# Introduction

From the beginning, Birmingham's strategic location near the mouth of the Maumee River made it naturally attractive to settlers in northwest Ohio. Even before the first Europeans arrived, Native American tribes were drawn to the area by its easy access to Lake Erie, its abundant fresh fish, and its location under a major migratory bird route. What would become the Birmingham neighborhood was settled early on by French, German, and Irish farmers impressed with the area's rich loamy soil. Streets and park names such as Collins, Valentine, and Paine commemorate these early farming settlers.

Birmingham's economic shift from agriculture to industry happened suddenly, beginning with the establishment of a foundry by the National Malleable Castings Company. In 1890, the company transferred approximately two hundred Hungarian workers from its home plant in Cleveland to its new East Toledo site on Front Street. Their



arrival is documented in the Sacred Heart Catholic Church registers, where many of the first Hungarian settlers recorded their baptisms, marriages, and deaths until St. Stephen's Church was built in 1899. This dating is also confirmed in a 1941 profile of Hungarian-American communities in the United States by the Cleveland Hungarian daily newspaper *Szabadság (Freedom)*. Birmingham quickly became a working-class Hungarian enclave.

Local records show that most of the populace had emigrated from the so-called Palóc counties of North-Central Hungary: Heves, Abauj, and Gömör (now in Slovakia). Most, though far from all, were Roman Catholic. Although assigned to nearby Sacred Heart Church, the newly arrived Cleveland Hungarians were visited regularly by a Hungarian priest from Cleveland. In 1898, their own parish was established, the Church of St. Stephen, King of Hungary. Its registry listed about one hundred families in the following year.

Birmingham's name, like that of the Iron Town

neighborhood just to its north, was meant to invoke a thriving iron and steel manufacturing center. And by the time of World War I, it did resemble its English namesake, as National Malleable had been joined by United States Malleable, Maumee Malleable Castings, two coal yards, a cement-block manufactory, and the Rail Light Company (later Toledo Edison). The population of East Toledo was growing rapidly, too, going from 17,935 in the 1900 census to 39,836 in 1920. With this increase came civic amenities such as sidewalks, paved streets, grocery and dry good stores, banks, bakeries, and saloons. Often, the owners of these establishments lived above the store.

The ethnicity of East Toledo and Birmingham in particular continued as the total population increased. The number of Hungarian births in East Toledo grew from 647 in 1900 to 3,041 in 1920. The main ethnic group in Birmingham remained Hungarian, but others were present as well. Immigrant Slovaks, Czechs, Germans, Poles, Bulgarians, and Italians all appear in the World War I-era



census records.

Like the Hungarians, other immigrants lived in modest homes built by real-estate speculators. What preservationists would later call "worker cottages" were small one-story houses without basements or indoor plumbing. The backyards were small and front lawns smaller. Some sites had smokehouses, and most residents kept chickens in fenced-in areas. In time, the privies were torn down and indoor sanitary facilities added.

At first, most homes had no front porches but that changed quickly and front-porch socializing became an important element of Birmingham life. Gardening occurred in a green-belt commons area along the railroad tracks marking the eastern and northern boundaries. Many Birmingham houses also became sources of revenue as families took in boarders, usually single male workers who paid rent to live with established families until they were able to start households of their own.

Until World War I, the major challenges facing the

first wave of immigrants were adjusting to their new work, neighborhood, and language. Here the role of the religious institutions was crucial. Some early organizational efforts came from religious societies, which would eventually become the basis for the neighborhood churches.

The first important society was the King Matthias Sick and Benevolent Society (Mátyás Király Egylet), which provided the equivalent of social security and disability insurance for members through dues and fund-raising. The association split when Catholic members established their own Saint Stephen (Szent István) Roman Catholic Society.

This move was followed by the formation of the Saint Michael's Greek Catholic Sick and Benefit Society and the John Calvin Society for Hungarian Reformed Protestants. In terms of community support and fund raising, the Society of Reformed Women and the Saint Elizabeth Roman and Greek Catholic Women's Society were equally important. These groups were the pre-World War I foundation on which the neighborhood's three churches—Roman



Catholic, Byzantine Catholic, and Hungarian Reform—were built.

Birmingham's own neighborhood school came early in its history. The first public-record mention is in 1894, in the annual report of the Toledo Public Schools: "Near the Craig Shipyard on the east side of the river in a settlement known as Birmingham, a four room brick building was erected which is now wholly occupied, furnishing ample school facilities for the people of this neighborhood."

Miss Lillian Patterson is listed as the school's principal in 1899, at a salary of $750 a year. By 1916, the Birmingham School was sixteen rooms in size. A gymnasium and classrooms were added in 1926. In 1962, the original building was torn down and replaced by the current structure on Paine Avenue. Throughout this period, the school was a social and educational center, used for public gatherings and adult night classes in reading and writing.

The pre-WWI era was also the heyday of Birmingham's military marching bands, the first of which was

assembled in 1903. John Lengyel and later Julius Bertok were the organizers of these musical ensembles, which served social and ethnic purposes as well as patriotic and musical ones. The most impressive was the Rákóczy Band, named after Prince Francis Rákóczy II, who led the anti-Hapsburg rebellion of 1703-1712. The band, dressed in genuine Hungarian military uniforms, performed in Courthouse Park in Toledo and in Cleveland as part of the dedication of the Louis Kossuth Monument.

Social forces outside of Birmingham started to gain influence during this period. The Americanization Movement, a nativist response to the mass European immigration to Northern industrial cities, was exerting subtle—and sometimes not so subtle—pressure on ethnic communities around the country to conform to an "Anglo" model. Israel Zangwill's 1908 hit play, *The Melting Pot*, notwithstanding, the Americanization Movement urged immigrants to forsake their ethnic identity and abandon old-country loyalties. In Birmingham major pressure came from the secular



Birmingham School and a citizenship drive that took on a particularly aggressive tone during World War I.

These pressures can be seen in the speech Superintendent William B. Guitteau gave in 1916 to mark the opening of the enlarged sixteen-room brick building of the Birmingham School. After comparing the school opening to the launching of a great ship at the Toledo shipyard, Guitteau noted that several men had taken out naturalization papers and several more had enlisted in the Army or Navy, "thereby proving their loyalty to the country of their adoption."

He went on to say that "each year brings to us thousands and hundreds of thousands of Germans and Irishmen and Russians and Italians and Hungarians. And yet we have no German-Americans, no Irish-Americans, no Hungarian-Americans. We are all Americans, whether born here or abroad."

For the first generation of immigrants in Birmingham and around the country, this was the constant

message—Americanize! Americanization meant Anglo-conformity. It wasn't until the rise of multi-cultural identity in the 1960s that this message was questioned and a more pluralistic idea of society emerged, one that saw America metaphorically more like a tossed salad than a melting pot.

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The United States' entry into World War I provided an especially trying test of Birmingham's loyalties. As with German-Americans, this was also a difficult time for Hungarian-Americans. Their old homelands were now at war with their new country, forcing them to prove their American patriotism and loyalty. Acquiring citizenship and purchasing Liberty Bonds were two of the easiest ways to do this. A neighborhood businessman named János (John) Strick, for instance, was named the "first citizen of Toledo" for purchasing $20,000 worth of Liberty Bonds during the war.

Commitments to the new homeland were reinforced by the post-war dismemberment of the historic political



units of East-Central Europe. The Austro-Hungarian empire vanished from the map, and citizens of northeastern Hungary found themselves living in the southeastern region of the newly created Czechoslovakia. Many in Birmingham no longer had a homeland to return to. Many residents were convinced that their future had been decided by the war. Like it or not, they were now destined to be Americans.

The period between the world wars was thus one of neighborhood consolidation and psychological adjustment to life in America. Changes in U.S. immigration laws that ended large-scale immigration combined with post-war realities to discourage any thought of returning to Hungary. A generation was coming into its own that had learned the assimilation lesson and had grown up speaking primarily English.

Birmingham's secular organizations and its three established churches encouraged neighborhood residents to secure American citizenship, become fluent in English,

and get involved in American society and politics. Second-generation Birmingham residents broke into the American mainstream through the professions, business, and politics. The 1920s and 1930s saw the rise of such Hungarian-American-owned businesses as Kinsey's (Kigyossy's) Funeral Home, the Weizer furniture store, and Tony Packo's restaurant.

Birmingham did not escape the effects of the Great Depression, but the neighborhood's cohesion, the support of its churches and social organizations, and the overall spirit of kinship and solidarity helped most of the residents through the hard times. People took care of each other and the community institutions supported their efforts, including those where coal was "liberated" from trains coming through Birmingham with the tacit blessing of the priests.

Two prime movers in sustaining Hungarian consciousness during this period were Monsignor Elmér Eördögh and Dr. Géza Farkas. Elmér Géza Eördögh was born in Kassa, Hungary (now Kosice, Slovakia) on July 4,



1875, into a family tracing its roots to 1232 when King Andrew II of the House of Árpád ennobled them. Eördögh had a university education, including seminary training at Kalocsa, and was ordained a priest in 1897 at the age of 22.

Initially he worked in a Slovak and German parish in Hungary. He came to the United States in 1911 and, after a stay in Throop, Pennsylvania, he arrived in Toledo in 1913 and was installed as St. Stephen's pastor. From the beginning, Father Eördögh put his heart and soul into his assignment. Though plans for a large new church building had been made before his arrival, he took charge as the actual construction and fund-raising began. Until his death, Father Eördögh provided the church's goals and the strategies to achieve them. Almost all of the present structure was built under his supervision.

After World War I, Father Eördögh's family fell victim to Hungary's dismemberment when his brother and sister were separated by the new international borders. Since he himself associated home with upper Hungary,

now part of Czechoslovakia, his commitment to staying in Toledo was reinforced. In spite of his strong links to an aristocratic past in Hungary, henceforth Father Eördögh would be a Hungarian-American priest.

His mission became more inextricably intertwined with the fate of the working people of Birmingham. He was still an Old-World, upper-class man in his personal habits, his ability to "wine and dine" guests, and in the selection of some of his official visitors, including such luminaries as Countess Bethlen, Otto von Hapsburg, and Joseph Cardinal Mindszenty.

Father Eördögh saw the parish as his primary concern, but even here his mode of operating was still old school. He was a hard taskmaster and a strict disciplinarian, establishing a nine p.m. curfew for the parish children. He managed to keep the youngsters, at least until they were sixteen, out of the local saloons. The force of his personality alone was enough to keep most of his congregation within the behavioral limits he personally defined.



Recognition came from the Toledo city fathers, prominent citizens of Birmingham, the Church hierarchy, and even officials in his former homeland. He became Monsignor Eördögh in 1929, and received Hungary's second highest award, the Hungarian Order of Merit, for his work on behalf of Hungarian-American immigrants. In 1938, he became chairman of the U.S. Hungarian contingent at the International Eucharistic Congress; in 1939, he was appointed the U.S. representative to the St. Ladislaus (László) Society of Hungary. Msgr. Eördögh offered his Golden Jubilee Mass on Nov. 16, 1947. But ill health began to take its toll, and during the last eight years of his life, assistant pastors took over most of his responsibilities.

The other seminal figure in this period was Dr. Géza Farkas, editor and publisher of the Hungarian-American newspaper *Toledo*, started in 1929. A first-generation immigrant who received his formal education in Hungary, Farkas shared the newspaper editing work with his wife, Rózsa, until her death in 1948. After that he worked alone,

often setting his own type to bring *Toledo* to its readers.

Born in 1878 to upper middle-class parents in the western Hungarian town of Egerszeg in Zala County, Farkas initially considered the priesthood, but soon turned to legal studies and received a law degree in 1899 from Pázmány Péter University in Budapest. The law lost its appeal, however, and he began to work for newspapers.

Farkas visited the United States in 1904. He'd planned a brief stay, but settled in Cleveland and within a short time, became the city editor of its *Magyar Napilap (The Daily Hungarian)*. In 1908 he moved to Toledo where he worked for the Imperial Austro-Hungarian Consulate and started a steamship ticket and foreign exchange agency, becoming a major travel agent in Birmingham. He quickly entered national politics, too, serving as the Hungarian-American manager of William Howard Taft's 1908 presidential campaign. In 1911, Farkas became an American citizen.

Between 1908 and 1929, Farkas advised the Birmingham community on legal, personal, and even family matters. He was an active and public-spirited citizen who helped his people organize churches, fraternal societies, and benefits for the sick and poor. He was also a respected Birmingham spokesman and an important link between the Hungarian community and city authorities.



Farkas's many-sided but practical personality was mirrored in the pages of *Toledo*. It was not a sophisticated paper but a simple weekly concerned with providing working people with useful information. Beginning publication at the start of the Great Depression, *Toledo* remained the sole voice of the Hungarian-American community until the end of 1971. Forty years of history are reflected in its pages, including the perspectives of the editor and the reactions of his readers to World War II, the Soviet occupation and communization of Hungary, the Korean conflict, and the 1956 Hungarian Revolution. *Toledo* also covered events in the civic life of the city and state, interweaving them with the day-to-day concerns of Birmingham's churches, clubs,

businesses, and cultural institutions.

Even though cultural assimilation continued, Hungarian customs, festivals, and food practices also thrived in Birmingham during these decades. It was not contradictory to be a fiercely patriotic American while maintaining traditions from the old country. The customs were not practiced in any conscious effort to preserve the Hungarian heritage. They were simply the way one lived life.

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Birmingham greeted summer with the Corpus Christi procession. Young girls in white dresses and boys in their best clothes marched down the streets to pray at highly decorated outdoor altars set up in front of homes. Flowers were scattered on the streets and tree trunks were painted white to make the neighborhood look cleaner.

Autumn meant the Harvest Dance, to celebrate the crops taken from backyard and vacant-lot gardens. Children dressed in traditional costumes and marched behind a



bandwagon (later a truck) to inform everyone that Harvest Dance was that night. At the dance hall, grapes were strung from a temporary arbor, and the adults danced the Csárdás. They attempted to steal the grapes as they danced, while the children were responsible for arresting the culprits. Everyone was caught and brought before the "judge," who levied a fine. The proceeds always went to a worthy neighborhood cause.

Christmas was not only the celebration of Christ's birth, and the occasion for bringing out the best Hungarian food, sweets, and delicacies, but also the time the Betlehemes folk play was enacted on the streets, in the bars and in neighborhood homes, and finally at midnight Mass on Christmas Eve. The players would collect donations of food, drink, and money from their audiences. [A complete text of the play begins on page 226.]

The feast of St. Patrick was also a major celebration in Birmingham. While many Toledoans flocked to the local bars to celebrate Ireland's patron saint, March 17 found the

people of St. Stephen's participating in a solemn ceremony honoring the Virgin Mary and celebrating the Hungarians' Irish Madonna, whose feast coincidentally falls close to Hungarian Independence Day, March 15.

An interesting and little-known story lies behind this celebration. During the English Civil War, 1640-1660, the British persecution of Catholics in Ireland forced many Irish clergymen to escape to mainland Europe. A man named Bishop Lynch was given sanctuary by the Bishop of Györ in Hungary and was made an auxiliary bishop of that diocese. After Bishop Lynch's death, it was reported that a painting he had given his benefactors was seen to sweat blood for three hours. Toledo's bishop gave a copy of the painting to St. Stephen's Church, which led to the adoption of Ireland's patron saint in a Hungarian parish.

Easter was a tradition-rich time in Birmingham as well. On Palm Sunday, parishioners at St. Stephen's brought pussy willows to church to be blessed as they had done in Hungary where palms were unavailable. On the



Saturday before Easter, baskets of Easter food wrapped in native embroidery were brought to the church to be blessed. Easter eggs were decorated in the traditional folk manner. Easter was a time of jubilation, when the fasting and sacrifices of Lent were over.

The climax of the season was Easter Sunday Mass, but the folk customs continued into the next week. Easter Monday was dousing day, a tradition that originated in the villages of Hungary. Originally, the young men would throw buckets of water on the young women or pick them up and drop them in horse-watering troughs. In Birmingham, however, the ritual became more stylized and more dignified. Young men would ask to sprinkle the young lady of the house, sometimes with a bottle of perfume and sometimes with a homemade concoction. In some cases, they would enter the bedroom and sprinkle the girl before she awoke.

But the most common setting, especially among family members, was the breakfast table while outsiders,

including potential or actual boyfriends, gathered at the front door. Often the sprinklers were given coins or Easter eggs. Dousing became an excuse for the younger boys to throw water balloons at the girls. Tuesday was the girls' turn to douse. It is said that even the U.S. Mail carriers stayed away from Birmingham on Easter Tuesday.

As was true in most European and American ethnic communities, social rites of passage, like the seasonal events, were centered around the church. Births were marked with baptisms; young adulthood was recognized by Confirmation and the biggest celebrations surrounded weddings. Divorce was extremely rare. Marriage was for keeps and for bearing children.

Once a marriage was announced, Birmingham residents watched for male members of the wedding party to walk the neighborhood with a ceremonial cane tied with ribbons proclaiming the event. Some wedding celebrations lasted for days. Gypsy orchestras played as beer and wine flowed freely. Father Eördögh, in fact, confined weddings to



the early days of the week so St. Stephen's parishioners would not still be suffering from too much celebrating by the time of Sunday Mass.

The bells of St. Stephen were rung when a member of the congregation died, one sequence for a man and another for a woman. At the vigil, men stayed in the deceased's home guarding the body in tribute to their lost friend. During the night they would talk of their loss while playing cards, telling stories, and drinking. After the funeral service, especially if the person had been important or affluent, a band would lead the procession to the cemetery.

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World War II brought profound changes to Birmingham. Some of these were part of the natural process during which the first American-born generation breaks away from the ways of their parents. Their children, reconciled to the past but fully Americanized, moved more smoothly into the mainstream society. The number of Birmingham residents becoming citizens in 1941 doubled

from the previous year. The numbers remained high throughout World War II.

While the old Hungarian traditions did not die out, a marked community reaction against old-country, ethnic consciousness set in. Hungary was once again on the side of the enemy while the general American patriotism was surging. This attitude is apparent in a series of articles in *Toledo*, sponsored by the Common Council for American Unity and designed to give guidelines on raising children not hindered by local, parochial attitudes, but who would view issues globally. The articles warned against being "hamstrung by ethnic or neighborhood loyalties."

The socio-economic upheaval of the war years also changed Birmingham. Young women, housewives, and mothers left the home for the first time to staff the war industries while their boyfriends and husbands were drafted and shipped to far-off locales. These experiences re-oriented both groups, connecting them to different ethnic peer groups in the military and in the work place. The family and the local community were no longer their only social influences, and a wider view of the world inevitably resulted.



Broadened horizons and attitudinal changes were accelerated by the general technological transformation of American life in the post-war period. Like most Americans, Birmingham residents were moving up and out, with the automobile and television showing the way. People could drive out of the neighborhood in their cars and shop elsewhere, or even move to other parts of the city. This newfound mobility facilitated a migration to the suburbs, particularly to the nearby suburbs of Oregon and Rossford. The June 15, 1945, headline of *Toledo* proclaimed the departure of one of Birmingham's foremost citizens: "Strick János kiköltözik a magyar negyedünkböl"..."John Strick is moving out of our Hungarian neighborhood."

Television's effect was more subtle. Its premiere in the neighborhood was a communal event. *Toledo's* Aug. 13, 1948, headline read "Television a Monoky-Arvai üzletben,"

the Monoky-Arvai bar now boasts a television. At this point, however, TV was still a novelty. Although television switched public discourse from Hungarian to English, it still brought people in the neighborhood together. Only as television sets appeared in individual homes did its full force begin to be felt. Birmingham's sense of community started to erode. Television replaced grandmothers as baby-sitters, lessening the Hungarian-language link between the generations. Television also provided free entertainment at home, weakening the importance of group activities in the community.

The cumulative result of the war, mobility, and the rise of a television culture was a decline in Hungarian consciousness in Birmingham between 1945 and 1965. This is apparent in the increasing number of English language articles appearing in *Toledo*, the extensive coverage given to campaigns such as Loyalty Day and "I am an American" celebrations, and the Anglicization of many first and last names. Kigyossy's Funeral Home became Kinsey's. Tony



Paczko's Restaurant dropped the z, becoming Tony Packo's. *Toledo* dropped advertisements for the summer Hungarian language school at St. Stephen's Church. In 1948, the only summer notice was for a New York school offering training in "democratic citizenship."

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The gradual fading of ethnic consciousness in Birmingham came to a sudden end in 1956 when the Hungarians openly rebelled against Soviet occupation and repression. Hungarian-Americans, who twice in the twentieth century had been characterized as relatives of the enemy, overnight became relatives of the fearless freedom fighters who had defied the Communists and fought for democracy against overwhelming odds.

In Birmingham, self-effacement was replaced by obvious pride. The community pulled together to support the refugees who escaped and made their way to Toledo after the Soviet Union crushed their revolution. The year had a distinct revitalizing effect on Birmingham, even

though relatively few Hungarian 56ers settled there.

Community cooperation grew as the newcomers were greeted and efforts were made to settle them in homes and jobs. About three hundred individuals came to Toledo; approximately one-fourth settled in Birmingham. The infusion provided new leaders for the community since a majority of the refugees were well-educated engineers, business people, and professionals.

This transfusion came at an important moment in the neighborhood's history as its economic base was beginning to fail. One after another, the major riverfront industries had closed down. Many of Birmingham's residents were already at retirement age; others were laid off involuntarily as Unitcast, Craig Shipyard, and other major employers closed their doors.

Younger residents were often forced to leave Birmingham for jobs elsewhere. The process was exacerbated by discriminatory "redlining" policies of real estate agencies and banks that were unconcerned about sacrificing



Birmingham for the newly developing suburbs.

Although the new leadership and ethnic pride the 56ers brought with them had significant impact, it was not enough to reverse the overall trend of Birmingham's decline. As the 1960s began, the eventual dissolution of Birmingham as a vital neighborhood became increasingly apparent as the younger generation continued to drift toward the suburbs. In 1962, the Hungarian Reformed Church became the Calvin United Church of Christ. A new era had arrived, the minister said, in which "nationalistic labels were becoming less applicable."

It is possible that, despite the influx of 56ers, Birmingham's slow disappearance might have run its sad course, as the German ethnic enclave in Toledo known as Link's Hill had decades earlier. But in 1974, two events occurred that brought Birmingham back from the brink, both as an ethnic community and as a political force in the city of Toledo.

The first was the proposed closing of the Birming-

ham branch of the Toledo-Lucas County Library. Residents organized a group called Save Our Library out of the churches and the 20th Ward Democratic Party Club, and, after several reversals, convinced the library board to keep the neighborhood branch open.

The other significant event was an attempt by city and county planners to widen Consaul Street and build an overpass that would have split Birmingham into two parts. St. Stephen's Father Martin Hernady, Nancy Packo, Oscar Kinsey, and other Birmingham civic leaders organized to respond. They mobilized a protest and blocked traffic in front of St. Stephen's along Consaul Street, the main thoroughfare to the Maumee River. Teachers and their students together streamed out of St. Stephen's School, stopping cars and trucks.

These demonstrations, along with sympathetic coverage in *The Blade*, Toledo's major daily newspaper, and some effective lobbying, enabled Birmingham to "beat city hall." In April, Father Hernady, spokesman for the newly



formed Birmingham Neighborhood Coalition, addressed Toledo City Council and convinced the members to postpone the Consaul project for ninety days for further study. That summer the issue was voted down unanimously in Council, and *The Blade* trumpeted "Residents Triumphant in Birmingham Area." The bells of all three of Birmingham's churches were rung simultaneously for the first time since the end of World War II.

These two civic successes—the saving of the library and the killing of the overpass—revived Birmingham's sense of community. Furthermore, the energy and political power unleashed by the events had numerous ripple effects, launching the political careers of former Toledo City Council President Peter Ujvagi and two-term County Commissioner Francis Szollosi as well as the formation of the Birmingham Neighborhood Coalition and the East Toledo Community Organization (ETCO).

The Birmingham Ethnic Festival, originally a victory celebration, has become an annual event. Held continually

since 1974 on the third Sunday in August, close to St. Stephen's Day, the festival is one of Toledo's best summer ethnic festivals, with proceeds going to Birmingham's self-defense fund.

The 1976 presidential campaign brought Democratic candidate Jimmy Carter to Birmingham, a traditional Democratic Party stronghold, where he and Walter Mondale autographed Tony Packo's Hungarian hot dog buns, one of the restaurant's traditions. Packo's had become part of the national consciousness through frequent mentions by Max Klinger, a character on the popular television show, *M*A*S*H*, who was played by Toledo native Jamie Farr.

In 1976, with a grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, the Birmingham Neighborhood Coalition produced a professional documentary film of the Abauj Betlehemes Christmas folk play. The neighborhood has also been the subject of a video documentary, "Urban Turf and Ethnic Soul," made in 1985 with support from the Ohio Humanities Council. In 1983, the Birmingham Cultural



Center was established by University of Toledo Professor John Ahern, through its Urban Affairs Center. The center has spearheaded numerous projects to collect and preserve the history and culture of the neighborhood, including this book.

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The main effect of Birmingham's 1970s revitalization was the rekindling of Birmingham as a cohesive unit. Birmingham was seen not as a random sprawl of streets and houses with a curious past, but a community capable of thinking in terms of "self-defense."

Today, if you drive into Birmingham from the south along Front Street, you cross an overpass and cloverleaf shunting traffic on and off I-280, Toledo's east-west connecting point to Cleveland, Detroit, and Chicago. A large green highway marker hanging over the road, announces, "Welcome to the Birmingham Ethnic Neighborhood."

The sign marks the physical beginning of Birmingham, but the actual community remains larger

than the neighborhood itself. Former residents return from the suburbs or across the Maumee River on a regular basis—to buy bread at the Golden Oven bakery, sausage at Takacs' Market or from Calvin United's traditional Hungarian-style sausage made every autumn, winter, and spring, to eat at St. Stephen's chicken paprikash dinners, and to attend church.

In a documentary videotape interview, Mr. Ujvagi, himself a 1956 refugee, noted that there is a large contingent throughout Toledo with an affinity for Birmingham.

"Many people have been surprised," he said, "that we have been able to get people who live far, far away—union leaders, teachers, corporate leaders—to come to the rescue of Birmingham. This is because they still come back, to baptize their children, to bury their dead. They may not live in Birmingham anymore, but there is a life-blood in this community that serves not just the people who physically live in it, but involves people throughout the city."

Perhaps it was the arrival of the 56ers, or the library



and overpass crises of 1974, or both—but whatever the reasons, Birmingham has come to be the most visible and politically powerful ethnic community in Toledo. Writing in his 1975 master's thesis, University of Toledo history student John Hrivnyak commented that "if the Birmingham community suffered from any serious problem in its history, it [was] a lack of political initiative. Birmingham has never had any of its sons or daughters elected to City Council." Ironically, this was written as Birmingham was about to elect both a councilman and a county commissioner. Few Toledoans in 2002 would accuse Birmingham of lacking political clout.

By the time a neighborhood puts up a sign to announce its ethnicity or boasts a large-attendance annual ethnic festival, it may well be that its real period as an ethnic community is over. Tony Packo's pickles, sauces, and sausages are now sold from kiosks in the suburban malls, suitable for mailing around the country. And a book like this one is an attempt to capture the special essence of a

time and place that no longer exists.

But visitors still come away agreeing with the residents, the scholars, and the politicians, that Birmingham remains an extraordinary American neighborhood. The European immigrant experience in America, of which the Birmingham story is a core example, is receding into memory. Nostalgia grips those who lived through it, and to an extent, all Americans who have lived contemporaneously with it.

Still nostalgia alone is not enough to keep the immigrant experience from fading. Those with shared experiences and memories of Birmingham's glory days must be encouraged to value and preserve their experiences in every way they can. And scholars who care about the American experience must study and document such places. The results of such studies and preservation form the following sections of *Hungarian American Toledo*.