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# THE CZECHS OF BUTLER COUNTY, 1870-1940

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THE CZECHS OF BUTLER COUNTY, 1870-1940

by

Clarence John Kubicek

A THESIS

Presented to the Faculty of

The Graduate College in the University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements

For the Degree of Master of Arts

Department of History

Under the Supervision of J. L. Sellers

Lincoln, Nebraska

July, 1958

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# MAP OF BUTLER COUNTY NEBRASKA

by George L. Brown  
1876



W.C. Johnson, Compiler and Distributor

W. & J. S. Geographical Establishment, PHILADELPHIA

## THE CZECHS OF BUTLER COUNTY

1870-1940

### INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

The Czechs and their descendents make up one of the large groups that settled and developed the State of Nebraska. While every county of Nebraska may have a few Czechs within its confines, the largest numbers are found in Douglas, Saline, Colfax, Saunders, and Butler Counties.<sup>1</sup>

It is the purpose of this thesis to deal with the Czechs of Butler County. A racial group, Slavic in origination and since the first World War, properly called the "Czechs." The term "Czech" is to be applied, not only to those whose ancestry goes back to Bohemia, but also to those who originally came to Nebraska from Moravia. Separation of the two, though they have some racial differences, would be impossible.

The Czechs are principally an agricultural people. It may be said that the Czech farmers are the mainstay of the Czechs in Nebraska.<sup>2</sup> One definite trait that was

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<sup>1</sup>Sarka B. Hrbkova, "Bohemians of Nebraska," Nebraska Historical Society Publications, XIX, 143.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., 143.

shown by the early settlers was their calm acceptance of the blows of fate. This trait probably is not so evident among the second and third generation. Willis S. Monroe writes,

In mental and moral characteristics, the Bohemian traits are not unlike those found among Teutonic people in Germany, England, and America. Family life is strong among them, they have a keen sense of personal honor; they are characterized by great hospitality; they are passionately devoted to the welfare of their country; high standards of cleanliness are maintained by all classes of society; they are frugal and industrious.<sup>3</sup>

The early Czech settlers of Nebraska seem to have the uncanny ability to make crops grow. Great proficiency was shown in the raising of wheat.<sup>4</sup>

The Moravians are akin to the Czechs, and have their own characteristics. This group is made up of Czechs, Horaks, Hanaks and Slovaks. Whether any of the Horaks, Hanaks, and Slovaks constituted any part of this Czech group in Butler County has not been determined, but this seems likely to be true. The Moravians are said to be less progressive, and more tenacious of their ancient customs. Horaks as a rule are tall and slender, temperate

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<sup>3</sup>Willis S. Monroe, Bohemia and the Czechs (Boston, 1910), 159.

<sup>4</sup>Personal interview with John B. Tihacek, Linwood, Nebraska, June 16, 1940. Mr. Tihacek was 16 years of age when he came to Butler County with his grandfather and father in 1871.

<sup>5</sup>Monroe, 451.

and hard working. The Hanaks again are thrifty and industrious, generally of medium stature, with strong vigorous statures.<sup>6</sup>

The early Czech settlers consisted of three types of peasants. The first is the "sedlak," or farmer, who owned from twenty-five to one hundred acres of land. The "chalupnik," or cottager, probably owned from five to twenty-five acres of land, and belongs to the second group. The last group, the "Nadenici," were the day laborers who owned no land and generally lived on the farms of the "sedlak," or first group.<sup>7</sup>

Most of the immigration to Nebraska and especially to Butler County came from the second class. The first class was too well off to want to move, while the third class was almost too poor to move.

Many factors combine to furnish an explanation of the migration of the Czechs to Nebraska. Land, of course, interested them mainly. It could be secured so easily and cheaply in Nebraska. One way was by pre-emption. This law in 1844 allowed a settler to take 160 acres of land, and after living upon it for six months, buy it from the government at \$1.25 an acre. With the passage

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<sup>6</sup>Monroe, 452.

<sup>7</sup>Robert I. Kutak, A Bohemian-American Village (Louisville, 1939), 9.

of the Homestead Law in 1862, a settler could take 160 acres of land, pay the filing fee of \$14, live upon it for five years and upon proof of claim, the land was his. The factor of citizenship was also included in securing this homestead. In 1873, the Timber Claim Act was passed. Under it one could secure 160 acres of land by planting ten acres of it to trees.<sup>8</sup> Lastly, were the extensive railroads lands, offered at rates from \$1 to \$10 an acre.<sup>9</sup>

Other factors, mainly economic, were poverty and large families. The Czech homeland was overcrowded. There was no opportunity to better one's self there. America offered them a chance to better themselves. In their homeland, "Once a day laborer, always one." Inheritance of family property generally went to the eldest son. Girls had to have a suitable dowry for a successful marriage. Their lot easily could be so much better in America.

The religious factor must not have played so important a part in the settlement of Butler County as was the case in some other Czech communities. The Hapsburg rule was Catholic, and Butler County Czechs are pre-

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<sup>8</sup>Records found in Clerk of District Vault, David City, Nebraska. "Frank Juranek, Joseph Jakl, and Jerry Pokorney took lands under this act. Pokorney later relinquished his claim."

<sup>9</sup>Railroad land advertisement in Pokrok Zapadu, July 1878.



dominately Catholic.<sup>10</sup> Czech Catholics probably were drawn to Butler County since many of the early Czech settlers were of that faith, but religious persecution in their homeland did not cause them to leave. No doubt some hated the political rule of the Hapsburg kings. One of the most hated laws of this regime was compulsory military service.

Lastly, one should not overlook the letters that were written to relatives and friends in Europe. Though conditions were hard here, only a small percent went back. Of those who stayed, the greater numbers wrote encouraging letters and advised their relatives and friends to come to America.

The part played by the railroads, especially the Union Pacific and Burlington cannot be overlooked in bringing Czechs to Butler County. In 1871, Edward Rosewater founded the Czech newspaper, Pokrok Zapadu (Progress of the West) in Omaha. This paper was supported by both railroads. The Czech reading matter was arranged by V. L. Vodicka. Vodicka came to Omaha in 1868, and served as land agent for the Union Pacific from 1868 to 1877. From 1877 to 1885 he served as agent for the Burlington. Rosewater's paper was sent to Europe and was read by many of the Czechs. The land advertisements as prepared by Mr.

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<sup>10</sup>Rosicky, Czechs of Nebraska, 195.

Vodicka were always very inducing. The land was cheap and very fertile. The farms would be close to railroads and the towns were never too far away. Fellow citizens were close at hand. If the lurid land advertisements were not sufficient, the rates from Europe to America would certainly encourage those who were a little hesitant.<sup>11</sup>

To compute accurately the number of Czechs now living in Butler County, is difficult, if not impossible. Dr. John Habenicht, in his book written at the beginning of the century, states that in Butler County they numbered around 1,060 families.<sup>12</sup> It is possible that there are more Czechs in some counties, but the exact number is difficult to establish. In 1930, Butler County had 1,406 persons listed as foreign born. Out of this number 388 per cent were Czechs. Basing an estimate on reports of

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<sup>11</sup>Table showing rates from Bohemia and Moravia to New York. Taken from Pokrok Zapadu, Vol. VII, No. 3, 1878.

From	To	
Prague	New York	\$36.75
Pisek	New York	37.50
Plzne	New York	36.75
Tabor	New York	38.25
Budejovice	New York	38.00
Knute Hor	New York	36.75
Chatebore	New York	38.75
Podebrad	New York	36.85
Caslovy	New York	36.95
Kolina	New York	36.50

<sup>12</sup>John Habenicht, History of Czechs in the United States (St. Louis, 1904).

prominent citizens and of the County Clerk, it would be safe to say that the portion of the population of Czech extraction ranges from one-third to one-half of the total population of the County. The next largest foreign born element in the county was of German origin and numbered only one-hundred and forty-three persons.<sup>13</sup>

The writer became interested in a history of these people in several ways. The foreign language groups of Nebraska have been covered by other writers in general. Not a great deal has been written about a specific group and this thesis is an attempt to write the history of a large group that settled in Butler County. There is no state in the Union that has anything like the Czech collection that Nebraska has in its State Historical Library. This is an attempt to preserve some of the Czech history for posterity.

It was my privilege to work among this group for a number of years. Contacts have been made with many of the old settlers and from the second and third generation that are American born. The comparison of the immigrants with their descendants reveals changes that are clearly evident. Their customs and even their European language is slowly disappearing. While there are survivors who preserve the

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<sup>13</sup>Population for Nebraska, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, D. C., 1941.

spirit of this immigrant group of people who struggled to make their homes in a new land, the author is humbly trying to gather the evidence of their experiences and to record their story.

## CHAPTER I

### THE COMING OF THE CZECH

The movement of many Czech to this country was contemporary with the settlement of Eastern Nebraska and the occupation of Butler County. The County had been organized June 26, 1856, by proclamation of Governor Cuming. In August 1868, the county was permanently organized by its local inhabitants, and the first election held, showing a poll of 70 votes. At that time the county had been divided into four precincts, consisting of Skull Creek, Pepperville, Ulysses and Oak Creek.<sup>1</sup>

The first Czech to enter Butler County for settlement was Peter Kastl.<sup>2</sup> Kastl was a soldier in the Austrian army and came to Cedar Rapids, Iowa in 1866, where he worked at the mason's trade. He wanted to become a farmer, but Iowa land being too high in price, he came to Omaha in 1868 and filed upon a homestead in Saunders County. He went by rail to Fremont, where he crossed the Platte by ferry and then followed the river until he came to the present town of Linwood. From there

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<sup>1</sup>George L. Brown, "History of Butler County," 1876, Transactions and Reports of Nebraska State Historical Society, Vol. IV (1892), p. 289.

<sup>2</sup>Rosicky, Czechs of Nebraska, 97-98.

he went south in search of his homestead. After he had gone about twelve miles he stopped on the farm of a Mr. Garrett to ask the directions. Mr. Garrett told him the homestead lay many miles further south on Oak Creek, probably near the present site of Valparaiso. Kastl did not seek further as Garrett advised him to buy a farm a few miles south from a certain settler, which he did and settled upon it. Kastl's connection with Butler County begins with his arrival at Linwood and an early departure for his newly purchased farm in Saunders County.

The Czech settlement of Butler County actually begins in 1869. These early settlers entered the northeast part of the county, centering around the present towns of Linwood and Abie. Several reasons may be given to account for this. One relates to the land itself, as it is rolling, intersected by several timbered streams. The prairie lands were probably not much more fertile, but at least were more easily cultivated. Water and timber were plentiful here, and they were very essential to early settlers.

The next reason pertains to the Union Pacific Railroad, which had been built on the north side of the Platte River. The towns of Fremont, North Bend, and Schuyler, on this railroad, were not far distant from

this particular part of Butler County.<sup>3</sup> Omaha, of course was the starting place of many who came west to these towns.

No exact evidence has been found to indicate that the early settlements of Butler County were promoted by any colonization clubs. It was a penetration by individuals or groups of individuals seeking lands and home. Land agents of the railroads probably exercised the most influence in getting people there, especially after a few Czechs had already settled.

The census report of persons living in Butler County up to April 1, 1869, fails to list any Czechs in the county.<sup>4</sup> Rosicky, in her book, stated that Albert Mares and Vaclav Vacha were in the Linwood vicinity at that time. Further south, in the Abie district, were the Marusaks, Pavels, Vyskocils, Shorney, Frank Faytiner and a few others.<sup>5</sup> A possible explanation of this may be found, that these settlers came into Butler County after

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<sup>3</sup>J. Stefan, letter written to editor of Pokrok Zapadu, published July, 1878, gives distance from Fremont to Linwood as 25 miles, from Wahoo 25 miles, from Schuyler 12 miles, and from North Bend 9 miles.

<sup>4</sup>Nebraska Census Reports, Butler County, 1869, 1870, 1874-79, and 1881-84, (not complete). MSS, Nebraska State Historical Library.

<sup>5</sup>Rosicky, op. cit., 196-197.

the census had been taken.

Additional evidence bears out this contention in a school census report made by F. C. Johnson, the census enumerator.<sup>6</sup> This report, dated March 28, 1870, was taken eleven months after the other census. In this report the children of Joseph Cermak, John and Joseph Pavel, and John Vyskocil are listed. It stands to reason that they were more apt to come during the summer months of 1869 than after January 1, 1870, during the winter.

During the year of 1870, other Czechs joined the groups already here. To Linwood came Albert Prai. John Voboril, Mathais Shmerka and Joseph Gruntorad settled near Abie. Still further south, near the present site of Bruno came Matej Vachal and Frank Novotny. Other settlers in these areas included the F. F. Prohaska, and Vincent Shmerka families.

Among the first groups that came during the first few years it is interesting to note that many had been in America for some time. Vachal and Mares came from Ohio and Josephy Gruntorad took his family to Kansas in two covered wagons. The trip took over two weeks. Not finding things in Kansas to their liking they started back to Nebraska. Finding their fellow countrymen near Abie,

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<sup>6</sup>County Superintendent's Record. Enumeration of School District 2 by F. C. Johnson, March 28, 1870, County Superintendent's office, David City, Nebraska.



they stopped and settled.<sup>7</sup>

Near Linwood during the year of 1871, there were located the Tihaceks, (John, Albert and Thomas,) Jacob Kriz, Joseph Divis, and Frank Marushak. To Abie went Vaclav Brezina, J. Wall, Frank Barcal, Mathias Shonka and a few others. The Bruno vicinity received Joseph Posvar, Charles Coufal, and Joseph Jakl.<sup>8</sup> John B. Tihacek, who came with his grandfather and father in 1871, at the age of 16, relates that there were a few German-Bohemian families around Linwood at that time.<sup>9</sup>

In 1872, the county was redivided into nine precincts. Each surveyed township was called a precinct.<sup>10</sup> That same year, Thomas Vitamvas, Charles Urbanek, Frank Wall and Vincent Sedlicky arrived to settle in the Linwood vicinity. Frank Tupy settled in the Abie district while Vaclav and Frank Mazanc moved on to the Bruno vicinity. The arrival of John Stava, Vaclav Wittera, John Stuchlik and John Paseka swelled the Bruno group.

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<sup>7</sup>Personal interview with Mrs. Emily Prochaska, June 26, 1939. Daughter of Joseph Gruntorad.

<sup>8</sup>Rosicky, 196-197.

<sup>9</sup>Personal interview with John B. Tihacek, June 16, 1940. "His story brings out the idea that the families of Shavlik, Cipera, Hoffman, Killians, Exteins and Steiners were Czechs with German names. This may account for their being overlooked in early census records, as one would naturally seek persons with Czech names."

<sup>10</sup>Brown, op. cit., 127.

Each succeeding year brought more Czech settlers into the county. By taking homesteads and buying railroad lands or purchasing from non-Czech settlers, they continued to push steadily southward. Others pushed toward the west and southwest parts of Butler County. Immigration from 1870 to 1890 brought in a human tide of Czech settlers, with the peak being during the 1880's.

The census records of 1875, which showed the nativity of each person in the precinct clearly indicated the rapidity with which the Czech had come into the county. Linwood precinct listed 273 showing nativity in Bohemia, and Skull Creek next with 149. There were 25 recorded for Franklin precinct and Oak Creek had listed 5.<sup>11</sup> Out of the 15 precincts then listed, eleven reported no Czech settlers. Comparing the number of Czech settlers listed in the census of 1870 with the census of 1875 should give one a good picture as to the number that settled in Butler County within that five-year period.<sup>12</sup> There were no Czech settlers reported in the existing precincts of Bone Creek, Center, Olive, Pepperville, Read, Reading, Richardson, Summit, Ulysses and Union.

For the year 1876, the number of Czech residents in Linwood increased to 319; in Skull Creek to 171,

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<sup>11</sup>Nebraska Census Reports, Butler County, 1875. MSS, Nebraska State Historical Library.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 1876.

Franklin to 69 and Oak Creek to 12. By 1878~~k~~ the Czech settlers had begun to penetrate into Center precinct, west of Brainard and south of David City. Bone Creek, west of Platte and Linwood precinct reported over 25 Czech families. Joseph Pokorney in his letter describes vividly where the Czechs are settling.<sup>13</sup> In this letter he states that there were approximately 550 Czech and Moravian families in the county, and that the region northeast of David City and toward Appleton was chiefly settled by Moravians. East of David City towards the Saunders County line and in the direction of Lincoln, mostly Czech and Moravian settlers are found.

By 1879, there were over 1,066 foreign born Czechs of whom one hundred and sixty-two were born in Moravia.<sup>14</sup> In 1881 the number showing nativity in Bohemia was 1,043, and in 1884, 1,154. The census of 1890 listed the population of Butler County at 15,548.<sup>15</sup> Out of this total population, 3,195 were foreign born and 1,078 listed Bohemia as their birthplace. Of the total population there is no way to determine the exact number of

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<sup>13</sup>Joseph Pokorney, letter to editor of Pokrok Zapadu, July 7, 1879, Vol. VII, No. 8.

<sup>14</sup>Nebraska Census Reports, Butler County, 1879. MSS in Library of Nebraska Historical Society.

<sup>15</sup>United States Census Bureau statistics. Eleventh Census of the United States, 1890.

Czechs in the county. Children born to foreign born Czech parents were now listed as American citizens.

The figures that have been given, clearly show the gradual increase of the Czech population in Butler County. The small nucleus in Linwood and Skull Creek precinct had rapidly expanded so that by 1890 there was a heavy Czech population in Platte, Linwood, Skull Creek and Oak Creek precincts. A slight penetration had begun into Center and Richardson precincts. This condition in these precincts has continued to the present day.



Section of a map appearing in Hospodar, Omaha, October 15, 1892, showing the penetration of Czech population in Butler County, Nebraska. (Nebraska State Historical Society photo No. D 4695.)

## CHAPTER II

### HARDSHIPS AND TRIAL OF EARLY DAYS

The Czechs of Butler County suffered the misfortunes and hardships that were common to early settlers. When they came westward they found a prairie country that was difficult to subdue. Their social life was to be different, and nature might be just as cruel as it could be bountiful.

The Czechs of Butler County escaped one grave danger, that so many pioneers came in contact with. They had no great Indian problem. Though ruins of Indian villages were found near Linwood and other places, no acts of violence occurred in this region after their arrival. The Indians as a whole were friendly and though they came often to beg, thievery was kept at a minimum. The settlers did not escape stories of Indian horrors. A tragic incident was supposed to have occurred on Rawhide Creek, several miles east of Linwood. It is not pinpointed in time but seems to have survived as a legend.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Tihacek, Interview, June 16, 1940. "This story related by Tihacek, occurred before he came to Butler County in 1871. The story was related to him by the settlers who had been there when the incident took place." The story is as follows: A young white man, obsessed with the idea that he was to help exterminate the Indians, shot

The early settlers, after staking out their homesteads or having bought land from the railroad, proceeded to construct homes. The first home of the Tihacek family was a hole in a bank where they lived for two years.<sup>2</sup> Their second home was a "soddy" built on their homestead. Very few homes were of frame construction. Mrs. John Dusatko related that their first home in Butler County was frame.<sup>3</sup> Her father, being a miller in Bohemia, was in a better financial condition than a great number of the early settlers, and her mother refused to live in a soddy. Her father therefore went to Schuyler where he purchased lumber and ferried it across the Platte, paying seventy-five cents a load. But a frame house also had its

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an Indian girl who happened to be combing her hair on the banks of the creek. The Indians shortly captured the young man and proceeded to punish him for his cowardly deed. The settlers wanted to save the young man, but were outnumbered by the Indians. Since it was the young man's fault, the Indians wanted him alone. After tying the young man to a tree, they proceeded to skin him alive, taking strip by strip the skin from his body. After torturing the young man in this manner for some time, they untied him from the tree and then spread-eagled him on the ground. A large stake was then driven through him and he was left to die. His cries and moans could be heard by the white settlers, but nothing could be done, the young man paid the price for his folly.

<sup>2</sup>Tihacek, Interview, June 16, 1940.

<sup>3</sup>Interview with Mrs. Jon Dusatko, daughter of Frank Johannes, an early settler, Brainard, June 27, 1939.

disadvantages. In extreme cold weather it was hard to heat, and in very hot weather it became very uncomfortable. "We just about froze in that house and as children we were always glad to visit our neighbors in winter as their sod houses were much warmer than ours."

The early "soddies" were constructed in the usual manner, with many using corn stalks or prairie hay over branches, and then covered with dirt for a roof. To have snakes dangling from the roof was nothing unusual.<sup>4</sup> Early barns and granaries were also constructed in the same manner.

Many of the early settlers, though living in "soddies," had a good deal of money when they arrived. Frank Johannes purchased land at \$5.00 an acre. Mathias Shonka bought his 320 acres from the railroad at \$3.00 an acre.<sup>5</sup> Urbanek bought all the land he wanted, and then was supposed to have over \$4,000 in gold left.<sup>6</sup> Other evidence could be cited to show that all the early Czechs were not poverty stricken.

Many settlers again were not so fortunate. Many were in debt upon their arrival, stranded many miles from

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<sup>4</sup>Sabata, Interview. Frank Sabata came with his father to the Bruno settlement in 1874. January 24, 1939.

<sup>5</sup>Rosicky, Czechs in Nebraska. 198-199.

<sup>6</sup>Tihacek, Interview.



their intended destination.<sup>7</sup> Those that could, borrowed from their more prosperous neighbors, while others sought work elsewhere. John B. Tihacek went to Omaha to find work, while his father worked on the railroad. Frank Sabata secured employment on a farm near Lincoln, receiving ten dollars a month.<sup>8</sup> Others cut wood and made fence posts to sell and many exchanged labor since they had no money to hire help. Other examples, too numerous to mention, could be given to show how many settlers acquired the means to buy tools and land. Some worked on farms for many years to get the necessary start.

One of the early scourges of the pioneer settlers was the prairie fire. Beautiful to behold in the distance where one is safe; but nothing beautiful to those who were in its path. Butler County had its share of prairie fires. Its most notable one took place in October of 1872, destroying hundreds of acres of corn, over 1,000 bushels of wheat, and other grain.<sup>9</sup>

Another serious fire took place in October of 1878. The town of Brainard had a narrow escape. The very door

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<sup>7</sup>Tihacek, Interview. Stated that "his father was in debt on arriving at North Bend and they had originally intended to go to Buffalo County."

<sup>8</sup>Sabata, Interview. January 24, 1939.

<sup>9</sup>Plat Book, Butler County. "An account of fire in 1872" given in introduction of Butler County.

yards in that village were burned. Ordinary fire guards were not sufficient; the wind was so high that the flames leaped the fire guards with ease.<sup>10</sup> Pokorney gave us a version of this same fire in another part of the county. His account stated that it occurred on Sunday, October 20, 1878.<sup>11</sup> He wrote, "The wind was from the south, with the fire approaching from David City. It seemed to be burning from three sides, South, West and from the East. I paid no attention to it until it was almost upon me. I felt that it would not cross Bone Creek, which it did when the wind made a sudden shift. Nothing serious happened to me except that a large number of my small trees were burned. My neighbors did not fare so well. Some lost all their hay and straw, others lost stacks of wheat and oats. V. Riha lost seven stacks of wheat and has not a kernel of grain left. M. Riha and another neighbor, Havlovic, lost three stacks of wheat. Others lost houses and cattle, the fire evidently doing thousands of dollars worth of damage."

The second scourge of the early Czechs was the grasshoppers. These were fought over a period of seven years. In 1872, they were said to have approached from

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<sup>10</sup>Nebraska Reporter, October 24, 1878, Seward, Nebraska.

<sup>11</sup>James Pokorney, Letter to editor of Pokrok Zapadu describing prairie of 1878. Appeared in issue of November 6, 1878.

the south and the most devastating horde came from the north in 1873.<sup>12</sup> In the space of a few hours, they stripped everything. One settler tried to save some of his tobacco plants, so he placed a coat over them. When morning came, both coat and plants were gone.<sup>13</sup>

The Czech pioneer encountered winters more severe than in the homeland. Blizzards were new experiences for all settlers on the prairie. Most severe blizzards occurred in 1873 and 1888. The blizzard of January 12, 1888 has gone down in history as the worst of its kind. Livestock and humans caught in its fury suffered immensely, and though lives were lost in Nebraska there is no record that any Czech lost his life or any of his children who were in school when the storm struck.<sup>14</sup> Minor blizzards occurred in 1870, 1878 and the winter of 1881 was the year of heavy snow. Storms of unusual severity also struck in 1886, 1905 and 1913.

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<sup>12</sup>Tinacek, Interview.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>In All Its Fury, A History of the Blizzard of January 12, 1888. In Nebraska Historical Society Library. Account of O. E. Davis of the storm: "Was in school about a mile and a half north of Brainard. It was a fine winter day with no wind and snow falling all day until about eight inches deep. At three o'clock the wind came out of the Northwest blowing forty to fifty miles per hour. We could not see two feet away and the temperature dropped rapidly. No loss of life occurred among the Dutch and Bohemian children in school."

One of the great problems of the Czechs was adaption to life in America. In Bohemia and Moravia, the isolated farm house did not exist. People lived in villages and went to their fields in the morning and back to their villages in the evenings. The social life of the evening to which they were accustomed did not exist here. What hours of loneliness, and the tears that must have been shed as they passed their days and nights, isolated from their neighbors. If neighbors did exist, they were non-Czechs in many instances, and association with them was almost impossible in the early years.

Association with the non-Czech settlers was encountered by all Czechs that settled in various parts of the county. Some groups of certain nationalities were friendly while others of some nationalities were unfriendly. Tihacek stated that on their arrival in Linwood, they were warmly greeted by the settlers there. He believed that this was due to the fact that these settlers, who were non-Czechs, were new settlers themselves, and were glad to see others, even if language proved to be a barrier for some time.<sup>15</sup>

Numerous difficulties occurred with some of the non-Czechs. Dance hall fights were frequent, especially during railroad construction. The construction crews were

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<sup>15</sup>Tihacek, Interview.

generally a rough element. Some of the difficulties had a humorous aspect. One occurred when a Czech and a non-Czech entered into a partnership to purchase a team of oxen, each having purchased one ox. While one drove the pair, the other handled the plow. One day while plowing a fight resulted when one partner accused the other of beating his ox more than his own.<sup>16</sup>

An unusual experience was related by John Tihacek in connection with the building of their third house, a log cabin, as their second house had been destroyed by a prairie fire. During the winter they had been collecting logs brought down by the Platte River. The large logs had snagged in shallow water or upon the numerous sand bars of the river. One day, while they were cutting up these logs, they were approached by a certain Newberry, mounted on a horse. Upon his arrival, with gun in hand, he told John's father that the logs belonged to him and he wanted them to be brought over to his place. John's father could not understand English too well, so he turned to his son for an explanation as young John could understand a little English. In the meantime, as Newberry talked to his father, John had secured the double-barrel shotgun which they had carried with them that day. Upon finding out what Newberry was demanding an argument took

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<sup>16</sup>Tihacek, Interview.

place. To this day, John Tihacek did not know whether his argument in regard to the logs was more convincing or that of the shotgun thrown carelessly over his arm. "I would have shot him had he made one move to use his pistol."<sup>17</sup>

Other incidents such as this took place undoubtedly in various places in the county. Fences at first were not too common and cattle had a tendency to stray into cornfields owned by non-Czechs and trouble generally ensued.<sup>18</sup> The early Czechs who settled near the vicinity of Brainard encountered a great deal of trouble from the non-Czech element that had settled there previously.<sup>19</sup> Fights were common there when the various groups went to town to do their shopping. At first the Czechs received the worst of it, but as their group constantly increased the tide turned. There is no need to relate some of the outstanding encounters that occurred, especially when there was a dance in town.

Another point of friction occurred in the matter of social habits. It was customary to find Czech women working in the fields. In non-Czech groups, this was not

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<sup>17</sup>Tihacek, Interview.

<sup>18</sup>Dusatko, Interview, May 15, 1936. "Mrs. Dusatko explained her irregular attendance in school was because one of her jobs was to herd cattle and to keep them out of "Yankee" cornfields.

<sup>19</sup>Interview with John Osmera, Brainard, Nebraska, July 16, 1938.

very prevalent. Consequently the non-Czechs had to hire help while an entire Czech family would be found working in the fields. The economic return therefore, would greatly favor the Czech, who hired no help as the entire family assisted. Non-Czech women made fun of the Czech women working in the fields. Such terms as "Bohunks" and "gypsies" were quickly applied, for the most part by women rather than men as they no doubt wished that their women folk could be induced to do the same.<sup>20</sup>

Today, to see a woman working the fields is not a common sight. The second and third generation Czechs adopted the American custom in this particular. Probably more modern machinery has accounted for a part of this change. Other factors no doubt entered into this also, but tribute should be paid to these women, who worked along side their men in establishing homes in a new country. Their hard work and sacrifices made possible the fine farms and homes that they handed down to their children. Much too often has the present generation forgotten what their grandparents endured to give them the things that they now have.

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<sup>20</sup>Dusatko, Interview.

## CHAPTER III

### TOWN DEVELOPMENT TO 1913

Along with the rural settlement by the Czechs of Butler County came the founding and growth of towns. In 1867, F. C. Johnson and the Western Town Plat Company, established a postoffice at Linwood. A mill run by water had already been built on Skull Creek. The town itself was established in 1879 on Section 26 and laid out in the summer of that year.<sup>1</sup>

The establishment of Czech business places is not quite clear. J. Stefans' letter of 1879 indicated that A. Mares and H. Pavel ran stores.<sup>2</sup> A certain A. Chasta was also mentioned, but his business was not made clear. Thomas Killian ran a saloon which had been recently built, but in this letter he speaks of it as being five miles to the east.

Wolfe's Gazetteer of 1882 and 1886 gave no listing for Linwood, yet in the listing for 1888, one finds that

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<sup>1</sup>Plat Book of Butler County, National Publishing Co. (Philadelphia, 1889).

<sup>2</sup>J. Stefan, Letter to Pokrok Zapadu, "Description of town of Linwood, July 12, 1878."



the population had grown to around three hundred.<sup>3</sup> In search of Czech establishments, one finds ten businesses in the hands of Czechs out of the twenty-eight listed for the town. John Docekal and James Werka ran saloons. A bank had been opened. Two millinery and dressmaking establishments were run by Fannie Brezina and Fannie Kavan. Frank Faytinger had a store and Peter Faytinger was a shoemaker. The Jelinek Brothers were operating a hardware store, and also dealing in farm machinery. V. C. Stecher had a furniture store, while Charles Sang dealt in lumber and coal.

By 1890, a few changes had taken place. Novacek and Kobza ran a store. In 1893, A. A. Hayek was in the hardware business and August Klatka was the town carpenter. The number of Czech business places in 1895 were eleven in number and by the end of 1907 there was an even dozen.<sup>4</sup>

By 1909, the population of the town had reached a high of three hundred and sixty, with fourteen Czech business houses. As the years moved on, establishments changed hands, so that by 1929, approximately ninety Czech families lived in the vicinity and all business houses were in the hands of Czech people.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Wolfe, Gazetteer and Business Directory, Vol. II and IV., 1882 and 1888 (Omaha, Nebraska).

<sup>4</sup>Wolfe, Gazetteer and Business Directory, Vol. II and IV, 1882 and 1885.

<sup>5</sup>Rosicky, Czechs in Nebraska, 197.

Other early Czech settlement was Abie, which was located on Section 27 and laid out by the Western Pioneer Townsite Company in July of 1887. In 1878, Charles Stevens built a store which also served as a postoffice.<sup>6</sup> In 1880 Stevens sold his store to Frank Faytinger and Louis Hromas, who therefore became the first storekeepers in Abie. Straka replaced Hromas as a partner of Faytinger in 1882. In 1882 Mathias Hasik was the town's blacksmith. In 1886 Uridil was running a store and Hamsa had opened a blacksmith shop. Frank Faytinger along with his duties as a storekeeper had become the town's first Czech postmaster.

In 1878, the Fremont, Elkhorn and Missouri Valley Railroad was constructed through the county from the south and the town was moved to the above-mentioned Section 27. This new town was approximately a mile from the old post-office, so Faytinger and others moved their places of business to the new town of Abie.

In 1888, the population of Abie amounted to about fifty people. Stores were run by Faytinger and V. J. Uridil. Anton Datal and Mathias Hasik were the town blacksmiths. A shoemaking establishment was operated by Joe Kalina. Anton Hurt ran a general merchandise and hardware store. The town's only dressmaking establishment was owned by Anna Pospisil. The town's population by 1890

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<sup>6</sup>Rosicky, op. cit., 197.

had increased slightly. The first saloon was run by Coufal and Shandera. V. J. Uridil had replaced Faytinger as postmaster.

An even one hundred and twenty was the town's population in 1895.<sup>7</sup> The first elevator which had been built by Charles Sank in 1887, had passed into the hands of Shonka and Coufal. Joseph Koskan and V. J. Uridil operated the two saloons of the town. M. A. Mashek had become the dealer in hardware and agricultural implements.

There were ten business establishments in Abie in 1902. Two were owned by non-Czechs, but operated by Czech agents.<sup>8</sup> The Abie Milling Company, incorporated by Vacin, Malovic and Svoboda in 1905 was in operation. "White Lily" and "Pride of Nebraska" white flour and Svoboda's "Rye" found a small but ready market in Omaha, Prague, Fremont, Schuyler, and other establishments.<sup>9</sup> The Abie State Bank, organized in 1904 had amply taken care of the town's financial needs. There were fifteen business places in operation in 1909 and the number had increased to eighteen by 1911. The population of Abie in 1913 was 250 and has remained near this ever since.

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<sup>7</sup>Wolfe, Gazetteer and Business Director, 1895.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 1902.

<sup>9</sup>Ray Shorney, History of the Abie School District No. 38. This is a mimeograph copy, compiled by Ray Shorney while a teacher in this District in 1938.

Of the town's business houses, only one was operated by a non-Czech.

In 1887, the town of Nimburg was established. The town was named for Nymburk, a town in Bohemia.<sup>10</sup> The plat was filed on November 12, 1887, and was located on the farms of V. Marushak and John Pavel.<sup>11</sup> The Burlington and Missouri railroad passed by the town which never consisted of more than an elevator and a few business places. In 1888, J. J. Marushak operated a general store. By 1885 a hardware and grain elevator was added to his business enterprises and a F. F. Trochaska, (may be Prochaska) operated a blacksmith shop.<sup>12</sup>

Marushak's store served the needs of the surrounding territory. No town arose after its founding and by 1907 Marushak's store was no longer in existence. Today Nimburg consists of an elevator and a school. At the present the remains of J. J. Marushak's store and an adjoining dance hall, both in ruins, are all that remains of a once lively and thriving establishment.

Bruno was established by the Pioneer Townsite Company in 1887.<sup>13</sup> Previous to this, the settlement must have gone by the name of Skull Creek. At least the

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<sup>10</sup>Rosický, op. cit., 443.

<sup>11</sup>Plat Book, Butler County.

<sup>12</sup>Wolfe, Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1895.

<sup>13</sup>Plat Book, Butler County.

following item taken from a local newspaper suggests that usage. "Anton Posvar is hauling lumber from Borgardus Lumber Yard to Skull Creek,--going to build a store."<sup>14</sup> The Waverly Townsite Company had evidently started a town on Skull Creek, near the ruins of an old Pawnee Village many years ago. The settlers soon left because of gold being found in Pike's Peak region. All the settlers except two were supposed to have left for the new gold field in Colorado. The town originally, as laid out by the Townsite Company, was called Brno, after the capital of Moravia, but with the advent of the railroad, it was changed to Bruno, since the latter was more easily pronounced.<sup>15</sup>

During that same year the new town's population was listed at 150, with ten Czech business enterprises. General merchandise stores were run by Anton Ptacek, J. F. Stava and the Posvar Brothers. Two saloons were operated by J. M. Stava and A. F. Dobry. Other business places were: John Texel, hardware; Peter Havil, harness; and Miss Vontafal was the village dressmaker.

The Bruno State Bank was organized in 1890. A hotel was operated by Carl J. Coufal and a cigar maker made his appearance in the person of Frank Hausner. Dobry's saloon

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<sup>14</sup>David City Tribune, Vol. XIV, No. 40, November 14, 1887.

<sup>15</sup>Rosicky, op. cit., 200.

had changed hands and was being run by James Blatny.<sup>16</sup>

The establishments of Bruno have remained mostly in Czech hands to the present time. In 1895, fourteen business places were listed. No great changes occurred in 1907 except that a few had changed owners, but the town had acquired John H. Jelinek as a physician. By 1911 the population of Bruno had reached 400, and all business houses were in the hands of Czechs, except the two elevator companies and they had Czech agents. Even the railroad agent, J. A. Uridil was a Czech. Bruno, like Abie was distinctly a Czech village.

David City was laid out in 1874, thereby replacing Savannah as the county seat.<sup>17</sup> In 1879, the name of Joseph Shramek was listed as operating the Farmers House, a sort of a hotel and boarding place. Shramek evidently was the first Czech to operate a business place in the new town.<sup>18</sup> By 1882, additional Czech business places had been established. During the years of 1886-87, additional business places were; Charles Hromas, machine shop; Frank Sochor, tailor shop; and Fred Houska, a shoe shop. Martin Novotny in 1885 built a new opera house which seated over 400 people. The hall was situated on the

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<sup>16</sup>Wolfe, Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1890.

<sup>17</sup>Plat Book, Butler County, 1889.

<sup>18</sup>Wolfe, Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1879.

ground floor, making it safe in case of fire.<sup>19</sup> Just how it was made safe in case of fire is not disclosed. Other business places were established by Hlavac and Shorney, Mach & Styskal, Soukoup and Getchot. A butcher shop was started by Frank Sidlik.

Joseph Otopalik ran the David City hotel, and John Shramek had opened up a restaurant in 1888. Few changes appeared in 1890. In 1893, W. J. Bouse was the town's new tailor, and Emil Folda was the first Czech insurance agent. Talacka and Walenta operated a saloon and F. E. Brezina had a harness shop.<sup>20</sup> By 1895, John Shramek Jr. was operating a saloon and Cyril Svoboda had become an insurance agent. At least eleven Czech business establishments were noted, but in 1902 they had dropped to only 6. One new place of business was Frank Machurek's meat market.

The period from 1902 to 1907 showed a great many changes. Bouse, Peschek, Sochor and Styskal were still operating their business places. New additions were as follows: Cram and Ptacek, general store; Kadlec and Dworak, meat market; Joseph and John Shramek Jr., saloon keepers; Frank Feidler, harness shop; Lorenz a butcher

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<sup>19</sup>David City Tribune, Vol. II, July 16, 1885.

<sup>20</sup>Wolfe, Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1895.

shop and Mrs. Frank Outopalek in charge of a hotel.<sup>21</sup>

The changes from 1907 to 1913 were not many in regard to the number of Czech places of business. In 1913, with an estimated population in David City of about 2,200, there were about 10 Czech business places. Two Czech lawyers, Sylvester Shonka and Frank Mizera were listed. Another Czech attorney had in the meantime become a County Judge.<sup>22</sup>

The construction of the Omaha and Republican Valley Branch of the Union Pacific railroad from Valparaiso to David City and on west resulted in the location of the town of Brainard in 1878.<sup>23</sup> The town of Brainard presented an interesting story in its changes of business establishments and character of its population. J. Slavik was the first Czech to settle in the town's vicinity, he was followed rapidly by other Czechs.<sup>24</sup> From 1879 to 1882 no Czech business establishments were noted. By 1886 five business places had made their appearance. L. J. Kavalec and the Posvar Brothers were operating a general store; Frank Matoush a harness shop; and Hlavac and Posvar a combination saloon and billiard parlor. J. J. Smersh and

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<sup>21</sup>Wolfe, Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1902-1907.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 1913.

<sup>23</sup>Brown, History of Butler County, 1876.

<sup>24</sup>Rosicky, op. cit., 202.



Sons had a general merchandise store and also were dealing in drugs.<sup>25</sup>

From 1886 to 1890, no great changes were found. Joseph Matousek had the only Czech saloon and Fran Vrana had opened up a meat market. From 1886 to 1890 no great changes in business houses were noticed, except that Joseph Matousek had a saloon and Frank Vrana had opened up a meat market. Charles Dworak and Hlidik were operating new meat markets in 1893.

The year 1895 begins to mark the exodus of non-Czech business places and a considerable increase in Czech establishments.<sup>26</sup> Five Czechs' establishments were noted for the year 1893 and by 1895 there were 10. By 1902 there were over 20 Czech business houses, and that figure did not include non-Czech business houses with Czech agents or professional men such as doctors or lawyers.

Approximately the same number existed in 1909 and on down to the present day the Czechs have the majority in business establishments as well as predominating in the town population. The town had changed from a non-Czech town to a Czech town in a considerable space of years. Definite reasons had been given for this change. It was a story of a migrating people. The immigrant Czechs were

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<sup>25</sup>Wolfe, Gazetteer and Business Directory, 1895.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 1895.

steadily moving south and west into Butler County. They were buying up the existing establishments and non-Czech farms as rapidly as they financially could. The non-Czechs, finding themselves being offered good prices, sold and moved out.<sup>27</sup> A few families stayed on and their descendants still live within the town and its vicinity.

The settlement of Dwight in 1878, is a continuation of the advance of the Czechs southward through Butler County. The town was laid out by the Western Townsite Company in 1887. With the completion of the Fremont, Elkhorn and Missouri Valley Railroad through Dwight in July of 1887, the David City Tribune comments, "The track was laid and sidetracks completed on the 15th of July, and the inhabitants turned out with milk and apples for everybody--in the evening there was a fine display of fireworks."<sup>28</sup>

The Czechs that settled in Dwight and its vicinity

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<sup>27</sup> Some idea can be formed by noticing the following land sales by non-Czechs to Czechs as to the rapidity with which the vicinity of Brainard was populated by Czechs. W. Armstrong to Frank Dworak, 120 acres, \$40 an acre; John Ilg to Frank Tomahdl, 160 acres for \$5,000; C. C. Gelwick to James Dusatko, 160 acres for \$57.50 an acre. All sales in the month of October, 1902. Taken from the Home Record, published in David City.

<sup>28</sup> David City Tribune, July 21, 1887. "Account of Railroad and Dwight Celebration."

came mainly from the Abie vicinity and from Saunders County.<sup>29</sup> In 1888 it had a population of twenty-five. Joseph Holcapek established a blacksmith shop there and incidentally became the first Czech to establish himself in town. A grain and lumber establishment was operated by Abley and Son in 1895. The population of the town continued to increase but the number of Czech business places had dropped to eight in 1907. A slight gain was shown in 1909, with fourteen business houses and a population of two hundred and twenty-five. In 1913, all business houses were in Czech hands and have continued to the present day.<sup>30</sup>

At about the same time as the settlement of Dwight, the town of Loma was laid out. The town itself was plotted in 1901, but a small village had been in existence there before. The Union Pacific had located a small depot there and the place went by the name of Spur.<sup>31</sup> Upon its founding, Holcapek moved his blacksmith shop there from Dwight. Its business houses were few but in the hands of Czechs. The town came to life when a church celebration was held or a public dance was held in its small parish hall.

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<sup>29</sup>Rosicky, op. cit., 202.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 202.

<sup>31</sup>Plat Book, Butler County, 1889.

Other Czech establishments have appeared from time to time in Ulysses, Bellwood, Edholm, Octavia and possibly Rising City. Those here described have played a greater part in the development of the county and the Czech people.

## CHAPTER IV

### ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The Czechs of Butler County have come a long way economically since the first confused settlers staked their future upon the possibilities of the undeveloped hills and valleys of the county. The first settlers' means were meager, but they were not destitute. Household equipment consisted of a few articles that could be easily transported. One of their possessions was a spirit that could not be conquered even by continuous hardships and failures. Men made the adjustment to the new life more easily but it took the women twenty years to get adjusted to their new mode of life.<sup>1</sup> Settlement was slow in starting, but once the penetration had been made in the northeast part of the county, settlement proceeded rapidly.

The United States Agricultural Census of 1870 for Butler County gives data that pictures the economic state of the first Czech settlers:<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Tihacek, Interview, June 16, 1940.

<sup>2</sup>Taken from United States Agricultural Census for 1870. MS in Nebraska Historical Society Library, Lincoln, Nebraska.

<u>Settler</u>	<u>Acres</u>	<u>Horses</u>	<u>Cows</u>	<u>Oxen</u>	<u>Pigs</u>
John Pavel	80	2	1	-	1
J. J. Pavel	80	1	-	-	-
John Shorney	300	-	2	-	-
John Voboril	80	-	1	2	-
Albert Prai	80	-	-	-	-
Frank Prochaska	80	-	1	2	-
Joseph Gruntorad	310	4	1	2	0
Frank Faytinger	320	2	-	-	-

Early census enumerators had a great deal of difficulty in spelling Czech names, and there may have been others listed in the census of 1870. Most extensive land holdings were held by the Gruntorad and Faytinger families. Most families possessed at least one milk cow, one or two horses. Three families had a pair of oxen. Items such as poultry, eggs and grain were not listed in the census.

Money being scarce, many tried to earn money in various ways. When the B. & M. and Chicago, Northwestern railroads came through the county, many found employment. Omaha and Fremont were places for employment and some worked as hired hands on established farms.<sup>3</sup> Those who were musically inclined could make a little money by playing in dance orchestras.<sup>4</sup> Some settlers had more money and loaned it to many, but interest rates were high, usually about ten per cent. Many that were more blessed

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<sup>3</sup>Shabata Interview, June 24, 1939. "Frank secured employment on a farm three and one-half miles from Lincoln. He also found employment on farms near Schuyler."

<sup>4</sup>Tihacek, Interview, June 16, 1940. "Mr. Tihacek stated that he earned over a thousand dollars in his years of playing."

with worldly goods shared much of what they had to help the more unfortunate get started in the new land.

Though money was scarce, there seemed to be no lack of food. Flour, spices, salt and sugar had to be purchased. Wild game was available for those who liked to hunt, and fishing in the Platte provided sport and food as well. Wild fruit was utilized by the resourceful Czech wives. A favorite among many when in season was elderberry blossoms dipped in an egg batter and fried as one would pancakes. This was considered by many a luxury as eggs were not always plentiful. Early transportation was poor and some butchered hogs on the farm and took the meat to town to sell.<sup>5</sup>

Prices for farm commodities fluctuated in the decade from 1870 to 1880. In 1875, wheat sold around twenty-five cents a bushel, hogs brought two cents a pound and sale price for potatoes was fifteen cents a bushel. Wheat sold for fifty cents in 1878, but 1879 prices were a little higher, but because the year was dry the farmers did not raise too much wheat. Even with periods of dry weather, severe storms, and grasshoppers, the Czech farmer continued to improve his lot.

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<sup>5</sup>Biographical sketch of John Dusatko, translated from Czech by Miss Rose Rosicky, Omaha, Nebraska. Speaks of early produce being taken to towns of David City or Schuyler. Hogs usually killed at home and then sold.

Farming was a hard and laborious task, but Czech prosperity slowly was being measured, not by money, but by new farm machines as the farmer was able to buy. The hand planter replaced the hatchet for corn planting and was in turn replaced by the corn planting machine. The sulky plow pulled by three horses made plowing easier for man and beast. Binders for harvesting grain were not always too successful but cutting wheat with a machine was faster than cutting with a scythe. As the Czech farmers increased their wealth, they increased this acreage for grains. Wheat was the best cash farm crop. Its production was limited by the difficulty of threshing.

No activity in farming has ever touched the emotions of the older generations still living more than threshing, the one time of the year when all the neighbors got together to help each other. The first horsepower threshing machine in the Linwood vicinity was brought in by Kavan, Vitamvas and Urbanek. John Macholan brought in the first steamer from Schuyler. Later Brezina bought one, and later, Peltz and Docekal. These early threshers were large, usually 36 and 40-inch separators.<sup>6</sup> The horsepower thresher had seven teams going around in a circle. The power was transmitted through a long coupling rod instead of a belt. The cylinder of 28 inches would run

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<sup>6</sup>Tihacek, Interview.



1,250 revolutions per minute. A usual crew consisted of one driver, one separator man, one feeder, two band cutters (usually boys), four pitchers, two straw stackers and two grain men. The modern combine has removed a land mark of pioneer days.

A social phase in connection with the economic changes that were taking place involved the "old folks." Many of the first pioneers among the Czechs had earned their eternal rest. Others were retiring from the farm and moving to town to enjoy their remaining years, proud of the fact that their hard-won farms were in the hands of their sons and daughters. Will the coming generations appreciate what their forefathers did?

Progress made by the early Czech settlers is best shown by the table prepared from returns of the 1880 Agricultural Census. All names appearing were selected from those who were listed in the 1870 census and many of those who settled in 1871.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Taken from United States Agricultural Census for 1880. MS in Nebraska Historical Society Library, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Settler	Acres	Horses	Pigs	Cows	Corn		Oats		Wheat	
					A.	Bu.	A.	Bu.	A.	Bu.
A. Prai	80	2	8	1	10	550	6	60	22	150
J. Pavel	80	3	6	2	5	100	7	100	15	150
J. Shorney	380	4	30	3	40	400	20	420	80	856
F. Prochaska	100	2	15	8	10	300	7	150	28	200
J. Gruntorad	360	6	12	4	40	800	12	200	45	400
V. Vachal	280	5	7	4	8	300	10	90	50	450
J. Vyskocil	120	3	36	2	8	500	6	130	30	320
J. Kriz	80	3	15	1	20	350	6	160	13	95
F. Novotny	280	5	25	2	20	600	12	200	50	616
C. Coufal	160	4	10	2	10	500	6	50	30	470
J. Posvar	320	8	70	3	30	1500	22	585	60	780
M. Shonka	520	8	40	35	60	1700	15	350	100	800

This partial list of representative farmers in the Linwood and Abie vicinity is compiled from the Census of 1880. Gains were made in livestock and grain production. Horses had replaced oxen and a few had mules. Only milk cows are listed on this table but other cattle were listed in the Census. Many supplemented their income by selling butter and eggs. Frank Prochaska reported 200 pounds of butter produced, and the highest number of pounds of butter production reported was by John Shorney. Usual amounts per family ranged from fifty to one hundred pounds. Eggs produced ran from a few dozen to several hundreds of dozen. Farm and livestock values had risen considerably since the 1870 Census. No appreciable gain in amounts of rye and barley raised is evident.

The period of 1880 through 1890 was a period of continual improvement. Czech immigration into Butler County was approaching its climax. Fewer homestead areas were available, but railroad lands were still being sold though they were not as choice as before. Czechs were beginning to buy up existing farms from each other. Transportation had improved as new townships were created. Czechs were beginning to show skill in other professions besides farming. The Czech tide was penetrating south and westward across the county.

The table prepared below shows that good and bad

times prevailed in the decade from 1890 to 1900, both in prices and production.<sup>8</sup>

Year	Corn		Wheat	
	Price	Bu. per acre	Price	Bu. per acre
1890	\$ .48	18	\$ .76	10.8
1891	.26	35.2	.73	15.5
1892	.28	28.2	.50	12.5
1893	.27	25.2	.40	8.9
1894	.50	6.0	.49	7.0
1895	.18	16.1	.40	12.0
1896	.13	37.5	.58	14.0

The low in prices prevailed during 1895 and 1896, while production fell in 1894. Wheat prices in 1896 were still around 12 to 16 cents. The prosperity of the McKinley administration was reflected in the farm prices that prevailed during 1898.<sup>9</sup>

The year of 1894 was the year of the great drouth. Prices did not drop until the next year but production in 1894 suffered terribly. Water almost became priceless as farmers' wells dried up. Farmers had to haul water for livestock and even attempted drilling for water in creek beds which normally had running water.<sup>10</sup> The period

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<sup>8</sup>Year Book, United States Department of Agriculture in Nebraska State Historical Society Library, Lincoln, Nebraska.

<sup>9</sup>Brainard Clipper, May 8, 1898. "Wheat prices had jumped to 83 cents, corn 24 cents and hogs \$3.65 cwt."

<sup>10</sup>Personal interview with Mrs. Joe Kriz, June 29, 1940. Mrs. Kriz's father was Martin Rezac who settled in the Nimburg area in 1874.

known as "hard times" had arrived, but the Czechs never faltered in their desire to succeed even in periods of adversity.

Even during this decade economic development continued. Two banking institutions were organized and were staffed by their fellow country men. A few banks were in existence ~~were~~ owned by non-Czechs. The Bruno State Bank was organized in 1890 and served the surrounding area until 1931 when it went into receivership as the Great Depression arrived. The Farmers and Merchant's Bank of Linwood was organized in 1893 and survived the depression. By 1898, the Linwood Bank was controlled by the Folda family, one of Nebraska's oldest banking families.<sup>11</sup>

The amount of land acreage of many Czech farmers had increased considerably and some of the more successful farmers had acquired extensive amounts by 1892. A table has been prepared, showing the amount of land held by some of the early Czech settlers.

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<sup>11</sup> Annual Reports of the State Banking Department,  
in Nebraska State Historical Society Library, Lincoln,  
Nebraska.

Settler	Acres	Settler	Acres
Jake Pelan	520	Joseph Jakl	320
Frank Peltz	320	Jan Coufal	320
Anton Coufal	320	Philip Novak	320
Leopold Hotovy	400	Matez Hotovy	320
Jan Hotovy	240	Frank Juranek	320
Rudolph Novacek	380	Frank Kracman	280
Mathias Shonka	360	Mathias Masek	320
Vaclav Roh	360	Matej Pavel	400
Jacob Kriz	280	Martin Kavan	280
Frank Ruzicka	280	Tom Tihacek	280
Vaclav Tihacek	260	Vojt Saloun	240
Joe Votava	280	Frank Prochaska	240
Joseph Pavel	240	Joseph Gruntorad	320
Frank Johannes	280	Joe Dostal	280
Jos Husak	240	Vaclav Witters	280
Stephan Maixner	280	Jan Dolezal	280
Jos Dobry	280	Jan Stava	280
Vaclav Rech	240	Jos Rerucha	240

Townships represented were Linwood, Skull Creek, Oak Creek, Richardson, Platte and Plum Creek.<sup>12</sup>

The Czech economic situation continued to improve during much of the period from 1900 to 1910. Wheat prices ranged from 42½ cents to 76 cents, corn from 33½ to 41½ cents a bushel. Price variations fluctuated with the kind of weather the farmer had in his growing and harvest seasons. Land sold around \$100 an acre in 1906. In 1910 a piece of property near Bruno sold for \$370.<sup>13</sup> New

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<sup>12</sup>Hospodar, Vol. II, 1892. "Statistics on size of Czech farms taken from November, December and January issues of magazine."

<sup>13</sup>Brainard Clipper, November 3, 1910. "Frank Jelinek, sold property at edge of town (Bruno) to Joe Semin for \$375 per acre. Ten years before that, the land sold for \$10.00 an acre."

homes were replacing many of the old frame houses which had replaced the "soddy," the barns that were built were far more substantial than earlier structures. Well-kept farmsteads dotted the countryside. A few homes had running water and modern plumbing installed.

The Czech farmer enjoyed the prosperity that came with World War I. Farm activities were stimulated by the farm prices and the desire to produce the necessary food to win the war. Farm prices began to drop at the close of the War and by 1920 the farmers were showing signs of distress and began to agitate for new farm legislation. In the decade from 1930 to 1940 the Czech farmers were to pass through the Great Depression. Hogs were selling from \$7.50 to \$7.75 in July of 1930 and dipped to the low of \$1.85 to \$3.95 in 1934, but went up to \$9.65 by 1936. Wheat sold for sixty-eight cents a bushel in 1930, and reached its low in 1931 and 1932. A dozen eggs could be purchased in 1933 for eight cents. Prices began to rise sharply in 1935 and 1936 and the farmers' worst days were over.<sup>14</sup> Many farms were lost because of heavy mortgages incurred during World War I. The New Deal Program helped the farmers to save some of these farms and by the close of the decade the farm situation was brighter.

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<sup>14</sup>Butler County Press, "Prices quoted were taken for the last week in July for the years from 1930 to 1936."

## CHAPTER V

### EDUCATION

No group of foreign people ever strove harder to learn the language of a new country than did the Czechs, and probably no nationalistic group that settled in Nebraska tried harder to maintain their native tongue at the same time.

Prior to the coming of the first Czech settlers, the present school system of the county was inaugurated in 1869.<sup>1</sup> Nine school districts were blocked out, but evidence seems to point out that a school had been organized in what is now District 6, Butler County, as early as 1867.<sup>2</sup>

The Czechs as a whole have been steady advocates of education.<sup>3</sup> There is no reason to believe that the

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<sup>1</sup>Brown, History of Butler County, 19.

<sup>2</sup>Annual Reports of County Superintendents to State Superintendent of Instruction, Lincoln, Nebraska. The following notation appeared at the bottom of the report, as follows; "A. B. Fuller, County Clerk of Saunders County, certifies that he did appoint J. D. Brown to office of School Precinct Treasurer in said school district No. 6, in December 27, 1867." Fuller evidently gave J. D. Brown authority to organize this district in Butler County, which was not officially organized until election of 1868.

<sup>3</sup>Hrbkova, Bohemians in Nebraska, 157.



first Czech settlers around Linwood and Abie lacked a common school education. In fact, they were fortunate in having among their group several who could speak English.<sup>4</sup>

Prior to the organization of the first Czech school district, their children were sent to the school known then as District 2, near Linwood.<sup>5</sup> This school only took care of those who were close enough to attend. Children living too far away failed to attend school or were very irregular in attendance.

The first of the early Czech school districts was organized March 26, 1872, and known today as District No. 38. The principal individual in its organization was Mathias Shonka.<sup>6</sup> After building his sod house, Shonka realized that there was no school within four miles of his home. He proceeded immediately to organize a district. Since there was no money in the treasury, Shonka called upon his neighbors to assist him. With a yoke

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<sup>4</sup>Rosicky, Czechs in Nebraska, 199. In the biography of M. A. Masek, who came to Butler County in 1873, appears the following statement: "He was the advisor of pioneer settlers, for he alone spoke English well and was always willing to help in time of need."

<sup>5</sup>Record of Census Enumeration of District No. 2, March 1871. County Superintendent's Office, David City. Listed number of children in district at that time.

<sup>6</sup>Rosicky, op. cit., 199.

of oxen and a sod breaking plow, they affected a building that was partly a dugout and partly sod, boasting of one window, an opening called a door, home-made benches, one chair and one desk.

Wenzel Marushak, Frank Prochaska, and Mathias Shonka comprised its first school board.<sup>7</sup> The teacher received \$90 for a term of sixty days of school. School was held for three years in the sod building which was then replaced by a frame structure. In the sixty-eight years of its existence, Czechs served as directors in all but seven years. Early directors following Marushak, were: Joseph Shonka, John Wahl, J. J. Marushak, J. Shonka, F. W. Barcal, Joseph Cerney, James Brezina, Louis Marushak, James J. Krenk, J. M. Uridil, Rudolph Barta and the then-present director Rudolph Shalon. James Krenk had the longest tenure, serving as director for eleven years.<sup>8</sup>

School District 25 was the next Czech district organized in 1875, with J. Faytinger as director. Other directors in order were: Joseph Shorney, J. D. Hasik, F. J. Svoboda, L. J. Vavrina, Edward Brt; James Shorney being the present director. Directors with longest terms

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<sup>7</sup>County Superintendent's Records, MSS, David City, Nebraska.

<sup>8</sup>Annual Reports of County Superintendent to State Superintendent's office, Lincoln, 1869-1940.

were John D. Hasik, eleven years, Vincent Shimerka and L. J. Vavrinna, ten years. District 25 later became the Abie Public School. In the sixty-four years of existence, only three years was the district without a Czech director.

Districts 19, 39 and 46 were organized during 1876.<sup>9</sup> First Czech director of District 19 was James Reha, followed by Anton Bruner, Frank Styskal, Albert Shonka, Frank Dworak, John Rezac, Frank Janak, Joseph Janak, James Pelan, August Pelan, Ludvik Andel, John D. Rezac, John Svoboda, with Edward C. Pokorney present director. Directors of District 39 were: Joseph Dostal, Frank Wondraska, Frank Shonka, Frank Johannes, Anton Bohaty, Joe Virgil and James Stuchlik. For District 46: Frank Hlavac, John Paseka, Anton Spatz, Joseph Pallas, George Spatz, J. L. Spatz, Joseph Houba, F. H. Chmelka, who served twenty-one years as director, and Joseph Stava.

The organization of District 77 occurred in 1877. Directors in order were John Vidlak, Frank Novacek, Matthias Pavel, M. A. Mashek, John Matoush, Vaclav Sobotka, F. J. Vidlak, Charles G. Semrad, Peter Votava, and Frank Krov. M. A. Mashek, served on this school board for thirty-two years, with twelve years as director.

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<sup>9</sup>Annual Reports of County Superintendent to State Superintendent's office, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1869-1940.

This district had Czech directors in all but three years of its existence.<sup>10</sup>

In 1878, District 54 was organized. Directors were Frank Fleming, Anton Maly, Albert Hinish, John Fleming, Joseph Yindrich, Joseph Uridil, W. C. Yindrich, James Bruner and John A. Coufal. James Bruner had the longest tenure of any Czech director in the county, serving a period of thirty-three years. Only five years of the sixty-one years, has a non-Czech served as director.<sup>11</sup>

The school districts so far mentioned were all located within the vicinity of Linwood, Abie and Bruno, where the heaviest early Czech settlement occurred. From 1880 to 1890, as Czech population increased, many districts were redivided to create new ones, making early districts much smaller.

District 28, southeast of Bruno was organized in 1880, with Anton Proskovec as director. Other directors down to the present time were: James Proskovec, Henry Kastl, Rerucha, Joe Coufal, and Frank Novacek. Joe Coufal served a period of twenty-two years as director of this district. In fifty-nine years of existence, Czech

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<sup>10</sup>County Superintendent's Annual Report, 1876-1940. MSS, State Superintendent's Office, Lincoln, Nebraska.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., 1878-1940.

directors served in all but six years.<sup>12</sup>

District 73 was organized in 1883, with John Wahl, Frank Prochaska, and Joseph Gruntorad comprising their first school board.<sup>13</sup> Other directors were Matthias Hasik, Albert Houska, Joseph Zeleny. The district was dissolved in 1896. On February 20, 1924, a new district was created. James Slavik served as director for ten years, followed by Joseph Pekarek and Joseph Slavik.

District 12 was organized in 1883. Early directors were Frank Coufal and Jacob Ably. After the founding of the town of Dwight, the school building became too small and a two-story brick building was constructed. Directors were: Robert Shabata, Frank Houska, L. H. Kafka, F. J. Maxiner, F. V. Krenk, J. A. Divis, H. E. Horacek, Joseph Kalina and Leo Hottovy.<sup>14</sup>

Another Czech district was created when District 66 was organized in 1886. Early Czech directors were John Carney, serving three years and Frank J. Semin who served the next ten years. No Czech director has served since. This district was later divided and District 85 created out of it.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>County Superintendent's Annual Report, 1880-1940, MSS State Superintendent's Office, Lincoln, Nebraska.

<sup>13</sup>County Superintendent's Records, MSS found in County Superintendent's Office, David City, Nebraska.

<sup>14</sup>Annual Reports, op. cit., 1883-1940.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., 1886-1940.

During the year of 1888, two new districts were organized. District 57, near Appleton Church, with Frank Pospisil as director. Other directors were: V. B. Kadlec, John Svoboda, Joe Bohaty, Frank Palik Sr., and Louis Palik. District 61, south of Bruno, had Edward Texel as its first director. Other directors were: Thomas Rerucha, J. F. Semin, Stephen Jouba, E. F. Janak, J. C. Rerucha, Anton P. Yanak and Joe Kucera. This district has had Czech directors since 1888.

Czech directors of District 85 since 1889 have been M. A. Mashek, F. M. Mashek and V. A. Mashek. V. A. Mashek had served twenty-four years as director of this district. Another district organized in 1889 was No. 52. M. J. Pavel was its first director and has had no director since. This district was south and west of Rising City, bordering Polk County. Czech penetration had reached the western fringe of the county, although this district, when organized, may have been considerably larger.<sup>16</sup>

The year of 1889, found Czech directors elected in two districts that were among the earliest organized in the county. James Haylic became the first Czech director of District 2, which had been organized in 1869. Czech directors since have been A. A. Hayek, L. C. Sedlicky,

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<sup>16</sup>County Superintendent's Annual Report, MSS, County Superintendent's Office, David City, Nebraska, 1889-1940.

Frank Sedlicky, Joe Wall, F. F. Mundil and J. L. Hoffman. The school of this district is now located in the present town of Linwood. The present brick school was erected about 1918, and at present is a ten-grade school. This district is credited with being the oldest school district in the county. Joseph Dworak was elected director in 1889 and served for six years and then was followed by James Rezac, the present director. This district was known as the Brown School district but is now called the Oak Creek School. The present school building is the old Baptist Church that originally stood on Oak Creek.

District 86 was organized out of districts 46 and 54. First school board consisted of John J. Texel, Joseph Sabata, and John Dolezal. Other directors have been Frank Jungman, J. F. Stava, Anton Ptacek, L. J. Coufal, John Maca, J. W. Markitan, Joseph Maca, Joe Dworak, F. J. Roh, J. H. Proskovec, J. A. Proskovec, B. F. Ptacek, Adolph Vraspir, John Spatz, Edward Koza, and Bem Docekal. The Bruno School is of frame construction, costing about \$5,000 when constructed and was a ten-grade school.

During the period of 1890 to 1900, four more districts were organized.<sup>18</sup> District 82, southeast of Brainard was organized in 1890. Czech directors have been

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<sup>18</sup>County Superintendent's Annual Reports to State Superintendent's Office, 1890-1940, MSS, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Anton Soukup, Charles Janak, C. M. Novak, Joseph Divis, John Liska, James Holacapek, Joseph Kantura, Louis Ruzicka, Julius Novak, and Alois Navratil. This district has had Czech directors since 1890.

In 1891, T. J. Smersh was elected secretary of District 72, of what is now known as the Brainard Public School. The first frame school was constructed in 1889. During the early 90's, an addition was built. The school was originally an eight-grade school, then two more grades were added and finally it became a twelve-grade school. For many years, citizens agitated for a new school as well as a new location. After many years of effort, and through the help of the P.W.A. their hopes were realized. In 1935, the cornerstone was laid with appropriate ceremony and completed in time for the fall term of 1936. The building is a brick structure, costing in the neighborhood of \$90,000. It is the finest school building in the county and a source of great pride to the citizens who had worked so hard and saw their hopes finally realized. Other secretaries of this district have been A. O. Klein, Frank Matoush, Adolph Pelak, J. H. Dobrey, Ray Rerucha and C. J. Divis. Five of the present members of the school board are Czechs. The old frame building was torn down about a year later and the lumber sold.

Czech directors of District 42, east of David City



were Joseph Janak, W. E. Yindrich, and Charles F. Rech. Joseph Janak's term started in 1893.<sup>19</sup> District 37, north of Brainard, elected Anton Yanak as director in 1895. Other directors were: Frank Fiala, John Shalon, Louis Slama, Victor Slama and R. J. Rech. This district has elected Czech directors in all but three years since 1895. Czech directors of District 79 have been Joe Coufal, John B. Codr, and Anton Sedlak. Anton Sedlak has served as director for this district for twenty-seven years.<sup>20</sup>

The period from 1900 to 1910, showed a great increase in the number of new districts created and had elected Czechs as directors. District 29, elected Thomas Dworak as director in 1901. Dworak served twelve years and was followed by Joe Hladky, Emil Dusatko and Edward R. Coufal. Czechs have been elected to serve as directors since 1901. Edward R. Coufal has served over nineteen years. Mike Slossar was elected as director of District 94 in 1901. Others that have served are John Korinek and Ludvik Lavicky. Lavicky has been director for thirty-one years. District 93, during the same year as the above district, elected John Stoupa, director. He was

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<sup>19</sup>County Superintendent's Annual Reports to State Superintendent's Office, 1890-1940.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., 1890-1940.

followed by Albert Writobal and Frank Pesek, who has already served thirteen years.<sup>21</sup>

Three Czech directors had been elected for District 48 since 1902. The first was F. A. Holesovsky, followed by Joe Urbanousky and Charles Rech. In 1902, the patrons of District 81 elected J. T. Zitek as director, who has been followed by M. J. Semin. Semin held office as director for eighteen years, and then was succeeded by Edward Rech. This district at present is midway between Dwight and Ulysses. District 75, west and south of Dwight has had Czech directors since 1904. They were: J. J. Tesina, James Krenk, Albert Mares and Louis Krenk. Longest terms being served by James Krenk, for sixteen years and Louis Krenk served for ten years. Since 1935, children of this district have been sent to the village of Dwight for schooling.

District 89 has had three Czech directors since 1904. They were Frank Pelan, Rudolph Osmera and L. J. Divis. Since 1905, six Czech directors have served District 91. They were: Andrew Dufek, Joseph Vogeltanz, John Tomandil, James Krenk, Charles Kobza and Joe Morovec Jr. Charles Kobza having served seventeen years in this district, was the then-present director. Anton Spatz has served as director in District 77 since 1907--

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<sup>21</sup>Annual Reports, op. cit., 1891-1940.

thirty-three years of painstaking service to the patrons of that district. District 69 has had Czech directors since 1909. F. J. Kovar was the first director and Anton Plasek has served twenty years. District 35 elected Fred Semin a director in 1910. He served twenty-one years and was succeeded by Emil Kobza.<sup>22</sup>

From 1910 to 1920, nine additional districts were directed by Czechs. District 87 elected J. J. Sitek in 1913, who served nineteen years. He was followed by August Matulka and W. M. Bartek. District 19 elected Frank Votava, who in turn has been followed by J. Ustohal, John F. Macholan and Frank Ustohal. In District 58, Rudolph Rerucha has been director since 1915. For District 60, J. F. Kovar was elected and followed by C. E. Palik, who has served from 1920 down to the present time. For District 23, Anton Horacek and Joe Bruner served. In District 92, Joe Kadavy has been director since 1916. District 63 elected R. A. Plisek for one year and he was followed by John J. Kozisek and J. A. Novak. Charles Houdek served District 55 for ten years starting in 1919. He was then followed by Frank Dolezal and James Hurt.<sup>23</sup>

From 1920 to 1930, nine more districts elected Czech directors. In district 66, J. J. Pokorney was the

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<sup>22</sup>

Annual Reports, op. cit., 1904-1940.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 1913-1940.

first, serving four years and then followed by Rudolph Codr and Adolph Hromas. In 1921, District 78 elected Frank Svoboda, who served nine years and was followed by Louis Yindrick. District 76 elected Anton Spatz in 1921, who served only one year. No Czech director since that time has been elected. J. L. Coufal has been the only Czech director in District 33 since 1922. District 74 elected James Krenk in 1922, and Joe F. Homolka next. Homolka was still in office in 1939. John Becak was the first director of District 90, serving one year. Up to 1939, no Czech has been elected to serve as director. Ray Rerucha has been the only Czech director in District 18 from 1923 to 1939. Ray Dusatko served as director in District 8 for eight years. During the 1930's the frame structure was destroyed by fire. A modern brick structure replaced the burned school building, giving the district one of the better rural school buildings in the county. The last of our Czech districts had James Cermak as director who had been elected in 1929 and was still serving in 1939.

During the period of 1930 to 1939, additional directors have been elected in the following districts. John Havlovic in District 20 was elected in 1930 and served for six years. For District 64, Frank Makovick was elected in 1930 and served a term of nine years.

Louis Nozicka was elected in District 65 in 1931 and he served three years. Fred Hottovy was serving as director for District 27 for the school year of 1938-1939.<sup>24</sup>

The table below indicates the increase of Czech directors from the creation of District 38, the first district created by the Czech to 1939.<sup>25</sup> Of the ninety-four districts in the county, thirty-seven districts had all Czech officials and fourteen of the districts had one or more Czech on the Board for the term of 1938-1939.<sup>26</sup>

As new school districts were organized, it became necessary to look for teachers. It would be natural for the Czech school boards to look for teachers of Czech descent. It has been stated however, that many early school boards did not seek Czech teachers. Wanting their children to learn the English language as rapidly as possible, many felt that this could be accomplished much

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<sup>25</sup>This table indicates the number of Czech directors from 1870-1940. Compiled from the State Superintendent's Records, MSS, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Year	Number	Year	Number
1870	0	1910	24
1875	2	1915	31
1880	5	1920	35
1885	6	1925	44
1890	11	1930	46
1895	16	1935	44
1900	15	1940	43
1905	22		

<sup>26</sup>Taken from County Superintendent's Record for the school term of 1938-39, David City, Nebraska.

better for a time by employing non-Czech teachers. The early Czech teachers might not be familiar enough with the English language to do the most good for their children. No doubt there was some wisdom in this contention.

So far as records show, Joseph Zerzan was the earliest of the Czech teachers.<sup>27</sup> Zerzan taught in District 38 for four months in 1876 at a salary of \$30 a month. He was the holder of a third grade certificate that was issued during those early years. Teacher's certificates were issued to J. W. Stefan on April 29, 1879 and a certain A. Mares on December 29, 1879.<sup>28</sup> No evidence has been found to show whether Stefan taught in Butler County or not. Mares was taken on trial, but in what district and for how long could not be determined.

No records were found to indicate Czech teachers for the year of 1880, but one certificate was issued to Mary Mares in 1881.<sup>29</sup> In the report of Superintendent R. V. Beach, the school year of 1881 was a difficult one as he reported a scarcity of coal, and many schools were

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<sup>27</sup>Annual Report of County Superintendent to State Superintendent, MSS, Lincoln, Nebraska. The report indicated that Joseph Zerzan taught in District 38 for the year of 1876.

<sup>28</sup>County Superintendent's Record, MSS, 1879, David City, Nebraska.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., 1881.

closed for a short period of time. Eight schools in existence at that time were without blackboards.<sup>30</sup>

Four Czech teachers were listed for the year of 1882. Mary Mares taught in District 38 for four months, Mary Straka in District 46 for five months, Josephine Kadlovec in District 73 for three months and James Maly in District 29 for five months.<sup>31</sup> The Teachers' Institute held in David City in the year of 1882 had James Bruner as one of the visiting lecturers. Bruner came from Omaha, but his nationality would be guess work as the name Bruner is common in both Czech and German.<sup>32</sup>

The school term of 1883 showed that Mary Straka taught in District 25 for one month and in District 46 for six months.<sup>33</sup> Mary Mares taught in District 38 for six months. Salaries for the women teachers averaged about \$30.00. Louis Straka was the teacher in District 73 for a six months' term. His salary of forty dollars a month was considered high for that time.

For the school term of 1885, Mary Straka taught in District 25 for six months and in District 38 for two months and in District 73 for eight months. Willa Bruner

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<sup>30</sup>Special Report of R. V. Beach, County Superintendent of Butler County, 1881.

<sup>31</sup>County Superintendent's Records, David City, 1882.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid.

entered the teaching ranks by teaching in District 67 for two months. The next year Miss Bruner taught in District 32 for ten months, which was considered to be a rather long term as most schools in 1880 had shorter terms. Salaries for the women ranged from thirty-six dollars a month to forty dollars. Louis Straka received the same amount for the year of 1885.

The list of Czech teachers increased for the term of 1888 and 1889. Willa Bruner continued teaching in District 32 for nine months, at a salary of forty dollars a month. Other Czech teachers were: Mary Ptacek in District 25, Cyril Svoboda, in the same district for six months and Clara Kapelska in District 5 for a nine-month term. Salaries still ranged around forty dollars a month for teachers. For the term of 1889 to 1890, another Czech teacher was added to the above list of teachers. Anna Hurt taught in District 84 for five months at thirty-five dollars a month and also taught in District 49 for three months at the same salary.<sup>35</sup>

During the ten year period from 1890 to 1900, teaching certificates were issued to the following: John Zerzan, Rose Vacin, John Zeman, Charles Rousek, J. D. Hasik, R. J. Kavelec, James Ptak, W. F. Roh, Frank Zeman,

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<sup>34</sup>County Superintendent's Records, David City, 1888-1889.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.



J. A. Posvar, Huseph Hruska, Frank W. Mashek, Lucy Hrubesky, Emma Hoskovec, Stephen Kurchek, Emil Kavelec, J. J. Koliha, Elizabeth Feidler, Charles J. Zerzan, Anna Feidler, Anthony Donato, Rose Shonka, Mary Bruner, Emma Zerzan and M. L. Marushak.<sup>36</sup>

The number of Czech teachers gradually increased. As new districts were created, a greater demand came for Czech teachers. The table below indicated the increase of Czech teachers from 1916 to 1939. This table does not include teachers in parochial schools. Neither would it be entirely correct in regard to Czech names as nationality, in many cases, was hard to determine.<sup>37</sup>

Included in the list of County Superintendents of Butler County are two Czechs.<sup>38</sup> James C. Hruska was the first Czech elected to this position. Hruska remained in office from 1902 to 1908. The second Czech elected to this office was F. A. Stech. Stech served from 1910 to 1914. No record was found indicating whether Hruska

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<sup>36</sup>County Superintendent's Records, David City, 1889-1890.

<sup>37</sup>Table indicates number of teachers of Czech descent teaching in Butler County during various years. Taken from County Superintendent's Record, David City.

Year	Number	Year	Number
1902-03	8 (in-	1925-26	42
	complete)	1927-28	35
1916-17	37	1929-30	46
1920-21	31	1938-39	50

<sup>38</sup>County Superintendent's Record, David City.

taught school in the county, but Stech taught in the Bruno Public School for some time.

Attempts have been made from time to time to perpetuate the Czech language in the schools. The Liberals confined themselves to the teaching of Czech outside of public school hours, and the Catholic Czechs have taught it as a part of their regular course of instruction. The most effective work of teaching Czech has been done by the parochial schools. From time to time Bohemian schools have been started by various Z.C.B.J. lodges and in the Brainard and Dwight Public school systems. The task has proven to be very difficult.

The Holy Trinity parochial school building was started in 1915, after a vigorous drive for funds had been launched by Reverend Klein in 1914. The new building was dedicated by Bishop Tihen August 23, 1936.<sup>39</sup> It was erected at an outlay of about \$52,000, including the site and inside furnishings. The school as constructed was three stories high. The first floor contained the music room, furnace room and storage space. The second floor was used for class rooms and also contained an auditorium seating about three hundred people. The third floor was given over to the Sisters for living quarters. The school is in charge of the Order of Notre Dame, a Czech religious

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<sup>39</sup>Rosicky, op. cit., 419.

Order. Sessions began on September 5, 1916, with an enrollment of one hundred and forty-seven pupils. Several years later two more grades were added, making the school a ten-grade school. Between 1932 and 1935, the two upper grades were discontinued. The enrollment in 1938-1939 ranged from one hundred and fifty to two hundred grade students.<sup>40</sup>

Dwight Assumption School was erected in 1912, during the administration of Rev. Pazourek. It was credited with being one of the finest school buildings in the diocese. The school was constructed of yellow glazed brick, similar to the church. A two-story structure, with basement containing three class rooms for the grades and four rooms in the High School, it also has an auditorium and a Chapel. The west end of the building served as a home for the Sisters. The school is also in charge of the Sisters of Notre Dame. The enrollment in 1938-1939 was seventy-four in the High School and ninety-one in the grades.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>The Register, Jubilee Edition. "History of Brainard Parish."

<sup>41</sup>The Register, Jubilee Edition. "History of Brainard and Dwight Parish."

lodges and in the Brainard and Dwight Public School systems. The task has proven to be very difficult. The younger generation does not take kindly to it, and from their point of view, cannot be entirely blamed. The feeling of the native generations about the language was different from that of their grandparents' and even parents' viewpoint. All children born in America are Americans. This is their homeland and English is their language. The traditions of old Bohemia, so loved by the older generations are not theirs.

The first thought of the earlier immigrants to Nebraska was to secure land. They believed that the possession of a farm would enable them to realize their other rewards.<sup>42</sup> They soon discovered that the farm could be secured only at the expense of the education of their children. Universal and compulsory education had been the law in Bohemia long before the first settlers in Nebraska left their homeland. Those immigrants who stress education strongly are ready to make sacrifices to see that their children remain in school, do so, not so much because they value education for itself, but because it is a means to a better life.

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<sup>41</sup>Kutak, Bohemian-American Village, 37.

## CHAPTER VI

### RELIGION

The religious history of the Czech people was filled with turmoil and dissension. From earliest times national strife was interwoven with religious strife. The Reformation had its birth in Bohemia.<sup>1</sup> The condemnation to death of John Hus and the Thirty Years War left the Czechs a bewildered people. Up to the Thirty Years War the Czechs had been a Protestant nation.<sup>2</sup> After the Battle of White Mountain in 1620, the recatholization of Bohemia by the Hapsburgs began.

The Czechs who migrated to the United States were either Catholics or Liberals, the remainder were Protestants. Liberals (also called Rationalists, Free Thinkers) are divided into classes, negativists, the milder type, and radicals, with an anti-Catholic tendency.<sup>3</sup> Upon their arrival in the United States, many Czechs seceded from the old faith of Catholicism. However, it is not fair to

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<sup>1</sup>H. A. Miller, Races, Nations, and Classes (Philadelphia, 1926), Chapter III.

<sup>2</sup>Thomas Chapek, The Czechs in America (Cambridge, 1929), 124.

<sup>3</sup>Rose Rosicky, A History of the Czechs in Nebraska (Omaha, 1929), 279.

blame the Hapsburgs or the Catholic Church entirely, for secession from their faith. The underlying reason is the gradual development of Liberalism out of Hussitism, along with the development of science and non-sectarian education. When people of that bent of mind came to this country, their ranks were strengthened not only by freedom of press and speech, but also by the fact that for quite a number of years Czech newspapers in this country (with the exception of the Catholic Weekly Hlas, St. Louis, Missouri) were rationalistic or at least of neutral tendency. This condition separated Czechs of this country into two factions. No violence occurred, for Czechs do not readily engage in fistic combat. They like to settle their disputes orally. They look upon religion as a person's private affair.<sup>4</sup>

Liberalism or Freethought in religion is to a degree negative. For that reason it is not sustained by a strong organization. Czech Liberals are organized mainly through their reading matter, fraternal and other societies. The community life of the Liberals centers about their halls, which serve many purposes, even occasionally for public funerals.<sup>5</sup>

To non-Czech people, this manifestation of this

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<sup>4</sup>Rosicky, 286.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 287.

free thought group is one of the most puzzling and most difficult to understand. Not only have they severed their allegiance to the Catholic Church, but to all other churches. They are either indifferent in regard to religious matters or in some ways hostile to it. Many of these Liberals came to feel that they could live a moral life outside the church.<sup>6</sup> The practice of their religion in the New World met with an obstacle, which for a time threatened their faith. In those early days they could not understand the language of the country, that is, the English language. There was a scarcity of priests, of whatsoever kind of nationality, but especially was there a scarcity of Czech priests who could speak the native tongue of the Czech people.<sup>7</sup>

The Czechs who settled in Butler County were predominately Catholic, with the Liberals in a minority. In some early Czech settlements, absence of priests to minister to their religious needs caused a breaking away from their faith. This did not seem to be the case in Butler County. The first Catholic services were held by missionaries from surrounding counties. The north part of the county was served by priests from West Point, and

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<sup>6</sup>Robert I. Kutak, A Bohemian-American Village (Louisville, Kentucky, 1939), 9.

<sup>7</sup>Rev. John B. Pastorak, Brainard's Monsignor Klein (Chicago, 1937), pp. 29.

after the location of a Catholic organization at Columbus, they were served from that point. The Czech Catholics of the east part of the county were visited by priests from Omaha and Falls City.

The first Czech Catholic Church in Butler County, St. Peter's and Paul's, at Abie, was constructed in 1876. This was the first church that was built in a Czech parish in the state. The first visit of a priest to the community was that of Father Bobal of Omaha, in 1875, who had charge of all the Czech Catholics in Nebraska. John Wahl, a German Lutheran whose wife was a Catholic, donated ten acres of land for the church and cemetery on condition that his body would be interred there. The church was of simple frame construction, 24 x 48 feet, with all lumber hauled from Fremont, thirty-three miles away. The church was built about a mile north of the present town of Abie. Its first priest was the Rev. Joseph Hovarka, who served from 1877-1891. Czechs priests who followed were: Joseph Koutek, 1891-1897; Rev. Francis Zalud, 1897-1902; Rev. Wenceslaus Pokorney, 1902-1908; Rev. John Novatny, 1908-1909; Rev. Matthew Nemec, 1909-1916; Rev. J. Hancik, 1916-1917.

Rev. Joseph Koutek built a second church costing \$5,000, but when Rev. J. Hancik tried to have a new church built he only succeeded in securing the site from



James Pavel. When Rev. F. J. Kopecky succeeded Rev. J. Hancik in 1917, the church was damaged by fire. The original bell of this church, donated by Mr. John Benesch, was damaged by fire and sent to Lisle University, Illinois as a remembrance of the first Czech church in Butler County. A new church was built on the lots donated by W. F. Pavel and completed by Rev. V. P. Mlejnek, who served from 1918 to 1932. Rev. Mlejnek left in October of 1932 and Rev. Anthony Nouse took his place until February of 1933 when the present pastor, Rev. Alcuin took his place.<sup>8</sup>

The year following the building of the Catholic church at Abie, another nucleus of Czech settlers erected a church in the east corner of Franklin precinct, which was to be known as the Appleton church. Early church meetings had been held in the home of Peter Maly. The church was built in 1877 on land donated by Mr. Maly. About twenty-five were present at the organization of this parish. From the time of its conception, the parish was served by Rev. Joseph Hovarka of Abie, who held services every third Sunday.<sup>9</sup>

In 1890 a severe windstorm destroyed the church and the parishoners decided to build another one in a more favorable location. Anton Shonka donated one acre and the

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<sup>8</sup>Jubilee Edition, The Register, August 15, 1937, Southern Nebraska Edition, Section 8.

<sup>9</sup>Idem.

parish purchased two additional ones. About ten bodies were moved from the old cemetery to the new parish site. The first services in the new building were held by Rev. Joseph Koutek, who came once a month from Abie until 1897, when he died and was succeeded by Rev. Francis Zalud who served in Appleton from Abie until 1902, when he was transferred to Bruno. Rev. Zalud continued to serve the Appleton church from Bruno until 1921. In 1921, Rev. Francis Cerney who had replaced Rev. Zalud continued the services. Rev. Cerney tried to make Appleton a regular parish but did not succeed. A parish residence was built in 1922. A parish hall, costing \$12,000 was constructed in 1929. Without exception, Czech pastors served this parish from its beginning. Czech pastors after Father Cerney were: Fathers Vaclaw Pokorney, Ignac Skopal, Francis Kopecky and Joseph Blacha. About sixty families made up this parish in 1937.<sup>10</sup>

The first Czech settlers in the Brainard vicinity were Mathias Slavik and Frank Maixner. In the next two years they were followed by Mathias Kabourek, Frank Novacek, Joseph Semin Sr., Joseph Jakub and Frank Dworak, Sr. A more vigorous tide of emigration ensued in and after 1878.<sup>11</sup> In 1883, there had been talk of a church in Brainard and the first meeting was held at the Rejda

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<sup>10</sup>Idem.

<sup>11</sup>Idem.

public schoolhouse, District No. 8, February 2, 1884, to consider its possibilities. The meeting was attended by eighteen friends of the proposition. An organization was effected with Frank Dworak, Sr., M. Kabourek and L. J. Kavelec as committeemen. Meanwhile F. Novacek offered ten acres on Section 10 in Oak Creek township for that purpose, but it was decided in the meeting held October 12th, 1884, to build in the village. On November 18, two lots were purchased by the new committee, M. Kabourek, Vaclav Polivka and Frank Bures, in order to secure a place for the proposed church. The land where the first church stood was deeded January 15, 1885 and cost the modest sum of \$62.50. In 1885, with Ignatius Dworak, M. Kabourek and J. J. Smrz as members of the church committee, two acres of land were purchased for a cemetery.

Services were held for the first time among the Catholics in Brainard on May 1, 1887, by the Rev. Jordon Stutz, who came from Plasi, Saunders County, to say Mass in the public schoolhouse and baptize several children. In the meeting of November 1, 1887, a congregation of thirty-two assembled and finally decided to erect a church. The preliminaries were begun November 6, 1887, and the church completed in the spring of 1888. It was a fine frame structure 60 x 36 and eighteen feet in height. On June 3, 1888, Father Stutz said the first Mass in the

new church. Rev. Matej Bor, then incumbent in Wahoo, Saunders County, took care of the congregation once a month for the next eight months. Rev. Alois J. Klein succeeded Rev. Bor in 1889, serving the parish from Wahoo and from Crete where he had been transferred in 1891.

Father Klein determined to make a parish of it and on February 21, 1893, secured from J. T. McKnight, the local banker, a handsome residence for a priest's house. On September 5, 1893, Father Klein was transferred from Crete to Brainard, becoming the first Czech resident priest which place he still held in 1938. The first church of Brainard was dedicated by Bishop Bonacum on October 7, 1896. On June 10, 1906, the corner-stone of a new brick and stone church was laid, which is still one of the largest and most stately Czech churches in Nebraska. This building with contents and adjacent property cost about \$47,000. The main steeple contained three musically harmonized bells, and were dedicated by Bishop Bonacum on June 30, 1909. In 1916 a tower clock costing \$1,000 was placed in the main steeple by the members of the Knights of St. George. A Bennet pipe organ, costing \$3,666 was donated by the Young Ladies Sodality of St. Agnes the Premyslide.<sup>12</sup> After the church and school were

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<sup>12</sup>Jubilee Edition, June 12, 1938, Omaha. Fiftieth Anniversary of the First Holy Mass in first church building of Holy Trinity parish.

completed, a brick and stone rectory was built in 1927-1928 and dedicated by Monseignor Klein, June 4, 1928.

The beginnings of Assumption of Blessed Virgin Mary of Dwight goes back to 1895. About fifteen families from the Dwight vicinity attended the Brainard parish. The first church service of any kind held at Dwight was the burial of a young girl, whose funeral was conducted at the home of her parents and at the cemetery by Rev. A. J. Klein, February 19, 1896. The small group of Catholic families requested that Father Klein be permitted to serve them. He hesitated until permission was granted by the Bishop to separate Dwight from the parish at Brainard.<sup>13</sup> Rev. Joseph Bartik of Milligan served the first Mass in a public school building on March 1, 1896.

On April 21, 1896, the first Mass in this new parish was served by Father Klein in the schoolhouse of District 12.<sup>14</sup> A new church was built, 68 x 32 feet in size and the first Mass was said in the new edifice by Father Klein, September 8, 1899. In March, 1900, Rev. Vaclav Pokorny began to come from Crete, but on February 11, 1901, Dwight again was made a part of Brainard, with Rev. Klein in charge.<sup>15</sup> The Sacrament of Confirmation was

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<sup>13</sup>Rosicky, 303.

<sup>14</sup>The Register, August 15, 1937.

<sup>15</sup>Rosicky, 303.

conferred on one hundred and two persons by Rt. Rev. Bishop Bonacum on October 16, 1905. In 1906 a society hall was erected and three lots were purchased near the church with an eye to the future expansion of the parish.

In the spring of 1910 a house was purchased and established as a parochial residence for the new pastor, the Rev. Michael Pazourek, who took charge of the parish on August 10. In the administration of Father Pazourek a new brick church was built. It is 43 x 115 feet and of Gothic style. Its high spire houses a four-face clock which strikes every half hour and is illuminated at night. The art glass windows, as well as the stations, altars and statues were donated by the parishioners. The first rectory, purchased in 1910, has since been traded for the present rectory, situated across the street from the church. Father Pa<sub>z</sub>ourek served from 1910 to 1924. He was succeeded by the Rev. Ferdinand Suesser, who served until his death May 11, 1929. Since that time the following have been pastors: Fathers Francis Kopecky, 1929-1931, Alois Horacek, January-August, 1931, Stephen Srahulek, O.S.B., August-December, 1931. Rev. Benedict Bauer O.S.B., was appointed December 20, 1931.

Between the church and the school stands a shrine built under the direction of Father Bauer at no cost to the parish. The parish auditorium has been re-

modeled and three additional acres for the cemetery were purchased. The shrine is unique in view of the fact that the landscaping is original. The shrine contains a monument to the Virgin that forms the center attraction. To the left is a grotto of Tuffa rock from the Black Hills, and dedicated to St. Jude, to the right stands what is recognized as the smallest church in the world, being 8x12x15 feet in size. In this church each Tuesday morning, devotions are held in honor of the Mother of Perpetual Help. It contains an altar of exquisite beauty, and a religious picture 16 x 24 inches painted in bronze and decorated with silver. This picture is said to be the only one of its kind in the country. Beneath the altar and exposed to view, behind a pane of glass, reposes an exact likeness of St. Celia who died in 300 B.C. The shrine to the front contains a waterfall, the water drawing off to a good sized pool. The grounds of the shrine are dotted with a variety of trees and shrubbery.<sup>17</sup>

Bruno's St. Anthony of Padua parish celebrated its first Mass in 1899 in the church that had just been finished. M. W. Mahoney, Anton Ptaček, Joseph Hlavac and Joseph Sobota served on the building committee and succeeded in raising \$1,500. The church was built with the assistance of a \$1,000 donation made by A. A. Hirst

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<sup>17</sup>The Register, op. cit., August 15, 1937.

of Philadelphia, who had been moved by an article written by the Rev. James T. Roche in Donohoe's Magazine, and who requested that the check be used to build a frame church in some needy district in memory of his deceased child and dedicated to St. Anthony of Padua. Father Roche selected Bruno and asked the people to collect \$300 needed to buy three lots from the Chicago & Northwestern Railway. The church was dedicated October 10, 1899 by the Rev. Thomas Cullen, Dean of York. Father Roche, who then lived in David City, celebrated the first Mass. The first marriage occurred on July 9, 1901. There were then sixty-five families in the parish. Rev. Francis Zalud of Abie attended Bruno from October 1899 to February 1901, when he was succeeded by Rev. Alois J. Klein who attended this parish until October of that year. During his administration the present rectory was built. Father Zalud returned as the first resident pastor in 1901.

A tornado destroyed the church July 29, 1903. A new church of colonial style, 84 x 36 feet was constructed in its place and dedicated September 26, 1905, by Bishop Bonacum. Pastors who served this church were Father Bauer, Father Hotovy, Father Kvtek, and Father Kopecky who was who was appointed September 20, 1935 and is still its pastor. At that time there were one hundred five families in the parish.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup>The Register, loc. cit., Part 8.



Linwood's Blessed Virgin Mary Catholic church was built in 1901. Prior to 1901, priests from Abie and Cedar Hill looked after the parish. Religious services were held as early as 1870, usually in private homes. Frank Juranek was responsible for the organization of the mission, not only furnishing the lot, but most of the lumber. The framing of the church is said to have been made out of cottonwood.<sup>20</sup>

St. Luke's Church at Loma dates to 1902, where the incentive for the foundation of a mission begins. Rev. Alois J. Klein of Brainard organized in the then lonely flag station, called Spur, St. Luke's branch No. 69 of the Catholic Workman, with only eight charter members. In 1908, a committee was elected under the guidance of Rev. Klein for the purpose of building a church. In 1911 the church was built, costing with furnishings, \$5,300. The bells and windows were brought from the discontinued Ware Methodist Episcopal church.<sup>21</sup> It was dedicated in 1912 by Bishop Tihen. Rev. Alois J. Klein used to come from Brainard every third Sunday until November 30, 1915, when it was attached to the Touhy parish under the Rev. V. P. Mlejnek.<sup>22</sup> The Rev. A. Grye was appointed pastor of

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<sup>20</sup>Sheldon, op. cit., "Dates and places of worship supplied by Mrs. Charles Bratresovsky." W.P.A.

<sup>21</sup>Sheldon, op. cit.

<sup>22</sup>Rosicky, 306.

Touhy and Loma in 1919, but due to his illness, the parish was attended by Rev. M. Pazourek of Dwight. In 1920, Loma was again made a mission of Touhy, with the Rev. F. J. Kopecky as pastor. Father Pazourek became the first resident pastor of Loma in 1925. In 1926 a rectory for the priest was built. In 1933, two buildings in town were converted into a club room. Father Pazourek remained until May, 1937 when he took a leave of absence and was succeeded by Rev. Otto Ekamel, who in turn was succeeded by Father Arthur Huebesch in 1938.

Other Catholic parishes in Butler County are mixed. None have had early Czech organization. One of the largest Catholic churches was St. Mary's Catholic church in David City, organized in 1874. Priests from Brainard, Bruno and Abie came to serve the Czechs at intervals. Rev. Francis W. Cadek, a Czech priest was there September 7, 1922 to July 30, 1925 as assistant to Rev. Sproll.<sup>23</sup> No Czech priests have served except as assistants to the regular priests in charge of the parish.

Catholic parishes are also located at Ulysses, Bellwood and Center. Outside of the David City parish, St. Francis of Alverno in Center township serves the next largest mixed parish in the County. Center township was first settled by Hollanders direct from Holland and

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<sup>23</sup>Rosicky, op. cit., 302.

Wisconsin in the early 1870's. It has since become a mixed Holland and Czech parish.

In Alois J. Klein, the Butler County Czechs had one of Nebraska's outstanding clergymen. He is now the oldest Czech priest in Nebraska and has resided in one parish longer than any other priest. When the pioneer Czechs came to Butler County they lost no time in settling and met obstacles one by one, but in one sense they faced a serious problem in the practice of their faith. When Rev. Alois J. Klein made his decision to come to America and eventually to Butler County to serve the Czechs, he insured the preservation of their faith.<sup>24</sup>

Alois J. Klein was born at Frantoly near the city of Prachatice in Bohemia on February 6, 1866. After graduation from the German public school at Prachatice, he entered the classical gymnasium at Budejovice at the age of twenty. He stayed there a year and then transferred to the German Theological Faculty of the University of Prague. He finished his studies for the priesthood at Klagenfurt, in Carenthia.

During the continuation of his studies for the priesthood, his family had moved to America in 1881. On June 15, 1889 he was ordained for the Diocese of Lincoln

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<sup>24</sup>Rev. Ray L. Wageman, Golden Jubilee of Msgr. Klein (Omaha, 1937), 12.

in Nebraska, by the Prince-Bishop of Gurk, Dr. Joseph Kahn, and celebrated his first Mass in Bohemia on July 21, 1889. On October 31, 1889 he arrived in America and by November, was in Lincoln at the newly created diocese of Lincoln. He received his first appointment from Bishop Thomas Bonacum as pastor of St. Wenceslaus parish in Wahoo, Nebraska. Later he was transferred to St. Ludimila's at Crete, and in 1893 to Brainard where he has abided ever since.

Whenever Msgr. Klein organized a parish, he invariably established a branch of the "Catholic Workmen," an organization founded on principles which held the Czech settlers of this county to a rigid practice of their faith, and which is directly credited with the origin of many parishes in this Diocese. Once the Czech men were organized and imbued with the spirit to preserve their religion, it was an easy task to start the erection of a mission church.<sup>25</sup> He not only attended the spiritual needs of his parish but went as far as two hundred and fifty miles to say Mass. His ability to speak German, Czech and English was well known by this time and made him a person in great demand.<sup>26</sup>

Monseignor Klein founded four congregations,

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<sup>25</sup>Rev. Ray L. Wageman, op. cit., 17.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., 17.

organized a dozen branches of different benevolent societies, the building of four rectories, one model school and five churches. His attainments brought him the following offices and honors: as a prominent member of the Diocesan Curia, he served as Vicar General under three bishops (Bonacum, Tihen, O'Reilly); Apostolic of the Lincoln Diocese during two vacancies in 1911 and 1917; served as Diocesan Consultant, Examiner of the Junior clergy and Pro-synodal Examiner; made Domestic Prelate with the title of Right Reverend Monsignor Klein by Pope Pius X; Honorary Canon of the Collegiate chapter of St. Maurice at Kromeriz, Moravia; the first Protonotary Apostolic with the right of the Pontificals by Pope Pius XI; and on September 5, 1933, Dean of Brainard by the then bishop of Lincoln, Louis B. Kucera.<sup>27</sup>

Czech Protestants in Nebraska are organized as Presbyterians, and take pride in being, nationally, descendants as to faith of the Bohemian Brethren, the first Protestants in Bohemia, and probably as an organization the first anywhere.<sup>28</sup>

There were no Czech Presbyterian churches in Butler County. Czech Protestants generally affiliated with

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<sup>27</sup>Golden Jubilee, 50th Anniversary of the First Holy Mass in First Church Building of Holy Trinity Parish, July 12, 1936.

<sup>28</sup>Rosicky, 337.

the Protestant churches in the communities where they resided. Principal towns in which they existed were: Linwood, Brainard, Ulysses, Rising City and David City. The Linwood Congregational church is said to be the oldest church building in the county, and still stands as originally erected. The congregation was small and around the 1930's had about fifteen Czech families attending. Czech families that were members of the Linwood church were: Mundil, Thomas, Vesseley, Tihacek and a few others. Other Czechs attended but were not affiliated. A Czech Protestant minister, V. J. Lisy resided in Linwood and in all probability filled the pulpit for the Congregational Church in 1917.<sup>29</sup>

The Brainard Methodist Episcopal church was organized and erected in 1885, and is still in existence. Its Czech membership has never been large, but has been the only Protestant church that has been served by Czech pastors in that community. Protestant denominations were faced with the problem in conversion to their faiths as the Catholics were in retaining faith. In a report made by F. J. Baeye at the Nebraska Conference of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1920, he declares,

. . . the difficulty from the incoming foreigner

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<sup>29</sup>Butler County Press, July 12, 1917. "Rev. V. J. Lisy spoke in the Bohemian language in commemoration of John Hus."

is at our doors. In one locality, every farm sold these past years has been either to a Bohemian or to a Swede. The latter brings with him almost invariably his European church and language. The Bohemian is either Catholic or a hater of the total church. The experiment tried on this District this year of sending a Bohemian pastor has not had any happy results. Said a keen-brained Bohemian superintendent of school on that situation--what the town needs is not more Bohemianism, but more Americanism--we are yet on the hunt<sup>30</sup> for Bohemian pastors who have truly American ideals.

Attempts were made mostly by the Methodists to undertake the evangelism of the Bohemians in 1921. A bilingual pastor was stationed at Brainard at full time. Karl J. Zavadil, a student at Nebraska Wesleyan University had been serving as student pastor to a small group of Czechs in Seward County and was now assigned to Brainard. One of his tasks was to attempt the conversion of hundreds of Czechs who had left the Catholic church and were commonly called Free Thinkers. In the same year, Miss Rosa Rezac, a graduate from the training school at Uniontown, Pennsylvania, was to serve through the district as Sunday School missionary.<sup>31</sup>

Rev. Zavadil held the pastorate at Brainard from 1922 to 1925, also attended the Czech Mission at Bee, Seward County. He was succeeded by Edward M. Novak as resident pastor until 1930. From 1931 to 1940, the parish

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<sup>30</sup> Report of L. J. Baeye in Nebraska Conference Church, 1921.

<sup>31</sup> Baeye, op. cit., 610.

had ministers from Lincoln holding service and later the parish was attended by the Methodist minister from Garrison, Nebraska.

Records of the Linwood Methodist Church are very incomplete and the Ware Methodist Church in Section 10 of Plum Creek has gone out of existence. A county Sunday School Association, Interdenominational, was organized on November 4, 1891 and is still in operation. Louis F. Novak, of Brainard's Methodist Church served as one of its presidents. The exact number of Czech families connected with the Protestant churches in David City is not known. That some families did belong was noticed in the name of R. G. Rech on St. Luke's Methodist Church finance committee. Membership in churches in Bellwood, Rising City and Ulysses would be limited as the Czech population was not as heavy as the east and central parts of the county.

The result of all church activities in Butler County left the Catholic church with the largest membership. Protestant churches made converts but were not able to increase their Czech congregations to any great extent.



## CHAPTER VII

### FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

The Czech people in the United States are unusually strong on organization.<sup>1</sup> Judging alone by Nebraska's Czech lodge membership, one might easily believe they were inveterate "joiners." It has been commonly said that when Czech meets Czech, they start an argument, and continue it in lodge organization.<sup>2</sup>

Organizations among Czechs are of two classes generally: benevolent or confraternal organizations which pay a benefit in case of sickness or death, and non-benefit organizations. Of the non-benefit class, the most interesting are the Sokols (gymnastics), the amateur theatricals, and the choral societies.<sup>3</sup>

The oldest existing fraternal organization, established in March, 1854 in St. Louis, Missouri, was the Czech Slavic Benevolent Society, known by its initials, C.S.P.S.<sup>4</sup> The Czechs of Butler County were not long in organizing their fraternal orders. Besides

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<sup>1</sup>Sarka B. Hrbkova, Bohemians in Nebraska, 147.

<sup>2</sup>Robert I. Kutak, A Bohemian-American Village, 98.

<sup>3</sup>Thomas Chapek, The Czechs in America, 254.

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 258.

serving as material help in time of need, they offered opportunities for social gatherings so dear to the Czech people. The first C.S.P.S. lodge was organized in David City on February 19, 1882. The lodge started with nine members and reached a high of thirty members in 1897.

During the year of 1890, two more C.S.P.S. lodges were organized in Linwood and Abie. Records were not available to indicate the number of members or of their meeting places. Affiliated with the C.S.P.S. is the Union of Czech Women (Jednota Ceskych Dam or J.C.D.).<sup>5</sup> In 1929 there were 14 lodges with 1,455 members. Two lodges "Deery Vlasti" No. 48 at Linwood and "Lilie Zapadu" No. 89 at Bruno were organized in Butler County.<sup>6</sup>

The Western Bohemian Fraternal Association (in Czech, Zapadni Cesko Bratiska Jednota, or Z.C.B.J.) was founded in Omaha, at a convention called for that purpose. For a number of years dissatisfaction had been growing in the old C.S.P.S. lodge, especially in the west. When the convention at St. Paul, Minnesota failed to reconcile the views of the east and west, a break from the old order was started in the so-called Omaha Convention. The C.S.P.S. lodges of the West formed this new order, which became entirely independent of the old existing lodge.

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<sup>5</sup>Rosicky, 357.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 357.

The C.S.P.S. lodge of David City went out of existence when the new Z.C.B.J. lodge was organized on February 11, 1897 and became active during July of that year. Through the leadership of John Styskal, thirteen members left to join the new organization. Charter members of lodge "Dobroslav" No. 12 were John Styskal, Frank Sochor, Fred Houska, Anton Talacka, M. J. Bouse, Frank Pesek, Karel Hromas, Joseph Outopalik, Frank Mach, Frank Wondrazka, Albert Zaruba, Vaclaw Siedlik and Frank Sudek. The organization had no hall of its own, generally meeting in rented rooms. Some years later the lodge sponsored a Bohemian school, but had to give up as the younger generation of Czechs failed to support it. In 1939, the membership of this lodge totaled fifty-seven members. One new feature of the newly organized Z.C.B.J. lodges was that women were included in its membership.

The C.S.P.S. organization at Bruno followed the footsteps of the David City lodge and on July 4, 1897 became Rad Brno, No. 43, Z.C.B.J. Charter members were Vaclav Blatny, Anton Cuhel, Albert Hajek, Frank Hausner, Frank Hlavac, Vaclav Jungman, Joseph Khor, Jan J. Posvar, Antonia Proskovec, Joseph Ptacek, Jeri Spatz, Edward Texel, Jon Texel, Joseph Vondra and Vaclav Uridil. Since most of the people came here from Moravia, they named their lodge "Brno" after the capital of Moravia. The

organization prospered for a time, but membership slowly dropped so that by 1939, there were only nine members and the lodge had become the smallest in the county by 1939.

The old C.S.P.S. lodge of Linwood which had been organized in 1890 became "Ratolest Mladocechu No. 31." Charter members were Frank Bartos, Thomas Duda, Joseph Dufek, Jan Docekal, Emil Folda, Ferdinand Jelinek, Frank Jelinek, Jan Kalina, Joseph Mensik, Vojtech Prai, Anton Pospisil, Baclav Vavra, Jakub Vitamvas and Thomas Walla. Lodge meetings were held every other Sunday in Vitamvas's hall until 1933. The first hall, 28 x 72 feet, had been built in 1903. The building committee consisted of Thomas Duda, Emil Folda, J. B. Tihacek, L. C. Sedlicky and John Hoffman. In 1912 a stage was added, 24 x 36 feet and a basement built underneath the building. In 1933 the hall was increased in size making the hall 40 x 96 feet. The members felt that more space was needed for dancing and plays. In 1939 three charter members, Anton Pospisil, Ferdinand Jelinek and Thomas Duda were still living. The lodge was still active in 1939 and its membership had reached a total of one hundred and fifty-two.

Lodge Karel Havlicek Borousky No. 66 was organized in Abie on July 16, 1899. Charter members were John D. Hasik, Charles Docekal, Frank Marushak, Anton Chladek, Joseph Hasik, Joseph C. Hruska, Anton Hurt, Frank Jungman,

Joseph Koskan, Frank Shorney, Vaclav Uridil, Vaclav Vidlak, Josephine Hurt and Marie A. Viridil. A hall for recreation purposes as well as a meeting place was constructed in 1905. Membership in 1939 totaled about fifty-five adults.

Lodge Cech-Moravian No. 68 was organized July 30, 1899 in Brainard. The organization meeting was opened by M. J. Bouse. Some of the charter members were Josephine Rezac, John C. Rezac, Theodore Smersh, J. J. Dus, J. J. Hayek, Anna Dufek and many others. First president of this new organization was John C. Rezac, with J. Liska as Secretary. The first meetings of the lodge were held upstairs in a home occupied by Frank Sedlak, later moved to a residence occupied by Robert Pytlik. Its next lodge room was in Bruner's Hall, which was occupied simultaneously by three other lodges.

The present brick building was constructed in 1916, at a cost of \$12,000. In 1929, a furnace was added and modern facilities a little later, giving its members a building worthy for their purpose. In 1935 an English speaking branch of the Z.C.B.J. lodge was organized. Opposition of older members finally caused it to be discontinued in about three years. Membership of this lodge totaled 375 members in 1939 and had become the largest Z.C.B.J. organization in Butler County.

Lodge "Dwight" at Dwight, Nebraska was the youngest of the lodges founded in Butler County, being organized in 1906. First officers were James Vala, F. J. Hromas, J. Korinek, and Joseph Morovec. This lodge did not grow rapidly and was about to die when new life was injected by Dr. J. J. Srb and others in the early 1930's. A large brick building had been purchased and membership had increased to about a hundred and fifteen when disaster struck in the summer of 1939. The building was entirely destroyed by fire and only three walls were left standing and have been torn down since. The lodge never recovered from this severe blow.

A great deal of the social life centered around the activities of these lodges. They have served as a medium whereby the normal social life of the community found expression. Women as well as men found that lodge activities satisfied certain of their needs and desires. This included lodges not of Czech organization, but American lodges as well. Besides the direct participation in ritualistic work, the fraternal lodges were used for social entertainment, dances and masquerades to raise money, presentation of dramatic plays by local organizations, gymnastic exhibitions and athletic contests between local schools. Many times funeral services were conducted from the fraternal halls, especially where the deceased

was not a member of the local church.

It is not difficult to understand the reasons for the greater success of the Czech fraternal societies. Their organizers were usually Czechs of outstanding ability and leading citizens of the community. The Czech language was always spoken and it was not until 1923 that English speaking lodges were organized in Cedar Rapids, Iowa and Omaha, Nebraska. The Fraternal Herald, official magazine of the Z.C.B.J. lodges, was published in Czech. Some years later the magazine began to publish articles in English and Czech with the possibility that at some future time the magazine would be entirely English.

Whether the lodge had Czech or English background in its organization it played its part in holding the older people together. It helped to carry on in the new world the pattern of life which they had known in the old world. The fraternal lodges have passed through difficult period. Most fraternal lodges had an insurance program and it was not on a sound actuarial basis.<sup>7</sup> The younger generations were taking out their insurance in companies whose specialty was insurance. Memberships began to decline, premium rates for old members went up and so older members, unable to pay the high rates, began to drop out. Others wished to have the social life continued and

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<sup>7</sup>Kutak, 100.

unrelated pursuits of the lodge discontinued.

To perpetuate the existence of the declining lodge's membership, drives were often conducted for new members. Sons and daughters, grandchildren and in some instances the third and fourth generations of former charter members were asked to join. Time has brought the inevitable change that could not be avoided. All new members speak the English language and in a few instances they are versed in the Czech language of their forefathers.<sup>8</sup>

The Sokol Gymnastic Society has been an important factor in Czech national life in this country as well as in the mother country and is the only order in the United States that had its inception in Bohemia.<sup>9</sup> Its object is dual: physical training for the body, and national or patriotic training for the mind. Sokol organizations in Butler County, especially the Telovicna Jednota Sokol, were not numerous. Early records showed the formation of three Sokol Societies of which two were active in 1929. Tel Jed Sokol organizations existed at Abie, Bruno and Brainard. Abie and Bruno organizations are still active but the organization at Brainard no longer exists. Some

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<sup>8</sup>Mrs. Gilbert Harry, "The Czechs, Their Settlement and Contribution to Nebraska and the Midwest," Fraternal Herald, LIX (December, 1956), 421.

<sup>9</sup>Rosicky, 352.



of its equipment can still be found in the store-room of the Z.C.B.J. hall in Brainard.

Sokol activities of both the Tel Jed and Catholic Sokols do not seem to occupy the prominence that such societies have in other counties and are dying out, if they exist at all. Just why the strongest association of the Czechs has declined in Butler County and kept very active in other counties such as Douglas and Saline seems very strange. One of the strongest reasons, disputed by some old timers, is the lack of competent instructors. Back in the 1880's and 1890's many of the early settlers had received this sort of training. To organize a Sokol lodge was much easier, as the members who founded such Sokol groups were familiar with this type of work. As they grew older or passed away, the next generation may have received some training from their fathers, but their numbers were fewer. This continued until the time approached when there were none who could adequately interest the younger generation.

Another factor was the influence of American sports offered as part of the curriculum of Nebraska High Schools, and the recreational programs of the towns and cities. Sokol training is individual, though very competitive, while American play is mass play. It is a thrilling and inspiring sight to see hundreds of young

Sokols go through their intricate drills in perfect order and rhythm. American football, basketball and baseball now appeal to the younger Czech, who is now himself the young American.

Catholic organizations were numerous and probably increasing as each parish grew in memberships. One of the more numerous was the Western Bohemian Catholic Union. Originally the organization was known as the Bohemian Roman Catholic Central Union in the United States. The western lodges seceded from the parent organization to form the new union for practically the same reason that occurred in the founding of the Western Bohemian Fraternal Association.<sup>10</sup> Lodges formed in Butler County were: Nejsvetejsi Trojice No. 11, Brainard; Sv. Petra & Paul, No. 23, Abie; Sv. Joseph Kal, David City (Appleton), No. 45; Sv. Vaclava, No. 71, Bruno and Sv. Tadease No. 74 at Dwight. These organizations prevailed for some time and then were merged with the Catholic Workman (Katolicky Delnik). Reverend Alois Klein of Brainard was the leading figure in the new organization.<sup>11</sup>

Catholic Workman's lodges were formed in Brainard (St. Ivan, No. 16) in 1896. Others to follow were at Dwight (St. Narodzeni Pane, No. 32), Bruno (St. Antonina

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<sup>10</sup>Rosicky, 360.

<sup>11</sup>Pastorak, 45.

Paduauskeho, No. 53), David City (St. Cyril & Methodus, No. 62), Loma (St. Luke No. 69), and Linwood (St. Vaclav, No. 76). Societies may have existed also at Ulysses, Center and other Catholic parishes, but would not be predominately Czech as in the above.

Catholic Sokol Unions (Katolicka Jednota Sokol) were not any more numerous than the Tel. Jed. Sokols. Earliest lodge was formed at Abie. Later Catholic Sokol lodges were formed at Dwight and Loma but are not very active at the present time.

Women's Bohemian Roman Catholic Central Union lodges were formed at Brainard (No. 69), Bruno (No. 77), Abie (No. 79), and at Ulysses (No. 128). Young Men's and Women's Sodalitys are found at Brainard, Loma, Bruno, Appleton and Abie. Holy Name Societies are found at Brainard, Linwood and Appleton. Minor societies appear in all Catholic Church parishes. In Brainard, sixteen organizations existed in 1938 and lesser numbers in other parishes.

The many societies that existed in the churches now make little effort to keep alive among the Czechs an appreciation of the Czech traditions and language. Though religious services are still given in the native tongue, it has been the Z.C.B.J. and Sokol organizations that have kept many of the traditions alive. To the younger American born generations they mean little or nothing.

## CHAPTER VIII

### POLITICS

From the earliest times Czechs have evinced an earnest interest in local, state and national politics.<sup>1</sup> As a rule the majority of Czechs belonged to the Democratic Party. Early in Nebraska's political development there was a swing by many Czechs to the Republican Party. Edward Rosewater's paper, "Pokrok Zapadu," was Republican, which influenced many to join that party. The Greenbacks, Populists, Fusionists and other minor parties were not without their Czech followers and candidates.

Varied are the reasons that drew such a preponderance of Czechs to the Democratic Party. To many it was just a habit, their parents were, or had started voting as Democrats and they have continued to do so. Friends and relatives influenced many and they believed that the Democratic Party had the right issues.<sup>2</sup> John B. Tihacek, an early Republican, gave a European background to the Democratic tendencies of many of the Czechs.<sup>3</sup> The

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<sup>1</sup>Sarka B. Hrbkova, Bohemians in Nebraska, 50.

<sup>2</sup>Robert I. Kutak, op. cit., 33.

<sup>3</sup>Tihacek, Interview.

Czechs under the domination of Austrian power, hated the party that represented the government. Since the Republican party was the party in power in the United States, they associated with the party not in power. The early Czechs, not being familiar with America's political system, for a while would naturally associate the party in power as responsible for all evil. Wealth was also associated with the party in power. The early Czech, not having a great deal of money, formed the minority party, which had been characterized by many political writers as a "poor man's party." Women usually voted the same as their husbands, although women's suffrage was not too cordially received.

In the early political history of the country, the Czechs constituted a small group. Early politicians made a bid for their vote, but after election generally ignored them. In some cases elections were held in which Czechs failed to vote, not knowing an election was being held.<sup>4</sup> In a county that was to be so heavily populated by Czechs, it would be natural to expect Czechs to hold many county

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<sup>4</sup>Letter of Ludvick Kavelec to editor of Pokrok Zapadu, January 1879, Vol. VII, No. 35. "In letter, stated his hopes for a Czech commissioner being elected so they would have a chance to be heard. About twenty Czechs in the precinct and only three voted,--rest did not know an election was being held."

offices. Their rise to political power began with the election of officials in the various precincts. Mathias Shonka was elected in 1874 to the office of supervisor in Linwood precinct and was the first Czech elected to any office.<sup>5</sup>

From the year 1875 through 1880, Czech candidates were elected to minor offices such as road supervisors, assessors, constables and to the office of Justice of the Peace. Precincts involved were Linwood, Skull Creek, Platte, and Oak Creek, centers of early Czech settlements. Road supervisors during that period were Vincent Sedlicky, Frank Prochaska, James Hlavac, James Reha, Wencil Wittera, Albert Houska, and Wencil Musil. Those serving in office of Justice of the Peace were: Wenzil Marushak, Mathias Mishek, and M. A. Mashek. In the office of Assessor were: Frank Wondraska, Frank Fleming, (Kozisek) and Joseph Dostal. Constables were Albert Henish, Albert Prai, John Havlovic, Thomas Tihacek, Anton Shonka and Louis Kavalec, who was appointed in Oak Creek in 1880.<sup>6</sup>

In the election year of 1879, the first attempt of a Czech to be elected to a county office occurred. Frank Wondraska had been nominated for the office of County

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<sup>5</sup>Register of officers elected in Butler County, County Clerk's Office, David City, Nebraska.

<sup>6</sup>Election Records, County Clerk's Office.

Treasurer on the Greenback ticket. In the election, Wondraska was defeated by his Republican opponent. In a letter to the editor of Pokrok Zapadu, Wondraska blamed his defeat to jealousy, to the fact that he belonged to the wrong party and because of personal feeling against him. He also felt that the Czechs had not supported him in his campaign for office.<sup>7</sup> Wondraska's supposition in regard to his defeat must have been unfair, as a letter by M. A. Mashek, to the same newspaper, gave a different version for his failure at the polls.<sup>8</sup>

During the years of 1881-1890, political affiliation centered in the Republican, Democratic, Prohibition and Labor parties.<sup>9</sup> Czechs gained minor political offices in the townships of Linwood, Skull Creek, Oak Creek, Platte, Bone Creek, Richardson and Franklin.<sup>10</sup> The greatest gain had been made in Linwood precinct as five Czech officials were elected in 1881 and nine officials in 1890. Judges for that year in Linwood precinct were M. J. Pavel,

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<sup>7</sup>Wondraska's letter to editor of Pokrok Zapadu, Vol. VIII, Nov. 26, 1879.

<sup>8</sup>M. A. Mashek's letter to editor of Pokrok Zapadu, Vol. VIII, November 26, 1879. "Mashek's letter stated that Wondraska carried Czech sections. He ran against strong Republican opposition. He should not feel badly, as the Czechs did not desert him."

<sup>9</sup>David City Tribune, November 17, 1887, Vol. IV.

<sup>10</sup>Register of officers elected in Butler County, County Clerk's Records, David City, Nebraska.

V. H. Shimerka, M. A. Mashek, with John Shonka as Clerk of Election. New precincts that showed elective Czech officials were Oak Creek, Richardson and Platte. Joseph Dostal of Linwood precinct and John Havlovic of Skull Creek were elected to the County Board of Supervisors in 1885.<sup>11</sup>

The register of officers elected in Butler County failed to indicate whether any Czechs ran for county offices higher than county supervisors during that period.<sup>12</sup> The abstract of votes cast for the years 1889 and 1890 also failed to indicate any attempts to gain county offices.<sup>13</sup> Whether Wondraska's attempt in 1879 dimmed their hopes for the next ten years cannot be stated. Early records showed only the successful candidates.

During the years of 1891 to 1900 more excitement prevailed among the Czechs in politics. Contest for local precinct offices, county posts and the Bryan-McKinley contest provided the excitement. Party affiliations were divided between Republicans and Democrats. Populism had appeared and a Fusion ticket had appeared in 1896.<sup>14</sup> Town-

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<sup>11</sup>David City Tribune, July 16, 1885.

<sup>12</sup>County Clerk's records, op. cit.

<sup>13</sup>Abstract of votes in Butler County, Book B, David City, Nebraska.

<sup>14</sup>David City News, November 4, 1897, Vol. VI, No. 52.



ship elections, National campaigns provided the local excitement. In township elections, further gains were made. Linwood precinct elected all Czech officials but one, up to 1895, and all Czech officials to 1939. A majority of the township offices were held in Skull Creek and Platte. Additional gains were made in Oak Creek, Franklin and Richardson. Other precincts having one or more Czech officials were Plum Creek, Alexis and Bone Creek.<sup>15</sup>

In 1891, Louis Straka ran for Clerk of the District Court and polled 834 votes, finishing second. A bid for state representative was made by M. A. Mashek in the 28th District, which polled 973 votes in Butler County, but failed to win.

Louis Straka ran on the Fusionist ticket for the office of Clerk of District Court and won, thereby becoming the first Czech to be elected to a county office in 1895.<sup>16</sup> At this time the county government changed to the county supervisor system and Joseph Dostal was elected to represent District 1, which consisted of Linwood, Skull Creek and Platte townships. J. J. Texel ran on the Republican ticket for County Clerk, but lost to the Fusionist

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<sup>15</sup>Abstract of votes, County Clerk's Record, David City, Nebraska.

<sup>16</sup>Election Abstract, County Clerk's Record, David City, Nebraska.

candidate. Texel polled 1482 votes to his opponent's 1,710. Texel carried the strong Czech townships of Linwood, Skull Creek, Platte, Richardson and all three wards in David City.<sup>17</sup>

The Presidential election of 1896 was the high spot of political activity for Butler County. Bryan carried the county by a substantial majority. One pre-election incident occurred in Abie which showed the intensity of the contest. According to the David City News, a Czech McKinley meeting took place. A crowd of David City Silverites came, enjoyed the refreshments and then tried to break up the meeting. Mr. Dolezal, the chief speaker continued to talk.<sup>18</sup> The David City Press again gave a different account, stating that the Republicans stepped in and took possession of the hall while the young people were having a dance and placed speakers on the stand. Mr. Derby, the County Sheriff, drew revolvers to maintain order while the speakers had their say.<sup>19</sup> The account of the David City News was probably more accurate as later evidence showed that the sheriff was on his way to the meeting where the incident occurred. Another piece of evidence was uncovered in the

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<sup>17</sup>David City News, Vol. VI, No. 52, November 4, 1897.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., Vol. 5, October 29, 1896.

<sup>19</sup>David City News, Vol. 5, October 29, 1896. (The Press account reprinted in the David City News.)

signed statement of the individual who had rented the hall to the Republicans for this said meeting.

Political activities from 1900 to 1910 center chiefly around township, county and a few attempts for state offices. Political parties in the field in 1900 were the Republicans, Fusionists, Prohibitionists, Mid-Road Populists and Socialists.<sup>20</sup> The Fusion element was strong for a time, but gradually declined and the same was true for other minor political parties. The Fusion group returned to the Democratic fold, although the Fusionists remained strong in Linwood and Skull Creek townships while Oak Creek showed Republican tendencies.

That Bryanism seemed to prevail during this decade was evident by the formation of Czech Bryan clubs. The Brainard Bryan club was organized in 1904 with 102 members. Officers were J. G. Dobry, Frank Kostka and Frank C. Horacek.<sup>21</sup>

Further attempts in state politics were undertaken in 1904. During that year, F. J. Roh of Abie was nominated on the Republican ticket for representative in the 29th District.<sup>22</sup> Roh's candidacy was unsuccessful. Better luck was had in 1908, when Joseph Dostal of Linwood

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<sup>20</sup>David City News, Vol. X, November 29, 1900.

<sup>21</sup>Brainard Clipper, Vol. VII, No. 12, October 15, 1902.

<sup>22</sup>Brainard Clipper, Vol VIII, October 6, 1904.

was elected as representative of the 28th and in 1910 was reelected along with John D. Hasik of the same district.<sup>23</sup> F. A. Stech and J. F. Hlavac were sent as delegates to the State Constitutional Convention from the county.

Within the county, L. J. Coufal was elected to the County Board of Supervisors from District 1 in 1900. Three Czech candidates were successful in their quest for county offices in 1900. Anton Ptacek was elected County Treasurer, M. J. Bouse as County Clerk and Joseph Hruska Superintendent of Public Instruction.<sup>24</sup> Both Bouse and Hruska were reelected to their respective offices in 1902. Hruska also repeated in 1904.

Czech voting strength showed itself in the coming elections. In 1907, L. J. Coufal became the County Treasurer and Edward L. Rech was the first Czech elected to the office of County Assessor.<sup>25</sup> Three out of four Czech candidates that tried for office were successful in 1908. Joseph C. Hruska lost by only one vote for office of County Clerk, while L. J. Coufal was reelected County Treasurer. Edward Coufal and F. A. Steck, County Superintendent of Schools were the other successful candidates.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Election Abstract, David City, Nebraska.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

Township elections followed the same trends as in previous decades. Linwood township continued electing all Czech officials and was joined by Skull Creek in 1907. In 1908, Oak Creek and Plum Creek elected all Czech officials. A majority of offices were filled by Czechs in Franklin, Richardson, and Platte townships by 1910. Czech officials also appeared in two other townships, Olive and Center.<sup>27</sup> Additional gains were made to the County Board of Supervisors during this period. Successful candidates were J. A. Proskovec, J. L. Svoboda and George Fleming (Kozisek), followed by L. J. Maixner from District 6 in 1909.

The next decade from 1910 to 1920 showed no great change in electing Czech officials. Some candidates were successful and others defeated. One trend was indicated. Political leadership had developed in a few personalities. They were repeatedly elected or advanced to positions of greater political responsibility. Party affiliation centered mainly in the Republican and Democratic party with Democrats having the majority. Minor parties had their following but outside of the Populists and Fusionist, made no dent or swung any election. In state elections, John D. Hasik was elected representative for the 37th District, while James Blatny was defeated in the 38th in 1912. Frank Maixner made an attempt for the State Senate

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<sup>27</sup> Abstract of votes, County Clerk's office, David City, Nebraska.

in the Twelfth District but was defeated in the election year of 1914.<sup>28</sup>

Though the Prohibition Amendment was passed by the State in 1916, Butler County voted "No" to the question. Many Czechs belonged to the Anti-Saloon League but the majority would like to have seen light wine and beer sales continued. Townships heavy with Czech population definitely were against prohibition.<sup>29</sup>

In 1918, Joseph Mashek made a bid for State Representative in the 37th District but was unsuccessful. In the special election of 1919 for delegates to the State Constitutional Convention, the Czech votes carried E. A. Coufal to victory as one of the delegates. His election attested to the honesty and integrity of the man as a lawyer and politician in the county and of the confidence

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<sup>28</sup> Abstract of votes, op. cit.

<sup>29</sup> Butler County Press, Vol. XLIV, No. 14, November 9, 1916. Table below shows vote of each township on the prohibition question. Asterisk designates townships with large Czech population.

	"Wet"	"Dry"		"Wet"	"Dry"
*Platte	88	48	Center	90	16
*Linwood	145	17	Union	69	104
Bone Creek	67	102	Reading	96	156
Savannah	104	93	Read	77	140
Alexis	52	50	Ulysses	102	150
Summit	43	63	*Plum Cr'k	60	14
Olive	64	54	*Richardson	125	23
*Franklin	121	29	D.C. 1st Ward	49	149
*Skull Creek	178	11	D.C. 2nd Ward	57	95
*Oak Creek	211	29	D.C. 3rd Ward	74	101

that the people placed in him.

Czech candidates successful in county elections after 1910 were Philip Tomek, County Treasurer, winning in 1916 and 1918. E. A. Coufal became County Judge in 1911 and served to 1915. Joseph C. Havel was elected Clerk of District Court in 1911 and 1916 but lost out in 1920. M. J. Bouse was County Clerk from 1914 to 1918, being re-elected twice. F. A. Steck served as County Superintendent but was defeated in the 1914 election. Several Czech candidates were not so successful. J. C. Hruska lost in his bid for County Superintendent in 1911, as did C. F. Roh in his bid for the County Coroner's position. Louis Straka lost out in the race for County Judge in the 1918 election.<sup>30</sup> County Supervisors' posts were won by George Fleming (Kozisek) and Thomas Duda. Most successful Czech supervisor in elections was John Kriz, winning in 1911, 1916, and 1920 in District 6.<sup>31</sup> Ed. T. Rech was the township supervisor for District 7.

By 1920 sixteen townships existed in the county and in some townships the heavy Czech population elected

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<sup>30</sup> Abstract of votes, County Clerk's Office, David City, Nebraska.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

all or nearly all of their fellow countrymen to those offices.<sup>32</sup> After 1912, county elections were held every two years and starting with the election of 1922 through 1930, the following Czechs were elected to the State Senate from the 13th District: Phillip Tomek and Frank Dolezal, the first serving from 1922 to 1924 and the latter from 1926 to 1928. For state representation of the newly created 42nd District, the Czechs did not succeed in placing any candidate in office. John D. Hasik was defeated in 1924 and W. H. Malovic lost out in 1926.

In county elections, W. J. Bouse was re-elected County Clerk and Frank Mizera won the county attorneyship. In the election of 1926, M. J. Bouse was again re-elected County Clerk and Frank Mizera re-elected as County Attorney. M. J. Bouse resigned because of poor health in 1927 and Joseph C. Dworak was appointed in his place. The untimely death of Bouse in 1927 saddened all citizens of Butler County as he had become a highly respected

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<sup>32</sup>Table prepared from Abstract of Votes cast and Czech officials elected from 1910 to 1920.

Precincts	1911	1912	1914	1916	1918	1920
Linwood	all	all	all	all	all	all
Alexis	1	0	0	0	0	0
Olive	2	0	0	1	0	1
Franklin	5	6	6	3	5	4
Skull Creek	all	all	all	all	all	all
Oak Creek	8	all	9	8	all	8
Plum Creek	4	4	6	6	8	all
Richardson	7	7	7	5	7	6
Platte	1	4	3	3	4	4
Center	0	4	2	2	2	3
Bone Creek	0	1	0	0	1	1



citizen of the county. County Supervisors during this period were: District 1, Thomas Duda; District 6, John Kriz and Ray Rerucha; District 7, Edward T. Rech and J. L. Semin. In 1930 all Czech officials served in townships of Linwood, Franklin, Skull Creek, Oak Creek, Plum Creek, Richardson and Center. Two Czech officials were elected in Platte township.<sup>33</sup>

In the period from 1932 through 1938, no Czech was elected to any state office from the county. More success was enjoyed in county and township elections. Joseph C. Dworak, County Clerk and Rudolph Ably, Clerk of District Court (who was replaced by Edward H. Rech in 1948) were the successful candidates. Charles Machurek was elected County Sheriff in 1934, along with Ray E. Sabata, County Attorney and Edward E. Rech as County Assessor.<sup>34</sup>

The 1936 elections had Joseph Hranac, former County Attorney as County Judge. The only two important county offices not in Czech hands were the office of County Superintendent and County Treasurer.<sup>35</sup> County Supervisors during this period were: District 1, Fred Yindrich, and in 1938, W. J. Rezac; District 6, John Kriz, who was succeeded by Jerry Vavrina in 1938; District 7,

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<sup>33</sup>Abstract of votes cast in Butler County, County Clerk's Office, David City, Nebraska.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

Joseph Semin, elected in 1930 and still in office in 1938.<sup>36</sup> Township officials were all Czechs in Linwood, Skull Creek, Oak Creek, Plum Creek and Richardson townships in 1938. Seven out of eight officials in Franklin, six in Center, two each in Ulysses and Platte, and one in Bone Creek and Olive townships were Czechs.

From the time that Mathias Shonka's election as road supervisor took place until the present, the Czechs have responded readily and loyally to the two major political parties in the United States. Butler County Czechs have favored the Democratic party. Older generations, when asked how they voted, usually answered with great emphasis and sincerity, "Demograt." Local elections showed Republicans being elected, even in Democratic years, especially if the opponent happened to be a non-Czech. Czech ancestry is no longer a guarantee of Czech support in an election year. Second and third generation Czechs began to show a tendency to vote for the person, and not because he belonged to a certain party.

No longer do they miss an election because no one bothered to tell them that one was being held. More and more, women are casting their vote along with the men. They also realize their voting strength in county elections

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<sup>36</sup> Abstract of votes cast in Butler County, County Clerk's Office, David City, Nebraska.

and state politicians make a strong bid to capture the Czech vote in Butler County.

## CHAPTER IX

### WORLD WAR I

While the Czechs are internationally known as the "dove-like" race, being conscientious objectors to war in the abstract, they have never been found wanting in the military ranks when the cause has been just.<sup>1</sup>

During the Civil War, Czechs of their own free will joined the ranks of the Union armies. As the real settlement by the Czechs of Butler County came after the Civil War, a Czech Civil War veteran would be scarce. The only Czech Civil War veteran known to settle in Butler County was Frank Fleming (Kozisek). As a result of the change in name, much confusion has existed relative to the Flemings living in Butler County as to nationality.<sup>2</sup>

No evidence has been found to indicate that any Butler County Czechs served in the Spanish-American War. In 1925, Charles W. Pool, Secretary of State, published a roster of soldiers, sailors and marines who had served in

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<sup>1</sup>Hrbkova, Bohemians in Nebraska, 151.

<sup>2</sup>Rosicky, op. cit., 201. "Frank Fleming (Kozisek) came to Wisconsin in the early sixties and served two years in the Civil War, where he changed his name to Fleming. A soldier by that name was killed in action, and as the name Kozisek was hard to pronounce, the others gave him the dead man's name, which he and his children used."

the Civil, Indian, Spanish-American and World Wars and living at that time.<sup>3</sup> No Butler County Czechs were found. The list did not have the names of those who died or had moved away before that time, but the list of 1925 showed no Butler County Czech in the Spanish-American War.

The American Czech played a double role in the drama which ended in the humbling of the Hapsburgs and the final disruption of the Dual Monarchy. In the first place they financed the external revolutionary movement, secondly, they were expected to present the cause of the Czechoslovaks before the country and to endeavor to win American public opinion.<sup>4</sup>

Soon after the beginning of World War I, the Czechs of New York formed the American Committee for the liberation of the Czech People. An organization nationwide in scope was formed in Chicago, January 2-3, 1915. After June 6, 1915, this society was officially designated as the Bohemian National Alliance.<sup>5</sup> When the United States declared war on the Central Powers, the Alliance promptly re-adjusted its program to meet the new conditions incident to the war. Their purpose was not only to

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<sup>3</sup>Chapek, The Czechs in America, 265.

<sup>4</sup>Charles W. Pool, Roster of Soldiers, Sailors and Marines of Civil, Spanish-American, Indian and World Wars (Lincoln, 1925).

<sup>5</sup>Chapek, 267.

raise funds to help in the work of freeing Bohemia after its three hundred year subjection to Austria, but to become the sentinels of wholesome loyal Americanism. The Alliance became an agency for the sale of Liberty Bonds, and the rallying point for volunteering and for war activities in general.<sup>6</sup>

The Czechs in Butler County responded generously to every call issued by their adopted country. A County Patriotic League was organized in David City and E. A. Coufal was elected President. Vice-Presidents for each township also were elected. Patriotic clubs were organized in Czech communities of Brainard, Dwight, Bruno, Linwood and Abie. These organizations were responsible for patriotic rallies, and all clubs had elaborate programs on National Registration Day. The organizations were very active in all Liberty Bond, War Savings Stamp and Red Cross Fund raising drives.

On July 23, 1918, a meeting was called in David City for the purpose of founding a branch of the Bohemian National Alliance for Butler County. A central committee with headquarters in David City was chosen and committees were named for the Czech settlement in the county. Very active groups existed in Brainard, Bruno, Dwight, David City, Abie and Ulysses. It had been agreed that at least

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<sup>6</sup>Chapek, 268.

\$20,000 must be gathered to help free the Mother Country (Bohemia) from Austria. Butler County Czechs went over the top, and their total contributions amounted to over \$27,985.<sup>7</sup> A gigantic bazaar conducted by all organizations in Brainard contributed \$5,000 alone. On October 14, 1918, the treasurer sent \$10,250 to the Bohemian National Alliance and a like amount to the Catholic Alliance. The remainder was used to pay expenses and what remained after that was divided up among local organizations.

Liberty Bond and War Savings Stamp drives were equally successful. During one of the Bond drives of 1917, three Brainard banks sold over \$34,950 of Liberty Bonds. Over \$535,000 was subscribed by banks in David City, Linwood, Bruno, Dwight, Abie and Brainard in this same drive.<sup>8</sup> The above banks were located in heavily populated Czech areas and no attempt was made in distinguishing non-Czechs from Czechs. For the sale of War Savings Stamps the county was divided into districts. E. A. Coufal of David City headed the county committee.

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<sup>7</sup>Peoples Banner, October 10, 1918, Vol. XXIV, No. 2. Amounts contributed by Butler County Czechs to Bohemian National Alliance and to National Alliance of Bohemian Catholics.

David City	\$2,163.	Brainard	\$2,000
Linwood	765.	Dwight	5,192
Abie	4,600	Ulysses	3,231
Bruno	4,500	Octavia	153

<sup>8</sup>Peoples Banner, October 25, 1917.

Czechs who headed committees in their localities were J. L. Roh of Abie, Dr. S. H. Jelinek of Brainard, J. A. Proskovec at Bruno, L. B. Tomes at Dwight, F. F. Mundil in Linwood, L. A. Lorenc at Loma and J. J. Marushak for Nimburg.

Red Cross activities occupied a very prominent place in the war activities of the Czechs. Contributions of money and materials were made not only for the American soldiers but also for those who had enlisted in the Czechoslovak army as well.<sup>9</sup> Money was raised by means of dances, home talent plays by local dramatic clubs, special dinners, and suppers, picnics, bazaars and programs involving outstanding personalities as speakers.<sup>10</sup> Box socials were also held and many a young lady's box brought a very high premium from some young man.

The Butler County Red Cross chapter at David City was organized in June of 1917. Two hundred and ten members were signed up and E. A. Dworak was elected Secretary of the organization. A Large Red Cross Auxiliary followed at Brainard. Over two hundred members were secured with James Cabela as Vice-President and Helen Sypal as

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<sup>9</sup>Peoples Banner, December 27, 1917.

<sup>10</sup>Butler County Press, May 10, 1917. (Sarka Hrbkova, Professor of Slavonic Language at University of Nebraska, will give a lecture in David City, May 18, auspices of David City Women's Club.)



Secretary. A non-Czech headed the organization. On July 11, 1917 the Dwight Red Cross chapter was organized with L. B. Tomes as President, F. R. Shonka Vice-President and Mildred Dosek, Secretary. Original membership was one hundred and fifty and later increased to over two hundred members. On July 15, the Bruno Red Cross chapter organized. Officials were J. A. Proskovec as President, A. V. Proskovec, Vice-President and L. J. Roh as Secretary. The report of Red Cross work in Butler County for the month ending in July, 1917 indicated twelve active Red Cross organizations in the county.<sup>11</sup>

As the war progressed, memberships in Red Cross organizations continued to increase. Contributions also increased as members devised various methods to raise funds. On one drive the village of Dwight raised \$8,000. The successful committee consisted of John Nabity, L. B. Tomes, Robert Sabata and Joseph Maly.<sup>12</sup> All Czech communities had their special drives but the two communities of Bruno and Brainard gained the most attention. At Bruno

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<sup>11</sup>Butler County Press, August 9, 1917. (Red Cross Chapters and contributions in Czech population centers of county)

David City	992 members	\$1,190 collected
Abie	262 members	446 collected
Brainard	263 members	277 collected
Bruno	279 members	615 collected
Dwight	139 members	244 collected
Linwood	124 members	315 collected

<sup>12</sup>Butler County Press, January 3, 1917.

in September of 1917, occurred one of the community's famous Red Cross drives. The local chapter of Bruno served a supper in which over a hundred chickens and trimmings were donated by the citizens of the community. Speakers for the occasion were E. G. Hall, who spoke in English and M. J. Bouse who addressed the crowd in the Czech language. The community had raised \$1,200 before but boosted the total to \$1,500 for the Red Cross. So successful was the event that Editor L. Runyon commented in the Peoples Banner:<sup>13</sup>

There is no place in the State where they have been more patriotic and have given up their boys with more grace than right here in Bruno. Parents who have come from Bohemia to America and have made their homes here are giving their sons to go back and fight for the freedom of other nations as well as their Mother Country, and those boys are not slow in volunteering.

A Bruno Red Cross drive in 1918 gained further publicity from the Lincoln Star:<sup>14</sup>

Bruno Sets Record . . . Sarka Hrbkova, chairman of Women's Committee of State Council of Defense, . . . to address audience at Bruno . . . celebration program as a result of the splendid returns in Red Cross campaign . . . \$10,000 raised in two weeks . . . 900 people in township . . . 100% Red Cross membership . . . 96 Czechs and 4 Germans . . . \$12.11 for each individual. . . . Every man owning a farm subscribed \$75 for each 40 acres he owned and town people paid in 3% of their total possessions.

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<sup>13</sup> Editorial in Peoples Banner, September 20, 1917.

<sup>14</sup> Peoples Banner, January 10, 1918. "Reprint of an editorial appearing in Lincoln Star, Lincoln, Nebraska."

On October of 1917, Brainard had a special Red Cross celebration. Over \$7,500 was realized from the celebration making \$24,475 that the community and its vicinity had collected. Governor Keith Neville was the principal speaker and was met at the edge of town by the Brainard Home Guards and the Brainard Patriotic Band. A parade was formed and the group marched to the hall where the governor gave the principal address. Home Guards from Abie, Bruno, David City and Brainard were present as well as bands from Linwood, Bruno, Dwight and Brainard who furnished music all day. At night, a successful dance was held.<sup>15</sup>

Czech women played an important part in the county's war activities. On September 12th, women were asked to register for war work. Czech women who were precinct chairmen were Mrs. M. J. Bouse, David City; Mrs. L. F. Mundil, Linwood; Mrs. J. J. Srb, Richardson; Mrs. Fred Dworak, Plum Creek; Miss Marie Uridil, Linwood and Mrs. Jerry Uridil, Ulysses. One hundred and six women registered in Oak Creek township. Surgical and bandage dressing courses were given in Dwight and Linwood. Women made and sent to the soldiers mufflers, socks, wristlets, helmets and even bed sheets. Miss Helen Klein enlisted to take training as a Red Cross nurse.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Butler County Press, October 19, 1918.

<sup>16</sup>Peoples Banner, August 18, 1918.

The Czechs in Butler County had a double motive in their war effort. Besides helping to free their Mother Country, they gave as willingly to their own adopted country. Not only did they contribute financially in every way asked by the American government, but boys of Czech ancestry enlisted in large numbers for service in the armed forces of the United States.

The first resemblance to anything military was the organization of local Home Guard units. No military service outside of the county was involved. Uniforms of some type were supposed to have been worn and no guns were available for early drills. Units were formed in Bruno, Dwight, Abie and Brainard. They played an important role in patriotic celebrations and in various fund-raising drives.

Upon the entrance of the United States into the war, many young men of Czech ancestry enlisted in the armed forces before being called by their draft boards. An outstanding example of voluntary enlistment occurred when twenty boys, all from Brainard and vicinity joined the armed forces in a group. Of the twenty young men who enlisted were eleven boys of Czech background. Four men, Raymond Dusatko, Lad Hlavac, Gus Kopilec and Ivan Novacek had enlisted first, followed immediately by eleven more men. Czech boys in this group were John Cerney, Joseph

Dufek, John Hecl, Lad Janousek, G. Sklenar, James Taborsky, and John Urbanovsky. Joseph Dufek had served on the Mexican border as a member of the Nebraska 4th Infantry.<sup>17</sup>

A farewell reception and dance was given at Novak's Hall. The entire group of boys, twenty in all, were escorted to Lincoln. There were eleven Czech boys in the group, the rest were non-Czechs but all had grown up together in the vicinity. A large crowd had gathered at the depot and a farewell address was given by Dr. S. H. Jelinek. The escorting party included James Cabela, Sr., S. H. Jelinek and seven other citizens of the community. The entire group called upon Governor Keith Neville who addressed the group, praising their loyalty and devotion. "Brainard stands high for Nebraska's prize for patriotism," commented the Lincoln Star.<sup>18</sup> "Everybody in Brainard is doing his bit," was remarked by one of the members of the delegation.<sup>19</sup> No Czech boys ever went into service without an appropriate farewell party. Non-Czech boys who were going from Czech predominated communities were always included in the farewell parties.

Several Czech men paid the supreme sacrifice and

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<sup>17</sup>Brainard Clipper, December 29, 1916.

<sup>18</sup>Butler County Press, June 7, 1918. "Reprint from article appearing in the Lincoln Star."

<sup>19</sup>Ibid. Reprint appearing in the Lincoln Star.

gave their lives for their country. Anton J. Rejda of Brainard, member of Company K, 125th Infantry was killed in action. Jacob A. Blatny, Linwood, member of Company 4, 4th Infantry, died of wounds received in combat. Influenza took Anton Maly of Brainard, a member of Company B, 336 Infantry. One young man committed suicide while in service.<sup>20</sup> Three other young men, Bedrick Maixner, Albin Folda and John P. Dolista, who had been reared in Butler County, lost their lives. Since they had moved away prior to enlistment, they are not listed with the casualties of the Butler County group.

The triumph of the Allied cause and the creation of the Republic of Czechoslovakia was a high point in history for the entire Czech race. It stimulated all the Butler County Czechs to a height of endeavor and pride of origin, that will remain a high point in their history.

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<sup>20</sup>Rosicky, 302.

## CHAPTER X

### CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT AND AMUSEMENTS

The frontier and homestead life are not likely to be considered as something leading to cultural development, and yet in the story of Butler County Czechs, certain activities which come distinctly under that heading were practiced rather extensively. The early settlers seem to follow two lines, active participation and spectator participation. The Czechs have always been very active in music and dramatics. They are noted for the color and pleasure that go with their amusement activities. No national group seems to get as much joy out of their celebrations as the Czechs do. Their carefree spirit seems to be very contagious and attracts many visitors from outside the immediate vicinity. They want to see why the Czech seem to have so much fun in what they are doing and want to join in. Czech celebrations at times have become very boisterous and noisy.

Old timers like to tell stories of the good times they had in their early settlement days. Hardships were also included in their stories, but like all people, the good times were more pleasant and enjoyable. Many hours of loneliness were spent by the early Czech settlers in

their unfamiliar environment. Each year added more of their fellow countrymen and both the pioneers and the newcomers were glad to see each other. Sunday was the day for visiting and neighborhood gatherings were very popular.

Love of music seems to be inherent among Czech people. The early pioneers turned to their musical instruments to help pass away many an hour in their new homes. Favorite instruments were the cornet, baritone, alto, violin and the ever popular accordian. Organs were later found in the more prosperous homes and the piano belongs to a more modern era. Czech music is gay and lively, but many students of music have often commented that a strain of sadness seems to prevail in Czech music. A possible explanation that has been advanced is that the Czechs have been for many generations under foreign rule, and that an ever persistent longing for freedom finds expression in their music.

Early music among Butler County Czechs was first confined to the individual homes. On Sunday gatherings, birthdays, namedays, anniversaries and national and local church holidays, musical instruments were ever present. The social gatherings sometimes lasted until morning, especially if it was a special occasion. Neighborhood dances in early days were very well patronized. They were not held too often and the people came early and



stayed late, but did not always go home in the morning in the way described by the editor of a local paper.<sup>1</sup> Many walked for miles to attend the Saturday night dances. Walking became necessary for many because horses were scarce and had been worked in the fields all day and needed a week-end rest.

Before local bands were organized, music for special occasions was generally furnished by a violin or an accordian. Not until fraternal orders, churches or private individuals built halls were these dances held in town. The dance hall at Nimburg was the scene of many a festive occasion. Waltzes, two-steps and polkas were favorite dances, but the second and third generation have forgotten that the square dance was very popular. Schottischees were also popular and were usually played several times during the evening. The Czechs brought with them from the old country many folk dances but these are also passing into oblivion. The Czech national dance "Beseda" was also enjoyed. Sokol celebrations would often feature this dance in Czech costumes. Today, the older generation remembers it and the younger generation has never learned it.

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<sup>1</sup>David City Tribune, January 13, 1888. "Our Bohemian friends danced all night at Novatny's Hall Tuesday night and some of them started home in a most exaggerated state of happiness yesterday morning."

One of the popular social events was the dance that usually followed many a Czech wedding. Even today, a Czech wedding calls for a free dance and people come for miles to attend the dance. Early Czech wedding dances were usually held at the home of the bride's parents. Music generally was furnished by a violin or an accordian. The Czech wedding dance has now been commercialized to a certain extent. Admission is charged but proceeds do not always go to the bride and groom to start their wedded life. The Czech wedding celebrations were prolonged, not only lasting an entire evening, but for several days.<sup>2</sup>

One of the early Czech dance groups was John Docekal's. This group was organized around 1882 and furnished a great deal of dance entertainment. Some of the members of this group were: Kinesh, Caha, Jakl, Frank Docekal, Chmelka, Shabata, Pelan and J. Docekal. Vitamvas had a band in Linwood that played for dances. Another later group consisted of C. Docekal, Vavra, Koskan, Vidlock, Stava, Ptacek, Bartunek and Frank Docekal. This group was commonly known as the Abie band. Rerucha brothers had a brass band that was available for dances. Plasek's orchestra originated at Appleton. Other older

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<sup>2</sup>Brainard Clipper, February 18, 1898. "Wedding presents published. Afternoon, in fact the whole night, was spent in singing, playing, eating and drinking and everyone present expressed themselves as having spent a day long to be remembered. Wedding dinner at home of bride's parents."

dance organizations were those of Joe Cerney, Novotny and Kucera. More modern Czech dance bands were led by Anton Sdelak and Fred Semin, Sr.<sup>3</sup> Municipal bands were common in the Czech communities. During World War I, John Dus led the Brainard band and years later, Fred Semin Sr. was the director. Linwood and Dwight also had municipal bands, ~~which played~~ing for special occasions. The weekly band concert during the summers was very popular.

Another feature of early Czech music was singing. Much of this occurred at social gatherings, such as picnics. Groups seated at tables would burst into a Czech song, the incentive probably coming from someone playing an accordian. A great deal of singing also occurred at dances. Unfortunately this custom gradually disappeared and is unknown to the third and fourth generation. Czech music was not confined entirely to active participation, but they also loved to hear prominent artists, especially if they were of Czech ancestry. Concerts were given by such musicians as August Molzer, Bohemian-American concert violinist, Jaroslav Kocian, noted Czech violinist and Bohumir Kryl and Concert Company were heard by the early settlers in the Czech communities.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>Personal interview with Fred Semin, Sr., July 2, 1958, Lincoln, Nebraska. Fred Semin Sr. was band director in Brainard for many years, and furnished much of the above information relative to many of the early musical groups.

<sup>4</sup>Brainard Clipper, February 20, 1908; January 27,

Dramatic clubs were organized in Czech communities of Brainard, Bruno, Loma, Linwood and Dwight. Abie undoubtedly had dramatic talent also, as strong Sokol and Z.C.B.J. organizations existed there. The dramatic groups not only gave their plays in their own communities but performances in nearby communities. The plays were in the Czech language and were thoroughly enjoyed by the older generation. A non-Czech who might be witnessing a play would be puzzled by the strange looking box affair that was placed in front of the stage. Prompters in American plays are usually found in the wings of the stage, but it was not so with the Czech prompter. A small opening was made in the stage, usually called a pit. The prompter usually sat on a stool underneath the stage with only his head and shoulders showing, but not to the audience. Memorizing was not done as in American plays. Usually the prompter not only prompted, but read the line and the actor repeated after him. It must be remembered that the plays were rehearsed so the actors were not entirely unfamiliar with the lines. Prompting was so loud at times that the people seated in the first few rows heard the prompter as well as they did the actor. After a dramatic performance a dance was usually held. The

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1910 and December 15, 1910 issues. (Artists appeared in the same order as given above.)

chairs were taken up and put away at the sides of the hall. While the floor was being swept, the musicians tuned up and before the dust had settled couples were dancing to the music.

State and nationally known Czech speakers gave talks and lectures on special occasions. Personalities that appeared before Czech audiences during World War I were: Sarka B. Hrbkova, Votja Benes and Hynek Dostal.<sup>5</sup> Charles Smrha of Milligan and Dr. Olga Stastny talked on several occasions. Local citizens gave talks commemorating events connected with patriotic occasions, such as lodge anniversaries and memorial days.<sup>6</sup> Many speeches were given in the Czech language but on many occasions, both English and Czech were spoken. Besides home talent organizations, traveling theatrical companies gave performances. These groups were made up of Czechs and were usually greeted with good audiences.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Hrbkova was connected with the University of Nebraska, Votja Benes was a relative of Edvard Benes, President of Czecho-Slovakia and Hynek Dostal was the editor of the Catholic paper Hlas published in St. Louis.

<sup>6</sup>Butler County Press, July 12, 1917. "A program in commemoration of John Hus given in Z.C.B.J. Hall. Rev. V. J. Lisy spoke in Bohemian language and Dr. B. W. Crasky in English."

<sup>7</sup>Butler County Press, May 24, 1917. "Bohemian Theatrical Company, the Ludvig Company, from Chicago, will present the entertaining play "Three Pairs of Shoes," in Bruno, Thursday evening, May 31. There are sixteen people and the company are all talented actors. All are from Prague and the performance will be followed by a dance."

Citizens sometimes undertook sponsorship of entertainment that was not Czech in organization. Brainard citizens sponsored a Chautauqua for several seasons and David City, which had a mixed population, supported one a great deal longer. Early movies were also a source of entertainment. Many free weekly movies were sponsored by local merchants, usually shown out of doors.

Besides obtaining enjoyment from house-dances and elaborate celebrations, the Czechs also love card games. During the long winter nights, neighbors frequently visit back and forth and indulged in this pastime. Card games included some that were a departure from American card games such as whist, pinochle and rummy. Games such as "Beran," called Buck, "Taroks" and "Darda" were played. Occasional gambling was indulged in, but for the most part card games were for social entertainment. Step into a Czech tavern today and one will usually find a card game in progress in the late afternoon and early evening. Card clubs were organized in many of the Czech communities, similar to a women's bridge club of today.<sup>8</sup>

With the erection of Czech Catholic Churches and Parish Halls, certain days came to have special significance to them. Anniversaries and patron Saint Days, such

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<sup>8</sup>Brainard Clipper, March 9, 1900. "Card club formed at Bruno . . . "The Ideal" . . . twenty members . . . first meeting at home of L. J. Zeman . . . played whist."

as St. Joseph's and Saint Wenceslaus', were occasions for celebrations. Patrons of the church would donate food for the dinners and suppers and a dance would be held in the evening. Proceeds of the occasion went to the church parish. Fraternal lodges featured dances on Thanksgiving and New Year's Eve. Mid-winter masquerade dances were held in the early nineteen-hundreds, but are seldom held at present. Social dances open to only lodge members were often held.

The Czechs have been lovers of sports. In the beginning they satisfied this desire for this type of recreation by hunting. Game was more plentiful, prairie chicken and rabbit was a welcome change of diet. Those who lived next to the Platte River had opportunities to fish. An occasional wolf hunt was indulged in.<sup>9</sup>

Following the turn of the century the Czech turned to the American game of baseball. Baseball teams that existed around 1904 were in the Czech communities of Brainard, Bruno, Abie and Dwight. Not all teams took the name of the community they represented, one example was the team known as Blatny's Polar Bears. The Brainard team of 1909 had a predominating Czech roster with such players as Dus, Kavelec, Semin, Fiala and Sabata. Teams at

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<sup>9</sup>Brainard Clipper, February 25, 1904. "Wolf hunt in Richardson township. Wolves have been plentiful this winter. Round-up on Section 15."

Linwood, Bruno, Dwight would have very few non-Czechs in their line-up while a David City team would have a few Czech ball players. Brainard had an unusual team in 1916, winning eleven games and losing five up to August 31st.<sup>10</sup>

Two Czech young men from Dwight were proficient enough in baseball to gain recognition in professional baseball. Ernest Krenk pitched for Lincoln in the old Nebraska State League and had a record of twenty games won and five losses during the 1928 season. He was to report to Minneapolis for the 1929 season. During the early 1930's Krenk pitched for the Iowa-Nebraska Power Company team in Lincoln. His Dwight High School team-mate Adolph Liska attained more success in professional baseball. In 1938, pitching in the American Association, Liska had a record of twenty wins and only four losses. He reported for spring try-out with the Washington Senators during the spring of 1929.<sup>11</sup> He remained with the Washington Senators for several seasons and in 1934 was pitching for Rochester in the International League, and was also third-base coach.<sup>12</sup> He finished his professional baseball career with the Pacific Coast League.

In the period after 1910, the sporting interest

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<sup>10</sup>Brainard Clipper, September 8, 1916.

<sup>11</sup>Butler County Press, March 21, 1929.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., April 12, 1934.



of the Czechs turned to wrestling. Nebraska has produced many Czech wrestlers of national fame and Butler County Czechs came to be proud of Hugo Outopalik of David City and Joseph Zikmund of Brainard. Outopalik attended the University of Nebraska and became prominent in football and wrestling. He captained the Nebraska wrestling team and was undefeated for two years. After graduation he became head wrestling coach at Iowa State University and remained in that capacity for many years.<sup>13</sup>

The most famous wrestler was Joseph Zikmund who started to wrestle professionally in 1908. He was under the tutelage of Farmer Burns for many years. During his wrestling career, Zikmund wrestled over 1200 matches. Some of the nationally known wrestling opponents were: Joe Stecher, Adolph Ernst, Bull Montana, Landos, Zybisko, and Chief Montur. Highlights of his wrestling career were his victory over Strangler Lewis in Chicago, Earl Caddock in Des Moines, Iowa, Frank Gotch in Omaha, and his match for the light-heavy weight championship of the world in 1922. The match ended in a draw after two hours of wrestling. After 1926 he was known as the wrestling Mayor of Brainard.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup>Butler County Press, May 17, 1917. "An account relating the news that Hugo Outopalik was going to Atlantic City to the National Amateur Wrestling Tournament."

<sup>14</sup>Personal Interview with Joseph Zikmund. February 10, 1936.

In 1928, with his friend John Pesek of Ravenna, he went to Australia and wrestled for nine months, participating in thirty-eight matches. After retiring from active wrestling Zikmund conducted a wrestling school and became a well-known wrestling referee. Local boys who participated in wrestling were Joe Tripesovsky, Charles Camera, John Janousek, Adolph Hlavac, Fred Texel, John Novacek, Jerry Maixner, Frank Hotovy and George Smersh.<sup>15</sup> No other wrestlers attained the distinction that these two wrestlers did during their lifetime.

Other pastimes participated in by the Czechs were Live Pigeon and Blue Rock shooting.<sup>16</sup> Dwight organized an athletic club and had twenty-seven members who engaged in boxing, wrestling and basketball.<sup>17</sup> Bowling teams existed in Dwight, Brainard and Linwood.<sup>18</sup> A football team was even organized in Brainard but no evidence was found as to the kind of season the boys had.<sup>19</sup>

Much has been said about drinking among the Czechs. For many of them, this reputation is an exaggeration. For the most part their indulgence consists of the

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<sup>15</sup>Brainard Clipper, December 29, 1916.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., November 30, 1901.

<sup>17</sup>Butler County Press, January 24, 1918.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., April 12, 1917.

<sup>19</sup>Brainard Clipper, October 10, 1904.

the consumption of beer. They drink in a leisurely fashion as they visit in their homes or play a game of cards at their favorite tavern. As a group they are not particularly fond of hard liquor.

In prohibition days when sale of liquor was illegal in Nebraska some bootlegging among the Czech was carried on. In one instance a well-known bootlegger even ran for sheriff. Fortunately, he was defeated in the primaries. Bootlegging did not flourish as one might expect. The Czechs made their own "home brew" for their own consumption. Wine making also produced liquor for home consumption. Tame and wild grapes provided many a gallon, and dandelion wine was quite a treat. When fruit was plentiful, peach and apricot brandies were also made. Not every Czech family made "home brew" and during this period many Czechs forgot their habit of drinking.

Czechs in their amusements do not vary greatly from other nationalities. Their fondness for music has undoubtedly created a great deal of interest in dancing. The early Czechs were more clannish than the younger generation of Czech-Americans. With all of the hard work of pioneering, they have managed to inject into their lives a great deal of pleasure and enjoyment of the better things in life.

## CHAPTER XI

### RECENT TRENDS

Since the first settlement of the Czechs in the early 1870's many changes have taken place. The process of Americanization began immediately. Their future was now linked with the future of America and its ideals rather than with their Czech heritage. The playing of the Czech National Anthem "Kde domov Muj" no longer shakes the frame of men nor brings handkerchiefs to the misty eyes of women of the second and third generation Czech-Americans. The original Czech pioneers have passed on. Only a handful remain. Even many who were children among the early settlers have passed on. With their passing went the strongest link that connected the American-born Czech with the land of his forefathers. This was the group that tried so hard to tell the glory of Bohemia's past and to retain their language. It was this group that also tried to preserve many of their ancient customs.

It was natural for the older Czechs to speak their native tongue and its use was a part of their daily lives. Their American-born children began their Americanization when they entered the primary grades of their schools and developed their citizenship in

practical life.<sup>1</sup> The denationalization of this European stock had begun. Many foreign-born Czechs made it a practice to converse in Czech at home and learn English as rapidly as they could in school. It is for this reason that many early Czech school districts sought instructors who were American so that their children would progress faster. The youngsters were quick to respond as they found that they could express themselves more clearly and the tendency to drop the Czech language at home began.

The Czech language can still be heard on the streets and stores of the Czech towns. To find a second and third generation Czech who can write and read the Czech language is becoming more difficult. At one time Czech magazines and newspapers could be found in Czech homes. Over thirty-four magazines and newspapers appeared in Nebraska from 1871 to 1921.<sup>2</sup> Today, no Czech daily newspaper is published in Nebraska and only two are published nationally.

The first Czech settlers themselves began their Americanization by declaring their intention of citizenship. Frank Faytinger filed in Douglas County in 1868. Matej Shmerka, Matej Pavel, John Voboril, Joseph Pavel,

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<sup>1</sup>Chapek, op. cit., 102.

<sup>2</sup>Rose Rosicky, "Miss Rosicky compiled a list of Czech magazines and newspapers published in Nebraska from 1871 to 1921. Mimeographed copy is in writer's possession."

Joseph Vyskocil, Joseph Shorney, Frank Prochaska, John Shorney and John Pavel filed their intentions for citizenship in 1869. Filings were usually in Douglas or Saunders County.<sup>3</sup> They evidently filed in groups as dates on filings were the same. They evidently acted as witnesses for each other. The list declaring intentions of citizenship grew exceedingly in the later 1870's to 1890.

From the beginning of the settlements there was a tendency for Czechs to encourage marriage with Czechs. This tendency also appeared in other nationalistic groups in America. The older Czechs frowned on their young men and women if they fraternized too freely with non-Czechs. Getting too serious was discouraged by the parents. As the Czech population continued to increase by immigration it was easier to find young men and women of their nationality. One factor must not be overlooked among Butler County Czechs. The large Czech population is predominately Catholic, so unless the young man or women of another nationality was of the same faith, a problem arose. Examination of obituary notices in newspapers reveals that mixed marriages did take place. Marriage with other nationalities is more evident among the second and third generations.

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<sup>3</sup>Clerk of District Court records. Records of filings and dates of final papers were compiled from records found in the vault of the District Clerk's office.

Following World War I, changes have taken place among those who were in the service. Many young men had never been far away from the community and when they came back their interest centered in the future of America and its ideals. The young men and women began to leave their districts and make their livelihood elsewhere. Lincoln and Omaha attracted many of the enterprising and more ambitious young people, leaving behind a less ambitious group. This manifests itself in the caliber of youth left in town, rather than those who have remained on farms. Many young people have left the Czech communities to attend colleges and universities and have entered other professions which in many cases does not bring them back to their communities. Outside of the youngsters of school age, the Czech communities are made up of older citizens who have retired from the farm or are business people.

The bank failures, drouths and crop failures of the 1930's did result in an unhealthy financial situation. Very few Butler County banks survived the depression and many farms were lost. Insurance, banks and real estate companies came into ownership of many of these farms. No change is noted in regard to the make-up of the Czech districts. Where the farms were sold or tenants secured, they were usually Czechs so a non-Czech population has not appeared. Many Czech farmers increased their land

holdings during the depression and Czech farmers are now found in the western part of Butler County. Before the depression only a few Czech farmers owned land there.

The Czechs as farmers have always shown progressive tendencies and are very competitive among themselves. The first settler who purchased a pair of fly nets for his horses, or the first lady who owned a new rocking chair was viewed with envy and was evidence of the fact that the owner was making his way in the world.<sup>4</sup>

Modern farm machinery is found on the farms. Modern homes with all the conveniences usually found in city homes have replaced many of the old farm homes. When the dry years came, the Czech farmer did not hesitate to try drouth-resisting sorghums and hybrid corn. Crop failures and extension of governmental activities into the field of farming was viewed apprehensively by the older Czechs. They had managed during the drouth days of the 1890's and felt they could do it over again. Nevertheless, they have gone along with farm programs. Acreages in many cases have been reduced, hog production has declined, but cattle production has probably held its own, if not increased. Many Czech farmers applied for relief when the New Deal Program was inaugurated, especially during the crop failures that occurred in the 1930's.

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<sup>4</sup>Tihacek, Interview, June 16, 1940.



Before leaving the Czech people of Butler County it would be well to **notice** another change that has taken place. Their homes are built in the conventional pattern, their living rooms are filled with modern furniture and the kitchens have the latest gadgets. In that living room a modern radio may be playing Czech music from a nearby broadcasting station and in the kitchen the housewife may be preparing food, which would please her Czech ancestors. Old ways are dying out and some day the old Czech family names will be the sole reminders of the land of Bohemia.

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