not only the YWCA, but it was the YWCA, they had hundreds of women working in the YWCA huts of Europe, there was also the Salvation Army, and... Well, it was... what the women did overseas to a degree in some ways, some particularly, without mentioning any special [sic], special organizations, it's not YWCA, because our work was entirely with women overseas, it was not with men at all. But the result was that the Secretary of State, Robert Lansing, who was in World War II, said "no", literally in the way that Mr. Ford said the other day "not over my dead body." But it's "not over my dead body," would women, American women get abroad, except if they are in American uniform and subject to American command. And that ruled out YWCA right away from being of any help to women. And yet there were more women enlisted and working overseas, as telephone operators and as nurses and all kinds of things, so the British YWCA and Her Majesty's, with Young and Christian organizations, had to do all the work for the Americans. And many of our American young women went over and were YWCA secretaries, but all of the British, because of Her Majesty, serviced to Her Majesty's troops. And this was all very ironical to me that the American women had to be served by British... units. Anyhow, we... the program of the First World War got a large number of opportunities for young YWCA secretaries to go abroad, because they could do work for the women of the Allies, and one of the... Alice Masaryk, the daughter of President Masaryk of Czechoslovakia, had studied social work in this country living at the University of Chicago settlement of which Mary McDowell was the head. She... Mary McDowell

was a very-very fine woman, the settlement was in the Stockyards, this was in the '90s and up to the time of World War I, and the workers in the meat plants, Stockyards, large numbers of them were Czechs, Bohemians, and they did the work which is done today entirely by hand, with disemboweling the, the... And I can remember Mary McDowell describing the work that these Czech women had to do, picking the eyes out of the heads of the carcasses, all of which Alice Masaryk came to live in that settlement. And she saw and she listed all the Czech women in the neighborhood and those who were... And when she heard what these women were doing, she has often told that to me, she would come home to her lodging, which was with one of the doctors in the neighborhood, a woman doctor, and she said, "I would throw myself on the floor and weep in agony over what my wonderful women and fellow citizens from the mountains of Slovakia were doing in this country." Well, I can amplify that with another story, which Mary McDowell has told me of a period much later. She said she was coming home to settlement and they had a cleaning woman whose name was Mary, I don't remember what her Slovak name was, but they called her, they called her Mary, and she was on the stairs scrubbing the steps coming down on the second floor. And she was crying, the tears were rolling down on her face, and she got up, and tears were rolling down her face, and Mary McDowell said, "Mary, why are you crying?" and "What is the trouble?" And she said, "I have been thinking of my..., my daughter. She is going to be married, you know." "But why are you crying? She is going to be married. Aren't you happy about that?" She said, "I am just thinking. When she has to scrub steps, what is she going to think of? When I scrub steps, I think of the pine trees in Slovakia, I think of the snow

in the mountains, the streams running down the valleys, but she... all she has is Chicago to think of. What is she going to think of?" Now, to my mind that is a terrific, terrific story. But again, by a very thoughtful and experienced woman. She knew of the work that I have been doing, and when Alice Masaryk sent her a cable, saying that she wanted help, she was the daughter of Professor Masaryk, who at a famous meeting here, in Pittsburgh—which is another story that I can tell you—and... became the president. First he was the president of the organization that set up the Republic, then he became the president of the Republic. After he became the president of the Republic, he was waited upon by a committee bearing the responsibility to appoint the president of the Red Cross. And it was headed Zenkel (?). And Peter Zenkel is still a very important, former, I think, Prime Minister, who escaped to this country after the Russian coup, and was still living in Washington. And he headed the committee who asked the daughter, Alice, to be made the president of the Czechoslovak Red Cross, because of her... because of her character and wonderful personality, to begin with, but also because her experience and American training in social work methods. They thought she would be the best trained person in the country and the perfect head of, and to develop the program of the Czechoslovak Red Cross, which of course, there had been an Austrian Red Cross, but they wanted a Red Cross that was based on the American methods. So, and he wasn't quite sure about it, but he had appointed her. And the first thing she did after she was appointed as the President of the Czechoslovak Red Cross was to send a cable to Mary McDowell saying that she would have need of a trained American social worker, but would it be possible for Mary McDowell to get one? Mary

McDowell was first at YWCA , she knew Terry Brown and she knew me. And she asks the national YWCA board if they will be willing to set up a budget for, to assist Alice Masaryk with what she wanted, in the way of a group of American trained social workers. And the answer was “yes,” and the further answer was an invitation given to me to be the head of the unit and to go to Czechoslovakia.

LR: OK. Let’s just summarize a little bit of what you said and I’ll tell you what I would like to know about the next subject, which is the survey.

RCM: All right.

LR: You describe beautifully the conditions of the immigrant. What would you say was your emotional reaction to the immigrant, I mean the immigrant girl and the conditions under which they worked? Was your reaction one of pity for them... for the bad conditions?...

RCM: No, no, no. My reaction, I am sure was amusing. My reaction was always to do something about it.

LR: You didn’t waste time on crying...

RCM: No.

LR: Let’s see what we can do.

RCM: People cry out loud without looking. What can be..., and particularly when you are the representative of an organization or a university, which has power and which is... you learn that if you can do something for women in Chicago, and the YWCA can do it for San Francisco, this was ugly as well. And there was a field secretary in San Francisco, and went down by the Mexican border by that time, this... this...How would you say? So, and also, there were workers out...who could

tell you of, of... by another Pittsburgher, a YWCA secretary Lois Downes, who became judge McBride. This, you see, the fact that the war ended so quickly after the United States entered, and in the case of assistance to private agencies to do welfare education or cultural work with the army, and with women of the Allies, led to the fact that it was money left over. And not only did they, did Mary McDowell see that some of it were set up for Czechoslovakia, but there was an interest, all going to Terry Bremer, all those requests for work in the areas in which we had immigrants came through Ms. Bremen, to the national board. Another project was, it was, I can't remember the name, Tukjunavich (?), I think her name was, she was a Polish woman, well born, who had agreed of helping Poles, and she got the idea of training Polish Gray Samaritans to help Mr. Hoover, who very shortly after the First World War, [break] of... the... He became head of a mission to feed the hungry villages in Russia. You see, Russia was an ally, and Russia had the Ukraine where there was a tremendous degree of starvation, and also Poland had been a part of old Russia, but became free, and ended up free as a Polish country. And they had tremendous hunger and need for food. And again, we had great money put at the disposal of Mr. Hoover. And he set up a different program with a different staff, and all the countries that were being fed, this was Hoover's mission. In Poland, this Polish woman had the dream that a group of girls of Polish immigrant background born in the United States, educated in the United States, speaking Polish, could be a great help to the Hoover mission head, if they were trained properly. So with the help of the YWCA and the Red Cross, in New York, they set up an immediate... the YWCA handled the housing and some of the teaching of Polish, to improve their Polish, it was... to go. The Red

Cross gave them the courses in first aid, in diet, in things of that sort, they were all in New York City. But these girls were recruited from all over the United States on a selective basis: they came in and... and I don't know, I think they were about 8 or more or less, here in Pittsburgh, and some are still alive. This is something I thought, the best was that one of two or many good things. These girls, because they were in Pittsburgh, the host of the Peace Corps, they were residents they could add a great deal of this about their first-hand experiences in Poland, because the head of the Polish unit was Lois Downes, whom you know here as Judge McBride. And she and I went over on the same steamer. But she was on her way to Poland, and I was on my way to Czechoslovakia, each of us to head up a YWCA unit for work with girls and women. And hers started with the Polish Samaritans and was perhaps, it never had a subsequent follow-up as my Czechoslovak did, because Poland was very... Well, Colonel Starzyński who was the head, who organized the Polish Legion in Niagara Falls, this was the head of the Polish National Alliance over here on 18th Street, and he is a personality that... One of the things that I feel most strongly about it is that there are groups of individuals born and raised in Pittsburgh, the graduates from the University of Pittsburgh, and I think Starzyński was in medical school, that... I think of the other men and women, [Polish name, incomprehensible] was in the law school, I am not quite sure about that... But thing is that there are personalities who played a very important part in World War II in relationship to the emerging independent countries...

LR: You mean World War I...

RCM: World War I, yeah, thank you.... That, who are absolutely forgotten, who should be known, you see, and not forgotten. Now, where were we?

LR: OK, on to the survey in Czechoslovakia. Let me tell you my question beforehand and you can answer as it occurs to you. First of all I would like to know what was the survey, what was the goal of the survey, what population were you surveying, and secondly, I am very interested in knowing about the broken families, separated while the children with men had already immigrated to America. What were their problems, what were their emotional hardships? How did they feel about being left behind, were they glad or sorry that their men had left? Did they hope to join them? What were the obstacles that made it difficult for these families to be reunited?

RCM: Let me turn the heat on a little bit. It was cold when you got here, but I forgot. Let's see...[break] ... unit of the YWCA, to be sent to Prague to help Alice Masaryk with the starting of the Czechoslovak Red Cross, came in shall we see November 1918, or shortly after the armistice. And to get things going and planned took a month or two. I think it was in March when we finally started overseas a unit of three. Well, my condition was that I would have a secretary, who spoke Czech, I was not willing to go without somebody who spoke Czech, and secondly that I would have with me a really trained social worker, a case worker, who was more mature and knew more about life than I did. The first condition was met fortunately by a very-very fine young woman, who've been in the Foreign-born department as a secretary and had lived on the East Side in a famous Czech neighborhood in New York City and had good Czech and good, good skills and stenography that was invaluable. The other was a classmate of mine at Vassar, who had a very tragic life experience in the death

of her fiancé, and worked her way through that and was a graduate of the New York school of social work, and who today she actually is the person who created the whole concept and technique of international case work. And she established the International Migration service, which then became the International Social service, and has recently merged with the travel aid for the FISA. Where were we? Every one of these organizations that got started indirectly through the YWCA is today still alive and still going, because the immigration program at YWCA then led to the establishment of international institutes and today there is this huge national association of international institutes working as independent centers to help immigrants and foreign born. And one is after the other throughout the United States, so the thing is this reality and substance to all these programs and they go back to the philosophy of Terry Bremen. Well, just as we were about to embark, the three of us, Mary Robin, and Emily Clyne and I, somebody sent for me to go and see Miss Craddy (?), who was the head of the national YWCA, who said to me: "You know, we're been having great many requests of help about the problem of the brides, the foreign brides of American servicemen and officers too," and said "apparently the War Department never suspected this thing will happen, and as a result, the girls are being brought back to this country, without any thought being given to the conditions on their transports, with toilets that are not separate for the women, they have no doors on the cubicles, they are put in without knowing what their background is, whether they are prostitutes or perjurer's daughters." And she said, "The situation is terrible. Will you please take the time when you are in London to go to the headquarters of the Allies, and see the American, and see if they are in London from

that end, because most of them were shipped from the Ireland, from England or from France.” Well, she said, “See what can be happening and let us know what ought to be done.” Well, when there is a war situation, you go on and do the best that you can, but the ear of the commanding officer in London was aware of the problem, and grateful for helping a woman’s organization. And I went on again to Paris and there the same was Philippe (?), as the result of which, to set out and wrote out a program to go to command and tour of recruiting all of the women who come... By this time the armistice had been declared, and a lot of the women who were YWCA hostesses were relieved of their work and sent home. And we started a plan whereby the ones that get in touch with the YWCA headquarters, who pass through to get their accommodations for them to go home, they would go home also on these transports, and ask them to volunteer and be the hostess, I mean to work and look to see what the situation was on each of those transports that they were on. And one of the people I ran into was a cousin, was a Crawford, and I asked her what she was doing [incomprehensible], but later she said: “Little did I know what I would get into,” she said, but things that I never knew, ‘cause remember this was 1918, a long time ago, and young women did not know all that they know today. She said, “I just never knew, I just never knew things like these could happen. I had to be a witness for a man, a court martial case after one of the officers broke into the rooms where the girls were [laughs], while the girls were sleeping. The situation was perking terrible.” So, the result of that was that there was a woman in uniform from some of the agencies put on every transport. Furthermore, there was a classification of the girls, so they did two perjurer’s daughters together, [laughs] I don’t know all, all that happened, but

certainly I... they succeeded in finally, in setting up and finally looked after the women off those transports. You see, trouble was that the government, the US government saw only this far, and did not put the wives on the same transport as the husbands. They put the wives on a different transport and the husbands on another one. Of course, this was alright in some ways, but in other ways it was that much worse [laughs]. So they refined this process and got a pretty good one that was working before: all the men came home and all the wives came home, but there were constantly more wives. And I didn't forget this one when I was over in Czechoslovakia and you'll see how I will fit it in at a later moment. When we first got to Prague, one of the first, the first person we met was Mr. Hoover's representative. He was down there knowing that the American girls were coming in, and he was down there to meet us. And he was a Yale man, Harvard Public Health graduate, an altogether perfectly grand person also from Pennsylvania, and he told us... He was a Yale and Harvard man who had been demobilized, but who had once volunteered and asked to join the Hoover mission and was sent to Prague. As he told us, in the earliest days, there were some American soldiers in a military hospital in a section of Prague and that it would be nice if some of us, the three of us would go and meet them. With the concept of American soldiers in our mind, I guess I went first, and I was just... Some.. This... Some... In the first place, this was a one of the those military hospitals, it was a good one, it was clean as a whistle, but the men were on straw pads on the floor, there were no beds, there were no sheets, they were lying there, they were all of them, and having been volunteers not for the American army, volunteers for the Czechoslovak Legion, which was recruited in the United States, trained and

Godson Formanly (?), the sculptor, on his estate in Connecticut and then shipped over in France, to fight with the French. The same way, the Polish Legion was organized by Starzyński, here in Pittsburgh, was trained in Niagara Falls and put into the uniform there and then sent to fight with the French. The French army had a number of legions of countries seeking independence. They took them and fought with them in France. These were... When the Czechoslovak Legion, the Czechoslovak government, they were demobilized and sent back to Czechoslovakia and President Masaryk and the head of the War Department from the Republic decided they should all have the opportunity to go back to their villages from which they had emigrated to the United States, for them to see their friends and families, and in many instances to see their wives and children that had been born at home and whom they had never seen. Well, that is the reason... [break] After they have been home and talked things over, seen their families, they decided that they did not want to stay in the United States. They've been all alien, they were still alien. And they would not get citizenship by service in the French army, only through service in the American army. But even so, they decided that there was more opportunity for them and for their families in the United States, but they... and they therefore returned to Prague, where they have taken sick, getting ready to be sent home. But they were laying there in the palace, and in their broken English they told me that all they were doing was worrying how would they ever get their women and children back to the United States. And of course with my experience with the brides in England and France, I must [have] sensed what the situation was. I arrived in Paris, I mean in Czech... Prague, I guess, at the end of March, met many-many people, we've set up our plans

for the survey, but without conferencing with Alice Masaryk. I have met Jan Masaryk, the son, who was the one who got us this castle, when we needed a place to live. But I've never met President Masaryk. And of course he was a great figure and this was my secret, the height of my ambitions was to see this man, just to hear him, be near him, because he was such a perfect... one of the great men of the era of Winston Churchill, probably Masaryk as a philosopher, he was a professor of philosophy, became the president of the Republic after he was 70. Well, and one day Alice Masaryk called and asked me to come at once to the summer..., the castle which they had on the outskirts of Prague, where they lived during the summer, the Liechtenstein House. And she said she had something she wanted to talk to me. We were conferencing, I was to come up and have a conference and lunch, we were in the midst of talking when the gravel on the path, on the road sounded with an automobile coming over the gravel. And she went to the window and she turned over with a look of consternation and she said: "That is Captain Shoaf (?) of the Pasia oviče (?)." Now, "pasia oviče" was the Czech name for the Hoover mission. This is was the head of the Hoover mission. She said, "I'll have to see him, so you will please go down and have luncheon with father." Well, [laughs] I went... nearly went up and she took me up to the door of the dining hall, with all shining hardwood floors and great chandeliers, and opened the door and showed me in to the dining room, which was a break... more or less a breakfast room on the second floor, looking out. And there was a butler, and the table was set for three. Well, I had enough sense not to sit down anywhere, but to go to the window. And I remember watching some geese in the puddles of the rain, you know, walking around and... when I felt somebody coming

in[to] the door. And I turned around, and there was a picture showing. In the dark, a very tall, very slender, little goatee, a little mustache, little half-glasses, of a gray-haired professor. And he looked at me, he didn't know anything about my coming to lunch, and there was nobody else there, so I introduced myself, and he still looked puzzled, but very courteous, got to seat us both, by that time there were two men in the room. And I thought, "Oh, what am I going to say to him? Who does he think I am? He no doubt wanted a quiet luncheon, and now he got this strange American woman whom he had to be polite to. Oh, dear!..." So I put myself together trying to think what I would talk about. And it came to me [laughs]: I talked about the brides and the sick American soldiers down in Karlin hospital. And he was tremendously interested. This is what he said, and I tell you, I told this story so many-many times, and ever since the Communist seizure of the government in '49, I tell it to an audience where I think there may be a Communist Czechoslovak with great disbelief. President Masaryk turned to me and said, "Miss Crawford, these men who are in the hospital and who now want to go back to the United States, have fought for the freedom of the Czechoslovak Republic. We have hoped very much that they would stay with in Czechoslovakia, and help us with their American experience to build our republic. We need help. However, if they feel they want to go back to the United States, this is their right, their privilege. And they have every right in the world to have their women and children with them. If you would make a plan, the Czechoslovak government will pay for it." And I went out with the commission to make the plan, whereby the women and the children will be safely conducted from their villages to the United States, where the Red Cross will pick them up at Ellis

Island, and see they got to San Francisco or Texas, or wherever they were going to go to join the husbands. The husbands in the meantime were all on American transports. This is a very wonderful program, in which Alice Masaryk, the Red Cross and the youth of the Sokol... The Sokol was a gymnastic organization all through the days of Austria-Hungary. The Czechs, the people trained as athletes, gymnasts, but they were using guns, which they, the men can then learned how to use when the time came for the revolution and for uprising, you see, and they still... they were over there, they were the police who took over the republic, before actually it became republic. They had the bloodless revolution on the streets of Prague, with the Sokols as the police, which then led to the creation of the republic. These Sokol runners went from Bratislava, the largest city in Slovakia, because most of them were Slovaks, way up into the mountains, where the little man who is responsible for of news every day came out and beat his drum in the square and everybody would flock from their cottages to the square, knowing that something is going to be announced. And there he read a proclamation from the president of the Republic and the mayor of the town, saying that any wife of an American who had fought in the Czechoslovak Legion of American Slovaks, or Slovaks who fought in the American Legion in France, who is now returning to the United States, they would assemble in Bratislava on such and such a day, with their children and with all their house belongings, the Czechoslovak Red Cross would take them from Bratislava to the port where there would be an American transport, which would be waiting and would be conducting them across the Atlantic, and the Red Cross would meet them in New York and see them that they got to their homes. And this is exactly what happened. And so, my own secretary, the

one I told you about, who was such a fine girl speaking Czech, she was a YWCA secretary on this train, a sanitary train that went from Bratislava all the way to... I've forgotten what it was... Hamburg, probably not Germany, probably somewhere, of course, like Cherbourg, something like that in France, she went on the transport right across and delivered the whole shipload to the Red Cross in Ellis Island in New York. Now, this is...

LR: How many ships were they?

RCM: Well, I think there was this one. It was a train load.

LR: Did all men choose to go back?

RCM: All that I talked to. No, no, no, there were many who stayed. But I just talked to the few that were at the hospital, but they... they... I knew there were many others who thought the same way. And any man who left, so therefore the news would spread in this country and cables went, and their wives... they were more just... you know... came and... So when they joined, so I guess they went either on foot or with farm wagons or somehow they got down on the mountain roads and they got down to Bratislava, and then they were picked up in the sanitary train. This... this point of view of President Masaryk of the Republic, that it is the man's privilege to decide where he want to bring up his family, and even if they hoped they would stay and helped in Czechoslovakia, if they wanted to go they should have their women and children and the government will pay, being grateful for their services in fighting.

LR: Is your conversation with him that brought this all about?

RCM: It was him. He had just said that he would make plans of... for the government to foot that bill. And Alice Masaryk, as the president of the Red Cross, she set up the

whole Red Cross sanitary train, and took Ms. Emily Clyne as the person to be in charge of the hostesses, of the women, she was a doctor, of the nurses, and things like that. So, this thing started early, I have not been in Prague doing, you see, any survey really, this all got started right at the very beginning, but it brought me in pretty close contact. And from then on, the President knew, so when it was a question of getting this castle, he knew... to live in, for this training work, the training for the social work, because what happened was, when we started to do this path-finding survey, Alice Masaryk told us that what she wanted was, she wanted a knowledge of what Austrian social service agencies had been doing, and what we as American social workers thought of their methods, because she did not want to start the Czechoslovak Red Cross on old Austrian, European methods. She wanted to start on American methods of social work, basically careful analysis, case work field investigation, training schools for social workers, graduate public health nurses, and so forth. So, our job was to contact and go and visit all of the little new Czechoslovak organizations that rose from the ashes of the Austrian organization, and see where they were. This is what I called a path-finding survey. And we divided them into social welfare, which case work, the public health, and education, and working conditions for women. And I was able to have Mary Hurlbutt, my associate, who took the social work training. We picked up the Hoover man after he got through the Hoover mission, it was public health, he had been in public health, we thought that we had the first man on our staff [laughs] and Fjeril Hess, who by that time went out of her way to come [imcomprehensible], she was an education person, she came over to do education, and we've got from Dr. Kingsbury (?), at the Renmar (?) training

school for social workers, it was a very fine young woman, who was particularly interested in women in industry, she came over to do women in industry. And I was, Mary Hurlbutt, I guess I was the director of the survey... Of course, the first thing, having been told to go and hunt for Austrian organizations, I had to find out there was none, there was no such thing as a directory, and I laughed because at the end of talking with Alice Masaryk, she said "I think the most helpful thing you did was our directory," which was nothing in the world but listing the names, and addresses, and telephone numbers of all the social agencies that were then functioning. Some were the old Austrian, and some were new Czech, but nobody ever had one. Well, I went back five years later, they were still using the same directory [laughs], this getting around a new directory. It was that the basic work that was needed. So, we spent some work on the directory and on the actual listing. But we had a staff, and we had a Czech staff. For every American, there was a Czech colleague. They did, I remember, in World War I, in World War II, for every American, there was a British, who was a kind of counterpart. We had Czech counterparts, and then a complete Czech secretarial staff of Czechs who spoke English, and all those people spoke English. So, they worked together. It was essential, because no American would understand Czech, except Emily Clyne. And we discovered that when we talked about statistics and how you do statistics and analysis, I really forgot what social welfare terms are in case working, in case work, I don't remember them now, but we couldn't translate them into the existing Czech, and they didn't know what we were talking about, and Mary Hurlbutt and I noticed that we cannot do this survey. We will just have to stop everything and have a training school for social workers to try to do with their

principles. And that's when we wanted the castle. We wanted a place where we could live and the students could live. And Alice Masaryk just... with an eye there for social work, she just..., she saw the point, she wanted it for the country, and everything, everything she could do to help was done. And we had this beautiful home, it was called Leto Hrade, in Czech. "Leto" is summer, "hrade" is "little castle" and it was the summer residence of the former Austrian governor of Bohemia. And when the Austrians withdrew... [break]... all the officials left the country, and the buildings stood open, and it became the right of the president of the Republic to decide what would be done with these buildings. And so, President Masaryk said, "Let the YWCA have use of the Leto Hrade while they are here." And we turned what was a great dining hall into dormitories for the girls, we got some iron bed stands from the army and we painted them white instead of black, and we got a lot of... a bathtubs being collected from the what was the exhibition parlour, and extra materials, and we put them in a row, to have more than one bath, to have a number of baths for the girls, and we set the whole thing up. And it was a perfect joy to live there and have classes. And I will tell you this one story. Early in the beginning, the question was the teaching. And Mary Hurlbutt, one other reason I had thought Mary Hurlbutt was an ideal colleague, was that she had German relatives whom she had visited as a young girl and her German was quite perfect. So she could lecture in German, she could talk German. And we knew they hated it, the German language. Every street in Prague had its German language sign torn down, people wouldn't speak German to you, they understood it perfectly, but if you spoke German to them, they couldn't understand. This intensely bitter, anti-German feeling, against the

Austrians, I should say. So, the question was what, what... should she teach it? And this was her approach: she called the whole school together, she was going to teach the principles of social case work, she said, "This course, I can give it to you in English, and using an interpreter." We had one of the students, who spoke very good English, who could be an excellent interpreter. "Or," she said, "I have this experience with German relatives. I can teach in English, I mean in German. You will make the decision." She said, "I am leaving the room, when you are ready to tell me which one to speak in, which language, then you call me." And she was waiting, until she was called back in, and they said "We had unanimously decided that we would ask you to teach lectures in German, just to save time, and we can learn more for our country."

LR: Despite their antagonism to the German language...

RCM: Yes.

LR: And what became of the social survey at this time? Had it been completed?

RCM: It had just been put in a... [incomprehensible] box, and went on with the address, because in connection with the training school, we arranged for field work, just an entirely new word, "field work" is an expression, and we... Dr. Julia Clarke officially at the beginning of the course, the less... some of our students and then Julia Clarke, we had a case work, an agency that gave relief, we had recreation, another subject we talked, we created playgrounds, we were naughty enough, because all of the American playground equipment which was sent over, I forgot for which one of our agencies, had no passage for Czechoslovakia. So... [laughs]... and in time, so this got the whole set of materials, and the Czechs are very clever, you know, and do things with their hands, and we just reproduced all those models of American

playground equipment for this model playground that we had. And then public health, we had the nurses, and a track for lecture on that, and we had nurses, we had one or two nurses, and had just one half of what they wanted to do. So we were able to set up summer field work, getting ready, you see, for the survey to go on after the school was over, but in the meantime the people who have been working on the survey, the recreation director went right into the recreation field, which was the playground with the equipment, with the students, and she taught right on the ground. And it was a marvelous thing, and by the time it got through in fall, we were ready to go on with the survey, we had a group of Czech and Slovak people, young women, who knew a little bit what we were talking about, and were able to go ahead with the survey. And then by that time we got a Czech statistician, who could handle tables and things of that sort, and we set up another office downtown, in what is part of, it's called Staré Město Radnice, and we had a marvelous, it's an older house that had graphite frescoes on it, that go right back to 1400-1500, and we had the whole top floor as our offices, and we lived in the castle. And we had our offices for the survey downtown...

LR: Did you just in effect interrupt the survey to teach it, and instruct the women for the way how to carry it?

RCM: Yes, yes.

LR: How much longer did it go on?

RCM: Well, I came home because of the illness of my father, in 19... in the 1920s, I went in 1921, I guess, I was there two years, and then the survey was closest to being

translated from English, it had been written in English and I edited it, and into... being translated into Czech. And it was printed by the Ministry of Social Welfare...

LR: In Czechoslovakia?

RCM: Yes, it was published in Czech, and there are still... But not all of it, the first three: "Social Welfare," "Education," and "Recreation," and "Public Health," those four, "Women in Industry" never did get published.

LR: Was this a description of conditions as they existed at that time?

RCM: Yes.

LR: Or did they also include recommendations... for improvement?

RCM: Oh, yes, and in the discussion of the conditions, the recommendations, the two of them went together. And in the meantime, the school of social work, for which Alice Masaryk had called, was entirely organized and reconstituted, and they used this survey. An interesting thing is that, one, as a part of... before it got through, with our work with the survey, we had had visits from Alice Masaryk as... Julie Lathrop, who was the first woman head of the bureau in Washington, who was head of the Children's Bureau, she had invited Julie Lathrop to come to Czechoslovakia, to go up into Podkarpacka reservation, which is protected, way-way in the East, and to see all the work that the Red Cross, the Czechoslovak Red Cross was doing in that Eastern area of Czechoslovakia. Julie Laife, she asked Julie Laife to live with us in the castle, and she was a Vassar graduate, and so she was very much at home with both Mary Hurlbutt and me, and we concocted the idea of cabling President at Hrad, in the castle, to ask if we could get scholarships for some of our girls, who had gone through the school, were university students in their junior year, so they could really

get to the United States and could really, you know, polish off. We got four scholarships [incomprehensible] and those four scholarships continued to this day for students abroad, and the first four girls were sent. And one of them went to the New York..., after she finished classes, she went to a New York school for social work. And when she returned to Czechoslovakia, she began and translated into Czech the guiding documentary teaching volume on case work, written by Mary Richmond, *The Art of Social Diagnosis*, I think, something like, as I remember, it was the bible of the case worker. And she was then selected by President Masaryk to be the case worker in his office, which followed up all of the appeals which any president gets, any key member, any head of state always has from the people, petitions, letters for help because of some accidents or human needs. And it was Dešková, her job, to follow on through each letter and make a recommendation for the president to do that, so you see, it was a direct feed-in for the whole social work program of the federal government in Czechoslovakia. And she later became a lecturer at the school for social work, where she then began to write a Czech and Slovak revision of... Mary Richmond's *Social Diagnosis*, because she felt that the American philosophy of case work did not quite suit either of the Slav temperament or the conditions in Central Europe. Now, this... she was writing and working on this when they had the Communist coup, she came to this country, she had come to Pittsburgh to ask for the help of somebody who was in charge of a very important, modern and very up-to-date social worker agency, and she was introduced to Mr. Freedman, here, who is the head of this organization, is the combined social agency, case working social agency for the city... for Alleghany County, I guess, an exceedingly understanding and

perceptive person. She was able to have many conferences with him, and on the basis of that she revised her book, went back only to be thrown out of the social work, when the Communists came in, and I think I got myself that twisted, I think that the Communists came in, she was thrown out of school, and no support was given, for the Communists said, you know, "There is no need for social workers, there is only need for psychologists or psychiatrists." So people who were social workers had become psychologists, doing tests and making measurements, and doing that sort of things, attached, should we say, to an industry. But a social worker? No, no place for that. So, she and her husband went on working on this volume, this must be at least ten years ago, and it is only this year that finally so many of her students, who did not write this book, went into psychology departments, of labor or something else or industry under the Communists, who said, "We need that book, we need it to help us in our work. Please write it," and begged her to go on writing, and then when she was near the end of it, they then began to importune the Communist government for its publication. It has taken then five years, but they finally have gotten it, I have been told that it has been printed this past year, this is twenty years, and I have yet to see it. And I don't know whether there really is... her husband has died in the meantime, he was always in the Ministry of Social Welfare, he was the man who was the representative of the Czechoslovak government in all the negotiations with the United Nations relief and rehabilitation mission which they set after World War II into Czechoslovakia. So, but what I wanted to show is how the seed that grew, the bush is creating branches and flowers that are still going on, are still going on.

LR: Of the original work with the survey?

RCM: Yes,.

LR: ... the social work...

RCM: Yes, work with the young people who were students, who caught a vision, had never wavered once in their loyalty, or once in their devotion to Alice Masaryk, to the traditions of the Czechoslovak Republic, you see, this is the point, and they were dedicating their lives to doing something. And this girl now, her name is Mrs. Krakeš, her husband is gone, she lives alone in a Czech village, she is crippled with arthritis, I just can't tell you what those girls are going through now. But heads up, and still being useful and still being independent, but watched by the police, because of their contacts. So, I think this gives rather... that the survey was printed, and then what I have here to give you to look at, the last survey magazine, the editor was Paul Kellog, and Paul Kellog was the man who had been the head of the 1912 Pittsburgh survey. After he got through making the survey of industrial conditions in Pittsburgh, they were published, then he caught a vision of the things that were needed to shorten the hours in the steel mills, the housing conditions, and the exploitation of the immigrant, and he began to bring all this things out in a lovely, what was a great social work publication, I think it was 1921, post-World War I. He knew about the survey, he was so thrilled about it, that his was the first survey magazine, that Paul Kellog conceived the idea of taking an issue of a monthly magazine and devoting it entirely to one country. Now, this has been done by many other magazines since, an issue which takes... this was the first issue of a magazine entirely concerned with one country, namely Czechoslovakia and with Prague. And the leading article was called "Prague: the American spirit in the heart of Europe." And here is the story. It was done by

Bruno Lasco (?), the editor, it's a critical, it's a lead story that I did and it's not quite critical, this is emotional to everybody, you know. And then, in a message from Alice Masaryk, and the thing that always amused us was that she never said who about social worker, as far as I can see, she said, she too... she... and the mayor... a gorgeous engraving of Prague and the castle where she lived, a message from Alice Masaryk: "It is very late. Night is over Prague, the stars are shining, the air is full of violets. This is the moment I have snatched to write a short letter, not an artwork, after a day full of work." This is Alice's picture I have shown you. "The survey which Miss Crawford undertook has been very useful and has helped every American worker who had come to our country." This is the thing that tickled her, was to say nothing about how it helped the Czechoslovak, it helped only the American worker. "Mr. Hoover's work, I am firmly convinced, will help to consolidate child welfare work. The American Red Cross and Rockefeller foundation are helpful in coordinating sanitary..." I forgot to say that the health program in addition to being the other thing that it was, it was the representative, closely in touch, the head of the Rockefeller foundation had been this professor at Harvard, that's what he was, so he interested the Rockefeller foundation. "... are helpful in coordinating sanitary work. At present we are creating a center to bring together voluntary social hygiene organizations, which we hope will develop to be a clearing house for all our plans and so forth. From emergencies we go to lasting works and guarantees for success are proper schools for nurses, help visitors, and social workers. We have a committee which prepares a concentrating plan for social hygiene, school system, we have a school for nurses, a school for social workers, and in the autumn we expect to open a

rural social welfare school.” And let me say here, all under the Red Cross, because her concept, her concept for social work is that, or of the Red Cross rather, is that it should be one agency... [break]

Appendix B
Transcript of the April 11, 1975 interview with Ruth Crawford Mitchell
(Pennsylvania State Archives, MG-409, Pittsburgh Oral History Project 69-2 and
70)

LR: My interviewee is Ruth Crawford Mitchell at her home on Walnut Street. We are going to pick up from our last interview in which we discussed Mrs. Mitchell's experience abroad, in particular in Czechoslovakia, and try to find a transition as how she came to Pittsburgh, and got involved in new work here.

RCM: I came to Pittsburgh as bride with no thought of work or anything that I might do. But memories of the villages in Slovakia, with the women and the children waiting to come to the United States to join their husbands, from which they were separated during the war, they were still vivid in my mind. And so, but I was doing nothing about it. One day, downtown, I ran into Frank Tyson, who was the professor of Economics at the University of Pittsburgh, who had known me in New York, in the East, in my work as a national secretary for immigrant girls, with the YWCA, and knew my work at Ellis Island, and he said, "What are you doing in Pittsburgh?" And I told him, "I was a housekeeper of sorts," and he said, "My goodness, you should be teaching my course at the University of Pittsburgh, you know so much more about it than I do." And I laughed and said goodbye and passed. Shortly after that, I was called in the office of Steve Gowe, who now, I don't know, is the director of the Ford Foundation. And he was just out of the graduate school at Harvard, and secretary of the university, first assistant to Dr. Bowman, and he said, "Frank Tyson thinks you are the person to take his course in teaching the history of immigration. Would you consider being a lecturer at the university?" And it so happened that I did consider, and Frank Tyson went back to doing something, research in regard to steel, that he was much more interested. And I had students in various schools of the university,

but with my undergraduates, in the Liberal Arts, of course, whom Frank taught most, and I've got them, each one to work out a Nativity sketch of the closest person to them, who usually was the mother or the father, who had come from the old country. To my amazement, they knew practically nothing about the country from which their parents had immigrated. This is in such..., this made the class so much more heterogeneous, interesting, so entirely different from anything what I had experienced at either Vassar or at Washington University. But it was the fact that these young people had no knowledge of fairy tales, children's rhymes, nursery songs, that the average American child had. They had a whole different set, and I realized that that was back in the cultural background, further than that, for anything related, say, in their themes, they might have hanged on trees and just dropped into the United States. This seemed to me to be a tremendous problem. And so it was that I got a ticket and I went up to Carpathian Russia, the farthest in the interior, in Central Europe, from which we have a very large group in Pittsburgh, and that experience again strengthened the necessity of somehow finding a way to express the cultural contributions, which was inherent in the cultural traditions of so many of our new Pittsburghers. Shortly after that, I had the idea of making a study of the attending students at the university, and Steve Gowe again made it possible for me to have help and to make a study over four years of where each student was born, or his mother was born, or his father was born. Now, this gave us the statistical picture, and the results of this study came exactly at the moment Dr. Bowman was facing the legislature for budget. This happens to all the chancellors, and he grabbed... he was given this, the findings, by Steve Gowe and told, "Here is something that might help

you in presenting the budget for the University of Pittsburgh in the coming year, because it is... it shows that the university has in the student body the right proportion of young people who are from families of foreign birth, and they are therefore serving the Allegheny County and the whole area, the Pittsburgh area, and really reaching all of our people, which is a very good record.” This brought me into Dr. Bowman’s office, and I have been told by Mr. Gowe, “Don’t you ever go near Dr. Bowman, until you have an idea that is so good that he won’t forget you because of the idea.” So, when I was sent to him, I said, “Oh, my goodness, oh, my goodness!...” But the point was that his idea was so good, that we came together and sparked, because his idea was that he was then working on plans for the interior of the Cathedral of Learning. His greatest fear was that the classrooms would be like classrooms in most educational institutions at that time, that the pictures that hung on the walls would be of the old faithful guides, or would be maybe of the Roman forum. He said, “No, no, we must have rooms that would stimulate the students. I want rooms that would tell students of times when men lived creatively, or I want just the kind of room Pericles might have taught in, or Chaucer, for an English Room.” Well, this it was, I didn’t say anything for the moment, but once I saw the Pericles Room, not Pericles, Aristotle [laughs], you can change that [more laughs], I was in my own mind tied up with the Greeks in Pittsburgh, with the opportunity of doing something and making a contribution to a university, because at that time so far as I knew then, so far as I know today, no university in the United States that the immigrants had any kind of cultural heritage that could be a contribution to the university. There were plenty of professors who talked about Greek civilization in history, American

civilization, including in Pittsburgh, but it wasn't related to the immigrants. And as we talked on and on, we put the two ideas together, my idea being that we need money for these rooms, which would not be small, could be a contribution from the newcomers. The Chancellor's contribution was the idea of giving to our newcomers this chance to make a great, creative, and making possible for him to work in his Cathedral of Learning the interpretation of great civilizations and great cultural traditions. Well, Chancellor Bowman was always a very practical man, you know, a great politician, with an understanding and perception of how things should be done, for these two came together like that, these two ideas. [incomprehensible]

LR: ...these two ideas...

RCM: ... and come and help him with plans for the Cathedral of Learning. And I said, "Oh, Dr. Bowman, I'm just starting in, I will have to stop everything that I am doing and be more and more creative." And he said, "No, non-sense, it's going to be only eighteen months, not for the rest of your life." And he made a very wonderful decision, he helped me, the opportunity that he gave me, that has never, for one minute, it had not been a great rich, great enrichment of my personal life. So...

LR: This then was the origin of the idea of the Nationality Rooms?

RCM: Yes.

LR: And from there we have to go to how this idea became a reality. The first act implies how the support was enlisted from various nationality communities?

RCM: Then my training of making the survey in Prague and surveys for different industrial communities came right before ground. I began to make a survey of nationality leadership in Pittsburgh, which really meant asking about names of people

who were important in different communities, officers in big beneficial organizations, and going and personally calling them and compiling a list of doctors, lawyers, interpreters, officials in the city government, and women who were leaders in women's organizations. And nationality by nationality, Dr. Bowman invited the leaders to an evening at the old Hapeley (?) Club, which was up on the highest, one of those lovely old residences on Fifth Avenue, about where the Medical School, no, what is its name, the Scaife Hall is today, just below the stadium. Lawn sloping up, great trees, beautiful veranda all around the house, and there on, the whole summer evening after evening he had long hours of friendly exchange between Chancellor Bowman of the University of Pittsburgh and the leaders of different nationality groups. And he told these groups of his dream for the University of Pittsburgh and this new building down on this empty lot, facing Carnegie Museum and old houses that once stood... [break]

LR: OK, go on and tell us more...

RCM: There were similar, there were similar meetings with representatives of Italian organizations and many of the other, larger groups, but there were some nationality groups at that time, which were really not represented in the community by very many Pittsburghers. However, they were well represented among our foreign students. I am thinking particularly of Romanians. You see, this is right after World War I... [break] And we had countries that were under Austria-Hungary, and many of them coming to be independent countries. Romania had been independent, but she's not been that large. Romania became very much larger by the whole area of Transylvania from Hungary being added to the bigger Romanian kingdom, and

Romanian students coming here for oil training in the School of Mines was... were a very strong and able group. And they asked if they could have a Romanian room and said that they would be responsible for raising the money not..., from other Romanian centers outside of Pittsburgh where Romanians were in larger numbers, and that was particularly true of Youngstown, up the river from here to Cleveland. It's a very strong band of Romanians. So they were taken into consideration; same was true of the Chinese. The Chinese community was then larger than it is today, but still very small. But they had a very-very strong group of Chinese foreign students and they got in touch with their ambassador in Washington and came and asked for an interview with Dr. Bowman to tell him that the Chinese government... This was in the days when the Chinese government was... the head officials were practically all graduates of American universities. So the Chinese government was tremendously interested, and they thought certainly the Chinese government will make a contribution. The Chinese government... [incomprehensible]... to get it from the Chinese government in Peking. So, we had the students, well, backing committees, some committees. All of this pleased Dr. Bowman and he told to the trustees and one of the nicest results is what happened in appreciation, an expression of appreciation on the part of the leading men, business men in Pittsburgh, who wished in some way to express the appreciation which they felt for what this whole new group of Pittsburghers was doing to help the university in its campaigning efforts to build a great university and a great university building, the Cathedral of Learning. Dr. Bowman said to me one day, it was just before Christmas, I forgot what the year was, it was perhaps '27, it was early on, and he said, "You know, I was telling, talked to

Richard Mellon about this, the nationality committees and what they want to do. And he was so pleased, he said ‘I’d like to give to each of those committees a Christmas present. Would you make up a list of the treasurers of the committees and send it to me?’” But we only had four or five committees organized, well organized, with acting treasurers, and we had two or three more that hadn’t elected their officers. They rushed to quickly elect their treasurers [laughs], because they had to be well organized to have a treasurer, in order to report this. And we came up with about eight committees that did have chairmen and officers. And their names were sent and only for those committees that had to get the treasurers, I only suggested that they get 500, but the committees that were all organized, and were working and raising money, they got a thousand. And you can imagine, Dr. Bowman started a very nice tradition of having a Christmas party at the University club, to which the chairman of each of the active committees was invited, in order to make a report to him about what they had done in the course of the year. This was the first meeting of the chairmen of these eight, more or less, committees after they had reported to him about what they had done for the University, for raising funds for the year. And he told them about the response of Mr. Mellon, and a very-very nice way of appreciation. This brought the leaders of the nationality groups right into Mr. Mellon’s office, right into the University of Pittsburgh chancellor’s office, so the speak. This was the most... it was the loveliest before imagining... And...

LR: And that one thousand dollars that they were given today would be about 10,000 dollars. It was a practical help, as well as tautological incentive...

RCM: Yes, yes. So, I might interject here, it didn't happen at that time, but later on, the whole program of the nationality committees and their sponsorship of the Nationality Rooms led the president of the board of trustees, Dr. Craig, to give the Early American Room, in order that the United States might add its early American tradition to the traditions of the other nationalities.

LR: OK then, and we move from how support was enlisted to how all these decisions were made, to which country could build a room and then further what design the room would take, what cultural aspect of the country would be represented.

RCM: That's, that's... OK: how was it decided which country should be represented? Because there were only a certain number of spaces around the first floor. It was decided by Dr. Bowman in consultation with the architect of the building that these rooms should be placed around the great Commons Room, because the Commons Room, the original idea was that the Commons Room would represent the life that we were building together in Pittsburgh. The contributions on the first floor, the classrooms from other countries in the world, contributions coming to Pittsburgh. On the second floor we would have contributions from the State of Pennsylvania, and on the third floor there would be individual memorial rooms with individual names who had made a special contribution. Now, all that came out of that, eventually, is the first floor of the Nationality Rooms and this... there are many reasons for that. But the original idea, you see, was to have all the classrooms around the Commons Room in three galleries, specialized rooms. Today, we have finished the first floor and are others on the third floor and there are more coming. But for the moment, my connection was with the first floor, that's all I can speak of. Remember, this is just

after World War I, and the emergence of many independent countries, that have either been a part of the old Austrian-Hungarian Empire or of the old Russian Empire. And they thought very strongly of and they were very proud of their independence, the Czechoslovaks, the Yugoslavs, the Poles, the Romanians. Always, of course, the Scottish, and the Welsh, and the Irish have... within the British Empire, been strong nationalists for their own section. So you had to be a nomenclature for the rooms, with this feeling, that is "How were you going to maintain a program that would reduce to the minimum potential jealousies, potential frictions between those that always happen in a political situation?" So, at the very start, we saw the difficulties that would come from the naming of the room. And, the change was true for the Yugoslav Room of today, that changed its name several times, because it changed, first the kingdom, then it was a republic, and still in the process of not being quite satisfied with what they thought. So, we decided that we must get a principle. And I think that probably this was known as the wisest decision that was made in the beginning of this whole program, which was to reduce any important action to principle. By that I mean that we would arrive at a policy that showed no preference for any nationality or group, that was equally good for the Chinese or for the Poles. If we hadn't done that, we would have been in an endless war. Now, let me just give a practical illustration. In order not to show political bias, we did not allow the name of any room to be carved in the stone board or within the room, but it would be printed on a card, so the card could be changed. And we have a nice rule as today [incomprehensible], and the name could be changed tomorrow, and the names have been changed, the names of the rooms, as the names have been changed officially.

The name we took from our United States State Department, we did not take the name the country gave itself. It was what the State Department was calling those countries at that time. Now, one of the interesting, best illustration of that is that it had to be an independent country, recognized by the United States State Department. This is right after World War I. And poor Ukrainians, who wanted to come out of the Russian Empire and who had every reason to come out of the Russian Empire, their size, their culture, their individuality, many things as different as Irish and Scottish, or Irish and English, same... a similar language, but different. They were independent just one day, when they could have become... and they became part of what is today the Soviet [Union]. Therefore we had to say "no" to them, and this is something they could not understand and it's only today that the situation is beginning to... only fifty years later, something can be done about it. But, that's another story. This is what I am saying: you have to find some principle. Now, let me give you another illustration. In the earliest design that came from... about the Yugoslav Room, large portraits of King Alexander at one and Mr. Roosevelt at the other. This was the idea of the committee abroad and the architect abroad. We had to say, "No portrait or symbol of a living personality!" That must have ended any possibility of the individual not being really great in the estimate of his fellow countrymen. The medallion which is in the Czechoslovak Room, of President Masaryk, spent ten or fifteen years behind the back, velvet curtain in my office. It was done before his death, but it was not put up until many years after. This is what I call a political decision, which is... is... a principle, a principle which makes possible working the

political problems. For this, I would say, was the first decision. Can we stop now?

[break]

LR: Now, let's go on and talk about how the design of the specific Nationality Rooms was selected.

RCM: Here again, as we looked ahead and we planned a matter of principle was involved, mainly that if you were to have pretty authentic interpretations of interior designs that were peculiar to different cultural groups, we must go to the source. There were not in the United States architects steeped in cultural difference, they were American, only steeped in American, early American architecture, but not with Polish. Therefore, it was necessary to go abroad to the country concerned and seek out an architect of first caliber out of there. We discussed this with the chairmen and the officers of our committees, with whom personally I met very-very often... [break] ... they were able [incomprehensible]... I am thinking of one particular case I know very well of how it was perceived. Dr. Gomory was the chairman of the Hungarian room committee. Dr. Gomory was a graduate, a doctor-physician, a graduate of the University of Budapest [incomprehensible]. He had connections in Budapest; he also had wisdom. He said, "The person to help us is the Minister of Education in Hungary. I will write to him and ask for his cooperation as to how to proceed [incomprehensible]." The Ministry of Education invited a small group of Hungarian educational leaders to form a cooperating committee in Budapest. This committee was in correspondence back and forth with Dr. Gomory, and Dr. Gomory with me decided to have a competition of certain selected architects. Now this... with this we learn about how people do things. It's a difference between having an open

competition, open architectural competition, and a selective, on-invitation competition. You are invited to submit a drawing, this is a great honor in the architectural world. So, this committee representing the Ministry of Education invited a group of artists to select, to present designs and out of those represented they selected two, which were sent to Pittsburgh, to the Hungarian committee that in turn presented them to the University. And the members chose this that we now know as the room from the University of Pittsburgh, which is... There is no such thing as a pure Hungarian architecture above the rustic, indigenous village architecture, because Hungary as a very sophisticated part of the Austrian-Hungarian Empire used only architects from Vienna in the traditions of Gothic and of the Renaissance and of the Baroque. The only thing that was peculiarly Magyar was the thing that came out of the villages, and that's what you have, a very able architect of basic Hungarian folk motives in a modern... in a modern setting has given the wonderful ceiling, the wonderful carvings that are indigenous to the Hungarian folk people. And it is through this combination of working together between the architects abroad and the architect in Pittsburgh that you, we achieved the various rooms. Then we came to other kind of difficulties, such as how to get the work done. There again, we decided that certain things couldn't be done in this country, there were no craftsmen to do it, and the work had to be done abroad. And this was a marvelous opportunity for me, because as the designers who had come here and worked with the university architect, I then went abroad to visit the various architects and the various cooperating committees, in some instances to place orders for work that was to be done, for instance in the Czechoslovak Room there was this medallion of Masaryk, of course

those beautifully inlaid doors, all of which were done in Czechoslovakia. And the same true was true in the Hungarian Room, the ceiling squares that had to be painted and the carvings on the door. But then there were also quite different little problems. This is the Polish Room, the architect was Poland's one of the most distinguished architects, who had been given the responsibility even under Austria-Hungary of restoring the Wawel Castle in old capital of Cracow, and also of doing after the war, World War I, the Zamek castle in Warsaw. He was said to be the kind of man who once he had put his pencil stroke on the design, he would never change it. He had sent us as a design for Polish Room, a design taken from the old Jagiellonian University in Cracow, very early on, what they called a crystalline ceiling, this was kind of like diamond-cut and only in plaster with crystalline... It's quite hard to describe it, but it came, it was Gothic and it came down very low upon us. So we discover that with a student standing, near upon his head. Furthermore, in Pittsburgh we didn't think that a white plaster ceiling was awfully practical. And this is long before Pittsburgh has been cleaned up. So, we thought that something must be done about it. And this was my task to go to this architect in Cracow who never changed anything that he had designed and see what I can do about it. And he didn't speak any English, and I didn't speak any Polish. I had a trembling interpreter, because he was a very austere, very important gentleman, and everything that I said that was translated, and one word was "Niet," which means "no." And I thought, "What am I going to do?" All this time, there was a little dog besides him, he reached down and pet the little dog, and he had a lovely home, beautiful things in it, charming wife, who served tea, and I said to myself: "Any man that loves a little dog, and the little dog loves him

as much as a little dog does, who has a charming, lovely wife, there must be some Achilles' heel we could reach." So I didn't, I didn't listen to the "no" and I just kept on and on. But when I left it was still "niet," and we made an appointment to come the next day to his office, which is in Wawel... [break]... Szyszko-Bohusz, the architect for the Polish Room, said, "Would you see me in my office at the Wawel Castle tomorrow morning?" He worked in such a beautiful office: glorious room in yellow valence curtains, and the sun coming through the window, wonderful old furniture, and he said to me, "I am going to take you over to the Wawel Castle. And you can go wherever you want to, it's not open to the public this morning, and you look and see what you like in there, and then come back and tell me." And he took me over and the door was open and I was allowed inside, put on those felt shoes, shuffle over the highly polished floors, cold as winter, freezing inside, and he said [laughs] "Goodbye." And I was left to wander through those great halls with painted ceilings and carvings and to pick up anything, which I wished... Stop, not, not that, not quite yet, Mary. Well, this gave me a chance to see a beam-painted ceiling, which is now in the Polish Room. It gave me a chance to see the marvelous copper and brass hardware on the door, the doorknobs and the doorframes, and I could see that this was what he asked me to do. And you have the story of the Polish Room as it is today, except that in addition this trip taught me that the only thing to do, to really get the rooms to be authentic was in certain instances to have the artists themselves come from Poland to do the work. So, in the case of the Polish Room, the sister of the architect who was a painter, with her husband, who was also a painter but also a decorator, who knew how to do the fine old Spanish leather wall coverings that were

used extensively in the restoration of the Wawel Castle. They both came to the United States and did the Polish Room ceiling and superintended the completion of the walls and the floor and the furniture in the Polish Room. I was... because the formula which they used in the ceiling, it was secret, and they... it necessitated about a dozen eggs, fresh eggs, every morning, with which they went all summer quietly about themselves [laughs] and did something to the paint with the eggs, though nobody knew what it was, but that is how [laughs] the Polish Room ceiling is as it is today. It's all according to the plan worked out in Cracow and applied in Pittsburgh. So, there is another story of this procedure, which is important to tell and interesting, let's put it that way. And that is the case of the English Room. The English Room committee was chaired by Alvin Mansbridge, a very brilliant and innovative educator, who is the man who conceived of the whole adult education movement, which originated in England. He conceived of the seaman's library that put books on vessels at sea, that stayed at sea for long periods of time, so that they, the sailors, the officers could have something to read. And Her Majesty the Queen was one of his strongest supporters. Dr. Bowman invited him for commencement early on, before the Nationality Rooms, to receive a honorary degree. Prior to Dr. Mansbridge's visit to Pittsburgh, when we were planning the... and I guess I forgot to say this, that the original choice of the rooms and the countries to be represented was based upon the 1920 census of the major groups in Pittsburgh, and the only groups that were not major were those represented by students. I forgot to say that. And I had said to Dr. Bowman, "What about the English and the Scottish? What about an English Room?" And he said, "Nonsense. There is absolutely no difference between English and

Americans.” Well, I didn’t agree, but I didn’t say anything and I had much to do with the Poles, Hungarians, and Lithuanians. The English could come later [laughs]. And then, sometime later, Dr. Mansbridge was invited to get his honorary degree in Pittsburgh. And Dr. Bowman said, “I’d like to have Dr. Mansbridge, after the commencement ceremony here and then commencement luncheon, would you be willing to take him around the Nationality... the location of the Nationality Rooms and talk with him about our plans?” I thought now my chance has come. So, when Dr. Mansbridge asked where would the English Room going to be, I smiled and said that Dr. Bowman doesn’t think there is any difference between the English and the Americans, and there is no need for an English Room. “What? What? Ridiculous! Of course there will be an English Room, and it will be different from any of the other rooms, we in England will pay for the English Room.” And I thought, “That is just fine.” We had a little difficulty in getting an English committee, because there really aren’t a large number of English, there are Scots and Irish, but there are not too many English people in this community. And we didn’t get to them, until it was almost World War II, because we put them all toward the end, you see, because it was easy, they raised all the money in England, and they only needed a cooperating committee in Pittsburgh. And what happened was that the war came and the English Committee said, “Our country is at war, and other countries are at war, and we just cannot do anything about it.” So, the whole thing just dropped completely. And we were able to start, and with another, a younger chairman, after the war was over. And then we were fortunate in getting Alfred Bossom, an architect, who was also a member of the Parliament, as the chairman. And he asked the... [break] Alfred Mansbridge, before

we got into the war, decided to ask the Courtauld Institute, which is an art institute in London, with a very strong architectural section, to have again an invited competition. They had a committee and they decided that they would take two of the more important English architectural periods, namely Tudor and Georgian: Tudor, 1500s and Georgian, 1800s. [break] ... and asked for the most outstanding architects from those periods in England to submit drawings. The committee in London selected the Georgian design, but sent both to Dr. Bowman, recommending the Georgian. Dr. Bowman looked at both of them and consulted with the architect here and with the committee and his preference was for the Tudor, because of the Gothic aspect, in relation to the Gothic design for the Cathedral of Learning. This is what I always thought it was so typical for the British. When they got the letter, that we preferred the drawing they had not preferred, they at once said, "This is entirely a matter of the university to make the decision. We would be very glad to have [incomprehensible]..." So the Tudor design of, by a very well known English architectural authority, who had written a great deal about Tudor Gothic, named Cosby, and his drawing was selected. Then the war came along and the whole thing dropped and it wasn't until afterwards that we came to the present design. The idea of Mr. Bossom, which came when the House of Commons was bombed, and he being an architect and also tremendously interested in restoring old famous buildings, got hold of the man in charge with the maintenance for the houses of the Parliament, and they went down the morning after the bombing, to see what was left in the rubble, because the bomb was dropped right, smacked in the middle of the House of Commons. And they picked out those pieces they thought they could keep and that's where the

fireplace in our English Room came from, that's where the beams came from, that's where the paneling all along the blackboard wall, that came all charred and black, right out of the debris of the House of Commons. All right, this changed the whole nature of the room, but it made it a far more historical room, because of the original House of Commons materials. We have more of the old House of Commons in London than there is anywhere else in the world, although a great deal of that material was put into the Churchillian entry into the new House of Commons.

LR: It might be interesting to add here how this money, funds came to be used for the English Room, without the usual situation for funding?...

RCM: This is an excellent question, because this goes back to what happened to the Nationality Rooms during World War II. Everything stopped about the English Room when the war broke out, after Munich. We remember this, about a year before the United States..., oh, it was more than a year before the United States got into the war itself, and it was during this period that many of the other Nationality Rooms were completed. For example, the first four rooms, the Scottish, the Swedish, the Russian, and the... one more... did I say Swedish?... The first four Nationality Rooms were dedicated in July 1938, which meant they were dedicated and opened for use just before the war broke out in Europe. We had the remaining two or three years until the United States went into the war in '41 to continue to work on some of the other rooms and during that period we were able to complete a number of rooms. So that ... We need to stop... It's all right... I got myself into this thing. Are we doing something here, is it going? When the war threatened, I made up my mind that this time, if at all possible, I wanted to be a part of the war effort. During the First World War, as I said

early on in this... in this... speaking about the Nationality Program, and about my own experience, I stayed in the United States during World War I, because I thought my job was a world war job, and I didn't get the job in Czechoslovakia until the post-war period. This ...World War II seemed to me the time has come for me to participate and so I applied for an opportunity to go overseas with the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation and asked Dr. Bowman for a leave of absence, which was granted. I therefore... the whole question of the Nationality Rooms program quieted down and I was abroad for two and a half years. While I was gone, Dr. Fitzgerald... Dr. Bowman died, and Dr. Fitzgerald became the chancellor, a man of great sensitivity who had very little interest in the Nationality Rooms. He knew about the financial difficulties of the English Room committee and was very well aware of... LR (incomprehensible question)

RCM: Of what? All right, let's...It was... He also had great respect for Andrew Mellon and his work as the ambassador from the United States to Great Britain. It seemed to him that it might be a way of paying tribute to Andrew Mellon and in a way that Mr. Mellon and his family would appreciate, if they, if he could be a part of this English Room, and therefore he went to the Mellon Foundation and to its president, Adolf Schmidt, the recent ambassador from the United States to Canada, a man of great international vision, and asked for... whether or not the Mellon Foundation would be interested in making the English Room possible. And the Mellon Foundation was. Therefore, the English Room today has two portraits: one is a portrait of Andrew Mellon, which was a gift from his daughter, an original portrait, and the other is a copy, which Carnegie Museum had, of the Earl of Chatham, Pitt.

And the room, the English Room, is the gift of the Mellon Foundation and of the architectural services of Lord Alfred Bossom, because what he has done, besides working on the design, he went from Alfred Bossom, architect, to *Lord*, Sir Alfred Bossom, and then Lord Alfred Bossom, a very distinguished and one of the longest [living] members of the House of Commons.

LR: We talked about the difficulties and obstacles in getting one of the rooms realized. What other problems impeded the completion of the Nationality Rooms?

RCM: Oh, now we have to go all the way back. You see, I just talked about war, the... one other thing that complicated the completion of the rooms. And now we go all the way back and that is the first difficulty was the Depression. And perhaps it is a good idea to go back today to go, when we are said to be in a recession, to what happened when it was a real, so they say, depression. What happened, of course, was that there wasn't any money for this University of Pittsburgh, and the Cathedral of Learning, which had reached the status of steel and cement, steel beams standing right straight up to the sky, and cement floors, with the individual... There have been enough money for all the individual blocks of limestone, from the Indiana Limestone Company, which have been delivered and deposited floor by floor, each block of Indiana limestone with a black number corresponding to its position in the architectural drawing, and there that structure stood for almost two years, such exposed to all the weather. Such was the exposure to the weather that I remember in one of the summers University of Pittsburgh employed a graduate of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, an architect, an architect just to walk from floor to floor and repaint on each block of stone the black number. So when they

finally got back to being able to build the building, they would have the numbers that would correspond to the drawings. This is the depth of the depression. No money was coming in for the building, the legislature had cut down on faculty, there was just not a single bit of promotion line, except the Nationality Room committees. Now the men and the national beneficial organizations, they stopped working, but the women never stopped for one minute. And they took hold of the situation, their committees, they cooked and they baked, and they had little parties on the thirteenth floor, where our offices, were with 25 cents admissions, and they picked up the quarters and the quarters were banked month after month to keep the accounts growing slowly, but to keep the interest alive, because people couldn't afford movies, they came on the street carts, which were of course inexpensive relatively speaking, from a long distance to these parties, just to encourage each other and to get into a different atmosphere from what they had in their communities where nobody was working. So, Dr. Bowman appreciated this, the board of trustees appreciated this, that in this terrible economic dilapidation and shut-down somehow these people cared so much about their rooms, that they never stopped working for a minute. So I would say that having survived that economic test not only from the point of view of the contributions for promotion but also from this holding on the construction, great-great amount of money that was necessary, and you get a perspective on the fact that in a long run the good survives, the evil and the bad disappears. And if your principles are sound and your motives are not egoistical and your motives are good, and the thing is meant to be, it will be. Of course all the same is true coming out of World War II, but that again presented other difficulties. Those were the days when I could say today, a

person who has not have any contact directly with the ongoing program as an emeritus administrative officer at the university. Whenever I go into a nationality community and somebody says “Mrs. Mitchell, who started the Nationality Rooms,” there I kept seeing a broad beam that goes across the face of the person, and the person would say, “Yes, you know, when I was a student in grade school, I worked for and earned ten cents and sent it to the campaign fund for the building of the Cathedral of Learning and got a little certificate from Dr. Bowman, saying that I had earned ten cents.” Today you are adult and mature citizens of Pittsburgh, thousands of them have that memory of having as a grade school student participated, further than that, the... the... I think of the poster which has gotten out in the campaign before the Depression, it was a huge picture of the Cathedral of Learning, as it was designed. And remember, Dr. Bowman was told by the board of trustees in the earliest days that he can only build seventeen stories, he would not have this monstrosity of thirty-six stories, and Dr. Bowman said to the architect Klauder in Philadelphia, “Cut it off to seventeen. Give a picture of the seventeen.” That it was the only picture that was used in promotions or in publicity. About the architect work he said, “In your office in Philadelphia, go right ahead and design the most beautiful building that you possibly can.” He, Dr. Bowman, would not call the board of trustees for a year, until he had a new design which was a lower design than the original, and that of course was in every way the present Cathedral of Learning. Then he called, then he went, I don’t know if you know the story, but the design he had, this new sketch of the Cathedral of Learning from Mr. Klauder, he got himself upon a train and went up to the North Shore in Boston and called... come... the name of a

contractor, Stone Webster, to see Mr. Stone, Mr. Stone, I think I am right. He went in to Mr. Stone's summer home and they sat down together and he told him Mr. Stone about the Cathedral of Learning and his experience with the board of trustees, that he now had a new design that the board of trustees has never seen, but that he had no money, but he wanted to build and he knew he would get the money, insured him he would get the money. Would Mr. Stone take the order and build that building? And Stone said, "Well, never in my life have I accepted a contract without any down-payment, but I'll do it." So Dr. Bowman came back and called the trustees together, showed them the new design and said the contract has been signed, "We are going." And later on, what you should know, he had this very interesting experience with Mr. Mellon, two Mr. Mellons, and of course the Cathedral of Learning stands, and Mr. Andrew Mellon from being a great skeptic became Dr. Bowman's firmest supporter, you know, he offered Dr. Bowman a job in Washington to help him. Everybody in this community should read...

LR: ...*Unofficial Notes*...

RCM: *Unofficial Notes*, which was published after his death, in which he tells the story of going to see Mr. Mellon, week after week, in Washington. And then Mr. Mellon's desperation that he couldn't get anybody to help him handle the mountain of correspondence on his desk of Secretary of Treasury, and Dr. Bowman offering to answer and help him strengthened those ties. He had been so good, he has done it in Mr. Mellon's style, he then asked, "Would you come to Washington and help?" And Dr. Bowman said, "No, I have all those responsibilities in Pittsburgh." But he said, "I could do lots more for your university in Pittsburgh from here. There are far more

opportunities waiting for you in Washington.” “Sorry, I must go back.” This is the first support that Andrew Mellon and his brother [break]...

LR: Would you repeat for me what you were saying about the lasting effects of the Nationality Rooms on the community?

RCM: I don't believe it is possible for me to talk about the lasting effects beyond saying that the Rooms not only survived, but the committees adopted their programs to the needs of the university coming out of the Depression, to the needs of the university coming out of the Second World War, which thrust the United States into world leadership and confronted higher education with the problems of educating a people which was responsible for world leadership. And right here in Pittsburgh, this is very significant, because up until after World War II, the whole philosophy of the educational system at the University of Pittsburgh was based upon the Turner theory of the western frontier. Pittsburgh stood on the banks of Ohio and faced west. After World War II it was confronted to stay right in Pittsburgh and looking east to Europe, west beyond San Francisco to the Far East, and it had no preparation whatsoever for that. Because the only other area that we were studying was Latin America, with one or two courses, there was nothing about Asia, there was very little about Eastern Europe, I don't think it was anything about Russia. This situation, internationally, at the University of Pittsburgh, is comparable to the situation when I came first to the university, when they taught only Economics, no Sociology and no Political Science. Now, the whole Nationality program, at the end of World War II, the committees were all organized, we moved into an entirely different interpretation of the program, because of the fact that I took my leave of absence, I was in England, and although

today in respect to the Nationality program, it is still so pervasive, that people never realize that the program of cultural and education exchange, which is now in [incomprehensible] tremendous development in...

LR: ...the International Center...

RCM: ... the University Center of International Studies, which is a tremendous center, for which the University of Pittsburgh is justly recognized throughout the entire higher education in the world, in the United States. It started with the concept for a post-World War II program for the nationality committees who had finished their rooms structurally and who said to Dr. Bowman at our last pre-World War II Christmas party in the Commons Rooms, with the eighteen committee chairmen sitting along, with the great festive speaker's table. Each one said to Dr. Bowman, "Please do not discharge us. Keep us, there must be something that we can do for the University of Pittsburgh. We have come to treasure our relation with the university; we don't want to be disbanded." All right. That was in the back of my mind when I went to UNRRA in Cairo, later to London, to UNRRA in London and UNRRA in Cairo. And it happened to be at the time of the meeting of all the educational societies, which were facing education for the future and they had as a speaker Howard Wilson, who was the secretary of the preparatory committee for UNESCO, a man of great innovative educational thinking in America. And he said to this group of British educators, "Education in this post-World War II world has got to be internationally universal in order that students may face the world they are going to have to live in. And he outlined the programs that must of cultural exchange, of student studying in various parts of the world, courses that must taught that included

all languages, included histories of all countries, not just a country, a particular country. His book is excellent on that and this made me say: "Here is a program for our committees." So when I came back, this is at the beginning... I mean, at the end of my period, I was moving on towards retirement age, we set up a program for the nationality committees, which replaced raising funds for rooms to raising funds for exchange scholarships. This was very-very... and also programs for introducing languages other than French and German and Spanish, histories other than of the Western world. Our Chinese committee was absolutely basically responsible for the creation of our superb Asian Studies program today. The very first teaching of a Slavic history was taught by a young Scotchman from the University of Glasgow, whose salary and transportation... he was brought to Pittsburgh by the... the Slavic committees...

LR:... Eastern European...

RCM: ...Eastern European, contributing to a central fund that made it possible to bring him permanently into the History department as a guest. And out of that grew our whole Slavic history program. I could go on and on. The first book on world literature was published by our nationality committees, published a series of lectures in English by the outstanding authorities on Greek literature, Italian literature, Romanian literature, which were given for public school teachers in the Stephen Foster Memorial over a period of three years, in order to get eighteen lectures. We were thinking that we couldn't pay too many in one year. All that money was raised by nationality committees with this kind of a purpose. And this has gone on and on. I want to emphasize that the substitution of the Nationality Rooms per se was a cultural

program that was aimed at permeating those departments within the university which were purely...

LR:... provincial...

RCM: Yes, provincial! And now, provincial isn't quite the word, because it accepted Western European interpretation of the liberal arts education, that went back to Latin and Greek, but it didn't go into Slavic languages or Asiatic languages, of those things which today we know are absolutely essential, because of the handing of the... the importance of the Russian language, they... in order to hold up our foreign policy, has to be recognized. So, this is the point that I want to make, but it again came to a crisis, when we had an administration at the university, which was concerned with a tremendous improvement in our academic standards. Again, by a person, a chancellor with great international vision, Dr. Leachfield, which backed this question of an international curriculum, but which had no particular interest in the Nationality Rooms, because they represented immigrants, whereas the ambition of the university at that particular period was to be a University of Michigan or University of Wisconsin or Princeton or Yale or Harvard, not to be "an immigrant institution." And the nationality committees sank to their lowest ebb and would have been extinct if there hadn't been the change that occurred. And Stanley Colvert, who succeeded the... Dr. Leachfield... (break) and have been one of Dr. Bowman's first superior officers under him and had been a very great friend of the nationality committees. And it had been possible to get from the Pittsburgh Foundation a special grant, which made it possible to have me, as I moved out, succeeded by a full-time worker. The budget provided for, only for a limited part-time work with the nationality

committees. But our present director, Maxine Bruhns, was able to come in at that time, a highly gifted individual, not only, not only because of her own personality, but also because of practical experience in life, a person who had lived... A young woman, who with her husband has lived and worked in many countries in the Far East, the Middle East and Europe, to the end that she spoke fluent French, German, modern Greek, Arabic, some Italian. She lived in country after country, knew the parts of the... and history of the countries in the world, again a person [laughs] brought to Pittsburgh through matrimony, her husband being a professor at the School of International and Urban Affairs here at the University of Pittsburgh. Under Maxine Bruhns's leadership, the program has been able to be adapted to the tremendous changes that have taken place in recent years, among which there is nothing more significant than the replacement of the term "nationality," which is political, by the word "ethnicity." And "ethnicity" permits the bringing in of the most recent attempt on the part of the American people to absorb its entire population, absorb and educate and give opportunity to this entire population, namely that... This is a tremendous, tremendous experiment that we have moved into, and even more acute problem to conquer that was ever the problem of assimilating many-many different nationalities, to have the relationships between the Blacks and the nationalities, as well as between the Blacks and the Whites.

LR: I think I am just about done with the interview.

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