

# **Czech Contributions to the Progress of Nebraska**

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Venovano ceskym pionyrum Nebrasky, hrdinnym budovatelum americkeho Zapadu, kteri tak podstatne prispeli politickemu, kulturnimu, nabozenskemu, hosopodarskemu, zemedelskemu a socialnimu pokroku tohoto statu

Dedicated to the first Czech pioneers who contributed so much to the political, cultural, religious, economical, agricultural and social progress of this state

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## THE GREAT PRAIRIE

**By Vladimir Kucera**

*The golden disk of the setting sun slowly descends toward the horizon of this boundless expanse, and changes it into thousands of strange, ever changing pictures which cannot be comprehended by the eye nor described by the pen. The Great Prairie burns in the blood-red luster of sunset, which with full intensity, illuminates this unique theatre of nature. Here the wildness of arid desert blends with the smoother view of full green land mixed with raw, sandy stretches and scattered islands of trees tormented by the hot rays of the summer sun and lashed by the blizzards of severe winters.*

*This country is open to the view. Surrounded by a level or slightly undulated plateau, it is a hopelessly infinite panorama of flatness on which are etched shining paths of streams framed by bushes and trees until finally the sight merges with a far away haze suggestive of the ramparts of mountain ranges.*

*The most unforgettable moment on the prairie is the sunset. The rich variety of colors, thoughts and feelings creates memories of daybreak and nightfall on the prairie which will live forever in the mind.*

*Not only is one impressed by the virgin beauty of exquisite nature at sunset, but one also feels the magnetism of this country that compels one to love it forever. There is the sound of its dramatic past, for on the Great Prairie echo the heroism of western battles, courage and gallantry, determination and sacrifice, blood and tears—that inalienable heritage of pioneers. Here on this great prairie, once the free land of the red men, the heroic hearts of the settlers met with those of not less courage and honesty who were strongly determined to*

*defend their hunting grounds, their homes, their free land and the vast herds of buffaloes.*

*The sun is already hidden behind the horizon. The night now takes possession of the prairie. The time comes to remember and think. This is a moment of reverie, a moment to sink deep into dreams and to listen to the mysterious voice of the past and present. This is a moment to catch the call of distance which ends somewhere in the massive ranges of mountains, to understand the Indian soul, the objectives of the explorers, the soldiers, the hunters, the pioneers and the missionaries, and thus to understand the warlike past of the plains. And perhaps in the last ghostlike gleam of sunset you will see the running herds of buffaloes; perhaps in the quiet moment which inaugurates the night, you will see again a chain of prairie schooners on the way to their new homes that will be free and better; and perhaps the shriek of the night beast of prey will strike your ears, a symbol of the departing day.*

*And in this moment you will realize that the prairie is not (illegible words because of punched out paper on page 4) toward those who can lose themselves in its mysterious past, written forever in blood and tears. It is not niggardly toward those who can fuse with it or reveal their inner souls or toward those who appreciate the heroism of the pioneers' courage. The prairie is then generous the more so to a poet or painter and especially to those who revel in its dreams. She will serve them and reveal the fullness of her mysterious beauty.*

*The wilderness has been the setting for a dramatic epoch since its beginning, when the primitive hunter invaded this continent and looked down from the mountains of the West and with astonishment saw a wide open panorama like the open hands of a Titan.*

*For centuries the master of the Great Prairie was the Indian. He was the exclusive owner of the thousands of buffalo herds so essential to his way of life.*

*For centuries these children of the prairie lived happily and freely, until suddenly the white man appeared, and there began a new epoch of discovery and conquest.*

*The Indians ardently defended their hunting grounds but the resolute westward march of the white man could not be stopped. And so the Great Prairie, principally the river basin of the Platte River, became a major artery of transportation westward and the highway of civilization and the place for settlements.*

(Picture page 4)

Dugout built by Kovarik brothers near Crete, Saline Co.

(Drawing of dugout Page 5)

## **Czechs and Nebraska**

By Dr. Marvin Kivett, Director of Nebraska State Historical Society

The Czech contribution to the development of Nebraska has been a significant one. Readers of Nebraska history will find that Czechs have played an increasing role in the affairs of the state as successive waves of these Central Europeans emigrated to the Plains. The first few Czechs were here in the Territorial years—before 1860. The latest arrivals are refugees who left their native land following World War II, when armies of invaders crushed the Republic of Czechoslovakia. Today it lies behind the Iron Curtain.

The author of this study is Vladimir Kucera, once a newspaperman in Czechoslovakia, who has been a dedicated employee of the Nebraska State Historical Society since 1952. Today he is curator of the Nebraska Statehood Memorial (the Kennard House) in Lincoln. This book, **Czech Contributions to the Progress of Nebraska**, is his third on some phase of Czech culture in our state. The author is eminently qualified to undertake such a work. It is a significant addition to the history of his people in America

## The Czech Contribution to Nebraska

By Leigh G. DeLay, Historian, Nebraska State Historical Society

The Nebraska State Historical Society, the principal repository of significant materials delineating the backgrounds of the state, is pleased that its own Vladimir Kucera has come out with the second edition of his Czech history. The first was published during Nebraska's Centennial Celebration; this volume is a contribution to the 1976 Bicentennial activities commemorative of our nation's origin.

This volume brings to the non-historian a realization of the accomplishments of this distinctive ethnic group which has given Nebraska such diverse men as the sometimes irascible **Omaha Bee** editor Edward Rosewater, and the always affable Congressman Karl Stefan; as well as all the Svobodas, Viteks, Novotnys and Husaks who have built prospering farm communities, managed successful businesses and contributed to the cultural and religious activities in Nebraska.

In addition to his contribution to the history of Nebraska, Dr. Kucera through his book, has brought to Czech communities a renewed interest in their old-world origins. Czech festivals have sprouted in a number of cities. The rollicking good humor of the several yearly Czech celebrations—the colorful costumes, the distinctive food and polka dancing—is all great fun and is now entered into almost as enthusiastically by non-Czechs as Czechs.

(Picture Page 6)

First school in Saline County – In this log cabin between Crete and Wilber were meetings of the oldest Czech society

(Picture Page 7)

The first home of Ludvik Cavis, founder of the Czech colony in Box Butte Co.—

1885

## **The Czech Immigration to Nebraska, From Its Origins to the Present**

By Dr. George J. Svejda

The landing in America of Columbus in 1492 marked a new epoch in the history of the world. When the early explorers returned to their home countries and told of the value of this unknown land and its untold riches, a mad scramble for possession took place. French, Portuguese, Spanish and English all sent their daring seafarers to America to claim a part of it as their own. Each of these countries carved out its section of the American continent and established its own customs and government.

The various colonies were settled by people who differed widely from each other in religion, race and forms of government. Each group naturally introduced its own ideas into the new land and these have come down through the years as the characteristics of the various sections of the United States. A glimpse into the lives of these settlers who introduced customs and ideas which influence our lives still today will give an insight into our social history. The colonists settled from Maine to Florida, and each section was settled by people of widely different status. Each brought its own contribution and left its particular section with the stamp of its original habitation.

Although the Dutch, Spanish and Germans settled many of the colonies, the English influence was predominant. John Cabot, an Italian sea captain in the service of the King of England, was the first man to explore North America in the name of England. He landed on the eastern coast of North America in 1497 and explored as far south as Virginia. He did not start a colony but he carried tales back to England which encouraged migration to the New World.



Although the founders of the colonies differed widely from each other, they also shared many common characteristics which are still predominant in the American people as a whole. They were the Christian people of Europe, who despite their various languages and national characteristics, had basically a common culture and way of life.

The beginning of the melting pot had already appeared at the Jamestown Colony where many people of various backgrounds and ethnic origins settled. Even during the colonial period when the English immigration was predominant and established our basically Anglo-Saxon institutions, the non-English immigration at that time, though numerically small, also contributed to the democratization of these institutions, and the influence of these smaller groups was particularly significant in the social, economic and cultural development of colonial America.

The Czech immigration to these shores is rather early. One thinks immediately of that marvelous Czech immigrant Augustine Herman, whom Earl L. W. Heck in his biography calls "the first great American." (1) He was well-educated, a surveyor by profession, skilled in drawing, etc. Among his various offices and honors he was Ambassador to Rhode Island and later to Maryland. He drew the first map of Virginia and Maryland, of which one copy is now in the Library of Congress. His sketches are also famous, for example, his view of New Amsterdam in 1650.(2) Herman was a part of the Czech political and religious emigration which left Bohemia in the 1620's and culminated with the arrival of the Moravians on this continent early in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century. No less famous was Herman's counterpart Frederick Philipse, that merchant prince of Yonkers, from whom many prominent American families are descended. Perhaps his most illustrious descendant was John Jay, politician, diplomat and first Chief Justice of the United States.(3) And who would forget Mary Cooper, as depicted in James Fenimore Cooper's novel, **Spy**, who in real life was Mary, the beautiful daughter of Frederick Philipse whose charm enchanted the 24-year-old Colonel

George Washington, then staying in New York.(4) Thus the Czechs were indeed honorably represented among the vast variety of the American population in the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> Century, illustrated as it is by the 13 different languages spoken in the New York colony; Dutch, English, Swedish, Finnish, French, Portuguese, Spanish, Norwegian, Czech, Danish, Polish, Italian and German.(5)

The Moravian immigration, not so much German as many sources state but very much Czech, was important for its influence on early American ethics and culture through the religious way of life of these people, as expressed in their exemplary family life, their concern for the education of their children, etc. and above all through their fine church music, which is comparable to the best music in that period. Indeed they are considered the founders of American church music. One of the best-known Moravians was Matthew Stach, who became famous for his missionary work in Greenland, where he was active and successful for 40 years. He died in December of 1787, and one hundred years after his death a monument was erected in Salem, North Carolina, which says: "Matheus Stach. Here Lies Buried the First Moravian Missionary to Greenland." (6)

The signer of the Declaration of Independence for the State of Maryland, William Paca, was of Czech extraction, most probably a descendant of the White Mountain immigration. (7)

During the first part of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century the Czech emigration here, though still numerically weak, was outstanding for its quality. One need think only of Dr. Antonin Dignovity, inventor, linguist, physician and close friend of Sam Houston.(8) In Dignovity one sees an interesting figure, typical of Czech perseverance. A Czech youngster, fighting for the Polish cause in 1830, comes after the Polish defeat with other Polish fighters to America, and develops himself through his diligence and ability into a man of respect and position. Another exemplary man of this period is Blessed John Nepomucene Neumann, fourth

Bishop of Philadelphia, City of Brotherly Love, who is another example of Czech ability, perseverance and moral character.(9) These were the people who formed the vanguard of the Czech immigration, which from America's beginning, was primarily political and religious in its motivation and which brought here moral and intellectual gifts and skills which greatly enriched the American way of life. They were soon followed by others who were no less outstanding in their achievements.

## **Formation of the State of Nebraska**

The route to the Western lands leads through the region known as the Great Plains, (10) which is essentially a step into the desert. The Great Plains first appear in recorded history in the reports of Coronado to his King. He came to this area from Mexico in 1542, and in his first reports he described the local Indians as looking like Arabs. The French later moved to the West in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century, followed by the English. The Spanish and French explored this region primarily for the fur trade; the French came mostly from St. Louis in the 1770's.

In 1784 the United States consisted of 13 colonies and at this time her boundaries were not well defined. After the Revolution, in 1803 the new United States acquired a tremendous amount of land known as the Louisiana Purchase, including much of the Great Plains area, for which she paid to France the price of \$15,000,000 which equaled about 2-3/5 cents per acre and which was eventually organized into thirteen new states: Louisiana, Missouri, Arkansas, Iowa, Minnesota, Kansas, Nebraska, Colorado, Montana, South Dakota, North Dakota, Wyoming and Oklahoma. Thus we have in this 29 years of the existence of the United States a vast expansion of her territory. One result of this extension was a movement of population into the new territory to Great Plains and the West.

Until the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century there was a dearth of information on the area beyond the Rocky Mountains. It was due to the foresight of Thomas Jefferson that the exploration of the West began. Lewis and Clark, who crossed the northern part of Nebraska in 1804, Zebulon M. Pike and Stephen H. Long made expeditions to the West, but their discouraging reports caused this region to become known as the "Great American Desert," – an enormous deterrent which prevented further westward expansion. This belief was changed, however, with the military and scientific expeditions in the 1840's, plus the migration to Oregon. It was due primarily to the description of John Charles Fremont in 1844 that this part of the country became known to the world. He was the first to recognize this

vast interior basin. He described the Humboldt River—which he named after the great geographer Alexander Humboldt—as the future route to the West, and such it indeed became. During the period 1844-60 the Humboldt River was the principal way to the West. It was the California trade route.

People were now moving to the West for several reasons, one of which was the establishment of the fur trade. This, while it did not attract great numbers, did advance geographic knowledge. Following the fur expeditions there were military and scientific expeditions. Still another reason for the migration West was the discovery of minerals and rare metals, especially gold. The routes to the West were usually one-way. People who once moved West seldom came back.

Along the routes forts were built for the protection of the migrants. These forts were established first in the East, along the Ohio River and other migration routes; however in the 1830's or 40's the western military frontier reached Nebraska and soon beyond. (11) Various carriers were responsible for supplying the army. The Pony Express was principally a medium of information across the country, since it carried mail; it was not a primary transport facility. In primary land transport most of the people went on foot and some pushed handcarts as the Mormons did. Then there was also the prairie schooner, which was light and had a cover of canvas, and stagecoaches and wagons. Finally we have horseback as a means of transportation.

In planning westward movements one had to consider topographic conditions. First there was the drainage pattern; here the pioneers followed the waterways. Secondly, there were the passes, (12) which the people searched out by forward approach. The pioneers also naturally became interested in seeking out routes free from floods. Finally there was the need of forage for livestock. With all these innovations and movements, then, the region became a scene of enormous activity in the 1850's.

Though the first bill for the creation of the Territory of Nebraska (five times as large as the present-day State of Nebraska) was introduced in Congress in December 1844, it was not until 1854 that a bill was passed. One difficulty was that the government had moved certain Indian tribes west of the Mississippi. To open the Nebraska Territory for white settlers would bring the Indians south and other white people would not want many Indians on their frontiers.

Another question confronting the Congress was where to build the railroad to the Pacific Coast—through southern country, as the South wished, or through the Platte Valley in Nebraska.

Another point—should Missouri enter the Union as a slave state or a free state? Under the Missouri Compromise it entered as a slave state, but Nebraska and Kansas were to enter as free states. The above mentioned Act of 1854 (The Kansas-Nebraska Bill) provided that the settlers in each territory should determine by vote whether to be free or slave. The South argued that any person should be able to take his property with him. Political parties and churches split on the issue; feeling ran high. Finally Congress, after a hot dispute, passed the bill creating two new territories, Nebraska and Kansas, which was signed by President Pierce in May 1854. (13)

With the creation of the Territory of Nebraska, which as we have said was five times larger than present-day Nebraska, and included the present states of Nebraska, South Dakota and North Dakota with parts of Colorado, Wyoming and Montana, a new era began. On October 8, 1854, the territorial Capital was established at Omaha. The first territorial Governor, the Hon. Francis Burt of South Carolina, died shortly after his arrival in the Territory and the Secretary of the Territory, the Hon. T. B. Cumming, who acted in the interim, organized the first Territorial Government and called for the first election. In February of 1855 the second governor of the Nebraska Territory, the Hon. Mark W. Izzard of

Arkansas, assumed his duties, which he performed until 1857, when he was succeeded by the Hon. William A. Richardson of Illinois. Upon his resignation in April 1858, J. S. Morton, the Secretary of the Territory, acted in the interim until President Buchanan in 1859 appointed as Governor the Hon. Samuel Black, who served until 1861, when he was replaced by Hon. Alvin Saunders of Omaha, appointed by President Lincoln. It was Mr. Saunders who continued in his office until Nebraska's admission as the 37<sup>th</sup> State of the Union in 1867. The Hon. David Butler became the first Governor of the new State and a new Capital was laid out in Lincoln on the unbroken prairie. (14)

## Arrival of the Czechs in Nebraska

No official national immigration policy was clearly set forth during the early years of our country. Policies differed among the various colonies regarding the selection of the foreign-born as to their religious beliefs and their physical, mental, moral and economic suitability.(15)....(Note to fill in Reference No. 21-27 marked with \*)

The voyage across the ocean was long and difficult and only the robust in body and spirit could survive the inhuman conditions which the steerage passengers suffered on the sailing vessels when the whole trip lasted sometimes three months and the immigrants were left at the mercy of the captain and his sailors. This situation in transportation, under which the westward Atlantic crossing was a great ordeal for the millions of often impoverished European immigrants, repeatedly bringing them face to face with disaster, lasted approximately up to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The immigrants were poorly protected. After having been usually fleeced at the port of embarkation they were generally crammed into pitifully small sailing packets, (16) where they were herded like cattle into the steerage, the space between the decks which was known as "tween decks" (17) in the African slave trade. Indeed, as a rule, immigrants on board ship fared only slightly better at the hands of ruffian crews (18) than the Negroes on the slave ships, unattached immigrant women being forced to protect themselves as best they could from drunken seamen. (19)

Up to the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century it was considered commonplace for those making the transatlantic crossing, which averaged anywhere from about one month to three months depending on the weather, (20) cramped as they were in overcrowded, unventilated, unsanitary and inflammable quarters, to have run the gamut of any of the following experiences: suffocation, \* starvation, \* thirst, \* disease and pestilence, \* fire, \* shipwreck, \* and, of course, the inevitable stormy weather.\* Small wonder that the sufferings of the transatlantic crossing



have been compared to the horrors of the African slave trade. (28) The slow crossing explains how the vessel became a floating world in itself where the miserable immigrants were left to the mercy of the captain and his crew. Despite the tiny size of a vessel which was on the average of about three hundred tons, there were often packed into it from four hundred to one thousand wretches. (29) Although these poor people formed themselves into voluntary organizations based on codes of agreement, by which watchmen appointed from among themselves endeavored to protect the passengers' lives and scanty property, they were unable on higher issues to resist the captain and his often ignorant and barely skilled crew. (30):

However, the difficult condition faced by these people during their voyage did not end upon their arrival in New York. Very often these people were again fleeced and deprived of personal possessions that had not been stolen on shipboard. In the 1840's these notorious conditions became the object of sharp criticism and manifestations of public discontent in which the Irish and German Emigrant Societies in New York City played an important role. At this time the influx of European immigrants arriving in New York, caused by deteriorating economic conditions in Europe in general and in particular by famine in Ireland and on the European continent, had become apparent. Therefore regulation of immigration became a necessity. As a result of numerous public meetings, and thanks to the work of Andrew Carrigan, President of the Irish Emigrant Society and of Friedrich Kapp, his German counterpart, public opinion and conscience were aroused. (31) On May 5, 1847 despite considerable opposition, the New York State Legislature created a Board of Commissioners of Emigration with the purpose of regulating immigration. (32) Each ship's captain was required to pay a fee of one dollar for each passenger he landed in New York harbor. (33) Although the new measures lessened the immigrants' suffering somewhat, they were not yet sufficient to guarantee a decent reception upon their first hours of arrival here. The real lack was a permanent immigrant depot where the arrivals would be protected from sharks and runners, and where they would be given

assistance in exchange of money and in purchase of tickets for their final destination and other personal needs. This lack was finally met by the action of the New York State Commissioners of Emigration on August 3, 1855, establishing Castle Garden as a “compulsory landing place for immigrants” (34) which guaranteed them a decent and honest reception upon their arrival on these shores.

The year 1848 in Europe was the year in which the systems originating in the Congress of Vienna were tested, namely the principle of legitimacy of rulers and the principle of special rights for the nobility. The consequences of the Industrial Revolution were beginning to show. In England in 1832 a large portion of the population received for the first time the right to vote, a recognition in political terms the new forces at work. Most of the countries of Europe did not have parliamentary forms of government such as that of England, which permitted peaceful reform. There was a constant conflict between the center of authority and the people itself. The Industrial Revolution had produced a **bourgeoisie**; professional classes of trained men were being developed by the universities, which had become an important source of intellectual leadership. The rapid growth of nationalism was significant in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century; the old orders, based on the principle of legitimacy, had been basically supranationalistic in nature. This nationalism was identified with the new **bourgeoisie**, who wished to bear their part in the function of government.

The first country in which these new forces came to a head was France, where on February 22, 1848, riots began in Paris. Within a few weeks revolutions broke out throughout Europe, and especially in the Hapsburg domains; Bohemia, Hungary, the Lombardo-Venetian territory and also on the periphery of Austria. The uprising in Poland affected the Poles in Galicia. All these uprisings were nationalistic having the purpose of establishing independent national governments. Austria successfully used the old method in combating the insurrections, namely the division of power: **divide et impera**, and the

revolutions in all the Austro-Hungarian countries ended in failure. The revolt in Bohemia was suppressed by Windischgratz. The Polish revolt collapsed because the Poles had made the mistake of revolting simultaneously in three places: Prussia and Austria. The Polish revolt had provoked a movement in Moldavia and Wallachia on the Russian frontier. This was the main reason Russia moved in and offered her help to Austria against the Hungarian uprising. The Hungarian forces were confronted by the Russian, Austrian and Croatian forces in August 1849. When the revolution broke up in Hungary it simultaneously broke up in Milan and Savoy where Charles Albert of the Kingdom of Italy had been the leader of an insurrectionary movement. After the suppression of the revolution in Bohemia by Austrian forces, Austria in two decisive battles, those of Custozza and Novara, defeated Charles Albert. Thus all these revolts collapsed, but from 1848 on this whole area was troubled by nationalistic outbreaks

It has been written that gold seekers formed the bulk of the immigrants coming during the 1850's, predominantly from Bohemia, and the right of unrestricted departure has been given as the primary reason for this emigration. It was also thought that emigration would solve Bohemia's agricultural and industrial problems. Yet the ten thousand Czechs who decided to emigrate were only a small portion of the population of the Czech lands. (35) The economic and agricultural conditions in the Czech lands in the middle of the last Century were actually rather good. The Czech farmer, even the small one, was not only very well versed in the latest farming innovations but he was also very often a writer and politician, who followed closely the socio-economic-political situation in Europe and abroad. What the average Czech lacked at that time was personal freedom, Bach absolutism and the political persecution of the Czechs after the 1848 upheaval having made the situation in the Czech lands unbearable. Another fact, also of great importance, was that the small Czech farmer had begun to realize the great natural wealth of this country. To him the soil had an almost religious significance, at that time as it still has today, partly because of

the scarcity of soil to cultivate. These were perhaps the two most important factors, lack of personal freedom and lack of land, which drew the Czech immigrant from his homeland to these shores.

As a consequence of political revolutions in Europe then, migration from Europe to North America from 1848 reached an unprecedented height. Europeans in the difficult times following 1848 began to view America with renewed respect and interest and were envious of those who had already gone there. To them America was a country where freedom of the individual was respected and personal and spiritual freedom recognized. This was completely unknown among the Czechs in Bohemia, Moravia and Silesia where the absolutism of Bach was merciless and eared. Bozena Nemcova, a prominent Czech novelist and national figure, in her letter dated August 12, 1856 to her friend Joseph Lidumil Lesikar, who had gone to America following the 1848 uprising wrote: ".....You cannot realize what a difficult time we are living through in our country.....Till my death I will regret that I did not decide to leave for America when you were going there.....I would now be spared many bitter moments and would be rid of these miserable conditions.....Live happily in that new country and never regret that you had to leave your native country and that you have to live abroad- the Fatherland is everywhere where there are people of one language, morals and endeavors." (36)

Most of the first settlers in Nebraska came from Iowa and settled on lands of the Omaha and Otoe Indians ceded to the government in March, 1854. The settlers selected land, built log cabins and returned to Iowa to live. Bellevue was at that time the oldest as well as the only town in Nebraska. There was a fur-trading post, an Indian Agent and the only mission house in Nebraska. Because of these facts it appeared that Bellevue would be the capital. However, settlers from Council Bluffs had started a town named Omaha. Here they built a two-story brick building and offered it as the Capitol, and here the first legislature met on January 16, 1855. (37).

By October 1855 only 4,494 settlers had come. (38) The first settlers found no markers limiting the land; the early Indian traders Manuel Lisa and Henry Fontenelle settled wherever it pleased them. (39) However it was not unusual for counties to be associated with certain nationalities, classes of people, or religions, as for example the Germans in Hall and Cuming counties, or the Irish in Dakota County. The settler would write to their homelands urging immigrants to come to their particular counties. (40)

As has been said, Czech immigration at this time can be attributed to several causes; religion, politics and, perhaps the most important, the desire for better economic circumstances through the acquisition of land. (41)

Soil, having for the Czech farmer from time immemorial a sacred significance, the Czech immigrant farmer brought with him here a love for and dedication to the care and cultivation of the land. The Czech immigrant farmer, through hard struggle, fought his way to victory over Nature and brought the virgin soil to its present prosperity.

The greatest numbers of the Czech farmers were located in the upper Mississippi Valley prairie states; however, large and prosperous settlements have also been in existence for a long time in Nebraska and Texas. (42) Libor Alois Slesinger is generally considered the first Czech settler to come to Omaha, or perhaps rather to Nebraska, although the name of the above Indian trader, Manuel Lisa, indicates a possibility of Czech origin. Slesinger, a participant in the 1848 uprising in Prague, was also a member of the Czech Diet, and as such was persecuted following the events in '48. The unbearable conditions in the Czech lands caused by Bach absolutism finally drove Slesinger to leave his country and come to America in January 1857 where he settled in Cedar Rapids, Iowa and from whence, after a short stay, he came on April 15, 1857 to Omaha. In addition to his farming, in 1860 he began to drive yoked oxen hauling

provisions and goods between Omaha and Denver, in which town he finally settled in 1865, staying there until his death on February 26, 1893. (43)

Slesinger might be classified as a frontier farmer of the Plains who achieved a considerable respect in his community.

The second known Czech in Omaha was Joseph Horsky, who arrived in America in 1857 from Borovnice, near Kostelec above Orlice. The third Omaha Czech was a Czech Jew, Edward Roewater (Rosenwassr), who as a 13-year-old boy arrived in 1854 with his father in America, and after a stay in Cleveland, Ohio, was appointed in 1863 a field telegraph operator in Omaha. (44)

The constant flow of Czech immigrants filled the rich lands of Nebraska, Wisconsin, Iowa and Texas between 1850 and 1870. Cedar Rapids, Iowa, became for the Czechs a type of distributing center, from which they migrated further on to Nebraska or Kansas. (45) The Czechs reached the Great Plains areas in sufficient time to profit by the Homestead Act. (46) Under this Act any man or woman 21 years of age or older, or the head of a family, could have 160 acres if he lived on it for five years and paid \$18.00 in fees. For the first eighty years of American history there had been no free homesteads, and President Buchanan would not consent to the first Homestead Act of 1860, which required the settlers to pay \$0.25 per acre. In 1862 the Free Homestead Act was passed and it went into effect on January 1, 1863. (47) Thus this Sea of Grass begun to be occupied by Czechs, Scandinavians, Germans, Russians and others who began to break the tough prairie sod. They fought inclement weather, grass fires, grasshoppers, Indians and cattlemen, and this was a fight which only the hardy could survive. But their enormous effort resulted in a transformation of this territory into a vast food producing area.

In order to attract immigrants various pamphlets were printed, informing the newcomers about the possibilities in the State of Nebraska. One of these

pamphlets suggested that “Persons with families should not come here entirely destitute to brave the hardships and trials of a pioneer life, for though the country abounds in resources and is full of bread, yet it requires time and money to a limited extent to develop the one and purchase the other.” (48)

In addition to the State Immigration Bureaus, the railroad and steamship companies also actively tried to promote immigration. There were cases in which whole Czech villages emigrated to America. For the Czech immigrants there were in Hamburg as well as in Bremen respectable steamship firms of Czech background, which assumed the responsibility of getting them to these shores.

Because of the steadily increasing number of Czech immigrants, these very often had to place their hopes in the hands of unscrupulous agents, who not only cheated them of their savings but sometimes actually regulated their fate. This sad fact is brought out by an article entitled “The Czech Pioneers in New Zealand,” which appeared in a Chicago newspaper, in which was described the grievous voyage of several dozen Czech families from the vicinity of Pilsen, Bohemia, who arrived in the port of Auckland, New Zealand in June 1863 after suffering unbearable conditions for more than six months on the sea, during which two of their number died. These immigrants had intended to come to Nebraska, but in Hamburg they entrusted their traveling destiny into the hands of an unscrupulous agent by the name of Kohn, who was receiving bonus money from the English for each newly acquired immigrant. And so it happened that the Czech immigrants were sent by this agent, instead of to Nebraska, to New Zealand. The agent evidently thought that these places were the same, and he was in a sense, ironically, not too far from the truth. “Nebraska,” in a dialect of the Otoe Indians, means “flat water,” and the Czech immigrants finally reached a place in New Zealand which the Maori call Puhoi which is “lazy water.” (49)

The Czechs began to immigrate into southeastern Nebraska, particularly the counties of Saline, Richardson, Colfax, Butler, Saunders and Dodge in the

1860's and everywhere they came they changed the barren plains into a paradise. In the lovely valleys of the rivers Big Blue, Nemaha and Platte flowing through these counties, the Czechs began to buy the railroad lands for between 3 and 5 dollars per acre. The Czech immigrants came here not only from the old country but also from Wisconsin, Iowa and other eastern cities; (50) indeed the settlement of Knox County was prearranged in Chicago and Cleveland, and eight hundred families moved there **en masse** from these two cities. (51) In these counties they began to build towns like Praha, Brno and others reminding them of their homeland. One of the land agents for the Burlington and Missouri Railroad Company between 1877 and 1885 was Vaclav L. Vodicka, who was born in Techonice, Bohemia on September 14, 1844 and who in 1868 came to Omaha. By the time he arrived in the United States the majority of the good homesteads were occupied and railroad lands were the second best opportunity. People were not anxious to colonize any distance from the Missouri Rivers, so the Burlington Railroad presented special attractions to the immigrants. For example, settlers on their land were reimbursed for freight charges on the possessions they brought with them and the transportation expenses for their families were paid by the company. In addition, a 20% discount, called a "premium for improvements" was allowed on the initial payment on the principal. This discount was given to settlers who had cultivated part of the land before the end of two years from time of purchase and continued working the land until the premium had been applied. This premium paid the first installment of the principal which was due in four years from purchase, and a portion of the second which was to be due in five years from the purchase date,. The other railroad companies did not provide such special attractions and therefore Mr. Vodicka, who was an honest man speaking the same language as the Czechs and who had won their faith, was successful in his efforts to have the Czechs settle there and found several colonies. He died on March 15, 1917 in Omaha. (52)

It should be again stressed that the desire for political and religious freedom spurred the first wave of Czech immigrants to Nebraska. Later the



Czech immigrants sought to escape Austrian military service or to seek economic betterment; however, those who were conscientious objectors in the Czech lands then suffering under Austrian despotism, fought bravely for the Union in the Civil War and in the Spanish-American War. (53)

Saline was the first county in which the Czech immigrants settled in 1865, and Frank Krten is considered the first Czech who came to this county. (54) Another Czech who came there was John Herman who came to Saline County in 1868 and took up a claim not too far from the present Wilber. (55) He was a member of the Czech Diet at the time of the 1848 upheaval and also a member of the delegation sent to the Austrian Emperor in Vienna. During the political persecution which followed the 1848 revolution Herman emigrated to America in 1853. He came here with a fair amount of wealth amounting to 30,000 gulden, but he speculated in Wisconsin farm lands and lost heavily. Later he grew wealthy and politically and socially prominent through successful Nebraska investments. (56)

In the seat of Saline County, Wilber, which was founded in the Fall of 1873, the best known Czech pioneers were the brothers Joseph and Frank Rychtarik. With steadily increasing immigration Wilber around 1900 had already 1,054 inhabitants. Crete was another town in Saline County with a large Czech population founded a little earlier than Wilber. (57) In addition to these two large Czech settlements there were several smaller ones spread throughout Saline County. (58)

Many of the Czechs were also located in Saunders County, where according to Habenicht, there were at the beginning of this century about 1,200 Czech families. The first to arrive in Saunders County in 1886 was Peter Kastl. (59) In this county the town of Plasi had the oldest Czech parish. (60) Not too far from Plasi to the southeast lies Wahoo, founded in 1875, where at the beginning of this century there lived 66 Czech families. (61)

Near Wahoo lie Touhy and Weston which had a Czech majority at the beginning of this century. Praha, Nebraska was a typical Czech settlement, which according to Habenicht in the early 1900's, had 350 Czech inhabitants. Founded in September of 1887, it received town charter in 1905. It was mostly settled by Czech Catholics who in 1899 founded there the first Czech Catholic Church of St. John Baptist. In 1870 there was also a small Czech settlement at Morse Bluffs. (62)

In Butler County, which is situated west of Saunders County, Habenicht notes Czech settlements in Abie, Bruno (Brno), Appleton, Brainard, Dwight, David City, Linwood, Bee, Ulysses and Garrison. (63)

The settlements in Colfax County were primarily centered in Schuyler, Clarkson, Howell, Leigh, Heun, Dry Creek, Wilson, Tabor and Richland (64)

In the northeastern part of Nebraska in Knox County, Czech settlements such as Tabor, Vodnany, etc., were established under difficult circumstances. Here the Czechs, lacking ploughs and oxen, had to cultivate the soil with spades in the sandy and hilly deserts, yet they succeeded. (65)

In Butte County, which borders on Knox County, Czech settlements of considerable strength were located around the town of Butte, as well as at places like Lynch and Spencer. (66)

## **Economic, Cultural, Religious and Political Life of the Czechs in Nebraska**

The Czech immigrants came to Nebraska in the 1860's, 1870's or 1880's in the hope of acquiring the land which they lacked in Europe. They established small settlements which, in spite of their initial smallness, soon increased in size upon the arrival of families and friends both from this country and from the native land. A reliable pioneer authority, Mr. F. J. Sadlek of Wilber, reports that up to 1880 approximately 75% of all Czech immigrants to America settled in Nebraska. The majority did not have sufficient funds to pay even the most modest price for land but they were willing to endure rigorous hardships in an unfamiliar sparsely settled land in order to attain that which was closest to their hearts. (67)

Not all of the settlers had been farmers by profession. Many had been employed in different trades but they saw in farming a better future. Under the difficult conditions which they had to face some of them began longing for their homeland. These conditions of the hard and sometimes merciless frontier life are well described in Willa Cather's classic **My Antonia**, (68) which though a novel, is actually based on the life of a Czech immigrant girl. Here a Czech immigrant family lives in the Nebraska prairie with no one of their nationality in that area and the father, who was a violinist by profession and had played at weddings and dances in his native village, becomes lonely there on the prairie. He longs for his old musician friends and gazes sadly at his violin. Before the first winter is over he has taken his own life. His daughter Antonia, in spite of a difficult life of her own, overcomes all obstacles and succeeds where her unfortunate father had failed.

Thus the beginnings of the Czech settlers in Nebraska were difficult. Their dwelling places were houses made of sod, log cabins, and dugouts chiseled out of the sides of ravines. (69)

In many instances those Czech settlers who knew other trades were of great advantage to themselves and to their neighbors for the supply of mechanics and artisans on the prairie was limited. Being the first to settle on previously untilled land is very difficult at any time, however, for the Czechs it was even more so for they did not speak the language of the land. (70) To assist the settlers the Czech Farmers' Mutual Aid Society in Nebraska was formed. It had its beginning in March 1876, and continued in existence for 17 years, until 1893. It was the first and only society of its kind in Nebraska, the State which contained the greatest number of Czech farmers. Its purpose was to provide insurance against damage to crops, such as wheat, rye, barley, oats and later flax, corn and potatoes. For example, in 1889 hail did damage amounting to \$2,553.66. Society insurance compensated the farmers at the rate of \$68.68 per every \$100.00. There were all told 50 branches of the society and the total membership was 1,000. It was originated by Joseph Hanzl, a pioneer miller from the town then known as Glencoe, Dodge County. Hanzl was not well versed in the English language and, therefore, was assisted by John Rosicky. Hanzl held the position of manager for eight years and was followed by John F. Sobota, a farmer and postmaster from Praha, Colfax County (this post office is no longer in existence). After four years Joseph V. Holecek took over and he in turn was succeeded in 1891 by Vaclav Krikac, Sr., who had been residing in Geranium Valley which is now known as Comstock, Custer County. The Society went out of existence in 1893. **Pokrok Zapadu** (Progress of the West) was the official organ of the Society from its beginning until 1890 when it was succeeded by **Nova Doba** in Schuyler, Nebraska. As brought out before, this society was extremely important to the early pioneers because of their lack of knowledge of English. Their descendants were of course able to join English-speaking insurance organizations. (71)

The Czechs, who have a reputation for thrift, also established saving banks here in greater numbers than any other group. The first Czech bank

originated in Chicago in 1886. The second was opened in 1887 in Schuyler, Nebraska. At one time the Czechs had in control ownership 103 banks, of which the largest number 46 were in Nebraska. (72)

The Czechs are also strongly organization-minded; as members of labor union they are “stickers,” as organizers and joiners of lodges they excel. Indeed, fraternal lodges afforded inexpensive insurance. One of the best known societies, and the first such Czech organization established in the U. S., was the C. S. P. S. (Cesko Slovansky Podporujici Spolek) or Czech Slavonian Protective Association, founded in St. Louis in 1854. According to one source this group had in all some 25,404 members, while the Z. C. B. J. (Zapadni Cesko Bratraska Jednota) or Western Bohemian Fraternal Order had 18,000. (73)

The Czech Jew, Edward Rosewater, previously mentioned, founded on July 19, 1871 an English daily, the **Omaha Bee**, and on August 1, 1871 the Czech weekly **Pokrok Zapadu** (Progress of the West). (74) **Pokrok Zapadu**, the official organ of the Czech Farmers’ Mutual Aid Society in Nebraska, had as its motto “pilne sluzic zajmu narodnimu, hledet chci vzdy k vzdelani obecnemu,” meaning “While ever serving national interest let me give heed always to the education of all.” One of its early editorials called for Austria’s becoming a Slavonic state; another approved President Grant’s proposing the union of the telegraph system and the Post Office department. The before-mentioned Vaclav L. Vodicka, as the first business manager of this paper, attempted to interest Czech immigrants in the Nebraska prairies. John Rosicky, through his pamphlet **Jak Je v Americe** (How Things Are in America), aided prospective immigrants in selecting a state in which to live. Rosicky, after selling the paper, published other papers such as **Obzor**, **Americke Kvety** and **Osveta**. Journalists who edited **Pokrok Zapadu** include V. Snajder, V. A. Jung and F. J. Kutak. At one time 20 Czech papers were published in Nebraska, (75) which certainly indicates a zeal for information and education.

These Czech societies and newspapers were founded for the purpose of explaining Czech ideas and guarding the Czech name in America. Each one performed a service, eliminated some prejudice and aided in the spread of knowledge among the Czechs in America. (76)

Many groups were dedicated specifically to music, dramatics or gymnastics. The Czech is extremely fond of song and the choral society provided him with the occasion to sing. If the professional stage would not produce the works of the Czech playwrights, amateur groups would stage the kind of productions, heroic and pastoral, which are dear to the Czechs. (77)

Sokol and Komensky Clubs confined their efforts to the betterment of social and economic conditions among the settlers, the Sokols emphasizing physical sports. J. K. Mallat was an early organizer of the Sokol movement in Crete in 1875. Wilber had an active Sokol society which was widely known for its dramatic productions; the thespian groups there were under the direction of J. K. Schuessler, "the grand old man of the Bohemian American stage." (78) J. K. Schuessler, considered the first Czech-American actor, was a professional actor in Bohemia, arriving in this country on April 10, 1864. He was active in Milwaukee as director of Slovanska Lipa and later as stage director of the Czech-American Sokol in Chicago and, finally, from September 1877 as Director of the Sokol thespian group in Wilber. (79)

The Czechs also carried their musical traditions into Nebraska. Indeed in American music generally they play a particularly important part, a fact which is apparent from the frequency with which one hears on the radio or at public concerts music composed or played by Czechs. Thomas Capek has stated that it is inconceivable that a brass band or a symphony orchestra should be without a Czech as one of its members. (80) Indeed, music is inborn in the Czech wherever he lives.

Frank Nedela, who organized his Czech band in Crete, made this community famous. His band, known as "Nedela's Band," was considered in the early 1870's as the only band west of the Missouri River. Its glory was known in many Nebraska communities. It was even called upon to play at the last inauguration of David Butler, Nebraska's first Governor. (81) The first music store in Crete was opened in 1875 by a Czech named Joseph Kopecky. (82) J. C. Prochazka, in addition to being a teacher of violin and cornet, was also the director of the first military band in Crete, organized in 1880 as a Silver Cornet Band, and in 1883 assigned to the First Nebraska Infantry. (83) Stephen Jelinek, son of Frank Jelinek, who homesteaded three miles south of Crete in 1865, organized another Crete Military Band in February 1889. This band played both standard and popular selections. The residents of Crete sponsored the band and for several years concerts were given on the street once a week during the three summer months. One rehearsal a week was held throughout the whole year. The band was widely sought after and traveled all over Nebraska. It won first prize in contests at Omaha in 1889 and at Grand Island in 1890 in a contest sponsored by the G. A. R. Stephen Jelinek never forgot Crete and he made frequent visits there to see his friends and acquaintances. His musical career was outstanding. Prior to the Spanish-American War, he was a cornetist for eight years in a Chicago theater and for three years during that War he was chef musician of the 11<sup>th</sup> Infantry. His career also included five years as a cornetist in the Old Oliver Theater Orchestra and 17 years in the same capacity in the Lincoln Orpheum Theater Orchestra. (84)

Education has always been dear to the Czech and the Czechs are proud to be called the Nation of Comenius. For the Czech immigrant education was a passion not only in the old country but also here. Illiteracy was practically non-existent among them during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. During the Ellis Island period of immigration the Czechs established two records among all nations which were part of the old Astro-Hungarian Empire, including the Germans, Austrians and

Magyars: they twice showed the lowest percentage of illiteracy—only 1 1/2 %, and the highest percentage of skilled labor. (85)

The Czech settlers in Texas were stimulated by the Comenius tradition to build schools in their pioneer colonies there; (86) to a certain extent this practice was established wherever the Czech immigrants settled. The desire to furnish their children with educational opportunities was marked among the Nebraska Czechs. Robert I. Kutak notes that a small Nebraska town, Milligan, populated mostly by Czechs, sent a particularly large number of young students to the State University. (87)

The University of Nebraska was the first State University in the United States to found a Department of Czech and Professor Jeffrey D. Hrbek was summoned from Iowa City to fill the first Chair of Czech in that institution in the year 1907. (88)

A Comenius Club, to further the cultural growth of the Czech communities, was established in 1906 at the State University of Nebraska, and in 12 years it had increased to 26 clubs in six states, 13 of them in Nebraska. (89)

The Czechs in Nebraska were Roman Catholics, Protestants and Free Thinkers, but over here they put aside the religious differences which had marked much of the Middle Ages and the Reformation period in Bohemia. Their frequent discussions of religion give proof against the charge that the Czechs were “infidels.” (90) The first Czech Catholic priest in Omaha was Father Frantisek Bobal, born in 1845 in Luzkovice, Moravia, and ordained to the priesthood in 1871 at the American College of Louvain, Belgium. (91) The Czech Fraternal Presbyterian Synod was established in Omaha in 1889; its first preacher was Joseph Vladyka and its first pastor Antonin Paulu. (92) The Czechs who moved into Dodge County at the end of 1860’s were Catholics and Protestants. In this county they settled mostly in towns like Dodge, Snyder,



Scribner or North Bend. (93) In the parish of St. Wenceslaus in Dodge an erudite Czech priest, Father Jan Stepan Broz, who was born in Kardasova Recice, was active. (94) He was an outstanding literary figure, a poet, essayist and folklorist, whose thinking was influenced by the American Plains. (95) He was fascinated by the American Indian and wrote excellent treatises on this subject. One of these entitled **Starobylost Cloveka v Americe** – “The Antiquity of Man in America”—expresses his love for and devotion to the American Indian. (96) He was also interested in the Mormons and his stories of them are thought of very highly. In Saint Wenceslaus” Parish in Omaha there was also active another unusual priest, Father (later Monsignor) John Vranek. He was a literary figure of unusual spirit and talent whose collection of poems called **Na pude Americke**—“On American Soil” commemorate various aspects of Czech-American life. (97)

Soon after their arrival in Nebraska the Czechs began to participate actively in political life. In Omaha, for example, Frantisek J. Kaspar was for two terms a member of the City Council at the end of the 1880’s. Antonin Kment was also seated for one term during 1896 and 1897. Around 1883 a Czech Jew of liberal disposition Ludvik Berka was active in Omaha for a long time as a Police Judge. Thomas Capek, prominent historian of Czech migration in this country, was a member of the Nebraska Legislature in 1891. (98) The versatile Edward Rosewater, also nicknamed Rozvaril, was the first Czech member of the Nebraska Legislature serving in 1871 in the House as a Republican.

Czech interest in National and State politics increased particularly after Rosewater established the weekly **Pokrok Zapadu**, a paper of Republican overtones. Between 1871 and 1917 Thirty three Czech-Americans sat in the Nebraska Legislature. These were generally Democrats, but there were also some important Republican and Independent figures in early Czech political life in Nebraska. (99)

Since 1921 the following persons of Czech descent have served in the Nebraska Legislature:

1921	Louis Berka
1923-27	Charles Smrha
1923	Philip Tomek
1925	Frank Dolezal
1927	L. Tesar
1929	Rudolph Brazda
1929-31-33	Gus Dworak
1931-33	Hugo Srb
1935	Alois Slepicka
1935	Edward Jelen
1933-35	Emil Brodbecky
1935	Charles Tvrdik

In 1937 Nebraska became the only state in the Union with a unicameral or one-house Legislature, and a person of Czech descent, Hugo Srb, became the clerk of this new body. Since this time the following legislators of Czech descent have been elected. (100)

1939-41-43-45	John Mekota
1941	Otto Kotouc
1943-45	Latimer Hubka
1937-39-41-43- 45-49-51-53- 55-57	Charles Tvrdik
1947-49	Joseph Benesh
1951	Joseph Salla
1951-53-55-57	Otto Kotouc
1953-55	Ernest Hubka
1959-61	Joseph Vosoba-
1955-57-63	LeRoy Bahensky
1959-61-63-65-76	William Skarda

1965	Rudolph Kokes
1971	Richard Maresh
1965	Donald Dworak

The first Congressman of Czech descent from Nebraska was Karl Stefan who was born on March 1, 1884 on a farm in Zebrakov, Bohemia, and arrived with his family in 1885 in Omaha, Douglas County. As a youth he engaged in various occupations. For a while he served as a telegraph operator in the Philippines and was commended several times by the government for his work. He then settled in Norfolk, Nebraska where he became city editor of the **Norfolk Daily News**, then publisher of the News and a radio commentator. He was elected as a Republican to the Seventy-Fourth Congress and served continuously from January 3, 1935 until his death on October 2, 1951. (101) Another prominent Nebraska politician at the national level is Roman Lee Hruska who was born on August 16, 1904 in David City, Butler County. Educated at the University of Chicago and Creighton University where he received his L. L. B. degree in 1929, he served in various capacities in local politics until he was elected to the Eighty-Third Congress as a Republican. Serving from January 3, 1953 until November 8, 1964 when he resigned to assume the vacancy caused by the death of Senator Hugh Butler. Senator Hruska served from November 8, 1954 until January 3, 1959; he was re-elected in 1958 (102) and again in 1964. Senator Hruska has the distinction of being the first United States Senator of Czech descent.

The Czechs have contributed more than their share in the field of agriculture. Their success as farmers, both in American and abroad, can be attributed to their innate love for the soil and working of it which is apparent wherever one sees Czechs engaged in this activity. Their love for farming is so great that their farmsteads throughout the country can be recognized on sight by their neat and thriving appearance. This exceptional compliment is readily bestowed upon the Czechs by other groups, particularly in Nebraska and Texas,

where they are well-established and have farmed for many years. Although they have won the acclaim of their non-Czech neighbors who are engaged in the same occupation, one most frequently hears the praises of Czech agricultural economy from the officials and inspectors in the various State departments of agriculture. (103)

The Czechs are also conservers of tradition. The Czech tradition has a great hold over the people. It is called the "dedictvi otcu" or heritage of the fathers. W. T. Thomas remarked in 1917 that the Czechs were the best immigrants in the City of Chicago because they maintained their values. (104) In 1933 R. I. Kutak commented of a Czech group in Milligan, Nebraska that the old methods of doing things and the outer side of life had succumbed more readily to the pressure of the environment than had the inner values in the ends of existence. This is usually true in culture conflicts. To the writer's eye Milligan did not appear different from the typical American city. The inhabitants wore American clothing, the dwellings were the same and the rooms contained the usual products of the age of mechanization. The people, however, spoke only the Czech language. Although the most modern type of radio was in the house, it was played only for broadcasts of Czech orchestra music. Perhaps the most up-to-date electric stove was in the kitchen but the housewife still cooked the same foods which her ancestors had prepared somewhere in Bohemia. (105)

The 1910 Census reported that there were then 539,392 Czechs living in the United States, (106) of whom it was estimated that one-eighth were in Nebraska. (107) During the First World War immigration here was non-existent, and the conditions which existed following it resulted in passing of several immigration laws, of which the so-called Johnson law passed in 1924 was perhaps the most stringent, establishing the "quota system." (108) As a consequence of this law fewer immigrants were allowed here and thus the steady influx of immigrants, which had enlivened and added new blood to the old immigration, decreased considerably. This consequence was felt particularly in

the fraternal, social and protective associations whose officials and members were dying off. It is perhaps not too much to say that limited amount of immigration allowed by the restrictive immigration laws caused the decline of these organizations. During the Second World War, when the Czech immigration to this country completely stopped, there was a danger that Czech life here would completely cease to exist. However, a new lease was given by the immigration which came here following the Second World War as a result of changed conditions in Europe. Thousands of educated newcomers who came here enriched not only the Czech life but also the whole of American life through their skills and culture. Up to around 1958 the Czechs in Nebraska felt that the language would soon become extinct and the culture and mores of their ancestors would be forgotten. That this did not happen is chiefly the work of Dr. Vladimir Kucera of the Nebraska State Historical Society who single-handedly renewed cultural interest of the Nebraska Czechs. "Dr. Kucera came to our state," says one source "and started to teach Czech classes in these small towns and re-awakened that spark of our heritage and loyalty, until now we are known as a state alive in reviving the culture of our ancestors. (109) In 1959 Dr. Kucera started to teach the Czech language at the University of Nebraska and by 1963 the Comenius Club, which had ceased to exist, was revived. During that year on December 13, 1963 he organized at the University of Nebraska the First Czech Spectacular attended by 500 people who enjoyed excellent programs and Czech cuisine. The Second Czech Spectacular held in 1965 was even more successful than the first one. Both of these Spectaculars were the most impressive ethnic events ever held at the University of Nebraska and were attended by prominent people including Senator Hruska, Governor Frank B. Morrison, (his wife sang two Czech songs in one of the programs), Dr. Frolik, Dean of the College of Agriculture of the University of Nebraska, various State Senators, etc. After the successful introduction of the Czech language at the University of Nebraska Dr. Kucera then successfully organized ten-week Czech language courses in Milligan, Dwight, Schuyler, Clarkson, Abie, North Bend, Table Rock and finally at the University of Omaha.

To further the appreciation of Czech folklore and other traditions he organized the Czech Festivals, the first being held at Omaha in 1960. At present the Czech Festivals are held during the summer in several small towns, Wilber, Clarkson, Dwight, Schuyler, North Bend and others. These festivals, which present programs on the Czech pioneers, are extremely popular and well attended. The festival which is held for two days early in August at Wilber is attended by 30,000 people annually and is televised. In 1963 Wilber was officially proclaimed the Czech Capital of Nebraska by the Governor.

## Epilogue

Francis Palacky, the great historian of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, wrote that “even if I were of gypsy origin and already its last descendant, I felt it my duty to endeavor in all possible ways that at least an honorable memory would remain after me in the history of mankind.”

The Czech immigrant has made himself a great asset for the development and growth of his new American adopted country through his skills, thrift, education and readiness for assimilation. When we follow the steps of Czech immigration we see that it originates from a great cultural tradition. Though the Czech immigration here was never numerically as strong as the massive immigration of Poles, Irish or Italians, to mention a few, it is nevertheless significant for this cultural maturity and the general advancement of the Czech immigrants. Throughout their history the Czechs have been known as builders, not only in the physical, but primarily in the spiritual and cultural senses of the word. It is true that the average Czech immigrant had language difficulties in his new environment, but he quickly adjusted himself to the new situation thanks to his general intelligence and ability. As an illustration of this trait, let us read the words of one Czech immigrant who reminisced about his experience of adjustment after only a few hours on American soil in the following words: “I’ve been in America a long time now,” he said, “but when I first came over I knew only two English words.” They were enough to carry me well beyond Chicago. On the steamer I heard them many times a day and soon caught on to their pronunciation. Reaching Ellis Island I was examined by an immigration officer. I asked him respectfully “All right?” to which he replied “All right.” At the barge office where some of my fellow countrymen were waiting for me someone stepped on my foot and excused himself. “All right,” I replied much to the wonder of my companions. At the railroad station there were many trains. I showed my ticket to one of the guards and after examining it he pointed the direction in which

I was to go. I started and looked back. "All right" he said. Finally I reached Chicago. The station was crowded and I had to wait. Leaning against the back of a baggage transfer truck I suddenly heard as the warning "All right?" I jumped aside crying out "All right!" Two porters pushed a second truck where I had been standing. Whenever I found it necessary to cross the street I waited until the policeman called "All right," and after many "All rights" finally reached the home of my uncle. After supper as we were talking in my native Czech language he asked me how I enjoyed my trip. I replied "All right" whereupon my uncle nearly fell over in amazement. Then he slapped my shoulder and said "You're all right!" (110)

The churches, schools, gymnastic societies, Sokol and Orel, cultural, social and fraternal organizations established in this country are testimonies of the cultural and social advancement of the Czech immigrants. From the north to the south, from the east to the west, the Czech immigrants built these institutions, of which they can well be proud. Yes, here were personal sacrifices, sometimes often tears, but there was always the hope for a better life which perhaps could be realized in a free country like ours. The traditions of learning and of civil and religious freedom have been inborn among the Czechs for 12 centuries. Perhaps precisely because the Czechs had suffered so much in the past at the hands of political and religious persecutions they became in this country champions and advocates of political and religious liberties, knowing from their personal experience how great a misfortune the denial of these blessings inflicts on individuals and nations as well. Perhaps this democratic sympathy explains how it is that the Czech people flow so easily into the mainstream of American life. Even in their home country they had become known as the "Yankees of Europe."

As we walk along Fifth Avenue in New York City and pass by St. Patrick's Cathedral and stop to admire its beautiful Gothic towers we may not realize that they were built by a Czech architect. The oldest comic strip, still in existence,



“Mutt and Jeff,” is the work of the Czech immigrant Bud Fisher. One of the main collaborators of Frank Lloyd Wright was a Czech immigrant architect, Antonin Raymond. Whoever buys one of the well-known Bulova watches should realize that the founder of the Bulova Watch Company, Joseph Buleva, was born in Czechoslovakia where he began his career in watchmaking, coming to the United States when he was 18 years old. And who would forget the name of Dr. Ales Hrdlicka who came here as an immigrant boy and through his diligence achieved fame as a Curator at the Smithsonian Institution and an outstanding physical anthropologist? In 1934 a Czech voice received a prize for the best diction among radio broadcasters in the United States. Indeed, there is perhaps not a single branch of human knowledge in which the Czech immigrant is not honorably represented. At Indiana University one of the world’s leading mathematicians, Professor Vaclav Hlavaty, teaches. At the Center for Byzantine Studies, Dunbarton Oaks, lives one of the outstanding world Byzantologists, Professor Msgr. Francis Dvornik. At the University of Pennsylvania Professor Otakar Odlozilik, a recognized authority on European history and particularly of the Czech Reformation movement, and also Professor Frank Kral, a leading world dermatologist, hold teaching posts. Professor Rene Wellek of Yale University is an outstanding authority on comparative literature. There are many more hundreds of professors of Czech descent who teach at various American universities and colleges. Then there are physicists like A. F. Kovarik, or L. L. Beranek, a leading world authority on acoustics, Jan Micka, an outstanding chemist and many, many more in various branches of applied science. In the field of sports there was first of all Jack Root, who in 1903 became the Light-heavyweight Boxing Champion of the World, who was Czech born. If it were not for the Czech mother of Stan Musial, the baseball fans would have been cheated of the marvelous career of this wonderful man who led the National League in batting seven times; it was she who encouraged him to enter baseball.

And finally there are astronauts James Lovell and Eugene Cernan who are of Czech origin and proud of it.

A civilization is known by that which it cherishes. Czech culture is a Christian culture and a part of Western civilization to which the Czechs have contributed much. But a culture must also be creative so that from its roots can grow new values. The past must not be a mirror, but a tree, from whose roots grow these new values. Indeed it must be not only a mirror but also a blueprint for new generations.

And so the Czech immigrants fell in love with their new adoptive country and they are faithful to it. Although through their clubs and fraternal organizations and institutions they do much to preserve Czech culture in the United States, they have also assimilated themselves into American culture. Thus the fine qualities of the Czech character; diligence, love for useful work, honesty, industry, respect for family and public life, respect for law and institutions, respect for the human mind, are reaching through assimilation and inter-marriage into other groups and thus become part of the whole.

In Nebraska the Czechs aided in making Nebraska a garden state and made provisions for their families and for their declining years. In praise of the Czech settlers in Nebraska, Bartos Bittner, a Czech-American author who was born in Milavec, Bohemia in 1861, arrived in the United States in 1884 and died in Chicago on May 1, 1912, wrote the following: (111)

“With empty hands you came to wilderness uncharted—  
Lo, gaze upon it now, O pioneers brave-hearted.  
From Father of Waters west of Rocky Mountains’ base  
Prosperity’s sweet streams those prairies grace.  
You triumphed over hardships, weary and heartbreaking,  
None censures you today for joyful pride you are taking.  
In your fair handiwork, which far and wide you view,  
Instead, success we wish—success to you.”

On the pinnacle of the Nebraska State Capitol stands the statue of a sower, created by the sculptor Lee Lawrie who, inspired by the Czech immigrant farmers near Crete, formed this sower as a symbol of hope of the tilling of the Plains. (112) No better way could be found to honor the Czech settlers in Nebraska than in this work done by this distinguished sculptor as it stands to remind us all of what these men and women contributed to their State.

As over 100 years ago the Czech pioneers helped to open the virgin soil of Nebraska, their descendants help today to open the universe and thus to aid this blessed country of ours in its further advancement.

A span of one hundred years is not very long in human history, but in such a period much can be accomplished as the Czech settlers in Nebraska proved. Let us hope that future Czech-American generations will continue to preserve the religious and cultural heritage of their forefathers, to augment and enrich it, and through it continue to sow to the fruitage of this great Nation.

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an elderly lady went into the Confessional booth where Bishop Neumann was sitting and started with the Gaelic words: "Beannaigh me..." When she left the church with a smiling and happy face, she told the neighbors: "Moladt go deo le Dia. Easpog Eiraennach ata, galnn are deire." (Praise the good God, it's an Irish Bishop we have at last!). There are some elements who try to pinpoint Bishop Neumann as being German; this is not so. Neumann was proud of his Czech heritage and at the same time he was also a good American, proud of his Czech heritage. In Philadelphia his only difficulties were with the Germans. One source says: "At times the German churches offered special problems. Thus, when on one occasion he (Neumann) had to have a new church erected, the Germans in the congregation asked that the church be erected for the Germans only, since an English-speaking church would not serve them as they thought they should be served. On the other hand, the English-speaking members of the congregation were just as strong in their desire to have a church where all services might be in English. Both came with their complaints to the bishop (Neumann), who listened to each side calmly and then told them that the church would be built for the English-speaking but the latter, once they had their church, should help the Germans to build their own church. Some of the outspoken Germans, highly displeased with the solution, frankly told the bishop that it was a shame that he, a German, should desert their cause. Thereupon he promptly rebuked them, "Thank God I'm not a German; I'm a Bohemian." They were so highly incensed against him that some of them placed a railroad tie on the tracks to wreck the train on which he was to leave the town. Fortunately, the evening sun outlined the tie and the train was stopped in time. So indignant were some of the Germans over the bishop's decision that they went in a body to his house in Philadelphia. Here they made such noisy recriminations that the bystanders, sympathizing with the bishop, did not know what to do. They wavered between their inclination to eject them from the scene or merely to pity

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## **CULTURAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE CZECHS**

**By Professor Orin Stepanek**

**University of Nebraska**

Do you remember reading in a representative monthly an essay memorializing Nebraska's place in the sun? We have, I learned, the largest creamery in the world, and, shades of Mussolini,, the largest macaroni factory. We have the largest stockyards in the world and unmistakably the smelliest. At the time of writing we were the world's chief hide market and hay market, second to Iowa in corn production, and second to Massachusetts (was it?) in per capita auto consumption. An interesting and informing essay this, and even my uninstructed academic brain began to glow with the cumulative wonder of statistical revelations which, to one born and reared in Nebraska, should have been part of a cultural catechism

Yet I was moved more by what the essay failed to recount. There was no word of the sons and daughters whom Nebraska bore and gave of her fields to roam; sons and daughters who partook of better bread than wheat and perchance of that which cometh of heaven and giveth light unto the world; sons and daughters who gave Nebraska a place in a sun that has never set since the dawn of civilization in the valley of the Nile many thousand years ago. There was no word concerning Willa Cather of Red Cloud, Howard Hanson of Wahoo, John Pershing of Lincoln, William Jennings Bryan of Fairview, and the rest. There was nothing about this stupendous enterprise of public education, nothing of this huge state university to which thousands of dedicated Nebraska youths come yearly seeking the way of reason and the will of God.

There was nothing of the Capitol. And yet some far tomorrow, when under time's inexorable way, this great memorial shall have fallen into

monumental ruin—when the genius of Goodhue and Lawrie and Meiere and Alexander shall have lapsed into anonymity—another people (better than we, so one dreams) will walk these plains and pause to marvel that here once lived a race built better than they knew.

What such a triumph of architecture can mean, even in a time of war when all cultural values seem subject to the self-preservational instincts of national groups, men of my generation well know, being mindful of the wrath of the civilized world when, after the brutish conquest of Belgium, German shells began to fall upon the Cathedral of Rheims.

Today, when the larger part of earth's two billion mortals are at war, those of us who still believe that we are our brother's keeper, even though he be a Chink in far Cathay, may find the following paragraphs on Czech culture uninviting and contentious. Nowadays men are more concerned with bread and bullets. And indeed if I were asked whether it were better to build a Nebraska Capitol, and the price be a child starving or a good man dying, I should have to answer no. But this is a senseless question and all the idealistic emprise of man since conscience came bears final and irrefutable testimony that when men cease believing civilization is worth starving for and worth dying for—and not the least of its symbols is just such a house of state as this which Nebraska farmers built—man will once again crawl on all fours, ready to return to the dust whence he sprung, leaving God to start anew with a better Adam and a less persuasive Eve.

In recording some of the Czech contributions to culture in Nebraska, in the United States and in the lands beyond, one must grant that the culture of the whole western world is **one**, with Hellenic and Hebraic bearings; that there is no such differentiable thing as Czech culture or German culture or French culture or British culture or American culture—each linguistic or geographic group tends either to fulfill or to repudiate (as Germany has now done) the common cultural

heritage. And I am aware, also, that some of these American Czechs, especially of the present generation, may be part Irish or German or Swedish or Scotch, and that some of the European Czechs may be three-tenths Slovak or seven-tenths Moravian. Quibbling over such quantitative distinctions leads to the depravities of Nazi **Kultur**, as vicious a libel upon the German contribution to culture as upon the Czech.

In her remarkable history of Nebraska Czechs, Rose Rosicky, daughter of the famous publisher and journalist, records the heroic chronicle of Nebraska Czechs since their appearance on our plains eighty-five years ago. In our day nearly six hundred Czech sons and daughters are teachers in our public school systems, eighteen of them on the faculty of the University, one an eminent dean. Surely the American challenge to the least favored youth that he acquire schooling from the kindergarten through the college graduate—school is the most magnificent bequest of our democracy, and the fact that among the relatively small number of Czechs in Nebraska such an extraordinarily large number are devoting themselves to teaching is eloquent tribute to the cultural idealism of a people whose European forebears gave the world a Komensky (Comenius).

This famous Moravian-Czech scholar of the seventeenth century, as Professor Charvat of Creighton told the readers of this monthly in October, is acclaimed one of the world's greatest educators. Indeed, from many points of view Comenius remains the first and foremost of a fraternity including Rousseau, Pestalozzi and Froebel, who have created and codified the patterns that typify institutional education in all of the westernized world.

Beyond the borders of Nebraska, so Professor J. S. Roucek of New York University points out in *Books Abroad*, many men of Czech extraction are distinguished academically. Dr Ales Hrdlicka of the United States Museum and the Smithsonian Institute is a world famous anthropologist. Dr. Emil Novak of

John Hopkins University is a noted gynecologist. Dr. J. W. Papez at Cornell University, Dr. F. G. Novy at the University of Michigan, Professor John Zeleny of the University of Illinois and Bohumil Shimek of the University of Iowa are other well known Czech-American scientists. In other fields Professors Carl W. Hasek at Pennsylvania State, Alois R. Nykl at the University of Chicago, Robert J. Kerner at the University of California, Charles Pergler at the National University and Edvard Micek at the University of Texas further adorn the blessed profession bequeathed by Komensky.

Within the province of the fine arts, which with religion comprise the most meaningful contribution until the advent of modern experimental science and industrialism, the Czechs likewise play a comparatively important part. Nebraska musicians like Marie Mikova, Stanislav Letovsky, August Molzer, Tony Donato perpetuate the tradition of world-renowned Czech composers like Smetana, Dvorak, Fibich, Dusek, Foerster, Ambos, Bendl, Weinberger, Friml.

Czech opera singers like Marie Jeritza, Emmy Destinn, Leo Slezak, Jarmila Novotna have signally adorned the Metropolitan stage. Blanche Jurka is one of the most famous actors on Broadway, Frances Lederer on the screen. Sculptors like Albin Polasek and M. J. Korbel of the Chicago Institute of Fine Arts and Cyril Jurecka of Pomona College have an international reputation and Vaclav Brozik (his **Columbus** graced one of our anniversary postage stamps) is known the world over as a historical painter. This honor roll of Czechs who have contributed to world culture, were there any point in listing names now largely unfamiliar to Nebraska readers, might be greatly extended: in his pretentious volumes on the subject (Who Are the Slavs?) Professor Radosavljevich lists over 240 Czechs who have a permanent place on the annals of European and American culture.

In a time like this, when nations are beating their ploughshares into swords and their pruning hooks into spears, when the lion is lying down with the

lamb to make a meal, artists and scientists appear to be less in demand than soldiers and statesmen. I, who learned from a noble Czech general what honor is and from the brave men fighting with him what a love a man hath, am under no little constraint to tell the story here of the Czechoslovak foreign legions—American, British, French, Russian, Italian, Serbian—which on every front were fighting the Hohenzollerns and the Hapsburgs twenty-five years ago in a futile struggle to make the world safe for democracy—soldiers inspired by the tradition of the great Jan Zizka, father of modern military strategy, who in the fourteenth century led the embattled democratic Hussites against the totalitarian Teutonic empire of that day.

Only a year ago another generation of these fearless Czech fighters were ready—a million of them—to die for country and for God. They were shamefully betrayed, not by Hitler, the Anti-Christ, for he had recorded all his diabolical designs with perfect candor in “Mein Kampf,” but by Chamberlain and Daladier and by all the other hypocritical rulers of Christendom who give equivocal lip-service to democracy. These million Czech soldiers now suffer in articulate agony while British and French soldiers, similarly betrayed by the craven and treacherous politicians who domineer over the destinies of free men, are hurled into a belated holocaust that may consume not only their lives but that pearl of utmost price which is liberty itself.

In such melancholy reference I cannot help lamenting that another Jiri of Podebrad or another Masaryk of Prague was not presiding over the Czechoslovak Republic when that fatal thirtieth day of September 1938 broke upon the gilded cathedral spires that enshrine the ancient citadel of Hradcany. Statesmen like Tomas Masaryk and Woodrow Wilson no longer walk the earth and it seems that earth has more need of statesmen this fortieth spring of our floundering century than of scientists and artists. It is true that dynasties and democracies rise and rot and fall: true that the Homers and the Dantes and the Shakespeares, the Phidiases and the Michelangelos and the Rodins, the



Raphaels and the Rembrandts and the Whistlers, the Beethovens and the Tchaikovskys and the Debussays, the Voltaires and the Goethes and the Tolstois survive. Nevertheless, that part of Christendom which still bares its head to the Symbol of Martyred Humanity and cherishes the truth that makes men free may well pray this desperate hour for a Zizka to lead the democratic hosts against Pharaoh and, when the good fight is over, pray for a Masaryk to bring broken-hearted idealists back to the Promised Land.

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(Picture of Josef Francl, p. 35)

The first Czech to enter Nebraska

(Drawing of Covered Wagon with Oxen p. 36)

## THE VANGUARD OF THE CZECH PIONEERS

### Josef Franci

#### The First Czech to Enter Nebraska

As far as we know, the first Czech to enter Nebraska territory was Josef Franci who traveled overland in 1854 on his way to the California gold mines.

Our Czech goldminer was born in Bohemia in 1824. Franci studied music in the Prague Conservatory and later he directed an orchestra making many concert tours through Bohemia, Austria and Germany. In about 1851 he came to America and in 1852 he married Antonia Prochazka in Wisconsin.

Luckily for us, Franci wrote a diary during his trip to the West and his son Fred in Crete, Nebraska gave permission that part of this diary may be used in the Rosicky book "Czechs in Nebraska" from which we reprint it.

Traveling in an ox-drawn wagon, Josef Franci set out from Watertown, Wisconsin on April 18, 1854. With four companions, leaving behind his young wife and small son Fred, he hoped to find fortune in the gold fields of California. On June 3, 1854 this party reached a hill in a small grove about three miles from Council Bluffs, Iowa. Apparently they did not stop there but went seven miles south to the St. Mary settlement across the Missouri from Bellevue, where the ferry boat owned by famous fur trader Peter Sarpy plied back and forth. Sarpy was for more than thirty years an Indian fur trader at Bellevue. Our "forty-niner" writes in his diary:

"Thank God we have made the 700 miles without misfortune. From Newton to the Missouri river we saw elk horns, some were seven feet long. We saw deer at streams. It may be understood that we did not suffer hunger for we shot all the small game we could use. We roasted several and at last grew weary of them. The valley here is beautiful. How green are the grasses in this

rich valley and what a fertile soil here awaits the hands of those who will cultivate it! Emigrants to California are preparing here for their journey and resting after their trip so far.”

Here Francl first saw western trappers and he wrote:

“These people are hired by fur traders for two years or for as long as their journey requires. They go in boats which the steamer pulls up the river against the current as far as it can, then fasten their boats to the shore and proceed further in small boats to their destination where they shoot, trap and trade with Indians. They exchange beads, calico, provisions, etc., for tanned hides. These trappers appear to me like lunatics. At least they could never walk the streets of a European town in their attire. From the remnants hanging in tatters on their bodies it is difficult to say whether their clothing is cotton, linen or wool. Wherever you look you can see the owner’s dark hide, the rest is covered with skins of wild animals. The trapper’s face has not seen water during the many hundred miles of his travels. His hat is made of rough, raw buffalo skin adorned by a fox or wolf tail. Some have attached in front the horns of deer or antelope. When the trapper’s trousers give out he takes a small buffalo hide, cuts it through the mouth, dries it by fire and smoke, and behold a pair of trousers which he simply pulls on, the skins of the extremities serving for suspenders. However, his boots make up for the rest for they are quite handsome, embroidered by Indian women with beads and ornamented by a long fine leather fringe. They are very comfortable. These trappers are an uneducated, Godless sort of people, and most of them are Frenchmen from Canada. There is an abundance of game, but these trappers gamble away not only the money but even the last piece of decent clothing if they happen to have it and then go back to hunt again.”

A wagon train consisting of 36 persons, 160 oxen and 30 horses, which belonged to John Kinney who was later a prominent Nebraska citizen, arrived at St. Mary. Because both money and provisions were beginning to give out, Francl and his companions were glad to sell what they had left including their teams to

Mr. Kinney and to enter his employ with Francl as cook. The ferry carried their train which now consisted of 28 wagons across and Francl stood on Nebraska Territorial soil. That evening a company of 27 Omaha Indians called and after their departure Mr. Kinney was missing a fine dog. The captain of the wagon train went with the party to the Indian village situated five miles west of Bellevue to look for the dog. Francl wrote about this episode:

“We came within ten feet of the village. About forty Indians advanced toward us, armed with bows and arrows, tomahawks, pikes, stone hammers and a few had old guns and swords, but they would not let us enter their village. Their chief crossed his arms on his breast and made us a speech, saying that the dog had been eaten but that he would give us a horse instead. The Omaha Indians are of fine, tall bodies. They paint their faces red and yellow. They smear mud on their hair to make it stiff. Here the Indians begin to go about naked except for a small apron. Some wear buffalo robes with designs painted on them. Their moccasins are of elk or deer skin. We did not see any women. Their village consists of twenty to thirty huts.”

On June 14 they set forth across Nebraska. They reached the Elkhorn River with no adventures to speak of. At this point the notes written by Francl have been lost. The continuation is taken up somewhere in what is now central Nebraska. Their way lay along the real western plains now where Indians and wild animals threatened. Every evening all wagons were drawn into a circle and the stock driven inside. The third day after leaving Lucky Ford River they found a body partly devoured by wolves. The dead man had been driving 1,500 sheep to California. The Pawnee Indians had taken 400 and then killed the owner. The buffalo range began here and they saw many come to Buffalo Creek to drink. Francl thus describes a buffalo hunt:

“We see our half-breed Indian, who is going along with us as hunter and interpreter, pursue the buffalo. When two yards away from him, he fires four

times. Suddenly the animal turns on him and the Indian flees before him. The buffalo stops and the Indian approaches, turning him in our direction. The horse is weakening for he has been hard at it for an hour and half. A fresh horse is procured and the hunt goes on until the second horse is exhausted. The buffalo speeds toward the creek about half a mile distant. He hides in the high grass. There, others await him with revolvers. He stands motionless and allows them to shoot. He weighed 2,000 to 2,300 pounds. We roasted and fried part of the meat and then smoked and dried the rest. The dried meat we hung under the wagon covers to finish drying there. Each evening large droves of buffaloes came to drink but we did not molest them.”

“The day following that we saw a magnificent sight. If anyone had told me before I had seen buffaloes that so many are in existence I would not have believed it. On the other side of the river was a great open space of prairie covered with buffaloes. As far as the eye could reach we saw nothing but buffaloes. On the horizon great clouds of dust rose upward where they were stamping around. These all belong to the Indian, they are his wealth. The calves are kept inside the drove, one can see how the old animals crowd together to protect them.”

They saw and killed many rattlesnakes. They met a group of Sioux returning from battle with Pawnee. One carried a sack from which blood was dripping. At length after much sign language, they made him understand that they wanted to see what he had and he very willingly emptied it. It contained twenty-one scalps of the enemy. Later our group reached Fort Laramie. On September 2, 1854 they reached Salt Lake City. They succeeded in crossing the Sierra Mountains but here his notes end. From several letters, the last sent from California, we find that luck was against him and he hardly made a living. Unfortunately, he found no gold.

Francl returned to Watertown where he taught piano and directed a singing society. For several years he was county clerk and clerk of the district court. In 1869 he left for St. Joseph, Mo., and went afoot to Nebraska City where he entered a claim on a homestead in Saline County, Nebraska. In the fall of that year he settled there with his family, a mile south of Crete near the old Indian fort. In August 1870 he built a store on the corner of 12<sup>th</sup> and Main Streets in Crete and made a well. His corner was a stopping place for immigrants who replenished their supplies for the trip further. However, times were hard. The pioneers had no money, grasshoppers ruined crops. So in 1874 Francl again set out for California to try his luck. But fate was against him. In the meantime his eldest son, Fred, had gone to Oregon where he lived near Walla Walla with Theodore Daum who occupied himself by making cord wood. In 1875 Francl set out afoot for Walla Walla arriving in Portland, a distance of 600 miles. He found Fred in the mountains and in November of that year all three set out on horseback for California. A few days later Fred turned back, intending to take a boat. On December 3<sup>rd</sup> Francl and Daum camped near a large spring. Daum walked off a short distance to look for the right direction and when he returned half an hour later, Francl had vanished. Daum spent the rest of that day and the next one in a fruitless search. The following day he found his way to an Indian settlement where he was directed to the Klamath Indian Agency. There he met people who accompanied him back to aid him in looking for Francl who was discovered dead. He apparently had eaten nothing and part of the time was delirious. That and the arduous journey through deep snow had hastened his end. In 1915 his sons, Ernest and Joseph, searched for his grave in the Fort Klamath cemetery where he was buried but in vain.

### **Karel Zulek**

#### The First Czech Settler

As far as we know, the next Czech to enter Nebraska and the first to become a permanent settler was Karel (Charles) Zulek.

Karel Zulek was born in Podmoklany, Bohemia on June 23, 1822. He lived for a time in Germany where he married a German maiden. He lived in Hungary, later in Bohemia, and in 1854 he came to this country to Freeport, Illinois. There he became acquainted with Germans with whom in 1856 he set out for Nebraska and came to Arago, a little town in Richardson County on the Missouri River in August 27, 1856.

At that time there was a German settlement there. He took claim four miles from the town of Humboldt. The nearest trading point was St. Joseph, Missouri where at first he walked for provisions. These he carried on his back and when his burden became too heavy, he would set down a portion, carry the rest, then walk back for the first part. Thus he continued along the distance of seventy-five miles each way. Travel between Arago and St. Joseph was by boat. Old settlers recount that as many as four boats were anchored at the landing at a time.

There was an Indian reservation in Richardson County and the red men visited Zulek's family and his children played with theirs. Zulek was known among his countrymen far and wide. All of those who came after him to Richardson County turned to him for advice and help and almost all at first worked for him.

The first house he built of stone and is still standing under a hill near the Nemaha River.

Karel Zulek died in Humboldt on May 17, 1896.

## **Libor Alois Slesinger**

### Czech Freighter of the Sixties

Libor Alois Slesinger was born October 28, 1806 in Usti nad Orlici, Bohemia. He participated in the revolution of 1848 and was arrested for inciting revolt. Having been elected a member of the City Council he was liberated, but kept under surveillance. In the latter part of 1856 he arrived in Cedar Rapids, Iowa and later set out for what is now Washington County, Nebraska via Sioux City where the Omaha Indians lived on their reservation.

On October 25, 1860 he went to Denver with a load of freight and thereafter continued to haul provisions between Omaha and Denver. In those times there was no railroad and all supplies were transported by wagons with horses, mules or oxen.

Such transportation was called freighting and Slesinger freighted thus for several years for he settled on a homestead near Denver in 1865. He undoubtedly experienced many interesting episodes of which he makes no mention. This is to be regretted for in course of time all would have become valuable.

When Josef Francl traveled westward he did so as a member of a large and well-protected wagon trail. Libor Slesinger, however, traveled alone over Nebraska plains at a time particularly dangerous for white man.

In 1876 Libor Slesinger retired from ranch life to live in Denver where he died in 1893.



## **Josef Horsky**

### The Czech Settler in Washington County

Josef Horsky is probably the next of the first Czech settlers in Nebraska following Karel Zulek and Libor Alois Slesinger.

He was born in Borovnice near Kostelec nad Orlici, Bohemia in 1806 and came to Linn County, Iowa in 1856. In 1859 Josef Horsky and his sons traveled by covered wagon to Pike's Peak, Colorado where gold had been found, but returned three months later to Iowa. Soon thereafter Josef Horsky moved with his family to a claim he had taken in Washington County, Nebraska. In 1863 he moved to Helena, Montana where he died in January 1900.

## **Frank Walla**

### The Czech Settler in Cuming County

As far as we know, after these four men the next to come and settle in Nebraska was Frank Walla. Sometime in the early sixties, as recorded in the history of Cuming County, Frank Walla had left his home in Wisconsin on an exploring trip during which he visited the Elkhorn Valley in Nebraska. Upon his return home he told relatives and friends about the valley and in 1864 the first Czech arrived in Cuming County. About that time Vaclav Tucek settled in Omaha. In 1864 Jan (John) Herman and Robert Sary (Shary) settled in Arago. Sary and Herman too had lived in Wisconsin. Sary had also taken an exploring trip which resulted in their coming with their families to Nebraska. They established a distillery in Arago and conducted a sort of tavern for in the following year quite a few transients stopped there on their way to homesteads.

Sary and Herman came via St. Joseph, Missouri, up the Missouri River, before the Union Pacific Railroad was built. But when the railroad was built through Nebraska the problems of transportation were solved to a great degree.

Those who came by wagon or afoot had to meet not only the difficulty of transporting provisions but furniture, implements and food. Transportation facilities by railway smoothed out those difficulties and it is evident from the history of the counties that, beginning with 1866, they were settled more rapidly.

(Picture of Slesinger p. 41)

Czech Freighter of the Sixties

(Drawing of Sod House p. 42)

## **CZECH SETTLEMENTS IN NEBRASKA**

Of all the agricultural states in the Union, Nebraska claimed the largest Czech immigration although the settling of other states by our people began ten or fifteen years sooner. According to the census of 1900 Nebraska had 16,138 inhabitants born in Bohemia or Moravia and 25,115 inhabitants born here whose parents were born in the old country. Then there were persons of mixed parentage, one or the other of the parents being Czech and people with only one parent born in Bohemia or Moravia and the other born here of Czech parents. There were also people whose mothers were Czechs and fathers of another nationality.

If we add to this those who did not speak or understand English, when they were asked about their background, we can safely say there were at that time more than 70,000 of our people in this state. The largest group of Czech immigrants came between 1870-1890. Because many of those earliest immigrants left Nebraska and settled in other states we may estimate that during those years more than 80,000 Czech people were in this state.

In 1910 the total population of Nebraska was 1,192,214. In the same year the population of foreign born and of foreign parentage amounted to 530,015, almost half the total. Of this foreign population 62,810 (registered as Czechs), were either born in, or of parents who came from the old country. Of the 539,392 Czechs in the United States in that time, it is probably safe to say that one-eighth resided in Nebraska.

Every year from 300-600 Czech immigrants arriving at various ports gave Nebraska as their destination. The immigration figures since 1910 warrants us to regard 90,000 as a fair estimate of Nebraska's Czech population.

It is interesting to note that of the 93 counties of which our state is composed, the Czech pioneers settled in 72 counties and in 272 towns or villages. The most settled counties by Czechs were those in the eastern part of the state: Butler, Colfax, Cuming, Douglas (Omaha), Knox, Pawnee, Saline and Saunders counties. Cities and towns which had a generous percentage of Czechs were and many still are: Abie, Bee, Brainard, Bruno, Clarkson, Crete, Dwight, Linwood, Milligan, Omaha, Ord, Prague, Schuyler, Table Rock, Touhy, Valparaiso, Verdigre, Wilber.

Listed below are the counties, villages and towns settled by Czech pioneers. You will note some of the names of towns are not in existence today.

Adams Co.: Pauline; Antelope Co.: Clearwater, Elgin, Neligh, Oakdale; Banner Co.: Freeport; Boone Co.: Albion, Cedar Rapids, Petersburg, Primrose; Box Butte Co.: Alliance, Box Butte, Canton, Hemingford, Lawn; Boyd Co.: Butte, Gross, Lynch, Monewi, Naper, Spencer; Brown Co. : Buffalo Co.: Amherst, Gibbon, Luce, Trocnov (Nantasket), Pleasanton, Poole, Ravenna, St. Michael, Sweetwater; Butler Co.: Abie, Appleton, Brainard, Bruno, David City, Dwight, Garrison, Linwood, Loma, Ulysses; Burt Co: Cass Co.: Louisville, Plattsmouth; Cedar Co.: Coleridge, Hartington; Chase Co. Catherin, Chase, Imperial; Cherry Co.: Crockston, Eli, Kilgore, Nenzel, Wood Lake; Cheyenne Co.: Colton, Lodgepole, Potter, Sidney; Clay Co.: Deweese, Fairfield, Springranch; Colfax Co.: Clarkson, Dry Creek, Heun, Howells, Leigh, Richland, Rogers, Schuyler, Tabor, Wilson; Cuming Co.: Bancroft, Beemer, West Point, Wisner; Custer Co.: Ansley, Broken Bow, Comstock, Lodi, Mason City, Phillipsburg, Sargent; Dakota Co.: Emerson; Dawes Co.: Dunlap, Chadron, Crawford, Esther, Fort Robinson Marsland; Dawson Co.: Lexington, Overton, Summer; Dixon Co.: Newcastle; Dodge Co.: Fremont, Hooper, North Bend, Scribner, Snyder; Douglas Co.: Omaha and vicinity; Fillmore Co.: Exeter, Fairmont, Geneva, Milligan, Ohiowa; Franklin Co.: Campbell; Frontier Co.: St. Ann; Gage Co.: Barneston, Beatrice, Clatonia, Filley, Liberty, Odell, Virginia, Wymore; Garden Co.: Garfield Co.:

Burwell; Grant Co.: Hyannis, Whitman; Greeley Co.: Wolbach; Hall Co.: Grand Island; Hamilton Co.: Giltner; Harlan Co.: Hantley; Hayes Co.: Galena, Hayes Center, Palisade, Strikland, Tasov, Thornburg; Hitchcock Co.: Culbertson; Holt Co.: Amelia, Atkinson, Doresey, Ewing, Innman, O'Neill, Page, Red Birds, Stuart; Howard Co.: Cotesfield, Cushing, Elba, Farwell, St. Paul, Warsaw (Varsava); Jefferson Co.: Buckley, Diller, Reynolds, Thompson; Johnson Co.: Crab Orchard, Elk Creek, Tecumseh; Keith Co.: Brule; Kaya Paha Co.: Carns, Norden, Pekin; Knox Co.: Armstrong, Bloomfield, Creighton, Crofton, Dukeville, Jelen, Knoxville, Niobrara, Pishelville, Ruth, Sparta, Tabor, Yankton, Verdel, Verdigre, Vodnany, Walnut, Wineetoon; Lancaster Co.: Agnew, Hallam, Highland, Kramer, Lincoln, Malcolm, Raymond, Roca; Lincoln Co.: North Platte, Wallace; Logan Co.: Ford; Madison Co.: Battle Creek, Hale, Chloe, Kalamazoo, Madison, Meadow Grove, Newman Grove, Norfolk; Morrill Co.: Redington; Nemaha Co.: Aspinwall, Peru; Nuckolls Co.: Pawnee Co.: Burchard, DuBois, Pawnee city, Steinhauer, Table Rock; Perkins Co.: Foster, McLean, Osmond, Pierce, Plainview; Platte Co.: Lindsay, Platte Center; Red Willow Co.: Indianola, McCook; Richardson Co.: Humboldt and vicinity; Rock Co.: Bassett; Saline Co.: Crete,, DeWitt, Dorchester, Friend, Pleasant Hill, Swanton, Tobias, Trident, Western, Wilber; Sarpy Co.: Louisville, Plattsmouth; Saunders Co.: Cedar Bluffs, Cedar Hill, Ceresco, Colon, Morse Bluff, Plasi, Prague, Touhy, Valparaiso, Wahoo, Weston; Scotts Bluff Co.: Seward Co.: Bee, Garland, Milford, Pleasant Dale, Seward; Sheridan Co.: Antioch, Ellsworth, Hay Springs, Marple, Rushville, Whiteclay; Sherman Co.: Ashton, Hazard, Loup City. Rockville, Wolbach; Sioux Co.: Canton, Harrison; Stanton Co.: Pilger, Stanton; Thayer Co.: Alexandra, Belvidere, Davenport, Gilead, Hebron, Hubbell; Thomas Co.: Thedford; Thurston Co.: Pender, Render, Thurston, Walthill; Valley Co.: Arcadia, Comstock, Elyria, Geranium (Netolice), Olean, Ord; Webster Co.: Red Cloud and vicinity; Wheeler Co.: Newboro

The majority of Czechs in Nebraska, however, were settled on farms rather than in towns, in small communities rather than in cities, and in the eastern part of the state rather than in the western part. A large majority of the Czechs of

this state were and are farmers and still are the real backbone of the great Western frontier.

It is not known who was the first Czech settler in Nebraska, but we do know that in the spring of 1857 L. A. Slesinger settled in Washington County probably at the same time with Josef Horsky. Those two pioneers were followed by Edward Rosewater, as far as we know. Although he was of Jewish origin he claimed kindred with the Czechs, and although he came when he was only twelve years old, and his work was entirely in English and with English speaking people, he considered Czech his mother-tongue.

(Map of Nebraska counties p. 44)

(Drawing of Church p. 45)

## **Religious Life of Nebraska's Czechs**

### **Czechs and Religion**

Over and over again the same story is heard. They were deeply religious in the homeland. They brought with them their cherished family Bibles and prayer books. They were poor and shy and kept to themselves. They could not afford to pay towards the maintenance of the church so they stayed at home rather than be embarrassed. Because of the deep rooted religious history of the Czech Catholics, Protestants and Liberals (in the past called Freethinkers) the author feels obliged to briefly trace the outline of that history.

Christianity penetrated into Moravia and Slovakia earlier than in Bohemia. As early as the year 836 a Christian church was consecrated in Nitra, Slovakia. However, Christianity introduced through the agency of Germany was not likely to gain many adherents, as the Christian faith was in the eyes of Czechs, necessarily connected with the hostile German race. It was from the East that Christianity completely and permanently penetrated into Moravia and Bohemia.

In 863 Rostislav, the Prince of the Great Moravian Empire, sent a mission to the court of Emperor Michael in Constantinople asking him to send a Christian teacher of the Slavonic race to his country. The Emperor appointed two monks, the Brothers Constantine and Methodius, to accompany the mission to the Great Moravian Empire. When the Brothers left, Constantine (Cyril) took with him a translation of the Bible written in the language of the Slavic inhabitants of Macedonia. For this translation Cyril used the letters of the new alphabet which he had himself invented. It was the first written alphabet for all Slavs. The Slavic language thus became a written one and by its use in religious service took its position alongside Latin and Greek as a liturgic language. The undertaking of the brothers was fully successful. Numerous churches were built and the inhabitants

of Great Moravian Empire eagerly flocked to the religious services which were held in the Slavonic tongue.

Catholicism prospered for several centuries but the burning of Jan Hus (1415) marked the beginning of the Reformation. A flame was projected into Bohemia that lighted the flames of the "Thirty Years War." The Hussite Party was formed to avenge his death. However, the Czech feudal aristocracy, both Protestant and Catholic tiring of the resultant devastation of the country from internal struggles, joined together with the neutral inhabitants. Therefore, in the battle of Lipany the radical Hussites were annihilated.

The struggle between Catholicism and Protestantism began, not only in Bohemia, but in Europe generally. While the Hapsburg rulers tried to stem the tide, the Protestants forged ahead and endeavored to wrest the scepter from a Hapsburg ruler to give it to one of their own people. In 1617 Ferdinand II was made king of Bohemia. When he refused the Protestants permission to re-open churches built by them he precipitated the Thirty Years War. The rebellion of Protestants ended with the battle on White Mountain on November 8, 1620, when they met their downfall and Bohemia lost the last remnant of her independence.

Ferdinand II was now determined to severely punish the rebels. Twenty-seven leaders of the revolution were executed and so the bloody revolution in Bohemia was followed by a great exodus of the inhabitants who would not renounce their faith. It is estimated that 36,000 families, including 185 houses of nobility, statesmen, authors, professors and ministers went in exile. The slogan of that time was: "Cuius region, eius religio" or translated: "Those who governed had the right to determine religion of their subjects."

The unity of Czech Brethren had greatly increased and popularized Czech literature in exile. Many books were then published of a philosophical and



educational nature. Almost all literary work subsequent to Hus had been imbued with his spirit.

But again it was a Catholic and a Hapsburg, Emperor Joseph II, who in 1781 issued the Toleration Patent allowing Protestants to worship openly, although not exactly in the form that had been used by the Czech Brethren. True, this same Emperor endeavored even more persistently than did his forebears to Germanize the Czechs. Among the Czech patriots who, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, helped to resuscitate and modernize the suppressed Czech language, kept alive so long among the lowly, we find the greatest credit due to a number of Czech Catholic priests called with the rest the “awakeners of the nation.”

As stated before, these are the phases of Czech history which many contend made patriotic Czechs feel antagonist to the church, which in their opinion was in league with the hated alien government. Coming to this country they found freedom of speech and press, became Liberals, and ceased to believe in orthodox doctrine. But that cannot be the only reason why they became such. They could have been Protestants here as well as many others are. However, the Czech temperament is strongly individualistic. Czechs like to dissent, question, challenge and dispute. This quality is inherited from their Hussite forefathers and this quality is the foundation for liberal thinking.

Czech Liberals in this country for years commemorated the burning of Jan Hus, whose motto was: “Seek the truth, hear the truth, learn the truth, love the truth, defend the truth unto death.” But truth is different in theory for each individual. When Liberals are asked why they revere the memory of a Catholic priest, Jan Hus, they reply: “If Hus were living today, he would be a Liberal.” However, many Catholics in Bohemia respect his memory just the same, as we all instinctively respect the memory of any man who has laid down his life for his true belief.

## **Czech Catholics**

The Czech Catholics struggled tenaciously in their early days, but they have reason to feel satisfied with what they have accomplished. For a long time they had but one Catholic paper. In 1867 the first Catholic paper was published in Chicago (Katolicke noviny) but it existed only six months. It was not until 1872 that the Catholic weekly "Hlas" was founded in St. Louis, Missouri. Thus, in the matter of publicity, the non-Catholics had the start. Practically no newspapers of their own and almost no Czech priests or churches added to the struggling for a bare living. It is natural that the beginning was slow and hard for them. Through the first Bishop of Lincoln diocese, Bishop Bonacum, came the help needed to support the Czech Catholics. The devoutness of Bishop Bonacum was manifested in his understanding that Czech priest were needed desperately. He traveled to Bohemia in search of the priests himself.

Catholic Masses were said in private homes and in public school buildings. In Howard County, for example, they met for worship before a cross driven into the ground. As soon as they could obtain enough money they built sod or log churches and occasionally they built frame churches in both eastern and western Nebraska.

The first Mass served for Czech in Nebraska was in the home of Josef Simanek, near Prague, Saunders County in September of 1871 by Rev. Francis Sulak, S. J. For a long time there was a country post office there, called at first Plzen after the city in Bohemia of that name. Later the name was changed to Plasi because it caused confusion in mail delivery with Pilger, Stanton County. Rev. Boubal alternated with Rev. Sulak serving also in the school house and although the church was not built until 1878, it is in truth the oldest Czech parish in Nebraska.

As far as is recorded, the next Mass served in a private home was in the sod house of Josef Sindelar, Colfax County, on Christmas Day 1871, by the members of the assembly themselves. Several pioneers had settled there on Maple Creek in 1870, as recorded in the history of Tabor parish. These people continued serving Mass for themselves for some time before the missionaries and priests came.

During the late seventies and early eighties Colfax County was the scene of greatest activity. Within six years six churches had been built. It was probably for that reason that there was some agitation in favor of erecting a monastery of the Czech Benedictine Order in Plasi or Cedar Hill, Saunders County. Bishop O'Connor had ordained the assistance of two Benedictine fathers from Pennsylvania, Rev. V. Kocarnik and Rev. Sig. Klima, but the plans were not approved. Later the monastery was established in St. Procopius parish of Chicago.

Thus, for several years Catholics worshipped in homes or buildings allowed them for that purpose. In 1877 Bishop O'Connor of Omaha sent Rev. Groenbaum to Europe to enlist the services of Czech and German priests. A call was issued in the papers of Bohemia for priests that were needed in rapidly forming settlements. Several answered and thus an impetus was given to the building of churches.

(Picture of church p. 48)

The first Czech Catholic church in Nebraska built 1876 in Abie, Butler Co.

## **Czech Protestants in Nebraska**

By Jaroslav Mrazek, PhD.

According to available records, the Czech Protestants, or as they often called themselves the “Evangelicals,” started to move into Nebraska in the late 1860’s. They usually came together with the Catholics and the so-called Freethinkers. As far as we know, we can trace one stream of covered wagons to Saunders County near Prague where three Protestant families settled in 1868 and began to gather for devotions.

In the year 1870 six families crossed the Missouri River and settled in Colfax County near Schuyler. After a long trip of many hardships they arrived on the homesteads, which were to become their future homes. As they were looking around and seeing nothing but the long prairie grass, John Novotny their leader spread out his hands and said: “Deti, tak toto je ta zaslibena zem!” (Children, so this is that promised land!).

There were many other parts of our State settled by the Czech immigrants about this time. No doubt, there must have been many Protestants among them but we have only scanty records about them. However, during the later 70’s and 80’s greater numbers of Czech Protestants arrived and began several settlements of their own, which we shall describe later in more detail.

They were part of a great migration from Bohemia and Moravia which then belonged to Austria-Hungary. They lived in their homelands in political and religious oppression for many centuries. Following the burning of John Hus at the stake in 1415 they were known as the Bohemian Brethren. After the Battle on White Mountain in 1620 they were bitterly persecuted and tens of thousands of them were exiled. Some of these refugees later in the 18<sup>th</sup> century immigrated to America and organized the Moravian Church. However, it was not until 1781, when the Austrian Emperor Joseph II issued the Patent of Toleration, which

allowed the Czech Protestants to organize their own Evangelical Reformed Church in Bohemia and Moravia. It was from these congregations the early Czech Protestants, poor in the worldly goods but vigorous in their faith, emigrated to America and eventually settled in our State.

The signing of the Homestead Act by President Lincoln gave the movement a big impetus. His name stood for freedom and free land for those who were willing to suffer and work hard for it. No wonder many of the immigrants felt like pilgrims on the way from the slavery of Egypt into the liberty and plenty of the Promised Land.

Because of the lack of ordained ministers, the Protestant families began to conduct devotions in their own humble homes. As the word spread about the fertile land of Nebraska and more Czech Evangelicals arrived, there gradually appeared about a dozen congregations which were organized in the following areas: Prague, Wahoo and Weston in Saunders County; Zion and New Zion in Colfax County; Bohemian Brethren in Omaha and Bethlehem in South Omaha; Thurston in Thurston County; Wilber and Crete in Saline County; Table Rock in Pawnee County; and Burwell (Sedlov) in Valley County. Of these original (cannot make out the next few words) congregations, only the first eight survived to the present time. In 1921 an additional church, the Bethlehem Chapel near Howells, was organized. It has become a part of the Larger Parish of "The Second Mile," comprising also the Zion and Webster churches in Colfax County.

### **Pioneer Ministers**

The first known Czech Protestant minister in the Midwest was the Rev. Francis Kun of Tama County, Iowa. He was ordained in 1849 in Moravia and came to the United States in 1856 to preach the Word of God among his countrymen. In 1860 Rev. Kun became the pastor of a small flock of Czech Protestants at Ely near Cedar Rapids, Iowa. The congregation, however, could

not support him entirely so he had to farm. In addition, he was called to minister to several pioneer evangelical groups scattered over the wide Midwest. Thus, Rev. Kun was invited in the middle 70's to help the struggling Czech Protestant groups in Nebraska. He was independent in spirit as well as in action and never accepted any support from any missionary board. He died in 1894 in Ely, Iowa.

The Rev. H. A. Schauffler was another kind of any ordained minister who came to the early Czech immigrants in Nebraska. He learned in Prague, Bohemia to speak the Czech language acceptably and the Board of Congregational Missions appointed him a missionary among the Czech immigrants in the United States. Rev. Schauffler did a fine piece of work around Cleveland, Ohio in the early 1880's where he was gathering new congregations from the "Evangelicals" as well as from all others whoever would respond to the Christian gospel. In 1885 Rev. Schauffler visited Omaha, Wilber and Crete, Nebraska. However, after some initial success his efforts had no permanent results.

Then in 1889 came the Rev. Vincent Pisek who was sent by the Presbyterian Mission Board to survey the field among the Nebraska Czechs. Born and educated in Bohemia, Pisek studied at the Union Theological Seminary in New York. During his studies Pisek helped with the organization of the John Hus Czech Brethren Presbyterian Church and Neighborhood House in New York City. After his ordination in 1883 he became pastor of that church. Wherever this man of unusual gifts and experience spoke to our Czech pioneers in Nebraska, the people were inspired to renewed faith and sacrifice.

Later came some theological students to help with the activities of the growing number of Czech congregations. Among these student-assistants were Vaclav Losa, V. S. Beranek, V. Siller, Philip Reitingger, John Rundus, Adolph Kadlec, Bohdan and Milo Filipi and others. Several of these men became regular

pastors in our State, as we shall see from the stories of the developing congregations.

### **Freethinkers or Liberals**

Czech Freethinkers in Nebraska were organized in the past mainly through their reading, fraternal and other societies, schools and clubs of a Liberal Thinker's League (Svobodna obec or Volna myslenska). The later, however, have not made any headway because the younger generations did not have much interest in them. The weekly paper "**Vek rozumu**" (Age of Reason), the organ of this League, and the monthly "**Svojan**", both published in Chicago, Illinois, were devoted to the program of furthering Liberalism. The community life of the Freethinkers centered about their halls which served many purposes. Occasionally, in the case of a prominent person their halls were used for public funerals.

### **Pioneer Funerals**

Although the pioneers of Nebraska are often portrayed as hale and hearty persons, death was a frequent visitor in their midst. A family burying ground on the homestead was much in evidence; some with shafts of marble bearing dates prior to the year 1880; some marked by a plain cross of wood on which the written word has long been obliterated by the elements. I have seen just a mound, grassed over by time bounded by boulders, brought by loving hands from the creeks and streams. Some of these burying grounds are long forgotten; some with sagging fences of barbed wire; all in the sleep of the dead.

Funeral processions of sorrowing loved ones, neighbors and friends, with heavy hearts assemble to pay a tribute of respect to the dead. Often a nosegay of wild flowers, tearstained and bedraggled, clutched in the hand, was carried as

an offering of love. A neighbor or a friend often would read the lines and offer a prayer for eternal peace at the open grave.

Often times funeral processions were marked with pomp. Uniformed bands rendered sorrowful dirges; the tolling bells, the shining hearse of black with polished glass, drawn by prancing horses of black or white-black for the aged and white for the child followed by buggies of all descriptions; men on horseback and if the distance was not too great, some on foot. Truly a fitting display for a pioneer.

The burial of the dead varied with the community. Often old country customs were observed. In one community it was custom to photograph the dead in their burial regalia. Lodge and church customs were observed and I honestly believe that all were buried with a hope in their hearts to join the choir invisible of those immortal dead who live again, for God had promised to these pioneers. "Thou wilt light my candle." Thus assured they go forward through this unknown land.

From "Panorama of Our Heritage"—Verdigre



## Cultural Work of the Czechs

### Czech Schools in the Past

Love for one's native land and language is natural, but it is much stronger in people living in countries subjected to the rule of an alien government. Bohemia and Moravia are a notable example of this truism. Despite the effort of the Austrian (German language) government for three hundred years to stamp out the Czech language, it never died, but revived again in its full purity and beauty. What wonder then that immigrants to our shores brought with them this love for their native tongue and tried to keep it alive here for their children? However, they never forgot their duty to this country and sent their children to public schools regularly. This applies to the time before Catholic schools, when Czech was taught, were established and that time came much later. The first such school was in Dodge and was established by Rev. Jan Broz in 1911.

The Liberals, while sending their children to the public schools, prepared for them Czech language schools on Saturday and Sunday forenoons. Miss Sarka Hrbkova, in an address delivered on July 4, 1917, in Krug Park, Omaha, very aptly summed up their attitude when she said: "I should be ashamed if I could not speak to my mother in the language in which she first spoke to me, but I should be equally ashamed, if my mother had not seen to it that I received an education in English, the language of my country." Ruzena

Rosicka

These non-public Czech language schools were sponsored mainly by lodges and the teachers were men and women who devoted themselves to the work for a very modest stipend. Occasionally a summer term was held and school was in session forenoons during the summer vacation.

Following is a list of Czech schools. Of the teachers, all of whom taught more for love than gain, Joseph Sterba stands first having taught in South Omaha for twenty-eight years, while Frank Kotouc of Humboldt taught there twenty years.

In 1873 the first school was recorded. At that time Josef Jindra began to teach Czech in a little log schoolhouse on Josef Jelinek's farm near Crete, Saline County. In 1877 a school was established in Schuyler, Colfax County, by the Literary and Dramatic Society Tyl and Lodge Zapadni Jednota. In 1878 a school was established in Wilber, Saline County. From 1880 to 1882 Josef Holecek taught Czech and English in Niobrara, Knox County. In 1881 school was established in Omaha. The Omaha Sokol Board donated the use of the schoolroom in Holub's building on the corner of 13<sup>th</sup> and William Streets where Prague Hotel now stands, gratis. The first teacher was Ladislav Fliegel. He was followed by V. Jung and T. Capek. In 1890 a schoolhouse was built on ground donated by Josef Michal near 12<sup>th</sup> and Pacific Streets. Omaha Sokol and other lodges helped with expenses. When Sokol built its hall on 13<sup>th</sup> Street and Dorcas the building was moved there. Three grades were instituted at that time. In 1883 the school in Humboldt, Richardson County, was established and Frank Kotouc taught until 1903. In 1892 the school in Morse Bluff, Saunders County was established when Josef Prai taught one year in Frank Hynes's hall. In 1892 Lodge Zapadni Svornost established a school in its hall in Clarkson, Colfax County. Anton Odvarka Sr. taught Sunday forenoons. Later, Czech was taught one hour each on Friday in the public school by Misses Aksamit, Folda and Superintendent Fred Jelinek in turns. In 1894 a school in Pawnee County was established, being in session on Sunday forenoons during summer vacations. Jan Nedela taught in a German Evangelical Church in the country near the Richardson County boundary. In 1894 a school was established in South Omaha sponsored by the Lodge Hvezda Svoboda and Sokol in Brown Park schoolhouse during summer vacation. Bohuslav Horacek taught four days per week having two classes of ninety children. The course included reading,

writing, history, Czech songs, arithmetic and geography. In 1896 another school was founded four miles northwest of DuBois. In 1899 the school in Boyd County was taught by Anton Basta during one summer. In 1900 the school in Howells, Colfax County was established sponsored by Lodge Svoboda and various parents. The first teacher was Anton Rysavy and he was followed by Miss L. Dusatko who used to come from Clarkson. Later, Professor Srb taught in the public schoolhouse. In approximately 1896 Anna Jelen taught one summer in Verdigre. In Pishelville Mr. Vonasek taught Czech in 1906. In 1907 a school was established in Brainard, Butler County under the tutelage of Professor Fred Jelinek, maintained by the parents. In 1916 a school was founded in Ord Valley County with the average attendance of thirty pupils. Miss Ludmila Kupec taught during the three summer months of vacation. (note, word is punched out) then, Czech was not taught until 1925 when Rev. (again note illegible name) a Presbyterian minister, taught during the three summer months in the hall belonging to Lodge Denice. About thirty-five pupils attended. In 1916 a school was maintained in Virginia, Gage County for one year by Lodge Osveta in a building one mile east and two miles south of Virginia. In 1916 a school was established in St. Paul, Howard County by K. Svoboda. Czech was also taught at the Dwight Public School during the 1920's to 1940's by Professor James Liska.

## **First Czech School Teacher**

The first public school teacher of Czech birth was Frank Znamenacek, a pioneer of Saline County. He was born in Macovice, Bohemia in 1844 and died in 1932 at Crete, Nebraska.

Frank came to Cincinnati, Ohio in 1862. During the Civil War he was employed by the government working in a bakery making bread and crackers for the soldiers. He attended school in the evenings to learn the English language. After earning some money he sent for his parents. They settled in St. Louis in 1865 where he worked in a rope factory. In 1868 with seven other families he came by boat to Nebraska City, then to Saline County in 1869 where he homesteaded. His document was signed by President Ulysses S. Grant on July 1, 1875.

In 1869 Znamenacek began to teach in English, although he taught during the first three months without textbook. At that time the school belonged to District No. 3 which was organized October 6, 1868 and covered a large territory—twenty-six sections of land.

Frank Znamenacek married Anna Zajicek in 1873 and they had thirteen children. Four children passed away within two weeks during a diphtheria epidemic in 1894.

## **Pioneer School Teachers**

Vincent Stedry taught in Saline County in 1879 near Wilber. He was born in Bohemia and came with parents to Baltimore, Maryland in 1854. In 1879 they moved to Saline County. Vincent Stedry translated the textbooks for his pupils and wrote the words of songs in both Czech and English on large sheets of

paper. These he tacked on the wall and then he played the melody on his violin. Children were so pleased with his methods that the school could not hold all the pupils.

The next pioneer teacher was Josef Zerzan of Schuyler who taught in District 17 in Colfax County in 1874 and 1875. He began teaching near Abie in 1883 and continued for many years following.

Jan Sobota of Praha, Colfax County taught in District 17 of that county in 1874 and 1875. Later he taught in Butler and Saunders Counties. Other pioneer teachers in Colfax County were Josef Zerzan and Jan Novotny who taught in 1876 in a small building on Jan Folds's land. Novotny also taught in Butler County. The course lasted three months and the salary was \$30.00 per month.

Miss Anna Zajicek taught in Cuming County in 1876. Somewhat later the Misses M. Dvorak and K. Langer taught. Jan Sobota taught in Saunders County prior to 1880 in Vanek's school near Prague. He was succeeded by Jan Peleska of St. Louis, Missouri who was also organist in the Plasi Church. Frank Lundak taught in Knox County in 1882. Josef Walter, Jr. taught in Dodge County in 1883.

There were probably others in this vanguard of the army of men and women in the noble work of teaching, but records are lost.

## **Slavic Department at the University of Nebraska**

In order to establish a Department of Slavic Languages at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, the first step taken was to approach the Board of Regents and present the request. But this request was refused on the grounds that there was not enough interest among students. However, the students were not discouraged and began to prepare the way by forming the Comenius Club which was named for Jan Amos Komensky (Comenius), the world renowned teacher of modern forms of education.

In the meantime, agitation for a Slavic Department continued. During the winter of 1906 and 1907 Jan Rosicky and Vaclav Bures of Omaha drew up a new request. They were present at the meeting of the Regents on February 15, 1907, together with Frank Rejcha who at that time was a member of the State Legislature. Rosicky made his plea and spoke of the history of Bohemia and Jan Amos Komensky. Bures told how the Austrian government had tried to Germanize the Czechs in the past and Rejcha made his plea on behalf of the large number of Czechs living in Nebraska.

Chancellor Andrews replied that financial conditions would not permit this new expenditure. He said, however, that if Rejcha would help the passage of the bill allowing one mill of the entire state tax for the state University, the Slavic Department might materialize.

The struggle lasted for six weeks. **The Lincoln Star** published a cartoon showing Frank Rejcha as an old, cross man with the caption: "Frank Rejcha is watching the lobbyists and grafters." On March 24, 1907 the voting began. Rejcha asked for the help of Victor Rosewater who was there as a newspaper reporter for the **Daily Bee** of Omaha and who agreed to call a meeting of the Douglas County delegation which numbered nine. A member named Harvey

bargained with Rejcha that if he would vote against the railroads Harvey would vote for the mill levy. Rejcha had also secretly obtained the votes and finally the levy bill, which actually assured the Slavic Department, passed by 56 votes.

It seemed then that the Slavic Department was assured but Governor Sheldon, who was preparing his campaign for a second term, reduced the expense estimate by \$80,000. Chancellor Andrews again did not see his way clear to grant the request for this department in spite of the appeals of Rosicky and Bures. He went abroad and the persistent Bures, cabled anew the request and this time it was granted.

In the fall of 1907 Jeffrey Dolezal Hrbek became professor of the new department. He was succeeded by his sister, Professor Sarka B. Hrbkova. During World War I when so any activities were disrupted the Department of Slavic Languages was abolished.

When the State Constitutional Convention was in the 1919-1920 session two members, Karel V. Svoboda (Howard Co.) and Josef Votata (Douglas Co.) conferred with Chancellor Avery about reinstatement of teaching Czech, the Chancellor had no objections provided that the proper teacher could be found. It was agreed to have a conference with the other Czech delegates to this convention and with Chancellor Avery and Dean Buck. At that time Chancellor Avery explained that he knew the most qualified teacher, Orin Stepanek. This met with satisfaction among the delegation and the Chancellor agreed to cable Orin Stepanek who was in Europe at the time. Thus, Professor Stepanek accepted the position and assumed his duties in the fall of 1920. And so the teaching of Czech was resumed under the Department of Modern Languages.

After the death of the beloved Professor Stepanek there was again an intermission in the Czech classes and the language courses were eventually canceled once again.

In 1959 Dr. Pfeiler, Chairman of the Department of Germanic Languages, contacted Dr. Vladimir Kucera and inquired as to his accepting the position of teaching Czech at the University of Nebraska. Dr. Kucera had been waiting many years for this opportunity and so he commenced teaching his beloved mother-tongue in the fall of 1959 with twelve students registered. Only two of the students were regular University students, however, the others being registered in the Extension Division of the University of Nebraska. But as soon as classes were resumed, the Czechs of Nebraska were so happy that their native tongue was again being offered as a course of study that a publicity campaign was launched to further the interest of the students. After one year of teaching, Dr. Kucera realized the growing need for additional classes and so he expanded his area of teaching by asking for a second year class to be included in the Czech Language Courses. In 1963 the third year Czech was approved for advanced study. These extensions were granted due to the understanding and cooperation of the Chairman of the Department of Germanic Languages.

Until the school year of 1964-1965 the Czech classes were on the same level as the other foreign languages. Now, after six continuous years of Czech Language classes by Dr. Kucera; six years that have encompassed so many problems and so much concern that has been met and solved with dedication, the course of registration was changed in the spring of 1966 after a decision of the Board of Regents at the University of Nebraska. This change is both interesting and confusing for the people of Nebraska and the end result of such a decision will be followed closely. Until this change the Department of Germanic Languages included Czech and Russian Languages. Now, it will be known as the Department of Germanic and Slavic Languages.

Many educators and citizens wonder as to what the next evolution of the Czech Language classes at the University of Nebraska will be. It will depend, of course, to a large degree upon the understanding and the ultimate purpose of the



University officials. The interest and accomplishment of the Czech people of Nebraska, both students and parents, should play an active part in this transformation also.

It would be a discredit to the populace of Nebraska to have the Czech Language placed on a lower scale than other foreign languages. If prejudice dominates the state's educational decisions, the classes will without a doubt be terminated again.

A Department of Slavic Languages has been needed, planned and anticipated for so long by so many. With the increase in the number of students registered in the last few years it was felt that this dream of a separate department would at least become a reality. Now that the reviving of the Czech spirit has been progressing so wonderfully, why is the Czech Language being pushed farther in the background? Why is this not the proper time to establish a Slavic Department for the hundreds of thousands of descendants of the Czech, Polish and Russian pioneers that settled this heart of the Great Plains?

The cradle of Slavic freedom has already been placed here in Nebraska's Plains. We have the obligation, and it is an imperative duty, that this cradle must be preserved clean, untarnished and proud as the sacred hope of the Slavic Race. It must be fostered not only for the Slavs, but for all who live in this state and in this country.....the country that was founded and populated by people believing in the rights of every man, regardless of creed, color or race.

## **The Czech Department in Creighton University**

The rich activities of the Czech Department in the Creighton University in Omaha was the result of deep patriotic feeling, hard work and unknown sacrifices of two young men, Professor Chas. C. Charvat and his former schoolfellow, Rev. Edw. Cepuran.

In the spring of 1924 Professor Chas. Charvat, then a teacher of English at the Creighton University, conceived the possibility of a Czech Language Department. He communicated with Rev. Cepuran, a pastor of St. Wenceslaus Church, Omaha. With the consent of Rev. J. McCormick, President of the University, the project was started. Early in June Prof. Charvat announced that Czech would be taught the following school year. It was agreed that it would be best to begin with an elementary course to be taught in the evenings, thus enabling professional students and non-university students to take the course. Classes were begun with about twenty students.

Prof. Charvat and Rev. Cepuran agreed that it might be well to cultivate a spirit of national pride before sufficient enthusiasm could be mustered for a successful Czech department and consequently, on December 10, 1924 a group of Czech students organized the Czech club. The names of twenty-five students were submitted. The immediate purpose of the club was to further the study of the Czech language, literature and history and to also provide social entertainment. "The ultimate purpose was to realize the wish of President McCormick to make Creighton University a center of Czech intellectual and cultural life in the Middle West."

The officers elected were; Ad. Svoboda, president and Jos. Pallat, Wahoo, secretary-treasurer. Rev. Cepuran was chosen faculty moderator. The first meeting was on December 17, 1924. The late Msgr. Vranek made an eloquent

plea for a continuation of the Czech student activity at Creighton. Music, oratory, recitation and dancing were usual features of the Czech programs.

In the summer school of 1925 at Creighton University two courses of Czech language were offered. In September 1925 the second year of Czech was conducted by Rev. Cepuran. One was a day course in elementary Czech and the other an evening course in Czech literature. On October 29 the Czech club was reorganized with Jos. Pallat, president, Roman Hruska, now U. S. Senator, vice-president, Miss I. Tauchen, secretary-treasurer and J. Cacek, chairman of the entertainment committee. Prof. Charvat was chosen faculty moderator

The prospects for the second term were very encouraging. Two hundred Czech books were received from Czechoslovakia and thirty books were received from the Chicago office of the National Alliance of Czech Catholics in America. Prof. Charvat who has furnished the data about the Czech department and club said: "While the future of the Czech department is promising, I cannot refrain from saying that the sum total of the little difficulties which persisted in besetting the path with Rev. Cepuran and I had to tread until now, has on more than one occasion been sufficiently discouraging to make me wish to abandon the work. Fortunately, when the enthusiasm of one chanced to ebb, the other was aglow with fresh zest. In that manner a perpetual interest was maintained in support of the venture."

Prof. Charvat said that while this department and club had done good work in stimulating young Czech-Americans to concern themselves with the intellectual and cultural value of their original nationality, had won admiration of many Czechs in the Middle West, and had brought publicity of the best kind for the university; for its continued success it would be desirable to have one person devote all his time, or the major portion of it, to this work. Both Rev. Cepuran and Prof. Charvat have been able to give it but their spare time.

## **Professors of Czech Language at the University of Nebraska**

**Jeffrey Dolezal Hrbek.** In the fall of 1907 Jeffrey Dolezal Hrbek became the first professor of the Czech language at the University of Nebraska.

As a young student Jeffrey attracted the attention of his teachers and in high school came under the influence of Miss M. McClenahan, who encouraged his poetic talent and to whose memory he dedicated the class poem "**Where Brook and River Meet,**" written at his graduation from Washington High School. At that time he began writing verse and through his efforts "**The Pulse,**" a literary magazine was established. He was its first editor. After leaving high school he taught in the public school in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. In 1902 he entered Lafayette College, Easton, Pennsylvania where he gained distinction in literary and language studies. He visited Bethlehem, Nazareth and Lititz in Pennsylvania and examined the libraries, schools, cemeteries and other landmarks left by those early zealous countrymen of his parents who had settled there in the first half of the eighteenth century. Upon visiting an old Czech cemetery there he conceived the motif for his poem, "**The Old Bohemian Cemetery**", written in 1905. Upon his return to his native city, he taught in the public schools and in summer vacation at the Czech school. In the fall of 1904 he entered the State University of Iowa.

A month after his graduation he was formally tendered the position of head of the newly-organized Department of Slavonic Languages and instructor of the Germanic Languages and Literature at the University of Nebraska. He had refused two other flattering offers in order that he might best serve the Czech people as instructor in the newly-appointed chair.

He began preparations for his work and outlined a practical textbook of Czech grammar. He plunged into his work with great energy and worked zealously in the Komensky Clubs.

On November 14 he became ill of typhoid fever and died December 4, 1907. On December 7 in the Czech school building, Cedar Rapids, Iowa, thousands assembled to bid farewell to this talented youth of twenty-five who had known and loved them all.

His collected poems were published in 1908 under the title "**Linden Blossoms.**" Aside from that he had translated many Czech and German poems.

**Sarka Hrbkova** was born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. From 1895 to 1906 she taught in the public school in Cedar Rapids where she organized the first night school for foreigners and for two years she taught it gratis. From 1908 to 1919 she was a member of the faculty of the University of Nebraska where she was head of the Department of Slavonic Languages and Literature. In 1910 she received the title of Adjunct Professor; in 1914 Assistant Professor with a position on the University Senate; and in 1918 was made full Professor. From 1908 to 1917 she was editor-in-chief of the **Komensky Magazine** in Lincoln. Between 1918 and 1919 she was State Chairman of the Women's Committee Council of National Defense (Nebraska Division), appointed by Dr. Anna Howard Shaw and later elected by a mass vote of the women of Nebraska. For her patriotic and tireless service she received no pay. In 1919 she was Chairman of the Speaker's Division of Women's State Liberty Loan Committee. In that year she left the state for New York City where she was a manager of the Czechoslovak Bureau, Foreign Languages Information Service.

Sarka Hrbkova published these articles: **“Bridging the Atlantic”**(a discussion of the Americanization problem), 1918; **The Slavs of Central Europe**, 1919; **Czechoslovak Stories** (a translation of thirteen stories by Czech writers and a brief history of Czechoslovak literature), 1919; **The Bohemians of Nebraska** (Volume 19 of Nebraska State Historical Society Publication); **Jan Vyrava** (a translation of a Czech play); **The Wisp** (a translation of a Czech play); **The Library and the Foreign-born Citizen** (published in Public Libraries, 1910); **Bunk in Americanization** (published in the **Forum**) **Americans of Czechoslovak Descent** (published in the **Survey**, 1921; **The Czechoslovaks in America** (published in **Our World**, 1921; **Articles on Masaryk’s Spirit of Russia, Americanization,** etc. (in the **Czechoslovak Review**); **Jan Zizka** (in **Organ Bratrstva** 1925); **The Parrot** (a translation of story by Jan Havlasa and published in the **Czechoslovak Review**) and numerous articles and reviews published in **The Survey** and newspapers in Cleveland, Ohio; Omaha and Lincoln, Nebraska and Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

**Professor Orin Stepanek** was born in Crete, Nebraska. He studied at the University of Nebraska from 1909 until 1913 when he received his Bachelor’s Degree. The following year he received the Degree of Master of Arts at Harvard University, winning a scholarship for that year, and also in 1918, when he returned to Harvard for another year of graduate work.

During World War I he enlisted as private in the United States Marine Corps and was stationed at the Marine Flying Field in Miami, Florida as instructor. A year later, under the auspices of the Young Men’s Christian Association, he entered General Snejdarek’s division of the Czechoslovak Army then on the Hungarian frontier in Slovakia.

During the summer of 1920 he received a cablegram inviting him to the position of Assistant Professor of English in the University of Nebraska. He

returned to America in the fall and after three years of teaching, having been promoted to an Associate Professorship, he returned to Czechoslovakia to study Slavic philology at the Charles University in Prague. A year later he again took up his post at the University of Nebraska, where he has taught first, second and third year courses in Czech offering also correspondence courses in that language.

Known as one of the best-beloved teachers at the University he had taught literature, specializing in comparative literature and particularly in Slavic literature. In 1931 he had published a much praised **Czech Grammar** and several articles on American and Czech cultures. He traveled widely including a trip around the world followed in 1926 by a trip to Russia as a member of one of the first groups to be invited to visit Russia after the revolution.

Although his health had been poor the past few years, he had continued with his teaching at the University and had followed the practice of inviting students to his home for informal sessions. He died June 4, 1955 at age 66. Only a week before his death he had proctored final examinations for his courses and had expected to teach courses in summer school that year.

### **Orin Stepanek**

Editorial in Lincoln Star—June 7, 1955

Young Nebraskans lost an unusually understanding, inspiring friend in the death of Orin Stepanek, for many years professor of English and Slavonic languages at the University of Nebraska, whose sudden death Saturday night shocked and saddened a wide circle of friends.

Professor Stepanek was a teacher in the best tradition. No sacrifice of time, energy or strength was too great for him when he discovered a student of

intellectual stature and competence. In the broad field assigned to him he made the classroom live in terms of humanness, an unforgettable part of undergraduate life on the campus. And in time among undergraduates he became one of the most beloved members of the faculty.

Only a week before Professor Stepanek's death a returning graduate, here to be honored and to address a university group, paid this tribute to him: "It would be hard for me to describe the debt I feel I owe to this university and especially to two men.....And then too, to Prof. Orin Stepanek from whom I never took instruction but who opened so many doors of the imagination and who sharpened and nourished an interest in an appreciation of poetry which has given color and cadence to my writing and the great music of the English language to my life."

Prof. Stepanek was there on that occasion. The tribute to him must have come as a compensation for years of teaching. It was the kind of tribute which others who have studied under him or perchance enjoyed his warm friendship would have paid to a man of simple tastes and a truly great heart. To his home on innumerable occasions went students, there to talk over literature and to weigh civilization in terms of the classics. He gave everything that he had to teaching. Teaching consumed so much of his time that he did not have the opportunity to write books, although books and writing were close to his heart. He always graded his own papers, never trusting the evaluation of a student's work to readers.

Among the cherished memories of scores of graduates of the University of Nebraska will be the recollections of those golden hours under the teaching of Prof. Stepanek.



## **Komensky Clubs**

The first Komensky (Comenius) Club was founded at the University of Nebraska during the Christmas vacation in the year of 1903 being organized by Professor Boh. Simek of Iowa State University and J. Pipal, a student at the University of Nebraska.

In January of 1904 Mr. Pipal and twelve students met and officially formed the **Komensky Educational Clubs**. According to the constitution drawn up at that time, any club or society of an educational or cultural nature was entitled to membership upon taking the name of Komensky, the world renowned educator. The primary aim was to help all clubs enrolled in educational welfare and also to strengthen a common bond among all Czechs. Also, efforts were made toward perpetuating the Czech language and music; to preserve the Czech history and to foster an additional interest in reviving Czech literature. The social condition of all the Czech people here was of primary concern, therefore, the club adopted the plan to improve their social life and also to inform all Americans of whatever meritorious endeavors undertaken or accomplished by the Czechs. The Komensky club, therefore, could be honestly described as an educational sponsor toward better Czech-American relations, improving the cultural life of both.

The first step taken referable to Czech enlightenment was a request to the University of Nebraska Board of Regents to establish a Department of Slavic Languages and Literature. This request was promptly denied on the basis that there was not enough public interest among the Czechs. Fortunately, the students were not discouraged and they began to realize the attainment of their ambitions by simply forming fraternal clubs. The first Komensky Club was the one founded in Lincoln, Nebraska, followed by the second formation in south Omaha in June of 1904, which was founded by Dr. Sterba and Mr.L Pipal. The third Komensky Club was formed in Omaha on January of 1905. After some of

the club's most active members moved from Omaha the club eventually disbanded. The club which was founded later in Iowa City, Iowa by J. Hrbek then took the Club Number Three for its official number..

After a few years there were twenty-nine such active clubs. Clubs were located in such schools as the State University of Minnesota, Illinois, Iowa, Texas, Northwestern University, Ames, Iowa and the State Normal School of Texas. These clubs have formed a Federation known as the **Educational Association of Komensky Clubs**.

As some clubs lacked the facilities for literary and historical studies, the University of Nebraska's Komensky Club has been the bulwark in planning and directing their activities.

The official organ of these associated clubs has been the monthly publication **Komensky**, published by the Komensky Educational Association in Lincoln, Nebraska. The editor was Sarka Hrbkova; co-editors were O. Kotouc, Humboldt and E. Korab, Iowa City, Ia.

Almost \$1,500 was collected for the purpose of erecting a statue of Komensky on the Nebraska University Campus in 1912 after the various clubs undertook a fund-raising project under the leadership of the local chapter.

In August 1914 a convention of the Federation of Komensky Clubs was held in Chicago where a constitution was compiled and accepted. Karel Smrha of Milligan presided; Ferd. Musil acted as secretary. Dr. Jirka (Chicago); Mrs. Mekota (Cedar Rapids, Iowa); Fr. Hrdy (Milligan); V. Bures (Omaha) and Jos. Sterba (Chicago) made up the constitution committee. The following officers were elected: J. Sterba, president; Miss Emily Krisl, Lincoln, Nebraska, vice-president; Miss Millie Suster, Chicago, secretary and F. Musil, Chicago, treasurer. In 1917 the sixth and last convention was held in Omaha. The last

publication of the **Komensky** magazine was issued in December of 1918. The clubs then suspended activity. Due to the War young men and others enlisted and all foreign language clubs and similar movements were considered more or less Un-American.

“It is to be regretted,” wrote R. Rosicka in her book in 1925, “that an organization of such high caliber and aims should not have flourished. There is still on hand, in charge of the treasurer, the sum of \$1,970 in funds which were gathered for building the monument to Komensky.”

We believe that this money was used to purchase the bronze plaque which was dedicated to this great Czech patriot and world famous educator which has been erected in the main hall of the Teachers College on the Campus of the University of Nebraska.

After the many years of rich and cultural activity of the Komensky Club in Lincoln and the other clubs in the country, all activities were at a stand-still for almost forty years.

In 1959 Dr. Vladimir Kucera undertook action to revive a better and deeper feeling of pride for the Czech heritage in Nebraska. The first action of this planned spiritual mobilization was the commencing of teaching the Czech language at the University of Nebraska. After the interest of the students was aroused, Dr. Kucera strove to revive the Komensky Club too. In 1963 with help of interested students the club started again and became very successful. When the first meeting was held in 1963 seventy students were present and registered for membership. The same year in December at the Campus ballroom, the Komensky Club in Lincoln presented the first **Czech Spectacular** consisting of Czech music, folk dances, election of a Czech queen to represent the club and a full course Czech dinner. Many prominent guests were present at this initial Czech cultural and social activity of the club. Among those were: U. S. Senator

Hruska, Governor Morrison, Lt. Governor, Dr. Frolik, the Dean of the College of Agriculture, many State Senators and Hugo Srb, Clerk of the Legislature. There were approximately 500 participants at this event.

The first president of the Komensky Club in Lincoln was J. Janousek, now in Texas, the second L. Jiskra of Crete, Nebraska, the third L. Sysel and the fourth Joe Stehlik of Table Rock, Nebraska.

(Picture of Sarka Hrbkova, p. 63)

Sarka Hrbkova  
Professor of Czech Language  
University of Nebraska  
1909-1919

## Czechs in Newspaper and Literary Endeavors

### Journalism

**Edward Rosewater** was born Bukovany, Bohemia in 1841 and came to Omaha in 1863. He was the first person born in Bohemia to become a permanent settler in Omaha. In 1871 he established the **Omaha Bee**. Rosewater was a Jewish Czech immigrant who began life in America in obscurity and rose to a position of influence. He initiated campaigns that brought improvements to the state and particularly to Omaha.

In 1871 Rosewater founded a Czech paper in Omaha, the **Pokrok zapadu** (The Progress of the West), although at first it was more in the nature of a land advertising sheet. It was supported by the Burlington and Missouri and Union Pacific Railroad Companies, and the reading matter was arranged by V. Vodicka. The early history of the **Pokrok zapadu** is given here in some detail because it undoubtedly was a very great aid in bringing many Czechs to Nebraska. Edward Rosewater died in 1946.

The American Jewish Archives, located on the campus of the Hebrew Union College, Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, has a collection of approximately 4,000 items relating to two generations of the Rosewater family.

**Jan (John) Rosicky** was born in Humpolec, Bohemia December 17, 1845. He came to this country in 1861 as a fifteen-year old boy. After spending some time in Boscobel, Wisconsin where his parents had settled on a farm, he moved to Chicago where he established a store which was destroyed by the great Chicago fire in 1871. He then traveled through the west going to the Pacific coast and on his return in 1873 he settled in Crete, Nebraska. There he entered into partnership with Frank and Josef Jelinek in general merchandise. In 1874 he married Mary Bayer. Nine children were born of this union. Mrs. Mary

Rosicky was the author of a **Czech Cook Book**. In 1876 Rosicky moved to Omaha with his family.

In 1877 Jan Rosicky bought from Edward Rosewater the Czech weekly paper, **Pokrok zapadu**, then a small sheet without influence and without readers. He published it until 1900 when he sold the paper. In time Rosicky raised the **Pokrok zapadu** to the front of Czech weeklies. That his tastes were higher than mere commercial journalism he proved in 1884 when he began to publish the first **Kvety americke** (American Blossoms), a Czech literary periodical containing, besides the serial novel, only original work by Czech-American literati—the only magazine of its type ever published in this country. Tiring of recurring deficits, Rosicky was forced to modify his original plan with the **Kvety americke**, and in 1887 he changed it to a semi-monthly containing novels that could be later bound in book form.

The far most profitable of Rosicky's ventures proved to be an agricultural magazine, **Hospodar** (The Farmer), the only one of his papers still being published.

About that time he founded the Pokrok zapadu Printing Company, the name of which was later changed to National Printing Company. In 1900 he tried again a second **Kvety americke**, but unsuccessfully. In 1903 he bought the weekly, **Osveta**, combining the two into the weekly, **Osveta americke**. In 1916 after his death, a third **Kvety americke** was tried, but the magazine was suspended in its third year.

Jan Rosicky is also called the Father of the Western Bohemian Fraternal Association. His printing company conducted also a book selling department importing books from Bohemia. Thus, he was instrumental in helping many lodges, settlements and even universities (Nebraska and Minnesota) to establish

Czech libraries. This he did at a financial loss often just to help the cause of Czech culture.

Jan Rosicky was also instrumental in preserving the Department of Slavonic Languages in the University of Nebraska in Lincoln. In the last year of his so productive life, he tried to establish a club, the object of which was to collect all Czech printed matter and cultural objects in this country to be sent to the National Museum in Prague, Bohemia.

In 1909 he was elected President of the Czech-American Press Association, the object of which was to furnish the American papers and public correct information about Czechs and their native land.

Rosicky was a newspaperman and not an author, although he published his translation of the **Nebraska School Laws** and a brief booklet **Jak je v Americe** (Conditions in America) for the guidance of Czech immigrants in America.

His tireless and persistent labors in various directions to the very day when he was stricken in 1910 were, at his age, an example and inspiration to those around him. Jan Rosicky died in Omaha on April 12, 1910.

Tomas Capek, an eminent authority on Czech history in the United States, wrote in his book, **Fifty Years of Czech Letters in America**, "Jan Rosicky was the best known Czech in the northwest. He deserves great credit for Nebraska being so largely Czech for he devoted his most productive years to that state."

The beautiful monument standing on a knoll near the entrance to the Czech National Cemetery in Omaha, bought by subscription and dedicated to him by his people of the middle west, is their lasting tribute to the memory of this great Czech patriot.

**Ruzena (Rose) Rosicka**, daughter of Jan Rosicky was born in 1875 in Crete, Nebraska. In 1876 her parents moved to Omaha where she lived until her death. For a number of years she was her father's secretary. After his death she became associate editor of the **Osveta americke, Hospodar** and **Kvety americke**. She translated for the **Osveta americke, Ramona** by H. H. Jackson and **The Pride of the Prairie** by M. McCarter besides many articles and stories. She edited five volumes of the almanac **Pioneer** for which she prepared translations. She translated also S. Forman's **History of the United States** into Czech. From Czech into English she translated the **Mother's Cook Book** (Bohemian-American Cook Book) and articles by the following leading Czech writers: Rais, Preisova, Svobodova and Vikova-Kuneticka. She had compiled several handbooks for farmers and the home too.

The most important book she published is **History of Czechs in Nebraska** which she published in Czech and also in English.

**Josef Bunata** was born in 1846 in Kresetice, Bohemia and came to this country in 1870 to New York. He divided his time between working on newspapers and his trade of cigar-making. In 1899 he started work for the **Pokrok zapadu** in Omaha.

**Vaclav Bures** was born in Vosecik, Bohemia 1859 emigrated to American in 1863 and his father located in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. One year later Mr. Bures died leaving his son to the care of strangers. The lad worked on a farm until he was nineteen and then he attended Wesleyan College at Iowa City, Iowa. Due to ill health he was compelled to abandon his studies. He worked with various mercantile firms in Iowa until 1886. He settled in Omaha and engaged in the hardware business. For four years Mr. Bures was Deputy in the Office of City Treasurer. He was one of the Republican representatives from Omaha who served in the 1901-1902 Legislature.



He married Jennie Letovsky, the daughter of Jan Barta Letovsky, publisher of the first Czech newspaper in America. Mrs. Bures was interested in “**Pokrok zapadu**” and Mr. Bures helped organize the Pokrok Publishing Company with R. V. Kiskovsky, President; V. Bures, Secretary; Ch. Steiger, Treasurer; in 1900. Within a short time it began to publish local editions for various Czech localities as follows: **Cretesky pokrok**, Crete, **Wilbersky tydenik**, Wilber; **Dakotsky pokrok**, Dakota; **lowsky pokrok**, Iowa; **Kansasky pokrok**, Kansas; **Minnesotsky pokrok**, Minnesota.

After 1902 Vaclav and Jennie Bures became the owners of the Pokrok Publishing Company. They continued publishing the paper until it was sold in 1921 to **Hlasatel** in Chicago. Thus after fifty-one years of continuous existence it was extinct. It was the first, and for a few years, the only Czech paper in Nebraska.

The credit goes to Vaclav Bures, Frank Rejcha and Jan Rosicky for setting up the Slavic Department at the University of Nebraska in 1907.

**Tomas Capek**, one of the most distinguished Czech-American writers, was born in Chrastovice, Bohemia in 1861. He came to this country in 1879. In 1883 he became editor of **Pokrok zapadu** in Omaha. In 1890-1891 he was a member of the Nebraska Legislature. After marriage he began to practice law in New York. In 1910 with four friends he established the Bank of Europe, of which he was vice-president and later president. Tomas Capek is an author of many books written in English and Czech.

**Ludvik Dongres** was born in Kralovice, Bohemia in 1872 and came to this country in 1891. He was editor of **Hospodar**, Omaha; **Hospodarske listy**, Chicago; the magazine **Komensky**, Lincoln; **Hlasatel**, Chicago and others. He

wrote many articles for various papers, fiction, and poems and also translated poetry.

**Jaroslav Albert Havranek** was born in Prague, Bohemia in 1879 and came to this country in 1904. For a time he was editor of the **Pokrok zapadu**. He wrote articles, essays and lyrical poems although nothing has been published in book form. Later he became a member of the editorial staff of the daily newspaper **Hlasatel** in Chicago. He died in 1929.

**Josef Holecek** was born in Cerna Hora, Bohemia in 1856 and settled in Niobrara, Knox County. He wrote articles on farming for the agricultural magazine **Hospodar** and many reminiscences about Czech pioneers in Nebraska.

**Jan A. Hospodsky** was born in Tabor, Bohemia in 1858. When he was eight years old his entire family, except himself and a younger sister, died from cholera. When sixteen years old he joined a theatrical company, then obtained a position with a lawyer at home. In 1879 he was a member of an expedition undertaken by the Royal Botanical Commission of Dresden, Germany to Canada. Upon his return to Europe he left for Cleveland, Ohio where he worked on the paper **Volnost**, and later on the **Nova vlast** in North Bend, Nebraska, which paper he bought and brought to Omaha changing the name to **Narodni listy**. This paper was sold to Jan Rosicky whereupon Hospodsky edited the populist weekly **Pritel lidu**, in Wahoo, Nebraska, later acquiring ownership and moving it to Wilber, Nebraska. When he sold it later he lived for a time in Chicago and worked on the daily **Hlasatel** there. He returned to Wilber where he edited the **Saline County Democrat** and was Justice of the Peace. In 1909 and 1911 he was a member of the State Legislature. Later he was a judge in **Wilber**. **Jan Hospodsky died in 1929.**

**Otakar Charvat** was born in Pelhrimov, Bohemia in 1885 and came to this country in 1905. He was editor of **St. Louiske listy** and later of **Cesky Oklahoman** in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma. He came to Omaha in 1906 as editor of **Pokrok zapadu** and lived there until his death. Later he was editor of the **Nova doba** and **Narodni pokrok** in Omaha. After the death of St. Serpan in 1940, he was named editor of **The Fraternal Herald** which position he held for sixteen years. He also edited and wrote for the monthly magazine **Hospodar**. As a poet writer of stories he edited a monthly issue called **Zvon**. Two volumes were published. During his lifetime he wrote hundreds of columns for different Czech newspapers and magazine throughout the country.

Mr. Charvat was a loyal Czech and devoted time and energy in promoting the poetry, literature and music of his native country. He was a poet, philosopher and distinguished speaker. His talent as an outstanding speaker for special occasions was greatly acknowledged. He was a leader among the Czechs. He was often called to officiate at funerals and his words of comfort were of great solace to those who heard him.

He loved to read and owned one of the finest personal libraries in the city. He was a true Czech patriot and whoever came in contact with him, either personally or through his articles, caught his enthusiasm to preserve the history, culture and love of the mother country. He was one of the outstanding journalists of his time and his death came as a blow to those who loved him, as they knew they lost a great leader and thinker. His wife Otilie was an inspiration to him. She was talented in music and dramatics and taught in the South Omaha Children's Czech School. Otakar Charvat died October 25, 1956. There were two children.

**Vojta Chladek** contributed articles to the **Hospodar** in Omaha.

**Hugo Chotek** was born in 1851 in Jindrichuv Hradec, Bohemia. He came to this country in 1876. In Nebraska he was editor of the **Nova doba** in Schuyler.

**Jan Janak** was born in Kretin, Moravia in 1876. He came to Omaha in 1898 and immediately began his newspaper career under Jan Rosicky as editor of the **Hospodar**, and then became editor of the **Osveta americke**.

**Antonin Kaspar** was editor of the department on bee-keeping in the **Hospodar** and author of **Practical American Bee-Keeper**.

**Vitus Koupal** was a well-known writer on bee-keeping and wrote many articles for the **Hospodar** concerning bee-keeping.

**Jan E. Kroupa** was born in 1865 in Kutna Hora, Bohemia. After coming to America he went to Schuyler to become editor of the weekly **Kotva**. Then he became editor of the **Hospodar**, **Delnicke listy** and **Kvety americke**.

**Frank J. Kutak** was born in 1872 in Blatenka, Bohemia and came to this country in 1887. He worked for many newspapers in New York, Cleveland and Chicago and then published the weekly **Osveta** in Omaha.

**Antonin Piskac** is a musician, printer and editor. Dedecek Antonin Piskac used to say that he left Chotebor, Bohemia in 1906 to come to Beatrice, Nebraska because three of his very good friends from Chotebor needed a fourth for Marias. Whether that was so or not, it is true that his friend Pavel Kopecky welcomed Antonin Piskac to Beatrice and helped him get started in his trade of shoemaking—and they did play cards with a Mr. Pilny and one other whose name is now forgotten. A year later the rest of the Piskac family came to America. Babicka Katerina David-Piskac came to Beatrice in 1907 with all of the children; Antonin (age 17), Marie, Karel, Anna and Jerry. At the present time two members of this family still live in Nebraska—Karel in Schuyler and Antonin in

Omaha. Marie (Mrs. Richard Dolezalik) makes her home in San Diego, California and Anna (Mrs. Joseph Pacovsky) and Jerry live in Bozeman, Montana.

Antonin and Katerina lived in Beatrice for a number of years before taking up a homestead near Roy, Montana. The eldest son Antonin worked in a print shop in Beatrice from 1907 to 1911. In his free time he played cello, violin or flute with small groups. In 1911 he went to Chicago to attend a school for linotype operators and then was employed at the National Printing Company in Omaha, Nebraska. In 1912 he was married to Jindriska Pechousek. He remained in the printing trade with music as a second line for a good many years. He was a member of the old Omaha Symphony Orchestra when Sandor Harmati was conductor. He played cello in theater orchestras during the era of silent movies playing in such Omaha theaters as the Rialto, Sun, Strand and Brandeis. He became editor of **Hospodar** from 1918 to 1920 and again from 1940 to 1962.

In 1935 during the great depression, he had the courage to start his own printing company, the Automatic Printing Company at 1713 Cuming Street in Omaha. He is now semi-retired from the business. He has been the editor of **The Fraternal Herald** (Bratrsky vestnik), the monthly publication of the Western Bohemian Fraternal Association since 1956. He maintains a continuing interest in music, practices his cello regularly, and is a member of a cell-violin-piano trio. Antonin Piskac has three sons and two daughters and seventeen grandchildren.

**Vaclav Snajdr** was born in 1847 in Ceske Budejovice, Bohemia and was one of the early editors of the paper **Pokrok zapadu**.

**F. B. Zdrubek** was born in 1842 in Bezdedice, Bohemia and came to this country to Omaha. He became one of the editors of the **Pokrok zapadu**. He is also remembered for publishing many English-Czech and Czech-English dictionaries.

## Literary Work

**Mrs. Marie Folk Belohlavy** was born in Chotina, Bohemia in 1871 and came with her parents to Kansas in 1883. In 1891 they moved to Oklahoma and in 1908 Miss Folk married V. Belohlavy. She wrote articles for the **Kvety americke** and **Hospodar** and many stories for the almanac **American**, published in Chicago, Illinois.

**Josef Dinebier** was born in Liben, Bohemia in 1856. He came to this country in 1878 and worked as compositor in Omaha. He wrote many poems and some prose for the **Kvety americke**. For several years he was a greatly beloved teacher of the Czech school in Omaha. He died in that city in 1889.

**Longin Folda**, for years a prominent banker in Nebraska, wrote a play **Kupec a basnik** (The Merchant and Poet).

**Alois Janda** was born in 1869 in Klatovy, Bohemia. He came to Cleveland, Ohio in 1893 and was a teacher there. Finally he came to Omaha. He was a good poet and also became an editor of the **Osveta americke** in Omaha. He published a volume of poems, **Ceskym dusim** (To Czech Souls).

**V. A. Jung** was born in 1858 in Habroc, Bohemia and came to Omaha in 1881 where he was employed by the weekly paper **Pokrok zapadu**. He translated many poems from Byron and Tennyson into Czech and was also a publisher of English-Czech and Czech-English dictionaries.

**Otto Kotouc, Sr.** His literary work consists of a sketch named **The Bohemian Settlement in Humboldt** and a volume of translations of Czech poems named the **Songs of the Slavs**.

**V. Minniberger** was born in 1883 in Pisek, Bohemia and came to Omaha in the year of 1907. He is best remembered for some of his novels; namely, **V mlhach** (In The Mists), **Slava kazatelova** (The Minister's Fame), and **Pisne prerie** (The Songs of the Prairie). He also contributed many articles to newspapers here and in the old country.

**Ferdinand L. Musil** came to Omaha in the year of 1900 and wrote many poems. He was also publisher of the almanac **Pritel lidu**. He wrote many articles on vegetable and flower gardening.

**F. K. Ringsmuth** was born in 1858 in Dobruška, Bohemia and came to Omaha in the year of 1885 where he immediately became editor of the publication **Kvety americké**. He was also remembered for writing many poems and one novel **Černý stín lásky** (Black Shadow of Love). He was also editor of two weeklies in Schuyler, **Nova doba** and **Stit**.

**Josef Sedivý** was born in 1825 in Nymburk, Bohemia and came to Nebraska in the year of 1870. He is remembered most for writing his memories and experiences of the pioneers that came to Nebraska. He also contributed many articles for the publication **Osvěta americké**.

**Josef Valasek** (Pseudonym Sigma) was born in 1868 in Vřetov, Bohemia. He studied in Hradec Králové and graduated from the law school of the University of Prague. For his political activity he was sentenced to thirteen months' imprisonment, but escaped to this country arriving in Chicago in 1895. He became associate editor of the weekly **Dennice novověku** in Cleveland and later edited the **Kvety americké** in Omaha. His work, both prose and poetry was of very good quality.

**Mary Libal-Barker** has written some very appealing stories about Czech immigrants in Nebraska. **Milenka's Happy Summer** has been published in book

form and **Transplanted Roots** was published in installments in a popular weekly newspaper **Capper's Weekly**. Mary planned a trip to Czechoslovakia in the summer of 1966 to gather material for another story.



## **Czech Newspapers in Nebraska**

Of those many pioneers who came to Nebraska in the early days only a few had more than the most rudimentary schooling. This is but natural, for immigration was drawn from the poorer classes for which a better livelihood was the main consideration. The law regarding compulsory attendance of school in Bohemia or Moravia did not become effective until 1869. Besides, under Austrian despotism and the caste system, the peasants were repressed in intellectual matters. Many learned to read from Czech newspapers in this country and as far as Nebraska is concerned, the **Pokrok zapadu** (Progress of the West) for years the only newspaper here, played an important role in that respect as well as that of attracting settlers.

Mr. Tomas Capek in his book **Fifty Years of Czech Letters in America** says of Czech newspapers in this country:

“The influence of newspapers was everywhere deep and of creative tendency. It was the newspapers that taught a neglected people to think independently. It was the newspapers that tried to liberate them from the domination of darkness and fear. People came by the tens of thousands. They were in need of wise counselors. The wide, unsettled, western plains beckoned to experienced farmers. Who was to advise the immigrants? This office, honorable and sometimes replete with ingratitude, fell to the Czech editor. He was the vanguard around which new settlements sprang. It is not the truth the newspapers always followed settlers. They did come in existence in some colonies already established, but the **Pokrok zapadu** in Omaha (first Czech newspaper in Nebraska) always led.”

The **Pokrok zapadu** holds the record in Nebraska, for it was published unceasingly for fifty years. The next is the farm magazine **Hospodar**, still

published. Thirty-two Czech newspapers had been published in Nebraska and in our time all are gone.....

**Pokrok zapadu**, founded in 1871 by Edward Rosewater, who published it until 1877, when Jan Rosicky bought it. From 1871 the paper (Illegible word) the name **Pokrok zapadu**, from 1872 to 1873 **Pokrok zapadu a (Illegible word)** (Progress of the West and American). When the Pokrok Publishing Company took it over in 1900, within a short time it began to publish a local edition for various Czech localities as follows: **Cretesky pokrok** (Crete Progress), **Wilbersky tydenik** (Wilber Weekly) for Saline County, **Dakotsky pokrok** (Dakota Progress) for South Dakota, **Iowsky pokrok** (Iowa Progress) for Iowa, **Kansasky pokrok** (Kansas Progress) for Kansas and **Minnesotsky pokrok** (Minnesota Progress) for Minnesota. After 1902 Vaclav Bures directed the affairs of the company, later acquiring sole ownership. On November 1, 1915 he made it into a daily paper. In 1920 he sold it to the weekly **Hlasatel** in Chicago, Ill., and thus passed out, after fifty-one years of continuous existence, the first and for a few years the only Czech newspaper in Nebraska.

At first it was in the nature of a land advertising sheet. It was supported mainly by the Burlington, Missouri and Union Pacific Railroad Companies and the reading matter was arranged by V. L. Vodicka. **Pokrok zapadu** always led among the publisher and editors where learned and noted Czechs were ready to help build a better life in Nebraska.

It is interesting to find that among those interested in the **Pokrok zapadu** was Mrs. Jennie Letovsky Bures, daughter of Jan Barta Letovsky, publisher of the first Czech paper in America and later Vaclav Bures, her husband, assumed direction of the publishing company finally acquiring sole ownership.

## Other Czech Newspapers in Nebraska

**Saline County Post**, Crete, 1874. Hoyt and Wells, publishers; printed one page in Czech. Cenek Duras was editor.

**Beseda** (The Circle), Wilber, 1877. A weekly paper. Editor Josef Novinsky. Thirteen issues were published.

**Vestnik bratrsky** (Fraternal Herald), Omaha, 1880. A monthly magazine devoted to the interest of the Bohemian Slavonian Benevolent Society. The editor was Jan Rosicky. Publication was suspended in January 1881. From 1889 **Bratrsky vestnik**, the monthly magazine of Western Bohemian Fraternal Association, was edited by Rosicky, Otakaar Charvat and now by A. Piskac, Sr.

**Kvety americke** (American Blossoms), Omaha, 1884. Illustrated monthly literary magazine containing, aside from the serial novel, only original contributions from Czech-American literature. The only magazine of its kind ever published in this country. At the end of the third volume the publication was suspended and the bi-weekly **Knihovna americka** (American Library) was published instead.

**Nova vlast** (New Homeland), North Bend, 1885. A weekly newspaper. Anton K. Walla, V. Virka, F. Mizera and J. Mensik, publishers. In July 1886 the paper was moved to Omaha where Jan Hospodsky became owner and editor. In October of that year its name was changed to **Narodni listy** (National News).

**Narodni listy**, Omaha, 1886. A weekly paper. Frank Kaspaar, publisher, Jan Hospodsky, editor. Suspended in May 1888.

**Nova doba** (New Era), Schuyler, 1887. A weekly newspaper published by the Literary Society, Schuyler, Nebraska. Hugo Chotek and F. K. Ringsmuth, editors. Publication was suspended June 1892.

**Knihovna americka** (American Library), Omaha, 1887. A bi-weekly, containing only novels. Jan Rosicky, publisher.

**Hospodar** (The Farmer) was established in 1891. The only agricultural journal printed in the Czech language. It was under the long time direction of Jan Rosicky and published by the "Pokrok zapadu Printing Company" until mid-year 1961 when it was moved to West, Texas. The editors under the direction of Jan Rosicky: L. W. Dongres, Josef Cerny, Jaroslav Hancik, Jan Janak, J. E. Kroupa. After Rosicky's death in 1910: J. E. Kroupa, Roe Rosicka, Jan Janak, Anton Piskac Sr., and Josef Brezacek, the present editor in Texas.

**Pritel lidu** (The People's Friend), Wahoo, 1891. Moved to Wilber in 1893. A populist weekly. Jan Hospodsky, publisher and editor. In 1915 it was sold to the daily **Hlasatel**, Chicago.

**Nove doby listy svatecni** (Sunday Supplement to New Era), Schuyler, 1892. A supplement to the weekly **Nova doba**, containing novels. Suspended in 1892.

**Noviny** (News), Wilber, 1892. A weekly newspaper, Hanzelin Brothers, publisher and editors. Suspended during the first year.

**Kotva** (The Anchor), Schuyler, 1892. A weekly newspaper. Priborsky and Co., publishers. J. Em. Kroupa, editor. Suspended in 1893.

**The Bohemian Voice** (In English), Omaha, 1892. The organ of the Czech Americans in the United States. Bohemian-American National Alliance, publishers. Tomas Capek and later J. Kral, editors. Suspended in 1894.

**Wilberske listy**, Wilber, 1893. A weekly newspaper. Publisher F. J. Hanzelin, editor V. Fuchs. In 1894 merged with the **Delnicke listy** of Omaha.

**Svit** (The Gleam), Schuyler, 1893. A weekly newspaper. J. Priborsky and F. Ringsmuth, publishers, Ringsmuth, editor. In 1894 moved to Cedar Rapids, Iowa, suspended there in 1902.

**Delnicke listy** (Labor News), Omaha, 1894. A weekly newspaper. Bohemian Typographical Union No. 21, publishers. J. Pribyl, L. Dongres and J. Kroupa, editors. In 1898 bought by S. Kostohryz, who changed it to **Osveta**.

**Osveta** (Enlightenment), Omaha, 1898. A semi-weekly newspaper, later changed to a daily, being the first Czech daily in Nebraska. Bohemian American Newspaper Union, publishers. S. Kostohryz and later F. Kutak, editors. Kostohryz not only established the first Czech daily in Nebraska, but was the first to put into practice publishing editions for Czech localities in the state. He published the **Wilberske listy** for Saline County, **Cesky obzor** (Bohemian Horizon) for Colfax County. In 1903 the paper was merged with the **Kvety americke** and the name of **Osveta americka** (American Enlightenment) given it.

**Kvety americke II.** (American Blossoms II) Omaha, 1900. An illustrated literary weekly, published by the National Printing Company. Josef Valasek, editor. In 1903 it was merged with the **Osveta** and called **Osveta americka**, a weekly.

**Zlata hvezda** (The Golden Star), Schuyler, 1901. A monthly magazine for children. F. H. Svoboda, publisher and editor. In 1902 it was changed to a semi-monthly, suspended in 1903.

**Zabavne listy** (Divertisement), Omaha, 1902. A weekly of the daily **Osveta**. Suspended when the paper was merged with the **Kvety americke II**.

**Osveta americka** (American Enlightenment), Omaha, 1903. An illustrated weekly newspaper. National Printing Company, publisher. F. Kutak, Al. Janda, V. Fuks, Jan Janak, J. Prachensky, editors. Changed to **Kvety americke II** in 1916.

**Domaci noviny** (Local News), Clarkson, 1904. A weekly newspaper. Anton Odvarka, publisher and editor. In 1910 it was taken over by his sons, Anton Jr. and Otto, who sold it to the **Narodni pokrok** in 1924. During the period Odvarka brothers published it, they also published a weekly **Ozvena zapadu** (Echo of the West) containing matter from **Local News**, but adapted for other localities.

**Komensky** (Comenius), Lincoln, 1908. A monthly magazine, the organ of the Komensky Educational Clubs. Prof. S. Hrbkova, editor-in-chief. Suspended in 1918.

**Zivot** (Life) Crete, 1910. A Protestant monthly. G. Ishan, Rev. K. Sladek and J. Drahovzal, publishers. In 1918 Rev. Sladek moved it to Oklahoma City, Okla.

**Cesko-Americky venkov** (Bohemian-American Country Life), Omaha, 1910. An agricultural monthly. Pokrok Zapadu Publishing Company, publishers, J. Janak, L. Dongres, J. Rezabek, B. Stradal, J. Kroupa and J. Klabouch, editors. In 1915 it was changed to a bi-monthly and discontinued in 1917.

**Zvon** (The Bell), Omaha, 1910. A monthly literary magazine. Nebraska Printing Company, publisher. Otakar Charvat, editor. Eight or nine numbers were published, suspended in fall of the same year.

**Nova doba** (New Era), Omaha, 1911. A weekly newspaper. Bohemian-American Publishing Company, publisher. Organizers thereof: O. Charvat, F. Kutak, J. Padrnos, M. Tetiva, J. Sinkule, E. Placek, J. Franek, J. Fiala, F. Bartos, F. Jerman, J. Vana. Published to 1914 on the South Side (South Omaha) in that year moved and changed to a semi-weekly. Suspended in 1918.

**Drubeznicke listy** (Poultry Journal), Benson (a suburb of Omaha), 1913. Monthly poultry magazine. Editor A. Backora. In 1917 moved to Omaha. In 1918 moved to Chicago by Jan Janak who became publisher and editor.

**Kvety americke III** (American blossoms III), Omaha, 1916. An illustrated bi-monthly magazine during 1916 and 1917, changed to a weekly in the third volume. J. Kroupa, editor. Suspended in 1919.

**Narodni pokrok** (National Progress), Omaha, 1921. A weekly newspaper. Riha Printing Company, publisher, Otakar Charvat, editor.

(The **Pokrok zapadu** and **Narodni listy** were Republican newspapers, **Pritel lidu**, Populist, the rest were Democratic or Independent newspapers).

## **Music – Musicians**

Music, oftentimes called the language of the heart, occupies the foremost position in the Czech people cultural art field. Their national anthem, festival songs, love songs, patriotic songs and the simple folk songs speak of the things closest to the hearts of every Czech. The love of home and country, family and friend all combine to form the richest segment of Czechoslovakian's art. Some of the songs are carefree and happy and some are sad and melancholy but they all have the resemblance of reflecting the everyday emotions of a nation. The musical historian, Berney, in 1773 called the Czechs the most musical people of all Europe. Music was and still is an integrated part of every Czech's life. At home, at work, and on festive occasions music occupied their first thoughts. The partisans created their stirring patriotic songs during wars to instill the fighting spirit in their people.

The Czech and Moravian songs are an entirely different sphere of melody. They typify the happy and gay spirit of a happy and gay people in a striking contrast. The Czechs and Moravians were no doubt influenced directly by France and Italy when the earliest western tribes of Czechs were living in Bohemia and Moravia.

Music played an important role in the Czechs of Nebraska. There is an old Czech saying: "Who is a Czech is a musician."

Possibly Saline County leads all counties in musicians and bands. The first outstanding early pioneer musician was Josef Francl, who settled in Saline County in 1867. The next most outstanding musician was Stepan Jelinek who came to Saline County at the age of six weeks. Stepan became nationally known, having played in the Chicago Symphony Orchestra and later became conductor of the same.



Next was Frank Nedela who organized a band in Wilber. For over fifty years Frank Nedela's band played for every occasion requiring music, political rallies, funerals, church music, etc. Possibly one of his best engagements was the playing for the second inauguration of Governor D. Butler, Nebraska's first governor.

Some other outstanding musicians of Saline County were Bartolomej Brt, who specialized in playing a Czech bagpipe and also Vaclav Brt who played a Czech trumpet. One of Wilber's famous musicians was Tomas Pasek who led many brass bands. Also mention must be given to Lumir Havlicek of Crete, who was a long time instructor of music in Crete public schools and conducted many different bands.

In Butler County mention must be given to one of the early brass bands, "Sedlak Brass Band," led by Anton Sedlak Sr.

### **Nebraska's March King**

The Rev. Dr. Edward Cepuran, known as "Nebraska's March King" and pastor of St. Wenceslaus, Czech parish in Omaha, Nebraska, is another of our Czech-American musicians and composers. Born and raised in Omaha, Rev. Cepuran is truly a native Nebraskan who achieved distinction in the field of music.

At the age of six he began his violin studies with the Sisters of Mercy and later under Professor Kolbaba, finishing at various conservatories of music in Chicago, Illinois. At the age of eleven he had experience in orchestra work and was a member of Franek's Czech band. During his college days at St. Procopius, Lisle, Ill., he organized and directed the first band in that institution. With it he toured Nebraska during the vacation period of the year 1920.

After his ordination to the priesthood and assignment to St. Wenceslaus Church, he utilized his musical talent by assembling and teaching music among the young people in the parish. Soon the parish in Omaha was called the "Notre Dame in Music." Just as Notre Dame is synonymous with football, so too was St. Wenceslaus synonymous with music.

He arranged and directed the first Czech programs over radio stations WAAW now KOWH and WOW with his Smetana club artists. Everywhere Czechs have listened to and invited boys trained under his tutelage, such as: Smetana Orchestra, Golden Prague Orchestra and others. But most famed was the St. Wenceslaus Czech Band of Omaha. This band had gained National recognition winning highest honors at the Century of Progress Exposition in Chicago, Ill., in 1933 and winning honors again in 1936 at the Texas Centennial at Dallas, Texas. This band has represented the Czechs of Nebraska on various national and civic occasions.

The popularity of Czech music in America today can be attributed to Father Cepuran.

From the many works of this Czech-American and native Nebraskan we list his popular "New Deal March", dedicated to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, "Czech History in Music," spirit of America under Roosevelt titled "On the 30<sup>th</sup> Day of January," "Transcription for Band," the ancient choral of St. Wenceslaus; and Epic pastoral "Poeme Angelique," the stirring and Czech spirited marches, "Catholic Sokol," "Czech Civic Alliance," "Catholic Workman," "Czech Mothers," "United Czechs for Victory," "Creighton University" "Beseda and Farewell Depression," "A Suite of Mother Songs." We note with deep appreciation the new march from the pen of this composer "The American Czech Magazine March of Progress," dedicated and composed in tribute to the founders and publishers of this American monthly.

After the fall of the Czech nation to the force of tyranny under the dictator Hitler, a new march by Father Cepuran came into being, "Czech Children Never Die But Win."

Father Cepuran received the title of Honorary Doctor of Music from the Charles University in Prague, Czechoslovakia in the year 1929 as a mark of distinction for his ability and fervor for the Czech people here. The honor was conferred upon him by the late Tomas Masaryk, first president of the nation and presented by Karel Cardinal Kaspar of Prague.

--- American Czech Magazine, 1940

## **Musicians**

**Stanislav (Stanley) Barta Letovsky**, veteran Omaha musician and composer was born in Racine, Wisconsin in 1864 and died in 1934 in Omaha. He was the last of a family of five sons and two daughters of the pioneer Czech journalist, Jan Barta Letovsky, founder and editor of the semi-weekly **Slovan Americky**" at Iowa City, the first newspaper in the Czech language in America.

Departing from the journalistic bent of his father and brothers, Stanislav showed an early talent for music and began studying on the violin at the age of seven. For 22 years Stanislav Letovsky participated actively in the musical life of Omaha, composing, teaching and playing in various orchestras. He was cellist in the orchestra which opened the new Boyd Theatre in 1891. He returned 29 years later to occupy the same position at the closing performance before the building was wrecked.

His hobby was a string quartet and for years he was a member of such a musical group composed of veteran Omaha musicians. He was a charter

member of the Omaha Musicians Association and served as its first secretary. He was also a member of the Omaha Symphony Orchestra until last year when ill health prevented him from being very active.

Stanislav Barta Letovsky composed several operas and was well-known for his ability to arrange music for road shows coming to Omaha. He was father of Stanislav (Stanley) Jan Letovsky, a prominent Omaha musician and composer.

**Stanislav (Stanley) Jan Letovsky** was the grandson of the pioneer Czech Journalist Jan Barta Letovsky. He was born in Omaha, his parents being Stanislav and Agnes Rezac Letovsky. At the age of six he began to study music under his father, a composer and cellist of marked ability and later under Richard Burmeister, the bosom friend and pupil of Franz Liszt.

At the age of 18 Letovsky went abroad to finish his studies. He accepted the position of assistant conductor of the Stadt Theater to Kiel, Germany, during which time he composed and played several tours of piano concerts. At this time he was offered a scholarship to the Schwenka Piano School of Berlin. Later in Posen, Germany the first conductor, Dr. Fritz Stiedry, resigned his position in favor of the young musician who conducted in an amazing manner Richard Wagner's "Ring of the Nibelungen." During that period Letovsky made his debut as a fullgrown pianist at a philharmonic concert at the Academy of Posen. The following season he accepted the position of First Conductor of the Grand Duke's Royal Opera in Mecklenburg and in 1916 was the recipient of a scholarship for piano and composition to the Academy of Tone Art in Vienna, Austria. His works as published in Berlin by Schlesinger were: "Sonata for Piano," D. Flat, Op. 1; "Variations upon an Original Theme" for piano, Op. 2; five piano pieces: "Praeludium," "11 Penderoso," "Valse Intermezzo," "Sehnsucht," "L'Allegro," Op. 3, "Four Ballads for Piano," Op. 4, "Five Fantasy Pieces," Op. 5; Grad Opera in

three acts, "Lady Anne," Op. 6; "Five Songs," Op. 14; a concert number for violin with piano accompaniment.

Because of ill health, Letovsky returned to Omaha and opened a studio where he taught piano and voice until the early 1950's. He left Omaha for California and later Denver, Colorado where he continued to teach. In a span of years he made four trips to Europe where he continued to write music.

Letovsky's last trip to Europe in 1965 ended his career and he passed away in Berlin, Germany, September 1965. Letovsky is survived by one daughter, Ursula Maria Letovsky, an Omaha Designer of Fine Jewelry.

**Archie Baley**, violinist, son of Frank and Anna (Stibralova) Baley of Omaha was born in 1906 in Lesterville, So. Dakota. At the early age of four he began to take violin lessons from Dr. Juergens. In 1913 he studied with Prof. Machek of Chicago, Ill., and Prof. Rychlik of Cleveland, Ohio and with Prof. F. Mach of Omaha in 1915 with whom he continued steadily during the next seven years. In 1921 when only fifteen years old he studied with the great Czech violinist Prof. O. Sevcik of Prague, Czechoslovakia when the master was an instructor in Ithaca Conservatory, Ithaca, N. Y. In the winter of that year he began to teach. In 1922 he headed a company of five artists who made a summer concert tour through Nebraska and South Dakota. In 1923 he graduated from Omaha Central High School where he took active part in the orchestra. In the fall of 1924 he became musical and dramatic critic on the Omaha Daily News. In 1926 he became a member of the World Herald staff.

**Anthony Donato** was born in Prague, Nebraska March 8, 1909. He is a noted educator, composer, conductor and violinist. Donato studied at the University of Nebraska. Since 1947 he was a Professor of Theory and Composition at Northwestern University.

**C. W. Havlicek** was born in Wisconsin in 1865 and came with his parents to Nebraska in 1866. At the age of ten he began learning the jeweler's trade with his brother-in-law, Josef Kopecky in Crete and in 1887 established that business for himself. In 1911 he sold out and started the music business. His son, Lumir Havlicek, was born in Crete and was director of the 110<sup>th</sup> Medical Regiment Band, Nebraska National Guard in Crete. It was the first unit of its kind to be organized west of the Mississippi River and the members were mostly Czech musicians. Lumir Havlicek was with the 335<sup>th</sup> Infantry Band in France during World War I.

**Karel Havlicek**, a famous violinist was born in Omaha and studied music in Berlin, Dresden, Paris and Prague. He made many concert tours throughout the United States, and then became a member of the Boston Symphony Orchestra. Later he taught violin music at the Washington State College.

**Frank W. Hodek**, a famous concert pianist, composer and orchestra director was born in Baltimore, Maryland in 1895. He studied music in Prague but came to Omaha to conduct the Nightingale Orchestra which has made many tours throughout Nebraska and neighboring states.

**Stepan Jelinek**, a cornetist of ability, was born in Manitowoc, Wisconsin on August 10, 1865 and came to Saline County with his parents, Frank and Marie Jelinek in 1865 settling on a homestead near Crete. He grew to manhood there and later went to Chicago where he studied music at Northwestern University and played in the orchestra of the Chicago Opera. He was appointed bandmaster of the Eleventh Regiment Infantry Band and served from 1898 to 1901 during the Spanish American War in Puerto Rico and the Philippines.

On January 1, 1901 Stepan Jelinek and the Eleventh Infantry Band played at the New Year's Reception of President McKinley at the White House.

Stepan married Frances Dvoracek of Wilber. He died September 17, 1954.

**Agnes Knoflicek**, a famous violinist, was born in Nebraska. At the age of fourteen she went to Prague, Czechoslovakia to study violin with Prof. Suchy and Prof. Sevcik. She gave many concerts throughout the United States as a solo violinist.

**Frank Mach Jr.**, a great violinist, was born in Omaha in 1887 and studied violin in Prague under Prof. Jan Marak. He returned to Omaha to teach music and has taught leaders of many famous orchestras.

**Marie Mikova** was born in Omaha, daughter of Joseph and Anna Drozda Mik, graduated from Omaha High School, became a well-known concert pianist in the country. She studied piano in Omaha under August Mothe Borglum. In 1910 she studied piano with Wager Swayne in Paris and played concerts with the Touche Orchestra. She made many concert tours throughout the United States. She also taught music in California State University in Berkeley.

**August Molzer** was born in Slane, Bohemia in 1881 and at the age of seven came with his parents to Wilber, Nebraska. In 1910 he went back to Prague, Czechoslovakia to study music and became one of the renowned concert violinists and teachers of violin music. While in Prague he studied under the famous Prof. O. Sevcik, the teacher of Jan Kubilek and Kocian, two of the world's most renowned violinists. He also studied piano and music theory under the personal direction of the famous Czech composer Antonin Dvorak.

Returning to Nebraska, he taught two years at Wesleyan University. Later Molzer was head of the Music Theory and Violin departments of the University of Nebraska for 35 years. He also opened a music store in Lincoln. For the last 20 years he has lived and worked in Denver, Colorado. ,

Last year August Molzer was honored at Carnegie Hall in New York at a North American Air Defense Command Band concert. The performance directed by Molzer's son, Victor, an Air Force Major and band director, included "Slavonic Folk Festival," written by the senior Molzer.

His son, Major Victor Molzer, was born in Lincoln, Nebraska. For years Maj. Molzer was assistant chief and executive officer of the Air Force bands at the Pentagon. Before his assignment to NORAD he was director of the Air Force band of the Pacific and command director of Pacific Air Forces bands.

**Helen Sadilek KhyI**, a pianist, was born in Chicago, daughter of Karel and Mary (Sabata) Sadilek who were residents of Nebraska. She returned to Omaha for her education graduating from Central High School. She studied music in Berlin then returned to Omaha to open her own school teaching piano, coaching voice and also giving many concerts throughout the United States. In 1916 she married Louis KhyI.

**Clara Schneider Tesar**, famous violinist, was born in South Dakota in 1902. She began studying violin at the age of eight under the supervision of Prof. F. Mach. She toured many western states giving concerts. She was also concert master and soloist for the Omaha Symphony Orchestra.



## **Music in Saline County**

**By Edward C. Brt**

As I have, for the past twenty-one years since returning to Saline County from Butler County, been gathering historical material pertaining to our great state of Nebraska for the coming Centennial in 1967.

I have been requested by many musician friends to write and mention something about the musical tradition in Nebraska. All my life I have worked for or with the early pioneers of Saline and Butler Counties, with all the different nationalities, but mainly with the Czech pioneers.

I thought it might be interesting to mention the Czech musical tradition in Nebraska. I have claimed Cree as my hometown since 1889, but after being married, my wife and I were absent from Crete for 27 years. This story I am relating in my biography, which I will write in the near future. We spent over a year in Tobias, Nebraska during World War I, then ten years in Western and about seven years in Omaha.

From my musical experience in all these different places I can state that you will not find such a musical tradition in any other county or state. Every place I lived in, I either played in a band or orchestra.

I would say that the first outstanding early Czech pioneer musician was Josef Francl, who was called the "Vanguard of the Czech pioneers" in Nebraska and Saline County. There are many of his descendents in Saline County. The writer was well acquainted with his widow, sons and grandchildren.

Our next outstanding musician was Stepan Jelinek, who was brought to Saline County by his parents at the age of six weeks. The family came from Wisconsin..

The next great musician of Saline County was Frank Nedela. He came from Chicago. Jan Nedela, his father, went to Russia, (while they were in the old country) to make a living with music. Jan Svoboda, Tomas Aron, Jan Chyba and Jan and Frank Nedela Sr., already played together in a band in Chicago. All five of the above immigrated to Saline County and settled in one section south of Crete. They played at the Inauguration of Governor Butler.

Frank Nedela Sr., was my instructor in music and also served as my Godfather at my baptism so I have always held him in the highest esteem. In 1896 he placed me in his band composed of the older musicians that came from the old country. He had started a juvenile band in 1893 or 1894. Ever since I have kept up my interest in music and have tooted a horn.

For more than fifty years Nedela's bands—the old and young—were known far and wide. They played for every occasion requiring music, political rallies, funerals, church, etc. I recollect my special joy was when Nedela gave me a silver dollar for playing with his old band. At that time it seemed there were not a lot of silver dollars in circulation, so the one he gave me when I was 14 looked like a little saucer.

Now I would say that the next outstanding musical organization that came to Saline County was that of my grandfather Bartolomej Brt, composed of my grandfather, playing a Czech bagpipe, my father on the bass horn and clarinet and my uncle Vaclav Brt playing a Czech trumpet. The above all came to America in 1874 and located in Saline County. All these have their instruments preserved. I have reasons to believe that my grandfather's Czech bagpipe is the only one in America. It is still in good shape and could be made to play if the

person could be found to play it. Twelve or more years ago it was presented to our State Historical Society in Lincoln at its dedication. Since that time I am informed they have never received any other kind of bagpipe, Czech or Scotch.

I might add that the "Brt Trio" after coming to America played for our First Saline County Czechs at Frank Jelinek's place. They received a live cow for their services. (This was not bad pay in the pioneer days). The Nedela Brass Band with whom my father, Frank Brt Sr., later played bass horn was paid \$8.00 when they would go to Lincoln to play. Their driver, if he was one of the musicians, also, got \$8.00 more.

Twenty years ago one of the County pioneers, namely J. Kotas, wrote to me from Denton, Montana stating that the "Brt Trio" played for his wedding, which he celebrated with two other relatives all at the same time and place. They danced to the sweet strains of the "dudy" (the Czech name for bagpipe) at this "marathon wedding," dancing all day, all night and part of the next day.

The next outstanding musical organization which was a credit to Saline County was the Medical Musical Organization of Crete led by Lumir Havlicek.

There were many more bands, musical organizations and orchestras in Saline County and throughout the state. I have been furnished pictures of some that were donated to me for historical purposes. I would like to mention these here but will present later.

I must also mention that our neighboring city Wilber also had many musical organizations. I have many pictures of them. Especially I wish to mention Wilber's most famous Czech musician Tomas Pasek and his different bands. Pasek was another of Saline County famous band leaders.

In conclusion I will say there is nothing in any state that can compare with the musical tradition of Saline County and the state of Nebraska.

(Pictures of Stepan Jelinek and Frank Nedela Sr. p. 80)

(Pictures of Edward Rosewater, Founder of “Pokrok zapadu”—1871 and  
Jan Rosicky, publisher in Omaha p. 81)

## **The Reading Societies and Dramatic Clubs**

In Crete, Saline County, Josef Jindra founded a Reading Society in 1867. It was the first Czech Society or Club in the state. Later it was changed to a Sokol organization and then to a lodge of the Bohemian Slavonian Benevolent Society.

In 1872 Frank Mares called a meeting in Omaha for the purpose of forming a society to promote the Czech language and social life. On January 26, 1873 officers of the organization called "The Reading and Benevolent Society" were chosen. This Club disbanded in 1875 and the money was given to the reading circle of the dramatic society "Klicpera." The dramatic club "Klicpera" (the name of a Czech playwright) in Omaha was founded by F. B. Zdrubek in 1874.

(Picture of Sod house of Frank Fiala, Buffalo Co. p. 81)

Sod house of Frank Fiala, Buffalo Co.

In 1874 the rural settlement Tabor in Colfax County also had a Reading Society. In Schuyler, Colfax County, Josef W. Zerzan founded a Reading Society in 1875.

These clubs are the first of which we have record and it is significant that they were formed at a time when life was a struggle for existence in an unsettled country. They are strong proof that Czech pioneers hungered for intellectual food, while being denied in many cases sufficient food for the body.

Czech people are lovers not only of singing, music and dancing, but also of drama and in many settlements they gave amateur theatrical performances frequently. Almost in every Czech hall was build a stage. You may find those in

Abie, Clarkson, Crete, Dwight, Milligan, Ord, Prague, Table Rock, Wilber and in many other places settled by Czechs.

Probably, the first theatrical performance in Nebraska, except Omaha, was given in 1869 by the Reading Society on the farm of Jan Svoboda, near Crete, Saline County. A log house 16 x 22 served for the opera house, lighted by only two windows. The first play was "Rekrutyрка v Kocourkove" (Recruiting in Kocourkov) with Josef Jindra as director and the following actors and actresses: Svoboda, Nedela, Vit Jelinek, Znamenacek, Aksamit, Ant. Herman, Mrs. Aron and Miss Nedela (Mrs. Kubicek). Eight year old Barbara Nedela took a part of a boy in this play. Boards laid across two strong saw bucks served for a stage and white calico curtains for the drop.

In Colfax County probably the first dramatic performance was given in the country church settlement Tabor, near Howells, in 1874, by the Czech Reading Society. The play was "Hluchonemy Frantik" (Deaf and Dumb Frank). The affair took place in the sod house on the farm of F. J. Jonas, the curtain being two sheets sewn together. A dance followed for which the only band in the county played that of Vaclav Svoboda.

The Dramatic Society in Wilber was founded in 1893 but there were dramatical performances much earlier. At first they played in the old wooden hall of Matej Hokuf and under direction of J. Schuessler who came to Wilber from Chicago in 1877. J. Schuessler was the oldest Czech-American actor. When Schuessler left, Hokufa theater was directed by Petr Safarik. The best actors in Wilber were machinist A. Nepil, F. Sadlek, Cenek Duras, Mrs. Herman, Mrs. Spirek, Mrs. Sadlek and others.

James Stuchl of Abie sent me this information about the activity and directing of the Czech plays in Abie, Butler County: "I had been doing this for about 26 years. Before my time others have been active in this line. Czech plays

were very well attended. We had people come from all parts of Nebraska, from Omaha, Clarkson, Howells, David City, Schuyler and a lot of small villages. All the proceeds went towards good causes; for instance the church, school, polio fund, Red Cross, hospital etc. The cast did this willingly and gladly. Our last play "Vesela Vojna" was presented in 1955 in the Abie Sokol hall. Now it is impossible to try to get a cast together. The young generation is not interested and many do not speak Czech anymore. Our usual attendance at these Czech plays was anywhere from 600 to 750."

Singing societies were found in the larger settlements, and thus with the aid of speeches, songs, music and plays. Many celebrations were held aside from dancing parties. Catholic societies celebrated and still celebrate occasions connected with their Church and give dances. Non-Catholics for many years never failed to commemorate the burning of Jan Hus (July 6, 1415).

### **The Serpan Memorial Library of Omaha**

The Serpan Memorial Library of Omaha was organized in February 1941 at the Sokol Auditorium. Four men met for this purpose; they were Simon Rokusek, Frank Raska, Ludvik Pavoucek and Roman Hruska. After Stanley Serpan's death, his wife Emma announced that his personal library of 3,000 books, both Czech and English, valued at \$5,000 could be used as a private library and be used as a memorial to him.

Officers were chosen as follows: S. Rokusek, President; Pavoucek, Secretary; and Roman Hruska, Treasurer. At a later date Rose Rosicky was asked to serve as Vice-President. It was decided to have the Library in the school room and funds would be raised for expenses and also for the building of glass enclosed cabinets for the books. Otakar Charvat consented to write up the information about the prospective Library in the "**Pokrok zapadu**," Mr. Pavoucek in the "**Hlasatel**," Mr. Hruska in the "**Fraternal Herald**" and "**World Herald**"

and Miss Rosicky in the “**Hospodar.**” The Czech lodges both in Omaha and South Omaha were notified and before long considerable funds were collected not only for the building of the cabinets and expenses but also for the purchasing of new books from time t time.

Persons were asked to join the Library Club and by enrolling at a fee of one dollar per year would be entitled to checkout books for two weeks' duration; a few years later this was changed to three weeks. Lodges chose representatives to the Club and paid their annual fees. Kveta Ptak was the first Librarian; later Emil Serpan took over her duties. The Librarian would come to the Library on Thursday evenings and any member could borrow a book before or after the quarterly meetings.

When the Club was first organized, meetings were held four times a year but a few years later it was decided that only three meetings a year would be sufficient, omitting the summer months. Three months after the first planned meeting, 27 persons enrolled and books were already checked out. Many individuals not only from Omaha but from other towns and cities donated books and money to the Library. Within a year the membership rose to 137. During the year 1944, 630 books were borrowed; in 1945, 554 and in 1949, 773. In 1951 Rose Rosicky donated 150 books. In 1963, 241 books were borrowed.

The meetings throughout the years were source of inspiration to all members. Throughout the centuries the Czechs have always been great readers of good books and in this way they would still be able to read the books of their own choice. After business meetings a program of a cultural nature takes place and a social hour follows. These get-togethers are very important to keep the Czech heritage and folklore alive. From the very beginning, special observances have been held in October, celebrating the Anniversary of Independence of Czechoslovakia (in 1918) and then again March, the birth month of Tomas Masaryk. Membership in recent years has decreased and books have not been



issued as often as the Club would like, but the older generation of Czechs is slowly diminishing in numbers and the second generation does not read Czech as easily as their forefathers. However, members are very proud of their Club and are anxious that all Czechs interested become active and take advantage of what the Library has to offer.

Special recognition should be given to the first president, Simon Rokusek, who so loyally directed the Club for eighteen years. His wisdom and experience have enabled the Library to serve members who enjoy reading and the better things in life. Also, the rich cultural heritage and folklore have been kept alive.

Presidents for the past 25 years have been: S. Rokusek, 1941-59; Josef Sklenicka, 1960-63; Alfred Hasterdlo, 1964-66. Present officers are: A. Hasterdlo, President; Frank Smrz, Vice-President; Marie Vitek, Secretary; Aloisie Tonar, Treasurer and Krista Skocpol, Librarian.

**Czech Library in West Point.** Josef Zerzan, later of Schuyler, who resided in West Point for a time, organized a small Czech library in 1874.

**Czech Library in Clarkson, Colfax County.** A very rich Czech library was established in Clarkson and still is visited by many readers.

(Pictures of Dr. Olga Stastna and Willa S. Cather p. 84)

Dr. Olga Stastna	Willa S. Cather
Prominent Czech physician	Great American novelist—Anna Pavelka, a Czech Girl, lives on in Cather's "My Antonia"

(Artist's Drawing p. 85)

## **CZECH PROFESSIONALS**

### **Political Activity**

At the start of Nebraska's political history, the majority of the Czech populace was Democrats. Because the Czechs had fought long and hard in their homeland against the tyrannical Austrian Government, they were naturally progressive in their ideas and action. Saline County, however, was an exception to this fact. It is interesting to note that this county, so typically Czech, was for many years Republican in majority and only in recent years has it become Democrat.

The Czechs, like all other nationalities of Nebraska, have held many political offices, especially in counties settled primarily by them. We have attempted to list herein those who had filled State positions in an endeavor to make notation of the fact that they have performed well their duty as American citizens.

Heading any such list would have to be the man most honored by Nebraska's Czechs, United States Senator Roman Hruska who holds the highest political post. All of us, both Republicans and Democrats are proud of Senator Hruska, an American, who publicly proclaims with pride that he is of Czech birth; and who speaks and writes the Czech language so eloquently.

(Picture of Roman L. Hruska p. 87)

### **Roman L. Hruska**

Roman L. Hruska, a freshman House member from Omaha, Nebraska, was chosen in 1954 to serve the unexpired four-year term of the late Senator Hugh Butler. And so at the age of 48 years, Roman Hruska was named to the

United States Senate, the only Czech to ever hold that position. In his acceptance speech before Congress in 1954 he said: "Any country boy would like to be Senator in the greatest legislative body in the world. I have shared that desire for some time. I will embody myself as assiduously and diligently in the Senate as I have in Congress and before in the Courthouse of Douglas County, Omaha, Nebraska."

Senator Hruska was elected the following November, taking office the same month. In two short years he had made the giant political stride from chairmanship of the Douglas County Commissioners Board, to Senior United States Senator from Nebraska. Now as Nebraska's Senior Senator he is one of the nation's fastest rising figures of the "country boy" term. The Czechs of Nebraska and the world are proud of this man whose more than a decade of Congressional law-making has poured forth into the mainstream of America new promise, hope and betterment. Roman Hruska has become himself a revered and respected figure on the American scene who has been lifted and who has lifted by his own perseverance and vision to a position of leadership and power. He is truly an inspiration to all people as a man who recognized the value of integrity and human dignity. As Senator Hruska has humbly said: "I would still like to be considered a country boy who has learned a little something along the way."

The way has not been effortless for the son of a Czech immigrant schoolteacher. Senator Hruska has not been lauded for his colorful career or glorified in newsprint. His colleagues have said that despite a lack of what might be called showmanship on the Senate floor, Mr. Hruska has rightfully claimed his foothold deep in American politics. Since entering the Senate he has become a member of that group's hierarchy. He is a member of Republican Policy Committee, being on two of the most powerful Senate committees, Appropriations and Judiciary, and is, in fact, the No. 2 G. O. P. member of the latter.

Senator Hruska's background clearly shows the motivation behind his statement; "There is not enough time. You have to choose between being a work horse and a show horse." His career is something of an American success story, embodying old-fashioned virtues like thrift, hard work, independence and steady progress toward a goal.

Roman Hruska was born in David City, Nebraska, August 16, 1904, son of Josef C. and Karolina Hruska, both of Czech origin. He was the fourth boy and fifth child of eleven children. The Hruska family moved in 1917 to Omaha when Roman was thirteen years of age and he has called Omaha "home" since then.

Mr. Hruska's elementary education has been mostly in David City and so he started his schooling in Omaha's old Commerce High School (now Tech. High) where he proved to be a mainstay of the Webster Debating Society. He went on to enroll in the University of Omaha for his pre-legal training as his sights were on a law career early in life. During all the years he worked first carrying newspapers and, later, taking over the newspaper switchboard at nights during his only free time. He gives credit to three persons who particularly inspired and influenced him regarding his ambition. One was J. B. Pospisil, a lawyer and close family friend and the two Pospisil brothers, Ralph and Edward.

The Senator-to-be continued his education at the University of Chicago Law School where he worked nights as a clerk in a hospital which provided him his meals and studying time. Returning to Omaha, he began his last mile of training when he enrolled at Creighton Law School. He still earned his way, proving to all his capacity for enormous responsibility. Mr. Hruska, while at Creighton, managed to budget his studies and then found time to drive a truck, install window shades and Venetian blinds and work as a bookkeeper. He received his L. L. B. Degree in 1929, passed the bar and began the general practice of law in Omaha.

In 1930 he married a Czech girl, Victoria Kuncl of Omaha and to them, three children have been born; Roman L.Jr., Quentin and daughter Jana L. Hruska.

## **Karel Stefan**

Karel Stefan, who was elected nine consecutive terms to serve in Congress, was born on a farm near the town of Zebrakov, Bohemia, March 1, 1884. In 1885 his family migrated to the United States and settled in Omaha. There young Karel attended the public school as well as the Czech and German parochial ones. Adept in learning foreign languages he is said to have mastered thirteen during his life. Hard times forced young Karel to quit school at the age of 13. He worked at various jobs, packing house, publicity department of the Trans-Mississippi Exposition and as a messenger boy for Western Union. This job gave him the opportunity to learn telegraphy. While still in his teens, he sailed for the Far East and became a telegrapher for the Philippine Constabulary. For this service to the Philipinos he received many awards. Returning to the United States he worked awhile in Omaha newspapers. After marriage he moved to Seattle where he worked as a telegrapher, but soon he returned to Nebraska settling in Norfolk in 1909.

Norfolk was really the ideal place for Stefan. His ability to speak Czech, German and Scandinavian opened up many possibilities.

In Norfolk Stefan's first job was that of telegrapher for the **Daily News**, but later he served as city editor. He resigned in 1924 and bought a cigar store. He continued ownership of this store until shortly before his death.

Wireless always intrigued him. He assisted in setting up WJAG, the Norfolk Daily News station in 1922 and until elected to Congress in 1934 was its

chef announcer and newscaster. In his first race for Congress in 1934, Stefan defeated the veteran Democrat Howard by a plurality of nearly 20,000 votes. In Congress he battled for the farmers and the small business man. His most important assignment in the House was he Appropriations Committee and he was ranking minority member at the time of his death.

His fluency in languages made Stefan a valuable man for many missions. He was an official advisor to the United Nations Conference in San Francisco in 1945 and his last official assignment was that of congressional observer at the signing of the Japanese peace treaty. During World War II he broadcasted encouragement to his native Czechs in their own language.

Four Indian tribes, Winnebago, Omaha, Ponca and Sioux adopted him as "Pah-Hug-Mon-Thee," meaning "Leader Man." The Philippine Commonwealth Government made him honorary brigadier general and presented him with many medals. National University of Washington, D. C., granted him an honorary Doctor of Laws degree.

He was, as the **World Herald** points out, "a good American and a living success story, an immigrant from Bohemia who hustled and educated himself and made a success of several careers."

Karel Stefan died in 1951.

**Otto Kotouc Sr.** Otto Kotouc, Sr. was born in 1885 in Humboldt, Nebraska. He was graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1908 and the same year was elected a representative to the Legislature a position he held for two terms. In 1951 he was elected to the unicameral and served for four consecutive regular terms and two special sessions. He announced his resignation in 1958.

In the bicameral legislature, Kotouc sponsored legislation reorganizing the university into seven colleges; secured appropriation necessary to start pioneering soil conservation work by the university's division of conservation and survey. In the unicameral while Kotouc served as chairman of the Committee on Banking, Commerce and Insurance all bills recommended by the Committee were approved by the legislature. He also served as chairman of the legislative council's committee on watershed legislation which prepared enabling laws for the formation of public watershed districts in Nebraska. Kotouc also sponsored the act creating the retirement system for the Nebraska judiciary.

In addition to serving in many ways his own community, county and southeast Nebraska, Otto Kotouc is a trustee of the University of Nebraska foundation. He has published an anthology of Czech poetry "**Songs of the Slavs,**" a historical sketch "**The Bohemian Settlement in Humboldt**" and written articles for various bank magazines. He is one of the founders of the Komensky club at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, first in this state and country.

In 1958 the Nebraska Builder award, highest non-academic honor of the University of Nebraska, was conferred upon Kotouc for his outstanding contributions to the growth and development of Nebraska.

**Rudolf C. Kokes.** Rudolf C. Kokes was born on May 10, 1911, the third son of Frank and Elizabeth Kokes of Ord in Valley County. Mr. and Mrs. Frank Kokes migrated from Czechoslovakia to Nebraska. As a child Rudolf was taught the Czech language and is able to converse fluently in Czech.

He was educated in Valley County Public Schools and became engaged in farming near Ord. During the depression he continued to farm and also began to work for the Commodity Credit Corporation. As the size of his farming

operation increased, he was forced to quit Commodity Credit Corporation and devote full time to farming.

Mr. Kokes served his community in several capacities, including Chairman of the School Board, member of Valley County A. S. C. committee, Chairman of the School Reorganization committee and member of the F. H.A. board. In 1964 he filed for the office of State Senator for the 41<sup>st</sup> district.

**William R. Skarda Jr.** William R. Skarda Jr. was born in Omaha, Nebraska on May 16, 1916, the son of William Skarda. His grandparents, Jan and Emma Skarda (Granat) immigrants from Bohemia, first settled in Wisconsin, then moving to St. Paul, Nebraska and later to Omaha.

William Skarda Jr., attended South Lincoln grade school then South High School and business school at night. He was Fire Inspector for the city of Omaha retiring from that position in 1956. He was associated with Watson Bros. transportation company and is now presently employed with the Yellow Freight System of Kansas City, Missouri.

He was elected to the Unicameral Legislature in 1958, and became member of the Government and Military Affairs, Agriculture, Banking, Commerce, Insurance, Labor, Public Welfare and Miscellaneous Committees during his term in the Legislature.

He and his wife Dorothy have two daughters, Cheryl and Christine. He is a member of the Czech Civic Alliance, Sokols of South Omaha, Old Settler's, Knights of Columbus and Omaha Traffic Club. He is past president of the Better Omaha Club and South District Safety Chairman for the Boy Scouts.

**Karel Tvrdik.** An accountant with service in the legislature stretching back to 1935, Tvrdik has served longer than any other member. He served first



in the legislature in 1935 during that year's special session and then each session after that through 1957. He was Speaker of the Unicameral during the 1953 session.

He attended an Omaha parochial school, South High School, Boyles Business College and LaSalle Extension University, was president of South East Progressive Improvement Club, a member of the South Omaha Merchants Association, Vinton Commercial Club, Better Omaha Club and Eagles. Senator K. Tvrdik, 59, died in 1962.

**Hugo F. Srb.** Hugo F. Srb was born in Dodge, Nebraska on August 4, 1900, son of Frank J. Srb, a resident of Nebraska since 1876 and a resident of Dodge since 1888, born in Opatovice, Bohemia in 1874, son of Frank and Marie (Novotny) Srb. His grandfather lived in both Cuming and Dodge County.

The parents of Hugo F. Srb resided in Dodge, Nebraska until the last 7 years which have been spent in Lincoln, Nebraska. To the Frank J. Srb family were born 6 children, namely, Marie (Malec), Leon (deceased), Hugo Jr., Frank J., Luella (Hampson) and Vivian (Graf).

Hugo F. Srb attended Dodge public and high school and graduated from the latter in 1918, attended Wayne Normal School and graduated in 1920 and then received his LLB from the University of Nebraska in 1924. He taught school in Elgin and Dodge high school.

He is a member of the Nebraska Bar and Lincoln Bar Associations. He practiced law for fourteen years with his brother Frank J. in Dodge. He was elected to the Nebraska State Senate in 1931, and in 1933 was a candidate for Congress. He was elected Clerk of the Unicameral Legislature in 1937 and has held that position for almost 30 years, and is presently holding that position.

He is married to Francis Grace Davey and is the father of 5 children, namely, Richard, a Rhoades Scholar and teacher in Munich, Germany; Arthur who is with the Associated Press in Springfield, Illinois; Lois of San Marion, California; Charles and Sarah living at home.

Hugo Srb died December 13, 1975.

**Richard H. Maresh.** Richard H. Maresh was born September 8, 1917 in Milligan, Nebraska, son of Joseph and Anna Betka Maresh. He is a graduate of Milligan High School and took night classes at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln. He attended the Air Force Mechanic and Flight Schools during World War II. Maresh was a recipient of the Air Force Medal with four Oak Leaf Clusters and the distinguished Flying Cross when he served as an Air Force B-29 Flight Engineer.

Maresh is married to Ruth Sweeney and they are the parents of three daughters; Dixie, Janet and Chere.

Maresh owns and operates a farm near Milligan. He was formerly the Fillmore County A. S. C. Committeeman, past chairman of the Fillmore County C. R. O., P. Committee, past member of the Milligan School Board. He is a member of the Milligan Methodist Church, American Legion, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Nebraska Historical Society, Fillmore County Agriculture Society, Nebraska Association and the Nebraska Feeders Association.

Maresh was elected to the Unicameral Legislature on November 3, 1970 from the 32<sup>nd</sup> District and was re-elected November 5, 1974. Maresh is Chairman of the Labor Committee and serves on the Agriculture and Environment; Public Health and Welfare; Conflicts of Interest and Legislative Council Committees.

Maresh's home address is Milligan, Nebraska 68406.

**Don Dworak** was elected to the Nebraska Legislature in 1974. A native of David City and descendant of a Nebraska pioneer family, Don Dworak, 41, received his bachelor of science degree from the University of Nebraska and taught American government and history and coached in Nebraska before entering the insurance field.

Dworak, a CLU (Certified Life Underwriter), owns and manages the Nebraskaland Allied Agency and the West Central Employers Association. His business career began with the Travelers Insurance Company of Hartford, Conn., and in 1965 he joined Bankers Life Nebraska in Lincoln. Community involvement is a must for Dworak. He currently serves on the Platte County Red Cross Board of Directors, is the American Red Cross Advisor for counties in Nebraska, Kansas and Iowa, and will represent Nebraska at the National Red Cross Convention this spring in Minneapolis, Minn.

A leader in the United Fund Drive since he came to Columbus in 1969, Dworak is also a member of the Columbus Chamber of Commerce, Optimists, Elks, St. Bonaventure Church and Fellowship of Christian Athletes. Concerned about conservation and protection of wildlife, he belongs to the Izaak Walton League and as one who encourages cultural development, Dworak serves as vice-president of the Friends of Music Board of Directors.

Dworak believes that youth are a vital asset to any community. As a vocational advisor at Columbus High School, he participates in a student trainee program giving high school students assistance in career decisions through on-the-job training and experience. He is active in scouting and is an Eagle Scout.

A licensed water safety instructor and Platte County Water Safety Chairman, Dworak has taught swimming classes at the Columbus Family Y and is presently engaged in a swimming instruction program.

Don and his wife Judy, formerly of David City, have two sons, Donald Paul and Tony.

## CZECHS WHO SERVED IN THE NEBRASKA LEGISLATURE

**House of Representatives---R; Senate---S**

<b>Date</b>	<b>Name</b>	<b>Party</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Return Yrs.</b>
1871 R	Edward Rosewater	Rep.	Douglas	
1875 R	Frank Folda	Dem.	Colfax	
1879 R	Henry Fisher		Saunders	
1881 R	Stepan Herman	Independ.	Saline	
1883 R	Frank Sadlek	Antimonoply	Saline	
1885 R	Josef Jindra	Rep.	Saline	
1887 R	Tomas Simacek	Dem.	Saunders	
1887 R	Cenek Duras	Rep.	Saline	
1889 R	William Bohacek	Rep.	Saline	
1891 R	Stepan Herman	Independ.	Saline	
1891 R	Tomas Capek	Dem.	Douglas	
1895 R	James Havlik	People	Saunders	
1899 R	Josef Dobry	Fusionist	Colfax	1903
1901 R	Vaclav Bures	Rep.	Douglas	
1903 R	J. J. Vlasak	Fusionist	Saunders	
1905 R	Frank Fitl	Rep.	Douglas	
1905 R	Jan Pospisil	Rep.	Saunders	
1907 R	Frank Rejcha	Rep.	Lancaster	
1907 R	Frank Vopalensky	People	Saunders	
1909 R	Frank Dolezal	People	Saunders	1911
1909 R	Josef Dostal	Dem.	Butler	1911
1909 R	Jan Chab	Dem.	Saline	
1909 R	Jan Hospodsky	People	Saline	1911
1909 R	Otto Kotouc	Dem.	Richardson	1911
1909 S	Frank Bartos	Dem.	Saline	1911

1909	R	Josef Kraus	Dem.	Douglas	
1911	R	J. B. Sindelar	Dem.	Colfax	1913, 1915, 1917
1911	R	Jan Hasik	Rep.	Butler	1913
1911	R	Anton Sagl	Dem.	Saline	
1911	R	Frank Riha	Dem.	Douglas	
1911	S	Emil Placek	Dem.	Saunders	1913
1913	S	E. J. Spirek	Rep.	Saline	
1915	R	C. F. Hynek	Dem.	Saline	
1917	R	J. J. Jelen	Dem.	Douglas	
1919	R	L. Berka	Rep.	Douglas	
1919	R	T. Stibal		Colfax	1923
1921	S	L. Berka	Rep.	Douglas	
1923	S	K. Smrha	Dem.	Fillmore	1927
1923	R	K. Katusky		Douglas	
1923	R	K. V. Svoboda	Dem.	Howard	
1925	R	W. Korisko	Rep.	Douglas	
1925	R	Lad. Tesar	Dem.	Douglas	
1925	S	Frank Dolezal	Dem.	Saunders	
1927	R	Jan Bures		Douglas	
1927	R	Leo Miskovsky		Douglas	
	R	Frank Freeouf		Saline	1931, 1933
	S	Lad. Tesar		Douglas	
	R	Joe Wolf		Douglas	
1929	R	Oldrich Jelen	Dem.	Douglas	1933
	R	Adam Sloup	Rep.	Douglas	
	R	Mrs. Barbara Sloup	Rep.	Douglas	
	S	Rudolf Brazda	Dem.	Cuming	
	S	Filip Tomek	Dem.	Butler	
	S	Gus Dworak	Dem.	Douglas	1931, 1933
1931	D	Hugo Srb	Dem.	Dodge	1933
	R	James Bures	Dem.	Douglas	1935

	R	Rudolf Tesar	Dem.	Douglas	1933
1933	S	Josef Bren		Douglas	
	S	Emil Brodecky	Dem.	Colfax	1935, 1937, 1939
1935	S	Edward Jelen	Dem.	Douglas	
	S	Josef Kaspar		Saunders	
	S	Alois Slepicka	Dem.	Saline	1937
	S	Karel Tvrdik	Dem.	Douglas	1937 through 1957
	R	J. K. Proskocil	Dem.	Douglas	

### The Unicameral

Date	Name	County	Return Years
1939	Jan Mekota	Saline	1941, 1945, 1953
1941	Otto Kotouc Sr.	Richardson	
	Josef Knezacek	Valley	
1943	Ladd Hubka	Gage	1945
1947	J. V. Benes	Douglas	1949
1951	Otto Kotouc Sr.	Richardson	1953, 1955, 1957
1953	Ernest Hubka	Gage	1955
1955	LeRoy Bahensky	Merrick	1957, 1963
1959	William Skarda	Douglas	1961, 1963, 1965
	Joe Vosoba	Saline	1961
1965	Rudolf Kokes	Valley	
1971	Richard Maresh	Fillmore	
1975	Donald Dworak		

## **Czech Physicians**

**Dr. Jan Habenicht** was the pioneer Czech physician in Nebraska. He was born in 1840 in Caslav, Bohemia. His father was a German army physician. Under the guidance of his mother and ardent Czech patriot, young Habenicht grew up to be a Czech. He studied medicine in Prague and later in Leipzig, Germany. He engaged in medical practice and in 1869 came to Chicago, Illinois. Dr. Habenicht was an ardent lover of literature and the dramatic art. He devoted thirty years of his life to writing a history of the Czechs in the United States which was published in 1904 by the Catholic paper "**Hlas**" in St. Louis, Missouri. In 1897 he published at his own expense his "**Reminiscences of an Old Physician,**" which deals mainly with the history of the Czech settlement in Chicago. He revised and brought up to date an edition of a popular medical book in Czech, written originally by Dr. Pecirka in Bohemia. He was a great admirer of Napoleon and many books about his favorite hero were found in his large library.

He came to Nebraska for the first time in 1880 to Wilber. In 1887 he moved to Schuyler and in 1890 moved again to Wilber, having lived in the meantime in Dodge and possibly in other places. He did not stay long in Wilber the second time and after that never again settled in our state. In 1898 he returned finally to Chicago where he died in 1918 after a long illness. He was cremated and the ashes were placed in the columbarium in the Czech National Cemetery in Chicago.

**Dr. C. H. Breuer** was born in 1866 in Hemerna, Bohemia. He came with his parents in 1876 to New Prague, Minnesota. At first he worked on the farm, then on newspapers in Chicago and Omaha where he graduated in medicine and began his practice. He has written many articles on medical subjects for "**Hospodar.**" During World War I Dr. Breuer became a member of the Nebraska

Home Guards, organized when the state militia was sent out of the state. Governor Keith Neville appointed him chief physician with the title of captain. When in the spring of 1918 agitation tending to help free Czechoslovakia developed. Dr. Breuer obtained leave from the governor to organize Czech companies of the Nebraska Home Guards. He allowed them to use the Czech language which was a marked concession, in as much as during that time there was great distaste for anything but the English language. These Czech companies were allowed to recruit legionnaires for the allied armies, among those who could not enter the American army and 17 such enlisted. A company was formed in Wilber with Alois (cannot read the name because a hole is punched through it) as captain. Companies in Crete, Schuyler, Wahoo and elsewhere were being formed when the war closed and there was no necessity for further work.

**Dr. Jan Rudis Jicinsky** was born in Jicin, Bohemia in 1862 and came to this country in 1884 to Chicago. In 1890 he was editor of the paper “**Domacnost**” and later **Rovnost,**” both in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and in 1892 was editor of the “**Pokrok zapadu**” in Omaha. In 1893 he began to study medicine in Omaha and finished in 1896 at Rush Medical College in Chicago. In 1897 he began to practice in Crete, Nebraska where he made many experiments with X-ray, lectured and wrote many articles on that subject. In 1900 he moved to Cedar Rapids, Iowa and later to Chicago. In his earlier years he wrote novels and stories, later articles on medical subjects, and was active in Sokol work editing their organ “**Sokol Americky**” for many years. During World War I he served as physician in Serbia and later in Siberia where his health was impaired. He has translated many articles from English, also a book “**Six Historical Americans.**”

**Dr. Olga Sadilek—Stastny,** the first Czech woman physician in Nebraska, was the daughter of the prominent Czech pioneer in Wilber, F. J. Sadilek. She was born in Wilber in 1878 and graduated from Wilber High School



in 1895. After graduation she married Dr. Charles Stastny. Of this marriage were born a daughter Elsa (Mrs. Lad. Skocdopole of Crete) and a son Robert who met death in a plane accident in 1921 while visiting his mother in Prague, Czechoslovakia.

After her husband's death in 1906 Olga began to study medicine and in 1913 graduated from the College of Medicine in Omaha. During 1913 and part of 1914 she took a postgraduate course in Boston as House Physician of the New England Hospital for Women and Children and began to practice in Omaha in 1914. During World War I she organized a tag day for the Franco-Serbian Relief Hospital when \$10,000 was collected for that purpose. In that year she organized a department of Americanization of the Woman's Division of the State Council of Defense. Her "Five Minute" speech on Americanization was accepted by the National Council of Defense and sent to other states as a model. She also was active in Czech National Alliance work. In November, 1918 she organized a tag day for the benefit of the American Women's Hospitals serving in France when \$5,000 was collected, enough to establish one dispensary.

In December 1918 she sailed to join Unit No. 1 of the above mentioned hospital at Luzancy, France. On July 2, 1919 she left for Czechoslovakia at the request of Dr. Alice Masaryk, daughter of the president of Czechoslovakia, to teach medical social service and hygiene in the Social Service Training School organized by Dr. Masaryk with the help of the American Young Women's Christian Association. She made a survey of the nursing situation in Prague. As a result of this survey the American Red Cross organized a training school for nurses under the direction of the American trained workers. She established a baby clinic and feeding station in Prague and used it as a teaching center for the students. In 1919 she was transferred to the Young Men's Christian Association. There she was given full charge of the Health Department and did much good work in that direction so that it spread to civilian classes all over the country. In December of 1921 Dr. Stastny returned to Omaha on sick leave and in

September of 1922 returned again to Europe planning a course of postgraduate work in Prague and Berlin. But a few months later she was called to Athens, Greece by the American Women's Hospitals and sent to Smyrna to work among the deported Christians from Turkey and Asia Minor. She was made Director of the Quarantine Station on Macronissi Island through which a thousand refugees passed monthly. Pest ships from the Black Sea ports discharged their human cargoes on this barren island during the exodus of the Christian population from Anatolia. Dr. Stastny lived with these outcasts who suffered from typhus and smallpox and served them personally for six months. She was decorated with the Cross of St. George by the Greek government for this work. She contracted malaria in Greece and left in the fall of 1923.

During that year and 1924 she gave many lectures all over the United States. In 1924, having returned to Omaha, she was elected a delegate to the International Medical Women's Conference in London in July. In the fall of that year she returned to Omaha engaging in practice. In the summer of 1929 Dr. Stastny was appointed president-elect of the Women's National Medical Association, to assume her office in 1930.

Dr. Olga Stastny, a prominent Czech physician, was a great patriot devoted to the Czech nation and language. During every visit to Czechoslovakia she was very close to Dr. Alice Masaryk. A short time before her death she donated to the Historical Society in Lincoln some specimens of Czech folklore and a very colorful Slovak national costume which are on display now in that Museum in Lincoln.

Dr. Olga Stastny died on August 23, 1952 at the age of 73.

**Dr. Josef F. Kaspar, M. D.**, is well remembered in the community of Prague, Nebraska. He was born in 1876 to Josef and Mary Kaspar, one of the founders of the village of Prague. He attended the University of Nebraska and

later graduated from New York University Medical School in 1899. He interned at Bellevue Hospital in New York and practiced medicine there for two years. He spent one year doing post graduate work at Charles University, Prague, Czechoslovakia. He returned to Prague, Nebraska and in 1913 he built the first hospital in Saunders County.

It was soon realized that Dr. Kaspar was an unusual man. People either worshipped him or were leary of him for he had ways that were different from a typical American doctor. He was known for his intuitive diagnosis and he was also known to create his own medicine for various maladies. In some cases, those who were leary of him came to him as a last resort and usually it was said after that, "Dr. Kaspar saved my life." Neighboring town doctors often consulted him about difficult diagnostic cases. He has been known to stop strange people on the street and tell them what was wrong with them and that they should seek medical help. An illustration of his different ways was an incident that took place on a street corner one day. One Czech man had a sore on his hand that just would not go away. He had been to many doctors and this sore persistently returned. Discouraged and desperate, one day this man met Dr Kaspar on the street and asked him his advice. After one glance Dr. Kaspar reached for his pocket knife. To this man's disbelief and before he realized what happened, Dr. Kaspar had carved out this bothersome sore. Not knowing what to do—to thank him or curse him—he went home and waited for it to return. Stranger than fiction, this man is now in his seventies and the sore has never returned.

This was not his only accomplishment. He was identified with several fraternal organizations, school boards, farming, oil painting and playing a prominent part in local and state politics. At one time he was State Senator in the Nebraska Legislature.

Dr. Kaspar passed away in 1955. He is survived by his wife Antoinette and five children: Pearl, Joe, Oliver, Ruby and Opal and ten grandchildren. Dr.

Kaspar left a rich heritage behind him and memories of a strong pioneer spirit that people will love to recall to their children for many years to come.

(Picture of Jindra Cemetery p. 97)

Jindra Cemetery near Crete, Saline County, the oldest Czech cemetery in Nebraska

## **Dentists**

Dentistry in Nebraska had made great strides in the healing arts. From very humble beginnings the University of Nebraska Dental College moved from the old Lincoln Liberty Theatre to Andrews Hall on the University Campus. In 1966 ground was broken for a new Dental College to be erected on the University Agricultural Campus.

The Nebraska Dental Faculty is considered to be tops in their profession and ranks with the best faculties in any University. The same can be said of Creighton University in Omaha which started its dental program on a small scale and today has a good quarter of the Creighton Campus.

As a rule, graduates of Nebraska University and Creighton locate in their native state to practice their profession; however, many seek locations in other states where they all seem to be a credit to their respective institutions of learning. Certainly this is a loss to the State of Nebraska but it is excellent proof that their education has been a substantial one.

As far as is known, Dr. Jan Mach of Omaha is the first Czech graduate of a dental school in Nebraska. He was born in 1877 at Omaha and his maternal grandfather was a pioneer of Saunders County. He graduated from the School of Dentistry in Omaha 1898. Next we can record the name of the first woman

dentist, that is Miss Pauline Kubicek (Kubitchek) who practiced in Omaha for a short time in the early years of the 1900 decade.

There have been many noted Czech dentists in Nebraska, oral surgeon specialists and general practitioners. Dr. Bretislav Diensbier, born in Wilber, practiced dentistry over 50 years in Omaha. He is Nebraska's outstanding historian for both the Nebraska State Dental and American Dental Societies. Dr. F. Friedrich, born in Wilber, practiced 52 years in North Bend. Dr. S. Jelinek practiced over 54 years in Brainard, Dr. Joe Ruzicka practiced dentistry 50 years, still active in the profession at Plainview, Nebr., Dr. J. Fisher practicing at Hartington 52 years, Dr. L. Proskovec practiced almost 50 years at Schuyler, Dr. J. Pucelik practiced over 45 years at Spencer, Nebr., Dr. Jan Pucelik is practicing dentistry at South Sioux City, Nebr. He was an All American in football while attending the University of Nebraska.

--Dr. R. Tomes

**Dr. S. H. Jelinek.** Stephen H. Jelinek, D. D. S. was born in Wilber in 1887. He was educated in Wilber High School and the Dental College of Creighton University from where he graduated in 1911. For many years he was active in civic affairs, serving as a member of the village board, mayor, chairman of the commercial club and fire department in Brainard. During World War I he was active in all patriotic efforts. He was President of the school board for almost twenty years. The present magnificent school plant in Brainard is the result of his sound judgment. He has taken a very active interest in all matters affecting the welfare of the Czech people.

### **Czech Lawyers**

**Florian V. Kratky**, who settled in Wahoo, Saunders County in 1878 was the first Czech lawyer in Nebraska. The next was **Frank D. Dolezal**, who was born in Džbánov, Bohemia and came to Iowa in 1867 and from there moved to

Crete in 1881. In 1882 he settled in Fremont where he has been since, except six months in 1897 when he was in Salt Lake City, Utah as attorney for a mining corporation. **Ludvik Berka**, who settled in Omaha in 1883, is the third oldest Czech lawyer in the state. Another pioneer lawyer was George Elbling.

F. D. Dolezal wrote this information: "When I came to Nebraska in 1881 there was only one Czech lawyer here, Mr. Kratky of Wahoo. He showed educational training and was a regular lawyer, whether he studied in a law school or got his training in a law office."

**J. W. Blezek** was born in 1877 at Baldwin, Iowa. He was the sixth of the seven children born to Matej Blezek a wagoner by trade and K. Shimenda, both of whom immigrated to America from Bohemia in 1850. Mr. Blezek received his education in the Randolph and Fremont Normal Schools, going on to Highland Park College and then graduating from the University of Nebraska Law College of 1905. He was married to Emma Zajicek in Wilber, Nebraska. They moved to Oklahoma where he managed his homestead, taught school and served in the capacity of Judge. In 1911 they moved to Verdigris, Nebraska where he practiced law. In 1914 he was invited to become a law partner with Mr. F. Free in Plainview, Nebraska. Later he took over the entire law practice in Plainview where he served as an attorney for 42 years until his death in 1956. Mr. Blezek served as Mayor of Plainview for three terms. He also served on the School Board, City Council, was a member of the Chamber of Commerce and the Odd Fellows Lodge. During the World Wars he was a legal advisor to the Selective Service Board. He was an ardent supporter of youth, being interested in their athletic as well as their musical programs.

**Josef T. Votava** was born on a farm near Abie in the year of 1885. He received his Bachelor of Arts degree at the University of Nebraska and later graduated from the College of Law in 1911. He was an honor student in his pre-law school classes. One of his greatest achievements was being appointed

United States District Attorney for the State of Nebraska in 1934, a position he held until July of 1953. He also served on the State Highway Advisory Commission. He has been recognized as one of the leading lawyers in the city of Omaha.

## **First Czech Bankers of Nebraska**

**By Jan Moural**

In 1863 Nebraska's Homestead Law became effective, thus attracting many settlers. A great majority of the settlers came from Wisconsin where the clearing of land was much slower and harder work than on the plains of Nebraska.

Frank Folda and his wife arrived in Schuyler in 1868 when the town had only two houses; the third being the home he built. Mr. Folda was a financial genius of sorts and in those early days opportunities were great and he knew how to grasp them. He acquired much land and cattle. He established a grain and land business and he prospered in each endeavor. As the settlers arrived he was the natural one for them to come to for help and advice. Few of the settlers could speak English, so Mr. Folda was an invaluable help to them as he knew the English language. All in all, he was an influential and trustworthy compatriot. In 1887 he established the first Folda bank in Schuyler, the first of its kind west of the Missouri. It became the foundation for five more. Others followed in Howell, Clarkson, Rogers, Linwood and Pilger. In 1875 he was a member of our State Legislature serving as a representative on the democratic ticket. In 1879 he was nominated for State Treasurer (Dem.) and in 1888 he was nominated for Lt. Governor. However, since the Republicans were in the majority in those days he did not win either time. In 1887 in cooperation with several prominent democrats, he established a Czech weekly, "Nova doba." Mr. Folda died in 1892, leaving his memory of a kindly gentleman whose innate courtesy and helpfulness to his countrymen never changed with his rising

fortune. He donated the building site in Schuyler to the Sokol organization on which they expect some day to build an auditorium.

Like the Folda family, there was another prominent banking family, the Kirchmans and relatives. **W. C. Kirchman** was born in Klatovy, Bohemia in 1851. He came to Saunders County, Nebraska as a pioneer and settled in Wahoo in 1876. Mr. Kirchman became the founder of eight different banks. It is of interest to note that there had been no Czech bank in Omaha until 1917. That can be explained by the fact that there were few wealthy people among the Czech settlements. The Union State Bank of Omaha was established in 1917 and **Frank Horacek** was president guiding the bank to success. Frank Horacek was born in Vomice, Moravia.

-The Union Building and Loan Association was founded by Frank Horacek as president and Lad. V. Tesar, Sr., as executive secretary in 1921 leaving all the managing to Mr. Tesar. J. Votava was vice president and Frank Riha was treasurer. Mr. Tesar was president in 1965 to March of 1966. At this time the bank merged with another and this became known as the First Federal Savings & Loan of Omaha. Tesar is now vice president.

### **Jonas L. Brandeis**

The founder of the House of Brandeis stores was born in Prague, Bohemia on November 14, 1836. At the age of seventeen he left Bohemia for the United States, settling first in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and then on to Manitowac where he started a small business selling items to the settlers in the frontier village. It was in this frontier settlement that Mr. Brandeis was married and from this union three sons and one daughter were born.

Mr. Brandeis came to Omaha, Nebraska in the fall of 1881 where he opened his business called the "Fair Store" at 506 South 13<sup>th</sup> Street which



continuously expanded. His three sons, Arthur, Emil and Hugo, learned the merchandising business from their father and eventually worked alongside with their father. In 1888 Mr. Brandeis moved to a different location, 114 South 16<sup>th</sup> Street, which was centrally located and this establishment was named the "Boston Store." Business continued to increase and he purchased more ground on the northwest corner of 16<sup>th</sup> and Douglas Streets where a partnership was formed. It took the name of J. L. Brandeis and Sons.

Early in the year of 1894 the entire store was destroyed by fire. Undaunted by this tragedy Jonas was not kept from building anew. A new store was built on the same site and more ground was purchased. This building became twice the size of the old one.

Jonas L. Brandeis died on January 23, 1903, leaving the entire operation to his sons. In 1921 the last surviving son Arthur passed away. At this time, George Brandeis, a nephew of Jonas who had immigrated from Bohemia, took over the entire Brandeis business.

**J. Vaclav Charvat** was born in Psany, Bohemia. He came to this country in 1905 landing in Galveston. For a while he worked on a farm, managed a newspaper and later spent many years in banking. During World War I he spent seventeen months with the AEF in France serving with heavy artillery. He has traveled extensively both in this country and abroad. He is intensely interested in all civic and national enterprises and a tireless worker in the Sokol. He now resides in Milligan, Nebraska.

## PROMINENT CZECH NEBRASKANS

**Stanley Bartos**, Czech pioneer, judge, and patriot. His life story spans most of the time this land was developed. He was born in Maly Prepili, Bohemia in 1883, the ninth child born to Frantisek Bartos and Katerina (Bauer) Bartos. A tenth child was born to them in America. In 1885 when Stanley was two years old the Bartos family came to America. When they arrived at Crete an uncle took them to his sod house in Lancaster County where they shared the sod house with seven members of the uncle's family until spring.

In the spring of 1886 the uncle gave them permission to make a dugout in a bank of his pasture, dug by hand by Stanley's mother. Here the Bartos family lived for a year while the father walked to and from town to earn money at his tailor's trade.

In 1887 when Stanley was four, the family moved to a house in Wilber, and this town was Stanley's home for 78 years. Here he lived and worked, here he raised his family and here he died in 1966 at the age of 82 years.

Stanley sometimes spoke of his childhood in Wilber. The family was poor, the father earning a living by tailoring clothes for people by hand without a sewing machine. Many a time Stanley and his brothers caught fish in the Blue River and carried them from house to house to sell them. In his own words written a few years ago, Stanley said: "Our life was a typical pioneer life as was led by many, many immigrants who left their homes in Europe and came to the wonderful land of hope, opportunity and liberty."

After graduating from Wilber High School he went to Lincoln to the University of Nebraska to study law. He graduated with honors in 1907 and was admitted to the bar of Nebraska. The dean of the law school at that time was Roscoe Pound, one of America's legendary legal scholars.

In 1907 Stanley was married to Theresa Beck. Their marriage of 53 years ended with her death in 1962, and her loss was a blow from which he never fully recovered.

To their marriage were born five children: Theresa Morrison, Blanche Fralick, Dorothy Davies, Mary Menne of Wilber and Stanley F. Bartos.

When Stanley finished law school his brother Frank was practicing law in Wilber and they formed a partnership. In later years the firm became Bartos, Bartos and Placek. In that practice Stanley Bartos was the champion of many, many people who needed help. His brother was killed in a car accident in 1932 and Stanley carried on the practice of law during the Depression years when often his work was rewarded with a duck, chicken or a dozen eggs and sometimes nothing at all.

In 1940 after a career of over 30 years of outstanding practice as a lawyer, he ran for the office of District Judge. In 1941 Stanley Bartos began a distinguished career of 20 years on the District Bench serving Saline, Fillmore, Thayer and Nuckolls Counties. Though he often had opponents for the office, the people re-elected him term after term.

This man, who came here as the immigrant son of poor parents from a foreign land, became one of the outstanding and most loved and respected judges in Nebraska. His fine career as a judge ended in 1961 when he retired. Instead of losing interest in the world when he retired from the bench he threw himself into a new career with enthusiasm. He went back to carrying other people's burdens, back to practicing law, this time with Alan and me. And he was appointed County Attorney of Saline County. After Mrs. Bartos died he resigned as County Attorney, but continued to practice law until September of 1964.

Money was never important to Stanley Bartos. He learned that the true riches I life lie in other things, like his family, his profession, his beloved flowers and trees, his genuine but quiet patriotism, his love for American and Czech history, his sympathy for Indians, his poetry, his reading and his love of his fellowman

**Bohacek, Stuart J.** Former Nebraskan, Stuart J. Bohacek was Chief of the Czechoslovak Service of the Voice of America, the United States Information Agency's radio arm.

Bohacek was one time the Editor of the **Wilber Republican** in Wilber. He attended Doane College in Crete, later receiving his Bachelor's Degree from Syracuse University.

He returned in 1965 from his post with USIA in Prague, Czechoslovakia where he was cultural affairs officer. He has also been stationed in Nagoya and Kobe, Japan. Mrs. Bohacek is the former Helen Straube.

Mr. Bohacek's new assignment puts him in charge of all Voice of America programs that are beamed to various Czech speaking aareas explaining American Foreign Policy and portraying the hopes, problems and aims of the people of the United States.

**Buchta, William J.** William Buchta was born in 1895 in Osceola. He received his Bachelor of Science degree in electrical engineering from the University of Nebraska in 1920 and in 1921 he received his A. M. degree from the University. He is presently editor of the **Physics Teacher**. He has held this position since 1963. Washington, D. C. is his present home.

**Dudek, Richard.** Mr. Dudek was born on September 3, 1926 in Clarkson. In 1950 he received his B. S. degree in mechanical engineering from the University of Nebraska. Presently he is a professor and Dept. Head of Industrial Engineering at Texas Technology College in Lubbock, Texas, a position he has held since 1958.

**Duras, Victor Hugo.** Mr. Duras was born in Crete, Nebraska on May 6, 1880. He graduated from the University of Nebraska in 1900 after receiving his Bachelor of Arts degree; in 1902 he received his L.L.B. degree. In 1903 he received his L.L.M. from Columbia University and later in 1905 he received his D.C.L. and M. degree from George Washington University. He was admitted to the bar in Nebraska, New York and Washington, D.C. He was appointed Judge to Cristobal, Panama in 1908 at the age of twenty-eight years, making him the youngest U. S. Judge ever appointed as of that date. He has written many articles on world peace and also two books: **Panama-West vs. East** and **Universal Peace by International Government.** In 1914 he became American Vice-Consul to Liege, Belgium where he was wounded during the siege. After Liege capitulated he was sent to St. Petersburg, Russia at his own request. In St. Petersburg he was later accused of being a spy and was imprisoned, released later. Mr. Duras was an outstanding international attorney (Washington and Paris). He was the son of Cenek Duras and he died in 1943.

**Filipi, T. A.,** the son of Mrs. Mary Sedlak Filipi and the late Rev. Bohdan A. Filipi, is the Director of Environmental Health Services of the Nebraska State Department of Health. Mr. Filipi was responsible for the organization of this Division in 1937. The work consists of the control of the environment which includes water supply, waste water disposal, stream pollution abatement, swimming pools, control of insects and rodents, in fact, all items that affect a person by virtue of an unsanitary environment.

Pennsylvania born in 1904, Mr. Filipi moved to several locations: Omaha and Clarkson, Nebraska; New York City and Newark, New Jersey, before finally settling in Lincoln. Elementary schooling began in 1909 at the Comenius School in Omaha and secondary education completed at Clarkson, Nebraska in 1922. After graduation from the University of Nebraska in 1926 as a Mechanical Engineer, Mr. Filipi wanted more education and thus returned in 1935 for a master's degree and a professional degree from the University of Michigan was received in 1937.

In 1927 he married Miss Olga Novotny, the daughter of the late Josef and Marie Novotny of Clarkson, Nebraska.

Apart from the work of State Sanitary Engineer, his time is spent in woodworking, yard work and whenever possible, travel.

He is an elder and a deacon in the First Presbyterian Church of Lincoln, a 32<sup>nd</sup> Degree Mason, Past President of the Hiram Club, Interprofessional Institute and the Society of Professional Engineers.

Being raised in a Czech community, Mr. Filipi is proud and grateful for his heritage with its customs and sincere, honest, thrifty, God-fearing citizen.

**Frolik, Dr. Anton Lawrence.** Anton Lawrence Frolik was born on a farm at DeWitt, Saline County, Nebraska on May 19, 1907. He attended the local country school, District No. 20, and was graduated from the DeWitt High School in 1924. Following his graduation from the University of Nebraska College of Agriculture in 1928 he was awarded assistantship in the Department of Agronomy which led to a Master of Science degree in 1930. He was then appointed a staff member of the University. In 1934 he was given a leave of absence to take further graduate work at the University of Wisconsin, following

which he returned to the University of Nebraska in 1935. He was granted a Ph.D. degree from Wisconsin in 1936.

A comprehensive research program accompanied Dr. Frolik's teaching duties. He was interested chiefly in pasture and range management studies and carried on some of his most important work in the Sandhills section of north central Nebraska. He was the author of a number of articles and research bulletins in this field. At the time of his death he had underway several research projects which were completed by his associates.

Dr. Frolik's avocation was his work with the United States Army. As an undergraduate he took the advanced course in the R.O.T.C. where he attained the rank of Cadet Major. Following graduation he continued his military studies through correspondence course work and frequently spent summer vacation periods in active Army service. In September of 1940 he was called from his position as Associate Professor at the University of Nebraska to duty as a Captain with the United States Army at Fort Leavenworth, Kansas. Soon afterwards he was promoted to the rank of Major. While riding with a group of fellow officers, he was thrown from his horse. The cerebral hemorrhage which resulted from this injury led to his death on January 27, 1941.

**Frolik, Elvin F. Dr.** Elvin Frank Frolik was born June 9, 1909 in Saline County, Nebraska on a farm west of DeWitt. His parents were Anton and Fanny Frolik. Anton Frolik was born on a farm southwest of Crete, Nebraska in Saline County on October 16, 1876. He graduated from Crete High School in 1895, attended Doane College at Crete during the academic years of 1895-1896 and 1896-1897, and graduated from the Omaha Commercial and Business College. He farmed near Ponoka, Alberta, Canada from 1903 to 1907. He was married to Fanny Kolarik on February 14, 1906. Mr. and Mrs. Frolik moved from Canada to a farm west of DeWitt in 1907 where they continued to live until Mr Frolik died on September 20, 1931. Mrs. Frolik was born in Sepadly, Domazlice,

Czechoslovakia (at that time a part of Austria-Hungary) on April 25, 1885. After her husband's death she lived in Lincoln for two years and then moved to Wilber, Nebraska. She continued to live there until the time of her death on September 23, 1954.

Elvin Frolik's paternal grandparents were Frank and Marie, nee Hijak, (Hajek), Frolik. They immigrated to the United States in 1869 from Pavlov, Bohemia. They settled immediately on the farm southwest of Crete where Anton Frolik was born. The farm remains in the family, presently being owned and operated by Louis and Olga, nee Frolik, Malonek. Olga is the granddaughter of Mr. and Mrs. Frank Frolik and a niece of Anton Frolik.

Elvin Frank Frolik received the Bachelor of Science degree in agriculture from the University of Nebraska in 1930. He received the Alpha Zeta freshman scholarship medal, was a member of the dairy cattle and crops judging teams, was editor of the **Cornhusker Countryman**, was a member of Farm House Fraternity, was elected to membership in Pershing Rifles, Alpha Zeta, Gamma Sigma Delta and Sigma XI and was recognized for Superior Scholarship. He received his Master's Degree with a major in Agronomy from the University of Nebraska in 1932

He later studied at Cornell University's Department of Agricultural Economics and then at the University of Minnesota. From the latter institution he received his Ph.D. in agronomy and plant genetics in 1948. He was a Research Fellow at the California Institute of Technology during the summers of 1947 and 1948.

Dr. Frolik served as Nemaha county agent from 1933-1934. For two years he was in farm management work for the Bankers Life Insurance Company of Nebraska. He was then named to the staff of the University where he served first as Extension Agronomist and later as research worker and classroom teacher.



He became chairman of the Department of Agronomy in 1952 and in 1955 was promoted to Associate director of the Agricultural Experiment Station. In June 1960 he was named Dean of the College of Agriculture.

Dr. Frolik made two trips to Turkey in 1954 at the invitation of the International Cooperation Administration to help develop the University of Nebraska exchange program with Ankara and Ataturk Universities. In 1962 he made a return trip to Turkey and also to Jordan and Nigeria in the interest of the U. S. Agency for International Development programs. He also made trips in 1965 and 1966 to Colombia, South America in the interest of developing cooperative programs involving the University of Nebraska.

Dr. Frolik is listed in the following: **American Men of Science, National Register of Scientific and Technical Personnel, Presidents and Deans of American Colleges and Universities, Who's Who in American Education, Who's Who in the Midwest, Who's Who in America, and Leaders in American Science.** At the University of Nebraska he is an Honorary member of the Innocents Society.

**Janike, Edward W.** E. W. Janike became Dean of Extension at the University of Nebraska in 1963. Prior to that he was Director of the Nebraska Agricultural Extension Service.

E. W. Janike was born on a farm, attended High School in Rising City and was graduated from the University of Nebraska. He also attended Colorado State University. He started his career at the University as Assistant Extension animal husbandman in 1931. He was a District Supervisor for the Agricultural Adjustment Administration from 1932 to 1939. In 1939 he returned to the University as Assistant Extension animal husbandman, a post he held until 1945. He was State 4-H Club leader from 1949 to 1950. He was acting

Associate Director of the Agricultural Extension Service in 1950 and Associate Director in 1951. He also has farmed and served as Secretary of the Omaha Livestock Exchange.

Janike has been a pioneer leader in Nebraska in the rural Development program. In the animal husbandry field Janike pioneered the first sow testing work in Nebraska. He also demonstrated the use and importance of protein supplements for swine feeding.

He has served and is serving in many national Extension posts. He is a member of the Extension Committee on Organization and Policy. He has served as chairman of the Great Plains Council and as chairman of the North Central Region Extension Directors.

Janike was instrumental in the planning, work and designing of the National Project in Agricultural Communications. The contributions brought him national recognition in 1958 when the American Association of Agricultural College Editors presented him the Reuben Brigham award in agricultural communications. This was the first time the award was presented to someone outside the field of agricultural communications.

He was active in the Pasture-Forage-Livestock Program. He has been a member of the Governor's Watershed Advisory Committee, the Governor's Lay Leadership committee, a member of the board of directors of the National 4-H Club Foundation, a member of the State Soil and Water Conservation committee and a member of the State Selective Service Board. He serves on the agricultural committee of both the Omaha and Lincoln Chambers of Commerce.

As a result of his contributions as a staff member and citizen, he was awarded the Superior Service Award by the U. S. Department of Agriculture in 1958. Janike was cited by Secretary Benson.

Mr. Janike's parents were William Janike (born in Germany) and Fannie Skoda (born in Bohemia). His parents settled in Butler and Sheridan Counties. Mr. Janike's father was a farmer and livestock feeder in Butler County. He was active in early Extension work, Farm Bureau, Farmers Union, Farm Loan Association work, school activities and generally recognized as a strong leader in his community.

**Kopac, Milan J., Dr.** Among those who have greatly contributed to the modern concept of cell structure and function is Dr. Milan J. Kopac, a Czech born in Ravenna, Nebraska, who is now Professor of Biology at New York University. His research, writings, lectures and untiring dedication to his work have established him as one of the world's eminent cell microbiologists. Dr. Kopac began his study for the practice of Medicine almost half a century ago at the University of Nebraska. Instead, he became one of the nation's most distinguished cell microsurgeons and a leading fundamental researcher in biochemical genetics, a field which includes cancer studies.

In 1963 the University of Nebraska received a most unusual gift from Dr. Kopac. He used part of his eight weeks sabbatical leave from New York University to give a series of fifteen lectures to our University faculty and students interested in the biological sciences. One wonders if this sacrifice on his part was a gift of gratitude for the honorary degree of Doctor of Science which was given to him in 1962 by the University of Nebraska. When asked about this he said "No, not really. I have a warm spot in my heart for this University. It was here that I got my start and I have always been aware of this debt."

When a newspaper reporter spoke with him, he told stories he remembered from his boyhood days in Ravenna where his father was a laborer on the railroad, a Czech who only had about four years of formal education, but a man with a consuming determination that his children be educated.

**Kovanda, Jess**, one of Nebraska's outstanding agricultural educators was born at Table Rock, Nebraska in 1902. He received his B. Science degree from the University of Nebraska in 1923, his M. S. from Colorado in 1935. He completed his graduate work at Cornell, Penn. State and Iowa University. He is married and has two children.

He was the Voc-Ag. Teacher at Milligan from 1923 to 1928, at Ord from 1928 to 1959, except for one year when he served as a Supervisor in the State Department of Education. His work in Extension started in 1959 at Kearney, Nebraska.

He was president of the Nebraska Voc-Ag. Association for one year and held many other offices in educational organizations. He was an author of articles and a weekly column in the **Ord Quiz**.

**Master Sgt. Ernest R. Kouma** is the only living Nebraskan and the only Czech who was awarded the Nation's highest decoration for military bravery, The Congressional Medal of Honor. He was presented the medal by President Truman on Armed Forces Day, May 19, 1951. As of the date of this writing, Sgt. Kouma is still serving in the military service at Fort Knox, Kentucky.

Sgt. Kouma, born in Dwight, Nebraska on November 23, 1919, is the son of the Joseph J. Kouma's who were both born in Czechoslovakia. Sgt. Kouma is one in a Catholic family of nine. He attended both grade and High School in Dwight.

St. Kouma is one of the first Army men to receive the Medal of Honor in person since the start of Korean fighting. From the story of his bravery it seems impossible that he actually did live through the ordeal.

His citation reads as follows:

Master Sgt. Ernest R. Kouma a tank commander of Company A, 72<sup>nd</sup> Tank Battalion, 2<sup>nd</sup> Infantry Division, distinguished himself by extraordinary heroism in action against an armed enemy on 31 August and 1 September 1950. In the vicinity of Agok, Korea on the Naktong River front armored elements comprising two tanks and two M-19 armored vehicles were in support of friendly infantry units in a defensive position. At approximately 2200 hours on 31 August, an enemy force estimated at 500 crossed the Naktong River and launched a fanatical attack against the friendly positions. As a withdrawal was ordered, the armored units received the mission to remain in position and delay the enemy until secondary positions could be established.

Due to the superior numbers of the enemy the two armored vehicles were overrun, one being destroyed. The other withdrew and one of the tanks was abandoned because of mechanical failure. Suddenly Sgt. Kouma discovered that his tank was the only remaining obstacle in the path of the aggressive enemy attack. Standing steadfastly and fiercely, he gave fire orders to his crew and remained in position throughout the night fighting off repeated attacks of enemy troops.

During one assault, when the enemy surrounded his tank, he left the protective cover of his armored tank turret. While entirely exposed he manned the 50 caliber machine gun mounted on the rear of the tank and delivered point blank fire into the fanatical enemy. When his 50 caliber ammunition was expended he began firing his 45 caliber pistol and throwing hand grenades in order to keep the determined foe from reaching his tank.

After more than nine hours of constant battle and close-in fighting, and having received two wounds, one in the foot and a second in the shoulder, he withdrew his tank to friendly lines at 0730 hours on 1 September. During the

withdrawal through eight miles of enemy territory, Sgt. Kouma continued to inflict casualties upon the enemy and exhausted his remaining ammunition in the destruction of three machine guns along with their crews.

In addition to killing an estimated 250 enemy soldiers, the selfless devotion to duty of Sgt. Kouma in remaining in the area allowed sufficient time for the friendly unit to re-establish defensive positions. After returning to his company area, although suffering from his wounds, he attempted to resupply his tank with ammunition and was requesting permission to return to the battle area when he was evacuated for medical treatment.

The fearless courage displayed by Sgt. Kouma reflects great credit on himself and is in keeping with the high traditions of the military service.

Celebrations were the order of the day with the return of Sgt. Kouma to his hometown of Dwight, Nebraska, an event that drew an estimated 300 citizens of that small town to welcome home their hero. Banners proclaiming "Vitame Vas" (We welcome you) were hung throughout the town. A nine-man all-Czech band met him at the edge of town to escort him amid the cheers of hastily assembled neighbors and friends.

"Kouma Day" honored the hero at a later date as one thousand persons gathered to hear speeches by Gov. Val Peterson and dignitaries from Butler County. A parade led by the State Safety Patrol opened the festivities with bands assembled from many of the nearby towns included in the program which was concluded with a Grand Ball in the evening.

Sgt. Kouma is a military man in every sense of the word, serving eleven years in the Army prior to the Korean War. He first served with a cavalry unit at Fort Riley, Kansas. His war record of World War II covered most of Europe as he

fought with a tank outfit. He went to Korea as a tank commander right after the shooting first started. Between the War, he served in Alaska.

A brother, Anthony, a Marine still serving in the service, also distinguished himself and brought additional honor to his family and community by winning the "Navy Cross," the nation's second highest award for heroism in Saipan during WW II.

Czechs of Nebraska as well as all over the world are proud of Sgt. Kouma for the courage and heroism he displayed while fighting for freedom and for his country. Sgt. Kouma's people recall with great pride his courageous feats and on occasion, they proudly sport badges reading "Dwight—Ernie's Home Town."

**Kuska, Val.** Val Kuska was the son of Czech immigrants. His parents migrated to the United States in 1881, taking up a farm between Milligan and Ohio, Fillmore County, Nebraska. Val was born on February 14, 1887. His earliest recollections included memories of working on the family farm. His formal education began at the Fillmore County rural school after which he finished the tenth grade at Milligan High School. Later he graduated from the School of Agriculture at the University of Nebraska. After college Val joined a group of hardy souls who were heading into the Sand Hills of western Nebraska. There he learned about dry-land farming first hand as he helped homesteaders get established. Subsequently he managed farms and ranches in various parts of Nebraska, Wyoming and Colorado. In 1913 he accompanied a brother to visit the area in Bohemia, the homeland of their parents, on a journey across Europe and England where he studied foreign farming methods and gradually acquired a massive understanding of agricultural problems. His experience equipped him admirably to become a farm demonstrator in Madison County, Nebraska in 1914—a job which was a predecessor of the county agent's work. World War I interrupted his agricultural pursuits but briefly. After 15 months service as a volunteer, Aviation Section of the Signal Corps, U. S. Army, Kuska served as a

colonizer for a large Denver land company helping settlers locate on farms in Colorado. In April 1922 he joined the Burlington Railroad as a Colonization Agent.

During the first two decades of his work with the Burlington, Kuska served in the dual capacity of colonizer and agricultural development agent.

Kuska's influence was evident not only in Nebraska but through the great Plains and at least in one instance it extended to Canada. A member of the Canadian House of Commons read about Val's work with irrigation and asked to tour the area. Upon returning from the tour with Kuska, John R. MacNicol wrote the Burlington President; "I was continually struck with a multitude of folks who knew Val in the whole 1,000 mile course of our trip. I know you know it, but I cannot refrain from writing it. In Val Kuska, the CB&Q has a highly thought of, most courteous, considerate, industrious and helpful gentleman. I am indeed happy to have known such a real and true man—gentleman such as Val. Kuska. I thank you for according me that high privilege."

The official announcement by J. B. Lamson, Director, Department of Industry and Agriculture of the Burlington, says this of Val's retirement:

"During his 35 years of loyal service Mr. Kuska has received national recognition for his outstanding work in development of Irrigation and the promotion of 4-H club work. Thus creating many sources of traffic and lasting goodwill for the Burlington lines."

Val's life story would make a colorful and useful chapter in the history of American farming. Unfortunately, he was too busy "doing" and did not have time to record most of his experiences. Those accounts of his work which are available in the Burlington's archives indicate, however, that he truly belongs among the great men in the progress of Agriculture.



It was Val's aim to keep in touch with agricultural development in the territory so that if there is need for legislation, research, machinery equipment or other service to agriculture he could use his influence. To that end Val cooperated closely with Chamber of Commerce, Civic organizations, Reclamations, Water Conservation Boards and similar and regional bodies. To spread the value of irrigation, water and soil conservation and to spread the gospel to labor, industry and capitals that they have a stake in this development.

By Maria Kuska

**Placek, Emil.** Emil Placek, Nebraskan politician, banker and manufacturer in Wahoo was born in 1877 in Fillmore County's town of Milligan. In his youth he attended school during the winter only because he had to work on the family farm during the spring, summer and fall seasons. In 1894 he studied at Western Normal College and then later at the University of Nebraska Law College where he graduated in 1897 at the young age of nineteen.

Since the turn of the century he has been active in banking. He is a Veteran of the Spanish American War. He began his career by organizing and serving as President of the Nebraska Culvert Manufacturing Company from 1909 until 1936. Also, he organized the Economy Housing Company and served as its President from 1933 until 1945.

In addition to his business ventures, the Wahoo banker found time for politics. He served as County Judge in Wahoo from 1906 to 1910 and then served as State Senator from 1911 to 1915. He also was the mayor of Wahoo from 1918 to 1921.

Emil Placek was the Democratic candidate for Congress in 1924 and a nominee for the U. S. Senate in 1926. He was also presented the title of Distinguished Citizen for his outstanding service to the city of Wahoo and to the

nation. As he is a leading citizen, he is also a great Czech patriot always maintainng his great interest in and for the Czech people and their activities in Nebraska.

**Plachy, Fred Josef.** Mr. Plachy was born in Ponca in 1901. He received his Masters degree in 1931 from the University of Nebraska. He is currently President of the Adams State College in Alamosa, Colorado.

**Podlesak, Emil.** Born in a dugout on his parents' homestead in 1875, Emil Podlesak, the fourth child of a family of eight, became a distinguished inventor and consulting electrical engineer.

Immigrant parents of Emil were Josef and Katerina (Pekar) Podlesak who arrived in America from Czechoslovakia and stayed for a short time in New York before bringing their family to Exeter, Nebraska in 1874 where they homesteaded west of Milligan. Later the family moved to a farm purchased from the B. and M. Railroad which is now the Podlesak farm.

Emil worked on the farm and attended country school. As he did so much reading and his observation was so keen, he decided to take the University of Nebraska entrance examination without going through high school. He passed the tests and was admitted to the University in 1892, receiving his degree in 1896 from the Mechanical and Electrical College. He was the youngest student at that time to receive such a degree. Emil was nicknamed "Tesla" after Nicola Tesla, the electrical wizard of that time whose electrical inventions were recognized for their brilliance and practicality, because of his own brilliant and analytical mind. He with his brother was constantly experimenting with homemade gadgets and on their farm they wired several buildings in order for them to transmit sound and to be heard over the wire some distance from the speaker. This continued experimentation with electricity resulted in the brothers perfecting a gadget that developed the "make and break" spark used in the Webster magneto and spark

plug which led to the breakthrough in developing the internal combustion engine used even now.

Emil also designed and supervised the construction of the barge and conduit used in the Kingsley Dam which reduced greatly the cost of the dam. He was always inspired to attempt what was considered impossible. He was among the twenty men cited by the U S. Government for his electronic development for the Navy during World War I. During World War II he worked as a designer, draftsman and consultant in Toledo, Ohio to improve the Willy's jeep, enabling it to travel and start in water beyond the jeep's depth.

**Sadilek, F. J.** F. J. Sadilek was born in 1851 in Ledec, Bohemia. As a young man his great ambition was to be able to acquire a higher education for himself, an ambition that was favorably endorsed by his parents. Unfortunately, his father lost most all of his properties and the boy, barely fourteen years old, was compelled to quit school and learn the trade of a harness-maker.

In March of 1868, being a lad of seventeen, his parents sent him to America to the home of his uncle and his eldest sister in Chicago. After reaching Chicago he followed his trade as a harness-maker until 1874. During these years his favorite pastime was taking part in Czech theatrical performances at "Slovanska lipa."

In 1874 he moved to Omaha, Nebraska where he remained until the last of 1875 when he then returned to Chicago. There he married Miss T. Jurka and the young couple then came back to Omaha. A year later they moved to Wilber where Mr. Sadilek established his business as harness-making. He continued in this business until 1883 when he was elected a Representative for Saline County to the State Legislature. The following year he accepted the position of Deputy County Treasurer and after serving four years in this capacity, he was re-elected for two successive terms as Saline County Treasurer. In 1897 he was elected to

the office of Register of Deeds of Saline County, a position he held for twenty-two years. Outside of his interest and service in public office, he was also active in other fields. Together with Jan Rosicky he laid the foundation for the Palacky Lodge, Number 29, C.S.P.S. (Bohemian-Slovakian Fraternal Society) in 1876 in Omaha. This lodge was the first of its kind founded west of the Mississippi River. In 1882, in Mr. Sadilek's harness shop in Wilber, he organized and brought into vigorous activity the first Sokol organization in that town. He was very prominent in Masonic Circles and served as Master of his Lodge for a number of years, serving later as its Secretary. Mr. Sadilek helped organize the "Wilber State Bank" and since its organization he has served as its President.

His family consisted of his wife, four sons and four daughters. His eldest daughter, Dr. Olga Sadilek Stastny, became a prominent physician and an untiring supporter for the Czech people of Nebraska. His home was well-known for its hospitality to visitors from the East and also Europe.

Mr. Sadilek published a narrative biography "Z mych vzpominek" (From my Reminiscences) in 1914 which began with his remembrances of his boyhood in Bohemia. The booklet, written in the Czech language, is primarily a personal account of the early settlers in the Wilber area with some accounts of settlers from Crete and Friend. This interesting booklet has its share of good humor, anecdotes which truly characterized life as it was in the years from the seventies until 1914.

**Shonka, Frank Dr.** A native of Abie, Dr. Shonka has gained fame as a member of scientists who participated in the development of the first atom bomb. He was recently honored in London by the British Royal Academy of Medicine for his work in Radiology.

**Smrha, Charles.** Charles Smrha, born in Styria, Austria in 1876 of Czech parentage came to American in 1884 with his parents, brothers and sisters.

They originally settled in Exeter, moving to Geneva and back again to Exeter in 1891. Eventually they moved in 1894 to Milligan, Nebraska. He was united in marriage to Agnes Barta of Wilber in 1904 and they made their home in Milligan for thirty-two years. In 1936 they moved to Lincoln which became their home with the exception of a few years spent in North Platte and Grand Island.

Mr. Smrha started his adult life as a county school teacher, being elected Superintendent of Fillmore Schools. (County). This post was interrupted by his service in the Spanish-American War of 1898 and 1899. Returning from service, he became cashier of the Farmers and Merchants Bank in Milligan, later becoming President of the bank until 1933. During this period of time he served two terms as State Senator, representing the 17<sup>th</sup> district, comprised of Fillmore, Jefferson and Thayer Counties. His entire life time was devoted to active affiliation with the Democratic party.

In 1933 he became state manager of the Home Owners Loan Corporation. In 1936 he was appointed Director of Insurance for the State of Nebraska by Governor Cochran. He also served as District Director of the office of Price Administration at North Platte during World War II.

He was a 50-year member of the Knights of Pythias Lodge and was past grand chancellor of the Grand Lodge of the State of Nebraska. He was also a 50-year member of the Masonic Order, a charter member of the Z.C.B.J. (Western Bohemian Fraternal Association), a member of Harris-Fraley Post No. 131, Veterans of Foreign Wars, past commander of Nebraska's Veterans of the Spanish-American War, the Knife and Fork Club and the Blizzaard of 1886 Club.

Charles Smrha's life was a full and useful one, a great portion of which was devoted to helping people of his homeland to make the transition into the ways and customs of their adopted country. He was well-known for always extending a helping hand to anyone who approached him. He was known and

will always be remembered as an orator, philosopher and as one who gave of himself untiringly in order for equality and brotherhood to prevail.

At memorial services held in Milligan after Mr. Smrha's death on April 19, 1961 in Lincoln, Senator Roman Hruska said "the world is a better place for Charles Smrha's having lived in it."

**Stefan, Charles G.** Mr. Stefan was born on July 21, 1920 in Omaha. He is at present the Counselor of Legation at the American Legation in Sofia, Bulgaria.

**Svoboda, Karel V.** Karel V. Svoboda was born in Jaromeric, Moravia in 1859, coming with his parents to Schuyler, Nebraska in September of 1874. In 1875 his family moved to Howard County where a Czech colony "Slovakia" was being started. As he had received his schooling in a German technical school and a Czech college in Czechoslovakia, learning the English language from necessity after coming to America and later, he learned the Polish tongue. With his knowledge of four languages he was an adept and able interpreter for the early settlers. He also took over his father's farming activities at an early age due to his father's aging.

Karel organized his school district and built the original schoolhouse. He was elected School Director, Supervisor of Roads and served for six years as County Assessor. He organized the Farmer's Alliance Local serving as its President. He was elected County Clerk, the first County official of Czech nationality, serving in this capacity six years

He was nominated for Secretary of State in 1900 on the Populist ticket and was endorsed by the Democratic and the Silver Republican conventions. He served in the Constitutional Convention in 1919-1920 and in the Legislature in 1923. He was also nominated for State Auditor on the Democratic ticket in 1928

and served four years as Chairman of the Democratic County Central Committee.

Mr. Svoboda became one of the leading farmers in the State and gradually acquired several thousand acres of land in Nebraska, Canada, New Mexico and Texas. For many years he served as Secretary of the Z.C.B.J. Lodge.

In 1926 he was elected President of the Czech Historical Society of Nebraska.

**Serpan, Stanislav.** Stanislav Serpan was born in Tis, Bohemia in 1887, coming to this country in 1900, settling with his mother in Omaha, Nebraska. The father had come some years before. Stanislav attended school in Omaha, entering the service of the National Printing Company as an apprentice at the age of fourteen years. Later he was promoted to the position of stenographer and personal secretary to Jan Rosicky, a position that included the manager of the imported book department of that company. In 1912 he became Editor of "Bratrsky vestnik," a monthly magazine of the Western Bohemian Fraternal Association. During World War I he was secretary of the Czech National Alliance. Since 1920 he served as President of Lodge Palacky as well as President of the Sokol Organization of Omaha, being very successful and active as a speaker and an organizer among the Czech people. On January of 1921 he was made the first Czechoslovakian Consul in Omaha for the district west of the Mississippi River.

During his life he collected hundreds and hundreds of Czech books which were dedicated to the Sokol Organization in Omaha after his death as a donation toward a library. Today the Serpan Library is an actuality being housed in a special room in the Sokol auditorium and rightfully named after its donor, Stanislav Serpan.

**Rudolph Tesar.** Mr. Tesar, distinguished Nebraska attorney, was born in Omaha in 1908. His father was given a gold medal by Czechoslovakian president Tomas Masaryk for his leadership.

Rudolph graduated from Central High School and in 1925 entered Creighton University. He was very active in sports, especially football and is still a sports enthusiast. While at Creighton he was elected to the Nebraska legislature and had the distinction of being the youngest person ever elected to the legislature. He was re-elected in 1933. In 1935 he was named a deputy county attorney by the late District Judge James T. English.

On June 2, 1964 he was appointed Judge of the Fourth Judicial District of Nebraska by Governor Frank B. Morrison.

Judge Tesar has an ethnic pride in his appointment. He is the first Czech appointed to the Fourth District bench. "My mother and father, if they were still here, would be very proud of me. Our family has been Czech through and through and I am proud to be a Czech."

He married Helen Zikmund in 1934. They have three children, Rudy, Pat and Richard.

**Visek, Willard G.** Mr. Visek, son of the James Visek's of Ord, Nebraska graduated from Sargent High School in 1940. During his high school days he played a prominent part in the Voc. Ag. activities. He received the State Farmer's degree in 1939 and the American Farmer degree in 1942. He served both as a state and national officer.

He attended the University of Nebraska until 1943 at which time his studies were interrupted by three years in the Armed Services. He graduated



with distinction in 1947, being a member of Alpha Zeta and Gamma Sigma Delta, honorary fraternities and Alpha Gamma Rho, a social fraternity.

Dr. Visek earned his M.S. and his Ph.D. degrees at Cornell University and completed a medical internship, being awarded a Doctorate of Medicine from the University of Chicago.

At present he is an animal scientist at Cornell University. His most recent achievement is the discovery of a chemical combatant of the effects of radiation. He is presently recognized as one of America's most promising scientists.

By Howard W. Deems

(Picture of Windmill and Plow p. 116)

# THE AGRICULTURE DEVELOPMENT OF NEBRASKA BY THE CZECHS

Helping the Farmer Build a Better Life

**By Val Kuska**

Czech immigrants came to a strange land with little knowledge of the English language. Few had many possessions or the means to pay even the moderate prices asked, but they were eager to brave hardships and they suffered to gain their heart's desire. To this land they brought their love for freedom, music and drama.

The Czech pioneers started a new life altogether. They made a land of which we can be very proud. The rich fields of our land are etched deeply with hardships that the pioneers encountered and endured.

Rose Rosicka wrote that the Czech newspapers were a great force in aiding immigration to Nebraska. The papers in those days had departments devoted to communications from readers which dealt with successes, methods and practices of the new life in respective localities in Nebraska.

In 1871 Edward Rosewater founded a Czech paper in Omaha, Nebraska, the "**Pokrok zapadu.**" Although, at first, it was more in the nature of a land advertising sheet, financially supported by the Burlington and Missouri and Union Pacific Railroads, it was mailed to prospective settlers. In 1891 the **Pokrok zapadu** started publishing the **Hospodar** (Farmer) under the guidance of Jan Rosicky who knew the west and the problems and needs of the settlers. The **Hospodar** was the only Journal printed in the Czech language in this country. Rosicky was a good writer and surrounded himself with reporters of ability who could translate and pass on to the readers the results of research and experimentation carried on at the University of Nebraska and surrounding states as well as the U. S. Department of Agriculture. They developed improved seeds, more practicable methods in production, care of livestock, all in order to build a

happier life. It filled a great need, especially among the people who could not read English.

While Extension education ideas before 1914 were on a limited scale, there were the Farmers Institutes, Agricultural Short Courses, Demonstration and work with Boys and Girls in Agriculture. However, in 1914 Congress passed the Smith-Leaver Act establishing the Cooperative Extension Service. From the start it has grown into a massive, voluntary, out-of-school system of learning for adults and youth. Cooperative Extension work in Agriculture and Home Economics was characterized by historian, Joseph Bailey, as the "largest educational enterprise in the world."

It gave the Universities Agricultural Colleges and Experiment Stations an added avenue to circulate the results of years of research and experimentation. The County Agricultural and Home Extension Agents are serving as a vehicle in carrying the important information to the farmers, ranchers, homemakers and the farm youth.

Here again we find many Czech persons among the State and County Extension workers. The list is headed by Dr. Elvin Frolik, Dean of the College of Agriculture and Edward Janicke, Dean of Extension. Their story appears elsewhere, and Elaine Skucius, Assistant State 4-H Club leader.

**Elaihe Skucius**, also had an outstanding 4-H record. While in college at the University of Nebraska she served as President of the University 4-H Club and was selected to christen the U S. Battleship E. A. Burnett. She taught school and was a Home Agent in Dawson County when she was selected as a 4-H fellow to work on her Masters degree at George Washington University. When she obtained her advanced degree she came back to Nebraska to work on the State 4-H Staff. Her academic rating is now professor at the University of Nebraska where she with a team of supervisors serves one-fourth of the state in northeast Nebraska, helping to guide the 4-H Club program there as well as her other state assignments.

## **Czech Master Farmers in Nebraska**

The meaning of **Master Farmer** is a distinct and deserving tribute to American Agriculture. It has focused the attention of the nation on the dignity and business aspects of successful farming. The finer values of rural life, as portrayed in home building and citizenship, are emphasized to the benefit of agriculture as a whole.

The honor is even now bearing fruit in the inspiration it gives other farmers to improve their farming methods through business practices, general appearance and upkeep of their farms and homes and citizenship standards.

**The Country Magazine**, January 1935, carried a story about a countryman,

**Joe Dusek** of Sweetwater, Buffalo County, Nebraska, Master Farmer in 1934. He came as a 19 year old lad from Bohemia. He was put off the train at Kearney. This lad could not speak a word of English nor did he have friends. He did, however, have ambition to own a farm. He started as a farm hand at 16 dollars a month and bought a farm. It was in 1892 he began farming—worked hard, paid for his farm, and bought more land. Finally at the age of 66 he owned three farms totaling 8,000 acres in Buffalo County. Dusek's had 12 children.

**J. F. Prokop**, Sheridan County, Master Farmer 1935, came from Bohemia as a 12 year old boy. His father was one of the few settlers to remain through the hard times in 1896. Saving 15 dollars from his farmhand wages and borrowing \$180.00, he started the career which has brought him ownership of 1,600 acres and a comfortable home. He raised cattle, hogs and poultry.

**Jan Cilek**, Sheridan County, Master Farmer 1938. His father moved to this part of the state in 1888 and operated a ranch which later he sold to a large Land and Cattle Company. Jan Cilek became manager and foreman of this ranch and held this position until 1917 when the ranch was again sold. Mr. Cilek, with the money he had saved, bought a farm of his own. He and his family lived in a log house on their newly acquired land for five years and in 1912 built the

home in which they lived. He raised cattle, hogs, chickens and turkeys. During 1934-1938 he raised 7,000 turkeys. Cilek's had two children. In 1938 the son was working with his father and the daughter was living on one of Mr. Cilek's farms.

### **Czech Ranchers in Nebraska's Sandhills**

Long Established Master Breeder was the choice for commercial cattlemen's annual award of merit recognition.

On behalf of his accomplishment in the breeding of purebred cattle, Ed. Belsky, Merriman rancher, was the 1954 award of merit winner when members of the Nebraska Stock Growers Association recognized the outstanding member of the Nebraska Hereford Association. The presentation award was made at the banquet of the sixty-fifth annual convention of the association at Chadron June 11, 1954.

Ed was born in Knox County, Nebraska in 1883. He took up a Kincaid Sandhill Homestead 25 miles southwest of Wood Lake in the spring of 1904. Ed married Ella V. Micheel in 1910. Three children were born to this union.

On April 20, 1956 Ed Belsky received another recognition as an outstanding Nebraska stockman by the Block and Bridle Club at the banquet held in conjunction with the 44<sup>th</sup> Annual Feeders Day at the University of Nebraska College of Agriculture. "Hereford Breeder dedicated to improvement of Purebred and Commercial Cattle and the encouragement of youth."

**James Kreycik.** In 1959 a nationally recognized producer and judge of Angus cattle was honored by the University of Nebraska as an outstanding Nebraska Stockman. He was James Kreycik, Wood Lake rancher. He was a guest at the Block and Bridle Club's annual banquet in connection with Feeders Day at the College of Agriculture. Kreycik has been recognized as one of the leading judges in the country and has judged at many of the major stock shows in the midwest. He was a charter member of the Sandhills Cattle Association.

## **Czechs in 4-H Club Work**

4-H Clubs actually came into being at the turn of the century. Its main practices are in Agriculture and Home Economics.

At present there are approximately 38,000 members in Nebraska and of this total many are of Czech descent. In the past and present, many Czechs have won top honors with their entries of livestock or home economics projects. Following is a partial list of names who have won honors in the state and nation in 4-H club work. We find that Val Kuska was one of the first members in the organization known as Boys and Girls Club Work in the year 1905. It was organized in the state and was the forerunner of the 4-H clubs in Nebraska and the United States.

## **The Nebraska Tree Farmer**

From an Article Written by **Robert Houston**

People need some prodding to sustain their interest even in such an elemental thing as tree planting and culture. Nebraskans have been lucky to have a modern-day Johnny Appleseed or Sterling Morton in Frank J. Pipal of Omaha.

Mr. Pipal retired in 1951 as Omaha's City Forester after a 10-year term. During that decade Mr. Pipal's influence went far, far beyond what anyone could reasonably have anticipated. He founded the Junior Foresters with 1,700 pupils in 26 Omaha schools. This program since has girdled the globe. There are clubs now on every continent except Africa. Junior Foresters are planting and caring for trees in such faraway places as Argentina, Australia, Spain, Siam, India, Costa Rica, Mexico and Canada.

It is estimated that more than 10 thousand trees have been planted in Omaha as a result of Mr. Pipal's tree evangelism and more than 50 thousand outstate.

### **Frank in Czechoslovakia**

Frank Pipal's origin was humble and he was planting his first trees at the age of 5. He was born in the village of Strmechy in southwest Czechoslovakia.

"When I was 5 years old," said Mr. Pipal, "I qualified as a person and I went to the forest to make my labor payment to the nobleman. I was given pine seedlings and this was my first experience in tree planting."

"By the time I was 7, I knew all the trees, birds, plants and the good and poisonous mushrooms. It was the only form of recreation we had."

But his father had been thinking about going to America. He left alone and after two years sent home his savings plus a sum borrowed from relatives.

“We got little money from the sale of our property because we had a lot of debts.

“I was 12 and it was the first time I had a real suit, overcoat and boots. We had no luggage as we landed in America. Our possessions were tied in big bundles that we carried on our backs.”

### **Introduction to Omaha**

The Pipals came to South Omaha where Frank’s father had rented a two-room house. He worked in a packing plant. Frank went to school for the last six weeks of the term and progressed from the first through the sixth grade.

“While I was in the first grade trying to learn the language I towered over the other pupils. The kids paid more attention to me and my clothes than their school work. I got into all sort of scrapes because I’d use the wrong word in the wrong place.”

When school was out Frank went to the packing house to work for 75 cents for a 10-hour day. He worked all day with his feet wet, and contracted tuberculosis.

Frank finally quit the packing house job, joined a gymnasium association, went to work on a farm, and licked tuberculosis.

He had always wanted to get more education. When he was 21 a preacher in a church he attended got him a scholarship to Bellevue College Academy. The summer before enrolling he washed silverware at the Merchants Restaurant at Fifteenth and Dodge Streets while attending a business college.

At Bellevue he worked in the college’s fields to earn board and room. Then he obtained a commitment for one hundred dollars a year from a student loan organization in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Frank enrolled at the University of Nebraska. He made up some high school credits fast by studying a course and taking examinations.



Frank started out taking Latin and Greek with the idea of becoming a teacher.

“A newspaperman I knew suggested that I look into ‘this new thing they’re talking about—forestry.’”

### **In and Out of Trees**

Mr. Pipal got acquainted with Dr. Charles E. Bessey, whom he describes as the most wonderful man he ever met.

Dr. Bessey started the Halsey National Forest despite warnings from leading horticulturalists that trees would not grow in the Sand Hills.

“I had a part in starting the Halsey National Forest,” said Frank. “I spent eight weeks there in the spring of 1907 shortly before I graduated.”

Mr. Pipal went on to the University of Michigan for graduate study. He then spent eight months with the Canadian Government supervising timber cutting and logging.

After a year and a half as school superintendent in Benkelman, Nebraska, Frank returned to the University of Nebraska as Dr. Bessey’s assistant and obtained his Master’s Degree.

There was a nine-year stint in the botany department of the experiment station at Purdue University.

A period followed in which Frank spent some years in the hardware business in Humboldt, Nebraska.

### **Decade as Forester**

When the Omaha City Council authorized a City Forester’s job in 1941 Frank Pipal was the first applicant. The Council liked his idea for selling tree care to Omahans, and he got the job.

During the decade in which he interested thousands of Omahans in tree care, Mr. Pipal wrote a weekly column on the subject in The World Herald.

Since he retired five years ago he has continued the column, has been serving as a tree consultant and has continued his work with youth speaking to many groups or going on field trips with them.

Mr. Pipal believes that the study of trees is a deterrent to delinquency. Teachers who have had Junior Foresters in their classes back him up.

In the last decade in Omaha tree and shrub vandalism has almost vanished. Destruction and theft of school property has drastically been cut.

### **Trees Help Themselves**

A deep understanding of trees can bolster a man's faith, Mr. Pipal maintains.

"You build a fire under a tree and it singes some leaves. They'll drop off, and two or three weeks later that branch will burst into bloom. That tree was scarred and to overcome the danger of becoming extinct, it reproduced itself as quickly as possible."

Mr. Pipal feels that the things he learned about nature helped him gain a faith that has carried him over many rough spots.

"When I started the Junior Foresters my dream was to have the Joslyn Auditorium packed with youngsters in love with trees. It started slowly but after several years my dream was fulfilled."

Mr. Pipal never tires of repeating to people that without trees we cannot live.

"When you go into the woods you can breathe better; all the needles and leaves are pumping out oxygen all the time. God created the plants before animals to condition the air. Plants can exist without man, but man cannot exist without plants."

Omaha World Herald Magazine, April 22, 1956

## **Czech Farmer Family in Nebraska**

If you are Josef and Helen Janky of Chapman, Nebraska, parents of 15, you get up around 6:30, have a cup of coffee and then swing very fast into daily routine. There are 11 children still at home at the Janky's during school vacation time. Count off, now! On school days at about 7:30 A. M., Judy, 16, and Paul, 14, must leave for Grand Island 17 miles away where she is a junior and he is a freshman at Central Catholic High School.. If an errand trip to Chapman or Grand Island is necessary during the day, Mom and Dad must take into timetable account the return home of the children after school is dismissed at District 28. Some days Dad drives to nearby St. Paul to help a married son, Ronald, 27, on his farm. On Saturdays there are catechism classes for the younger children at St. Michael's Church in Central City. On Sunday everybody attends 10 A. M. mass there.

One night each week Dad and Mom drive to Grand Island to bowl. Friday nights there is usually a Central Catholic basketball game at Grand Island or neighboring town. Paul is a junior high player.

Stuffed into the schedule from time to time is transportation to accommodate the needs of Bob, 19, a freshman at Kearney State College and David, 20, a University of Nebraska junior studying chemical engineering. Joe and Helen Janky were married in 1937. Helen's brother, Josef Ruzicka, and Josef Janky's sister, Helen, were also married at that time. The Ruzicka's now parents of seven, also live on a farm near Chapman.

Besides Ronald on the farm near St. Paul, the Janky's have three daughters who no longer live at home: Mrs. Gene Bishop, Mrs. Marlin Sekutera and Mrs. Gilbert Bolen. All three daughters are graduates of St. Francis School of Nursing, Grand Island.

"For big families I guess life during the winter on the farm isn't much different to that in the city," Mrs. Janky said. "You have to take each day as it comes and adjust. Where there's only one or two children I would imagine you concentrate on their faults and mistakes. In a large family you tend to

concentrate on their good points. We make rules and insist that the children stick to them.”

The herd of Holstein keeps Josef busy but not on the run. He uses milking machines. The older children help some with the outside chores. The girls have housekeeping and cooking assignments.

Josef Janky farms a half-section of the home place plus a quarter-section and hundred-acre tract nearby. What milk the family doesn't need is marketed for Grade A dairy distribution. A truck comes for the milk on alternative days. For meat Josef butchers beef and keeps cuts in a freezer. Mom cans vegetables in the summer.

Suppertime comes around 6 o'clock for everyone but Judy and Paul who arrive later from school. Bedtime for the children is 9 o'clock—"loosely speaking." TV is confined to the basement of the farm house where the youngsters play if the weather is bad. They do not always agree on which program to watch, the Mom added cryptically.

Part of story in "Magazine in the Midlands"—The Omaha World-Herald, 1966

(Picture threshing, p. 122)

James Tuma (on engine) and his son during threshing season, Elba, Nebr.

(Another picture, p. 122)

Stepan Freeouf—Invented straw spreader and got a patent on it.

(Drawing of Sokol insignia p. 123)

## **CZECH ORGANIZATIONS IN NEBRASKA**

There were and still are two classes of Czech organizations in Nebraska: confraternal or benevolent and non-benefit. To the latter type belong the gymnastic organizations: American Sokol, Catholic Sokol, reading, dramatic, singing and social societies.

### **Czechs and the Sokol Movement**

The following is an address by Hon. G. Eberly, Justice of the State Supreme Court of Nebraska, delivered at the annual meet of the Western District of the American Sokol Union in 1931 at Clarkson, Nebraska.

“Today I have been honored with an invitation to speak on this happy occasion. To address this assemblage is no means distinction. You gather together in the middle of a continent in the heart of a great liberty-loving nation. Here once reigned the American desert inhabited by the nomad and the savage, where the buffalo covered your hills and valleys in countless thousands and the coyote dug his hole unscared. The labors of the pioneers conquered the desert, converted the prairies to tillable soil, built homes and schools; taught their children and their children’s children the way of the nation, and in their young minds instilled the principles of the new republic of the western world. In that great work your race as one among the many races that found in a new world an asylum, a home and freedom, had due participation. And now called together in this delightful situation you meet as “Sokols,” converse as members of the American Sokol Union and feel the thrill that comes to the spiritual life from the fact that you are bonded together with others of kindred aims living beyond the seas, united in a great undertaking that has found common fruition under different climes.

“Yet as we are assembled in this beautiful surrounding, many there I doubt not, who little comprehend the meaning of this event, save and except those who

are of the Slavic nations by birth or descent. Many are here among my countrymen who know not what "Sokol" means or what the term suggests and signifies to those that love it. Even the ancient Czech vocabularies will inform the searcher of but little more than to translate Sokol as a falcon which the naturalist tells us is the noblest of our birds of prey. Not until our very latest **Webster's International Dictionary** was published do we find this definition in English: "Any of many Czech-Slovak gymnastic societies in Czechoslovakia and the United States which endeavor to inculcate in their members the qualities characteristic of a falcon, as strength and elegance of body and courage and keenness of mind. The first was organized in Prague in 1862."

"So we have adopted and naturalized this word as a new word of peculiar meaning and have made it our own.

"Here about us we have seen what forms your inspiration, your handiwork. The beautiful exercises and drills you perform speak in no uncertain voice to the physical man. It is a prophecy of the coming future of the American youth. It is eloquent of the possibilities that are to be his in the better days to come. To us who have passed life's meridian it inspires that rare monitor, conscience, to remind each of us as we admire your work of duties both past and present that we owe to our physical bodies, neglected and unperformed.

## **American Sokol Union**

By **Ed Pavoucek**

The Sokol idea was brought to the United States by Czech immigrants three years after it was originated in Czechoslovakia. The first unit was organized in St. Louis in 1865 and is now known as the Gymnastic Association Sokol. From this single unit has grown an organization known as the American Sokol Union.

The Sokol organization was founded in 1862 by Dr. Miroslav Tyrs and his colleague and advisor, Jindrich Fugner, with the ideal that "In a healthy and vigorous body there must be a healthy and vigorous mind," and if a man or a woman is fit physically they are fit mentally. Their purpose is to educate their members from early childhood up to young manhood and womanhood, maintaining schools with capable and efficient instructors.

### **Western District American Sokol Organization**

The Western District was organized by act of the 1893 Chicago Convention, comprising the states of Iowa, Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska. Later the states of Minnesota, Oklahoma and South Dakota were added. In 1898 Missouri was transferred to the Central District by the Convention and in 1903 Iowa was also transferred to the Central District later returning to the Western District. Through the years the Western District was reduced to the states of Iowa and Nebraska and recently Minnesota and Kansas were added.

Today the Western District is made up of fifteen units: Sokol Cedar Rapids and Sokolice Renata Tyrsova, Cedar Rapids, Iowa; Sokol Crete and Sokolice Libuse, Crete; Gymnastic Sokol Society Fuegner-Tyrs and Sokolice Libuse, South Omaha; Sokol Omaha and Sokolice Omaha, Omaha; Sokol Schuyler, and Sokol Wilber, Wilber, all of Nebraska; and making up the Northern Circuit of the Western District are Sokol Hopkins, Hopkins, Minnesota; and Sokol

Minneapolis and Sokol St. Paul in Minnesota. There are also the Sokol Karel Jonas in Wilson, Kansas and Sokol Caldwell, Caldwell, Kansas.

The greatest activity took place during the years 1925-1932 when Bro. Frank Chmelik was traveling district instructor. There were 32 active units with more than 1,800 members. The largest exhibition was held in Omaha in 1926 when 660 gymnasts, including little boys and girls, took part. The District has sponsored many instructor courses, the largest in 1931 with 157 attending.

In the early 1930's during the depression, the rural communities were besieged with long-lasting droughts. Many units, because of financial difficulties, capitulated and were never revived. Other units were more fortunate. Second, third and even fourth generation members are carrying on the ideals of Sokol, with a few exceptions, in the English language.

The seat of the District has remained in Omaha these many years and most officers have been from metropolitan Omaha.

The oldest member of this patriotic Czech organization in the United States is Omahan Simon Rokusek. He was born in Chelcice, Bohemia, in 1874, and came to Omaha in 1894. Since 1897 he was in business as a baker. Bro. Rokusek has always been active in patriotic and social life of Omaha Czechs as an officer of the Western Bohemian Fraternal Association and Sokol.

During the past two or three years, younger members have taken over leadership of many units as well as the District. Attendance in the gyms has increased, membership in many units has increased, social and gym activities are on the upswing. Public relations through radio, newspapers and television are most profitable. Requests for participation of gymnasts in programs of service and ethnic organizations are increasing. Gymnastics have been added recently to high school sports on a statewide basis and an Omaha gymnastics instructor and coach publicly stated that Sokol boys are the backbone of his class and team. The public is becoming cognizant and is taking greater notice of Sokol in these three states.



The doctrine of precepts and ideals is again being brought to the youngsters in the gyms. The Sokols are proud of their century-old inheritance and step forward into the next century with confidence.

### **Sokol Omaha**

Sokol Omaha was organized in September of 1877 under the leadership of Frank Jelen. The first building was erected in 1899 directly north of the present Sokol Auditorium at 13<sup>th</sup> and Martha Streets. The new building was erected in 1926 and has a gymnasium, lodge room, dance hall, schoolroom which houses the Stanley Serpan Memorial Library, and a six-lane bowling alley.

For many years Sokol Omaha was the cultural and physical culture center and the hub of activities of the early Czech immigrants in Omaha. During these many years it has sponsored educational and cultural programs, gymnastic programs, Czech language schools, dances, picnics and other activities.

In 1917, Twenty seven members of Sokol Omaha volunteered and served in the Armed Forces. In World War II men and women who had Sokol training were better fitted for combat, endurance and patience, and their willingness to fight was never questioned. The willingness of members at home to work and sacrifice in Red Cross, war bond buying, blood banks, industry, etc., are bright pages in American history.

Sokol Omaha has practiced the erasuer of social distinction—truly democracy in action. It has made a great and valuable contribution to civic and cultural life in Omaha. Its members have served as leaders in civic, service, educational and cultural organizations. Sokol Omaha members have served as city and county commissioners, state senators and a United States senator. Folklore, art, literature and music of past centuries of Czech and Slovaks have been brought to America and nourished by Sokol. They have added to the color, richness, strength and ideals of American civilization.

Sokol Camp, 100 acres on the Platte River one mile south of Valley, Nebraska, is a part of Sokol Omaha.

Classes for young boys and girls ages 6 to 12, junior boys and girls ages 13 to 18, and for men and women are in session during the school year.

### **Gymnastic Sokol Society Fuegner Tyrs, South Omaha**

The Gymnastic Sokol Society Fuegner-Tyrs was organized on July 1, 1888 with 23 members. It is now 77 years old, has a membership of 143, and is still growing.

In 1909 the Bohemian National Hall, the Sokol Home, was built and the Sokols were co-owners with a Czech Lodge. They became sole owners a year later. Under the supervision of the Board of Directors constant improvements have made this an excellent gymnasium and social hall. Many happy Sokol memories are in the minds of the Sokols for the wonderful hours spent in the gymnasium and at Sokol social functions. Bingo on Thursday evenings is one of the sources of revenue to help provide these facilities for the future Sokols of South Omaha.

Recently completed is a Sokol Honor Roll which is displayed at the Hall on which more than 100 deceased members' names appear. To these Sokols, a tribute is most deserving.

The gymnasium has been active since 1893. This year there were over 175 gymnasts of which the Sokol was very proud. The first public exhibition was in 1904, and each year since inception, the Sokols have sponsored gymnasts to all Sokol District and National Slets. A well-stocked trophy case with beautiful awards is evidence of the love for the Sokol life

In 1936 a committee was formed to organize a non-profit corporation known as the Sokol Park Corporation. This was to establish and maintain facilities suitable to development of sound bodies and minds in the outdoors. Twenty-seven acres of ground was purchased near the Platte River. Due to the efforts of the faithful South Omaha Sokols' hard labor, the dormitories for summer camps were erected and recreational facilities established. The park is now a well-shaded area, has excellent picnic facilities, new dormitories,

children's rides and dancing under the stars every Sunday evening during the summer to favorite Czech music..

### **Sbor Sokolek Libuse, South Omaha**

Sokolice Libuse of South Omaha was organized in January 1902 by Josef Sterba and his wife, Louise. The first meeting was held at the old Schlitz Hall at 20<sup>th</sup> and Q Streets. Charter members were from 14 years on up and their (married) names are: Frances Zpevak, Anna Trunecek, Mary Milota, Julia Maly, Antonie Vondracek, Anne Mulac, Mary Bures, Emma`Drdla, Barbara Kubin, Anna Kubin, Frances Capek, Delfa Smolik, Ludmila Dintsbier, Frieda Vankat, Rose Klapal, Mary Kohout, Anna Benak, Rose Mucha, Mary Patac and Mrs. Schnieder. The charter members still living are Frances Zpevak and Anna Trunecek.

The first officers of the Sokolice were President Anna Benak and Financial Secretary Mary Dintsbier. The first gym instructor was Josef Sterba who started the classes and then Frank Benak took over. In 1903 the group was drilling at Beseda Hall. Then a new Bohemian National Hall was built and dedicated in 1904. In 1905 the women's Sokol Unit started to drill and have been here ever since.

Money made from bazaars, dinners, dances and plays were used for the gymnastic trips as they do in the present. South Omaha always attends all competition and has its share of trophies on display at the Hall. Olga Cinek participated in the Sokol Slet in Prague, Czechoslovakia in 1926.

The younger generation still has its traveling fund and meets with Ed and Bea Pavoucek every month. Instructors are Kathy Olsen, Cathy Walker and Bud Benak.

## **Telocvicna Jednota Sokolice Omaha**

On March 3, 1889 a group of 25 young women decided to organize a sister club to the Tel. Jed. Sokol, which was then in existence for over 12 years. They met at the home of Mrs. Marie Kriz for this purpose. Monthly dues were set at 15 cents. Gymnasium classes were held on Wednesday and Friday of each week from 7:00 to 8:00 in the evening with Josef Pecival as instructor.

The first regular meeting of this organization was held March 10, 1889. The following officers were elected: Anna Chval, President; Marie Kriz, Vice President; Rose Rosicky, Secretary; Anna Spitalnik, Financial Secretary; Kristina Bartos, Treasurer; and Bozena Drozda, Captain. It was decided to change the name from Plzenske Sokolky to Sbor Omazskych Sokolek.

This budding club started with \$2.40 in the treasury. The officers were elected every six months until 1893 when it was decided to elect the officers annually. The first public affair sponsored by the club was a May dance at the National Hall on May 4, 1889. On December 31, 1889 the second dance was given—a New Year's Eve dance. Although there was not a large surplus in their treasury, in April of 1890 they donated \$25.00 to the Bohemian School.

At first gymnasium classes were held only in the evening for the young ladies. Later a class of small girls was organized and for years the two classes were held. The class of small girls grew so that it was necessary to divide it into two classes—juvenile (zakyne) and juniors (dorostenky).

On October 9, 1899 the Sbor Sokolic Tyrs was organized by S. Rokusek. This club was a sister club to the Podporujici Sokol Tyrs which was in existence at that time. The first meeting was held at the home of Bro. Simon Rokusek with 22 women present. The first President was Marie Moravec and Recording Secretary was Anastasia Benak. The first instructor for this organization was Anton Moravec. From 1914 to 1924 the following served as instructors: Frank Kopecky, Frank Vanek and Olga Cinek.

These two organizations—Sbor Omazskych Sokolek and Sbor Sokolic Tyrs, meeting in the same Hall, drilling together, donating their time as well as

money for the same worthy causes, and striving for the same purposes for which the Sokol was founded—voted to merge in December of 1948. The name of the combined club was changed to Telocvicna Jednota Sokolice. Omaha. Its first officers were: Marie Ptak, President; Helen D(cannot make out the name), Vice President; Blanche Buresh, Recording Secretary; Mildred Krejci, Financial Secretary; Anna Mach, Treasurer; and Marie, Franek, Guard.

After Josef Pecival, Frank Riha was one of the earlier instructors of the Sbor Omazskych Sokolek and Bohumil Bartos followed, serving faithfully for 30 years. He was well known for his graceful, rhythmical drills. The girls at this time did very little apparatus work. Succeeding Mr. Bartos was Emil Klobasa and then Marie Lastovica. At this time the girls included apparatus in their workouts. Also at this time the Tyrs girls were without an instructor so their class joined with the Omaha Sokol Girls. Marie Lastovica was succeeded by Charles Serpan who did not have the opportunity to teach the girls for long as it was decided by the three clubs to secure an instructor who could devote all his time to the gymnasium. Lad Tkadlec was secured for this job in 1924. It was in this year that some of the married women of the organization wanted to drill but did not want the strenuous exercises of the senior girls' class in the evening, so an afternoon class was organized. Mr. Tkadlec stayed for almost ten years. When he resigned, Jos. Kos came to take this position remaining a year. Raymond Pospisil came in 1935 and was the instructor until 1942. Jim Hruban and Frances Hulac (nacelnice of the Zupa) took over the classes until a full-time instructor was secured. Richard Molcar came in 1943 and taught until he resigned in 1948. That year Jos. Fait, an instructor from Czechoslovakia, was hired. Mr. Fait left in 1950 and that year Mr. Molcar returned and served very ably until his retirement in 1959.

The organization attempted to locate a full-time instructor but was unable to do so. With the beginning of the 1959 session members of the gymnasium took it upon themselves to teach. Mildred David and Gloria Zadina taught in 1959. In 1960 Frances Susterka took over the teaching of small girls, junior girls

and women. Dues for the gym classes were raised to reflect a charge to each student for accident insurance.

The Sokol has sent teams to every Slet that has been held by the American Organization of Sokol and has been represented at every tournament sponsored by the Zupa Zapadni, besides appearing before the American public numerous times with various gymnastic numbers. Two of the most active members, Marie Lastovica and Agnes Fiala, were members of a team that went to Prague, Czechoslovakia in 1926 with the American Sokols to participate in the VIII Slet. Both are now deceased. In 1938 the organization was again honored by having Frances Hulac represent the Zupa in Prague at the X Slet.

The sport of gymnastics is picking up speed in the United States and Sokols are keeping right in step. Modern teaching methods emphasizing ballet and tumbling have become very important as a firm base for gymnastics.

Tel. Jed. Sokolice Omaha is an active organization and has sponsored dances, bingo games, dinners and gym class activities. It has never lost sight of the foundation of Sokol—the youth—and helps them in any way it can.

Every spring the Sokolice hold their annual Mother-Daughter get-together. It is always a happy party with the oldest mother and the youngest mother receiving flowers, an entertaining program for all, and a delicious luncheon.

The Sokolice donate liberally of their time and effort to help make Sokol Omaha, Nebraska an up-to-date organization. March 8, 1964 was the Telovicna Jednota Sokolice Omaha's 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary—its Diamond Jubilee. During the 75 years of existence of Sokolice Omaha the many members who took part did a wonderful job. Happiness and friendliness prevail among the members.

### **Sokol Organization, Crete, Nebraska**

The first steps for the organization of a Sokol unit in Crete were taken on July 1, 1883. The unit was officially organized on May 4, 1884. Officers were

elected and gymnastic training was started in a private hall. The group grew in membership. Home talent plays were given. A Czech summer school was substantially supported by this group of Czech pioneers who were eager to keep alive the Czech culture, the ideals of the Sokol founder and to preserve the Czech tradition. Physical fitness was their primary goal and the teaching of calisthenics was eagerly practiced.

In 1891 the unit members prepared plans for the construction of a new frame building. Money for its construction was raised among the members. The building was used for various functions until 1912 when, unfortunately, it burned down and most of the records were destroyed in the fire.

In 1915 the present brick building was erected. It contains a large gymnasium, shower rooms, lodge rooms, a kitchen and a spacious auditorium with stage. This new hall gave renewed impetus to the Sokol group and many new members joined the organization. This place located in the center of the city became a cultural center in the community. Czech, as well as English, theatrical performances, dances and concerts were presented for the general public. The Czech language was taught in the summer months. For several years the gymnasium and the auditorium were used by the local public schools because these facilities were lacking in their buildings. The drill teams and also individuals won many trophies in the various district, state and national tournaments. In June 1964 the Crete unit hosted the annual state tournament. Classes in calisthenics with qualified instructors are still held regularly and presently many of the younger generation are enrolling. There is a renewed interest in this ethnic group which has had a beneficial influence on the Crete community.

### **Sbor Sokolek Libuse, Crete, Nebraska**

Sbor Sokolek Libuse of Crete, Nebraska, observed its 73<sup>rd</sup> year in 1965. A number of Czech women organized Sbor Sokolek Libuse a year after the Telocvicna Jednota Sokol Crete completed the building of their first Sokol Hall.

Sbor Sokolek Libuse aims and ideals were the same as that of the Sokols—"A strong body for a well-developed mind"—achieved only through physical, mental, social and moral culture.

The first by-laws were written and approved in 1894. President was Mrs. Anna Havlicek and Secretary, Lottie Trcka. Meetings were held in various places after fire destroyed the Sokol Hall in 1912. In 1913 Sbor Sokolek Libuse was incorporated and became part of the National Sokol Organization. It was also at this time that the Sokol ladies organized their physical culture classes with Jan C. Nespory as the first instructor. Classes were divided into three divisions; small girls, junior girls and women just as they are classed today. This is to give all ages a chance to participate in a good balanced physical and character building program. Girls' and women's teams were sent to District and National competition and exhibitions held far and near. This is still practiced today.

Both men and women instructors devoted a great deal of their time without compensation to uphold the Sokol ideal. Some of these were local people and others commuted from neighboring towns, such as Prof. Kostlan of the University of Nebraska in the early 1920's. Other instructors in the 1920's were Vaclav Prochaska, Bertha Eltze, Agnes Vasak, Lulu Nespory Kohel and Irma Nespory. In the early 1930's Victor Nespory was instructor for all classes of both men's and women's units, followed by Steve Pomajzl in the 1940's. In 1954 Alice Kalkwarf started new classes for women, junior girls and small girls. In the summer of 1956 this same class won the world championship in the Low Division Junior Girls in Chicago, Illinois. This was the same team that won so consistently through the years of 1954 through 1960. Norma Henning assisted with the teams in 1961. From that time until the present she has had charge of the classes.

(Picture of Sokol Girls and Picture of South Omaha Sokol Hall p. 130)

From the very beginning of Sbor Sokolek Libuse, it was their goal to help others and support a good cause. Many dances and social functions were held to raise funds for their treasury. When work was started on the new Sokol



Auditorium the ladies went all-out to support the cause, raising funds from many various projects. They helped plan the program for the laying of the cornerstone on May 22, 1915. They also helped plan the gala celebration of the dedication of the new auditorium on September 28, 1915. During World War I these members worked in the Bandage Circle making dressings, knitting mittens, sweaters, etc., to be used by the United States Armed Forces. During World War II members again took their place in the Red Cross rooms working for the comforts of the men in the service. This was all done in the Sokol Hall. Sbor Sokolek Libuse helped with the sale of war bonds and stamps and they bought their goodly share of them. In addition to helping the Sokols sponsor the dramatic plays, the annual dances and social activities, many members of the Dramatic Club held regular meetings for friendly entertainment and educational purposes. In the year of 1926, when Sokol Omaha dedicated its Sokol Auditorium, this Dramatic Club presented a play called "Cesta k srdci" during the first week of its opening. These people also supported the Czech school taught by one of their own members, Helen Kupka. They also supported the Council of Higher Education and many other worthy causes.

Today the Sokol ladies are still very active in many of these same activities, plus many new projects. One outstanding project is the entry of many Sokol floats during county fair time. Their last large project was the Sokol Slet held in Crete the summer of 1964.

Special recognition is given to members when they have attained 50 years of membership. There are seven such members who have achieved that distinction. They are: Nettie Vetrovsky, Emma Nedela, Olie Kobes. Emma Tobiska, Bessie Vasatka, Louise Nespory and Adela Prasek.

### **Sokol Brush Creek, Wilber, Nebraska**

Sokol Brush Creek of Wilber, Nebraska was organized in 1888 and held its first meetings in an old schoolhouse near where Brush Creek Hall now stands. Records show that the hall was to be painted in September 1891 so evidently it

was built prior to that. One-half acre of ground was purchased from Wm. Dvoracek. Some of the earlier members at that time were Frank Jelinek, Jan Sasek, Adolf Pivonka, Jan Pekar, Franta Rychtarik, Vaclav Tyser, Stepan Simon, Vojta Jelinek, Jan Castoral, Karel Drda, Josef Cvach and Vaclav Horak.

Some members holding office at that time were: President, F. Jelinek; Vice President, Josef Tachovsky; Secretary, Adolf Pivonka; Treasurer, T. Houser; Physical Trainer, Josef Pivonka; and Janitor, A. Sasek.

The first Sokol practice was in 1891. A dance was held November 1, 1891 and was probably the first. A fee of 50 cents was paid to Jan Pekar at one time for coming on horseback to train the Sokols. On June 4, 1893 the membership had dwindled to only a few members so monthly dues were lowered from 50 cents to 10 cents and most of the members returned.

The first girl Sokols in July 1925 were: Emilie Rezabek, Alice Svara, Millie Svoboda, Anna Misek, Adela Misek, Blanche Fictum, Georgia Krajnik and Mary Kovar. In May 1925 a 40 by 60 outdoor dance floor was built. In 1926 the girl Sokols took first place in the Western Division. The 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary was celebrated in 1938 and the 75<sup>th</sup> in 1963.

### **Bohemian Farmers Mutual Aid Society**

This organization was founded in March 1876 and was the only one of its kind here. It functioned until 1893. Its object was to furnish insurance against damage to crops. In 1893 the Society disbanded. From the beginning until 1890 the weekly **Pokrok zapadu** was the official organ followed by the **Nova doba** in Schuyler, Nebraska. This society was most beneficial to the pioneers for they knew little or no English.

### **Bohemian Roman Catholic Central Union**

In Czech: Ceska katolicka prvni ustredni jednota. This is the oldest order of its kind in the country, having been established in St. Louis, Missouri in 1877.

Like the oldest non-Catholic Czech fraternal order, it met with secession of the western lodges largely for the same reason. In the early days of its existence it numbered several lodges in Nebraska: three in Omaha belonging to the lodge St. Jan Nepomucky; five in Plasi to lodge Cyril a Metodej; seven in Wilber to lodge sv. Vaclav; and five in St. Paul to lodge sv. Pavel. The first lodge of this order was that of sv. Cyril a Metodej No. 32 in Wahoo, founded September 15, 1897.

### **Bohemian Slavonian Benevolent Society**

In 1922 the name was changed to Czecho-Slovak Protective Society, C.S.P.S. or in Czech: Cesko-Slovensky Podporujici Spolek. It was the oldest Czech fraternal organization in the United States, established in March 1854 in St. Louis, Missouri. The first society of this order to be founded in Nebraska was Lodge Palacky No. 19 on July 22, 1877. The founders were: Jan Rosicky, F. Sadilek, V. Jablecnik, Frank Vodicka, Jan Hora, V. Vodicka, Anton Pokorny, H. Cajkovsky and Anton Hanys. This order flourished for years in Nebraska as well as all over the United States, but in February 1897, when the Western Bohemian Fraternal Association was established in Omaha, the majority of the western lodges affiliated with it. Lodges were in Wahoo, West Point, Humboldt, Schuyler, Sedlov (Geranium), Lincoln, Dodge and Prague, all in Nebraska.

### **Catholic Sokol Union**

The first organization of the Catholic Sokol Unon (Katolicka jednota Sokol) in Nebraska was organized July 18, 1893 in Omaha. The president was St. Sadil. A national Slet of this organization was held in Omaha in 1920. There were also other branches organized in the towns of Abie, Bee, Dodge, Dwight, Clarkson, Howells, Prague, Weston, Verdigre and South Omaha.

As years passed and many young men had to leave for military duty in World War II, the branches in the above towns were disbanded and were never reorganized. There is presently one active branch in South Omaha.

### **Catholic Workman—Katolicky Delnik**

Fraternal societies did not begin systematically to develop and build reserves for the future until the end of the nineteenth century. In this period belongs the founding of the Katolicky Delnik, which was organized in September 1891 in St. Paul, Minnesota by 23 fraternal men. They worked zealously for a worthy cause; first, to promote the spiritual, moral and social welfare of the members; and secondly, to help the widows and orphans of deceased members.

The founders realized that from a religious standpoint, Catholic societies were very important because of their influence in parishes, communities and families. This was a paramount need of the time and something had to be done to hold the people together for their own welfare. This important undertaking was daring because to successfully launch such an organization was a very difficult task. The following were organized:

Branch No.	6 – St. Peter & Paul, Heun	June 1, 1894
	7 – St. Wenceslaus, St. Paul	July 7, 1894
	8 – St. Procopius, Dodge	July 15, 1894
	11 – St. Bartholemew, Plattsmouth	May 1, 1895
	13 – St. Wenceslaus., Prague	Feb. 2, 1896
	14 – St. John Nep, Howells	Sept. 29, 1895
	15 – St. Joseph, Ravenna	Dec. 8, 1895
	16 – St. Ivan Brainard	May 15, 1896
	17 – St. Procopius, Plasis	May 6, 1896
	18 – St. Procopius, Omaha	Jan. 26, 1896
	20 - St. Cyril & Method, Abie	June 10, 1896
	26 – St. Mark, Weston	Sept. 1, 1896
	32 – Nativity, Dwight	April 15, 1897
	34 – St. John Nep., Verdigre	Oct. 5, 1897

36 – St. Ladislaus, Touhy	Oct. 1, 1897
37 – St. Peter & Paul, Omaha	Dec. 1, 1897
40 – St. Joseph, Wilson	June 6, 1898
41 - St. Joseph, Crete	March 1, 1898
43 – St. Wenceslaus, Lynch	June 22, 1898
44 – St. Joseph, Milligan	June 22, 1898
53 – St. Anthony, Bruno	Oct. 29, 1899
55 – Sacred Heart, Cedar Hill	Feb. 3, 1900
58 – St. Wenceslaus, Wahoo	May 29, 1900
62 – St. Cyril & Method, Appleton	Aug. 13, 1901
69 – St. Luke, Loma	Nov. 12, 1902
72 – Sacred Heart, Wilber	Dec. 1, 1902
76 – St. Wenceslaus, Linwood	Jan. 16, 1903
80 – St. Joseph, Clarkson	June 3, 1903
81 – St. Joseph, Omaha	May 13, 1903
83 – St. Joseph, Warsaw	Jan. 1, 1904
92 – St. Cyril & Method, Thornburg	July 17, 1905
102 – St. Wenceslaus, Netolice	June 29, 1906
115 – St. Wenceslaus, Bee	Nov. 4, 1911
122 – St. Joseph, Schuyler	Aug. 13, 1913
127 – St. Albert, Omaha	Sept. 9, 1914
140 – St. Joseph, Deweese	Jan. 1, 1913
144 – St. Cyril & Method, Wahoo	Jan. 1, 1899
151 – St. Wenceslaus, Tabor	Jan. 1, 1899
179 – St. Clement, Omaha	Nov. 14, 1937
182 – Stanton	Nov. 1, 1940
184 – Ulysses	April 1, 194?
185 – Leigh	Oct. 1, 1945
187 – Valparaiso	Nov. 1, 1946

Nebraska now has 40 active branches with a total membership of 7,000.

Alfred Novacek

## **Czech Historical Society of Nebraska**

The Czech Historical Society of Nebraska was founded in December 1926, the object being "To maintain the level of the Czech element in Nebraska and with end in view to care for Czechoslovak cultural interests; the teaching of the Czech language; conserving matters of historical value; publishing histories of Czechs in Nebraska; promoting the erection of suitable markers; fostering friendly relations with each other; and in other suitable ways striving toward the appointed goal."

The first officers of the Society were: C. V. Svoboda, St. Paul, President; V. F. Jelinek, Omaha, Vice President and Stanley Serpan, Omaha, Secretary. The Board of Directors consisted of the following: J. T. Votava, Frank Riha, Prof. Charvat, Jan Rosicky and F. Korab.

This very important and active institution of the past does not exist today. All materials, books, transcripts of meetings, etc., have been lost. Only a rubber stamp previously used by this organization has been preserved.

## **Czecho-Slavonian Workman Benevolent Association**

In Czech: Cesko-Slovanska delnicka podporujici jednota. The first lodge of this union was Cechie No. 11 in South Omaha, established July 23, 1898. At that time it had 402 members. Lodges were in Omaha, Plattsmouth, Clarkson and Prague.

## **Daughters of Columbus**

In Czech: Dcery Kolumbovy. The first society of this order was that of sv. Alzbeta founded in South Omaha, January 1, 1906. Others were later founded as follows, with a total membership of 665: sv. Anna, Howells; Jmenovani Panny

Marie, Crete; Panna Maria Lurdska, Milligan; and sv. Katerina, sv. Ludmila and sv. Alzbeta, Omaha.

### **Sisterhood Benevolent Union**

In Czech: Sesterska podporujici jednota. There were three lodges of this order in Nebraska, numbering 329 members, and located in Omaha and Wilber.

### **Union of Bohemian Women**

In Czech: Jednota ceskych dam. This order was affiliated as to a liberal (in religion) program with the Bohemian Slavonian Benevolent Society. The first lodge of this order was established in Wilber—the Lodge Hvezda zapadu on September 28, 1885. At that time the lodge had 1,455 members in Nebraska. Lodges were in Omaha, Schuyler, Linwood, Clarkson, Crete, Bruno, Milligan, Ravenna and Humboldt.

### **Western Bohemian Catholic Union**

In Czech: Zapadni ceska katolicka jednota. The reason for the secession of the lodges belonging to the Bohemian Catholic Central Union, whereby the Western Bohemian Catholic Union was founded, is practically the same for the secession of the lodges belonging to the Bohemian Slavonian Benevolent Society which founded the Western Bohemian Fraternal Association. These western lodges noted that the death rate in the east, notably in the large cities, was growing higher than in the rural communities of the west. They were beginning to pay out more than they received. Their lodges were in Omaha, Tabor, Brainard, Prague, Verdigre, St. Paul, Abie, Weston, Ravenna, Milligan, Crete, Morse Bluff, Plattsmouth, Dodge, Plasi, Wahoo, David City, Netolice (Geranium) and Lawn. Later the following joined: Howells, Bruno, Lawrence and Dwight..

## **Western Bohemian Fraternal Association**

In Czech: Zapadni Cesko-Bratska Jednota. Within a very few years after the first Czech immigrants arrived in this county, in 1854 they founded a fraternal order known as Cesko-Slovansky podporujici spolek (C.S.P.S.), Bohemian Slavonian Benevolent Society. The name was later changed to Ceskoslovenske spolky v Americe, Czechoslovak Societies in America. This order from the first included in its program life insurance and sick benefits, both of very modest dimensions, but even as such they were very helpful to those who were striving to gain a foothold in a new country.

Jan Rosicky of Omaha, for many years an active worker for the C.S.P.S., began to realize that a change ought to be made. The Czechs in the east did not have the proper consideration for their western brethren. As the middle west became more thickly settled by Czechs in the rural district another phase appeared—heavier mortality in the crowded cities settled more largely by factory workers.

Thus it happened that the western lodges of the C.S.P.S. grew more and more dissatisfied so a meeting was called for a convention in Omaha February 9-11, 1897. It was attended by 22 delegates representing 29 lodges and the foundations were laid for the establishment of the Western Bohemian Fraternal Association (W.B.F.A.). The following states were represented: Nebraska (13 lodges), Minnesota (7 lodges), North Dakota (1 lodge), Iowa (6 lodges) and Wisconsin (2 lodges). Josef Zbanek was elected President of the convention, Hynek Breuer Vice President and Horacek and Blaha Secretaries.

The delegates accepted the by-laws of a new Society and on May 1, 1897 the by-laws went into effect. Originally, only persons of Czech extraction were permitted to become members. In June 1899 the wives of members were accepted as full-fledged members. Then in 1920 a Juvenile Department was formed. Now, any person regardless of nationality can join the W. B. F. A.

One of the benefits of this Society is life insurance. Other benefits of a social and fraternal nature are provided by the local lodges. Through local



lodges, members elect delegates to Quadrennial Conventions. The Conventions elect national officers and a board of directors.

Jan Rosicky is called the father of the W.B.F.A. During his lifetime he constantly labored to set the foundations as broadly and firmly as possible. The members of this Association expressed their gratitude by erecting to his memory a large monument in the Bohemian National Cemetery in Omaha.

Jan Rosicky was the first editor of the monthly magazine of the Association until his death in 1910. F. J. Kutak occupied the editor's chair until the end of 1912, followed by St. Serpan, then by Otakar Charvat. Present editor of this magazine is Anton Piskac, Sr. Present officers (1966) are: National President, M. L. Hromadka; National Vice President, Roman Hruska; National Secretary, George Schultz.

### **Roster of Western Bohemian Fraternal Association Lodges in Nebraska**

Abie—Lodge Havlicek Borovsky; Atkinson—No. 176; Barneston—Budejovice; Box Butte—Lawn; Brainard—Cecho-Moravian; Burwell—J. Jungman; Clarkson—Zapadni Svornost; Crete—Nebraska No. 2 and No. 349; David City—Dobroslav; Dodge—Jan A. Komensky; Dorchester—Tabor; DuBois—Jan Kollar; Dwight—No. 158; Elba—No. 213; Exeter—Zbirov; Farwell—Cech; Geranium—Slavin; Lincoln—No. 426; Lindsay—Jan Hus; Linwood—Ratolest Mladoческа; Lynch—Lipany; Milligan—Svatopluk Cech and No. 420; Morse Bluff—Plzen; Niobrara—Vysehrad; Odell—Kralove Hradec; Omaha—Palacky, Hvezda svobody, J. Pedebradsky, E. Premyslovna, E. Krasnohorska, Dobromila, Mlady, P. Cechova, Explorer, Zest, Pathfinder; South Omaha—No. 424; Ord—Dennice; Osmond—Voda; Pierce—Cesky prapor; Plattsmouth—Tyrš; Prague—Vladislav I; Prague—Prazske vlastenky; Ravenna—Zizkuv palcat; Sargent—No. 139; Schuyler—Blanik; Spencer—Karlin; St. Paul—Kutna Hora; Swanton—Vlastenec; Table Rock—Premysl Otakar II; Tobias—Krivoklat; Verdel—Sladkovsky; Verdigre—Bila hora; Virginia—Osveta; Weston—Libumil; Wilber—Praha and Libuse.

## **Women's Bohemian Roman Catholic Central Union**

In Czech: Ceska rimsko-katolicka ustredni jednota zen .There were the following lodges of this order in Nebraska with a total of 1,118 members: Crete, Omaha, Wilber, Tobias, Clarkson, Brainard, Weston, Plattsmouth, Bruno, Abie, Morse Bluff, Howells, Verdigre, St. Paul, Schuyler, Touhy, Dodge, Ulysses and Bee.

## **Table Rock Historical Society**

In observance of the Nebraska State Centennial, a Table Rock Historical Society has been established. The old opera house (formerly the Z. C. B. J. Hall) has been restored and household articles, pictures, newspapers and other small items of historic interest are displayed there. The stage curtain and scenery, the old-fashioned bedroom, the quaint kitchen, the replica of a parlor of yesteryear, the old post office, the history room, all combine to make this the only attraction of its kind in this section of the state.

A nearby vacant building has been repaired and here are displayed early-day farm tools, antique cars, machinery, etc. The adjacent office building houses the replica of the rock formations found just east of the town of Table Rock. This site was once an Indian Ceremonial ground and a huge table-like rock gave the town its name. Joe and Dolores Sochor have erected in the office a model of the rocks and caves that can still be seen east of town in the bluffs of the Nemaha River.

A little country schoolhouse stands on an adjacent lot. It represents all the rural schools that once served the purpose of educating children in surrounding communities.

Gordon Bethel is the founder of the Old Opera House Museum and President of the Table Rock Historical Society. Millie Briant is Secretary. Serving on the Board of Directors are: Ed. And Lola Flider, Ed. And Libbie

Kalina, M. and Elsie Tomek, Joe and Dolores Sochor and Lawrence and Nettie Stehlik. The Table Rock Historical Society formed the nucleus of a Pawnee County Centennial Committee.

### **Western Union Mutual Insurance Association**

On May 18, 1879 a small group of Czech farmers living about 5 miles west of Wilber in Saline County organized their own fire insurance association in order to protect their buildings and livestock. The first officers and directors were: F. Richtarik, President; F. Fencel, Secretary; F. Sasek, Treasurer. Board members were: J. Janouch, A. Javorsky, Jos. Kobes, F. Kostlan. The first annual meeting one year later showed insurance in force was \$20,185. The membership was 54. Losses that year included three horses that were killed by lightning totaling \$230.00 and damage on one barn \$10.00 with assessment levied on each member. The next annual meeting was held in School District No. 76 just south where Brush Creek Hall is now located. The association prospered and by 1900 had 269 members.

In 1900 they elected their first adjuster, Jan Chab. That year losses were small and they assessed each member 20 cents to pay the expenses of the officers and directors with the secretary to receive 5 cents per member for his work.

The names of officers and directors that served in the early days of the association were: A. Shimonek, F. Sukovaty, F. Pizar, J. Stejskal, J. Houser, F. Horak, Jan Honzik, F. Krivohlavek Sr., F. Rezny, Jos. Pizar, Ch. Ripa, F. Sefrna, Ch. Kohout, and J. Stehlik, who was the adjuster for many years is still living.

In 1914 they voted to extend their insurance territory to include all of Saline County. In 1946 members who were moving to town wished to keep their insurance with the association and so, the by-laws were amended to include residential property within Saline County. Up to the year 1950 the meetings were conducted with the minutes all being in the Czech language. In 1954 members wanted wind and hail insurance so the association joined the Nebraska Farmers

Mutual Reinsurance Association of Wahoo. All precincts joined the boundary at the annual meeting on Jan. 16, 1966. The records now show \$41,688 insurance in force and 1,842 members. Present officers: A. D. Kasl, President; Ludvik Krivohlavek, Vice President; V. Ripa, Treasurer; Elmer Ourecky, Secretary. Directors: T. Houser, J. Brabec, L. Papik, L. Bicek, J. Vnoucek, B. Zoubek, H. Kubicek, L. Rychtarik and A. Kovanda.

The Association has prospered from the very beginning due to the hard work and interest of all the men after elected. Some members have served from 25 to 35 years. We pay special tribute to the Czech pioneers who organized the Association of Insurance to protect themselves.

Compiled by Ludvik Krivohlavek

(Drawing of athlete p. 138)

## **Czechs and Athletics**

### **Physical Culture**

The Czechoslovakian physical culture organization is known as "Sokol." When translated into the English language it means "Falcon," the daring, fearless bird which flies high in the face of danger. The "Falcon" is famous both in story and song. There is no doubt that Sokol was adapted as the official name for the organization because of its independence, strength and fearless defense of its domain.

As early as the 17<sup>th</sup> century the Czech educator Comenius began the first mention of physical culture in Bohemia when he published "Orbis Pictus," a documentary describing the great teaching value of games, especially the effect of physical exercise upon the mind of a child.

However, it was not until 1862 that the statutes for Sokol were drafted in Prague, Bohemia. The primary reason for the delay was the long periods of political subjection of the Czech nation. The first Pan-Sokol Festival (Vsesokolsky slet) was held in 1882, celebrating the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Prague Sokol. The last slet was held in 1948 which ended in an anti-Communist demonstration. Today it goes on as a Communist imitation but it is an empty shell because the true Sokol ideas are oppressed. And so, Sokol is active now only in the free nations of the world.

The last three Presidents of our country have all been advocates of a physically fit nation. Sokol is probably one of the best organizations for this purpose in America. (Commemorated officially in 1964).

The Czechs of Nebraska are proud of their athletes. Surely they have exhibited what voluntary discipline can do when it is inspired by national enthusiasm and by the Czech ideal of physical and moral excellence. Although so many Nebraska's Czech athletes have turned "pro," they have not taken heed to the often expressed opinion that fundamental merit runs second to

theatricalism. Basic adroitness has remained their ideal which is a tribute to the Sokol principles.

As the Czechs came to Nebraska the spirit of "Sokol" came. Physical culture is a trait peculiar to the Czech people. Surely, the impressive list (which is partial) of Nebraska's outstanding athletes is indication enough of their heritage.

## **Football**

**Bill Chaloupka.** Outstanding member of the 1907 University of Nebraska team and named All-Conference tackle.

**Sylvestr Shonka.** Born in Abie, Nebraska, he played with the 1910-1911 University of Nebraska team and was named All-Conference tackle. Nominated in 1966 for the National Football Sports Hall of Fame.

**Steve Hokuf.** Member of the 1929-1930 University of Nebraska team and All-Conference end both years. He went on to play with the Boston Redskins in "Pro" football.

**Tom Novak.** Coming from Omaha, he played with the 1946-1949 University of Nebraska teams. Novak was named All-Conference center in 1948-1949 and was named All-American center in 1949. Tom keeps his interest in sports alive refereeing current wrestling bouts throughout Nebraska.

**Ray Prochaska.** Coming from Ulysses, he played with the 1940-1941 University of Nebraska teams. He played in the 1941 Rose Bowl game. He was named All-Conference end, going on to play with the Cleveland Rams in "Pro" football.

## **Professional Baseball**

**Adolf Liska.** Coming from Dwight, Nebraska, he played with the Washington Senators from 1929-1934 finishing his career with Portland in the Pacific Coast League.

**Bob Cerv.** Born in Weston, Nebraska, Cerv played with the New York Yankees and then the Kansas City Athletics. In 1965 he accepted the position at John F. Kennedy College in Wahoo as Athletic Director and Baseball Coach.

### **Professional Wrestling**

**Joe Zikmund.** Coming from Brainard, Nebraska, he was born in Czechoslovakia. He became one of the greatest wrestlers, competing with the best in the game. The climax of Joe's career came when he wrestled for the Lightweight Championship of the World with the match ending in a tie. Later he was acknowledged winner of the World's Lightweight Title. Joe went on to refereeing and as confidant of Jan Pesek.

**Stechers.** The pioneering Frank Stechers who helped settle the northeast section of Dodge County in 1877 were among the first to contribute to the field of sportsmanship—having three sons who proved their athletic powers.

**Lewis Stecher** was born the second son in Dodge in 1891. He was appointed to Annapolis, graduating from the Naval Academy in 1914. He won the National Intercollegiate Light-heavyweight Wrestling Championship in 1915 and the Heavyweight crown in 1916. Lewis later served 15 years in command of American submarines, stationed all over the world. Captain L. Stecher also served as Instructor of Electrical Engineering at the Naval Academy. He retired from active Naval Service in 1847 after 36 years. Two of his sons are also graduates of Annapolis.

**Anton Stecher**, the first son was born in Dodge in 1889. He attracted national attention as a Middleweight wrestler, but gave up his wrestling career to devote his time to managing his brother, Joe. Success also came to Anton as a promoter. A bronze plaque to his memory has been installed in the foyer of the Minneapolis, Minnesota Auditorium. It reads: "Tony (Anton) Stecher 1889-1954, Minneapolis, Outstanding Wrestling and Boxing Promoter. He staged over 700 bouts."

**Joe Stecher** was the youngest son born in Dodge in 1893. Joe was acknowledged by the majority of the “Old-time Wrestling Greats” as the Greatest wrestler that ever lived. It would take a book to describe in detail the career of the

Scissors-King” which started as a lad on the home farm and ended as the Heavyweight Wrestling Champion of the World. Joe had the strongest legs ever known to man which led to his being labeled by his opponents as the “python-like legger.” His leg scissors hold could not be endured. Stecher reportedly could pop a sack of grain with his legs. He was known to terrorize matdom with his feared scissors hold. The Scissors-King won the World’s Title first in Omaha in 1915 against Charlie Cutter, the second time from Earl Caddock in 1920 and the third time from Stanislaus Zbyszko, the Polish Giant on May 30, 1925.

Joe Stecher, Dodge, Nebraska’s scissors expert has been crowned as the “greatest wrestler of all-time in his prime.” He proved to the world time after time with the Czech spirit of the Falcon that he was always self-assured and genuine and that no grapplers were barred in the game. He gave each and all contenders their chance as they came along.

**John (Jan) Pesek.** Known professionally as the Nebraska Tiger-Man, he became the wrestling Heavyweight Champion of the World in 1932. In 1957 he was named to the Nebraska Sports Hall of Fame as the greatest wrestler of his time.

Pesek’s name has endured in the profession where it first became nationally prominent. Known as the scientific master of the mat, “Old Jawn” made history by being a perfectionist who turned his bouts from a “rassle” into a “wrestle” with his mat finesse. Sports authorities rated John as tops in competitive skills and showmanship—a wrestler possessing a vastness of knowledge of maneuvers combined with strength and endurance.

John Pesek, named the “Tiger-man” because of the ferocity of his attack in matches, was born on a small farm near Ravenna, Nebraska in 1895 of Czech parents. As a youngster John aspired to be a boxer, but to prove his fearlessness of the town’s bully, he took a long chance at wrestling meriting the



bully on the mat as the 5-1 underdog. The result was a painful trouncing to the bully by young John. John's parents objected to their son's activity in "Pro" sports—fearing injury to their son.

John Pesek won additional fame as one of America's first expert breeder of racing dogs, being responsible for the first entry of an Australian racing dog to the U. S. When Pesek left Australia after a wrestling tour, he brought to Nebraska the fastest purebred greyhound in the country, "Just Andrew." This was the first Australian Greyhound ever to be exported to America. From Pesek's Greyhound Kennels in Ravenna came the finest coursing dogs in the States. Entering 13 dogs in the National Coursing meet Pesek came through with the first grand slam in the history of the National Coursing Association. He owned and raced over 1200 purebreds through the years, capturing titles from Boston to Miami. In time John's ranch in Ravenna became famed for its zoo of native and foreign wildlife—clear evidence of his varied interests. The gentleman farmer remained however, in actuality, a real fire alarm when in action.

Nebraska can rightly be proud of this Czech athlete—winner of the World Championship Title—who never forgot the principles of fairness and good sportsmanship. Today in his years of retirement, the old fire is still in his eyes and the old iron grip is still intact.

**Jack Pesek.** Nebraska State Heavyweight Wrestling Champion has certainly followed in his famed father's footsteps. Jack has had a notch high on the ladder of the athletic journals of the sports field. Born on the Ravenna, Nebraska farm, Jack showed his athletic prowess at an early age. Only 8 years old Jack created a sensation at the Belmont, California Trap Shoot by breaking 15 out of 25 birds using a 20-gauge gun at 16 yards.

Winning track meets was Jack's specialty during his high school days in Ravenna. He proved his sport's supremacy by being a one-man-track-team. In 1941 he broke the 7 years record in the State Relays; winning the high jump, the high hurdles and placing second in the discus and shot. Jack was awarded 2

trophies and 4 medals as high point man on the field. Jack played football in the end and fullback positions during high school.

After graduating from high school Jack entered the University of Nebraska where he made the freshman football squad. However, his college career was cut short by the war. Jack was commissioned in the Army Air Force and he played with the third A.A.F. team. While in the service Pesek heaved the shot 48'5" for a record-breaker. He took the discus with a 121'9" toss and cleared the bar at 5'5" in the high jump. Jack collected enough points to win individual honors in the field and track meet.

In 1946 Jack resumed his college studies at the University of Nebraska. Playing right-end he finished his second year of football as the leading punter in the Big Six Conference and ranked fourth in the nation with his record 41.7 yards average punt, a record that has never been broken. Jack's remaining two years at the University proved his zest for action and big capacity for hard work.

After graduation from college Pesek turned to "Pro" wrestling and soon won the public's favor with his clean cut tactics and good sportsmanship backed up with a remarkable physique—6'4" and 230 pounds that would inspire a Greek sculptor. Using his patented abdominal stretch and the Pesek treasure, the toe-hold, Jack has captured titles throughout the United States and overseas, climaxed by winning the Nebraska State Wrestling Champion Title.

Like his father Jack toured the world, gaining stature and respect in each country he visited. Able to dismember the toughest heavyweight opponent he has remained a gentleman. His tours have taken him to all the Canadian provinces, Cuba, the Bahamas, Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii and Japan which led to his being fluent in the Japanese language.

**Jerry (Jaroslav) Adam.** Nebraska's professor of wrestling became a master sportsman and then devoted his life to teaching the principles of physical culture. After fulfilling his desire for "pro-sports," Jerry turned to instilling the ideas of sports knowledge into community service—training servicemen, teaching athletics to the blind, training Highway Patrolmen and State Penal Complex guards.

Adam, son of Josef and Anezka Adam (both born in Bohemia), was born in Omaha, Nebraska. At an early age Jerry's family moved to a farm in the Plattsmouth vicinity. Young Jerry's interest in sports was evident during his high school days in Plattsmouth when he played football, keeping his activity a secret due to the opposition of his parents who feared injury to their young son. However, when the local newspaper carried a feature article regarding Jerry's football activities the secret was out. Fortunately for Nebraska, his parents realized their son had more than a passing interest in sports and they finally relented giving Jerry their approval.

After graduation from high school, Adam enrolled at the University of Nebraska where he lettered in both football and wrestling. Jerry's football position was as guard.

After graduation Jerry was named the University of Nebraska mat coach. For 14 years he produced top athletes who proved their skill throughout the United States. He went on to become the University assistant football coach and line coach both at Nebraska University and later at Wesleyan University.

Jerry was the All-Service-Athletic Instructor from 1943 through 1946 when the Nebraska University Physical Education Department pledged complete cooperation to the U.S. Government to put the military trainees through their daily physical pace. Jerry devoted his time to teaching guerilla warfare tactics in this specialized training. Training consisted of every rugged and uncouth method: jujitsu, judo and all the illegal throws, trips and blows of wrestling that was necessary for hand-to-hand combat. Jerry coached 30,000 men in these war-time "combatives."

In 1950 he became the Athletic Director at the University of Nebraska.

In 1955 Jerry became the Director of a two-way project at Nebraska's State Penal Complex: physical education for the prisoners and a training program for the guards. Emphasized in the guards training was judo, the art of forcing submission through leverage. The inmates program was set-up to "use up all the exuberant energy inmates have—working toward body building and better health—and thus, toward better citizenship."

## NEBRASKA'S CZECHS FOR THE INDEPENDENCE OF CZECHOSLOVAKIA

Soon after the beginning of World War I a Czech National Alliance (Ceske narodni sdruzeni) was formed in the United States. Its basic project was to collect funds to help in the work of freeing Bohemia, Moravia, Silesia and Slovakia from their subjection to Austria and Hungary. The Midwestern district of this Czech patriotic organization, with headquarters in Omaha, (F. Kutak and later J. Votava, President; Stanislav Serpan, Secretary and M. Votava, Treasurer), succeeded in raising money from Czechs in the following towns in Nebraska: Abie, Barneston, Beemer, Brainard, Bruno, Burwell, Clarkson, Crete, David City, Dodge, DuBois, Exeter, Friend, Hemingford, Howells, Humboldt, Lincoln, Linwood, Lynch, Milligan, Morse Bluff, Niobrara, North Bend, Odell, Omaha, Ord, Pawnee City, Plattsmouth, Prague, Ravenna, Schuyler, Spencer, Table Rock, Thurston, Tobias, Ulysses, Verdigre, Wilber and Wymore. The amount totaled \$150,354.00.

To this should be added the Czech fund collected by the **Hospodar** and **Osveta americka** from its readers \$8,345.00; the amount collected in the state by the members of the Western Bohemian Fraternal Association \$5,000.00; National Alliance of Czech Catholics \$65,000.00; proceeds of a bazaar held in 1918 at Omaha \$65,109.00, or a total \$293,809.00.

In 1917 the Czech Catholics in this country established an organization similar to the Czech National Alliance called the National Alliance of Czech Catholics in America (Svaz ceskych katoliku v Americe) and collected \$65,000.00 from the Czech people of the following towns: Abie, Bee, Brainard, Dodge, Dwight, Geranium, Howells, Milligan, Omaha, Ord, Plattsmouth, Ravenna, Verdigre and Wahoo. Of the states in the United States where Czech Catholics live, Nebraska held first place.

An auxiliary of the Czech National Alliance was established soon after, called "Vcelky" (The Bees). The members of this organization made knitted

articles, underclothing, kits, and sent these with tobacco to the Czech legionnaires fighting in France with the French army. Later many of these supplies were sent to Siberia where Czech legionnaires, who voluntarily surrendered to the Russians when they could to avoid the duty of fighting for Austria, had made their historical march from Russia to the east.

The mammoth Liberty Bazaar was held by the Czechs of Omaha and Nebraska on September 1 to 8, 1918 in the Omaha Auditorium, to which proceeds of \$65,109.00 were given to the work of helping free Czechoslovakia. This was not only the greatest action of its kind accomplished by Czechs of the Midwest but was the largest affair of its kind accomplished by Czechs anywhere in this country. Ch. Stenicka was general manager with J. Pavlik, assistant. The chairman of the bazaar committee was V. Tesar, secretary J. Ptak, treasurer V. Kuncl. The bazaar was opened by Governor Keith Neville. Among the many gifts received was one from Mrs. W. Wilson, wife of the President of the United States, a framed and autographed etching of the White House.

Among the various activities tending toward the liberation of Czechoslovakia and proclamation of a free Republic was that of couriers whose task it was to deliver personal messages at the risk of their lives. Several Czechs from this country were sent secretly to Bohemia for this purpose and one of those was Ch. Steiger of Omaha. In October of 1916 he set out for London to receive from T. G. Masaryk (later first Czechoslovakian president) messages to be orally conveyed to various prominent patriotic workers in Prague, Bohemia.

Some may be critical that Czechs in Nebraska supported the movement favoring the liberation of the mother country at the expense of their patriotism as Americans. It should be explained that they did their duty in the latter respect also. They contributed financially in every way required by the United States at that time. Czech women were very active in all American Red Cross work. In the larger settlements Czech chapters of the Red Cross were organized.

Just look in the book "**A Roster of Soldiers, Sailors and Marines**" published by the Secretary of the State of Nebraska, Ch. Pool, you will find how

many Czechs served in the Civil War, Indian, Spanish-American and World Wars and how many died for this country.

According to R. Rosicka

(Drawing of Buffalo p. 144)

## PERSONAL REMINISCENCES

### A Famous Nebraska Friendship

#### Anna Pavelka, a Czech immigrant girl, lives on in Cather's "My Antonia"

By Bess Eileen Day

In harvest time when the wheat is tall, ripe and golden, there are those who think of Anna Pavelka because they knew her and others who think of her because they read about her in the writing of Willa Cather.

When Willa Cather started her career as a novelist in New York, she saw Anna Pavelka's form tower above all the others she knew back in the little Nebraska town of Red Cloud.

She saw a Czech immigrant girl who moved in strength and grace like a figure in a painting by Millet. A black-haired and dark-eyed Ceres come alive, sowing and reaping the mighty harvests of the newly broken prairie.

As a physical being Anna is dead now. She died on the same day and in the same month as Will Cather, eight years later, but as the character in the classic **My Antonia** by Cather she may live centuries longer.

The character and the author met as teen-age girls 70 years ago and became friends for life, closer than sisters in many ways. Indeed Anna was big sister to all who knew her. Even those who met her in her eighty-sixth year marveled at her boundless warmth and the love she poured out to friend and stranger.

Willa Cather with her intellectual and creative mind found in Anna's simple and earthly reality the completion of her complex self. Though a vigorous and handsome woman Willa Cather chose marriage only to the art of writing and produced a score of splendid books, while Anna married and produced 13 children.

## **Their Worlds Differed**

Their worlds were so different that the exchange between them became a rich and profitable barter. In the beginning Anna, as the hired girl of the family next door, gave of her good heart in love and understanding to the curious and life-hungry Willa at her most impressionable age.

So Author Cather used the basic facts of Anna's life and many facets of her character to create the immortal **My Antonia** from her childhood pioneer days in the prairie dugout to her own big family on a prosperous farm.

It was Anna as Antonia who was quick and eager to learn all the English words for everything she saw in the new country. She loved to walk and explore, hunt in prairie-dog towns for puppies, owl eggs or snake skins.

During the first hard winters she and her sister slept in a cave at the back of the family dugout and nearly starved to death.

When neighbors brought fresh meat and provisions from their cellars the Shimerda family made an effort to return their kindness by giving away some of their precious dried mushrooms.

Their rich brown powder had been brought all the way from the old country but the American neighbors took a sniff of the powder, thought it nothing worth cooking, and cast it into the fire.

After Anna's sensitive and artistic father took his own life in a fit of despair at the bleakness and poverty of their pioneer Nebraska winter, Anna, 14, did the work of a man. She took the team to the field and worked along with her brother.

Then she came to town to work for the Miner family, next door to the Cathers.

In 1921 Miss Cather said:

"One of the people who interested me most as a child was the Bohemian hired girl of our neighbors who was so good to me. She was one of the truest artists I ever knew in the keenness and sensitiveness of her enjoyment, in her love of people and in her willingness to take pains. I did not realize all this as a



child but Annie fascinated me and I always had it in mind to write a story about her.”

### **A Solace to All**

In the book, Antonia after the summer harvest came to town to work for the (Miner) Harling family for \$3.00 a week. The wages all went to her brother and widowed mother. Although the family agreed to keep her in shoes she saved on them by making cloth slippers to wear around the house. As a hired girl Anna was quick to learn and eager to serve in any capacity required. She became a friend, confidant, mother and solace to all the members of the family she worked for and to all the neighbors and their children as well.

Her heavy work on the farm, from the time she arrived in America at the age of 12, the breaking of the sod, the planting and the harvesting, made the housework in town seem easy. She learned to cook and sew. When Mrs. Miner had shown her how to use the sewing machine she made all the clothes, shirts, jeans, overalls and husking gloves for her hard-working farm family in spare time. She made her own dresses, duplicates of the town girls' dresses she liked best. Then it was not long before she was a handsome figure at any entertainment and a vigorous, statuesque dancer with a host of partners...

### **A Betrayal**

After several years of good times and growing up, Anna met a brakeman on the railroad and he proposed to her. She worked for months on her linens and trousseau, doing fancy work by hand. Finally he sent her word to come to meet him. She took a dowry of three hundred dollars with her and all her household things. Then for once her boundless love, faith and devotion were betrayed. He spent her money and deserted her in a city hotel. She had no choice, a lost country girl, except to go home to the farm dugout and work again as a harvest hand.

Still this disillusioning experience did not embitter Anna. In a few years she married a Czech boy. She mothered a large family of 13 children and reared all of them except the twins. They died in infancy. She grieved over them all her life because she believed they died from too much handling by curious neighbors. Her daughters were beautiful and her sons prize-winning athletes.

Willa Cather was particularly pleased with the family of Anna Pavelka. Always sensitive to any change of weather Miss Cather carried an assortment of capes and wraps. When Anna's boys took her to the carriage at their farm gate, each one would have some garment draped over his arm ready to help Miss Cather into it or with a flourish lay it at her feet in the conveyance.

After visiting that family Miss Cather would exclaim: "The manners of Anna's sons would do credit to the family of a Grand Duke."

### **Willa's Favorite Story**

Miss Cather felt she had accomplished much by putting Anna into her book. In 1938, on the twentieth anniversary of the publication of **My Antonia**, Miss Cather said: "The best thing I've done is **My Antonia**. I feel I've made a contribution to American letters with that book."

Willa Cather had traveled everywhere and lived in such widely separated points as Taos, New Mexico and Jaffrey, New Hampshire, yet she always enjoyed coming back to the long table in Anna's kitchen and looking down the row of happy faces. Willa liked Anna's Czech cooking from the kolache to her special banana cream pie. When a neighbor told her husband John that the way to save money for more land was by skimping on the family use of butter, cream and whole milk, Anna said, "No, that is not for us. I want roses in the cheeks of my children not more land and money in the bank." Miss Cather was pleased with Anna when she heard about this. She wrote a story then about Anna's husband called "Neighbor Rosicky" and it was published in the book **Obscure Destinies**.

The husband of Anna was very proud of his wife. Once when he was admitted to a hospital and the attendant asked him who he was, he replied, "I am the husband of 'My Antonia.'"

At one time Miss Cather gave Anna Pavelka a check for \$50.00 with instructions to buy a gift for herself. Taxes on the home place fell due and Anna paid them instead, never revealing that the money was needed so badly.

### **Never Unhappy**

The day I met Anna I was accompanied by Mrs. Carrie Miner Sherwood, life-long friend of both Anna and Willa Cather, and Mrs. Mildred R. Bennett, author of **The World of Willa Cather**. She showed us the prizes she had won on handwork and baking at the last county fair, in her eighty-fifth year. She also took out a heaped dresser drawer of fancy work and begged us each to take several pieces. The work ranged from huge doilies and dresser scarves to hotpads and potholders.

"Take all you want. I can make more unless I die. You don't think I die soon, no."

"You look equal to a stout hundred to me."

Then she had to show her birthday presents and a rug she was weaving.

During her last years she lived with a married daughter at Bladen about 20 miles from Red Cloud. A shawl sent her after Willa Cather's death hung in her bedroom. On the dresser was a small photograph of Willa beside a package of letters telling how much Miss Cather enjoyed hearing from Anna during her illness. On her walls were prints from Czechoslovakia, a gift to Miss Cather from President Thomas Masaryk. In a china cupboard was a set of Italian dishes, a gift from Willa. While Anna lived no one else was allowed to wash them.

One of Anna's sons said of her, "She was wonderful and happier with a crust of bread and a new baby than someone else with a million dollars. I never saw her unhappy."

Omaha World Herald Magazine, 1957

## **Czech Freighter of the Sixties**

By **Libor A. Slesinger**

In November 1856 we left our beloved native land, taking passage on the steamship "Hammonia" and arrived in New York. After stopping there two days we set out for Chicago where I met Mr. Novak. He advised me to buy property costing \$300.00. But I decided to go to Cedar Rapids, Iowa where my son had been living for two years and my son-in-law the past two months. I wished to be near my children. However, we did not like the place and hearing much about Sioux City we went there. Even there we felt dissatisfied and so we crossed the Missouri River and settled on the Omaha Indian Reservation in Nebraska.

Our nearest neighbors were Omaha Pawnee and Otoe Indians. They were all kind and often visited us being grateful for anything we gave them. Occasionally Sioux Indians appeared. They stole from Indians and from whites and gave us much trouble.

In the spring I had the prairie broken and planted with corn which gave a good crop that year. Steamboats stopped near my place so I had wood cut to sell to them at \$4.50 per cord. In 1859 we had 80 acres of cultivated land. I decided to help with plowing which I had to learn in spite of the fact that I was then already fifty-three years old. The first day was unsuccessful but I made up my mind that I must succeed and by the third day I was almost an expert. I liked farming and worked at it constantly.

In 1860 one of my daughters married a German who owned one farm near Omaha and another in Denver, Colorado. He moved to Colorado and when my wife went there to visit them she wrote me to come too. I yoked two pair of oxen to a wagon and loaded it with flour which I had ground in the mill. On October 25<sup>th</sup> I set out in good weather and arrived in Denver on December 3<sup>rd</sup> without any mishap. We stayed in Denver over winter, making a living by selling wood. I did not succeed in selling the flour until in the spring for large shipments were being received from the east. In the spring I returned to Nebraska intending to buy

flour and other goods and haul it back. I bought flour in Omaha at \$3.00 per hundred pounds and sold it in Denver for \$9.00 so there was some profit. I made several trips like that, buying and selling flour, butter, lard and eggs. Often I met Indians on the prairies and sold them blankets, sugar and other commodities, receiving as pay tanned buffalo hides. Once I met an Indian suffering so with piles that he could not sit on his horse. I treated him for three days and he improved very much. When parting from me, he gave me a little cube and said I should show it to any Sioux Indian I might meet and he would be a good friend to me. This Indian was a powerful Sioux chief.

In 1863 the business section of Denver was laid waste by fire and there was no work all winter. Times were hard indeed and I was impatient for spring that I might return to Nebraska. When I was traveling back again with my load, I met an immigrant train belonging to a young physician of Decatur, an Omaha lawyer and a Methodist minister. I was acquainted with the first two and so we traveled together and had a pleasant time.

These young people shot plenty of rabbits. In the morning we used to go under the telegraph lines where reposed flocks of wild duck and prairie chickens. They would fly up, get caught in the wire and thus meet death. One day my companions went hunting and I was to take care of the stock and the kitchen. Scarcely two hours later I beheld them from afar returning home and followed by a crowd of Indians. I grasped both guns and intended to sell my life dearly to the Redman. How surprised I was when the chief sprang from his horse and greeted me with a most friendly "How." Several other chiefs did likewise, all shaking hands most heartily. I recognized the Sioux whom I had treated for piles. He sent several warriors to cut wood and they brought a liberal supply of meat too. We feasted together. The chief presented me with a buffalo robe, beautifully embroidered, the like of which is seldom seen. He said he owed it to me for my kindness. In turn I gave him sugar, coffee, salt and tobacco. We parted the next morning on most friendly terms. My companions were surprised, but then I explained that I had treated the Indian. The physician was pleased to think he

had a colleague and after that they always called me “doctor.” The following year I met that physician in Central City and we had a great time recalling our trip.

In the spring of 1864 I decided to go to Omaha in spite of reports that Indians were on the warpath, for I relied on my acquaintance and friendship with them. My wife accompanied me quite a distance to bid me farewell for she feared she would never see me again. I promised to write every week, the mail being delivered regularly even in dangerous times. An Irishman accompanied me. He rode in his wagon in advance and we made 20 miles each day. We had hardly gone a few miles on the third day when the Irishman called saying the Indians were upon us. He told me to watch his wagon and then he vanished in the brushwood for we were going through a piece of timber. I stood guard at his wagon and wondered what would happen. The Indians came, six riders surrounded one side of the wagon, six the other, but when they saw we had nothing they departed without paying any attention to me. I awaited the Irishman but he remained invisible. Therefore I called and called, but he came not. In fact, I never saw him again.

My wife wrote that Indians had killed and scalped two settlers near Denver. Their bodies were carried about the town to incite whites to retaliate. There was great excitement in Denver. Everybody expected an Indian attack but nothing happened. After I had traveled a hundred miles further I found the first burned house. About twelve wagons, all heading for Denver, stood nearby. They had been destroyed by fire too with all their contents. I found many buildings and many wagons so destroyed and did not meet a living soul on the entire way. All was desolate, but I had no adventure until I reached a spot about 45 miles from Kearney where I camped. Two groups of Indians appeared carrying the stolen goods on their horses. They sat around the fire. I said nothing, they said nothing. Presently another group appeared. A number of chiefs in that group approached me, greeting me with a friendly “how” and calling “pakachi” (go away) to the others. I saw among them the chief I treated for piles and knew I was saved. In the morning he helped me to find my oxen and to yoke them. We parted company. He told me what they had done at Plum Creek

where I was acquainted with two French traders who were brothers. I had stopped to rest in their store several times. Both were killed and scalped and their goods taken. The chief said that six sacks of flour were hidden in the thicket nearby and asked me to take it.

I traveled on, weighted down with painful thoughts and reached Plum Creek by midnight. The Indians had indeed spoken the truth. I beheld a ruin instead of the little store and the bright moonbeams showed me two scalped corpses, all that was left of the French brothers. A short distance away in the brushwood lay three other scalped bodies and beyond that the six sacks of flour. Of course I could not bear to touch it. My heart trembled with horror and sorrow. Further away I saw a pile of iron, all that was left of burned wagons of which there must have been twenty carrying at least thirty people. Why did they surrender? They had made a fort of the wagons the way the Taborites used to do under their famous general Jan Zizka and thus they could have withstood 300 Indians. But, unfortunately, they had made their fort near a haystack to which the Indians set fire. The wagons caught fire too. The immigrants were obliged to flee and thus became victims of the Redman. I recalled that one of the Frenchmen had a wife. I had not seen her body anywhere. Then I remembered that when the Indians visited me in camp I had seen some distance away a woman on a horse, her figure veiled, an Indian at her back. It must have been the Frenchman's wife who had been obliged to witness the killing and scalping of her husband and brother-in-law, the destruction of their property and was then forced to become the slave of their captors. Such were the terrible thoughts that tortured me. I could not rid myself of them until about noon of the next day when I reached a place a mile distant from Fort Kearney. I took a couple drinks of whiskey then to clear my mind of the awful weight, and I rested a bit.

Despite all this no one can believe how good Indians are, how sensible, wise and honest. When I was their neighbor we always got along in harmony. I was kind to them and they were my good friends, reliable in every way. I sold many goods to them and my sons did field work with machinery for them and

taught them how to make molasses. Therefore they remembered me and were so glad to meet me again.

We left Omaha with a heavy load but it was difficult to find people to accompany us. They were afraid of Indians. Reports came in constantly of danger. No one wanted to risk his life. Upon our arrival at Fort Kearney we found many soldiers and they would not let us go on unless ten wagons went together in a train for protection, therefore, we were obliged to wait. Within a few days about twenty wagons had assembled and we started for Denver. About twelve miles from Fort Kearney I met my son who was first lieutenant in the cavalry service. He was in command in that part of the country and assured us that there were plenty of soldiers all along the way. After we had made a hundred miles we heard that the soldiers themselves were robbing immigrants, taking their oxen and sometimes all they had in the wagons. Therefore, each night five of our party stood guard in order that our "protectors" against Indians could not rob us for they were much worse than Indians themselves. We found that to be a truth within a short time. Near Julesburg, Colorado an iron axle-tree broke. We had to take the wagon to town. There was a blacksmith there but he worked for the army department and the officer forbade him to repair our wagon. He offered instead to sell the owner another wagon for \$200, taking in pay flour at \$15 per sack. The flour cost only \$5 per sack in Omaha, but the wily officer knew that it sold in Denver for five times that amount. The unfortunate immigrant was forced to buy an old wagon for \$200, leave his broken wagon behind and give the officer 14 sacks of flour on which he lost \$140, so that the officer really got \$340 for this wagon. And that was not the only instance. We heard of many others where the "protectors" of our citizens robbed them of oxen and goods.

We prospered so that by 1870 we had a hundred head of cattle and a number of sheep. In March of that year one Sunday I noticed that black clouds had gathered around the crest of Pike's Peak, a sign of a coming storm. Therefore, I admonished the man who took care of our cattle to be careful and in case of bad weather to drive the animals to the stream because the timber there offered protection. At noon I arose from dinner and beheld a snowstorm



advancing, therefore, I saddled my horse and rode to help the herder. The animals had stampeded and we had all we could do to get them together. In the meantime the snow came down and the wind piled it in high drifts. Many holes in the prairie were thus filled and the beasts that fell therein could not get out. Two cows fell in before my very eyes. I could see only their horns and could do nothing for them. Their example warned me and saved me from a like fate. However, before nightfall my horse did sink and I jumped down just in time and took off all his harness. He was a young and strong horse so he managed to fight his way up. Night had come and I was obliged to lodge there, fifteen miles away from home. The herder was nowhere to be seen. I sought a little hill, bare at the top, put my saddle under my head, covered myself with the blanket, took two drinks of whiskey and tried to sleep, but could not do so until after midnight when the wind had subsided. When I awoke the sun was shining on the horizon and found I was lying near two large rocks. There I found my horse grazing and a little way further the herder's horse dead.

I went about from place to place but could find no trace of the herder. Therefore I climbed to the top of one of the rocks and saw him driving about 30 sheep in my direction. After he had recovered his strength by a draught from my flask we went out to find something to eat. I knew that a cattleman lived about two miles away so we went there, but his house was empty and locked. I broke in like a robber and to my great delight found bread, butter and cheese. Therefore, I took a loaf of bread, butter in a tin bucket and a large piece of cheese. Finding a piece of yellow paper I wrote thereon in German; "Hunger makes even an honest man steal. L. A. Schlesinger." I knew the cattleman employed a German herder who could interpret what I had written. Then I locked the door and took the food to my herder. We spent the entire day getting the beasts together. Many head were missing. By evening I saw a man coming toward me. It was the cattleman. After telling him what I had done, he invited me to return and spend the night with him. He too had spent the previous night in the open, about twelve miles away.

The next two years were good, but in 1873 my feet bothered me so that I could not ride a horse and was obliged to remain at home when my stock was being gathered in. I could not find honest people to do that work. I advertised in the Czech papers, but no one answered. One would think that branded cattle would not be readily stolen but even wealthy stockowners were not above taking cattle and changing the brands so I kept losing all the time. Therefore in 1875 I sold out, having only 97 head and I used to have 300 head. In 1876 I sold my farm cheap but this I was forced to do because my strength had given out.

## **Our Start in Saline County**

**By Mrs. Marie Jelinek**

On October 5, 1865 our family and my husband's brothers Josef and Vit with their families left Manitowo for Saline County, Nebraska. Also traveling with us was grandfather Vaclav Jelinek, Josef Hynek, Matej and Frank Kubicek. Arriving in St. Joseph, Missouri we learned that our baggage had not arrived due to the trains being loaded with soldiers and freight as this was at the close of the Civil War. We waited three weeks before our missing articles turned up. A scarlet fever epidemic was raging in St. Joseph and there we lost our three-year old son, burying him in Arago. While we were waiting in St. Joseph, grandfather Jelinek, Mr. Kubicek and Mr. Sestak went ahead on foot to prepare a shelter for us.

We traveled for two weeks to reach our destination since the roads were so bad. We had to forge the Big Blue River when we came to it as our claims lay on the other side. Hardly had we crossed the river than we came face to face with fourteen Indians on horseback. You can imagine our surprise and fright. However, all that the Indians wanted was tobacco and the men acceded to their wish with alacrity. Going on a mile farther we came to our claim. The shelter was a veritable hole in the ground, covered, but without doors or windows. It measured 10 by 14 feet and eighteen people lived crammed together all winter.

A bad snowstorm hit on the third day after our arrival. Our abode soon was filled with snow which also had drifted high all around. Krajnik had brought along his aging and ailing mother who had become worse during the traveling and had been left for that reason on featherbeds in the wagon. She passed away on the morning of the storm. As there was no material for a coffin the men broke up a wagon box, fashioning a coffin for Mrs. Krajnik.

Spring came early the following year of 1866. It was February that brought fresh hope and a renewed determined energy. The settlers put their crops in and all helped one another. Two teams were harnessed to a plow and the breaking of the virgin sod began. Women planted corn with the aid of hatchets.

We celebrated our first Fourth of July in Nebraska in 1866. We all gathered on Vaclav Petracek's farm where we danced, sang and feasted. It was indeed a merry time. Mr. Petracek provided the music for the dancers by pounding on a plow wheel. Then later that year the grasshoppers came, eating every growing thing in sight. They covered the river so thickly that our only supply of drinking water was shut off for some time.

In 1871 my husband Frank was elected County Commissioner of Saline County and was instrumental in having the first bridge built over the Big Blue River.

In 1873 we suffered the devastating force of a tornado that blew our home away. We were fortunate, however, we did not suffer any loss of life.

## **Atlantic Ocean Crossing of a Czech Pioneer**

### **Josef Vrtiska**

Pioneers in many communities could recite incidents on their crossing the Atlantic to America, but we have in mind one Czech, Josef Vrtiska of Tecumseh, Nebraska.

Mr. Vrtiska was born at Nemisel Village, Bohemia in 1846. He sailed from Bremen in 1866. Through many difficulties he arrived in New York City three months later.

He embarked on the boat "Amelia," which was a German freight and passenger craft. Being of the old sailboat type it depended entirely upon the winds for power of navigation. There were perhaps 300 passengers aboard together with a full consignment of freight. Mr. Vrtiska, a young man of limited means, was obliged to take passage in the steerage. There was a wait of a

week at Bremen before there was sufficient wind for the “Amelia” to assume the ocean trip. In those days of sailing boats several weeks were required to cross the Atlantic, even with the most favorable weather. From the day of sailing until the last day of December the “Amelia” plowed the waters of the great ocean steadily day by day and seemed to be doing very satisfactory. At that time the captain ordered the boat cleaned up and advised that she was within two days of the American port New York. It was a custom to have the boat ready for “dress parade” upon landing...

The very day that the captain passed the word along that he expected to land his passengers within two days, a terrible storm came up from the west becoming more terrific by midnight. The storm became so violent that the boat was practically helpless. The great masts and sails of the boat were blown down. The captain ordered men on the decks, secured with life lines to guard against being dashed away and capsized in the infuriated waters, to cut the huge ropes and other moorings which clung to the vessel. The ropes and moorings washed away in the monstrous drifts of water and the great hulk was at the mercy of the storm.

For four days and nights the vessel tossed and rolled in the terrible seas. Even though the boat was sealed as best could be, water found its way into the craft and filled the lower portion of the boat to a considerable depth. The pumps were out of commission and it looked as though a sufficient amount of water would soon fill the boat to cause it to sink. At any moment it was feared that the boat would capsize..

Fearful that the added weight of the water would cause the boat to go down, the captain ordered every able bodied man on the boat into service. He ordered a great deal of the freight to be thrown overboard. Finally the storm subsided and the ship stopped tossing. During the four days of the storm there had been very little to eat and this was served with difficulty because the boat pitched and tossed so badly it was almost impossible for persons to stay in their bunks.

With the calming of the sea a period of four weeks of helpless drifting started for the "Amelia." The ship's instruments had indicated that the boat had been driven from the usual paths of transportation and there was fear of inability to signal for help. Every effort was put forth to attract the attention of any boat that may have been in the locality. Imagine the disappointment of these distressed people when the first boat easily sighted by the passengers failed to notice the distress signals and passed on its way without a signal of any sort. The captain ordered all the canvas on the boat brought up and made some improvised sails which helped to make some headway.

At last a sailing vessel, which was to be the succor of the "Amelia," was spotted. Every possible energy at signaling was put into force. After a considerable time there came an answer. The strange boat went out of its course and sailed as near the "Amelia" as the officers dared.

The captains exchanged messages over their speaking instruments. It must be remembered that these were the years before the thought of wireless had entered the head of man. With difficulty the officers exchanged words and, finally, the strange vessel lifted its sails and disappeared. The captain informed the anxious passengers that the sailboat was not able to take them off, but that the captain left word he would go for help at once. About a day and a half later there was joy on board when a large steamboat or tug approached and signaled the boat in distress.

All hands were soon on deck. The day was pleasant and the water quiet. Soon the captain ordered everyone below, explaining that he wanted to dicker with the steamboat owner. If he should see all the passengers on deck his charge for towing the stranded boat to port would likely be more than it would be if he thought there were few if any passengers. After the deal had been made, he allowed all people to return to the deck. A great tow line was thrown from the steamboat and made fast to the "Amelia," and the rescue boat got under way. Twenty-four hours after the "Amelia" was towed into the port at Liverpool, after being on the ocean for nearly two months and having gotten within two days of his landing place, Mr. Vrtiska found himself comparatively near his port of

embarkation in the old country. He experienced an ocean voyage which drove one passenger insane and killed three who had to be buried at sea.

Five days after reaching the port the passengers found themselves aboard a good ocean-going steamboat with better fare and accommodations. Their tickets were honored for transportation. So you see, they readily had three trips for the price of one. Three weeks later Mr. Vrtiska found himself in New York City. Counting the time required in going from his native village to Bremen and the time consumed in the terrible ocean voyage, Mr. Vrtiska reached New York City in three months.

A brother, Jan Vrtiska, who had come to this country before Joe was living in Chicago. After his arrival Joe went to that city to join his brother. In July of that year he became twenty-one, took out citizenship papers and headed west to Nebraska taking a homestead in Pawnee County. He married the former Theresa Wenzel of that community. Joe and Theresa with their ten children, five boys and five girls, made their home there for many years

Narrated in 1923

(Picture of Family p. 155)

The Brabenec Family

### **Brabenec Family Tragedy.**

**By Josef Sedivy**

Dear readers, in order to accurately describe the sad and tragic episode of this incident recounted on these pages, I called on the only living eye-witness to the Brabenec family's tragedy, Mr. Matej Hrbek. Mr. Hrbek had become acquainted with the Brabenec's in Chicago in 1869 at the time of the "Ceska kolonie," a Czech society founded to help locate governmental land for its members desiring to settle. Messrs. Hrbek and Brabenec were both members of the society and left Chicago with the second expedition composed of several

such interested families. Their goal was the country in L'Eau Qui County in Nebraska which is now known as Knox County.

All the participants of the expedition carried with them numerous plans for the future, however, they all lacked money and knowledge of the American style of farming. They took with them only the barest necessities in implements, clothes and feather-beds in order to save on freight. They also knew the railroad went only as far as Sioux City, Iowa.

After many days of travel they reached the mouth of the Bazille, five miles from Niobrara. The water was extremely high and so they had to camp there three days, being hungry most of the time as their supplies were now exhausted. On the fourth day, with great difficulty, they forded the river. In the afternoon they reached several cabins made from cottonwood logs and were informed they had reached Niobrara. They found shelter in an empty shanty. Several families living together managed to get along fairly well together.

After resting two days the weather was favorable for the men to set out to explore the countryside. They started early in the morning by foot with the intentions of selecting homesteads next to each other. They felt if they stayed together they would help one another in time of need and also would be companions. They went west to the Niobrara and then up along Verdigrée creek. Not finding the land to their liking, they started next in a southeastern direction from Niobrara but were still dissatisfied. Having spent five days searching, they finally came to the agreement to take up their claims on the Niobrara River in a valley about 18 or 20 miles from the town of Niobrara which the Czech settlers used to call "Third Bottom." At the time of their homesteading the valley was covered with an abundance of cottonwoods, oaks, elms, cedars, basswoods and other trees. Unfortunately, today the timber is gone. Brabenec, Hrbek and Prasek liked the land in this beautiful valley entirely free of other settlers. Not only were they blessed with rich, fertile land but also the timber which provided them with building material and fuel. There was also an abundance of rich grass untouched by prairie fires.



Satisfied with their decision the men returned to their families in Niobrara. After telling of their trip their friends warned them not to go so far from the other settlers, to be closer to the white man's settlement. They were warned against the Indian raids that their property and lives would be greatly endangered, but their warnings were in vain. They said they would take up their claims in that valley they loved or else they would return to Chicago.

Mr. Hrbek continues his story: "After our parting we three men immediately started preparing temporary dwellings for our families. As you remember, I had a wife and two small children, John age three and Anna who was five months old. The Brabenec couple had a daughter, Caroline age fourteen years and John who was twelve years old. Prasek and his wife had a daughter born to them after one year

We each put up a shack on our land—it was really a dugout covered with brushwood and reeds. We set up stoves putting sod around the pipe in the roof and then plastered it with mud. We made our beds on the floor and put our flour (a precious item, then) and other provisions inside. We had to leave the rest of our things outside, the provisions inside. We had to leave the rest of our things outside. The weather was dry so it did not really matter. The women busied themselves with planting and caring for gardens. We men cut some of the slender cottonwoods growing by the river with the intention of building log houses on each claim, the first being on the land of Brabenec. On the morning of April 28 we left for the river, chopping down only the straight trees of a size that three men could load on a wagon. By noon we had unloaded the first wagon of timber where the cabin was to stand and after lunch we returned to the woods. We worked with a will, happy in the thought that we all would have good, sturdy homes. We were approximately half a mile from the Brabenec dugout, however, we were not able to see it. It was a clear and quiet afternoon. Suddenly we heard several gun shots which seemed to come from the direction of the Brabenec dugout. We were surprised, in fact, we were paralyzed as we looked in the direction of the noise and in a short time saw a group of Indians riding

rapidly into the hills which bordered the valley. A bad premonition took hold of us and we hurried to the dugout.

When we got there we saw nothing wrong at first. However, Brabenec entered only to run out again lamenting that his wife was dead. Prasek and I entered the dugout and saw Mrs. Brabenec apparently dead, lying on the floor next to the stove, the oven door being open. After gaining some composure, we carried the poor woman outside and tried to revive her. We managed to do so and found her skirts above the knees soaked with blood. Suddenly, with horror, I remembered my own family and ran to our dugout. I was extremely excited and worn. My knees trembled and my heart beat so fast that I felt I would suffocate. When I saw all my family unharmed I could not speak from relief and happiness. Then, with the realization of what I had seen at Brabenec's, I began relating to my wife what had taken place. She had not seen or heard the Indians nor did she hear the shooting. Amazed and deeply saddened, she went with me and my son who I had taken in my arms back to the Brabenec dugout. From afar we could hear Brabenec and Prasek calling for John and Caroline. When we reached the dugout we found Mrs. Prasek there trying to console the wounded and grieving woman who called continually for her children.

Leaving my family at the Brabenec dugout I left to join the men in their search for the missing children. Finally, Brabenec, worn from fear and weeping, returned home. Prasek and I tried to comfort him with the hope that perhaps the children had simply wandered off earlier and were home by now. Walking back through high and thick grass, we found to our horror the dead body of little "Johnny" lying in the blood-soaked grass. His body was only about a hundred feet from the dugout, his face was to the ground and his hands stretched above his head. How very sad was this meeting between father and son! The visible wounds showed that poor Johnny had been shot in the back, one bullet had gone through his skull, one through his neck and the third through the left shoulder-blade. It seemed most evident that he had been trying to flee when shot, falling after only a few steps and died probably instantly. We stood frozen not able to speak or act. After a time we persuaded our friend to go to his wounded wife.

She went into a faint. Prasek and I went again in search of the other child, Caroline. We searched all over the valley, calling and looking, but it was a fruitless search. We had no choice but to return to the dugouts. As evening came, being very careful not to let Mrs. Brabenec see us, we took our spades and in the setting sun prepared the final resting place for little Johnny on the spot where he had fallen and where his dust now rests. With tears in our eyes we returned to the Brabenec's. After a council we decided to hitch the wagon and take the wounded woman with our wives and children to Niobrara, leaving everything behind as it lay. Mrs. Brabenec was in a dreadful condition. At times she seemed beside herself with grief and we feared for her sanity. We had lost hope of ever finding Caroline, feeling certain the Indians had spirited her away. We were fortunate to have a moonlit night, otherwise, we would most certainly have become lost in territory unknown to us. We reached Carl Schinlder's after midnight where we stayed until morning. It is needless to say that none of us thought of sleeping that night.

Toward morning Mrs. Brabenec fell asleep, possibly from sheer exhaustion. She was drained from pain and sorrow. When she awakened she seemed more collected and was able to tell us what happened: "I was baking bread and was just putting the loaf in the oven when it seemed I heard shots outside. The children were playing outside and I was not worried for them. Presently, I knelt down by the stove to open the oven to see about the bread. Suddenly, I glanced toward the doorway and it was filled with Indians. I felt petrified! They said: "Hau" and the nearest one put his hand out. I don't know why, without thinking, I pushed his hand aside saying in Czech, "Go away, you scoundrel." Afterwards, all I remember is hearing a shot and I fell to the floor."

Apparently the Indian was offended at her manner. The Indian's shot entered her upper leg causing a bad but not fatal wound, for the bullet went all the way through the leg not lodging.

The following afternoon we left for Niobrara. Traveling only about three miles, we were stopped in the woods by thirty (approximately) Indians of the Ponca tribe. One of them could speak some English. He asked who we were

and where we were going. We had been assured when we first arrived that the Ponca's were friendly but especially after our recent experience we were most uneasy. These Ponca's were heavily armed and their faces strongly painted. In our broken English and with gestures, we told them what had happened. After they conversed together their interpreter told us to go back to our claims where our homes were. They said that they the Ponca's were our friends and would watch over us to see that no bad Sioux would persecute us. Inasmuch as they pressed their offer so hard, we returned to the Schindler's, staying there nine days. We left on the 10<sup>th</sup> day for our homesteads to retrieve our few provisions and clothing.

As we were going with the team from Brabenec's dugout to Prasek's, we noticed an odor coming from the heavy brushwood. We thought it must be an odor from a dead body, and surely enough, we found what remained of poor Caroline Brabenec. The body was mostly decomposed and had been partly gnawed. Filled with horror, we gazed upon the mutilated body of the once pretty, pert girl. On examination we saw she had been shot in the breast with a well-aimed bullet. She must have staggered into the brushwood and fallen, never to rise again. We brought our sheets and wrapped her body, burying her about thirty feet north of Johnny's grave. And so, Czech blood, the blood of two little innocent children was laid on the altar of bloody sacrifice that gained for us our western country."

Translated from the article written in Czech for the **Bohemian Almanac Pionyr, 1919**

## **Czech Musicians in Saline County**

**By Frank Nedela Sr.**

In 1869 my father came to Nebraska with my brother-in-law, Thomas Aron, and settled in Saline County on claims. They wrote us telling us to come too. I married Miss Marie Papik and the day after the wedding, April 1, 1869, I started for Nebraska. Anyone can imagine our wedding trip when one considers

what Nebraska was like in those days. We had to go by wagon from Nebraska City and those who had no conveyance had to go on foot. Before my father came to Nebraska he sent me to this state to locate on a claim, and I did take one up in Johnson County and then returned to Chicago. When I arrived in Nebraska a second time I inquired if I could take up a claim again, having done so once before. I was told to go ahead that no one would know. I did so, but was sorry for it. I prepared a dugout where we spent our honeymoon. I plowed some and prepared for the next year, but before the year was up it became known that I was not entitled to a homestead and I was afraid I would lose it. I went to Lincoln where my sister worked in the family of Governor Butler and sought his advice. He sent me to an attorney, Mr. Robinson, then considered the best in Lincoln. In accordance with his advice I gave up the homestead and got a preemption and agreed to pay \$200 within a year. It was sad to have no money and agree to pay \$200 within a year and not know where to get it. I thought it over and decided to do the work I fairly hated—shoemaking—but there was no help. I worked one winter in Lincoln and earned a nice sum. There was no railroad then so I used to walk. Music is my passion. I had served in a military band in the old country during the war between Prussia and Austria so very soon I gathered a number of fellow musicians into a band. There were five of us, my father Jan Nedela, my brother-in-law Thomas Aron, Josef Chyba, Jan Svoboda and I. We used to play in the Capital city and our music was well liked. We got very good pay--\$8.00 per man , the one who owned the team got \$8.00 for his playing and \$8.00 for transporting us. Our band was the first that played in Lincoln for there was no other in this part of the country.

In the fall of 1870 Crete was established and I applied my trade there. In the spring of 1871 the railroad was built and I made good money with my cobbling. I had two workmen and we had all we could do. In those days we made boots and shoes to order. A pair of boots cost from \$11.00 to \$17.00 and there was good profit in it. Thus I worked for two-and-a-half years while my wife worked on the farm. I went home Saturday evening and stayed over Sunday. I lived on the farm two years and then opened a saloon in Crete. In the spring of

1875 I rented a place and a year-and-a-half later built my own building. In 1880 I sold it and built a larger one where I kept a saloon for fifteen years. Then I started something about which I had no knowledge whatever, a drug store. To this day I wonder how it happened that I made a success of it for I had to hire help to run the place. Later my son studied to be a druggist and then he took care of the store. I own three farms, a store in town and nice home. I am well situated in every way and my family life has been a happy one too.

## **A Pioneer Family**

**By Mrs. Albie Tesar Rasmussen**

Jakub, born in Tejkovice, Moravia and Marie Tesar, born in Rouchovany, arrived in New York Harbor with their four small children on June 11, 1870. They were weary after sailing for fifty-two days on a windjammer. As the new immigrants

The family traveled in a boxcar from Omaha to Nebraska City and rode in a covered wagon from Nebraska City to Saunders County. There Mr. Vanous, a relative of Tesar's, had located earlier near Prague, Nebraska.

The Tesar's had \$30.00 of their life savings to stake them when they arrived in Saunders County. After Jakub paid \$14.00 to file for his homestead and purchased an old stove, the family had \$8.00 with which to buy the immediate necessities to subsist as they wrestled a living from the raw prairie. Their relatives, the Vanous, were in no position to help the Tesar's financially.

Jakub Tesar selected a home site near Prague. The farm is now owned by the Kubiks. The Tesar family worked long hours as they fashioned a crude dugout shelter in the creek bank. The roof of the dugout was made of limbs and dry prairie grass covered with soil. The roof leaked when the hard rains came, but otherwise the home was warm and quite cozy.

Now that the family had shelter and warmth, Tesar's immediate problem was to provide food for them. He obtained some corn and rye from settlers who had come a few years earlier. They supplemented their meager diet with some

wild game such as rabbits, squirrels, prairie chickens and quail. Because the diet consisted mostly of corn it eventually caused the family to suffer poor health. When spring came their health improved for they ate the wild onions and other greens which grew on the prairie. Later they learned that the Indians and early settlers did not suffer from this condition because they ate the dried fruit of wild roses (rose hips).

After Jakub Tesar had provided his family with food to last a short time, he was forced to leave them to earn money for additional food for his family and for the tools needed to develop the virgin land. His first job was at a flour mill sixty miles from home. Later he worked on a ranch on the Elkhorn River for \$1.50 a day. He spent \$0.35 on himself in three months. With his wages he bought two small oxen and a heifer. It took him three days to ford the Elkhorn River and lead the cattle home where his family greeted him with open arms and joy.

After the young oxen matured Tesar broke them to draw. He borrowed an old breaking plow to break a small piece of sod which he sowed to wheat. In July the Tesar's harvested their first crop of wheat. Jakub used a scythe and his wife Marie used a sickle. That fall Tesar cut logs from the creek banks to build a house. Mr. Vanous helped. When the simple structure was completed the family rejoiced as if they were moving to a palace from their dugout.

The family raised a garden of vegetables, potatoes and peas on a half-acre of ground where they broke the sod by hand before the oxen were acquired. At the time the Tesar's came to Nebraska, the railroad was being pushed west from Omaha. In 1869 the Union Pacific made a bid for Texas cattle and Schuyler became a loading point. The railroad also brought destruction when trains ignited the tinder-dry prairie grass. The Tesar's lost everything they had except for the oxen, heifer and two dozen hens. These were brought into the house to keep them from perishing in the fire. Jakub bartered the hens for a dilapidated old wagon to which he hitched his oxen. He drove this rig to an area not scorched by fire and managed to borrow grain from more fortunate settlers to feed his family and to plant a new crop.

The family reaped good crops for a few years but another prairie fire devastated the area and destroyed much of what they owned. A plowed fire-guard saved them from a complete loss because their house and out-buildings did not burn. In other years hordes of grasshoppers destroyed much of their crops. The worst grasshopper plague occurred in 1874. Hailstorms and periods of drought sharply reduced the yield of crops that escaped fire and grasshoppers.

The children attended school whenever they could. Distance and a lack of shoes kept them at home in the cold winter months. The older children attended classes about three months out of the year. All of them learned to read and write and to calculate numbers well enough to take care of their affairs.

With the help of God, the family managed to survive hardship and to thrive. They were able to endure the privations of those hard years because they knew there was no turning back to the life in the Old World if this venture failed. There was no money for a journey back nor was there any relative who could help them. They gained strength from hope and a belief that together they could build a good life in this land of promised opportunity.

With exception of a small son who died from a sudden illness, and the elder daughter, Anna Theede, who married in Saunders County, the family moved to Tobias in Saline County in 1894. There, land was cheaper as the country was more recently developed. Marie and Jakub Tesar bought several farms for they had four sons: Josef who homesteaded in Alberta, Canada; Frank who remained near in Tobias; Jan who settled south of Friend; and Anton who moved to Cheyenne County. The younger daughter, Anna Kucera, remained in Saline County.

The pioneer couple lived to see their children prosper and enjoy an easier life. Jakub Tesar died in 1902 and his wife died five years later. They are buried in the old cemetery on a hill northwest of Milligan, Fillmore County.

When Marie Tesar died in 1907, the couple's son Frank dictated a partial biography of his parents to his young bride, the former Frantiska Cihal, who newly immigrated to America. She wrote the manuscript in Czech and sent it to **Hlasatel**, a Czech newspaper published in Chicago. In the biography Frank



Tesar noted that his parents were very thrifty in comparison to the generation coming of age around the turn of the century. The old newspaper clipping provided many of the facts mentioned in the present manuscript.

Translated into English by Frank Tesar

## **From Dugout to Frame House**

**By Josef Zajicek**

In 1870, as an eight year old boy, I emigrated with my parents and sisters from Racine County, Wisconsin to West Point, Nebraska. At the time of our coming there were no railroads traversing Cuming County and Fremont was the nearest railroad station. From there we traveled on in a stagecoach. As I have heard from my parents, most of Czech emigrants of the early fifties came because they wanted political and religious liberty, but those that came in later years to the middle west were attracted by the plentiful and cheap land.

As stated in this history, Frank Walla, who came from the same province in Bohemia as my father, explored the Elkhorn Valley in the early sixties. He settled in West Point in 1868 and correspondence between him and my father ensued, the result being our arrival in 1870. At the time of our coming there was no bridge across the Missouri River so we made our way by ferry. West Point was the only town northwest of Fremont and the homesteads were all taken but the country was sparsely settled. This was true because so much land had been taken by script and government grants by speculators. In some places there were distances of two and three miles between settlers.

While a part of the country belonged to the Omaha Indian Reservation, we had in those early years many Indians around us, sometimes as many as five hundred camping on the Elkhorn River for a year, right in town, yet none of the Czech pioneers were disturbed by them. As a boy I enjoyed their company for every night they used to camp here and the few town folks mingled with them. By the light of the moon, while their camp fires were burning, we listened to the

beating of their tom-toms and watched the young bucks dance to the tune of something like Hale-Luya.

In 1871 I experienced homestead life for my father purchased a homestead relinquishment of eighty acres and entered that land again as a homestead. Mother and a part of the family, among them I, made our home in a dugout on this claim. These dugouts preceded the sod houses. They were built about four feet in the ground by excavating that much and were common in our neighborhood. The roof rafters were laid, a few boards or poles placed over them and the whole covered with sod.

Czechs are natural lovers of music, song and dances and even as poor pioneers they sought to lighten their lot by social gatherings. As early as 1872 a dance hall was built in what was known as a summer garden on the banks of the Elkhorn River. It was surrounded by a natural grove of trees, wild fruits, grapes and berries. A band of musicians was organized, Vaclav Svoboda from near Schuyler being hired to do this, employment being given that he might stay. It is safe to say that two out of five Czechs can play some instrument and so in no time we had an orchestra of no mean ability.

In those days prairie fires were more feared than the Indians. In about 1875 I was in a company of people surrounded by a fire, but we made our way through a cornfield which checked the flames while we passed. A Czech, Matej Krajic, however, was not so fortunate. He perished in that fire and his wife looking on and unable to help lost her reason. The flames of those prairie fires made leaps and bounds sometimes twenty and thirty feet where the grass was tall. It was said that those fires could travel faster than a horse could run.

In 1880 dugout and sod houses were replaced with frame and some brick buildings. On the farms and in towns brick buildings superseded ramshackle frame structures. In 1873 Cuming County built a brick courthouse in West Point at a cost of \$40,000. It was the best in the state at the time with perhaps the exception of Omaha. At that time also a three-story brick hotel, the Neligh House, rivaled anything in the state.

(Picture of Indians and man p. 164)

Vaclav F. Kucera—Founder of Czech colony in Cheyenne County and Indians  
Jim and Lawrence Wausheeka

## **How Pioneers Really Lived**

**By Robert Houston**

Most Nebraskans have only a hazy notion about what the day-to-day life was like among the people who settled this state. Those who have dipped into histories have found that the authors liked to talk about political, economic and social forces and seldom did they get around to mentioning the “little things” that told how these pioneers actually spent their time. However, there is a history which mentions these “little things” and the unsung author is an Omahan, 77 year-old Rose Rosicky.

Miss Rosicky typed in Czech, and later in English, **A History of Czechs in Nebraska**. One of Nebraska’s foremost historians, Addison Sheldon, has labeled it the only adequate history ever written dealing with the settlement of a foreign group in this state. The 492-page volume, completed in 1925 after two years of hard labor during which Miss Rosicky boiled down thousands of pages of reading matter in the Czech language, does deal with only one foreign group. Yet it is, in a sense, a history of all the foreign groups which had such a major role in settling the Husker state. The book is well larded with first hand accounts by settlers about their daily life. In these days of automatic weapons and jet planes some of these remarks about daily happenings in Eastern Nebraska just 70 or 80 years ago sound rather startling.

The reason settlers came when they did is easy to explain. A settler in Nebraska in 1854 could take 160 acres and after living on it six months buy it from the United States for \$1.25 an acre. This was called pre-emption.

In 1863, under the new Free Homestead Act, families could settle 160 acres with only a \$14.00 filing fee and have it free by living on it for five years.

In 1873 the Timber Claim Act was passed, granting a settler 160 acres if he planted 10 acres to trees and took care of them for eight years. All three of these laws were in force from 1873 to 1891. Under them a settler could in a few years get 480 acres of land.

This was important for it would have taken years for most immigrants to have saved enough to pay \$6.00 an acre for lands which the United States Government had ceded to railroads along their rights of way. Other lands in Eastern Nebraska then were even higher, selling for around \$14.00 an acre.

Many of the Czech immigrants were skilled at a trade, but long hours worked in Eastern cities seldom brought them more than \$2.00 a day.

### **They Walked In**

The earliest settlers literally walked into the state, women as well as men. Mrs. Theresa Grewe and three other Czech young women, the first Czechs to settle in Cuming County, walked all the way from Wisconsin driving cattle before them.

Joseph Zajicek, who came to West Point in 1870 as a boy of (? Check copy), relates that building a dugout was the first order of business. The dugouts preceded the sod house and often were built about four feet into the side of a bank.

“For the roof, rafters were laid, a few boards or poles placed over them and the whole covered with sod.”

When some timber was available four posts were driven in one corner, young trees laid across and covered with grass—that was the bed. In the other corner stood a packing box—that was the table. Stumps and boxes served as chairs.

Roofs leaked in wet weather, snow drifted around them in winter and sooner or later snakes were likely to penetrate the sod walls and infest the living quarters.

Next order of business was to obtain a water supply. A few settlers, said Mr. Zajicek, dug wells by means of shovel power. This was dangerous for neophytes and some lost their lives in cave-ins. Most settlers hauled water at first from a neighbor and often for a long distance.

The prairie sod was so tough that, as a rule, it took three years before a family had enough broken for cultivation to produce enough food to feed everybody.

The result was that husbands walked to Omaha and some even went back to coal mines in Illinois during the cold weather months to earn money to keep the family going. Wives remained behind to battle the weather, snakes, obtain water, gather fuel, feed the livestock on hand and often nurse sick children without the aid of a doctor.

### **Even Money Didn't Help**

Anton Brazda who settled near West Point in 1887 related that "money was an almost unknown article and was almost of no value for no one could buy with it what was most needed in those days."

"While our parents were away, which was almost all of the time, Grandfather looked after us and gathered sunflowers, gum weeds and plum brushes for fuel, storing what he could gather for winter use."

Mr. Klojda says that in 1869 his father was informed that he was living on the wrong track. So he had to build a new dugout.

"After two years residence there, father started to earn his first cow for which he gave five months' hard labor on a farm some 12 miles from our home. Then he labored nine or twelve months longer to earn a pair of steers which were broken to yoke and made our first team. During his absence Mother continued working and carrying afoot 12 miles to town her poultry products, returning the same way with provisions for her family. On one such trip she was delayed so that it was sunset and she had eight miles to go with a luggage of groceries and 25 pounds of flour. She kept walking until exhausted when she was obliged to rest and await the dawn. Coyotes yelped all around her and she had nothing but

a sunflower stalk for defense. When morning came she found herself only half a mile from home.”

After rains the rivers and streams rose and crossings were a hardship. Mrs. Frank Jelinek, who settled in Saline County, tells the story of how her husband once bought a small pig.

“The price was service, not money. The owner would sell it in no other way. So one day my husband set out to pay his debt. He put a plow in the wagon and began to ford the stream. When he reached the middle the box was lifted off the wheels. These and the horses went shoreward and my husband in the box sailed down the current. He saved himself by jumping out and swimming for the shore. The plow, so valuable to him, was never recovered.”

### **Prescription for Groceries**

Few settlers were in a position to avail themselves of medical care. Mrs. Jacob Simon, pioneer near Crete, lay ill for 13 weeks without professional medical attention. There was no physician for many miles and home remedies had to suffice.

At the wedding of Anna Hynek to John Zvonicek, Jr. later a well known miller at Wilber, the entire company including the bride and groom were infected with smallpox by a new immigrant who was not aware she had the disease.

When doctors were available they did not always prescribe drugs. Mrs. Rosalie Soukup, settler in Saunders County, told Historian Rosicky that around 1880 “I had been farming with my husband and felt weak and worn. My husband took me to Fremont to see a Dr. Brunner for whom I had once worked. He examined me and wrote a long prescription and told me to take it to the store. How surprised and delighted I was to find that the ‘prescription’ was an order for beans, onions, apples, rice, cheese and other provisions which the generous and kindly doctor, noting my undernourished condition, prescribed and paid for.”

Schools were scarce until settlers had enough income to support them by payment of taxes. Another deterrent to education, besides the distance to schools, was the need for “boy power” in the fields.

### **Shortages of Food**

It would have been difficult to compute the number of man-days per year that the early farmers spent in walking. It was a common thing for a man to go 20 or 30 miles to the nearest town with hogs or grain, find the price less than he would take and return home with the load.

“In summer we all went barefoot. In winter men and boys wore boots with rags wrapped around their feet in place of socks. The women and girls managed to knit stockings for themselves and later made them for the male folk.

“When the men were out driving on cold days, or afoot too, they wrapped gunny sacks over their boots to keep from freezing. For light at night we used old-fashioned tapers soaked in a plate of grease or an oil lamp if we happened to have oil. However, we seldom had light for illuminating purposes. It was early to bed and early to rise.

“Finally, those who had put in three or four years on claims began to get some income so that a dollar or two could be spared for social purposes. Granaries and barns began to appear and these, whether the owner wished it or not, had to be dedicated with a dance.”

### **The Rich Became Poor**

The first Czech band in Nebraska was led by John Nedela of Crete and his son, Frank Nedela. It played for the last inauguration of Gov. Frank Butler, the state’s first governor.

Another early band was led by Thomas Pasek of Wilber. At first these men walked to their destination, each carrying his instrument. They played from

evening until dawn for \$3.00 each and in the morning returned home the way they came.

One settler pointed out an interesting phenomenon about Nebraska settlers of all nationalities:

“They were all poor with few exceptions. Those who had a little more helped the poorer ones so that in the end they were no better off than the poorest of the poor.”

So far as is known, the first Czech to enter Nebraska was Joseph Francl. He came in 1854 but was on his way to the California gold fields. The first immigrant from Bohemia to become a permanent Nebraska resident was Edward Rosewater. He arrived in Omaha in 1863 and until his death in 1906 was a prominent editor and a force in state politics.

The history relates that the influx of Czechs came between 1865 and 1880. At the end of this period, fully three-fourths of the immigrants from that country who settled in the Husker state had arrived. At the time the history was published in the 1920's the number of Nebraskans with Czech blood numbered around 70,000.

Newspapers printed in Czech which were sent to Czech settlements east of Nebraska and to the “old country” helped to bring more settlers.

One of the most important editors was John Rosicky, father of the Czech historian. He published and edited a weekly in Omaha, **Pokrok zapadu**, from 1877 to 1900.

In 1891 he established a biweekly farm magazine in Czech, the **Hospodar**, and this still is a thriving publication. Since farming practices on the prairies differed from that on the small farms in Bohemia, such magazines tutored settlers in how to make their living.

Mr. Rosicky who gave counsel and help to many immigrants died in 1910. A monument to him stands on a knoll near the entrance to the Bohemian National Cemetery in Omaha.



## Done in Czech and English

His daughter Rose, the only one of four children who knew Czech thoroughly, edited the farm magazine after his death until her retirement seven years ago. For many years it was the largest Czech farm paper in the world.

Around 1923 Miss Rosicky decided that unless something was done quickly, first-hand information about the life of Czech settlers in Nebraska would be lost forever. She supplemented this by contacting numerous friends who were among the early settlers, and by working nights and weekends, assembled the history in a surprisingly short time. The book lists thousands of names and invariably gives their birthplaces, birth dates and dates of death. It even lists those of Czech parentage who served in World War I and the units to which they were attached.

A printing of 1,500 copies in the foreign language version was sold out. A printing of two thousand copies in English, done under the auspices of the Czech Historical Society of Nebraska, did not sell out but copies were distributed to many libraries throughout the country.

Omaha World Herald, March 29, 1953

(Picture of Wencil and Anna Jelinek p. 168)

Settled in Saline County—1865

**Matej (Mike) and Anna (Kodes) Vrana.** (Bohemia Precinct—Saunders County, Nebraska). Can we, even in imagination, place ourselves in the position of two Czech immigrants coming to a bare prairie where, as far as the eyes can see, lies a huge vastness void of all humanity. This was the situation of my parents the newly wed Matej and Anna Vrana. He must build a shelter. Of what? With what? A five foot deep dug-out on the southern slope of a hill, covered with brush and sod must suffice. Furniture? There wasn't any. Only a small iron stove for cooking and heating during the winter. A wooden box served as a table, tree stumps were used as chairs. The bed was a pile of prairie grass

covered with U. S. Army blankets, recently released for sale by the Government following the end of the Civil War. This was their humble and lowly pioneer beginning in a strange new land. The year was 1869.

The first few years were a period that tried man's souls. All odds seemed to be against them with drought, grasshoppers and prairie fires contributing to an already austere life. Food was of the lowest variety. Parched corn or barley served as coffee. Corn bread and corn mush was a daily menu, however, wild game was plentiful. During the winter, howling blizzards would completely cover their dug-out with huge drifts of snow and they had to shovel their way out. It became necessary at times to even ration their meager supply of food.

Most traveling was on foot, straight across the prairie in the direction of your destination. Miles meant nothing. The nearest mill was at Ashland. There were no roads or bridges. Oxen were used so that a trip to and from Ashland, 100 miles away, lasted a week.

During this time mother stayed at home tending the homestead. The nearest town was Fremont some 30 miles away, but it was on the other side of the Platte River and there was no bridge. Later a ferry was established at Fremont and all products were taken there and all provisions and supplies hauled from there by oxen. During the first years products were scanty. Small areas of ground had been broken and planted by hand. A trip to Fremont with products lasted a day and a night, longer in bad weather. Father made several trips to Fremont walking all the way and carrying a bundle of furs to be exchanged for the barest of necessities such as salt, matches, thread, etc.

The years of the great grasshopper infestation meant a total loss for that year. They flew so thick that they blotted out the sun. Clouds of them would descend and eat everything in sight. When they arose and flew away there was only devastation left behind. One day mother washed and hung out a work jacket to dry. Before they could come home from the field the grasshoppers had done away with it leaving only the metal buttons on the ground.

The oxen was the beast of burden. Father had staked his two oxen out one evening, using long ropes so they could graze during the night. In the

morning he could see only one. Upon further investigation he discovered that one of the oxen had fallen over a creek bank, still tied to the rope in such a way that it drowned in very shallow water. In order to replace his lost oxen he walked to Omaha to seek work and stayed several months. All this time mother again stayed home, all alone, on the prairie.

Several years later a ferry was in operation on the Platte River at North Bend. This meant a closer market. They would hand shell a wagon load of corn. While father took it to town, mother would hand shell another load all by herself before father came back. Corn sold at eight cents a bushel. Sometimes it could not be sold at all and was brought back home again in a wagon drawn by oxen.

Altogether it was a hard and trying life, but their beckoning star that carried them through in the face of adversity was that someday...someday, they would own 80 acres of land they could call their own. As time passed, each year was a little brighter with more and more settlers moving in. They now had neighbors. Friendships grew and an extended helping hand was offered to one another. There was genuine sincerity, integrity and honesty between these people of the prairie. A man's word was his gilded bond.

With the advent of the railroads, small towns mushroomed on the prairie, markets became closer. Roads and bridges were built. New farmsteads were being erected. As children grew up new school districts were established. Nebraska was now on its way!

To my parents and to every rugged Nebraska pioneer goes my and my descendant's undying gratitude for having laid so firm a foundation for so great a State.

**Master Tailor. Vaclav Tauchen** was born 1860 in Smrkovice, Bohemia. He left his home at an early age to learn tailoring in Prague, alterer in Vienna and Berlin. He worked also in Gratz, Gorlitz and Hamburg. To learn more about fabrics he went to England in 1876 visiting Hull, Edinburg, Glasgow, Dublin, Liverpool and London.

In 1877, when the Zulu-African War broke out, he joined the English Army and fought in Africa. In 1879 he visited Prague, Vienna, Bavaria, Switzerland, Milan and Janov in Italy, and went on to Monte Carlo, Monaco, Lyon and Paris.

Tauchen stayed in Paris to learn more about fashions and worked in a well known tailoring establishment in the heart of Paris. Here he met Victor Hugo and was commissioned to tailor a coat for Master Hugo who was buried in this coat six weeks later. By this time he had become a Master Tailor. He left Paris for South America where he worked as tailor's cutter in Buenos Aires and Montevideo and managed a tailoring business in Uruguay. When a dangerous epidemic threatened this part of South America, he left in a hurry on a sailboat passing through Natal, St. Helene Island, Brazil and Trinidad. In 1889 he arrived in Philadelphia. He visited Baltimore, Washington, Asheville, North Carolina and Chicago, where for one year, he operated a tailoring shop.

From Chicago he moved to West Point, Nebraska, later to Galveston, Texas; Hot Springs, Arkansas; Memphis, Tennessee and St. Louis, Missouri, and finally to Lincoln, Nebraska. Here in 1898 he married Rosa Bouska of Czech descent. In the same year the young couple moved to Omaha where they settled and lived for 50 years.

During his most interesting life Vaclav Tauchen was a member of WBFA Lodge, Sokol Omaha and for many years a board member of Bohemian National Cemetery in Omaha. Speaking seven languages he was active in several foreign clubs in the city.

He had three daughters, two of them and his wife preceded him in death. The only living daughter is Mrs. Angeline Thompson, now retired High School teacher, one of the most active Czechs in Nebraska. Mr. Vaclav Tauchen died in April 1944.

**Peony Park.** **Josef Malec, Sr.** came to Omaha from Detroit with intentions of becoming a florist. He and his two brothers bought ten acres of meadow-land on Lincoln Highway, also known as Dodge Road in 1916. His natural love of music helped change his mind. He installed a ballroom and called

it Peony Park as it was just across the street from Peony Gardens which was famous across the country for their beautiful peonies.

Malec, the flower and music man, built one of the nation's best known entertainment centers. Dancing was at that time a very important part in people's recreation. In 1945 the pavilion was expanded to accommodate 3,500 dancers. Throughout the following years with much remodeling, the ballroom presently accommodates 2,000 for dancing and the Royal Grove holds 5,000.

Malec traveled to Chicago twice yearly engaging such bands and talents as Lawrence Welk, Glenn Miller, the Dorseys and other giants of the entertainment world.

The meadow surrounding the pavilion was beautiful. Malec had turned it into a lovely outdoor garden early, planting many beautiful trees, shrubs and flowers and a three acre natural water lake used for ice skating. In the early thirties it was later transformed into a swimming pool with a sand beach.

Because of Malec's wide travels he saw the need for Omaha to have motels. So in 1933 he started the Tower Tourist Village. Originally there were 36 motel units and presently it has 340 rooms and is called New Tower Hotel Courts.

Through the years the team of brothers broke up but Malec continued expanding with the help of his wife Mamie and his two sons.

Despite floods from the Papio, the Dance Pavilion burning and Dutch Elm Disease wiping out many trees, Malec matched his magic with hard work. Being helped through the years by his sons, today Peony Park has expanded to 40 acres of Fantasy Land.

Amusement and thrill rides added by his sons now total 19. Malec is retired and has turned the business over to his sons, but he is very much involved with the park. He is a man who is happy that he brought so much happiness and satisfaction into the life of so many.

**Josef Jicha, Sr. Family.** Josef Jicha was born in Czechoslovakia, kraj Plzen. He came to Omaha, Nebraska in 1885. He was married to Mary Kohout of Schuyler. In 1890 he moved to Milligan, Nebraska, where he established his

own business. He was a prominent business man and very civic- minded. He was a charter member of the ZCJB Lodge Rabi No. 27 for over 50 years. He attended many state and national conventions as a delegate and also was a member of the Knights of Pythias Lodge. He was a member of the Board of Education, Village Board and Bohemian National Cemetery for many years.

Mr. and Mrs. Jicha were parents of one son, Josef Jr. and four daughters: Mrs. Joseph (Mayme) Varejcka, Mrs. H. C. (Anna) Gregory, Mrs. F. S. (Libbie) Smrz and Mrs. Helen Wilbur.

**Irma Freeouf Ourecka.** This is a story of her ancestors when they left Bohemia to emigrate to this land of freedom. They endured hardships and sacrifices. They brought with them Czech customs, music and their native tongue. They were honest and hard-working people.

Irma Ourecka is the wife of Lumir Ourecky whose father came from Czechoslovakia. Mrs. Ourecka's great grandparents were Mr. and Mrs. Jan Freeouf. They came to America in 1870. Josef, the grandfather of Irma, came to America when he was 17 years old. The grandmother was Anna Zeman, born in Bohemia, too. Albina, the mother of Irma, was born in a sod house in 1890. They lived on a farm near Dorchester for 50 years. Four daughters were born to this union; Irma (Ourecka), Olga (Hoffman), Gertrude (Aksamit), Mildred (Brodt) and one son Rudolf.

Mrs. Ourecka has won many awards for her active work. She was the first recipient of the "Ladies of Libuse" honorary society, an award given for community service. The same year she received the "Rotary Reverend Cortis Award." She has been named in "Who's Who of American Women." Mrs. Ourecka and her husband Lumir have traveled to many communities in Nebraska and other states to represent Wilber and Nebraska at the Czech Festivals and Polka Days.

Mrs. Ourecka helped organize and participated in a tour to Czechoslovakia in 1973. She has presented travelogue "Czechoslovakia" at many functions. She helped organize the Nebraska Czech Club at Hastings on March 14, 1976. She spoke there to 50 representatives of 7 communities. Now

as Nebraskaland State Chairman of Czechs, she will help with "All Ethnic Bicentennial Festival" to be held in Hastings.

(Picture on p. 172)

The exhibit dedicated to the Czech immigrants. Museum of Historical Society, Lincoln, Nebraska.—In center: Czech costume. On right side; Bagpipe (dudy), donated by Bartolomej Brt, who came to Crete, Saline County 1874.

**Bernard J. Klasek** was born on a farm near Wilber, Nebraska. His parents were born in Bohemia. Bernard Klasek is a graduate of Wilber High School. He received the Bachelor of Arts and Science degree from Doane College and his Master of Arts and Science degree from the University of Nebraska in 1939. He married Sylvia F. Smrz. Bernard Klasek was high school principal at Callaway, Nebraska 1927-1929. He served as County Clerk of Saline County 1931-1934. He studied law and was admitted to practice law in 1932. He served as Superintendent of Schools at Wilber from 1937-1963. He began serving as Saline County Superintendent of Schools in 1963 which position he now holds.

He is past president of the Nebraska State Speech Association, Nebraska Society for Crippled Children and Adults, Inc., Saline County Education Association, Wilber Rotary Club, past district I, executive committeeman of Nebraska State Education Association, member of National Education Association, Nebraska Bar Association, Wilber Chamber of Commerce, Nebraska School Masters Club, Phi Kappa Delta, Phi Delta Kappa, First Lutheran Church of Wilber, Nebraska Czechs of Wilber, local and past district chairman Boy Scouts of America. He is currently serving as president of the Board of Educational Service Unit No. 6, State of Nebraska.

Mrs. Sylvia F. (Smrz) Klasek graduated from Crete High School and attended Doane College, specializing in music. She has been pianist for the Wilber Rotary Club and she plays for the Czech singing and dancing schools held in Wilber. She is a member of the First Lutheran Church and served as choir director for 11 years.

## **Patricia Exon – First Lady of Nebraska**

The Czechs of this great state of Nebraska may be very proud that the wife of our popular Governor, J. J. Exon, is of Czech nationality. We can be sure of the fact that she is very proud of her origin also.

Pat's ethnic heritage shows through clearly publicly, not only in her interviews, but also in her frequent visiting of Czech festivals and Sokol exhibitions.

Her desire to perfect her family's native tongue was so strong that she attended the evening Czech classes at the University of Nebraska taught by Dr Vladimir Kucera.

It was January 7, 1971, during the Inauguration ball of her newly-elected husband, Governor J. J. Exon, when Patricia proved her love for her Czech origin and heritage by requesting that the dancing group of Czech children from Dwight perform Czech folk dances during this celebration.

Patricia Exon, proud of her heritage from a young age and an active member of the Omaha Sokol organization, was born in Omaha of Czechoslovakian parents. Her mother, Anna Elias Pros, still living in Omaha and speaking her native language perfectly, says: "Our roots are here and I love Omaha."

In addition to Pat's natural interest in people our First Lady adapts easily and is very artistically inclined. She plays the flute, piano and organ. She has composed musical scores and lyrics as well as having participated in the Omaha Symphony Orchestra in the past. She loves to cook and entertain, says her mother.

The library at the Mansion is well stocked with the books of the great American novelist Willa Cather, her favorite author, especially "My Antonia," a story of a pioneer Czech girl.



Second only to her enthusiasm for music, bowling and writing comes the art of cooking, deeply influenced by the Czech old kitchen and recipes, mostly roast pork, dumplings, sauerkraut and kolace.

We Czechs of Nebraska are very fond of our First Lady. We have deep respect for Pat Exon who remains today proud of her Czech background and heritage.

Pat has been an active campaigner for her husband and a strong supporter. Although not a self-recognized women's libber, Mrs. Exon feels that the Equal Rights Amendment should be written into the U. S. Constitution.

The Exons have three children, Steven, Pamela and their youngest Candy who remains the "apple of her grandmother's eye."

By Vladimir Kucera

(Picture of Dancers p. 173)

## **REVIVING OF CZECH SPIRIT**

### **Let Us Revive the Spirit of the Pioneers**

**By Vladimir Kucera**

*We must revert the Czechs of Nebraska to the great heritage of those who, while furthering the progress of this great free land, still remained loyal to their Czech origin, their Czech blood. We recall minding this sacred heritage of those who with an iron will and ardent heart helped to build a spiritual, cultural and economic prosperity in Nebraska and thereby in all of America.*

*We are awakening these natural sentiments of the Czech people, arousing in the souls of men, women and especially the youth, the acknowledgment and close relationship of our Czech brothers and sisters in the heart of Europe—our own beautiful country far across the sea. We are doing this so our youth may be proud of it and show their love for the language, history and the priceless Czech culture of their mothers and fathers. This love of things Czech and our mother tongue extends from the generations already passed on, through the now living, on to the new generations yet unborn.*

*It is a tremendous task—a loyal duty—in this so-called eleventh hour, because the mother tongue is slowly but surely losing its foothold not only among the Czechs in all Nebraska but in all America as well. But our efforts, our work for the perpetuation of this heritage are prospering.*

*However, it is necessary to ask for help. Everyone must cooperate in this historic effort. Everybody in this free land of American who are off-spring of the Czech pioneers, we need you and your ideals! It is a struggle for the survival of Czech consciousness and speech. It is also a battle for spiritual freedom—for victory of the spiritual over material.*

*May I take the liberty to say that Nebraska leads the entire American populace of Czech descent in this great effort! (Reminiscing, I recall that in the past six years more than a thousand students, young, old, even children, from*

*Omaha, Milligan, Dwight, Schuyler, Clarkson, Wilber, Abie, North Bend and Table Rock, completed my Czech course, including many students who enrolled for semester hours in any of the three courses in the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.) This means a new apostolate of more than a thousand to carry out this revival work in Nebraska.*

*In closing, I must not forget the great part that the Czech songs played in this revival—songs of our forefathers that brought such a wealth of heritage to their new home here in Nebraska. We can understand what these songs meant to them—the comfort, the ecstasy and solace that we found in them, that we also find, we who were forced so unwillingly to leave our beloved homeland.*

*The hero, Jakobin, in one of Dvorak's Operas, must leave his Czech home and wanders through the world as an exile. In this opera we hear the broken-hearted Jakobin accompanied by the music of the famous Maestro, Antonin Dvorak:*

*In a strange land we wandered,  
Ah, many long, long years,  
Tears of sorrow in our eye,  
Our hearts warmed with hope.....  
For only in song---Yes, only in song  
We found our solace!*

*(Picture on p. 174)*

Czech Spectacular in Dwight—1965. In middle: A. Novacek with Dr. Kucera.

## **Nebraska My New Home**

In truth there is in all actuality many factors that determined the path I took to my new home. I believe Faith guided my choice and then watched over my journey into this wondrous American Country, and on into the state of Nebraska.

To this day it is difficult to know precisely why I find my second home in Nebraska so dear to me and why I have preferred it to all the other states I have visited. Lands more beautiful and more prosperous failed to attract my soul: that deepest motivation.

My home, The heart of the Great Plains.....Nebraska.....spreading from the foothills of the snowy peaks of the Rocky Mountains to the great Missouri, the thirty-seventh star in the flag of the free and democratic United States.

In Nebraska I can feel the divinity of man standing as a giant over the beautiful land that has erupted from the raging storms and the peaceful quietness. A divinity that has been willed with the love of God, the anger of the elements and by man's joys, tears, blood and his gains.

Enormous cities in the East as well as in the West have attracted me with their metropolis glowing with bright lights. I have visited the quiet country of Michigan and have observed the azure Canadian lakes hemmed with trees and shrubs of endless variety. I have been thrilled and astonished by the beautiful scenery abundant in the Colorado Mountains. The rugged life of the cowboys on the ranches of Wyoming broken by the sentimental evenings on the prairies have captivated me, that land painted by the setting sun blending with the guitar music echoing with the howling coyotes. When the first stars timidly proclaim the coming of night, the heart rejoices with happiness.

I crossed the majestic deserts of Utah and Nevada which by their profoundness demands the respect of every mortal stepping on their sands. I have climbed the Rocky Mountains with their enormous rises covered with eternal snow and then following their stretching to the sunny land of California. A land of Mecca bounded by the vast waters of the Pacific Ocean, California holds

a fascination for all with the hundreds-of-year old missions, the fertile orchards of oranges, peaches and the productive vineyards. California, a land of the brightest of flowers, the greenest of greens, adds to the dramatic epoch of the gold miners.

In spite of all these interesting places I have visited, my heart always directs my return to Nebraska, my new home. I come home and it isn't only the beauty of the Nebraska prairies that impresses me with her virgin gaudiness. There are more astute reasons that have caused me to fall in love forever with Nebraska. Here I can stand in remembrance! Perhaps because I have studied her past and colorful history, I can stand and the voices of the earliest pioneers fill my ears. When I see the enticing view of the prairies covered with rich grass and colorful cactus, then turn in a half-step to the alluring panorama mirrored in the waves of the rivers, I can understand and glorify in the grandeur God has created for man. As I stand, where your echo returns magnified, and my eyes behold the tears and misfortunes, the triumphs and the gladness that have crossed Nebraska's span of history, I pay homage in humility to the sight and sound of her dramatic growth.

The heritage of this land is the love of freedom for a single human soul; a steadfast belief in hard honest labor, battles and heroism where bravery and determination walk side by side with suffering, tears and even blood. This inheritance is of silent yet open revolt toward greed, injustice, evil and the suppression of human rights. The pioneer's sacred belief in liberty and progressive civilization marked them as the builders of the great American West. This heritage is yours and it is mine!

Because the Czech pioneers chose this land to be their home certainly has influenced my love for Nebraska. So many thousands of them worked hard with their calloused yet artful hands to break these prairie plains and to turn the sod into fertile land. Today we are blessed to be left with large fields of golden grain, orchards bearing many species of fruit and green pastures dotted with bodies of water which are refreshing to man and animal alike. These pioneers drew back the curtains surrounding the new land, the unknown. With those

curtains drawn back were able to see with clarity their naked hearts and spirits that spurred their actions on to accomplishments. This is our heritage!

And yet, are we able to really measure the pioneer's deeds? Are we able to fully comprehend their steel determination and unbelievable patience especially in times of bitter disappointments? Can we relive those days in primitive sod houses which were hardly sheltered from the relentless hot summers and the grim, merciless winter blizzards?

We can relive those days only in reverie. Now we see the modern homes standing in the sod house's place in quiet repose surrounded by flowers and the shady linden trees. The memory of those Czech immigrant pioneers flood over me with the fragrance of the linden tree in spring and once more, sometimes with tears. I see again my own Czech birth place, our Czech and Moravian villages so dear to me.

And so, I stand in remembrance, proudly to the memory of those Czech pioneer settlers who like myself, found and cherished their new home in Nebraska.

There is a sadness that engulfs one when he thinks of the tears of loneliness and despair that the Czech women shed after coming to American with their husbands to seek a better livelihood. Few people would have the capacity to vision the pangs of sorrow in their hearts when these good people experienced the many trials and disappointments on the western frontier.

To escape tyranny and their desire to breathe the free air of a great Republic, thousands upon thousands of Czech immigrants gave up their homeland to come to Nebraska. Many also came to seek a more prosperous way of life. These predecessors came and with their steadfast hope strengthening the soul and lifting the heart they contributed to the cultural and agricultural wealth of the state.

The majority of these people were poor farmers and craftsmen, but they were rich in their faith and courage. They firmly believed that a free country would bring them a free and better way of life for themselves and for their children. They yearned for the freedom of thought as well as speech and for a

higher standard of living. With precious few material possessions and without any knowledge of the English language or the American way of life they gave up their homeland hoping to find peace, success and happiness. They spent their last dollars for oxen and a cart. Many were too poor to purchase these and so they set forth on foot until they came to the banks of the Missouri or else continued on to the prairies of this state which was to be their new homeland. These pioneers suffered mental anguish and physical abuse as they made their own way.

They made abundant use of the cement of Faith to mend the oft times shattered fragments of expectations. Their tolerance was their candle of light into the unknown. Throughout their misery they stood straight with the flame of love for the new American freedom and life. And yet, as all the world knows, they still remained loyal to their mother soil in spirit and they bore in mind constantly: "What the heart joins, the ocean cannot disunite."

I do think I should add here that one so often hears that the Czechs are "clannish" and that they have stubbornly maintained their old-world ideas and actions. Some even say they refuse to mingle with other people of different nationalities. Of course, all Czechs are "clannish." We are all common descendants and it would be terribly deprecating to make the mistake of not giving a rightful place to the love of one's traditions and folklore.

I think it would be wise for anyone holding these beliefs to remember the Czechs are not self-centered but that they entertain a deep love for home, family and friend. It would take a lesser person than they to forsake their native homeland.

These predecessors broke the virgin sod. Husband and wife joined together to sow and later to reap their meager livelihood. Their immeasurable sacrifices are buried alongside with their tears in the fields of Nebraska. In all this toil they never forgot their mother-tongue and they tried to preserve it by teaching their off-spring to talk, read, write and sing in it. They had a burning desire to preserve the Czech language and folklore. In their gatherings they still

danced the polka and kept alive the music of their ancestors which they loved so passionately.

This first generation of old, courageous and self-denying pioneers have now died and their ideas and rich Czech heritage has slowly become a memory as the new American born generations are growing into adulthood. The spirit of the pioneer life is slowly dying out as the technical and mechanical advances speed up and industrialism takes a firm foothold in America. The change from the wooden plow and sod house to automobiles, appliances, television, jets and rockets has been experienced. The second and third generation of Czechs along with their American neighbors were fast becoming acclimated to a material and technical world. The cultural and spiritual style of living were not stressed. The Czech loyalty and pioneer ways of life were slowly disappearing and the mother-tongue was becoming a language of the past. The American public has become a slave to the materialistic world and the almighty dollar seems to rule.

Now we are awakening to a critical period of life. We, in America and the world, realize that we must save our freedom and continually strive for a democratic way of life and for peace. As defenders of freedom, it is our moral obligation to keep alive the historic watchword: **REVIVE THE SPIRIT OF THE PIONEERS!**

It was that Christian man, that man who was a profile of courage, who until the last moments of his brief life confessed his firm belief in the basic principles of freedom, equality and the fraternity of all and for all, John F. Kennedy, that urges us to return to the pioneer spirit. He asked the nation, all people, especially the youth of the country: "Return to the spirit of the pioneers in these days of peril!"

This great American referred to the pioneer's spirit as a HOPE. One wonders if he was not also stressing the need and desire to remember the fighting pioneers as a salvation for these days that are filled with world unrest and strife. He implied that in returning to the pioneer spirit the American people would find the strength and willpower to remember with pride the beginning of



this country. Then, we in doing the necessary, preserve those freedoms that all pioneers sought and then fought to preserve.

This is why we Czechs go back to the rich heritage of our forefathers, the poor immigrants, reviving their deep love of freedom for all men, to revise the appreciation for the history of the Czech nation, its language, folklore and the beautiful Czech songs and dances.

I dedicate this book as a token of gratitude to all the pioneers, to all my people and to Nebraska, my new home.

## **Postscript**

**By Alfred Novacek**

After much thought and consideration by my counterpart Dr Vladimir Kucera and myself, we decided to publish a condensed issue of our original book "Czechs and Nebraska" which came out in the Centennial year 1967 of our great state of Nebraska. At that time we were very much concerned after going to so much expense and time that we would be rewarded by selling our supply. In approximately one year the supply was practically exhausted. That is why we thought it fitting for our Bi-Centennial of our country that we publish another issue only in a condensed manner as we have had countless requests and orders for our original book.

I am sure that after reading the introduction in our book by Dr. George Svejda everyone will realize that our Czech forefathers and ancestors played a great part in settling this great country and state of ours.

We are bringing out in this publication only a very small fraction of what our pioneers endured in their hard work of toil, their courage, bravery in plowing, farming, breaking of the prairie on this strange land and frontier. I am sure that there are countless instances that many of us know by our forefathers relating stories how they braved the weather, economy, not knowing the English language and all the factors that went into the settling of this new land.

We know one thing for sure. The new settlers, the Czechs, were very loyal citizens of their new land "America" but they also remained proud of their Czech origin, language, customs, music and culture. One thing we also know the Czechs were and are freedom loving people as was in the case in our pioneer settlers whether they were Czech or non-Czech.

As we know our Czech forefathers were not only poor, but they built a home with their bare hands, provided for worship, education and entertainment by building churches, schools and halls where they prayed and transmitted the riches of their inherited culture to his progeny here in the new home.

Our original book and this condensed issue is by no means a complete history of our Czech forefathers. It only scratches the surface. We are very grateful to Ruzena Rosicky who in the year 1928 published the book "History of the Czechs in Nebraska" in both languages as we gathered much information from the publication of this book.....

We have to thank many of our friends in Nebraska and from out of state for contributing articles and especially the Nebraska State Historical Society where we found much of our material. It was a great task taking over two years, gathering, gleaning and sorting out information and articles for our original book. Dr. Kucera and myself feel that it was well worth the effort put forth as we hope it will help many people in the future whether they be in elementary, secondary, college or just plain people interested in the Czech heritage of this state.

Once again from the bottom of our hearts we want to thank anyone who in any way contributed or cooperated in any small way with the publication of this book.

---Alfred Novacek

(Picture p. 179....."The Great Melting Pot")

(Picture of Czech Club p. 180)

Czech Club—Creighton University 1926-1927. Bottom row from right: Prof. Charvat; third: Rev. Cepuran; Second row, third from right: Mrs. Angeline Thompson; third row, second from right: Senator Roman Hruska.

(Picture of Sokol Beseda Dancers, Saline Co. p. 180)

Sokol Beseda Dancers, Saline Co. – 1930. From left: Irma Shimerda Jelinek; Olga Freeouf Hoffman; Melva Shimerda Sukovaty; Irene Freeouf Vosika; Rose Nerud Papik; Freda Koci Broz; Irma Freeouf Ourecka; Bertha Rezabek Nadherny

(Copy of Passport p. 181)

Reisepass (Passport)—issued to Wencil Jelinek, 1854 in Budweis (Budejovice), Bohemia for his trip to America. He was one of the first Czech settlers in Saline County.

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## **Post Office and Railroad Stations with Czech Names**

**Bruno, Butler Co.**, named for a capital city of Moravia (Brno), inasmuch as many settlers came from Moravia. The railroad company later changed the name to Bruno as more pronounceable.

**Butka, Rock Co.**, established by Frank Butka who later moved to Boyd Co.

**Cloudy, Cuming Co.**, named for Frank Klojda, a prominent pioneer. Americans called him Cloudy.

**Jelen, Knox Co.**, named for Anton Jelen, pioneer.

**Kowanda, Garden Co.**, established by a German of that name which is of Czech origin.

**Nimburg, Butler Co.**, name for Nymburk, a town in Bohemia. Established in 1887 on farms of V. Marusak and Jan Pavel.

**Pishelville, Knox Co.**, named for Anton Pishel (Pisel).

**Plasi, Saunders Co.**,

**Prague, Saunders Co.**, named for the capital city of Czechoslovakia

**Praha, Colfax Co.**, established by Jan Sobota

**Sedlov, Valley Co.**, established by Jan Beran. Named for a city in Bohemia

**Shebesta, Rock Co.**, named for a Czech homesteader, Karel Sebesta

**Shestak, Saline Co.**, named for Vaclav Shestak(Sestak), a pioneer

**Trocnoc, Buffalo Co.**, named for birthplace of the famous Hussite warrior Jan Zizka when Lodge Zizkuv palcat 125 C.S.P.S. was established. In a year or two changed to Nastasket.

**Netolica, Valley Co., Loucky, Clay Co., Tabor, Colfax Co., and Tasov, Hayes Co.**, were rural churches, not stations. Many of these Czech names were discontinued when rural mail delivery was instituted.

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