

Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec

THE STORY OF KAREL POKORNY- PART 2 OF 2

We continue this week with the final part of the autobiographical account of Karel Pokorny, a Czech immigrant from the village of Rovecne in Moravia, who settled in the Silver Lake area. At the end of this article is a letter written to the *Hospodar* in 1906 by F.J. Totushek.

Karel Pokorny

Silver Lake, Minnesota

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“On 2 May 1886, we set off, and on May 21, we arrived in St. Paul, Minnesota, but not all of us, some went elsewhere. I spent a month in St. Paul with relatives, and after getting a taste of the life and its goodness, I hurried on. I could have stayed in St. Paul, there, was work; they were working on a street right near where I was staying. But I held onto the shovels too diligently; I injured my hand, and developed an infection and was not able to work for a whole month, at least not doing that kind of work.

So I went to my cousin Barton’s in Silver Lake, thinking I could help him a little on his farm. We were there until winter. For the winter, I rented a little house for myself because we were expecting there would be more of us (up to then there were only the two of us), and here I was an independent man with nothing. Of course, in the summer, we did get respectable pay for our time but we bought a stove and a few other things and our money was gone. At that time, all the land had been picked over and settled. There were still a lot of woods, so farmers and laborers were dependent on the clearing of this land and selling of wood. For several winters, I sold wood for 40 cents a bundle. As soon as the ground permitted digging I cleared land at \$5 to \$15 an acre. It depended on what kind of a woods it was, and how people wanted the work done. So I spent four years in rent. My first farm I bought from Mr. Frank Micka, 20 acres with an old building on the verge of collapsing, for \$450. I could only get together \$75, the rest I had to pay over ten years. I built a new house and got everything into good shape. In four years, I sold it for \$1,100. That was near Hutchinson.

Then I bought 40 acres near Silver Lake, but with no buildings and no well, for \$1,050. That was during the second term of President Cleveland, which were the worst years I can remember. Our cows were sick one died (bought on credit) it wasn't possible to sell, and there was nothing with which to buy. I had to get out working, and any wife with the children drudged at home. Those were some days! Even those with large farms couldn't pay because at that time wheat was 45 cents a bushel, and everything else was priced accordingly. I built a little house, and everything else out of straw if necessary, because there was no help for it. The third year, Mr. Halva, who operated an 80-acre farm, came to see me. He offered to rent it to me, and the implements and plow he would sell me in installments. I took it and at the same time kept making improvements on ours, even though the farms were three miles apart. About that time a dairy was built nearby, and even though butter was still cheap, it did help our situation considerably.

Between that time and now, I have exchanged several farms, and also I wanted to catch onto a business, a milling company. I was railroaded into this with promises of big earnings for light work I let myself be caught good, because it was a Bohemian organization in a thickly populated community, so a person would think that the mill would be bound to prosper. But I was wrong. I

spent a year-and-half there, and at the first opportunity, I got out of it with a relatively small loss, but with a large lesson. Since that me, I have said: Don't ever get into anything where you don't belong, that is, be sure in your mind of what you are getting into. From that time, I have been on the farm again and I am content. Ten years ago, we had a fire, our large home burned down. I had made a lot of improvements on it and wasn't even finished with them, and the house lay in ashes. It was a hard blow because we lost our beds and bedding and all our clothes, and winter was coming. With the help of God we persevered. The neighbors took us in to their house for the winter, and also helped cart the materials for a new home.

So that the readers know exactly how rich I am, I will explain. I have a rather good farm of 56 acres, three miles from Silver Lake, which my son now farms. I bought an 11 acre little farm just across the lake from the town of Silver Lake for my retirement, just enough to occupy me in my later years. I brought up 14 children, seven girls and seven boys; one little one died. My son, Karel died in the war, and the rest are all alive and well. Two daughters are married, one son is married, and the rest are single. As for religion, I am an evangelical and I am not ashamed of it. I can say that although I have had all kinds of tribulations, my faith in God has always kept me in a good frame of mind, and I never gave in. If I am favored with another year of earthly life, I expect it will be easier, and I will enjoy everything, as I have no reasons for complaints."

Editor's note: Karel Pokorny would go on to live for another twenty-six years after writing this letter to the *Hospodar*. His life ended in McLeod County, Minnesota on October 9, 1949 at the age of 89.

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F. J. Totushek

Silver lake, Minn.

(21 February 1906, p 69)

"In this area, *Hospodar* has many subscribers but seldom does a letter from this area appear in it. People mostly keep their experiences to themselves, so the public does not learn about them. After a number of years, I finally discovered the difference between corn which was plowed in the fall, and corn which was plowed in the spring. I prefer to plow the corn in the fall because it is easier to do, and the resulting harvest is better. Corn in a field which has been plowed in the fall makes tougher stalks, and the cobs are larger and fuller. Maybe this is not true for every year or for every area, so everyone, must decide for himself, and he does what he thinks is best for him. Also, I like to plow when the corn is tall maybe even going into ears already. I have observed that this does not harm it, in fact, it benefits it."

Editor's note: Frank J. Totushek was born in Minnesota on September 11, 1876 and died in McLeod County on August 25, 1961. He was the father of Silver Lake resident, Milton Totushek.

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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