

David Nakoff

**Leader of Steelton's Macedonians and
Founder of the First Macedonian-
American Orthodox Church**

Victor Sinadinoski

Macedonians of America Series

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*For the Macedonian-American priests who dedicate
their wisdom and time to strengthening their
Macedonian communities.*

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I

Macedonians' first mass migration to the United States commenced shortly after the failed Ilinden Uprising in 1903. Within ten years, tens of thousands of Macedonians – mostly men – sailed across the Atlantic Ocean to find work in America. They worked difficult jobs for long hours, several dying on the job, in order to provide for their families still living in an impoverished and war-torn Macedonia.

David Nakoff, however, didn't arrive in America to join his Macedonian brethren in the sweltering factories or the deadly mines. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church (the Holy Synod of Bulgaria) sent him to fulfill the role as priest of the Macedono-Bulgarian Orthodox Church of Steelton, known as the Church of Annunciation. In those days, the Macedonian Orthodox Church (MOC) did not exist for a variety of political reasons. Despite the efforts of several respected and celebrated Macedonians throughout the 19th century who pushed for the creation of such a church, the Macedonians slogged along without a church of their own. The MOC didn't become autonomous until the 1950s, and it didn't become independent until 1967 (and its independence is still not recognized today).

Orthodox Christians in Macedonia thus only had three options for religious and spiritual shelter: the Bulgarian, Greek, or Serbian Orthodox churches. Prominent

Macedonians, like Krste Misirkov, and foreign observers, like Henry Brailsford, recognized how the existence of three separate national churches was counter-productive to religious doctrine and detrimental to the Macedonian Cause. For all intents and purposes, such writers emphasized that these churches did not differ in religious or spiritual doctrine. However, the appropriation of religious matters by Greek, Bulgarian and Serbian national agendas helped those countries realize their irredentist and chauvinistic policies. This left the Macedonians with a severe disadvantage when it came to advancing their national interests, because the church was the most efficient vehicle to communicating with the peasants and laymen.

Upon first arriving to the United States, therefore, many Macedonians would join these Serbian, Greek or Bulgarian congregations that may have already existed. But as more Macedonians continued to pour into the States, they accumulated the numbers to form their own congregations. They didn't have the ability or wherewithal to create separate Macedonian churches, so they formed their congregations under the church leadership of the predominant church in the village or region from which they originated. For some Macedonians, this was the Serbian church; for many others, it was the Greek church. But for most, this meant joining under the Bulgarian church.

But these Macedonians generally formed Macedono-Bulgarian churches, which showed that while their

churches were under the spiritual jurisdiction of the BOC, the congregations were composed of people originating from Macedonia. No other Bulgarian churches had such designation. This fact indicates that the Bulgarian propaganda's hold over many Macedonians was fragile. For if many of these churches were simply Bulgarian churches, and did not include a derivative of the term 'Macedonian' in their titles, many Orthodox Macedonians would join other churches, such as Greek, Serbian or Russian churches.

In this religious backdrop, Nakoff arrived in Steelton, Pennsylvania in 1915 and was embraced by the existing Annunciation congregation. The parishioners were mostly from Prilep, located in today's Republic of Macedonia. A series of dramatic events would unfold, however, that would make Nakoff the priest of the first Macedonian-American Orthodox church, two decades before the MOC declared its independence.

Nakoff was born in Veles, Macedonia in 1877. He shared his childhood with three sisters, Marie, Rose and Anna, until he was sent to school in Bitola. After completing his studies in Bitola, he joined the Bulgarian Seminary in Constantinople to study for the priesthood. He then became ordained in Veles in 1904¹ and was eventually made arch-priest in Prilep. He married a young lady name Eftimia and together they had a son named Theodore.² When Nakoff was sent to Steelton, Eftimia and Theodore remained behind in Bitola.³

His new church, Annunciation, was located on Front and Franklin Streets. Front Street ran along the Susquehanna River and was less than four miles from downtown Harrisburg. When Nakoff arrived, the Macedonian community was numerous and growing. The hard work of these Macedonians from Prilep had set the foundations for Nakoff to create a flourishing and dedicated community.

The church congregation was formed in 1909 and it was the second Macedono-Bulgarian church congregation established in the United States, the first being located in Granite City, Illinois.⁴ The Steelton founders first started a 'Macedonian-Bulgarian Fund' to realize this dream of creating a church for Steelton's Macedonians.⁵ In early September they held two meetings (one with about 100 people in attendance and another with 250 in attendance) to discuss fundraising efforts and the church construction. A committee was also formed to find a suitable location for the church. This committee included T. Dundoff, T. Abzasoff, A. Minaff, K. Georgieff, Y. Chaleff, Y. Dimoff, Y. Yamimaff, S. Balkonsky, N. Priganeff, S. Chorkeff, S. Dimitroff, O. Mercoff, and G. Kersteff.⁶

In mid-September, another committee was appointed to "canvass the borough for subscriptions." This committee included: K. Gorgieff as president, J. Spurciff as vice president, J. Velcoff as treasurer, A. Minoff as secretary, A. Mircheff, O. Angeloff, T. Abroshoff, M. Lichoff, A. Belcheff, N. Dimoff, O. Mercoff, J. Dundoff, J. Ykimoff, O. Kersteff, N. Monstodinoff, G. Kersteff, B. Grueff, J.

Socaloff, O. Botleff, M. Terponeff, C. Chorleff, T. Fudulion, M. Trimcheff, N. Todeff, L. Mendeff, T. Dundoff as chairman, and S. Dimitroff as Dundoff's assistant.⁷

In late September, rumors circulated that they had purchased a site to build their church. As the *Harrisburg Telegraph* reported:

Yesterday, a committee composed of Macedonians purchased three lots on Main street for the erection of a new church. The price paid was \$900. The edifice will be a place for the Macedonians of the borough to worship.⁸

The three lots were purchased from M. Alleman.⁹ Of course, in the end, when all talking and dealing was settled, the Macedonians instead possessed two lots on North Front and Franklin streets with the purchase price not being made public.¹⁰ William Hanshue had sold it to the Macedonians probably for a fair price.¹¹ Either way, by October, the church fund had surpassed \$1,000 and scores of people had already donated to it.¹²

By early November the Macedonians had secured a contractor to build the church. A.B. Smith said he and his men would construct the church for \$3,000.¹³ In mid-November, the excited Macedonian colony held a procession to bless the site of the future church. Five hundred Macedonians and Bulgarians "marched to the new church site" with Reverend Theophilarte of Granite City leading, as he was "in charge of the new congregation." Prominent Steelton religious men joined

the congregation's march, including Bishop Gilbert Darlington, Frederick Oldknow, and J. P. Braselman of the Protestant Episcopal Church.¹⁴ Macedonians from other colonies also came to observe the ceremony. Theodore Kaleff, the editor and manager of the newspaper *Macedonia* in Granite City, participated in laying the first stones of the new church.¹⁵

When they arrived to the site of the future church, a wooden cross was placed on the land as a male chorus led by M. Chiseff and Theodore Koleff sang religious hymns. Then "a bottle containing the name of the church and records was placed in one of the stones used to start the foundation." Bishop Darlington addressed the crowd, congratulating the Macedonians for their "fine work in establishing the first church of its kind in Pennsylvania."¹⁶

Throughout the entire drive to build the church, the *Harrisburg Daily Independent* continually furnished lists of donors and how much they donated.¹⁷ Names that appeared on these lists included:

Alexa Yovonoff

Alexa Zdraveff

Andon Ivanoff

Andon Todeff

Aroico Kostoff

Atanas Toleff

Boris Grueff

Boris Mircheff

Christo N. Chevreff

Christo Chotleff

Christo Obrosoff

Christo Stomencoff

Damcho Dimitroff

Damian Drenovsky

Danail Chocoreff

Dancho Djunralieff

Dancho Yanakieff

Dimco Grueff

Dimco Yovanoff

Dimitor Yovanoff

Dimitry Djunralieff
Filip Germoff
George A. Cherneff
George Economoff
George Midzeff
George Otomosoff
George Petreff
George Stoyonoff
George Yovanoff
Georgi Jaditcoff
Gligor H. Christoff
Gligor Dancoff
Ilia Kostoff
Izco Padleff
Jodor Doneff
John M. Pepelugoff
John Menco
John Mircheff
John Petcoff
John Spiroff
John Toleff
John Yokimoff
Jose Padleff
Konstantin G. Dancoff
Lane Petreff
Marco Lvetanoff
Marin P. Kaneff
Marin T. Trevneff
Milan Angeleff
Milan Okchioff
Milan T. Soleff
Milan Ylio
Mio Petreff

Miyle Trsicheff
Nicola Koleff
Nicolo Koneff
Nikolo Kodach
Nikolo Koramondzoff
Odon Boinoff
Ordombatleff
Ordon Spaseff
Ordon Topchio
Ordon Zdroveff
Orlexa Ylio
Ormuso Koneva
Peko Serkoff
Petre Milosoff
Petre Soleff
Petre Yonchoff
Petro Constantinoff
Pontus Omkko
Rampo Dimoff
Rampo Soakos
Rampo Spuroff
Slave Georitzoff
Spasia Koneva
Spiro Kuzmanoff
Stoyan Georgeff
Stoyon Pesoff
Tase Goreff
Theodor Fudulion
Todor R. Balcansky
Tono Amborodo
Triphon Miteff
Trsion Yokimoff
Vangel Ytzo

Velco Yvonoff
Velicho Angeleff
Venco D. Ruskoff
Voids Proikoff
Ylio Bairamche
Ylio Bogiaff

Yohim Pseoff
Yonco Petcoff
Yordan Christoff
Yordan Makesh
Yosim Georgioff

While the building was being constructed, Macedonians used the Serbian church in Steelton to attend ceremonies and to celebrate Christmas.¹⁸ Then on April 24, 1910, Annunciation was finally blessed.¹⁹ The building – constructed of brownstone brick with “two belfries instead of one” – was blessed by Bishop Theophilarte. The *Harrisburg Daily Independent* described the blessing:

He then entered the building and blessed the ikon of the patron saint, which is in front of the iconostas or icon wall in front of the altar. Then the numerous icons which are hung on the iconostas were blessed and the priest entered the altar, which is really a room opening into the main room by an entrance in the icon wall. After blessing the altar he blessed his new robes, which he then proceeded to don.

After the ceremony, they appointed the church board leaders. The members were required to take an oath to “faithfully and honestly perform” their duties delegated by the priest. It was reported that it was one of the only churches in the area that had “been opened entirely free from debt, not a cent being outstanding on the payment for the building or furniture.” The newspaper further stated

that it was “remarkable when it is considered that all the members are working people and at least ninety per cent of them” earned a “laborer’s wage.” The total cost of the building with furniture and decorations was \$4,800.²⁰ Finally, in August, the congregation transferred the deed to Archbishop Joseph I in Constantinople (Istanbul), Turkey as a security measure for insuring the property in case the congregation disbands.²¹

With the new church constructed, the Macedonians of Steelton had vigor, pride and hopes for the establishment of a future colony. Surely, they were happy to be part of the bustling Steelton community. But they also had a venue to celebrate their religion and culture. For example, they used the new church to observe Saints Cyril and Methodius day, the two brothers who spread the Cyrillic Alphabet to the Slavic-speaking peoples. For the holiday’s first celebration in May of 1911, the Macedonians suspended all business and paraded through the streets, with a Macedonian band leading the way. Over 400 men carried banners and flags, along with the American flags, and “cabs filled with women and children also formed part of the parade.”²²

They also used the church to celebrate Ilinden, as they did in August of 1912. They paraded on Friday, August 2nd, carrying pictures of Damjan Gruev and Boris Sarafov, two Macedonian rebel leaders who were killed several years prior in Macedonia. One gentleman carried a portrait of George Washington “as a tribute of respect to the country

of their adoption.” American, Macedonian and Bulgarian flags and banners were waved, and the Macedonian band played, directed by C. P. Musgrave. All Macedonians’ homes were decorated as the marchers marched to Annunciation.²³

In late September of 1912, Annunciation received a new priest from Bulgaria, Gregori Chizmaroff. He was an ethnic Bulgarian priest, born in Veliko Trnova, Bulgaria in 1877 and had attended many Bulgarian seminaries in Russia, Bulgaria, Macedonia, and Turkey.²⁴ Now the Macedonians in Steelton could hold weekly services and would not need to contact the priests in Granite City or Toronto, or find non-Bulgarian priests, to officiate weddings, baptisms and funerals.

Two years later, Chizmaroff had left Steelton and Reverend Nicoli Pavaloff took his place.²⁵ In 1915, Pavaloff led the Steelton’s Macedonians in Epiphany Day (Vodici) ceremonies. To celebrate the baptism of Christ in the river of Jordan, the priest blessed the local river in Steelton (the Susquehanna) and also followed through with an ancient custom: throwing a wooden cross in the river and having young men swim through the icy waters to retrieve it. He who got it would be honored and blessed.

So, on January 19, Pavaloff blessed the river as 1,000 people watched on the chilly and windy day. The swimmers stood on a “small covered steamer anchored near the boat landing at the foot of Francis street” and waited for Pavaloff to toss the cross. One hundred other

brave soles gathered near the shores. There were four contestants, including Macedonians, Bulgarians and Armenians. This time, the Armenian Harry Amphiegian retrieved the cross, leaving Peter Jalinoff, Stefan Stooanoff, and Konstantin Standoff behind in the water. Many Bulgarian and local Steelton officials were present for the event.²⁶

Next year, however, Pavaloff would no longer lead this unique event that would entertain Steelton's natives and foreigners for nearly three decades. A new priest would assume that duty. And not only would this new priest keep alive ancient Macedonian rituals and traditions, but he would inspire his local Macedonians to be outstanding individuals who loved their identity and their community.

II

Nakoff came to Steelton as the Macedonians' religious figurehead. But he developed into much more than that. He not only led the Macedonians in spiritual matters, but he guided them in education, community service, and integration into American society.

The reverend arrived in Steelton in the early summer of 1915. For Steelton's Macedonians, it was a time of uneasy transition. In less than five years, three different priests had led their community and now another had been sent their way. Would this new priest become a part of their community, or would he be transferred to another church within a few years? Did he want to stay in Steelton while separated from his family, who remained in the Balkans? On the other hand, Nakoff's native town of Veles was relatively close to the Steelton Macedonians' native town of Prilep. To the Steelton Macedonians, this fact held much weight in their community: unlike the previous Steelton priests, Nakoff was a Macedonian and not a Bulgarian; and further, he spoke a Macedonian dialect similar to their own dialect. While priests and educated Macedonians usually could speak the official Bulgarian language, most Macedonians had limited or no education and could only speak their Macedonian dialect, which was quite distant from literary Bulgarian.

The other transitions that Macedonians were dealing with included the end of the Balkan Wars and the beginning of World War I. The Steelton's Macedonians' lands had switched between Turkish, Serbian and Bulgarian rule in just a matter of a few years, and many were uneasy about how their families in Macedonia were coping. Many had travelled back and forth to participate in the wars. In this context, Nakoff arrived to direct a congregation that was unsure of its place in Pennsylvania as well as apprehensive about the fate of their homeland.

Among Nakoff's first duties upon arriving in Steelton was to deal with another transition – a distant but eventually significant development for the Macedonians in Steelton. After the Balkan Wars, Exarch Joseph I, leader of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, transferred his offices from Istanbul to Sofia, Bulgaria. Then on July 3, 1915, Joseph I passed away, and the Holy Synod of Bulgaria became, for all intents and purposes, a tool of the Bulgarian government. Nevertheless, Nakoff conducted services paying tribute to the late Joseph I, with the Bulgarian minister plenipotentiary, Stephen Panaretoff, and his entire staff in attendance.²⁷

Being one of only a few Macedono-Bulgarian priests in the U.S., Nakoff was often called on by the Bulgarian government to represent them and their interests in America. One commentator noted that he traveled “extensively in the country on official missions...and for other government work.” For example, in late September

of 1918, he was called on to represent the Bulgarian government in the trial of one name Rada Evanhoff, who was accused of murdering George Mihailoff²⁸ on December 24, 1916.²⁹

But his allegiance to the Bulgarian government was for official purposes only. Throughout the upcoming decade he would completely sever his ties with Bulgaria's fascist government. In the meantime, though, he utilized his education and speaking abilities³⁰ to strengthen the Macedonian community in Steelton.

One of the biggest projects, upon Nakoff's insistence, was to expand Annunciation into more than just a church and instead into a cultural and social center. The congregation wanted a hall for social events; but Nakoff also wanted space for education and cultural programs. So, the congregation pooled their resources and bought the empty lots next to their church for this purpose.

In late July of 1921, details emerged regarding what this future expansion would look like. There would be a room equipped for screening educational and religious films, along with a library containing religious and educational books. There was to be club rooms and lounges for social and entertainment purposes. John Dundoff, a founding member of the church, told a reporter:

The whole plan is for the purpose of Americanization. We want all of our people to know how to read, write and speak English. We want them to know more about the country, and we want them to know that to become good citizens of this country they must first

become good men and good women. As soon as the parish house is built, we will put in a good library. Two thousand books have already been promised us and I am sure many more can be secured. We are going to make good use of a moving picture to teach not only the children but the older folks.

Furthermore, since his arrival in 1915, Nakoff had been living in Harrisburg. While Harrisburg was only a few miles away, the parishioners wanted him on premises to essentially be available at a moment's notice. Thus, the plan was to have a rectory in which Nakoff could reside. As *The Evening News* reported, "members of the parish are anxious to have the rector live in the parish."³¹

Nakoff, nonetheless, decided not to wait until the addition was complete before beginning his educational work with the Macedonian youth. He intended on instituting a night school for the community, of which he would be the head.³² By October of 1921, the classes had begun. The classes were held in the evenings on Monday and Wednesday, and on much of the day Saturday. The children were taught both Bulgarian and Macedonian, and there was also instruction on religious matters and morality.³³ These classes were greatly appreciated, especially due to the fact that, by the mid-1920s, the official membership of the congregation consisted of 80 adults and 115 children.³⁴

In December, a fund drive was initiated to raise money for the construction of the new building.³⁵ A building committee was elected to oversee the construction and

details of the new building. This committee was comprised of Alex Kormushoff, Rosco Dundoff, and Elis Mirschoff.³⁶ By March of 1922, the plans were finalized for the new building to be constructed on church premises. The goal was for the building to be about 6,800 square feet, and for the construction to be performed by Macedonians and Bulgarians who were unemployed as a means to provide them with temporary jobs.³⁷

The construction of the new addition, however, would not start until several years later. On September 5, 1926, over 200 Macedonians and Bulgarians gathered as the cornerstone of the new community house was laid, with Nakoff leading religious ceremonies blessing the land and construction beforehand.³⁸ In addition, many out-of-state Macedonians attended this blessing, as the Macedonian Political Organization (MPO) was hosting its annual convention in Harrisburg that weekend.³⁹ It was then announced that the new building would be completed and ready for use by January of 1927⁴⁰ and that the total cost of the new building was to be about \$14,000.⁴¹

After a slight delay, the dedication of the new church center was held on Sunday, February 27, 1927.⁴² The final layout of the building included one large room for business meetings and one large room for school affairs, as well as a large classroom and restrooms for men and women.⁴³ The dedication program started with a parade that began on Main Street, and proceeded to the site on Front Street.⁴⁴ After the march, there was an invocation by

Reverend Oscar Tredor of St. Stephen's Episcopal Church in Harrisburg; the singing of 'America'; a service by Nakoff; and addresses by Carl B. Shelley, the borough solicitor; Charles S. Davis, the superintendent of the schools; and Senator William Earnest and Judge William Hargest. The next day, the church held a dance in the hall to complete its festivities of the grand opening.⁴⁵

The new hall was immediately used for Nakoff's education campaign. As a matter of fact, on Children's Day in June of 1927, Annunciation held examinations for the children of the school who were studying in the "Macedonian and Bulgarian languages."⁴⁶ Eventually, Nakoff also instituted a Sunday school for the children where they not only learned about religious matters, but participated in several different activities. For example, in September of 1929, Nakoff took scores of his Sunday school children to a camp, where there was picnicking and tug-of-war, among many other fun events.⁴⁷

This is not the only way that Nakoff reached out to the many Macedonian children in the Steelton area. He organized a church choir that sang not only religious music, but traditional Macedonian and Bulgarian songs. In the winter of 1928, he directed 15 Macedonian and Bulgarian girls in a concert at the YWCA for a meeting of the Business Girls Club. His choir sang several traditional Macedonian and Bulgarian songs.⁴⁸ During the Christmas season of 1932, Nakoff led his choir in a Christmas music celebration at a Steelton community event. The choir sang

native Macedonian music and danced traditional Macedonian folk dances to the music of bagpipe. After Nakoff addressed the crowd on the topic of Christmas,⁴⁹ his choir ended the musical performance with a Macedonian rendition of 'Silent Night'.⁵⁰

Nakoff was not simply content with providing his Steelton Macedonians with an organized community. In the early 1920s, he toured the United States to help foster the creation of these Macedono-Bulgarian churches in Macedonian communities where no such churches existed. He focused much of his efforts on Ohio and Indiana, where there were growing Macedonians settlements; and while there, he would first conduct a religious service and then hold a meeting on how to establish a congregation.

Upon completing his first tour, he applied for naturalization in October of 1922.⁵¹ Shortly after, however, it was reported Nakoff had to relinquish his pastoral duties due to ill health.⁵² For about two and a half years, the record is essentially mum about Nakoff's whereabouts. He reappeared briefly in November of 1924 to assist in officiating the funeral of John Dundoff, one of the more prominent individuals in the Steelton community.⁵³ Aside from that, however, it was as if Nakoff had all but disappeared from the scene. As we'll discover later, his disappearance might have had less to do with ill health and more to do with Macedonian politics.

In any event, the Steelton Macedonians asked him to be Annunciation's priest once again. The reverend in charge

had been Krsto Tsenoff, but he resigned “in order to devote his time to the duties in connection with the Bulgarian mission” throughout the United States.⁵⁴ In short, Tsenoff, who came to the United States in 1922, was the ordained head of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church in the US and Canada and was finding it difficult to promote the growth of the BOC while being a fulltime rector in Steelton.⁵⁵ Thus, on July 5, 1925, over 100 members of Annunciation and their families held a picnic to celebrate Nakoff rejoining their congregation.⁵⁶

Back under the realm of Nakoff, the Steelton Macedonians were reinvigorated. Not only did he begin realizing cultural and educational endeavors for Macedonians, he brought Macedonians closer to the Pennsylvanian community.

Annunciation held occasional “variety night” performances under the direction of Nakoff that saw many non-Macedonians in attendance.⁵⁷ At one performance in May of 1935, to celebrate the 25th anniversary of Annunciation, guests included students of the Ley Dancing School, from Harrisburg, who also presented musical numbers.⁵⁸ In that same year, as part of the ongoing 25-year anniversary celebration, Annunciation held a turkey dinner, sponsored by the Ladies’ Aid Society (Annunciation’s ladies’ section). Nakoff, of course, held special services for the occasion, but other speakers included Charles Davis, the former superintendent of Steelton public schools, and Carl Shelley and Fred Morgan,

assistant district attorneys for Dauphin County in Pennsylvania. Nakoff's church choir sang Macedonian folk songs and the Young Men's Club furnished music.⁵⁹

Nakoff also flaunted his Macedonian congregation's culture when opportunities arose. In the middle of May in 1936, for example, Nakoff led a Macedonian group at the WPA Festival of Nations.⁶⁰ Similarly, the year after, eighteen members from his Macedonians participated in that same festival, where they dressed in native costumes and danced to Macedonian bagpipes.⁶¹

Just as significantly, however, Nakoff led his congregation helping those in need in their community and abroad. For example, the floods of 1936 ravaged Pennsylvania when the Susquehanna crested at over 29 feet, and more than 100 people were killed in Pennsylvania.⁶² In response, Nakoff's congregation raised \$68 in one meeting, which was donated to their local Red Cross Chapter.⁶³ And after Nakoff was elected as a delegate to the American Slav Congress by his congregation in 1942, held in Detroit on April 25 and 26, Steelton's Macedonians "passed a resolution pledging unreserved support of the Nation's war effort." Nakoff announced that his congregation "pledged themselves to buy during the coming year defense bonds totaling \$40,000."⁶⁴ The next day, his congregation raised and donated \$100 for the local Red Cross Unit, and Nakoff presented the check personally to the local chapter in Steelton.⁶⁵ Further, in early August of 1943, Nakoff

reported that his congregation had donated more than 800 pounds of clothing for the Russian War Relief Association after he appealed to them at a meeting to do so. Both Macedonian and Bulgarian residents raised \$135 for medical supplies for the Soviet Union's army.⁶⁶

But Nakoff – more than most Balkan religious leaders in America – was not just a pivotal figure in his local community. He was a leader amongst his fellow Americans. He often preached in other churches, such as when he held a sermon at the St. Andrew's Episcopal Church in Harrisburg in March of 1922.⁶⁷ The *Evening News* wrote that "Father Nakoff is an outstanding figure in the Eastern Orthodox Church in this section of the state."⁶⁸

His activity in his community especially escalated in the late 1920s. In November of 1928, Nakoff invited the Eastern Pennsylvania and Delaware Typographical Union to have one of its quarterly meetings at the Annunciation hall. Over 150 guests attended and Nakoff addressed them, speaking about how proud he was to be hosting them, as they were the men in charge of preparing "courses for that great university for the poor man – the daily newspaper."⁶⁹

In 1928, Nakoff also joined the Kiwanis Club (a club founded in Detroit to strengthen communities and provide education and services to children), and was one of five members in the Steelton branch in charge of the program for the club's first anniversary dinner. For the event, he had asked all members to bring a toy to the anniversary dinner to give to the Steelton Toy Mission so they could be

distributed to the toyless children of Steelton.⁷⁰ Throughout his life as a priest, Nakoff placed great emphasis on helping and educating children. Because of this, he became more involved in the Kiwanis Club, and in 1929 he was appointed to the reception committee of that organization.⁷¹ And it was not just the Kiwanis Club. Nakoff was extensively involved in both the local YMCA and YWCA. In December of 1930, he presided over a meeting (leading the invocation) at the YMCA as the group strove to increase its membership to 400 members.⁷² In May of 1937, Nakoff gave a lecture on “Orthodox Faith” at the YWCA as part of a lecture series on religion.⁷³

Nakoff’s goodwill didn’t simply extend to children and young people, however. He was a member of the Steelton Welfare Association Campaign, and often raised money for the group and gave the invocation addresses at their meetings.⁷⁴ In the June of 1929, Nakoff brought several Macedonians to join him on committees to direct the Edward E. Beidleman Memorial fund in Steelton,⁷⁵ who was a Lieutenant Governor of Pennsylvania born in Harrisburg and who had passed away in 1929. Also in 1929, Nakoff brought his Macedonians to a meeting of international goodwill, hosted by the Harrisburg branch of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom. There were peoples from twenty different nations in attendance; and after a speech by Nakoff, Annunciation’s Macedonian choir performed several folk songs.⁷⁶ Nakoff and his choir were in attendance representing

Macedonia.⁷⁷ Nakoff and his Macedonians were also one of eleven teams signed-up to sell tickets for Chautauqua, which was an adult education movement, to be held in the Steelton high school auditorium in the middle of July, 1929. Nakoff's team included Vasil Dundoff, Alex Illioff, and D. Minoff.⁷⁸

Of course, Nakoff was not only a priest, community leader and educator. He was an active athlete – and a successful one. At the age of 56, the *Harrisburg Telegraph* reported that he was in lead of the YMCA 20-mile marathon swim. To complete the marathon, one had to swim 1408 lengths of the YMCA pool. Nakoff was in the lead with 172 lengths completed with the next closest competitor far behind at 124 lengths.⁷⁹ He also served as his volleyball team's captain in a 45-and-over volleyball tournament.⁸⁰ He was not an ordinary priest.

Still, most of Nakoff's time was not devoted to himself, but to his parish, his Macedonians, and his Pennsylvania community. Nakoff also made his mark in religious matters and in political matters. However, one specific recurring annual religious event employed by Nakoff and the Annunciation congregation gave the Steelton Macedonians nationwide recognition and Macedonian youth much to look forward to every year.

III

As head of Annunciation, Nakoff had the honor of presiding over one of the most ancient rituals celebrated by only a few communities in the world at that time. As a matter of fact, the only communities to celebrate this ritual outside of Macedonia were located in America, and one of those communities was Steelton's Macedonians.

This ritual was (and still is) performed on January 19 (according to the Julian calendar, which most Orthodox Christians follow) every year, a date known as Epiphany Day (in Macedonia, it is known as Vodici). Many Orthodox Christians worldwide commemorate Jesus Christ's baptism in the Jordan River on this date. Different Orthodox peoples perform different rituals on this day; but all rituals generally revolve around blessing the waters.

The Macedonian ritual, however, is more elaborate. In addition to the blessing of the water, it involves the priest throwing a wooden cross into a river (or body of water), and young men then compete with one another by diving in the waters to retrieve the cross. Whoever retrieves the cross is said to be blessed for the entire year.

Back in 1932, Nakoff explained the origins of this Macedonian ritual to the *Evening News*:

Perhaps this custom is taken from the Egyptians who, during the month of January went along the banks of the Sacred River Nile,

and worshipped the river for fertilizing the soil of those vast Egyptian deserts, which without the waters of the Nile could not produce nothing. The custom was later seen during the early Christian centuries in the Greek towns along the Mediterranean Sea, where the climate is mild, but later it spread north into the snowy hills of Macedonia, where the people are observing it until present times. Those ceremonies that the Egyptians exercised were paganistic, worshipping the river as a god, while this custom of course is a ceremony to bless the waters in the name of Our Lord, Jesus Christ, who submitted himself to be baptized in the river Jordan by John the Baptist.⁸¹

The Steelton Macedonians initiated this event in 1911, a few years before Nakoff arrived. After the completion of their church, which was not more than a stone's throw away from the Susquehanna River, they realized a perfect opportunity to incorporate this Macedonian ritual in their adoptive community.⁸² Their first few years brought several hundred observers and a few participants. With Nakoff's arrival, however, the ritual became a spectacle that often brought more non-Macedonians than Macedonians to the ceremony.

The details for the 1916 celebration, Nakoff's first in Steelton, were etched out in the home of D. Minoff. The committee's main task was to find volunteers to jump in the icy river. The outside temperatures for several days had been below freezing, and the temperatures on Vodici were expected to be much colder.⁸³ Eventually, they found two young men to attempt the plunge: Peter Jeloff and 30-year old Atze Zdraveff, a well-built athlete.⁸⁴

On the morning of, the temperature was near zero, as it had been for three days leading up to the celebration. Church services started at 7:30 am and lasted until 10 am. Then, Nakoff led the congregation on a march to the river.⁸⁵ About 400 Macedonians and Bulgarians marched behind Nakoff. One newspaper described the scene:

Several incidents in the life of Christ were depicted on banners which were carried in the procession, as were also a number of small United States flags. Leading several hundred of the members of his flock, the rector carried the Holy Bible in one hand and a gilded wooden cross in the other.

After the marchers arrived at the edge of the river, fully half an hour was spent in chanting the story of Christ prior to his baptism, in which the Rev. Mr. Nakoff was assisted by Alex Ilioff. At the end of the chants all those who took part in the services started for the very edge of the river, with the Rev. Mr. Nakoff in the lead.

In addition to the 400 Macedonians and Bulgarians, there were over 1,500 other observers in the streets and along the shores, awaiting the procession to arrive at the river's edge. Upon arrival, Nakoff began to bless the waters.⁸⁶ However, this was quite difficult, as the entire shore was ice. Nakoff then walked onto the frozen river, until he got to the edge of the ice and the open water.

Over 150 Macedonians followed him onto the ice⁸⁷ because they were eager to attain the best vantage point to watch the tossing of the cross and the attempt to retrieve it.⁸⁸ The Macedonians had to cover a span of fifty feet to

reach the edge of the ice, to which Nakoff was headed. The *Harrisburg Daily Independent* explains what happened next:

When less than half this distance had been covered the sound of an ominous cracking reached the ears of all and in an instant the ice gave way. Many lost their footing and in some instances men and several women found themselves standing on the river bottom, wet to their waists. The procession was quickly reformed and although the more timid ones returned to the shore, the rector and more than 100 church members continued their march a little farther up along the stream until more solid ice was found.⁸⁹

The ordeal was best described as a “mad scramble” to get to the shore, with men and women swimming over each other. Luckily, no one was killed or severely injured.⁹⁰

Through the entire ordeal – and while having fallen into the river himself – Nakoff continued calmly with the ceremony.⁹¹ “After sprinkling the attendants with water from the river, the rector threw the gold cross far out into the stream.”⁹² But when Nakoff threw it at 10:55 am, Jeloff backed out, leaving Zdraveff as the only swimmer.⁹³ Zdraveff, however, wasn’t appropriately dressed to swim in the river. Still, he removed his top coat and plunged into the water with a vest, trousers, shirt and shoes. In such attire, it was difficult for him to navigate the floating chunks of ice.⁹⁴

With pigeons flying above him, liberated by S. Dimetroff as part of the ceremony, Zdraveff had to swim fast. The cross was only thrown out fifty feet, but the current had taken it downstream quickly. After a couple of minutes, he

snatched the cross and swam back to the shore, to the sound of cheers and applause of the nearly 2,000 observers gathered near the river.⁹⁵

Despite the 1916 fiasco, or perhaps because of it, the 1917 Vodici event was bigger and proceeded with much enthusiasm.⁹⁶ The 1917 competitors included a pair of different young men. One was John Koloff and the other was Steve Yovcheff. Koloff, who was 23, and Yovcheff, who was 21, were both steelworkers in the area. The *Harrisburg Telegraph* described the event in the backdrop of “a stinging wintry wind sweeping down the Susquehanna River valley and the river full of huge cakes of floating ice.” Koloff beat out Yovcheff after swimming the necessary 100 feet to capture the cross.⁹⁷

In the days preceding 1918 ceremony, the Vodici committee spent several hours searching for the best spot for the ceremony. It had been so cold in Steelton that there were very few unfrozen spots of the river within the town. Finally, they found a little opening near Francis Street. Thus, they sketched out a parade route, starting out on Franklin Street, where they marched to Main and then turned down Francis Street.⁹⁸

That year there were over 1,500 people participating in and observing the ceremonies. Of course, most were there to watch the three swimmers – Steve Yovcheff, Dimko Stephanoff, and Nacho Nenoff – compete for the cross. An observer described the young men and the conditions of the day:

The men were attired in thin bathing suits and stood on the ice while the services were being held on a sand flat at the Susquehanna river shore at the foot of Francis street, where an open 'air hole' was found. Before jumping in the water and even after taking the icy plunge, the men did not seem to mind the cold weather.

In less than a minute, however, Stephanoff retrieved the cross. He was the day's hero, and he certainly was treated like one by the large crowd. The festivities were better attended for a longer period of time this year mostly due to the fact that the steel plants were shut down, giving people more free time on what was normally a typically busy weekday.⁹⁹

For the 1920 Vodici celebration, the ice on the river's surface was so thick that the Macedonians were forced to cut a hole in it so that the young men could jump in to retrieve the cross.¹⁰⁰ The thinnest layer of ice was found near Frederick Street, so the Macedonian Vodici committee spent the day before Vodici cutting through the ice.¹⁰¹

The next day, on Vodici, four young men competed against one another for the cross: Rampo Spirkoff, Nick Kalpackoff, Vancho Todoff, and Elia Christoff. As Nakoff flung the cross into the river, two doves were released to symbolize "the doves that came out of the clouds at the baptism of Christ." The competition for the cross was close, but the victor was Christoff, an orderly at the Harrisburg Hospital. His moment of victory, however, was not one of

gloating, but one of shared strength and blessing. As the *Harrisburg Telegraph* described, Christoff “grasped the floating emblem and kissed it. The congregation on the shore watched Christoff throw the cross back into the water, and the second swimmer grasped it, and the second did as the first until the four swimmers had a chance to pick the emblem from the water.”¹⁰²

Vodici in 1921 was just as cold as the year before – the thermometer read 4 degrees Fahrenheit. Being so cold, only two young men braved the freezing weather for sacred glory: Natcho Nanoff and Christo Yaneff. The two swimmers, however, ignored the brutal cold and stood barefoot and in one-piece bathing suits through the entire ceremony. When Nakoff flung the cross into the river, with ten doves circling above, Nanoff had the advantage because he was tall enough to wade in the water while Yaneff was forced to swim against the current. Thus, Nanoff retrieved the cross rapidly and brought it back. The Reverend Nakoff, however, recognized the disadvantage and perhaps wanted to bring more entertainment to the crowd. So, he hurled the cross again into the water, much further out into the river. Nanoff was forced to swim hard and fast, breaking ice with his hands and arms, in order to retrieve the cross. He captured it again, but this time with many cuts on his arms from the ice. The winner, per custom, then spent the next few days visiting different families for congratulations, gifts and food.¹⁰³

If the previous two Vodici celebrations proved to be brutally cold and the ice so frozen that it needed to be cut, then the 1922 celebratory preparations blew those past celebrations out of the water. In January, 1922, the Susquehanna River was covered in such a thick layer of ice that Nakoff's congregation needed city permission to dynamite the river to break up the ice. This suggestion came from Nakoff after church officials determined, after several visits to the river, that the areas free from ice were too rugged and the water too high for a relatively safe event. The church committee then omitted the cross-tossing part of the ceremony.¹⁰⁴

Nakoff would not hear it – to cancel the event would be a travesty, in his eyes. He thus suggested dynamiting the river. So, the Vodici committee acquired dynamite and found a chunk of ice to carve off opposite of Conestoga Street. In the late afternoon on January 18, they finally got around to dynamiting the ice.¹⁰⁵ However, only a little bit of ice broke with the explosion, and church officials had to install a temporary boardwalk from where Nakoff could throw the cross and the competitors could dive into the water.¹⁰⁶

Over 500 people lined the shores to watch the ceremony, in which Natcho Nenoff was the only swimmer.¹⁰⁷ Two other young men had initially volunteered to compete for the cross, but their doctors advised them not to dive in the frigid water.¹⁰⁸ The police warned the Macedonians not to gather too tightly on the ice and to stay on the shore, but

several hundred adamantly vied for the best view of the ceremony. So, just like a few years prior, the ice gave way and several Macedonians ended up in the water.¹⁰⁹

Moreover, the strong current and only a small hole in the ice caused the Annunciation leaders to be extra cautious so that the celebration wouldn't turn into a disaster. Thus, "church officials secured a rope, which was placed around his [Nenoff's] body, and held by several comrades." As the *Harrisburg Telegraph* wrote:

Following the preliminary services on the piles of ice along the shore, the Rev. David Nakoff, with several church officials, accompanied Nenoff to the hole in the ice. Standing on the temporary platform, only two feet wide, Nenoff, in a bathing suit, braved the cold, damp atmosphere while the officiating rector, in his native language, chanted prayers in keeping with the religious proceedings.¹¹⁰

After Nakoff tossed the cross into the water, "Nenoff, without hesitation, jumped far into the water to recover it, an honor cherished by many in the church membership." Nenoff had some difficulties in recovering the cross, but he finally grabbed it and swum back to Nakoff. However, he had to be assisted up by many men because the current was too strong. "After being pulled out of the hole Nenoff patiently stood in the cold air, covered by a wet bathing suit...while photographers adjusted their cameras to snap him." The photo session lasted several minutes until his friends "rushed to him with heavy clothing and an

interested bystander volunteered to take him to his home several squares away in an automobile.” Otherwise, he would have had to walk home.¹¹¹

Nakoff did not lead the Vodici ritual in 1923, 1924 and 1925, due to his absence as Annunciation’s priest. A winner of the cross-retrieval competition included Dimco Stephanoff in 1925,¹¹² who competed against only himself. In 1923 and 1924, the winners are unknown, but the priest of the Serbian Orthodox Church, Reverend Peter Dobrovsky, joined the Steelton Macedonian congregation in conducting services in 1923.¹¹³

For the 1926 Vodici, Nakoff’s first celebration in a few years, Annunciation had to break the ice again. This time, it was a section of the river about 100 feet from the shore. Moreover, the congregation was hoping for more competitors this year because there had only been one or two competitors in each of the previous five years.¹¹⁴ Thus, on January 18, the Vodici committee announced that three men would be vying for the cross. Two of the men were from Steelton and one was from Mt. Union. It was also announced that the secretary of the Macedonian Political Organization, Jordan Shkatroff of Indianapolis, would be joining Nakoff in preparing and directing the ceremonies.¹¹⁵

In the end, however, only one swimmer braved the cold weather and strong current to capture the cross: Lubomir (Louie) Yancheff of 447 Myers Street in Steelton. The other two expected swimmers did not even show up. But Vodici

1926 was a day with spring-like weather and warm temperatures into the 40s and 50s. But the water was still frigid. The *Evening News* captured the moment Yancheff dove for the cross:

Before the plunge beneath the surface he hesitated a moment, threw several handfuls of water on his chest and shoulder. Then he made a dive...the wooden cross...bobbed up and down in the stream, as the swimmer lunged after it. He reached it after several powerful strokes, grasped it, brought it reverently to his lips, and threw it back upstream. Another attempt and the cross was in his possession.

Per usual, as Yancheff swam toward the cross, doves were released and flew over him.¹¹⁶

On Vodici, 1927, a total of four Macedonians said they would make an attempt for the cross. But three eventually backed out and a previous two-time winner (from the previous year and from 1914) went at it alone and retrieved the cross. The *Evening News* described the winner: "Lubomir Yancheff, a hardy Macedonian about 35 years old, this morning retrieved a gilded cross hurled far out into the stream."¹¹⁷

Apparently, the other three had valid reasons for dropping out. One had traveled to Youngstown, Ohio on important business; another had fallen sick; and the third had been "advised by his physician not to risk exposure" because he was recovering from the flu.¹¹⁸

Even though there was only one competitor, and despite the downpour of rain and the muddy shoreline, 1,000 people attended the celebration. After Nakoff completed the ceremonial service on the shore, “Yancheff removed his street clothing and stood at the river’s edge, attired in an ordinary dark blue bathing suit. He stood with face toward the stream. The river stage was high and the current very swift.” When the doves were released behind him, he mistook their flight for the swish of the cross and prematurely dove into the river. He eventually realized it was a mistake and came back ashore, “dripping wet with small icicles forming on the edges of his thin attire.” Nakoff then immediately flung the cross twenty yards upstream and Yancheff dove in again, quickly retrieving the cross.¹¹⁹

Next year’s Vodici in 1928, two men struggled to salvage the cross from Nakoff’s far throw. Spiro Mircheff and Tode Tosheff were both steel workers in Steelton. “The dash for the cross was one of the most thrilling seen since the ceremony was first instituted.” Both men jumped as soon as the cross was thrown and hit the water when the cross hit the water. Tosheff, however, had the advantage from the initial jump because he dove in the direction in which the cross was tossed. However, Mircheff was a fast swimmer and caught up to him and they both grabbed the cross. They then disappeared under the water as they struggled for it. But then Mircheff resurfaced with it, and soon after Tosheff came up without anything in his hands.¹²⁰

Afterward, the Ladies Aid Society held a dance in their community hall at Annunciation “in honor of the man who rescued the cross,”¹²¹ which of course was Mircheff. Annunciation had even sent an invitation to Archbishop Eftimios,¹²² head of the American Orthodox Church and based in Brooklyn, to attend the ceremony. He did indeed show up for the ceremony. Reverend Boris Burden, also from Brooklyn, assisted Eftimios and Nakoff.¹²³

On January 16, 1929, Spiro Mircheff announced that he would again seek the cross for the Vodici celebration.¹²⁴ He attempted, but this time had to face Tony Koneff. And this time it was Koneff who tallied a victory. Barbara Ray reported about his victory:

The hero himself didn't seem to be giving it a thought. Clad in a bright orange swimming suit, a top coat, and a smile, he stood there through the long preliminary service, with scarcely a shiver waiting eagerly.

Koneff's little niece remarked before he dove:

Oh, he won't mind that cold water. It will make him strong to dive in there because the water has been blessed by the priest...He's coming up to our house to get warm, as soon as he comes out. We live nearer than he does, and we've got a fire up there blazin' hot for him. I'm going to hurry home 'cause I'd like to be the one to unlock the door for him as I did last year. Our whole family is down here, and they can't hurry as fast as I can.

Describing the ceremony, Ray wrote:

The service itself was a beautiful one. An awesome contrast was the drab clay to the bright yellow and red of the Priest's costume and banners. The brave Macedonians didn't heed this apparently, as they came garbed in their 'Sunday-best.'¹²⁵

After the ceremony, Nakoff told Ray that there would be "a dance given in Tony Koneff's honor by the Macedonians and Bulgarians in their hall."¹²⁶

For Vodici in 1930, Spiro Mircheff was once again a competitor for retrieving the cross. Several thousand people witnessed this event that day.¹²⁷ Tony Koneff then announced that he would go up against him again, promising a stunning rematch.¹²⁸ Eventually, Kiril Petroff of Harrisburg threw his hat in the ring;¹²⁹ and shortly after him, Milan Koneff announced he would dive for it as well.¹³⁰

When the actual day came, only three participants dove in for the cross. Tony Koneff backed out for unknown reasons. The temperature was seven degrees Fahrenheit and the water was very icy. Milan, aged 17, outswam his competitors and brought it to shore. And, like many years prior, the ice gave way to the weight of the spectators, and many were thrown into knee deep water.¹³¹ Everyone was alright and, after the ritual, Milan Koneff was honored at the banquet, where many community and borough members were in attendance, including several officials.¹³² Carl B. Shelley, an attorney, was the principal speaker, and J. Paul Rupp, a Steelton High School coach, also spoke.¹³³

Vodici in 1931 saw newcomer Bruce Tricoff go up against previous years' winners, Spiro Mircheff and Milan Koneff. As the *Harrisburg Telegraph* reported, there were 1,500 people in attendance to watch when the "three young Macedonians braved the icy waters to rescue a wooden cross thrown far out into the stream by the rector, the Rev. David Nakoff."¹³⁴

The race was really close. Mircheff was swimming neck and neck with Tricoff for several seconds, until Tricoff just barely surpassed him and retrieved the cross.¹³⁵ Of course, the evening celebrating Tricoff's victory was a wild one:

The event of celebrating consisted principally of dancing with native Macedonian music furnished by an orchestra, consisting largely of string instruments, directed by Charles Hoffman. The quaint folk dances of the Macedonians struck a strange contrast with the occasional waltz or modern fox trot that the orchestra played at times. The dancing continued until midnight.¹³⁶

In 1932, the Vodici ritual saw Bruce Tricoff and Spiro Mircheff compete against one another again.¹³⁷ One reporter observed: "Amid cheers of their fellow church members, two young Macedonians braved the chilly winds and icy waters of the Susquehanna River this morning in the annual observance."¹³⁸ And yet again, Tricoff nudged out Mircheff for the victory, whose victory was probably due to the fact that Mircheff slipped when he dove in, thus giving him a slow start.¹³⁹ Over 1,500 people

watched them swim for the cross.¹⁴⁰ Some reports put the number of observers at about 3,000.¹⁴¹

When the congregation returned to the church, the Reverend Clifford French of Trinity Episcopal Church in Steelton delivered the principal address there. He said:

We have different ways of worshipping but we are all the same Catholic and Apostolic Church. There is great significance in going down to the river and asking God to bless the waters, and all that He made. God is a God of material things as well as of spiritual things. Those young men who returned the cross from the river have shown us what we all should be willing to do, sacrifice for Jesus.

Nakoff then concluded the services, “alternately using the English and the Macedonian language, urging a unification of creeds and churches in mutual understanding.”¹⁴²

By January 17, 1933, for the first time in the 23 years existence of the St. Annunciation church, there were still no volunteers for retrieving the cross. Nakoff said he would have to cancel the ceremony if no volunteers came forward.¹⁴³ But on January 18th, the dedicated Spiro Mircheff stepped up to the plate, allowing the ceremonies to continue. Nakoff hoped that others would volunteer as well.¹⁴⁴

Sure as he hoped, a total of five swimmers participated. The winner was 16-year old Tony Stoyanoff of Steelton High School, who enjoyed the mild temperatures as he

popped out of the river, with the sun beating down on him. He captured the cross in less than a minute. The other competitors included Dimo Atanasoff, Milan Nicholoff, Milan Koneff, and Spiro Mircheff. Nearly 2,000 people watched the race. Keyro Atanasoff carried the religious church banners, along with Boris Elioff; Samuel Atanasoff carried the cross used in the ceremony; and George Kormushoff carried the holy bread and the two pigeons released in the ceremony; and Nick Ilioff led the singing as choir director. A dance in the hall followed at night, hosted by the Macedonian Ladies Aid Society.¹⁴⁵

For Vodici in 1934, Kero Petroff, a John Harris High School football star, beat out Dimo Atanasoff and Spiro Mircheff for the cross.¹⁴⁶ Two white doves were released when Nakoff threw the cross 35 feet out into the water. The current was strong and the water was slushy-ice. Petroff only beat Atanasoff by a foot. They “reached for the cross at the same moment but Petroff grasped it firmly and turned towards the shore. His feat was greeted with shouts of praise from the 3,000 people who lined the shore.”¹⁴⁷

Competitors for the cross toss on January 19, 1935 again included Spiro Mircheff, who had participated in five previous attempts for the cross; last year’s winner, Dimo Atanasoff; and Kero Petroff.¹⁴⁸ This year, thousands showed up to watch the cross being tossed by Nakoff, who delivered the sermon completely in English for the first time. Dimo Atanasoff, a well-rounded athlete, won the competition this time. Dimo was known in the sporting

world as “Young Demo” the boxer. He had participated in the celebration years before, but this was his first successful attempt.¹⁴⁹ The dance following the ritual was at the hall and furnished with music by the Balkan Mountain Men’s Orchestra. The Ladies Aid Society hosted the ball, and those involved in organizing the dance included Blanche Velkoff, Stephania Kormushoff, Anna Spanseff, Ilka Kristoff, Kata Atanasoff, Kaia Ilioff, and Antina Kormushoff.¹⁵⁰

Dimo Atanasoff jumped for the cross again in 1936.¹⁵¹ Nakoff announced that maybe five or six more youths would jump in total.¹⁵² But on the day there was a massive snowstorm, and only two youths participated in the jump: Atanasoff and George Kormushoff. The young Atanasoff won his second Vodici cross retrieval.¹⁵³ About 1,500 people showed up to watch the ritual, including 150 members of the church.¹⁵⁴

By January 18, 1937, the congregation was again struggling to find volunteers. Alek Kormushoff, Jr., a high school student, said he would do it. Nakoff said that if at least one more didn’t volunteer, the blessing of the waters would have to happen in the church and not the river.¹⁵⁵ When the day came, Alek backed out and no divers competed for the cross. For the first time in almost three decades, the tossing of the cross was omitted from the agenda. Many non-Macedonian onlookers that had gathered “expressed disappointment that the usual river services were not held.”¹⁵⁶

The 1938 Vodici celebration was officially abandoned on January 18th. Nakoff said that the decision was due to young people in his congregation wanting to “cleave from the centuries-old custom of recovering a cross tossed into water”. Thus, he claimed he had no choice but to abandon the ritual.¹⁵⁷ However, as we will find out in the next chapter, another group of Macedonians went ahead with the ritual and four members of the “Macedonian colony” volunteered to leap as part of the ceremony. Those included Michael Yancheff, Tony Stoyanoff, Dimo Atanasoff, and Spire Mircheff.¹⁵⁸ However, the spirit and mood of the celebration was completely compromised due to a split within the Macedonian congregation.

The Vodici celebration in Steelton, commanded so many years by Nakoff, was one of Harrisburg’s and Steelton’s most treasured foreign rituals, and proved to be a spectacle that many residents never wanted to miss. In of itself, the ritual was a strange but fun curiosity.

However, something out of the ordinary was bound to happen on Vodici almost every year. During a few celebrations, as illustrated above, the ice would cave underneath the spectators and many would fall in. Some years, the ice had to be dynamited. Perhaps the strangest and most heart-racing moment, however, happened when a non-Macedonian observer became so excited that he decided to dive for the cross without telling anyone. He jumped in the river with his overcoat on, but was dragged underneath the water by the weight of his clothes, and the

Annunciation congregation had to launch a boat to rescue him.¹⁵⁹ He survived, but it was a frightening ordeal.

Nakoff and his Macedonian congregation instituted a nearly three-decade long annual Macedonian celebration in Steelton that became engrained in the cultural life of Steelton. It was a Macedonian Orthodox celebration, indeed; but the ritual also served as a bridge of understanding and shared celebration between the Macedonians and the rest of the Steelton community. Nakoff certainly created many such bridges in the cultural and social sphere; but he also tried to establish political bridges, as well. These bridges, however, were more focused on bridges between Macedonians than between Macedonians and others. And these bridges eventually crumbled.

IV

Nakoff was, undoubtedly, one of the more prominent Macedonian political figureheads in America during the first half of the 20th century. His beliefs and ideologies placed him on the left side of the ideological spectrum, and he was often associated with socialist, liberal and labor causes. Moreover, when it came to the Balkan politics, he eventually placed himself as an adherent of the goals of the Macedonian People's League and in opposition to the Bulgarian-influenced agenda of the Macedonian Political Organization.

But Nakoff was not always opposed to MPO's ideologies. Before MPO existed, he expressed the Bulgarian rendition of identity and nationalism for the Macedonian people, especially before MPO existed and before Ivan Mihajlov was in charge of VMRO back in Macedonia. Nakoff's earlier views were definitely shaped by his exposure to Bulgarian church propaganda during his religious studies.

Still, Nakoff was the chairman of the Macedonian Convention held in Chicago in 1918, which took place from December 1st through the 6th. The president of the convention was Alexander Belieff. As chairman and president, they signed and submitted a resolution to

President Wilson at the Paris Peace Conference, expressing their views. The resolution stated:

We, the undersigned, authorized by the two hundred and one delegates, representing 40,000 Bulgarians from Macedonia, now residing in various places throughout the United States of America, and assembled in convention in Chicago, Illinois, December 1st – 5th, 1918, for the purpose of exchanging views about the future fate of our land and people, consider it, before all, our sacred duty to express our profound gratitude and heartfelt thanks toward the great American people for the kind hospitality shown us from the day of our arrival in this country – an asylum for the oppressed.

Furthermore, we would wish to lay emphasis upon the invaluable services of the American pioneers and missionaries and the splendid influence of their institutions among our people during the past seventy years.

We take liberty to submit for the earnest consideration of the President of the United States of America, the following facts:

First: We were born, raised and brought up in the various towns and villages of Macedonia, such as Scopie (Uskub), Tetova, Debr, Ochrida, Kostur (Kastoria), Lerin, Vodena, Bitolia (Monastir), Prilep, Veles, Ghevgeli, Doiran, Kukush, Radovish, Shtip, Maleshevo, Kotchanie, Kratovo, Koumanovo, Palanka, Demir-Hisar, Seres, Drama, Salonika, Ressen, Tikvesch, Enidje-Vardar and their respective districts, all of which are at present under Greek and Servian yoke. Driven out of our home by the terrible Turkish misrule and oppression, we found refuge in America, the land of Liberty, where we enjoy freedom and justice. Yet, we cannot forget the land of our fathers where we have left our wives

and children and our homes – this being the most sacred duty of every man.

Second: We, who for more than half a century had struggled against the Turks and fought for liberty lived to see our ideals frustrated by the terms of the ignominious treaty of Bucharest (1913), against the injustice of which immediately raised a voice of protest from America. This treaty as an act of violence brought new painful complications in the Balkans and when the great war broke out threw Bulgarian on the side of Germany against Serbia, a circumstance that benefited, for the time being, Germany alone.

Third: We are a part of that people whose fathers and forefathers struggled against the yoke of the Greek church and long before the commonwealth of Bulgaria was brought into existence were the founders and builders of our church organizations – the Bulgarian Exarchate in Constantinople.

Fourth: We, the Macedonian Bulgarians, living in the United States of America form only a small part of 1,200,000 Bulgarians in Macedonia, who speak nothing but Bulgarian, **BUT WE WISH IT BE KNOWN THAT OUR WILL IS EXPRESSED HEREIN FREE OF ANY FOREIGN INFLUENCE AND PRESSURE WHATSOEVER.**

Fifth: We shall say nothing herein whatever relative to the opinions of the scientists, travelers and ethnographers who have ascertained the Bulgarian nationality of the Slavish population of Macedonia, but we take the liberty to declare that it would be absolutely unjust to leave us under Servian and Greek yoke now after the principle of **SELF-DETERMINATION AND NATIONAL UNITY** has been so solemnly proclaimed.

In view of all the above facts, the convention adopted the following RESOLUTION:

In the name of the great principles which the President of the United States of America has proclaimed and has made the basis of his world policies the convention most respectfully begs the President of the United States of America to kindly exercise his best efforts at the Peace Conference so that our native land, Macedonia, be included within the future boundaries of our common fatherland – Bulgaria, and prevent from accomplishing a great injustice those who again will try to break up our land and subject us to foreign domination.

The convention places its implicit confidence in President Wilson and trusts that he will gladly defend a just cause, it being one of his sacred purposes to secure freedom for every nation and thus insure a safe and lasting peace for the future generations.

The convention sincerely believes that the President of the United States of America will take a firm stand in behalf of our freedom and national unity and wishes him success in his great mission.¹⁶⁰

In September of 1919, Nakoff wrote a letter to the editor of the *Harrisburg Telegraph* echoing many of these same views:

We are on the eve of the settlement of the Balkan problem by the Peace Conference at Paris. While it was solemnly declared by President Wilson and the leading nations that they were fighting for the liberation of the small and oppressed peoples, it is a pitiful fact that we do not hear from the Peace circles at the present time anything about Macedonia. This country, which has played a

leading role in the early centuries of Christianity – is it not going to be liberated? The cry for brotherhood, love and liberty in the time of Paul spread out from Macedonia, and it will be a disgrace to history if this country is going to be abandoned to persecution.

We, the Macedonian-Bulgarians, comprise 60 percent of the population of the country, 1,200,000 out of 2,000,000. In 1910, we possessed 1,040 schools, with 55,378 pupils and 1,838 teachers; 1,158 churches and monasteries, with 1,132 clergymen and priests. In Macedonia, even the Turks speak the Bulgarian language, which is the language of the market place. We Macedonians have fought for religious and political liberty for more than half a century. In these revolutions we have lost more than 60,000 men. Under the flag of the revolution, which bore the slogan: 'Macedonia for the Macedonians,' the Rumanians of the country, and also many Turks took part, who, equally with us, had borne the oppression and cruelty of the Turkish Government.

There are in Macedonia only a few Greeks as merchants and none Serbian. Those called Serbians of late were a small number of Bulgarians of the country who were paid agents of the Serbian propaganda and supported by the Turkish Government, whose policy was to rule by dividing. Will the Peace Conference overlook the historical facts concerning Macedonia, and forget that prior to the Balkan War Austro-Hungary, Russia and Great Britain, anxious to bring to an end the trouble in the Balkans, dealt only with the Macedonian case, and at Revel the King of England and the Czar of Russia agreed to create an autonomy of Macedonia? This would have been carried out if the Turkish pronunciamiento in 1908 had not taken place under the dictation of Germany.

If the Peace Conference, after all these facts, decides the Macedonian question without consulting the will of the people,

there can by no means be established peace in the Balkans. It will not be long before my countrymen, realizing the new slavery to Serbia and Greece, will start a new revolutionary movement, which will be a menace to the peace of the world.¹⁶¹

Nakoff's attitude and understanding would eventually shift drastically, due to events in the Balkans and the awakening of his separate Macedonian consciousness. Furthermore, the emergence of the MPO and the uncovering of their true intentions inspired him even more-so to shake off Bulgarian propoganda and work only for the Macedonian Cause.

But as stated earlier, Nakoff was always on the left side of the spectrum, and he became immediately loyal to the United States of America upon setting foot in the country. On April 28, 1918, his Annunciation congregation decided to subscribe \$2,000 to the Third Liberty Loan (to help America win the war in Europe). At that meeting, Nakoff took charge of the campaign and addressed the crowd, appealing for them to give money.¹⁶² Nakoff had set a goal of \$15,000, and by April 31 they already had \$5,000 and were confident they would surpass their goal.¹⁶³

Nakoff was also a member of the Foremen's Club, a workers' rights organization, and gave invocations at several of their meetings, such as in May of 1932,¹⁶⁴ and in December of 1940, as the rector "of the American-Macedonian Orthodox Church," giving the invocation to a crowd of 260 members at the Methodist Church in Steelton.¹⁶⁵

His political work wasn't limited to just American political issues. On November 21st, 1927, Nakoff gave a speech at the YWCA in Harrisburg, entitled "What about the Balkans?" This was part of an ongoing series at the YWCA on international talks.¹⁶⁶ Two weeks later he gave a lecture at the hall of the Annunciation church on the topic of World War I.¹⁶⁷ Ten years later, he gave a lecture on "Nationalism vs. Internationalism" hosted by the Youth Guild of the Jewish Community Center.¹⁶⁸

On November 16, 1938, Nakoff spoke to the International Workers' Order in the Hershey Building. He accused Hitler and Mussolini of plotting to divide the Balkan States, saying that the Balkan States were "organizing in secret in the hope of setting up one single democratic Balkan state, and if they should succeed they would stand like a Chinese wall between Hitler and his aspirations...The Nietzschean doctrine of the super-man still has an important influence on German thought just as it did in 1914 and this makes it easier for Hitler to convince his people that an inferior race, the Jews, are responsible for conditions inside Germany." He further said that Hitler "like Kaiser Wilhelm before him, looks upon the Slavs as supine creatures whom Germany is destined to trample under foot as she marches in the rich oil fields of Turkey and Russia."¹⁶⁹

Furthermore, in early 1943, Nakoff was elected to serve as a member of the United Committee of South Slavic Americans representing the Harrisburg area. He was to be

the organizer and key contact person. The group's aim was to seek "unity of its people in support of the war against the Axis and post war plans and operations."¹⁷⁰ Fulfilling this mission, Nakoff gave a talk on "The Balkan Situation" at a meeting of the Lions Club in the Penn-Harris Hotel.¹⁷¹

Nakoff's views defined much of his social and political work. However, his views were also reflective of the growing Macedonian identity and a movement of Macedonians distancing themselves from the Bulgarian government and church. Because of these issues, during the mid-1920s, the Macedonian Annunciation congregation experienced a deep split. These issues weren't publicly made known, outside of Macedonian circles, until the spring of 1929. On June 2, four former trustees of the church (Jordan Stankoff, Atanas Gugoff, Jordan Atzeff, and Kone Georguff) accused Nakoff and six Annunciation Board members (Ilia Mirtzluff, Alex Ilioff, Nicholas Ilioff, Peter Vasiloff, Trico Stoyanoff, and Vasil Dundoff) of violating U.S. laws and Bulgarian Church doctrine. These four members were then ousted from the church. The ousted Macedonians then filed a petition in court on June 7 in Dauphin County against these men.

The *Evening News* wrote:

The plaintiffs aver that the church holds allegiance to the Synod of the Bulgarian Church with headquarters at Sophia, Bulgaria, and allege that the defendants have maintained a hostile attitude to the Holy Synod and have refused to yield, obey and follow

instructions received from the Holy Synod in relation to church management and control.

The violation was based on the premise that the church was “incorporated under a charter issued by the Dauphin County court, thus making the ouster action illegal.” They asked the court for the defendants “to rescind the ouster of the four plaintiffs as trustees and to rescind the re-election of the Rev. Mr. Nakoff for a period of three years.” They said that the Holy Synod in Bulgaria gave them instructions to not re-elect Nakoff.¹⁷²

Nakoff and the other defendants filed a response through their attorney, Carl B. Shelley, alleging that three of the members filing suit were not actually members of the board of trustees. Further, in their response, they claimed:

This controversy arose because the American Macedonian citizens in this vicinity are attempting to exercise their rights as American citizens. We feel that the American Macedonian citizens in this vicinity have a right to conduct their church affairs according to the dictates of their consciences without interference from any foreign powers. These proceedings have been brought by a few disgruntled persons in order to embarrass the Rev. David Nakoff, who has been in charge of this church and under whose contract a wonderful community hall has been built.

All four plaintiffs, Shelley continued, were removed from a meeting on June 2. Further, Kone Georguff had been absent from three meetings in the year and was thus

“considered as having automatically resigned.” Nakoff further commented that Annunciation’s Macedonians did not hold allegiance to the Holy Synod of Bulgaria and only recognized its power in spiritual affairs. They said the Synod of Sofia did not order Nakoff’s removal and that, even if Nakoff was ordered to leave, the Synod had no such power to issue such an order.¹⁷³ This case was eventually dropped.

Toward the end of 1933, the Reverend Tsenoff (head of the Bulgarian Orthodox mission in America) ordered Nakoff to be deposed from the Church. Nakoff, however, insisted on staying in his position, and Annunciation members said Nakoff’s dismissal was based on congregational political differences. Nakoff would not leave, though. He stated:

Under no circumstances will I leave the church. They do not have the power to force my expulsion. I will not allow myself to be forced out of it by any organization. Even if they send a pastor to take my place I will continue as the pastor of the Macedonian-Bulgarian Church Steelton...The decision taken by the Synod of Sofia (Bulgaria) for my expulsion from the ranks of the church does not change my status as a clergy in this country. The Synod of Sofia is a part of the Bulgarian government and since I have taken my citizenship papers in this country and have been encouraging my countrymen to do the same, the Synod has looked upon me as a traitor to Bulgarian aspirations.

He further stated that “the Bulgarian political unit in Steelton is the main opponent to his work in Steelton.” He

stated that the “heads of the Synod have attempted to compromise him in the eyes of the older immigrants” and that the latter “are still more or less in spiritual ties with those of political and religious oppressors in Bulgaria who hold the people by physical and spiritual force. In this manner they keep them subject to their autocratic regulations.”

Some disgruntled members still insisted they would take Nakoff to court should he refuse to leave the church. Tsenoff made public his statement deposing Nakoff, which in part read:

David Nakoff, of Steelton, Dauphin County, State of Pennsylvania, is deposed for spreading through the church and to its people anticanonical doctrines contrary to the exarchial laws of the church. On account of the above violations of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church rules and laws, the now Rev. David Nakoff from now on reverts to the status of layman.”¹⁷⁴

So, on December 17, 1933, the church congregation met to discuss their response. Alex Kormushoff, president of the church, said he was very surprised by news of the dismissal because Nakoff was “well-liked by members of his parish.”¹⁷⁵ Two weeks later, Tsenoff and two former congregation members asked the Dauphin County Court to restrain Nakoff from using the church to perform services. They also targeted nine current members of the congregation in their court case, along with Nakoff.¹⁷⁶

The two men making the request were Traiko Stoianoff and Peter Taleff. Still, most of the other church members at a recent meeting “voted unanimously to support Nakoff and declared that they no longer were under the jurisdiction of the Bulgarian Synod.”¹⁷⁷ In the first weeks of 1934, Nakoff’s counsel, Carl Shelley and Fred Morgan, attacked the suit as faulty “because the holders of legal title to the church property are not made parties to the action asking the Rev. Nakoff’s removal.”¹⁷⁸

In the spring of 1934, testimony was heard on Tsenoff’s suit in the Dauphin County Court. Tsenoff’s attorneys, Oscar Wickesham, J. Paul Rupp, and Maurice Metzger, “offered a number of papers intended to establish [that] the authority of Dr. Tsenoff contends [was] vested in him in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church of Sofia, Bulgaria.” Nakoff’s counsels objected on many grounds, “one of them being that the papers had not been recognized by the American Consul.” Judge Curtis C. Leshar presided specially for the trial.¹⁷⁹

There were four plaintiffs in this case. In addition to Tsenoff, Stoianoff, and Taleff, George Patoff joined Tsenoff’s circle of friends. They took action against Nakoff and Alexander Kormushoff, Todor Atanasoff, Milan Naidenoff, Alexander Spaseff, Milan Kristoff, Peter and Mirchie Christoff, Dimko Koneff, and Jordan Dameff. “Partisans of both factions crowded into front seats in the courtroom and excited whispering was frequent. Several

times when attorneys rose to make objections, witnesses went with them to the bar.”¹⁸⁰

In the second day of testimony, the counsels established some basic historical facts regarding the Balkan Wars and the subsequent creation of the autonomous Balkan states. The court established that, at one point, one Orthodox Church in the Balkans split into three synods at the close of the Balkan wars. These three Churches were established in Sofia, Bulgaria; Athens, Greece; and Belgrade, Servia. The attorneys agreed that “the question involved in the suit is whether the Bulgarian Orthodox Church has control over the Steelton church and if the Rev. Dr. Tsenoff has the right to unfrock the Steelton rector.”

However, Nakoff’s attorneys insisted that while the Steelton church subscribed to the dogmas of the Bulgarian Church, as it existed prior to the split, “the Steelton Church was formed to worship under the regulations of the church at Prilep, which is in the Synod of Belgrade.” Tsenoff submitted evidence to the contrary, noting that at all times Nakoff “had submitted himself to the regulations of the Bulgarian church.” Tsenoff further claimed that Nakoff was unfrocked on January 1, 1926 because he refused to be transferred to Granite City, Illinois where he had been transferred. Tsenoff claimed that he had been reinstated, but was unfrocked again after he refused to go to Indianapolis.¹⁸¹

On April 25, 1934, Alex Minoff and Taska Dundoff testified that the Sofia Synod had authority over Nakoff.

Nakoff's lawyers countered that the church was incorporated in 1921 as a separate organization not under Sofia jurisdiction and that only Nakoff's congregation could remove him. Vladimir Manoloff, secretary of the Bulgarian Legation in Washington, testified on behalf of Tsenoff but "refused to submit to cross-examination, until presiding Judge Curtis Leshar threatened to strike his testimony from the record."¹⁸²

When Nakoff was called to the witness stand, he read a letter he had received from Tsenoff in, which directed Nakoff to take orders from the Minister of Foreign Affairs in the Bulgarian Legation at Washington and further asked him to go to Granite City "to take charge of 'our countrymen.'" Nakoff then produced two contracts that bound "himself and the Steelton congregation into an agreement to retain him as pastor."¹⁸³

In 1925 a contract was signed for an undetermined term, but in 1929 the contract called for a three-year service. The 1929 contract, in addition, provided that no outside interference be permitted to influence the terms of the agreement and that the rector was to receive two months' notice prior to the expiration of the contract of further intentions of the congregation. The testimony proved the contention of the defense that the Steelton church is autonomous and not subject to the regulations of the Bulgarian Synod.¹⁸⁴

On April 27, Judge Leshar indefinitely adjourned the trial because he had to return to his bench in Snyder County. He didn't set a date to reopen the case.¹⁸⁵

However, at that last day of testimony, many members of the congregation “testified they did not recognize the authority of Dr. Tsenoff.”¹⁸⁶ These members included Alex Ilioff, Ilia Atanasoff, Alex Spaseff, Kalia Eliooff, Milan Dogoff, and Tode Atanasoff.¹⁸⁷

After a break of a few months, the trial resumed in July of 1934. But “a legal technicality...interrupted the taking of testimony.” Tsenoff’s attorneys “offered to introduce written evidence taken from church officials at Sofia, Bulgaria, to bolster their case.” Nakoff’s attorneys objected and the trial was temporarily postponed until later in the day.¹⁸⁸

That night Tsenoff’s counsel withdrew the suit and served notice that the same action would eventually be started again. Because he withdrew, his team had to pay \$1,000 in court costs. Nakoff’s supporters then threw a celebration for their victory. Sixty children of the church paraded through the town with banners that read: “No other government could rule our church – only Uncle Sam” and “Long Live Rev. Nakoff; down with his enemies; boo!” Alexander Kormushoff, as the congregation’s president, led the parade alongside Anthony Atanasoff, the treasurer. Later at the Annunciation hall, there was a celebration for the adults, with songs and folk dances.¹⁸⁹

But as promised, by July 14 of that same year, a new case was started by Tsenoff with very similar allegations. Before the case started, however, they had to pay \$436.90 in court fees, of which 99% of those fees were witness bills.

They paid, but at the same time protested that it was excessive because some witnesses were not in the court all days stipulated and others did not show at all.¹⁹⁰

Ten days later, the Dauphin County Court ordered Nakoff “to show cause why letters rogatory should not be issued to permit the taking of depositions of the secretary of the church of the Holy Synod of Bulgaria.” Tsenoff sought those letters because “the depositions...[were to] show the relationship between the Steelton church and the synod at Sofia.”¹⁹¹

After a break of several months, the court case resumed in early December. There were fifty witnesses in attendance, and Judge Henry C. Niles of York County presided. Tsenoff’s attorney finally read into deposition statements made by Bishop Boris, who was secretary of the Holy Synod of Bulgaria. Bishop Boris revealed that Nakoff “was appointed to the Steelton Church in 1914, although he was not duly qualified as priest, and that he has been paid an annual salary by the synod. His traveling expense for the trip to Steelton were furnished by the Steelton Congregation, which founded the church in 1909.” Still, Nakoff’s attorney “maintained that since the incorporation of the church, February 23, 1920, the church owed no allegiance to any political or religious body and that its existence [was] autonomous and not within the jurisdiction of the Bulgarian Church.”¹⁹²

Tsenoff argued that Nakoff “diverted in his worship from the dogma and canons of the Church and instituted

new customs, which are at variance with the teachings of the Church.”¹⁹³ Tsenoff stated that in the mid-1920s he had visited Nakoff and urged him “to return to the teaching of the doctrines of the church.”¹⁹⁴ The leader of the Bulgarian mission also testified that “a woman from Detroit showed him by-laws adopted by the Steelton congregation in 1928. These were transmitted to the Holy Synod and orders were issued at that time to all priests in the United States to be careful in obeying the doctrines of the orthodox church.”¹⁹⁵

Further, Tsenoff emphasized that Nakoff changed these by-laws of the original constitution. The woman from Detroit had visited Steelton and brought back those by-laws to Detroit in order to introduce them into her church’s by-laws. This “exhausted his [Tsenoff’s] patience, which he exercised previously with Rev. Mr. Nakoff although he had previously received reports of the alleged divergence from dogma of the church on the part of the Steelton rector.” The Holy Synod then sent a letter to all their priests in America to “abide by the teachings of the church.” Tsenoff said that Nakoff never replied. Nakoff’s attorneys showed that churches in Lorraine and Toronto were, without BOC permission, “administered by priests from the Russian Church.”¹⁹⁶

Eventually, witnesses that had been with the church from the beginning of its formation in 1909 testified that they were with the church until 1925, “when, they said, they could no longer subscribe to the changes in worship instituted by the Re. Mr. Nakoff, and withdrew.” They said

that when they organized the church they were subscribed to the Holy Synod of Bulgaria, which was the founders' intentions. Moreover, Bishop Boris' deposition insisted that Nakoff was not sent to Steelton as an ordained priest.¹⁹⁷

Nakoff, in his testimony, insisted that "the Holy Synod [had] jurisdiction only over priests in Bulgaria. Those who [went] into other countries [were] under the jurisdiction of the Exarch, who lives in Constantinople." Thus, he continued, the Holy Synod was powerless when it came to unfrocking priests outside of Bulgaria.¹⁹⁸ Nakoff even testified that the Annunciation congregation protested to the Holy Synod in 1928 about its interference in their church's affairs.¹⁹⁹

Then Nakoff's lawyers provided arguments that Annunciation was patterned after the church of the same name in Prilep, Macedonia. Mishko Zaikoff, formerly of Steelton, testified:

Zaikoff said he came to this Country from Prilep, Macedonia, in 1907. In 1909, he testified, the Steelton congregation was organized along the same principles as the church in Prilep, and he was a charter member. The church, he said, did not divert itself from the practices and mode of worship of the church at Prilep, and still continues to follow the practices of the Prilep church. He said he was still a member of the congregation.

Zaikoff also indicated that the Prilep church recognized Exarch Joseph and the immediate supervision of the

Russian Bishop of that district with no allegiance to the Holy Synod of Bulgaria. “The organizers of the Steelton church were 99 percent Macedonians,” said Zaikoff. He emphasized that priests were “coming and going” until Nakoff became pastor in 1915. He then read minutes of the church into the record, “showing that the congregation changed the church by-laws in 1925 and declared itself independent of the Bulgarian church.”²⁰⁰ After two weeks of testimony in December of 1935, the case was paused until February of the next year.²⁰¹

When February 1936 came around, Nakoff’s trial was resumed. More witnesses testified that their church was not aligned with the Holy Synod. They testified that “the ritual of the church and the mode of worship, including the customs and manners adopted in the Steelton church, [were] the replica of the ritual employed in the Church of St. Annunciation, Prilep, Serbia, after which the Steelton church was modeled. Each of the witnesses testified that at no time during the various church ceremonies is the name of the Holy Synod mentioned.” Anthony Nickoloff, from Prilep, provided such testimony, as did “Peter Christoff and Nickola Ilieff, members of the congregation, who said they were married in the Steelton church and their children were baptized in the church, and that at no time during the ceremonies was the Holy Synod of Bulgaria mentioned.”²⁰² Testimony was completed on February 14, 1936.²⁰³

On May 20, 1936, the court heard the legal arguments. Tsenoff’s lawyers “cited decisions of courts...to show that

the civil courts did not concern themselves with that part of similar disputes where ecclesiastical authorities were better qualified to determine the facts." Nakoff's attorneys phrased the argument differently:

The sole question in the case is the religious identity of the founders of the Steelton church and its organizers. They...modeled their Steelton Church according to the percepts of their homeland church in Prilep, now a part of Servia, and they recognized the jurisdiction of only that church regardless of the fact that at a later date they may have placed themselves within the scope and administration of the Bulgarian Synod.²⁰⁴

But this argument found little support with Judge Henry Niles of the Dauphin County Court. After years of testimony and arguments, on October 7, 1936, the judge ruled against Nakoff, stating that he was "restrained from conducting public worship at the church" and forced him to surrender the keys to the church and all church property he owned.²⁰⁵ The court further "enjoined anyone else from interfering with worshipping in the church according to the customs and under the supervision of the Holy Synod of Sofia." Judge Niles concluded that Nakoff was properly unfrocked. "The court also found that even if he could establish an autonomous property relationship, he could not deny his allegiance to the Holy Synod at Sofia, because he had, at one time, sought to prevent his unfrocking, thereby recognizing the authority of the church, under

which he first came to the Steelton parish.” Nakoff’s attorney said they would appeal the decision.²⁰⁶

A mass meeting of the Annunciation congregation on October 9 passed a resolution stating that “it was sorry that Judge Niles had handed down the order giving the property to a foreign body which never has contributed money toward the building and support of the church in Steelton.” Counsel for Andon Nicoloff, president of the congregation, was expected to file exceptions to the opinion by October 17.²⁰⁷ On November 12, Judge William Harges began hearing those exceptions that were filed.²⁰⁸

Then on December 10, Judge Harges upheld the exceptions made by the Nakoff team. He wrote:

I am reluctantly forced to disagree with the adjudication of the chancellor who so graciously came into this district to hear this case. There is not a scintilla of evidence that Dr. Nakoff has conducted any service not in accord with the canons of the Bulgarian Church. I am much inclined to think that the better inference is that Dr. Nakoff’s alleged ‘anti-national activities’ were along the line of a failure to acquiesce in the activities of the Bulgarian government in the control of the Bulgarian priests in the United States.

This opinion did not overrule Judge Niles’ decision, but made a stronger case for appeal, which Nakoff’s attorneys promised was coming.²⁰⁹

In the appeal to the Pennsylvania Supreme Court, which started the last week of May, of 1937,²¹⁰ Nakoff’s attorney argued that “the action against the pastor resulted from

placing of the Synod of the Church at Sofia, Bulgaria, under the Bulgarian government.” He further argued that there was no admission by the Annunciation Church that it was even amenable to the Synod; and even if there was, placing the local church under the control of the Bulgarian Government “was in violation of the political liberty guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution.”²¹¹ Despite these arguments, on July 7, the Pennsylvania Supreme Court affirmed the lower court’s ruling ousting Nakoff.²¹²

On July 9, the keys were handed over to Nakoff’s opposition, who were excited to celebrate their court victory. The members who received keys included many “who had not entered the church for many years since the inter-church scrap started in 1925.” After their attorney, Paul Rupp, opened the door, their “joy turned to anger and they openly announced that the church had been deliberately stripped of its sacred possessions, even including the church minutes.” Included in the missing items were a baptismal tub, gold communion cup, gold altar cross, a Christ cloth used on Good Friday, a gold inlaid Bible, 1,000 church dishes, 100 chairs, and an inlaid gold cloth.²¹³ The next day, Tsenoff’s attorney announced that someone tried to force their way into the church the previous night but failed to get in. So, new locks were placed on all doors.²¹⁴

In the meantime, former Annunciation congregation president, Alex Kormushoff, announced that Nakoff’s supporters would purchase new ground and build a new

church. For the time being, however, they began looking to rent a place of worship.²¹⁵ On the evening of July 9, Nakoff's 200 loyal followers formed a new Orthodox Church congregation and promised that they would retain Nakoff as pastor until his death, per Macedonian custom. Further, in response to the items removed, Kormushoff claimed the dishes were the property of the Ladies' Aid Society and they had the right to remove their property when forced to leave the building. He then denied that other property had been removed.²¹⁶ Nakoff's faction decided that their congregation's new name would be the Macedonian-American Orthodox Church.²¹⁷ The Macedonian-American congregation's first service was even held at Kormushoff's home.²¹⁸

A few days later, Tsenoff's attorney gave Nakoff's faction a warning: "An opportunity is being given to those who removed articles from the Macedonian-Bulgarian Orthodox Church to return them. If this is done promptly, no action is contemplated. Otherwise, proper legal proceedings will be instituted."²¹⁹ Meanwhile, Nakoff's group found a temporary church home in the Trinity Episcopal Church of Steelton, after Nakoff, Kormushoff and Alex Spasoff (secretary of the new Macedonian-American congregation) met with Reverend Canon Clifford French, who was representing Wyant Brown, Bishop of Episcopal Diocese of Harrisburg. Then Carl Shelley, Nakoff's attorney, announced that there were three tracks of land offered as free to Nakoff's

congregation to build a new church. The congregation held a meeting on July 14 to discuss these future plans.²²⁰ Meanwhile, at the Macedono-Bulgarian Annunciation church, Tsenoff became acting priest until a permanent one was sent by the Holy Synod of Sofia, Bulgaria.²²¹ The new Annunciation pastor eventually ended up being Charalmy Elieff, from a Macedono-Bulgarian Orthodox Church in Toronto.²²²

On August 19, Tsenoff's lawyers filed witness fee bills, amounting to \$829. Tsenoff had 55 witnesses, each which were paid \$2 per day. Nearly \$10 was spent to reimburse them on mileage, "and \$55 was the cost of the paper book used in connection with the appeal to the Supreme Court." They demanded Nakoff and his supporters pay those bills immediately.²²³ This witness bill was believed to be the largest ever filed in the Dauphin County Courthouse.²²⁴

Two weeks later, four members of Nakoff's new faction (Alex Kormushoff, Paca Koneff and her son Mishko, and Christ Spaseff)²²⁵ voluntarily turned themselves in to the police station and were booked for theft of the church articles. They each had to post \$400 bail. Warrants for other members were also issued. The followers contended that they had purchased all of the church equipment and thus had the right to remove it. The Bulgarian church authorities denied these claims.²²⁶

On October 18, 1937, Tsenoff's lawyers filed suit to recover the costs of the civil trial. They now sought to recover a bond of \$1,500 that Nakoff's group posted to

cover the cost of the case in the event that they lost. In addition to witness fees, they wanted to collect rentals for the use of the church property during the time of litigation, as well as other expenses. They said the aggregate bill was close to \$1,500. The suit was filed against Nakoff, A. J. Spaseff, Dimko Koneff, Tode Atanasoff, Gordon Dameff, Minke Kirstoff, Peter Christoff, Milan Krstoff, and Alexander Kormushoff.²²⁷ After that failed, Tsenoff's group filed another suit in mid-December seeking to collect \$1134.74 in costs. Nakoff's congregation were his bondsmen, so the suit was also directed at them.²²⁸ Eventually, Nakoff's team had to pay.

The beginning of 1938 saw the opening of the larceny trial against Nakoff's followers for removing the church items that Tsenoff's factions insisted was rightfully theirs. Tsenoff's attorney told the jury "that the defendants 'ransacked the church' last July." In response, the defendants' attorney, Homer Kreider, stated that this prosecution was "a grand stand play" by the Tsenoff faction. Kreider said that "if the defendants were not entitled to the property they took, the prosecutors could bring replevin action of have them cited for contempt of the court order."²²⁹

The next day, the jury deliberated for "only a short time" and acquitted all five persons, including Christo Spaseff, Alex Kormushoff, Paca and Milan Koneff, and Katie Ilioff, who was charged with receiving the stolen goods that the other four had stolen. Costs for the case were placed on the

prosecutors.²³⁰ Because T. Dundoff and Slave Georgeff were initiated the larceny cases, they had to pay \$229 in costs, which were imposed by the jury. Of that, Dundoff had to pay the majority, \$156.80.²³¹ The next month, someone plundered the Annunciation church and burned several holy pictures in the furnace.²³² It was never determined if this act was related to the congregation's schism.

In late October of 1938, the Annunciation Church's remaining members found themselves in a different dispute over rights to church property, which escalated after the death of Tsenoff and a new Bulgarian bishop, Andrey, was put in charge of the Bulgarian mission in America. Reverend Elieff's faction locked the doors so that the Bulgarian Bishopric in America could not enter the church. He even posted some of his followers as guards. The bishop's followers filed an injunction to restrain Elieff's faction from excluding the bishop. Judge John E. Fox denied this injunction and instead gave the defense thirty days to show why the injunction order should not be issued.²³³

In May of 1939, Vasil Dundoff and Triko Stoyanoff led the Bulgarian bishop's case against the Elieff faction. They "sought to enjoin the Rev. Mr. Elieff from holding services in the church, claiming that Bishop Andrey, in charge of the Bulgarian Bishopric in America, [was] the rightful rector, having been appointed by the Holy Synod of Bulgaria. They claim[ed] that the followers of the Rev. Mr.

Elieff set up guards and refused to admit Bishop Andrey.” In response, Elieff’s faction said there was a jurisdictional question and that the court has no jurisdiction to decide such matter. They said it should “first be taken to the Holy Synod for adjudication.” The judge ordered Elieff’s group to submit an amended answer to the complaint against them.²³⁴

In July 1940, the separate Steelton Annunciation factions agreed to a truce due to the dispute that had closed down their church for more than a year. The two “warring factions” came to an agreement, temporarily, in front of Judge W. C. Sheely in Dauphin County Court. They agreed, for the time being, to have a priest from the Russian Orthodox Church preside at services, particularly the priest at the Lykens Russian Church, if and when he was available. The truce stipulated that “all persons on record as members of the congregation on April 14, 1938” were to be admitted and immediately must pay their 1940 dues. Previously, on July 6, 1939, Judge Sheely had ordered that Bishop Andrey “must prove he is a bona fide representative of the Bulgarian Synod.” But Andrey left the country for South America. Despite the truce and Andrey’s migration, Andrey’s followers insisted they would still “continue its effort to establish his right as priest in the church.”²³⁵

A few years later, on October 8, 1944, Nakoff died at the age of 67 from heart failure. His congregation managed to avoid much of the post-split drama that Annunciation

faced, but Nakoff still felt much regret that the Macedonians of Steelton were split in their allegiances. Despite this, his obituary highlighted his dedication to his Macedonians:

He was especially noted for his work with Macedonian youth and for use of the ritual of the original Eastern Orthodox Church. The pastor went to school in Bitola, Macedonia, and studied for the priesthood in the Bulgarian Seminary at Constantinople. He was ordained at the Veles Cathedral in Macedonia and was made arch-priest at Prilep, Macedonia. In 1905, he was attached to the Bulgarian Embassy at Constantinople.

His funeral was at the Macedonian American Orthodox Church and Archbishop Christopher of the Orthodox Church in America officiated his service. Like many Macedonian-Americans in Steelton, Nakoff was buried in Baldwin cemetery.²³⁶ His estate was valued at \$4,000 and was given to his heirs, his wife and son, who were overseas in Macedonia, and his sister Anna Zaroff, who lived in Drexel Hill, Pennsylvania.²³⁷ A year later, a memorial service was held for Nakoff at the Steelton Trinity Episcopal Church to honor his memory.²³⁸

Just because Nakoff died, however, it didn't mean that the Macedonian divisions died with him. Nakoff's followers eventually reentered the Annunciation church because they lacked a Macedonian leader. In the late 1940s, however, tensions escalated and brought significant violence to the Macedonian community in Steelton. These

climaxed when George Minoff, a MPO member and loyalist of the faction that opposed Nakoff, fatally shot two men at Annunciation's hall in a confrontation in early spring of 1948. "The shooting took place during a discussion of a new priest for the church, designed to heal the schism that began a score of years ago and which led to other disputed and court battles." Minoff was 51 and his two victims were Koche Atzeff, 24, and Boris Mioff, 32.²³⁹

Boris Atzeff, Koche's brother, testified that, on that fatal April 4th day, there were objections to proposed business and that Nickola Taleff struck him on the head before Minoff fired the shots. Jordan Atzeff testified that someone had hit Minoff before he fired his shots and that he thought that Minoff had walked over to the crowd and began pushing people. Peter Mioff, vice-president of the church and brother to Boris, said he saw Taleff strike Boris Atzeff on the head with a chair, but that no one hit Minoff. Peter said that after Taleff hit Boris, Minoff ran over and shot Koche. As Boris Mioff bent to help Koche, Minoff shot him. Peter Mioff said that he admitted he hit Minoff with a chair, but only after his brother was shot by Minoff. "That's how he got that mark on his head." Milan Zaikoff, treasurer and Nakoff loyalist, testified: "There were arguments every meeting."²⁴⁰

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court summarized the day's events in a decision issued in 1949 on an appeal by Minoff:

The bad feeling between the two divisions over the doctrinal teaching or tenet that separated them was very intense. As a

consequence of the internal dissension, the church had been without a priest since 1944 and was served only by a visiting priest from time to time. The selection of a full-time priest, with which the members of the church were concerned in late 1947 and early 1948 served to promote further differences and bitterness.

A congregational meeting was called for Sunday afternoon, April 4, 1948, to consider matters concerning the call of a priest from Sofia, Bulgaria, whose departure for this country had apparently been delayed through a misunderstanding allegedly engendered by some of the members of the church. The meeting which was held in the church hall, located in a separate building near the church, was largely attended. The members of the one group sat on chairs along one side of the hall while the members of the other group, also sitting on chairs, were along the other side of the hall. The proposed reading of a letter from the priest in Sofia and, especially, whether a certain portion or the whole of that letter should be read provoked heated discussion.

While the argument was going on, one George Patoff, a member of the defendant's [George Minoff's] group, was on his feet objecting to the course being followed in presenting the letter. Lazo Atzeff, father of Koche, one of the victims, went over from the side of the hall where his group were seated to where Patoff was standing and asked him to be quit. Patoff told him to "get out." Koche and his brother, Boris Atzeff, moved across the hall and stood by their father. One Nikolo Taleff, a friend of the defendant and a member of his group, raised a chair and attempted to strike Boris Atzeff. Boris struck Taleff, knocking him to the floor.

Up until then, the defendant, who was sitting along the wall on the side of the hall occupied by his group, had made no move. He was some twenty to thirty feet from where the altercation was

going on. He arose and began pushing toward Patoff and the Atzeffs. Making passes with his arms, he moved closer to the gathering. Once there, he pulled a thirty-eight caliber revolver from under his coat which he fired without warning and shot Koche Atzeff who died almost instantly.

When Koche had fallen to the floor, Boris Mioff bent over him apparently to render assistance; and, while Boris was in that position, the defendant fired a second shot, fatally wounding Boris who died four days later. It was not until after the second shot had been fired by the defendant that anyone laid hands upon him. He had carried the revolver underneath his coat and sweater on his left side between his trousers and his shirt and, from there, withdrew it to fire the fatal shots.²⁴¹

The *Evening News* further clarified some of the backstory:

When the court ruled that the Steelton church must be guided by the Sofia Synod, the Nakoff group withdrew and existed independently until Nakoff's death...Then, at the invitation of the orthodox group, the Nakoff followers rejoined their former church. They now hold the majority control, while the Minoff group is in the minority. However, since Nakoff's death, the church has been without the services of a priest, and the dispute on the fateful April Sunday centered about the letter from a priest in Bulgaria who was called to accept the pulpit of the Steelton church.²⁴²

The Bulgarian priest's letter highlighted difficulties in obtaining a visa due to "slandorous allegations" against him by some members of the Steelton congregation, which

had hindered his departure. The letter asked other members of Steelton to intercede with US and Bulgarian authorities so he could gain clearance to come to Steelton. The letter also referenced a previous letter written to Minoff, which triggered the dispute that day. George Patoff insisted that the previous letter be produced and the arguments began.²⁴³

Boris Atzeff provided further testimony about that day:

After Mioff and my brother had been shot, George Mioff and myself jumped on Minoff. In the scuffle, the gun was kicked out of the reach of any of us. Traiko Minoff, George Minoff's brother, ran over, picked up the pistol and demanded that George Mioff let George Minoff up. Meanwhile, I had gone over to help my brother. George Mioff then let George Minoff up off the floor. Traiko later gave the pistol to a Steelton policeman."²⁴⁴

Alex Kormushoff, former president of the Macedonian-American Orthodox Church, testified he was reading the letter from the prospective priest when the shots were fired. Alexander Spaseff testified that there were two factions, the "Minoff group" and "our side." Atzeff and Mioff were on "our side," which was Nakoff's faction. Spaseff told about how the Minoff brothers had been involved in a number of the disputes suffocating the church congregation. Minoff's group were MPO men and had been repeatedly defeated in its attempts to place members on the church governing board.²⁴⁵

The District Attorney, Carl Shelley (who had been Nakoff's attorney previously) said Minoff showed "a brutal disregard for human life." He insisted that it was a planned killing because Minoff took the gun with him to the meeting tucked in his trouser with the butt of it prominently protruding. Minoff claimed he fired only after he was attacked, and that he had a permit to carry the gun.²⁴⁶

On June 8, 1948, a jury of eight men and four women found Minoff guilty and recommended death on both counts. The trial lasted a week and the jury deliberated for just under three hours. Judge Sheely requested Traiko Minoff to translate the verdict in Macedonian to church members in the court room (Traiko was George Minoff's brother.) Minoff's wife was not present, but Alex, George's son, was there. He cried and shouted in Macedonian to the court, and then ran up to his dad, hugging him tightly. The hearing was then adjourned and police had to separate Alex from his father, whose arms were locked around him.²⁴⁷

Minoff was sentenced to death. Before his sentencing, he stated: "I am not guilty. That group of Communists on the other side made that trouble at the church meeting and then jumped on me." District Attorney Shelley, in response to Minoff's statement, said: "The matter of Communism does not enter the controversy in any matter whatsoever. I make this statement with 25 years of experience with the intimate problems of the church."²⁴⁸

Minoff was electrocuted on February 27, 1950²⁴⁹ after his clemency plea for commutation was rejected by the State Pardons Board. Minoff insisted that his murder was not premediated, and that he fired at random when he was hit on the head and had his glasses knocked off during an argument.²⁵⁰

This unfortunate ending to the divisions in the Macedonian community cast a dark shadow over the Macedonian community in Steelton. It was a community that had built a church and cultural center free of debt, and it was not only the center of the Macedonian community in Steelton, but a hallmark of the Steelton and Harrisburg communities. Bulgarian influence eventually divided the Macedonians; and the community that Nakoff helped to integrate into society, while upholding their culture, traditions and faith, splintered into pieces. That splintering was not just specific to Steelton; but Steelton's Macedonians had the longest history and then the deepest divides in the first half of the 20th century. However, this would not be Nakoff's legacy.

V

Beyond politics and community work, Nakoff was a religious and spiritual man. He was open to change and growth, but his faith guided him in everything he did. His devotion to his religious practice was evident in every sermon and every act.

For example, in the week leading up to Easter in 1916, Nakoff led services for one week straight with non-stop services, preaching for over eighteen hours each day. He opened the services on Monday, April 24 at 7:30 am and stopped services on Sunday morning, April 30. There were only small interruptions for rest and light eating.²⁵¹

Another religious holiday he took seriously was Orthodox Christmas, which is on January 7, and one of the most important holidays for the Macedonians. He reflected on much more than just the standard Christmas sermons. For the 1920 Christmas, for example, after Nakoff gave his usual Christmas service, he ended his sermon with praise for America:

In his talk the rectory praised President Wilson, and urged all of his hearers to pray for the long life of the American people. He said America is a peaceful country and spread its influence over the world by putting an end to the butchering in Europe.²⁵²

After his 1926 Christmas service, Nakoff held a sermon called “Christ, the Savior of the World.” Christmas carols were sung by children of the Annunciation Sunday school. “Features of the evening services [included] the exhibition of ‘Passion Play’, a motion picture dealing with the life of Christ, and the presentation of the ‘Birth of Christ’ by children of the Sunday school.”²⁵³

In 1927, Nakoff announced that the year’s January 7 Christmas service would potentially be the last observed by them because the Eastern Orthodox Church was considering converting to the Gregorian calendar, which would have Macedonians celebrate Christmas with most other Christians on December 25th.²⁵⁴ However, January 7, 1927, was not the last Orthodox Christmas celebration. In 1928, Nakoff held Christmas services according to the Julian calendar, and the children also presented religious entertainment at night.²⁵⁵

This is how most Christmases were for the Macedonians throughout Nakoff’s tenure: religious sermons followed by children’s plays and musicals, as well as gift giving. Sometimes, they mixed it up, though. For example, on Christmas in 1937, children went door-to-door caroling Christmas songs for their parishioners, even through a downpour of rain and sleet. Nakoff held services all day, and a Christmas party was held at night, with traditional Macedonian music and dancing, as well as gifts being distributed to the children.²⁵⁶ And on Christmas in 1942, church, prayers were “offered for victory and peace” for

American soldiers, and candy was handed out to children as a gift.²⁵⁷

It wasn't just religious holidays where Nakoff incorporated religion and prayer. Nakoff performed his first English sermon on March 20, 1921, at the Trinity Episcopal Church in Steelton.²⁵⁸ This timely service was perhaps symbolic because, at the time, there were negotiations "for the bringing about of inter-communion between the whole Anglican communion and the Eastern Orthodox Churches."²⁵⁹ On Sunday, October 17, 1937, the head of the American-Orthodox Church in America, Archbishop Nickolay of New York City, held services at the Steelton Macedonian American Orthodox Church with Nakoff assisting. Nickolay was also in charge of the Russian Cathedral in NYC. The Steelton Macedonians then held a reception for him afterwards. Nickolay used Old Church Slavonic for the services and English for the sermon. He also urged English to be adopted as the language of the church.²⁶⁰

Also, when World War II began, Nakoff began holding prayer services for Macedonians serving in US Army. The *Harrisburg Telegraph* publicized one of these events on January 11, 1941:

Nakoff will conduct special prayer service and preach a sermon tomorrow morning in the Macedonian-American Orthodox Church, Steelton, where Holy Eucharist service will be held for Boris Spasseff and Milan Koneff, two members of the

congregation who leave for a year's service in the army on Monday.²⁶¹

Aside from presiding over religious holidays and conducting regular sermons, Nakoff presided over virtually all of the baptisms, weddings and funerals in his congregation, as well as for others outside of his congregation. The following is just a brief sampling of some of the weddings and funerals that Nakoff officiated:

WEDDINGS

- Dimko Mircheff and Lelli Funk, June 25, 1916.²⁶²
- Sotir Stoicheff and Catherine Bores, May of 1918.²⁶³
- Alexander Spaseff and Anna Sivic, June 16, 1929.²⁶⁴
- Tony Koneff and Anna Kitaneff, September of 1937.²⁶⁵
- Keyro Atanasoff and Sena Nikoloff, October 25, 1939.²⁶⁶
- Boris Mioff and Elizabeth Szeles, June 1, 1941.²⁶⁷
- George Atanasoff and Olga Vaiea, August 20, 1942.²⁶⁸
- Peter Taleff and June Shuler, May 2, 1942.²⁶⁹
- Albert Dimond and Spacia Zorikoff, June 15, 1944.

FUNERALS

- George Ignia, April 21, 1916. Baldwin Cemetery.²⁷⁰
- Peter Jordanoff, drowned in the Conemaugh River in Johnstown on July 4, 1922 at the age 19. Baldwin Cemetery.²⁷¹

- John Dundoff, grocery store owner, November 8, 1924, age 55.²⁷²
- Spiro Pedia, of the Steelton Serbian Orthodox Church, died of a stroke in late January, 1931, age 50. Steelton Cemetery.²⁷³
- Marie Mircheff, died of prolonged illness on September 1, 1934, at age 14. Baldwin Cemetery.²⁷⁴
- Menka Kuleff, July 7, 1936, Baldwin Cemetery.²⁷⁵
- Stanko Stefanovich, October 2, 1936, age 58. Baldwin Cemetery.²⁷⁶
- Christ Yoneff, December 11, 1936, age 38. Baldwin Cemetery.²⁷⁷
- Peter Vasiloff, July 20, 1937, age 58. Baldwin Cemetery.²⁷⁸
- Dorne D. Kormushoff, October 26, 1937, age 70. Baldwin Cemetery.²⁷⁹
- Frances Petroff, March 23, 1941, age 40. Baldwin Cemetery.²⁸⁰
- Tony Spasoff, May 28, 1941, age 64. Baldwin Cemetery.²⁸¹
- Stojan Vujaklija, September 9, 1941. Oberlin Cemetery.²⁸²
- Vaska Ilioff, April 20, 1943, age 60. Baldwin Cemetery.²⁸³
- Blanche Kristoff, February 9, 1944, age 28. Baldwin Cemetery.²⁸⁴
- Jova Popivc, April 5, 1944, age 59. Baldwin Cemetery.²⁸⁵

Reverend David Nakoff was an inspiration to his congregation and to those who knew him. His faith shaped his principles and ideologies, which drove him to be a trustworthy and dedicated leader of many causes. His entire life in America was dedicated to bettering his community, whether it was helping children in need, advocating for labor rights, or providing spiritual guidance to his parishioners.

For the Macedonians, however, Nakoff was more than a leader: he was their idol. Nakoff took a stand against the Bulgarian government and church. He recognized and preached about the dangers of the Macedonian Political Organization's association with the Bulgarian government and against the growing fascist movement in Bulgaria. Nakoff did not give up when he was forced out of the church that he helped grow into a community and cultural center for Pennsylvania's Macedonians. Instead of retreating, he took his loyal flock and formed the first Macedonian Orthodox Church in America. Even though it was under the jurisdiction of the American Orthodox Church, he and his members were adamant that they were a Macedonian congregation.

Nakoff's name has escaped the memory of most Macedonian-Americans living today. However, his dedication to the Macedonian Cause and the building of the Macedonian community in America must be remembered and celebrated. Macedonian-Americans need

more idols to help guide them in building their character, preserving their culture, and serving their communities. Nakoff was a good man and a good citizen, and he wanted his followers to be the same.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ There is some conflicting information in the record. Some sources say he was ordained in Veles; other sources say he was ordained in Constantinople. Later, there was a court question about whether or not he was ordained in 1915. Steelton Church Will Mark Feast, To Rescue Cross, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 17 Jan 1935, Thu Page 1, 7; Conflicting Groups On Witness Stand In Church Dispute, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 13 Dec 1935, Fri Page 10
- ² Rev. David Nakoff Dies at Age of 67, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 09 Oct 1944, Mon Page 5
- ³ Memorial Service for Late Pastor, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 12 Oct 1945, Fri Page 24
- ⁴ Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 15 Nov 1909, Mon Page 7
- ⁵ Church Site Purchased, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 21 Sep 1909, Tue Page 2
- ⁶ New Greek Church, Harrisburg Daily Independent (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 14 Sep 1909, Tue Page 7
- ⁷ Committee Appointed, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 23 Sep 1909, Thu Page 7
- ⁸ Church Site Purchased, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 21 Sep 1909, Tue Page 2
- ⁹ Church Site Purchased, Harrisburg Daily Independent (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 21 Sep 1909, Tue Page 7
- ¹⁰ Purchased Church Site, Harrisburg Daily Independent (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 21 Oct 1909, Thu Page 7
- ¹¹ Harrisburg Daily Independent (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 25 Oct 1909, Mon Page 4
- ¹² Macedonian-Bulgarian Fund, Harrisburg Daily Independent (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 05 Oct 1909, Tue Page 7
- ¹³ Will Build Church, The Courier (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 07 Nov 1909, Sun Page 7
- ¹⁴ Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 15 Nov 1909, Mon Page 7
- ¹⁵ Harrisburg Daily Independent (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 13 Nov 1909, Sat Page 9
- ¹⁶ Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 15 Nov 1909, Mon Page 7
- ¹⁷ Macedonian-Bulgarian Fund, Harrisburg Daily Independent (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 05 Oct 1909, Tue Page 7; Church Fund Contributors, Harrisburg Daily Independent (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 29 Sep 1909, Wed Page 7; Greek Church Fund; Harrisburg Daily Independent (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 02 Oct 1909, Sat Page 7
- ¹⁸ Greek Christmas Celebration, Harrisburg Daily Independent (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 08 Jan 1910, Sat Page 5
- ¹⁹ Harrisburg Daily Independent (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 21 Dec 1910, Wed Page 8
- ²⁰ Priest Blesses Entrance of New Orthodox Church, Harrisburg Daily Independent (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 25 Apr 1910, Mon Page 7
- ²¹ Deed Sent To Turkey, The Standard (Lykens, Pennsylvania) 26 Aug 1910, Fri Page 1
- ²² Holiday in Honor of Two Noted Saints, Harrisburg Daily Independent (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 24 May 1911, Wed Page 5
- ²³ Foreigners to Observe Victory, Harrisburg Daily Independent (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 30 Jul 1912, Tue Page 7
- ²⁴ Observe Cross Day, Harrisburg Daily Independent (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 28 Sep 1912, Sat Page 7
- ²⁵ New Rector Now in Charge, Harrisburg Daily Independent (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 23 Oct 1914, Fri Page 9

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- ²⁶ Swim Icy Waters for Gilded Cross, Harrisburg Daily Independent (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 19 Jan 1915, Tue Page 7
- ²⁷ Bulgarian Embassy at Services in Steelton, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 12 Jul 1915, Mon Page 7
- ²⁸ Col. Shindel Entertained Rev. Dr. Shindel, Lebanon Daily News (Lebanon, Pennsylvania) 26 Sep 1918, Thu Page 5
- ²⁹ Evanhoff Guilty of Voluntary Manslaughter, Evening Report (Lebanon, Pennsylvania) 25 Sep 1918, Wed Page 1
- ³⁰ Col. Shindel Entertained Rev. Dr. Shindel, Lebanon Daily News (Lebanon, Pennsylvania) 26 Sep 1918, Thu Page 5
- ³¹ Church Plans to Install Movies, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 25 Jul 1921, Mon Page 4
- ³² To Build Parish House, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 24 Sep 1921, Sat Page 3
- ³³ Making Plans for New School, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 25 Oct 1921, Tue Page 6
- ³⁴ Church Dedicated Community Home, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 28 Feb 1927, Mon Page 13
- ³⁵ Making Plans for New School, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 25 Oct 1921, Tue Page 6
- ³⁶ 200 Attend Church Corner Stone Laying, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 06 Sep 1926, Mon Page 4
- ³⁷ Plans for Parish House, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 01 Mar 1922, Wed Page 10
- ³⁸ 200 Attend Church Corner Stone Laying, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 06 Sep 1926, Mon Page 4
- ³⁹ Ceremonies Mark Cornerstone Laying at Steelton Hall, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 06 Sep 1926, Mon Page 5
- ⁴⁰ Ceremonies Mark Cornerstone Laying at Steelton Hall, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 06 Sep 1926, Mon Page 5
- ⁴¹ Community House Work, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 25 Sep 1926, Sat Page 3
- ⁴² Dedication to Occur February 27, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 09 Feb 1927, Wed Page 3
- ⁴³ Community Home Plans Complete for Dedication, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 25 Feb 1927, Fri Page 4
- ⁴⁴ Macedonian-Bulgarian Hall to be Dedicated, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 26 Feb 1927, Sat Page 9
- ⁴⁵ Community Home Plans Complete for Dedication, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 25 Feb 1927, Fri Page 4
- ⁴⁶ Children's Day Sunday, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 25 Jun 1927, Sat Page 3
- ⁴⁷ Church Group that Attended Picnic at Shikellimy Camp, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 13 Sep 1929, Fri Page 2
- ⁴⁸ Bulgarian Girls Sing, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 29 Feb 1928, Wed Page 9
- ⁴⁹ Christmas Musical Given Last Night At Bishopscourt, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 23 Dec 1932, Fri Page 3
- ⁵⁰ St. Stephen's Vested Choir Joins With Macedonians in Christmas Carol Service, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 23 Dec 1932, Fri Page 16
- ⁵¹ Bulgarian Pastor Asks Naturalization, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 27 Oct 1922, Fri Page 4
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- ⁵² Church Calls Former Rector, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 01 Jul 1925, Wed Page 4
- ⁵³ Dundoff Funeral, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 10 Nov 1924, Mon Page 2
- ⁵⁴ Church Calls Former Rector, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 01 Jul 1925, Wed Page 4
- ⁵⁵ Bulgarian Head of Mission, Dies, Harrisburg Sunday Courier (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 13 Nov 1938, Sun Page 1
- ⁵⁶ Church Calls Former Rector, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 01 Jul 1925, Wed Page 4
- ⁵⁷ Plan Entertainment, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 18 May 1935, Sat Page 6
- ⁵⁸ Variety Program is Planned By Church, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 28 May 1935, Tue Page 9
- ⁵⁹ Anniversary to Be Observed by Steelton Church, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 23 Nov 1935, Sat Page 4
- ⁶⁰ Festival Group Plans Program, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 14 May 1936, Thu Page 16
- ⁶¹ Nation Festival Program Will Be Given at Forum, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 18 May 1937, Tue Page 9
- ⁶² Kira Schlechter, Remembering the 1936 Susquehanna River Flood, http://www.pennlive.com/midstate/index.ssf/2009/03/remembering_the_1936_susquehan.html. Last accessed February 26, 2018.
- ⁶³ Give Red Cross \$68, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 03 Feb 1937, Wed Page 24
- ⁶⁴ Elected Delegate to American Slav Congress, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 23 Apr 1942, Thu Page 27
- ⁶⁵ Church Gives Local Red Cross Unite \$100, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 24 Apr 1942, Fri Page 21
- ⁶⁶ Congregation Donates Clothing for Relief, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 09 Aug 1943, Mon Page 9
- ⁶⁷ Steelton Churches, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 15 Mar 1922, Wed Page 11
- ⁶⁸ Bulgarian Rector to Appear at Saint Andrews, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 17 Mar 1922, Fri Page 20
- ⁶⁹ Steelton Welcomes Typographical Union to Meeting Here, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 12 Nov 1928, Mon Page 11
- ⁷⁰ Kiwanis Club to Hold Dinner, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 17 Dec 1928, Mon Page 4
- ⁷¹ Kiwanis Club Installation, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 03 Jan 1929, Thu Page 7
- ⁷² 88 New Members in YMCA Drive, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 03 Dec 1930, Wed Page 15
- ⁷³ Religious Committee Plans Lecture Series, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 10 Apr 1937, Sat Page 3
- ⁷⁴ Welfare Campaign Is Larger than First Report Given in 1928, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 26 Apr 1929, Fri Page 4
- ⁷⁵ Committees Named On Beidleman Memorial, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 11 Jun 1929, Tue Page 4
- ⁷⁶ 20 Nations in Meeting Here, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 10 Apr 1929, Wed Page 7
- ⁷⁷ Over 100 Attend Goodwill Meeting, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 15 Apr 1929, Mon Page 4
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- ⁷⁸ 11 Teams to Sell Tickets, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 28 Jun 1929, Fri Page 10
- ⁷⁹ Harrisburg Happenings, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 22 Jul 1933, Sat Page 9
- ⁸⁰ Physician, 70, Celebrates by Playing Volleyball, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 13 Mar 1933, Mon Page 1
- ⁸¹ Two Volunteer to Rescue Cross from Susquehanna River Next Tuesday, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 16 Jan 1932, Sat Page 14
- ⁸² Bulgars to Seek Cross in River, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 14 Jan 1916, Fri Page 12
- ⁸³ Want Volunteers for Plunge Into Icy River, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 17 Jan 1916, Mon Page 1
- ⁸⁴ 200 Fall Into Susquehanna At Steelton When Ice Gives Way, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 19 Jan 1916, Wed Page 1,
- ⁸⁵ Arrangements Complete for River Celebration, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 18 Jan 1916, Tue Page 7
- ⁸⁶ Arrangements Complete for River Celebration, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 18 Jan 1916, Tue Page 7
- ⁸⁷ 200 Fall Into Susquehanna At Steelton When Ice Gives Way, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 19 Jan 1916, Wed Page 1, 7
- ⁸⁸ 200 Fall Into Susquehanna At Steelton When Ice Gives Way, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 19 Jan 1916, Wed Page 1, 7
- ⁸⁹ Dives into Icy River to Gain Cross, Harrisburg Daily Independent (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 19 Jan 1916, Wed Page 2, 11
- ⁹⁰ 200 Fall Into Susquehanna At Steelton When Ice Gives Way, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 19 Jan 1916, Wed Page 1, 7
- ⁹¹ 200 Fall Into Susquehanna At Steelton When Ice Gives Way, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 19 Jan 1916, Wed Page 1, 7
- ⁹² Dives into Icy River to Gain Cross, Harrisburg Daily Independent (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 19 Jan 1916, Wed Page 2, 11
- ⁹³ 200 Fall Into Susquehanna At Steelton When Ice Gives Way, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 19 Jan 1916, Wed Page 1, 7
- ⁹⁴ Dives into Icy River to Gain Cross, Harrisburg Daily Independent (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 19 Jan 1916, Wed Page 2, 11
- ⁹⁵ 200 Fall Into Susquehanna At Steelton When Ice Gives Way, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 19 Jan 1916, Wed Page 1, 7
- ⁹⁶ Bulgars Seek Cross In River, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 18 Jan 1917, Thu Page 9
- ⁹⁷ Dives Into Icy River for Cross, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 19 Jan 1917, Fri Page 8
- ⁹⁸ Bulgars to Seek Cross in River, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 18 Jan 1918, Fri Page 15
- ⁹⁹ Three Swim In Icy River To Recover Cross, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 19 Jan 1918, Sat Page 1
- ¹⁰⁰ Leap Into River Part of Service, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 07 Jan 1920, Wed Page 15
- ¹⁰¹ Bulgarians to Dive for Cross in Icy Waters, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 16 Jan 1920, Fri Page 11
- ¹⁰² Four Brave Ice to Rescue Cross from River, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 19 Jan 1920, Mon Page 1

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- ¹⁰³ Two Race in Ice-Clogged River to Recover Cross; Mercury Stands 4 Above, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 19 Jan 1921, Wed Page 1
- ¹⁰⁴ To Dynamite Ice for Religious Fest, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 18 Jan 1922, Wed Page 8
- ¹⁰⁵ To Dynamite Ice for Religious Fest, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 18 Jan 1922, Wed Page 8
- ¹⁰⁶ Saves Cross by Braving Frigid Water of River, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 19 Jan 1922, Thu Page 1, 20.
- ¹⁰⁷ Saves Cross by Braving Frigid Water of River, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 19 Jan 1922, Thu Page 1, 20.
- ¹⁰⁸ Only One Makes Plunge to Get Cross in River, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 19 Jan 1922, Thu Page 1, 2
- ¹⁰⁹ Saves Cross by Braving Frigid Water of River, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 19 Jan 1922, Thu Page 1, 20.
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- ¹²⁵ Plunges into Icy Water to Recover Cross of Church, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 19 Jan 1929, Sat Page 1
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- ¹⁸⁸ Testimony Halted in Church Dispute, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 02 Jul 1934, Mon Page 1
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- ²³⁷ Pastor's Estate Given to Family, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 14 Oct 1944, Sat Page 4
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- ²⁴⁸ Condemned Man Reveals What He Told Judge, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 23 Mar 1949, Wed Page 23
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- ²⁵⁴ Christmas to be Observed, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 06 Jan 1927, Thu Page 10
- ²⁵⁵ Start Yuletide Observance, The Evening News (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 07 Jan 1928, Sat Page 7
- ²⁵⁶ Bulgarians Carol in Rain Greeting Their Christmas, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 07 Jan 1937, Thu Page 1
- ²⁵⁷ Christmas Services Planned by Church, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 06 Jan 1942, Tue Page 16
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- ²⁶⁰ Archbishop Will Be Guest at Reception, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 16 Oct 1937, Sat Page 20
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- ²⁶² Will Wed in Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 21 Jun 1916, Wed Page 9
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- ²⁷⁴ Marie Mircheff, Harrisburg Telegraph (Harrisburg, Pennsylvania) 03 Sep 1934, Mon Page 5
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