

Rough Was the Road They Journeyed

by
Anna Johnson

Anna Johnson was born April 5, 1907 in Pocahontas, Iowa to John (Jan) Dockal and Mary Koskan Dockal. Her mother was the first generation offspring of Bohemian emigres to Abie, Nebraska via Russia and South America, and her father came to Pocahontas, Iowa from Bohemia via the Southwest and Chicago.

Bohemia was a large Czech province in the Dual Monarchy of Austria-Hungary before the first World War. Throughout the nineteenth century, Czechs, Slavs, and a host of smaller ethnic minorities chafed under the rule of the German and Magyar majority in the ancient empire, and by the 1850s, a steady stream of immigrants from Middle Europe and the Balkans began to settle in cities along the Eastern seaboard of the United States and spread westward to Chicago, Texas, and finally to the plains of the Dakotas, Iowa, and Nebraska. Not only religious and racial persecution, but political unrest, government upheaval, wars, and poverty urged them on to their new homes in the United States.

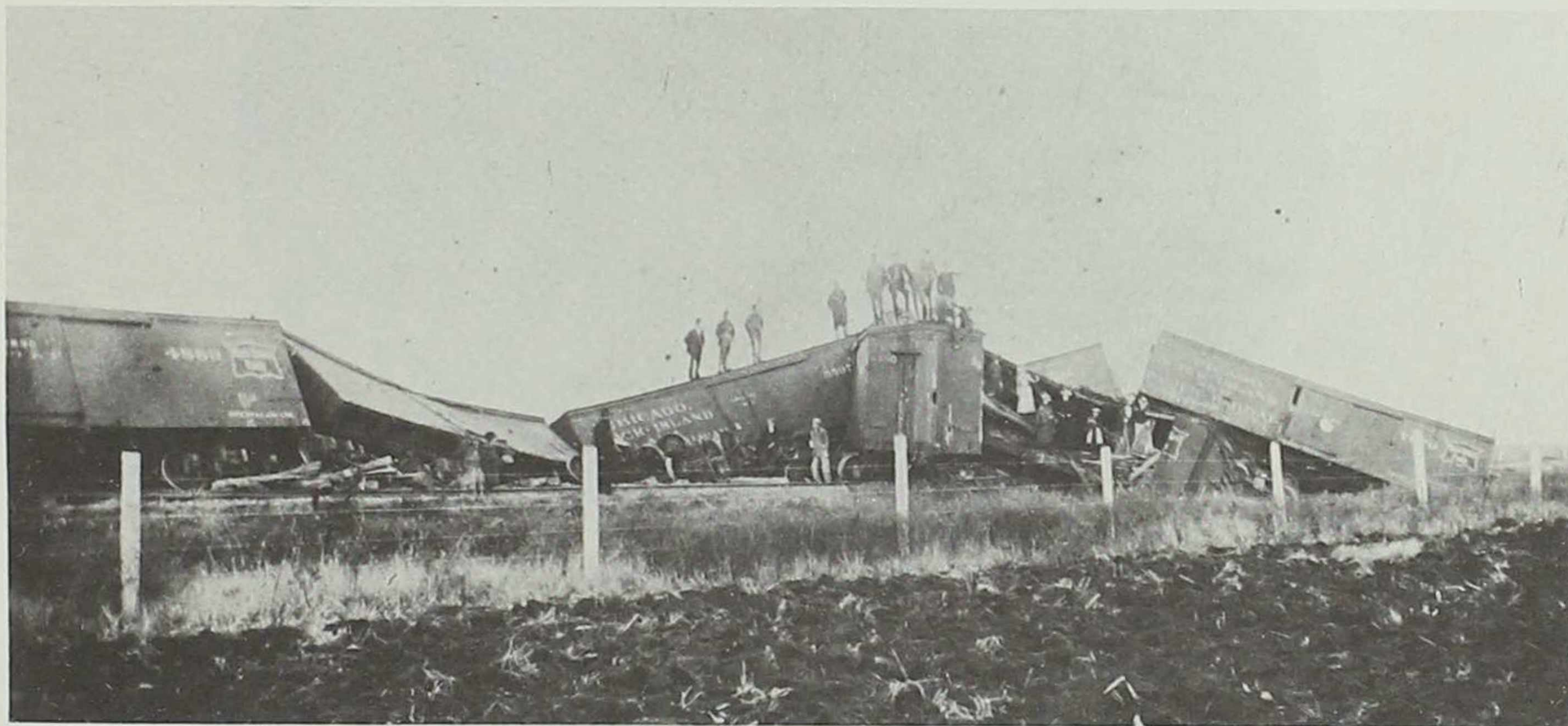
Anna's grandparents on her mother's side left Austria around 1864 and reached Chicago about 1870 where they joined a large group of Bohemians leaving for Nebraska. Sixteen years later her father, a certified shoemaker, left Bohemia to escape a draft into the Austrian army that would have forced him to fight "his own people." He came to Pocahontas in 1887 in answer to an advertisement he had seen in a Chicago newspaper: "POCAHONTAS WANTS: A drug clerk; A boot and shoemaker; A jeweler; One-hundred new homes; And a railroad." He became a citizen in

1896. In 1901, he was invited by a friend to visit Abie, Nebraska, a primarily Czech settlement, for the Christmas Holidays. There he met the friend's sister Mary Koskan and immediately proposed. Almost as immediately, they were married and returned to Iowa to begin the raising of a family.

In her memoir of early childhood during the teens of this century before World War I in Pocahontas, where she still lives, retired after a long career as a public school teacher, Anna Johnson reconstructs the "journey" of her parents and family and some of the warmth and joy of growing up under such parents in the early Czech settlements of the Midwest. The following is excerpted from her account, "Rough Was the Road They Journeyed."

Ed.

Pocahontas was named after the Virginian Indian Princess and so our city is spoken of as the "Princess City." It was surveyed in 1870, but the real settlement did not come until much later. From a mere hamlet consisting of one building used as the postoffice, real estate office, and a residence it became the county seat in 1876. But by 1890 the population numbered 116. The first postoffice was established on May 16, 1871. The village then had 20 inhabitants and about 50 families living within half the distance to the next



The train wreck in Pocahontas, Iowa in 1901 (courtesy of the author).

postoffice. Rural mail delivery was begun as soon as road conditions were improved. Most of the area around the county was more or less marshy and when it rained it made cross country or any form of travel almost impossible. So roads were a very important item for those early settlers. By 1902 Pocahontas was rated as a third class postoffice. Postage on envelopes purchased in 1903 was one cent, two cents, four cents, and five cents and could be had at the postoffice.

As more settlers came to the community the hamlet became a village which seemed to develop rapidly. But it was soon evident that it needed a railroad badly. The Northwestern went through "Old Rolfe" northwest of the town about ten miles as the "crow flies." The Illinois Central went through Pomeroy on the south of the town. But attempts as early as 1886 when the paper advertised for a railroad did not seem to bring any results as

far as the wish and desire to have that railroad.

Finally it was rumored that the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific was planning on building a line just south of town. Immediately, prominent business men, including Mr. Barron, editor of the paper, met with the railroad officials asking (or should I say begging) them to build that railroad near Pocahontas. Land was donated for the right-of-way and a promise of labor to help build the track was used to persuade the company that Pocahontas needed and would do all that it could to bring the much desired railroad to the village. An agreement was reached, the line surveyed, and the rail laid. The latter proved a very difficult task indeed as the land was so spongy that it took a lot of work to get the railroad bed built. It was built high, so high that it towered over the community, but it was necessary as it was sure to settle in the swampy ground,



John and Mary Koskan Dockal, soon after their wedding in 1901 (courtesy of the author).

which it did. Today that same railroad bed is as flat as the ground around it.

But the train did not begin to operate until much later. In September 1900 the town welcomed it with a big celebration. Pocahontas had its railroad, and almost 8000 people from surrounding territories, towns, and states came to help celebrate the arrival of the first train to the town of Pocahontas. Quoting the local paper concerning that big day: "They came, they saw, they went away. Pocahontas had a reason to be happy. An event of great moment has passed her life. A thirty year old bride, she at last has received the desire of her heart and is united by bands of steel to the great outside world. Long had she waited and many times had it seemed her waiting would be in vain." Now the town could receive passengers, freight from all parts of the country, and ship her grain, as well as have better mail service.

The joy of the first railroad was short lived as a little over a year later on September 26, 1901 disaster hit; it had its first

wreck. Five loads of grain and three empty cars were destroyed. All that was left of them was called a heap of kindling wood and mangled steel. It is not really known what caused that wreck, but it is thought that the settling of the railroad bed caused it. The track had been built through swampy ground, and the ditch on each side was filled with water. This water is thought to have kept the bed from hardening, thus the rails parted.

No one was injured, but the report from the local paper stated: "The brakeman was thrown headlong into the ditch, five cars being 'nigger piled' over him in such a manner as to leave him untouched. He crawled through and under the wrecked cars until he was able to emerge—thoroughly soaked." The wrecking crew coming to take care of the wreck also met disaster when their car was ditched just east of town never reaching the wreck in the west.

When Dad came to Pocahontas, it was so young that there was no clothing store so he and other residents had to travel



The Dockal children in 1908: Lloyd, Anna (age one year), and Lillian (courtesy of the author).

cross country to "Old Rolfe" to buy their necessary clothing. Of course he could and did make his own shoes as he was able to make them from scratch. He also made shoes for many of the other settlers until ready-to-wear stores came to town; then shoes could be purchased. For a while he did sell the ready-made shoes but that was not until after the railroad came to town. Many of the first businesses were operated out of the homes as was the first hardware store.

Until the village of Pocahontas grew large enough there was not much shoe repair business, so Father supplemented his income by doing odd jobs such as janitor of the school, later of the first bank, and still later of one of the churches. As business improved and he established a permanent place of business, he was able to drop some of the extra work. Yet as a child, I still remember his janitor work in the bank. I often went with him to the basement when he went to check the fire and carry out the ashes. The eerie feeling

that I had in the large, dark labyrinth still lingers with me. I feared it, yet it seemed to draw me back like a magnet and I begged to go with him knowing full well the fear I had of the place.

When Anna's parents were married on December 30, 1901, her mother's "dowry" consisted of her ability to sew, a few clothes, and some furniture. The clothes and the furniture were left behind in Abie, Nebraska.

They returned to Iowa on a train which took them to Rolfe as the train to Pocahontas was not operating at that time. Then, as there were no roads, they came cross country in a buck-board with the few possessions Mother brought with her. (Mother had left most of her personal things, some clothes and furniture behind her as they planned on going back for them the following summer.) This trip was in January with heavy snow and extremely cold weather. What a Honey-Moon!! I can well imagine Mother's feelings as she left her home, her family,



The main street of Pocahontas in the late nineteenth century (courtesy of Mrs. M. H. Hammes).

and all of her friends and relatives, moving to a strange territory, and Dad a complete stranger to her. One thing I do know is that Dad promised her folks that if at all possible she would return often for visits, and he kept his promise faithfully as long as the grandparents were living and Mother wanted to go. But they never did go back for her things as all were lost when the grandparents' home burned taking everything with it.

Until their own home was built, my folks lived in a boarding or rooming house operated by a family known as Rhea. Even though they could talk Bohemian, Mother was lonesome because she knew no one; there was nothing for her to do, so time seemed long for her. She was very happy when they were able to move into their own home. To her, it must have seemed like a palace after what she had been used to in her home in Nebraska. This house was a two-story structure with three bedrooms, a living room, dining room, and a kitchen. It is here that my

oldest brother was born.

But her happiness did not last long. Dad traded it for another one in the east part of town where he had ample room for a big garden. He raised chickens, a few hogs, and had a cow which he could not have done in the other location. Mother was disappointed and often described this house as "a house in a hole" because the dirt had never been leveled off after the house had been built. It was smaller with only two bedrooms, living room, and a kitchen. Yet it was still better than she had had before. Over the years Dad did much to improve it. He built on two more rooms, put a basement under it, and did all the landscaping. He planted trees and bushes, and Mother added many flowers to help cheer things up. Five of us were born there, and all called it home until we moved on to seek our fortunes.

In the backyard of the home that Father bought was a barn with an attached granary and a hog house under it. There was also a long building divided into a

chicken house, coal house, toilet, and a cob house. Only the chicken house had any windows, and the darkness of the others did not appeal to me. Their only light came from the door. Each section had its own door with a special lock or fastener to keep it shut.

When using the outdoor facilities, I always blocked the door open so I could have a little light. One day, the door shut (how was never learned) and I could not get out. It seemed a long time before I was missed and found in a state of shock from fear. Dad removed that lock so it could never happen again, but my fear of the place was even greater than ever before. When indoor plumbing was installed many years later, I was relieved.

My sister did not seem to have any fear of the place and was able to spend a lot of time there, especially when there were dishes to wash which we girls hated. She managed to disappear at that time and could nearly always be found looking at the catalogue. We claimed that she had "Dish Washer's Diarrhea." But what we thought or said did not bother her as long as she got away without washing all those dishes.

Besides a garden, we had a strawberry bed, apple, plum, and cherry trees, many gooseberry and currant bushes, and rhubarb. We ate the fruit fresh, in pies, in jams and jelly or butter. The rest was canned for future use. Stemming strawberries (we were not allowed to pick them as Dad claimed we trampled down more than we picked and probably he was right) and picking and stemming all those gooseberries and currants was a chore that we all despised. The currants and gooseberries spoiled many a Fourth of July as it seemed that they were always ready to be picked, stemmed, and canned on that

day. But, oh, the deliciousness of that fruit later in the winter! Gooseberries with their tartness were and still are my favorite fruit, and my taste for them has been imparted to my family. The first thing my son asks for upon returning home is a gooseberry pie or just the sauce. Yes, we still raise them and still dislike to prepare them as we did before, but of course there are not as many (Dad had one long row from the back of the yard clear to the front and I have only one bush!).

As children we had many chores to do, some we did not mind but others we hated with a passion and if possible got out of them. One we really dreaded was pulling weeds and hoeing in that big garden that Dad had at home. There were six of us (three boys and three girls) and each of us was assigned rows to weed or hoe and they had to be cleaned or else! Dad inspected the job when he got home from work, and if not done properly, we did it over again. Mother, though very busy, often came to our rescue, especially of the younger ones.

We shelled peas, snapped beans, picked up the potatoes after Dad had dug them, and cut the tops off the beets and carrots, all of which was very tedious work. The potatoes were stored in the basement for winter use, and the carrots were either buried in a pit covered with straw or placed in a crock covered with layers of sand where they kept crisp until the next spring. Because there was no way of preserving the other vegetables excepting pickling the beets and the cucumbers, the peas and beans were left to ripen and then dry before being hulled.

We used a unique hulling method that took time as well as energy, but it was one we children enjoyed. The peas or beans in the pods were put into a sack and beaten

until we were sure that the hulls were cracked and broken up, yet we had to be careful that we did not hit too hard or the peas and beans would be split. After the beating, they were poured into a sieve and shaken until all the seeds settled at the bottom so that we could remove the broken hulls. Then commenced the process of pouring them from pail to pail very slowly while the winds or breeze blew away most of the remaining pieces left of the hull. Before cooking, each handful had to be carefully sorted for the bad seeds and any remaining hull. Thus we had beans to boil with ham hocks, baked beans, and soup along with the peas.

Mother cooked on a wood-coal burning range with a warming oven on top and a copper boiler or reservoir on one side which held several pails of water so that we had warm water when needed. This range was Mother's pride and joy! She took very good care of it. Each day the ashes were taken out, but once a week (usually on Saturday when the general house cleaning was done) Mother would remove all the soot from around the oven by means of a special scraper that fit in the little opening just under the oven door. Then she blackened the stove with a special polish which was really messy to use. This was her task and only hers, because the polish, if gotten on anything, was very hard to remove. But when many years later she got her new range, it did not need the polish; it just took soap and water to keep it clean which was much quicker, easier, and not messy. The chrome and the enamel were polished until one could almost see his image. After each use she always rubbed a bread wrapper over the top surface while the stove was still warm to bring out the sheen and to keep the top

from rusting. The only thing we children had to do to help her was to carry out the ashes daily.

The house was heated with an old fashioned heating stove, and much fuel such as cobs, coal, and wood had to be brought in daily. The coal was kept in a coal pail, but the cobs and wood were in bushel baskets. The extra fuel was kept out on the back porch, and the coal was brought from the coal bin as needed. All this was an after school project, and here again we were assigned tasks which were changed from week to week so that no one had the same one to do all the time. The coal, which was heavy, was given to the older children.

If one of us forgot (as children do), at night after dark that one had to carry out those chores assigned to him before going to bed. Dad bought the cobs from a farmer who hauled them to town, but we had to unload and put them into the cob house as well as clean up any that had spilled to the ground. The coal was purchased from a local dealer, delivered and unloaded into the coal bin until a full basement was dug and a fuel room built, then it went into the basement. The wood was given to us and had to be cut into stove lengths, split, and stacked in outdoor piles for later use. As soon as we were considered old enough to be trusted with the saw and ax that, too, became our responsibility.

When the cobs were carried in from the bin, we had to fill the baskets by hand so that no mice were brought into the house. It was a worry to Mother because once any got in they were extremely hard to catch or get rid of. One day Dad forgot his coat in the granary, so the next morning when he came in for breakfast he brought it



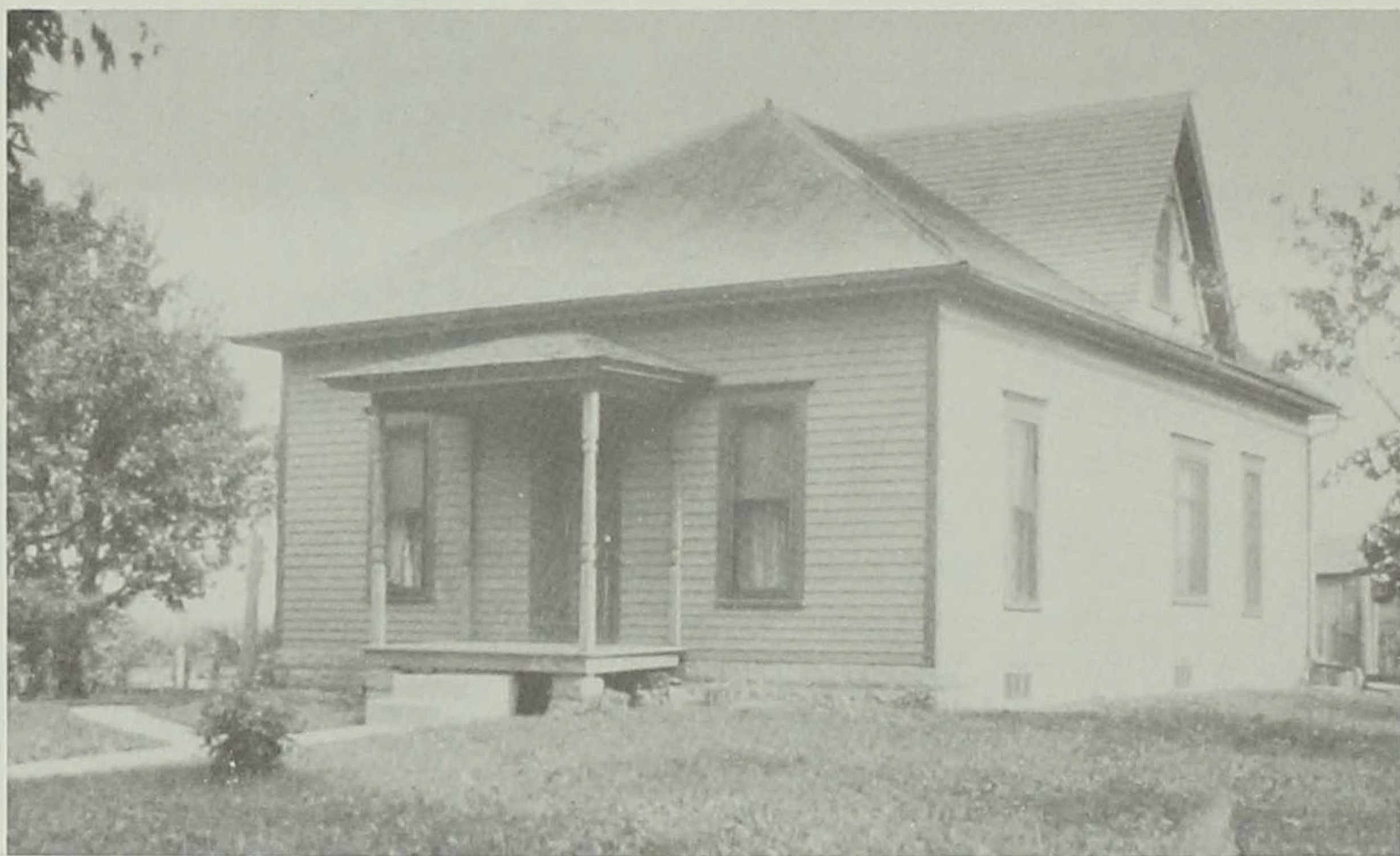
A combination post office, telephone building, and general store in Pocahontas run by F. E. Hronek (courtesy of Mrs. M. H. Hammes).

back with him and hung it up on a hook behind the door where our everyday clothes were kept. In the middle of the meal my youngest sister startled us with a scream, jumped up on to the middle of the table dancing a jig that set the food and all the dishes bobbling up and down, and continued screaming. When we finally got her calmed down enough so that she could talk, she explained that a mouse had crawled out of Dad's coat pocket.

Mother quickly shut the door to the dining room and placed a rug against the door to cover the crack below, and we all started looking for that mouse. In our own minds we were sure that it had already entered the other part of the house, but the search went on. In pulling out the kitchen sink cabinet, we found the poor creature clinging to the wall even more frightened from all the racket than my sister. It was caught to the relief of us all, and my sister bravely climbed down from the table with our breakfast completely ruined.

That range was not only used for cooking, but also to heat the kitchen. The

fire was kept going all winter long, so it required a lot of cobs, coal, and wood. It was also used to heat the water to do the family wash. The night before, Dad filled the big copper boiler, and Mother shaved in pieces of homemade soap. In the summer the washing was done out of doors, Mother using a wooden tub and a wash board. She had to wring all those clothes out by hand. Then Dad bought a new wooden washing machine that had a big wheel and a lever which was pulled back and forth to make the dolly in the machine work. The clothes were rung out with a hand wringer that could be fastened to either the machine or the rinse tub. The white clothes were carried back into the house and put back into the boiler where extra lye had been added to make them even whiter than before. Then another round in that machine before they were rinsed. When it was new, we fought over who was to operate that lever and wringer, but that soon got old and was not so much fun as it was at first. Yet we each had to take our turn on wash day.



The Dockal home in Pocahontas, birthplace of Anna (courtesy of the author).

When not in use the machine was kept next to the back of the house with some water in it so that it would not dry out between washings, but when cold weather arrived it was moved to the back porch and into the kitchen for the washing. Then all those clothes had to be dried; with a family of eight there were a lot of them. Lines were strung all over the house, and as the clothes dried they were replaced with others. The larger pieces such as the sheets, blankets, and heavy work clothes were hung in the attic and left there to dry.

Of course after washing there was the ironing to be done, so the range again was put to use to heat those old sad irons which had to be heated over and over and over to be hot enough to take out the creases and wrinkles in those clothes. How I hated that task especially in the summer when the temperature was well over 100 degrees! Because my older sister was working and the youngest was too young, it became my responsibility. At first the kitchen table was padded for the ironing, but then an

ironing board was purchased and things were a little bit easier, or should I say a little handier? I hate ironing today with a passion, and "God Bless" the one who discovered perma-press material! When I think back to the number of shirts alone (often as many as 16 each week) that had to be ironed one can understand my dislike of the task. With four men folks requiring both dress shirts as well as work shirts, all the clothes for us women, plus the table cloths, dish towels, sheets, pillow cases, etc. (all had to be ironed) there was indeed a long, tedious job for me each week and some times more often if certain pieces of clothing were needed. Of course Mother did help and my sister also if she had time, but they each had other work to do so I did most of it myself while at home.

We girls also had to help Mother make comforters for our beds. As our sleeping quarters were not heated and the winters extremely cold, we children hated to go to bed at night due to this cold. We slept on top of a feather bed with another over us, plus a comforter on top. Since there was

no way to heat the room and take the chill from the bed, Mother heated bricks in the oven, wrapped them in several layers of cloth, and placed these between the feather beds in order to help warm our toes and take the chill out.

If we lay quietly, we were as warm and snug as could be, but if one of us began to wiggle or squirm the feathers were shaken to the bottom and the comforter slipped to the floor. Then all we had over us were two thin layers of cloth. We often lay and shivered waiting for the other one to get up and put things right again. When the chill became too great, one of us would jump out of bed to shake the feather bed to re-arrange those feathers, throw on the comforter, and finally jump back into bed, chilled to the bone. The one who remained in the bed was equally as cold as she had no covers while the process of shaking was going on and also had the chilled air fanned over her. So really the one doing the chore was a little better off than the one in bed.

Grandmother sent many of our feather

beds which she had made from the duck and goose feathers after plucking the birds. It was a hard and tedious job, and unless one has had any experience with feathers he does not know how sticky, itchy, and messy they can be. After Grandmother's death we received a few more of them.

As for the comforters, Mother made them, and the three of us girls as well as the boys helped her make them. This, too, was a tedious task and equally as despised by us children. Dad bought the raw wool from a farmer. Then commenced the cleaning process which consisted of washing the raw wool in many, warm, soapy waters to remove all the dirt and the natural oils. Once the wool was clean and dry it had to be carded to remove all foreign objects such as seeds and weeds. We children pulled it apart with our fingers piece by piece until all the snarls and lumps and the imbedded seeds such as stick-tights and cockle burrs were removed. Then Mother, using a carder, combed it until it was as fluffy, soft, and



The Pocahontas barbershop, laundry, and bathhouse in 1909 (courtesy of Gilbert Hunt).



John Dockal and his first shoe shop in Pocahontas during the late 1880s (courtesy of the author).

white as snow. We wanted to use the carders, but until we learned to use them properly they were a dangerous tool as those sharp teeth could easily rip the wrist or hand.

When the wool was carded to the softness that Mother wanted, she put it between two layers of cheese cloth and tacked them down in many places to keep the wool from slipping around. This was placed between two pieces of bright, printed cloth that made the covering. The whole thing was then tied very closely with yarn to hold it all together. The edges were sewn together and the quilt was finished. To keep the comforter clean, end covers were made of white muslin and hand sewn over each end. These were washed often and replaced; thus, the ends of the quilt were kept clean where they came in contact with the body. If Mother had time a fancy design was worked into

these end covers that really was colorful.

When the wool became lumpy and the cloth old, faded, and lacked the strength it needed, the quilt would be torn apart, the wool washed, and the process gone through again with a new piece of cloth for the cover. The wool never deteriorated and could be used over and over again. This did take many days with the washing, drying, and carding until the quilt was finished. Yet what would we have done without this warmth on those extremely cold nights in our unheated bedrooms and the cold, cold attic where the boys slept?

As her mother gave her a feather bed when she got married, so our mother gave each of us a comforter she had so laboriously made when we left home. I still have the one she gave me. It looks almost like new and is still soft and fluffy. With the temperatures in our home we

have had very little use for it. But it is a reminder of what my mother and those before had to do in their life time.

Still another use for that kitchen range was to heat the bath water. The reservoir gave us warm water for hand washing and dish washing, but it did not take care of the needs of bathing. The boiler again was filled, getting the water as hot as possible, then with cold water added to the wash tub we each took our bath. After each bath the water was emptied, and another lot was added for the next one. We enjoyed the water, but unless Mother supervised the ears, neck, and the wrists were easily forgotten.

The chickens, hogs, and the cow we had added to all our daily chores. The baby chicks until they were large enough to care for themselves in bad weather were a worry. Many a time when a sudden rain storm came up we were soaked to the skin catching those chicks because they huddled together instead of taking shelter. In the kitchen we had to dry and warm them, since without feathers they chilled easily, and even then we lost many of them.

We had to shell and grind the corn that was fed to the livestock, but that we did not mind, in fact we enjoyed it, often having many bushels ready for use. Then there was the hay that had to be cut and cured and put into the haymow of the barn. That was such a hot, sweaty task. Then again the haymow with its fresh hay gave us an ideal place to play. We just rolled in it, sat in the loft opening watching the traffic go by, and dreamed of all the trips we would like to have taken or would take in the future. We played hide-and-go-seek in the loft besides using it as a place to get away from all the others when we wanted to be alone with our thoughts or just read.

We had to watch the cow while she grazed, and as the grass was cropped short, change her tether to another spot besides seeing that she had plenty of water to drink. Most of the time there was no real pasture for her, or if there was one, the grass had been closely cropped so other places to feed her had to be found—usually along the street near our home or along the highway which passed so closely. If she was pastured it was our task to bring her home in the evening to be milked or housed for the night.

When the cow went dry before calving, we children had to walk out into the country to a farm home where we bought milk. We carried it daily in a half-gallon syrup bucket. In nice weather we enjoyed that trip, but dreaded it when it was raining, snowing, or cold.

Churning that butter was a tedious, slow, but rather fascinating job. We girls really did not care for it since it got rather monotonous sitting there pushing and pulling the plunger in the churn until the cream began to thicken and finally separate into tiny globs of yellow butter. Mother finished the task by washing out the buttermilk, salting it, and making big pads of butter. The buttermilk was drunk or used in making buttermilk pancakes, cookies, or cake that we all enjoyed.

We girls had still one very important, responsible job: filling the lamps with kerosene, cleaning the globes until they shone and sparkled, and trimming the wicks to keep the lamp from smoking. More than once we forgot this important chore, which had to be done daily, and as darkness approached found ourselves without lights. Filling those lamps and trimming the wicks in the dark was far from easy, and poor Mother had to come to our rescue, but not without a reprimand



*Anna at age 12 in front of the family woodpile
(courtesy of the author).*

for our forgetfulness!

With six healthy, growing, active children there never was enough, and the money just did not stretch far enough. So there was where Mother's so called "dowry" came in handy, because she used those fancy clothes to make dresses for us girls and even some of the clothes for the boys when we were small. There were yards and yards of material in those skirts and petticoats. We wore hand-me-downs, something I always bewailed. When my oldest sister outgrew her clothes they were passed down to me, but when I finished with them they were fit only for that rag bag. This was the case with my brother, so the two older ones got the NEW clothes and we middle ones got the left overs as I call them. I remember one little artificial fur coat that all six of us wore for good, and it hardly showed the wear. When dirty, Mother threw it into the machine, and it came out like new. (They just do not make material like that today.)

When I was in the first or second grade I wore the same dress to school every day of the week, week after week until there was very little left of it. Toward the end it was patched and mended so often that I wonder if the original material even existed. Of course when it got that bad, I did not wear it to school, only around home to play in; we were always clean and presentable in public even though there was not much money. Mother washed and ironed those clothes while we children slept, and they would be clean for school the next day. As other children were in the same predicament we thought nothing of

it while we were small, but as we grew older it did bother me.

My most embarrassing moment happened at school when the school nurse was collecting information for the health records. She asked what my father did and I told her he was a shoe repair man. She made some remark about, "One can always tell a shoe man's family from the shoes they wear." And there I stood with a pair of high, pointed shoes that someone had left at the shop. I needed shoes; there was no money for new ones just then; and my sister had not as yet grown out of hers. They were given me with the promise that as soon as able I would get others. I think the nurse was equally as embarrassed as I. I blame all my foot trouble and condition of my feet on the shoes that I wore as a child. But did all these hand-me-downs really hurt me? Not much, probably a little embarrassment was all.

As children we always had plenty to eat even if the fare was not always fancy. Cornmeal was cheap; so we had cornmeal mush for breakfast, fried mush for lunch, and corn bread or "Johnny cake" (which to this day I have to force myself to eat) for dinner. The chickens provided the eggs as well as meat. I think we had chicken fried, roasted, and with noodles in soup often, yet it is my favorite meat. We had our own milk, all that we wanted to drink, butter, cream, cottage cheese, and plenty of pork, fish, and rabbit meat. The rabbit was wild until my brother started to raise them, after that they were included the year round in our diet. He also raised pigeons, and roasted squab was a rare

treat.

In the fall when the weather was colder, Dad butchered a hog and the folks took care of the meat. Very little was wasted and we children used to say that all was used but the hair and the squeal. But even some of the bristles Dad used in his work at the shoe repair shop. Waxed, they became a form of a needle that he used to sew on soles of shoes. So just the squeal was wasted, and I think our squeals probably made up for that loss! The bacon and hams were cured in a very heavy salt brine and then smoked in a special smoke house that Dad had built. (Curing was another chore as we had to see that the fire did not go out, yet smoked enough to cure the meat.) We ate the meat fresh in chops, roasts, sausage, loins, and steaks, besides the meat from the salt brine that had to be soaked over night to remove the salt before we could eat it, plus the ham and bacon. Of course there was no way of canning meat or freezing it in those days, so the meat was roasted or fried, placed in three gallon crocks, and covered with fresh-rendered lard that kept it from spoiling. This meat required only reheating before it was ready to eat. Sausage was preserved in this way, too.

But the greatest treats of all and those we all looked for when we butchered were the pickled feet, hocks, ears, and the tongue. We also loved a form of Bohemian head cheese called jiternice (yit'er-nit-sě). It consisted of the meat that had been boiled to remove it from the head, then ground up with the lungs, kidneys, heart, some liver, and the tongue and brains if we

did not get away with them first as they really were a delicacy. To this was added bread or pearled barley and some of the meat juices; it was all seasoned with salt, pepper, and several cloves of garlic. This mixture was then pressed into casings which had been prepared in advance from the intestines soaked in a very heavy salt solution, scraped, and thoroughly scrubbed prior to the stuffing. A special meat press (a sort of tube with a plunger) was used to press the meat in. Then the sausages were tied into small links. These were then boiled until cooked and well done. When we wanted to eat them, all that had to be done was to reheat or eat them cold. Jiternici can still be purchased in several Bohemian communities in Iowa, but I have not had any since my folks quit raising hogs and butchering.

The work caring for all this meat after butchering lasted about a week, and during that time we children were kept out of the kitchen as much as possible before we were old enough to help. Cutting the meat, grinding it, and rendering the lard was considered too dangerous for us. But the kitchen was the one place we would have liked to have been because the work appeared very fascinating to watch, especially the making of the jiternici.

Once a year, usually in the fall right after the butchering and rendering of the lard, Mother made soap from the lard cracklings, old lard, chicken fat, tallow, and meat drippings that had been saved or collected during the year. She put all this in a large, three-legged iron kettle with a

little water and lye and then cooked it, as she called it. She stirred this mess until it became the consistency of heavy cream. Then she poured it into boxes or pans lined with cloth and let it stand until it hardened. Before it got too hard she cut it into squares and put it in the attic to cure. Thus we had ample soap for all laundry purposes until another year. By the way, all of this was done out of doors because the odor of the lye mixture was not very pleasant to smell. The reason for the fall soap making was because the soap set up better in cool weather.

We also made kraut from the cabbages that Dad had raised in that big garden. Dad brought the cabbages from the garden, we pulled up the outside leaves, then Mother took over checking for bad leaves, cut and quartered the heads, and removed the core. By that time the huge ten-gallon crock had been scrubbed and made ready as was the tub into which the cabbage was shredded with the big kraut cutter that held from four to five head of cabbages. Both Dad and Mother took turns shredding it. The shredded cabbage was placed into the crock in layers with salt sprinkled over it. With a special tool it was tamped until the natural juices rose. Then more layers of cabbage were added, until the crock was full. Fresh leaves were placed over all of it, and a large stone that had been scrubbed until it shone was placed on top to weigh the cabbage down. The crock with the cabbage all very tightly covered was placed into a warm place to ferment. Finally, it was put into a cool room in the basement where the

kraut was used right out of that crock until the last shred was gone. It was eaten cold, fried with onions, or prepared with spare-ribs and was delicious to the very end.

Also out of that garden were the cucumbers which became too large to pickle but were ideal for dill pickles. In the bottom of a five gallon crock a layer of washed grape leaves and dill was placed, then a layer of pricked cucumbers, another layer of leaves and dill, and more cucumbers until the jar was full. A mild salt brine was poured over all, and the cucumbers were allowed to cure. We children could hardly wait the six weeks it took to cure them. We ate them like candy; coming home from school we would prefer a dill pickle to a cookie, piece of cake, or a sandwich. The kraut I was able to make successfully, but my dill pickles never tasted the way they did when my folks made them. Either I did not have the knack or my taster is not the same as it was when I was a child.

Besides being an excellent seamstress my mother was an excellent cook. She used no recipe (just a little bit of this and a pinch of that) yet I know of only a few instances when her cooking was not up to par. One of these was when the sugar and the salt got put into the wrong containers and she sweetened the meat. After adding salt and more salt and it still tasted sweet, she checked the containers because something had to be wrong. No amount of salting seemed to improve the taste.

Her breads and rolls were delicious! She baked bread on the average of three times a week—four crusty loaves each

time (white and caraway rye). But Sunday was her day to bake raisin bread, crescents, and kolaci (ko'-lachě), a sort of open-faced Bohemian cake made from light bread dough. She used prunes, apricots, cherries, or poppy seed for the filling. Because I liked the poppy seed, she often made a few for me as the others did not really care for them.

Probably from things already mentioned you have figured out that our kitchen was the busiest place in the whole house. It was large, warm, and with the kitchen table it gave us a place to play games, write, and study, and on many occasions entertain our company. The dining room had its uses as Mother sewed there and on very special days we even ate there. The living room was heated only on special days, when we had special company and at Christmas; we rarely used it in the winter. Nearly every evening Dad sat in his rocker in the kitchen and read the news from the weekly Bohemian paper that came from Chicago. We children and Mother enjoyed hearing what was going on elsewhere in the United States and even in Europe.

Even with all the chores we still had ample time to play, and there were many places of interest close to home. We had no radio, no T.V., no telephone, and no car to travel in; we had to find our own means of entertainment. There were very few toys in our home, only those we made by ourselves out of every available piece of material such as boxes (cardboard and wooden), old wood, wheels, etc., but we kept ourselves very busy. Our toys such as

the bicycle, wagon, and sled had to be shared and were passed on to the younger ones so all were well taken care of.

There was a lumber yard where we played hide-and-seek with our friends. The stock yards were another place of interest where we spent much time watching the loading and unloading of cattle, sheep, horses, and hogs when they were brought to town by the farmers. These were usually driven in as there were no trucks or other means of hauling them to market. It was not an unusual sight to have them driven down the streets in town on their way to the stock yard. Then we watched them being reloaded into stock cars to be shipped to the Chicago slaughter house. We spent much of our time at the depot where we watched the daily passenger trains come and go and several freight trains switch back and forth and unload their cargo which was picked up by the dray man and delivered to the various business places. We were also interested in the mail cart pushed to the depot by the postmaster. When the trains arrived he collected the day's mail to be taken back to the post office.

One of these passenger trains came to town just as we were coming home from school, so many pairs of scissors were made by placing two straight pins in the form of an X on the rail just before the train came. We could tell when it was coming by placing an ear on the rail and listening to the vibration. The wheels flattened the pins making our little scissors, but they were so fragile that they did not last long. But who cared, we could have some more made the next day, that is if we had the pins!

There was the old gravel pit in the pasture behind our property filled with water and the dredge ditch just east of us

where we fished and often were lucky enough to catch a few for our meal. Here we chased dragon flies and caught minnows and frogs with home made nets or merely waded in the shallow water to cool our dusty feet. We never left home without telling mother where we were going in case she needed us or an emergency arose, which was most of the time!

The gravel pit was forbidden to us children because of the water which was thought to be over fifteen feet deep at the center or deepest part. It was the scene of a near tragedy and very much avoided by us after that. It was one time that we forgot to tell mother where we were going! My brother and a friend built a raft from some old boards that they found near by and were playing Robinson Crusoe. They used another old board as an oar and poled themselves across from one end to the other. Just as they approached the side of the pit, the raft sank, both boys scrambled for safety and barely made it. Neither boy knew how to swim.

Following the railroad track looking for treasures such as rocks or the strange shaped cinders of the railroad bed was ever a lark. And of course there were all the beautiful wild flowers such as violets, buttercups, star flowers, sheep-shower, and anemones to bring home to Mother (she often had so many jars full that she hardly knew where to put them, but still they were welcomed by her).

One summer one of the little girls with a bouquet of wild flowers stopped at the drug store on her way home; the owner traded an ice-cream cone for those flowers. Instantly he became the target of every child who could get a bouquet, until he no longer had available space for them and was running out of ice-cream. He had

to call a halt to the exchange. It was tried again the next summer, but he was a wiser man by then. The child, to save face, gave him the flowers. Several days later she received a cone, but not in exchange for the flowers.

As a little girl my greatest joy was to stop at Dad's shop on the way home from school where I helped him to straighten his peg table and rearrange the shoes on the shelves or put them away had any been taken down for a customer. It was fun listening to the people who came in with

shoes or harness to be repaired and see the various types of shoes brought in to be fixed. Even though there was a harness shop in town, he was often called upon to repair harness which interested me so very much. But if he was busy or some of his friends had a card game going, I was not allowed to stay as the language often used was not meant for the ears of a little girl. It was a disappointment to me when I had to leave, but one respected if I wanted to be allowed to stop another day. □



Anna in 1926 (courtesy of the author).