

NOTES on writing days in ...

Caledonia Twp., Kenosha Cty., Wisconsin.

J.W. Mikulesky, R.R. 1, Box 325, Racine, Wis. - July, 1940.

Caledonia, Wisconsin, is the second oldest Bohemian settlement in America. The first Bohemians here had drudging beginnings. The section was then inhabited principally by French, Germans, Welsh and Americans and was entirely forested.

The southern boundary is the City of Racine and the Town of Mt. Pleasant; on the east is Lake Michigan; on the north is Milwaukee County and on the west is the Town of Raymond. From the north about four miles west of Lake Michigan runs Root River into Caledonia and runs south about four miles, then turns to the east about two miles, again turns south into Racine where it empties into Lake Michigan. Into this turning, then heavily wooded, between Root River on the west, the Lake on the east, Milwaukee County on the north and Racine on the south settled the first Bohemians. They settled mostly around the Milwaukee Road from the Four mile to the Seven Mile Road. This section later obtained the name of Tabor. In the year 1850 Bohemians that arrived in Caledonia, were from Luze in Chrudin, John Posler and Vaclav Andrie. Posler lived on the Townline Road between the Five and Six Mile Roads, and Andrie lived where now lives J. W. Mikulesky. John Posler in the year 1851 returned to the old country but soon returned to America and settled in the state of Missouri. In the year 1851 there came John Mazanek, Daniel Stritesky, and John Zitka. Zitka was a wheelwright by trade and conducted a wheel shop on the Milwaukee Road many years until the year 1878 when he died.

In the year 1852 other Bohemians came to Caledonia: John Mikulesky, J. Splichal and Kremenak, who all died in the year 1854 of cholera in about the same week. Then came Anton Gregor, Anna Klofanda, widow and children, Joseph Stritesky, Vaclav Kroulik, John Houdek, John Kutina, Frand and John Mudroch, Joseph Kabriel, Joseph Velfe, Mendlik, Novotny, Mikulas Danek. In the year 1853 the following arrived: Frand Travnicek-Nechuta, Frand Nechuta, Frank Rynak, Frank Toll, Joseph Polak, John Polak, J. Kovar, Pavel Smerchek, Simon Smerchek, Joseph Stritecky, Stransky, Zamecnik, and Anton Filip.

Later in the year 1854 came John Elias, John Rosival, Joseph Uhlir, Joseph Hudrle, John Matej, Joseph Jenista, Anton Novak, John Novak, J. Marek, John Svec, Frank, John and Joseph Lorenc, John Hudriik, Vaclav Raiman, John Horak, Vaclav Trucha, Joseph Splichal, Martin Klima, Vanbouch, Joseph Houdek, Joseph Visa, Supleta, Machacek, Kadlec, Machal, Hubalek, Slama, Pulda, Vitouska, Klofac.

Soon after came Joseph Kubik, Frank Kubik, John Peterka, Joseph Lucas, John Dvorak, Frank Fridich, John Makovsky, Joseph Smetana, Joseph Hrbivovsky, Frank Pavlis, Vaclav Rusek, Joseph Dostal, John Mikulecky, Joseph Mikulecky, John Pulkrabek, Andriik,

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Joseph Petura, Vaclav Petura, Anton Kvapil, Zitka, Jiri Bouska, Joseph Bouska, Masak, Kroupa, Peklo, Dvoracek, Joseph Svanda, Joseph Stepan, Frank Bouska, Zenisek, Kuchynka, John Mikan and many other Bohemians. Few came to relatives, others to friends. Some moved to other states. There are not many States where there are no Bohemians who formerly were not in Bohemian Caledonia.

(1940) The oldest living Bohemian is Vincent Smerchek who is more than 84.

John Elias brought with him substantial property. He bought himself a fine farm on the Milwaukee Road, five and a half miles from the city of Racine. He was a great nationalist and the Bohemians ran to him with their trouble. He was good hearted and sociable. In the year 1860 he opened a saloon and general store. In the year 1872 he organized a society of the Bohemian residents. The society was named Tabor. He died in the year 1875.

In the year 1854 there was established the first Bohemian business by V. Masak, almost exactly where is now Mr. Charles Kaplan on the Milwaukee Road. After a year and a half he sold the business to Weber and R. Klofanda who ran it to the year 1865. J. Moravec ran it until 1873 when the business burned out and was never rebuilt. In the year 1867 there was established by John Petura a saloon and business on the Five Mile Road. He also sold agricultural implements.

The beginnings of the first settlers were very trying. Bohemians bought mostly wooded lands, so that they could cut wood and so provide livelihood for the family. The clearing of lands from stumps was so much work that grain was planted between the stumps. The man who had a piece of cleared land, did well. So far as clearing the woods, it was much work. Sometimes it was hard to sell it. Hard wood was wheeled to Racine and it brought some flour or some goods; of money there was no talk. Money ordinarily was very uncertain, since farmers could scarcely get from their work enough to pay taxes and other expenses. Nut wood then brought \$1 to \$1.50 per cord, maple \$.75 to \$1.25 delivered to town, other soft woods the farmers had to pull out, put in a pile, and burn so the lands could be cleared.

The roads were primitive. They were only cut between stumps. When it was wet, swamps were cut and then a wagon ran into a root and often the wagon was broken. Where there was a large swamp, round logs were cut and laid side by side so it made an uneven floor. Riding over such a road was not pleasant. Later when the Milwaukee Road was paved, these logs were found. Draft animals were all oxen; there were no horses. Work was done entirely by oxen, driven to Racine to Market Square where farmers drove with loads of wood, hay, grain, potatoes, and other vegetables. There were at times as many

wagons as there are now automobiles. The worst was when the farmer could not sell his wood; he had to unload it somewhere and ride home.

The first Bohemian in Caledonia who bought horses was John Mikan in the year 1855. Shortly after, other Bohemians bought horses. Then in the year 1854 when the Chicago Northwestern Railroad was built and they used a large amount of wood and they burned then only wood and not coal like today. Wood sold well. It rose in value from \$4 to \$5 a cord. Land also rose in value. Formerly it was from \$5 to \$10 an acre, then it rose from \$50 to \$80 per acre. The company bought much wood. The farmers brought it to the County Line where they piled it two cords wide and two high in two piles from the County Line to the Seven Mile Road, which made over one hundred thousand cords of wood. About the year 1870 the company stopped burning wood and began to burn coal and did not buy wood. Everyone at that time was astonished how the woods had disappeared. Nevertheless the farmers cleared their land from stumps so they could grow wheat. The wood that was left was then sold to the quarry at Ives and at the Rapids. After the cutting of the woods and the clearing of stumps the farmers began to buy farm machinery.

The first machine John Rosival bought in the year 1861 named Fliwy. The first thresher was bought by Daniel Stritesky in the year 1852. It was driven by tread power, but was without a fanning mill. In the year 1865 John Elias bought a thresher already up to date and he charged five cents per bushel for wheat, six cents for rye, four cents for barley, two cents for oats, and twelve cents for flax.

In the year 1861 there arose the desire for education. On the suggestion of Mr. Frank Mracka there was organized "Slovanska Lipa" on the third of March. The purpose of the association was education, helping in association, and the defense of the Bohemian nation and their interests. The first president was Daniel Stritesky, John Mikuleckv was vice-president, John Elias, treasurer, Frank Smerchek, secretary, and Karel Travnicek-Mechuta, correspondent. On April 7, 1861, it was decided that Frank Mracek obtain Bohemian newspaper edited in Switzerland under the name "Cech". This was the first that helped reading in Caledonia. On September 15, 1861, it was decided that the national newspaper, of whatever name, should be moved to Racine at the expense of Slovenske Lipy, amounting to \$55.00, so that "Narod Noviny" be joined with the Racine "Slovanum Amerikanskym" and open offices under the name of "Slavie".

In the year 1862 Slovenske Lipa began thinking of erecting a Bohemian school, but there arose great opposition, and the

lodge was almost broken up. It was divided into two factions. The smaller group proposed to build only Bohemian school. The other group wanted a religious school. Daniel Stritesky offered the land where the school now stands. On May 18, 1862, the following committee was elected: Frank Fridrich, president; Paul Smerchek, treasurer; Frank Smerchek, secretary; and Joseph Smetana, librarian; after this a new school building was soon started. Logs were contributed, and they built, shingles, windows, and others gave willing contributions. They built the school and the first meeting in the new school was held on January 4, 1864. Soon after teaching began; the first teacher was Karel Travnicek-Nechuta, who taught until 1867, without pay. Then John Sobotka taught. From 30 to 40 children attended this Bohemian school. Toward the end of the year 1860 the priest J. V. Sladek taught here for several months. He translated Longfellow's "Hiawatha" into Bohemian.

Because the Bohemians who were here then and those who came later were reared in brotherhood, they resolved that they also should have their own lodge of Bohemian Brothers. After this decision on June 4, 1865, there was started a voluntary subscription for a Bohemian lodge, which brought \$517.27, and John Elias dedicated an acre of land. They immediately began to build and by December 1, 1865, it was completed. The preacher was Frank B. Zdrubek, who later was editor of "Svornost". After him Frank Stindl preached for many years. Then it slowly dwindled until it entirely ceased and now there is no church.

The lodge "Osveta" was ^{PURE} organized February 14, 1875. The principles of which were ^{PURE} liberty of thought and education. The founding membership were the following: Frank Rynak, Sr., Frank Rynak, Jr., B. Peklo, Jakub Peklo, Joseph Stritesky, Joseph Danek, Jiri Bouska, Joseph Stepan, Frank Stritesky, Frank Nechuta, Vinc Smerchek, John Makovsky, Frank Bouska, Jakob Kroupa. This lodge attained its ^{PURPOSE} purpose for gradually there arose state lodges of liberalminded and in time they joined Slovenska Lipa (also liberalminded) into one strong and powerful lodge, which today supports a Bohemian School and has two fine libraries, "Slovenska Lipa" and "Osveta" in Caledonia.

Soon after November 1877, Bohemian catholicism died in Caledonia. On account of impassable roads and poor weather they could not drive for a priest to serve them, and when burial was necessary, the priest denied burial in a catholic cemetery. They had to take the dead home and then burial was had in the town cemetery in Caledonia. Here the strongest Bohemians said: "This also awaits us". A meeting was called on April 7, 1877, for the purpose of providing for a Bohemian Cemetery. Eleven attended. John Jenista was elected president, Karel Travnicek-Nechuta, secretary. It was decided to buy four acres of high ground from Mateje Jenista at \$45 per acre. Surveying, cleaning and road making was made without compensation. Plots are 20ft. by 20 ft. In the same year Josefina

Makovska, nee Krivska, was buried; she was very young. In the year 1878 it was decided to erect a large monument in the center of the cemetery in honor of the nation and the Bohemians of Caledonia. A subscription was had, to which the most was given by D. Stritesky, \$100. The next year the monument was erected at the cost of \$400. On June 22, 1879, there was held a dedication ceremony of the monument at the cemetery. This was about the largest dedication by the Bohemians which Caledonia ever witnessed. From the first burial to the present it has greatly changed. Almost all the original purchasers of plots now rest there, on soil prepared by them. The cemetery is now almost entirely planted with flowers and under the small gardens rest some of our loved ones or friends. The cemetery is the pride of Caledonia Bohemians.

The younger and best known Bohemians in Caledonia began to suggest that also body development in Caledonia should be encouraged and thereupon there was a gathering on March 15, 1890, to organize Jednota Sokolska under the name of Tel. Jednota Sokol Tabor. The Sokols worked enthusiastically and soon there was thought of building Ceska Sine. It was the thought of all the brothers to help, so in the year 1894 they erected it with a stage in addition, which serves Caledonia Bohemians as a national home.

So far as the farmers are concerned, most of them raised wheat and other grain for the market. At that time many began to raise strawberries and other greens. Later everyone raised strawberries, and the farmers helped themselves greatly through the sale of strawberries. Then prices declined and strawberry raising also declined. Later they raised cabbage and sugar beets. The raising of cabbage reached large proportions, so that the Bohemians filled nearly a thousand railroad cars a year. But this too lowered, sometimes by small crops, again by poor prices. The better farmers gave more attention to cattle raising and the sale of milk, which paid them better. They built good barns and stalls, where cattle had everything comfortable, such as light, ventilation and cleanliness; and all modern necessary equipment. Almost all now have silos.

The Bohemians who had the first automobiles were John Visa, Frank Rynak, Joseph Havlis, and Joseph Peterka. Now most of them have one or two automobiles.

February 15, 1892 was founded the lodge "Ceska Caledonia #182 C. S. P. S. Meetings are held each month in the Bohemian school.

When the World War broke out, the Bohemians of Caledonia took active notice that our Bohemian fatherland also sought freedom since Bohemians over the whole world worked for Bohemian freedom. In Caledonia in the year 1917 was organized "Ceskeho Narodniho Sdruzeni". To this purpose the Sokols were loaned the use of Ceska Sine and here all Bohemian lodges joined

to work for the old fatherland. It lasted but little over two years. In that short time there was gathered for national purposes annual parties and bazaars and otherwise, the sum of about \$2,422. It was almost unbelievable how the people offered contributions for Narodni Sdruzeni.

(These notes were first made in 1922 - according to the author's recollection - in Bohemian. They were translated by a young lawyer, his friend, living nearby. They have been brought up to date (1940) in the present form. A first draft of them is enclosed in the monument in the Bohemian cemetery mentioned above.)