

## A Genealogist's View of Czech Family Names-Part 3

By Miroslav Koudelka

For this column, I am pleased to present the next part of an article written by Mr. Miroslav Koudelka, Czech Republic Regional Representative of Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International (CGSI).

“All right, we have made a survey of the main sources of family names occurring in Czech society. All the examples included so far have been presented in their basic form (nominative singular). But everyone engaged in Czech genealogy comes across family names written down in many more forms. They are nouns from a grammatical point of view, and Czech as an inflective language provides nouns with a number of suffixes and endings. Some of them even change the word stem spelling. A foreigner not mastering Czech language may have problems with them.

The most frequent variation of a family name is its change according to gender. Most of the Czech family names create their **feminine forms** by adding the suffix -ová: Nováková, Dvořáková, Prokopová, Hanáková, Větrová, Doležalová, Schwarzková, Sorbiová, and the like. The adoption of that suffix in some cases causes a change of word stem: Names ending with -a or -e drop off that final vocal (Koudelka – Koudelková, Svoboda – Svobodová, Skočdopole – Skočdopolová), in some other cases a middle -e- is dropped off (Janíček– Janíčková, Marek – Marková, Vrabec - Vrabcová, Ošanec – Ošancová).

The history of that suffix is quite interesting. Like in other Christian countries in the Middle Ages, a woman in the Czech Lands was actually not considered a full fledged individual, she was “just” someone’s daughter or someone’s wife. The form of her surname simply referred to that fact, it was the possessive case (because she was his) which was expressed by the suffix -ova.

Later on, to be “politically correct” instead of male chauvinist, we added a diacritical mark (little slash) over the last vocal (-ová instead of -ova) – and it is not any more the possessive but the feminine form. Very simple, isn't it?

Another way to turn a Czech family name to its feminine form refers to the names having the form of adjectives ending with -ý (Novotný, Černý...) – they turn the ending to -á (Novotná, Černá...). And finally, there is a small group of names that remain unchanged– those ending with -í (Krejčí, Hořejší) or -ů (Martinů, Pavlů).

One more note regarding feminine forms. A similar suffix expressing the change according to gender exists in German too – there it is -in. Today we can find it in feminine appellatives (e.g. Lehrer/Lehrerin – man/woman teacher). In the past, that suffix was added to family names too – Mrs. Bayerin, Straussin, Lustigin, etc. And in the period when German was declared as the official language in the whole Austrian Empire (including the Czech Lands) and all records had to be conducted just in German (approximately late 18th and early 19th centuries), that suffix was used for Czech family names too.

Then a ggg-grandmother of yours may have been recorded as Mrs. Nowakin/Svobodin/Skočdopolin... (instead of Mrs. Nováková/Svobodová/Skočdoplová...).

To conclude the passage about feminine forms of Czech family names, let me add that the amendment of Vital Statistics Registers Act passed in 2004 somewhat loosened the rules. Especially foreign names do not have to absolutely necessarily change their form according to gender. So, for example, the Czech wife of a Mr. Nguyen Van does not have to spell her last name Nguyen Vanová, she can simply be Mrs.

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Nguyen Van. Needless to say, she can preserve her maiden name or her husband can turn to that maiden name of hers, too.

Location of ancestral graves and collection of data from the tombstones belong among regular parts of genealogical projects. And there we come across another form of family names. Let me say in advance that **cemetery research** is harder in the Czech Republic compared to the United States because our cemeteries are somewhat different. We do not have so much vacant space to bury every body individually, in our country we have family plots in some of which there are several generation buried at one place. That is also why not everyone can be listed on the tombstone. Sometimes we can find there only the names of last one buried or two generations, in some cases the tombstone only says the family name: Rodina Nováková, Rodina Svobodova, Rodina Markova, Rodina Novotných, Rodina Martinů, etc. Readers of this quarterly know, I guess, that the Czech noun rodina means family. But not everyone is such a good student of Czech. Once I brought a client of mine to the cemetery in his ancestral town, he looked around, and seeing the number of inscriptions Rodina so-and-so, he said: That “Rodina” must be a very frequent given name here. (smile).

But back to these forms of family names. We can see that on the tombstones they have actually preserved the possessive form, i.e. in most cases with the suffix -ova without any more diacritical marks. The names having the form of adjectives adopt the ending -ch (Rodina Novotných, Rodina Krejčích) or remain unchanged (Rodina Martinů, Rodina Pavlů,).

That same formula is also used in regular mail address. So, if you want to send a letter to your relatives in the Old Fatherland and want to address it to a whole family rather than just an individual, on the envelope there should be “Rodina Nováková/Novotných/ Martinů...” But of course, our postal clerks understand “Novák Family” as well.

Let me repeat that children were supposed to “inherit” their family names after fathers (except illegitimate children inheriting the mother’s maiden name) and wives after their husbands. But sometimes we can come across family names not following the rules of their preserving and handing down.

### **Cottage or House Names**

A phenomenon that every researcher can get fairly flummox about are the so-called “**names after cottage**”. Here and there they appeared in many areas but most frequent and long surviving they were (and have been) especially in South Bohemia. People in a village knew that a certain family lives at a particular house. And if another man took over the property (by marriage or purchase), along with the property he took over the surname – in other words, he lost the surname after his father, and instead, inherited the surname after the farm/ house/cottage. For example, we may in our research find a man who was born as Mr. Kubeš and got married (to Miss Kalátová) as Mr. Kubeš, but having taken over the Kalát family property, he gave birth to children as Mr. Kalát. This mess was supposed to be removed by the 1786 edict, but as a matter of fact, it took not years but decades until the edict’s principles of family names (rather than cottage names) prevailed in official documents. Some priests started using correct (family) names in vital statistics records as late as the middle of the 19th century. So, if we return to our example of the man who turned from Kubeš to Kalát upon his marriage and movement into the Kalát’s place, we can add that when he died, he was recorded as – yes, Mr. Kubeš again. And of course, the children of his, born with the name Kalát, were in marriage registers recorded under the name Kubeš too... That way the appearance of cottage names and then their “correcting” actually cause a double obstacle in genealogical search. If we are lucky, we may come across a record (e.g. for one of the man’s

children) where both the names – after cottage and after father – are used. Or we may be able to figure out the name change from the land register record – if an owner is recorded as the previous owner's son-in-law, it is obvious that his original family name was most likely different.

Then, when looking for his actual family name, we know that in marriage register we have to locate the record not by the groom's family name (Mr. Kalát) but by the bride's one (Miss Kalátová). And yet, people in some villages have been using those cottage names so far in colloquial speech. If you are looking for the house where the above mentioned Mr. Kubeš once lived in that village, you may hear: "Go to the house just across the street – they are the Kalát family but they sign as *(it means, in official contact they use the name)* Kubeš." Genealogy can be pretty colorful, do you agree?

We already know that the names after cottage were not just a matter of village lore, they are reflected in official documents too, namely in land registers. Records in them were bound to particular properties – if we say it in a simplified way, one by one they always listed the owners of a farm and their duties. And before houses were numbered in 1771, each of the properties was specified according to the name of the founder or oldest recorded owner – Statek Jana Nováka (Farm of Jan Novák) or Novákův statek (Novák's Farm) or simply U Nováků (At Novák's). And then everyone living "at Novák's" was called Novák. One of these forms of cottage names can still be found in detailed maps to date. Many of the farms in South Bohemia and Eastern Moravia (by the way, both areas where emigration for America was very frequent in the late 1800's and early 1900's) standing isolated, far from town centers remain bearing names of that kind: U Nováků, U Dušáků, U Březovských, and the like. A good friend of mine from Austin, Texas, John Stasny has ancestors coming from Rokytnice, Moravia. But when I researched his ancestry down to the mid-1700's, it lead me to a little town of Ratiboř, particularly to one of those isolated farms belonging to that town but standing some three miles apart and named so far – yes, U Šťastných! When the next year I brought John to that place on the slope of a hill dominating the whole neighborhood, he was proud to return to the nest of his family after some two and a half centuries. And there is another chance for us to come across the use of family names that same or very similar way in the Czech Republic – in the names of hotels, restaurants and taverns. We can compare it to the names such as Murphy's Tavern/Bar/Steakhouse or even McDonald's in the United States. So, for example, if you want to visit the oldest beer bar in Pilsen, go to U Salzmannů, in Prague you can taste good beer at U Pinkasů, in Prostějov you can stay at a B&B place named Penzion Kubíček, and so on. The family name in the name of the business is supposed to imply to a potential client the idea of family atmosphere."

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### **Mluvíte Česky? Do You Speak Czech?**

Bez peněz do hospody nelez (BEZ PEN-nyez DO HOS-poh-dee NEH-lez) - Don't go to the pub without money.

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

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Děkuji! Tony Kadlec