Immigrants come seeking jobs

By Fred McGugan

They may have been poor, but they weren’t penniless — and they weren’t the owners of anybody’s burning shoe.

They were Poles and Germans and Italians and Hungarians and Slovaks for whom a shrinking agricultural economy no longer held a place; and they were ambitious. They had heard about the jobs in the booming factories of Cleveland, where their relatives had promised to help get started.

According to Cleveland’s Immigration Bureau, 1,125 immigrants arrived in 1902, more than twice as many as in any other year, though the record was to be broken especially for the rest of the decade. Nineteen thousand, the rule of thumb for a record which was to stand until the 1930s.

And the 19,738 who arrived in Cleveland in 1903 were only the ones police counted as they got off the train. They didn’t include any English or Scotch, and only two Welsh, the police apparently ignored those who spoke English.

During the decade, Cleveland’s population grew by 49,900, and that of Cuyahoga County by 128,000. The Immigration Bureau counted more than 100,000 immigrants. That’s a million immigrants in the decade, Grabowski says, but he didn’t include the 1,125 from Slovakia.

One of the greatest immigration stories is of the queen of immigrants, Hanna.J.R., who arrived in the United States in 1901. She was 55 years old when she arrived in Cleveland.

J.R., whose real name was Johanna Raczowska, was one of the greatest American women of the 20th century, but she is little known today.

She was a political activist, a social reformer, a women’s rights advocate, and a leader in the labor movement. She was also a poet, a writer, and a speaker.

J.R. was born in Poland in 1846. She moved to America in 1880 and became a citizen in 1886. She worked as a nurse and a teacher, and later became a leader in the women’s suffrage movement.

In 1913, she founded the Women’s Trade Union League, which became the International Ladies’ Garment Workers’ Union. She also worked to improve living and working conditions for women and children in the garment industry.

J.R. died in 1932, but her legacy lives on. Her work helped to make the labor movement more inclusive of women, and her dedication to fighting for workers’ rights has inspired generations of activists.

Looking at a picture of J.R. today, it’s hard to imagine her as a political leader. But her work had a profound impact on the lives of women around the world.

Her greatest legacy may be her commitment to social justice and her belief in the power of everyday people to make a difference.

J.R.’s life and work remain an inspiration to those who continue to fight for a more just and equitable society.

An elderly couple poses for a photographer, possibly in the Reimert Market in Cleveland. While some immigrant communities, including Jews and Germans, created facilities to care for the elderly, many older people had to fend for themselves as children and other family members moved away.