

Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec

SILVER LAKE: 1933 TIME PASSAGES: PART 1 OF 4

I am pleased to present a series of articles contributed by Ron Pulkrabek written from the perspective of a visitor to the village of Silver Lake at the end of the year 1933.

“Dear Readers:

I have been gone from Silver Lake for a number of years and came back to visit businesses and the people of Silver Lake at the end of 1933. Everyone looks so busy. What a thriving town! I only have one week and may have a few names mixed up so please forgive any mistakes.



Tavern Scene, Silver Lake, McLeod County, Minnesota

State Highway #7 runs right down Main Street starting at the western edge of town, ending up at the double “S” curves on the East side. Six years ago after a heavy snow storm only a single lane was open through Main Street with snow banks 6 feet high pushed onto the board sidewalks. Generally speaking, the Czechs live on the South side of Silver Lake and the Polish live on the North side. In the past there have been clashes if someone stepped over the line but that is pretty much healed now. There are even instances where a Czech girl will marry a Polish guy and vice versa. Jobs seem plentiful, new businesses are established; people are well dressed; men with suits and hats and women with dresses and fancy hats and people are enjoying themselves after the Great Depression.

On the West side of Silver Lake at the wooden creamery, Tony Urban the butter maker is busy while his wife is dumping cans. In 1914 they took in almost 3,400,000 pounds of milk, paying out \$27,000 to the

176 patrons. In 100 degree heat this summer, the Creamery Company sponsored a picnic and dance. Over 500 people attended.

I walked past the St. Joseph Bohemian Catholic Church. The billboard states Father Skluzacek will hear confessions Saturday night at 8 PM and Sunday masses are at 8 and 10 AM. The St. Joseph Church can be traced back to a group of Bohemian settlers from the Assumption Church at Bear Creek, 4 miles south of Silver Lake. Everyone must remember not to eat breakfast or drink even a sip of water after midnight, before going to communion on Sunday morning. The 7 Nuns have the 117 students prepared to present the Christmas Play, a 3 act comedy called "Birds Christmas Carol". Pupils of both parochial Schools have been selling Christmas seals. Next Sunday the boys in white shirts and ties and the girls in white dresses will march slowly around the inside of the church in the semi-darkness carrying lighted candles. This is the Advent season. They are preparing for the Birthday of Baby Jesus. Christmas Eve mass is at midnight with the choir singing all the lovely Czech hymns. Better get there at 11:15 PM to get a seat. They have ordained three priests and four nuns from this parish. Forty Hour Devotions were held a few weekends ago from Friday until Sunday. A special Turtle Feed Luncheon at 25 cents per bow I was held last Thursday. The Fall Bazaar was held with meal tickets at 50 cents while the Blue Bird Symphony Orchestra played after the 10 AM mass. During the summer the St. Joseph Young Ladies Sodality presented, "Lighthouse Nan" at the Biscay Hall. This summer they had a 7 day Mission Appeal service.

Joe Navartil and Joe Svihel dug a "bored" well in front of Frank Bren's house this summer. It is quite an implement. A horse walks around and around while a round 18 inch diameter, metal saw affair digs a plug of dirt out to be raised and emptied. It took quite a few days to go down 50 feet.

The bandstand in the park is the home to many musicians, most notably the Silver Lake Concert Band, a group of about 45 Silver Lake male adults, dressed in smart white suits and have played 163 engagements in the last 5 years, capturing many awards from Minneapolis, to Mankato to Virginia to Little Falls. Traveling at forty miles an hour they have many hours on the road. They are noted for their snappy marching and excellent vocal selections. At the Standard Station, Mr. Navratil was pumping 10 gallons of gas up into the glass domed gas pump. He then unscrewed the gas cap from the car hood near the windshield and filled Mr. Chalupsky's Model "A" Ford via gravity. The gas tank sits near the dash board just above the rider's feet and is fed to the engine via gravity. The radiator temperature gage is part of the radiator cap which sits out front on the radiator where the operator can keep an eye on it. Mr. Navratil has gas on sale at 5 gallons for 85 cents.

C. S. Vojta's Implement shop is next. He has just sold a new Happy Farmer tractor to Joe Trutna. Overheard that this fall Oscar Pulkrabek was plowing with a large Case tractor and Joe Posusta was using a Samson tractor and doing belt-work with a big Avery tractor. Just to the east, plans are to build a new Silver Lake Auditorium in the future. Frank Shamla's Pure Oil Station is next. Tires are on sale for as low as \$3.25 each. Frank will deliver gas out to farms, pulling the gas barrel on a 4 wheeled wagon behind his car. Ed Smida has a garage next door. Then is John Pohanka's shoe repair shop. The building is slightly tilted and you step down into the shop. It is fairly dark inside even on the brightest of days. John usually does his fine work near a smudgy window on the west side. Heels cost 10 cents. Later in the evening a few of his friends gather in the shop to play cards.

Then the Joe Chalupsky Building which houses Vorlicek's 3.2 tavern. Next door is the big George Chalupsky Building which houses a mercantile store on one side and a Liquor Store on the other side, with a gigantic mirrored back bar. Chalupsky's Dance Hall, scene of many festive dances is upstairs. Two old guys are in for a little "bump" trying to warm up. They are digging a grave and the ground is frozen. They are trying to thaw the ground out by a corn cob blaze under a large piece of tin. They have to go to the cemetery every hour or so to check on things and then come back to the Liquor Store to thaw

themselves out with a few “bracers”. They also butcher cows and hogs. Their “warming” procedure is much the same.



Tavern Scene, Silver Lake, McLeod County, Minnesota

Then is Horejsi’s Meat Market. His delicious bologna, known far and wide is made with secret ingredients. Next door is a large barber shop owned by Phil Pilarski. It is Saturday night and people are lined up 6 deep waiting to get a haircut. Comic books are available to read. A large sink stands in the middle of the room. Phil got carried away talking to the customers, waving his clippers to explain a point and clipped off a patron’s hearing aid cord by mistake. The patron, in stripped bib overalls, told Phil something in Czech which cannot be repeated here. Don’t know who paid for the damage.

Next is the former failed Farmers and Merchants State Bank building. Florence and George Warnke’s shops are next. Florence has permanent waves for 35 cents where ladies stick their head into an electric metal container for an hour with 100’s of hot wires attached to metal curlers. No one has been electrocuted yet! Finger waves are 15 cents. George is more or less a serious hair cutter with an immaculate shop. He gives shaves to repeat customers 2 or 3 times a week. One Saturday he gave 25 shaves. Upstairs is the telephone office. Simply pick up the phone and ask for number 29. Gladys will plug you in and you will get Shamlá’s Gas Station. Also upstairs is the Dentist office. Everyone rinses out of the same brown stained water glass sitting on the window sill. The drills are not the sharpest and have a tendency to smoke. Excess force must be used. When the patients head is down near the bottom of the seat the drilling is complete. He occasionally sneaks down the back stairs to the back door of Liquor Store for a mid-after noon “bump” and a cigar. Patients don’t exactly care for the cigar tasting fingers.”

NEXT WEEK: Time to pay a visit to church...

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 Děkuji! Tony Kadlec