

Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec

From 1891 to 1910, the Czech Reformed (Presbyterian) Church of Silver Lake was led by Rev. Frantisek (Francis) Pokorny, D.D. (1867-1962), who would go on to serve at the First Presbyterian Church in the Czech community near Ely, Iowa. The next few articles will feature excerpts from his autobiography entitled, [My Journey Through Life](#), which cover his life in Silver Lake, Minnesota.

Rev. Francis Pokorny

“Chapter 8 First Years in Silver Lake, Minnesota

I arrived in Silver Lake, Minnesota with great zeal to lead a parish and with a longing to settle down. At last. It had been many years since I left home. I had gone from Habrkovice, my first home, to attend schools in Jihlava, Kutna Hora, Kolin, and New York City. I had been welcomed into the homes of many families to stay as a boarder or as a guest. Now, finally, it would be my turn to have a home again, and I vowed to have welcoming home that would be welcoming to others.

I soon began making arrangements to return to Bohemia to many my beloved. Shortly afterward the wedding, we would travel back to establish our home and begin our family here. We would expect to stay in Silver Lake and grow older with those around us. When I took the position, Silver Lake was a very small community. Only about twenty homes stood at the edge of the lake. The town was bounded on the other side by thick woods. There were no sidewalks, and the streets would become muddy after a rain. The largest building was the Polish Catholic church. The lake does indeed take on a silver hue in the evening under a clear sky, when stars are mirrored on the peaceful water.

My installation was held on November 24, 1891. Rev. Balcar from Melnik, Wisconsin and Rev. Kun from Ely, Iowa participated. Rev. Balcar preached at the Sunday morning services from Isaiah 26:4-6, "You shall no more be termed Forsaken and your land shall no more be termed Desolate .. "



Rev. Francis Pokorny

The Czech Evangelical people had felt isolated in this new country without their own ministers. Now this congregation was entering a new era. A strong church with a dedicated spiritual leader could keep its people strong and advance the Kingdom of God. Dr. Kim led the installation ceremony. He used the Epistle to the Hebrews 12:1-2, "... let us also lay aside every weight and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with perseverance that race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the Pioneer and Perfecter of our faith." We, the congregation and the minister, were thus called to be faithful to the tasks for which the Lord had called us and joined us together.

In 1892, I travelled back to Bohemia to marry Johanna. My good friend Josef Bren made the trip with me. We traveled from New York to Liverpool to London, Antwerp, Brussels, Cologne, and finally to Bohemia. Imagine my joy at seeing dear Johanna again! The years we spent apart, communicating through letters and poems, had made our hearts grow fonder. In my hometown of Habrkovice, I heard in person about the difficult times my family had endured in my absence. Both brothers, Josef and Rudolf, had been required to serve in the Austro-Hungarian army. Josef's commander had tried unsuccessfully to obtain his release on the grounds that he was the manager of a farm and the support of his widowed Mother. I visited my brother, now Soldier Josef, in Terezina, where he was stationed. His thoughts were always with the farm he was to inherit.

I was gratified to be accepted back as a peer by the ministers I had known before seminary school. I was asked to preach in various churches. Pastor Dusek invited me to preach in the Kolin church. For two Sundays, Josef Bren and another student also helped with the services. Senior Pastor Fleischcer of Chvaletice, greeted me with great kindness. So many years before, he had christened and confirmed me. Now, he invited me to preach from his pulpit. I visited Pastor Kocian in Horatev. His son was substituting for me in Silver Lake. I returned the favor by preaching one Sunday, and in the afternoon I talked to the church members about America and our ministries.

My elementary school teacher, Antonin Kopac, was still teaching. He was proud of his students who had ventured into the world. I had traveled the farthest, with one exception. Mr. Kopac still tried to help the young students in his care. He told me about an intelligent and courteous Evangelical boy who had read the entire bible when he was only six years old. Mr. Kopac wanted to see the student enrolled in the gymnasium, but his father could not afford it. Mr. Kopac asked me to look into it. I talked it over with Pastor Dusek, who asked me to bring the father and son to meet him. Pastor Dusek was able to make the arrangements to enroll the boy in the gymnasium in the fall. I heard about his progress as the years went by. Pastor Dusek would add a note to his letters, "Your ward is doing well." In time, "my ward" became counsel for the State Statistical Bureau and a member of the Synod of the Bohemian Brethren Evangelical church.

Johanna and I were joined in Holy Matrimony on June 2, 1892. There was a light rain in the morning, but the day turned bright and clear. Pastor Fleisher was a witness and Josef Bren was the best man. The church choir sang. Pastor Dusek spoke from the book of Ruth 1:16-17. "Where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge; your people shall be my people, and your god my god; where you die I will die, and there will I be buried...." There were tears in the eyes of my bride's mother, as she thought of our plans to live so far away.

In August, Johanna and I began the journey to our new home. On the way, we stopped in New York City, where we were hosted by Pastor Pisek. We also stopped in Melnick, Wisconsin where a new church was being consecrated. I preached in Czech at the ceremony. And we stopped at brother Pipal's farm near Muscoda.

Finally, we arrived in Silver Lake, where a warm welcome awaited us. I was eager to introduce Johanna to the church members and help her feel at home. I was not disappointed in their welcome. A collection of cooking utensils and other items had been gathered by the sisters of the church to start us in housekeeping. The parsonage was still under construction, so we moved in with the Fajman family where we used two rooms. Johanna was soon loved by the church people. Once, I

caught six year old Eddie Fajman holding her by the hand. I asked him kiddingly, "What are you doing, Eddie? It is I who brought her from Europe." He answered, with tears in his eyes, "No, it is I who brought her from Europe." I marveled how easily Johanna became accustomed to the new surroundings. She never complained of loneliness and never regretted venturing to a new land beyond the sea.

Mluvíte Český? Do You Speak Czech?

Hněv je špatný rádce: Anger is a bad advisor.

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