

PIONEER IOWA BOHEMIANS

By PAULINE SKORUNKA MERRILL*

The Bohemians of Sioux City settled here during the early seventies and eighties. My father and mother were the first Bohemians to locate in Sioux City, as far as I know, having come March 3, 1870. Father was born January 20, 1830, in the village Stupna P. C. Kremze, close to Prague, Austria (Czechoslovakia). Mother was born in the same village on February 2, 1837. They were married February 4, 1860, soon after father received his discharge from the Austrian army in which he served eleven years (from 1848 to 1859). He played in Franz Josef Royal Imperial band, where he received his musical education. He could play any wind instrument, but his clarinets were his favorites. I have music he wrote for his set of clarinets.

Before entering the army he served four years without pay as apprentice in a tailoring establishment. He also learned the barber trade. These were very useful to him while he served in the army. Father traveled in many lands and could speak six different languages: French, German, Italian, Spanish, Prussian and Polish, which accomplishment was very useful to him in after years.

He told of many experiences. When he was stationed at the Black sea a soldier stood guard on the beach. Each night a guard would disappear, so they built a tower to watch from. They stuffed a dummy with unslacked lime and a large, man-eating animal came ashore and swallowed the dummy. Another time they were in Italy, where they slept on the ground and could feel the scorpions crawling under or over them, but did not dare move for fear of being stung. He enjoyed the figs and fruit they could buy there. They would watch for a certain kind of snake with a wide yellow streak down its back, as they

*An address delivered by Pauline Skorunka Merrill before the Pioneer Club of Sioux City, Iowa, September 25, 1937, and contains valuable historic data.

marched through dense woods, using as butter the lard they could melt from its back.

There was so much unrest in Europe after this war that my father and about ten other families decided to come to America where there was more freedom, so they auctioned their household goods. How my mother cried when she had to part with her fine linens all woven by hand! She brought one sheet, tablecloth, and some towels, also a hank of flax she had carded, which she later divided among us three girls.

Father and mother went around by the way of Vienna and Strassbourg in northern France to see the famous clock in the cathedral. It has figures which come out when the clock strikes the hours, half hours, and quarter hours. Other figures point to the days of the week and dates of the month. At noon figures of Jesus and the twelve apostles move in a procession around the clock, and a cock crows as they disappear. I was quite young, and while mother was watching the clock, I wandered into a large office building and climbed three flights of stairs before an office woman took me in tow, and gave me candy. Then looking out of the window and seeing mother searching for me, she led me down to her, giving me a small gold brooch which she tied around my neck. I still have the brooch.

EMIGRANTS CAME TO AMERICA

This colony of Bohemians met at LaHavre on September 3, 1869, and sailed for America over a Bremen line to a new land of freedom. My mother was the only one of our party who did not get seasick. She waited on all of the rest. On September thirteenth we ran into a terrible storm, and two young men of our party were washed overboard. It took us over three weeks to cross the ocean. On arriving in New York, we all went to Chicago, where some of our party had friends. Some of them stayed in Chicago, while the others went on into the Dakotas, into Bon Homme county, where they settled on homesteads.

Father obtained work in Chicago at tailoring; also joined an orchestra. He played every night. Mother

didn't like Chicago; too much noise and no friends, and home alone all day and all evening, so they moved to Mineral Point, Wisconsin, but it was a mining town and father could not make a living, so they moved on to the Dakotas to join their lifelong friends. Father knew nothing of farming, so he sewed for the farmers and their wives that winter and they paid him in meat and grain. Mother worked in the hop fields while the Kotcher sisters took care of Sister Anastacia and me.

One day a traveling bishop came through Tabor and stayed at the Kotcher home. Josef took such good care of his horses he asked him if he didn't want to come with him and be his coachman, which he did for many years. The bishop, whose name was Haire, traveled all over Dakota territory giving lectures. Josef Kotcher met an Indian school-teacher whom he married. She owned lots of government land and they lived many years at Gordon, Nebraska.

The Bohemians whom I heard father talk of as having settled around Wagner, Tyndal, Tabor, Scotland and Olivette in Bon Homme county, were: Janda Josef Soukup, Vincent Hakel, J. Roechadell, Anton Byfel, Albert Blazek, Vencil Novotinee, Mr. Janousheks, Paul, Josef and Anna Wysup, John Dvorak Vortekf Vavra Johanna—Kate, Josef Kotcher, and others whom I cannot recall. My father attended their reunions in his later years.

FAMILY ARRIVES AT SIOUX CITY

Father and mother, sister Stazy and myself came to Sioux City from the Dakotas in March, 1870. Father had but six dollars in cash. He rented a small house on the prairie from a Mr. Nedham. It stood about where West Second and Sioux are now. He obtained tailoring from Jack McGee, a costume tailor located in the Vinton block, who had come here in 1869 with the James Leitch and Crawford families from Madison, Wisconsin. Our only neighbors were the Freenys and the Fred Kneeps families. Mary Kneeps still occupies the original home on the bluff between Third and Fourth streets. There were no

tailor shops in those days. Father brought all his work home. One day he decided to clean a rain barrel which stood at our back door in which he cooled his large forty-pound press iron. When he rolled the barrel away a large snake was coiled under it. He killed it with an axe which was close by.

About 1874 or 1875, James Leitch and Jack McGee formed a volunteer fire department. The engine house stood on Water street between Third and Fourth streets, next to the M. C. Davis flour mill. John Robson was chief, James Leitch and Jack Ryan assistant chiefs, Ross Weir and James Shanley, and M. C. Follis treasurer. M. A. Lyons was engineer and Albert Skorunka fireman and watchman. Father slept in the engine house on a cot beside a large open cistern just behind the engine. When an alarm sounded, father would light wood in the firebox and the engine would start pumping water into the engine out of the cistern. The hose carts were drawn by hand to the fire. Many times when father was playing at the Academy of Music or Turnverein Hall for dances, I would take his place and sleep at the engine house and light the match to the firebox of the engine. The second floor of the engine house was used for lodge meetings and band practice.

Father was interpreter for Dan Cheney who run the depot hotel. He would bring men whom he could not understand, up to Jack McGee and father would find out where they wanted to go and tell Cheney. Many of these travelers were housed by my father. Father bought a translator at Pinkney's book store, and studied it. It was not long before he could speak, read, and write English.

On Ash Wednesday in 1872, mother went to church which was located on West Seventh, about Perry, with the Jim and Bridget Nelon home right back of it facing Perry. When services were over there was a blinding blizzard raging. Mother lost her directions and wandered upon the porch of a barber's home. As she could speak only Bohemian and German, she could not tell them where

she lived. This storm lasted two days. She had set a batch of bread and father had quite a time getting it into loaves and baked.

The families who lived on West Seventh, as I remember them, were the McNamaras, who lived on the edge of the creek near the Seventh street bridge. Mary McNamara married Tom Foley, afterwards Police Judge. I worked with his sister Delia Foley many years at O'Meara and Webster's tailor shop. There were Gossens, Donnellys, Colemans, and going west, the Louis Kettle-mens who sold their home to Jonny Sassano, the harpist, whose second wife and her daughter Rose are still occupying it. Turning on Market were the Willeys, Dineens, Schoolards, Gradys, and Louis Montangue; also the Hân-ranhans.

ACQUIRED SIOUX CITY PROPERTY

On March 30, 1874, father bought two lots on the edge of a ravine. The back of the lots was cut off by the Pembina-Yankton railroad, now the Milwaukee line, where West Fourth and Market are now. A Bohemian carpenter, Fred Cach, who came here in 1872 with the Matij Juzek family from Baltimore, built us a frame three-room and large ell kitchen home. Louis Agness, who lived about Ninth and Market, dug us a deep well where we drew up water in buckets fastened with chains over a windlass, from which well we supplied all our neighbors. Louis Agness also built us a large cistern under our ell kitchen, with a pump.

Mother raised geese and ducks in the creek and ravine in front of our home. I used to go clear down to Bluffs street where Bob Kneeb's run his race horses, to bring our geese home. She also had lots of chickens and two cows and two hogs. Many is the time I was late at Webster school on account of delivering milk and eggs to the Hart-neets, Donavans, Schudells, Ryans, Fitzgibbons, and F. X. Hansen and Dr. Krejci. We had to cross this creek on planks to get to Webster school. It ran to Perry creek at Sixth and Perry, where there was a large bridge.

There was a high, teetery sidewalk built upon stilts where the Curtis Sash Company is now located. Our first artesian well was drilled about West Fourth and Perry, at a depth of 2011 feet,—wonderfully cold, clear mineral iron water. Later it was piped onto Shanley's lot, West Fourth and Bluff, and is now piped into Chesterman's bottling works and used for their soft drinks. Next door to the artesian well was the lovely Hanson home, with a yard of beautiful flowers. They were uncle and aunt of Charles Harstad who made his home there until his mother and sisters and brothers came here to make their homes. Across the street were the Tom Tuckers and Tooheys, and Waltermires' picture gallery.

In the winter of 1874, the roof of Webster School blew off during a blizzard. Father built a long arbor all the length of our house. He planted grapes to cover the arbor for shade; also made his own wine with a handmade press, which Joe Vondrak built for him, and evenings we would all sit and sing Bohemian songs. Father built his own smoke house and cured his meat for winter. Mary Sterling Grabin told me many times she and other children at Webster school would watch father dress hogs in our back yard.

The first little German band, also known as the Light Guard band, used to come to practice in our arbor on Sunday afternoons (about 1875). Fritz Runge was leader. Wm. Schudell, Tad Martin, Geo. Hill, Mr. Elsim, or Harry Fredelle, S. Stickler, Joe Borsch, and Albert Skorunka. This little band played every Sunday all summer at Borsche's beer garden way out in the country in a grove of trees about Fourteenth and Center streets. They had a platform where they danced and picnicked and visited all afternoon and evening.

Father also used to take us up the Missouri river on steamboat excursions where this little band played and they danced all the way up to Yankton and back on an open deck.

Another orchestra my father joined was organized by Sorensen who was a very fine violinist. Mose Reed played

French cornet, Albert Skorunka the clarinets; Oscar Hoberg bass viol; Joe Borsch viola; Wm. Schudell cornet; Mr. Sorensen was leader; Mose Reed business manager. They played at the Academy of Music, and Peavy Grand, and with Jonnie Sassano who was a very fine harpist and played at entertainments up on Cod Fish Hill.

Mose Reed, who came here in 1878, also organized the first brass band. Among members were James Turnbull who played a French horn and was a grocer (Deal & Turnbull), Fred Bush, Harry Beadell (worked in Journal bindery), Henry Wekerline, alto horn, Charles Hillard, trombonist was a tinner; Henry Mapes, bass horn; Jimmie Orr, snare drummer was a shoemaker; Walter Brookings, Albert Skorunka, clarinets, were tailors for Jack McGee & M. A. Ormsby. This brass band was called the Northwestern band, and later, the K. P. band. Well do I remember how my father used dozens of lemons to keep his brass instruments shiny to march in parades down muddy Fourth street on the Fourth of July, and at interstate fairs at Riverside, and on all holidays.

SOUGHT GOLD IN BLACK HILLS

In the spring of 1876 my father got the gold fever. Men were coming through Sioux City telling of the gold to be had in the Black Hills. He joined a party of men. They pooled their money—bought mules, wagons, and outfits and started for the land of promise. Mother baked a wash boiler full of rye bread; packed butter, bacon, and beans, blankets and warm clothing. Among these whom I can recall were Fritz Runge, Joe Borsch, John Schlawig, Gustave Pecaut, and Arron Hattenbach, who was a jeweler and was in business many years in Deadwood. I have an ebony ink well he gave my father for me. They suffered many hardships while crossing the Bad Lands. It took them eight days to go fifteen miles as they had to unload the wagons where there were no bridges, carry their provisions across and load the wagons again. Many nights when they found traces of Indians they did not sleep much. One night as they were making camp,

father set his big bass horn on the ground. After supper they were going to have a little music, and when father started to put the mouthpiece on his horn he saw two fangs wiggling. A snake had crawled all through the horn and could not back out, so the men took sticks and pulled him through. Father was very careful where he parked his horn after that.

These men all staked out claims around Hill City and Deadwood, but living was high—a dollar a meal, eggs twenty-five cents each, flour a dollar a pound. Father had all the tailoring he could do and the boys played at amusement places and in front of saloons. Got ten dollars each for three hours' playing. But father could not stand the poor food. They lost two of their men with mountain fever. It was impossible to get good drinking water as the miners would start panning gold at daybreak and the streams were all filled with mineral, making the water unfit to drink. So the latter part of October he started back home by train. I remember when he threw his roll of blankets into the back yard as the train went by—the Pembina, now the Milwaukee. Mother sent us down the track to meet him when he came back from the depot. He was so sick and thin and was not able to work for months. He brought each one of us a little chamois bag of gold dust. I still have mine. But he lost his claim.

While father was away, the grasshoppers came so thick you could not see the sun. They settled on the railroad tracks and gummed the rails so an engine could not pull a train up that grade past our back yard. Mother had a large garden on vacant lots around us. In order to save our vegetables we dug deep, wide trenches all around the garden, and tied paper to broom handles and chased the grasshoppers all day into these trenches and at night we burned them. At daybreak either mother or I was out there never letting them settle on the garden. We saved our garden, and F. X. Hansen, the druggist, and Dr. J. C. Krejci came out and offered mother fifty cents a head for her cabbage, but she did not sell and father made a barrel of kraut that fall. That was real pioneering.

EARTHQUAKE VISITS SIOUX CITY

Dr. J. C. Krejci was a pioneer Bohemian. He came to Sioux City from Prague in 1872. He had his office and living quarters on Pearl over the bakery of Henry Fachman between Fourth and Fifth. He had a very fine bass voice. He formed a singing society called the Manechoir. They practiced in the rear room of the Tower jewelry store operated by Wm. Hiles, which was on Pearl off Fourth toward Third. He married Chris Borman's oldest daughter. In Europe Dr. Krejci sang in concerts with prima donna Madam Paulina Lucca. Dr. Krejci also published a German paper in 1875, *The Courier*. I can remember I was being confirmed on May 28, 1877, in St. Mary's Church, which stood on the southwest corner of Sixth and Pierce, with a lovely lawn all around it where Trimble block is now. During the services we had an earthquake which cracked the entire east wall of the church. Everyone tried to get out at once. All the men were holding their children on their shoulders to keep them from being trampled under foot. Our class started towards the altar and through the sanctuary out of the side door on to Sixth street. In the choir Mary Fitzgibbons Follis, Mary McCarty, Dr. Krejci were singing. Mrs. Dr. Krejci was about the middle of the church crying: "Ach, my camile, where are you?" in German. My catechism teacher, Miss Malady, had fainted and was being carried out on the lawn. After the confusion was over we all went back into the church and Right Reverend Bishop Hennessy concluded the services. Those whom I remember in our class were: Anna Hanranhan, Rose Harnett, Maggie and Anna Ryan, Mame Donovan, Mary and Jonnie Wall, Charles O'Connor, Eliza Donnley, Ellen O'Connor.

Thomas McCarty was serving as altar boy. He afterwards became Right Reverend Msgr. McCarty of the cathedral. One of the first of a colony to come to Sioux City was Mataji Juzek, better known as watchmaker Juzek. His wife and daughter Josephine came from Baltimore in the spring of 1873. He had a brother in Balti-

more who was a large wholesale jeweler. With them came a carpenter, Fred Cach. They stayed at my father's until they located land about fifteen miles up Perry creek road and bought two teams of oxen and lumber. It took one day to haul lumber out, and one day to come back,—all ridge roads and ruts and hills. Fred Cach built their home and granaries and barns. There Josephine married a Frenchman, Alex Beaulieu, who owned an adjoining farm. They raised six sons, and one daughter, who married Mr. Max Huber. Most of the sons have large farms up Perry creek.

TWENTY-TWO DAYS IN CROSSING

In October, 1874, a colony of twenty-nine people arrived in Sioux City. It took them twenty-two days to cross the ocean. My father housed them until they got settled, some on homesteads, and some stayed in Sioux City. They were the Martin Juzeks, Sr., with five children; the Kovarns; the Marouseks; the Kudrles; the Mataji Pavlovics; the Krizeks and all their families. Martin Juzek was eleven years old, John Juzek was seven years old, Vatzlay Kovarna was a stepson, and Charles was a babe in arms. John Juzek told me he remembered when twenty-nine people slept in my father's house of three rooms and the large ell kitchen. Martin Jr. and John helped on the farm a few years, then came to Sioux City to attend business college. In 1884 they bought two lots on the southwest corner of West Third and Market and built two store buildings and a story and a half home. The stores had living quarters over them, and in 1884 Martin Juzek and John Kudrle opened a grocery store. In 1885 John Juzek bought out John Kudrle's interest,—then it was Juzek Brothers grocery store. In 1885 Martin married Fanny Beran. They were the parents of two daughters and two sons. In 1897, Martin Juzek went on the road for Franz Shenberg and traveled many years. Juzek brothers sold their grocery store to F. X. Hertz and he sold to Clark who then sold to Charles McWilliams. On September 27, 1893, John Juzek married Marie Chernohlavek.

They have one son who married a French girl while he was in the army. He is a veterinarian. His last address was Alexandria, Louisiana. He is now somewhere in England; has been in the army since 1917. They have two children. John Juzek worked for Tollerton-Warfield from 1906 to 1942, having charge of the shipping department.

Vatzob Kovarna farmed many years on the farm adjoining the Martin Juzek, Sr. farm. He married Anna Pavlick. They are the parents of three daughters and five sons, all on farms up Perry creek way. Charles Juzek married Rose Poradek. They are farming on the original farm. John Kudrle, a pioneer Bohemian, came to Sioux City from Baltimore in 1876, with his wife, her mother and father, Mr. and Mrs. Beran, and their two sons. Mrs. Martin Juzek and Mrs. John Kudrle were sisters. John Kudrle worked four years in John Rochelle's brick yard which was then on the edge of Perry creek about Eleventh or Twelfth and McDonald, where the old brick home of the Rochelle's still stands. Then Mr. Kudrle went to work at the Booge Pork house which was at Fifth and Water streets. When Booge moved into the stock yard district, Kudrle went with him and acquired much property, but after several floods he sold it and moved over on West First and Main streets. In 1884 he went into the grocery business with Martin Juzek and in 1885 built his own store on the corner of West Third and Sioux, with living quarters on the second floor. They were the parents of three sons and one daughter. She married William Fleckenstein. Mr. Kudrle retired in 1901 and his son Frank took over the store, for many years. John Kudrle and Charles Kudrle both live on the west side. Charles Pavlick worked for Mr. Kudrle many years and then moved to Omaha where he was with Haskin Brothers Soap for forty years. Joe Vorisek bought out Frank Kudrle and operated a grocery and butcher shop many years. He was married to Mary Kasper. His brother James Vorisek played in Mose Reed's Band for many years and is now living in Minneapolis. Josef Pavlovic and his wife and two sons and three daughters came

here with the Juzek colony in 1874. Mrs. Pavlovic was Mr. Juzek's sister. They settled on a large farm adjoining the Juzek farm. Adolph and James farmed the land and their father raised bees. The oldest daughter Mary married Albert Kodym, a merchant tailor of Omaha. Annie Pavlovic married Mr. Glickauff in Chicago. He was a barber and they settled in Deadwood. Josephine Pavlovic married Hugh Burkett and they still live on one of the farms on Perry creek.

Mathias Marousek with a family of eight children came in 1874. He was a tailor. His sons worked on farms until he built a home on Market between Third and Fourth. John and Anthon were tailors; Mike was a clerk in Davidson's store. Frank went to farming and was a school teacher. Charles went into dry cleaning, Mary married Mr. Jackman and they farmed. Josephine married Will Lindsay, a mail carrier, and Anna married Mr. Tackett. Joseph Vondrak also was a real pioneer. He came here in 1873 from Cleveland, Ohio, and worked at Booge's Pork House and boarded with my father. In 1875 he sent for his father, mother, two sisters, and two brothers, Frank and Mike Vondrak. He was a carpenter. On September 17, 1876, he was married to Anna Colon by R. Rev. B. C. Lenahan in St. Mary's church on West Seventh and Perry. Anna Colon came here with the W. E. Powell family and spent her Sundays at our home. She was from Moravia. Joe Vondrak built them a home up on Prospect Hill about First, between Market and Sioux, where their son Amile was born. Saved enough to make a down payment on an 80-acre farm up Perry creek about twelve miles. On this he built a small home. He moved his wife and son on the farm while he continued working at the packing house. Father lent him enough money to buy a cow and chickens and some machinery and pigs. He walked to this farm every Saturday night and back again Sunday night. In 1879 he started farming. They had to carry all their water from a spring up a hill about three blocks, but he prospered. They raised six sons: Amile, Edward, Frank, Albert, Thomas, and Joseph. As

each son got married the father gave them a farm all stocked with white-faced Hereford cattle, pigs, chickens. They all built their own homes except Joseph and he is on the old family home farm. They all live up Perry creek way.

Frank Pelan came to Sioux City in 1876; boarded at father's, worked at Barker's cooperage, next door to Franze's brewery on West Third. He moved into the packing house district where he made barrels in the packing houses. He acquired lots of property around Greenville and on Leech street, and was married. Others whom I can recall were Mr. Hubretizke, John Turecheck, Frank Krasny, Mr. Lukshan, Charles Chuhille, Jim Huiject, W. Kopal, Charles Kutil, John Kozlovsky, Jim Turchka, Jim and John Villiam, Vincent Yellan, Albert Krizek, Rudolph Hajny, Mr. Rochadell, Mr. Ryes, Mr. Reznek, Mr. Sailer, Anton Prochazka, Joe Dirltik, and others.

These Bohemians at first met each Sunday at one of their homes. Then they formed a club and in 1890 bought three lots at the foot of Main street in the willows on the sandbar. They built a club house and met every Sunday. The women brought lunches and the men played cards. The charter members were John Juzek, Martin Juzek, John Kudrle, Dr. J. C. Krejci, Albert Skorunka, Fred and Joe Chernohlavek, Mathias Marousek, Frank Pelan, John Hrubetizkee, Frank Krasney, John Kozlofvsy, Frank Stasney, John Strelesky, Joe Vondrak, Frank Vondrak, Frank Kutil, Joe Chuhille, Frank Turecheck, Vincent Yellan, James Kovarna, Mr. Ryzs, Joe Kopal, Adolph Pavlovic, Rudolph Hajny, and others. In 1906 they sold this sandbar club house and bought three lots on Prescott street and built a new club house and organized and filed articles of incorporation in the county recorder's office. The officers elected were Joe Vorisek, president; Anton Procharzka, vice president; Aman Yawrinek, Secretary; Joe Drtlek, financial secreatry; John Juzek, treasurer. The club was called Carel Havlicek Borovsky. They met twice a month during the summer.

SUBURBAN HOME ESTABLISHED

On May 4, 1875, father bought a quarter block, all prairie, on a hill where West Second and Market are now. We raised vegetables until 1881, when father built a seven-room house on the corner. Mr. Wakefield was contractor. We lived there about a year when the James Lake family occupied it until 1887, when we moved from 318 West Fourth up to 201 Market. On February 7, 1888 I was married to Addison W. Merrill. Father gave me half a lot on the alley and we built a seven-room home which I am still occupying. Hold an abstract direct from Doctor Cook—no transfer in over sixty-six years. We have three daughters. Jessie Marie Merrill married Leonard Rash in Los Angeles, now living in Alhambra. They have one daughter, Muriel Frances Rash. Edna Anastacia Merrill married Clark Turnbull. Alberta Pauline Merrill married Frank T. Siemonsma. My sister Anastacia Skorunka was married to Harry Mosby. Father gave her the other half lot where she built her home. They were parents of two children: Helen Mosby Hand, who has two daughters, Louise Hand Haynes and Frances Hand Kearney,—(They all live in Los Angeles.)—and William H. Mosby, who lives with his wife in Chicago and has a commercial art school.

Leopold Skorunka was born in Sioux City January 8, 1874 and died December 25, 1916. Marie Skorunka Jensen Schwarts lives in Los Angeles. Mother and father celebrated their Golden Wedding anniversary at Mrs. Mosby's home on February 4, 1910. Albert Skorunka died August 26, 1914. Marie Schaeffer Skorunka died August 2, 1918. Anastacia Skorunka died March 20, 1911. Leopold Skorunka died December 25, 1916.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.