

OFFERING A “GLIMPSE OF FAR-AWAY PLACES”: THE ELIAS TAMBURITZA SERENADERS ON THE 1930–1931 CANADIAN CHAUTAUQUA CIRCUIT

Preliminary communication

Submitted: 18. 9. 2025.

Accepted: 14. 2. 2026.

DOI: 10.15176/vol63no114

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Early twentieth century American-based tamburitza orchestras participated in chautauqua cultural, educational and entertainment tours that travelled to thousands of rural and small towns throughout the United States and Canada. One of the groups that participated in these tours was the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders from Racine, Wisconsin. Founded in 1924 and led by tamburitza virtuoso Charles Elias Sr., the ensemble was among the acts that performed at 84 different locations while taking part in the Canadian Chautauqua Festival during fall 1930 and winter 1931. Despite the prevalence of Anglo-conformity and fear of undesirable Eastern European immigrants flooding Canada, the acceptance of ethnocultural musical groups such as tamburitza orchestras, was due in large part to the success of chautauqua's ability to present the mystery of distant lands to isolated rural folk starving for a connection to the outside world. North American audiences were not only introduced to strange and colorful folk costumes donned by the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders, but were also introduced to a unique musical instrument often extolled as “authentic,” “distinctive” and “exotic.”

Keywords: Canadian Chautauqua Festival, Charles Elias Sr., chautauqua, Elias Tamburitza Serenaders, tamburitza

INTRODUCTION

On 22 September 1930, the Croatian language weekly *Kanadski glas* (Canadian Voice) based in Winnipeg, Manitoba announced on its front page that the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders of Racine, Wisconsin were about to embark on a major tour of the western

provinces of Canada. The musical group toured as part of the Canadian Chautauqua Festival. In the article, editor Petar Stanković wrote that Charles Elias Sr. and his seasoned family-based tamburitza ensemble had already been touring America for several years. The group was scheduled to perform in forty-eight remote small towns in the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan. Two months later, the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders were scheduled to undertake a swing through the province of Ontario and perform in thirty-six rural towns. Continuing in his piece, Stanković touted the family group as the “best tamburitza orchestra in the United States” and went on to state that it was “very doubtful” that the Elias Serenaders “could be bettered by any [tamburitza] group in Croatia.”

Following the group’s performance in Raymond, Alberta the local town newspaper, *The Raymond Recorder*, wrote on 14 November 1930 that the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders “pleased their audiences immensely.” The article went on to state that the group’s instruments were “a novelty to the audience and their performance was of a very high character. In vocal work as well as in instrumental they made a very creditable showing indeed.” How was it that Canadians living in small towns in rural areas were being introduced to the sounds from what they likely perceived as a strange and exotic stringed instrument at a time when Anglo-conformity and fear of undesirable Eastern European immigrants flooding the country prevailed in Canada? What was it about the chautauqua circuit that enabled the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders to perform to enthusiastic crowds in hundreds of Canadian small towns over several years as part of a travelling educational, cultural and entertainment festival?

CIRCUIT CHAUTAUQUA

Chautauqua was a travelling tent show tour that originated in the United States and thrived in Canada from 1917 to 1935. It brought orators, musicians, drama performers and other entertainers to small isolated towns in the above western provinces of Canada, as well as Manitoba, Ontario, Québec, Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. Its events were often advertised as bringing “the world to your door” (Jameson and Erickson 1979: 37, 137). Its origins are found in the United States where it was introduced in 1874 as a place of assembly for Methodist Sunday school teachers in New York State, south of Lake Erie at Lake Chautauqua. The term *chautauqua* was based on an indigenous Seneca word which meant “where the fish was taken out” (Edson 1935: 37; Jameson and Erickson 1979: 6). Soon after being established in the US, a comparable organization was launched in Canada as a Methodist temperance gathering near Grimsby, Ontario. This gathering became an annual event that prospered until 1900 before closing in 1909. Both the New York and Grimsby Chautauquas were closely associated with Methodist educational, religious and social objectives (*Ontario Methodist Camp Ground* 1885; Simpson 1999: 31–43).

While chautauqua originally focussed on religion, later it transformed to include general education and a wide variety of popular entertainment (Tozier 1934; Winks 1958; Stahl 1976). In 1904 two entrepreneurs from the United States, Keith Vawter and J. Roy Ellison, conceived of the idea to take chautauqua on the road in tents to towns in the American Midwest. The second tour was only able to be staged in 1907, but from then on it continued annually until 1932. During its peak in America between 1916 and 1920, the various chautauqua circuits made stops in several thousand towns and cities during the summer months and were attended by more than twenty million people (Dalgety 1931: 41–42; Horner 1954: 94–98; Johnson 2001: 53, 56). In a 15 September 1917 issue of *The Billboard*, an extensive list of two thousand US cities and towns which hosted chautauquas and which were run by some twenty different circuits or systems was compiled for the magazine. A 1931 piece by George Dalgety in *Current History* aptly described what chautauqua meant to the people of rural America. Dalgety described it as providing a “week of freedom from toil” for millions of people. It was “a great social event” that provided education and entertainment for which rural Americans “planned for weeks and even months to be free from entanglements” so that they could attend (Dalgety 1931: 44).

The significance of the mission of chautauqua “to inspire cultural, community, and individual improvement through performances of various kinds” (Canning 2005: 1) and what it came to mean for the American people is encapsulated in the following description by Charlotte Canning:

[...] the term *Chautauqua* came to mean entertainment and education, open debate and the inclusion of values, and commonality and difference. Thriving in rural areas, once a year it brought live music, singers, lecturers, comic performers, eminent public figures, and inspirational speakers to isolated communities. Unlike other popular touring forms – vaudeville, medicine shows, circuses, or additional suspect entertainments – Chautauqua was considered respectable and safe as well as desirable. Communities throughout the West and Midwest welcomed the Chautauqua and encouraged family attendance [...]. The circuit Chautauquas were mass entertainment before the technology of mass entertainment. People in areas as scattered as the Dakotas, Ohio, Georgia, and Utah all might see the same quartets, orchestras, impersonators, and speakers, and all knew that other towns and counties, too, were hosting the same events. (Canning 1999: 91)

Canning goes on to explain that what “Chautauqua claimed to present was a true depiction of a United States that was predominantly homogeneous, unconflicted, and stable, thus making real through performance a much-longed-for America” (Canning 2005: 39). Since the circuits operated at a time when a national media did not exist and before the arrival of radio during the 1920s meant that chautauqua was “one of the few ubiquitous experiences that linked people across the United States” (ibid.).

In 1912 Ellison and Clarence H. White launched the Ellison-White Chautauqua System, which brought the first travelling chautauqua to Canada in 1917. The Canadian branch of the Ellison-White operation also became known as the Dominion Chautauqua. The Ca-

nadian operation was based in Calgary, Alberta under the directorship of the Americans John and Nola Erickson. Throughout rural regions and small towns in Canada, people would travel from their homesteads and homes and come to the tent or hall where chautauqua would be based for several days. The crowds that gathered at these events were described as having "a quiet earnestness and expectation" for they were there for "a definite purpose" and this was their "annual contact with the great outside world" (Dalgety 1931: 40). This same sentiment was expressed by rural Canadians, some of whom were deeply moved to be able to experience a connection to the outside world after many years on isolated homesteads found throughout the vast but lightly populated country (Mugan 1952: 54–56; Jameson and Erickson 1979: 1).

Initially, travelling chautauquas included many popular lectures and later became more focused on providing an array of cultural attractions and was "instrumental in popularizing both exotic and classical music" to isolated communities (Taft 1993: 203). This was during an era when radios were not yet widely available to households and long before television became accessible to families during the 1950s (Dyck 1981: 269). A sense of what the travelling chautauqua meant to small town Canada is revealed by Elsie Moir in a history of Clearwater, Crystal City and Pilot Mound, three rural towns in the province of Manitoba:

[...] one avenue for the bringing of good music, drama and educational lectures to the small rural communities, was the Chautauqua movement [...] all children of the community had a chance to attend the programs. For children it was a week of excitement. First a big costume parade for the kids. In a few days the "tentmen" arrived to put up the huge brown canvas tent... Finally the arrival of the glamorous artists – singers, actors, lecturers, orchestras and instrumentalists. For six days in afternoon and evening shows, with usually a different group for each program, a festival of excellent professional talent made its way through the big tent, opening a window on the outside world to many people in rural communities, who would not otherwise have had such an opportunity. (Moir 1969: 179)

In describing the appeal of rural Americans for chautauqua, a former lecture bureau travelling agent who went on to become a general manager of several chautauqua circuits, Harry P. Harrison, wrote that here "was a strange, new something that they [rural folk] wanted with all their plain country hearts. Here, in the midst of summer's hard labor, had been relaxation, inspiration come to rest briefly." Over several days, chautauqua provided "gaiety, music, mystery, adventure, good clean fun" (Harrison and Detzer 1958: 76). A similar sentiment was conveyed in the local history of the Saskatchewan towns of Royal Canadian, Newcombe, Eatonia, and Laporte: "Chautauqua was education, inspiration and entertainment, and it brought to many folk in small towns their only opportunity for a cultural experience; it brightened their lives by bringing a touch of drama, a glimpse of far-away places and a sense of magic...thus filling an important need in their lives" (Hansen 1980: 587).

In a pamphlet prepared for the 1930 chautauqua in Gibbons-Bon Accord, Alberta John Erickson described the principles of the Canadian Chautauqua Festival as follows: "To

foster the ideals and vision of Canadianism, to bring to communities the best obtainable in drama, music and clean entertainment, in lectures by notable" persons "who are recognized authorities upon their subjects" (*Canadian Chautauquas* 1930: 2). When the Chautauqua Festival arrived in rural Canada during the summer months, its performances took place in tents. This was the case when it reached the southwestern Ontario town of Kitchener in 1918 and 1919, and was held under a tent on the grounds of a local school (Redpath Chautauqua Collection – RCC; series VI, sub-series A, box 2, file Kitchener). During the autumn and winter months following the harvest, chautauqua artists performed during the early 1930s in buildings such as Reid's Hall in Ayr, Ontario. This was a 250-seat music hall located in a small town south of the twin cities of Kitchener-Waterloo. However, chautauqua was also known to be held in venues like the halls of service clubs, local theatres, hotels, schools or any other available building that could accommodate large crowds.



Fig. 1. Chautauqua on Lake Manitou, Saskatchewan, 7–11 July 1922. [NA-1900-10], Glenbow Archives. Courtesy of Libraries and Cultural Resources Digital Collections, University of Calgary (Calgary, Alberta).

In 1931 a chautauqua that took place in New Hamburg, Ontario was described in a 13 February 1931 article in the town's weekly newspaper, the *New Hamburg Independent*, as being "a treat" for its audience. The article went on to underscore that the town was "fortunate to have such noted and gifted artists brought right to their midst." A post-chautauqua write-up in *The Ayr News* from 26 February 1931 described the event in Ayr, Ontario as being a major success. The article went into some detail, stating that: "The different entertainments presented were widely diversified and the entire series was well up to the standard set last year." The four-day event in both Ayr and New Hamburg

included the performance of the Broadway play "Turn to the Right" by the Peerless Players and the comedy "The Whole Town's Talking" by the Canadian Players. It also included music performances by the pianist and composer Lowell Patton and the duet singers Fenwick Newell and Gloria Robinson. The third day of the program in both towns featured performances by the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders who were dressed in their native folk costumes as they introduced the public to musical scores of the Croatians and South Slavs.

The musical acts that toured the circuits in both the United States and Canada included Black quartets, Indigenous performers, Hawaiian groups and various ethnocultural groups including Maori, Filipino, Bohemian (Czech), Hungarian, Russian, Polish, Scottish, Spanish, Swiss, Welsh, Mexican, Gypsy (Roma), and Italian performers (Harrison and Detzer 1958: 100–108; Tapia 1997: 100, 172; Sampsel and D'Avis 2000: 56–58). In his 1997 book *Circuit Chautauqua*, Tapia explained that many of the ethnocultural groups that participated in chautauqua were professional touring ensembles. He specifically mentioned the performances at chautauqua venues by Croatian and other ethnocultural groups that "exposed audiences to a breadth of cultural customs not likely to be seen on Main Street nor, in some instances, even in larger metropolitan areas" (Tapia 1997: 129). And while most of these ethnocultural groups performed their numbers in English, when they did perform pieces in their native languages, one of their members would explain to audiences the meaning of the lyrics.

The predominantly rural white audiences that took in the representation of America presented by chautauqua was significantly different from the experiences of more recent immigrants struggling in urban industrial cities or African Americans and their experiences in the American South (Canning 1999: 98). In her discussion of how circuit managers actively represented chautauqua as being "central to the survival of the nation" and how they "successfully blurred" the boundaries between chautauqua and the United States, Canning underscores that chautauquas helped the American populace imagine their local towns or counties as being part of the great family of communities making up America (ibid.: 99–100). She went on to state that chautauqua "offered itself as a place to stage the battle for rural communities as the source of American values, morals, and beliefs" and that the bond between chautauqua and evangelical Protestantism although "not always visible" nevertheless "undergirded every performance" (Canning 2005: 75, 73). In short, the chautauqua circuits were adept at representing what the United States was and what it was not. This is where the "foreign" or ethnocultural acts came in. Those acts "not of British Protestant descent were clearly the exoticized Other against which Americans should compare themselves" (Canning 1999: 100). However, the foreign musical acts were also romanticized. They performed "nostalgic memories of other cultures, reminding Americans of what they had left to become assimilated to the (apparently) ethnically neutral American culture" (ibid.: 101).

THE TAMBURITZA IN NORTH AMERICA

In his 1971 book on the Croatian ethnocultural community in America, historian George J. Prpic noted that already during the early 1900s, immigrants had brought the tamburitza along with them to the United States: "Written reports of individual Croatian immigrants about their voyage across the Atlantic show that on the ship the Croatians played the tamburitsas, sang their folk songs and danced. These immigrants brought to their new homeland their love for music and dances and, of course, they brought the tamburitsa" (Prpic 1971: 372).

During the initial settlement phase and the early period of institutional formation of Croatian immigrants transplanted in their new North American setting, tamburitza and chorale societies were soon launched. It should be kept in mind that many of these initial cultural endeavors were often launched by simple individuals, primarily members of the working or peasant class, some of whom were practically illiterate. They occupied the lowest economic and social rung, living under harsh conditions and labored at some of the most physically demanding and dangerous jobs (Prpic 1971: 151–161; Holjevac 1968: 116; Rasporich 1982: 52–60). Cultural and entertainment endeavors incorporating the tamburitza were very quickly identified as a means around which to help draw in and galvanize other members of the community towards additional institution-building projects, including mutual benefit societies. When Croatian fraternal lodges, community halls and various other organizations, of all ideological persuasions, were launched, affiliated tamburitza orchestras were also soon to follow. These often had the goal of reaching out to the second or American-born generation (Kolar 1975: 5; Stanković 1923: 53–54; Holjevac 1968: 125–130).

In his second volume on the history of the tamburitza that is dedicated to its appearance in America, Walter Kolar identified Karlovac native Frank Hoffer and his family as being among the earliest to introduce the instrument to American society. In 1891 this family of tamburitza players performed at a vaudeville review in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Two years later the group reputedly played at the Chicago World Fair (Kolar 1975: 3–5). In 1893 the Croatian Tamburitza Orchestra "Vila" based in Allegheny, Pennsylvania and led by V. Zima performed at the Chicago World Fair. A photograph of this ten-member ensemble was published in the 18 June 1897 issue of the Allegheny newspaper *Napredak* (Progress) (Škrivanić 2011: 45–46, 175). In an article entitled "Music" that appeared in *The Pittsburgh Press* on 30 June 1895 it was reported that nine tamburitza musicians from Zagreb visited the US. They were joined by three tamburitza players from Allegheny and established a temporary group called the Croatian Tamburitza Orchestra. This ensemble held a concert at the Allegheny Turner Hall and then travelled to perform concerts in Chicago, other western cities and ended their tour in San Francisco. Articles and advertisements published in the American press reveal that several other ensembles operated during late 1800s and early 1900s. Among these was the Croatian-Krainer Tambourine Club that was active in Steelton, Pennsylvania from 1884–1895 and directed by Hoffer. This ensemble was mentioned in several Pennsylvania newspapers published in Harrisburg and Lebanon (*The Daily News, Harrisburg Telegraph, Lebanon Semi-Weekly News, The Patriot-News*).

Based on articles in the local Buffalo, New York press and *Narodni list* (National Gazette), the Croatian Tamburica Orchestra "Sokol," directed by Ivan Očvarek, left its mark in New York during the first years of the twentieth century. This group performed in theaters, cafés, restaurants, halls, and banquet venues hosted by American businesses and organizations. Among the locations at which the ensemble performed was the Rooftop Garden of the posh Waldorf Astoria Hotel in 1900 ("Hrvatski tamburaši", *Narodni list*, 16 June 1900). Several years later the ensemble became known as both the "Croatian Tamburica Orchestra" and the "Tinkelty Band" and was directed by Emilio Blazevec. A photograph of this group was published in the 7 January 1906 issue of *The Buffalo News*.

The seven musicians that made up the "Sokol" group were originally from Sisak. There they were already members of an accomplished tamburitza group having participated at the 1889 World Fair in Paris. The group was reassembled and launched in Rosendale, New York in 1900 before moving to Buffalo, New York. In 1902 the ensemble performed at the Pan American Exhibition. That same year the group performed at several different venues as seen in advertisements and articles appearing in the local press about their past performances. Among the group's high profile performances was one for members of New York's high society at a banquet in honour of the city's former Mayor William Lafayette Strong, as well as at Carnegie Hall (Kolar 1975: 4; Škrivanić 2011: 163, 237). During the presidency of Theodore Roosevelt, it is believed that a Croatian tamburitza group performed for the President at the White House (Kolar 1975: 5).

The transplantation of tamburitza music by Croatian immigrants to America was completed by the end of the first decade of the 1900s. As noted by Kolar:

It is very evident that immigrants played a most important part in bringing the tambura to America and rekindling the flame of interest in this stringed instrument. The result was a flurry of activity from one end of the United States to the other. There were groups active in New York. Almost at the same time the tambura was being played in northern Michigan. Other early groups were in evidence throughout the mid-west and the far west in California and Washington. (Kolar 1975: 23)

Among the groups that were established during this early period were: a tamburitza group in Kansas City, Kansas (est. 1900), the Croatian Tambura Club "Zvonimir" of San Francisco (est. 1902), a tamburitza ensembles "Zora" and "Jablan" active in Allegheny, Pennsylvania in 1903, the Tamburitza Society "God and the Croats" of Whiting, Indiana (est. 1904), the Croatian Tamburitza Orchestra Velebit of Chicago (est. 1905), the Croatian Orchestra Tamburica of San Francisco (active 1905), the "Mountain Nymph" group of Johnstown, Pennsylvania (est. 1906), the "Zrinjski" group of Chicago (active 1906), the Croatian String Band "Vila" in Enterprise, Iowa (active 1907), the tamburitza orchestra "Balkan" of Chicago (est. 1907), the "Lika" ensemble of Gladstone, Iowa (active 1907), the "Rišnjak" group of Salt Lake City, Utah (est. 1910), the "Croatian Troubadors" of East Hammond, Indiana (active 1910), "Rišnjak" of Painesdale, Michigan (est. 1912), the Yugoslav Cultural and Drama Club of Chisholm, Minnesota (active 1908), Tambura orchestra "Sloga" of Chicago (active 1908), and the Tamburitza and Drama Ensemble "Brotherhood" of Allegheny, Pennsyl-

vania (est. 1907) (Crnković 1933: 3–4; Kolar 1975: 6–19; Sremac 2002: 61–63; Škrivanić 2011: 224, 231, 253, 271, 282, 300).

In Canada where fewer than 4,000 Croatians immigrated between 1899 and 1915, the establishment of tamburitza troupes lagged behind developments south of the border. The very first chapter of the Pittsburgh-based National Croatian Society (NCS) was established in Canada by eighteen immigrant miners who were predominantly from the Žumberak region. This was St. Nicholas Lodge 268 established in Ladysmith, British Columbia in 1903. Soon after its establishment, an affiliated twelve-member tamburitza group was launched with Jack Djuric serving as its musical director (Juricic 1994: 23; Peterson 2003: 156–157). In November 1909 Frank Burdick, the owner of the Imperial Hotel in Vancouver, took out several classified advertisements in the New York bi-weekly *Hrvatski svijet* (The Croatian World). Through his advertisements he attempted to hire tamburitza musicians for his establishment. However, it is not known if he succeeded in securing tamburitza players for the hotel. Several years later, a tamburitza group was established during the winter of 1910–1911 in the Ontario town of Welland (Škvorc 1931).

Due to labor unrest in various parts of Canada followed by the federal government's introduction of the registration and imprisonment of "enemy aliens" from 1914 to 1920, which also targeted unnaturalized Croatian immigrant workers, the early tamburitza orchestras struggled. In the case of the ensemble in Welland, it disintegrated as members of the community dispersed to other parts of Canada, were arrested and interned, or escaped illegally across the border into then neutral United States in order to try and avoid the possibility of imprisonment (Škvorc 1931; Rasporich 1982: 75–93). When immigration to Canada picked up during the mid-1920s, members of the community eventually began establishing chapters of various organizations including branches of the: Croatian Fraternal Union, Croatian Peasant Society, Worker Peasant Educational Club, and Croatian Educational Association. The following decade, members of the community began procuring Croatian National Homes (Hamilton, Kirkland Lake, Port Arthur, Schumacher, Sudbury) and a Croatian Education Home in Vancouver. Many of the local chapters of these various organizations and halls established affiliated tamburitza orchestras that were sustained over many years and in some cases decades (Jurak 1939; Gaži 1952).

CHARLES ELIAS AND THE ELIAS TAMBURITZA SERENADERS

Charles Elias Sr. was born Dragutin Ilijaš in Suhopolje, Slavonia region in 1886. He came from a musical family and played the tamburitza from a young age. In his youth he served as a barber apprentice in Hungary, Austria and Germany, before immigrating to the US in 1903 at the age of seventeen. Settling in Milwaukee, Wisconsin he worked as a barber, eventually opening his own business. In 1915 Elias moved to the Mesabi Iron Range in Northern Minnesota. He joined many other Croatian immigrants in becoming a member of the National Croatian Society (est. 1894), later renamed the Croatian Fraternal Union (CFU).

This mutual benefit and insurance society had lodges throughout the US and later Canada. These lodges often had affiliated tamburitza orchestras that performed at various events, commemorations and gatherings. While working during the day and teaching tamburitza groups in his spare time, Elias also attended the Meyer Music School in the evening.

Elias began organizing and teaching tamburitza orchestras already in 1904. He established several tamburitza groups over the years, the two best known being the twelve-piece Velebit Tamburitza Orchestra out of Virginia, Minnesota and the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders out of Racine, Wisconsin. From 1903 to 1914 he taught several Croatian and Slovenian tamburitza orchestras in Milwaukee and from 1914 to 1923 he instructed several in the Minnesota Iron Range. When the Velebit orchestra disbanded in 1923 Elias moved back to Wisconsin. In 1922 he lived in Racine, Wisconsin and taught several tamburitza orchestras in the Milwaukee-Racine-Kenosha region. From 1924 he devoted himself entirely to the tamburitza when he established the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders (Eliáš 1937; Elias 1956).

Over the years, Croatian immigrant tamburitza virtuosos and instructors who lived in the United States became increasingly exposed to American musical influences and eventually developed their own tradition (March 2013: 11–136; Bezić 2001: 107–110). They also became to a certain extent cut off from musical developments in the old homeland as the US introduced a cap on its quota of immigrants from southeastern Europe in 1921 and tightened the quota still further in 1924 (Prpic 1971: 251–257). At the turn of the century when the US started opening itself to the world through the hosting of world fairs in Chicago (1893) and St. Louis (1904), as well as the Panama-Pacific Exhibition in San Francisco (1915), the America public became increasingly exposed to “exotic” cultures. This provided a window of opportunity for members of tamburitza orchestras to embark on careers as touring acts in vaudeville shows, lyceums and chautauquas (Crnković 1933: 3–17, 57–98; March 2013: 111–117).



Fig. 2. The Elias Tamburitza Serenaders: Charles Elias Sr. with his children Charles Jr., Martha and Anna ca. late 1920s – Redpath Chautauqua Bureau Records, Special Collections Department, University of Iowa Libraries, Iowa City, Iowa.

Among the tamburitza virtuosos who embarked on a career as a touring artist, including as part of the early chautauqua circuits, was Petar Savich. He led the Zvonimir tamburitza group established in Steelton, Pennsylvania in 1906 (Kolar 1975: 26–29; March 2013: 115–116). This ensemble toured throughout America and only ceased after the US entered the First World War. The experiences of the group as they introduced the instrument to the American public during this early period was described by its member Rudolf Crnković in his 1933 mimeographed book *Sa "Zvonimirom" po Americi: zapisci 5 godišnjeg tamburaškog putovanja* (With the Zvonimir Tamburitza Group: Chronicle of a Five-year Journey Across America). The Zvonimir ensemble ceased to tour when its members began to be called to active service in the American military (Crnković 1933: 118, 121–123). Following the conclusion of the war, the orchestra resumed touring with some personnel changes and was led by Janko Gajski (John Gayski). In 1916–1917 the group was called the Croatian Tamburica Orchestra. Seven years later when the group toured on the chautauqua circuit in Australia and New Zealand, it was known as the Jugo-Slav Tamburica Orchestra. In 1925, this group also performed on the first day of a five-day chautauqua in Kitchener, Ontario. Two years later it was called the Adriatic Tamburica Band (Harrison and Detzer 1958: 245; RCC, Series 1: Talent, box 168, file Jugo-Slav Tamburica Orchestra).¹

Among those who used the opportunity to take advantage of the economic prospects that opened up as the American populace increasingly pursued leisure activities and to embark on a career as a touring artist was Charles Elias Sr. As noted by Frank Braidic during an interview on the "Americans All" television series that aired on the Pittsburgh educational station WQED and was noted in a *Zajedničar* (Fraternalist) article from 19 September 1956, Elias:

[...] was not only an exponent of the tamburitza, but also a teacher and composer of some caliber. Furthermore, his love for music transcended beyond that of the Croatians. For years he traveled with the famous Chatauqua [sic] troupes. This connection gained him greater recognition to the point that he was accepted by other nationalities as an arranger of music and composer.

At the time of the 1930 Canadian Chautauqua Festival tour, the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders group was composed of Charles Elias Sr., his brother Bartol, and his children Martha and Charles Jr. When his children were unable to travel, others such as Nikola Krznarić and Ivan Miškulin filled in as members of the group. In 1936 Elias became ill, was hospitalized and died the following year. At the time of his death, he left close to 500 compositions to his son Charles Jr., who took over the group and became a tamburitza instructor in

¹ The November 1916 issue of *The Lyceum News* (Chicago, Illinois), published by the Redpath Bureau, featured the article "Musical Instruments of Croatia: Tamburican Orchestra to Native Interpretations Meeting with Favor in America" (p. 13). This piece was dedicated to the "Croatian Tamburican Orchestra" and it included an accompanying photograph of the group. This 1916 photograph of the "Croatian Tamburican Orchestra" is the same photograph found in the file "Jugo-Slav Tamburica Orchestra 'Adriatic'" from 1925 of the above Redpath Chautauqua Collection.

his own right.² The Elias Tamburitza Serenaders became affiliated with several Extension Divisions, such as at the University of Wisconsin, the University of Kansas and Southwestern University, as well as the US School Assembly Service. The orchestra travelled to hundreds of cities and towns across the US and Canada and during the Second World War it performed at USO events for American troops.³

Elias contributed to the periodicals *Tamburica* (Sisak) and *Hrvatska tamburica* (Zagreb), and in 1924 he also published the book *Škola za tamburaše* (Instruction for Tamburitza Players) (Doliner 1998; Kolar 1975: 34–35). The significance of Elias to the history of the tamburitza in the United States was noted by several authors who studied the transplantation of this musical instrument to America. Kolar wrote that Elias played a “paramount role” in the proliferation of the tamburitza in the early part of the twentieth century and that: “His thirty-years of continuous performances was a tremendous pioneering effort and cast a profound influential shadow on many who were to follow” (Kolar 1975: 33). While discussing tamburitza orchestras that were part of the cultural-entertainment circuits in the US and Canada and who cultivated the image of their ensembles as performers on “exotic” instruments, Richard March in his book *The Tamburitza Tradition* added that the Elias Serenaders had:

[...] a long career on the Chautauqua circuit, developing a different image, a family-based group with an educational and ethnic-cultural appeal. They always performed in stylized versions of Croatian folk costumes, played many of their programs in school and college assemblies, and consciously sought to increase Americans’ knowledge of South Slavic culture, delivering short explanations in English about the performance. (March 2013: 116)

Among the reasons that Elias incorporated an educational approach to his performances and adopted the subtitle “In Learning Is Salvation” for his 1924 tamburitza instruction book was his general progressive outlook and his affinity for the lot of the working class to which most Croatian and South Slavic immigrants in the United States and Canada belonged. In a piece dedicated to Elias following his death in 1937, *Hrvatski glas* (Croatian Voice) editor Stanković wrote on 22 June 1937 that Elias was “a rebel by nature who

² Charles Elias, Jr. later led the American-Croatian Silver Strings Tamburitizens in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and the Waukegan Junior Tamburitizens (Waukegan, Illinois). These orchestras performed throughout North America, appeared on television shows and released recordings. In 1969 Charles Elias Jr. was chosen Guest Conductor of the CFU’s Junior Cultural Federation Festival and in 1973 was presented the “Man of the Year” award by the Milwaukee Croatian Civic Club. He remained active as a tamburitza instructor until his death in 1984.

³ For a better impression of the places where the Serenaders performed, see: “Final Number in Lyceum Course Tuesday Evening,” *Sauk Centre Herald*, 25. February 1926.; “Croatia [sic] Players Score Local Hit,” *Red Lodge Daily News & Carbon County News*, 3. April 1935.; “High School News,” *Fallon County News*, 23. January 1936.; “Lions Entertainment Will Be Given Friday Night,” *Henderson Daily Dispatch*, 2. November 1938.; “Jugo-Slav Music to Open Fall Festival at Music Hall,” *The Norwood News*, 13. September 1939. Elias also mentioned some of these places in a text that he wrote for *Zajedničar*. Drag. Elijaš, “Jedna skromna propaganda (A modest advertisement),” *Zajedničar*, 14. May 1930.

opposed social inequalities⁴ and went on to describe him as an independent thinker not blinded by ideology. Stanković had worked as a miner in the United States after immigrating to Calumet, Michigan in 1912. He crossed paths with Elias in America, recognizing his talent and influence years before eventually settling in Canada in 1928 and launching his newspaper in 1929. In his 1937 article, Stanković went on to place Elias among the small group of Croatian immigrants who “in addition to working to put food on their tables for themselves and their families, also managed to distinguish themselves with accomplishments that were of a general benefit to the Croatian people.” He also stressed that Elias possessed a deep connection to his instrument and that he “viewed the tamburitza as something sacred.”

COVERAGE OF THE ELIAS TAMBURITZA SERENADERS IN *KANADSKI GLAS*

Elias had performed as part of the chautauqua circuit already for several years when the Serenaders arrived in Winnipeg, Manitoba on 18 September 1930. Unbeknownst to Elias, Winnipeg was home to the Croatian language weekly *Kanadski glas* which was launched by Stanković the previous year and renamed *Hrvatski glas* in 1933. While walking the streets of Winnipeg, Elias came upon the National Press Building and saw the *Kanadski glas* (hereafter *KG*) sign in the window. He immediately went to the editorial office and ran into his old friend Stanković. From late September to late November 1930, the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders were scheduled to perform in forty-eight rural towns in the provinces of British Columbia, Alberta and Saskatchewan (see table 1).

On 6 October 1930, Elias sent a brief report to *KG* from Oyen, Alberta. He shared his impressions of western Canada since the start of the chautauqua tour. The following week Elias wrote an article “*Kanadjani vole naše tamburice*” (Canadians love our tamburitzas) in the 13 October 1930 issue of *KG* indicating that he had only run into one Croatian immigrant since the start of the tour. He underscored in the article that:

Canadians, like Americans, very much enjoy our tamburitza melodies and songs. Our performances are appreciated everywhere as something distinctive and new. And for that reason, wherever we perform, we are always invited to return the following year [...]. I like the people of western Canada as they are very hospitable and it seems that they have a greater affinity for classical music than the people of small-town America.

When the Serenaders performed in Kimberley, British Columbia on 20 November, several Croatian immigrants attended the performance. In his review of the concert, Petar Kekić

⁴ Elias may have been a sympathizer of the South Slavic International Socialist Federation which published *Znanje* [Knowledge]. In 1919 the editors of *Znanje* wrote a brief note in response to a letter sent by a D. Eliaš from Ironton, Minnesota. [Teodor Cvetkov and Djuka Kutuzović], “Odgovori uredništva,” *Znanje*, 7 July 1917.

wrote in the 8 December 1930 issue of *KG* “*Naši tamburaši u Kimberley*” (Our tamburitza players in Kimberley) that the Serenaders performed excerpts from the opera *Zrinski*, several Croatian folk tunes, English tunes, and some of Elias’ own arrangements. Later at a reception arranged for the Serenaders at the home of one of the locals who attended the performance, Elias and his group and local Croatian immigrants celebrated together and sang long into the night. In the article “*Medju braćom u Kimberley*” (Among brothers in Kimberley) from the 1 December 1930 issue of *KG*, Elias expressed how much this chance get-together with Croatian immigrants meant to him. It provided him an opportunity to get to know these recent immigrants and to unwind amongst his fellow countrymen.

Table 1. Locations and Performance Dates of the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders in Western Canada, Fall 1930.

	Location	Date		Location	Date		Location	Date
1	Ruthilda, SK	25 Sept.	17	Beymoor, AB	14 Oct.	33	Reid Hill, AB	1 Nov.
2	Stranraer, SK	26 Sept.	18	Stettler, AB	15 Oct.	34	Queenstown, AB	3 Nov.
3	Druid, SK	27 Sept.	19	Galahad, AB	16 Oct.	35	Bassano, AB	4 Nov.
4	Major, SK	29 Sept.	20	Heisler, AB	17 Oct.	36	Patricia, AB	5 Nov.
5	Luseland, SK	30 Sept.	21	Bawlf, AB	18 Oct.	37	Vauxhall, AB	7 Nov.
6	Cadogan, AB	1 Oct.	22	Hay Lakes, AB	20 Oct.	38	Grassy Lake, AB	8 Nov.
7	Hughenden, AB	2 Oct.	23	Leduc, AB	21 Oct.	39	Barnwell, AB	10 Nov.
8	Veteran, AB	3 Oct.	24	New Norway, AB	22 Oct.	40	Raymond, AB	11 Nov.
9	Monitor, AB	4 Oct.	25	Mirror, AB	23 Oct.	41	Warner, AB	12 Nov.
10	Sedalia, AB	6 Oct.	26	Delburne, AB	24 Oct.	42	Picture Butte, AB	13 Nov.
11	Oyen, AB	7 Oct.	27	Bentley, AB	25 Oct.	43	Barons, AB	14 Nov.
12	Chinook, AB	8 Oct.	28	Leslieville, AB	27 Oct.	44	Stavelly, AB	15 Nov.
13	Craigmyle, AB	9 Oct.	29	Innisfail, AB	28 Oct.	45	Blackie, AB	17 Nov.
14	Morrin, AB	10 Oct.	30	Markerville, AB	29 Oct.	46	Okotoks, AB	18 Nov.
15	Rockyford, AB	11 Oct.	31	Didsbury, AB	30 Oct.	47	Granum, AB	19 Nov.
16	Rumsey, AB	13 Oct.	32	Crossfield, AB	31 Oct.	48	Kimberley, BC	20 Nov.

Following the tour’s conclusion, Elias wrote a series of articles in *KG* describing the trials and tribulations of participating in chautauqua. He went into some detail about the challenges of travelling over a nine-week period throughout isolated rural areas of western Canada during the later months of the year on roads that were little more than muddy trails. In his reports, he described what the group faced while driving in a jam-packed Ford automobile carrying all four performers, their belongings and their instruments. His account of the tour included stories of flat tires, the overloaded car sinking down to its chassis and getting stuck on muddy roads during rain storms that turned to freezing rain. The Serenaders became stranded on several occasions and were repeatedly rescued through the kindness of local farmers who offered their horses or tractors to pull the

stuck automobile out of the muck or snow drift. Often times during storms, the wind and snow would wipe out telephone lines and the group would not receive updates on conditions from their fellow circuit performers travelling ahead of them to the next town (Elias 1930–1931: Part 1–2).

The following year from mid-January to late February, the Serenaders reached thirty-six rural Ontario towns (see table 2). When the group performed in Acton on 11 February, there were five Croatian immigrants living there and one of them, M. Grbčić, wrote a report to *KG* published on 24 February 1931 detailing the Serenaders' performance "*Boravak hrv. tamburaškog zbora u Acton, Ont.*" (Croatian tamburitza troupe stay in Acton, Ont). Based on articles and reviews appearing in the North American press, as well as the Croatian language press coverage of the 18 November 1930 performance of the Serenaders at a chautauqua taking place at the Elks Club in Okotoks, Alberta (Antolčić 1930) and the 11 February 1931 routine in Acton, as well as a concert bill from a 1939 performance in Detroit,⁵ the group was capable of performing a wide selection of arrangements on the tamburitza. This included parts from operettas, old Croatian folk tunes and *kolo* (circle) dance numbers, old American and Canadian melodies, polkas, waltzes, popular songs, and selections from different arias, as well as marches. When Elias wrote about his experiences on the Canadian Chautauqua Festival circuit, he underscored that the group had to be versatile and if a particular rural town had a significant population of citizens of Anglo, French, German, Swedish, Russian or Ukrainian origin, he would incorporate different numbers to perform that would be pleasing to the particular crowd.

When the 1930 Canadian Chautauqua Festival fall circuit through western Canada concluded, a special concert and radio performance of the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders was organized in Winnipeg, Manitoba. The evening broadcast showcasing the tamburitza performed by the Serenaders took place on Winnipeg's CKY radio station on 27 November 1930. The following day, the special concert featuring the Serenades was held at the Ukrainian Canadian Institute "Prosvita" which targeted members of Winnipeg's high society and music enthusiasts. Among the attendees were Winnipeg Mayor Colonel Ralph H. Webb, Colonel Louis A. Prud'Homme, the writer Constance Travers Sweatman, Secretary of the Winnipeg Folk Arts Society Esther Thompson, as well as the entire personnel of the Canadian Chautauqua Company, including its President John Erickson. The concert commenced with *KG* editor Petar Stanković introducing the Serenaders. Following the successful and well-received two-hour concert, the writer Constance Travers Sweatman invited local artists, musicians, literati, and actors with the Walker Theatre to her home for a reception in honour of the Serenaders (Stanković 1930b).

⁵ "Veliki koncert u Detroitu" (A great concert in Detroit), *Znanje*, 28 January 1939.

Table 2. Locations and Performance Dates of the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders in Ontario, Winter 1931.

	Location	Date		Location	Date		Location	Date
1	Harrow	16 Jan.	13	Dresden	30 Jan.	25	Penetanguishene	14 Feb.
2	Kingsville	17 Jan.	14	Brigden	2 Feb.	26	Port McNicoll	16 Feb.
3	Wheatley	19 Jan.	15	Wyoming	3 Feb.	27	Coldwater	17 Feb.
4	Merlin	20 Jan.	16	Forest	4 Feb.	28	Bolton	18 Feb.
5	Blenheim	21 Jan.	17	Thedford	5 Feb.	29	Milton	19 Feb.
6	Dutton	22 Jan.	18	Parkhill	6 Feb.	30	Ayr	20 Feb.
7	Waterford	23 Jan.	19	Ailsa Craig	7 Feb.	31	Elora	21 Feb.
8	Jarvis	24 Jan.	20	New Hamburg	9 Feb.	32	Erin	23 Feb.
9	Caledonia	26 Jan.	21	Rockwood	10 Feb.	33	Markdale	24 Feb.
10	Delhi	27 Jan.	22	Acton	11 Feb.	34	Warton	26 Feb.
11	Tilbury	28 Jan.	23	Creemore	12 Feb.	35	Hanover	27 Feb.
12	Glencoe	29 Jan.	24	Elmvale	13 Feb.	36	Mitchell	28 Feb.

CHAUTAUQUA AND INTER-WAR CANADA

The inter-war period in Canada was characterized by the prevalence of Anglo-conformity. There was a fear among those in a position of power and influence that undesirable immigrants would flood the country and overwhelm its ability to assimilate these newcomers who would “demoralize” its British institutions (Lloyd 1929: 106; Palmer 1986: 185–198; Mann 2014: 264–267). Despite this fear of the Other, local exhibitions and international festivals that featured various ethnocultural groups did take place in Canada during this period.⁶ In this dichotomous atmosphere, one of the reasons that a musical group like the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders was able to perform throughout rural Canada was because of chautauqua’s effectiveness in presenting “the lore of other lands” to its audience (Jameison and Erickson 1979: 108). When the Serenaders performed in Didsbury, Alberta *The Didsbury Pioneer* described in an article entitled “Chautauqua Here” (16 October 1930), that the group’s members wore “strange and colorful costumes” and performed “new, symphonic, native instruments.” The ability to present “the lore of other lands” was also reflected in the various musical groups that participated in the chautauqua circuit over the almost two decades that it operated in Canada.

The performance of native songs and music by various ethnocultural groups remained in demand at chautauqua events over many years (Harrison and Detzer 1958: 108).

⁶ In 1927 a “Cabaret of Nations” concert took place at the Mount Royal Hotel in Montréal and was organized under the auspices of the Imperial Order Daughters of the Empire. Twenty-six different groups performed at the event. Three years later the Winnipeg Folk Arts Society hosted a two-day festival at the Playhouse Theatre that featured thirteen groups that performed dances, songs, instrumentals, folk music and drama. A Croatian tamburitza group performed at both these concerts.

Among the reasons for this high demand was because both chautauqua promoters and the minority or ethnocultural performers invoked “authenticity” to promote their acts and to sell tickets. Such descriptors as “traditional” were used to convince the receiving audience of an “authentic” experience. For all the acts, and especially the ethnocultural and minority performers, cultural symbols or indicators such as the national dress, language, performance, set or props, instruments or artifacts, were all combined together to create a “real” experience of something “distinctive” for audience members (Dietz 2015: 59–60; Eliaš 1930).

From the perspective of the various managers of the chautauqua circuits, authenticity and distinctiveness were heavily used in marketing brochures, advertisements and even in write-ups in local newspapers covering the performances. This was particularly true when presenting the “exotic” multicultural and minority acts as “real” and “authentic” to the viewing public. Members of the various minority or ethnocultural acts also used these terms “to validate their own cultural identity and musical aptitude” while performing as part of chautauqua programs (Dietz 2015: 65). This validation was reflected in the articles and reports that Elias himself sent to the Croatian language newspapers *Kanadski glas* and *Zajedničar*. It was also echoed in the reviews of the performances of the Serenaders that different immigrants sent to the Croatian language press.

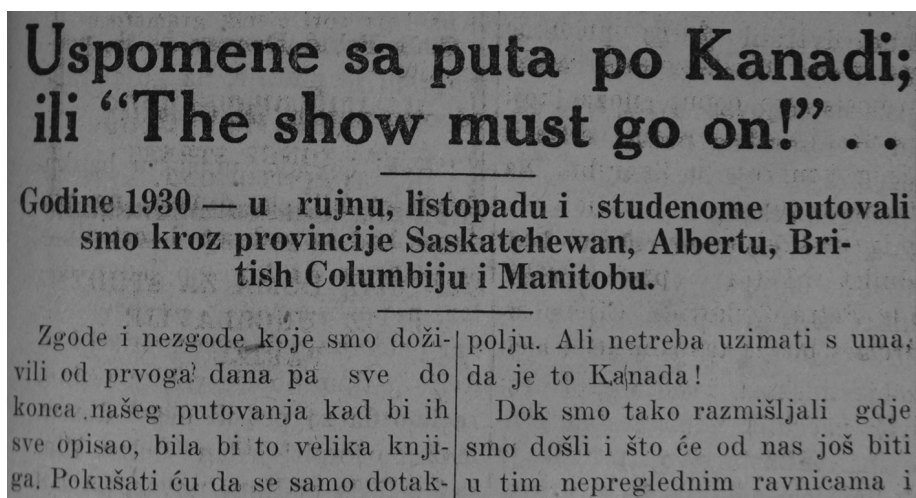


Fig. 3. Part of the first of four articles by Charles Elias Sr. appearing in the weekly *Kanadski glas* (Canadian Voice) of Winnipeg, Manitoba detailing the trials and tribulations of the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders' chautauqua tour of western Canada in 1930.

The managers of the chautauqua circuits recruited, employed and advertised a vast array of talent. However, the minority or ethnocultural performers were often not paid as well. This despite the fact that they were often positioned to perform on prime billing nights in order to capitalize on their drawing power (Dietz 2015: 42–47). However, one area of the operation of the chautauqua circuit where all performers tended to be treated equally was

through their travel arrangements. All of them had to travel from town to town in Ford automobiles carrying their own luggage and equipment, and often sharing the vehicle with fellow performers. As noted by Jameson and Erickson in *Chautauqua in Canada*:

The whole transportation question was one of vital importance, particularly as it affected the talent, for they were circuit travellers who were constantly on the move. Road conditions of every type were encountered; contending with dust, mud, or snow was accepted as an inexorable fact of the circuits. Other factors, too, such as the wear of travel, of packing up and hurrying away, of driving long distances to make the next show contributed towards making life strenuous and difficult for Chautauqua performers. Another problem was accommodation in the small towns they visited; it was often indifferent and sometimes poor. Meals, too, could range from very good to very bad. (Jameson and Erickson 1979: 113)

The artists and lecturers who signed up to participate in the chautauqua circuit often returned annually, despite the challenges and modest earnings. Jameson and Erickson wrote that for some, interest in participating in chautauqua may have been for the adventure and novelty of being out on the road in small town Canada. More probably, the reason was the:

[...] responsive audiences they faced day after day; people who were hungry for some tangible evidence of the outside world, some taste of culture; people who listened to them with rapt attention, admiration, and yearning. Perhaps these responses, compensated for their efforts and their sacrifices; the attitude of the audiences gave the artists something they craved and needed. (Jameson and Erickson 1979: 114)

This was the case for the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders. As Elias himself wrote in *KG*, although “the travel and the life on the road was gruelling,” the Serenaders “thoroughly enjoyed it when the public enthusiastically approved of our playing on the tamburitza, and our singing and dancing to Croatian melodies” (Elias 1930–1931: Part 2). Once when stranded on a farm in Alberta due to a terrible November storm, the Serenaders group was invited by the farm family to sleep overnight. The following morning, as a way to thank the farmer, his family, as well as the farm hands, Elias and his group performed an impromptu concert of several numbers to the beaming family and workers (Elias 1930–1931: Part 4). These types of impromptu concerts occurred with other chautauqua performers as well and reflected “the special relationship that developed at times between Chautauqua talent and their audience” (Jameson and Erickson 1979: 114).

CONCLUSION

The transplantation and proliferation of tamburitza orchestras within the Croatian American community was already in full swing by the end of the first decade of the twentieth century. This coincided roughly during the period after which the American public became

increasingly exposed to “exotic” or “foreign” cultures through the hosting of various world fairs. On top of that, the American public was increasingly able to take advantage of economic prosperity and pursue increased leisure activity. This included those living in rural areas. These were all important factors that led to the introduction of the chautauqua travelling tent circuit in the US in 1904 and which flourished for twenty-six consecutive years from 1907 to 1933. As economic development in Canada lagged behind America, chautauqua was first introduced north of the border in 1917 and lasted until 1935.

In 1904 when the first trial travelling chautauqua took place, Charles Elias Sr. began organizing and teaching tamburitza orchestras. From 1904 to 1923 he taught and led numerous tamburitza ensembles and by 1924 when he launched the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders, he held extensive experience and had a well-earned reputation as a tamburitza virtuoso. Developing a family-based tamburitza orchestra that emphasized education, as seen in its performances at schools and colleges where Elias provided brief explanations to his Anglo audiences, proved to be a natural fit for the chautauqua circuit. As underscored by Kolar, tamburitza performers like the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders who took part in chautauqua, lyceum and vaudeville circuits, “played a profound part in the subsequent acceptance of the tambura in America” (Kolar 1975: 25).

Elias and groups like his in effect joined the mainstream entertainment industry just as broad segments of American society were increasingly in a position to take part in greater leisure activity. Tamburitza orchestras in the US were performing on stages at respectable venues that included opera singers, quartets, dramas, and public lecturers. As a result, they gained a measure of prestige even among non-Slavic audiences (Crnković 1933). As noted by March, participating in chautauqua and other travelling tours:

[..] had a lasting effect on the nature of the tamburitza tradition in America. A good number of musicians found it possible to concentrate fully on musical endeavors and to develop their skills to a high level. Subsequent to their careers as touring artists, several of these musicians played important roles as teachers, composers, publishers, and organizers of tamburitza activities, and several found new roles in the evolving entertainment industry. (March 2013: 118–119)

When the chautauqua circuit was extended north of the American border into Canada, the participating tamburitza ensembles were part and parcel of the tours and based on the reports and pieces written by Elias for *Kanadski glas*, the audiences seldom included Croatian immigrants. This despite newspaper editor Petar Stanković and immigrants themselves (Antolčić, Grbčić, Janković, Kekić) writing to the Croatian language press to inform and encourage their fellow countrymen to attend chautauqua programs on the days that the Serenaders performed. Most of the single male Croatian immigrants to Canada, who were dispersed throughout the vast country, were relatively recent arrivals and often lacked a good command of English and may not have been able to read the local press advertising the Serenaders. They also tended to live in isolated mining, forestry and construction camps and were not in a position to afford to spend money for leisure

activities, particularly as there would have also been associated transportation costs to get to a nearby chautauqua.⁷ Writing in *Kanadski glas* following the conclusion of the 1930 fall circuit, Elias understood that the group often performed in locations where few Croatian immigrants lived and that many of these recent immigrants did not have the financial resources to get to those towns where the Serenaders performed. However, when Elias did learn about the presence of Croatians in the crowd, he would always go out of his way to play a few extra Croatian numbers as a special way to acknowledge and thank them (Eliáš 1931).

During its glory days, chautauqua provided people living in rural areas “what they wanted and did what other agencies did not do... It catered to their isolation and made them see the outside world and feel that this social, informative institution was the link which made them a part of that world” (Dalgety 1931: 44). Chautauqua provided small-town folk an opportunity for a cultural experience, a touch of drama and a hint of the magic of far-away places. Those staging chautauquas had to provide variety to their audiences and their programs had to accommodate a broad range of tastes. As underscored by Harry P. Harrison, isolated rural folk often engaged in the great outside world and travelled “vicariously” through the various foreign acts that wore “special garb” during chautauqua week (Harrison and Detzer 1958: 184). Through their stylized folk costumes, “exotic” instruments and Croatian melodies, the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders embodied chautauqua’s mission to provide people living in rural areas a little nook of the undiscovered and mysterious great outside world.

During an eighteen-year period of the early twentieth century, the Chautauqua Canadian Festival followed the same model used south of the border. And this was to bring “the lore of other lands” and “a glimpse of far-away places” to the people of small-town Canada. It not only provided people a week free from toil and a great social event, it provided its audiences an annual connection to the great outside world. Many rural Canadians living on isolated homesteads simply had no opportunity to travel abroad and chautauqua provided them, through the performances of groups like the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders and other acts with an ethnocultural flair, a taste of the strange sounds and customs of exotic far-away places. In selling audiences on the “distinctive,” “authentic” and “exotic” performances of ethnocultural acts from far-away places, chautauqua was able to succeed in Canada despite the prevalence of Anglo-conformity and the fear of undesirable immigrants flooding the sparsely populated country.

With the onset of the Great Depression, one of the key components to the successful operation of the chautauqua educational and entertainment circuit began to erode. This important component was the active involvement of local influential members of the particular town who acted as financial guarantors and through their personal endorse-

⁷ The peak of inter-war Croatian immigration to Canada was from 1926 to 1928, and by 1931 the community numbered just over 10,000. However, they were scattered throughout the vast country (Rasporich 1982: 96, 102–103).

ment cemented the broad participation of locals. Local newspapers also often included a list of the prominent residents on the chautauqua committee in their advertisements ahead of the multi-day event (Horner 1954 76–79). However, as the economic depression continued, it became increasingly more difficult to safeguard local guarantors. On top of that individual Canadians struggled as the Great Depression went on and they had to make choices, including holding back from spending on leisure activities. Changing cultural and technological conditions also impacted the continuation of chautauqua. The construction of better roads and increased automobile ownership allowed people to travel to towns to watch motion pictures in theatres during the ascendancy of the Hollywood film industry. Those not in a position to own a car, had radios at their disposal and with the turn of the dial could tap into free programming (Harrison and Detzer 1958: 250–267; Jameson and Erickson 1979: 138–141; Johnson 2001: 59–62).

Nevertheless, from late September to late November 1930 and mid-January to late February 1931, those living in small rural towns in Canada were treated to several cultural entertainments, including scenes from popular plays and comedies, classical musical performances and Croatian tunes played on the melodic tamburitza stringed instrument. Performed by a family group out of the United States known as the Elias Tamburitza Serenaders, the Croatian melodies that filled the air in those 84 small towns brought joy to people living in isolated communities and introduced them to a unique instrument at a time when only a few local Croatian tamburitza orchestras were active in Canada. (Grado 1930: 231–232; Jurak 1939: 151). These audience members were not only introduced to strange and colorful folk costumes sported by the Serenaders, but also to an unique symphonic instrument often extolled as “authentic,” “distinctive” and “exotic.”

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- Whyte Museum of the Canadian Rockies (Banff, Alberta), Crag and Canyon 1915–18, file Crag July 7 1917 – Dec 30 1917.

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- The Ayr News* (Ayr, ON)

The Billboard (Cincinnati, OH)
Buffalo Evening News (Buffalo, NY)
Crag and Canyon (Banff, AB)
The Daily News (Lebanon, PA)
The Didsbury Pioneer (Didsbury, AB)
The Evening Post (Wellington, New Zealand)
Fallon County News (Baker, MT)
The Franklin Press (Franklin, NC)
Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, PA)
Henderson Daily Dispatch (Henderson, NC)
Hrvatski glas (Winnipeg, MB)
Hrvatski svijet (New York, NY)
The Independent (Deniliquin, NSW, Australia)
Jadran (San Francisco, CA)
The Jarvis Record (Jarvis, ON)
Kanadski glas (Winnipeg, MB; renamed *Hrvatski glas* in 1933)
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Le Canadien (Thetford Mines, QC)
The Lyceum Magazine (Chicago, IL)
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The News Record (Kitchener, ON)
The Northland Age (Kaitaia, New Zealand)
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Proletarec (Chicago, IL)
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"DAŠAK DALEKIH KRAJEVA": ELIAS TAMBURITZA SERENADERS NA KANADSKIM CHAUTAUQUA TURNEJAMA OD 1930. DO 1931. GODINE

Početak dvadesetog stoljeća američki tamburaški orkestri sudjelovali su u kulturnim, obrazovnim i zabavnim turnejama (*chautauqua*) koje su gostovale u tisućama ruralnih i malih gradova diljem Sjedinjenih Američkih Država i Kanade. Jedna od skupina koje su u njima sudjelovale bio je i ansambl *Elias Tamburitza Serenaders* iz Racinea u Wisconsinu. Ansambl je osnovan 1924. godine pod vodstvom tamburaškog virtuozu Charlesa Eliasa starijeg te je uz druge izvođače nastupao na 84 lokacije tijekom sudjelovanja na Kanadskom festivalu *chautauqua* u jesen 1930. i zimi 1931. godine. Premda je u Kanadi prevladavao anglokonformizam i strah od toga da će nepoželjni imigranti iz istočne Europe preplaviti zemlju, etnokulturne glazbene skupine poput tamburaških orkestara bile su dobro prihvaćene. To se uvelike pripisuje uspjehu pokreta *chautauqua* u predstavljanju tajanstvenih dalekih zemalja izoliranom ruralnom stanovništvu koje je žudjelo za vezom s vanjskim svijetom. Sjevernoamerička publika upoznala se ne samo s neobičnim i šarenim narodnim nošnjama koje su nosili članovi skupine *Elias Tamburitza Serenaders* već i s jedinstvenim instrumentom – tamburicom, koja se često opisuje kao "autentična", "prepoznatljiva" i "egzotična".

Ključne riječi: Kanadski *chautauqua* festival, Charles Elias stariji, *chautauqua*, Elias Tamburitza Serenaders, tamburica