
Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec
CZECH SURNAMENES-Part 1 of 2**This article is the first of a two part series on Czech surnames.**

Have you ever had the experience where your name was misspelled - perhaps on an account or in a letter? What are the typical misspellings or pronunciation errors associated with your name? It strikes one very personally because name is your possession and identification, and it tells the world who you are.

Historically, names have served as a fingerprint of life, perhaps a basic clue to one's personality. Knowledge of naming practices in our ancestral country of origin can help us trace our respective families back to a village or a place, tell us their occupation, or it can give us an idea about what our ancestors looked like. The intriguing story of surnames dates back thousands of years. How and where they began, what their original meanings were, and their various spellings, is called the study of *onomastics* (www.mayrand.org).

Kadlec for Example

Take for example, my surname, *Kadlec*. The Czech surname 'Kadlec' is a fairly common one in the Czech Republic. It is derived from the ancient form of the family name, 'Tkadlec', which translates as 'weaver', as in the occupation of weaving to create fabric. It was the busy work my ancestors did to supplement their income when they weren't working in the fields. The Czech word 'tkadlec' is the noun for 'weaver'; the word 'tkat' is the verb for 'weave' in Czech. Interestingly enough, the Slavic words for weaver are 'tkač' or 'tkalac'; in Serbo-Croatian 'tkati' means 'to weave'; in Russian 'tkat' means 'weave'; and in Slovak 'tkáč' is the term for 'weaver'. Some 355 years ago, in 1655 my g-g-g-g-g-g grandfather Vitek Tkadlec decided to drop the 'T' from the family name Tkadlec. Perhaps he left his full-time occupation of weaving to become a farmer? Or did he do it to distinguish our branch of the family? *Nevím* (I don't know).

When I was young, I found it odd that "old timers" in the Silver Lake area would pronounce the name Kadlec as 'Kud-letz', but that is indeed the correct way to pronounce the name in the Czech language as the plain letter "c" makes the "tz" sound rather than the 'eck' you hear today. If you recall the letter č (i.e. "c" with the diacritical mark known as the 'haček') makes the sound 'ch' as in 'cheese'. Since the English language has no use for diacritical marks, those of you with surnames such as *Čačka*, *Čuhel*, and *Mička* had your names simplified to *Cacka*, *Cuhel*, and *Micka*, but the correct pronunciation has survived intact these many generations later!

Our Surnames

The following information was initially published in a book called *Naše Příjmení* (Our Surnames) by Dobroslava Moldanová, Prague 1983, and in the article *Jak vznikala naše příjmení* (How did our surnames come into being) and includes the personal research of Karel Kysilka of Napajedla, Czech Republic (www.zlimpkk.tripod.com).

There are more than 40,000 variations of Czech surnames. If were taken into consideration, that the whole Czech Republic has 10 million inhabitants, it would mean, that in case of the equal distribution, some 250 inhabitants including children would account for one specific surname.

But the situation is in fact different. Some surnames are more or less common, some (and they have majority) are rare and are connected only with few families. In the Czech Republic:

- The top 20 most frequent Czech surnames cover 6.9 percent (of the Czech population);
- The top 40 surnames account for 10.2 percent; and,
- The top 100 surnames account for 17.2 percent.

And so there is a great diversity of Czech surnames, many of which have interesting origins.

THE ORIGIN OF CZECH SURNAMES

a) A Newcomer to a Village.

The most common family name in Bohemia and Moravia is the surname **NOVAK** (in English: NEWMAN, in Polish: Nowak) . More than one per cent of the population (100 thousand people) in the Czech Republic have this family name. It was given by the fact, that the novelty was the first and most important sign of a newcomer who came to the closed community of old village inhabitants. The same ground have similar Czech surnames **NOVOTNY**, and less common **NOVY** or **NOVACEK** (dimin. form of **NOVY** or **NOVAK**). Those who came from a wanderer were called **PROCHAZKA** (from verb to walk).

b) Social Status of the Name Bearer.

The second expressive distinguishing feature was the connection to land-owners. Besides the serfs (subjugated people) there were free, independent yeomen or freeholders among the rural population. Thus he was given a surname **SVOBODA** (a free man) or **DVORAK** (a farmer having his free farm - DVUR = court, yard). The farmer who had a big piece of a land was called **SEDLAK**, a smaller one **SEDLACEK**, in Moravia the equivalent was **LANIK**. Who, according to his social status owned only a small house without scarcely any land, was called **CHALUPA**, **CHALUPNIK**, **CHALOUPKA** (the same as cottager) or **ZAHRADNIK** (from zahrada - a garden).

c) Personal Features of an Individual.

The personal features contributed to the surnames becoming. There was an overwhelming fair-haired (xanthochroi) population in the Czech lands in the past and a man with dark hair or face was an exception. Thus a surname **CERNY** (and equivalent **CERNIK** for 'red') or in German parts **SCHWARZ** (in the Czech script **SVARC** (for 'dark') came into existence. Similar is the origin of surnames describing the temperamental and physical features of the bearer: **VESELY** (a cheerful man), **KYSELY** (sour or bitter) , **KYSELA KUCERA** (a curly) **RUZICKA** (a small rose, a handful, nice man). Other examples are **HLAVA**, **HLAVICA** = a head, **HUBA** - a mouth, **BRADA** - a chin, **NOZKA** - a foot, esp. a small one, **NOHA** - a big foot etc.

d) Biblical and Slavic First Names

Most of surnames are derived from Christian first names, with many variations, derivatives, formed also by plenty of suffixes. The most common surnames, derived from a first name are **BENES**(Benedict) or **MAREK** (Marcus). The derivatives are for instance **BENISEK**, **BENAK**, **BENDA**, **BENIK**, **MARECEK**, **MARKUS**, **MARKOVIC**, **MARHOUL**, **MARES**, **MARSALEK** (could be derived also from Marshall), **MARSIK**, **MARTISEK**. Very common are also family names **URBAN**, **BARTOS** (Bartholomew), **HAVEL** (Gallus), **JANAK**, **JANECEK**, **JANOUSEK**, **JANDA** (John), **KASPAR** (Caspar), **KLIMA** (Clemens), **MACH** or **MACHACEK**, **MARTINEK** (Martin), **PESEK**, **PETRAK** (Peter), **VAVRA** (Vavrinec- Lawrence), **BLAZEK**, **SIMEK** (Simon), **STEPANEK** (Stephan), **TOMAS** or **TOMASEK** and **VACEK** (Venceslaus). Not only bible names were used, but also first

names of Slavic origin, for instance **JAROS** (from Jaromir) , **SOBEK** (from Sobeslav), **STICH** (from Stibor). The commonly used suffixes were:

- - a: **HAVELA**, **BARTA**, **KUBA** (Ja-kub), **TOMSA** (Tom-as)
- - s: **TOMS** (Tom-as), **KUBES** (Ja-kub)
- - s: (in fact -s with hacek, pronounced -sh-) **PES** (Pe-tr), **BURES** (Bur-ian), **BARTOS** (Bart-olomej), **VAVRUS** or **VAVROUS** (Vavr-inec)
- - c: (pronounced as -z- in German words like Ziel) **KUBEC**, **MACA** (Ma-tej)
- - k, ek: (pronounced -kh, -eck) **MARTINEK**, **BROZEK**, **LACEK**
- -ha: **BLAHA** (Blazej), **JANDA** (Jan)
- - ta: **KUBATA**, **MACHATA**, **VASATA**
- - n: **ZIKAN** (Zich- Zacharias)
- - u: **JANU**, **MACHU** (describing rather the origin like in Russian ALEXANDROVIC or in Anglo-Saxon names - SON)

Next week: CZECH SURNAMES-Part 2 of 2

Mluvíte Česky? Do You Speak Czech?

Pavučina – ('PA-vu-chee-na') - spiderweb

Jak se jmenuješ? ('yak say YE-men-u-yesh') - What's your name? (informal singular)

Jak se jmenujete? ('yak say YE-men-u-yet-eh') - What's your name? (formal or familiar plural)

Jmenuji se... (YE-men-u -yi say'...) - My name is...

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

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. Thanks! Tony Kadlec