

Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec

For this column, I am pleased to be able to reprint the next in a series of articles that were written by Mr. Gene Aksamit, a member of the Board of Directors of the Czechoslovak Genealogical Society International (CGSI) and resident of the Twin Cities.

FINDING YOUR ANCESTRAL VILLAGE – PART 2

This article continues the discussion on how to determine the village/town where your ancestors lived in the Czech lands.

Local Histories – Local U.S. area histories frequently contain the names and villages of origin for early settlers. These can include town, county, state and church histories that are available in many public libraries. One excellent source is the McLeod County history book, which was published in 1979. With over 680 pages, the book provides a comprehensive history of the County as well as the cities, villages, townships and organizations operating over the years. Over 500 pages are devoted to family histories of residents. With an extensive index, this book is a treasure for family history enthusiasts. You can find a copy of this book in Hutchinson at the public library and the McLeod Historical Society Library.

Regional Histories – Another excellent source is “*Nebraska, Kansas Czech Settlers 1891 – 1895*”, by Margie Sobotka. This book is organized by county, and precinct and town within the county, and the name index makes a search very easy. Column headings by county are: Name and Post Office; Precinct - Section and Acres; Birthplace - Village, Town and County. The last three columns, settler’s birthplace – village, town and county - uniquely identify the ancestral village. The “*Nebraska, Kansas Czech Settlers 1891 – 1895*” book is an invaluable source and can be found in many public libraries as well as in the CGSI’s lending and traveling libraries.

History of Czechs in America by Jan Habenicht is truly a U.S. source. Originally published in 1910 in the Czech language, the book has been translated into English and published by CGSI. It is organized by state, and describes Czech settlements (including Silver Lake) in 47 states and territories. The book almost always gives the village of origin for each person mentioned and contains an index of approximately 2500 of those names. You can purchase a copy of this book at www.cgsi.org/store .

Amerikán Národní Kalendář – Many autobiographies of early Czech immigrants were included in this Czech-language periodical published annually. Czech settlers from various states submitted short but very informative biographical sketches that almost always included their village of origin. Margie Sobotka has indexed these personal stories, again making a search very easy. Libraries holding extensive collections of this periodical include Love Library at the University of Nebraska in Lincoln, NE; the University of Chicago; University of Minnesota’s Immigration History Research Center in Minneapolis, MN; and CGSI.

Cemetery Tombstones – Some of the early Czech immigrants were buried in predominately Czech cemeteries; the Bohemian National Cemeteries (Česko Národní Hřbitov) are examples. For some in those cemeteries, the birthplace is noted on the tombstone. Tombstones for my

ancestors (all Czechs) include their birthplace. Although the tombstone for one of my great-great-grandfathers is almost 116 years old, it is still readable. Part of the inscription reads “...Narozen v Sopotnici Roku 1824...” which translates to “..Born in Sopotnice Year 1824..”. Certainly, not everyone placed this information on the tombstone, but do not overlook this possibility of finding your ancestral village.

Ellis Island Online Passenger Lists – Passenger arrival records for Ellis Island are searchable online at www.ellisland.org. The record for most passengers includes their residence just prior to immigration. The online records cover the period from 1892 to 1924 (Remember that Ellis Island did not open until 1892) and can be useful if your ancestor immigrated during this period. However, my limited experience with this website indicates a need for care in accepting the spelling of the town.

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Mluvíte Český? Do You Speak Czech?

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

Těší mě (‘TYE-shy MYE’) - Pleased to meet you (literally: ‘I am pleased’)

Odkud jste? (‘OD-kood STEY’) - Where are you from?

Jsem z ... (‘SEM z...’) - I am from ...

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

SILVER LAKE SURNAME-VILLAGE ORIGIN DATABASE

If you would like your surname(s) and your family village(s) to be included in an online database or need assistance in finding your ancestral village, 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