

THE KOMENSKY STORE

About one mile north of State Highway 7, where Major Avenue crosses the Luce Line State Trail (in Hutchinson Township, McLeod County) is the site of a once thriving general store known as 'The Komensky Store'. This column recalls the history of the Komensky Store, as told by Silver Lake native, Milton Totushek.

THE KOMENSKY STORE: (As I remember it) or was told to me.

By Milton J. Totushek

"My father Frank J. Totusek purchased the business from Jim Zavoral in 1917. The store building and the depot where goods and groceries arrived by train were owned by the Luce Line Railway that passed through Komensky Station. The 2-story building was about 24' x 40' with about a 20' lean-to on the back side of the store. At first the second story was used as living quarters by my father, his sister Agnes and Grandmother Totusek. In January 10, 1922 my father married to Anna Zastera and lived on the 2nd story until a new house was built north of the store on small acreage of land purchased from John Drahos Sr. which is divided by McLeod County ditch #8 and is presently owned by Henry J. Dostal.



Photo of the Old Komensky Store, looking to the east from the intersection of the Luce Line Railroad and Major Avenue.

The Komensky General Store was just that. Groceries were much of the items that were sold. I remember selling many staples bulk such as raisins, prunes, coconut, dried apricots, rice, sugar and coffee beans in big burlap bags. The coffee was ground in a coffee grinder which had two large flywheels with a handle on one of the wheels that was used to propel it by hand. There was a setting for the grind of coffee one wanted to make. The grinder is in the possession of my cousin Daniel Totushek which was

purchased by his father Louie when Pa sold out the store in the spring of 1942. Pa decided to sell out and quit the store after World War II started and rationing went into effect.

Other items sold were summer sausage, butter and cheese handled for the Creamery. Schmidts Malt (near beer ½% alcohol by volume), pop from Danek's Hutchinson Bottling Works, Hires Root Beer extract, Jack Sprat brands, talcum powder; hair pins, combs, forks, fork handles, buggy whips, wooden hay rakes, kerosene cans and many other hardware items.

There was a gasoline pump (Skelly Brand) by the store. It was the kind a 10 gallon clear glass overhead reservoir with gallon marks and was pumped by hand. Also had a shed nearby for kerosene, oil and even alcohol for car radiators.



The above 'View of Komensky' photo was taken on the Luce Line Railroad looking to the east, just west of Major Avenue.

There were several, curved glass show cases for display of items. Also sold Copenhagen, Norseman, and Viking snuff. Bull Durham for the roll-your-own cigarette people as well as Velvet, Prince Albert, Sir Walter Raleigh which were pipe and cigarette tobaccos as well as Corn Cake strictly a pipe tobacco. Spark Plug, J. T. and plug tobacco which was cut with a tobacco cutter were sold. Snuff was selling for 10 cents a can or 3 for 25 dollars then. Dry goods were also sold. Buttons, hook & eyes, combs for pugs, Christmas candles which were used for lighting up the Christmas trees, Valentines, some funny kind and some that are making a comeback.

The store was robbed several times. Entry was made once by the back door and another time by removing a window at the front entrance. Sheriff Beihoffer was the sheriff as I recall. No arrests were ever made.

The store was a fairly tall building and when it got windy it would sway. Items that were hung from the beams would sway such as lanterns, gas cans, copper bottom boilers etc. In 1935 Pa bought the store building from the Luce Line railroad for \$200 I believe. The building was dismantled and the used lumber was used to build a much smaller and insulated with flax straw store building. The building of the store was contracted by Emil Trutna with Fred and Mike Zrust doing most of the work. A furnace was placed in the basement and a register was used to heat the upstairs. The store building was sold to Joseph Zdrzil for \$700 and moved to Devil Island.

There are many memories that the store holds for me. The farmers bring their milk to the skimming station and how they would gather at the store and discuss politics. FDR was president then. The cold winter of 1936 and all the snow. The 1940 Armistice blizzard when Pa stayed at the store day and night for several days.

The store was closed on Sundays but I remember Henry Kuras and his folks would come Sunday afternoons to purchase sardines in cottonseed oil, soda crackers and maybe some gasoline. Henry Kuras was a hired man for Matt Dostal. We would accommodate customers that would come when the store was closed. Also, sales of aspirin was made to certain individuals who probably imbibed too much Sunday night at the Swan Lake Pavilion.

Pa was crippled with rheumatism for 30 years, walking with the aid of 2 canes. Struggled through hard times. One incident I would like to relate was when the Farmers & Merchant Bank in Silver Lake closed I remember Pa went to the bank. We parked vertically to the sidewalk about where Mel's Meat Market is now located. In the Czech language the word to describe a bank going broke was 'prask' which to me meant 'cracked'. The building that is the Coffee Shoppe was the bank at that time. When Pa came back from the bank I asked where the wall of the bank cracked?

Pa never lost his faith in God, and died a respectable man who was soft on credit towards many a family whom he felt their needs were greater than his own. Never received any government assistance except Social Security. Herewith I shall end.

Milton J. Totusek.”

Source: McLeod County History Book, 1978.

Mluvíte Česky? Do You Speak Czech?

Bůh dá den, Bůh dá pokrm - (God gives day, God gives Food)

As a rule, you should always stress the first syllable of a Czech word!

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