

**Pavučina Corner – By Tony Kadlec**

I am pleased to reprint the final 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.

“During our stay in Bohemia, one day we set out for Mysliborice, where brother Simunek was employed as a gardener in a castle. I took Pastor Jaroslav Urbanek's place, and baptized Jiri, the young son of the Simunek couple. I had no idea that this Mysliborice castle would someday be an important seat of Czech-Brethren churches and that the baptized boy would grow up to be a Czech-Brethren spiritual leader.

I preached in the Kolin church on our last Sunday morning. As we left in the afternoon, we took with us my wife's youngest sister. On her deathbed, Johanna's mother had requested that we take care of the girl for at least a few years. The father was now a widower and her oldest brother was still single. She would not have had a suitable home with them. She lived with us until she finished grade school. After that she stayed with the family of Brother Josef Bren in Warren, Minnesota, where she attended high school. She returned to Bohemia when her father remarried.

Our train arrived in Bremen, Germany a day before the boat sailed. That gave us plenty of time to explore the city and visit the botanical gardens. We docked in New York harbor on June 18. It was almost unbearably hot. We stayed two days at the parsonage of Mr. Pisek. We made the long train trip from New York to Silver Lake without mishap. We arrived a little after 10:00 at night. It felt so good to be safely home from the long journey. I went at once to see our little Sophie. She awoke, jumped out of bed, dressed, and insisted on coming home with me. We were thankful to our friends who took care of everything during our absence.

My substitute, Alois Barta, had served well in my absence. The people liked him very much. A new semester was starting at the University of Chicago, and he had to resume his studies.

I resumed my work with the same schedule as before our trip to Bohemia. My time was divided between Silver Lake, the Jan Hus branch, Hopkins, and Waconia. Soon, the Hopkins parish felt the desire to have a steady minister. It pleased me greatly when the brethren asked me if I would be willing to move to Hopkins and serve their church and the one in nearby Waconia. After I turned down their kind offer, the brethren issued a call to Pastor William Siller from Saratoga. He was elected unanimously, and was installed on August 3, 1900.

Pastor Siller became our neighbor and close friend. He came to Silver Lake often. He would come in the fall of each year to spend a week with us. He didn't care to sit in the parsonage to read or talk, but wanted to spend entire days roaming through the woods. For him, rabbit hunting was just an excuse for us to head out to the woods. All he really wanted was fresh air and a week of freedom from his usual occupation.

It was a painful blow when I received the news that Rev Siller had suddenly passed away after a short illness. I was asked to come to Hopkins, where I found the whole parish mourning his death. I learned

that he had suddenly become violently ill and passed away several days later. The funeral services took place February 2, 1904. Several pastors from Minneapolis Presbytery took part. The Czech pastors in attendance were Hlavaty, Bren, Trcka, Prucha, and myself. The Silver Lake choir sang. The Hopkins parish seemed overwhelmed as it mourned the loss of its beloved pastor. He was laid to rest next to the church he had served so well.

It was imperative that a new spiritual leader be called as soon as possible. As I considered the situation, I realized a good match could be made. I knew that Brother Josef Bren suffered from the climate in Racine, Wisconsin, as the sharp, cold winds off Lake Michigan were injurious to his health. He had confided a number of times that he might be forced to leave his position. With the consent of the Hopkins elders, I invited Josef to visit and become acquainted with the congregation. The happy result was that he was elected and soon made the move to Hopkins. And so it happened that the two of us, who used to sit side by side in the Kohn gymnasium and later in the New York Seminary, became neighbors as ministers in Minnesota. It was a great pleasure and comfort to have this close friend so near. It is certain that friendship enriches a man beyond measure.



**Portrait of the Rev. Pokorny Family**

A great happiness came to the Silver Lake parsonage when a daughter was born to our family. We had been waiting for her for almost ten years, and for that reason she was all the more precious and welcome. We now knew the joy of being parents. I used to say that the Lord favored us with this

daughter because we had taken over the care of Sophie after her mother had died. Johanna did not agree. She said it was pure gift; no one deserved such a great blessing. The whole parish shared our happiness. The ladies brought small gifts for the little one. Friends near and far away expressed their happiness for our good fortune. Three years later, a boy, Francis was born; two years later, a second boy, Justus, was born. Our family was complete.

The church membership continued to grow, and the church was becoming too crowded, especially on holidays. As the congregation began to belabor the decision regarding whether to build a new church, a new church member, Frank Penaz took the floor. He had been ill and was becoming progressively weak. He spoke: "Brethren, I beg of you, build. I won't be with you much longer, and I would like to see the new church before I go." There was an intense silence for a moment. Some members were moved to tears. The motion was made to begin the construction as soon as possible. It passed unanimously.

Much of the labor was done by the Brethren themselves. Some hitched their horses to scrapers and dug out the pit for the basement. Others began hauling stone for the foundation. Still others brought the lumber and bricks. Two talented brothers volunteered to build the stone foundation. All work was done with willingness and joy. The foundation was built and the floor was in place before winter. The cement work was covered with straw for protection against frost.

Construction resumed in the spring. The cornerstone was laid during a worship service and a fitting ceremony. The building was completed before the following winter, and the inside was completely furnished. The church was dedicated for the worship of God on December 17, 1905.

The branch church also started building. The log building was a bit crude, even though it had served the people well who had gathered there to seek comfort from God's Word. The new, fine looking building was up before the summer was over. I used to say that it was probably the smallest Czech church in the country. It was equipped with the pews from the old Silver Lake church. The small congregation was happy when the new building was consecrated with the Lord's word and prayers. Brother Bren and Brother Prucha of the village's Congregational Church took part in the ceremony. The services were to be conducted in the afternoon every other Sunday.

Another meeting of the Evangelical Union was held in Omaha. Following that, plans were made for a meeting the following year in Silver Lake. The convention in Silver Lake was made aware of trouble in the Ely parish. Two elders from Ely, Frank Larenc and John Telecky, Sr described the problems and asked for my help. The Ely pastor, Rev Balcar, also attended a portion of the convention. As soon as possible, I made a visit to Ely, and found that there was no hope of restoring peace. The Ely parish asked me to be their spiritual leader. I wondered if I could leave my present location and all the dear brothers and sisters there. At times I thought I could hear the voice of Rev Kun when he asked me to take care of his parish after he was gone. My friend Josef Bren advised me it was my duty to come to the rescue the Ely Church. At last, I agreed. The members of the congregation in Silver Lake accepted my decision to leave them when they heard that Brother Krenek would be available as my replacement.

On the last Sunday of the old year, we had the usual evening service in Silver Lake. We expressed our thanks for all the blessings the Lord had bestowed upon us. As I finished the sermon, Rev. Krenek and his wife and two brothers from Ely, Joseph Becicka and Josef Vavra stepped in. Brother Krenek was there to take over the management of the parish, and the two men from Ely had come to help with the moving.

It was very cold that winter, and there was plenty of snow. Brother F. Nunvar packed our belongings. He was an expert at such work because he owned a furniture store. The two men from Ely helped him. Friends came to wish us good fortune in our new location and home. The annual congregational meeting took place on January 6. I opened the meeting, but the rest was taken over by Pastor Krenek. We were ready to leave after that. We spent the night at Travnicek's, whose home was near the railroad station. Several young people were at the station in the morning to say a last good-by.

Finally, accompanied by brother Becicka, we went to St. Paul and from there to Ely, Iowa, our new home. Brother Josef Vavra, from Ely, rode in the freight train which was transporting our belongings. He spent most of his time taking care of the horses that were riding in one of the cars. I am certain he suffered a great deal along the way. It was bitterly cold and there were delays during switching operations. He remained uncomplaining to the end of the journey. Josef Vavra was to remain a close friend of ours in Ely. His sons would become close friends of our children into adulthood."

A special thanks to Rev. Francis R. Larew for submitting a copy of the Rev. Pokorny autobiography for reprinting in this column. The Rev. Larew was pastor of the First Presbyterian Church near Ely, Iowa for the years 1952-1961, devoting more than 50 years of ministry in the Presbyterian Church. He also served as the State of Iowa Director of Local Budgets (1,860 Iowa counties, cities and towns, K-12 schools, community colleges, et al) and Executive Secretary of the Iowa State Appeal Board.

#### **Additional Information about Rev. Pokorny, by Ron Pulkrabek**

From the book, [History of Czechs in America](#) it is mentioned that Rev. Pokorny occasionally held services in 1893 in the congregation in the town of Eagle, near Tabor, SD., [population 129 at the time] Financial assistance was given by the Czech Evangelical Church of Silver Lake to build a parsonage. In 1885 this church was consecrated by Rev. Kun of Ely, Iowa. A few years later Rev. Linka was succeeded by Rev. Jan [John] Skerik.

In the Silver Lake Centennial Book it stated that Rev Kun held services at the Czech Brethren Presbyterian Church in Silver Lake from 1876 to 1892.

From his book, [Deliny Cechu ve statu South Dakota](#) author Joseph Dvorak states, in 1890 and 1891, theological student, Frank Pokorny preached in Eagle, S.D. and conducted religious services. In 1914, at the dedication of the new church in Tabor, Rev. Pokorny, of Ely, Iowa and Joseph Krenek from Silver Lake, MN attended. The book has many pictures of the old Czech churches around Tabor. I (Ron Pulkrabek) will lend it anyone that is interested.

#### **Looking for a Summer Road Trip?**

Tabor, S.D. today: population 390; Vitame Vas! A gigantic colorful cut-out of a dancing Czech couple

dressed in native costumes greets you at the entrance to Tabor. They are advertizing their 63<sup>th</sup> annual Polka Festival to be held on June 16-18, 2011. You will also find several churches, including the very ornate St. Wenceslas Catholic Church, seating 400, with 6 foot high Stations of the Cross inside. The parsonage has very unusual architecture. Father Puthenkidsthil was the pastor in 2007. They call him Father Joe.

In the South Dakota Czech book you will find familiar Czech names such as: Father Vaclav Dvorak, Rev. Monsignor Emanuel Anton Bouska, Pastor Jan Skerik, Kadlec, Uherka, Skorpik, Dostal, Svanda, Travnicek, Kucera, Novotny, Bouska, Dvorak, Nemecek, Vlcek, Urban, Kasper, Oliva, Ulrich, Bednar, Jilek, Moravec, Klima, Dolezal, Matousek, and Ruzicka. Maybe these are some of your relatives. In 2007 we talked to Betty Pulkrabek who lives in Tabor. Her husband is buried in the Glencoe Cemetery.

If you have any contributions or suggestions for topics for future columns, please contact me by email: [tkadlec@gmail.com](mailto: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](http://www.kadlecovi.com) Dekuji! Tony Kadlec