

Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec

I am pleased to reprint the next excerpt from the autobiography entitled, My Journey Through Life, written by Rev. Frantisek (Francis) Pokorny, D.D. (1867-1962), who served the Czech Reformed (Presbyterian) Church of Silver Lake from 1891 to 1910.



“Finally, the parsonage was ready for us. We purchased many items from the merchants of Silver Lake. We also ordered items from firms in Minneapolis. The brethren helped us install the wall-to-wall carpeting which was so popular at that time. When we were settled, families would come for visits. And so, with pleasant company, the long winter evenings became short and pleasant. In the spring Johanna and I decided to landscape the land around the parsonage. We added flower beds and a lawn in front of the house. I planted hard maples at the sides of the house and two basswoods in front. I put in poplars in back of the church and a row of apple trees between the church and the parsonage. The apple trees grew and produced well. One autumn, we stored forty bushels of beautiful apples in the basement. They were gone by spring.

From the very beginning of my time in Silver Lake, I was kept busy with the work of the church. On weeks when I stayed in Silver Lake, my schedule of classes and meetings began on Thursday evening. I met with the teachers to prepare for Sunday school. On Friday evening, I led a Bible study which concluded with several hymns. On Saturday, I taught children from 9 in the morning until three in the afternoon. On Sunday, we had Divine Service from 10 until 12, Sunday school from 12:00 until 1:30, and youth fellowship from 3:00 until 4:00. The church was full every Sunday. The singing was from the Czech hymnal, the Kancional. At first, the singing was without organ accompaniment. Later, we decided to purchase one since some of the church women church, including my wife, could play the organ. I also obtained a good hymnal from Bohemia with music for the organ. A group of us met weekly to practice special vocal arrangements. About twenty members learned to sing in four-part harmony. The musical group sang for the Christmas celebration, and they received many accolades for their performance. The group began to sing at other church functions, including funerals. The

money earned from singing was used to purchase items for the church building.

After my installation, I also conducted services at the Hopkins church and at the Jan Hus branch. On the fourth week of each month, I would leave on Friday morning for Hopkins by train for the 40 mile journey. I followed a similar weekend schedule there to that in Silver Lake. On the weeks I was not in Hopkins, the elders took care of the worship service and the Sunday school. Every other Sunday afternoon, I would travel six miles to the Jan Hus branch. The brethren had built a modest log building for their services. In winter, I'd hitch my horses to the sled; in the summer I'd come on horseback. I'd leave my horse in the barn of one of the brothers who lived nearby. It was late in the day when our meeting ended. In the winter, I would return home in complete darkness.

I was also called occasionally to officiate with brethren who met in homes for services. Other requests came from individual families or groups of families who lived so far from a church that they could not bring their small children for baptism. There were trips by train, horseback, or buggy to the villages of Olivia, Jordan, and Hector. I preached in Tabor from time to time, when the brethren only had student ministers for the summer. I was there for the installations of brothers Dobias and Vavrina. The travel to Tabor was quite long, taking a day and a night. The zeal and dedication of their small church, however, gave me strength and soothed feelings of fatigue.

When I was away from Silver Lake on a Sunday, the brethren would conduct a service. They would read a message from "A collection of Sermons." My wife always told me that the service was dignified and well attended. For these meetings there was an enclosure around the pulpit and the Lord's Table, where no one was allowed. An ordinary table, covered with a red cloth, was placed in front of the enclosure. The lector, the unforgettable brother John Jerabek, sat next to the table and faced the congregation. The choir took seats at his side. In these services, people recalled the years when the church had been without a permanent pastor. They had used this same format for their meetings, receiving the comfort of God's word from laymen. In many locations of our Czech churches, such dedication of the brethren laid the foundation for churches, and brought light to those who did not want to walk in darkness.

In the autumn of 1892, I was called back to South Dakota for the installation of Pastor Jan Linka. I was very relieved that this location, where I had served as a student minister for three summers, would now have a spiritual leader dedicated to them. During the week I was there, Pastor Linka and I rode on horseback from farm to farm to visit the homes of his new parishioners. He was the right man for the job. When the dry years came, especially in 1894, this practical pastor suggested that the farmers build a creamery. The creamery was constructed and the pastor operated it. It helped the people tolerate the bad conditions until better crops could be raised. Rev. Linka's wife was modest, bright, and patient. She did much to keep the church facilities in harmony. The area faced other years of drought and one summer grasshoppers invaded and destroyed the harvest. I pray that the settlers' faith in God never gave out, even as some were forced to give up their dreams of farming in that prairie soil.

The year 1893 was memorable for all our parishes. We had the first convention of all the Czech and Moravian ministers and theologians. The year 1893 was also memorable to me personally, as Pastor Kun asked me to preach on the 22nd of October at the dedication of the enlarged and newly decorated church in Ely, Iowa. I remember the dedication as a day especially filled with joy and hope for the pastor and the church.

A larger and more organized convention took place in Cedar Rapids, Iowa in 1896, when the Evangelical Union was formed. The convention members took time out from the meetings to visit the mother church near Ely and the West Branch. I preached at the West Branch at its dedication. It never occurred to me that my conversation with Pastor Kun on that occasion would be our last. We talked far into the night about the Czech parishes in America. He was concerned about the welfare of the groups of the faithful, scattered throughout the Midwestern states. He felt that the separate groups could grow and join to form an Independent Reformed Church Union. I never forgot his words to me, "I brought this parish this far, as you saw it today — which is about as far as I had hoped. But I feel that I won't be here long, and I beg of you to take care of it after I am gone."

About three months passed. On January 6, 1894, a telegram came with the sad news that Rev. Kun had passed away. I was to preach the funeral sermon. I started for Ely that same afternoon. The funeral for the meritorious minister took place on January 9, 1894. I gave a talk in the parsonage for the family members. In the church, I preached on the text, "Well done, my good and faithful servant, you have been faithful over a little, I will set you over much; enter into the joy of your master" (Matthew 25:2 1). Dr. Burkhalter, pastor of the Cedar Rapids First Presbyterian Church and friend of the deceased minister, spoke in English. Pastor Hlavaty spoke the final words at the cemetery.

The church members sorrowfully parted with their beloved minister of many years. Many wept as they looked into his face for the last time. Even the men were not ashamed to show tears. Rev. Kun was a modest man who loved simplicity. He requested to be buried without great ceremony. He had said, however, that at a funeral he liked to see the hearse pulled by a team of black horses. For this reason, strong black horses took his earthly remains to the Ely cemetery. Immediately after the funeral, I was asked by the elders if I would be willing to take over the church. Instead, I suggested Pastor Balcar of Melnik, Wisconsin, who was eager to devote himself to a large undertaking. The congregation sent him an invitation, voted him in, and the Ely church had a new minister that same year."

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