

Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec

THE STORY OF KAREL POKORNY- PART 1 OF 2

One of the keys to advancing the genealogical research on your own family is to look for other families from the same village or region and to look for any possible connections or information linking back to your own family members. And so in the course of researching my own family, I came across this interesting story of Karel Pokorny, who originally came from the same village as my Kadlec family, as documented in the book, Pioneer Stories as Related by Minnesota Czech Residents.

This book, composed of abstractions and translations of stories by Czech pioneer residents of Minnesota, is from the periodical *Hospodar (The Farmer)*, covering the years of 1906 to 1930 (February issues only). It is the result of a joint effort of Karleen Chott Sheppard of St. Paul, Minnesota, and Margie Sobotka, of Elkhorn, Nebraska.

The *Hospodar (The Farmer)* was printed in Omaha, Nebraska, by the National Printing Company, whose editor and owner was John Rosicky, well known in the Czech community not only in Omaha, but throughout Nebraska. It was the only agricultural and horticultural journal published in the Czech language, and it also contained many articles to help the Czech housewife as well.

It disseminated information about American ways of farming that many Czechs could get no other way. It was of great value to the old Czech pioneers, many of whom were somewhat acquainted with the American farming methods by this time, but could not and were not too familiar with the English language. It also helped the 'new' farmer with his problems in beginning to farm the land.

It began publishing in March 1891 and at that time, was printed in newspaper format. Its first four years of issue contained maps of counties and Czech residents throughout Nebraska, and printed their names, locations, and also their residence in 'old country', prior to coming to Nebraska. (This section of the paper has been translated and printed in book form, and is known as the ('Nebraska –Kansas Czech Settlers')). It had a national circulation, and copies were also mailed to readers in foreign lands. It was changed to a magazine format in 1906 and from that time, articles appeared that were written by subscribers and sent to the editors.

These articles written by the people living in America and some from other countries, wrote about their lives, their biographies, and some historical sketches, and even their ideas of raising certain kinds of animals or crops. Most of the articles written to the editors, were printed under the section called 'Dopisy' (Letters). Some stories were very philosophical in nature, but all were written with sincerity to the editors of the *Hospodar*. Generally, the longer stories were contained in what was the first issue of the year, which was printed in

the first week of February.

The book contains over 100 separate articles from Minnesota Czech residents in that period of time. Some of them are very short and some are very long in text, but as you will note, they have a variety of information. The names in the articles were spelled as they appeared. Given names were also spelled as written in Czech as many individuals took on either Americanized names or nicknames after arriving in America. There is an index at the end of the 'All Name Index', giving some translations to given names. Some names do not translate well into the English language or some not at all. It is noted that quite a number of the residents moved often, and lived in other states as well as living in Minnesota at the time of writing the article.

Here is the autobiographical account of Karel Pokorny.

Karel Pokorny

Silver Lake, Minnesota

(5 February 1923, p. 19-20, Pioneer Stories as Related by Minnesota Czech Residents

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Karel Pokorny

“Esteemed editors! I was born 14 July 1860, (or anyway, that’s what my mother used to say, and that I was a very good baby) in the town of Rovecne in Moravia. My parents were poor, and they came from poor families, so they left nothing to us unless after all they gave us the best they had, our upbringing and good character.

We were four boys and two girls, one girl having died at a young age. Until I was 14 years old, my parents rented their house and land, keeping a percentage of what they earned off the land. Then they bought a house for which they paid 400 gold pieces. They only had 200, the rest they had to borrow. The farm was without a field, and not in very good condition, so they had to do a lot of repairs at the very start. My father’s health was not up to it; and after a two-year illness he died. How things went with us after that, anyone who has been in this situation can imagine. I did not have much schooling, even though I sometimes distinguished myself, but I was afraid to mention this at home for fear I would be given extra work. We had a very good teacher, Mr. Frank Spinar. I often think of him, and now I would take him more seriously.

When I was 15, my mother sent me to Kunstat, a three mile walk, to become a cooper. The county seat was there, and nobility, a baron whose name I have forgotten, lived there. The master from

whom I was learning made barrels or a brewery and various other places, and he also made beer, he was a brewer. For the first four weeks, I often suffered hunger and became melancholy, but after I became used to the hunger. I was all right. The master was a good man and, and his wife was, too, but like many others, he allowed his wife to lead him around, and he did whatever she wanted. They rented a nearby tavern. His wife would get drunk, and the master would get angry, which was a mistake. I never learned anything about my trade through the whole time. Once the master said to me, "Karel, go home, you will never learn anything here". He was a Jew by the name of Vingler, and he liked me. In the morning, we rode to our village with a load of beer, I rode with him, and I had finished learning my trade in a year-and-a-half.

When I got home, I found that my father was very ill, but he was still working in the brewery in Olesnice. In the winter, he worked as a brewer. I worked there with him till spring, helping him. In the spring, he took to his bed and never got up again. My older brother was in the army, and the two younger ones were still going to school. Then began the really bad time, with no one earning money, and money having to be spent all the time. We had about two acres of field rented, and at that time we had been growing only a little potatoes for three years, and they were poor quality. What should we try growing in order to keep our heads above water? We bought weaver's loom and found a journeyman to teach me, in hopes that I would soon be earning money. I learned weaving quickly, but manufacturers paid very little. Yet, at least it was something. In the summer, I worked at various jobs for a farmer. I enjoyed working in the field most of all. When I bought a scythe for cutting hay and learned how to use it things got better. The farmers liked me, I did honest work for them, so I earned our bread and even a little extra. I was spared having to go into the army. After my father's death, I was responsible for the cottage and the debts, because my older brother was not steady, he even gave over his small share to me.

When I was about 22 years old, I began looking around at the girls. It took a lot of work before I found mine, and she lived only a little way from our home. When I was 25 years old, we were married. We continued to live there a year and-a-half, and when we seemed to be looking at everything like through dark glasses, we decided to leave. I did not decide on America right away, but some place else. A friend told me, "Karel, if you want to sell your cottage, then go to America". I had relatives and friends there, but no one ever invited me to go. I took my friend's advice, and my mother and my wife encouraged me, saying that there was nothing here to hold me back, just pay my debts and go. Word got around that I was going and then came the questions Where? When? And couldn't I wait a little so they could go with me? Before I got ready more time had gone, and there were four families and three bachelors going with us."

Next Week: Karel Pokorny and his wife immigrate to the USA and settle in Silver Lake...

If you have any contributions or suggestions for topics for future columns, please contact me by email: tkadlec@gmail.com or call me: (651) 271-0422 or send your letters to my attention: 1408 Fairmount Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55105. See this article online at: www.kadlecovi.com Dekuji! Tony Kadlec