

THE CZECHS IN CEDAR RAPIDS

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The settlement of the Czechs in Cedar Rapids brought to this community a large group of people who had their own language, literature, and culture. For at least two generations they had many activities in common — insurance, banks, athletic organizations, and cultural societies. But these were not all. There were Czech churches, Czech fraternal organizations, Czech schools, Czech patriotic societies, which kept in touch with Czechoslovakia while day by day the Czechs in Cedar Rapids became Americans.

RELIGION

The religious situation among the Czechs has been unique, for among no other immigrants who have come to the United States have so many people professed religious liberalism. The origin of this liberalism may be traced back to fifteenth-century Bohemia where the followers of Jan Hus sought to correct the abuses of the Roman Catholic Church and to offset Austrian autocracy with Czech democracy. For two centuries following Jan Hus, Protestantism was the dominant religion of Bohemia; then came the defeat of the Czechs in the battle of White Mountain and the subsequent supremacy of Austria and the Roman Catholic Church. Many of the Protestants fled to other countries or remained in Bohemia to worship in secret, still clinging to the motto of Jan Hus, "Seek the truth, hold the truth."¹¹⁶

The Catholic religion, however, soon became the prevail-

¹¹⁶ Rosicky's *A History of the Czechs in Nebraska*, pp. 279, 285.

ing religion in Bohemia, and 96 per cent of the people professed that faith in 1920. After the Toleration Patent of 1781, issued by Joseph II of Austria, religious freedom was granted to Lutherans and Calvinists but not to the Bohemian (Moravian) Brethren. Protestants, Catholics, and free-thinkers, made up the Czech immigrants to the United States.¹¹⁷

THE LIBERALS OR FREE-THINKERS

In the nineteenth century when a liberal trend reappeared in Bohemia, Charles Havlicek, with his anti-clerical ideas, led a movement against the Roman Church and some of the liberal-minded Czechs who fled from Bohemia during the Revolution of 1848 renounced a religion which to them was associated with the Austrian autocracy. They gladly welcomed the American idea of the separation of church and state.¹¹⁸

Various classes of liberals or free-thinkers appeared among the Czechs in the United States. Some were negativists; some believed in nature as the guiding force of mankind; and others had faith in a Creator but did not approve an organized church.¹¹⁹ Some believed that there was no God and hence no future life. Ladimir Klacel, for example, wrote: "There is no future, . . . there cannot be a heaven, and there is absolutely no hell. The heaven for which you can prepare yourself and your families is right here upon the earth."¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Kenneth D. Miller's *The Czechoslovaks in America*, p. 120; Rosicky's *A History of the Czechs in Nebraska*, p. 284.

¹¹⁸ Francis J. Brown and J. S. Roucek's *Our Racial and National Minorities*, p. 236.

¹¹⁹ Rosicky's *A History of the Czechs in Nebraska*, p. 279; Boleslav Trojan's "Pameti Ceskych osadniku v Americe" in *Amerikan Narodni Kalendar*, 1927, p. 245.

¹²⁰ *The Cedar Rapids Republican*, September 30, 1906. Ladimir Klacel, an ex-monk, was buried at Belle Plaine, Iowa.

Among the early Czech settlers in Cedar Rapids there were many with liberal ideas concerning religion. Before 1868 they met in friendly gatherings to discuss their beliefs; after that year, as members of the Reading Society, they congregated in a more formal organization to investigate and debate new thoughts concerning liberalism. It was in one of those gatherings that Jaroslav Vostrovsky and Jakub Polak suggested that steps be taken to have the newspaper *Pokrok*, then published at Racine, Wisconsin, transferred to Cedar Rapids.¹²¹ Their efforts were successful and for two years, 1869 to 1871, Frank B. Zdrubek, a militant atheist, edited the paper in the Iowa community.

After the completion of the Reading Society Hall in 1870, these people gathered there on Saturday nights and on Sundays to listen to lectures given by Mr. Zdrubek. During that same year, through the efforts of this famous journalist, there was organized in Cedar Rapids the first official unit of the *Ceske Svobodne Obce* (Society of Free-thinkers) in the United States. An outstanding event during Mr. Zdrubek's short residence in Cedar Rapids was his lecture in commemoration of the work of Thomas Paine.¹²²

When *Pokrok* was moved to Cleveland, Ohio, the society of liberals in Cedar Rapids suffered a set-back. Few capable speakers could be secured in those days aside from the teacher, John B. Suster. The founding of the Sokols and the fraternal organizations temporarily strengthened the power of the liberals, for the members of those early societies were largely free-thinkers, although these organizations did little to aid the congregation of the liberals directly.

¹²¹ L. J. Palda's "Ruch svobodomyšlný v Cedar Rapids, Ia." in *Pamatník Česko-Amerického Dne*, p. 10.

¹²² Trojan's "Paměti Českých osadníků v Americe" in *Amerikan Narodní Kalendář*, 1927, pp. 243-245; L. J. Palda's "Sin Ctenarského spolku v Cedar Rapids, Iowa", in *Květy Americké*, Vol. III, p. 160.

In the late 1870's and 1880's new settlers and visitors who came to Cedar Rapids again aroused interest in liberalism, both political and religious. One was Josef Urban, a socialist. He organized a group of one hundred laborers who, through the efforts of their ardent apostle, also became free-thinkers. As a lecturer Urban attracted attention because of his fiery comments. Sometime after 1877 L. J. Palda, "the father of Cech socialism" in the United States, moved to Cedar Rapids. During the winter of 1880, interested audiences listened each Sunday afternoon to the lectures of this eloquent speaker, but when spring came regular lectures were again abandoned.¹²³

In the early 1900's an organization of liberals was again started in Cedar Rapids known as the Svobodomyslny Druzstvo (Free-thinking Society of Czechs), the purpose of which was to sponsor educational lectures. Once a month there were discussions in the C. S. P. S. Hall¹²⁴ concerning Thomas Paine, Robert Ingersoll, Jan Amos Komensky, and various religious denominations. The membership of the congregation numbered about one hundred people.

The speaker was Joseph J. Hajek, one of the most capable leaders the society ever had. Mr. Hajek had studied at the University of Prague before he came to the United States to become the editor of a Czech newspaper. He wrote poetry and two volumes of speeches to be used by liberal speakers. The new free-thinkers' society was incorporated under the laws of the State and Hajek was authorized to solemnize marriages. He also conducted funeral services and named children.¹²⁵

¹²³ Thomas Capek's *The Cechs in America*, p. 194; L. J. Palda's "Ruch svobodomyslny v Cedar Rapids, Ia.", in *Pamatnik Cesko-Amerikemo Dne*, p. 10.

¹²⁴ These initials represent the words Cesko-Slovanska Podporujici Spolku, the name of a benevolent society.

¹²⁵ Luther Brewer's *History of Linn County, Iowa*, Vol. II, pp. 713, 714.

After the death of Mr. Hajek in 1930, lectures were no longer given. Young people were not interested in the doctrines of the free-thinkers and the liberal faith of most of the people was of a negative quality. Some became members of the Liberal Christian (Unitarian) Church. Because a number of the Czech people in Cedar Rapids prefer not to have a minister or a priest conduct a funeral service, a speaker occasionally performs that duty.¹²⁶

CZECH CATHOLIC CHURCHES

Saint Wenceslaus Catholic Church.—The early Czech Catholics in Cedar Rapids attended Saint Mary's Catholic Church¹²⁷ and occasionally Father Clement J. G. Lowery of that church invited Czech missionaries to speak to these people in their native tongue. In 1873 Father Francis Chmelar, who had parishes in nearby towns, offered to aid these Czechs to build their own church. A lot was purchased in January, 1874, and a few months later work was begun on the new structure the cornerstone of which was laid on Sunday, August 23, 1874.

On that day a procession marched from Saint Mary's Church to the site of the new church which was named, Saint Wenceslaus Catholic Church. Father Chmelar addressed the audience in the Bohemian language. This address was followed by one by Father Lowery after which the cornerstone was laid with the usual ceremonies of the church. In the box below the stone were deposited current copies of Czech and American newspapers, names of municipal officers, a record of the officiating priests, current coins, and a list of the members of the congregation.¹²⁸ The

¹²⁶ This information was furnished by Milvoj Hasek, a charter member of the congregation of free-thinkers.

¹²⁷ This is now called the Immaculate Conception Church.

¹²⁸ Florian Svrđlik's "Pocatkové osady sv. Václava a její vzrust" in *Pamatník Česko-Amerického Dne*, p. 14; *The Cedar Rapids Times*, August 27, 1874.

building, completed in 1882, was a brick structure seventy-five feet long and twenty-seven feet wide and stood on the site of the present Saint Wenceslaus high school building.¹²⁹

Father Chmelar advised the people of his congregation to purchase a cemetery because the money received from it could be used to maintain the school. The chance for this came in 1881 when Saint Mary's Church sold Saint John's Cemetery to the Czech parish. In the years 1880 and 1881 a church bell was placed in a tower in front of the church and collections were made for the altar, a statue of Saint Joseph, and other church needs.¹³⁰

Reverend John Broz served Saint Wenceslaus Church from 1889 to 1891. He was the only one of the priests trained for the priesthood in the United States; all the others were born and educated in Bohemia.¹³¹ The next priest, Father Frank Kopecky, recognized the need for a new school building and proceeded to plan for one. In 1892, a small house adjoining the church was purchased and temporarily used for a school; two years later a brick structure was completed where five Sisters of Mercy served as teachers.¹³²

Reverend Florian Svrulik said his first mass in the local church on Saint Mary's Day, 1900. One of the most important events of his priesthood was the erection of a new church building. Need for it was evident because, during the mass services, parishioners stood in the street around

¹²⁹ *Letopisy Saint Wenceslaus Church*. This is a report of the church issued in pamphlet form.

¹³⁰ Edward R. Burkhalter's "History of the Early Churches in Cedar Rapids, Iowa"; Svrulik's "Pocatkové osady sv. Václava a její vzrust" in *Pamatník Česko-Amerického Dne*, p. 14.

¹³¹ This information was secured from Monsignor Vojacek.

¹³² Luther Brewer and B. L. Wick's *History of Linn County Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 405.

the church. By 1903 a total of \$10,000 had been collected. Lots north of the school were purchased and contracts were let for the church and its furnishings and also for a Sisters' home.¹³³

The cornerstone of the new building was laid on August 5, 1904. A procession, headed by a platoon of police and Kubicek's Band, marched to the church site. Father Gunn of the Immaculate Conception Church laid the cornerstone assisted by seven other priests. After the sermons and addresses, the band adjourned to the school yard and continued to play Czech and American airs.¹³⁴ Work on the edifice continued rapidly and Christmas Day was observed in the new church. The building, which cost \$40,000, was dedicated on October 18, 1905, by Archbishop John J. Keane.¹³⁵

In 1909 the city purchased land next to the Sinclair Packing Plant for a park and sold the church a lot where a new parish house was erected; in 1910 a pipe organ was installed in the church. The present priest, Monsignor Vojaček, came to the city in 1920 and since then has worked diligently to develop the religious and educational activities of the parish.¹³⁶

Organizations of three types have played an important part in the progress of the church. From 1882 to 1924 nine insurance, four recreational, and six religious organizations were founded, most of which are still in existence. Societies of a Czech nationalistic character are the Ceska Lipa club,

¹³³ Svrđlik's "Pocatkové osady sv. Václava a její vzrust" in *Pamatník Cesko-Amerického Dne*, p. 16.

¹³⁴ *The Cedar Rapids Evening Times*, August 7, 1904.

¹³⁵ Svrđlik's "Pocatkové osady sv. Václava a její vzrust" in *Pamatník Cesko-Amerického Dne*, p. 18.

¹³⁶ *Letopisy Saint Wenceslaus Church*; Mathias Hoffmann's *Centennial History of the Arch-diocese of Dubuque*, p. 238. The school maintained by St. Wenceslaus Church is described below.

a Singers' Club, which gives public concerts of Czech music, and the Catholic Sokols. The latter, founded in 1910 by Frank and John Hac, added a girls' unit in 1912.

In all of the early services of the church the Czech language was used entirely to address the people but about 1927, because of a request from the young people of the parish, Monsignor Vojacek began to use the English language also. At the present time the Czech language is used in addressing the people at devotions during the week and for one service on Sunday, while for the other two Sunday services the English language is used.¹³⁷

The Saint Ludmila Catholic Church.— In 1906 Reverend Florian Svrulik, the priest of the Saint Wenceslaus Church, and John Viktor bought five acres of land on J Street near Wilson Avenue Southwest for \$2800. The house on this land was rented and no further steps were taken toward the establishment of a school until 1914 when the Sisters De Notre Dame, all of whom were Czechs, announced that they would take charge of a school for the Czech Catholic children of the vicinity. By the middle of October, 1914, the building was ready and school opened there with sixty pupils. A room in the Saint Ludmila School was used as a chapel, and mass was said there each Sunday morning by priests from Saint Wenceslaus Church. Sometimes people stood out of doors for this service, and sometimes a tent was set up over the porch of the building.¹³⁸

This house was not large enough for a school and a corporation was formed on December 22, 1915, for the purpose of erecting a new building. Father Svrulik and Mr. Viktor

¹³⁷ *Letopisy Saint Wenceslaus Church*; information from Monsignor Vojacek.

¹³⁸ *Silver Jubilee, Saint Ludmila Church* (a pamphlet published May 25, 1941), p. 16; information secured from Frank John, one of the charter members of the church.

donated to this new organization the property which they had purchased. Work on the structure began in September, 1915, and the first mass was said on February 13, 1916, in the chapel located on the first floor of the new school building.

Two years later Father Thomas Ballon, a native of Bohemia, offered his services to the parish with no remuneration except lodging. Upon the death of Father Svrulik in 1920, the Saint Ludmila parish received property which he had willed to that church, and for the next two years this little west side parish was again a mission of the Saint Wenceslaus Church.¹³⁹

On October 6, 1922, Reverend Francis Hruby, who was then the assistant pastor at the Saint Wenceslaus Church, was appointed the first regular priest of the Saint Ludmila Church. After that the parish developed rapidly. In 1925 the Sisters De Notre Dame moved from Cedar Rapids to a convent in Omaha. The parish bought their home and some additional property adjoining the school and in 1926 the present church edifice was erected at a cost of about \$27,000. Frolic Field, a large area for recreation back of the church, was put into shape in 1934 and 1935, largely through the efforts of the Frolic Club. An annual festival in June, known as the Kolach Festival, is held here. It consists of a bazaar and a carnival with coffee and kolaches served free with each paid admission and is enjoyed by the whole community.¹⁴⁰

CZECH PROTESTANT CHURCHES

The Jan Hus Memorial Presbyterian Church.—In the early 1860's there was a goodly number of Czech Protes-

¹³⁹ *Silver Jubilee, Saint Ludmila Church*, p. 18; Hoffmann's *Centennial History of the Arch-diocese of Dubuque*, p. 543.

¹⁴⁰ *Silver Jubilee, Saint Ludmila Church*, pp. 22-24. Information was also secured from Father Francis Hruby.

tants¹⁴¹ in Cedar Rapids who were known as the Evangelicals of the Reformed Church. Because of their poverty, it was years before they were able to afford a building in which to hold their religious services and in the meantime they met in homes to sing hymns in long meter to the accompaniment of a violin. Occasionally these Protestants walked to Ely, nine miles from Cedar Rapids, to hear sermons by Reverend Francis Kun, the minister of the Reformed Church in that rural community. This church, organized in 1858, was the first Czech Protestant church in the United States.¹⁴²

In 1868 Miss E. J. Lund, a public school teacher, reported to her pastor, Reverend James Knox of the First Presbyterian Church, that only a few of her pupils attended any form of religious services. As a result a Sunday School for these Czech children was organized in July of that year and conducted in a small house on Seventh Avenue and Fifth Street near the Adams School. It was later held in two rooms of the Second Ward School.¹⁴³ The next move was to a building which had been used by the First Presbyterians and which stood on the corner of Second Avenue and Third Street. Mr. Kun walked from Ely to Cedar Rapids and preached in this church three or four times a year.¹⁴⁴

In the year 1874, the Czech Evangelical people found a good friend in T. M. Sinclair, the owner of the packing plant where many of these people were employed. He offered them the use of a room in his factory where boxes served as seats. Here services were held for about two

¹⁴¹ Most of these people had come from the same Protestant district of Bohemia.

¹⁴² Miller's *The Czechoslovaks in America*, p. 143.

¹⁴³ The building was located on the site of the present Washington High School building.

¹⁴⁴ Vilem Siller, Vaclav Prucha, and R. M. DeCastello's *Pamatnik Ceskych Evanjelichych Cirkvi ve Spojenych Statech*, pp. 44 ff.

years. In 1878 the Hope Mission Chapel (Third Presbyterian Church) was erected on the hill back of Saint Wenceslaus Church, and here at three o'clock Sunday School classes were taught in the English language, and at four o'clock church services were conducted in the Czech language. Reverend Mr. Kun often came to preach. During that same year Reverend J. E. Szalatnay, superintendent of the Reformed Churches in Bohemia, visited the Cedar Rapids congregation. Mr. Sinclair tried to persuade him to remain as the local pastor and even guaranteed him his salary, but the minister could not comply with this request.

On September 12, 1880, with the aid of Mr. Sinclair, this little group of Protestants formally organized a Czech Reformed Church. Finally, Reverend Mr. Bonekempr, a Russian, offered to preach to the Czech congregation and came to the city at the expense of Mr. Sinclair, but his knowledge of the Czech language was so poor that the members of his congregation found it difficult to understand him. He preached his last sermon on July 2, 1882. In the meantime Mr. Sinclair's sudden death, on March 24, 1881, brought sorrow to the congregation whom he had so kindly assisted.¹⁴⁵

After Mr. Bonekempr's brief pastorate, the church was often aided by Reverend Edward R. Burkhalter, the minister of the First Presbyterian Church. From 1883 to 1890 Mr. Kun again preached in Hope Mission Chapel once a month. On March 10, 1889, the Czech Reformed Church was incorporated with one hundred members and in May the frame structure of the First Congregational Church was purchased for \$1600 (including the seats) and moved to the corner of Ninth Avenue and Seventh Street. On July

¹⁴⁵ Siller, Prucha, and DeCastello's *Pamatnik Ceskych Evanjelickych Cirkvi ve Spojenych Statech*, pp. 45, 46; information from Charles Dudycha, son of Jan Dudycha who was one of the charter members of the church and also one of the first elders.

7th this building was dedicated with sermons by Reverend Mr. Kun¹⁴⁶ and several American ministers. On September 29th of that same year this Reformed Church became the Fourth Presbyterian Church of Cedar Rapids.¹⁴⁷

In the summer of 1890 Vaclav Dudycha, a son of one of the first elders and a student at Union Theological Seminary, preached in this new church without remuneration. That fall Vaclav Hlavaty came to the United States and during the Christmas holidays preached to the people of the Fourth Presbyterian Church. On January 7, 1891, he received a call to be their minister and on January 25th he was ordained. A few months after Mr. Hlavaty's ordination, a debt of \$735 on the church property was paid with the help of the First and Second Presbyterian Churches. After a thirty-year struggle to attain their goal, the people of this congregation at last had their own place of worship and a regular minister of their own nationality.¹⁴⁸

Reverend Mr. Hlavaty's ministry was an epoch of progress for the church. The church membership increased from 90 in 1891 to 220 in 1900. In the fall of 1892 a church parsonage was erected at a cost of \$1600. Until 1910 the church was a member of the Cedar Rapids Presbytery; in

¹⁴⁶ The Reverend Francis Kun who was the first Czech Protestant minister in the United States was a very unusual man. He was born in Bohemia August 30, 1825, ordained a minister in 1849, and came to the United States in 1856. For a few years he was a farmer in Tama County, Iowa. Several times before he accepted a call to Ely, Iowa, in 1860, he walked there, a distance of fifty miles, to preach. He also taught Latin and Greek at Western College, Western, Iowa, from 1870 to 1872. He was invited to move to Cedar Rapids and his salary was guaranteed by Mr. Sinclair but he did not accept. After helping to found the church in Cedar Rapids, he became its spiritual adviser.—Frank Pokorney's "Frantisek Kun" in *Verny Sluzebnik*, 1895, pp. 5-12.

¹⁴⁷ Siller, Prucha, and DeCastello's *Pamatnik Ceskych Evanjelickych Cirkvi ve Spojenych Statech*, pp. 46, 47.

¹⁴⁸ Information was secured from Reverend Vaclav Dudycha; Siller, Prucha, and DeCastello's *Pamatnik Ceskych Evanjelickych Cirkvi ve Spojenych Statech*, p. 47.

that year it became a part of the newly organized Central West Bohemian Presbytery. In 1915, the old church building was sold and moved away to make room for the new structure and on July 6th, Jan Hus Day, ground was broken for the new Bohemian Presbyterian Church, renamed the Jan Hus Memorial Presbyterian Church, which was erected at a cost of \$24,000. It was dedicated on Sunday, January 9, 1916, free from debt. Dr. Joseph Bren preached the dedicatory sermon.¹⁴⁹

Reverend Vaclav Hlavaty was succeeded on January 1, 1920, by Dr. Joseph Bren, a native of Bohemia and a graduate of Union Theological Seminary in New York. During his ministry which lasted until 1938, the Boy's Club and the Girl's Club, both independent of the Young People's Society, were organized. The next minister was the Reverend Benjamin Paroulek who was born and educated in the United States. He did much to build up the primary department of the Sunday School and he instituted in it the latest methods of religious instruction. In October, 1941, the present pastor, Reverend Zdenek Pauk, who was born and educated in Czechoslovakia, came to the city.

In the first church the Czech language was the only one used; later the ministers preached sermons in English once a month. Since January, 1942, there have been two Sunday morning services, one in the English language and the other in Czech. The latter, however, still has the larger attendance. The membership of the church in June, 1942, was 190 of whom about 90 per cent were of Czech descent.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁹ Siller, Prucha, and DeCastello's *Pamatnik Ceskych Evanjelickych Cirkvi ve Spojenych Statech*, p. 47; *The Cedar Rapids Gazette*, January 1, 1901; John F. Hinkhouse and William M. Evans's *One Hundred Years of the Iowa Presbyterian Church*, p. 309; *The Cedar Rapids Republican*, July 11, 1915, January 9, 1916.

¹⁵⁰ This information was secured from Dr. Joseph Bren and Reverend Zdenek Pauk.

The John Hus Methodist Church.—Like the Jan Hus Memorial Presbyterian Church, the John Hus Methodist Church also had a humble beginning. In the year 1890 the young people of Saint Paul's Methodist Episcopal Church in Cedar Rapids founded a mission for Czech Protestants. This was conducted in a vacant store building located on the corner of Tenth Avenue and Second Street Southeast. A young man by the name of Jan Tauchen, who had been a bank clerk in Chicago, volunteered to work as a missionary among the Czechs and for this purpose a chapel, known as Epworth Mission, was built on Eighth Avenue and Ninth Street. The congregation, numbering twelve members, dedicated this building on May 22, 1892. It was said to be "the first Bohemian Methodist Church ever organized in this or any other country."¹⁵¹ Young people met on Wednesday nights to sing, and a prayer meeting was held every Thursday night. A Sunday School was founded in May, 1892, which soon had seventy pupils; and a Young People's Society was organized which in a short time increased from six to thirty members.

On March 8, 1894, the chapel was moved to the corner of Eleventh Avenue and Seventh Street, rebuilt, and dedicated as Hus Chapel. A newspaper item commented that "the dedicatory program was well rendered and that 'Jesus, Lover of My Soul' was sung heartily in Bohemian." Reverend V. Vanek of Chicago, who gave the main address, spoke of the zeal of the Czech Protestants and of the devotion of Jan Hus. He asked for a liberal subscription to defray the expenses of moving the chapel and almost \$150 was received.¹⁵² Reverend Jan Tauchen died on March 7, 1895, and for the next three months the church was without

¹⁵¹ Siller, Prucha, and DeCastello's *Pamatnik Ceskych Evanjelickych Cirkvi ve Spojenych Statech*, pp. 269, 270; *The Cedar Rapids Times*, June 2, 1892.

¹⁵² *The Cedar Rapids Times*, March 9, 1894.

a minister. During that interval, however, religious services were conducted by Josef Karban, one of the active members of the church.

Reverend R. N. DeCastello came to the church in July of that year. He was immediately confronted with the problem of the location of the church building, for by that time most of the members of the congregation lived on the west side of the river. Two lots on First Street and Fourteenth Avenue Southwest were purchased for \$500. Then a vacated church building was secured from the Second Evangelical congregation and moved to one of the new lots. The price of the building was \$300 which included the bell, organ, seats, and a carpet; the cost of moving and repairing it was \$1500. The remodeled church was dedicated on November 14, 1897, with a Czech service in the morning, an English service in the afternoon, and another Czech service in the evening. A small library was opened in the basement of the church with 150 books in English and Czech, but later it was closed because of disturbances in the neighborhood.¹⁵³

In July, 1899, Reverend Frank Zavodsky became the minister and in November, 1914, he was succeeded by Reverend F. D. Chada. The latter was the last Czech pastor of the John Hus Methodist Church. During his ministry he preached in the Czech language at Sunday morning services and in English at the evening services. The membership of the church in July, 1942, was about 125 persons, 30 per cent of whom were of Czech descent.¹⁵⁴

The Czech Reformed Church.—The founding of the Czech Reformed Church in Cedar Rapids was due to the

¹⁵³ Siller, Prucha, and DeCastello's *Pamatnik Ceskych Evanjelickych Cirkvi ve Spojenych Statech*, pp. 271-274.

¹⁵⁴ This information was secured from Reverend F. O. Hillman.

fact that many members of the Ely church had moved to Cedar Rapids and wished to organize a branch of their mother congregation. Reverend Joseph Balcar, then pastor of the Independent Reformed Church at Ely, was asked by Reverend F. S. Bromer, pastor of the First Reformed Church in Cedar Rapids, to preach to the Czech people, and for that purpose he offered him the use of his church edifice.

Reverend Mr. Balcar gladly assented and the following Sunday afternoon, April 7, 1907, the first services were held and on October 3, 1909, the church was formally organized with forty-two members. The newly organized congregation continued to assemble in the building of the First Reformed Church until June 19, 1910, when for the first time it met in a tent called "Bohemian tabernacle" which had been temporarily erected until a permanent building could be provided.¹⁵⁵

Early in the month of September, 1910, steps were taken for the erection of a church. Rudolph Kriz donated a lot, Charles B. Zalesky drew up the plans, and Wesley Chihak received the contract to build a church for the sum of \$3800. A loan of \$2700 was received from the Board of Home Missions of the Reformed Church and the remainder of the cost of the building was paid before the church was dedicated. The cornerstone was laid on Sunday, November 6, 1910, and in less than a month services were held in the basement of the building. On January 15, 1911, the church was dedicated, with all debts paid.

About two years later Reverend Joseph Balcar resigned and for a few months the church was without a pastor. Then in the spring of 1914 Matthew Spinka, a student at

¹⁵⁵ The material for an account of this church was secured from an unpublished report written in Czech by Reverend Matthew Spinka in *Memorial Book of the Czech Evangelical and Reformed Church* and translated by Reverend Milo Filipi.

the Chicago Theological Seminary, was asked to supply the pulpit during the summer. After his graduation from the seminary he was ordained and installed, June 27, 1915, as the pastor of the church. Three years later he resigned and was succeeded in September, 1919, by Reverend Jaroslav T. Stulo who remained until May, 1922. During his pastorate a manse was erected. After Reverend Frank Helmich had served as minister for seventeen years, Reverend Milo Filipi was elected pastor in the fall of 1939.

In July, 1942, the church had sixty-three members, all of whom were of Czech descent. Since the Reformed Church united with the Evangelical Synod of North America in 1935, the church is now known as the Czech Evangelical and Reformed Church. Because the membership is not very large, the pastor's salary is supplemented by a yearly grant from the Board of National Missions of the Evangelical and Reformed Church. Sunday morning services are conducted in the Czech language, the Sunday School and Young People's Society are in English, and occasionally evening services are also conducted in that language.¹⁵⁶

FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

Soon after the early Czech settlers in the United States had erected their homes, they sought protection for themselves and their families through benevolent organizations. The first of these lodges was founded in 1850 with headquarters in New York City. About two years after it disbanded there was organized, in 1854, in St. Louis the first permanent Czech benevolent society known as the Cesko-Slovanska Podporujici Spolku. Since then numerous fraternal organizations have been founded by the Czech people.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁶ This information was secured from Reverend Milo Filipi.

¹⁵⁷ Thomas Capek's "Czechoslovaks in the United States" in *World's Fair Memorial of the Czechoslovak Group*, p. 32.

THE CESKO-SLOVANSKA PROPORUJICI SPOLKU

Fourteen years after the Cesko-Slovanska Podporujici Spolku (Czech Slavonian Benevolent Association) was founded in St. Louis a group of Czech men in Cedar Rapids recognized a need for a similar organization and a meeting was summoned for June 27, 1879, in order to arrange for an alliance with the C. S. P. S. Those present at the meeting decided to name the new organization the Prokop Velky Lodge in honor of Procopius the Great, who brought Bohemia to the peak of her military glory when he defeated the army of Frederick, Margrave of Brandenburg, on August 14, 1431. The request for affiliation with the C. S. P. S. was quickly acted upon by the main lodge and the local chapter received number forty-six, the first of the C. S. P. S. lodges in Iowa.¹⁵⁸

The formal installation into the C. S. P. S. took place on July 27, 1879, in a building on the corner of First Avenue and First Street. At that time the annual dues of the order were six dollars. After Josef Vondracek had been received as the first candidate, the membership of this fraternal organization grew rapidly. Because there were then no Czech doctors in the city, the lodge chose Dr. Charles H. French as their official physician.¹⁵⁹

Three years after the formation of the Prokop Velky Lodge, two other C. S. P. S. organizations were founded in Cedar Rapids. One, known as Karel IV Number 77, was organized on February 20, 1882, with thirty-three men and their wives as charter members. As in the Prokop Velky Lodge, this organization also adopted the name of a per-

¹⁵⁸ Joseph Urban's "Jednota Cesko-Slov. Podporujicich Spolku" in *Pamatnik Cesko-Americkemo Dne*, p. 21; Franz von Lutzow's *Bohemia*, pp. 157-160; Sarka B. Hrbkova's "Bohemians Have Done Much for Cedar Rapids" in *The Cedar Rapids Republican Semi-Centennial Magazine Edition*, June 10, 1906.

¹⁵⁹ Urban's "Jednota Cesko-Slov. Podporujicich Spolku" in *Pamatnik Cesko-Americkemo Dne*, p. 21.

son famous in the history of Bohemia, Charles (Karel) IV, who was one of the best kings and truest patriots of Bohemia.¹⁶⁰ The second lodge organized that year, the Mladocech (Czech Youth) Number 82, was affiliated with the C. S. P. S. on December 24th with thirty-three young men as members.

From the time of its organization the Prokop Velky Lodge had planned to erect its own hall and for that purpose it laid aside a definite sum of money each year. In 1881 a lot was purchased on which stands the present hall. Previous to the transaction an invitation was extended to the Karel IV and Mladocech lodges to join with Prokop Velky in the erection of the new building but both refused to do so. The Prokop Velky organization, not discouraged by this refusal, called a special meeting of its members and decided to undertake the project single handed. Contributions were made by individual members and by other Czech people in the city, a building committee was appointed, and within a short time a contract for the construction of the hall was let.

According to a newspaper account, the cornerstone was laid on October 30, 1890, "with due pomp and ceremony." In describing the event the reporter related: "The assembly was large and the procession was an imposing one." In the lead was a platoon of police, followed by a band and carriages containing Governor Horace Boies, prominent Bohemians, and the Governor's staff. "These were followed by a long line of the members of various Bohemian societies in regalia and carriages containing members of the female societies of the city . . . The governor's address was most appropriate for the occasion, referring especially to the progress of our adopted citizens notably

¹⁶⁰ Urban's "Jednota Cesko-Slov. Podporujicich Spolku" in *Pamatnik Cesko-Americkemo Dne*, pp. 19, 22; Lutzow's *Bohemia*, pp. 69-73.

among whom are the Bohemians who comprise so large a number of the population of Cedar Rapids." ¹⁶¹

Seven months later, on June 6, 1891, the building was dedicated. The new C. S. P. S. Hall was three stories high, cost \$22,400, and was designated for the use of the lodge and other Czech societies. A large assembly room was provided, with a stage, scenery, and theatrical appliances. In order to pay a \$9000 debt on the building, bonds were issued bearing six per cent interest. ¹⁶²

Fifteen days after its dedication, June 21 to 28, 1891, the new hall was the scene of the tenth convention of the main lodge of the C. S. P. S. There, 150 delegates from other vicinities assembled with the local members in the largest convention of Czech people which had been held in the city up to that time. ¹⁶³

In 1900 an \$8000 addition, ninety feet by thirty feet, was made to the hall. The enlarged building was formally dedicated on Christmas Eve, 1900, with a dancing party attended by members of the society, their families, and a few friends. "A splendid address was given by Professor Bohumil Shimek", notes a newspaper reporter, "and at midnight an elegant supper was served." In the new addition were a reception room, a reading room, and a small lodge room. Eight years later another three-story addition to the building was completed and opened to the public, thus making the hall at that time one of the most commodious in the city. ¹⁶⁴

From 1915 to 1919 the C. S. P. S. Supreme Lodge was located in Cedar Rapids. During those years Dr. J. S.

¹⁶¹ *The Cedar Rapids Times*, November 6, 1890.

¹⁶² Urban's "Jednota Cesko-Slov. Podporujicich Spolku" in *Pamatnik Cesko-Americkemo Dne*, pp. 21, 22.

¹⁶³ Urban's "Jednota Cesko-Slov. Podporujicich Spolku" in *Pamatnik Cesko-Americkemo Dne*, p. 19.

¹⁶⁴ *The Cedar Rapids Republican*, December 27, 1900, June 28, 1909.

Vojan, the editor of the lodge magazine, *Organ C. S. P. S.*, lived in the city although the magazine was printed in Chicago.¹⁶⁵

The earliest subordinate lodges of the C. S. P. S. had been founded by men although their wives were included as members. On May 14, 1927, a group of twenty-eight Czech women also demonstrated their ability as organizers when they established their own Karla Masaryk Lodge Number 344 C. S. P. S. The name chosen was in recognition of the services performed for Czechslovakia by the American-born wife of Thomas G. Masaryk. The president and Mrs. Masaryk acknowledged the honor with a letter and a picture of themselves which now hangs in one of the lodge rooms of the C. S. P. S. Hall.

This organization has always supported all of the fraternal and national projects in which the Czechs of Cedar Rapids have engaged. Its outstanding achievement, however, has been the formation of the Karla Masaryk chorus composed of ten of its members. This chorus has practiced Czech songs each Monday evening under the direction of Mrs. Esther Hronik Klersey and when it has appeared in public the members have worn authentic and colorful Czech costumes. The Karla Masaryk chorus has sung in many concerts both in Cedar Rapids and in other Iowa communities.¹⁶⁶

In 1933 the C. S. P. S. merged with four other brotherhoods to form an organization known as the Czechoslovak Society of America (C. S. A.). Although the members of the original lodge represented the religious liberals of the Czech people, today the members are of all creeds. In

¹⁶⁵ The by-laws of the organization limit the Supreme Lodge to one city for four years at a time. See also *The Cedar Rapids Republican*, September 13, 1914, December 29, 1918.

¹⁶⁶ This report was secured from Mrs. Esther Klersey.

Cedar Rapids in June, 1942, there were about 1500 people in the subordinate organizations of the C. S. A. and about 1000 families received the national publication. In addition to its insurance features, the local lodges have also sponsored plays, lectures, social affairs, and bazaars.¹⁶⁷

WOMEN'S FRATERNAL ORGANIZATIONS

In addition to being represented in the C. S. P. S., the Z. C. B. J., and the Praha Rebekah lodges, the Czech women of Cedar Rapids have been affiliated with two other national and one local fraternal organizations. These lodges are the Jednota Ceskych Dam (J. C. D.), the Sesterska Podporujici Jednoty (S. P. J.), and the Ceske Vlastenky.

The Jednota Ceskych Dam (Society of Czech Women) was founded in Cleveland, Ohio, on August 25, 1870, as a cultural and insurance organization. Soon subordinate branches were founded in all cities where Czech women resided. When first organized the annual dues of the lodge were two dollars. After one was a member for six months she could collect, in case of illness, two dollars per week for the first six months and one dollar per week for the second six months. In case of her death her beneficiaries received \$400.¹⁶⁸

The Anna Naprstek Lodge Number 24 was the first organization in Cedar Rapids to be affiliated with the national J. C. D. On March 9, 1884, thirty-five women assembled in the Reading Society Hall for the purpose of drawing up a constitution and by-laws, electing officers, and choosing a name for the local organization. The name of Anna Naprstek was selected in honor of a prominent Czech woman, the mother of Vojta Naprstek.

¹⁶⁷ Capek's "Czechoslovaks in the United States" in *World's Fair Memorial of the Czechoslovak Group*, p. 32; information secured from T. B. Hlubucek.

¹⁶⁸ Anna Mchovsky's *Jednota Ceskych Dam ve Spojenych Statech Severni Ameriky*, p. 8.

In its early days the local lodge gave two entertainments a year in order to raise money for its many and varied activities. Members of the Anna Naprstek group here called on and aided people who were ill, met and helped Czech immigrant mothers, decorated the graves of deceased members on Memorial Day, taught hand work to the girls in the Czech school, and sent contributions to Bohemia whenever droughts or floods necessitated aid. This organization still meets in the C. S. P. S. Hall once a month with an average attendance of about thirty members. Besides providing a means whereby the members may secure life insurance policies, the Anna Naprstek Lodge now provides social activities for its members, teaches patriotism, and participates in civic enterprises.¹⁶⁹

The second local organization to become affiliated with the J. C. D. was the Zofie Podlipska Lodge Number 25 which was founded in Cedar Rapids in 1885 with thirty-eight charter members. In choosing this name for their organization, says an early report of the lodge, the members wished to show that, though they were far from their homeland, they had not forgotten it and therefore they desired to honor an author of whom Bohemia was proud. By correspondence Zofie Podlipska gladly gave the Cedar Rapids lodge permission to use her name. Like the preceding organization, this lodge has also cared for the sick and needy, contributed to the Czech school, and sent donations to Bohemia.¹⁷⁰

The Pamnenka Vlasti (Forget Not My Country) was the third of the J. C. D. lodges to be organized in Cedar Rapids. Founded in 1898 with twelve members, it had one hundred

¹⁶⁹ Mchovsky's *Jednota Ceskych Dam ve Spojenych Statech Severni Ameriky*, pp. 229-232. Information was also secured from Mrs. Marie Hurka, a charter member, and from Mrs. Anna Bohac, the present president of the lodge.

¹⁷⁰ Mchovsky's *Jednota Ceskych Dam ve Spojenych Statech Severni Ameriky*, pp. 234-236.

members in May, 1942. It engages in practically the same activities as the other lodges affiliated with the J. C. D. organization. One more lodge, Ceskych Vlastenek Number 1, joined the J. C. D. On May 16, 1900, it had fifty charter members.¹⁷¹

A second national combination of lodges for Czech women is the Sesterska Podporujici Jednota (S. P. J.) or Sisterly Benevolent Order of Lodges. The first of these to be founded in Cedar Rapids was the Hvezda Pokroku (Star of Progress) Number 4, organized on September 15, 1892. On April 19, 1897, Zdenka Havlicek Lodge Number 23 was founded, the second lodge in Cedar Rapids to be affiliated with the S. P. J. group. This organization was named in honor of the wife of the great Czech journalist, Charles Havlicek.¹⁷²

In addition to organizing subordinate branches of these two national organizations, some of the Czech women of Cedar Rapids also founded a local lodge known as Ceska Vlastenky (Czech National) Lodge. When established it had seventy members; in June, 1942, it had four hundred members. Its dues have always been ten cents a month and upon the death of a member a benefit of fifty dollars has immediately been paid to the beneficiary. Like all the other lodges, it has sponsored social activities and charitable enterprises.¹⁷³

JAN HUS ODD FELLOW AND PRAHA REBEKAH LODGES

In 1884 six Czech members of a German branch of the Odd Fellows Lodge in Cedar Rapids withdrew from that

¹⁷¹ Information from Mrs. B. Hasek; "Damske spolky v Cedar Rapids" in *Pamatnik Cesko-Americkemo Dne*, p. 38.

¹⁷² "Damske spolky v Cedar Rapids" in *Pamatnik Cesko-Americkemo Dne*, p. 38. Information was also secured from Mrs. Joseph Paidar, an active member of both of these organizations.

¹⁷³ This information was secured from Mrs. Anton Tlusty, a charter member of the organization.

organization for the purpose of founding a Czech-speaking lodge. Five other men later joined the group and together they petitioned the Sovereign Lodge for the right to found an organization in which a Czech language ritual might be used. The request was granted and the organization was founded as the first Czech-speaking Odd Fellows Lodge west of the Mississippi River. On March 4, 1885, it was installed, with the name of Jan Hus Number 51 I. O. O. F., by eleven members of Lodge Palacky in Chicago. Since 1921, because of a regulation of the Sovereign Lodge, an English ritual has been used.¹⁷⁴

Praha Rebekah Lodge was organized on June 23, 1888. This name was selected because many of the charter members had come from the city of Prague, Bohemia. The local lodge was a Czech-speaking organization until 1921 when all foreign language rituals were cancelled by the Sovereign Lodge. In addition to its regular lodge work, the organization's activities have included observances of Czech Victory Day (October 28th) and Mother's Day, Christmas parties, special meetings honoring past officers, and the support of its Children's Home and the Odd Fellow's Home. In 1938 one hundred candidates were initiated into the organization. A membership in June, 1942, of 632 made the local lodge the largest Rebekah lodge in the world.¹⁷⁵

THE ZAPADNI CESKO-BRATRSKA JEDNOTA

The Zapadni Cesko-Bratrska Jednota (Western Bohemian Fraternal Association) was organized at a special convention held February 9 to 11, 1897, at Omaha, Nebras-

¹⁷⁴ Vaclav Dvorak's "Jan Hus C. 51 IOOF" in *Pamatnik Cesko-Americkemo Dne*, p. 40. Information was also secured from Joseph Mekota, an early member of the lodge.

¹⁷⁵ This information was secured from Mrs. Marie C. Novak, a prominent member of the local lodge and a State officer.

ka, when a group of western lodges broke away from the C. S. P. S. The new Z. C. B. J. was then incorporated under the laws of Iowa on July 4, 1897, with the supreme office in Cedar Rapids. By September 30th of that year, forty-nine orders in various cities had joined the new alliance. This was the first Czech fraternal society to organize a lodge for young people, to institute a juvenile department, and to establish twenty-pay-life and endowment policies. The Z. C. B. J. used the C. S. P. S. Hall for its meetings until 1908 when it erected its own hall on the corner of Third Street and Twelfth Avenue Southeast. The new building cost \$10,000, was a three-story structure seventy feet long and fifty feet wide, and was equipped with a dance hall on the second floor and offices for the Supreme Lodge on the first floor.¹⁷⁶

In 1928 the Z. C. B. J. instituted a local festival known as a "pout". This was a revival of an "Old World" custom when on certain saints' days, Czech people went on pilgrimages to cities where cathedrals were located to attend religious services, to enjoy a puppet show, and to eat heart-shaped cookies. The Z. C. B. J. "pout" has been held annually in May since 1928 either at the hall or at the park. There have been games for children, dances for adults, and ginger-bread cookies shaped as horses and hearts.¹⁷⁷

A \$22,000 addition was made to the hall in 1932 thus enlarging the stage and the portion of the building used by the Supreme Lodge. Seven years later the Z. C. B. J. park south of the city was purchased. Here are cottages owned by individual members of the lodge, a dance pavilion, and picnic grounds accessible to all members of the organiza-

¹⁷⁶ Information secured from the 1941 annual report of the lodge; *The Cedar Rapids Republican*, September 14, 15, 1908.

¹⁷⁷ Information secured from M. L. Hromadka, secretary of the Supreme Lodge.

tion from May until September. The lodge owns a library of fifty books most of which deal with the benefits of insurance. It has its own magazine, *Bratrsky Vestnik*, which all members of the organization receive with their dues. A few pages of this publication are printed in the English language; the remainder is in Czech.¹⁷⁸

In Cedar Rapids five Z. C. B. J. subordinate lodges have been organized for people of Czech descent and their families: Prokop Velky Number 7, Karel IV Number 13, Mladocech Number 15, Zizkub Dub Number 91, and Cedar Rapids Number 262. The first four were founded in 1897 and have always been Czech-speaking organizations. Three adopted the same names as lodges in the C. S. P. S. group. The name of the fourth lodge, which means Zizka's Oak, commemorates a famous leader of the Czechs during the Hussite Wars, who, according to legend, stood beneath the tree under which he had been born and "swore eternal vengeance" upon the murders of Jan Hus.¹⁷⁹ The fifth in the list was founded on July 24, 1923, and is an English-speaking organization. The membership of the five lodges in June, 1942, totaled 2617 persons.

The social activities of these organizations have included dances, card parties, lectures, dramatic productions, ball games, picnics, and dinners. The Z. C. B. J. Hall has been used by drill teams of various lodges. Since 1938 it has also been available for citizenship classes and since the spring of 1942 it has been used by a large group of Czech women engaged in Red Cross work.¹⁸⁰

All these Czech benevolent organizations which are affiliated with a national lodge have, in recent years, changed

¹⁷⁸ Information secured from M. L. Hromadka.

¹⁷⁹ Lutzow's *Bohemia*, p. 117.

¹⁸⁰ This information was secured from M. L. Hromadka and from reports made to the writer by the five presidents of the local lodges.

the policy by which they have insured their members. The early lodges granted a uniform death or sick benefit to each member who paid dues regulated by the supreme lodges. Within the last ten years, however, these organizations have adopted a plan whereby their members have received benefits dependent upon the face value of the policies which they carry.¹⁸¹

SCHOOLS, LIBRARIES, AND THE PRESS

“Language to the Bohemian . . . is history, religion, and life.”¹⁸² Because their ancestors struggled for centuries to maintain a national language and literature, these people have sought to preserve that language in the country of their adoption and they have organized schools and classes where the culture of their homeland has been taught in their native tongue to the succeeding generations. At the same time the Czech people have welcomed opportunities to learn the language of the country they have chosen for their home.¹⁸³

CZECH-SPEAKING SCHOOLS AND CLASSES

Records are not available which indicate when Czech-language classes or schools were first established in Cedar Rapids. The first organization to undertake the task was the Reading Society,¹⁸⁴ but the minutes do not state when John B. Suster was appointed as the first teacher. Mention of his name appears in conjunction with the observance of Jan Hus Day, July 6, 1870, and in the city *Directory* for that same year.

It is probable, however, that Mr. Suster conducted a Czech school either in the Reading Society Hall or in

¹⁸¹ This information was received from T. B. Hlubucek and M. L. Hromadka.

¹⁸² Will S. Monroe's *Bohemia and the Cechs*, p. 227.

¹⁸³ Zdenka and Jan Munzer's *We Were and We Shall Be*, pp. 14, 15.

¹⁸⁴ See above pages 135-140.

Thalee Hall. Later, instructors taught Czech children on Saturdays, Sundays, and during the summer in Monroe and Madison public schools. Prior to 1890, a group of mothers formed an organization which, with the Reading Society, maintained these classes for the instruction of their children in the language and culture of Bohemia.¹⁸⁵

In the meantime another school to conduct classes in the Czech language had been established in Cedar Rapids. This was the Saint Wenceslaus parochial school which was started in 1892 in the basement of the parish house built in that year for Father Francis Chmelar. Two years later, Father Kopecky helped the parish erect the first Saint Wenceslaus school building and there the Sisters of Mercy used the English language for their academic classes and taught their children to speak, read, and write the Czech language. Sometimes the priests assisted with this instruction.¹⁸⁶

In 1926 a \$45,000 high school building was erected which included an assembly hall and a gymnasium. That same year this school became the first accredited Czech parish high school in the United States. All of the Saint Wenceslaus school children now learn Czech songs and prayers and each pupil in grades five through eight receives instruction twice a week in Czech grammar and composition.¹⁸⁷

During the same year that the Saint Wenceslaus school began to instruct the pupils of the parish in the Czech language, there was organized in Cedar Rapids a society to plan for the erection of a Czech school building. This

¹⁸⁵ Information secured from Milvoj Hasek and Mrs. Anton Tlusty; Ann Drahos's "Damska Matice Spolska" in *Pamatnik Cesko-Americkemo Dne*, p. 31.

¹⁸⁶ *The Cedar Rapids Gazette*, January 1, 1901.

¹⁸⁷ Hoffmann's *Centennial History of the Arch-diocese of Dubuque*, p. 238; information from Monsignor Vojacek.

organization, known as the Damska Matice Skolska,¹⁸⁸ was founded September 26, 1892, and incorporated on March 16, 1894. By means of bazaars and programs the women built up a fund for the proposed building.

The society meanwhile supported Sunday classes for instruction in the Czech language and organized (in 1897) a library of children's books in that language. In the summer of 1900, W. F. Severa guaranteed the furniture for all of the schoolrooms and for the library. Then the Damska Matice Skolska appointed a building committee and an active drive for more money added several hundred dollars to the fund already on hand.¹⁸⁹

The new Matice Skolska (Czech School) was dedicated on January 1, 1901, as the first building in the United States to be used exclusively for a Czech school.¹⁹⁰ In the evening there was a fine dedicatory program. The Matice Skolska, which is still used as a Czech school, has two rooms on the first floor, each large enough to accommodate fifty-four pupils and one in the basement for younger children. On the second floor is the library which is now maintained by the Reading Society.

After the dedication of the building, the ladies of the Damska Matice Skolska continued to have bazaars in order to pay the debt on the structure. They also planned programs in memory of famous Czech leaders such as Pavlicek, Hus, Komensky, Klacel, Zofie Podlipska, and American patriots such as Washington and Lincoln. The school was non-sectarian and free. It was divided into three grades in each of which the pupils sang Czech songs, studied the history and geography of Bohemia, and learned how to

¹⁸⁸ The name of this organization literally means a woman's school-board for a school.

¹⁸⁹ Anna Drahos's "Damska Matice Skolska v Cedar Rapids" in *Pamatnik Cesko-Americkemo Dne*, p. 32.

¹⁹⁰ Brewer and Wick's *History of Linn County Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 124.

write, read, and speak the Czech language. In the early school girls were also taught, outside of the regular school hours, how to make lace, to knit, and to embroider. Regular classes were conducted on Saturdays and Sunday mornings and for five weeks during the summer. The building was also used by older girls for night school classes in the Czech language.¹⁹¹

Since 1905 the Damska Matice Skolska has undertaken the maintenance of the school and has provided light, heat, repairs, and janitorial services. Funds with which to maintain the school and pay the teachers have been secured from the Czech lodges of the city and from the Sokols. A small tuition fee of fifty cents is also charged each pupil for the summer term.

Since 1905 the teachers have been appointed and the textbooks selected by the Ustredni Matice (School Board for the School), composed of two delegates chosen annually from each organization which contributes funds for the support of the school. No definite attendance records for the Matice Skolska are available. A few which do exist, however, indicate a decrease in attendance since 1905.¹⁹²

In 1912 Dr. John A. Marquis, president of Coe College, asked Dr. Anna Heyberger to teach an elective course in Czech language, culture, and literature. Down to 1918 most of the students who enrolled in these classes had a partial knowledge of the Czech language before they matriculated; they had come from homes where a grandmother, a highly respected member of the family, had instructed her grandchildren in the folklore and language of her homeland. After 1918 few college freshmen had received this type of

¹⁹¹ Drahos's "Damska Matice Spolska v Cedar Rapids" in *Pamatnik Cesko-Americkemo Dne*, p. 32; information from Mrs. Marie Chmelicek, one of the present teachers, and from Mrs. Joseph Egermeyer, one of the early teachers of the school.

¹⁹² This information was secured from Mrs. Marie Chmelicek.

training at home and Czech was taught only as a foreign language with emphasis on grammar rather than on the literature of Bohemia. A few years later French and German were considered the more important foreign languages, and Czech was dropped from the college curriculum.¹⁹³

In the meantime another school opened in Cedar Rapids where instruction was received in the Czech language. In 1914 Father Florian Svrulik offered the Sisters De Notre Dame, who had recently arrived from Hrazdovice, Bohemia, a tract of land on which stood an old frame house if they would open a school for Czech children.¹⁹⁴ In that school the Sisters often addressed the children in Czech and songs were sung and prayers recited in that language. Lessons in the regular classes, however, were in English. Each Friday afternoon the girls were taught to knit and crochet and to do on samplers the colorful embroidery of Bohemia, while the boys received instruction in wood carving. Two or three times a year a program was presented consisting of a Czech play and the folksongs of Bohemia. Czech songs are still sung in all of the eight grades of the Saint Ludmila school. All of the pupils of the school are required to study the Czech language unless their parents excuse them from doing so. A choir of girls sings Czech hymns on Sunday mornings and each Thursday morning, when all of the pupils of the school attend mass, the old Catholic hymns of Bohemia are sung by the children.¹⁹⁵

Between 1933 and 1935, a night school in the Czech language was conducted in the Washington High School. The Cedar Rapids Board of Education permitted the free use

¹⁹³ This information was secured from Dr. Anna Heyberger.

¹⁹⁴ Hoffmann's *Centennial History of the Arch-diocese of Dubuque*, pp. 541, 640.

¹⁹⁵ Information was secured from Mrs. Zofie Kunel Hanson, one of the first pupils of this school, and from Father Francis Hruby.

of the building and funds with which to pay the teachers were collected from the Czech lodges and other organizations. The students were adults and included some of the prominent Czech professional men of the city. They met to study Czech grammar, literature, history, and music. The teachers were J. C. Stepan, T. B. Hlubucek, and Frank Raska. An enrollment of eighty-five on the first night increased to two hundred students, but the classes were discontinued when plans were made for teaching the Czech language in the public schools.¹⁹⁶

For several years prior to 1934 some of the prominent Czech citizens of Cedar Rapids had been urging that the language of their ancestors be taught in the public schools. The Board of Education finally consented, after a petition bearing five hundred signatures had been presented to it, and in the fall of 1934 Czech classes were organized at the Washington and Grant high schools. At the first school, twenty students entered these classes the first semester and eleven the second semester while at the latter school thirty-four enrolled the first semester and eleven the second semester. The next year Washington High School had no beginning class and only thirteen students in the advanced class. At the end of the first semester therefore, the courses were dropped from the curriculum.

At the Grant School in 1935-1936 four classes of Czech were taught with an average of sixteen pupils in each class. The following year when the Grant School was divided, Czech was taught only at the Wilson School. The first semester there were eight new students, five of whom dropped the course at the end of the semester. As a result of this lack of interest during this three-year period, Czech language classes were dropped by the public schools.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁶ This information was secured from J. C. Stepan and T. B. Hlubucek.

¹⁹⁷ This information was secured from Arthur C. Deamer, superintendent of the Cedar Rapids public schools.

THE COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION

During the years when attempts were being made to introduce Czech-language classes into various educational institutions in Cedar Rapids there was founded in that city an organization to aid students of Czech descent to secure advanced education. The idea probably originated in a meeting of the Reading Society on May 29, 1901, when W. F. Severa made a motion that financial aid for an advanced education be given annually to the most capable Czech graduate of the local high school.¹⁹⁸

A letter sent to the lodges concerning the matter met with no response, but on July 27, 1902, at a meeting of some of the prominent Czech citizens a temporary executive committee was elected for a new organization known as the *Matice Vyssiho Vzdelani* (Council of Higher Education). Mr. Severa donated \$2500 to the committee, "for the benefit of talented youth yearning for a higher culture."¹⁹⁹

Professor Bohumil Shimek outlined the program of the organization, prepared its constitution and by-laws, and aroused interest in it by writing and lecturing about it. As a result the local fraternal organizations supported the movement with generous sums of money. The council's headquarters were at first in Cedar Rapids but they were later transferred to Chicago.²⁰⁰

According to the by-laws the objects of the Council of Higher Education are to encourage American youth of Czech parentage to acquire a higher education; to give advice and information to the Czech people concerning the advantages and benefits that the various institutions of learning offer the students; and to render financial assist-

¹⁹⁸ Hrbkova's "Bohemians Have Done Much for Cedar Rapids" in *The Cedar Rapids Republican Semi-Centennial Magazine Edition*, June 10, 1906.

¹⁹⁹ *Prehled Matice Vyssiho Vzdelani*, p. 21. This booklet contains a report of the organization from 1902 to 1908.

²⁰⁰ *The Cedar Rapids Gazette*, January 1, 1933.

ance to those who deserve to receive it. Applicants for loans must be of Czech descent, have a knowledge of the Czech or Slovak language, and be of good moral character. A student who can meet these requirements may borrow from the Council and has a period of five years in which to pay back his loan without interest.²⁰¹

In 1909 a report of the organization which was made in one of the council conventions stated that in seven years \$2500 had been loaned to fourteen students. At that same convention it was decided to aid deserving students complete their high school courses. By the end of the year 1941 a total of \$107,442 had been loaned to 276 students in thirty-two States.²⁰²

In 1904, in order to acquaint all Czech students with the culture of Bohemia, the Council of Higher Education established a movable library. This was made possible through a donation of fifty dollars from Mr. Severa and by contributions of books and money from other people interested in the project. All Czech students have been able to borrow from the Council, without cost except for transportation, volumes of Czech prose, poetry, and history.²⁰³

AMERICANIZATION CLASSES

In addition to the Czech-language schools, classes have also been organized in Cedar Rapids to teach citizenship and the English language to Czech immigrants. The first of these was started in 1904 when a group of young people asked Miss Sara Hrbek, a public school teacher, for instruction in the English language. Her first classes, which she taught without remuneration, were conducted in the Czech school building. In 1905, through the efforts of Joseph

²⁰¹ Constitution and By-Laws of the Council of Higher Education.

²⁰² *The Cedar Rapids Republican*, July 27, 1909; annual report of the Council of Higher Education for the year 1941.

²⁰³ *Prehled Matice Vyssiho Vzdelani*, p. 42.

Mekota who was then a member of the Board of Education, these evening classes became a part of the public school system.²⁰⁴

The teacher who taught for the most years was John C. Stepan. He was born in Bohemia where he studied eight languages. After his arrival in the United States at the age of nineteen, he graduated from the Cook County Normal School and later studied in the University of North Dakota. In 1903 he came to Cedar Rapids where, for thirty-six years, he conducted classes in citizenship two or three evenings a week. From 1917 to 1922 he also had a two-hour class one night a week at the T. M. Sinclair Company plant. During that time his enrollment there increased from thirty-five to sixty-five adult students. Of the 3000 immigrants who have been enrolled in Mr. Stepan's classes a large majority were Czechs.²⁰⁵

In September, 1938, a Miss Alma Wright was sent to Cedar Rapids by a Federal agency to organize classes in citizenship and to prepare aliens for naturalization examinations. She was sponsored by the Board of Education, the Z. C. B. J., the Y. W. C. A., Coe College, and the administrative officials of the city. Two-hour classes in citizenship and the English language were organized. From that date until September, 1942, these classes were taught each afternoon and evening, except Friday, at the Y. W. C. A., the McKinley School, Coe College, the police station, and the Z. C. B. J. Hall. At the latter place, Miss Wright's enrollees were Czech women who had been naturalized but who wished to perfect their speaking knowledge of the English language. Classes were also continued through the summer at the Czech school and at the Z. C. B. J. Hall both of which places had been donated for the purpose.

²⁰⁴ *The Cedar Rapids Gazette*, January 1, 1933.

²⁰⁵ *The Cedar Rapids Gazette*, November 9, 1941. Information was also secured from John C. Stepan.

The Board of Education coöperated by furnishing part of the supplies and by permitting the use of rooms in the McKinley School for some of the classes. Industrial plants such as Wilson and Company, Quaker Oats, and Penick and Ford showed interest in the project by urging their foreign-born employees to enroll in these classes. The enrollment for 1939 was the largest of all the years because, after the European war started, aliens in Cedar Rapids were anxious to become citizens. Fourteen nationalities were registered in the classes but over half of the total number of enrollees were Czech.²⁰⁶

LIBRARIES

The libraries of the Reading Society, the Cedar Rapids Public Library, and the libraries in the parochial schools have given the Czech people of the city access to books in their native tongue. The Reading Society, proposing to furnish the best possible books for its members and to promote a love for the language and literature of Bohemia, purchased its first volumes from Prague in December, 1868. During the ensuing years the Reading Society has maintained a library first in its own hall, then in the Sokol Hall, and since 1900 on the second floor of the Czech school building.²⁰⁷

Previous to 1938 the Reading Society purchased from two hundred to four hundred dollars' worth of books a year from Prague. Since that year a few volumes have been secured from Czech publishing companies in Racine and Omaha. Rather fragmentary records indicate that in 1911 the library owned 2500 books; in 1941 it had 5500 books, about twenty-five of which were in the English language.

²⁰⁶ This report was secured from Miss Alma Wright. No citizenship classes have been held since September, 1942.

²⁰⁷ Brewer and Wick's *History of Linn County Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 124. Material was also secured from Joseph Holub, one of the present librarians.

All the other volumes were in the Czech language but they included translations of Russian, French, English, Spanish, and German authors. A record of the circulation of books which has been kept since 1922 shows practically no decrease in the number of volumes issued each year. In 1922, 6273 books were circulated; in 1927, 6727; in 1932, 6073; in 1937, 6326; and in 1941, 6641. According to Joseph Holub, one of the librarians, these volumes were all issued to practically the same fifty or sixty people. All of the readers are adults.²⁰⁸

The Cedar Rapids Public Library also has a department of Czech literature which was established in November, 1907, with an appropriate ceremony. On that day three hundred Czech citizens came to the library to commemorate the battle of White Mountain and to institute the Czech department of the library. One hundred and fourteen volumes which had been purchased in Prague were on display. Some were beautifully bound in bright red Morocco leather and the children's books were attractively illustrated. From time to time new volumes were purchased and added to the original collection. By April, 1942, the library had 1507 books in the Czech language.²⁰⁹

In 1915, two substations were opened in the southeast and southwest sections of the city where a large percentage of the Czech people lived and a Miss Kosek, who spoke the Czech language, served as station librarian. The southwest station reported that 69 per cent of all books issued to adults in 1916 were Czech books. During the years from 1911 to 1932 there was a marked annual increase in the

²⁰⁸ Brewer and Wick's *History of Linn County Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 252; information from Joseph Holub, librarian since 1920.

²⁰⁹ *Annual Report of the Cedar Rapids Free Public Library*, 1907; *The Cedar Rapids Republican*, November 7, 1907; information secured from the annual reports of the library and from material furnished by Miss Edna Erickson, a librarian of the Cedar Rapids Public Library.

circulation of Czech books. Since 1932 there has been a decrease in the circulation of Czech books and the report for 1941-1942 showed the smallest circulation of Czech books since 1910, only 616 volumes. It thus appears that the Czech library patrons have either read all of the books in that language in the library or that the present generation no longer manifests an interest in Czech literature.²¹⁰

Two other libraries, the parochial libraries of Saint Wenceslaus and Saint Ludmila parishes, also have Czech books. The Saint Wenceslaus high school has some 500 Czech volumes, few of which are now read. The library for the Saint Ludmila parish on the second floor of the school building, had, in May, 1942, only twenty Czech books, but the library subscribes to three magazines and two newspapers printed in the Czech language.²¹¹

THE PRESS

The first Czech newspaper published in Cedar Rapids was *Pokrok*. Founded in Racine, Wisconsin, by Joseph Pastor, it was brought to Cedar Rapids and published there by Frank B. Zdrubek, a militant atheist, from 1869 to 1871. It was issued every Saturday, had about 1600 subscribers, and at that time was next to the largest Czech newspaper in the United States. *Slovan Americky*, founded in Iowa City in 1869 by Jan Barta Letovsky, was moved to Cedar Rapids after 1872 and issued every Tuesday and Friday. *The Day*, which first appeared in Cedar Rapids in November, 1886, was edited by John B. Suster. Its contents consisted of Czech nationalistic material and advertisements. The next newspaper, *Svit* (The Dawn), published in Cedar Rapids in

²¹⁰ This material was secured from the annual reports of the library and from Miss Ruby Taylor, one of the librarians of the Cedar Rapids Public Library.

²¹¹ Material furnished by Monsignor Vojacek and the Sisters of the Saint Ludmila School.

1896 by F. K. Ringsmuth and Jan Borecky, had a large circulation among the intelligent and religious Czechs. A year later Mr. Ringsmuth also edited a newspaper known as *Listy* (News).²¹²

During the early 1900's several newspapers appeared. *Pravda* (Truth) was published in Cedar Rapids from October, 1900, to April, 1902. It was a Catholic journal dedicated to the interests of the Czechs and Slovaks in America. *Ceska Lipa* (Czech Linden) was published by Frank J. Tisera to take the place of *Pravda*. Three years later, from October, 1905, to March, 1906, a weekly paper, *Lidove Listy* (Paper of the People), was edited by Karel J. Sladek. In April, 1905, J. J. Hajek edited a Cedar Rapids supplement of the paper *Svornost* known as *Vestnik Iowsky* (Iowa Publication). Since Mr. Hajek's death, T. B. Hlubucek has edited two or three columns of local news in the *Svornost*.²¹³

Frank Hradecky published the weekly paper *Humoristicke Listy* (Humor Paper) from April 12, 1906, to November 7, 1908. The next month the name of this paper was changed to *Cedar Rapidske Listy*. It is still published in the city. From 1908 to 1912 it was edited by Mr. Hradecky. From 1912 to 1918 and from 1931 to the present time (1944) John Stepan has been the editor. Politically the paper is independent. In 1928 it had nearly 3500 subscribers, about 20 per cent of whom lived outside of Cedar Rapids. Copies at that time were mailed to Canada and Czechoslovakia. Mr. Stepan is of the opinion that few young people of Czech descent now read the paper.²¹⁴

²¹² Thomas Capek's *Fifty Years of Cech Letters in America*, pp. 107, 135, 157, 191, 243.

²¹³ Capek's *Fifty Years of Cech Letters in America*, pp. 164, 167, 172, 173.

²¹⁴ Capek's *Fifty Years of Cech Letters in America*, p. 175; material from John C. Stepan.

CEDAR RAPIDS CZECHS AND THE WORLD WAR

The participation of the Cedar Rapids Czechs in the First World War was, perhaps, their most outstanding activity during the period from 1880 to 1918. In October, 1914, a Bohemian Relief Society was organized in the city to raise money for the destitute widows and orphans of Bohemia. Even before a formal campaign was instituted, six hundred dollars was raised for the fund. Within the next few months money poured in from the contributions of individuals and lodges and from the proceeds of plays and concerts.

On February 26, 1915, this local war relief organization affiliated with a new national organization, the Bohemian National Alliance, which through its local and State units, worked for the liberation of Bohemia. The local officers were: F. M. Barta, president; Jan Pichner, vice president; Charles V. Svoboda, secretary; and Jan J. Hrbek, treasurer. Cedar Rapids was headquarters for Iowa and four of the five State trustees were Cedar Rapids men. As a result of continued solicitations, \$2700 was raised locally by this organization during the first year of its existence. That the people of Cedar Rapids were in sympathy with the movement is indicated by the fact that local merchants, in that same year, contributed an additional \$10,000 to the fund.²¹⁵

In April, 1915, as a result of a plea by Dr. J. Rudis Jicinsky²¹⁶ for clothing needed by prisoners in Serbia, the Czech women of Cedar Rapids formed an organization for work known as the Vcelky (Bees). Each Wednesday afternoon they sewed for the American Red Cross and each Friday afternoon they worked in the Czech School for war orphans in Bohemia and for prisoners in Serbia. Funds were solicited with which to buy materials and pleas were printed in

²¹⁵ *The Cedar Rapids Republican*, October 16, 1914, April 11, 1915; *Pamatnik Cinnosti Cechu Iowskych v Boji za Svobodu Store Vlasti*, p. 16.

²¹⁶ Dr. J. Rudis Jicinsky, a former resident of Cedar Rapids, headed an American Red Cross unit sent to Serbia.

Czech newspapers for worn clothing and shoes. Garments were knit for soldiers and civilians, 248 suits of underwear for Czech soldiers were made out of muslin, and twelve huge bundles of materials for war orphans were sent to Bohemia. These contained handkerchiefs, towels, bandages, new material for clothes, thread, underwear, stockings, soap, and new leather for shoes. The Vcelky also contributed \$150 to the Czech Red Cross, and \$50 for the care of war orphans. Between December 16, 1917, and December 31, 1919, this organization sent twenty-six large chests of clothing and supplies, in addition to the bundles, to the Czech Red Cross in Prague.²¹⁷

At the same time that the Vcelky was at work, the Bohemian National Alliance was active in securing contributions for the Czech war fund. The chief source of revenue was the bazaars which were held in Cedar Rapids, as in other cities with a Czech population, during the fall of 1915, 1916, 1917, and 1918. All of the Czech organizations of the city, both Catholic and Protestant, participated in these bazaars which were held in the C. S. P. S. Hall. In 1915 the profits were \$2,392.50, in 1916 they were \$1,257.55, and in 1917, \$10,800. The amount of money raised at the 1917 bazaar was exceeded only by the amounts raised at the Czech bazaars in Chicago and New York.²¹⁸

Each Sunday during the months of September and October, 1918, from twenty to forty cars of workers, known as The Flying Squadron, solicited goods and money in Cedar Rapids and the surrounding area. Contributions included such things as a wagonload of corn, live pigs, geese, chickens, cows, rabbits, vegetables, a bicycle, a colt, two forty-acre tracts of land, and a piece of real estate in Cedar

²¹⁷ *Pamatnik Cinnosti Cechu Iowskych v Boji za Svobodu Store Vlasti*, p. 12.

²¹⁸ *Pamatnik Cinnosti Cechu Iowskych v Boji za Svobodu Store Vlasti*, p. 12; *The Cedar Rapids Republican*, July 2, 1918.

Rapids. Perishables were sold at once and other products were stored until the week of the bazaar. It was planned for the last of October but, due to the influenza epidemic, it was postponed until Thanksgiving week.

In the meantime, the liberation of Czechoslovakia and the signing of the armistice added new zest to the occasion which lasted seven days. Czech bands and orchestras played every day. Everything imaginable was sold at booths and at one end of the hall were two paddle wheels where potatoes, livestock, live fowl, and rabbits were raffled off. Chances on the real estate were sold at one dollar a chance. On the evening preceding Thanksgiving Day, a dinner was served with *jitrnici*²¹⁹ as a special treat. Goods not sold at the bazaar were afterwards disposed of from a store on Sixteenth Avenue. The bazaar of 1918 netted \$30,200.²²⁰

Another important event during the war was the observance of the Fourth of July, 1918. In the morning there was the usual parade which was more than a mile long and which included five hundred Czech school children, some in native costumes, and other Czech groups which were always ready to march in procession. In the afternoon the Czech people assembled in Riverside Park to listen to a pledge of loyalty to the United States which had been formulated by the Bohemian National Alliance. Fourteen Cedar Rapids Czechs, who were unable to enlist in the American forces, volunteered to serve with the Czech Legionnaires. They were recruited by four Czech officers who had arrived in the city on July 2nd for the purpose of securing volunteers for their army. A total of twenty-eight recruits from Cedar

²¹⁹ *Jitrnici* is very highly seasoned liver sausage.

²²⁰ *The Cedar Rapids Republican*, July 5, September 29, October 6, 13, November 17, 24, 25, 27, 30, December 15, 1918; *Pamatnik Cinnosti Cechu Iowskych v Boji za Svobodu Store Vlasti*, p. 12.

Rapids were sent to a camp in New Jersey to be trained before they were transported to Europe to fight in the Czech army.²²¹

Throughout the war the Czech people of Cedar Rapids not only worked for Czechoslovakia, but they also acknowledged their loyalty to the United States by their participation in the Liberty Loan drives and the work of the American Red Cross. Frank Filip, who was especially active in both local and State units of the Bohemian National Alliance, was also Linn County chairman of the Liberty Loan campaigns.²²² The Czech-Americans of Cedar Rapids also served their country in the war by serving in various branches of the American armed forces. The Honor Roll of Linn County lists 2541 men from Cedar Rapids who fought in the First World War. Of these, 474 or 18.6 per cent were Czechs or men of Czech descent.²²³

Immediately following the First World War, some of the Czech organizations displayed their interest in the new Czechoslovak Republic. One of these was a project promoted by the Komensky Society of Coe College. This organization was composed of the students enrolled in Dr. Anna Heyberger's Czech classes. In the spring of 1919 several recitals and a "tag day" were directed by that society, resulting in a collection of \$1800, to which certain Czech donors added \$1000. The society decided to found a camp in Czechoslovakia for children threatened with tuberculosis. Dr. Heyberger was in Europe that summer and while there she formulated plans with the Czechoslovak Red Cross for the location and maintenance of a camp to be known as Coe Camp.

²²¹ *The Cedar Rapids Republican*, July 5, 7, 1918; *Pamatnik Cinnosti Cechu Iowskych v Boji za Svobodu Store Vlasti*, p. 12.

²²² E. F. Prantner's *These Help Build America*, p. 30.

²²³ A. F. Dotson's *Honor Roll of Linn County, Iowa*, pp. 20 ff.

In the meantime, between June 10, 1919, and the last week of August, the members of the Komensky Society collected \$3000 from individuals and organizations interested in the project. At the same time, Dr. Heyberger completed arrangements for Coe Camp, located near Tabor, Czechoslovakia. Four weeks after the project was started the first children were received at the camp for care. A corporation formed under the sponsorship of Dr. Alice Masaryk directed the sanitarium until 1931 when the management of it was assumed by the Czechoslovak National Department of Public Health.²²⁴

CZECHS IN THE MELTING POT

Early Czech residents in Cedar Rapids sought to preserve their national culture. They made efforts to have their native or their ancestral language taught in schools, classes, and organizations. The Reading Society successfully sponsored Czech-language classes for twenty years. Then a group of women in their *Damska Matice Skolska*, who had worked for years to accumulate a sufficient sum of money, erected a school building where children of Czech descent might be taught to appreciate a culture which they loved. In the two parochial schools Sisters born in Bohemia gave instruction not only in the language but also in the arts, crafts, and music of the country of their nativity. Persistently clinging to that ideal of the preservation of the Czech language for its cultural value, a group of people succeeded, as late as 1934, in having that language introduced into the public school system of the city. In Coe College classes in that language were taught for ten years and in the public schools they were a part of the curriculum for three years.

This effort to preserve the Czech language among the

²²⁴ This material was secured from Dr. Anna Heyberger.

young people of the city has not been successful and the use of the Czech language is rapidly disappearing from local institutions. In four of the five churches where that language was once the sole form of address for all of the Sunday morning services, the young people have requested and secured the use of the English language in at least half of the religious services. In the Czech Reformed Church, where all the Sunday morning forms of worship are still conducted in the Czech language, Sunday school classes are taught in English.

Two fraternal groups, the Jan Hus and Praha Rebekah lodges, adopted an English ritual in 1921 by requirement. The Sokols have increasingly used the English language in their lectures, gymnastic classes, and the Junior Falcon group. Only in the lodges where the active members are adults does Czech continue as a spoken language. A lodge of young people, Cedar Rapids Number 262 Z. C. B. J., has been an English-speaking group since its organization in 1923.

An attempt on the part of some of the Czech people to preserve their literature has met the same fate. Although the annual circulation of books in the library of the Reading Society has not decreased in the past twenty years, those volumes are issued to only about sixty adults. A small library at the John Hus Methodist Church closed years ago; scarcely any Czech books at the parochial school libraries are now read; and the circulation of volumes in that language at the Cedar Rapids Public Library has decreased rapidly since 1932. The importance of the Czech newspaper is also diminishing. In the early 1900's several journals in that language were published in Cedar Rapids; now there is only one. That paper serves the interest of the older people, but it is not read by the younger generation.

Changes have also occurred in other phases of Czech

culture. A natural fondness for the drama caused the formation of several dramatic organizations which have always been a part of the social life of the Czech people in Cedar Rapids. In recent years, however, fewer plays or operettas have been presented. Because music and the Czech people are inseparable, numerous expressions of their love for that art have been noted in their bands, orchestras, and choruses. Today none of these organizations exists. Instead, the Czech people find satisfaction in concerts presented by others, in their folk-songs sung over the radio, and in the music of their country enjoyed in informal groups.

Through their fraternal, social, and religious organizations, the Czech people have preserved some of their traditions. Many of their lodges and societies bear the names of famous historical characters and distinguished citizens of Bohemia. Under the auspices of these organizations the birth and death anniversaries of Jan Hus, Jan Amos Komensky, and Thomas G. Masaryk have been observed with appropriate programs. Historical events of note like the Battle of White Mountain and the liberation of Czechoslovakia (October 28th) have also been celebrated. Cultural organizations such as the Ceska Besada Club, the Minerva Society, and the Czech Fine Arts Association have preserved the music, literature, dances, and dramas of the Czech people.

Certain customs and traditions brought by the Czech people from the "old country" are disappearing; others have become a part of the cultural pattern of the community. The *dracky* or feather-stripping party, the Sibrinky and Besada dances, and the Z. C. B. J. *pout* are still a part of the social life of the Czech people. The *dracky* is now, however, enjoyed only by the older women; the Sibrinky fails to serve its original purpose because few of the

dancers now wear masks; the Besada dance has been revived as a novelty; and the *pout* is now chiefly a children's party. The Karla Masaryk chorus attracts attention by donning Czech costumes.

A phase of the national life of the Czech people, however, which has always been evident in Cedar Rapids is their food. Kolaches and other Czech pastries are sold in all the bakeries and food shops of the city. People who attend their bazaars are either served *jitrnici* or the favorite meal of the Czech people which consists of roast goose, dumplings, sauerkraut, and kolaches.

In addition to their cultural contributions, many Czech organizations have served other important functions. Early societies were nationalistic groups formed largely for the preservation of Czech culture; later organizations were insurance groups. The two Sokol units and the lodges have engaged in a certain amount of rivalry, yet in an emergency, like the first world war and the present world war, these organizations have been able to unite in a common and two-fold purpose. They have worked for the benefit of Czechoslovakia and yet, as loyal citizens of the United States, their first allegiance has been to this country. The Czech organizations have always encouraged American citizenship.

The native progressiveness and intelligence of the Czech people have been demonstrated in the establishment of their local institutions. Societies worked in independent groups, formed corporations, and erected their own halls. Religious organizations, with little aid from others, built their own church edifices. Czech people taught citizenship to their own countrymen. Thus the process of Americanization was never forced upon these people, nor did Cedar Rapids ever ask them to relinquish the culture of their native land. Gradually and naturally the Czech people have

been assimilated into the life of the community and have become Americans.

During their residence in Cedar Rapids this group of people has contributed to the civic development of the city. That they have served well in administrative positions is demonstrated by the number of years individuals have held public offices. Because of their extensive ownership of property and because of their insurance organizations, the Czech people have given stability to the community of which they have become a part.²²⁵

In the cultural field the Czech people have also made contributions. For years their bands were the only organizations of that type in the city and as such they played for all civic affairs. While their choruses have sung principally for their own groups, still their organizations have presented to all of the citizens of Cedar Rapids opportunities to hear Jan Kubelik, Bohumil Kryl, the Bakule Children's Chorus, and other attractions of a similar nature.

Perhaps their greatest gift to the city has been their skill and industry. Cedar Rapids can certainly attribute some of her prosperity to their capacity for labor. Brought up on the maxim, "Bes prace neso kolache"²²⁶ (Without work there is no bread), the Czech people have been industrious and active in all walks of life. Through diligence and frugality, many have become prosperous. It would be difficult to select the most outstanding Czechs in the city. Three — Frank Filip, W. F. Severa, and Charles B. Svoboda — have received the Bily Lev (The White Lion) insignia from Czechoslovakia, a rare honor conferred upon Czech-American citizens for distinguished civic service. In intelligence and educational advancement, in modern fraternalism, in

²²⁵ Brewer and Wick's *History of Linn County Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 121.

²²⁶ Karl Stefan's *American Czechoslovaks Appreciate Free America* (Washington, D. C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1938), p. 8.

social and cultural achievements, in the professions, in business, and in industrial enterprises, the Czech element in Cedar Rapids has made remarkable progress.²²⁷

MARTHA E. GRIFFITH

CEDAR RAPIDS IOWA

²²⁷ Brewer and Wick's *History of Linn County Iowa*, Vol. I, p. 126.